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Solidarity with the Poorest of the Poor in Black Africa
Theologico-Pastoral Study as Inspired by Paulo Freire's Principles

Dissertation presented by
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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Louvaniensium
CBCN	Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria
CELAM	Latin American Bishops Conference
DELTA	Development Education and Teams in Action
DEP	Development Education Programme
DH	Dignitate Humanae
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
GE	Gravissimum Educationis
GS	Gaudium et Spes
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
JOST	Journal of the Study of the Old Testament
LG	Lumen Gentium
MM	Mater et Magister
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme

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0.1. Statement of the Thesis Question and a Theologian's Perspective of African Poverty

The praxis of solidarity with the poorest of the poor is a major way of promoting the Kingdom of God especially in Black Africa. And how Paulo Freire inspired theologico-pastoral methods and principles can help us to achieve this goal is the task of theology of solidarity.

The above statement summarises the task which this project seeks to tackle. In doing so, one discovers that there are two main challenges facing us. The first is to demonstrate that there exists a massive number of extremely poor people in Black Africa, whose condition is significant for the Kingdom project in the region. The second task is how to develop a coherent theological system that can be used effectively, to tackle that problem of poverty. This is urgent not just for us but is also as a major concern of the Biblical God, the Church and the most Christian theologians as we shall see in this work. Meanwhile, below is a Christian theologian's approach to tackling this task.

One of the most interesting things about the Christian religion lies in the claims of its founder, Jesus Christ. First, he claimed to be the Son of God and the Messiah that Israel had been waiting for. He also claimed that he had come to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth, and thus beginning a new phase of God's relationship with the world. Jesus equally claimed that the spirit of God had been given to him in a special way to bring abundant life to humanity, and good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, give sight to the blind, set the oppressed free and proclaim the Lord's year of favour (cf. Lk. 4:18). With these claims, Jesus arrogated to himself the fulfilment of all the dreams of Israel, all the prophecies of the Old Testament. He was thus supposed to be the *answer* to man's perennial enemies: suffering and death. It is therefore in view of these claims and promises made by Jesus, that he was able to attract so many people, both from Judaism, and other non-Jewish peoples to his cause. This hope also became the foundation of Church missionary activities in the world since over two thousand years.

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But paradoxically, after two millennia of the gospel message and promises, it seems that not much has changed fundamentally. While the Kingdom promised to usher in peace, conflicts, violence and even warfare still abound. While the Kingdom promised justice, injustice not only still exists but seems to be growing in the world. And while the Kingdom promised liberty to captives, economic, political and cultural bondage still exist in many parts of the world. Despite the Gospel promises of bringing goodnews and abundant life to the poor, millions of them are still waiting for it to impact positively and effectively in their lives.

While Judaism may now affirm that it was right to have debunked the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah. Christian theologians have been trying to find a way of explaining this apparent embarrassment about the Kingdom promises. For some, the Kingdom has to be restricted to the spiritual realm. For others, the Kingdom has just been inaugurated but not yet realised. For other theologians still, the Kingdom is merely a symbolic way of expressing Jesus' vision for the *eschaton*. While these have been the traditional exegetical and biblical theological discourse, many theologians from the developing world now maintain that, unless one evolves a coherent theology of the Kingdom that will address the concrete concerns of the massive poor in the world, then the Gospel message and the mission of the Church will be greatly undermined. Therefore whether it is in Latin America where it is called theology of liberation, or in North America where it became Black theology, the constant concern is how to develop a Christian theology that would effectively address the issues of injustice, oppression and poverty.

So this project is an attempt by an African theologian to contribute to the quest of reconciling the *Kingdom dreams* and *promises* with the *reality of extreme poverty* which is affecting millions of people especially in Sub-Sahara Africa. Accepted that we shall discuss the problem of poverty from many other fields of specialisation, we must

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emphasise that our approach remains principally that of a theologian. Our solutions are equally theologico-pastoral oriented. Again, given the vast nature of the problem associated with African poverty, we shall limit ourselves to the problem of the poorest of the poor. We shall equally restrict our study to the regions of Black Africa where I have accumulated a lot of personal experiences that stimulated in me, both the choice of the topic, as well as the scope of this research project.

0. 2. The Rationale for the Choice of the Title of My Work

The word Solidarity is an important expression in my work because it has a strong African connotation. And again, it is becoming an important expression in Catholic Social Teaching. So by exploring it, I wish to contribute more in harnessing the meaning of the expression for both African theology and Catholic Social Teaching. As for the expression *poorest of the poor*, this is purposely used to express the fact that in discussing poverty, there are degrees of it. Poverty can become such an abstract or general concept with many people claiming to be its victims. But by highlighting the idea of *poorest of the poor* therefore, we wish to distinguish ordinary poverty from extreme poverty and its worst victims.

Another important expression in this work is 'Black Africa'. I consciously chose the expression Black Africa for the following reasons. First, the concept of *Black* seems to be used and understood pejoratively today. The same can be said of coloured people. So by using the expression 'Black' here, I wish to underline the fact that *Black* is a neutral expression, and therefore should not be identified with some racial inferiority complex. Black here is used more in the sense of Senghor's 'negritude' than mere expression of

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colour¹. Finally, Black Africa is also used geographically and thus, is synonymous with Sub-Sahara Africa. As for the sub-title to this work, I have used the expression theologico-pastoral to indicate the theoretical and dogmatic foundations of my pastoral propositions for tackling Black African problem of poverty. It equally shows that I am interpreting Paulo Freire's principles not as a philosopher, pedagogue, sociologist, economist, political scientist, but more as a Catholic theologian.

Coming to the choice of Paulo Freire's methods and principles as guide in this study, I have to state that it was motivated by a number of factors. First, today there is need for the theologian to engage in interdisciplinary study. A theological interpretation of Freire's methods and principles is undertaken in this direction. Secondly Freire comes from a developing part of the world, Brazil, and so can speak to the readers in Black Africa. Thirdly, after reading the biography of Paulo Freire, I discovered that he himself had experienced extreme poverty and was able to wriggle out it. His dogged determination not to accept his plight in a fatalist way, makes him a beacon of hope that provides motivation for other victims like him, who are still struggling under the burden of anthropological poverty.

The fourth reason why Freire's principles featured in our title is that his works, methods and principles have found some 'universal acceptance' in almost all parts of the world today as we shall see later in the study. He can thus be studied as an authority figure in an anti-poverty projects. Again, Freire had a firsthand experience in some Black African countries especially where he worked and personally helped in developing, the pedagogical, political and economic blueprint for psychosocial development. Finally that

¹Negritude is a philosophical movement and ideology propounded by Leopold Senghor of Senegal to help Black Africans to begin to appreciate their cultural values.

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Freire's method remained a major influence on the Medellin Conference of Latin Bishops in 1968, and on liberation theologies of the same continent, both inspired us to realise all the more, the relevance of his thoughts to Catholic theology. Here are the main motivations and inspirations that led to this study.

0.3. Main Sources and Inspirations for My Work

0.3.1. Personal Experience

The most important motivation for this research comes from my personal experience. Just like Paulo Freire, I have been concerned about the reality of human suffering and especially about the problem of poverty in Nigeria. As a child I experienced the horror of war when Nigeria was engulfed in a civil war from 1967 to 1970. During that war, I came face-to-face with human suffering and experienced the plight of refugees, the starving, the sick and the children among others. I saw people who were exhausted and died as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), as they embarked in very lengthy journey on foot to neighbouring African countries.

Another personal experience of extreme poverty came to me when I was a parish priest in Nigeria from 1993-1999. During this period I had the privilege of ministering to many people in my parish. There I discovered that there are degrees of poverty and powerlessness. I encountered very old people and sick people who were virtually abandoned because they had no close family members to care for them. I equally saw many people who died of preventable diseases simply because they were ignorant of what was wrong with them, or they had no money or opportunity to obtain medical treatment. In response to these experiences, in September 1993, I decided to form a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), which was called 'Madonna Mercy Family International'². The group which is composed of men, women and children from all

² Madonna Mercy Family is a private association of diocesan order founded on 23rd September 1993 by Rev. Fr. Cornelius Ojene. It aims at caring for the most needy people in the Catholic Archdiocese of Onitsha in Nigeria. The group is made up of over one thousand volunteers whose work is to give material, psychological and spiritual support to the poor. They organise weekly activities which include visiting and inviting the poor to designated centres where food, clothes, medicine and other items are distributed. The

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walks of life aims at providing material, spiritual and psychological support to the most needy of the people in Eastern part of Nigeria. This particular work among the very poor people brought me even closer to the experience human misery. The following were thus my personal experiences and the reactions it elicited in me.

First I realised that among the poor, there are extremely poor people whose needs were beyond the material ones. These are the people I have called the poorest of the poor in this project. Another experience was that there are very talented people whose potentialities are not realised because of the socio-economic and political system in which they find themselves. Thirdly, I became convinced that very poor people have a peculiar psychology. Extreme and chronic poverty affects one's way of thinking, talking, relating and even praying to God. Fourthly, I realised that many of the poverty alleviation projects carried out in many developing parts of Nigeria, and indeed other parts of the Black Africa are not well organised. Again I discovered that since religion is playing a great role in the lives of many people in Nigeria, there is a need to develop a systematic theological thought that will be coherent enough to preach God's love to the needy people, especially those whom I have described as the poorest of the poor in this project.

The final experience that has personally motivated the choice of the topic, title and scope of this work was also during my work as pastor in Nigeria. Nigeria being a strategic

group cares for about two thousand people in Nigeria and outside the Archdiocese of Onitsha. Madonna Mercy Family has now opened branches outside Nigeria in Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Yardley Wood, Birmingham in England; Kolbermoor Parish which is in München diocese of Germany as well as in Pittsburgh in the United States of America. The national chaplain in Nigeria is Rev. Fr. Boniface Okafor, the International Coordinator is Anne Mitchell of the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha is the chairman of the Board of Directors while the founder Rev. Fr. Cornelius Collins Ojene is the Director General. The group is now engaging more and more in social justice issues in Nigeria with the help of some voluntary lawyers helping to promote the rights of some poor people. The increasing rate of HIV/AIDS has also inspired the group to begin a hospice service.

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business centre for many West African countries, welcomes a lot of people from the neighbouring countries. Some come to Nigeria as traders, others come in to seek some jobs, while others come in as refugees as a result of conflicts in their countries. My interaction and study of some of these immigrants exposed me all the more to the problems of other Black African countries. The plight of the refugees and other poor immigrants from the neighbouring countries of Niger and Chad republics raised my curiosity about other Black African countries. I soon discovered that many of the Black African countries also have a lot of extremely poor people who are even poorer than Nigeria's poorest of the poor. The striking similarity between many Black African countries therefore encouraged me to investigate together the main causes and effects of extreme poverty in the region. For those countries where I had no firsthand experiences, I availed myself of the abundant literatures and documents therefrom. As a student in Catholique University of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium, my personal encounters and interviews with many students from other Black African countries convinced me, all the more, on the need and possibility of studying the problems of the region together while respecting their specificities.

0.3.2. Intellectual Motivation and Sources

Since liberation theologies claim to be concerned with the poor, I have been personally attracted to the various methods and principles they are proposing in dealing with the problem of poverty and oppression in the developing world. In fact, during my Master's Programme in theology, I undertook a study of liberation theologies especially as expounded by G. Gutierrez and L. Boff. That study, though limited in scope, nonetheless opened a new horizon of reflection for me. At the end of the study, I was convinced of number of facts.

First, that liberation theology signifies a new and revolutionary way of doing theology. That although it is rooted in Latin American socio-economic experience, it has relevance

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for other developing regions like Black Africa. I became equally convinced that liberation theology is at once liberal in tone but surprisingly orthodox and profoundly biblical³. I was equally impressed by the claims of its proponents that the theology is a prophetic theology and a theology of the Kingdom of God. Another impact of liberation theology on me is that its claim to be an offshoot of *Gaudium et Spes* is justified. At Vatican II, it was realised that the Church, has the right, and even obligation to intervene “in the issues that are social or political in nature as part of its religious mission”⁴. The Council challenged theologians to seek creative ways of translating its teachings in their various contexts. So I discovered that despite the weakness of theology of liberation⁵,

Bruno Chenu was right when he affirmed that, “*si Vatican II n’as pas apporté des solutions immédiates aux problèmes de l’Amérique latine, il a au moins libéré la créativité théologique. Gaudium et Spes devra être traduit dans chaque contexte*”⁶. When therefore Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the proponents of liberation theology was perceived as teaching what was not considered a Catholic theology, Karl Rahner was quick to defend him thus:

I am fully convinced that a condemnation of Gustavo Gutierrez would have extremely unfortunate consequences for the whole climate that is necessary today for the very existence of a theology that is alive and serving the task of evangelisation⁷.

³ V. WAN-TATAH, *Emancipation in African Theology: An Inquiry on the Relevance of Latin American Liberation Theology to Africa*, Peter Lang, New York, 1989, p. 113.

⁴ R. PLANAS, *Liberation Theology, Political Expression of Religion* Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1986, p. 58.

⁵ Some of their weaknesses can be identified. For example the proponents tend to claim that their theology is so original that sometimes they reject Western theologies as seen in this statement: “We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action” (EATWOT, cited in V. FANELLA and TORRES (eds.), *Doing Theology in Divided World*, Orbis, New York, 1985, p. x.). Note that EATWOT, is abbreviation of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Other weaknesses of the theology include the use of the title ‘liberation’ which came to associated with a kind of violent revolutionary approach to the problem of poverty and oppression in Latin America (cf. J. MOLTMANN, *An Open Letter to Miguez Bonino*, in A. T. HENNELLY (ed.), op. cit. pp. 195-204).

⁶ B. CHENU, *Théologies chrétiennes des tiers mondes*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1984, p. 20.

⁷ K. RAHNER, *Letter to Cardinal Juan Landazuri of Lima, March 16, 1984*, in A. T. HENNELLY, (ed.), *Liberation Theology, A Documentary History*, Orbis, New York, 1990, pp. 351-352.

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So while criticising and refusing the excesses of this theology, I have been greatly motivated by its creative contributions⁸.

Another intellectual motivation to this research comes from the African Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1994. At the African Synod, the bishops observed that despite the growth of the Christian faith in the region, many people are sinking more and more into extreme poverty and other forms of dehumanisation. So like the bishops of Latin America in Medellin, they called for a new way of presenting the Christian message as a good news to the poor in the region. African bishops called on theologians in particular to develop a coherent theological language for an organic evangelisation of the people especially, the poor. In response to this call by the bishops, I delved into the study of African theology. In the course of the study, I discovered that there are two main currents of thought in African theology. These are African theology of inculturation and African theology of liberation. Although the two currents aim at addressing African problems, one observes that there is a tension between them that has not enabled them to face the problems of the continent with a united force⁹. The desire to reconcile these two currents of thoughts in the region, became a source of challenge and motivation for the present work.

From the theology of inculturation I saw the need to systematically present some African traditional values like the sense of community, the role of God and other deities in African Traditional Religion and cosmology as their bases of social cohesion. This is central because one cannot adequately address the African problem without a proper understanding of the culture of the African people. And from African theology of

⁸ Such positive contributions include evolving a new theological approach to social issues, playing a unifying role for various third world theologies, serving as beacon for emancipation theologies, the ability to do theology in context, ability to combine theory and praxis in doing theology.

⁹ While the theology of inculturation emphasises the incarnation of the gospel message in the region as the basis for effective evangelisation and humanisation process, African theology of liberation sees the struggle against the anti-Kingdom forces in the continent as the first commitment for effective evangelisation and humanisation process.

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liberation, I saw the need to develop a relevant Christology that would help the poorest of the poor in the continent to respond to the question which Jesus posed to his followers in Caesarea Philippi: “Who do you think I am?” (Matt. 16:13). I am convinced that the future of the Christian faith in the region will depend on how the Church is able to respond to this question in a region where many are so disillusioned that they turn to the Church as their last succour¹⁰. The result of this attempted unification effort is what I called African theology of solidarity.

The final intellectual inspiration for this research comes from Catholic Social Teaching. According to Walter Lesch of the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Nueve, “Catholic social teaching (CaST) has been buried and revitalised several times and for different many reasons in recent decades...¹¹”. Since the Pope Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum*, in 1897, and especially with Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, in 1965, Catholic Social Teaching is becoming a very important branch of theology. The Church has come to realise more than ever her political, economic and social responsibilities to the society. Various papal encyclicals and theological initiatives has been trying to expound the nature, method and task of this branch of theology. Pope John Paul II contributed immensely in developing it. His personal experience of the power of solidarity as a movement, and as trade union in Poland helped him to appreciate more the need to develop a Catholic theology of solidarity. Since such theology is still in its evolutionary stage, I am motivated to contribute to it. I am particularly interested in seeing how

¹⁰ African Christology focuses mainly on four main areas namely, comparative, systematic, liberationist and community-based approaches. The chapter on the Kingdom promises of Jesus Christ has been consecrated to dealing with this theme.

¹¹ W. LESCH, *Towards an Ethics of Reconstruction and Mediation: Christian Social Ethics in Dialogue with Discourse Ethics*, in J. S. BOSWELL, F. P. McHUGH & J. VERSTRAETEN (eds.), *Catholic Social Teaching: Twilight or Renaissance?* BETL, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2000 p. 79. In this work W. Lesch discussed the importance of Catholic Social Teaching today. Its relationship with political theology, especially, the theology of Johann-Baptist Metz was examined in the above article. For us in this work, I will try to demonstrate that there is an urgent need to interpret and apply the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in Black Africa today. In this sense the increasing poverty in Black Africa could be described as one of the reasons why Catholic Social Teaching should be “revitalised” according to Walter Lesch.

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Catholic Social Teaching can be more appreciated and used in addressing Black African problem of extreme poverty. Another important remark at this juncture is that our proposed theology of solidarity is kind of practical theology. By this we mean that it,

cannot be limited to an understanding and explanation of the praxis of believing and of 'being church', but must also have as its purpose to influence and change this praxis. For this reason, a theory of action is devised that includes various theories of communication that are related to action¹².

0.4. Methodological Procedure for this Study

In this work, I have followed the traditional method of pastoral approach which has been adopted by liberation theology and other authors desiring to put Catholic Social Teaching in practice. This is the popular *seeing, judging and acting* procedure. Liberation theologians like Leonardo Boff refer to this as the three mediations in pastoral work¹³. Jacques Haers of the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven in Belgium has further expatiated on these three mediations in line with the same tradition: seeing, judging and acting.

According to him, the first mediation of seeing begins actually with an existential reality of human suffering from which the project of solidarity with those victims are initiated. For him, this stage is not that of mere theological or ideological niceties, but actually a moment of encounter with God, and as such a privileged place of divine revelation. Just like Paulo Freire who believes that every authentic conscientization comprises of

¹² G. HEITINK, *Practical Theology, History, Theory, Action Domains, Manual for Practical Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Cambridge, 1993, p. 6. We should state further that by practical theology here we do not mean that theology of solidarity is just an empirical theology which could be understood as being opposed to theory. We use practical theology here in the sense of a branch of theology that is not just about actual practice; rather just like other subdisciplines, it also attempts to share in the development of theological theory in general. By referring to theology of solidarity as practical theology, we understand it more in the German sense of "Praktische Theologie" or in even "Pastoral theology" as in the United States of America (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 7). We shall see this practical aspect of theology of solidarity more clearly in part four of this work under Paulo Freire inspired principle and methods of praxis of solidarity with the poorest of the poor.

¹³ Cf. L. BOFF and C. BOFF, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Burns and Oates, London, 1987, p. 24.

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reflection and action, J. Haers holds that the next mediation of this theological engagement calls for a deep reflection about the causes and effects of such suffering¹⁴. Coming to the action part of the mediation process, Haers sees it almost as an inevitable sequence following the experience of suffering and réflexion on that experience¹⁵. For him, the process of mediation is not a linear one but is dynamic, and cyclic, as it begins with experience, leads to reflection and then ultimately to reflected-action. He summarises the this dynamic thus:

*la vision ne permet pas de fuir, elle pousse à une incarnation toujours plus compatissante et à travers cela à une connaissance plus profonde de Dieu. A nouveau, cette action, fortifiée en vision, invitera à la réflexion. La spirale herméneutique entre praxis et réflexion théologique continue son chemin*¹⁶.

Another insight for understanding the methodological procedure of liberation theology and theology of solidarity comes from an African theologian, Efeturi Ojakamor. He refers to it as the three phases manifested in the application of Catholic Social Doctrine¹⁷. Like the liberation theologians of Latin America and J. Haers, Ojakamor describes the first stage of this dynamic as socio-analytical mediation of the world of the poorest of the poor¹⁸. This is followed by the hermeneutical mediation when God's word is used as a criterion

¹⁴ Like the liberation theologians of Latin America J. Haers sees this stage of reflection as that which is especially imbued with the spirit of the Gospel announced by Jesus Christ and meant to be a good news (cf. HAERS, J., *Les conditions d'émergence de nouvelles théologies pratiques. La perspective des théologies de la libération*, in J. Y. BAZIOU et M-H, LAVIANNE, (dir.), *Entre Mémoire et Actions. L'émergence des théologies pratiques*, Bruxelles, Novalis-Lumen Vitae, 2004, p. 120).

¹⁵ This suffering which one experiences generally presents itself as man-made as exemplified in its structural nature.

¹⁶ J. HAERS, op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁷ Cf. E. OJAKAMOR, *Catholic Social Doctrine, An Introductory Manual*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 1996, p. 28.

¹⁸ While the ideal thing is to get personally involved in the actual condition of these poor people, we have relied more on our pastoral contacts with the poorest poor in Nigeria and the refugees from the neighbouring African countries of Niger and Chad republics. Other information about the socio-economic condition of the poorest of the poor from other Black African countries are largely gathered from documentary sources.

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for judging the observed situation. The third phase is called practical mediation. It is the level of action that the theologian now offers enlightened guidelines using a coherent theological language, to propose effective action for tackling the problem experienced. In our present research therefore we have followed this methodology in its general sense¹⁹. In the division of our work below, one appreciates better how this methodology has influenced our approach²⁰.

0. 5. Division of Our Work and Summary of the Chapters

I have divided my work into five parts each containing some unequal chapters. The first part contains the introduction and explication of the main concepts used in the study. These are *solidarity* and *poverty*. The second chapter examines the socio-analytical situation of the poverty condition in the region. It considers the nature of the Black African poverty in general, studies its main causes, and finally focuses on the plight of the worst victims of poverty. This helps us to explain why they are referred to as the poorest of the poor, the extreme poor, and the anthropological poor. The second part is a theological reflection based on the 'Word of God' and the official teachings of the Church on extreme poverty. This part has three chapters. The first examines African traditional notion of God and his role in people's lives. I studied African traditional religion and cosmology because,

the hold of culture is such that it cannot be set aside. I do not believe that the African experience can be completely replaced by the Jewish one if we are trying to understand how God has

¹⁹The analysis of the nature, causes and effects of extreme poverty is followed by the study of the African Traditional Religion, the Exodus and the Prophets and then the Kingdom message of Christ to the poor. The practical part is consecrated to Paulo Freire inspired praxis of liberation and humanisation.

²⁰ This method is becoming popular in Catholic Social Teaching as exemplified in John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Reading the document carefully one discovers that numbers 11-26 were dedicated to surveying the contemporary world. Numbers 27-34 were dedicated to making a Biblical and Christian evaluation of the contemporary issues raised. And numbers 41-45 were then consecrated to what he called 'Particular Guidelines'. More on this has been described by other scholars (cf. E. OJAKAMOR, op. cit. p. 29).

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always been and how God continues to be active in Africa's history²¹.

Apart from the traditional African beliefs and practices, the emerging role of new religious movements in Black Africa has been considered also in this chapter. The second chapter examines the 'Word of God' in the Old Testament. God's reaction in the face of oppression of the poor has been studied based on the book of the Exodus and the writings of the prophets. The third chapter considers the significance of the Kingdom promises to the poorest of the poor in the New Testament. A fairly detailed study of the Kingdom theology will be undertaken to demonstrate that the ministry of Christ, and that of the early Church, were aimed at showing God's superlative solidarity with the poorest of the poor. What God began in the Old Testament reached its peak in the New. The last chapter in this part considers the official teaching of the Church about social justice. Following the example of its founder, how has the Church perceived her mission towards the victims of social injustice and oppression with special emphasis on the poorest of the poor?

The last part of this study will be action-oriented. It aims at proposing effective guidelines and strategies for tackling Black African poverty condition. As stated earlier, this part is a fruit of a combination of studies and personal experiences. The inspirations are from my personal experience, from African theologies, liberation theologies, Catholic Social teachings and especially from Paulo Freire principles and methods. All these have thus helped me in formulating what I have termed the "four pillars or principles of theology of solidarity". The part has four chapters. The first chapter considers conscientization as advanced education. The second chapter is a study of the principle of dialogue as an anti-poverty strategy. The third and fourth chapters are directly action-oriented. So I studied cultural action understood as nonviolent engagement. The fourth chapter is on praxis of charity. The last part of the study is an evaluation, conclusion and

²¹ M. A. ODUYOYE, *Hearing and Knowing, Theological Reflection on Christianity in Africa*, Orbis, New York, 1986, p. 60.

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propositions for further reflection on extreme poverty. Further propositions are necessary because the topic and theme cannot be treated exhaustively and completely in this study.

0.6. Commentary and Note on my Writing Style and Bibliographical Arrangements

As we read this work, I want to accept *ab initio*, that I will never completely resolve all the political, social and especially, economic challenges associated with the problem of extreme poverty in the region as raised in this study. All I will do, however is to continually address them throughout this writing process. If I succeed in raising the subject matter to a new level of perception that can elicit further reflection, then I may have succeeded partially. I have also to note that my personal experience with those in extreme need has been a source of temptation in this work. This is because I have tended to be unusually personal, and even passionate about the topic. My writing style betrays this tendency, because in as much as I have tried to be very objective in the research, I still discover that I have a tendency to write in a discursive and self-conscious style. But given that the problem of poverty is a life and death issue, I accept responsibility for my approach because, “the author of any book that purports to be about values has a clear responsibility to be explicit about the value position he or she holds”²².

Throughout this work, I have to admit that as one who has personally experienced people in extreme need, and having engaged in action for a long time, finding a role that embraces theory, research and practice has not been very easy. But by reading the works of Paulo Freire, and his theory of conscientization in particular, one realises that for any action to be effective, it must be based on sound theoretical principles. And these sound principles should in turn be applicable in concrete life especially in solving practical problems²³. Again, following the tradition of some official Church documents, I have sometimes presented the Church in feminine gender, thus using ‘she’ occasionally to

²² D. HOPKINS, *Education Improvement for Real*, Routledge/Falmer, London, 2001, p. xiv.

²³ As for my writing style, I have mainly used the first person plural in “we” in presenting my work. Of important note also is the fact that I have tried to use mixed pronouns like he, she or s/he to express myself. This is an attempt to ensure a fair representation of the two genders.

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represent it. I have also abbreviated many official Church documents and used mainly their Latin translations. Words that are not English language have been generally italicised hence the abundant cases of italicised French quotations. Also italicised are some English words and expressions which I want to emphasise.

In organising the footnotes, it is to be noted that for English books I studied, the name of the publishing company precedes the place of publication. For French books, the place of publication comes after the name of the publishers. As for bibliographical arrangement, I have classified my documents into four main groups. The first group are official Church documents, the second are books *by* Paulo Freire and books written *on* him. The third contains articles and collections and the fourth are internet sources.

PART ONE: EXPLICATION OF KEY TERMS

Chapter One: What is Solidarity?

We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in the world, no man can be totally rich even if he has a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people cannot expect to live more than twenty or thirty years, no man can be totally healthy, even if he has a clean bill of health from the finest clinic in America. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be²⁴.

1.1.1. Etymology

Etymologically, the word solidarity comes from the Latin expression *solidum*. It refers to something being solidly and compactly bound together. When used with a Capital 'S', solidarity generally refers to the Polish expression *Solidarnoic* which represents an independent trade union movement in Poland, formed in September 1980 and banned in October, 1982²⁵. Today the expression solidarity has come to mean a kind of communitarianism, or even a desire for more social inclusive social systems²⁶. Specialists in various human endeavors have adapted and used the word in their given domains as presented below.

1.1.2. Solidarity: Socio-economic and Political Interpretations

From sociological perspective, Max Weber, presents solidarity as a kind of social cohesion indispensable for the maintenance of order and for the promotion of social order²⁷. Another contribution comes from Peter Baldwin who examines the concept from the socio-historical and economic perspective where his is specialized. He sees solidarity

²⁴ M. L. KING JR., *The American Dream*, in E.OJAKAMINOR, *Catholic Social Doctrine*, Pauline Publications Africa, Nairobi, 1996, p. 77.

²⁵ It started in August 1980 with the shipyard strike. It was crushed in December 1981. It began again in 1989 and eventually contributed to the fall of Communism (cf. J. U. NJOKU, *Solidarity and Collaboration Without Boundaries, Shifts in the Social Teachings of John Paul II*, in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol., 17, (2005), p. 62).

²⁶ J. S. BOSWELL, F. P. McHUGH & J. VERSTRAETEN (eds.), op. cit., p. xix.

²⁷ Cf. M. ALBROW, *Max Weber's Construction of Social Theory*, Macmillan Press, London, 1990, p. 162.

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as a theory of mutual concession based on mutual interrelation for common good. According to him, “interdependence is to solidarity as dependence is to charity”²⁸.

Solidarity can equally be understood politically²⁹. So for L. Bourgeois, C. Bouglé, C. Gide and other social analysts, solidarity is seen as the official philosophy of an ideal Republican State³⁰. Still on the political interpretation, H. Pesch³¹, states that *solidarism* which is a derivative of solidarity refers to a society seen as a community of free citizens striving for the welfare of all. In such a society, the individual is not just a mere member or a mere means by which a State-designated goal is achieved. The individual is rather a person for whom all the activities of the state are directed³². It is given the mutual dependence between the individual and society, that Pesch advocates a philosophy that seeks to maintain a middle way between socialism and individualism. It stresses the necessity of establishing a group in the society that will play a *linking* and *mediating* role between the state and the individuals³³.

1.1.3. Solidarity: Philosophico-Anthropological Interpretation

One can equally examine solidarity from a philosophical anthropological perspective. According to a philosopher, Panteleon Iroegbu³⁴, the concept of solidarity is ontological to our understanding of the human person. According to him, when man is defined as a

²⁸ P. BALDWIN, *The Politics of Social Solidarity, Class Bases of the European Welfare State, (1875-1975)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 3.

²⁹ Cf. M. N. MPETI, *L'évolution traditionnelle de la solidarité en milieu rural et urbain du Zaïre*, Kinshasa, Presse Universitaires du Zaïre, 1974, p. 7.

³⁰ Cf. A. LAURENT, *Solidaire, si je le veux*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1991, p. 16.

³¹ He is a German economist, and one of the leading proponents of a social philosophy.

³² In a welfare state, where the market creates wealth and the state distributes wealth, the praxis of solidarity represents a method of transferring money from the rich to the poorest of the members of the society. This is usually done through progressive taxation. This practice allows the enterprises which operate under the iron rule of the market to continue to pursue their goal of profit-making and individual gain. Solidarity however obliges them to contribute in fostering the humanist values of altruism, solidarity, compassion and other communitarian values (cf. L. BRUNI, *Economy of Communion, Between Market and Solidarity*, in J. S. BOSWELL, F. P. McHUGH & J. VERSTRAETEN (eds.), op. cit., p. 243).

³³ Cf. R. E. MULCAHY *Solidarism*, in W. J. MACDONALD (ed), *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Catholic University of America, Washington, Vol. 13, 1967, pp. 419-420.

³⁴ P. IROEGBU, *Treatise on the Human Person*, Eustel Publications, Nekede-Owerri, Nigeria, 2000, p. 13. P. Iroegbu is an African theologian and philosopher.

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social being, he is actually being defined as being who lives in *solidarity with others*³⁵. This is to say that the concept of solidarity can be said to be synonymous with the concept of *belongingness*. And here belongingness is understood as the ontological sharing of being by human persons in a given community³⁶. For him, it is by belonging to *humanity* that one can really be called a person, and this realisation is only possible in a human society or indeed, a community. So for Ireoegbu, “outside community there is no belongingness, no humanity, no persons”³⁷. This is to say that he understands solidarity simply as, communality in practice.

Apart from Ireoegbu, other authoritative sources underscore this same understanding of solidarity. J. Moltmann asserts that, “life is communication in communion. And, conversely, isolation and lack of relationship means death for all living things, and dissolution even for elementary particles”³⁸. Eric Gaziaux of the Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium goes further to give a more more comprehensive understanding of this anthropological solidarity. According to him,

*L'être humain a donc besoin de la communauté, non seulement pour entrer dans l'existence et pour en assurer les fondements, mais pour s'exprimer dans la connaissance et la solidarité, dans la parole et l'amour avec les autres*³⁹.

From the above, one realises that a proper understanding of solidarity will lead to an appreciation of its ethical nature. P. Ireoegbu in particular highlights this point. He holds

³⁵ Ibid., p.13.

³⁶ One is really human because he belongs to the human society.

³⁷ What Ireoegbu is trying to argue here is that to be fully human, is to be solidarily human. It demands living with others. It demands sharing (give and receive) of our various qualities, characteristics and talented productivities. Solidarity is not just a social phenomenon but indeed an ontological reality of our humanity. This means that at its deepest level, solidarity is a sharing of our humanity with one destiny. It is the recognition of the brotherhood of humanity.

³⁸ J. MOLTSMANN, *God in Creation, An Ecological Doctrine of Creation, Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985*, SCM Press, London, 1985, p. 3. The theme of planetary solidarity is discussed among theologians under the theme of Cosmic Christology.

³⁹ E. GAZIAUX, *L'Autonomie en morale: Au Croisement de la philosophie et de la théologie*, in BETL, CXXXVIII, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1998, p. 232.

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that if every *homo-sapiens*⁴⁰ shares a common humanity and community. Anything that menaces solidarity *ipso facto*, menaces ‘Belongingness’ and is tantamount to a threat to the ‘being’ of the human person. On the contrary, any project that promotes solidarity promotes, belongingness, community, humanity and *ipso facto* promotes the being of the human person⁴¹. This ethical dimension of solidarity is expressed especially in matters of social justice and mutual responsibility for humanity irrespective of time and place. For him, this demands that,

all others in the cosmos: past, present and future are taken into account in the distribution of present world resources. This is consequential because all are co-persons and none is a lower being to be alienated, cheated, manipulated or exploited⁴².

So solidarity becomes the basis for seeking common good, where all are called to work together to build the common good and none is equally excluded from the fruits of such common good. Solidarity thus rejects dependency on the part of the weak and exploitation on the part of the strong. This means that it is justice in practice, since it obliges contribution to the common good, and distribution of the same⁴³.

1.1.4. Solidarity: The Ecological Perspective

We have to note that today, the understanding of solidarity as interdependence cannot be limited to the relationship between *homo sapien*⁴⁴s. With the increased awareness of the influence of ecosystem on human existence, we are entering a new paradigm. We are beginning to engage in dialogue and establishing new relationships with other beings that are not human. The new understanding of solidarity and interdependence is poetically described,

What is going on? We are returning to the homeland of our birth.
We were lost among machines, fascinated by industrial
structures, shut up in offices and air-conditioning and dried

⁴⁰ Human beings.

⁴¹ Cf. P. IROEGBU, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴³ Cf. D. DORR, *Option for the Poor. A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*, Orbis Books, New York, 1992, p. 303-304.

⁴⁴ Human beings.

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flowers, surrounded by home appliances and communication devices, and absorbed in myriads of talking pictures. Now we are returning to the vast planetary and cosmic community. We are fascinated by the green forest, we pause before the majesty of the mountains, we are awed by the star-filled sky, and we admire the vitality of the animals. We are filled with admiration at the diversity of cultures, human habits, and ways of signifying the world⁴⁵.

J. Moltmann is one of the scholars that has tried to develop this concept of solidarity from a more theological and ecological perspective. According to him, to be alive means existing in relationship with other people and things. Integrating and integral thinking serves to generate the community between human beings and nature which is necessary and promotes life. For Moltmann, “a theological doctrine of creation in our own time is also guided by the will to find a way into the community of creation, to reawaken the awareness of that community and to restore it”⁴⁶. This idea of ecological solidarity is of vital importance to the theology of the cosmic Christ which seeks to demonstrate that the Lordship of Christ is over the entire creation since in him all things hold together (cf. Col. 1:17).

Since our main interest is on the Christian concept and praxis of solidarity, we shall focus on that now. How did this concept enter ecclesiastical documents and how has it been interpreted in some official Church documents and in some theological writings?

1.1.5. Solidarity as a Christian Concept and Praxis

Judeo-Christian bible lays the foundation for the Christian understanding of the concept of solidarity. We discovered that since their constitution as a people, Yahweh has always demanded that the people of alliance live in solidarity. Indeed the vital moral content of

⁴⁵ L. BOFF, *Cry of the Earth. Cry of the Poor*, Orbis, New York, 1997, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁶ J. MOLTSMANN, op. cit., p. 4. See other works on this theme: R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, Orbis, New York, 1999, p. 260; J. G. GIBBS, *Creation and Redemption. A Study in Pauline Theology*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1971, p. 35; G. O'COLLINS, *Interpreting Jesus*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1983; p. 204; NEVILLE, R. C., *Symbols of Jesus. A Christology of Symbolic Engagement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 117.

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the covenant was a demand for righteousness⁴⁷. One of the ways of practicing this righteousness is to ensure “the condition in which each member of the community uses his or her position for the benefit of each other member, the solidarity requisite for a people on the move”⁴⁸. Given the precarious condition of the people Israel during their pilgrim years, only such spirit of solidarity and social cohesion ensured their protection with special attention on the plight of the weaker members of the community⁴⁹. As the new people of God, this Biblical sense of solidarity has been a guide in Church’s understanding of herself and her mission.

1.1.5.1. Vatican II and Solidarity

Since Vatican II, solidarity has become one of the bedrock principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Just before the Vatican II, the Pope John XIII published his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961) in which he calls on all peoples of the world to realise their mutual dependence. He refers to this as ‘the solidarity which binds all men together as members of a common family’ that makes it impossible for wealthier nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery and poverty of other nations whose citizens are unable to enjoy even the elementary human rights⁵⁰. So it was not surprising that in the opening words of *Gaudium et spes*, the Conciliar Fathers used the word solidarity to depict the commitment of the Church to the whole human family. According to the document,

the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are afflicted in any way are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people genuinely united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards

⁴⁷ The prophets always fought to establish this justice and solidarity as we shall see later.

⁴⁸ R. W. JENSON, *Eschatology*, in P. Scott and W. T. Cavanaugh (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Printing, Oxford, 2003, p. 410.

⁴⁹ We shall see under our discussion on poverty and social justice that the prophets were mainly called to ensure that such spirit of solidarity was maintained in Israel.

⁵⁰ JOHN XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, no.157.

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the Father's Kingdom....This is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race in its history⁵¹.

Gaudium et Spes holds that solidarity has become necessary especially because of the "very great increase in mutual interdependence between people"⁵². This mutual interdependence is a moral imperative so that "every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and even those of the human family as a whole"⁵³ The Council's option for solidarity is based on the Church's belief that God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity⁵⁴. And as a solution to the yawning gap between the rich and the poor, *Gaudium et spes* recommends that "the present solidarity of humanity calls for greater international cooperation in economic matters"⁵⁵

Studying *Gaudium et spes* very closely we can say that solidarity has come to become synonymous with *option for the poor* as seen in other ecclesiastical documents published after the council. Synods, popes and theologians have continued to draw out the implications of this concept for the nature of evangelisation, a broadened Christology and as Christian virtue as we shall see below⁵⁶. Since Pope John Paul II contributed much in developing the theme of solidarity we shall examine some of his writings on this⁵⁷.

⁵¹ GS, no. 1.

⁵² Ibid., no. 23.

⁵³ Ibid., no. 26.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid., no. 69.

⁵⁵ Ibid., no. 85.

⁵⁶ F. KAMMER, *Doing Faithjustice. An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1991, p. 89.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that before John Paul II, Paul VI, in his *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), invoked the idea of universal brotherhood to express his belief in solidarity of the human family. On this premise he advocates the right of emigration of workers from one part of the world to another. Such a world conceived as a universal family will help all to share and live in communities of freedom and justice. Only this can lead to the emergence of a world that involves itself with others and can indeed "spend itself in building up active and lived solidarity" (*O. A.* no. 47). And in his *Populorum progressio* (1967), he discussed solidarity within the ontological vocation of the human person as a member of the society and as part of the whole of humankind. "For this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse

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1.1.5.2. John Paul II and Notion of Solidarity

Even before he became the Pope John Paul II, Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, in 1969 published a work titled *Osoaba I Czyn* (The self and the Act). It is in this work that he made a philosophical analysis of the concept of solidarity. The key ideas in the book are represented in the citation below.

The attitude of solidarity is a 'natural' consequence of the fact that a human being exists and act together with others. Solidarity is also the foundation of a community in which the common good conditions and liberates participation, and participation serves the common good, supports it, and implements it. Solidarity means the continuous readiness to accept and perform that part of a task which is imposed due to the participation as member of a specific community⁵⁸.

Although John Paul's understanding of solidarity in the above citation has a more philosophico-anthropological note to it, it will later become more expressed in more Christian and theological dimension as well. Later one realises that his understanding of solidarity is also connected with his personal experiences of the mechanisms of Communism, especially as it concerns his native Poland. So whether, in his writings, speeches and numerous journeys, he kept on emphasising the urgent need of connecting the Christian faith to concrete action especially in matters of social justice⁵⁹.

A closer study of the statements, works and dispositions of John Paul II, one see that he had three visions of how to tackle the big problem of social injustice especially in the developing world. First, he had option of proposing the traditional charity approach to social challenges and this would mean *increased assistance* to the poor. While this may help the poor and the oppressed temporary, it may not change the very structures that breed social inequality, and injustice. The second option was to follow a Marxist approach. While the Pope may sympathise with Marxists for their concern for the poor

to interest ourselves in those who will come after us to enlarge the human family. The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty" (PP. no. 17).

⁵⁸ Wojtyla, *Osoaba I Czyn*, in D. DORR, *Option for the Poor. A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*, Orbis Books, New York, 1992, p. 304.

⁵⁹ Cf. F. KAMMER, *Doing Faithjustice. An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, Paulist Press, New York, 1991, p. 185.

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and the oppressed, he does not agreed with the ‘combatant’ approach proposed. His critique of Liberation theologies in Latin America concerns his fear of radical actions proposed as solution to the challenge of social injustice⁶⁰.

So John Paul II was now left with the challenge of finding a new Christian language and approach that would be effective enough for handling the problem of social inequality and oppression in modern world. His experiences in Poland offered him a clue. He saw that using effective trade unionism, workers and the poor in Poland were able to achieve what traditional charity and radical combatant action may not able to achieve. He seemed to have adopted both the *name*, *ideology* and *methodology* of the *Solidarnosch* Movement in Poland⁶¹. Once he has adopted the Solidarnosch approach, the Pope tried to modify or, one could say, *Christianise* it to make it more appropriate as a Catholic praxis⁶². The mutual influence between the Solidarity Movement in Poland and solidarity as Christian praxis can be confirmed. “Lech Walesa who was the leader of the Solidarity Movement and later a president of the country, attributed essential support to the pontiff that not only inspired Solidarity but encouraged it during the dark days of its apparent demise”⁶³.

So how has solidarity been interpreted and used as Christian vocabulary and praxis in the teachings of John Paul and other Catholic Social writings?

⁶⁰ SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instructions on Some Aspects of Liberation Theologies*. See especially Section VIII: *Subversion of the Meaning of Truth and Violence*, no. 3. Vatican City, 1984.

⁶¹ This Solidarity Movement evolved from a trade union to a political party in Poland with its first leader as Lesch Walesa.

⁶² Despite the attempt to distance himself from Marxism and even liberation theology which are accused of tending towards violence as a means of social change, John Paul II found it difficult to present a purely Catholic alternative. This why some critics hold that “anyone who is conversant with the writings of Marx would think that *Laborem exercems* was a 20th century edited and Christianised work of Marx” (J. U. NJOKU, op. cit., p. 58).

⁶³ We can say that the Pope inspired solidarity movement in Poland and the solidarity movement in turn inspired the pope (cf. Ibid., p. 56).

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1.1.5.3. John Paul II Sees Solidarity as a Christian Virtue

One important contribution of John Paul II to our understanding of solidarity is that he elevated it to the level of a Christian virtue⁶⁴. As a Christian virtue, the Pope sees solidarity as an advanced expression of Christian charity. It obliges the Christian to *translate* his/her religious beliefs into practical actions of charity especially in fostering social justice⁶⁵. As a Christian virtue, John Paul II sees solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”⁶⁶. As a virtue, the Pope holds that solidarity actually helps Christians to realise, that to work for the good of others is to fulfil our highest calling namely, to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mtt. 19:19)⁶⁷. As compassion in practice, John Paul II maintains that “solidarity is born out of compassion and urges one to share to some extent in the suffering of the less well-off on the social and economic ladder”⁶⁸.

In his *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II challenges those consecrated to religious life to live this solidarity in practice. He sees it as a contradiction, any form of individualism that gives “no place to solidarity, openness to others, or service of them”. Solidarity, he maintains is not just for the good of the other but leads to the realization of ontological vocation of man since “we find our fulfillment through the gift of self to others”⁶⁹. And again in *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II expatiates on the meaning of solidarity by contrasting it with individualistic mentality. And as a Christian praxis he underlines that solidarity is concrete commitment of charity for all peoples⁷⁰.

⁶⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 40.

⁶⁵ Some have described solidarity as an expression of perfect love because, “to be solidary is to act like God. It is to be like God, to be perfecting love” (P. IROEGBU, op. cit., p. 88).

⁶⁶ Ibid., no. 38.

⁶⁷ Cf. E.OJAKAMINOR, op. cit., p. 80.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 1985, no. 19.

⁷⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 49.

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In his post synodal document, *Ecclesia in Africa*, the Pope once again calls for the practice of solidarity in Africa as one way of surmounting the numerous challenges facing the continent. Calling firstly for ‘organic pastoral solidarity,’ he went on to enunciate how this solidarity could be put into practice⁷¹. “It is my desire that Christians in Africa will become ever more aware of this interdependence among individuals and nations, and will be ready to respond to it by practicing the virtue of *solidarity*. The fruit of solidarity is peace, an inestimable good for peoples and nations in every part of the world. For it is precisely by means of fostering solidarity that the Church can make a specific and decisive contribution to the culture of peace”⁷².

Donald Door has actually picked up the idea of solidarity as Christian virtue and further expounded it. According to him, this virtue has two main aspects. The first is the choice of life-style which enables us to share enter and share in some degree in the world of those left on the margin of the society. The second aspect has to do with the political analysis of their condition and the disposition to act in order to bring a change for the better. Having stated his understanding of solidarity as such, Dorr goes on to explain it more specifically as a Christian virtue just as John Paul II. For him therefore,

the virtue of solidarity emerges and flourishes within the matrix of experience of solidarity. This virtue is a habitual attitude and style of being and of relating which inclines one to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others in the group and to devote oneself generously to the common welfare. In order to nurture this virtue one must be open to challenge by the members of the group and to challenge them in return⁷³.

⁷¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 133.

⁷² Ibid., no. 138.

⁷³ D. DORR, *Option for the Poor Re-visited*, in J. S. BOSWELL, F. P. McHUGH & J. VERSTRAETEN (eds.), op. cit., pp. 252-253.

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1.1.6. Some Important Features of Solidarity

A critical study of solidarity, especially as a Christian praxis reveals the following important features which will indeed help us throughout this work.

1.1.6.1. Solidarity as Call to Action *For* and *With* the Poor

Whether we call it compassion or charity, Christianity has always preached that helping the less-privileged is central to the Christian vocation. This has been encouraged both on the individual and collective levels⁷⁴. But Catholic Social Teaching has brought a new dimension to this traditional acts of charity⁷⁵. The Church now tries to demonstrate that charity and justice are not two opposing or incompatible virtues⁷⁶. Today, the Christian should be concerned not only about the *plight* of the poor but also about the *causes* of their poverty. And it is precisely on this level that one can say that solidarity as a Christian praxis is an advanced way of practicing charity. This is because, it does not just content itself with *feeling* the pain of the poor⁷⁷, nor is it satisfied in carrying out occasional acts of charity (Mtt. 25: 31-35)⁷⁸. Solidarity instead seeks to discover the cause of poverty and to take action to tackle it.

⁷⁴ We have treated this topic in the last part of this study.

⁷⁵ As a matter of fact John Paul sees solidarity as complement of justice because, "justice alone can, if faithfully observed, remove the causes of social conflict but can never bring about union of minds and hearts" (JOHN PAUL II, *Quadragesimo Anno*, no. 137).

⁷⁶ Sometimes charity could be presented as a weaker response to social problems, while justice is presented as more audacious approach to such problems. While charity is presented as focusing on individuals, justice focuses on institutions, power arrangements, systems of finance and marketing, relationships between classes, ownership of goods and technology, distribution of costs and benefits among groups of people. So in some recent Church documents, promoting social justice is an expression of gospel love and precisely Christian charity.

⁷⁷ Cf. GS, no. 1.

⁷⁸ The early Christians saw it as part of their identity to show solidarity by concrete expressions of charity, not only to their members but to the needy in the society. With the passage of time and the expansion of the Church, the giving of alms to the poor became a central pillar in Christianity (cf. Acts 2:44). A. Durand, argues that today, the identity of the poor and the phenomenon of poverty have taken new shapes. The Church and Christians should therefore go beyond giving of alms to addressing the root-causes of poverty. This is solidarity in action, and if the Church gives it a second place, she is at once undermining the very foundation on which it was built (cf. A. DURAND, *J' avais faim, une théologie à l'épreuve des pauvres*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1995, p. 119).

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Coming back to John Paul II, we see that “solidarity is his term for the structural response demanded by gospel love”⁷⁹. So one of the fundamental principles of solidarity is that alleviating poverty necessarily requires fundamental changes in social and economic structures that perpetuate glaring inequalities and engender poverty⁸⁰. He often refers to such systems that breed injustice as the ‘structures of sin’⁸¹.

One important note about solidarity as an option for the poor is that it demands concrete action that may even appear radical in the traditional approach to charity. It is here that the Church is called not only to utter prophetic words against oppression, but especially commissioned to act prophetically by standing with the poor and the oppressed against the forces that threaten them⁸². It is here that one begins to see that such concepts as ‘struggling with poor’ entered ecclesiastical documents. Henceforth, one can then define solidarity as faith seeking justice⁸³. So active solidarity with the poor and the oppressed advocates that the Church sees it as its *sacred and urgent duty* to ‘struggle’ with the poor and oppressed to attain an economic, social and political development. This development will enable people to go through a transition from less human conditions to those which are more human⁸⁴.

Understood as praxis for social justice, some theologians like G. Gutierrez and L. Boff maintain that the solidarity should always be understood in its active form. For Gutierrez, in the praxis of solidarity, “passivity or indifference would be neither ethical nor Christian”⁸⁵. And for L. Boff and V. Pixley, active solidarity is one of the highest

⁷⁹ Ibid., op. cit., p. 185.

⁸⁰ Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *Geffré*, in R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 64.

⁸¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 36.

⁸² Cf. F. KAMMER, op. cit., p. 186.

⁸³ Cf. E.OJAKAMINOR, op. cit., p. 79.

⁸⁴ The commitment to alleviate the condition of the poor and the oppressed is motivated by the fundamental belief that the human person is created in the image of God. So one important fact about the practice of solidarity is that for it to be valid, members must recognise one another as persons created by God and imbued with dignity.

⁸⁵ G. GUTIERREZ, *The Truth Shall Make You Free, Confrontations...*, p. 75.

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expressions of our Christian mission. According to them, “this is because following Jesus on his way to the Father not only involves a practice of solidarity with the poor, but also means being, like Jesus, bearers of a message of hope, a message the Bible calls gospel, good news”⁸⁶.

1.1.6.2. Solidarity and *Subsidiarity*: Are they Reconcilable?

One cannot adequately discuss the Catholic doctrine of solidarity without explaining its relationship with that of *subsidiarity*⁸⁷. So while solidarity, cooperation and collaboration are important elements of solidarity, it still holds that the principle of subsidiarity must be respected. It should be part of the praxis of solidarity because without subsidiarity, solidarity stands the risk of promoting dependency and other forms of assistentialism⁸⁸. As an important element of solidarity, subsidiarity will seek to safeguard the *liberty* and *identity* of the individual and, indeed, help to promote individual initiatives and potentials⁸⁹. Subsidiarity should be present in the praxis of solidarity because it will promote justice since each person is obliged to contribute to the common good and only then, share in the fruits of the *commonwealth* as well. Pope John II explains this further.

Basing his teaching on the fundamental Christian doctrine of the dignity of man, John Paul II, recognises that without a proper appreciation of the individual, solidarity will not be authentic. According to him, the exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognise in themselves and in others the value and grandeur of the

⁸⁶ C. BOFF and G. V. PIXLEY, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, Orbis Books, New York, 1989, p. 92.

⁸⁷ The word subsidiarity is derived from the Latin word *subsidiarius* and has its origins in Catholic social teaching. It is the principle which is associated with Catholic Social Teaching but has now become widely acknowledged as ideal for true federalism. Its main demand is that in handling social matters and decisions (especially), we ought to begin with the smallest competent authority before referring them to the high ones. This is to say that the higher or central authority should play subsidiary functions in the society. This to ensure that central or higher authorities do not usurp the roles which are reserved for regional or local groups who could perform such roles effectively.

⁸⁸ Subsidiarity makes the marginalised individuals realise that they too are active subjects of history and not meant to be recipients of occasional charity from others (cf. E. OJAKAMINOR, op.cit., p. 80; See also G. V. RHEENEN, *Using Money in Missions, The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*, in, *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, Vol. 38, no. 1, Jan, 2002, p. 41).

⁸⁹ Cf. P. IROGBU, op. cit., p. 131.

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human person. For him, without respecting the principle of subsidiarity, the individual “effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefiting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him”⁹⁰. The Pope summarises the relationship that should exist between the praxis of solidarity and the respect for subsidiarity.

In the spirit of such solidarity, those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, would feel *responsible* for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the spirit of solidarity, would not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, would do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in turn, would not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others⁹¹.

1.1.6.3. Solidarity, Conformism and Confrontation

We have seen that the notion of justice in recent Church documents has to do with active commitment to alleviating the condition of the poor and the marginalized. Today the idea of *struggle* has come into the ecclesiastical vocabulary. How then does this type of struggle differ from that proposed by Karl Marx? How does this struggle differ from that of which Liberation theology is accused of? Could this type of struggle not lead to violence? In other words, what is the relationship between solidarity and violence?⁹²

Despite the ideas that suggest some type of confrontation with the forces of oppression and injustice, solidarity does not seek to enthrone conformism nor does it set out to seek the victory of one class over. Such confrontation often leads to more bitterness and

⁹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 41.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, no.39.

⁹² Liberation theology is accused of using the Marxist inspiration that talks of class struggle towards achieving a classless society as seen in the Vatican document that was probing the orthodoxy of Latin American liberation theologies. According to the document, “this all-embracing conception thus imposes its logic and leads the *theologies of liberation* to accept a series of positions which are incompatible with the Christian vision of humanity (cf. SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instructions on some Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, 1984, no. 1).

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disorder⁹³. Solidarity on the other hand *struggles non-violently* for a better world in which people from all classes can be carried along as they share the same values and goals. Being a Christian virtue therefore solidarity does not teach *exclusivity*. This is because the message of the Gospel is addressed to all people, rich and poor, oppressor and the oppressed⁹⁴. Since it does not seek to 'eliminate' the 'enemy', 'the oppressor', solidarity is open to dialogue and new visions⁹⁵. Solidarity sets aside the kind of thinking that divides and exploits and opts for mutual acceptance and respect in pursuit of justice. J. Haers describes this as an act of reconciliation leading to the fostering a community spirit that can lead to the "*restauration du lien entre victime et malfaiteur*"⁹⁶.

But inspite of the need for cooperation in the praxis of solidarity, confrontation, tensions and oppositions are not always excluded. One who expresses opposition does not remove himself from participation in the community and does not withdraw his readiness to act for the common good⁹⁷. And this is where dialogue comes in as an indispensable element in any discourse on solidarity⁹⁸. So in the praxis of solidarity, the concern is with the structure of the community that permits the emergence of opposition based on solidarity⁹⁹. Paulo Freire refers to this as a democratic system which should be marked by

⁹³ Violence tends to beget violence. We shall see more on this under the theme of nonviolence in the latter part of this study.

⁹⁴ Many rich people love justice, and many poor people still need to appreciate the virtue of justice in their own peculiar world. Solidarity as a Christian praxis therefore welcomes any artisan of justice and peace in its movement whether they are rich or poor.

⁹⁵ As a Christian virtue it rejects all injustices but does not use a hateful or a hurtful means to achieve its goal. It believes that the use of violence as a means for achieving just situations is immoral. Solidarity seeks to promote what people have in common rather than what divides them. The paradox of violence is that it often leads to the destruction of what it seeks to protect, namely human life, freedom, peace, and property. In as much as solidarity yearns for justice, it does not yield to vengeance and resentment since it believes that charity is fundamental to any Christian commitment.

⁹⁶ J. HAERS, op. cit., p. 130.

⁹⁷ But in all these, it must be emphasised that the type of opposition meant here should be constructive.

⁹⁸ We shall discuss dialogue in the latter part of this project.

⁹⁹ This is where solidarity bears the mark of modern democracy. Like any good democratic system, the structure must not only allow the emergence of the opposition, give it the opportunity to express itself, but it must also make it possible for the opposition to function for the good of the community.

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its unity within a diversity¹⁰⁰. The ideal of solidarity is that it seeks to work for a just social order, in which tensions can be absorbed, and communion with others fostered. This is as a result of the Christian belief that all peoples are the children of the same Father, God. Solidarity is thus an ideal which seeks to remove the foundations of hatred, selfishness and injustice. This is possible when the lust for power is curtailed, the defence of one's own wealth and privileged position can be replaced by an openness to sharing in a spirit of mutual trust¹⁰¹.

1.1.7. Closing Remarks on Solidarity

The main task facing us in this project is how to use the principle of solidarity to tackle problem of extreme poverty in Black Africa. We have focused on the solidarity as understood and used in Catholic Social Teaching. Here are the salient points from that study.

First solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching is treated essentially from its ethical dimension. Christian understanding of solidarity shows that it is synonymous *option for the poor*¹⁰². Again solidarity in the Catholic Social Teaching seems to have three levels. The first requires a perception of the reality of injustice, oppression and poverty. The second is the Church's desire to identify more closely (in solidarity) with the poor, and other victims of social injustice and oppression. This is the level that *Gaudium et spes* describes when it states that what affects peoples all over the world also affects the followers of Christ¹⁰³. But the third level of solidarity is the level of concrete action as presented below.

¹⁰⁰ A. DARDER, *Reinventing Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Love*, Westview Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Some Catholic writers see the need to strengthen solidarity and cooperation between the Church and State especially in promoting social justice (P. IROGBU, op. cit., p. 132).

¹⁰² Preferential option for the poor is a concept that has become associated with the historical Episcopal Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellin, Colombia in 1968 (cf. P. CASALDALIGA, *In Pursuit of the Kingdom*, New York, Orbis, 1990, p. 1).

¹⁰³ Cf. GS, no. 1.

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Although the Church has been traditionally engaged in various charity activities to help the poor, solidarity now obliges the Church and indeed every follower of Christ to ask:

But *why* are they poor and what can we do to tackle this poverty from its root cause? So when we present solidarity as a Christian virtue, as advanced charity, as faith seeking justice, or as theological system, we are actually engaging in a quest to find the best, most effective and most coherent language to address the problem of social injustice from a Christian perspective. The implication of the above is that solidarity as Christian praxis still remains and *ideal* to be aimed at, and which is difficult to achieve¹⁰⁴. But in a world that is marked by interdependence, in a world that is marked by a growing gap between the rich and the poor, and in a continent like Africa, which is marked by diversities and violent conflicts and wars, proposing the principles of solidarity appears an effective option for addressing these challenges.

On a personal note, we submit that adopting solidarity as an approach to African problems is an option among others. And like any other option it, one may forego other alternative strategies. One can actually argue that proposing solidarity as a way of dealing with social injustice in a quasi-militant situation as prevalent in Black Africa, is being

¹⁰⁴ P. Iroegbu observes that "some see the solidarity project as misguided, a false or distasteful route to righteousness in the world" (P. IROEGBU, op. cit. p. 87). There are many reasons why the praxis of solidarity will remain difficult. Some of the arguments against solidarity lie in its relationship to justice. Given that inequalities are part and parcel of human life, the practise of solidarity becomes difficult. Would it be just for everyone to share in the sweat and effort of those who have made great sacrifices and exerted themselves to incredible human limits to achieve success in their various fields of endeavour? And on another level, how can one speak of solidarity in a society where some have so exploited others that restitution appears impossible. Another difficulty in the practice of solidarity is that it takes for granted that human beings are essentially good, and are ready to share with others what they have. Although this is desirable, experience shows that human beings tend to consider their possessions as part or extension of themselves. To voluntarily give away some of their possessions becomes extremely difficult. Another difficulty in discussing solidarity is that human beings tend to measure their self-esteem and success by the amount of what they possess or can possess. Since this is one of the arguments for private property, one wonders if solidarity will not water down the spirit of healthy competition judged necessary for a creative society?

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unrealistic and unnecessarily utopic. While agreeing with these difficulties, a noted author nonetheless maintains that,

the risk of solidarity is a happy risk, at any rate a necessary and inevitable one. The risk must be taken if we are to achieve our goal of humanity: of being full human beings in the manner of divine fullness¹⁰⁵.

As for our use of the expression *theology of solidarity* in this study, we are inspired by the fact that today, both in ecclesial and other specialist disciplines, solidarity “*est proposé comme le principe fondamental de la vie en société et où il est explicité en termes particulièrement expressifs, philosophiquement et théologiquement*”¹⁰⁶. We now examine the meaning of poverty with special interest in material poverty.

¹⁰⁵ P. IROEGBU, op.cit., p. 88.

¹⁰⁶ R. COSTE, *La charité du Royaume*, Paris, Editions S.O.S, 1989, p. 113.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS POVERTY AND WHO ARE THE POOREST OF THE POOR?

Apart from *solidarity*, *poverty* is another key word in this study. So we shall try to interpret what poverty means in general and how the notion of *poorest of the poor* is understood used in our work. This is how we shall proceed. First, we shall present some definitions and descriptions of the concept. Then we shall present some classifications of poverty. We shall then focus more on material poverty. Eventually we shall explain what we mean by the *poorest of the poor*, and by way of summary, present the main characteristics of the poorest of the poor.

1.2 1. Attempt at a Definition and Barometer for Measuring Levels of Poverty¹⁰⁷

According to some scholars, like F. Lienard of the University of Montpellier, France, any attempt to define or describe poverty of ends in some difficulties. This is because the concept is very contextual and varies in degrees¹⁰⁸. But in spite of this, we can say that poverty has to do with the lack of basic human needs. It is in this understanding that the New Encyclopaedia Britannica states that, “poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs”¹⁰⁹. These basic needs may be defined narrowly to mean those necessary for survival or broadly to mean those reflecting the prevailing standard of living in the community. The first standard will cover those living on the borderline of starvation or death from exposure. The second criterion would extend to people whose nutrition, housing, and clothing, though adequate to preserve life, do not measure up to those of the population as a whole. And according to the Oxford English Dictionary, poverty is the condition of having little or no wealth or material possessions; indigence, destitution, want and so on.

In defining poverty, experts identify different types. *Cyclical poverty* refers to the poverty

¹⁰⁷ Many attempts to define poverty often end up describing it. So we shall present both attempts at definition or/description.

¹⁰⁸ Fritz Lienard of the faculty of Protestant theology in Montpellier University, has done a very systematic study on poverty that could be a useful guide for a theologian studying the topic (cf. F. LIENARD, *De la pauvreté au service en Christ*, Paris, Cerf, 2000, See especially, p. 14).

¹⁰⁹ J. R./J.K.R., *Poverty*, in *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 14, 1978, p. 935.

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that may be widespread throughout a population, but its occurrence is of limited duration¹¹⁰. *Collective poverty* unlike the cyclical which is temporal, is a more permanent insufficiency of means to secure basic needs. Collective poverty may be concentrated among a given group in an otherwise prosperous society. Collective poverty is often transmitted from one generation to another, fathers passing it on to their children. The characteristics of collective poverty include, nutritional deficiencies and even death from starvation. Others include low life expectancy, high rate of infant mortality and poor health. The next type of poverty is called *Case Poverty*. This like collective poverty is relatively permanent and refers to the inability of an individual to secure basic needs even in surroundings of prosperity. This inability is generally related to the lack of the some basic attribute that would permit the individual to maintain himself¹¹¹.

While the above is the traditional definition of poverty, today, recent research findings bring in other perspectives of poverty involving a wider set of deprivations, including vulnerability and exclusion from society in addition to material destitution. A person is considered poor if he lives in a condition without adequate food and money and is in need of help to meet the basic human needs for food, clothing and shelter. Today also it is agreed that the concept of poverty is contextual such that someone who may be regarded as poor in a given country or community may be considered wealthy in yet another context. While the above definition focuses on material want, there exist some other non-economic connotations that the word poverty has acquired also. So poverty is associated equally, for example, with poor health, low levels of education or skills, an inability or unwillingness to participate in society, high rates of disruptive or disorderly behaviour, and improvidence.

¹¹⁰ This temporal poverty may be caused by a depressive economy in a wealthy nation, fluctuation in a business as a result of inevitable consequences of a natural market regulation.

¹¹¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 935.

Part One Chapter Two: What is Poverty and Who are the Poorest of the Poor?

Another interesting explanation of the meaning of poverty is made by D. Dorr. His main contribution is that he offers us some barometers for measuring the level of poverty both individually and collectively¹¹². According to him, the most obvious indicator is the amount of regular or occasional income that a person has, and the extent of the person's capital resources. This includes land or other property that can generate income or be sold to provide income. Another indicator is whether or not a person has work that brings in income, either by being self-employed or by working for another where he is paid. The amount and quality of food, clean water, unpolluted air, clothing and housing are all useful indicators for judging if a person is rich or poor. The availability of energy, heating, lighting and power also count¹¹³.

Also important is the degree of access one has to such services as transport, sanitation, schooling, post, telephone, media, recreational and sporting facilities, as well as cultural institutions. With regard to health, we count such factors as average life expectancy, the level of infant mortality, the prevalence of endemic diseases. Since education is central to human development, we must judge if the individual has practical and technical skills as well as the ability to read, write, and to communicate effectively¹¹⁴. From his elaborate study on the concept of poverty Dorr concludes:

In the light of what I have said about the indicators of poverty
and the causes of poverty, there is one conclusion that emerges

¹¹²A Nigerian author has equally offered some criteria for measuring the levels of poverty or lack of it in that country. They correspond generally with the criteria presented by Dorr (cf. S. N. EZEANYA, *The Poor in Our Midst*, cited in P. EZEOKAFOR, *The Church's Social Teaching on Justice and its Relevance to Nigeria*, Pontificium Athenaeum Sanctae Crucis, Rome, 1996, p. 96).

¹¹³ The above indicators for determining the level of poverty or wealth correspond nearly to the criteria of the Human Development Index of the United Nations on human development. According to the latter criteria, three fundamental factors are to be considered in judging how rich or poor a person is. These include the level of health condition, the level of education one has, or has access to, and thirdly, the regular revenue of the person in question (cf. L. O'NEIL, *Initiation à l'éthique sociale*, Paris, Editions Fides, 1998, p. 357).

¹¹⁴ It must be noted that these indicators vary according to societies and cultures. In most developing societies one finds the doubly poor among widows, orphans, resident aliens and indeed all those who have nobody to defend them against exploitation. They find themselves in a situation of general insecurity characterised by economic destitution and psycho-social oppression. As for the major causes of poverty, Dorr thinks that discrimination and corruption constitute major causes of poverty in societies (cf. D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, New York, Orbis Books, 2000, p. 151).

very clear for me. It is that poverty is above all about *powerlessness*. It is clear that lack of power of one kind or another is both an essential part of being poor and is also the key cause of poverty¹¹⁵.

1.2.2. Main Classifications of Poverty: Spiritual and Material¹¹⁶

In the foregoing discussion, we have been interpreting poverty in general. The emphasis seems to focus on material poverty. But given the nature of this research, we shall go further on to classify and expatiate more on the expression. Below then, we shall see the two main classifications of poverty as found in the Biblical tradition, in some official Church documents and in some theological writings.

1.2.2.1. Spiritual Poverty in the Bible, Magisterial Documents and Theological Writings

The Old Testament is very rich in its teaching on poverty. A closer reading of many of the texts however show that there is clear distinction between material and spiritual poverty. We shall study some texts that can help us understand better the nature of spiritual poverty.

1.2.2.1.1. Spiritual Poverty in the Old Testament

Spiritual poverty is generally associated with a religious disposition often involving a voluntary sacrifice of something important for a given cause. Although this type of poverty is found in many religious traditions, we shall examine it only from a Biblico-Christian tradition. It should also be noted here that going through the Bible, some ecclesial documents and some theological works, one can say that *spiritual, religious* or

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

¹¹⁶ Although there may be other classifications of poverty, we have limited ourselves to the two broad types, spiritual and material. We shall begin our presentation with spiritual poverty so that it serves as a help to understanding material poverty and also to enable us use material poverty as proper introduction to the next chapter of this work. It should be admitted that an exhaustive study of the concept, poverty, is not possible within the scope of this work.

Part One Chapter Two: What is Poverty and Who are the Poorest of the Poor?

evangelical poverty can be used synonymously, and this is what we have done in this work.

In the Biblical tradition, especially in the Old Testament, spiritual poverty is seen as a religious disposition of those who depend on God for their deliverance. The spiritually poor in the Old Testament regard themselves as special children and friends of God. The poor in this sense were called by different names in the Old Testament. They were especially referred to as the *anawim*¹¹⁷ of God. They are God's own poor. Some people would later pride themselves as the *poor of Yahweh*. Anything done against them was done against God and any injustice against them was a direct insult against the God of Israel.

Reading through the Old Testament, one sees that there is a tendency to equate the *poor* with the *just*. But according to Albert Gelin, a noted biblical theologian, when the Bible speaks of the *poor of Yahweh*, this does not mean that the poor were pleasing to Yahweh simply by their being poor¹¹⁸. God had special interest in them because of their vulnerability, such that he "looked on the mistreatment of the poor as an affront to his sovereignty over Israel"¹¹⁹. The main point in understanding the Old Testament notion of spiritual poverty therefore is that even when such poverty is described positively and religiously, it was as a protest against oppression and injustice rampant among God's people as opposed to the plans and spirit of the alliance¹²⁰.

¹¹⁷ This word is common in the Old Testament. It has a variety of meanings. It evokes the sense of individuals with specific misfortunes. It has above all a spiritual connotation as those who know the name of Yahweh. Later the poor in the sense of those lacking in material necessities of life were conventionally referred to as the *anawim*. This explains why sometimes the poverty of the *anawim* is seen as if it were a privilege of God's special children. They are those who fear the Lord, his holy ones. The *anawim* had a special spirituality in Israel. The prophets see them as typical symbol of the future Israel (cf. Ezek. 36:24-28). Caring for the *anawim* was a sacred duty to God (cf. F. KAMMER, op. cit. p. 45).

¹¹⁸ As a matter of fact, many of them indulged in actions considered offensive to God and his people.

¹¹⁹ A. GELIN, *The Poor of Yahweh*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1963, p. 19.

¹²⁰ In the alliance between God and Israel, there was enough provision to ensure that nobody lived in extreme poverty. But when this directive was not respected, Yahweh himself opted to protect the poor. Later the prophets of Israel will equally defend the poor and oppressed in Israel.

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Another important fact about spiritual poverty in the Old Testament is that it was equally understood as a kind of disposition accepted as a form of protest against the excessive material tendencies of some people in Israel. We find this idea expressed especially in the Sapiential writings where God endorses neither excess wealth nor abject poverty. Those who became excessively rich could very easily slip into pride and greed. They arrogate to themselves the place of God. Their wealth becomes for them, their 'god' and their riches become their security. They could no longer see the need of God or their neighbour (cf. Ps. 48/49; Sir. 31:8). Those who were extremely poor were easily tempted to sin. They were prone to steal, tell lies, and were easily forced to engage in all sorts of acts forbidden among God's people.

It is from here that the notion of poverty as a moderation emerged. The ideal is an intermediate state befitting the men of virtue. While the Bible condemns the poor man who does not want to work, (cf. Prov. 20:13), it equally rejects the rich man who wanders after wealth (cf. Sir. 3: 8). Those who were neither too poor nor too rich easily regarded themselves as the modest poor of God. This was the ideal proposed by the God of Israel. The above understanding enables us to understand why a typical Jew would pray thus: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; lest, being full, I will deny you, saying who is Yahweh? Or being in want, I steal, and profane the name of my God" (Prov. 30: 8-9).

By the time of Jesus, there were new forms of spiritual poverty voluntarily embraced in anticipation of the Kingdom of God. The most significant example is seen in the disposition of the *Essenes*, a spiritual group who lived austere and secluded lives as described below.

The *Essenes* believed that a life of holiness in the Jewish society of their time was impossible. Consequently, they withdrew from the society and went into the wilderness. They called themselves 'men of holiness' and a 'house of holiness'. Holiness meant separation from the impure society. They regarded themselves as

'children of light' and looked at the Romans and most Jewish people as 'children of darkness', whom God would soon destroy¹²¹.

1.2.2.1.2. Spiritual Poverty in the New Testament ¹²²

Although one may not find a definition of *poverty* in the New Testament, one can still argue that poverty is an essential New Testament word. While the New Testament often speaks of poverty in general, one can still point out some instances where reference is made directly or indirectly to spiritual or religious poverty¹²³.

First, Jesus presents himself as model of spiritual poverty. For his father's sake and for the Kingdom of God, he owns nothing, not even a place to lay down his head (cf. Mtt 8:20). Since himself relies entirely on his father for everything, he encourages his followers to rely on the goodwill of his father to provide their daily needs even as he does for the sparrows of the air (cf. Matthew 6:25-34). Although he does not condemn wealth, he warns his audience of the dangers associated with wealth. To the rich young man who sought his opinion on how to inherit eternal life, he recommended spiritual poverty. "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and come, follow me" (Mtt. 5:21). He warns that it will be very difficult, if not impossible for the rich to enter the Kingdom (cf. Mtt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25). He equally called on his followers to renounce all that they have, otherwise they cannot be his disciples (cf. Lk. 14:33).

In the Beatitudes, the poor are blessed since the Kingdom of God belongs to them (cf. Mtt. 5:3). Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God. The poor in spirit are emphasised here. The spiritual poor are those who are conscious of their

¹²¹ J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God, the Message of Jesus Today*, Orbis, New York, 2002, p. 132.

¹²² We restricted ourselves to the gospel texts.

¹²³ By being essential word here, we mean that if we take poverty out of the Christian Gospel then we will fail utterly to understand the Gospel, or the true meaning of the lifestyle of Jesus. Actually one can say that poverty is the key that unlocks the mystery of His life and peace (cf. M. BUCKLEY, *Let Peace Disturb You*, Fountain Paperbacks, London, 1985, p. 40).

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powerlessness to satisfy their aspirations for God's reign. They are praised because they are convinced of their spiritual indigence and their need for redemption. They lean entirely on God, and never on themselves. The poor never stop begging for divine help and this gives them the disposition of 'clients' prepared to welcome the Kingdom of God, which is the consolation and redemption of Israel (cf. Lk 2:25). When the apostles decided to embrace poverty for the sake of the Kingdom they wanted to know their reward (cf. Lk. 18:28). Jesus promised them both temporal and eternal rewards (cf. Lk. 18:29-30)¹²⁴.

1.2.2.1.3. Spiritual Poverty in some Magisterial Documents

The renunciation of worldly possessions has for long been part of the practice of Christian asceticism. The early Christian community of Jerusalem in their initial fervour, sold their goods and divided the proceeds among themselves each according to his or her needs (cf. Acts 2:45). In Catholic tradition, spiritual poverty entails voluntarily giving up certain possessions and advantages in order to devote oneself entirely to the service of God and neighbour. So the Church has traditionally taught that spiritual poverty is an object of special virtue. And those who embrace the state of perfection understood from the first time that they must choose poverty. The practice of poverty thus derives its merit from the virtuous motive ennobling it, and from the virtues which one exercises in regard to the privations and sacrifices accompanying it. The virtue of spiritual poverty is traditionally practised in the form of religious vow. This is how chastity, poverty and obedience came to be the evangelical counsels¹²⁵.

¹²⁴ It should be noted that despite Jesus' teaching on poverty, it remained difficult for his followers to understand since such type of life seemed irreconcilable with the Kingdom expectation which was expected to usher in a new era in human history where people could enjoy abundant life (cf. V. MESSERORI (ed.), *Crossing the Threshold by His Holiness John Paul II*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1994, p. 66).

¹²⁵ Vatican II summarises the motivation for the evangelical counsels thus: "The teaching and example of Christ provide the foundation of the evangelical counsels of chaste self-dedication to God, of poverty and obedience. The Apostles and Fathers of the Church commend them as do its doctors and pastors, They constitute a divine gift which it has received from its Lord and which by his grace it always cherishes" (*L. G.* no. 43).

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Over the years, the notion and practice of evangelical poverty in the Church has been undergoing changes with various Church Council, papal teachings and canonical laws shedding more light on it. But one of the most important insights into the Catholic notion of poverty came at Vatican II and other documents following the Council. In line with the Council's teaching on evangelical poverty, Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical, *Ecclesia Suam*, called for a renewed zeal for spiritual poverty not just for religious men and women, but as a new spirituality for the Church in the midst of increasing quest for wealth in modern times¹²⁶, Pope John Paul II calls religious men and women to practice poverty not just for itself but "to enrich others through one's own poverty"¹²⁷. The Catechism of the Catholic Church warns that attachment to material possessions could be an obstacle to the practice of charity which is the core of the Christian message¹²⁸. The main emphasis today in understanding evangelical poverty is that, *it is not an end in itself*. Evangelical poverty is now understood more as a means of enhancing our practice of charity to our neighbour¹²⁹.

1.2.2.1.4. Theological Interpretation of Evangelical Poverty as Call for Action

Inspired especially by the positive interpretation of the meaning of evangelical poverty, some theologians especially from Latin America argue that the Church now understands more than ever, that poverty for itself is not essentially good. G. Gutierrez for instance agrees on the merit of spiritual poverty but argues that even when spiritual poverty seems to have a positive dimension to it, it is only when voluntarily undertaken that it has some merit. He argues further that evangelical poverty is not meant for every one but is reserved for those who voluntarily opt for it¹³⁰. Gutierrez thinks that evangelical poverty

¹²⁶ Cf. PAUL VI, *Ecclesia Suam*, August 6, 1964, no. 54.

¹²⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptionis Donum*, no. 12.

¹²⁸ Cf. CCC, no. 2545

¹²⁹ Cf. VATICAN II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, nos. 1 and 8.

¹³⁰ Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *La théologie de la libération*, Bruxelles, Edition Lumen Vitae, 1974, p. 87.

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should be best explained today as a kind of protest against greed, oppression and exploitation of the weaker members of the human family¹³¹.

For L. Boff, an authentic understanding of the demands of evangelical poverty will lead those who embrace it, to use the things of the world with moderation so that they can share with the materially poor in the society¹³². The two authors equally argue that evangelical poverty will help those who embrace it to be freer, and more available to engage in the liberation struggle, *with* and *for* millions of people upon whom poverty have been imposed on people¹³³. L. Boff in particular wonders how the Church which was founded in difficulty, oppression and poverty now fails to become truly the Church of the poor¹³⁴. The evangelically poor Church is one that is no longer just a Church *for* the poor, but rather a Church *of* the poor, and *with* the poor¹³⁵.

1.2.2.2. Material Poverty: Biblical and Theological Interpretations

Apart from the spiritual poverty discussed above, the Bible gives us useful insights into the nature of material poverty. We shall see that both in the Old and the New Testaments, material poverty generally has a negative connotation.

1.2.2.2.1. Material Poverty in some Old and New Testament Texts

The original concept of poverty in the Old Testament was purely negative and evil. As a matter of fact, we shall see that Rabbinical literature presents a very sad picture of poverty: It considers poverty the worst evil in the world and likens the poor together with the leper, the blind and the childless parents, and even to dead men.

Although many words are used to express the idea of poverty in the Old Testament, we shall examine the term *èhyôn* as it gives us the closest biblical equivalent of materially destitute people in Israel. They are closest equivalent group to the poorest of the poor in

¹³¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 298.

¹³² Cf. L. BOFF and C. BOFF, *Qu'est-ce que la théologie de la libération?* Paris, Cerf, 1987, p. 82.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 83.

¹³⁴ Cf. L. BOFF, *Eglise, charisme et pouvoir*, Paris, Lieu Commun, 1981, p. 231.

¹³⁵ Cf. L. BOFF and C. BOFF, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

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this study¹³⁶. We shall equally see that material poverty was perceived both as scandal, and as a punishment on its victims. In the New Testament, we shall see that even though Jesus spoke positively about spiritual poverty, his teaching and actions eloquently showed that material poverty was an aberration of God's plans for his people. So vulnerable were the poor people at the time of Jesus, that he tried to identify himself very closely with them. He did it to such a degree that one could say that, if Jesus is the sacrament of the Father, then the materially poor are the sacraments of Christ.

a. *Ebyōns* as example of the Materially Poor in the Old Testament

The term *èbyōn* occurs 61 times in the Hebrew Bible. It refers to those who are economically or legally distressed. In the Pentateuch, *èbyōn* appears 9 times and only in restricted sections of the legal materials in Exodus and Deuteronomy (cf. Ex. 23, Deut. 15, 24). Exodus 23:11 is of particular interest to us. Here the poverty of the *èbyōn* is presented as object, to the extent of having nothing to eat. They are thus permitted to eat freely from any eventual food crops and fruits found in a land that has been left to fallow. This position is consistent with instances of *èbyōn* in other Biblical texts (cf. Is 32:6-7, 41:7, Ezek. 16:49; Ps. 132:15).

In Deuteronomy one sees another characteristic of the *èbyōn*. *Ebyōns* are found among the indigenes as well as among foreigners who hire themselves to eke out a living. They are presented as landless manual labourers who are even often denied the small wage entitled to them after slaving the whole day (cf. Deut. 24:14). It is from the above that one can identify the poverty of the *èbyōn* as extreme.

From these legal texts we obtain the picture that the *èbyōn* are landless wage labourers living on the edge of existence. Certainly

¹³⁶Cf. J. D. PLEINS in D. N. FREEDMAN (ed), *Poor, poverty* in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 403. Let us note that for semantic analyses, it is important to keep in mind that often the context, and usage, and not etymology, are decisive in determining the meaning of a word. Today such words as 'environment/place, liberty/liberation, etc may have same roots etymologically but differ significantly in usage. So our choice of *èbyōn* seems the nearest in our present enquiry.

this is consistent with the notion that this level of poverty includes begging as a way of life¹³⁷.

In the book of Esther (cf. 9:22), the term appears to refer to those to whom alms are given, that is to beggars, they are the beggarly poor. The expression *èbyôn* occurs 4 times in the wisdom text of Proverbs and 6 times in Job. The Proverbs simply try to impress it on its reader that helping *èbyôn* is one way of honouring God (cf. Prov. 14:31). The book of Job gives us a further understanding of the nature of the real poor. They are first of all very poor because they are economically oppressed (cf. Job 24:4). Perhaps, due to their extreme poverty, neither their lives nor their death has any significance to the society in which they find themselves (cf. Job 24:14). In Job, we see that *èbyôn* is worse than an orphan. It was Job who pathetically assumed the responsibilities of a father to them (cf. 29: 16). Since they are insignificant and yet misfortune is their daily experiences, only Job saw anything of value in them hence he grieved with them in their lifelong misfortune (cf. 30:25). The *èbyôn* as the superlative poor are equally characterised by their nakedness, hence Job clothed them (cf. Job 31:19).

In the Psalms *èbyôn* appears 23 times. Significantly it is in the psalms of lamentation. The inhuman condition of the *èbyôn* is described as those robbed (cf. Ps. 35: 10). *Ebyôn* is known as one who is undergoing a great suffering (cf. Ps. 107:41). While the Wisdom literatures may blame the condition of the poor on their laziness, the Psalmist sees the poor as the victims of other people's wickedness. Without specifying who these wicked are (cf. Ps. 109:16), we know that they are victims of swords and bows of the wicked around him and they live precariously (cf. Ps 37:14)¹³⁸.

¹³⁷Cf. Ibid., p. 405. Although our special interest has been on *èbyôn*, other Hebrew words still provide us with the characteristics and plight of the very poor in Israel. For example the word, *ras*, which occurs 22 times in the Hebrew Bible refers to the poor as the economically poor, the beggar, the bum. It also portrays one who is politically poor and economically inferior. In some cases it is used for one who is lazy. The next word, is the Hebrew *dal*, which translates poor, weak, inferior, lacking. In spite of the insights from these nuances, *èbyôn* seems most apt to us.

¹³⁸ It is possible that the writer intends us to understand the above expression metaphorically in which case it can refer to any kind of suffering. But by reading Psalm 132:15, which states that it is God who now gives food to the *èbyôn*, one can suggest that *èbyôn* refers to the poor who lack the most essential human needs, especially nourishment.

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In the prophetic corpus the word appears 17 times where it connotes a general condition of physical insecurity and homelessness (cf. Is. 14:30, 25:4; Amos 8:4). *Ebyôn* is one suffering from hunger and thirst (cf. Is. 32:6-7; 14:7). Such poor person is generally mistreated and despised by the rulers and the other evil doers in the society (cf. Is. 29:19; Jer. 2:34; 20:13, Ezek. 18:12; 22:29, Amos 4:1). When the *èbyôn* has a case in the law court, he does not get any justice because he is a non-person (cf. Is. 32:7, Jer. 5:28; 22:16, Amos 5:12). Despite their total lack of social and legal security, the *èbyôn* is still exploited economically by the rich in any form the latter find possible.

Having seen the *èbyôn* as example of the materially poor in Israel, we now present the two dominant understanding of material poverty in the Old Testament. We shall see poverty as a scandal and as a punishment.

b. Material Poverty as Scandal and Punishment in the Old Testament

The first and the most important thought about material poverty is that it is a *scandalous condition* that should never have existed in Israel. The origin of this line of thought is found in the religion of Moses. When he established the people of God in the desert of Sinai, he gave them a kind of communal sensibility which could be referred to as a 'common soul'. Their semi-nomadic life facilitated this spirit of solidarity. The spirit of sharing that was being inculcated in the community was to make sure that each person was provided for. This was an antidote to poverty¹³⁹.

When however Israel settled at Canaan, the original structure of their society was threatened. So many factors made a life of solidarity with the neighbour difficult if not

¹³⁹ Cf. A. GELIN, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

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impossible¹⁴⁰. Being mainly farmers, the desire to own more lands, to provide some reserve in case of bad harvest for example, all contradicted the terms of their original communal spirit. In the face of this inevitable change, it was the regular reunion of the Israelite amphictyony¹⁴¹, that recalled past norms and the sacral act of the seventh year that made the products of the soil available to all and gave Hebrew slaves their freedom (cf. Ex. 21: 2ff; 23:10-11; see also Lev. 25: 1ff)¹⁴². This was a veritable means of reminding and maintaining Israel's sense of primitive solidarity¹⁴³. At this period in Israel, it was only the prophets that remained the *conscience* of Israel (cf. Amos 5: 7. Jer.5: 28. Hos.12: 9).

Although hated and attacked, the prophets kept on reminding Israel that having the poor in the midst of wealthy Israelites was a scandal and an insult to God. The poor man is pleasing to the Lord not because the Lord loves poverty but because the poor is a victim of human greed and so has only God as his friend, defender and hope. God looked on the mistreatment of the poor as an affront to His sovereignty over Israel¹⁴⁴. The poor like widows and orphans become the servants of God and it is God who protects them. Even in matters of cult, the prophets insisted that sacrifices, canticles, abstinence, etc are displeasing to God if they do not go alongside with justice to the poor (cf. Jer.7, 23). Indeed to know God became synonymous with understanding the plight of the poor and being out to ameliorate their condition¹⁴⁵. But poverty was also seen as a sign of punishment.

¹⁴⁰ The quality of the soil, the frequency of raids, intermarriage with non-Israelites etc. influenced the original social structure of the people.

¹⁴¹ This refers to a federation of tribes centered around a common sanctuary. It was occasional re-union that keeps reminding Israel of her history and responsibilities.

¹⁴² This theme is further discussed by L.MAGESA, *African Renaissance, The Jubilee and Africa's Position in the International Context*, in P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), *Marginalized Africa, An International Perspective*, Paulines Press, Nairobi, 2002, P. 13.

¹⁴³ Cf. A. GELIN, op. cit p. 16. The Jubilee Year was equally another effort to install equality among all the children of Israel (cf. le Comité de préparation des Journées jubilaires du monde du travail in, DC, 97, 2000, p. 466).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. A. GELIN, op.cit., p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Poverty was also seen as a sign of punishment.

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The law of temporal retribution had a very important place in Israel's theology and worldview. In this case we see that wealth is one of the clearest proofs that the just man is rewarded in this world. Good people received God's blessings while the sinner remained poor as a divine punishment.¹⁴⁶ They hoped at first that Israel, having been born in a liberating revolution, moulded by the trials of the desert and then made into a nation by the retribution of God, was to possess the good things of Yahweh. So anyone who could not receive these blessings evidently was not pleasing to the Lord of the covenant. The misfortunes of Job were seen as a punishment for some hidden sin (Job 15: 4)¹⁴⁷. God could equally send poverty and other adversities as a temptation for man's purification. In this case punishment is not to be interpreted as vengeance¹⁴⁸. It is for the overall good of the person suffering the effects of poverty or other adversities to purify them¹⁴⁹.

c. The Materially Poor as the Sacrament of Christ in the New Testament

Heir of the prophets, Jesus never contradicted what Israel's spiritual guides had taught about poverty. Far from breaking with tradition, Jesus gave new dimensions to their teaching (cf. Mtt. 5:17). Without defining poverty, the Gospel of Luke introduces the public ministry of Jesus with a manifesto which begins with announcing good news to the poor (cf. Lk. 4:18). In the Sermon on the Mount, (cf. Mtt. 5:3), Jesus said that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor¹⁵⁰. To the disciples he told that the poor will always be in their midst (cf. Mk. 17: 4. Lk. 14:7). Indeed, the most relevant text in our discourse is found in the parable of the last judgement (cf. Mtt. 25: 31ff). Here Jesus specifically

¹⁴⁶ Cf. G. DURAND et J. F. MALHERBE, *Vivre avec la souffrance*, Montréal Québec, Editions Fides, 1992, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ The idea of retribution was still strong in the New Testament. The disciples of Jesus wanted to know whether the man born blind was being punished for his own sin or that of his parents (cf. Jn. 9: 2)

¹⁴⁸ Cf. S. STUDOR, *Compassion and Remorse, Acknowledging the Suffering of the Other*, Peeters, Leuven, 2001, p. 118.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid. p. 19-20.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. G. GALDAMEZ, *Faith of a People, the Story of a Christian Community in El Salvador, 1970-1980*. Dove Communications, Melbourne, 1983, p.118. It is interesting to see that one can interpret the poor in the sense of sinners. With such interpretation, the sinner becomes the poorest person in the world and is even worst than the leper or the materially poor. Thus the primary mission of Jesus was to seek these lost sheep and to bring them into the Kingdom of God.

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defines those he considers really poor. These are the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner. In the parable of the great banquet they are described as the poor, the maimed, the blind the filthy and the indigents gathered from their horrible abodes of street corners and city lanes¹⁵¹. They are the minority excluded from human solidarity¹⁵². A very important remark about this text is that Jesus presented these poor and marginalized persons as the sacrament of his presence. He identifies himself radically with them so that whatever one does *for* them or *against* them was directed to Jesus himself¹⁵³. In this case the poor could be regarded as the ‘sacrament’ of Christ.

1.2.2.3. Material Poverty in some Theological Works

Having seen the Biblical interpretation of material poverty, let us now examine how some theologians have further interpreted it. Due to the direct relevance of their works to this study, we are restricting ourselves to the contributions of two liberation theologians, Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff¹⁵⁴, and some African theologians.

1.2.2.3.1. G. Gutierrez and Material Poverty

For G. Gutierrez, material poverty means the lack of economic goods necessary for leading a dignified life as children of God. Gutierrez often tends to identify poverty with material destitution hence he holds that poverty is a dehumanising condition which is generally abhorrent to the human nature. To be absolutely poor is to wait in line for days to have a simple medicine to treat a grave disease. “It is to feel you have no way of

¹⁵¹ Cf. W. BRAUM, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Lk. 14*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 85.

¹⁵² Cf. P.H. PLEUROUX, *Le défi des pauvres*, Paris, Desclee de Brouwer, 1997, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵³ In the later part of this work we shall see that this text is the foundation of our theology of solidarity. In it Jesus shows his solidarity with the poor and equally makes our solidarity with the poor a necessary condition for entering the Kingdom of God.

¹⁵⁴ Although these two proponents of liberation theology may have their differences, they are generally in agreement in their interpretation of the material poverty. The first thing that both have in common is that when they write about poverty especially in Latin America, they generally have in mind material poverty and its impacts on the weaker members of the society and its implications for the Church.

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responding to your family needs...”¹⁵⁵. Inspired by the Old Testament, G. Gutierrez holds that the poorest of the poor are often found among strangers, the widows, and the orphans. The stranger is rejected by a nationalist people, the widow, has no one to support her, and the orphan is left without the aid of parents¹⁵⁶. Gutierrez summarises what material poverty means in concrete terms. Any human being denied, food, exploited, without access to health care, who has no shelter, who has no access to education, who has no wage or worse still unemployed, any one who seeks for his rights to no avail, is materially destitute¹⁵⁷. According to Gutierrez, material poverty can lead to both physical death and psycho-social annihilation. For him,

death in this case, is caused by hunger, sickness, or the oppressive methods used by those who see their privileges endangered by any and every effort to free the oppressed. It is physical death to which cultural death is added, because in a situation of oppression everything is destroyed that gives unity and strength to the disposed of this world¹⁵⁸.

Material poverty also has devastating pscho-social impacts on its victims. According Gutierrez, once a person is denied the basic human needs, (especially for a protracted period of time), something eventually happens to the victim. Such a poor person now develops a special world view and attitudes. This is what he calls the *psychology of the poor*¹⁵⁹. This is to say that the very poor have a world of their world¹⁶⁰. More often than not, this new attitude of looking at themselves, of relating to others is often self-depreciating. Gutierrez describes them as those who doubt if they are really human

¹⁵⁵ R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *Toward a Theology of Liberation*, in A.T. HENNELLY (ed), *Liberation theology: A Documentary History*, p. 75.

¹⁵⁷ G. GUTIERREZ, *Théologie de la...* p. 286

¹⁵⁸ G. GUTIERREZ, *The Truth Shall Make You Free, The Confrontations*, New York, Orbis Books, 1990, p. 9-10.

¹⁵⁹ This now conditions the victim to a peculiar of thinking and feeling, of making friends and loving. If the poor person still believes in God, he has a particular way of praying and interpreting events.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 10.

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beings¹⁶¹. For G. Gutierrez, to really appreciate what poverty is, one needs to personally undergo the experience, which may eventually lead to a *personal conversion*¹⁶².

An important contribution of Gutierrez is the idea that material poverty especially in the developing world is generally caused by human beings and unjust social structures. This is why he posits that the poor are generally victims who are oppressed, exploited and have the fruits of their labour, their share of the social goods snatched away “so that their very humanity is degraded”¹⁶³. Gutierrez ends his study with a paradox. According to him, despite their plight, these extremely poor have a great sense of solidarity among themselves. They generally trust in God and exhibit inexplicable joy that the rich generally lack¹⁶⁴.

1.2.2.3.2. L. Boff and Material Poverty

For Boff, material poverty refers to the condition of men and women who are deprived of the necessary means of dignified existence. These basic necessities include food, housing, minimal health, elementary education, remunerable work etc. Boff also distinguishes what he called the innocent poor¹⁶⁵. Like Gutierrez, Boff believes that material poverty in many parts of the world is man-made¹⁶⁶. Unlike Gutierrez, Boff tends to define the poor

¹⁶¹ We shall discuss the psychology of the anthropological poor below.

¹⁶² Poverty is not an abstract bit of sociological data, nor are the poor abstract beings without flesh and blood. One must thus enter their world in order to understand them. As for the cause of poverty, Gutierrez holds that poverty is not accidental but a structurally induced reality. The poor do not exist by a decree of fate. They are the products of a system within which most of us live and for which we are often responsible. The poor live on the margins of our social and cultural world.

¹⁶³ R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Ibid., p. 74. G. Gutierrez seems to echo the Biblical teaching that the *anavim* are the protégées of *Yahweh*.

¹⁶⁵ According to him, these are those who in no way have contributed to their plight and they depend helplessly on the goodwill of others to keep on surviving. A typical example is the plight of farmers who become impoverished due to infertile land and chronic drought. Boff argues that while the farmer may be a victim of unpredictable weather, millions of people in the developing world are victims of the capitalist economy. Children belong to this category.

¹⁶⁶ He sees the exploited workers as belonging to the group of the poor in many parts of the world. They are either unemployed, under-employed or not paid as their lives hang on the good will of their employers and the unpredictable market prices. The entrepreneur often uses the poor and latter exclude them from the full benefits of their labour.

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as a special *class* of people in the society¹⁶⁷. They are not given equal opportunities like others and they always remain the footstool of others¹⁶⁸. An important contribution made by Boff is that there are degrees of poverty even among the class of the poor. The worst victims of poverty according to him, tend to suffer from multiple effects of dehumanisation. It is these people that he refers to as the *poorest of the poor*. So he argues,

*parmi ces pauvres, on peut ranger les victimes des discriminations pour les raisons de race, de culture, et de sex. C'est bien souvent parmi eux que l'on trouve les plus pauvres des pauvres, ceux qui supportent la gamme des oppressions et des ségrégations*¹⁶⁹.

L. Boff reminds us that any meaningful discussion on poverty and the poor should actually begin with the condition of these poorest of the poor. He pathetically makes a case for liberation theology by saying that the real motivation of liberation theology has been how to evolve a coherent theological language for presenting God's love to these people whom he refers to as the *poorest of poor*, the *nobodies*, the *voiceless minority*¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁷ L. BOFF, *Ecology and Liberation. A New Paradigm*, Orbis, New York, 1993. p. 97.

¹⁶⁸ Racial, religious and gender discriminations indeed make and keep so many poor.

¹⁶⁹ L. BOFF et C. BOFF, op. cit., p. 81. To make his case stronger, Boff presents us with a concrete example. In a typical community either in Latin America or Africa, a woman suffers double disadvantage. The very fact that she is a woman limits her opportunities and affects her social status. In Latin America if that woman is a "black", she is equally discriminated on account of her race or colour. If she is a prostitute for instance, she is further alienated from the community in which she belongs. If this very woman finds herself materially poor, one finds that she is almost totally stripped of all the material and social necessities that enhance human dignity (cf. L. BOFF and C. BOFF, op. cit., p. 82). Note that the emphasis in the quotation is mine.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. L. BOFF, *Toward a Christology of Liberation*, in A.T. HENNELLY (ed.), op. cit., p. 161).

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1.2.2.3.3. The Poorest of the Poor and Anthropological Poverty: The Contribution of African Theologians

There are two main currents in African theology today. The first is theology of inculturation and the second, theology of liberation¹⁷¹. Much of what can be said about poverty from the African theological perspective can be attributed to those scholars who can be regarded as African liberation theologians¹⁷².

The concept of anthropological poverty is a special contribution of African theologians to the poverty discourse. Having examined the concept *anthropological poverty*, we realise that it is almost synonymous with our concept of poorest of the poor. It is in this sense that we shall use the two concepts interchangeably in this study. According to Engelbert Mveng, one of its proponents, *anthropological poverty* occurs when persons are deprived not only of material goods but also have their spiritual, moral, intellectual, sociological values at the risk of annihilation¹⁷³. For Mveng, anthropological poverty is therefore a kind of indigence of being. This degree of poverty is therefore not just concerned with *possessions* but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of their human person. So he concludes that anthropological poverty is an alienation that is more insidious than mere material lack¹⁷⁴.

Apart from Mveng, other African theologians have continued to develop this concept. A. Mushete, another African theologian, explains anthropological poverty by comparing and

¹⁷¹ While theology of inculturation tends to focus more on how to incarnate the Gospel message more effectively in Africa, theology of liberation discusses issues associated with poverty, social justice, liberation and empowerment as fundamental Gospel imperatives.

¹⁷² It should be noted that there is a close relationship between African liberation theology, Latin American Liberation theologies and the Black theologies of North America. This is why some Black theologians in Diaspora may be cited when necessary in this section.

¹⁷³ Mveng is a theologian from Cameroon.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. E. MEVENG et LIPAWING, *Théologie, libération et cultures, Dialogue sur l'anthropologie negro-africaine*, Yaounde/Paris, Editions CLE/Présence Africaine, 1966, p. 141.

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contrasting poverty in Latin America with the type of poverty that is prevalent in Africa today¹⁷⁵. From his study, he concludes that,

*si la pauvreté latino-américaine s'exprime en termes de possession et de non-possession, la pauvreté africaine va beaucoup plus loin : elle se pose en termes d'être et de non-être*¹⁷⁶.

In the Latin American context, the preoccupation is a struggle for power and the possession of things, while in Africa the struggle is for life as such¹⁷⁷. For Mushete, the real meaning of poverty or wealth is centred on the human person and not just on structures and possessions. Therefore when African theologians speak of anthropological poverty, they refer to a condition that tends towards the negation and even the annihilation of the entire human personality. A. Mushete concludes that, "*la pauvreté anthropologique est un abîme qu'aucun bien matériel ne peut combler*"¹⁷⁸.

Other authors who have picked up this expression go further to demonstrate that anthropological poverty is a multifarious¹⁷⁹ type of *dispossession* and *oppression* that leads to annihilation of its victims¹⁸⁰. It is a negation of the human person which extends to the culture, the economic and social aspects of a person's life¹⁸¹. Anthropological

¹⁷⁵ One can understand why this author begins his analysis of the African predicament by juxtaposing the same with the Latin American experience. This is of course due to a number of justifiable reasons. First, both continents have had the experience of being colonised. Second, both continents have large Christian populations. Third, the two continents have great number of the materially poor in the world today. Finally, the contribution of liberation theology in the on-going reforms in Latin America is now inspiring many African theologians like the author we are discussing.

¹⁷⁶Cf. A. N. MUSHETE, *Les thèmes majeurs, de La théologie africaine*, Paris, Harmattan, 1989, p. 103.

¹⁷⁷Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁷⁹ There are many types of poverty which are simultaneously at work and they produce multiple disastrous effects on the victims (cf. MASSINGALE B., *The Social Dimensions of Sin and Reconciliation in the Theologies of James. H. Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez: A Critical Comparative Examination*, Rome, Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1991, p. 120).

¹⁸⁰Cf. V. FABELLA and S. TORRES, *Final Statement of the Sixth EATWOT*, in V. FABELLA and S. TORRES (eds), *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, Orbis Books, New York, 19985, p. 185.

¹⁸¹ The Tunisian author Albert Memmi and K. Nkrumah of Ghana are of the opinion that the psychological effects of colonialism are more devastating and more enduring than its economic consequences. Among other things, it truncates the history of its victims and they become caught up with two irreconcilable histories (cf. K. NKUMAH, *Axioms*, Panaf Books, London, 1967, p. 72).

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poverty goes beyond what is conventionally called ‘underdevelopment’. Other scholars like George Ehusani of Nigeria and James Cone in North America, see anthropological poverty as both an act of violence and oppression to the human person. As an act of violence, it transforms a person into a *thing*, he or she becomes a quasi-slave meant to serve the interest of another¹⁸². For J. Cone, anthropological poverty is an oppression. He explains that, “oppression refers not only to economic, social, and political disenfranchisement; there is the disenfranchisement of the mind, of the spiritual and moral values that hold together one’s identity in a community. To be oppressed is to be defined, located, or set aside according to another’s perspective...”¹⁸³.

1.2.2.4. The Main Characteristics of Poorest of the Poor as used in this Study

We can say that the *poorest of the poor* as used in this study refers to those whose economic, social, political, cultural lives have been denied or threatened for a protracted period such that it now affects their way of thinking, relating and indeed being human. The poorest of the poor are:

Human beings who are forced to live under ghetto conditions and whose daily life experience tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted the ordinary dignity and courtesy accorded to others, will as a matter of course, begin to doubt their own worth. Since every human being depends upon his cumulative experiences with others for clues as how he should view and value himself, children who are consistently rejected understandably begin to question and doubt whether they, their family and their group really deserve no more respect

¹⁸² Any situation in which one group of people exploits another or hinders them from their pursuit of self-affirmation is one of injustice. Such a situation itself constitutes violence as in the cases of racism, colonialism, classism, sexism, religious discrimination and other types of apartheid attitudes. All these are anthropologically violent, and sooner or later they provoke a more devastating and reactionary violence (cf. G. EHUSANI, *Nigeria, Years Eaten By the Holocaust*, Kraft Books, Ibadan, 2002, p. 73).

¹⁸³ CONE. J., *Black Theology of Liberation*, in MASSINGALE B.N., *The Social Dimensions of Sin and Reconciliation in the Theologies of James. H. Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez. A Critical Comparative Examination*, Rome, Pontificia Universita Lateranense, 1991., p. 120.

from the larger society than they receive. These doubts become the seeds of pernicious self and group hatred....,¹⁸⁴

The poorest of the poor generally share some common characteristics which may differ from one society to another.

The first characteristic of the poorest of the poor is that they lack the basic human needs essential for aspiring towards self-actualisation. According to Abraham Maslow, human beings are generally endowed with great potentials at birth but unfortunately many people do not realise these potentials. In his motivational theory, he examines the main characteristics of some personalities that could be said to have realised most of their potentials. Such people are referred to as *self-actualised* persons. The relevance of Maslow's study to our work is that he placed human needs in ascending degrees in what he calls *hierarchy of needs*. At the bottom of these needs he places the most essential elements that every human being must necessarily meet to be really human. These are the physiological or biological needs and they include: oxygen, food, water, and relatively constant body temperature which could be provided by clothing or/shelter¹⁸⁵.

Another characteristic of the extremely poor people is that they tend to be *afraid of life and living*. Their precariousness leads them to a great sense of insecurity. They live in perpetual insecurity born out of uncertainty, dependence and powerlessness. This explains why they can be described as schizophrenias¹⁸⁶. They tend to develop a slave

¹⁸⁴ CLARK.B. K, *Dark Ghetto*, in MASSINGALE B, *ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁸⁵ Maslows' hierarchy of needs puts the biological needs as the fundamental human needs. The second level of needs has to do with as safety and security. The third is affective needs, the fourth is esteem needs, and then the fifth is self-actualisation needs. While self-actualisation can be called the ontological vocation of the human person, no one can achieve it without meeting the lower needs in the pyramid arrangements. The poorest of the poor therefore run the risk of never actually realising their full humanity because they lack what is basically essential to be human in the first place. Although this order of human needs has been criticised and modified by other authors, it still remains a useful guide in understanding the poverty of the poorest poor. More on this can be read in these books: J. MONBOURQUETTE, *How to Discover Your Personal Mission, The Search for Meaning*, Longman, London, 2003; M. NEILL, *You Can Get What You Want*, Hay House, London, 2006; A. ROBBINS, *Unlimited Power, The New Science of Personal Achievement*, Pocket Books, London, 1986.

¹⁸⁶ Another trait of the poor is that they are always living in duality. This duality is as a result of the violence which has been established in their innermost being after so long in an oppressive and corrupt culture. The poor sometimes seem to be content with their condition for fear of demanding their rights. Although the poor do not like the unjust situation in which they live, ironically they admire the exploits of the rich and those who oppress them. Although they detest the exploitation of the fraudulent rich, within

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mentality which Paulo Freire describes as living on the *prescription* of the rich and the powerful¹⁸⁷. Describing the disposition of the very poor in Nigeria, F. Arinze states that, "the general belief in our society is that the rich and the powerful rarely go to jail and the small man is generally wrong"¹⁸⁸. The fear that tends to dominate the lives of the very poor is seen in the fact that they are even afraid to give their opinions even in matters that concern their lives. This is because, "*le pauvre, c'est celui qui écoute toujours et que personne n'écoute... C'est cela, la racine de toute pauvreté : n'être jamais écouté durant une existence entière*"¹⁸⁹. And since people do not generally listen to them, they gradually tend to lose the capacity to take initiatives, even on how to ameliorate their conditions¹⁹⁰. It only the poor themselves or those who have been personally associated with them that will understand better the psychosocial impact of extreme and protracted poverty on its victims.

Another dominant characteristic is that they generally tend to lose the sense of human dignity. Freire explains this from the study and experience he had in rural Brazil. At the initial stage of the adult education organised for the poor peasants, the educator tried to encourage them to participate actively in the learning process. One could however hear

their minds they admire the lifestyles of their oppressors and earnestly dream of it for themselves and their children. This conflict in the mind and attitude of the poor lies in the choice between being fully themselves or being divided; between changing the corrupt culture or maintaining it hoping that one day, their sons and daughters would be in the same position as the fraudulent rich. The duality of the poorest poor lies in their desire for solidarity among themselves (the poor) or the desire to form this alliance with the rich with hope to gain from them or even become like them. The poorest poor therefore always face the difficult choice of being actors or spectators; of speaking or keeping silent, of boycotting the corrupt elections or participating in the fraud if only they could gain their daily bread.

¹⁸⁷ Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the *prescriber's* consciousness.

¹⁸⁸ F.A. ARINZE, *Living Our Faith, 1971-1983 Lenten Pastorals*, Tabansi Press, Onitsha, 1983, p. 27.

¹⁸⁹ P. CHRISTOPHE, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. M. MOLLAT, *Les pauvres au Moyen Age*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 6. Although the author is trying to identify the characteristics of the poor in the Middle Ages, most of the attributes apply to the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today.

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the poor retorting: "Excuse us, we ought to keep quiet and let you talk. You are the one who knows, we don't know anything". Freire equally remarked that, "they often insist that there is no difference between them and the animals; when they do admit a difference, it favours the animals, "they are freer than us"¹⁹¹. According to G. Gutierrez, this lack of respect is aggravated by the fact that in a consumerist society, people's worth are generally measured by what they *have* and what they can *produce*. And since the extreme poor do not possess much and often produce *nothing*, they are regarded as liabilities and not assets to the society¹⁹². Another author describes them thus:

*Les pauvres sont aussi silencieux que les choses, et quand au hasard des chemins un foyer les accueille, ils y prennent place humblement comme des visages familiers et s'effacent dans l'oubli comme des outils abandonnés*¹⁹³.

Another characteristic of the poorest of the poor is that they tend to have a fatalistic frame of mind. From his personal experience among the very poor and from other research findings, Paulo Freire presents some of the behavioural patterns of the victims of extreme and protracted poverty¹⁹⁴. According to him, they tend to internalise the conviction that their situation is irremediable. This generally leads to fatalism¹⁹⁵. For Freire, this group of poor persons tend to impute to God the quality of sadism and organised disorder in the world¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹¹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 45. Freire would explain later that the poorest of the poor are treated as *objects* and not *Subjects* by the oppressive and exploitative society where they live.

¹⁹² Cf. R.M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁹³ R. M. RILKE, *Les pauvres* in, P. CHRISTOPHE, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ Having worked with, and for the rural poor in his native Latin American contexts and having undertaken numerous academic researches on the phenomenon of poverty, P. Freire has a lot of experiences in discussing the causes, effects and mechanisms for overcoming poverty. We shall study him in more details especially in last part of this work.

¹⁹⁵ He gives us a number of practical examples: If the wife of the destitute dies in child-birth because there is no hospital around or no money to pay the bill, if his child is caught by cholera because there is no clean water, if tax-collectors invade his house, if he loses one leg in an accident because the road is not maintained, the poor in his ignorance attributes all to the 'will of God' (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 46).

¹⁹⁶ When superficially analysed, this fatalism is sometimes interpreted as religious docility. But this fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of a long historical and sociological situation. It is not always the fruit of a religious belief of a people. The problem is that in the face of apparent insurmountable state of misery, the poor tend to devise psychological and religious reasons for their woes as a mechanism to quieten their bleeding hearts (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 44).

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Another characteristic is that, like most forms of poverty, this type of poverty tends to be classified under *collective poverty*¹⁹⁷. It tends to be *transgenerational*. This is to say that parents generally transmit it to their children since children from such background find it difficult to wriggle out of the shackles of poverty into which they are born. Just as we have noted in this work, the poverty of the poorest of the poor is usually created and maintained by the socio-political and economic systems often described as the sinful structures in Catholic Social Teaching.

1.2.2.5. Closing Remarks on Poverty

We have examined poverty from many perspectives and seen that there is neither a unanimous definition, nor unanimous description of the concept. This is because, “*il existe une pauvreté qui est un héritage du passé ou de circonstances qui échappent au vouloir humain; il en existe une autre qui est le produit des distorsions et des failles économiques, financières et politiques. Il existe une pauvreté fabriquée, tout comme il existe un sous-développement qui est corrélatif du développement*”¹⁹⁸.

Despite these difficulties, we followed two main classifications of poverty and distinguished spiritual poverty from material poverty. Although our main interest is on material poverty, we still realised that spiritual, religious or evangelical poverty is not an end in itself. It is essentially meant to enable those who embrace it to be at the service of charity to others especially the materially poor and the marginalized. Through spiritual poverty, “Jesus opens our eyes and our hearts to the richness of a life of service of God and fellowmen”¹⁹⁹. Our main interest has been on material poverty. We discovered that although the expression *poverty* is abundant in the Bible, we however examined the concept *èhyôn*, as the closest expression for the poorest of the poor in our study. But generally, in the Bible, poverty “refers first of all to the actual socio-economic state of

¹⁹⁷ A more permanent type of poverty that is characterised by severe deficiency of essential human needs like food. It generally leads to death.

¹⁹⁸ L. O’NEIL, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

¹⁹⁹ B. HARING, *The Beatitudes – Their personal and Social Implications*. St. Paul Publications, London, 1981, p. 8.

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persons and groups, later it came to have distinct religious meanings, and eventually became self-designation of a Jewish Christian sect²⁰⁰. Again in the Biblical tradition, God does not condemn riches yet he never glorified poverty²⁰¹. In the New Testament in particular, we see that material poverty which debases and dehumanises people is anti-evangelical and indeed evil²⁰².

Coming to the teaching of the Church and theological interpretations of poverty, we see that there is a clear distinction between evangelical and material poverty. The Church and most theologians hold that poverty that is imposed, or not ultimately chosen for the service of God and neighbour, is dehumanising and so unacceptable. Liberation theologians and some African theologians gave us useful insights in this regard. African theologians in particular introduced the concept of anthropological poverty to the discussion. They hold that while the traditional notion of poverty focuses on material possession or lack of it, anthropological poverty refers to multiple effects of poverty that go beyond the question of *possession*, to include that of *existence* itself.

As for the concept *poorest of the poor* which we shall use throughout this study, I must admit that the concept is not original to me, nor to other African theologians. The expression was used especially by the Latin American Bishops Conference to describe the condition of the worst victims of Latin American's poverty²⁰³. Liberation theologians like Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff also used the expression to describe the victims of multiple oppression especially in Latin America²⁰⁴. The rationale for using the expression

²⁰⁰ K. CRIM (ed.) *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1981 edition, p. 672.

²⁰¹ Jesus had some rich friends who supported him with their money (cf. Lk. 8, 2-3, Lk. 19, 1-10; Mtt. 27, 59; Mk. 15, 43).

²⁰² F. A. OBORJI, *Poverty and Mission-Charity Trend, A perspective from Matthew*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XCI, no. 360, Jan. 2002, p. 89.

²⁰³ LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS AT PUEBLA, in R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁰⁴ L. BOFF and C. BOFF, op. cit., p. 82.

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stems from the fact that “*au sein de population pauvre, les premières victimes sont toujours les individus les plus fragiles*”²⁰⁵.

Let us end with an important note. Although our main expression is in this study shall remain the *poorest of the poor*, we shall use it interchangeably with other expressions like, the anthropological poor, the destitute and even, in Paulo Freire’s language, they can equally be referred to as the *oppressed*. Meanwhile in the next part and chapter we shall examine the nature of Black Africa’s poverty, its main causes and effects.

²⁰⁵ COR UNUM, Pontifical Conseil, *La faim dans le monde, un défi pour tous: le développement solidaire*, Paris, Centurion/Cerf, 1996, p. 13.

PART TWO

THE NATURE, CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF EXTREME POVERTY IN BLACK AFRICA: SPECIAL FOCUS ON NIGERIA

2.0. Understanding The Nature of Black Africa's Poverty

Black Africa is one the poorest regions in the world today as shown in the statistics presented below.

Of all the 50 biggest economies of the world, only three African countries are represented with South Africa occupying the 30th position, Egypt 39th and Algeria 50th. And of all the 40 countries with biggest purchasing power, only these three African countries are represented occupying 21st, 30th and 40th positions respectively¹. As for general regional purchasing power, Africa's purchasing power is only 3.2% behind Middle East with 3.9%. Another indication of level of poverty has been the Human Development Index. Here a study of 80 countries with the highest Human Development Index, only Mauritius and Libya are African countries occupying 65th and 66th positions or average of 76.1% and 76% respectively. Another indication of Africa's development status is found in the area of foreign debt burden and debt servicing. Of 46 countries with the highest foreign debt burden, 27 are African countries². African nations remain some of the highest recipients of bilateral and multilateral aid. And in industrial output only Egypt and Nigeria are represented among 50 countries studied up till the year 2000. And as for general global competitiveness, only South Africa in 42nd position represents the continent below India and just above Argentina and Turkey occupying 43rd and 44th positions respectively³.

Coming to the field of research and creativity, only South Africa, Egypt and Mauritius represent the continent with 27th, 34th and 44th places respectively. No African country is among the forty-five world's largest businesses studied. In the field of education however four African countries Gabon, Malawi, South Africa and Namibia occupy the world's highest primary school enrolment. This gain is however erased by the fact that the twelve countries with the lowest primary school enrolment in the world are in the continent. These include Niger, Burkina-Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Burundi, Sudan, Eritrea, Guinea, Chad, Mozambique,

¹ Cf. M. COMPARER et al (dirs.), *The Economist, Pocket World in Figures*, Profile Books, London, 2002. p. 24.

² Cf. Ibid., p. 38.

³ Cf. Ibid., p. 56.

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and Tanzania. And three African countries have the least literate rate in the world as at 1997. These are Niger, Burkina Faso and Gambia ahead of Afghanistan. Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana however have some of the world's highest spending in education just below Moldova that spent 10.6 of its GDP in 1997. Nigeria has the lowest education spending in the world as at 1997 with only a 0.75 of its GDP on education followed by Sudan 0.9%.

Another indication of Africa's poverty could be observed in the health sector. The seven countries with crudest birth rates in the world are found in Africa. These are Liberia 55.4%, Niger 55.1%, Somalia 51.8%, Angola 51.2%, Uganda 50.6%, Mali 49.6%, Sierra Leone 49%. Another important indication of level of development is the measurement of life expectancy of the population studied. Of all the 50 countries studied between 2000 and projected towards 2005, only Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal Bangladesh and Pakistan are not African countries. Botswana which has the lowest life expectancy in the world boasts only of an average 36.1 years for its citizens⁴.

And indeed since the outbreak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Botswana and Mozambique have the highest death rate in the world. Nigeria has the least access to essential drugs among 50 countries studied and this is followed closely by another three African countries of Sudan, Angola and Burundi. Congo Brazzaville and the southern Africa's countries of Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe have some of the highest cases of the AIDS epidemic in the world. Today however, the Republic of South Africa has overtaken all other countries regarding the HIV/AIDS endemic. As for the highest population per doctor, African countries of Chad, Eritrea, Gambia and Malawi occupy the upper position. These four countries have an average of 50,000 patients per doctor compared to Italy with only 169 patients per doctor⁵.

Having presented a working statistics for disusing poverty in Black Africa in general we wish to focus more on the data from Nigeria with more concrete examples.

⁴ Cf. Ibid., p. 75.

⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. 80.

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Nigeria is potentially Africa's richest country. As the world's sixth largest producer of crude oil, with huge reserves of mineral and agricultural riches and manpower, it should normally be enjoying some of the highest global living standards. But realities ironically point to the contrary. Indeed in the past twenty years, the very condition of many Nigerians has attracted the attention of various international organizations. As far back as 1987, various experts have been warning that unless some concrete measures are taken to arrest the depreciating condition of life, Nigeria may end a 'failed state'. The following figures explain more. Less than 49% of its population is literate, less than 35% of the population have access to clean drinking water. Less than 70% of the population have access to the required daily intake of calories. At least nine of every hundred babies still die before the age of one. Energy sources available to the majority of the population are still from wasteful, primary sources and the energy sector is totally unreliable for any development planning. At least three new jobs have to be created yearly for every 100 that were there in the previous year. At least three out of every 100 people move out of the rural areas into the crowded cities. Personal freedom is still problematic and so with security. The country cannot afford to spend more than \$600 per citizen per year⁶.

Another survey conducted by Nigeria's Federal Office of Statistics shows that between the year 1980 (the year of the oil boom began) and 1996, the percentage of millionaires has increased on one side while the percentage of those living in absolute poverty has equally jumped from 28 to 66 percent. Numerically, while 17.7 million lived in poverty in 1980, the population living on less than US \$1.40 a day, rose to 67.1 million by 1996. Within the periods under study, the percentage of the rural poor not only increased from about 25 to 70 percent, but also their degree of poverty changed from being *merely poor* to being *absolutely poor*. The poor in the urban areas rose equally from 18 to 55 percent. Thus in Nigeria today a new class of poor has emerged and described as the core poor, or in our case, the poorest of the poor. They are those living on about US \$0.70 a day. Their percentage increased from six percent to 29 percent of the population⁷.

⁶These figures have been changing for the worse since 1987. (cf. M. M. NWOKEJI, *Enhancing Rural Women's Contribution to Agriculture and Rural Development in Igbo Land*, Rome, Pontificiam Universitatem, 1988, p. 50).

⁷UNITED NATIONS REPORT, *Nigeria: Focus on the Scourge of Poverty*, in IRIN, 12th January 2001. p. 1.

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Equally astonishing is the poverty level in different regions of the same country. While the percentage of the poor ranged between 55-60 percent in southern Nigeria, in the north they ranged between 70-78 percent of the population⁸. World Bank figures for Nigeria's gross national product per capita also reveals the same sad trend of events. From a very glorious economic peak of US \$780 in 1981, Nigeria's GDP fell to all time low of US \$220 in 1994 before a slight growth to US \$310 in 1998. Even since then inflationary pressures imply a further decline. It is the above condition that led a United Nation's report to lament that, "despite its oil wealth, Nigeria has performed worse, in terms of the basic social indicators, than sub-Saharan Africa as a whole and much worse than other regions of the developing world such as Asia and Latin America"⁹.

The latest government gazette warns that the increasing rate of poverty is the greatest challenge facing the nation. The government equally confessed that millions of the nation's citizens are today among the poorest poor of the world since they live in absolute poverty¹⁰.

By absolute poverty here the Nigerian government

denotes a condition in which a person or groups of persons are unable to satisfy their most basic and elementary requirements of human survival in terms of good nutrition, clothing, shelter, footwear, energy, transport, health, education and recreation¹¹.

Equally interesting in the government white paper is the fact that at independence in 1960 the poverty level in Nigeria covered about 15 percent of the population and by 1980 it grew to 28.0 percent. In 1985 the poverty level was 46.0 percent and it dropped to 43 percent by 1992. By 1996 the Federal Office of Statistics estimated the poverty level in Nigeria at about 66 percent. According to the United Nations reports of 1999, Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI), was only 0.416 which places the country among the 25 poorest countries of the world. Furthermore, Nigeria's life expectancy at birth was 51 years, literacy rate was 44

⁸ FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA, *National Poverty Eradication Programme, A Blue Print for the Schemes*, June 2001, p. 1.

⁹ UNITED NATIONS REPORT, op. cit, p. 1.

¹⁰ Here poverty is generally associated with conditions under which people live and is usually defined as either absolute or relative poverty. Although the concept of absolute poverty sounds an exaggeration, it nonetheless buttresses the superlative condition that characterises the situation.

¹¹ FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA, op. cit, p. 1.

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percent and 70 percent of the rural population do not have access to potable water, healthcare facilities and electricity¹².

From the above study one can rightly understand why the United Nation's report on Nigeria in 2001 sadly remarked: "At present, about one in five Nigerian children die before the age of five. The implication being that a baby born in the country is 30 times more likely to die than one born in an industrialized country. Similarly the risk of maternal death in Nigeria is 100 times higher than in an average industrialized country. More than half of all adults in the country are illiterate..."¹³ The story is same in almost other African countries¹⁴.

We have seen the definition of poverty and material poverty in particular. In this section, we shall examine the main causes of extreme poverty and how it affects the individual and collective lives of the people. We will see how these protracted impacts have given rise to a new type of poor people referred to as the poorest of the poor in this work¹⁵. We shall demonstrate in the second chapter that some of the poorest people in the region are found among refugees, the sick and the starving¹⁶.

¹² Cf. op. cit., p. 1.

¹³ UNITED NATIONS REPORT ON NIGERIA, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁴ With a quarter of the world's land mass and 12 percent of the world's population, Africa is rich in natural resources, yet it is only able to secure one percent of the world's trade and 0.4 percent of the world's manufacturing exports. All these is because the continent (especially Black Africa) is relegated to the background as technologically poor. Sixty-two percent of the population in Sub-Sahara Africa earns less than six dollars per week, thus the region is easily qualified as being in a non sustainable position (cf. K. A. HARRISON, *Maternal Mortality in Nigeria: The Real Issues*, in *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, January, 2001, p. 1).

¹⁵ Our concrete examples will be taken mainly from Nigeria.

¹⁶ Focus will be on those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MAIN CAUSES OF EXTREME POVERTY

2.1.0. Preamble

Although it is not easy to isolate some factors as being solely responsible for poverty in many Black African countries, today, in the study below we shall present what can be considered the main causes of the problem. We have limited ourselves to the impacts of bad leadership, corruption, violence and foreign debts. Under each factor, we have tried to present its nature, cause and how it is the cause or effect of poverty, or even both.

2.1.1. Leadership

The 1960s saw the independence of many African countries with African leaders taking over the mantle of leadership from various colonial rulers in a great sense of optimism and pride¹⁷. But many years after political independence, the political, social and economic lives of the many African peoples have not improved substantially despite the abundant human and natural resources in the continent¹⁸. Today African leadership has been identified as a major obstacle to African development¹⁹. Our study of leadership in the region reveals that the people of Africa have experienced at least four main types of leadership. The first was the traditional, the second is colonial, the third is Church leadership and the fourth is democratic leadership²⁰. And the general impression is that Africans have not been blessed with good leadership in general as indicated from the study below²¹.

¹⁷ At the dawn of political independence, a Nigerian poet had written with great optimism that, "there is nothing as sweet as independence. It is a great day on which the slave buys his freedom. When a slave can go to fetch water and nobody can tell him: you are coming late. When a slave will fetch firewood and use it to cook his own food. When a slave can bring in a couple of yams everyday to use for his meal" (A. FALETI, *Independence*, in F. LUMLEY (ed), *Nigeria, The Land, Its Art and Its People*, Studio Visita, London, 1977, p. 15).

¹⁸ A typical example of a potentially rich nation is Nigeria. During his visit to Nigeria in February 1982, Pope John Paul II praised the greatness of Nigeria describing it as a "nation blessed by the Creator with rich human potential and with natural wealth" (JOHN PAUL II, *Message to Nigeria*, cited in G. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church...*, p. 6).

¹⁹ E. ACHERMANN, *Cry Beloved Africa, A Continent Needs Help*, African University Press, Munich-Kinshasa, 1994, p. 1

¹⁰⁶ A. NWANKWOR, *Nigeria, My People, My Vision*, Ikenga, Enugu, 1979, p.1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁰ Cf. J. M. WALLIGO, *The Practice of Democratic Principles by the Catholic Church in AMECEA Countries*, in D. KEYEYUNE (ed.), *New Trends for the Empowerment of the People*, Paulines Publications, Nairobi, 1997, p. 92.

²¹ Our main concern here is about political leadership since it has direct impact on the prevalent poverty condition in the region.

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After a very exhaustive study of the causes of political instability and extreme poverty in Nigeria, G. Ehusani Nigerian concludes:

Though their land is rich and their people intelligent, they are living in misery. The majority of Nigerians have been stripped naked by a corrupt, selfish, greedy and callous elite. For thirty-five years, the majority of Nigerians have suffered untold hardship at the hands of a succession of despotic rulers, decadent administrators, visionless leaders and reckless managers²².

Another Nigerian author who has followed the history of Nigerian development since independence equally concluded from his finding that of all the troubles besetting the nation, bad leadership is the first²³. What worries another Nigerian researcher is that in African countries, politics is now seen as the fastest means of making money by a few individuals at the corridor of power²⁴. Afro-Nigerian politicians can thus be rightly described as those motivated and sustained by the passion for fat salaries, interesting travels and great social prestige all at the expense of the electorate²⁵. We know that no political system is perfect but modern democratic means of governance has been effectively used by other leaders outside Africa²⁶. So the dilemma remains: Why have Black African leaders failed in general?

2.1.1.1. The Main Causes of Bad Leadership in Black Africa

The problem of poor leadership in Black Africa is interwoven with other factors. But here we have singled three main elements. First we shall see the role of the leaders themselves, then we shall see the role of the system in which they are operating, and thirdly we shall examine the role of the citizens themselves whom we shall presume have elected the political office holders. Since many African states have experienced military dictatorships, we shall end with the question if military rule is better for Africa.

²² G. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church...*, p. 7.

²³ C. ACHEBE, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu-1983, p. 1.

²⁴ Cf. P. KII, *Priests and Laity in Politics, The Stand of the Magisterium*, Snaap Press, Enugu,

²⁵ E. ACHERMANN, *Cry Beloved Africa, a Continent Needs Help*, African University Press, Munich-Kinshasa, 1994, p. 78.

²⁶ J. M. WALIGGO, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

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2.1.1.1.1. When Leadership is not for Service

It seems that many African leaders do not understand the real meaning of *leadership as service*. Many of them do not realise that a leader is one who gathers and uses power

intelligently and is expected to set a personal example. His mission is to hold and project a valued vision or inspirational agenda for the group. A good leader facilitates others to act in solidarity and to excel. A good leader often possesses and applies multiple intelligence and is able to communicate the basic rules that make the organisation effective. The above shows that a good leader is able to awaken self-desired behaviour in others and is able to align individual and group behaviour in the direction that the organisation requires to be successful.

Compared with the quality of leadership found in other parts of the world, many African leaders adopt a lifestyle that is far removed from those of the people that they purport to govern. This is because, “the leadership style is in the form of orders from above without discussion and without opinion of questioning them....Leadership is always right and in no need of advice. It is domineering leadership, an imposing leadership, and with very little touch with the realities on the ground”²⁷. In many African countries, people aspire to power not with the motivation to serve their people for the common good, but to serve themselves and their families. So nepotism and favouritism are common. In order to remain in power, leaders often align themselves with powerful oligarchies, military personnel and even some powerful foreign powers²⁸. The fundamental is that many African leaders do not appreciate leadership as service. But there is another twist to this. Even when some of the leaders seem to have the good will to serve the people, one discovers another main handicap: ineptitude.

Good will is not enough for some African leaders. There is a growing awareness that many African leaders are quite incapable of assuming the role of effective management

²⁷ P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), *Marginalised Africa, An International Perspective*, Paulines Publications Africa, 2002, pp. 92-93.

²⁸ Cf. V. TIRIMANNA, *The Scandal of Marginalisation WorldWide, An Ethical Dimension form an Asian Perspective*, in P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), op.cit. p. 134.

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of the common good. This is why C. Achebe of Nigeria maintains that lack of creative leadership is an obstacle to effective governance in Africa and especially in Nigeria²⁹. On this issue of incompetence, G. Ehusani of the *Justice and Peace Commission*³⁰ in Nigeria describes Nigerian leaders as those who have “abandoned the pursuit of excellence in politics....and settled for expediency, mediocrity and charlatanism”³¹. If one considers the scrutiny, the public debates, the role of the media, the stringent conditions, and other efforts made to choose public office holders in Europe and America for example, we realise the gravity of the African situation³². How incompetent political leadership that is driven by avarice ruined the nation’s economy and plunged the nation into debt and poverty is described thus:

The glaring fact that buttresses the unguided recklessness of the second republic politicians was that statistical data showed that between 1980 and 1983, Nigeria earned from exports about \$68billion but spent not less than \$80 billion, thereby wiping out all our external reserves³³.

In spite of the consequences of such international obligation, even when the military took over poor in a coup d’ état in 1983, they kept on spending more money and even borrowing more from the IMF which had earlier refused Nigeria’s application for loan. Under the military the situation became worse. “The military administration of Buhari earned \$11.856billion in 1984, \$12.548 in 1985; \$7billion in 1986 under Babangida and \$6.5 billion in 1987 when the international oil market had collapsed”³⁴. The effects of the malfunctioning economy on the lives of Nigerian citizens were very adverse. This is all as a result of government’s failure to apply the major tools for macroeconomic management as well as adapting its policies to the economic realities facing it. The impact of this gross leadership failure was latter to be born by the common citizens when

²⁹ Cf. C. ACHEBE, op. cit., p. 1.

³⁰ A Catholic Organ that promotes the social mission of the Church.

³¹ G. EHUSANI, *Years Eaten by the Holocaust*, Kraft books, Ibadan, 2002, p. 111.

³² E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 194. Because of their political naivety and incompetence, such political office holders hide their mediocrity by surrounding themselves with praise-singers, they make alliances with their ethnic and religious groups and are thus governed by sentiments and not critical reasoning. Quite often, people without experience, people with questionable characters and even, those with records of crimes against are easily elected into offices because of their connection to the power brokers.

³³ Ibid., p. 159.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

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they were forced to adapt to various Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP)³⁵. We can conclude that in general, both the politicians and military rulers can be said to have failed the continent and betrayed the hope of a new African dreamed of by the African founding fathers at independence³⁶.

2.1.1.1.2. The Political Structure

One of the reasons for poor quality of leadership in Black Africa has been attributed to the very political structures in which the leadership operate. The transition from the traditional practice of leadership which focused on families, clans, and tribes to national type of leadership has been very difficult³⁷. About this a foreign researcher states: "If the external organisation is not in tune with the inner structure, the community cannot function properly"³⁸. So for an African author, "...calamity has been Africa's daily experience since the first Portuguese landed on its coasts"³⁹. Others think that African leaders have not been able to evolve a type of political leadership that is adapted to address African peculiar challenges as advocated by some leaders like K. Nyerere at the dawn of independence⁴⁰. Many leaders are neither really Africo-centric in their thoughts and actions, nor authentically Euro-centric and so they can be described as victims of political schizophrenia⁴¹.

Indeed the political system in many African countries seem to facilitate bad governance as explained here. According to D. Dorr, there is a close link between economic and political power especially in the African setting. The system is such that generally only

³⁵ We have discussed this under the Foreign Debts in Africa. The key ideas here is this.

³⁶ Those who aspire to leadership roles in the country are not critically selected to ensure that only people with high moral probity and good records vie for public posts. Many African leaders are not trained to do the job, some lack exposure and networking and experience. Many practice dictatorial democracy and desire to become life presidents and governors until they are pushed out by military dictators. There are not clear codes of conduct for leaders to follow and those who commit economic crimes often go with impunity.

³⁷ One can suggest that the African traditional social, political and economic systems confronted a more aggressive Western culture and so lost orientation.

³⁸ E. ACHERMANN, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

³⁹ A. NWANKWOR, *Nigeria, My People, My Vision*, Ikenga Publishers, Enugu, 1979, p. 45.

⁴⁰ Cf. S. URFER, *Une Afrique socialiste, la Tanzanie*, Paris, Les Editions Ouvrières, 1976, p. 52.

⁴¹ Cf. C. CHINWEIZU, *The West And the Rest of Us*, NOK Publishers, Lagos, 1978, p. 493.

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wealthy people go into politics or politicians become very wealthy by making use of political power. This leaves the poor masses with neither political nor economic power⁴².

After many years as a scholar and missionary to Africa, and after a very extensive study of the causes of poverty among the various countries in the sub-region, E. Achermann discovered that, unless there is a general overhaul of the present political structures in the sub-region, the problem of poor leadership will linger on if not get worse. According to him, many leaders see themselves more as tribal, regional and religious leaders than national ones. He then asserts: "My conclusions demand that the present African nations must be governed in a very decentralised fashion"⁴³. The issue of external influences in choosing and sustaining some leaders in office is equally a major factor. .

2.1.1.1.3. Leading the 'Blind'?

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing African leadership is that they are not accountable to the people they govern. And worse still, the people themselves seem to turn blind eyes on them while their national treasures are looted, their franchise denied or abused even as they live in dehumanising conditions. According to a noted African author, in the region today, people fail to realise that, "accountability is not to be given only at election time but continuously. Transparency must characterise the entire system of governance and each and every leader"⁴⁴. African peoples seem to believe that politics is a dirty game and

⁴²Cf. D. DORR, *Spirituality and Justice*, Grill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1993, p. 55. As a matter of fact, the socio-political system is actually maintained by the rich and political class who desperately want to protect their own interests. The ruling class sets up large administrative 'machinery' in different spheres of human life. This gives them control over the economic, political, cultural and ecclesiastical spheres of the national polity. On the economic level, they control the banks, insurance companies, large business concerns etc. On the political level they exercise firm control over the civil services and the law enforcement agencies. And on the cultural level they manipulate the news media and the whole educational system to serve their purposes. The result of this is that in most countries in Africa, the middle class constitute a large group of people employed by those who hold power of different kinds. The ability to challenge the status quo of injustice remains low as a consequence (cf. Ibid. pp. 56-57).

⁴³ E.ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 195.

⁴⁴ J. M. WALIGGO, op.cit., p. 81.

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so they keep away from it at their own peril. They seem to be ignorant of their rights, and duties, as well as the mechanisms of the political systems that determine their lives⁴⁵.

2.1.1.1.4. Military Dictatorship: Is it a Better Alternative?

Political instability and succession is both the cause and effect of bad leadership in Black Africa⁴⁶. This is seen especially in the constant interruption of the political process in the region. One can think of the vicious cycle of coup d'états, the merry-go round, the ding-dong situation that has characterised post independence African States⁴⁷. Since many African leaders are either incompetent, unpatriotic or both, the temptation has always been the desire for change. And ironically, the military claiming their neutrality, professional discipline and desire to protect the fragile democracies, always present themselves as alternative leadership⁴⁸. But no matter their claims, there is ample evidence that military leaderships have been more of a problem to Africa than a solution. A number of studies carried out in the region, especially Nigeria shows the impact of their leadership style⁴⁹.

Military rulers are not trained to govern democratic states, and so they are generally ignorant of what to do especially in an already precarious conditions that elicited their arrival. Trained to give and obey orders, and especially *to kill*, military leaders operate with draconian rules and use force to quell any civilised opposition. Indeed they create a culture of violence especially when they become intoxicated with the lust for power⁵⁰. P. Kii of Nigeria describes the effects of military leadership.

⁴⁵ How political ignorance and insensitivity contributes to bad leadership has been treated better in the last part of this study under Paulo Freire's theory of conscientization.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. A. MAZRUI, *Africa: The Next Thirty Years*, Wiltshire, London, 1977, p. 88.

⁴⁷ The failure of politicians to liberate the people from their anguish has often led to the intervention of military rules in many parts of the continent. The military claims to come to correct what they refer to as the greed and ineptitude of politicians.

⁴⁸ Cf. D. G. LAVROFF, *Les partis politiques en Afrique noire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1970, p. 120.

⁴⁹ Cf. F. FORSYTH, *Emeka*, Spectrum Books Ltd, Enugu, 1982, p. 139.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. G. DONNERS, *The Bourgeois Theology. An African Experience of Jesus*, Orbis Books, New York, 1985, p. 177.

Ever since independence thirty seven years ago Nigeria has for the most part of her history been governed by the longest institutional dictatorship of the military, that have successively impoverished our nation....Democracy has been pushed to the sideline and relativised so much that some generals (soldiers) even invoke it to describe their dictatorial regimes⁵¹.

And also from his study, G. Ehusani states categorically that leadership cannot be advocated as an option, because military regimes are generally dictatorial in nature. Under military regimes the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government are fused into one. They are characterised by the suspension of the nation's constitution that otherwise protects the fundamental rights of the citizens⁵². According to Ehusani, the consequence of the structural injustice, the executive recklessness, the widespread abuse of power, the large scale corruption and the impoverishment of the people, is the prevalence today, in our land, of violent crimes, including armed robberies and hired assassinations. Others are the breakdown of law and order, the widespread resort to drug abuse among youths, the menace of secret cults in our schools and colleges, the phenomenon of examination malpractice, and the near total loss of spiritual, moral and family values⁵³. So where then do we go from here?

2.1.2. Corruption

One of the causes and effects of bad leadership in Black Africa today is endemic corruption. So what is corruption, what are its causes and effects on a society where it is prevalent? And especially how does it breed poverty or/affect the poor?

2.1.2.1. What is Corruption?

Although the expression *corruption* refers to the idea of something that is rotten, it has increasingly assumed a moral significance. In this sense a moral theologian could describe corruption as a type of moral violence against either an individual, group, society or government which results in bringing hardship upon the person (s), whose right is violated⁵⁴. In the above sense, one can group all forms of unethical actions as

⁵¹ P. B. KII, op. cit., p. 99.

⁵² Cf. G. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church...*, p. 13.

⁵³ Cf. Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁴ Cf. J. C. SCOTT, *Comparative Political Corruption*, in R. E. MGBEAHURIKE, *The Ethical Challenges of Constant Military Intervention in Nigerian Politics to Nigerian Politicians*, Pontificia Universita Lateranense, Rome, 1989, p. 161.

In common parlance corruption often refers to sexually immorality but this often remains on the level of individual comportments which may not have a large scale impact on others.

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corrupting⁵⁵. But in this text, we shall focus on corruption understood as unethical practice aimed at, or leading to the misuse of *public property* for *private gains*. In this sense we mean by corruption the failure or inability of public office holders to play according to the rules and ethics of public accountability.

2.1.2.2. Nature of Corruption in Black Africa

Although corruption is not peculiar to Africa, it assumes an important significance in the face of already weak economy and fragile public institutions and democracies. In Africa, corruption takes place in the private sector, but its greatest impact is felt in the political and bureaucratic levels. Again there are various degrees of corruption ranging between small, almost insignificant actions to large scale ones that have great impact on the entire polity. In Africa corrupt practices take various forms including bribery, extortion, fraud, drug peddling, money laundering, prostitution, assassinations, and other forms of organized crime. On the government level, corruption finds expression especially in various forms of nepotism and influence-peddling⁵⁶.

During the African Synod and in the final papal exhortation following the assembly, the persistent position was that Africa's economic problems are compounded by the dishonesty of corrupt government leaders who, in connivance with domestic or foreign private interests, divert national resources for their own profit and transfer public funds to private accounts in foreign banks⁵⁷. Another researcher on African poverty equally sees bribery and corruption as the principal cause of poverty in the continent today⁵⁸. One of the main characteristics of African corruption is that it tends to pervade the entire social, political and economic lives of the population with adverse effects. What is the main cause (s) of endemic corruption in Black Africa today?

⁵⁵ See a good study on business ethics by G. ENDERLE, *Facing Globalization and Marginalization. Can Business Ethics Make a Difference?*, in P. KANYANDAGO, (ed.), op.cit., pp. 99-106.

⁵⁶ This is facilitated by money peddling and other forms of organised unethical actions especially by those who possess power and wealth.

⁵⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 113.

⁵⁸ Cf. P. PEAN, *L'argent noir, corruption et sous-développement*, M. R. AFAN, *La participation démocratique en Afrique, éthique politique et engagement chrétien*, Editions Universitaires, Fribourg-Suisse, 2001, p. 25.

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2.1.2.3. Causes of Corruption

First we have to underline that one of the consequences of poor leadership in the region is corruption. Many of the leaders generally come to power either through nepotism or through the manipulation of the electoral process. Often they have to pay huge sums of money to the power brokers in the political parties or to individuals operating independently as *godfathers*⁵⁹. The result of this is that once in office, they have to pay back what they borrowed and then make enough money for themselves. Acting under intense pressure from the sponsors, their ethnic or religious groups as well as their extended families, accountability/transparency in governance becomes a problem.

Another factor contributing to prevalent corruption in Black Africa today is that there is a general moral decadence and indiscipline in the region especially in Nigeria. A one-time president of Nigeria Mohammed Buhari himself once decried that corruption and indiscipline are now the two associate evils in the country⁶⁰. The quest for money and prestige has become a predominant passion in some African countries like Nigeria. The dominant passion today is to make *big* money and to make it *fast*. A Nigerian author states that corruption has become so prevalent that people give and receive bribe openly, having lost the sense of right and wrong⁶¹. The result of all this is that moral values like honesty, integrity, hardwork etc., are fast being eroded. And in a society where corruption is a culture and institutionalised, political leaders and even ordinary citizens of high moral probity find that they cannot easily be insulated from its cancerous effects⁶². What then are some of the direct impacts of large scale corruption in a country?

⁵⁹ A term used to describe wealthy people who sponsor people into political offices so that they too would have access to government treasury.

⁶⁰ Buhari himself took over the Nigerian government through coup d'état and suspended all organs of the country's polity. He governed as a sole administrator with other military juntas until he was in turn overthrown by another military group. Much of the country's woes are attributed to the military rulers.

⁶¹ Cf. MADU, K. O, *The Nigerian Church in the Case of Justice and Peace in the Light of the Social Teaching of the Church*, Rome, Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1988, p. 24.

⁶² Cf. ARINZE, F. A, *Living Our Faith, 1971-1983 Lenten Pastorals*, Tabansi Press Onitsha, 1983, p. 27. Apart from these, it should be noted that weak public institutions, the lack of an independent judiciary, inadequately paid civil servants, existence of systems that do not promote meritocracy, all interact to create a climate in which corruption can flourish. And when corruption is a culture people find ways of justifying their actions. For instance civil servants who are paid poorly, irregularly or not at all, may claim that it is the only way to supplementary their salaries. When the police or other law enforcement agents extort money from the public which they are meant to protect or furnish arm to robbers etc, they claim that it is

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2.1.2.4. Impacts of Corruption

The impacts of corruption cannot actually be quantified but the most significant effects that it occasions can be observed.

2.1.2.4.1. Political Impacts

One of the conditions for the effective practice of democracy is that there should be clearly stated rules of engagement and these rules must be observed⁶³. So in a continent where those who make laws flout it with impunity, people lose confidence in the system. Thus one of the biggest impacts of large scale corruption is that it undermines the democratic institutions upon which the state itself is founded. Today, there is loss of confidence in the government and public policies. Corruption in elections, in the judiciary and in legislative bodies have adversely reduced accountability and representation in policymaking.

In a corrupt political society, large scale rigging, intimidation of the opponent, all forms of unethical conducts are common experience. The legislature often becomes the rubber stamp of the corrupt executive. Justice and rule of law are suspended, or at worst, favours the rich and those with power. Corruption thus leads to what can be termed 'the triumph of mediocrity', and nepotism. And by so doing, it wrecks havoc on the entire polity⁶⁴. And once the custodians, interpreters and those who enforce the law become the problem rather than the solution, by flouting laws openly, the entire social fabric stands at the verge of disintegration⁶⁵.

2.1.2.4.2. Social Impacts

Another impact of corruption is that it is the main cause of most of the conflicts in Black Africa today. This can be explained thus. Through corruption, unqualified candidates are

the viable option to make ends meet. When students offer bribes to educational administrators to be admitted into schools, or to the teachers to pass examinations, they may claim that it is the way to get education, escape poverty and live human lives.

⁶³ J. M. WALIGGO, op. cit., p. 82.

⁶⁴ G. EHUSANI, *Years Eaten...*, p. 111.

⁶⁵ Cf. Major General Buhari, *New Year Broadcast*, in K.O. MADU, *The Nigerian Church in the Cause of Justice and Peace in the Light of the Social Teaching of the Church*, Rome, Pontificia Universita Lateranense, 1987, p. 28.

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forced on the people. And given their levels of ineptitude and sectional interests, some parts of the country generally feel marginalized. When people who have the qualifications are sidetracked in appointments, when the meagre resources of the state are unevenly and unjustly distributed, indignation and tension will normally follow. And in a society where justice cannot be done through the judiciary, many people see violent reaction as the only option to make their voices heard as they claim their legitimate rights. In a continent that is ethnically, ideologically and religiously diverse as Africa, the resultant effects become incalculable⁶⁶. Technically referred to as the *resource control problem*, the local population often watch their environment and source of livelihood being destroyed. In Nigeria, the local populations often observe the political leaders from other parts of the country enriching themselves through corrupt means. The result has been an incessant violent conflicts with devastating effects⁶⁷. Other African countries like Sudan and Congo also trace their own conflicts and woes to the corrupt management of national resources, especially, mineral wealth that favours one region at the expense of another⁶⁸.

2.1.2.4.3. Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of endemic corruption can be felt on the national economy and on the lives of individuals especially those who are already poor.

On the national economy large scale corruption stifles investments both locally and internationally. In the private sector for instance, corruption increases the cost of business through the price of bribes themselves, the management cost of negotiating with officials, and the risk of breached agreements or detection. Corruption costs a country much of its revenue as tax evasion by individuals, businesses and large corporations become the norm. Corruption also generates economic distortions in the public sector by diverting

⁶⁶ The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a typical example. Although the region produces over 80% of Nigeria's oil wealth, most of the poorest people in the country live in the area just close enough to the giant installations of the multi-national oil companies of the world. Recent report from the region shows that while many people in the government are making themselves millions from the region's oil, Nigerian Federal Government has been promising to help in tackling the problem of extreme poverty in the region but nothing concrete has been done for them (cf. S. ROBINSON, *Nigeria's Deadly Days*, Time Magazine, May, 22, 2006, p. 25).

⁶⁷ Ibid., cit. p. 25.

⁶⁸ Cf. I. M. DAU, op. cit., p. 45.

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away⁶⁹, for the public investments into projects where bribes and kickbacks are more plentiful. Corruption also lowers compliance with construction, environmental, or other regulations; reduces the quality of government services; and increases budgetary pressures on government.

In a corrupt economy, individuals and companies in the business sector become wary of the state institutions like banks and insurances. Issuance of credits, loans and other forms of doing business which require trust are destroyed. And in a globalised economy where interdependence is the order of the day, foreign aids, technical assistance and all forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation are hampered. And in many growing economies where a percentage of the nation's budget depends on foreign aid, the country can become gravely affected. Today, many foreign donors have suspended aids to offending African countries and some denied foreign debt forgiveness because of endemic corruption.

Another direct impact of large scale corruption is that it encourages money laundering. In Africa in particular, where many government institutions and agencies are weak and accountability not enforced, opportunist leaders siphon huge sums of public funds into their private accounts and businesses. Sometimes the whole state or local government allocation are transferred into private accounts of political office holders and yet the workers' salaries are not paid, the schools are closed down and the infrastructure are in dire need of repair. Sometimes, some office holders tend to be wealthier than some government institutions.

The impacts of corruption on the individuals cannot be underestimated. As a matter of fact, Nigerian bishops hold that the poor are the worst victims of African corrupt practices. While large scale corruption often benefit the rich, powerful and public office holders, the poor are left more and more impoverished. Since the poor can neither give nor be given bribes, much of the country's wealth circulate outside their reach. This

⁶⁹ Such social amenities like energy, hospitals, schools, security etc are neglected.

⁶⁹ Often contracts are inflated and awarded to less qualified individuals and companies because of their connection to people in power. Usually many of these contracts are uncompleted or poorly executed and the loss adds to the nation's list of woes.

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worsens their already precarious condition⁷⁰. Two areas where the poor are denied access to better life are the educational and health sectors.

Since education remains a sure means of escaping the cycle of poverty in Africa today, corruption in the sectors affects not just the poor today but also prepares the way for transgenerational poverty. While the rich send their children to the best schools at home and abroad, thus preparing them for future leadership roles, the children of the poor are almost entirely shut off the system. In Nigeria for instance, a middle-class family can hardly pay the prize of education for their children. Even the most brilliant students are denied opportunities to develop themselves and escape the shackles of poverty. In most Nigerian universities, huge sums of money are paid to secure admission. And the incessant demand for bribe from both the teachers and administrators of the schools compound the situation.

On the health sector, one observes that having looted the public health institutions, the rich and powerful can still go to the best private hospitals in their country or abroad for treatment. But for the poor, access to good hospitals even at home are usually impossible and when they do, they receive shabby treatments and ineffective drugs. A special report from the Nigerian health sectors describes how corruption can directly lead to poverty and even can menace life itself especially the lives of the poor in the country. It is reported that,

a staggering 80% of the medications sold there were deficient in one way or another. Some contained less of the active ingredient that was specified on the label. Others were past their expiration date. Some were filled with inert lactose or powdered chalk. Still others were poison. In 1990 more than 100 Nigerian children died from painkiller that had been made with toxic ethylene glycol instead of propylene glycol⁷¹.

Apart from Nigeria, other African countries have been labouring under the burden of large scale corruption as well. According to a Tanzanian report, "corruption is a disease

⁷⁰ Nigerian Bishops, *Current Abuse*, in P. SCHNEILLER (ed.), *Voice of the Voiceless*, Daily Graphics, Ibadan, 2000, p. 49.

⁷¹ D. AKUNYILI, *Nigeria, Drug Warrior*, Time Magazine, November, 7, 2005, p. 66. Since 2001, when Dr. D. Akunyili took over 'NAFDAC', the agency fighting fake drugs, much has changed showing that the war against corruption is not altogether unwinnable in Africa.

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more contagious than tuberculosis, killing more people than malaria and Ebola, and is more dangerous and destructive than cancer”⁷².

2.1.3.Conflicts

Conflict, violence and wars have been identified as a major cause of poverty in Black Africa today. The scope of this work only permits a presentation of the salient points involved in the discussion. So we shall see the nature and remote background of African conflicts, examine its present causes and then end with its main effects. We shall use the expressions conflict, violence and war almost interchangeably to describe the various forms of aggressions used in the region. These aim at self-defence or doing harm to another who is perceived as a threat.

2.1.3.1. Background to Understanding African Conflicts and Violence

Traditionally, African peoples organise themselves along tribal and ethnic groupings⁷³. Despite living in relative peace with one another, there were inter-tribal conflicts and even wars that were generally fought with primitive tools which have limited destructive capabilities. But the level of conflicts in Africa assumed a bigger dimension when the continent came in direct contact with other civilisations as seen below.

The decisive factor in understanding African conflicts in a large scale can be traced to the moment when the various ethnic and tribal groups that have been living relatively autonomous lives were forced into forming new nations. This began especially in the 1870s when the so-called ‘Scramble for Africa’ began. First, the local peoples were forced into war of defence as they tried in vain to drive off the invading forces. When almost totally subdued, the foreign powers also began ideological and open combats among themselves in the African soil as they scrambled for territories⁷⁴. With the

⁷² T.L. MALIYAMKONO, *Race for the Presidency*, in N. SEGEJA and M. OJARA, *The Prophetic Role of the Church in AMECEA Countries: Pastoral Challenges and Response*, in D. KYEYUNE (ed.), *New Trends for the Empowerment of the People*, Paulines Publications, 1997, p. 54. We shall see this further as well as proffer solutions under the theme of moral conscientization in the last part of this work.

⁷³ Cf. E. ACHERMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁷⁴ In Northern Africa, between 1870-1871 Germany and France were fighting for the colonies under French government. Germany which was late in the scramble race, joining only in 1912 was able to acquire only colonies scattered in different parts of Africa. France and Italy fought over Tunisia, and Spain and France were battling for Morocco. In the South and Eastern Africa, the Germans, the British and the Turks were

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establishment of the League of Nations, there seemed to be relative peace until the fascist regime of Mussolini attacked Ethiopia which was never colonised before. Ethiopia's defeat of Italy in 1935 did not deter the latter, for in 1936 they once again inflicted great damage and defeat on Ethiopia and occupied it. Although the territory that was called Ethiopia was made of different peoples with different histories and identities, the Italian regime forced them together to enhance a more economic and political control. As a major source of conflict in that region up till today, we read that,

in April 1936, the Italians defeated and occupied Ethiopia. Then they amalgamated Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia, to form Italian East Africa. The action was condemned by all European powers, but supported and recognised by Germany.⁷⁵

During the Second World War, many African countries which were forced to fight under their colonial governments. And since the colonial powers themselves were divided, many Africans were forced to fight among themselves as a consequence⁷⁶. The superior British forces that defeated other foreign powers in South, East and West Africa insidiously sowed a seed of distrust and violence among the people based on linguistic and cultural lines. But the real impact of all these would be felt soon after the Second World War.

Returning from the wars, many of the African veterans now turned their weapons against the colonial powers as they demanded for immediate independence. The French were forced to appoint Moroccans as ministers by 1947 paving the way for the independence struggle. In 1951 Libya forced its independence out of the allied forces. But the most violent situation in North Africa was in the French territory of Algiers where one of the most bloody wars in the continent was fought lasting till 1962⁷⁷. While many African

also fighting. This struggle for political and economic control of the African territories continued up to the end of the First World War. We read that "when Germany was finally defeated in 1918, all its colonies were taken away from it and given to France and Britain under the 'Mandate Territories' of the League of Nations which was set up after the war to maintain world peace" (C. O. OKORO, *International Relations and Diplomacy since the World Wars, The Nigerian Focus*, Feloks Communications, Enugu, 2000, p. 102).

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

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countries became independent through wars or negotiated means, South Africa remained a theatre of conflicts and blood shed until 1990 when the Apartheid regime was dismantled.

2.1.3.2. African Conflicts Today and Factors Aggravating them

Since the end of the wars for independence, the conflicts in the continent have taken new shapes and are fought for various reasons. The issue of nationhood and boundary disputes remain the main problem. When people who did not negotiate to live together do, internal strife is bound to occur. When there is no clear boundary demarcations between two artificial nations, intra-state conflicts may be frequent. So these are some of the antecedent reasons for the present impasse in the region⁷⁸. Historians and some social analysts like D. Oyeshola hold that intra-state wars, directed mainly against civilians and often fought by militias are very difficult to control, and that actually, is the experience in many Black African countries today⁷⁹.

2.1.3.2.1. Political and Economic Factors

Political succession and economic factors have been another major causes of violence in Africa. Although many African countries are now practicing democratic rule, a lot of violence are still associated with the system. A combined factor of bad leadership, corruption and ineffective political systems have all led to very unstable society. We can see for an example some of the countries where politically motivated conflicts have wrecked the lives of the people. In Democratic Republic of Congo for instance, there was a war against Mobutu and his allies. This polarised the country and provoked unprecedented conflicts and wars that have spilled from that country to other neighbours⁸⁰. Long after Mobutu was gone, the wars and conflicts have continued unabated. Since violence tends to breed more violence, today the conflict in that country

⁷⁸ Some authors are of the opinion that the size of some countries like Congo and Sudan make them almost ungovernable and unless such historical issue is addressed the problem of conflict may continue much longer (cf. R. ROBINSON and V. WALT, *The Deadliest War in the World*, Time Magazine, June 5, 2006, p. 31).

⁷⁹ Cf. D. OYESHOLA, *Politics of International Environmental Regulations*, Daily Graphics Publications, Ibadan, 1998, p. 108. Accepted that the causes of conflicts in Black Africa are complex to analyse since they are interconnected and have historical antecedents, one can identify some of the main problems associated with it.

⁸⁰ S. ROBINSON and V. WALT, op. cit., p. 32.

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has led to wars that are fought in many fronts with numerous foreign actors becoming involved. A recent report on Congo summarises the situation today:

Some wars go on killing long after they end. In Congo, a nation of 63million people in the heart of Africa, a peace deal signed more than three years ago was supposed to halt a war that drew in belligerents from at least eight other countries, producing a record of human devastation unmatched in history. The Internal Rescue Committee (IRC) estimates that 3.9 million people have died from war related causes since the conflict in Congo began in 1988, making it the world's most lethal conflict since World War II⁸¹.

In Uganda, it took a combined national and international forces to fight and overthrow the government of Idi Amin who is regarded as one of Africa's greatest dictators. The spill over from that war has had adverse effects in that country and aggravated the precarious condition of the poor. Liberia fought for a regime change but that country has never really known any peace even when Charles Taylor was said to be elected president. In Angola, the UNITA⁸² Movement did not bring in the peace it promised Angola when, in 1964, it broke away from other liberation movements dominated by Northern Angolans. And the death of Savimbi its leader has not deterred the violent struggle that has polarised the country⁸³.

2.1.3.2.2. Ethno-religious Rivalries

Africa has one of the largest number of active tribes in the world but were amalgamated into nation states in the 19th century. In the 1950s and 60s most of these colonies were given political independence. The animosity between these tribes, though present during the colonial rule, was suppressed as the colonial powers enforced peace through various means. At independent however, most of these new nations realised that they were bound more by tribal ties than their new national identity. So sticking to their tribes, coupled

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸² This means 'National Total Independence of Angola.

⁸³ In most of the African countries at war, the issue of resource control which is economic remains a motivation for seeking and retaining power. Such economic factor also propel many people to engage in violent actions against the ruling class. The Niger Delta in Nigeria which produces almost all the nation's wealth is an example, and so is the issue of mineral resources in Congo (cf. P. KII, op. cit., p. 66).

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with poverty and very weak legal systems, the situation became volatile. It is given this situation that tribal animosities began to emerge soon after independence. In order to keep the fragile peace and artificial unity, military dictators became the ugly but feasible option in many countries. That these military dictators came from one tribe and not another, all the more made conflict inevitable. Even when political democracy has been installed in some countries, the tribal sentiments often leads to more violence that invite the military and so the cycle goes on⁸⁴.

Nigeria like Sudan has a very high population of militant Moslems. The constant clashes between Christians and Moslems create not only political problems but also huge economic losses. Hundreds of people lose their lives yearly in religious vandalism. The religious riots in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria in the year 2000 occasioned the following. The total number of people killed was 567. Over 2224 houses, 770 cars and vehicles were destroyed. 124 Churches and 47 Mosques were burnt down⁸⁵. But the biggest problem in Nigeria is not just the religious plurality, it is rather the sad reality that ‘the powers-that-be’ in Nigeria have often gravely politicised religious matters in favour of the Muslim religion. They present Islam as if it were the official or national religion but statistics prove that Christians are the majority in Nigeria. According to some scholars like P. B. Clarke, there exist some fundamentalist Moslems in Nigeria who consciously reject the idea of the nation-state and whose primary objective is not Nigerian unity, and stability, but the unity of Muslims⁸⁶.

This religious favouritism in Nigeria is rooted in tribal and ethnic problems associated with many African countries. Having studied the relationship between the Igbos, the Hausas and Yorubas tribes of Nigeria since independence, an author concludes: “Deeply underlying the Nigerian predicament is the tension between the global political community (on the national level), and the individuals at different levels: personal, ethnic

⁸⁴ Nigeria can be cited as a typical example of how ethno-religious factor provoke conflicts.

⁸⁵ Cf. A. AINI, *Senate Panel Submits Reports on Kaduna Riots*, in *The Leader*, Vol. XLII, No. 5. (March 2000), p. 1.

⁸⁶ Cf. P. B. CLARKE, *Islam, Development and African Identity: The Case of West Africa* in K. H. PETERSEN (ed), *Religion, Development and African Identity*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1987, pp. 125-143, cf. p. 130.

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groups, languages, religions, regions and other sub-groups in the nation”⁸⁷. The resultant effects of conflicts is that “everywhere in Africa, our economies are crumbling and our treasuries are getting empty, we are becoming client states”⁸⁸. In almost all the countries in Black Africa there is growing poverty, political and economic instability, corruption especially among the leading classes, prostitution, tribal and ethnic rancour⁸⁹. Africa is thus described as continent suffering from anthropological poverty⁹⁰, a continent standing at the threshold of annihilation⁹¹.

So in post cold-war democratisation process, violence has been precipitated by the politicisation of ethnicity and religious differences. Afraid to face free and fair elections, political aspirants have promoted politically and religiously motivated clashes as the Nigerian experience has shown. Also to be noted is that the increasing economic dilapidation of African countries including the eternal servicing of foreign debts/SAPs, withdrawal of State subsidies, etc., have forced many law abiding citizens into becoming criminals, terrorists and agents of violence in Africa.

Since our main concern in this section of the enquiry is to situate the impacts of conflicts in Africa, let us briefly examine this further.

2.1.3.3. Main Impacts of Conflicts

Any meaningful discussion of poverty in Africa must take into account this perennial effects of conflicts and wars. As a matter of fact, the African Synod singled out conflict as the bane of African nations. That the Rwandan genocide was going on at the time of the Synod made conflict management a major discussion in the Synod as seen in Cardinal

⁸⁷ P. O. IROEGBU, *The Kpim of Communalism, Toward Justice in Africa*, International University Press, Owerri, 1996, p. 41.

⁸⁸ K. NKRUMAH, *Rhodesia File*, Panaf Books, London, 1976, p. 70.

⁸⁹ Cf. P. A. KALILOMBE, *Péché, société et libération*, in E. MVENG (ed.), *Spiritualité et libération en Afrique*, Paris, Harmattan, 1987, p. 57.

⁹⁰ Cf. A. N. MUSHETE, *Les thèmes majeurs de la théologie africaine*, Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 1989, p. 104.

⁹¹ Cf. H. G. KUIZA, *Jésus-Christ Peut-il être Africain?* Paris, Novine, 1993, p. 128.

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Thiandoum's opening remarks⁹². In general the effects of conflicts are felt on two levels. The first concerns the personal psycho-physical injury it inflicts on the people. The second is about the effects it has on the very foundation on which the warring society stands. On the personal level, conflicts and wars usually cause tremendous suffering on the people. Thousands are often intimidated, assassinated, thousands are forced to flee their homes and their means of livelihood. Wars create widows, orphans, unemployment and refugees⁹³. Wars destroy trust even long after they have ended⁹⁴. They maim their victims who turn to become dependent on others. The statistics below reveals the effects of wars especially as it concerns human deaths in the region. It is estimated that over three and half million people died in Africa since 1990 due to conflicts. The number of displaced persons and refugees in Africa ranges between twenty four and eighteen million respectively⁹⁵. In 1994/1995 alone, the estimated number of war deaths in Africa has been tabulated as follows:⁹⁶ Rwanda c. 500,000 – 1,000,000; Angola c. 50,000; Algeria c.10,000; Sierra-Leone c.3,000; Burundi c.3,000; South Africa c. 1,000; Sudan c 1,60; Ethiopia c.1,000; Congo(Zaire) c.1,000; Chad c. 1,000.

Today the on-going killing in Darfur region of Sudan which has been described as African tragedy, is considered a genocide⁹⁷.

⁹²On Monday 11th of April 1994, Cardinal H. THIANDOUM, the Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal who served as the reporter general of the African Synod opened the work of the assembly with his introductory report. Among other things he decried the rampant cases of war that was ravaging the African continent with abominable consequences. His introductory work would guide most of the deliberations of the Synod as we shall see later (cf. *Rapport introductif du cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum* in M.CHEZA (ed.), *Le synode africain, Histoire et textes*, Paris, Edition Karthala, 1996, p. 46).

⁹³ Cf. W. WAN-TATAH, discussing the African condition today sees the phenomenon of refugees as one of the greatest problems in Africa. He defines a refugee as a person who flees his home or country to seek shelter and protection elsewhere as a result of war, natural disaster, political or religious persecution. The constant struggle for power in Africa according to him is the major cause of the large number of refugees in Africa. He presents us with both the causes and effects of poverty (cf. *Ibid*, p. 184-185).

⁹⁴Cf. U. J. OGWU, *The Church as Agent of Reconciliation and Social Transformation*, in AECAWA Publications 2002, p. 11. AECAWA is the acronym for Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa.

⁹⁵ Cf. D. OYESHOLA, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁹⁶These figures are approximates of actual statistics. Although they may not be exactly accurate, they nonetheless give us the idea of number of lives lost in the continent within the period under study. But our major interest on these figures is not necessarily their accuracy as the effects they have on the living condition of the people. This figure is a compilation from World Conflict Map 1994/95 and cited in D. OYESHOLA, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁹⁷ S. ROBINSON and V. WALT, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

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The effects of wars on the social level is equally tremendous. Wars destroy the economy. The human and financial resources of the people at war are often diverted to the purchase of arms. Wars destroy the social infrastructure thus generally preventing the provision of basic human needs. War deter investors both local and international. One adverse effect of war is that long after it ends, it gives rise to a host of militia and ex-soldiers who then become unemployed as they become redundant in the time of peace. The result of this is the evolution of private armies⁹⁸. The problem of counter-insurgency is thus common in African countries even when aggrieved parties have signed official peace deals⁹⁹. The final impact of conflicts and wars is that the political system is generally weakened as it takes years to build trust, nationhood and a viable economic, political and economic order. In the meanwhile it creates a generation of very poor people¹⁰⁰.

2.1.4. Foreign Debts as Cause of Poverty

The question of the indebtedness of poor nations towards rich ones is a matter of great concern for the Church, as expressed in many official documents and interventions of the Holy See.... I particularly feel it is my duty to urge the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and all foreign creditors to alleviate the crushing debts of the African nations. Finally, I earnestly ask the Episcopal Conferences of the industrialized countries to present this issue consistently to their governments and to the organizations concerned. The situation of many African countries is so serious as to leave no room for attitudes of indifference and complacency¹⁰¹.

2.1.4.1. The Nature of Debts

Borrowing and lending are two common economic activities. In the case of a country, if it puts the money so borrowed to productive use, it benefits from faster economic growth and increased spending on social services and the contrary is the case if not prudently

⁹⁸ In most of the places where liberation movement fought wars, the end of such wars often turn the militants into permanent militia groups. This is understandable given that most of the militants are often neglected in a stable political and economic order. Many types of criminal violence, assassinations etc, are attributed to these groups.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ It is actually when we consider the plight of refugees in the next session that can one really appreciate how conflict is a major cause of poverty in the region.

¹⁰¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 120.

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managed. In case of Africa, one of the main causes of poverty is external debt. African governments are forced to spend more money servicing foreign debts, than they are able to spend on the health or education of their people. We must begin by stating that there are three main types of debts scourging most African countries. Domestic debts are those owed to local banks, insurance companies and individuals. Bilateral debts are those owed to specific countries while multilateral debts are owed to international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, or other regional banks.

2.1.4.2. Origin and Causes of Debt Crisis in Africa, the Nigerian Example

The phenomenon of foreign debts in Africa has a fairly recent history. Most African countries got independence in the 1960s and many of them had great visions for their new nations. Several governments in the continent embarked on massive nationalisation of basic industries and increased government participation in the economy. So with the increase in government participation in the economy, coupled with the increase in population and dwindling economy/income, foreign aid was seen as the last resort to bridge the financial gap. So most of the debts were loans given for strategic purposes aimed especially to prop up repressive regimes during the Cold War¹⁰².

Again during the 1970s, when Western banks were flush with oil money, loans were pushed on African governments with little or no thought to their purposes or to the recipients' capacity to repay. Another source of the debts is that most of the nascent African leaders engaged in grandiose development projects often supported by the creditors countries. Some of the loans in question were taken by repressive regimes. Military and civilian dictators were even granted loans without the consent of their citizens and their representatives. Until the beginning of the 80s, Western Commercial banks continued to provide huge loans to African countries. Unfortunately debtor countries did not achieve levels of economic growth sufficient to enable them repay the

¹⁰² The United States give huge strategic and financial support to the regimes that they saw as allies during the Cold War. That many of these regimes were dictatorial mattered less to them (cf. S. ROBINSON and V. WALT, op.cit., p. 32).

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loans¹⁰³. The consequence of such high levels of indebtedness on the lives of the already poor population becomes outrageous. Since a sovereign nation cannot just declare itself bankrupt, it is not possible to draw line under debts and bring them to an end. Instead of bringing these debts to an end, creditors offer new loans to pay off old loans, and so the cycle of indebtedness grinds endlessly on with its consequences on the poor citizens. A concrete example is exxigent here.

2.1.4.3. How Reckless Spending Led to Debt Crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria arrived on the international borrowing scene in 1978 when it took loans totalling \$1.5billion. Nigeria drew \$1.45billion that year to cover part of its deficit that year. Nigerian import then totalled \$9.95billion while its export was \$11.5billion. Between 1979 and 1980, Nigeria's exports improved drastically such that in 1979 Nigeria earned \$17.2billion and in 1980 a whooping \$26.73billion¹⁰⁴. By 1980, the reckless civilian regime that took over from Obasajno started to dismantle the bans imposed by the military rulers. As a result in 1980 Nigeria spent about \$23billion of the \$26billion it had earned. So by 1981 exports began to fall. This was due to the declining of earning as a result of less export activities. And the logical consequence of spending more than one earns is deficit in budget with its consequences¹⁰⁵.

In spite of the declining export, Nigeria's consumption did not adjust to the reality. So Nigeria which earned \$17.9billion in 1981 spent \$24.7billion the same year. This means

¹⁰³ The fall or fluctuating prizes of petroleum products and other such exports, over-ambitious projects, and mismanagement of these resources would soon land these growing countries into great economic dilemma. Unable to pay or even service these debts, the young countries became progressively indebted and impoverished. Caught in the dilemma, a vicious circle, these countries wanted to resort to more borrowing to meet up their domestic needs and to service debts. So some countries, through adverse economic factors, misfortune, bad spending decisions, corruption or unwise lending or borrowing got to a level of indebtedness that is too high to make repayment possible. Another contributory factor is the recession of the 70s and the fall in commodity prices, the end of the Gold Exchange Standard (GES), floating exchange rates and variable interest rates, misguided models of development and inappropriate industrialisation. Of all the factors the most disastrous seem to be "unethical banking, corruption and dictatorial regimes" (P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), *Marginalised Africa, An International Perspective*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2002, p. 57).

¹⁰⁴ It is believed that the ban in import imposed by the then military regime of president Olusegun Obasanjo was mainly responsible for these economic gains (cf. A. C. EYIUCHE, *Theory of Development Planning in Developing Economies, Nigerian Planning Experience 1945-2000*, Maurice Production Services, Enugu, 2000, p. 157).

¹⁰⁵ G. ABRAHAMS-FROIS, *Economie Politique*, Paris, ECONOMIA PRESS, 1992, 642.

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spending about \$7billion more than the country earned. In 1982 Nigeria earned \$12.93 billion from exports and consumed imports of goods and services totalling \$21billion, a gap of \$8billion. As a consequence of this, in 1983 Nigerian foreign reserve which was \$10.235billion in 1983 declined sharply to less than \$1billion in 1988¹⁰⁶.

In the course of these evolving economic realities, Nigerian foreign debts structured to be paid in three years (1979-1983) were never paid. So when the military under Buhari administration took over from the civilians in the face of the erring economy, it inherited debts which ran into one hundred billion Nigerian Naira (N100billion)¹⁰⁷. Faced with the dilemma, Buhari administration paid as much as it could, spending about 44% of the country's earning to service debts¹⁰⁸. In 1985, Buhari programmed to spend 57 percent of the national earnings to servicing debts, but this did not improve the situation. This was thus the beginning of the debts crises in Nigeria and the effects are drastic:

In spite of the servicing of the debts, the commitments which the second republic politicians dragged Nigeria did not decrease. Instead more trade arrears claims kept pouring in, most undefined debts. Sequel to these trade arrears, banks abroad and exporters to Nigeria i.e our foreign partners refused further trade transactions with Nigeria. Letters of Credit (LCs) opened by Nigerian Banks were no longer honoured by 1984 and 1985, and this made it impossible for Nigerian importers to bring in goods...Nigeria had lost her credit-worthiness to do business with overseas countries¹⁰⁹.

With all these, by the end of 1985, external debt outstanding thus included a \$11.4billion medium and long-term public debt excluding trade arrears of \$1.8billion being financed under trade letter of credits. Further to these there were general trade arrears of about N9.5billion in claims by foreign exporters. The debt service obligations had also increased considerably to 32% of exports. This external debts situation eventually caught Nigeria in an export credit squeeze. As a result of all these it became obligatory for

¹⁰⁶ Cf. A. C. EYIUCHE, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁷ Naira is Nigeria's official currency. The exchange rate then calculated in dollars gave this equivalence in the national currency.

¹⁰⁸ cf. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁹ cf. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

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Nigeria to accept the difficult but inevitable conditions given by the creditor nations rescheduling its external debts. One can actually say that it is lack of foresight, corruption and especially inability to manage the debts that landed many African countries into the destitute conditions that they are in now¹¹⁰.

2.1.4.4. The Role of the IMF and the World Bank in African Debt Crisis

In the entire debt-crises saga in the developing world, the role of the IMF and the World Bank have been ambiguous¹¹¹. Either through bad advise to developing countries or through unscrupulous lending, these two institutions have contributed to Black African dilemma today as they use all types of means to squeeze money from these poorest countries¹¹². In its effort to recover its funds, the IMF often introduces the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), which they often press upon the developing countries¹¹³. The direct impact of SAP is that government drastically cut spending on the welfare of their people on such areas as health, education and social welfare. This ensures that

¹¹⁰ Debt management is one of the important functions of monetary policy in an undeveloped economy. It aims at proper timing and issuing of government bonds, stabilising their prices and minimising cost of servicing public debt. The primary aim of debt management is to create conditions in which public borrowing can increase from year to year on a big scale without giving any jolt to the system. And this must be done on cheap rates to so as to keep the burden of debts as low as possible. In order to strengthen and stabilise the market for government bonds, the policy of low interest rates is essential. For, a low rate of interest raises the price of government bonds, thereby making them more attractive to the public and giving impetus to the public borrowing programmes of the government. Equally important is the maintenance of structure of low interest rates to enable the minimising of the cost of servicing the debts. This will further encourage funding of private firms and their foreign counterparts. So the priority of any debtor country is to ensure that debt management policies is to create demand by establishing well developed money market and capital markets with a wide range of securities for both short and long terms (cf. *Ibid.* p. 375).

¹¹¹ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a specialised agency of the United Nations established soon after the Second World War with its headquarters in Washington. It was established to provide international liquidity on a short and medium term and encourage liberalisation of exchange rates. The IMF supports countries with balance of payment problems with provision of loans. The World Bank is a multilateral development agency created with the aim of providing loans to developing countries to stimulate their growth and stability.

¹¹² In the past two years, the IMF extracted \$1 billion from Africa, the region it has consistently declared the poorest of the world. In 1998, the IMF received \$390 million more in loan repayments from Africa than it provided in new finance. Developing countries as a whole in 1998 paid back to western governments and financial institutions \$13 for every \$1 they received in grant aid. They paid back \$9 for every \$1 in 1996.

¹¹³ The main features of the Structural Adjustment Programme are: 1. Strengthening of the hitherto strong demand on management policies; 2. Adoption of measures to stimulate domestic production and broaden supply base of the economy; 3. Adoption of a realistic exchange rate policy; 4. Rationalisation and restructuring of tariffs in order to aid the promotion of industrial diversification; 5. Move towards improved trade and payments liberalisation; 6. Reduction of complex administrative controls simultaneously with greater reliance on market forces; 7. Adoption of appropriate pricing policies especially for petroleum products and public expenses; 8. Rationalisation and privatisation of public sector enterprises (cf. A. C. EYIUCHE, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

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enough revenue is made available for repaying debts. In Nigeria for instance, paying or rescheduling debts together with various SAP measures had drastic effects on every sector of the national life. "At this period most industries and manufacturing firms in the country were folding up and retrenching their employees due to lack of import dependent raw materials and other productive equipments. Inflation was growing and living standard becoming very unbearable"¹¹⁴.

To facilitate the achievement of the goals of SAP, other measures were put in place including Second Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) introduced to monitor, regulate official market exchange rates. In all these, the removal of any controls on foreign investments and the privatisation of assets enable foreigners with huger capital to control the resources of the nation in debt. So apart from the direct impact of SAP on the citizens, some of the conditions imposed by creditors lead to a bid reduction in the growth of the world trade, a severe drop in commodity prices and eventual avoidance of foreign investments in such a crises-ridden developing countries.

By imposing SAP and ESAF insensitive to their poverty consequences, IMF often helps in aggravating the deteriorating standard of living of the poor. By coercing, in the name of expert advise, the IMF encourages debtor countries to add new loans as a way to escape debts. Added to all these "The IMF and World Bank fail to address the unjust and odious debts. The issue of an independent and transparent arbitration process is not addressed"¹¹⁵. Today the belief is that foreign loans are used as means of control and manipulation¹¹⁶. After a very exhaustive research on how loans were given to developing countries to help them in pursuing birth control policies designed abroad, J. Kasun of the University of California concludes that developed countries, in granting most loans, "what they really want is control over other people's lives"¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

¹¹⁵ P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), op.cit., p. 59.

¹¹⁶ C.O. OKORO, op.cit., p. 125.

¹¹⁷ J. KASUN, *The Economics and Ideology of Population Control, War Against Population*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1988, p. 77.

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2.1.4.5. Economic Impacts of Foreign Debts

The economic impacts of debts is most worrying in the continent. Today Africa spends four times more on debt repayment than it does on healthcare. A few examples are necessary here. Spending on healthcare in Zimbabwe fell by over 30% in the six years following the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) in 1990. Zambia was once a rich copper-exporting country. With the fall in the price of copper on the world market, debts accumulated. Now almost every Zambian citizen owes the country's creditors some \$570, more than three times the average annual salary. Kenya pays out a quarter of the value of annual exports in debt servicing, more than 4\$ for every \$1 received in grants. In order to earn hard currency for paying off its debts, Kenya has been forced to increase its deforestation with annual loss of 3,000 hectares of forest.

Due to the pressure to pay its debts, the government of Mozambique can no longer start off its universal primary education programme. They seem to be hoping against hope to launch the programme by 2010. In Ghana, school fees have been introduced as part of a SAP. This has led to a drastic drop in the primary and secondary school enrolment. And in Tanzania, charges have been introduced for health care so depriving the poor of health care. Between 1978 and 1979 alone, the Tanzanian government spent \$9 per person on its debt, and only \$3 per person on health. In three heavily indebted countries of West Africa, (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso) primary school attendance is under 30%¹¹⁸.

So apart from the effect of debts on the institutional and governmental levels, excruciating foreign debts has immediate consequences on the citizens of the countries concerned creating the poorest of the poor in the continent. Today experts lament what they describe as “...l'endettement du Tiers-Monde, qui appauvrit les plus pauvres et les enfonce dans le sous-développement”¹¹⁹. For countries labouring under heavy foreign debts, the common experience is mass unemployment, economic recession, drastic reduction of the standard of life etc. Foreign debts cripple the local economy, cause the

¹¹⁸ P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), op. cit., p. 55.

¹¹⁹ L. O'NEIL., *Initiation à l'Éthique Sociale*, Paris, Editions Fides, 1998, p. 359.

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degradation of the lives of the populace, starve the national institutes of fund to operate, create dependence on the dictates of the creditor nations among others.

Aware of the impacts of foreign debts in Africa, some pressure groups have been insisting that there could be no meaningful solution to African poverty unless the issue of debts are settled¹²⁰. Some campaigners are actually arguing that it is the developed world that actually owe Africa given how the resources from the continent helped them during the industrial revolution¹²¹. We can mention two important groups campaigning for debt relief and forgiveness in the face of the effects it has on the already poor people. These groups are Justice and Peace Commission of the Vatican, and the (JDC) Jubilee Debt Campaign¹²².

According a Vatican document, huge debts affect the people in general but especially, *"en premier lieu les plus pauvres et ainsi que certaines classes moyennes, bref une situation intolérable et à moyen terme désastreuse pour les créanciers eux-mêmes"*¹²³.

2.1.4.6. Some Debt Relief Measures with a Special Focus on HIPC Initiative¹²⁴

Debt relief is not altogether a new phenomenon in the business world. Since the 1960s when many of the African countries became politically independent, measures have been taken to delay repayments in order to help a country that was unable to pay at the

¹²⁰ One can mention the contributions of Vatican Commission on this issue (cf. DOCUMENT DE LA COMMISSION PONTIFICALE « *Justice et paix* », *Au service de la communauté humaine, une approche éthique de l'endettement international*, Paris, Cerf, 1987, p. 18) .

¹²¹ E. ACHERMANN, op.cit., pp. 172-173.

¹²² This is an umbrella body of a large number of church, welfare, international aid, labour, youth and other groups. The Jubilee vision was inspired by the story of the liberation of the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. Its purpose is to ensure that justice between rich and poor nations was embedded in social relations by the law of Jubilee so that injustice would not recur. This group JDC also works closely with sister organisations like Jubilee Research and Jubilee Scotland to form what is called the Jubilee Movement. Its vision is a world in which people of the poorest countries are liberated from the crushing burden of debt, and in which the future financial arrangements between rich and poor nations are founded on fairness, accountability and transparency. Under the umbrella of the JDC, developing countries have been able to define odious debts under four categories. These are (a) Debts which cannot be serviced without placing a burden on already impoverished people. (b) Debt that in real terms have already been paid; (c) Debt for improperly designed projects and programmes; (d) And debts incurred by repressive and dictatorial regimes. Other groups protest regularly during European and G8 summits (cf. P. KANYANDAGO (ed.) op. cit., p. 59).

¹²³ Cf. DOCUMENT DE LA COMMISSION PONTIFICALE , op. cit., p. 16.

¹²⁴ This an abbreviation for 'Highly Indebted Poor Countries'.

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scheduled time. But today, experience has shown that rescheduling of debt has not helped much in ameliorating the situation. This explains why writing-off about two-thirds of such debts have been proposed. Before the current move to write-off huge national debts, there have been other similar gestures. For example, various Commercial Banks provide relief in some measures. But unfortunately many of the heavily indebted nations do not have actual heavy commercial debts. Some donors like the British Department for International Development (DFID), have equally written off some old aid loans. Despite these gestures, "however, it was found that these measures were not sufficient to deal with the high levels of indebtedness of some of the poorest countries"¹²⁵.

Debt swaps was introduced so that creditors could have their 'bad loans' sold to governments, enterprises and NGOs in what is known as the secondary markets. The Paris Club and the Special Terms Strategy which is an informal gathering of 20 to 30 creditor countries have played major roles in dealing with debt relief. But unfortunately, they give lot of rigid, and almost impossible conditions to debtors. The Toronto Terms (1988), London Terms (1991), Naples Terms (1994), Lyons Terms (1996) and Cologne Terms 1999 are laudable but have remained ineffective measures to lessen the debts. Perhaps it was under the Clinton administration that a most visible sign of commitment to debt issues was witnessed. The United States announced a 100% cancellation of debt owed it by 36 countries¹²⁶.

Apart from the bilateral initiatives above, the multilateral debts relief measures have been tried without great effect. In 1982, it was the 'Cash flow' provisions. In 1985 there was general willingness to reschedule but not reducing debts. In 1986 there was a general use of SAP as a measure. In 1987 came the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF). In 1989 there was the Washington Consensus and in 1996 the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative. In 1999 there was the Cologne Debt Initiative (CDI) as well as

¹²⁵DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, *Debt Relief for Poverty Reduction*, November 2002, London, p. 2.

¹²⁶ Canada, Britain and Italy expressed their desire to follow the USA initiative (cf. P. KANYANDAGO (ed.) op. cit. p. 58).

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Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF or HIPC2). Given its importance in the debt relief efforts, we shall discuss the HIPC initiative a little further below.

One of the latest debt relief measures is the Highly Indebted Poor Countries debt reduction initiative for 29 countries. Of this number, 24 are in Africa. The essence of this initiative is to help the debtor country free up resources to create space for direct spending on poverty reduction measures like health and education. Only four countries have so far received debt relief under this initiative. To qualify for this debt relief, the IMF and World Bank gave the countries which they now labelled *poorest countries*, very stringent economic conditions to fulfil. In particular they would have to prove that for a six year period, they were implementing the IMF structural adjustment demands not minding its impacts on the people.

At the AG 7 summit in 1999, the existing Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative was revised and re-launched as part of debt relief package worth US \$100 billion, which also covered traditional debt relief arrangements and aid debt cancellation. Designed to provide faster, broader and deeper debt relief to poor countries committed to eradicating poverty, the enhanced HIPC Initiative currently delivers more than twice as much debt relief as under the original 1996 Initiative. The objective of this is to provide a permanent exit from unsustainable debt burdens. To date, 26 HIPC countries have qualified for this exceptional debt relief, and more are expected to qualify over the months. Of these twenty-six countries, nineteen are found in Black Africa.

So great is their debt burden that that the international community proposed a relief totalling more than US\$62 billion. This will only reduce their debt burden by about two thirds on the average. With recent findings that every one in five of the world's population is living in extreme poverty, Governments worldwide have agreed to work in solidarity among themselves and in solidarity with the poorest poor countries and individuals to tackle poverty. The target is to reduce the number of the poorest poor on earth by half by the year 2015, and to provide universal primary education and improved

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healthcare¹²⁷. Indeed accumulated debt is a result of poverty and such debt keeps or even deepens the poverty situation. This is why the international community has stated strongly that the rational for the debt relief is to allow the world poorest poor countries to tackle the problem of the poorest poor of their citizens¹²⁸.

And to ensure that these funds achieve their targets, the donor nations and institutions have insisted that to qualify for these relief, benefiting countries must have to develop national poverty reduction strategy, setting out how they will tackle poverty and specifying how the debt relief savings, and other development resources will be used. One of the conditions proposed is that civil societies and NGOs will be actively involved in the development of these strategies so that they will command broad based support. Indeed this is very commendable in Black Africa where military dictatorship and political transition have remained great problems since the independence of African nations.

From our study above, we can make important remarks here. In each epoch and place in human history, basic economic activities are undertaken within some rules and guidelines. But a critical study of the foreign debt crises in Africa shows that the international financial systems is not really governed by any law. This is to say that there is not effective law governing the relationship between rich creditors and poor debtor countries. There was for instance no indication that there were *debt limits* as required by law. This would have helped to a peg ceiling stage by law on the amount of public debt that may be outstanding at any given time. This law would have helped limit the purposes for which the funds may be borrowed, the duration of the debts, the maximum interest rate to be paid, and the means used to repay the debt.

Again, there is no independent, just, transparent mediating institution or body of legislation to give protection to debtors as well as creditors. The role of the IMF and World Bank are ambiguous as and leaves much to be desired as neutral organs. The use of sanctions on defaulting nations have not proved very effective in recovering debts. The debtor countries are never on the same level to negotiate with their powerful donors who

¹²⁷ Cf. DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, op. cit., p. 1.

¹²⁸ Cf. Ibid., p. 1.

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fix the rate and conditions for the transactions. So as the global financial crisis deepens, poor indebted countries especially in Africa are increasingly transferring their tiny wealth to the rich countries through imbalance trade and debt servicing and repayment.

It should also be noted that it is when we understand the mechanism of debt management, that we can appreciate how vulnerable and malleable are the debtor countries in Africa¹²⁹. From this, one fact becomes incontestable: That in a capitalist society, foreign aid is generally not free. Aid as a simple philanthropic gesture does not exist. There is always some interests which may not be always be explicit. So aid is largely used to fulfil political rather than transformational aims. In Africa, both aid and debt are working as instrument of control and domination as seen in the case where population control is imposed on some countries “as a condition for receiving foreign aid”¹³⁰.

¹²⁹ Under the various debt management proposals, the debtor hardly has any voice. Creditors usually make the choice of policies affecting government composition and nature of existing government debt. Such issues as the interest rate level, maturity schedule, issuing new securities refunding or converting existing issues and other such measures are largely decided by lenders. Given that economy is the lifewire of polity, creditors use them to control their debtors.

¹³⁰ The common economic law is that between a creditor-debtor, a relationship exists in which the debtor can be compelled to furnish goods, services or money to the creditor. This relationship becomes more servile when the debtor has defaulted in the repayment of the debt. This is the actual stage in which many African countries find themselves now (cf. J. KASUN, op. cit. p. 76).

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2.2.0 Preamble

Having examined the nature and main causes of poverty in Black Africa, we shall now consider the conditions of those who are the worst victims of Africa's endemic poverty. We shall demonstrate that some of the poorest of the poor in the region can be found among these groups of people. We are limiting ourselves to the plight of the refugees, the sick especially the poor living with HIV/AIDs and those who are starving.

2.2.1. Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Refugees and displaced persons constitute some of the world's greatest problems today. In Africa where conflicts, harsh weather conditions and other factors are prevalent, one observes that the number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons has been on the rise. Today in the world there are over 14 million refugees, along with 20-30 million dispossessed people, most of whom have been pushed out of their homes by war. In Sudan alone, it is "estimated that three million people have been displaced, both inside and outside the country"¹³¹.

2.2.1.1. Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: Who are They?

A refugee is a person who flees his home or country to seek shelter and protection elsewhere as a result of war, natural disaster, political or religious persecution¹³². Another definition simply states that "refugees are people who are compelled to flee massive upheavals in their own countries and seek refugee in another country"¹³³. Today one is equally regarded as a refugee if s/he has a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Such a person is outside of his or her country of nationality and unable or unwilling to return. Refugees are forced from their countries by war, civil conflict, political strife or gross human rights abuses¹³⁴.

¹³¹ I. M. DAU, *Suffering and God, A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, Paulines Publications, Nairobi, 2002, p. 51.

¹³² Cf. V. WAN-TATAH, op. cit., p. 184.

¹³³ S. MUYEBE and A MUYEBE, *African Bishops on Human Rights, A Resource Book*, Paulines Press, Nairobi, 2002, p. 52.

¹³⁴ We have to note that a narrower use of the term refers to a person who has actually crossed national boundaries having left his or her own country to settle elsewhere. This narrow description is becoming

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The problem of refugees did not originate in our generation alone. All through history, there has been cultural and ethnic tensions resulting sometimes in persecutions and even open wars. This in turn often results in the flight of many people who are threatened by the dangerous conditions¹³⁵. In the aftermath of World War II, the international community included the right to asylum in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today International law recognizes the reality of refugees and seeks to protect them. Enshrined in Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the right "to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." This principle recognizes that victims of human rights abuse must be able to leave their country freely and to seek refuge elsewhere¹³⁶. In 1950, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created to protect and assist refugees, and in 1951, the United Nations adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as a legally binding treaty, ratified by 140 countries in February 2001.

In our time, the problem of exile from one's home has increased in an alarming rate. Some have even qualified our generation as that of refugees. The global refugee crisis affects every continent and almost every country. In 2001, 78 percent of all refugees came principally from 10 areas: Afghanistan, Angola, Burma, Burundi, Congo-Kinshasa, Eritrea, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Somalia and Sudan. Palestinians are the world's oldest and largest refugee population, and make up more than one fourth of all refugees. We shall now engage in a more critical study of the refugee phenomenon in Africa. The

more and more irrelevant today in the African context where inter-tribal and ethnic clashes often lead many people to flee one part of the country to another, especially from urban to the rural sanctuaries or vice versa.

¹³⁵ According to the Judeo-Christian Bible, the brothers of Joseph were forced to flee to Egypt because of the devastating famine in Israel (cf. Gen. 42: 1-3). The children of Israel left Egypt and remained refugees for a very long period of time as they travelled to the 'Promised Land'. When the life of prophet Elijah was threatened by Ahab and Jezebel, he sought refuge in Beer-sheba of Judah (1Kg. 19: 3). Judah went into exile after being defeated in war (cf. 2 Kg.25:21). In the New Testament, when the life of Jesus was threatened, it was God Himself who ordered Joseph to seek refuge in Egypt. Joseph obeyed immediately, took the child and her mother by night and fled to Egypt because King Herod wanted to kill the child (cf. Mtt. 2: 13-15). The early Christians also show us something about refugees. "On that day, a violent persecution was launched against the Church in Jerusalem. All, except the apostles fled into the countryside of Judah and Samaria" (Acts 8:1).

¹³⁶ This United Nations Conventions on refugees was adopted on 28 July 1951, as well as the Relative Protocol on the Status of refugees, adopted on 31st January, 1967. This and other United Nations texts do not seem to provide much protection to many others whose human rights are grossly abused or even denied within their country as internally displaced persons.

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plight of Internally Displaced Persons are also discussed under this section since they can be described as refugees in their home.

2.2.1.2. The Genesis and Challenge of Refugees Problem in Africa

Since the independence of most African countries, the problem of refugees has been a sad part of their history. In the 1960s the continent saw a large flow of refugees concentrated in a limited number of countries like Algeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Namibian and South Africa in particular where the liberation struggle created the refugee situation. But today the problem has worsened leading to many people fleeing their own independent countries due to political, religious or ethnic clashes.

A study of the worsening situation reveals the following facts. In 1967, when the first refugee meeting was held in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, the refugees in the continent numbered about three quarters of a million. By May 1979, the number of refugees in the region has increased to about 4 million. In August 1980, the Cameroonian Government had put the number of Chadian refugees scattered in their country at 100, 000 and by the end of the same year the figure increased by 10,000. This is why some described Africa in the 1980s as a continent caught in the throes of a refugee dilemma with an African country either 'exporting' its own refugees or 'importing' those from her neighbors¹³⁷.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of refugees in Africa came mainly from those regions under Portuguese rule such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. The neighboring countries like Zaire, Senegal and Tanzania received them as they sympathized with their quest for self-determination. With time, the situation went out of hand as the civil war in Chad raged on and the Ethiopia-Eritrea saga deepened. As Cameroon was relieved of many refugees from Guinea-Bissau, new sets of refugees flocked in crossing the Chad River into Northern Cameroon. Thousands of other such refugees from Chad fled into Nigeria¹³⁸.

¹³⁷ Cf. V. WAN-TATAH, op. cit., p. 184.

¹³⁸ Cf. Ibid p. 185.

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A study of conflicts in Africa reveals that areas of armed conflict very easily spawn refugees which immediately flows to the neighbouring nations. In Africa most of the armed conflicts that have created refugees and poverty were as a result of ideological differences between peoples. These differences range from political, religious, tribal factors. In the case of Nigeria which waged a civil war from 1967-1970, there was a combination of ethnic, political and economic marginalisation of some parts of the country. Among other things the issue of national boundaries inherited at independence continued to be a major problem. For instance, over 70,000 Sahraoui refugees of Western Sahara were victims of both Moroccan and Mauritanian expansionist policies. The situation is made more difficult by the fact, that the continental governing body, (OAU) operates on the principles of 'non-interference in the internal matters of member states',¹³⁹.

Only recently, the president of the United Nations High Commission on refugees in Africa dared to address the root causes of refugee crises in the sub-region. According to her, "in some regions of Africa, controlling natural resources- oil, diamonds, wood, appears to be more pressing concern, for governments and rebel groups alike, than the welfare of people living embattled areas. The relative ease with which arms are trafficked between countries all over the world means that conflicts are continuously supplied"¹⁴⁰. A closer study of the plight of internally displaced persons is presented now.

2.2.1.3. The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons as Refugees in their Home

According to a latest United Nations' study, the African continent today has more internally displaced persons (IDPS) than the rest of the world put together. With more conflicts still scourging the region, the number of displaced people has continued to rise. There are thus four times as many as internally displaced persons as refugees on the continent¹⁴¹. It is estimated that the number of internally displaced persons in Africa

¹³⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 185. OAU means Organisation of African Unity, now AU, African Union.

¹⁴⁰ S. OGATA, (UN High Commissioner for Refugees), *On the Situation of Refugees in Africa*, speech delivered to the Security Council for Refugees in Africa, New York, 13 January 2000., in <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20001110.sc6947.doc.html>. Confered on 16-10-2004.

¹⁴¹ Cf. NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL *Internally Displaced by Far Outnumber Refugees in Africa*, in AfroNews, 29 January, 2002, p.1. The NRC/ Global IDP of which the Database is a component which

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reached 13.5 million during the second half of 2001. This was an increase of more than 5 million since 1998. In contrast, Africa's refugee population was estimated to be 3.6 million by the beginning of 2001.

The magnitude of internally displaced persons reflects an increase in armed conflicts since the beginning of the 1990s. Currently it affects one third of the continent's 54 countries, says A. Danevad, the coordinator of the Norwegian Database¹⁴². The protracted wars in Angola, Sudan and Congo Kinshasa (DRC) have, together, produced a total of 10 million internally displaced persons. This is about 75% of the total number of internally displaced persons in the entire continent. Further fighting in Liberia and Guinea had also displaced hundreds of thousands of persons. Many of these conflicts, although internal in nature, are sustained by external factors like cross-border support for armed groups or rebel movements active in resource-rich areas.

In short in the past few years, there has been a steady pattern of civilians becoming displaced persons because armed groups are deliberately targeting them, either to loot villages for supplies, or in many cases to forcibly conscript people as fighters or effective slaves, exploiting them both physically and sexually. Reporting about Darfur crisis in Sudan today, the Norwegian Refugee Council, states that "during the past three years, two million people have been forced to flee. Over 3,5 million people are dependent on food aid in order to survive"¹⁴³. One important note about the plight of the internally displaced persons is that they are often less likely than refugees to find shelter in organised camps or protected areas. This forces them to seek refuge in host communities already exhausted by the effects of war, or to hide in the bush with little or no access to humanitarian assistance.

The agony of internally displaced persons lies especially in the fact that they lack physical protection as they lack humanitarian assistance that reach official refugees.

works closely with the United Nations and other organisations to raise awareness and improve response to the situation of millions of internally displaced around the world.

¹⁴²NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL, <http://www.nrc.no/AUextension.htm>, (consulted 23-9-06).

¹⁴³ Ibid.(internet source).

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Again even when the humanitarian agencies are willing to help the internally displaced, the fact that they are scattered in the region, in the bush or are continually on the run make access to them difficult. Here refugees hosted in official camps have better security than the displaced persons¹⁴⁴. S. Ogata, the president of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees laments that the problem of the internally displaced is defying solution in the continent. Dealing with the internally displaced persons is often more arduous than with refugees who cross borders. The difficulty of having access to large numbers of people in insecure and isolated areas is compounded by the complexity of assisting civilians in their own country-where their own state authorities, or rebel forces control¹⁴⁵.

Of the hundreds of thousands of people at risk in war areas such as Southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Angola and Sierra Leone, the majority of these are internally displaced persons. Some displaced people from the Rwandan genocide are still to return to their country long after the hostility formally ended¹⁴⁶. Access to them are impossible and even when the humanitarian agencies dare to go in search of them, it is often in very dangerous conditions¹⁴⁷. While the UNHRC, which is United Nations agency for refugees focuses its mission mainly on refugees, it assists internally displaced people, only when there is a special request or very urgent humanitarian need closely linked to a refugee or returnee situation.

Again, other humanitarian agencies all seem to focus on actual refugees. Thus, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, International Committee of the Red Cross, and NGOs intervene rarely in the case of internally displaced persons. While there has been quite

¹⁴⁴ Since peace is the best solution to the problem of refugees in the sub-region, it is heartening to note that even though more refugees and displaced persons are still created, the older refugees and displaced persons are gradually going back to their homes. This positive development is due essentially to the disarmament of more than 45,000 former fighters in Sierra Leone which marks the official end of the country's ten-year civil war. Again since the 2000 peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons are settling down in their own homes.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. S. OGATA, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ This was one of the greatest crises in independent African continent. It is estimated that about one million people were killed and much more displaced (cf. S. ROBINSON, *The Road to Recovery*, Time Magazine, March 14, 2005, p. 44).

¹⁴⁷ Most often the fighting factions give vent to their frustration by attacking and killing the United Nations workers either to take away their resources or under the suspicion that they are spies for their enemies.

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some traditional way of handling the problem of refugees, "there is no established mechanism for the assistance -and particularly the protection of internally displaced. Donor governments are very reluctant to allocate resources for programmes in fragile, insecure areas -UNHCR activities in Angola, for example, had to be drastically curtailed because of insecurity and lack of funds"¹⁴⁸.

2.2.1.4. Refugees Crisis and the Response of some Host Countries

According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948,

everyone has the right of freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including one's own, and return to one's country¹⁴⁹.

The discussion on the plight of refugees and the way they are treated is based on the above declaration. Since the declaration, there have been more developments and interpretations of the rights of refugees and how they are being treated. There has been more legal declarations since the United Nation's declaration and all of them aim at protecting the rights and dignities of refugee¹⁵⁰. It is based on the above declaration that as far back as 1951, a Geneva Convention had alerted the world of the social and humanitarian challenge that the problem of refugees posed to the world. But that Convention defined refugees almost entirely with reference to those seeking exile due to the cold war and the various persecutions and tortures perpetrated by the Communist regimes¹⁵¹.

In reality the problem of refugees finding protection outside their countries started to become a problem since the 1970s when the European countries began to close their boundaries to economic immigrants. This was due to the economic crises of the Third World which took a turn for the worse. This resulted in the flow of people from Asia,

¹⁴⁸ S. OGATA, op. cit.

¹⁴⁹ UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, *The Freedom of Movement and Residence*, 1948, art. 13.

¹⁵⁰ One can cite the examples of *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, art. 12, *European Convention*, *Fourth Protocol*, art. 2, *Declaration on Territorial Asylum*, art. 1, *OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*, art. 2. (OAU is Organisation of African Unity now replaced by the AU, African Union).

¹⁵¹ Cf. C. W. de WENDEN (dir.), *Conseils Pontificaux...* p. i.

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Africa and Latin America in search of better economic conditions as others sought exile status. Later, with the many political and economic difficulties in Eastern Europe, many more people began fleeing into the Western part of Europe for the same reasons as those from other continents. This led to the issue of refugees becoming a burning political question with the issue of security being cited especially¹⁵². According to Pontifical study on the issue of refugees, Germany remained one of the countries in the world that has received most refugees in Europe. "*Ainsi, depuis 1945, l'Allemagne de l'Ouest a accueilli à elle seule près de la moitié de l'ensemble des demandeurs d'asile qui frappaient aux portes de l'Europe occidentale. Selon les pays, l'accueil et le statut des réfugiés sont, tantôt un droit reconnu par la Constitution, tantôt confiés à un organisme chargé de la mise en application de la Convention de Genève*"¹⁵³.

A closer study of the plight of refugees shows that since the Geneva Convention, so much has changed in understanding and handling them. Although the problem of refugees has been recognised by most nations, there are still great disparities in the way the refugees are seen and received in different nations¹⁵⁴. So divergent have been the criteria for welcoming refugees that on July 15th 1990, an agreement was reached among European nations on the need to adopt a common policy for handling refugees as well as establishing common control measures on the European borders¹⁵⁵.

Today many host nations have started adopting particularly hostile and restrictive policies against refugees. Governments have subjected refugees to arbitrary arrest, detention, denial of social and economic rights and closed borders. In the worst cases, the most fundamental principle of refugee protection is violated, and refugees are forcefully repatriated to countries where they face persecution. This is done against the law stipulating that,

¹⁵² Cf. Ibid., p. ii.

¹⁵³ Cf. Ibid., p. ii.

¹⁵⁴ These disparities are also related to geographical realities of each nation, to their cultural and historical experiences, racial considerations, the porosity of their boundaries, cultural ties with the zones from where most of the refugees come etc. Other factors that determine how much refugees enter a country is the relationship that has existed between a country and its former colony. Most people seeking exile from the developing world tend almost always to seek refuge in their former colonial territories.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. ii.

a state must not send back any person, whether or not he/she entered lawfully into the country, to the country where one's life or freedom is threatened because of one's race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. This principle is part of the national customary law¹⁵⁶.

Since September 11, 2001 many countries have pushed through emergency anti-terrorism legislations that curtail the rights of refugees. So with the doors closed against so many refugees especially from Black Africa today, their conditions have become aggravated and thus fuelling the cycle of conflicts and extreme poverty. Today, many refugees are forced to die as Internally Displaced Persons. Others have managed to cross their national borders to the neighbouring African countries which in turn may just be coming out of their own war. Those poor countries of asylum in Africa who are forced to receive massive number of refugees, their security, the socio-economic and natural environment are severely affected.

One good news is that although many Black African countries are poor themselves, they have generally continued to welcome large numbers of refugees into their countries. One can cite the examples of countries like Tanzania and Guinea which have most generously hosted refugees at very high price. A recent study however shows that some countries even in Africa itself have not been well-disposed to refugees and immigrants. The plight of refugees from Mozambique fleeing into the Republic of South Africa has been pathetic since there is strict border control between the two countries. According to a recent report, "this border has seen an on-going violation of human rights ranging from shooting of refugees to forced repatriation that has culminated in the erection of a 3,500 volt electrical fence between Komatiport and Swaziland border"¹⁵⁷.

We have summarised the plight of African refugees that make majority of them most vulnerable and indeed the poorest of the poor in the region.

¹⁵⁶ UNITED NATIONS, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, art. 33

¹⁵⁷ BISHOPS OF SOUTH AFRICA, *On the Electric Border Fence between South Africa and Mozambique*, in S. MUYEBE and A. MUYEBE, op.cit., p. 57.

2.2.1. 5. African Refugees as Victims of Anthropological Poverty

One of the most bitter fruits of wars and economic hardships is the sad phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, a phenomenon which, as the Synod mentioned, has reached tragic dimensions. The ideal solution is the re-establishment of a just peace, reconciliation and economic development. It is therefore urgent that national, regional and international organizations should find equitable and long-lasting solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons. In the meantime, since the Continent continues to suffer from the massive displacement of refugees, I make a pressing appeal that these people be given material help and offered pastoral support wherever they may be, whether in Africa or on other Continents¹⁵⁸.

The problem of African refugees is that many of them were poor before most conflicts set in. This tends to aggravate their conditions since even the little they possess are generally lost in conflict. Another difficult of course is that they are forced to leave their fatherland without any hope to returning to it again. Sometimes whole villages and towns are so plundered and destroyed, that they would never exist again. The population are generally scattered elsewhere inside or outside the country. When the conflict that led to their flight is protracted, many of them who may still survive, could eventually decide to settle in their host communities instead of returning to their homes where they have lost everything. Again, in a region where many people depend on agriculture, any movement outside their bases would immediately spell catastrophe and destitution. How can a farmer on the run, move with all his livestock or a piece of land around which his or her whole life revolves?

We can equally present the issue of hunger and starvation. Many refugees have to go on running for days and weeks without food. Children, elderly persons and women are often the most vulnerable. Even when some are fortunate to be received in the refugee camps, their lives there often prove to be as precarious as the dangers they fled at home. Some times the rebels or government forces invade refugee camps. The men are generally killed or conscripted to fight. Women are raped or adopted. Children are forced to become child-soldiers and labourers. In the case of Liberian conflict for instance, a whole

¹⁵⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 119.

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population were maimed and so become handicap for life. The increased cases of HIV/AIDS in many Black African countries are found in the countries engulfed in crises. Other problems facing refugees include the psychological factor of being treated as non-persons. Many of the host communities actually see refugees as burdens and some even treat them as criminals and enemies. Instead of being treated as subjects of rights endowed with dignity, they are at best treated as objects of charity. That the problem of refugees include physical, economic and especially psychological destitution makes many of them the anthropological poor in Black Africa as summarised below:

Derrière les statistiques approximatives, mais significatives, se cachent des souffrances personnelles et collectives: perdus les lieux où leur vie trouvait sens et respect, perdus les lieux où ils pouvaient célébrer les événements de leur propre histoire et vénérer les tombes de leurs pères¹⁵⁹.

And while these can be said of refugees, the plight of Internally Displaced Persons seem to be even worse. While refugees are legally recognised and sometimes given some privileges, displaced persons are generally marginalised and forgotten. And among the displaced persons one can count thousands of children who live in the streets of major African cities. These are some of the worst victims of conflicts and harsh economic conditions. Often engaged in street begging or street trading, they are deprived of parental care, educational opportunities and protection of the law. Many of them become sex workers, acquire and disseminate diseases and join nefarious gangs. The most remarkable thing about the poverty of refugees is that it tends to be transgenerational, as poor refugees beget another generation of refugees many of whom may be born and raised in rehabilitation camps. That the plight of many refugees has become a moral challenge to modern civilisation has led to its being described as wound in the conscience of our the world,

malgré l'action inlassable de la communauté internationale et d'organisations bénévoles, la plaie n' a cessé de s'élargir au flanc de l'humanité et d'infecter les pays les plus pauvres: près de 90% de réfugiés se trouvent dans les pays du tiers-monde¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁹C. H. de WENDEN. op. cit., p. 6. See also, A. SODANO (dir). *La faim dans le monde, un défi pour tous : le développement solidaire*, Paris, Centurion/Cerf, 1996, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ C. W. de WENDEN, op.cit., p. 3.

2.2.2. The Poverty of the Sick especially People Living with HIV/AIDS

One of the indices for measuring development is the degree of health enjoyed by a person or a group. In Black Africa today, the general health level is below average. This is noticed especially in infant mortality as well as the life-expectancy of the average black African. With the outbreak of HIV/AIDS, malaria, cholera, tuberculosis and other tropical diseases are no longer regarded as the biggest threat in the sub-region¹⁶¹. We shall focus on the plight of HIV/AIDS patients and their families. What is HIV/AIDS? How widespread is it in Africa today? What are its impacts on the patients, family and the society?

2.2.2.1. What is HIV/AIDS?

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the final manifestation of the myriads of symptoms and signs in an individual afflicted with the Human Immune Deficiency Virus or HIV¹⁶². HIV is a lentivirus, that is a type of germ that stays long in the body wrecking havoc to the host's defence mechanism, until later, when the host begins to experience a catalogue of life-threatening conditions. It is transmitted through infected body fluids such as blood and semen and infected persons may harbour the virus for years until it manifests¹⁶³. Some of the commonest symptoms include unremitting fever,

¹⁶¹ Before HIV/AIDS reached an epidemic proportion in the continent, the World Health Organisation has singled out malaria as one of the six most killer diseases claiming the lives of millions especially children and women.

¹⁶² The exact origin of this disease has not been known for certain. But it began to appear in the early 1980s. Coming to the Nigerian scene, the first case was reported in the country in 1986. Various efforts have been made to assess the magnitude of the problem and to monitor its trend. In 1991, Nigeria established an HIV sentinel surveillance system with active collaboration of the World Health Organization. Current study by sentinel survey shows that no fewer than 2.6 million Nigerians are suspected to be afflicted by the virus (cf. S. ADEYI-ADIKWU, *Can Abalaka Cure HIV?*, in *Crystal Magazine*, January 2000, p. 47). Due to the menace of the disease, the Society for Family Health (SFH), which was set up in 1985 for population control, shifted its focus to the control and prevention of HIV/AIDS in 1997 (cf. Cf. M. ETTE, *The Killer Giant Killer*, in *The Newswatch*, December 1999, p. 17). The Ministry of Health revealed the following statistics of HIV/AIDS carriers from some Nigerian States. Kano State: 306,805; Ebonyi State: 66,740; About 73,546 people have already died of the disease in Niger State (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 22).

¹⁶³ In the body, HIV invades immune system called T-helper lymphocytes. The virus reproduces in the cells and sends out new viruses to attack additional T-helper lymphocytes. This goes on until the lymphocytes are destroyed leaving the patient vulnerable to *Pneumocystis carinii* and other opportunist pathogens. Although the symptoms vary from person to person, and even mutates in the same patient, there are common ones that have been observed. It has also been discovered that factors exist that either retard these manifestations or even keep them in check. Some of the antiretroviral drugs now help to keep the effects of these pathogens in check. This is not however a cure to the disease (cf. S. MADUGBA, *Treating the HIV/AIDS Patient*, in *The Leader*, Vol. XLII, No.54, August 2000, p. 5; See also KENYA EPSICOPAL

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diarrhoea, loss of weight, cough, skin lashes, enlargement of lymph node, pains, suppuration and copious discharge of pus from many parts of the body. Other symptoms like invigorated tuberculoses do appear in many patients¹⁶⁴. The basic mode of transmission of this disease is essentially by sexual intercourse. But blood transfusion and use of contaminated instruments also lead to its acquisition. In the meantime, there has not been any evidence of cure for this disease.

2.2.2.2. Is HIV/AIDS the Cause or Effect of Extreme Poverty?

Since HIV/AIDS assumed epidemic stage in Black Africa, there has been a curious attempt to discover if there is any relationship between the levels of infection and poverty. In other words, why is that Black Africa which is the poorest region of the world has the highest number of HIV/AIDS patients?

First, we have seen that poverty is not limited to lack of material means. It also involves a number of other factors which put together, give rise to what can be called a 'culture of poverty' or 'transgenerational poverty'. So when we speak of poverty, we also include such factors as weak endowments of human and financial resources. This would include areas as low levels of education with associated low levels of literacy and few marketable skills, general poor health status and low labour productivity as a result. An aspect of the poor health status of the poor is the existence amongst many Africans of undiagnosed and untreated STDs¹⁶⁵. This is now recognised as a very significant co-factor in the transmission of HIV. Poor households are often politically and socially marginalised. These conditions of social exclusion increase the problems of reaching them through programmes aimed at improving their sexual and other behaviours.

Another factor is cultural. Since sex matters are regarded as culturally and religiously sacred with many taboos surrounding it, is generally difficult to discuss any disease

CONFERENCE, *HIV/AIDS Manual for Facilitators/Trainers*, Paulines Publication, Nairobi, 2000, pp. 30-49).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. S. MADUGBA, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ This means Sexually Transmitted Disease.

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associated with sex¹⁶⁶. Many people therefore tend to shun any discussion or enlightenment programme associated with the topic. And in male-dominated culture, many men generally would resist any attempt to undertake fertility test or worst still, tests associated with STDs. Other cultural practices like polygamy, circumcision (with unsterilised tools like knives and razor blades), and sharing of some personal affairs that may be contaminated, all help to increase the rate of infection.

Another factor has to do with the general economic condition in the continent. With inadequate housing facilities that force people to live together as in slums and especially in refugees camps and other rehabilitation centres, the disease finds a breeding ground. And added to this is the increasing phenomenon of child-trafficking, prostitution and street children¹⁶⁷. So it is not at all surprising in these circumstances that the poor adopt behaviours which expose them to HIV infection.

We shall also mention the matter of nutrition. Although sexual interaction has been identified as the main means of transmitting the disease, there are aggravating factors to the disease. First, among these factors is severe malnutrition. This provokes immune dysfunction and other serious health effects. The functioning of the immune system, especially the cellular immunity has been discovered to be impaired in malnourished patients. Various studies and autopsies carried out on malnourished children in particular show that starvation not only made the acquisition of the disease easier, but it also quickened the death of patients. This is because, "poor nutrition leads to greater susceptibility to all illnesses"¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁶In Nigeria for example, stigmatization and discrimination is commonplace against people living with the HIV/AIDS as both Christians and Moslems see immoral behaviour as being the cause of the disease. This affects people living with the disease both physically, psychologically and economically. The direct economic consequence is that people living with the disease are often not accepted for jobs and those already having same may be sacked if discovered. Sometimes even the hospitals refuse to treat them and if they do, they are quarantined.

¹⁶⁷ It has to be observed that some years ago, HIV/AIDS was most common among men who have sex with men and drug users who especially shared their needles. Today in Black Africa, heterosexual transmission is by far the predominant mode of HIV transmission. And among the African population, women have the greatest number of infections. There are no anonymous explanation for this but it could be argued that the harsh economic condition in the continent may have exposed women to taking up roles that were traditionally assigned to men especially in the family. Some women often fall victim to undesired sexual activities in exchange for financial support and reward. Whether women are less immune to the disease is yet to be demonstrated.

¹⁶⁸ KENYA EPSICOPAL CONFERENCE, op. cit., p. 49.

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So what are the impacts of HIV/AIDS in Black Africa Today? We have classified the impact into two, namely the psycho-physical and economic impacts.

2.2.2.3. The Main Impacts of HIV/AIDS

In a continent already ravaged by wars and mired in poverty, AIDS is wiping out much of a generation. Families are being destroyed, skilled workers cut down¹⁶⁹.

2.2.2.3.1. Psycho-Physical Impacts

The impact of the disease on patients can be grouped into two. The first is the psycho-physical impact which involves the ordinary pains associated with the disease. Since the advanced stage of the disease comes with a chain of other illnesses, the patients generally experience attacks that may be described as 'crisis'. Again, after two decades, HIV disease still has a stigma attached to it. This makes the handling the disease even more difficult and the patients to suffer doubly¹⁷⁰. Many people refuse to be tested (even freely), and if eventually they realise that they have the disease, they prefer to hide it. This puts their lives and that of the community in even greater danger. The prejudice against patients is even common among the medical personnel who rarely give them equal attention and care as they do to other patients¹⁷¹. In some places, in the bid to protect the 'healthy' citizens, they are adopting alienating and discriminatory policies against those infected by HIV/AIDS¹⁷². It is in response to this stigmatisation in Nigeria that led anti-AIDS campaigners to issue this directive:

¹⁶⁹ G. BEALS, *AIDS*, in *The Newsweek Magazine*, January 2000, p. 18.

¹⁷⁰ A recent study carried out in the United States of America shows that despite the enlightenment programmes in that country patients living with the disease are still stigmatized (cf. C. GORMAN, *The Graying of AIDS*, in *Time Magazine*, August 21, 2006, pp. 34-35).

¹⁷¹ Cf. R. DAUDEL & L. MONTAGNIER, *Le Sida*, p. 99.

¹⁷² Cf. C. BRISSET, *La santé dans le tiers monde*, Paris, Editions La Découverte/Le Monde, 1984, p. 26. We have to add that today the outbreak of HIV/AIDS adds more to the already deplorable condition in the sub-region. This is why we are insisting that any health programme in Black Africa must be carried out in solidarity with the industrialised world. This will be in forms of providing drugs to the teeming patients, evolving effective prevention measures and finally getting involved in a massive enlightenment campaign to educate the populace on the nature of the disease. All this would require huge sums of money which may not be available to these developing nations and the massive poor population involved.

Relations of HIV/AIDS must remember that the fact that one is HIV/AIDS positive does not make him an immoral person...They must continue to provide them with care, food and comfort. A HIV-positive individual who has not got to the level of AIDS should go about his normal business, eat good food, stop destructive habits like alcoholism and smoking and enjoy his work, but he must refrain from sex and blood donation¹⁷³.

2.2.2.3.2. Economic Impact on Individuals and the Community

The economic impact of the disease can be grouped under five main headings, namely cost of drugs, bed occupancy, loss of labour force, working hours, transgenerational poverty due to orphanhood, and problem of value of human life.

The cost of treating patients with HIV/AIDS is very high even for rich and average families. This is compounded in a region where many people are already bearing the burden of poverty. People with AIDS do not suffer alone since the disease attacks their families and communities also. Some families who have ventured into the treatment have eventually ended up destitute. Instead of spending on education for example, many families now channel their resources to care for their sick members and their orphans. In all these we know that in many Black African countries, “drugs that slow the virus are prohibitively expensive and are out of the reach of most people”¹⁷⁴.

And in a culture where dying is as expensive as living, much more is spent in organising befitting funerals for their dead. Africa, the epidemic has a serious impact on households and communities. Many African countries are losing a good percentage of their annual economic growth to the disease. Affected households appear more likely to suffer severe poverty than non-affected ones. And the families who have lost their breadwinners to the disease are more prone to fall into destitution and transgenerational poverty.

And on the government level, we read for example that “AIDS drugs costs \$40 a month in Uganda, but the government spends just \$7 person per year on health care”¹⁷⁵. Many governments in the region, foreign donors and non-governmental organisations are now budgeting more to tackle the epidemic than they are doing for other schools, roads and

¹⁷³ S. MADUGBA, op. cit., no. 54, August 2000, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ KENYA EPSICOPAL CONFERENCE, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁷⁵ N. GIBBS, *Person of the Year*, in *Time Magazine*, 26 Dec., 2005, p. 41.

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energy¹⁷⁶. And in a continent where much of the resources have been spent on serving debts, HIV/AIDS has made the condition even worse¹⁷⁷.

Again, the disease has radically affected the demographic figure of most Black African nations. The disease is erasing decades of progress made in extending the life expectancy in the continent. Millions of adults are dying young or in middle age. This has drastically reduced the estimated life expectancy in Black Africa to 47 years, instead of the projected 52 years by now¹⁷⁸. And with the life expectancy declining, the labour force will suffer as a consequence¹⁷⁹. What is now being experienced by these populations are levels of Life Expectancy which were typical of the 1950s. Thus the fear of further declines in life expectancy is looming both in the aggregate and especially for the the poorest¹⁸⁰. In the southern part of the continent, it is estimated that there will be a negative population growth as there will be more funerals than births. So lower life expectancy and high child mortality will certainly affect the social and economic life of the society. This is made worse by the fact that planning for economic growth is effective only when based on fairly reliable population statistics¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁶ The traditional assistance which the American government gave to the poor countries in Africa is equally affected by the spread of HIV/AIDS. For instance, The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Millennium Corporation (MCC), had paid for retroviral drugs for 400, 000 people with HIV in the continent (cf. N. GIBBS, op. cit., p. 41).

¹⁷⁷ Even in the health sector which is now the main focus, there is imbalance in the budgetary allocation. Malaria and tuberculosis which have been the major killer-disease in the region are receiving less attention now and yet their effects remain. In the worst affected countries especially in Southern African region, there is a geometrical increase in the number of hospitalizations. As the epidemic spreads, the demand for more hospitals, hospital beds and more health workers grow. And sometimes there are more patients than the beds and personnel to cater for them. And when admission is granted, the overwhelming demands results in reduction of the quality of treatment as the staff and facilities are over-stretched.

¹⁷⁸ AVERT Report, *HIV and AIDS in Africa*, in <http://www.avert.org/aafrica.htm>. AVERT is an organisation that is fighting AIDS in the continent (consulted 20-9-05).

¹⁷⁹ The effects of HIV and AIDS are reflected in the changes in Life Expectancy which is the best summary indicator of the effects of HIV and AIDS on countries with high levels of HIV prevalence. These data illustrate the demographic impact of the epidemic on African populations. In many countries adult mortality has doubled and tripled over the past decade and this is directly attributable to HIV and AIDS.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. D. COHEN, op. cit.

¹⁸¹ Most of the figures used are based on the few people who have been tested in the continent. The majority have not been tested and some who have tested positive have avoided public or official recognition of the same.

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Another economic impact of the disease is that it will lead to transgenerational poverty as more orphans are created. Some of these orphans themselves are carriers of the disease as they contracted it from their mothers. A recent study carried by the UNICEF predicted that in ten hard-hit countries of Black Africa, up to 5.5 million children under the age of 15 may have lost their mothers to AIDS. Having lost one or both parents, some of these children may be lucky to have their aged grand-parents as the only custodians¹⁸². And in a culture that traditionally cherish having many children, such a grand parent may have to care for many children as reported in Malawian village of Nthandire.

The presence of death in Nthandire has been overwhelming in recent years. The grandmothers whom we met are guardians for their orphaned grandchildren. The margin of survival is extraordinarily narrow; sometimes it closes entirely. One woman we met in front of the her mud hut has 15 orphaned grandchildren¹⁸³.

The above describes the trauma of many children affected by the disease. Not only do children lose their parents or guardians but they lose their childhood as well. Some who have been forced to go into orphanages may come out maladjusted to the society later. Others have been used them for child-labour. Where there is no living relative or orphanage services available, the elder of the orphans normally assumes the role of parents for others. These children hardly receive good education and so become liabilities to the society even as they grow up¹⁸⁴. And added to these is the perpetual stigma often

¹⁸² Many families face the dilemma of staying at home to care for the sick or going to the farms in search of food and money. Staying at home to care for the sick and the orphans means that income generation activities have to be reduced or even stopped. So in either case poverty and suffering increase.

¹⁸³ THE EDITOR, *We Can Banish Extreme Poverty in Our Generation*, in *Time Magazine*, 14 March 2005, p. 32.

¹⁸⁴ There have been arguments for and against the use of orphanages to train children. Some have advocated the adoption and placing of children in foster homes. Proponents hold that orphanages provide standard formation for children which may be lacking in personal homes. Above all it will allow the child to grow independently and freely as he/she mixes with other children. But in an era that is marked by instability in many marriages and families, such homes remain potential dangers for a child who may have to face yet another separation. A good research work on this topic has been done based on the American experience (cf. E. W. CARP, *Orphanages Vs. Adoption: The Triumph of Biological Kingship, 1800-1993*, in D. T. CRITCHLOW and C. H. PARKER (eds.), *With Us Always, A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, New York, 1998, pp. 124-143).

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associated with having lost one's parents to a disease considered abominable by the society¹⁸⁵.

Another final impact is that with so many people dying around the family, the danger is that gradually the sanctity of life may be put into question. A family that has to care for two HIV/AIDS patients, may be so overwhelmed by suffering and destitution that death may eventually be seen as relief. Many deaths in a family may also change the actual composition of the family. This may happen when both parents are dead and their orphans relocate to rehabilitation homes or to other families. Sometimes a whole family may cease to exist as the few assets like land, livestock, and homes are sold to care for the sick or to offset the debts incurred during the sickness and eventual funeral.

2.2.2.4. The Poor Living with HIV/AIDS as Victims of Anthropological Poverty

Some of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today can be found among those living with HIV/AIDS. We have also seen that there is a relationship between poverty and the disease. This is well summarised by the Episcopal Conference of Kenya which states categorically that, "AIDS causes poverty and it is worsened by poverty"¹⁸⁶. From our definition of extreme poverty, we can conclude that if poverty means dependence, and destitution means absolute dependence, powerlessness, and exclusion, then the poorest of the poor in Black Africa can be found among the seriously sick, especially HIV/AIDS patients. Since they do not suffer alone, their sickness usually affects the entire family and community.

Many Black Africans have been touched by HIV/AIDS. They are either living with the disease, have died of it or have had someone close to them affected or died of it. Children and women in particular are the worst hit. As for the high rate of the disease in the region, a number of reasons could be given. These include the general economic condition in

¹⁸⁵ Actually some of these children lose all opportunity for normal social life since they are denied access to some schools, hospitals and families for fear that is based on ignorance of the disease. Some think that HIV/AIDS orphans are automatic carriers of the virus.

¹⁸⁶ KENYA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *HIV/AIDS Manual for Facilitators/Trainers*, Paulines Publication, Nairobi, 2000, p. 49. The education commission of the conference have enumerated how poverty is related to the disease. Poor nutrition and poorly treated Sexually Transmitted Diseases lead to greater susceptibility to the illness. Engagement in commercial sex to make ends meet, ignorance/inability to have access to accurate information about the disease due to poverty all compound the problem.

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Black Africa, unhealthy traditional practices, lack of education and job, gender inequality, fear and stigmatisation. And in the countries that are worst hit, the disease has stripped entire generation of parents, farmers, doctors, teachers and other breadwinners. Many businesses are losing their labour force and since the middle class seem the worst victims, the entire community is left more vulnerable. As families and communities battle with the results of this epidemic, they are further crippled by already existing poverty, debts, and unfair trade policies. That AIDS is aggravating the prevalent rate of poverty in Black Africa is further confirmed by a recent report by the World Health Organisation. According to the World Health Organisation commission for Macro-economics and Health, it will cost \$25 billion annually to save 8million lives a year and majority of these people are in Black Africa¹⁸⁷. Here is the dilemma facing the region.

2.2.3. The Victims of Starvation

Food is a basic human need and is closely associated with life itself. It is analogous to the foundation of a building upon which other structures are super-imposed. "It is the condition that makes possible human existence and survival"¹⁸⁸. Being directly associated with life, food is a fundamental human right¹⁸⁹. After the Second World War, world food production increased considerably faster than population. The increase in per capita food output between 1950 and 1977 amounted to either 28 percent or 37 percent, depending on whether United Nations or United States Department of Agriculture figures are used¹⁹⁰. But while food production is outpacing population in other parts of the world, there is an increasing shortage of food production in many regions of Africa. And this is leading to what can now be described as a food crisis in Africa sub-Sahara. Below we shall present the nature, causes and effects of this food shortage.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. N. GIBBS, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁸⁸ L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer. The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, Orbis, New York, 1988, p. 75.

¹⁸⁹ E. OJAKAMINOR, *Catholic Social Doctrine, An Introductory Manual*, Paulines Publications, Nairobi, 1996, p. 49.

¹⁹⁰ J. KASUN, *The War Against Population. The Economics and Ideology of Population Control*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1998, p. 33.

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2.2.3.1. The Nature of Hunger in Black Africa

The problem of hunger is not a specific African problem since other parts of the developing world also battle with it. As a matter of fact, the United Nations especially UNICEF and WFO and other agencies, have been in the forefront in the war against hunger¹⁹¹. In 1974, there was a United Nation-sponsored programme, World Food Conference held in Rome. During the conference, an increased attention was called to the need for action with regard to hunger in the world. Also the Catholic International Eucharistic Congress of 1976, held in Philadelphia had as its theme *World Hungers and the Need for Physical Food*. The discussion was made alongside the hungers for justice, freedom, and spiritual fulfilment¹⁹². In 1976, this Pontifical Council, *Cor Unum*,¹⁹³ issued a document on hunger titled: *World Hunger a Challenge for All: Development in Solidarity*. The document was signed by Angelo Sodano and Ivan Marin, the president and secretary respectively. Many more initiatives have been made in the campaign against world hunger.

But if the problem of world hunger has been a major concern in other parts of the world, the challenge assumes a more urgent proportion in Black Africa today. This is because many people are passing from stage of *hunger* and *malnutrition* to that of *starvation*. It was really in 1985 that the Ethiopia famine drew the attention of the world to the dangers faced not just by the Ethiopians but by millions of people especially African children. Today, there are increasing cases of food shortage with millions of people at the risk of starving. Let us see some examples.

¹⁹¹ UNICEF is acronym for United Nations Children Educational Fund and WFO is World Food Organisation. Nicole BALL, *World Hunger: A Guide to Economic and Political Dimension*, Clío, Oxford, 1981, p. 1.

¹⁹² EARLY T., "World Hunger," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, eds, Paul Kevin Meagher, Thomas C. O'Brien & Consuelo Maria Aherre (Washington DC: Corpus, 1978): 1740-1741.

¹⁹³ The Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* created for Human and Christian Development was established by Paul VI in 1971. According to Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, the Council expresses "the care of the Catholic Church for the needy, thereby encouraging human fellowship and making manifest the charity of Christ" (Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 145). Joseph Cordes, is the current president of the Council.

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It is estimated that famine in Bahrel Ghazal region of Sudan between 1995 and 1997 cost more than a quarter of a million lives¹⁹⁴. Today the countries worst hit especially by drought-related famine are found mainly in the Southern part of Black Africa. They include Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, Zambia, Mozambique, Swaziland and Angola. The West African countries of Niger and Chad have equally been affected in recent times. Despite the abundance of human and material resources, as well as enough arable land in Nigeria, we know that "in 1986, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), an agency of the United Nations with headquarters in Rome stated that one out of every three Nigerian was starving"¹⁹⁵. Although the condition may have improved considerably recently, there is still ample evidence that very many people are still malnourished in some parts of the country¹⁹⁶.

So with the increasing problem of hunger in the sub-region, many recent international campaigns against hunger and starvation are focusing on Black Africa. During the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, a target was set by the participants to halve world hunger by the year 2015. There is also the UN Millennium project which aims at reducing poverty and hunger in the world and especially in Africa by the first quarter of this century. The G8 which is a 'club' of the world's most industrialised nations have become more and more concerned with world poverty especially as it concerns hunger. In 2005 in Gleneagles United Kingdom, the G8 identified world hunger as one of the biggest killers of our time. Like the World Food summit in Rome, (1996), reducing world hunger by half by 2015 was a main priority one of the United Nations millennium goal¹⁹⁷.

¹⁹⁴ I. M. DAU, *Suffering and God, A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, Paulines Publications, Nairobi, 2002, p. 51. This figure is under-estimated given that the crises in the region is still going on.

¹⁹⁵ P. KII, *Priests and Laity in Politics, The Stand of the Magisterium*, SNAAP, Enugu, 1998, p. 101.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁷ UNITED NATIONS, *Millennium Development Goals*, in <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>. (Consulted 12-4-06). This was an initiative taken to help the world's poor countries to overcome the basic challenges facing them in within a record time through international solidarity. Of the eight goals, eradication of hunger was first. Others include, achieve universal primary education, foster gender equality and empowering women. Others are reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The other two goals include ensuring environmental sustainability and developing partnership for development.

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2.2.3.2. Main Causes of Hunger in Africa

We have to say that hunger is both a result of poverty as well as its aggravating factor. In countries where the GDP has been very low and poverty is spread across majority of people, the agricultural sector usually is affected. Countries that mismanage their meagre resources, and have to pay or service their external debts, end up becoming poorer and the agricultural and food production are directly affected. These and other factors are examined in this section¹⁹⁸.

Another main cause of hunger in the region is conflict/wars. Conflicts generally affect agriculture and food production in several ways. When there is conflict, governments divert the countries' resources to purchasing of arms and there is a general increased spending on security. If the conflict is internal, like in Darfur, Sudan, the government forces could use hunger as a punitive strategy and means of waggging war against the rebelling population and region. This is true because sometimes international humanitarian aids aimed at supplying food have been deliberately obstructed by the host nation. Wars create refugees and displace people. Such people instead of engaging in food production themselves become dependent on the meagre supply of the host communities. This aggravates the shortage of food, not only in the warring community but also those around. While the women and children often flee, the male population are often conscripted into the military force, or join them voluntarily in defence of the cause. Some men do go into hiding, and so stopping all gainful activities. A noted economist summarises this thus:

Africa, however, is a continent torn by war, farmers cannot cultivate and reap in battle zones, and enemy troops often seize or burn crops. Collectivists governments, also endemic in Africa often seize crops and farm animals without regard for farmers' needs. Wars and socialism are two great destroyers of the food supply in Africa, as they have been in other continents¹⁹⁹.

¹⁹⁸ In recent times, some of the campaigners against Africa poverty are focusing on both the *causes* and *effects* of poverty in the sub-region. Some of the main campaigners have come up with an acronym, *DATA* signalling that the problem of African poverty including hunger can be identified as *Debt* related, *AIDS* related and *Trade* related. Bob Geldolf, Bono and Bill Gates initiatives focus on these main areas as the foundation of African problems. These are campaigners against world poverty (cf. N. GIBBS, Persons of the Year, in *Time Magazine*, Dec. 26, 2005, p.39).

¹⁹⁹ J. KASUN, op.cit., p. 34.

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Another important cause of hunger in Black Africa is related to the issue of agriculture. It should be noted that in a continent that subsists in agriculture. It supports over 70 percent of the population and contributing an average of 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). So any thing that destabilises agriculture, *ipso facto* destabilises the region²⁰⁰. Weather conditions also contribute. Some climatologists and environmentalists have been warning about the dangers of rapid climatic change and its consequences. It is thought that the increasing rate and degree of natural disasters is linked to change in the weather²⁰¹. Harsh weather conditions and natural disasters also contribute in aggravating the food crises in many Black African countries today²⁰². Since the Ethiopian drought and famine of the 1980s, the region has been experiencing more severe droughts. The increase in global warming has just added to the situation, thus making it a 'criss'. This is because as fast as warming is transforming the oceans and the ice caps, it is having an even more immediate effect on land²⁰³.

While many Black African regions have been battling especially with the encroachment of the Sahara Desert, the added effect of global warming is compounding the problem of the region. According to climatologists,

global warming is tipping other regions of the world into drought in many ways. Higher temperatures bake moisture out of soil faster, causing dry regions that live at the margins to cross the line into full-blown crises. Meanwhile, the warm pooling of Pacific waters that periodically drives

²⁰⁰ Even when a typical African country is not at war, or is not actually suffering from drought, there is not enough fund to purchase fertilizers that would enhance production.

²⁰¹ How natural disaster can be a major source of poverty and hunger can be seen in the cases of the Tsunami which was provoked by an earthquake in the South East Asia in December 2004. Another large scale disaster was in New Orleans in the United States of America whose economic and human losses have remained unquantifiable. The Middle East has equally experienced continuous earthquakes with devastating effects. Our main focus here is how these affect the Black African sub-region where such natural disasters are more rampant due to harsh weather conditions (cf. D. BJERKLIE et. al, *Global Warming*, in *Time Magazine*, 3 April, 2006, p. 31.

²⁰² The region of Sub-Sahara Africa can be described as a region of *extremes*. By this we mean that too much rain or lack of it easily becomes a major problem for the people who are mainly dependent on agriculture. Too much of rain does cause over flooding and too little causes drought. In the same vein, when rains come too early, they do not allow crops to grow and when they come too late, no matter how copious they may be, they spell disaster for the local populations. But suffice it to say that in a region where neither the local peoples have been unable to predict and manage weather conditions, the effects have added to the region's litany of woes. The failure or inability of government to manage these disasters/or provide enough security to victims has contributed to the situation of extreme poverty in the region.

²⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

worldwide climate patterns and has been occurring more frequently in global warming years-further inhibit precipitation of dry areas of Africa and East Asia. According to a recent study...,the percentage of Earth's surface suffering drought has more than doubled since the 1970s²⁰⁴.

Another main cause of hunger in many Black African countries has to do with their level of technological advancement. Many Africans are still farming with the same old tools, using the same old techniques as did their ancestors. Advanced irrigation technologies have not been developed. Knives, hoes, axes, etc are still the prevalent tools used by majority of the farmers. These do not enhance production in large scale. Often there are no means of transporting food products from the farms to their homes and markets. Again the use of fertiliser is still limited either by ignorance of its importance/use or by lack of means to acquire it. Even when the meagre resources are available, there are no storage facilities. Tons of food therefore perish or are sold at give away prices only for the same population to face severe starvation a few months later.

Another cause of increasing hunger can be attributed to the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS. We have earlier shown that the disease has a devastating impact on the economy of many African countries. It also affects especially the labour force of the continent. And since agriculture in Africa is not generally mechanised, acute shortage of human labour spells problem for the sector and leads to hunger. The increasing rate of urbanisation has also been a problem since many young people in the work force do migrate to the urban centres leaving behind their aged parents and sometimes their young families. In Nigeria for instance, the discovery of oil has almost rendered the agricultural sector redundant resulting in over 150 million people depending on insignificant number of farmers to produce their food. The result is thus widespread cases of hunger and malnutrition²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁴ With the increase in global warming, there are more incidents of drought in Africa sub-Sahara than before. There have been many reports and evidence of desert encroachment in many parts of the continent. The countries nearest to the Sahara desert are directly affected. And since many of the farmers depend on rains for planting and harvesting, delayed rain, insufficient, or too much of it hampers food production. Bad weather not only affects the crops but also affects livestock of the people. With no grass to feed on, and no water to drink, thousands of livestock do perish before the rains come (cf. Ibid., p. 35).

²⁰⁵ D. A. COCKER, *Hunger, Capability, and Development*, in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997): 605-618, 607-608. We shall use the expression hunger to refer to those who are actually malnourished and starvation for those who have almost nothing to eat and are facing immediate problem of survival.

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2.2.3.3. Victims of Starvation as Some of the Poorest of the Poor

Since food is a basic human need, those who go without it for a protracted period of time will be affected in every aspect of their lives. From his personal experience and from his encounters with many poor people in the world, Paulo Freire states emphatically that, "hunger gradually expands into tragic realities, each of which constitutes an enormous challenge"²⁰⁶. It provokes other forms of poverty since hungry people cannot engage in any gainful employment. Those who are facing severe hunger as in many parts of the African region, soon discover that malnutrition affects their level of productivity and general well-being. Starving people equally are prone to getting many forms of diseases as demonstrated with people living with HI?/AIDS²⁰⁷. It generally reduces the natural body defences and so renders them more vulnerable to diseases. Children, elderly persons and especially pregnant and nursing women are most vulnerable. Again, increasing food shortage in the region also poses a major social security risk since it can easily lead to social unrest and other forms of anti-social behaviours.

The final effect of protracted starvation is that it tends to produce a future generation of poor people. Children who are hungry cannot go to school and if they do, their level of assimilation is drastically reduced. So when we argue that some of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa are found among those who are starving, we mean that they are victims of anthropological poverty. Anthropological poverty in this sense means that they are not just concerned about possessing very little but that they are actually struggling for *life itself*. Once again, we can use Paulo Freire to show the effects of poverty and hunger/starvation and on its victims. Writing about the effect of hunger, on Freire we read:

This had a profound influence on his life as he came to know the gnawing pangs of hunger and fell behind in school because of the listlessness it produced; it also led him to make a vow; at age eleven, to dedicate his life to struggle against hunger, so that other children would not have to know the agony he was then experiencing²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁶ P. FREIRE, *Letters to Cristina...*, p. 181.

²⁰⁷ The complexity of the problem is that even when malaria and Antiretroviral drugs are available they cannot be taken by hungry or starving people.

²⁰⁸ R. SCHAULL, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

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2.2.4. Closing Remarks on the Nature, Causes and Effects of Extreme Poverty

In this chapter we have examined the nature of extreme poverty in Black Africa. We have equally seen the main causes as well as the main victims of poverty. Although we examined more closely the human factors in African poverty, the natural causes associated with the weather and encroachment of the Sahara desert deserves a closer study²⁰⁹.

From our personal experience and from the studies carried out in some of the countries in Black Africa, we have been able to identify the worst victims of Black Africa's poverty burden. We limited ourselves to these three groups studied because we had enough personal experience, encounters and documents about these victims. This however does not exclude so many other groups which we cannot adequately study in this work²¹⁰. But we need to mention that in a society with little or no official security services, individuals and their families are often left to care for themselves. The problem therefore is that many families that are already poor may find it almost impossible to care for a needy person when such assistance demands huge financial obligation.

Among the poor in Black Africa, the plight of the sick remains extremely precarious. So by way of emphasis, we have to repeat that any one discussing African poverty problem today must necessarily find a way of dealing with the HIV/AIDS which is reaching an epidemic proportion in the region. This is especially because the impacts are pervades the entire society. It affects individual and societies both physically, psychologically, socially and indeed economically. It poses a threat to the human race. This is why John Paul II refers to it as battle. He called for global solidarity, and concerted effort to wage a war against the disease:

The battle against AIDS ought to be everyone's battle. Echoing the voice of the Synod Fathers, I too ask pastoral workers to bring to their brothers and sisters affected by AIDS all possible material, moral and spiritual comfort. I urgently ask the world's scientists and political leaders, moved by the love and respect due to every human person, to use every means available in order to put an end to this scourge²¹¹.

²⁰⁹ As a matter of fact, the causes and effects of extreme poverty cannot be treated as isolated issues since one cause could lead to another and thus aggravates the already complex situation.

²¹⁰ While focusing on the refugees, those living with HIV/AIDS and the starving, the plight of many aged persons, handicap people, orphans and widows in the region leaves much to be desired.

²¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 116.

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In the next part of this work, we shall examine what the role of God is in all these challenges in the region. For millions of people whose lives are menaced by anthropological poverty, their question thus is: Where is God? A study of the nature of God and his place in African Traditional Religion and Judeo-Christian Bible will be undertaken to try to answer this question. Some official teachings of the Church will equally be examined.

PART THREEE

GOD AND THE POOR IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION, THE BIBLE AND MAGISTERIAL DOCUMENTS

CHAPTER ONE: GOD AND THE POOR IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

3.1.0. Preamble

And in the last part of this work we have seen that the lives and existence of many people in the continent are threatened by hunger, war and indeed extreme poverty. Our main concern here is to find how these challenges can be related to the traditional African religiosity. Since many Africans believe in the existence of God as we shall see below, what is he doing in the face of oppression, dehumanisation, starvation, massive death and increasing poverty in the region? What is the role that religion (especially the new religious movements) is playing today in the midst of the big challenges facing the people? These are the questions we shall try to answer in this chapter¹. As theologians what then is the appropriate religious language for interpreting and addressing all these challenges?

3.1.1. The Nature of God and the Deities

It must be admitted that any discussion on African traditional religion is not easy given the diversities in the continent. Again that many tribes do not have documented facts about their cosmology compounds the problem. However the main groupings in the continent can be studied and especially with more African scholars engaging in these studies. Our study in this section is largely inspired by our personal experience of some major tribes in Nigeria and the works of some African researchers among some Black African tribes elsewhere.

3.1.1.1. God is Transcendent and Immanent

After an exhausted study covering over 300 peoples in Africa, J. Mbiti, a foremost African author concludes that “in all these societies, without a single exception, people have a fundamental notion of God as the Supreme Being. This is the most minimal and

¹Many of the examples used in this section are inspired by my personal experiences and study of some African authors especially of the Igbo and Yoruba tribes of Nigeria (cf. J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London, 1969, p. 29).

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fundamental idea about God, found in all African societies”². With particular reference to the Igbos of Nigeria, we can say that like other Africans, they take the existence of (Chukwu) God for granted. So instead of proffering a systematic teaching about God, his existence, nature and activities, they simply express gestures which show these in concrete. They believe that God is the eternal Creator and Sustainer of all things hence religion is the deepest thing in their living culture³. Apart from the names used to describe God⁴, in their various folklores and proverbs where the Igbo describe the origin of the world, the cause of evil in the world and the fate of humanity, God is often given a prominent place⁵. The whole creation owes its existence and sustenance to God. He is the source of fertility, the source of light and knowledge.

While all other beings are created, God is Self-existent. His greatness leads the Igbos in particular to attribute to him qualities that are beyond gender qualifications. God is an Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Being. As the Omnipotent Being the Igbos attribute to God the highest possible honour and respect. The Igbos simply call him the Highest Deity or *Chi-ukwu*⁶. Other ideas about God is that he is a Spirit, Pre-existent, Immortal and indeed a Mystery. Despite the great power and respect which the traditional Igbos attribute to the forces of nature and other elemental spirits, they believe that God’s power is greater than theirs. He is indeed their source and thus capable of exercising

²J. Mbiti, B. Idowu, P. Temples among others are some of the pioneer authors who began the study of African cosmology in a systematic way. For J. Mbiti, many of the African traditional notions of God, creation, evil etc are expressed in myths but that does not make them meaningless or mere fantasy. This is because religious myth is frequently an imaginary story about supernatural creatures, but its essential feature is that it constitutes the vital element in the people’s interpreting and understanding of reality that guides their lives (cf. J. Mbiti, op. cit., p. 29). The difficult problem of monotheism in African traditional cosmology, though important in understanding African traditional notion of God, is however beyond the scope of this work.

³ Cf. G. A. ODUDUYE, *Hearing and Knowing, A Reflection on Christianity in Africa*, Orbis, New York, 1986, p. 54.

⁴ The various names they give to God and to their children tell of his attributes, *Chukwu Okike*, God the Creator, *Chukwuma*, God knows everything, (omniscience), *Chukwu-new-ike*, God has absolute power (omnipotence).

⁵ As a matter of fact most of the folklores in Igboland have to do with *Mbe* (tortoise) and *Chukwu* (God).

⁶ The attributes of God as All-knowing and Ever-Present are expressed in various anthropomorphic languages as ‘He who sees all’, ‘The Wise God’. etc. In his wisdom and knowledge God is sometimes referred to as the ‘Great Eye’, or the Watcher of the World. Among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, God is called *Anya-na-ele nwa*, as one who observes everything without limitation and without exception.

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absolute control over them⁷. While other deities may have some superhuman capabilities, only God has these special attributes that distinguish him from them. Here “power is viewed hierarchically in which God is at the top as the omnipotent; beneath him are the spirits and natural phenomena; and lower still are men who are comparatively little or have no power at all”⁸.

But despite the great power and transcendence attributed to God among the Africans, he still remains immanent in creation⁹. Although beyond creation itself, God is personally involved in his creation. So people conceive themselves as living in a religious universe, where almost all natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. Although creation is not part of God (in formal pantheistic sense), He is not a stranger to it either¹⁰. Man therefore sees in the universe not only the imprint, but also the reflection of God¹¹. So for the African, God is never hidden but is a lived experience and not just a ‘truth’ that is deducible by syllogisms¹².

3.1.1.2. Mercy and Justice as Essential Moral Attributes of God

There is no systematic theology of God’s moral attributes in Africa, but a number of cultural attitudes demonstrate what the people think of him. Although he is All-powerful and Transcendent, almost all African peoples recognise that God is essentially good and indeed “for some, the goodness of God is seen in his averting calamities, supplying rain, providing fertility to people, cattle and fields”¹³. So the people experience the love of God in concrete acts and blessings; and they assume that he loves them, otherwise he would not have created them.

⁷ And since God is ever present to his world, the African indicates this by trying to establish contact with him through natural objects and phenomena. Most of the incidents for nature worship in traditional African are borne out of the respect the people have for nature and the belief that they can exploit the powers therein and through nature establish contact with the highest deity himself.

⁸ J. S. MBITI, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹ In African cosmology, the idea of God’s transcendence is most often expressed in his presence in the ‘skies’ since this is the farthest imaginable reality for human beings.

¹⁰ A balanced understanding of these two extremes is necessary in our discussion of African concept of God. This is an idea of immanence expressed in a more practical and relational sense. God is very near, very caring and ever present in the entire movement of nature and human history.

¹¹ J. S. MBITI, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹² V. WAN-TATAH, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹³ J. MBITI, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

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Whereas manifestations of evil, such as sickness, barrenness, death, failure in undertakings and the like, are attributed to malicious human agents (and occasionally, spiritual agents), the manifestations of goodness, such as health, begetting children, fertility, wealth, abundant harvest and the like, are attributed to God: they are the tokens of his love to mankind. People experience the love of God, so they do not speak of it as if it is detached from his activities¹⁴. Therefore, based on this strong belief in God, the traditional Igbo could not imagine evil coming from God¹⁵. Often they demonstrate their belief in the abiding presence of God by erecting sacred shrines and altars in strategic positions in most of their homes¹⁶. But one puzzle facing the Igbos is how to reconcile the reality of evil in the face of an Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent God¹⁷.

To understand the relationship between a good God and the reality of suffering, one has to appreciate the African notion of justice in God. Many Africans believe that God has a personality, and in this personality there is a will which governs the universe and the life of mankind in justice. God is *very good* but also *very just* so that no matter what befalls them many Africans believe that God is always right. Being just, God metes out his justice evenly by rewarding good conduct and punishing evil. When calamities, misfortunes and sufferings come upon individuals, families or communities without any clear explanations, instead of blaming God, the people would generally attribute the evil to some nefarious workers. They reasoned that the good and powerful God could only permit the agents of evil to inflict some calamity on their victims as retribution for contravening certain customs or traditions even unconsciously or secretly¹⁸. The justice

¹⁴Cf. Ibid., p.38. More than anything else many African traditional religions believe in providence. Always, "God is at work making a new thing out of the chaotic old" (M. Odudoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, pp. 91-92).

¹⁵ Cf. P. OKUMA, *Towards an African Theology, the Igbo Context of Nigeria*, Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2002, p. 70.

¹⁶Cf. Ibid., p. 70. From what Okuma is saying, one may wonder whether he equates the Supreme God with the lesser deities and ancestors who receive abundant reverence and even worship among the Igbos. Many of the shrines and altars in traditional Igbo families are dedicated to personal or community deities (cf. C. I. EJIZU, *Down But Not Out: Contemporary Forms of Igbo Indigenous Religion*, in T. OKERE (ed.), *Religion in a World of Change: African Ancestral Religion, Islam and Christianity*, Whelan Research Academy, Owerri, 2002, pp. 189-190).

Again Okuma paints a very rosy picture of the life of the Igbo such that the aspect of evil, death, witchcraft, bad luck etc. which often befell the people are almost entirely glossed over.

¹⁷ As a matter of fact, many traditional Africans lived in precarious conditions and were often confronted with some physical and moral evils that were difficult to explain.

¹⁸ J. S. MBITI, op. cit., p.37.

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of God finds practical expression in judicial situations like taking oaths, pronouncing curses, where and when he is regarded as the Supreme Judge. Unlike human beings, who may sometimes swerve justice, God is impartial and so ever dependable¹⁹.

However while many Africans tend to exonerate God from the reality of evil, a few tribes interpret things differently. They cannot reconcile how a good God could allow calamities especially death to occur among them. Consequently they develop an attitude that neither denies the existence of God nor affirms it. They Mbala tribe of Zaire for example tend to adopt a fatalist stance since calamity, especially death must eventually come. Some other tribes in Africa are so confident in the goodness of God that they neither pray to him nor offer him sacrifices. They believe that the God who made them even without their asking for it, the God who governs the universe and control history, is so good and powerful so that asking him for their needs is an offence since he will always do his duty as God. The only religious act they perform is thanksgiving in all circumstances²⁰.

3.1.1.3. Nature of other Deities and Spiritual Beings

Apart from the Supreme God, and still under the sphere of the spiritual world, many Africans equally believe and pray to other lesser deities, *Ndi-Muo*, *Umu-Alusi*²¹. There is a constant interaction and resemblance between the world of man and the world of the dead, the visible and the invisible forces. Two African authors affirm this. For C. Ejizu of the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria, "the supernatural sheds into the natural, the invisible into the visible, and spiritual beings as well as super-sensible cosmic forces impinge on and influence the affairs of humans"²². And for E. Metogo, "*le monde des morts est généralement organisé comme celui des vivants*"²³.

¹⁹ In all these we have to note that the African accepts the fact that no one can ever entirely fathom the mystery called God. This is generally how the African tries to grapple with the reality and problem of evil without considering God as intrinsically evil or weak.

²⁰ E. M. METOGO, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* Karthala, Paris, 1997, pp. 43.

²¹ These deities are essentially spiritual but are often conceptualised in various anthropomorphic artistic designs. They could be depicted as males, females, sons, daughters, or sometimes bear a combination of human and animal features.

²² C. EJIZU, *Emergent Key Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religions* by C. EJIZU, in C. D. ISIZOH (ed.), *Christianity in Dialogue with African Traditional Religion and Culture*, Vol. One, Ceedee Publications, Italy, 2001, p. 113.

²³ Cf. E. M. METOGO, op. cit., p. 51.

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But of importance to us is the fact that “as spiritual beings, however, they possess tremendous powers which human beings could harness. Their existence and activities are thought to be intricately bound-up with the fortunes of human beings and the world”²⁴. They are ambivalent forces capable of blessing and destruction, depending on the circumstances. This ambivalent capability enables the diviners, witchdoctors and traditional priests to discern their activities and often use them for the good of the people who consult them. Wicked people and other agents of evil are equally able to manipulate these forces to do harm to their victims.

These deities receive abundant sacrifices and in turn are expected to protect their worshippers and give them blessings. They are really believed to influence every major aspect of the life of individuals and the society as a whole. They influence especially fertility in human beings, good health, success in various life endeavours like bringing people luck and enhancing a positive inter-personal relationships. Apart from *Ani* who is the earth goddess that cares and provides for the entire community, there are other deities that protect every individual and particular communities. As a matter of fact, every Igbo man and woman has his/her own personal guardian spirit called, *Chi*. And among the spirit-beings stand out the ‘Ancestors’²⁵.

From the foregoing presentation, we now want to know how God and the deities react in the face of serious threats to human life as exemplified in anthropological poverty in the region.

3.1.2. The Role of the Supreme God and Other Deities in Human Life

To understand this theme better, a brief presentation of the origin and value of life itself will be useful. While the whole of creation is under God’s care, our main interest is on human life. Where does it come from? How far have the rapid changes taking place in Africa today influence the notion and value of life?

²⁴ C. I. EJIZU, *Down But...*, p. 189. The actual relationship between these deities and the Supreme God (*Chukwu*) is not clearly defined in Igbo cosmology. But while these deities can play ambivalent role (capable of evil and good), they are still under God as the Commander-in-Chief of creation.

²⁵ Many African theologians have done immense research on the theme of ancestors.

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3.1.2.1. Supreme God as Origin and Lover of Life

African Traditional Religion shares with Judaism, a very elevating concept of man. Man in this concourse is viewed variously as the image of God, the bridge between transcendent divinity and base matter, a hybrid of angelic and animal nature, the apex of cosmic creation, the chief accountant and steward of creation, a co-creator, the apple of the creator's eyes, and the only candidate for heaven²⁶. Life is an ultimate reality and meaning deriving its sacredness and dignity human from its supernatural Source God who is simultaneously its Owner and Sustainer²⁷. So traditional Africans see human life as sacred, of inestimable value and imbued with supernatural dignity. This implies that human life in all its forms and conditions must always be appreciated, defended and promoted at all costs, times and conditions. As an ontological value, all forms and qualities of life from conception to infancy, in sickness and poverty, right to old age possess great value²⁸.

For them, human life is inviolable and is also a subject of certain fundamental rights. "An offence against the human person, or a violation of human life invited the wrath of the Supreme Being, of the Ancestors, and of the human community"²⁹. The plight of those who take their own lives in Igboland is revealing as an Igbo author affirms:

Suicide is so rare as to be regarded as non-existent. People who commit suicide are not mourned for and there is no funeral, not to talk of a decent one, and in the olden days, they were thrown into the 'evil forest' (*Ajo ofia*) as a sign of rejection both by men and gods³⁰.

Apart from fighting against human threats to life, the traditional Africans especially Nigerian tribes, equally fight against the spiritual forces that threatened them. Witchcraft, magic, demons and sorcery were to be warded off through prayers, sacrifices, and

²⁶ E. F. OGBUNWEZE, *Religion and The Socio-economic Realities of Nigeria, A Critique of Religion in a Corrupt Social Milieu*, in T. I. OKERE, (ed.), op. cit., p. 66.

²⁷ G. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church...*, p. 31.

²⁸ Their appreciation of life has a number of practical implications. Children are so highly valued in Africa that procreation is considered to be the main purpose of marriage. Begetting children remains one of the ways to ensure the continuity of one's own life among his people. A childless marriage is thus often considered no marriage since it does not propagate life.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁰ R. D. NWANKWOR, *Religious Pluralism in Nigeria and the Christian Response*, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Rome, 1989, p. 17.

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incantations³¹. And fighting evil in form of injustice, sickness or abject poverty or murder is to fight on the side of God, or on his behalf since God did not create what is evil, nor does he do any evil whatsoever³².

In all these, human life depends on God as its Author and Protector (*Chinwendu*). According to G. Ehusani of Nigeria, the God of traditional Africans *lived* and *moved* with his people. He was present with the fisherman in the stormy sea, ever there with the farmer to provide the conducive climate for best crops. The African God was there to protect the hunter and the nomad who must wander about in the dangerous wild forests. In the case of foreign aggression or the outbreak of epidemics, sacrifices and invocations are made to God and the deities to solicit their favour and protection against threats to life³³. In all these, there is the fundamental conviction that through the right relation with God and the cosmic powers, man will receive the full blessings of the divine here on earth. The signs of such blessings include one's ability to develop his/her whole potentialities in a state of ultimate peace. This is to say that for the African, the blessings and promises of *after life* are to be anticipated here in this life³⁴. The value attached to life and the passion to promote it is expressed in *Ecclesia in Africa*,

the peoples of Africa respect the life which is unborn. They rejoice in this life. They reject the idea that it can be destroyed.... Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within their family³⁵.

Apart from the Supreme God who is the Creator and Sustenance of life, the ancestors play very vital roles also as presented below. While some of these spiritual beings and forces can play ambivalent role, capable of fostering or destroying life, the ancestors are generally benevolent spirits hence we restrict our studies to their roles.

³¹Cf. J. S. MBITI, op. cit. p. 203. Some of the prominent evils in traditional African society include, infant mortality and premature death, failure of rains and harvests, childlessness, witchcraft etc. (cf. M. A. ODUYOYE, op.cit. p. 41).

³² Cf. J. S. MBITI, op. cit., p. 204.

³³Cf. G. O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church...*, p. 32.

³⁴ While this does not contradict the idea of another life of bliss, it does emphasise that such experience should begin on earth.

³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 43.

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3.1.2.2. The Ancestors as Agents of Solidarity

An ancestor is a named, dead forbear who has living descendants of a designated genealogical class representing him as living among them in a different type of existence. The status of ancestors in African anthropology has become an important theme both in African theology and anthropology since the last century. Discussing ancestors in Africa is not always easy given the differences in particular cultures. Other issues include how to qualify to be an ancestor, why are men mainly considered ancestors? Are ancestors worshipped or venerated?

Despite the problems associated with interpreting this practice, many African thinkers hold that the issue of ancestors is central to understanding African cosmology. "The sense of community, communion, solidarity and representation are the things that make ancestor veneration central to African heritage. People are often defined in relation to, and, with reference to their ancestors"³⁶. Many Africans believe that only those who have lived a worthy life on earth will begin another life as the 'living dead' and are in communion with the living in a new mode of relationship³⁷. While God is the Supreme being and other deities may be ambivalent, traditional Africans generally see the ancestors as benevolent beings. They have lived and struggled with their people all through their human existence. They know every member of the family by name and are quite aware of the challenges facing them. With their transition to a new life, they acquire new powers and are thus better enabled to help the loving ones who are still living in the visible world.

With their tremendous power which is only inferior to that of God, they can perceive and even avert dangers where ordinary human beings do not. They are constantly watching

³⁶ O. ONWUBIKO, *Echoes from the African Synod*, Snaap Press, Enugu, 1994, p.141. To qualify as an ancestor one must have lived nobly and died and buried honourably. It is a prerogative for men among African peoples.

³⁷ The various nuances of Re-incarnation such as *Ino-Uwa*, *Ogbanje* etc express the belief that the dead are not dead after all for life is not destroyed but changed. Often elaborate funeral rites *Ikwa Ozu*, are performed to enable the dead have a good place in their new mode of existence and thus act favourably towards the living especially the relatives. The way one has lived and died will indeed affect one's re-incarnation later. The Igbo are ready to spend all their fortunes, and even remain in abject poverty if only to save a simple life as in the case of protracted sickness and incurable diseases. Various Igbo names affirm this claim. *Nwakaego*, a child is greater than wealth. *Ndukaku*, life is greater than wealth, *Ndubisi*, life is a primordial value. *Ndunagu*, longing for life, *Ndubuokwu*, Let there be life is first. Indeed all their prayers start with a request for long life.

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over their people and ‘blessing’ them. This is especially so when such ancestors have been accorded a befitting and honourable burial. Those who continue to honour their ancestors through prayers and sacrifices are assured of their constant blessings. In sickness, during wars and in our case, in the event of extreme and destructive poverty, Africans believe that the ancestors are there to help once they are invoked accordingly. Among the Igbo and Yoruba tribes of Nigeria in particular, one of the ways that the ancestors shows their visible solidarity with loved ones is to ‘re-incarnate’ among them³⁸.

One interesting thing about the teaching on ancestors is that despite the initial rejection of the practice by the Christian faith, today, it is becoming an important bedrock for interpreting the Christian faith in Africa. Today, theologians are trying to see how theologically correct it can be to designate Christ or/and the saints as ancestors. The attempt by many new religious movements in the continent today to combine the traditional teaching on ancestors with the Christian religion in terms of healing and protection has become a topic which can no longer be ignored. Aware of the importance of this teaching to African Christians today, Pope John Paul II writes about Africans thus in his post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: “They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints?”³⁹. Although space does not permit an elaborate discussion on this important theme, the main contribution of the ancestor discourse, is that it shows that solidarity exists between the living and the dead, the ancestors, (the living-dead) care about their beloved ones especially if anything threatened their lives. Finally the study shows that life is so precious that even death cannot destroy it⁴⁰.

³⁸ Many elaborate studies have already been done elsewhere on the place of Ancestors in African culture. Some African scholars like J. Mbiti, B. Bujo, J-M. Ela, O. Onwubiko, G. Oduyoye etc. see it as an interesting theme for understanding African Christology. Despite the different terms and approaches used in the study of Ancestors, the primary concern is that they are expected to intercede, protect and ‘bless’ their families and descendants.

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 43.

⁴⁰ It is pertinent to mention here that in order to maintain this spiritual harmony with the divine and other deities, and to foster social harmony, traditional Igbos like other Africans have a number of strict cultic stipulations with binding ethical implications. Various norms (*Omenani/Odinani*) exist and since they are believed to have come from the gods, one may not break them with impunity. Breaking any of such moral laws even in secret is bound to have its retributive effects on the individual, his family or even on the entire community even to generations to come.

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While the above has been the traditional way of conceiving life and the recourse made to the supernatural powers to protect and promote life, we shall now see if the rapid mutations taking place in the region have changed these dispositions. Of special interest to us is the role of the new religious movements in this regard.

3.1.3. The Quest for Life Persists: From African Traditional Religion to Christianity

One particular phenomenon interesting theologians, anthropologists and sociologists about the African continent is the issue of increasing religious fervour outside the traditional religions and the mainline Christian Churches. Compared to African Traditional Religion or the Catholic Church for instance, these religious groups are relatively new⁴¹. We shall note immediately here that it is very difficult to engage in a very systematic and exhaustive study of these new religious movements in Black Africa today. This is because they continue to grow daily and are not homogenous⁴². Despite these difficulties, one can still study them together because in almost all of them,

the phenomenological pattern of spirituality, worship and theology are so strikingly similar to early Pentecostalism that one can speak with justification of one movement, even if there is no organisational link between the different churches⁴³.

Another important note is that many Catholics are now adopting and adapting some of the practices of these new movements and so are no longer ignorant of their ways. In fact, in some Catholic communities, there is a growing tendency to mix traditional Catholic activities and liturgies with those learnt from the new movements. Some *Basic Christian Communities* and Charismatic Movements are examples of where this can be found in the mainline Churches⁴⁴. Below are their main characteristics and their main motivations.

⁴¹ When we talk about new religious movements in this study, we wish to distinguish some religious groups that are operating outside the mainline Christian denominations like the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, with its main groups.

⁴² They take many different forms and have different modes of behaviour at different times and contexts (cf. L. S. V de PETRELLA, *The Tension between Evangelism and Social Action in the Pentecostal Movement*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXV, no. 297, Jan. 1986, p. 35).

⁴³ W. J. HOLLENEGER, *After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXV, no. 297, Jan. 1986, p. 11.

⁴⁴ A very good work comparing the Pentecostalism and 'Basic Christian Communities' has been done by other scholars. Suffice it to cite the summary presented by C. Boff in the Latin American context. "He observes an important commonality between basic communities and Pentecostal congregations: in both the

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3.1.3.1. New Religious Movements in the Black Africa Today: Their Characteristics and Motivations

In this study, we shall use the concepts: *African Independent Churches* to refer to all the indigenous Christian initiatives outside the mainline/traditional Christian groups. And the expressions *Pentecostalism* and *Healing Ministries* will be used to include other religious movements both inside and outside the mainline Churches⁴⁵.

3.1.3.1.1. Their Main Characteristics

First, these movements show clear signs of trying to disassociate from the institutional Christian practices while binding themselves much closer to their new-found haven. And in doing this they emphasise a personal relationship between the believer and God⁴⁶. Secondly, they impose strict ethical laws emphasising bodily discipline as one of the means of establishing contact with the divine as well as getting His favour⁴⁷. Thirdly,

Bible plays a special role, there is experience of fellowship, there is strong lay participation and a missionary spirit prevails" (C. BOFF, *The Catholic Church and the New Churches in Latin America*, cited in M. BERGUNDER, *The Pentecostal Movement and Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America: Sociological Theories and Theological Debates*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XCI, no. 360, Jan. 2002, p. 174).

Linking Basic Community to Liberation theology, another scholar continues: "Both the Pentecostal movement and the theologians of liberation are concerned with healing and deliverance. Both define and criticise the destructive reality for individuals and for whole communities from different perspectives and different starting points. Both wish the Kingdom of God to grow among us. In the two thousand year history of Christianity, both are young movements, but in my opinion, there is no doubt that these two are becoming the most important expressions of the Christian spirit for the third millennium" (E. VIRGILIO, *Geistheilung und Befreiung*, in M. BERGUNDER, op. cit., pp. 174-175).

⁴⁵ 'Pentecostalism' refers to the form of Christian expression that affirms belief in, consciously encourage, and actively promote the experience of the Holy Spirit as part of the normal Christian life and worship. The coterminous expression, 'charismatic' often refers to Pentecostal movements operating outside major Pentecostal denominations, either as renewal groups within historic mission Churches, or as para-church trans-denominational fellowships or ministries. The Catholic Church distinguishes its own Charismatic movements from others by insisting on the appendage of expressions, Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (cf. J. K. ASAMOAH-GYADU, *Mission to Set the Captives Free, Healing, Deliverance, and Generational Curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 93, nos. 370/371, July/October, 2004, p. 391).

⁴⁶ In Congo Zaire the proliferation of these groups became problematic in the 1970s such that the government of that country had to decide which of such religious groups would be recognised and accorded the rights enshrined in the constitution. It was in this way that the decree of 8th February 1978 officially categorised as 'sect' any association or church not recognised by the State (cf. R. B. GANZA, *Les Sectes et les groupes des prières : La privatisation de l'expérience religieuse au Congo*, in B. N'ZELOMONA, (dir.), *Revue: Les Religions africaines*, no. 2, 1999, p. 8).

⁴⁷ Members and clients are to be sober, practice conjugal fidelity, reject 'worldly' lifestyle etc. They are to read the Bible conscientiously and try to establish personal intimate contact with divine spirit. Sometimes clients are asked to perform some charitable works, forgive their enemies, eschew jealousy and hatred in their lives.

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there is a general desire to witness to other people outside the fold, and in some cases outsiders are viewed as in dire need of enlightenment and salvation. Above all, they encourage open confessions and their activities are centred around a charismatic personality who is often the founder. Such personalities are designated by such titles as “prophet”, “pastor”, “pontiff”⁴⁸.

The next common characteristic is that these religious movements can easily assimilate what they admire in other religious groups including their doctrines and ways of worship. They generally assimilate many practices into their doctrines and practices⁴⁹. About this tendency to assimilate, Ejizu writes on the Nigerian experience:

In one breath, the new churches call break with the traditional charms and medicines, and on the other, they seek a rapprochement with the traditional worldview. Probably the mix-up of the old and the new partly explains the attraction the group of new religious movements currently enjoy. They multiply intermittently in many parts of the country, especially in the south⁵⁰.

3.1.3.1.2. Their Main Motivations

Studying the new religious movements in Black Africa today, one realises that there are a number of mixed motives for founding them. We have highlighted the major factors for their origin and continued growth in the region today.

a. Evangelisation and Search for Autonomy

Most of the earliest founders these religious groups and movements were motivated by a strong impetus to evangelise Africans by using African traditional language and values.

⁴⁸ These charismatic personalities claim the gift of healing, vision, exorcism, etc. They interpret the Bible and in some cases administer medicines which may be combination of native herbs or other mixtures (cf. J. TONDA, *La religion dans le champs de la guérison*, in B. N'ZELOMONA, (dir.) op. cit., p. 16).

⁴⁹ Like other syncretic movements and activities, they are characterised by three main phases: The first is contact or discovery, or awareness of something new. Some call this ‘contamination’. The next which is linked to the first is the redefinition or reconstruction of the precise religious material at hand, called the transition or appropriation stage. The last stage is syncretism leading to the birth of a new religious experience. Some experts have tried to give a positive interpretation of the syncretism holding that it is a common religious phenomenon for without it there can hardly be any evolution in religious practices (cf. B. N'ZELOMONA, (dir.) *Les Eglises Indépendantes prophétiques et/ou messianiques du Congo : Evolution, caractéristiques actuelles et perspectives d'avenir*, in *Revue: Les Religions africaines*, no. 2, 1999, p. 98)

⁵⁰ C. EJIZU, *Down But...*, p. 195.

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This was aimed at solidly incarnating the Christian message in African soil⁵¹. The second important motivation was the desire for independence and autonomy from the main churches. About this we read: "It ought to be noted that their emergence in itself is was an assertion of nationalism"⁵². Inspired by the models of the Protestant Churches in Europe and America which asserted their independence from the mainline Churches some of the founders and followers of African Independent Churches started breaking away from the traditional mainline Churches where they belonged.

And since the authorities of the main Churches (especially Catholic hierarchy) opposed over-emphasis on prayers as a means of healing, these new Churches found the opportunity to assert their own identity by emphasising just that. B. Ganza of the University of Lille in France affirms that it was simply a reaction against the traditional religious experience of Western Christianity that is 'purely apostolic'⁵³. While the desire to evangelise and to assert their autonomy mainly motivated the earliest founders of many religious groups in Africa, today recent findings point to a new direction. This is demonstrated below.

⁵¹ There are many theories trying to explain the motivation behind the emergence of African Independent Churches. According to V. Wan-Tatah, an African author of Cameroonian origin, the establishment of the first Independent Church in West Africa was motivated by the religious question. The original founders saw the venture as a more effective means of evangelising the African continent. They reasoned that to be effective, the Church must be able to speak to the people in their own language and culture. So even following the further splits in the church, one major preoccupation for the divided African Churches was the accommodation of African culture within the Church. The mixture of Western Christianity and African modes of worship were unmistakably visible in many of these new movements. While the formal patterns of worship was like of the main Christian denominations, the content and atmosphere were typically African. One could mention clapping of hands, dancing, witnessing and acclamations during prayer (cf. V. WAN-TATAH, op. cit., p. 155).

⁵² Ibid., p. 156. A typical example is the case of the Native Baptists in Douala-Cameroon, openly advocated independence from the colonial regime. Such was regarded by that Church as a patriotic action but feared by the colonial authorities as incitement to civil disobedience (cf. Ibid., p. 156). Independence was sought for from two fronts. In the midst of the colonial conquest, some Africans could hardly distinguish the colonial powers from the Christian missionaries. So one of the means of asserting their desired independence and autonomy was to begin their own brand of Christianity since Christ was not the monopoly of any race or culture. About this we read: The second quest for independence and autonomy was from the religious perspective.

⁵³ R. B. GANZA, op. cit., p.7. By this is meant being very orthodox and conservative and leaves little or no room for personal initiatives and adaptations to local needs and experiences.

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b. The Search for Security, and Healing' as their Primary Motivation

They were formed and grew largely because of the failure of Western mission-founded churches to accept or to integrate 'charismatic' experiences, especially in the area of healing, into their faith and practice⁵⁴.

Today, many of the founders of new religious movements and prayer groups in Black Africa are generally motivated by the passion to make money and for prestige⁵⁵. And many of the adherents are pushed into these groups by the desire for security, healing and material prosperity. The increasing pauperisation of many people, coupled with ignorance and disenchantment with the main Christian groups provide fertile groups for these new groups to flourish. Below are some interesting facts on this.

These religious movements have tried to impress it on their adherents that life on earth is a kind of battle between the good forces and the evil ones. This teaching fits in well with the African traditional belief that, life on earth is a struggle with visible and invisible forces. Since the benevolent deities fought and defended people against the evil ones, today, the new churches and especially their leaders arrogate to themselves the role of African chief priests, healers and diviners⁵⁶. They constantly encourage their followers to use the sacramentals like holy water, medal, candles, incense and incantations to ward off evil. The practical implication of these for the adherents, is that everyone is called to engage in fighting evil in its forms. They believe that in modern times, evil has taken a new character and is represented in injustice, sickness or abject poverty etc. Those who realise the presence of evil and fight them, through prayers and other religious rites, are actually fighting on the side of God or on his behalf. This is because God did not create evil, he never does evil, and never wishes it for any of his creatures especially those 'in

⁵⁴ E. Y. LARTEY, *Healing: Traditional and Pentecostalism in Africa Today*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XC. nos. 356/357, Jan/April, 2001, p. 57.

⁵⁵ Apart from their skill in persuading people make huge donations to them, the respect and prestige given to most of the leaders of these groups remain a constant source of motivation. Their claims and promises often make them to be 'venerated' by many gullible people in Black Africa today.

⁵⁶ The success of these groups stems from the fact that many of the founders often claim divine revelations and divine power to help those in need. They use all kinds of means to persuade their adherents that all things are possible in the community. Some of these include: Emphasis on strict moral obligations as means of getting divine favours; their colourful ceremonies and rituals which appeal to many traditional Africans.

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Christ'⁵⁷. While traditional Africans used incantations and sacrifices to fight these forces, today new approach is needed. This is because,

ces manifestations ne sont pas seulement dans la société. Elles sont intérieures à chacun de nous. La lutte entre le bien et le mal, entre la vie et la mort, se traduit dans l'affrontement des ces adversaires que nous portons dans nos membres, selon le mot de Saint Paul (Rom. 7 : 17-24)⁵⁸.

These Churches also offer psychological security to their adherents. They show an ability to promote personal relationship between the adherent and his God. And this becomes a source of comfort to many desperate Africans who find little fulfilment in the highly organised structure of the established Churches⁵⁹. By emphasising the importance of the interior life through prayer and mortifications, they offer the adherent the spiritual and emotional security which is so vital in African Traditional Religion⁶⁰. They equally offer social security to their members especially to those in need in extraordinary show of solidarity. This enables each member to feel important, recognised, and so is able to play active role in the community of believers. Being Africans and Christians, they present the image of a caring God and a caring community, and this makes them very appealing to many Africans. The impact of these strategies is significant because today,

les grandes villes sont envahies par des sectes de toutes origines et des sociétés secrètes. La crise ou la disparition des systèmes d'interprétation et des cadres de vie traditionnels provoquent un sentiment d'insécurité et d'angoisse. Les sectes et les sociétés secrètes

⁵⁷ Cf. J. S. MBITI, op.cit., p. 204.

⁵⁸ E. MVENG (ed.), *Spiritualité et libération en Afrique*, p. 20. Here E. Mveng is certainly influenced by the Christian theology of the fall and precisely the original sin which enables him to impute to every man and woman the vulnerability to sin. But whether the author is not exaggerating the reality of the force of evil remains questionable since he may not be far from juxtaposing the force of evil with the force of good, a theology that may lead to dualism. Again to reduce the whole of African religious experience to perpetual struggle between good and evil, life and death does not seem to do justice to the fact that celebration, joy and a sense of security made possible by the community solidarity are indispensable elements in African religion, cosmology and experience.

⁵⁹ R. B. GANZA, *Les sectes et les groupes de prières: Les privatisations de l'expérience religieuse au Congo*, in B. N'ZELOMONA, op. cit., p. 7. R. Rwiza of Tanzania affirms that, "during times of joy or peace, many African Christians may be able to live as genuine Christians. But when they are faced with crises, such as illness, suffering, misfortune, death, barrenness, etc., they easily return to divided royalty and involve themselves in the rites and beliefs that are contrary to the teaching of the Church" (R. R. RWIZA, *Formation of Christian Conscience in Modern Africa*, Paulist Press, Nairobi, 2001, p. 104).

⁶⁰ Sometimes they even emphasise that the spiritual reality is primordial and indeed superior to, and indeed controls the material. Once one does not cut oneself from the spiritual powers that control the universe, they claim that one can have abundant life which starts from possessing the basic necessities of life.

*offrent de nouvelles certitudes, des communautés de vie fraternelle et d'entraide, des moyens efficaces de réussite matérielle*⁶¹.

Apart from these enabling conditions to foster their movements, these groups have tried to develop a theological basis for their practices. In particular they promise the poor, the oppressed, the sick and those in extreme need, Christian salvation that appeals to traditional Africans⁶². If the traditional African understands a fulfilled life as a quasi salvation in the temporal realm, the spiritual churches conceive salvation as liberation *from*, and protection *against*, evil spirits. This means social harmony and prosperity to the individual and his community. Spiritual salvation in this sense should be manifest in material blessings⁶³. So believers are encouraged to seek liberation from tangible misfortunes such as sickness, witchcraft and witches, barrenness, lack of success and impotence⁶⁴. These religious movements seek to bring about a holistic community. Many of the groups studied were known to seek to unite the spirit and matter, body and soul, and indeed they emphasised the practical aspects of faith⁶⁵.

One of the integral promises of salvation among the Independent Churches is that they emphasise the need for physical healing. And in a society where many people are living in precarious health conditions that threaten their lives, the new movements never lack followers. Below are the research findings about the place of healing among them.

⁶¹ E. M. METOGO, op. cit., p. 14.

⁶² These religious movements emphasise that 'salvation' is about integral well-being. And human *fulfilment* and abundant life promised by Christ should be actually experienced in this life. And since God is both will and able to heal the sick, feed the hungry, protect the oppressed, it is only left to the worshipper to have recourse to him when needed.

⁶³ Indeed many of these religious movements and healing ministries are mainly made up of needy people. Some may be searching for a job, others for marriage partners or vocations in life and others seeking to have children. Those undergoing difficulties in their relationships especially in their marriage find refuge in these centres. But the irony is that while many of the people who go there are weak and poor, they are encouraged even to make generous gifts especially money 'to God' as a means of enhancing their prayers.

⁶⁴ V. WAN-TATAH, op.cit., p. 157. Oduyoye goes further to explain the urgency of a proper inculturation which will respect the sensibilities of the people even if it does not make meaning for outsiders. The problem, she maintains is that at the peak of the missionary activities in many parts of the continent, the missionaries told the Africans "that ancestors were to be ignored; infant mortality and premature deaths were purely medical matters. Failure of rains and harvest were acts of God. Childlessness had nothing to do with witchcraft, nor was there any spiritual aspect of any other physical disorder or infirmity" (M. A. ODUYOYE, op. cit., p. 41).

⁶⁵ B. TLHAGALE, *Mission and Evangelisation in Southern Africa, 100 Years On*, in, *Mission, Journal of Mission studies*, Vol. VIII. No. 2, 2001, p. 255. We have seen earlier that some of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today are the sick and HIV/AIDS are among the worst victims. Today therefore many of the independent churches and religious movements emphasise healing the sick as their main task. And indeed, many African researchers agree that the promise of healing specially for the poor who are incapable of paying for orthodox treatments, is a major reason for the expansion of these practices.

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For J. Pobee of the University of Ghana, since life is a supreme value in traditional African society, these religious movements focus on healing as one of their central missions⁶⁶. For another researcher, “healing and protection from evil are the most prominent practices of the liturgy of many African Independent churches and are probably the most important elements in their evangelism and church recruitment”⁶⁷. According to a third author, “foremost in the faith and practice of these churches is divine healing. In many respects, their practice of divine healing is phenomenologically similar to the activities of the traditional priest healers. This renders them culturally and religiously very amenable to the masses of people who find in them a congeniality and familiarity absent from the staid, silent and ‘orderly’ form of worship and liturgy in the western mission-founded churches with their non-interventionist theology”⁶⁸. In this healing ministry, the charismatic leader plays a decisive role⁶⁹. Another researcher carried out his investigation in Musana Disco Christo Church (MDCC), an Independent Church in Ghana. When he questioned the adherents on why they were there, they replied:

We are in this church because we found healing here. But for this church the great majority of us here assembled would not be alive today. That is the reason why we are here...⁷⁰

⁶⁶ J. S. POBEE, *Health, Healing and Religion: An African View*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. CX. nos. 356/357, January/April, 2001, p. 57.

⁶⁷ A. ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, cited by A. J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Mission to Set the Captives Free, Healing, Deliverance, and Generational Curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 93. nos. 370/371, July/October, 2004, p. 393.

⁶⁸ E. Y. LARTEY, op. cit., p. 75.

⁶⁹ Some researchers see this quest for healing as an expression of nostalgia for African traditional quest for life and faith in the priest since priests and indeed religion bring the traditional African closer to God and to healing. “Healing, exorcism, divination, diagnosis and the restoration to wholeness of ill or disturbed persons are seen as crucial functions of the priest. To the traditional African the most important activity of a priest is the medical one—the ability to diagnose correctly and to prescribe accurate remedies for various diseases. To separate this function from his other priestly activities, or to disclaim the authenticity of this as a valid service of a religious person, is to seriously detract from a priest’s acceptability and recognition with a traditional African” (E. Y. LARTEY, op. cit. p. 75).

⁷⁰ J. S. POBEE, *I Lift Up my...*, p. 125. Writing from the Nigerian experience, another Igbo author further breaks down the main reasons for these religious movements. These include, religious enthusiasm, commercialisation, desire for quick-money, quest for social status, frustration, inability to adhere to doctrines/dogma and scandal indeed a general feeling of insecurity and heightened rate of hardship in the Nigerian socio-political milieu (cf. B. A. C. OBIEFUNA, *Charismatism: A Challenge to Catholic Theology in Nigeria*, in T. I. OKERE (ed.), op. cit. p. 117).

Part Three Chapter One: God and the Poor in African Traditional Religion

3.1.4. Closing Remarks on God and the Poor in African Traditional Religion

By way of conclusion, and in order to apply the above study to inquiry, we shall now ask: How then can our study of African Traditional Religion and some new religious movements help us in evolving a theology of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today?⁷¹ How the African collaborated with the deities in the fight against oppressive forces cannot be ignored by the theologian today⁷². That some traditional African abandoned any cult which consistently failed to grant them the favours they asked should be a warning to the Christian faith in the region today⁷³. For a people that are very religious, it is urgent to try to explain the reality of extreme poverty to them in a religious language. Such language should try to include the fact that God remains the origin and sustenance of human life⁷⁴. The Church and theologians should realise that for Africans, such matters as extreme poverty or any threat to human life is seen as a direct affront to God⁷⁵.

Another important point for reflection from the above study is that religion should have a practical/utilitarian value also. This is not just so for Africans. The Christian religion in particular has this inherent nature. There is little doubt that the Church was commissioned by Christ to continue a healing ministry that would point to, and embody God's continued care for people in the world. Healing and enjoyment of abundant life continue to be the sign of the Kingdom of God among human beings⁷⁶. Faith, health and healing are central to God's purposes for humanity and creation. This is embodied in the life, acts and message of Jesus Christ. However in Africa health is intimately linked to issues of poverty and economic disparity and is therefore a justice and theological issue. Indeed we can actually agree with P. Tillich that, "a religion without healing or saving power is

⁷¹ We shall end this section by stating that while our main attention has been focused on the activities of independent churches, many Catholics under the auspice of Charismatic Renewals and Healing Ministries could easily be studied along the same line as the Independent churches.

⁷² Cf. G. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church...*, p. 31.

⁷³ And the commonest favours demanded in almost all African societies are material blessings, personal blessings like health, riches, honours and long life, offspring etc. It is here that we can address the rampant issue of sorcery and witchcraft. Since there are many forces in African cosmology, the belief is that there are agents of evil who are less powerful than God but can and do really wreck havoc in individuals, families and communities.

⁷⁴ P. DE MEESTER, *Où va l'Eglise d'Afrique?* Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1980, p. 103.

⁷⁵ Cf. J. C. FROELICH, *Nouveaux dieux d'Afrique*, Paris, Primes/Orantes, 1969, p. 23.

⁷⁶ E. Y. LARTEY, op. cit., p. 81.

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irrelevant⁷⁷. In the midst of increasing suffering and poverty in Africa, this utilitarian dimension of religion has become more accentuated⁷⁸. This is to say that for them,

“le Dieu inaccessible est impossible et impensable. Il permet le bonheur temporel (sur terre) et céleste (après la mort), contrairement à la doctrine chrétienne qui insiste beaucoup plus sur le salut après la mort (paradis)”⁷⁹.

I will conclude by emphasising the significance of the phenomenon of the new religious movements in the region today. Despite their weaknesses⁸⁰, could their ‘success’ not be interpreted as ‘a sign of the time’?⁸¹ We shall now focus on God’s Solidarity with the poor in the Biblical Tradition.

⁷⁷ P. TILLICH, *The Impact of Psychotherapy on Theological Thought*, in J. MATTEY (ed.), *Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles-Our Witness in Europe*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XCI, no. 362, July, 2002, p. 436.

⁷⁸ U. D. ANYANWU, *Re-Thinking Christianity and African Cultural Development: The Experience of the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria*, in T. I. OKERE, (ed.), op. cit. p. 47.

⁷⁹ B. N’ZELOMONA, (dir.), op.cit., p.71. To further demonstrate that the search for a better life plays a prominent role in African religious adherents, F. Eboussi Boulaga traces the success of Christianity in Black Africa to the way the early missionaries presented Christianity as superior religion with its promises of a better life for its adherents. Being closely associated with the colonial regimes and Western civilization, many Africans believed that abandoning their traditional religion and adopting Christianity would give them access to the ‘secrets’ and ‘successes’ of the “Whiteman”. There were other values which Christianity were supposed to give as ‘a religion of enlightenment’ that appealed to many people in Africa. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the missionaries confronted some obnoxious practices as inter-group conflicts, slave trade, domestic slavery, human sacrifice, killing of twins, hostile funeral rites against widows etc (cf. F. EBOUSSI-BOULAGA, *Christianisme sans fétiche, Révélation et domination*, in E. M. METOGO, op.cit., p. 14).

⁸⁰ Some of these religious movements could lead to the birth of neo-paganism and other forms of obstacles against the emergence of mature Christianity in the region (cf. O. ONYINAB, *Contemporary ‘Witchdemology’ in Africa*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 93, nos. 370/371, July/October, 2004, p. 345). Another important problem of these religious movements is that their theology of the cross is generally deficient. Even the Christian God is presented as one who has nothing to do with the cross and human suffering. The theme of redemptive power of suffering and vicarious suffering in particular are technically avoided. Again they tend to encourage passivism among their adherents. Since God is capable and willing to doing everything for man, the needy are encouraged to wait for God and his miracles even when one can help himself. There are cases of those who refuse to work, to take medical treatments and to listen to the voice of reason, because faith is taken to be superior to reason. This is what can be described as spiritual escapism (cf. L. S. V de PETRELLA, *The Tension between Evangelism and Social Action in the Pentecostal Movement*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXV, no. 297, Jan. 1986, p. 37).

⁸¹ At least some of the signs is that modern Africans are still influenced by their ancestral religious practices and culture. Another sign is that Africans expect their religion and their God to come to their secure in the most difficult moments of their lives. Finally these religious movements send a signal to the mainline Churches and Christian theologians that there is an urgent need for finding a new language for speaking about God especially to the anthropological poor in the region.

CHAPTER TWO: GOD'S SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOREST OF THE POOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

3.2.0 Preamble

Having seen that traditional Africans had a very positive view about God and the deities especially in their daily lives, we shall go further in this chapter to see how God is perceived in Judeo-Christian tradition. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that God is the origin of life and that he cares for what happens to human life especially when threatened by such dangers as extreme poverty.

3.2.1. God's Attributes in the Bible with special Focus on the Old Testament¹

We cannot actually discuss the nature of God's solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in the Bible without actually making a brief presentation of the nature of that God. The first note of course, is that unlike all their neighbours, ancient Israel believed in a God who is very personal, living and involved in their national history and personal histories. The decisive event of the Exodus made them essentially a theocratic nation. In the lines below we shall see the main attributes which Israel came to learn about their God. That knowledge became a point of reference, so that even when calamity and sufferings became their lot, they were sustained by the fact that God knows everything, that he is everywhere even in their exiles and woes. They knew that he is powerful, and can change their tears into laughter whenever, and however he wished. The purpose of this section is to help millions of people in Black African today, to realise that God has not abandoned them. The main attributes of God in the Old Testament relevant to this study is hereby presented.

3.2.1.1. God as the Origin and Sustenance of Life

The book of Genesis while narrating the account of creation gives the creation of man, a special accent. While the Bible describes how other creatures were made (when "God said"), in the creation of man, there was a solemn proclamation: "Let us make man in our own image" (Gen.1:26). So what distinguishes human beings from other creatures is that they were made in the image of God. The idea that man is made in the image of God is that in this special creature, God does not merely want to recognise his work, but indeed to recognise Himself. This means that in human beings, God finds as it were, the mirror in

¹ Since we will discuss Jesus more as the sacrament of God in the New Testament, we focused on God's attributes in the Old Testament.

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which he recognises his own countenance, an image that resembles him. So as the image of God, men and women are beings who corresponds to God, beings who can give the seeking love of God; the sought-for response. According to some theologians like St. Augustine, P. Tillich and J. Moltmann, this important place which God accorded to human beings is the basis for understanding God's solidarity not just in the history of Israel but for us today². Human beings are creatures, not in the sense of belittling them, but in the sense that, they originate from a personal creator who knows them by name, who cares about them and who their providence. He intervenes in their personal lives³. Apart from being their creator, he also knows everything about each person as seen in the doctrine of his omniscience.

3.2.1.2. The Omniscient God

God's greatness is also measured by his omniscience⁴. Even when things went wrong, the chosen people continued to wait and to believe because their God knows everything. God's knowledge not only embraces the whole reality, it also has a creative force. It does not derive from the created things. He does not know creation by observing it as a *fait accompli*. Scripture stresses particularly that God's vision penetrates into the future as well as embracing the past. Never is his knowledge deficient or uncertain in any manner. God's knowledge is in the first place turned towards man, his primary interest. As the creator of man God knows every man much more than he knows himself. He sees into the deepest recesses of man's being, his soul (cf. Ps. 7:9; Prov. 16:12; Jer. 11:20; Mt. 6:4, 18; Acts 1:24; 15:8). That no man can hide from him is presented in the Psalms as a motive for faith and as a foundation for hope. So overwhelming is Yahweh's knowledge that even when one acts in secret or in pretence, Yahweh weighs even the most hidden of man's motives (Ps. 139; Eccl. 17:1-13)⁵.

² J. MOLTSMANN, *God in Creation...*, pp. 82-83.

³ M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma 2, God and Creation*, sheed and Ward, london, 2002, impression, p. 12.

⁴ By presenting God as all powerful and all knowing, we will be laying a foundation for our proof that God appreciates the plight of the afflicted and has power to reverse their fortune.

⁵ Psalm 139 expresses God's knowledge and presence as the foundation of any teaching on God's solidarity with man in particular. "Lord, you probe me and you know me...Even before a word is on my tongue Lord, you know it all. Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me. Such knowledge is beyond me, far too lofty for me to reach. Where can I hide from your presence, where can I flee? If I ascend to the heavens you are there; If I lie in *Sheol*, you are there too....Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand holds me fast....You formed my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb... My very self you knew; my bones were not hidden from you, when I was being fashioned in the secret, fashioned

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This knowledge shows that God's relationship to the world is not like that of a subject who just knows the object of its knowledge, like that of an uninterested observer. But on the contrary he is closely involved in its existence. The fact that the world is known by God means that it is acknowledged as his own, loved, cared for and indeed chosen by him. God's gaze on his creation is not indifferent; it is a look of creative love (Ex. 32:12). To stand in the sight of God means that the creature does not stand alone in the immensity of the universe; it assures every creature that it has a home with its maker, that its life has meaning and value. As God's knowledge of himself is the foundation of his creative activity, all creatures are analogous realisations of his thought and knowledge. Again that God's providence knows no boundary can be seen in the discussion that below.

3.2.1.3. The Omnipresent God

Another important attribute of God in the Old Testament is his omnipresence. Explaining this abiding presence of God in creation has led to many pantheistic interpretations and controversies among theologians and philosophers⁶. Despite this difficulty, this characteristic of God is of particular interest to us because it will help us to argue that God's love reaches to all places, is for all peoples and races, all religions and classes, the rich and poor alike. Although God's dealings with Israel came closest to pinning him down to a place or a race, he still demonstrated to Israel that he was an omnipresent God. By this we mean that the category of space and time does not apply to God, and that he is the lord of spatial creatures. Spatiality was created by God himself and while he poured himself into the non-divine, he at the same time retains his sovereignty over space.

In the Old Testament, there are various anthropomorphic phrases that seem to "localise" God. We see that sometimes he is reported to appear in particular places like in the burning bush, at Mount Sinai, etc. Does this mean that God occupies space and time? The answer is surely on the negative if space and time is considered in human language. We believe,

in the depths of the earth. Your eyes see everyone of my actions; in your book all are written down; my days shaped, before one came to be...How precious to me your designs, O God, how vast the sum of them" The Psalmist does not seem to make a difference between God's knowledge seen as a specific divine attribute from God's knowledge considered as providential care. His knowledge and power is for caring and providing for his creation.

⁶ We shall discuss this topic in greater detail under the cosmic influence of Christ's redemption.

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however, that the dialectics of an omnipresent God being localised must then be interpreted in the sense that the Scriptures want to express, namely, the nearness and hiddenness in God. He is a truly living God both, active and immanent in the world and yet transcends it. This actually differentiates Israel's God from the pagan gods. It is only because of his sovereignty over space and time, being in time and space and yet transcending them, can God plan, and carry to fulfilment, that salvific future. Therefore from the above, we can say that the notion of divine providence as conceived in biblical tradition is a synthesis of two distinct aspects of God's relation to the world, *foreknowledge* and *sovereignty*. Of all God's attributes, his compassion stands out.

3.2.1.4. The Good and Compassionate God

Despite the greatness of God, he revealed himself to Israel more as a Liberator and Caring Father than anything else⁷. Their experience of the intervention of God during their bondage in Egypt convinced them that God is both a creator, a liberator, a living and loving father⁸. This living God makes his voice heard, speaking loudly out of the fire and the thundercloud (cf. Deut. 5:23). While his love is for the whole of his children, this love expresses itself more spectacularly in his readiness to help in the time of danger. It was this conviction that he is a living God that inspired most of the prayers in the Old Testament. The Psalms in particular show the sentiments of people who invoke someone who is living and personal (cf. Pss. 18:46; 42:2; 84:2). What the Jews learnt about the inexhaustible power of God exhibited in history shows equally that his life is inexhaustible. Such a life has no beginning or end, it cannot be cut off or endangered by anything. It is distinguished and superior to human life in its frailty and mortality (cf. Deut. 8:3). This God is not only immortal but is also the very author of life (Gen. 2:7; Ps 104:29f; Ps. 36:9). Indeed human beings live, thanks to the simple breath of this God (cf. Gen. 2:7). Only Yahweh has dominion over life and even man's greatest enemy death (cf. Deut. 32:39f; 1 Sam. 2:6). Once God withdraws his breath every other living thing passes away (cf. Ps. 104:29; Is. 42:5).

⁷Cf. R.MARTIN-ACHARD, *Création et Salut: L'exemple du second Esaïe*, in J. FISCHEUR, *Dieu, le monde et l'homme*, p. 23.

⁸J. MOLTSMANN, op. cit, p. 75.

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Indeed, the Old Testament equally interprets God as a lover of his world. Creation is from God and is dependent on God for its continued existence⁹. We can see this on two levels, God's manifestations of love and solidarity with his world. In the first place, God is presented as the bringer of salvation to man; and in the second there is explicit testimony in many anthropomorphic ways to God's actual love for man. This is found in the Scriptures both on the level of community of men and on the level of the individual. As far as the first level is concerned Scriptures show that there is nothing which God does which is not actually aimed at the salvation of man. As a matter of fact, God's creative act itself is a work of salvation. Although salvation is present in all God's acts and intents, it was in the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, and their guidance into the promised land, that this salvific act of God reached a climax. The people of Israel had such a tremendous experience of his saving act that their whole existence as a people must be ascribed to God's salvific power. He is the centre of the whole of salvation, full of care and love and indeed the saviour of his people. That Israel saw him essentially as a father who love and disciplines his children is proclaimed thus:

Yahweh, Yahweh, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger and rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgression, sin, yet he lets nothing go unchecked, punishing the father's fault in the sons and in the grandsons to the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:6-7)¹⁰.

Israel's understanding of God continued to grow such that by the time of the prophets, God's bond with his people is described in such intimate expressions of marital images and family life (cf. Hos. 1-3; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16:23; Is. 50:1; 54:5-8). The foundation of God's will to save is love, even when it is hedged out with exact legal decrees which were intended to

⁹ Accepted that it is in the New testament that we see the explicit formulation, God is love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:7f), yet this has been foretold by the Old Testament as a promise for the future.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy here that Israel's knowledge of God as creator, lover and father underwent various phases of evolution. Israel knew for sure that God is so close to them by a special grace, but also growing in awareness that the other peoples of the world were also the subjects of God's concern. Israel knew that God chose them to be representatives of all the others so they recognised their task to proclaim to the whole world, God's greatness and his love. Soon Israel discovered that God's will to save was universal. He is a God who intervenes in history at definite points from which his power radiates, becoming effective throughout the whole creation (Ex. 19:4f). God's universal love and solidarity is most explicit in the statement made in the call of Abraham that all generations shall be blessed in him (Gen. 12:3). This is the paradox of mediated salvation in Old Testament. One is chosen and not the others, but the ultimate plan is in order to grant salvation to those others through the *chosen one*.

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serve order in the community and for respecting the alliance. In all his relationship with his people, God kept on promising them a future which will bring with it the fullness of life. One observes that even when the people found themselves in their greatest dilemmas, God still spoke by the mouth of the prophets, "Fear not, I am with you; Be not dismayed; I am your God. I will strengthen you, and help you, and uphold you with my right hand of justice" (cf. Is. 41: 10). It is in the light of such personal concern not just for the universe but for each human being as his child that led Isaiah to use the image of a mother and spouse in describing the relentless providence of God for his people (54: 5-8). In fact, in the prophetic tradition, the whole history of Israel is dramatised as a love story between Yahweh, the jealous husband, and Israel, his unfaithful wife. However, at the end of times Yahweh will bring about the conversion of his unfaithful bride and a joyous wedding feast will be celebrated (cf. Hos.1-3; Is. 62:1-5; Jer. 3: 1-3; Ezek. 16).

As a matter of fact, God often treated the Israel as if they were one single person. He always desired their reciprocal love (cf. Deut. 6:4f. 11:13). It is because God's fidelity and loving care is guaranteed that the we read in numerous Psalms, the call that man should unconditionally surrender himself to God in hope and confidence (cf. Pss. 23; 27:1-3;10; 34:9; 31; 33; 35; 42; 46). This call to trust God is even more pronounced in the moments of suffering. Those who surrender themselves unconditionally to God and bear up for his sake under the torments which life can bring will experience God's love all the more. Such people will receive eternal life (cf. Wis. 3:4-12).

With regard to the poor and the sinner, one sees that God's love assumes the form of mercy. Although God hated sin, his love for the sinner is remarkable. This love as we have noted above takes the form of compassion, mercy, patience, consideration for weakness, pardon, mitigation of wrath (cf. 2 Chr. 30:6-9; Jer. 18:5-11; Mich. 7:18-21). While God's love for his people is best presented by the prophets by the image of a mother, he also calls himself "Father" so that Israel becomes Yahweh's son. As a father he shows his solicitude for his people and at the same time remains their lord. By referring to him as father, the Old Testament all the more demonstrates the unbreakable bond between father and son. Such a

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relationship has many legal and cultural implications that are even more serious than mere love which is a free act¹¹.

So God's love for his creation is not a conditional love. He necessarily orders himself in the reality which he produces; he cannot create without relating the creature to himself in love. In this sense we can assert that in his love for what he has created, God wants his creatures to serve his glory. Everything he creates is an inadequate reflection of what he himself is and therefore refers to him. So creature's relation to God is willed by God himself, and creation cannot be itself without this relationship to God. In its very turning to itself, creature essentially turns to God, even when it is unaware of it. But it is only when creatures consciously assimilate into their self-development the immanent meaning of their existence (God), that such creatures really conform to the full essence of their creation.

So God's creature is ontologically dependent on God since it cannot cease to be a creature¹². But God's providence is better appreciated once it is recognised that creation is not a demonstration of God's boundless power but rather the communication of his boundless love. This love knows neither premises nor preconditions¹³. In his love God can choose but he chooses only that which corresponds to his essential goodness, in order to communicate that goodness to his creation. In his free love God conveys and communicates his goodness, that is the work of sustaining his creation¹⁴. The delight with which God celebrated the Sabbath portrays the inner love and solidarity which he bears towards his creation. "God looked at everything that he had made, and he found it very good" (Gen. 1:31). So to recognise the world as a creation of God is to accept that he is

¹¹ The basis of a father-son relationship is seen in the election of Israel and this obliges not only love and appreciation but also obedience and respect due to a father. Thus whether the image of a mother's love is used or that of a father, the key point here is that there exists an inalienable relationship between God and his people. This is for us divine manifestation of solidarity with humanity exemplified in Israel. When the justice of God is emphasised in the Old Testament, it is often within the context of this love and father-son relationship. God's justice is thus a way that divine love expresses itself.

¹² P. GIBERT, *De l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament*, in J. FISCHER op. cit. p 18. The following Psalms emphasise the belief that creation comes from God and invariably sustained by him. Ps 8 sings the beauty of the heavens, the entire universe and the importance of man in God's sight. In Ps. 19 we see that the heavens and the firmament proclaim the handiwork of God. In Ps 51:12 we see that since God has the power to create, the author asks God to re-create man. Ps 89:13, 48, attests that God created the North and all the frail children of Adam. Ps 104:30 ascribes all the creatures as to God even, the *leviathan* (vs.26).

Since all creation comes from God, Psalm 148:5 holds that creation owes God eternal praise.

¹³ J. MOLTSMANN, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* 76.

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involved in the event of the history as an active participant. It is to trust in his providence¹⁵. It is indeed in the book of the Exodus and the Prophets, that one can see in a very special way how God reacts in the event of his creatures being threatened. We shall conclude this section with this passage below:

Yes, you love all that exists, you hold nothing of what you have made in abhorrence for had you hated it you would not have formed it. And had you not willed it could a thing persist, how could it be conserved if not called forth by you? (Wisdom 11:24f).

A study of the books of the Exodus and the some prophetic writings will demonstrate more concretely how various attributes of God express themselves in defence and solidarity with the oppressed and the poor.

¹⁵In Luke 12:6, Jesus summons believers to trust their lives to divine providence. So they should not worry about what to eat or drink or even about their lives since their heavenly Father cares for them and not a hair of their heads will be lost. For Paul, it is in God that believers live, move and have their being (Acts:17:28). Even in their moments of difficulties, Paul reminds believers that in all, God works for the good of those who love him so they needed not be afraid (Rom. 8:28).

3.2.2. God, the Poor and the Oppressed: Study of the Exodus and the Prophets

3.2.2.1. The Exodus

The book of Exodus is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. Without it, Israel's history in particular, and the Bible in general would be unintelligible¹⁶. Although the book of Exodus could be studied from many perspectives, here we shall simply focus on God's active commitment and solidarity with his oppressed people in Egypt. We shall see the special role that Moses played in the liberation project. This will help us argue later in this work that God needs the instrumentality of human beings in fostering solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. After presenting the salient message of the Exodus, we shall use it as foundation for our theology of solidarity with poorest of the poor.

3.2.2.1.1. The Exodus Setting

The Exodus is symbolic not only for Israel but manifests symbolically the God who cares, protects and liberates any of his oppressed creatures¹⁷. It presents the people of Israel as the poor of the land, a people with no human rights and who are treated harshly by their oppressors. And in the midst of their extreme agony "they turned to the God of their ancestors, and discovered in their own experience that he was still with them, and was willing to listen to them, and respond to them"¹⁸. In the book of Exodus, we see the God who reveals himself to the Jewish people in the Old Testament as one who cares for the poor and the oppressed¹⁹. Indeed the foundational event in Jewish history is God's decision to lead his people out of slavery²⁰. So God said: "I have heard the cry of my people and I see how they are oppressed..." (Ex. 3: 9). He was moved to pity and quick to act in justice because, his people were politically enslaved, economically exploited, and crushed in spirit²¹. For G. Ehusani, a commentator on the Exodus,

¹⁶ H. HOGAN, *The Words of Life from Exodus*, Collins/Fount Publishers, London, 1984, p. 11

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹ D. DORR, *Spirituality and Justice*, Orbis, New York, 1984, p.87.

²⁰ The Bible describes vividly the condition of Israel in Egypt which moved God to protest against it. Apart from other obnoxious policies that can be likened to modern 'ethnic cleansing', the book of Exodus states: "So they made the people of Israel serve with rigour, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigour" (Ex. 1:13-14).

²¹ Cf. A. WENIN, *L'homme biblique, Anthropologie et éthique dans le Premier Testament*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1995, p. 87.

the God of Moses, Joshua, and the judges is a compassionate God who hears the cry of his oppressed people and is moved to action to free his people from oppression and to give them back their dignity²².

God so identifies with the poor and the marginalized, that he took the initiative himself to come to their rescue. That even Moses did not know the identity of this God at that time, shows the anguish of God who could no longer bear the pains inflicted on those he loved. "Because of His immense compassion, the cry of the people, especially that of the poor and oppressed masses of Israel, became God's own cry"²³. The Exodus events depicts a God who decided that Pharaoh must be made aware of God's sovereignty, justice and incomparable greatness and must therefore be ready to succumb to a superior power. Pharaoh must therefore obey God, allow the people to go so that they can live in freedom and dignity of the sons and daughters of God²⁴. But one important element in the liberation project is that despite his omnipotence, the God of Israel needed human agency to carry out his divine plans for his oppressed people (cf. Ex. 8:1). By involving Aaron and the elders to help him, God demonstrated to Moses that, "...il a besoin de sa collaboration et celle du peuple..."²⁵. Since Moses played a major role in the liberation mission, a brief study on this will be needed here.

3.2.2.1.2. God Seeks Human Collaboration

God called Moses in unusual circumstances to engage in the delicate mission of Israel's liberation. Like most prophetic calls, Moses was filled with awe and was reluctant to engage in the mission (cf. Ex. 4:10). Like the prophets, God pledged an unflinching support to Moses assuring him: 'I will be with you...' Ex.3:11-12)²⁶. So patiently, and gradually God led him to the awareness of the evil perpetrated by Pharaoh, 'God's concern for the Israelites', and God's determination to act decisively on their behalf. After much persuasion and encouragement, Moses became really impressed by the personal concern of God for Israel so, "he then becomes aware that God wants to send him to Pharaoh and to bring the people out. We see hence, that this Moses who had been formerly concerned with the flock, needing his shepherding attention, now

²² G. O. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, p. 34.

²³ Ibid. p. 34-35.

²⁴ C. HOUTMAN, *Exodus*, KOK Publishing House, Kampen, 1996, p. 9.

²⁵ A. WENIN, op. cit., p. 87. This idea will be developed further in the next part of this work when we shall discuss the meaning of active commitment and collaboration of all men and women towards the building of the Kingdom of God.

²⁶ G. AUZOU, *De la servitude au service, étude du livre de l'exode*, Paris, Editions de l'Orante, 1961, p. 90.

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experiences God's concern for the 'flock' of Israel, (cf. Ps. 77, 20) and then God's concern becomes his own"²⁷.

The Pentateuch thus presents Moses as one that is endowed with characteristics that place him well out of the ordinary. And he devoted his life to the mission of being servant of Yahweh and engaged in active solidarity with the enslaved people he led, a solidarity which he maintained till his death²⁸. From his experience Moses discovered that Yahweh is both compassionate, powerful and just. This is because,

*depuis qu'il a entendu sa plainte (Ex. 2, 23-25), le Seigneur prend à cœur le sort du peuple esclave en Egypte au point de se considérer comme son père (Ex. 4, 22) et donc de se soucier de la vie et de la liberté que le pharaon menace (Ex. 3, 7-10)*²⁹.

The result of his love was the subsequent liberation of his people³⁰.

3.2.2.1.3. Active Collaboration in the Liberation Struggle

The call of Moses was just the beginning of a long and challenging liberation struggle for Israel. Through many signs and wonders, God tried to persuade Pharaoh to liberate the Jewish slaves. But all these efforts proved abortive³¹. To show the value which he attaches to human liberty and his distaste for injustice, Yahweh permitted unusual catastrophe to befall Egypt³². This paved way for the liberation of his people. This can be said to be the first stage in the liberation and humanisation initiatives of Yahweh³³.

²⁷ J. G. JANZEN, *Exodus*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997, p. 30.

²⁸ C. BOFF and G. V. PIXLEY, *The Bible, The Church and the Poor*, Orbis Books, New York, 1989, p. 72. There is an excellent account on this topic in G. Von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, vol. I, Munich 1966, pp. 302-308. This account inspired the description of the mediating role of Moses between God and Israel. Moses was really destined for this mission right from his birth. From the point of view of human formation, his careful upbringing, his familiarity with the Egyptian liturgy and temples, contacts with his father-in-law Jethro, priest of Midianite sanctuary, were all a providential preparation for his role as liberator, legislator and religious leader of Israel. Thus prepared by providence, Moses was to assume a task that would call for a total and unconditional faith.

²⁹ A. WENIN, op.cit., p. 86.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

³¹ See the plagues in chapters 7-11 of the Exodus.

³² God seemed to have exhausted all possible avenues for a peaceful release of the Jewish slaves before the decisive event of the death of the first sons in that country (cf. Ex. 11:5).

³³ According to some authors, the saga between Moses and Pharaoh is indeed synonymous with the struggle between good and evil, justice and oppression. The entire encounter shows that the Hebrews' wretchedness constitutes an oppression, and oppression is unjust because it depreciates human relations. God was not just

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After the dramatic episode in Egypt and on the Red Sea, God continued to guide his people delicately (cf. Ex. 15, 22), providing them with food (cf. Ex. 16, 4) and drink, (cf. Ex. 17, 6), giving them able leaders, (cf. Ex. 17, 8), defeating their enemies like the Amalekites who were more powerful than Israel and who were threatening Israel. About them God said: "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex. 17, 15). God eventually gave them a set of rules to guide and protect them through their journey and thereafter (cf. Ex. 20, 1-17). And these rules in particular were meant to sustain the alliance and in a particular way, protect the poor and the weakest members of their community.

A critical study of the book of Exodus shows that, it was in this second stage of their history that God would even show them a greater solidarity. D. Dorr argues that the very name *Yahweh* is linked to God's determination to set his people free but above all it means a God who will be with his people and whom they will recognise gradually in the course of their history³⁴. In the God of Israel we see one who, not only liberates but also offers a constant providential care even in the face of continued ingratitude and infidelity (cf. Ex. 15, 22-27, 16; 17, 1-7)³⁵. Israel's dealings with their God taught them that he was a "God of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in kindness to the thousands generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin..." (Ex. 34, 6-7). That his love is without end is seen in his accompanying the patriarchs as their Father, Protector and Teacher all through their odyssey till the Promised land³⁶.

God's solidarity with his people did not end with their liberation, the long journey and precarious journey to the Promised Land. Once they settled in the land that God promised

interested in pulling the Israelites out of Egypt to abandon them. True liberation through God's intervention will therefore be more than the mere cessation of cruelty. It must bring justice, that is a deeper bond between God and the Israelites, restoring the value of knowledge, and service by directing them to him (cf. G. F. DAVIES, *Israel in Egypt*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1992, p. 60).

³⁴ The implication of the above position is that the Exodus marked the beginning and not the end of God's solidarity with his poor persecuted children. So one important attribute of God revealed in the story of the Exodus is his fidelity to his people (cf. D. DORR, *Spirituality and Justice...*, p. 87).

³⁵ N. M. SARNA, *Exodus, Book of*; in D.N. FREEDMAN (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, Doubleday, New York, 1992, pp. 689-700.

³⁶ J. COPPENS, *La notion vétérotestamentaire de Dieu, Position de problème*, in J. COPPENS (ed), *La notion biblique de Dieu. Le Dieu de la Bible et le dieu des philosophes*, Gembloux, Editions J. DUCULOT, 1976, pp. 63-76.

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them, God's solidarity for Israel took another form. As Egyptian slaves, God was on the side of Israel as a community. Now that they have settled, God's care and solidarity become focused on the most vulnerable people among the Israelites themselves. Numerous laws were enacted not only to foster solidarity among the people of the alliance, but especially to protect the widows, the orphans, the stranger and indeed the poor whose lives were precarious.

3.2.2.2. The Prophets

In spite of God's manifestation of distaste for oppression and the mighty works he did to liberate Israel, it is ironical to see that when Israel settled in the Promised Land, many of them soon turned oppressors of their own people³⁷. And once again, the God of Israel had to intervene. Just as he chose Moses to collaborate with him in the Exodus, God chose the prophets to protect the poor and weak. So we shall see who actually is a prophet? How can we situate their mission in Israel's history? Who are the principal prophets whose mission was directly linked with the problem of social justice in Israel?

3.2.2.2.1. Who is a Prophet?

The phenomenon of prophecy is a distinctive feature of biblical religion, setting biblical religion apart from other religions of the ancient Near East with whom Israel shared much in common. The Hebrew word most often translated as "prophet" is "*nabi*". The most common definition of this word is spokesman or one who speaks for or on behalf of someone. It is in this sense that Aaron is described as Moses' *nabi* or his spokesman to Pharaoh (Ex. 4: 16). So a prophet can be described as God's spokesman who, because he is conscious of his having been specially chosen and called, feels forced to perform actions and proclaim ideas which, in a mental state of intense inspiration or real ecstasy, have been indicated to him in the form of divine revelations³⁸. In religious terms, a prophet is a person, who announces a message received through a direct inspiration of a 'god' and who often

³⁷ Some of the poorest and most vulnerable like the widow, the stranger, the orphan and all poor people became victims.

³⁸J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, in D. L. PETERSEN, *The Roles of Israel's Prophets*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1981, p. 26. While God spoke to prophets through visions, auditions, and even dreams, with Moses God spoke face to face (cf. Deut.34) or mouth to mouth (cf. Ex.33).

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speaks from the fringes of a given religious institution. Since a prophet claims a direct link with the divinity as a divine herald³⁹, he can preserve a certain degree of autonomy and authority from the dominant religious and political structures of the society⁴⁰. Again, we shall observe that generally while the prophets do not seem to be acting under certain ecstasy we can state that prophets have very distinct prophetic consciousness and are able to share in the divine pathos and are able to communicate this pathos to the human scene⁴¹.

There must certainly have existed a great number of prophets, most of whose names we do not know, living and acting in Israel before the institution of the monarchy. Prophecy as an essential part of Israel's theo-political structure and as prophetic movements had their beginnings with Samuel, and his band of followers in the eleventh century at the time of transition from the era of the judges to the beginnings of the monarchy. But once Saul, and then David, established a monarchy among the peasant clans of Israel, we see the appearance of outspoken prophets in Israel. They played important part in establishing and censuring the monarchy in the name of Yahweh, by denouncing the injustices of the new ruling class. Some were attached to the court and took up their critical stance from there

³⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁰ It is the divine encounter that marks the beginning of the prophet's career. Although no two prophetic situations are exactly the same, they all tend to share a few things in common. The first is that the call is initiated by God and is often accompanied by one or more visions. Other miraculous occurrences may follow as in the case of Moses and the burning bush (Ex. 3: 1-3). The combination of these circumstances persuade the prophet that he is not hallucinating but is having contact with a living Deity. This call is always accompanied by a commission. While some prophets like Moses, Jeremiah, and especially Jonah were reluctant to take up the divine responsibility, others Isaiah and Ezekiel were eager to go for the mission. A third factor is that a prophetic mission is for others, and especially for the nation. As for content of their message, there are warnings and threats, and sometimes promises and encouragements. Most of the prophetic messages are oriented to the future and are often time bound. Here is the formal structure for understanding the prophecies in Israel:

a) Situation of distress or crisis moving God to confront a chosen person.

b) Commissioning of the person for some action or message

c) Objection raised by the person in the form of inadequacy for the task

d) Assurance of God's help, often in the formula "I will be with you"

e) A sign to confirm the commission, often with the content of the commission. (cf. D. BRATCHER, *Prophets Today?* (Internet Source: <http://www.cresourcei.org/isa61>) 10-01-04.)

In contrast to true prophets, Israel experienced a number of false prophets. These are the common characteristics of false prophets: They did not really receive any mandate in God's name, and they tell lies in God's name. They often receive false visions emanating from their own minds, they hardly predict danger for fear of falling out of favour with their audience, they therefore fill the people with false hopes. False prophets also live false lives. They steal their purported words of prophecy from one another (cf. esp. Jer. 14:10-16; 23: 10-32, Ezek. 13: 1-14; 22: 28-31, Mt. 24:24-25, 2 Pet. 2:1-3)

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 28.

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but many others who were most outspoken kept their distance from the monarchical apparatus⁴². During the centuries of monarchy, it was the prophets who kept alive the tradition of Yahweh as the God who took part of the poor. This became necessary in a society that was dominated by the ruling class who had little regard for the less-privileged.

3.2.2.2.2. Why did God Need Prophets?

The original ideal of solidarity in Israel began during the semi-nomadic period in the desert. The people were essentially pastors. The social structure of that period was centred around tribal lines. Tribal affinity in turn was founded on two main pillars namely, blood ties and secondly the extended family structure with the father of the family as a point of unity. These two groups were in turn administered by a group of elders who served essentially as guardians of social unity among the different clans. And because of the precarious nature of their life in the desert, living and acting in solidarity was obligatory since surviving as individuals then was unthinkable. Social cohesion was thus imperative.

But on settling down at Canaan, there was change in the family groupings. The tribe lost its binding power as larger village structures emerged. Solidarity was at stake. Certain passages in the book of Exodus and the Leviticus, testify to the existence of laws meant to enforce solidarity for the protection of the weak. Among the most vulnerable of the society were the immigrants (cf. Ex. 20, 22-23), the widow and the orphan who had nobody to defend them (cf. Ex. 22, 21-23). Various laws were enacted to protect the rights of the marginalized and the weak (cf. Ex. 23, 6). The poor could borrow money without any interest (cf. Ex. 22, 24) The Sabbath rest became essentially for the benefit of the immigrant and the servants so that they could have a little rest (cf. Ex. 23:12). Every seventh year the products of the farm were for the care of the poor in the society (cf. Ex. 23:10-11). In the original Israel we read, "*le devoir de solidarité clanique passe avant tout, même avant l'intimité personnelle*" ⁴³. Authors like A. Durand interpret the jubilee year as a superlative expression of this solidarity in Israel⁴⁴.

⁴² L. BOFF and G. PIXLEY, *The Bible, The Church and the Poor*, Orbis, New York, 1989, p. 41. There are indeed lesser prophets as mentioned in the book of Chronicles but they did not seem to have played significant role in Israel.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁴ The Jubilee year was commanded by God in Israel so that both the rich and the poor, the slave and the freeborn could express their common origin and dependence on God. It is also a year of favour when God

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The fundamental act of solidarity on the political level is that the ruler should be practically close to the governed. But with the institution of the monarchy, the very foundations of Israel's communal sensibility began to undergo a devastating transformation. God himself regretted Israel's request for a human king (cf. I Sam. 8, 11-17). Among other things, God knew that the future kings would abuse their powers and destroy the traditional communal life style stipulated for his people. Later events really would show that the kings of Israel greatly ruined the spirit and practice of solidarity. The need to protect the kingdom, to build magnificent edifices, to fight the enemies that surrounded them, all forced the kings to impose heavy tax and even labour on their subjects. National interest overshadowed the sensibilities and needs of the individuals⁴⁵. Again we shall remark that the situation was made worse by the fact that those who were to be the custodians of the people turned to be their oppressors⁴⁶. It is within this context that the mission of the prophets can be understood. A brief presentation of some important prophets of Israel is needed here.

3.2.2.2.3. Studying some Prophets

The people of Israel had a belief that God was involved in their ordinary history. There must have been many more prophets in Israel than officially recorded in prophetic literature. While the prophets declared that God communicated to them on various issues, the study of some prophets below shows that the matter of social justice and concern for the poor was their major preoccupation. We have summarised the message of some important prophets on this issue.

a. From Samuel to Elijah⁴⁷

Samuel was the first major prophet in Israel and after him the prophetic institution became part and parcel of Israel's theo-political reality. Indeed from the eleventh century on,

himself shows solidarity with his people. One of the greatest events of the Jubilee was the Great Pardon , *Yom Kippour*, Lev. 25, 9. (cf. A. DURAND, *J'avais faim, une théologie à l'épreuve des pauvres*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1995, p. 109).

⁴⁵ After the death of king David who was considered the ideal king of Israel, Solomon (970-933) and his son Rehoboam were to impose such unbearable burden on the people. In their protest, the people seemed to have rejected all forms of communality. This they demonstrated in the famous agitation "To your Tents O! Israel" And everyone left to mind his/her own business (Cf. 1Kg. 12, 14-16). Indeed with the institution of the monarchy, the tension between authority/power and solidarity became a problem that will perpetually plague the people of alliance.

⁴⁶ The metaphor of shepherd was abundantly used in the Old Testament to buttress the pastoral role God assigned to the leaders of his people.

⁴⁷ These earliest prophets were more concerned about the injustices and abuses by the monarchy, so they can be grouped together. Injustice does not seem to have been widespread in Israel then.

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prophets were recognised as a force in Israel when Saul and later David were building up the monarchical state of Israel. Another important prophet was Nathan who had very close links with the court of David and supported the king. But this contact with the king did not prevent the prophet from reproaching the king for his wrong-doing. After reaching the climax of the account of David's adultery with Bathsheba and the connived murder of her husband Uriah, the book of 2 Samuel 11:27, immediately introduces Nathan "who appears on the scene to rebuke David and to pronounce divine punishment"⁴⁸.

In Nathan one could see a typical role which the prophet is called to play as the conscience of the society on behalf of God. After the catastrophic failure of Saul, through Nathan, God expressed concern with the character of David's kingship; a very young institution which has been renewed by David (after the Saul). It was thus the concern to protect the kingdom that moved Nathan to intervene,

because he saw a great danger for the kingship if the holder began to take advantage of his status and began to exploit his subjects. Nathan's interference was thus mainly political⁴⁹.

Ahijah of Shiloh begins the line of prophets who stood up in the name of Yahweh and the poor against the domination of the people by the kings. Having supported Jeroboam against the revolt of Solomon, Ahijah did not hesitate to turn against Jeroboam later when the king did not seem to do the will of God. Consequently Ahijah became God's mouthpiece to announce the fall of Jeroboam's household (I Kings 14:1-18). Another prominent prophet was Elijah who fearlessly confronted and denounced Ahab for his double crime. Having killed Naboth of Jezreel, he went on to appropriate his vineyard (cf. I King 21).

In the eight century BC, Israel and Judah witnessed a period of great prosperity⁵⁰. But instead of this prosperity becoming an advantage for every one, it became a period of widespread abysmal injustice and laxity. The great prophets of this time, Amos, Micah, Hosea and Isaiah confronted quite some difficulty in denouncing the oppression which was widespread in Israel.

⁴⁸ G.H. JONES, *The Nathan Narratives*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1990, p. 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.100. Through the prophet Yahweh exposes the contrast between Yahweh's goodness to David and the king's despicable behaviour. In anointing, delivering and establishing him on the throne, Yahweh had entrusted him with power, but David abused that power and status by killing Uriah.

⁵⁰ This period lasted till the end of the Syrian invasion in the 734 BC.

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b. Amos

Samaria was ruled by the dynasty of Jehu, the king who restored the cult of Yahweh after the deviations of the Amorites. But this restoration of divine worship seemed to emphasise the letter and not the spirit of the rites. At this point, Amos emerged to show how love of luxury was making a mockery of their devotion to Yahweh. For Amos, injustice to the poor was incompatible with true cult. Amos charged the rich and the powerful with all forms of corruption/oppression against the poor. The poor were humiliated in the society, and in the market places, traders swindled, by lowering the bushel, raising the shekel and tampering with scales. In short they bought the poor up with money and the needy for a pair of sandals and were thus directly abusing and even attacking God (cf. Amos 8:5-6).

What baffled Amos most was that even when the poor sought redress in the law court, the rich and powerful would buy up the judges through bribery (cf. Amos 5:12). But while the poor were oppressed and regarded as non-existent, the great people of Israel lay on ivory beds, over-ate, bawled songs, drank wine by bowlful and used the finest oil for anointing themselves, caring not at all for the ruin of Joseph⁵¹. Amos however warned the oppressors that such blatant inhumanity to man will be punished with exile to some unknown destination (cf. Amos 5:26; 6: 7). There will indeed come a catastrophe that would bring the whole nation to an end with no single person escaping (9:1-4). Amos' message to the oppressors of Israel can be summarised:

Amos, the firebrand among the prophets, will always be remembered as one of the greatest champions of the poor and the oppressed. He fought for their rights and exhorted his co-religionists to work for what is commonly known as social justice⁵².

⁵¹ The ruin of Joseph is a symbolic language referring to the collapse of Israel (Amos 6:4-6). The main concern of Amos here is how insensitive the rich people of alliance are towards their fellow citizens. If this was done by foreigners, it could be understood, but here the very rich live side by side with the destitute. The ruling class do not bother about their 'brothers in the covenant'. The poor do not even seem to exist as their main concern is to get maximum comfort and amusement. Amos wonders how the rich could claim to belong to the alliance while refusing an important element expressed in the Code of Deuteronomy: "There shall be no poor among you" (Deut. 15: 4).

⁵² R. de MENEZES, *Voices from Beyond, Theology of the Prophetic Books*, S. Paul's Publications, Mumbai, 2003, p. 81.

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c. Micah

Micah was a country prophet. Through him Yahweh denounced the oppression of the poor and sought to show his solidarity with them. Micah discovered that the root cause of the problem was in the ruling class of Jerusalem. They are populated with corrupt princes, judges, priests and even prophets (cf. Mic.3:9-12). They tear the skin from the people and their flesh from their bones (cf. Mic.3:2). God's reaction against oppression of the poor could be very rapid and devastating. As a result of these acts, "Zion will become a plough land, Jerusalem a heap of rubble and the mountain of the temple a wooded height" (3:12). When God has acted, the social order will be totally reversed and the disposed peasants will take over the lands which are held presently by greedy landowners. When Yahweh has done all this those who abused their wealth and exploited the poor will in turn become the underdogs with "no one to measure out a share in the community of Yahweh" (2:1-5).

d. Hosea

In the prophetic activities of Hosea, we see a more forceful denunciation of the use of religion to accumulate riches⁵³. The ruling class, under the cloak of *Yahwehism* seemed to be worshipping Baal, the god who was thought to bring rain and material abundance. In the face of these, Hosea laments a religion that has become prostitution and its rites carried out not for love or reverence to Yahweh but for gain⁵⁴. The fact that corruption, perjury, lies, slaughter, theft, adultery, violence and murder had become part and parcel of the society can be judged by the lack of the knowledge of God reigning in the country (4:1-3)⁵⁵.

What worried Hosea most was that even priest and kings who were called to protect the poor and the weak were party to this state of affair. Since the people do not want to heed the call for the reign of God's justice, Hosea prophesied the fall of the monarchy as the only solution. Once the monarchy and luxury have been put aside, the people can once more live their good life with Yahweh (2: 16-25).

⁵³ The prophet Hosea has the distinction of being the only prophet from the Northern Kingdom who worked in his homeland.

⁵⁴ C. BOFF and G. PIXLEY, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

⁵⁵ Hosea spoke about the love of God more than any other prophet. But how Israel will ignore this love and refuse to show same in concrete reality baffles the prophet. If they really know God, they will love him and if they loved him they will keep the covenant terms. And one of the main demands of the covenant is to honour God in fellow human beings especially the poor and most vulnerable among the community.

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c. Isaiah

Isaiah was another important prophet whose peculiarity lay in his coming from the capital, Jerusalem. He denounced the rulers as murderers and seekers of bribe to perpetuate injustice (1:21-26). The leaders have failed in their duty to care for the widows and orphans who hope on them (10:1-4). Like Micah he denounced the greedy and unjust acquisition of land to the detriment of the poor. However, Isaiah continued to hope that God will send a king who will promote justice and defend the poor (11:1-9). He looked forward to a society in which one class of people will not exploit the other. Isaiah showed himself God's special emissary by reminding those who oppress the poor that cult without love is nothing or even offensive to God. "In other words cult that is not an expression of one's life is meaningless. One cannot stretch out one's hand to commit murder and then stretch them out before Yahweh in prayer"⁵⁶.

f. Jeremiah

While Hosea announced that kings were responsible for the injustice and oppression in Israel (cf. 5: 1), Jeremiah identified king Jehoakim as a typical oppressor. "In the case of king Jehoiakim not only did he not care for the crimes his subjects were committing but he himself was one of the greatest perpetrators of injustice in the land"⁵⁷. The king was building palaces and was making his fellow men work without paying them wages (cf. 22:13-19). It was for this blatant exploitation, oppression and slavery of his subjects, that Jeremiah was bold to announce that the king will be punished and even at death. He will receive the funerary honours of an ass, which means having no rites at all (cf. Jer. 22: 18-19).

Jeremiah equally disagreed with the reforms of Josiah describing it as false (3:6-13). According to him, by the device of the ruling class, even the temple had become part of a system of exploitation of the people. Crimes are perpetually committed against strangers, widows and orphans through these deceitful practices (7:1-15). So great was the anger of Yahweh for the injustice done against the poor that when the Babylonians attacked the city of Jerusalem, Yahweh supported Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon in his attack on the

⁵⁶ R. de MENEZES, op. cit., p. 124.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

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city (21:1-10). Indeed Jeremiah never stopped dreaming and praying for an equalitarian society where the poor and the oppressed would have a place⁵⁸.

3.2.2.2. 4. Salient Message of the Prophets

From our study above we can say that the prophets played their roles in response to generally felt crises. Enacting their role as individuals apart from a group context, prophets regularly spoke in defence of cardinal values in Judaism and on behalf of God who sanctions the moral structure of the society⁵⁹. One of the central teachings of the prophets is that God is a Father of justice. The prophets show that God is interested in human life and the way it is lived in this world. God is portrayed as one who is concerned about morality, about law, about how people conduct themselves, about who is a victim and who is the cause of oppression. The God of the Bible is not a God who is aloof and indifferent to what goes on in human society and individual behaviour. The God of Judeo-Christian Bible is also presented as a God of judgement against injustice. When the Scriptures speak of the reign of God, this is a dream of an ideal society where oppression and suffering will be overcome. Despite the notion of God's universal love, the prophets (and later Jesus) portray God as one who favours the weak and champions the cause of the oppressed and the underprivileged. He is the protector of the poor. The God of the Bible can be depicted as saying: "When you attack the weak ones who are not favoured, you attack me" or put positively: "Whatever you do for the least of my children you do for me" (Mtt. 25:40).

The prophets like the priests were acting in the name of Yahweh. But while the priests engaged in cult matters, the prophets stressed the moral demands of Yahweh in line with the ethical requirements of the covenant. Their mission was on the ethical dimension of biblical religion and how it affects the well-being of the nation and its individual members. Prophets reminded priests and kings that the survival and success of Israel depended more on justice than on cultic activities, military or economic might. They felt their call and

⁵⁸ Jeremiah often combined his rebuke of the people with his prophecy of God's mercy. Even when God calls for repentance, when he seems to punish, his love remains unchanged. Given the obstinacy of Israel, Jeremiah prophesied a new society with a new covenant between Yahweh and Israel (cf. J. UNTERMAN, *From Repentance to Redemption, Jeremiah's Thought in Transition*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1987, p. 11).

⁵⁹ D. L. PETERSEN, *The Roles of Israel's Prophets*, Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1981, p. 68. Although the prophets spoke in defence of all kinds of religious and social anomalies in Israel, their main concern seems to be the plight of the poorest of the poor in Israel.

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fulfilled their mission “*par leur défense intransigeante du Dieu libérateur, par leur rigueur à dénoncer les injustices, à revendiquer les droits des petits et à annoncer le monde messianique*”⁶⁰.

3.2.2.3. Personal Inspirations from God's Solidarity in the Old Testament.

A very important note here it that the God of Exodus has something in common with the writings and commitments of the prophets. Take for instance, reading through the Exodus and the prophets, one appreciates that the prophets share with the *Torah*, a concern that ethics should be grounded in the historical revelation of the God of Israel, especially as manifested in the Exodus. So Israel was expected to reflect in their individual and collective lives the type of solidarity with the oppressed and the poor as God showed them in their own misery. They knew what it means to be poor, powerless and marginalized, and so they are called to defend the powerless of the society. When Israel failed to apply the laws that defended the poor, God sent the prophets not only to remind them of their past but to enforce his plans for the weak. So the prophets often dealt with the practical applications of social ethics in the community. They felt a special mission and were not deterred by threat nor by the often discouraging results of their mission. So since the two bodies of writing share something in common, we can then study them together so as to discover the inspirations that they offer us as theologians seeking to develop a coherent theological language for dealing with the problem of extreme poverty in Black Africa today.

3.2.2.3.1. God of the Bible is Interested in Human History

The Key idea in the study of the Exodus and God's alliance with Israel is that God is interested in human history and human condition. The Exodus negates any notion of a transcendental deity, the ‘*motor immobilis*’ of the philosophers. In the Exodus we see a God who is intimately involved in the life of the world. Yahweh presents himself as the God of history in the sense that the coming into being of the people of Israel, their enslavement in Egypt, their liberation, and the events connected therewith, are not fortuitous or the result of human endeavours, but the unfolding of the divine plan of history (Gen. 15, 13-14). The breaking of Egyptian resistance establishes God's absolute

⁶⁰ L. BOFF et. C. BOFF, *Qu'est-ce que la théologie...*, p. 64.

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hegemony over history. History is the arena of divine activity endowed with meaning⁶¹. God wants his reign, power and compassion felt in this present world⁶².

3.2.2.3.2. God Cherishes Human Freedom

The Exodus and the prophets portray an image of God who cherishes freedom. So we can say that the liberation event of the Exodus in particular is the landmark for any biblical, dogmatic and theological teaching on true liberty. When God rescues his people from hard economic, political and cultural slavery, he does so in order to make them, through the Covenant on Sinai 'a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation'(Ex.19:6). He wished to offer Israel not just freedom from oppression, but above all the religious freedom to worship him. God wishes to be adored by people who are free. All the subsequent liberations of the people of Israel help to lead them to this full liberty that they can only find in communion with their God⁶³. The major and fundamental event of the Exodus therefore has a meaning which is both religious and political. God sets his people free and gives them and their descendants, a land and a law, but within a Covenant, and indeed for a Covenant. "One cannot therefore isolate the political aspect for its own sake; it has to be considered in the light of a plan of a religious nature within which it is integrated"⁶⁴.

⁶¹ M. N. SARNA, *Exodus, Book of*; in D. N. FREEDMAN (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 699.

⁶² In the biblical traditions, the experience of the world as created by God is determined by the faith in the revelation of God in the history of Israel. It is not by itself that the world shows itself as the creation of God. It is only by revealing himself as the origin, conservator and saviour that God reveals himself as the creator of the world. It is in the light of the experience of salvation, the Exodus, the covenant and the entry into the Promised Land that Israel learnt to understand that the world was created by a good God. Israel did not learn about the world from natural theology as the Greek philosophies did. So we can state categorically that for Israel, the experience of life in general is marked and interpreted by the particular experience of God in their history his auto-revelation as 'Lord'. So from the Exodus account, we see that God is interested in what is happening in, and to the world. He works within the limitations that humans have, and creatively shapes history with a subtle hand. The agony of millions of poor people in Black Africa is of special interest to God.

⁶³ The idea here is that oppression has many facets and so is poverty. This helps us to argue most strongly that the oppression and poverty of many people in Black Africa cannot be limited to mere material considerations.

⁶⁴ SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, The Truth Makes Us Free*, 1986, no. 44. Whether the accent is on religious liberty or on the political, the decisive contribution of this book is that God is in solidarity with his chosen people and the oppressed, and he is committed to setting them free. Political freedom from slavery was the prerequisite for enjoying all other types of freedom. The laws, and the mission of prophets were God's chosen means of continued solidarity with the oppressed.

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3.2.2.3.3. There are the Poor and there are the Poorest of the Poor

The prophets have helped us to confirm that in each given society and epoch, there are the poor and there are also poorest among the poor. Our critical study of some the the prophetic writings has revealed that actually in traditional Israel society, a lot of materially poor people existed but,

there were those who were both materially, socially and politically poor⁶⁵. At that time for instance,

it is clear from the oracles of Isaiah that those who suffered the most in the legal assemblies were the widow and the orphan (Is. 1:17; 10: 1-4). While the paterfamilias was alive, the rights of his wife and children would have been protected since, he in his position as an elder in the community, would have been able to plead their cause before the legal assembly. However when the husband died, the widow and her children would have been quite defenceless and would have remained at the mercy of the community at large. In general, therefore, the widow was among the landless members of society and, as such, she is often mentioned along with the alien and the poor and commended to the mercy of the community at large⁶⁶.

Since the election of Israel the solicitude for the weak was always emphasised. That the prophets often mentioned the widows, orphans, strangers etc. among the most pitiable in Israel shows that their precarious existence was obvious to the community (cf. Amos 5,7. Jer.5, 28. Hos.12, 9). It is not surprising therefore that consideration for the widow and the orphan is constantly enjoined in the Old Testament, and the law sought to legislate for their support. For example, they were given the privilege of gleaning the fields after harvest (Lev. 19:9; 23:22; Deut. 24: 19-22). Again triennial tithe was ordered to be distributed to them to relieve their needs (Deut. 14: 28; 26:12-15). We can thus appreciate the role of the

⁶⁵ Despite the laws meant to defend the poor by fostering solidarity for their cause, their condition in Israel was often miserable. It is in the context of their wretchedness that we can locate the mission of the prophets for them. Although hated and attacked, the prophets kept on reminding Israel that having the poor in the midst of wealthy Israelites was a scandal and an insult to God. The poor man is pleasing to the Lord not because the Lord loves poverty but because the poor is a victim of human greed and so has only God as his friend, defender and hope. God looked on the mistreatment of the poor as an affront to His sovereignty over Israel. The poor like widows and orphans become the servants of God and it is God who protects them. Even in matters of cult, the prophets insisted that sacrifices, canticles, abstinence, etc are displeasing to God if they do not go alongside with justice to the poor (cf. Jer. 7, 23). Indeed to know God became synonymous with understanding the plight of the poor and being engaged to ameliorate their condition. It is in the light of the above that the prophets can be described as the voice of God and the voice of the weak and the oppressed (cf. A. GELIN, op. cit., p. 19). We can say that today in increasing religious fervour in many Black African societies have failed to be translated into practical quest for justice.

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prophets better when we realise that "oppression of the widow and the orphan was strictly forbidden, and a severe punishment would overtake those who transgressed this provision"(Ex. 22:20-30)⁶⁷.

3.2.2.3.4. God Detests Injustice

When God announced to Moses, his intention to liberate Israel from the bondage and oppression in Egypt, little did Israel know that later the same God would protest against the practice of injustice among his own people. So one can say that whenever and wherever injustice is done, God feels directly concerned. So whether it was in Egypt, in Israel or in Black Africa, the Exodus and the prophets depict an image of God, who not only frowns at injustice. Above all he would do all it takes to tackle its cause and liberate the oppressed and the victimised.

3.2.2.3. 5. Identifying the Root Cause of Poverty is Important

Another important contribution of the prophets of Israel was that they tried to identify the root cause of the problem of poverty. In their society just as in many Black African societies today, it is obvious from the indictments of the prophets that one of the most rampant vices was bribery and corruption. It is also probable that the courts were often no more than pliant instruments in the hands of the rich and powerful citizens of the community (cf. Is. 5:23; Mic.3:11; Ezek. 22:12). It is not always clear from the accusations of the prophets whether the bribes was being offered by the litigant to the judge to decide cases in their favour, or whether the bribe was offered to the witness as an inducement to distort evidence so as to condemn the innocent. No matter how one interprets it, one thing is common in the lamentations of the prophets: "The normal process of law would have been undermined and the justice due to the poor would consequently have been neglected"⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ This concern for the protection of the widow and the orphan was a common phenomenon in the Near East and it reflected in some of the oldest law codes. Elaborate provisions were made to enable the widow inherit the property of her deceased husband. It is quite striking that such provision are conspicuously absent in Hebrew legislation. There is no explicit provision to permit a childless wife to succeed to the inheritance of her husband's estate. So the childless widow could be described as one of the poorest poor in Israel since she would have lost all claims to her husband's estate thus remaining socially disadvantaged, mentally crushed and economically destitute (cf. E. W. DAVIS. *Prophecy and Ethics*, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 198, p. 103).

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 93. Although laws existed prohibiting the acceptance of bribes (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19), the situation must have been so bad as to dint the legal system itself. The plight of the poor and the marginalised

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3.2.2.3.6. God Needs Human Collaboration to Accomplish His Divine Purpose

Another important inspiration from the above study is that despite the omniscience, omnipresence and omnibenevolence of God, he appears rather helpless in dealing directly with human beings. This explains why he often sought the collaboration of human beings to carry out his plans especially in redressing injustice and fostering freedom. In the Exodus Moses played this role. Since God needed him, none of his excuses could exonerate him from the mission. God kept reassuring him of his divine assistance. Another interesting fact from the story of the Exodus is that Moses needed to be convinced to undertake the mission. So even when Moses complained about his lack of eloquence, God proposed to him yet another human agent in the person of Aaron:

Then the Lord became angry with Moses and said, 'Have your not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he is an eloquent speaker. Besides, he is now on his way to meet you. ... You are to speak to him, then, and put the words in his mouth. I will assist both you and him in speaking and will teach the two of you what you are to do (Ex. 4: 14-15).

In New Testament also we see that Jesus himself sought the collaboration of human agents to accomplish his mission of announcing and fostering the Kingdom of love and justice in the world (cf. Lk. 9:1-6). We can therefore say that God needs human collaboration in addressing the challenges facing the poorest of the poor in Black Africa.

3.2.2.3.7. Fostering Justice May Entail some Confrontations

Yet another inspiration from the book of Exodus and the prophets is that challenging injustice and unjust social structures may sometimes demand confrontation and courage. Moses knew this from the beginning of his call and was pusillanimous. He was frightened of confronting pharaoh hence his persistent excuses. When eventually, the avenue for dialogue seemed exhausted, there was indeed a confrontation between the forces of God represented by Moses and Aaron, and the forces of oppression incarnated in pharaoh. In the prophets also we see that many of them were speaking from the margin of the society and were not always popular. They knew however that confrontation may be necessary in their

was so precarious that appeal to the court would have served but little if the judges were themselves guilty of judicial misconduct. The law designed to prevent such abuses would simply not have been discharged.

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challenge. Therefore in a region like Black Africa, where there are many dictatorial regimes and institutionalised injustice and corruption, to seriously tackle the problem of oppression and the root causes of extreme poverty may not avoid confrontation with these anti-Kingdom forces⁶⁹.

How God's solidarity reached its apex in the New Testament will now be explored in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ through the Kingdom which he proclaimed.

⁶⁹ In the last part of this work we have further developed this theme under nonviolent engagement as a principle of praxis of solidarity.

CHAPTER THREE: THE KINGDOM MESSAGE FOR THE POOR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

3.3.0. Preamble

Our study the Exodus and the prophets has shown among other things that, the God of the Bible is 'living' and is involved in the history of the world and especially the history of his people. In the New Testament, we shall see that the central message of Jesus is about the Kingdom of God. And if the Kingdom discourse is the core message of Jesus, then the concern for the poor and solidarity with them is the central message of the Kingdom discourse. So in this section we shall examine the expression Kingdom of God¹, and see briefly the three main paradigms in the Kingdom theology. As for the texts to be studied, we shall limit ourselves to some texts in the Gospel accounts as well as Paul's teaching about the Kingdom. Due to their peculiar contribution to the Kingdom discourse, we shall see how some liberation theologians understand the meaning and task of the Kingdom.

In this section also, we shall show that in the ministry of Jesus, the Kingdom was proclaimed mainly through teaching and some concrete prophetic actions. His miracles and some of his acts of solidarity with the poorest of the poor and the oppressed will be examined. How the early Church continued these acts of solidarity will be briefly presented. By way of summary, we shall see the salient message of the Kingdom discourse. Finally how the Kingdom discourse inspired theology of solidarity with the poorest of the poor will be studied.

3.3.1. Historical Background to the Kingdom Discourse

Israel's notion of the Kingdom of God underwent many stages of evolution. But from a very critical reading of the Kingdom see that there are a number of strands of Old Testament theology that could be basically used to synthesise the whole salvific activity of God under the comprehensive scheme of the Kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, right from the time Rudolf Schnackenburg wrote his classical work on the Kingdom of

¹ A careful reading of the New Testament reveals that there are two expressions used almost interchangeably in discussing the theme, Kingdom of God. These two expressions are *Kingdom of God* and *Kingdom of Heaven*. The reason for using these expressions can be explained. It is Matthew who almost invariably speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven, while Mark and Luke speak of the Kingdom of God. This is to be understood because Matthew was the most Jewish of the Gospel writers and such is the reverence of the strict and orthodox Jew that he would never, if he could avoid it, take the name of God upon his lips. As such Jews often used periphrasis to avoid uttering the name of God in vain (cf. Ex. 20:7). In this sense the nearest periphrasis for God in Matthew's writing was heaven. Mark was not so strictly Jewish and Luke was a Gentile who was not bound by the Jewish conventions and customs.

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God, some theologians have been trying to decipher the main trends in Israel's understanding of the nature of God's reign². A synthesis of the main evolutionary understanding of the Kingdom in the Old Testament is this. First, there is the belief that God is King over all creation. The second is that as a result of the Covenant, he is the King over the chosen people in a particular way. The third notion is that there is the hope of a final decisive intervention of Yahweh on behalf of the chosen people in the near future. This is in order to fulfil the promise he made to his people. The key ideas in these three main interpretations are presented below.

3.3.1.1. Yahweh as King of All Creation

The Old Testament describes Yahweh as King, first and foremost, when seen as the Creator, the King of the universe, the Victor over the monster of chaos, the Sustainer of the universe. The creation narrative is a typical example of God's show of power. He made all things and governs them after defeating the chaos of nothingness that stood in opposition to creation³. And just as Yahweh could dominate the forces of nature, soon Israel reasoned that he (Yahweh) was the ruler of all nations as well, hence, they acclaim him King of all the nations. Soon this notion found its way into the liturgical celebrations of Israel as we read in the Psalm: "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:3).

3.3.1.2. Yahweh as King over Israel

The second key idea in the Old Testament discussion of the Kingdom of God is that Yahweh is the King over his chosen people. This sovereignty over Israel is experienced in Israel's history especially through such events as deliverance from slavery in Egypt, guidance through the perilous journey of the wilderness, the conclusion of the Covenant, the gift of the land, the protection from the surrounding nations etc. It is from the above stance that we can appreciate better the fact that: "This experienced care, protection and

² Many theologians and exegetes now regard Schnackenburg as a major contributor to the Kingdom of God discourse.

³ There is growing evidence that the hygiographers' creation account and God's dominion over it was influenced by the mythologies of the ancient Near East (cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God, The Message of Jesus Today*, Orbis, New York, 2002, p. 27).

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love for the chosen people found expression in images and metaphors which described God as shepherd and redeemer, but most distinctively as father or mother”⁴.

At first there was no express mention of the Kingdom of God in the sense of temporal dominion. But there were references to the rule of God over his people. Indeed right from the covenant scene in Sinai, God personally took responsibility of guiding, protecting and leading Israel. Even when God appointed some human agent for a specific mission to Israel, or with the institution of the monarchy, such a person always acknowledged his (own) vicarious rule over Israel since God was the Supreme Ruler. The case of Gideon is a typical example (cf. Jgs. 8: 23).

3.3.1.3. The Dawn of Eschatological Hope for God’s Rule

With the institution of the monarchy and the socio-political transformations which Israel found itself, there was to be a fundamental change in Israel’s original vision of itself. The disillusionment with the monarchy gave shape to a renewed theology of God’s definitive reign over Israel. The prophets played decisive role in projecting an ideal society in which the will of God will be done. The return from exile offered another impetus showing that a final divine intervention and salvation was possible. It is at this moment that the notion of Yahweh’s reign started taking a more pronounced eschatological tone. Schnackenburg encapsulates the situation thus: “The fundamental idea in the future hope of Israel is always the kingly rule of Yahweh, his victorious advent as king and his reckoning with his enemies. Yahweh’s victory is followed by the manifestation of the kingship. He appears as king and takes possession of his reign”⁵.

The frustrations following the return from exile went further to enkindle the eschatological hope of absolute divine intervention and rule. And in later Judaism, with the experience of all kinds of foreign domination, every Jew yearned ardently for God to liberate his people. The main features of the eschatological kingdom of Israel’s expectation at this moment in history were three. First, the place of this divine intervention is this world, even if the spiritual and moral dimensions were not denied.

⁴Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *God’s Rule and Kingdom*, in Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

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Secondly, the awaited kingdom is expected to remove all hindrances to God's kingship in this present world. Thirdly, the coming of the reign of God is seen as God's own activity which human beings can only accept graciously.

But the final restoration of Israel would not be realised without Israel accepting it willingly and actively. Later one sees that in the Apocrypha⁶ and in Qumran⁷ communities, the expectations were high for the coming of the kingdom as an eschatological reality. So the idea underlying all conceptions of the Kingdom seems to have been that God is the King of the universe, past, present, and future. It was expected that the Kingship of God would be manifested in an eschatological Kingdom. The common denominator of all eschatological formulations was the rejection of any foreign rule. The bringing about of the Kingdom of God, whether by a messiah or a direct heavenly intervention, implied the destruction of kings and the mighty of this world.

3.3.2. Three Paradigms of the Kingdom

There are three approaches or paradigms in understanding the meaning of the Kingdom of God. The first approach treats the Kingdom as a *concept*, the second as a *symbol* and the third as an *event*.

3.3.2.1. The Kingdom as a Concept

There has been a traditional effort to treat the Kingdom of God merely as religious concept. Here the effort is to present it as one clear and consistent idea that can be defined perfectly. Various efforts to define the Kingdom in categorical terms have however run into difficulties. This is more so when one discovers that in the New Testament, Jesus himself never defined the expression with specific concepts. His use of the expression was more descriptive and metaphoric than definitional in nature. The nearest attempt at a definition of the concept is seen in St. Paul's letter to the Romans where he writes that: "For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness

⁶ This is a Jewish religious sect which lived apart and is often associated with some scriptural writings.

⁷ This is Jewish sect who lived a very separate life, even keeping themselves apart from the Jewish religious officials in Jerusalem. They didn't want much to do with other people, and according to most accounts, most people didn't want much to do with them. What eventually happened to them is not known.

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and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom.14:17)⁸. Other attempts at a definition, present the Kingdom of God as “the final, eschatological, and decisive intervention of God in the history of Israel in order to fulfil the promises made to the prophets”⁹.

All the above efforts at a definition are beset with difficulties. The first difficulty lies in the present-future tension which is central in the message of Christ. In that case no one can really give a perfect definition of the expression whose future nature is yet to be fully realised and understood. Another difficulty lies in the fact that the idea of the Kingdom and ruling as used in the Bible is best understood within the context of the ancient world of oriental monarchs and monarchies, their traditions and cultures. Hence the expression cannot easily be explained in relation to modern systems of government¹⁰. Another problem at a definition can be traced to St. Paul’s writings where the reign of God and the reign of Christ seem to be in a dialectic tension. This is why Schnackenburg acknowledges that the expressions Kingdom of God, Reign of God, Sovereignty of Christ, Reign of Christ etc, are all closely related and must all be explained and interpreted correctly and together for any meaningful investigation into the Kingdom of God discourse¹¹.

3.3.2.2. The Kingdom as a Symbol

Since a categorical definition of the Kingdom remains problematic, some scholars seek to abandon it and adopt the *symbol* paradigm. For such scholars, “the Kingdom as a concept is regarded as too narrow and misleading. The idea of seeing the Kingdom as a symbol

⁸ Although this offers useful clues to the discussion, one observes that righteousness, peace and joy are more or less characteristics of the Kingdom rather than its totality. And again such a definition tends to emphasise the private, individual, interior and purely spiritual dimension of the Kingdom while ignoring other perspectives as we shall see later.

⁹ J. FUELLENBACH, op. cit., p. 55. Other attempts include that the Kingdom suggests a theological concept that attempts to get behind Jesus’ own understanding of the expression, determining its definitive meaning for all time. Or again the Kingdom must be an apocalyptic concept which in turn must have completely determined Jesus’ understanding of the reign of God.

¹⁰ D.C. DULING, *Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven*, in D. N. FREEDMAN (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol.4, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 49. The influence of the cultures of the ancient Near East in understanding the idea of the Kingdom of God must be underlined here. For the Jews, in concrete terms, the idea of the Kingdom of God means ruling, not so much the actual Kingdom as the sway of the king as such. So it is only within the context of the spirit of theocracy that dominated the Old Testament that one can begin any serious interpretation of the idea of the Kingdom of God.

¹¹ Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Règne et Royaume de Dieu. Essai de théologie biblique*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1965, p. 8.

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evokes an entire series of ideas, because a symbol, by its definition, presents or elicits a whole range of concepts”¹². Understanding the Kingdom as a symbol has far-reaching significance especially in Israel. It evoked in the people of Alliance the remembrance of God’s activity, as Creator and Lord of creation, Father of Israel, and ultimately as agent of God’s final intervention at the end of history. Understanding the Kingdom as a symbol would equally help us appreciate why Jesus himself never defined it. Instead he often described it symbolically as epitomised in his copious use of parables. In conclusion scholars who propose a symbolic interpretation of the Kingdom argue as follows: “The symbol stands for a very rich and multifaceted religious experience expressing a personal relationship with God”¹³. As a symbol, the Kingdom evokes the idea of God as Creator, Provider, Omnipotent, Omnipresent and especially as a Protector and Liberator¹⁴.

3.3.2.3. The Kingdom as an Event

Some theologians, especially liberation theologians, believe that the Kingdom is neither a mere a theological concept nor a religious symbol. Rather it is an event, a decisive event in the history of salvation when God has broken into human history to change it. The manifestation of the Kingdom in this world takes place, in and through the ministry of Jesus, where it manifests itself visibly in human history¹⁵. Here the Kingdom is understood as an experience, an event in the present and does not remain a mere hope for the future. Through his miracles, Jesus demonstrates that God wants to repair the broken human existence so that salvation must be seen as ‘integral and all-embracing’. Understanding the Kingdom as an event becomes a motivating factor in such theological endeavours as liberation theology which seeks to make it felt by the oppressed and the poor¹⁶.

Whether understood as a concept, symbol or an event, a number of features characterise the Kingdom. For G. Friedlander the idea of the Kingdom of God implies the universal

¹² N PERRIN, *Jesus and the Kingdom Language*, in J. FUELLENBACH, op. cit., p. 55.

¹³ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁴ We shall see later that the symbol of the Kingdom as liberation is central to liberation theologians’ interpretation of the Kingdom of God. We have discussed below the Kingdom of God in selected liberation theologians.

¹⁵ J. FUELLENBACH, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

¹⁶ We see more on this under liberation theology.

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rule of God, based on the greatest of all facts, that He is the only Lord, God, Creator and the Father in whose image we have been made¹⁷. And for R. Schnackenburg, the Kingdom of God is that which ushers in the Reign of Christ and his Sovereignty over the whole world¹⁸. From the foregoing, one sees that it is better to study the Kingdom in terms of symbols, images, descriptions and even experiences rather than as a unanimously accepted concept. Now we shall show that if announcing the Kingdom of God was the central message of the Christ, then the central message of the Kingdom is showing God's mercy and love especially to the poorest of the poor¹⁹.

3.3.3. Biblical and Theological Discourse of the Kingdom in the New Testament

We have noted earlier in the introduction to this work that one of the most audacious claims of Jesus was that he was the Messiah sent to bring to fulfilment, God's promises to his people. He was to do this especially through inaugurating the reign of God in the world. The implications of this claim to our enquiry will be seen below especially when we see some theological interpretations about the Kingdom.

3.3.3.1. The Messiah and His Kingdom

In the New Testament, Jesus seemed to take the notion for granted since it must have been something every Jew understood. We shall see below however that in the New Testament Jesus raised the phrase Kingdom of God to such high level that only by it can we understand the whole of his salvific mission, especially as it concerns the poor and the oppressed.

The traditional difficulties involved interpreting the real nature of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament resurfaced again in the New Testament²⁰. It was indeed in the midst of expectant hope in Israel that Jesus started 'proclaiming' the Kingdom of God (cf. Mtt. 4, 17). The notion of the Messiah was one of the main titles attributed to Jesus of

¹⁷Cf. G. FRIEDLANDER, *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount*, KTAV Inc. New York, 1969, p. 137.

¹⁸Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, op. cit., p. 8

¹⁹ We shall equally show that while the Church is a principal agent for proclaiming the Kingdom and its values, everyone is called upon to propagate it.. The importance of the Kingdom theology to our present study will equally be presented.

²⁰Cf. G. HUGHES, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics. Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Examination of Biblical Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 66.

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Nazareth. Other titles include, Prophet, Lord and the Son of God. By the time of Jesus the social conviction of the Messiah's role, the understanding of what he was to do, had become more or less crystallized and remained stable, at least for a time. The prayers, belief and aspiration of the Jews of a Messiah-King in David's lineage can be summarised thus:

The Messiah was to be a royal, holy figure who would be associated with victory over gentile oppressors, with the saving and restoring Israel, and with establishing the reign of God's righteousness and justice²¹.

So at the end of the line of the prophets stands John the Baptist who can be said to live at the turning point in the history of salvation. In Jesus of Nazareth John sees the *kairos*, the hour of judgement and grace standing at the door²². He saw that the reign of God will now obtain a might which it has not possessed till then. All previous expressions of God's reign were anticipations of this decisive divine intervention which will shape the reign of God beyond human history (Mt. 3: 2-12). In his preaching John warned that the reign of God will come as a judgement upon human self-glorification. Only those that will escape its terror are those who devote themselves to the Lord in repentance and conversion. And to indicate that the decisive reign of God is about to begin, John points to its universal significance. Henceforth consanguinity with Abraham is no more sufficient for membership in the impending reign of God (cf. Lk. 3:16f.).

John having prepared the way for the Messiah enabled Jesus to take up the expectations and hopes of the people about the reign of God. Theologians differ in their interpretations of Jesus' emphasis on the Kingdom characteristics. For some Jesus freed the Kingdom of God from the political-nationalistic elements, and gave it a universal validity. According to this opinion, Jesus' conception of the Kingdom as opposed to the hopes of the ruling powers of his time would antagonise him with them. "After the initial high hopes with which his proclamation of God's reign was greeted, his supporters grew

²¹ A. R. ECKARDT, *Reclaiming the Jesus of History. Christology Today*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1992, p. 18.

²² It is in the light of this new expectation that the whole question of Christology is hinged today. This is why many of the evangelists try to trace Jesus back to the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, the descendant of king David (cf. D. JOHNSON, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies- With Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 117).

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fewer and fewer, until the nations' leaders changed over to open enmity and determined on his death, in the conviction that it would be in the interest of the people if Jesus died, in order that nationalistic expectations of the Kingdom should not be destroyed"²³.

The apprehension of the leaders and the ruling class over the claims of Jesus is understandable given the political oppression of the people at the time of Jesus. More than ever, broad circles understood it as release from the yoke of the Romans, as material wealth and as earthly security. It was equally understood as the restoration of Davidic dynasty and the creation of this into a world dominion. While some radical groups like the Zealots advocated the use of brutal force to expel the Romans, a greater majority counted upon a direct intervention by God. Recounting the Exodus experience, the people believed that God could not remain silent for long, and leave his people to the humiliation of a godless and lawless world power. So while they believed that God was always at work in his world, they nonetheless directed their hopes to the transformation of the state of affairs. A closer study of some gospel texts will further elucidate the theme of the Kingdom in the Gospel tradition.

3.3.3.2. Examining some Gospel Texts more Closely²⁴

The New Testament shows that at least the disciples of Jesus were among the ardent Jews who were expecting the Messiah and who found him in Jesus of Nazareth. By requesting privileged positions when Jesus would begin to reign as king, James and John expressed their faith and hope that he was the Messiah (Mk. 10:37, Mtt.20:21). However, while some took Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus' attitude, or claim to the title appears very ambivalent. At least he never used the word to describe himself. Even when Peter proclaimed him to be the Messiah, Jesus was happy, but immediately forbade his disciples to proclaim it abroad (Mk. 8:27-30; Matt. 16:13-16; Lk. 9:18-20). Even when Jesus seemed to accept the title of Messiah or King, he was only responding to the question of Pilate if he was the king of the Jews. "You have said so" replied Jesus (Mk. 15:2; Mtt. 27: 11; Lk. 23:3).

²³ M. SCHMAUS, *God and His Christ*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1975, p. 25.

²⁴ These texts offer us very relevant insights into our discussion.

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The gospel according to Matthew made a significant contribution to the Kingdom enquiry. Matthew's teaching on the Kingdom of God can indeed be grouped under three main headings. The first is about the righteousness of the Kingdom (cf Mtt. 5-7). The second is about the Kingdom coming at the end of time (cf. Mtt. 24, 25) and the third about the Kingdom essentially being a mystery (cf. Mtt. 13). In Matthew especially, the quest into the meaning of the Kingdom is equally tied to the theology of the judgment in the Gospels. It is more pronounced in Matthew's Gospel where the Son of man will come to give his final verdict on the whole world (cf. Mtt. 25:31ff). Matthew here introduces and accepts the usual apocalyptic-eschatological scenario that the new age will witness both the general resurrection of the dead and the re-creation of the cosmic order.

These events will lead to the all-important universal judgment over which Jesus as the Son of Man will preside on his glorious throne. Here, whether this new order will be here in this present world or in the form of mystical reality, is not known. One sees the difficulty that confronted Matthew in making precise the nature of this kingdom where Jesus will reign. This difficulty emanates from the fact that the evangelist's vision of the judgment and the figure who oversees it, is a combination of his Christian and Jewish Son of Man sources.

Mark does not show evidence of a univocal understanding of the Kingdom God. In his Kingdom theology, one finds that the Kingdom language is difficult to fit into the common eschatological view of the concept. For Mark, the so-called 'little apocalypse' certainly suggests future events of national (catastrophe) and personal (judgment) significance²⁵. So if Mark did not seem to present the Kingdom as closing in according to the expectations of Israel, then another interpretation is that it is man himself that is advancing towards the Kingdom. Here again the spiritual-visible tension of the Kingdom appears. Another difficulty in understanding Mark's Kingdom discourse is that he speaks of "receiving the Kingdom as a child would"(10:15), and 'entering the Kingdom' (10:25-

²⁵ The present-future tension indeed found its full expression in Mark. For instance the enthusiastic crowds that accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem were shouting 'Blessed is the coming of the Kingdom of our ancestor David' (11: 10), and shortly afterwards Jesus assured an earnest scribe that he is not far from the Kingdom of God (12:34). Yet again, Jesus often indicated the uncertainty of the actual advent of the Messiah.

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26), the one and same thing²⁶. Mark uses the powerful deeds of Jesus as one of the main testimonies that Jesus was the Messiah, even if this messiahship meant something different before and after the cross and the resurrection. This is to say that the idea of the Messiah and the Kingdom initially understood in terms of the redemption and restoration of Israel, become more of an ideal type than a historical reality.

So Mark demonstrates that the Kingdom announced by Christ remains a mystery. Although a number of remarkable things will accompany its arrival, the time of these events is not known to anyone, even to 'the Son of man' (cf. Mk.13, 3). They are neither imminent nor far off. Here the dilemma facing the readers of Mark is whether really, temporary issues strictly determine the nature of the Kingdom teaching. But in all these, from Mark, one notes that "service, powerlessness, poverty, humility, and solidarity became the chief characteristics of God's anointed; these same feature disclose the nature of God"²⁷.

3.3.3.3. The Kingdom of God in Pauline Writings²⁸

Paul more than any other New Testament authors offers us important insights about the nature of the Kingdom and how it could be inherited.

First, Paul underlines that the Kingdom of God remains a mystery. It seems tied to the decisive moment when Jesus will come to institute his dominion over creation at the *Parousia*²⁹. As a mystery, Paul seems to accentuate this Kingdom as something more spiritual. Paul's emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the Kingdom shows that he does not see it as exclusively meant to benefit the Jews only but is meant for the whole humanity and indeed the whole creation. It was when Paul started preaching such a spiritual Kingdom (which was not restricted to the Jews but was also available to the

²⁶ W. REISER, *Jesus in Solidarity with His People. A Theologian Looks at Mark*, The Liturgical Press, Collegiville Minnesota, 2002, p. 208.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

²⁸ Paul's special contribution and insight to the Kingdom discourse makes works of special interest to our enquiry so we restrict ourselves to the salient elements in his theology of the Kingdom.

²⁹ This refers to the second coming of Jesus.

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Gentiles), that his conflict with the orthodox Jews began³⁰. For Paul, it is spiritual, since it is a Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 14, 17). It is a realm of spiritual redemption from our sins (cf. Col. 1, 13f). As a spiritual phenomenon, one is expected to suffer many tribulations before being admitted into the Kingdom³¹. It is a Kingdom won not by physical force but by the victory of the cross³². The Kingdom is not about empty talking, but rather a spiritual power. The Kingdom of God is not just a matter of eating and drinking, but is characterized by justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 14, 17).

That the Kingdom remains a mystery for Paul is seen in his struggle to present it comprehensively using many expressions, metaphors and examples. Sometimes it is seen as 'justification' (Gal. 2:16-21; Rom. 3: 21-26), or as 'salvation' (Rom. 1:16, 5:9, 10:10), 'reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 5: 10-11, 11:15) and 'redemption/ransom' (Rom. 3: 24, 8: 23). Sometimes the Kingdom is seen as 'freedom' (Gal. 5:1, 13; 2 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 8:2), 'transformation/metamorphosis' (2 Cor. 3:16-18; Rom. 12:2) and 'new creation' (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5: 17). It is further presented as 'expiation' (Rom. 3:25), 'new life' (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 6:4), 'adoptive sonship' (Gal. 4:4-6; Rom. 8:14-16), 'sanctification' (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11), and finally as 'forgiveness/pardon' of sins (Rom. 3:25)³³.

Sometimes again, Paul presents the Kingdom as a gift. Paul remarks that the Kingdom is God's gracious gift to humanity, since God himself has freely invited us to share in this Kingdom and glory (cf. 1 Thes. 2, 12). He maintains that God has mercifully and powerfully snatched creation from the kingdom of darkness and transferred it to the Kingdom of his beloved son. But this gift does not seem to be unconditional since Christians are expected to avoid all vices so that they can inherit the Kingdom of God (cf. Gal. 5, 21). Another observation in Pauline theology of the Kingdom is that Paul seems to

³⁰Cf. R. RICHARDSON, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 102. For majority of the Jews, the establishment of the Kingdom was for the favour of Israel, against the Gentiles who often oppressed them.

³¹Cf. P. DOLBE, *The Paradox of Salvation. Luke's Theology of the Cross*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 234.

³²Cf. T. B. SAVAGE, *Power Through Weakness, Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Cor.*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 153.

³³J. A. FITZMYER, *A Christological Catechesis, New Testament Answers*, Paulist Press, Bombay, 1991, p. 83. One can observe that it is only Johannean soteriology and Christology distinctive with its own emphases that can come near to the richness of Pauline Christology.

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be battling with a conceptual tension between the God reign of God and the reign of Christ. Sometimes it is the Kingdom of *Christ* and at other times it is the Kingdom of God³⁴. All through his epistles, he is seen trying to reconcile the role of God and that of the Messiah as interwoven within the eschatological hopes of Israel and the Christians. That Kingdom of God is a mystery intricately interwoven in the person of Jesus Christ is seen in the complex Pauline theology of the Christ-event.

Another remark about Paul's understanding of the Kingdom is that even though it has a very deep spiritual dimension of a universal magnitude, its effect is supposed to be experienced in the historico-temporal sphere. His letters are replete with modes describing the effects of the Christ-event as having both spiritual, interior and mystical effects, as well as all encompassing cosmic significance. It will be such a great even that will transform the whole of creation and not just modifying it. When it dawns, everything in the world will be subjected to Christ and then, Christ in turn will submit everything to the Father at the end of time (1 Cor. 15, 24-28). And of special interest to Paul is the reality of suffering in the world. According to Paul, the greatest impact and hope of the Kingdom is that it will bring an end to suffering and even death that accompanies it, both which are the perennial enemies of man will be destroyed for ever at the coming of the Kingdom (cf. Rom. 8: 11; Cor. 5: 4)³⁵.

The highlights of Pauline theology of the Kingdom is very much tied to his understanding of the mission of the Messiah and will be fully realised that the *eschaton*³⁶. And of special interest to us is that Paul emphasized that the Kindgom of God will have a direct impact in the world and more precisely, it will deal a lasting blow to suffering and other forms of injustice in the world. While the orthodox Jews were still hoping and praying for this event to occur, Paul signals that the process has even begun in the person and life of Christ. This is why Paul's Christology and his theology of the Kingdom can be summarised thus:

³⁴We should note that Paul's theology of the Kingdom of God is tied to his doctrine of the *Parousia* and the final judgment.

³⁵ It is here that we can situate Paul's theology of the cosmic Christ.

³⁶ The final coming of the Messiah.

‘La pensée de l’apôtre Paul est christocentrique. Le Christ en constituant le centre, c’est à partir du mystère du Christ qu’elle pénètre et s’approprie tout le contenu du message chrétien du salut. Ainsi la théologie de Paul est-elle dominée par la conviction de l’action actuelle du Kyrios Jésus...Le Règne présent du Christ est donc ce qui vient en tout premier lieu, avant même la prédication apostolique primitive du salut’³⁷.

Having examined Pauline theology of the Kingdom, we shall further present the key contributions of theology of liberation since this has direct influence on our present enquiry.

3.3.3.4. Liberation Theology, the Kingdom and the Poor³⁸

The Kingdom discourse as a principle of action both individually and communally has been taken up by theologians since Vatican II. Interestingly it is mostly theologians from the developing countries that are championing the new appreciation of the Kingdom message not just as a concept, or symbol but also as an experiential event that will lead to a historical liberation’. Today these groups of theologians are technically referred to as ‘liberation theologians. Originating from Latin America, a context that is almost entirely Christian, these theologians could not reconcile the ideal promises of the Kingdom of God with the gross human suffering experienced by the majority of people in that continent. What contributions has this theology made in the interpretation of the Kingdom of God and its relationship to the problem of suffering in general and poverty in particular?³⁹

3.3.3.4.1. G. Gutierrez and the Kingdom of God⁴⁰

The relation between the Kingdom of God and the present human history is the point of departure in the theology of G. Gutierrez . How could one explain to the poverty stricken masses that the Jesus of the Bible who went about caring for the needy, can not help them out of their present predicament?

³⁷ R. SCHNACKENBURG, op.cit., p. 239.

³⁸ We are restricting ourselves to the contributions of G. Gutierrez and L. Boff who are two important proponents of this theology.

³⁹ We have to state immediately that Latin America and Africa are paradoxically so different and yet so similar in their historical, political and economic experiences such that given few changes, one can apply many of the cases in Latin America and liberation theology to Africa.

⁴⁰ G. Gutierrez is, a Peruvian theologian and one of the founders of liberation theology. Like many other liberation theologians, his concern is how to interpret the salvific message of Christ to the poor and oppressed especially, in his native Latin America.

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From the above dilemma, G. Gutierrez delves into exploring the blessings and promises of the Kingdom to see if they are purely eschatological and spiritual, or if they can be felt in history. How then did he interpret history? In the Acts of the apostles, God made it clear to Peter in a vision that the whole of creation has now been sanctified (cf. Acts 10, 15). The traditional dichotomy between the history of salvation and profane history has been overtaken consequently. There are no two histories but one. The very theology of Incarnation shows that Christ has reconciled in himself everything in the world. This leads Gutierrez to reject all dualism between body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity⁴¹.

God initiated salvation as a gift to man. But man has a vital role to play in response to this gift. Gutierrez sees man's collaboration with God for the promotion of the Kingdom of God already taking place in history through liberation⁴². The Kingdom of God is already taking place in historical actions that will lead eventually to the total liberation of creation. Our author thinks then, that by engaging in liberation efforts, one is destroying the root causes of oppression. By so doing, one is already playing a role of fostering the Kingdom of God⁴³. When he speaks of history, Gutierrez thinks essentially of human beings in this world, what they are doing and what we are doing to them. History is the place of man's encounter with God and with his neighbour⁴⁴. Gutierrez's position can be summarised thus: Each person is the living temple of God. We meet God in our encounter with others; we encounter God in our commitment to the historical process of humankind⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Cf. R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 124. What Gutierrez is saying could be seen in the book of Genesis. At the end of his work God saw that everything he had created was good. Christ came precisely to restore creation to its original state. This means that Gutierrez expects a new world order as a concrete evidence of the Incarnation blessings (cf. Gen. 1: 9).

⁴² It is when liberated from the inimical forces that hinder his growth, that man can blossom as the Creator ordained.

⁴³ Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *The Truth shall Make You Free...*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ In the Old Testament, God was encountered in the tent, the ark, the temple etc. But in the New Testament God has decided to encounter man in human beings. Henceforth human beings are the best temples to encounter God. Whatever we do to any of our brothers and sisters in history we do it to God (cf. Mtt. 25: 40).

⁴⁵ Cf. R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 126.

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G. Gutierrez does not however mean to say that the Kingdom is a purely historical phenomenon. The Kingdom has an eschatological dimension. In Jesus, the promise of God is already fulfilled. But this fulfilment is not yet complete. God's promises and history are forever projecting into the future. This creates a situation termed permanent mobility. The promises of God, instead of being regarded as past events, become the propelling forces that animate human beings in history. Here the future gives meaning to the present reality. From the above, Gutierrez argues that any act of injustice or oppression in this present history is radically opposed to the Kingdom of God and all that it stands for. He sees in the prophecy of Isaiah (66, 17-22), the establishment of the Kingdom of God where evil will be defeated and justice, peace and joy will triumph as part and parcel of God's plan⁴⁶. The implication of what Gutierrez is saying is that history is to be understood as one, and God is actively and personally involved in it.

3.3.3.4.2. L. Boff and the Kingdom of God: Its Nature and Implications in History

Although one can say that L. Boff does not present a systematic theology of the Kingdom of God, his contributions on this subject are found in many of his theological reflections as we shall see below.

a. Nature of the Kingdom

Boff's theology of the Kingdom of God is based on his understanding of the very person and mission of Christ. According to him, "the proclamation of the Kingdom of God constitutes the core of his message and primary motive of his activities"⁴⁷. Boff traces the historical background of hope and anxiety in Israel from where Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom can really be corrected interpreted⁴⁸. Boff sees in the powerful deeds of Jesus Christ the signs of the Kingdom because "the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing good news"(cf. Lk. 4:18). To show that these are the unmistakable signs of the

⁴⁶Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *Toward a Theology of Liberation*, in A. T. HENNELLY (ed), *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*..., p. 76.

⁴⁷ L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer, The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, Orbis Books, New York, 1988, p. 54.

⁴⁸ The prophets especially Joel 3:11-15; Isaiah 63:4; and Malachy 4:1-5 proclaimed with confidence the coming of God's Kingdom when Israel will be redeemed and reconciled to God. At the time of Christ various movements had emerged trying by their various ways to accelerate the decisive reign of God (cf. L. BOFF, op. cit., p. 57).

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Kingdom which the prophets predicted, Jesus sent word to John Baptist on that effect (cf. Lk. 7:18-23) and to his audience he said, "today in your hearing this text has come true" (Lk. 4:21).

From the above understanding of the Kingdom, Boff now seeks to describe, define and interpret the real meaning of the Kingdom. He presents it as an event by arguing that the "Kingdom does not refer here to a territory but to the divine power and authority that now in this world, transforming the old into new, the unjust in to just, and sickness into health"⁴⁹. He sees the Kingdom as,

*l'aboutissement heureux en Dieu de la totalité de création enfin libérée de toute imperfection et pénétrée par le Divin qui la réalise absolument. Le Royaume parachève le salut dans son stade final*⁵⁰.

Aware that Jesus himself did not give a clear definition of the Kingdom of God Boff affirms that "the Kingdom is something understood to a certain extent and yet at the same time hidden and desirable"⁵¹.

He equally sees the Kingdom as a process that is already emerging and becoming present in the very person of Jesus, in his words, in his liberating practices. These are however open to a tomorrow when the Kingdom will arrive in absolute fullness⁵². This present-future characteristic of the Kingdom leads Boff to further describe it as a joyful state, celebrated in the present, but at the same time remains a promise to be realised in the future. As for the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church, Boff holds that the Kingdom encompasses the Church. He argues that while the reality of the Kingdom will affect the whole world, the Church remains part of the world. But the Church through the power of the Spirit has received the Kingdom in a very explicit way in the person of Jesus Christ. The Church thus becomes a privileged place for celebrating the presence of the Kingdom in the world. However, he maintains that the Church is not identical with

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 57.

⁵⁰ L. BOFF, *Eglise, charisme et pouvoir*, Lieu Commun, Paris, 1981, p. 8.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 58.

⁵² L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, p. 59.

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the Kingdom but the “sign” and “instrument” for the accomplishment of the Kingdom in the world⁵³.

From the above conviction that God is ever at work, Boff holds that history should then be taken seriously as an arena of grace where God is actively operating. There is thus a guaranteed tanshistorical end of all things, and this he calls the “eschatological Kingdom of God”⁵⁴.

b. Implications of the Kingdom Discourse in History

Boff sees a number of characteristics of the Kingdom announced by Jesus. The first is that it is universal, which means that it embraces all things. Secondly, the Kingdom is structural as it entails the revolution of status quo. It does not just modify them but gives them a radically new existence. Thirdly the Kingdom is definitive. It defines God’s ultimate and final will leading to a new heaven and a new earth hence Jesus exclaimed to his followers: “Happy the eyes that see what you are seeing” (Lk. 10:23).

In all these Boff is battling with the eschatological and the present tensions in the Kingdom theology. This is why he ends his discourse eventually by affirming that the “the Kingdom must be understood as a process: It is already emerging, it is becoming present in the very person of Jesus, in his words, in his liberating practices, and at the same time it is open to tomorrow when its absolute fullness will finally arrive”⁵⁵. Till the eshaton when the Kingdom will arrive in fullness, Boff juxtaposes the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan⁵⁶. Another characteristic of the Kingdom according to Boff is that it is “constructed in opposition to the Kingdom of Satan and to the present existing diabolical structures”⁵⁷. So for Boff, all the structures that promote oppression and dehumanisation of man, producing destitution in all its forms are examples of the anti-Kingdom forces. But he is optimistic that in all these God “is powerful enough and

⁵³ Cf. L. BOFF, *Eglise, charisme et pouvoir...*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, p. 61.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁶ For Boff, the Kingdom of Satan is especially represented by many diabolical structures of sin that dehumanise people.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

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merciful enough to transform this frustration into possible path of realisation. Creation is not derailed, because God will finally conquer and reign"⁵⁸.

For Boff, man has an active role to play in the Kingdom project⁵⁹. For him the Kingdom of God is like a joint venture between God and man. Man is called to help in the construction of this Kingdom firstly by fighting against all the 'anti-kingdom' forces in the world. So Kingdom of God is already being realised wherever man seek justice, fraternity, mutual pardon and especially where life is being promoted. Even though the Church is not identical with the Kingdom of God, Boff, acknowledges that it a privileged place for fostering the Kingdom values⁶⁰. Indeed by introducing the idea of the Kingdom as a project, Boff tries to reconcile the tensions between creation and redemption, time and eternity. As a project, every action is decisive towards its ultimate realisation. It is here that Boff also introduces the idea of the Kingdom as a task and calls for the praxis of "struggle" towards delivering the victims of poverty and injustice from marginalisation⁶¹. Thus like G. Gutierrez, Boff holds that the Kingdom values being promoted in history give us a foretaste of the fully- realised nature of the kingdom at the end of time⁶².

While man is called to participate actively in fostering the Kingdom values, Boff indicates the sign(s) that will announce its gradual arrival. He holds that Christians can discern the signs of and infallible criteria that signal the arrival of the Kingdom: This is when the poor are evangelised, that is, when justice begins to reach the poor, the dispossessed, and the oppressed. When bonds of fellowship, of harmony, of participation, and of respect for the inviolable dignity of every person are created, then the Kingdom of God has begun to dawn. Whenever we do away with the social structures that facilitate the exploitation of one people by another, whenever we do away with the system that

⁵⁸ Cf. Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁹ Project here is used metaphorically to designate a future establishment under process of realisation.

⁶⁰ Cf. L. BOFF, *Eglise, charisme...*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Cf. L. BOFF and C. BOFF, *Salvation and Liberation, In Search of Balance Between Faith and Politics*, Orbis Books, New York, 1988, p. 12.

⁶² The position of liberation theologians that man has an active role to play in fostering the Kingdom values will be explored further when we consider the Kingdom as a God's gift and human task.

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foster master-slave relationship, whenever justice dawns in the world, then the Kingdom of God is beginning to burst forth like the dawn⁶³.

The above criterion will be visible especially as a new social order for the Kingdom God is not only a spiritual reality but also a universal revolution of the structures of the old world. Boff's conviction is based on the belief that "the incarnation of the eternal Son of God in Jesus possesses a supereminent heuristic significance: God the Son has assumed unto himself the totality of human life, including its infrastructure dimensions-its biological, economic, social, personal, religious moments, and so on"⁶⁴. Freed from oppression, creation can then appear in the presence of God in its ideal form⁶⁵. And because the Kingdom is the 'absolute reality', it includes all things both sacred and profane, the Church and the world, man and the entire cosmic order. This idea of an entirely new social order in history is what is Boff calls the utopia of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom will be fully realised when we experience the total liberty of all humanity. This liberty will be enjoyed in the place of work, in the provision of health facilities and in the respect and promotion of peoples' cultures⁶⁶.

While accepting the spiritual and invisible elements of the Kingdom of God, Boff warns against any undue spiritualisation of the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed. It is a universal reality so he rejects any attempt to privatise the Kingdom and reducing it to the intrahuman dimension. For him, a 'regionalisation' of the reign of God in terms of some ideology, or even in terms of religious ideology "is tantamount to perverting the original meaning of the reign of God in Jesus' intention"⁶⁷. He concludes that the reign of God inaugurated by Christ is integral, historical and eschatological⁶⁸. The strategies for proclaiming the Kingdom will be examined now.

⁶³ L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, pp. 61-62.

⁶⁴ L. BOFF and C. BOFF, *Salvation...*, p. 54.

⁶⁵ ID., *Qu'est-ce que la théologie...*, p. 88.

⁶⁶ Cf. ID., *op. cit.* p. 154.

⁶⁷ L. BOFF, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World, The Facts, Their Interpretation, and Their Meaning Yesterday and Today*, Orbis Book, New York, 1987, p. 14.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 14.

3.3.4. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God through Teaching and Action

In this section, we shall see that Jesus marched teaching and action in the Kingdom project. Later we shall see that the two approaches are also important in fostering solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa.

3.3.4.1. Jesus' Pedagogy: Its Nature, Setting and Method

Since we are proposing conscientization which is a form of teaching as a principle of theology of solidarity, we shall see what Jesus was teaching, where he was mainly teaching, and how he taught it.

3.3.4.1.1. Nature of Jesus' Pedagogy

The evangelists do not tell us about Jesus' childhood education but they describe him among other things as *didaskalos*, a Greek word which translates 'teacher', 'instructor', or even 'master'⁶⁹. That 'teaching' was a prominent element in his ministry is seen especially by the fact that it is strategically placed in the summaries of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. Mathew writes that he "went around Galilee, *teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the good news of the Kingdom of God, and *healing* every disease and infirmity" (Mtt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Mark also shows Jesus as teaching great crowds on the shores of the lake of Gennesareth (cf. Mk. 2:13; 4:1; 6:34). Luke frequently alludes to Jesus teaching in the synagogues (cf. Lk. 4:15; 4:31-33; 6:6; 13:10) or in the Temple (cf. Lk. 19:47; 20:1; 21:37).

Although the gospels do not give us a coherent picture of the pedagogical praxis of Jesus, they do however give us occasional glimpses of Jesus teaching the apostles or the multitude. Even in these cases, the teachings of Jesus are not always presented in a chronological order from which we may derive his educational theory. Despite these difficulties, the task of getting to know the liberating pedagogy of Jesus is not all together impossible. Presented conspicuously as a teacher, his educational project is substantially indicated in these various descriptions. Jesus' teaching does not really conform to any strictly technical pattern, whether in content or in method. Generally his main concern was always seeking a right congruency between method and content, so as to achieve the

⁶⁹ Even his enemies recognised him as a great teacher and addressed him accordingly (cf. Mtt. 22:36).

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desired effects on his audience. In all these, he saw his teaching as a critical mediation of both content and method. Below are some of the characteristics of his pedagogy.

A first important characteristic of Jesus' teaching is that he taught the multitude openly, but he generally taught his apostles privately. His teaching of the crowd made so much impression on them that he drew large crowds who come *to see* what he was doing, and *to hear* what he was teaching, and especially *how* he was teaching that. They confessed that no one has ever taught like him (cf. Jn. 7:46). As for his more private teaching, he gradually brought the apostles together and started teaching them more formally and consistently. This is no doubt because they were to be his closest collaborators, to whom the mysteries of the Kingdom would be revealed (cf. Mk. 4:11).

A second characteristic is that Jesus relied much on his own credentials as he taught. He believed that a good teacher should practice what he teaches. This is why he criticised other teachers of the Law who lacked congruency between what they taught, and what they actually practiced (cf. Mtt. 23:3). And because he believed that his credentials were from God, since the spirit of God was with him, he then could teach with authority (cf. Lk. 4:18; Jn. 16:13). Another characteristic of Jesus' pedagogy is that it was so revolutionary that he was often confronted by opponents who consistently tried to implicate him by what he was saying (cf. Mtt. 22:46). So he was often forced to be polemical in his public utterances and often outwitted them, as in the case of paying tax to Caesar (cf. Mk. 12:17).

A very important feature of Jesus teaching is that he often taught in parables. His parables are highly distinctive of the saying-materials in the synoptic gospels. Johanine tradition contains no parables strictly speaking but uses a lot of 'figurative sayings'⁷⁰. By using parables, Jesus often avoided making clear moral stipulations for his audience, but left them to internalise his figurative utterances in a process of moral reflection that would guide their conducts. He equally uses questions, he introduces dialogues, he tells stories, and these all aimed at the moral transformation of character without compulsion. To teach in parables means that he was using an open-ended way of communication that is

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

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riddled with paradoxes, possibilities and surprises⁷¹. Some of the paradoxes in his teaching include the insight that one has to lose in order to gain (cf. Mtt. 10:39) to humble oneself in order to be exalted (cf. Lk. 14:11), the first may eventually be the last (cf. Mtt. 20:16). The Scriptures note that he “went about among villages teaching” (Mk. 6:6); he “taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes” (Mk.1:22); and he taught everything in parables (Mk. 4:33). Jesus himself was aware of the enigmatic nature of his teaching methodology hence, later in his ministry Jesus said to his disciples:

Till now I have been using figures of speech; but a time is coming when I shall no longer use figures, but will tell you of the Father in plain words (Jn. 16:25).

Another important characteristic of the pedagogy of Jesus was that it was mainly done in the villages and rural settings. What could be some possible explanations for this strategy?

3.3.4.1.2. The Setting of his Teachings

Jesus had no formal teaching forum. Sometimes he taught from the boat while the crowds stayed at the shore (cf. Mk. 4:1). At other times he taught from the mountain (cf. Mtt. 5:1). He equally taught in the Synagogues (cf. 4:23). At other times Jesus taught his disciples in private (cf. Mk. 4:10-12). Despite the diverse locations in which he taught, the important point is that his educational project, according to the synoptic tradition, was a public project. It was often done in the open places and was meant for all those who were ready to listen.

It was not a formal academic teaching restricted to the members of a scribal school trained in the Law. He taught in various locations as we have seen above, but the fact that he taught in typical Jewish villages, which are rural, has a curious and indeed important significance for our present enquiry. Why did he choose to launch his mission in remote

⁷¹ J. A. FITZMEYER, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

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villages and obscure constituencies given that there were the major cities of Galilee or Judea such as Saphoris or Tiberias?⁷².

First since most of these teachings were given in the rural places, it became obvious that the immediate and most available audience of Jesus were the uneducated, the ‘sinners’ who were considered social outcasts and indeed the marginalized of the society. It is these and defenceless poor that were expecting something really ‘good’ and ‘concrete’ from the *good news*. So even though the poor are found in the large cities, Jesus knew that the villages were the natural milieu of the poor. One could also argue that Jesus chose the obscure villages, either because he was more at home at the countryside than in the ‘Hellenised’ urban settlements, or that he was avoiding a premature confrontation with the religious or civil authorities, or because he was seeking the poorest poor in their *natural habitats*.

No matter what final interpretation one may adopt, the main point is that the teaching of Jesus was thus far removed from the intellectual elitism of the academy, or the spiritual elitism of the classical theological schools. Teaching in such milieu as Jesus chose, demands a very high degree of moral probity, spiritual and emotional maturity as well as having the sensitivities of human touch. Jesus therefore demonstrates that his teaching was not for impacting mere sophisticated doctrines, but rather an expression and communication of love to the poorest of the poor found in the rural locations.

Although Jesus had many teaching methodologies, his use of parables is significant so we shall examine it further.

3.3.4.1.3. Teaching God’s Mercy Mainly in Parables

There were many types of parables in the gospel texts but our interest here is on some of the significant ones that taught about the mercy of God in parables. These parables thus give us the image of God, and the type of Kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming. The

⁷² Cf. G. M. SOARES-PRABHU, *The Liberative Pedagogy of Jesus, Lessons for an Indian Theology of Liberation*, in F. WILFRED (ed.), *Leave the Temple, Indian Paths to Human Liberation*, Orbis Books, New York, 1992, p. 102.

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inspiration from these parables will help us in the last part of this work to propose practical charity as an expression of solidarity with the poorest of the poor.

a. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29)

This parable is an elaboration of his earlier challenge ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. The man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho who was obviously a Jew was attacked by robbers. Neither the priest nor the Levite stopped to help him until a third man, a *Samaritan* stopped and helped him. Here Jesus passed among other things, the message that compassion for strangers, and indeed caring for those in need is at the heart of the Kingdom message. Belonging to any religious group, or to any race, strict observation of the Laws of any religion or any other personal piety become less important compared to practical love for others, especially the vulnerable.

b. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mtt. 18:21-35).

In this parable Jesus teaches the importance of compassion and forgiveness. The first servant was poor and incapable of settling his debts and his master forgave him. But this same servant lacked gratitude on one hand, and lacked compassion and forgiveness as he held his poor debtor at ransom and worsened his condition by throwing him into prison.

c. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32).

The parable of the prodigal son gives us some important materials for considering the relevance of the poorest of the poor in the teaching ministry of Jesus especially about his Kingdom expressed in parables.

The parable reveals the many facets of the characteristics and conditions of the poorest of the poor. His prodigality landed him in an untold hardship where he could be classed one of the poorest of the poor, having lost both the material sustenance, emotional stability and social respect⁷³. According to John Paul II, “the inheritance that the son had received from his father was a quantity of material goods, but more important than these goods was his dignity as a son in his father’s house. The situation in which he found himself

⁷³ H. J. M. NOUWEN, *The Return of the Prodigal Son, A Story of Homecoming*, Darton.Longman.Todd, London, 1994, p. 37.

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when he has lost the material goods should have made him aware the loss of that dignity”⁷⁴.

The prodigal son has lost his family protection, he has lost his dignity of sonship and heir, he has no job, even the meanest. And now he laments: “How many of my father’s hired labourers have enough bread and even to spare, but I perish here with hunger” (15:17). To be hired as a labourer in his father’s household is the height of humiliation and shame but his extreme poverty and hunger forces him to even rejoice at the possibility of this offer⁷⁵. But in spite of all his misdeeds, at his return, the high point of this parable is expressed thus:

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him...He ordered his servants, ‘quickly bring the finest robe and put on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fatted calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life; he was lost and has been found (15:24).

This parable is significant for us. First, it reveals the relationship between ‘justice’ and ‘mercy’ for “it becomes more evident that love is transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice”⁷⁶. Secondly, the parable reveals the father’s faithfulness to his fatherhood. He sees more the humanity of his son more than the material damage he has done to him hence he calls for merriment and feasting. That the parable of the lost son is the epitome of Jesus teaching on divine mercy is best encapsulated below.

The same God who suffers because of his immense love for his children is the God who is rich in goodness and mercy and who desires to reveal to his children the richness of his glory. The father does not even give his son a chance to apologise. He pre-empted his son’s begging by spontaneous forgiveness and puts aside his pleas as completely irrelevant in the light of the new joy of his return. But there is more. Not only does the father forgive without asking

⁷⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 45.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, op. cit., nos. 48 and 49.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* no. 50.

questions and joyfully welcome his lost son home, but he cannot wait to give him new life in abundance⁷⁷.

In the above episode, the justice demanded by the elder son is overtaken by the compassionate response of the forgiving father. Although the father loves the two sons, this love expresses itself especially towards the delinquent son, such that even before he turns to God, God is there accepting him (cf. Lk. 15:11-31)⁷⁸.

d. The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31)

Another parable of Jesus that concerns the poorest of the poor is that of the rich man and Lazarus, a parable recorded only by Luke. The parable contrasts two personalities, the first was a very wealthy man who was constantly feasting. The second is Lazarus who lived in abject destitution and only survived by begging. He was often lying at the gate of the rich man unwanted, or at best ignored as he desired to be fed by the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores (cf. 16:21).

In the above parable the plight of the poor and the insensitivity of failing to show them mercy becomes an eloquent message. The final fate of both men were however decided at death, where Lazarus is said to be at the bosom of Abraham and the rich man condemned. The parable does not show that Lazarus 'just,' for the fact of his being poor, or that the rich man was condemned simply because he was rich. It is only in another parable about the last judgement (cf. Mtt. 25:31), that one can better appreciate the present teaching. The parable shows among other things, that a man's worldly condition is not the absolute test of his fate before God. It teaches that death is a common end for all and that God's judgement awaits all peoples. But above all, the rich man's pleas to warn his living

⁷⁷ H. J. M. NOUWEN, op. cit., p. 111.

⁷⁸ In the person of the Jesus Christ the original plan of God to communicate himself reached its perfection. In Christ God could then fulfil his original plan for creation through the agency of man. Christ is the historic person who penetrated time and space, and thus signalling the beginning of the absolute communication which God makes of himself; a beginning which inaugurates this once and for all, producing the irrevocable effect that it signals: The Incarnation thus becomes a landmark but not the finality of God's plans. And all these movements in the history of salvation are geared towards their apogee, towards the ultimate reign of God. And it is only the Saviour who can, and has perfected this communication and movements. On how Jesus could play this perfect role, we argue that Jesus is truly man, truly an element of the earth, he is a moment in the human history because he is born of a woman. He is a man in whom the spiritual subjectivity, the human and the finite, reside, like all of us. He is the recipient of this gracious communication which God makes of himself for all men and for the entire universe.

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brothers about the dangers of insensitivity to the poorest of the poor remains significant (cf.16:28).

e. The Parable of the last judgement or of the Sheep and the Goats (Mtt. 25:31-46).

Since we have variously made allusion to this parable in this study, we shall simply mention its relevance to our study of the poorest of the poor. In this parable Jesus presents a graphic image of the last judgment. Using the images of sheep and goat, he underscores a number of messages.

First, this parable helps us identify those we refer to as the poorest of the poor in this project. These include the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked and the prisoner. This parable is to be read together with that of the 'Wedding Banquet' where the poorest of the poor are equally described as the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame who are found in the streets and the outskirts of the town (cf.Lk.14:21). Second, it shows that good works especially to the poorest of the poor, will be the ultimate criterion for the final judgment. Third, Jesus explains his solidarity with the poorest of the poor in a very radical way calling them his 'brothers' so that whatever one does to any one of them is done directly to him (cf. Mtt. .25:40).

Meanwhile Jesus demonstrated that in the Kingdom project, teaching has to be complemented with practical actions as presented below.

3.3.4.2. Action for the Kingdom of God: The Case of Miracles and other Prophetic Acts

In the gospel accounts, we see that miracles were part of the ministry of Jesus Christ. These miracles vary in nature but their main purpose remained to demonstrate the power and love of God through the Incarnate Son. Below are the essential features of Jesus' miracles.

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3.3.4.2.1. Nature of the Miracles of Jesus

In the Synoptics the prodigious actions of Jesus are usually called *dynameis* in Greek and *miraculum* in Latin⁷⁹. Belief in miraculous happenings is a common feature in almost all religions and they generally refer to religious phenomenon that is extraordinary and astonishing and are attributed to some divine power. Miracles are usually so called because they are seen to operate above the known laws of nature. In the Gospel texts they are often translated as 'deeds of might' or 'power' (cf. Mk. 6:2, 5, Lk. 10:13; 19:37; Mtt. 13:54). In John, miracles are referred to as 'signs' (cf. 2:11; 4:54; 9:16) and 'deeds' (cf. 5:36; 10:25, 32). Indeed, by the criteria of historicity, especially of multiple attestation, there is evidence in the gospels that Jesus performed exorcisms, healings, and 'mighty deeds' that transcended normal explanation⁸⁰. These miracles coupled with his teachings gained him a remarkable popularity and following that would culminate in his eventual execution⁸¹. Below are the main characteristics of the miracles of Jesus.

First, although Jesus never wished them be made public shows, or as definitive criteria for his claim as the Messiah⁸², the hagiographers meticulously recorded them as important aspect of understanding him⁸³. This shows that they are signs and guarantees of the "new man" fully and eternally alive for God and with God⁸⁴. Secondly, these miracles often provoked controversies since they were out of the ordinary hence while the followers of Christ see his miracles as evidence of God's solidarity with the needy, his enemies interpret them as satanic by tracing them to Beelzebub the prince of the devils (cf. Lk. 11:15). Thirdly, the miracles of Jesus were closely interwoven with his identity and mission as redeemer of men. For example, when the Jews were investigating into the identity of Jesus, he simply pointed to his miracles as evidence (cf. Mtt. 11:1-5)⁸⁵.

⁷⁹ Cf. J. A. FITZMEYER, op. cit., p. 61.

⁸⁰ Both the synoptics and John independently testify about Jesus' miracles. The miracles of Jesus form part of the traditions that considered them no less important than the words of Jesus (cf. Ibid., p. 61).

⁸¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 113.

⁸² Jesus consistently refused to perform "signs" in the cosmic portents that would have satisfied the apocalyptic expectations of certain Jews.

⁸³ We shall note that the miracle traditions in the gospels have been re-thought, re-told and re-composed in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection in which they receive a new meaning.

⁸⁴ Cf. R. A. KERESZTY, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

⁸⁵ When he chided some towns and persons, for whom he performed miracles but remained unconverted, Jesus was once again demonstrating the centrality of miracles in his life and mission. About this, Jesus lamented: "Woe to you, Korazin, woe to you Bethsaida, for if the miracles (mighty deeds) that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth

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The fourth important feature of Jesus' miracle is that, being motivated essentially by love, one discovers that "unlike other ancient miracle-workers, Jesus never punished people in a miraculous way, never worked miracles for profit, and refused to work miracles for show. Over and over, again Jesus associated his miraculous deeds with his call to a faith which would believe in his power to forgive human sin and save people from the powers which afflicted them"⁸⁶. The fifth characteristic of his miracles is that they announce a new form of God's regal activity in the conquest of evil afflicting his people. These evils are experienced in sin, physical or mental illness, disasters in nature, even death itself. By possessing the power of the kingdom, Jesus clearly makes it known that a counterforce is present among human beings to cope with evil⁸⁷.

Sixthly, the miracles were essentially expression of God's mercy such that more important than the number and the extent of the cures, expulsion of devils and the wonderful deeds, the fact is that Jesus turns with sympathy and compassion to all those whom no one else turns: the weak, the sick, neglected, social rejects⁸⁸. Another characteristic of the miracles of Jesus is that he performed them for the good of others. Sometimes he did so even when the beneficiaries least expected, nor asked for it⁸⁹. In all these Jesus singled the afflicted and the oppressed out of the crowd to liberate them. And in healing the woman with haemorrhage Jesus demonstrated that his entire personality expresses God's love and care, even if he was humanly, and personally not conscious of this (cf. Mk. 5: 25-34).

and ashes. But, I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you" (Mt. 11:21-22; cf. Lk. 10:13). Also to those doubting his divine claims, he challenges. "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (Jn. 14: 11). And for Nicodemus, the miracles of Jesus proved that he, Jesus was sent by God for no one can do these great deeds except they come from God (cf. Jn. 5:36).

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

⁸⁷ Cf. J. A. FITZMEYER, op.cit., p. 61.

⁸⁸ H. KÜNG, *On Being a Christian*, cited in V. IFEANYI, *The Catholic Church and the Challenges of the Traditional System of Health Care in Nigeria*, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Rome, 1989, p. 32. The following gospel texts explicitly explain that it was compassion that moved Jesus to perform most of his healings and other acts of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. When he disembarked from the boat and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (cf. Mtt. 9:36, Mk. 6:34). Having taught the crowds for three days, and feeling their plight, Jesus stated: "I have compassion for these people for they have been with me for three days and have nothing to eat" (Mk. 8:2).

⁸⁹ These are exemplified in feeding the five thousand people (cf. Lk. 9: 10-17), in raising the son of the widow in Naim, (cf. Lk. 7: 11-17), in healing the man in Bethesda (cf. Jn. 5:1-15), in restoring sight to the man born blind even when the man knew neither Jesus nor believed in him (cf. Jn. 9: 1-17).

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3.3.4.2.2. Classification of Jesus' Miracles

The miracles of Jesus can be grouped under the following main headings: The nature miracles, Healing Miracles/casting out demons and resurrection of the dead.

The *nature* miracles include, stilling the storm (cf. Mtt. 8:23, Mk. 4:35, Lk. 8:22). Feeding the five thousand (cf. Mtt. 14: 13, Mk. 6:30ff, Lk. 9:10, Jn. 6:1), walking on the water (cf. Mtt. 14:25, Lk. 6:48, Jn. 6:19). Feeding the 000 (cf. Mtt. 15:32, Mk. 8:1). Getting the money for Temple tax from the mouth of a fish (cf. Mtt. 17:24), withering the fig tree (cf. Mtt. 21: 18, Mk. 11: 12), draught of fish, Lk. 5:1), turning water into wine, (cf. Jn. 2:1), second draught of fish (cf. Jn. 21: 1).

Theses are the *healing* miracles: Cleansing of a leper (cf. Mtt. 8:2, Mk. 1:40, Lk. 5:12), healing the Centurion's servant (cf. Mtt. 8:5, Lk. 7:1), healing Peter's mother-in-law, (cf. Mtt. 8:14, Mk. 1:30, Lk. 4:38), healing the paralytic (cf. Mtt. 9:2, Mk. 2:3, Lk. 5:18), healing a haemorrhaging woman (cf. 9:20, Mk. 5:25, Lk. 8:43), healing two blind men, (cf. Mtt. 9:27). Others include, healing a man with a withered hand (cf. Mtt. 12:9, Mk. 3:1, Lk. 6:6), healing an epileptic boy (cf. Mtt. 17:14, Mk. 9:17, Lk. 9:38), healing a deaf-mute (cf. Mk. 7:31), healing a blind man at Bethsaida (cf. Mk. 8:22) and cleansing ten lepers (cf. Lk. 17:11). Others were equally healed through the casting of the demons which was oppressing them as in the case of the lunatic in the graveyard (cf. Mtt. 8:28, Mk. 5:1, Lk. 8:26), demon-possessed mute (cf. Mtt. 9:32), and another case of casting out unclean spirit (cf. Mk. 1:23, Lk. 4:33).

Finally Jesus equally raised the dead as in the ruler's daughter, (cf. Mtt. 9:18, Mk. 5:22, Lk. Lk. 8:40). He equally raised a widow's son in Nain (cf. Lk. 7:11), and Lazarus (cf. Jn. 11:43).

3.3.4.2.3. Other Acts of Solidarity by Jesus and the Apostolic Community

Apart from his teachings and miracles, Jesus also performed other acts aimed at promoting the Kingdom which he preached. His followers continued with such compassionate acts

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which eventually become part of the identity of the apostolic community. A summary of these prophetic acts are hereby presented.

a. Solidarity with the Sick and the Afflicted

Although Jesus preached the Gospel of spiritual renewal, it is remarkable that he was even more concerned for the physical well-being of man. Matthew records the activities of Jesus in this way: "He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mtt. 4, 23, see also Mk.1, 39, Lk. 6, 17). Matthew was so impressed by Jesus' concern for the sick and the afflicted that he emphatically notes that "he healed *all* who were sick and brought to him (Mtt. 8, 16). Since some people's sicknesses were often attributed to divine retribution at the time of Jesus, Jesus takes up the defence of their rights, then, demonstrating that not all illness is as a result of sin, whether personal or that of one's forebearers, nor does it render its victims impure⁹⁰.

A critical examination of the healing activity of Jesus shows that it is integral. This means that it includes two important elements: *therapeutic* aspect and the *salvation* dimension. Each of these perspectives aims at holistic healing considered especially medically and spiritually. These two aspects of healing as practised by Christ mean an effort towards the liberation of persons from their inner struggles, conflicts and pains. They mean implanting and nurturing ways and abilities free from enslaving forces and mechanisms. The type of healing performed by Christ is characterised by the desired notion that "a healed and healthy person stands for peace and security, vibrant relationships with others and intimate communion with God. At the same time, healing is meant to allow the seeker to be free to be a person growing to greater maturity in Christ, to be creatively involved in the community and to thus become fulfilled persons"⁹¹.

⁹⁰ L. BOFF, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World...*, p. 19.

⁹¹ C. DRAGO, *Holistic Guidance, A Manual*, St. Pauls Publications, Mumbai, 2003, p. 130.

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b. Solidarity with the Hungry

The compassion of Jesus to human suffering did not stop at healing their physical ailments, neither did it stop in mere sympathy for the needy. Having taught his disciples to ask God for their daily bread, Jesus concretely demonstrated God's readiness and ability to care for the material needs of his people⁹². He knew that man does not live by bread alone⁹³. But being in full solidarity with the human condition Jesus knew also that man does not live by word of God alone. The two are indispensable for man hence having preached the word of God he still adds: "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days, and they have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away, lest they faint on the way" (Mtt. 15, 32)⁹⁴.

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Jesus knew that no matter how deep our mystical probings, or how metaphysical or abstract our thinking may be, the human being will always be dependent on food. So for him, the salvation of the soul was closely linked to the care of the human body. The stomachs of his audience thus assume an importance in line with that of the head and the heart. By feeding the crowds, even under difficult or humanly impossible circumstances, he demonstrated that:

⁹² One of the petitions of the Lord's prayer shows the concern of Jesus for the physical needs of his people. It is only when one understands the significance of bread in Jewish culture that one appreciates better the concern of Jesus. Although bread is often interpreted in terms of its Eucharistic symbolism, the Lord's prayer makes direct appeal for physical bread especially. In the prophetic tradition, Jesus like Isaiah seems to be saying: "Share your bread with the hungry" (Is. 58:7). And in the Psalms reference is made to real bread as real food when the psalmist praises God as the one "who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives for the hungry" (Ps. 146:7).

Later St. Basil would comment on the theme of bread and justice thus "The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor" (St. Basil the Great's exhortation as cited in L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, p. 84)

⁹³ In this pericope of the Scripture, Jesus demonstrated that man is an integral being. Against the notion that he is an idealist who cares very little about the Kingdom of this world, here he demonstrated that the hearers of the Word of God also need the material disposition for their continued existence. His anxiety that the tired and hungry crowd may faint (die) on the way is a very central in our proposed theology of solidarity. It is to serve as a challenge to any abstract theological enterprise that does not consider the destitution of millions of Christians starving and dying in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Matthew 4:4 must therefore be read together with Matthew 15:32 if we are to get a balanced interpretation of the two.

⁹⁴ The feeding of the multitudes in the desert appears as a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. It marked the climax of enthusiasm for the crowds, who wanted to make Jesus king in a messianic uprising. All these equally convinced Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. Mt. 16:13-20; Mk. 8: 27-30, Lk. 9:18-21; Jn. 6: 68-69).

There is no prayer or spiritual activity that takes the place of bread, or the frequency of the frequently heavy labour required to earn it and to put it on the table of the hungry. Nor can pious speech quell the hunger of a starving person... God wants us to be concerned not only with his affairs, his kingdom, his will, and his name but also with human affairs, human needs, human hunger, the desperate need for protection and salvation.⁹⁵

That Jesus fed the hungry has two implications. First it shows God's solidarity, concern and commitment to alleviating the hunger of his people. But this divine solidarity carries with it the obligation to show similar solidarity with our own hungry brothers and sisters. The significance of Jesus' actions and his commitment to alleviating the plight of the hungry place great obligation on his followers to have the same concern for those who are famishing in the world today. Today millions are dying of hunger while others have more than they need. "In such circumstances any extravagance in food and eating becomes a real sin against our needy brothers and sisters and against God. In a consumer society the petition for bread becomes a demand for conversion not only on the individual level but on the social level as well"⁹⁶

c. Solidarity with Outcasts

One of the characteristics of the poorest of the poor is that they are often excluded and marginalised by the society⁹⁷. Although this type of exclusion differs from one society to another, and from one epoch to the other, it remains one main evils that aggravates poverty. It is therefore in the light of the evils associated with this type of exclusion that one can appreciate Jesus' commitment to their plight in an effort to humanise, re-integrate them into the human society and reconciling them to God⁹⁸.

As a matter of fact, the entire ministry of Jesus was characterised by its special care for the socially excluded, often termed 'sinners' and those with great misfortunes⁹⁹. Jesus

⁹⁵ L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, pp. 75-76.

⁹⁶ J. FUELLENBACH, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁹⁷ From our definition of poverty we realised that poverty is not just the lack of material goods. It is also about powerlessness and exclusion. In the life and mission of Christ, one sees that Jesus did not stop merely at providing food to the hungry but also sought an intergral healing and inclusion of the poor and the marginalized.

⁹⁸ Although some of those socially excluded at the time of Jesus may not be materially poor like in the case of Zaccheaus, others like the lepers are typical examples of the poorest of the poor.

⁹⁹ A sinner in the Old Testament is not necessarily someone who has committed a sin against God. Since the Law is at the heart of Jewish concept of religion, a sinner is one who 'breaks or disregards the Law'.

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visited Simon who is described as a 'leper', and even ate in his house, (cf. Mtt. 26,6; Mk. 14, 3). He accepted the friendly gesture of anointing by the woman described by others as a 'sinner' (cf. Lk. 7, 36-47; Jn. 12, 1-8) Even without being invited, Jesus paid a controversial visit to the house of Zaccheaus, despite criticisms that "he has gone to the house of a man who is a sinner" (cf. Lk. 9, 7)¹⁰⁰. Although Levi and the other tax-collectors were socially excluded by others, Jesus chose him as one of his disciples and attended a feast in his house as he did with many others, an act that annoyed his opponents most (cf. Lk. 5, 29-30).

One understands this malaise in the context of the Jewish culture where eating together is the highest expression of friendship, respect and love. The act of eating with outcasts and the marginalised goes beyond the satisfaction of bodily hunger. Jesus, by having fellowship with outcasts, placed sinners on the same level as the righteous. He understood his meals with the wretched of the society, first as a sign of reconciliation and anticipation of the heavenly banquet in the consummation of time¹⁰¹. So "every meal was for his followers a symbol, a pre-representation, indeed, an actual anticipation of the meal of consummation"¹⁰².

This is understandable since the Law was intrinsically linked to the Covenant so that keeping the Law meant keeping the Covenant. So sinners were often regarded as social group of people. To belong to that group automatically makes one a breaker of the Law no matter the degree of one's personal piety and purity of life. Some of those called sinners at the time of Christ included prostitutes, tax-collectors, etc, who because of their condition lost civil rights and social status. They were deprived of the right to sit on the local councils, have lost their privilege as the children of Abraham both in the present life and in the world to come. They lost the freedom of association with other people who were called righteous by virtue of their belonging to the right group in Israel. Indeed the concept of sinner can be better understood in terms of a religious caste system. It is thus in this context that one can understand the revolution brought by Christ. By announcing that he has come to call 'sinners' (cf. Mk. 2:17), and associating intimately with them, Jesus was *ipso facto* jeopardizing his whole personality and his mission. Whether he was totally regarded as a 'sinner' because of his relationship to them is not very clear (cf. J. FUELLENBACH, op. cit., p. 146).

¹⁰⁰ His concern for the outcast and the so-called sinner was more important to him than his own personal convenience or reputation. This same concern was equally more important to him than the criticisms of the so-called righteous. Many of his parables show that he was really re-writing the religious history of Israel in favour of the least and most vulnerable.

¹⁰¹ A meal has a kind of religious and sacred character with those with whom it is shared. As a sign of acceptance and friendship the host would bless the bread, break it and distribute it to those at table. The sacred and intimate nature of sharing meal can be seen in some sects who restrict such activity to only their members who have been properly initiated and are worthy. The *Qumran* community in later Judaism is an example. Thus by eating with everyone, even sinners, Jesus was demonstrating that God's love has no frontiers and obeys no rule. These and other gestures would ultimately lead to his death.

¹⁰² J. FUELLENBACH, op.cit., p. 288.

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So beneath the visible sign of eating with the outcasts, Jesus was offering the people an unconditional forgiveness¹⁰³. So if healings and exorcisms show Jesus releasing people from the grip of the devil, his compassion to public sinners, outcasts and the poorest of the poor demonstrate the definitive sign of God's will to reconcile us to God and to one another. Through such acts of unconditional love and practical expression of solidarity, Jesus demonstrated that the reign of sin is constantly being checked and broken by the sheer fact of God's merciful healing and forgiveness. Being pardoned by Jesus equally imposes obligation on the beneficiaries. "Forgiveness is without doubt knowing oneself pardoned and loved by God in such a way and to such a degree that one readily extends the same pardon and love to others..."¹⁰⁴.

d. The Apostolic Community and the Sick

Before the end of his public ministry, Jesus demonstrated that he wished his mission to be continued by his successors. So "he called unto him his twelve apostles and gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, to heal all types of sickness and types of diseases" (Mtt. 10:1). At another occasion, he instructed them: "Whenever you enter a town and they receive you,...heal the sick in it and say to them, the Kingdom of God has come near to you" (Lk. 10: 8). St. Mark equally records that he called them and sent them out two by two with the power to cast out demons and anoint the sick to heal them (cf. Mk. 6:7, 13)¹⁰⁵.

After Christ's ascension, the apostles continued his ministry of healing and caring for the needy. Peter and John went into the Temple at the hour of prayer and seeing a lame man, they were filled with compassion and healed him (cf. Acts 3:1-8). Phillip equally

¹⁰³ B. O. MCDERMOTT describes the forgiveness motif in Jesus eating with sinners in these poetic words: "Dine with me, enter into a trusting relationship with me, share life with me, and in that dining with me you will know and receive God's accepting love, which will mean the forgiveness of your sins. No need to go through the rituals prescribed by the Law for returning to God's good graces. Simply be open to the gift which God offers you through me" (B. O. MCDERMOTT, *The Word Became Flesh, Dimensions of Christology*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1993, p. 51).

¹⁰⁴ W. REISER, op. cit., . 79.

¹⁰⁵ After his resurrection he commanded: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to all creatures...And these are the signs that will follow those who believe; in my name they shall cast out demons; they shall speak in new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink poison it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands on the sick and they shall recover. And they went forth, and preached everywhere and the Lord was working with them and confirming their word with signs" (Mk. 16:14-20).

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performed many miracles of healing and deliverance when he went to the city of Samaria (cf. Acts 8:5). Other healing and compassionate activities are recorded in Acts 9:33 where Peter heals a sick man named Aenas. At Joppa Dorcas was raised to life (cf. Acts 9:41). At Lystra Paul healed a lame man (cf. Acts 14:8), Paul equally cast out the demon that tormented a girl (cf. Acts 16: 18). He raised to life a dead man called Eutychus (cf. Acts 20:12). He also healed the father of a certain Publius. In fact, his very presence, his preaching and other missionary activities became closely associated with the compassion and power of God to heal (cf. Acts 19:11).

Apart from Paul, James expected the elders of the community to engage in the healing and praying for the liberation of the sick and the needy (cf. James 5:14). Indeed, that compassion, healing and concern for the sick and the needy was the central mission of the apostolic community is expressed in these two texts: “And by the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were wrought among the people; and they were of one heart in Solomon’s porch” (Acts 5: 12). And again, “there came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing the sick, and when they are oppressed with evil spirit, they were all healed” (Acts 5:16).

Apart from these healings, the apostolic community engaged in other acts of charity in favour of the poor and the needy in their midst.

e. The Apostolic Community and other Acts of Compassion

The early Church was deeply marked by the concern to make charity the boldest expression of their faith. Despite the obvious differences among them, they made consistent effort to share not just their faith but also their problems. This can be demonstrated from the few instances below.

In the Acts of the Apostles it is recorded that in the years immediately after the resurrection, there were already a division in Jerusalem Church between the ‘Hellenists’

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and the 'Hebrews'. This division is said to have followed linguistic lines¹⁰⁶. This major difference resulted in a tension between the two groups leading to the commissioning of the Seven Deacons who were charged to oversee that the charity mission of the Church was maintained especially to care for the most vulnerable like widows among them (cf. Acts 6:1-6).

Another expression of compassion and solidarity in the apostolic Church was demonstrated in the collection made for the Church in Jerusalem. After his vision about the Macedonian community (cf. Acts 16:9), Paul began to take advantage of his popularity (cf. Acts 16:37), to sensitise the followers of Christ on the nature and imperative of Christian compassion and solidarity. Imbued with a deep sense of mission, he organised a special collection to help the poor believers in Jerusalem church. Paul used many arguments to buttress his point on the inestimable value of Christian charity. He challenged believers to see it as a privilege to share in the suffering of others just as Christ suffered vicariously for us becoming poor to enrich others (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). He believed that such solidarity through the collection for the needy would help bind the two communities even closer so that they become in fact the true family of God. Such concern, compassion, generosity and solidarity would pass an eloquent message to non-believers about the splendour of their faith.

And to show that the call for solidarity was not an isolated case, Paul reminds believers of the generosity of Macedonian Christians (2 Cor. 8:2), as well that of the Philippians and the Galatian churches (cf. Phil. 4:16, Gal. 2:10). He reminds believers that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). In what can be called the model of solidarity Paul urges believers:

For if there is eagerness, it is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have; not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality. As it is written: 'whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less'" (2 Cor. 8:12-15).

¹⁰⁶ The Hellenists were Jews from outside Palestine, otherwise the diaspora, and they spoke Greek. They had their own Synagogues in which the Bible was read in their language. The Hebrews were native Palestinian Jews whose language was Aramaic but in whose synagogues the Bible was read in Hebrew.

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We shall end the apostolic practice of compassion and solidarity with the contribution of St. James who defines Christian faith as active love. Writing from the Jerusalem church where the rich and the poor, Jews and Gentiles congregated to worship God, James perceived more than ever the importance of charity as a cardinal Christian virtue. It is only such charity that will heal the wounds of discriminations (cf. 2:1-7), inspire care for the poorest of the poor represented by the widows and orphans (cf. 2:27), correct jealousy and selfish ambition (cf. 1:14), lead to community care for the sick (5:19-20) etc. So the unique contribution of James to the understanding of Christian compassion and commitment to the poor lies in his ability to reconcile faith and action as he urges believers: "Show love to others first and that will prove that you have faith" (James 2:18).

3.3.5. Towards a Theology of Solidarity: Inspirations from the Kingdom Discourse

We have studied the Kingdom of God especially in the New Testament. We have seen that it is the central message of Christ and every other thing he said or did revolved around it. The same is to be said of the early Christian communities, who through words and active commitment to the needy sought to advance the Kingdom. The debate about the present-future, spiritual-physical characteristics of the Kingdom shows that the Kingdom remains a mystery which no one can really grasp. But the study offers us a number of inspirations that can serve as guide in our quest for the plight of the poorest of the poor in the Kingdom project¹⁰⁷.

3.3.5.1. The Kingdom will Usher in a New Social Order

The old Testament seems to have a more radical and concrete idea about the Kingdom than the New Testament. Yet a number of New Testament writings also suggest that the kingdom announced by Christ was something very visible and concrete resulting in an entirely new social reality¹⁰⁸. This expectation becomes more pronounced for those who accept that Jesus is the Messiah. The king whom the angel Gabriel predicted in Luke 1,32-

¹⁰⁷ The idea that the Kingdom of God will bring about transformation is of special interest to an African theologian since it will offer hope to millions of poor people who are waiting to see and experience the gospel message in their concrete lives today.

¹⁰⁸ The actions and words of Jesus suggest that the expected Kingdom is something practical, visible, experiential and indeed revolutionary. From his teachings, through his miracles and his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the constant echo was "Blessed is the Kingdom that comes, the Kingdom of our father David" (Mk. 9:10). The followers of Christ hailed his royal entry into the eternal city of David as a dream realised. Luke's redaction accentuates both the royal-messianic implications of Mark's account and at the same time clarifies the nature of Jesus' messiahship. By introducing '*o Basileus*' into the citation of Psalm 118:26. Luke emphasizes more clearly than Mark, the royal status of Jesus.

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33 would reign forever on the throne of David is at the gates of Jerusalem¹⁰⁹. Such a Kingdom will oppose all forces of oppression and injustice. When this Kingdom comes, then the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven¹¹⁰. A number of scholars hold that the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus has to do with the present historical order. That Jesus desired a new reality for human beings as is demonstrated in,

his refusal to accept that things in human society are as they should be. In his healings and exorcisms Jesus is setting many of those things right, revealing through these symbolic gestures a profound vision of wholeness and peace¹¹¹.

C. Dodd, one of the foremost contributors to the Kingdom of God debate, argues that the very personality, the teachings and the ministry of Jesus Christ announce the reign of God and embody the reality of the expected Kingdom¹¹². The Incarnation is the greatest event in history and in the whole economy of salvation. Never has the sovereignty of God been so real and effective as in the person and ministry of Christ. Nothing is expected in the future that will be more decisive as the Jesus event. Dodd then concludes that God

¹⁰⁹ The difficulty in the kingdom discourse as present or future is aggravated by the fact that sometimes the evangelists themselves seem to present Jesus as a royal personality. He is presented consistently as one who has come to reign on the throne of his father David whom the Jews regard as their greatest king. In that case, how then do we understand Jesus as a king and yet speak about a future Kingdom? Does this make Jesus a mere prince who would 'only inherit the throne' at the legitimate time or does it mean that Jesus was a kind of 'an apprentice king'? How can we really speak of a king without a kingdom? (cf. G. JOHNSON, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p. 52). But this vivid and seemingly political picture still calls for clarification. Could it be that when Jesus saw that his dream of the messianic Kingdom was not to be realized on earth, he announced that he would come again and display his power (cf. Mtt 24,3,27,37), as judge with supreme judicial powers and then punish all those who resist his call (cf. Mtt 23, 39)? Could it not be argued also that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem not to establish his kingdom physically on earth but to fulfill his exodus, to complete his messianic task and assume his kingly reign at God's right hand. Moreover, the fully realized Messianic Kingdom of the Christian religion is not our ordinary holy life on earth, but a heavenly realm to which admission depends on our relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.

¹¹⁰ There is close connection between the Kingdom of God and the will of God. At the full realisation of the Kingdom, God's perfect designs and will shall reign in the world. This indeed has been the expectant hope of Israel as they pray and wait for the Messiah and the Kingdom.

¹¹¹ W. REISER, op. cit., p. 208.

¹¹² There were various interpretations among the Jewish scholars as regards the nature of the expected Messiah. There is a school of thought which held that he would be a priest-Messiah, or a prophet-Messiah, or even a slain-Messiah. The speculation about a slain Messiah held that the Messiah of Israel was to be slain in the eschatological battlefield. Perhaps this could be reconciled with the vicarious expiation that can befall a good person so that by his death others could be saved. But the rabbis did not interpret this into the Jesus-event for even if he died tragically as speculated, there was not enough accompanying proof that Calvary could be equated to a battle field (cf. G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew, A Historian's Reading of the Gospel*, Collins and Sons, London, 1973, p. 139).

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comes to meet us in history, and he sets before us the open but narrow door into his Kingdom¹¹³.

For M Schmaus who is inspired by R. Schnackenburg, the present and future elements of the Kingdom are complementary and not contradictory. In Jesus, God has already begun to reign hence the future cannot be spoken of in any way other than it opens up and illuminates the present and thus enables the present day to be a day of decision. "The reign of God is truly present dramatically, but will be consummated only in the future"¹¹⁴. For Schmaus, the Risen Lord has prevailed at one point in creation, and in so far as the Christ is the centre of creation, the total movement of the world is oriented towards him. With the resurrection of Jesus, the final future has been inaugurated and radically transformed. So to limit the influence and signs of the Kingdom to a private realm is to do a disservice to the greatest event in human history.

For L. Boff, the Kingdom is neither a mere a theological concept nor a religious symbol. It is rather an event, a decisive event in the history of salvation, when God has broken into human history to change it¹¹⁵. It is not some kind of extra-terrestrial entity that will be superimposed on this world. Nor is it a process of spiritual or internal change that leaves the outer realities looking much the same. It is the liberation of the world we live in, know, touch, smell, suffer, from all that corrupts and destroys it. The implication of the above appreciation of the transforming nature of the Kingdom is that one should not restrict the message of the Kingdom to the arena of individual soul or to a mere experience that one should have after the sojourn on 'this valley of tears'.

The message of the Kingdom challenges all believers to re-appropriate the vision of the prophets and the historical Jesus for whom the Kingdom of God means that God is King and the owner of history. The followers of Christ should anticipate, pray and participate

¹¹³ Cf. C. DODD, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, J. Nisbet and Company, London, 1965, p. 169. This is the famous theory of realized eschatology introduced into the debate by C. Dodd

¹¹⁴ M. SCHMAUS, *God and His Christ*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1971, p. 26.

¹¹⁵ L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, pp. 61-62.

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in fostering the Kingdom which will entail a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of all realities including the cosmos. Believers should be encouraged by the Christ-event to know that the transforming power of God's intervention has taken place in Christ even if it is awaiting for the final consummation at God's own chosen time¹¹⁶. Perhaps the greatest inspiration from the Kingdom discourse comes from J. Haers. He opines that the Kingdom message holds the key to the emergence of a new human family. In such such community, the poor for example will feel the pride and dignity of the children of God. According to him,

*la communauté du Royaume ne peut se concevoir que comme une communauté de tous; toute communauté qui se réduit à être communauté de quelques privilégiés produit des exclusions qui provoquent la souffrance. Le monde global dans lequel nous vivons aujourd'hui nous fait penser la communauté comme communauté universelle*¹¹⁷.

From the above, we see that our study of the Kingdom has a direct relevance to the African situation. The Kingdom is about hope, hope in the power and goodness of God, hope that God is at work in history and will bring about a new social order especially in favour of the poorest of the poor.

3.3.5.2. Teaching is an important Element of the Kingdom Project

One important element in the life of Jesus is that teaching and preaching are complemented by practical acts of love, such as healing, feeding the multitude and binding the broken hearted. It is this action-oriented pedagogy that really marked the difference between Jesus and the other teachers of the Law. "What, then is this? A new teaching? With authority, he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him" (Mk.

¹¹⁶ While accepting the socio-political and visible expectations of the Kingdom message like most of the theologians cited above, Rahner calls for a balanced appreciation of the Kingdom message. According to him, Christians might be called those who enjoy nice things, without being pleasure seekers. They are not those who make the most of the present, as the New Testament puts it. Yet they are people who accept being led further on; in the hope of higher values, they allow whatever had been given them to be taken away from them; through all this, they keep going ahead and in this way live their own lives patiently and full of hope. This they do until the whole fullness of their life that is called God, is once and for all given to them across the dark portals of death- as they had hoped (cf. P. IMHOF (ed.), *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, Crossroad, New York, 1986, p. 152).

¹¹⁷ J. HAERS, *Les conditions d'émergence de nouvelles théologies pratiques...*, p. 129.

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1, 27). The exorcisms and other acts of healing are therefore to be understood as authoritative teaching becoming deed. About this we read:

Word and deed go hand in hand in the teaching of Jesus, and one would be quite unimaginable without the other...The sharp dichotomies between spirit and matter, soul and body, word and action, preaching and social concern would have made little sense to Jesus...¹¹⁸.

From the above, we see Jesus as a model teacher who avoided both the verbalism of the unauthentic word unable to transform reality, and the frenzy activism without proper reflection associated with some so-called freedom fighter and social reformer¹¹⁹.

Again, from our study above one understands that both Jesus, the disciples and even his adversaries acknowledged that he had an extraordinary charismatic *power and authority* (cf. John 3: 2). But the authority of Jesus was of a unique type. He had no official standing in the society. He did not command the power of wealth, for he claimed to be a homeless, itinerant preacher with nowhere to lay his head (cf. Mtt. 8: 20). He was not academically schooled as the scribes and in matters of cult, he was impotent for he was not of the priestly institution of his time. But the authority of Jesus lay in his selfless and unconditional love and commitment to the poorest poor in the society for whom he was a teacher, a healer, a friend and a brother. So close did he identify with them, that the poor became Jesus-incarnate. Henceforth, whatever you do to any of these poorest poor is done to Jesus himself (cf. Mtt. 25: 40). The poor masses themselves saw in Jesus, one who, despite his authority was one with them for in him authority comes from service.

Again from the pedagogy of Jesus, we learn that a good education is the most powerful tool for revolutions and reforms. The teachings of Jesus provoke a critical awareness, which aims at the subversion of the world of his listeners. It even upsets their traditionally accepted attitudes and values. He upsets Nicodemus by teaching him that he must be born again to inherit the Kingdom of God (cf. John 3: 3). Labourers are paid the same wage for unequal hours of work (cf. Mtt. 20: 1-15). Tax-collectors and sinners have

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 103-104.

¹¹⁹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 60.

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more chances of salvation than others (cf. Lk. 18, 9-14). Priests dedicated for caring for others leave a wounded man callously on the road side while the Samaritan cares for him (cf. Lk. 10: 30-37). Gentiles are invited to the messianic banquet and the children of the Kingdom are excluded (cf. Mtt 8: 11-12; 22:1-10). A young child, after listening to the teachings of Jesus on love, on sharing, and on solidarity with the needy neighbour, surrendered his cherished loaves of bread and fishes which eventually fed thousands of starving people. This indeed is a new teaching, a transforming teaching, action-teaching.

Our last lesson from the teaching of Jesus is that it liberates his audience from the restless demon of unbridled competitiveness and insatiable greed by making them conscious of their worth. The value of the children of God does not derive from their personal ability, accumulated wealth, social status, their gender or race. Everyone is to be seen and judged from the point of view of sharing in the inalienable reality of God's love (cf. Mtt. 6:25). This is indeed the central role which education can play in a theology of solidarity. Such mental attitude will naturally promote solidarity, dialogue and concrete charity towards and with the poorest poor. It is this new vision that can curb greed, still aggression and promote brotherhood between peoples. That the historical Jesus is a model for the praxis of liberating education, we conclude:

There is more to the gospel than content and atmosphere. There is Jesus' pedagogy, too: the way in which he conveyed his proposition, and organised practice. He establishes a dialogic structure. Never is he imposing like a legalist or a moralist who is ruled by the structure of authority. He makes the most of his hearers' existing knowledge. Never does he employ power as a mediation of the reign and its message. He relies on persuasion, argumentation based on common sense, the deepest calls on one's being¹²⁰.

From our study so far, we can state that the kind of teaching which Jesus practiced does not fit into any strict pattern of didactic styles of most instructions either in the Palestine of his time or in modern way of instruction. He used various rhetorical forms drawn from his Jewish tradition and experience. His use of diverse methods including figurative devices all helped to ensure that the message of the Kingdom received popular

¹²⁰ L. BOFF, *Good News to the Poor, A New Evangelisation*, Burns and Oates, Kent, 1992, p. 79.

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intelligibility without losing its mystery nature. In general one can say that as a teaching instrument used by Jesus, “parables are a didactic device, intended to disclose an obvious aspect of the Kingdom, God, or conduct, but they are at times subtle”¹²¹. The inspiration from Jesus’ pedagogy and the importance which Paulo Freire attaches to it as praxis of liberation, will help us in formulating the first principle of theology of solidarity which is conscientization as advanced education¹²².

This inspiration comes from the realisation that in his teaching, Jesus was giving the ethical and religious guidelines in the form of conversion brought about by the acceptance of the good news¹²³. So while the theologian is expected to *preach* the Kingdom of God to the poor in the region, he is above all, called to *teach* so that through effective conscientization and transformatory pedagogy, the Kingdom will become really a good news to the poorest of the poor. Jesus’ approach remains a model and a challenge because it is only when one understands the teaching ministry of Jesus, essentially as an act of expounding God’s mercy to the most vulnerable, that one can appreciate Jesus message as a good news to the poor (Lk. 4:18). So whether he is healing the sick, feeding the hungry or teaching the crowds, love was the primary motive of Jesus Christ. This is to say that “the goodness God saw in the world after its creation reflected the goodness of the divine mystery itself”¹²⁴.

3.3.5.3. The Kingdom Demands Conversion from ‘Sin’

We demonstrated in the earlier part of this work that bribery and corruption and other forms of moral decadence are some of the root causes of extreme poverty in Black Africa. In our study of the Kingdom Jesus underscored the fact that conversion is a Kingdom imperative. Indeed the opening challenge which Jesus threw to his audience as

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 52.

¹²² We saw from this study, that Jesus had two main approaches in the Kingdom proclamation. There is the theoretical aspect and there is the practical accent. The theoretical aspect consists of the Jesus teaching about the Kingdom through a peculiar pedagogical style that was quite revolutionary. His teaching (*didaskhein*) is clearly distinguished in the gospel tradition from his preaching (*keryssein*). While he was preaching the ‘good news of the Kingdom’ (Mtt. 4, 23), he was teaching ‘the way of God’ (Mtt. 22, 16). In his preaching, Jesus was announcing God’s definitive offer of salvation to humanity.

¹²³ Note that his teaching and preaching approaches rather than being contradictory, are complementary aspects of his educational project (cf. G. M. SOARES-PRABHU, op. cit., p. 102).

¹²⁴ W. REISER, op. cit., p. 26.

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he began to proclaim the Kingdom for the poor is conversion (cf. Mk. 1:15)¹²⁵. Jesus was aware that many of the ills besetting the society and especially leading to the oppression of the poor stem from the human heart (cf. Mtt. 15:19). As a matter of fact, the New Testament is replete with important figures whose conversion made them radically new persons¹²⁶. So aware that man is in constant need of conversion, Jesus, following the pattern set by the prophets and John the Baptist, called his audience to repentance, to turn towards God. For Jesus, repentance which is a new force, is a pre-condition for entry into the Kingdom of God and the enjoyment of its blessings.

So decisive was Jesus' call to conversion that nobody is rejected, even those who are socially excluded, and condemned as 'sinners'. Through this *metanoia*, or a call to change of heart, Jesus was inviting everyone to the compassionate embrace of his Father.

So from the teaching of Jesus, we can say that solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today, demands a radical change in the society especially from Black African leaders. Just like the prophets called the oppressors in Israel to do justice to the widow, orphan and others, we can equally state that according to Jesus,

the power of sin in its many forms was the obstacle to the participation in the blessings of the kingdom. Jesus sided with the good creatureliness of both the rich and the poor and the possibility of their sharing in the Kingdom, while opposing their sin, whatever forms it might take"¹²⁷.

As for the nature of this conversion in Black Africa today, its personal and social nature must be highlighted.

The Kingdom call for conversion is a call to live in a new and better way, to relate in a better way and to worship in a new and better way. In many of his teachings and parables about the Kingdom Jesus emphasised that the Kingdom will lead to new spiritual life for

¹²⁵ Conversion is also taken to mean *metanoia*, a Greek word which can be translated 'change of heart'

¹²⁶ Peter denied Jesus three times and then wept bitterly and committed himself to the mission of Christ, (cf. Mtt. 26: 75); Zaccheus was converted from his corrupt practices as a tax collector and promised restitution (cf. Lk. 19:1-10). Mary Magdalene is said to have experienced conversion and became an ardent follower of Christ (Jn. 20:11-18), St. Paul was a convert and turned from a persecutor to an evangelist (cf. Acts 9). In the history of the Church St. Augustine's conversion became a turning point in his life leading to a great service to God and neighbour.

¹²⁷ B. O. MCDERMOTT, op.cit., p. 61.

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those who embrace it. As a spiritual phenomenon, the Kingdom is something to be realized from within, quietly and gradually, and leading to the emergence of a new man. It is in this sense that Luke makes allusion to Zech. 9,9-10 that portrays the expected king as a humble and just king who has not come to 'conquer' his enemies as other earthly rulers, but as one who will usher in peace¹²⁸.

So this spiritual Kingdom implies an interior, depth-quality of life in faith. It calls for a cognition that what God disclosed about the future is now being realized in us as believers as it awaits to find its public display later. This realisation is felt essentially within the individual hearts but also within the community of faith. This of course permits Christians to see the Incarnation as a partial eschatology, and the Jews to read the whole phenomenon in the light of continuing promise of the messianic age yet to come.

For the people in African, this call for personal conversion demands a whole-hearted turning to the person of Jesus Christ. It calls for a sincere worship of God, for pardon and reconciliation with oneself and with God. When one sees that hatred, greed, violence and corruption are some of the main causes of poverty in Black Africa today, the Kingdom message of conversion becomes more urgent than ever. And the results of this personal transformation will then express itself in one's relationship to his neighbour and to his entire community as we shall see under the social dimension of sin and conversion.

¹²⁸ This peace however is a spiritual peace not fully realizable on earth. Luke goes on to confirm that this kingdom has not come. This he does in the parable of the talents (cf. Lk.19, 11). As spiritual phenomenon, the Kingdom is presented as a reality where admittance is through repentance (cf. Mtt.4,17, Mk.1,15). To inherit it one's righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Mtt. 5, 20). It also involves an active faith so as to fulfil the divine will (cf. Mtt. 7,21). It will be something that will transform the human heart so that he becomes docile to divine plans. But this design cannot be achieved if man with his freewill resists the divine project. The great obstacle to realizing this project is man's sin and pride exhibited in preferring his own will to that of God. When there is a genuine conversion, man's kingdom of pride, (*malchuth zaddon*), will be completely overthrown as a sign that the messianic age has dawned. The proud, *zedim* and *minim* who oppose God's will as revealed in the law (cf. Mtt.7, 23), and by their sinful arrogance that hinder the development of universal peace and justice on earth will be overcome. The argument here is that it is only those who do the will of God, who obey his rule that are the sons and daughters of God. And since it is only the sons and daughters of God that will inherit the kingdom of God, the implication is that the blessings of the Kingdom of God will be available to individuals depending on their personal dispositions. This of course contradicts the other conception of the Kingdom as a universal spectacular phenomenon described in the Gospel of Matthew where there will be earthquakes and a whole lot of cosmic cataclysm which will follow the coming of the son of man in that decisive final eschatology. Here it is love of enemy and an entirely new social relation that will both usher in, and mark the Kingdom (cf. J. PIPPER, *Love Your Enemies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 77).

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Catholic theology teaches that sin has both personal and social dimensions. To speak of conversion from this type of sin, one has to understand its nature and causes¹²⁹. So what is social sin? It is a product of economic, social and political structures that result in misery and dehumanisation of the most vulnerable. Some authors describe it as a type of 'in-built societal agents of marginalisation'¹³⁰. For John Paul II, the peculiar thing about social or structural sin is that human beings are responsible for creating these immoral and destructive structures¹³¹.

In Black Africa like many developing regions of the world, a number of institutionalised practices serve as agents of dehumanisation of man and so against the Kingdom values¹³². One can think of institutionalised corruption, favouritism and nepotism used by the rich and the oligarchs to serve one another, to marginalize and pauperise the most vulnerable of the society¹³³. So structural sin can be described as the cultural context of sin that hinder individuals and society from hastening to the Kingdom vision¹³⁴. So when the Kingdom demands conversion from social sin, it is equally calling for collaboration, reconconciliation and solidarity between the children of God in the society. Just as nobody is excluded from this call to conversion, none is equally excluded from the blessings it promises because,

the gift offered by Jesus to both the rich and the poor was the blessing
of the reign of God. That blessing consisted in their radical acceptance

¹²⁹ Indeed social sciences have helped us realise that there are structural mechanisms in society that exceed all personal responsibility and decisions. Individuals and groups find out today that there are sins which they 'absorb' from the environment in which they find themselves.

¹³⁰ This includes all forms of manipulation by the rich and powerful of using information technologies in order to mould public opinion to their own wishes or to propagate their political, cultural or economic ideologies for sustaining their exploitations (cf. P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), op. cit, p. 134).

¹³¹ Cf. CCC, no. 1869.

¹³² Medellin and Puebla Conferences describe the dreadful condition of poverty in their continent as caused by structural sin. One may really wonder if social or structural sin is as a result of individual egoism or product of it. If one holds that human egoism is the cause of unjust social structures in the world, then education and moral conscientization of people become a priority. But if one holds that unjust social structure elicit egoistic tendencies in humans, then the priority becomes change of social structures. While pacifists may hold to individual conversion of the oppressors as the key to a just society, social reformers and activists call for a radical reform of the society to make people more human. But the truth seems to lie at the middle of these extreme positions. Individuals are products of society and vice versa. Individual conversion should go hand in hand with social reforms.

¹³³ In the earlier parts of this project, we have already discussed corruption as a major cause of poverty in Nigeria.

¹³⁴ One can only imagine how the Islamic law called the *Sharia*, in Nigeria and Pakistan, the caste-system in India, the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia and Rwanda have affected the lives of millions. This is against the Kingdom values and vision.

by God, leading to forgiveness of their sins and conversion to the values of the Kingdom¹³⁵.

3.3.5.4. The Kingdom Calls for the Promotion of Peace, Justice and Love¹³⁶.

The debate whether the Kingdom of God is a spiritual experience or has temporal significance seems to be settled in a compromise. So today, we can say that apart from the spiritual demands of the Kingdom like conversion from sin, there is the Kingdom imperative of promoting other human values. This is what John Paul means when he states that,

certainly, the Kingdom demands the promotion of human values, as well as those that can properly be called 'evangelical' since they are intimately bound up with the Good News¹³⁷.

Of all the Kingdom values which Jesus preached, perhaps peace, justice and love need to be promoted urgently in Black Africa today¹³⁸. A brief presentation of these Kingdom values and why they are needed urgently in the region can be made.

Discussing the Kingdom value of justice is very urgent in Black Africa today. This is because, the increasing religious fervor in the region does not seem to translate into concrete actions of justice. So we can say that "the critique of the prophets is located here. It is directed precisely against elaborate liturgical feasts, the construction of altars and temples, the practice of fasting, and the pilgrimages to traditional shrines. These are no longer seen as expressing true religion. Rather they are used to avoid the real issues and to soothe the conscience by believing that Yahweh might genuinely be pleased with this kind of relationship"¹³⁹.

¹³⁵ B. C. MCDERMOTT, op. cit., p. 61.

¹³⁶ Perhaps these are the values most needed in Black Africa today.

¹³⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, no. 19.

¹³⁸ In what seems to be the only definition of the Kingdom in the Bible, St. Paul explains that the Kingdom is not just eating and drinking but justice, peace and joy. It is presumed that joy can be achieved when there is justice and peace so we shall examine these first two elements of the Kingdom. This means that the Kingdom message brings joy and happiness to the world and especially the poor. Although compassion is not explicitly mentioned by St. Paul in his apparent definition of the Kingdom value, from the very example of Christ, we shall include compassion as a Kingdom value which is needed urgently in Black Africa today.

¹³⁹ J. FEULLENBACH..., p. 158. The biblical usage of justice is about action and relationship. It implies acting in the right way in order to achieve or maintain right relations with God, oneself, neighbour, society and indeed the whole of creation. A just man or woman is one who respects one relationship in the aforementioned directions. Justice is said to exist when everyone respects his or her commitment to others and when everyone is treated fairly in the society. In biblical tradition, justice is closely related to the social nature of man without which common life is impossible.

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We can indeed say that justice as demanded by Yahweh, preached by the prophets and emphasized by Jesus in the Kingdom message is essentially a mutual bond which links persons together in a community of mutual responsibility and mutual rights. It is the prime characteristic of the Covenant relationship which binds God to the people of Israel and the people to each other. Indeed in biblical tradition “the scale on which the justice of the whole society is weighed is the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the aliens. When they are exploited and oppressed, neither worship of God nor knowledge of God can be true religion”¹⁴⁰. The Kingdom message challenges believers to “hunger and thirst for justice” (Mtt. 5:6). Followers of Christ should imitate him who was extremely sensitive to any kind of discrimination and marginalisation, be it religious, moral, social, cultural, racial, national, or sexual¹⁴¹. Isaiah’s words to oppressors of his time, remains relevant in addressing the oppressors Black Africa today:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? Says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts;...Bringing offering is futile; incense is an abomination to me...Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates;...(Rather) learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Is. 1:11-17).

Peace is another important Kingdom value especially as seen in Pauline theology of the Kingdom. In Black Africa today, promoting this value is crucial because, according to *Ecclesia in Africa*, “despite the modern civilization of the ‘global village’, in Africa as in elsewhere in the world the spirit of dialogue, peace and reconciliation is far from dwelling in the hearts of everywhere. Wars, conflicts and racist and xenophobic attitudes still play too large a role in human relations”. The document holds that promoting peace is crucial, “otherwise the world will look more and more like a battlefield, where only selfish interests count and the law of force prevails, the law which fatally distances humanity from the hoped-for *civilization of love*”¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ J. T. TOPEL, *The Way to Peace: Liberation through the Bible*, in J. FUELLENBACH..., p. 157.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁴² JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 79. That many of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today are refugees and internally displaced persons is indicative of how much the Kingdom value of peace is needed in the sub-region. When one considers the economic, social and political consequences of the hostility/violence in the Black Africa, then the challenge of promoting the Kingdom value of peace becomes more existential. The need for peace has equally been treated in some of the official documents of the Church as we shall see later.

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And the peace which the Kingdom proposes does not just mean an absence of war but refers to wholeness, total health and total welfare. This peace which can be translated *shalom* appears over 350 times in the Old Testament is what God desires for his own people. It is therefore not surprising that in proclaiming the Kingdom, Jesus made peace is constant theme¹⁴³. In the New Testament Jesus sees peace as an essential element of the Kingdom he announced and it referred to a wholeness that comprises the physical, social and spiritual aspects¹⁴⁴.

The highest value and demand of the Kingdom is love. Jesus sums up the whole Law, focusing it on the commandment of love (cf. Mtt. 22: 34-40; Lk.10: 25-28). To his followers he challenges: "Love one another, even as I have love you" (Jn. 13: 34; cf. 15: 12). And to demonstrate that his entire Kingdom mission is all about love, he gave his life in love as proof (cf. Jn. 15: 12). The Kingdom value of love needs to be emphasised in Black Africa today in the face of increasing suffering. This love can show itself in the way the leaders perceive their role as service to the people. It can be expressed through forgiveness and reconciliation in a conflict-torn region. There are indeed many other ways that love for the neighbour can be expressed especially towards the poorest of the poor. The Christians in Black Africa should be challenged by the example of the early Christians, who saw love and solidarity with the poor, as a principle way of promoting the Kingdom of God¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴³ In the New Testament peace is used in at least five different ways. It means the absence of war or chaos. It also refers to right relationship with God or with Christ. Peace equally means a good relationship among people. In other times it implies an individual state of tranquility or serenity. Finally peace is a formula of greeting which invokes all the aforementioned conditions on the person so greeted.

¹⁴⁴ Aware of the difficult conditions of anxiety and exclusion which the, frightened, sick, the sinner, the poor and the oppressed face, Jesus made it a duty to impact peace on them. Hence "Go in peace" was a constant refrain in his public ministry of healing and reconciliation (cf. Mk. 5: 34; Lk. 8:48; Lk. 7:50). By constantly reassuring those in need not to be afraid, Jesus was showing that the Kingdom is that of peace. He made his followers the agents of divine peace when he said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn. 14: 27). This peace which reconciles human beings with others, reconciles the world to God, becomes a foretaste of the eschatological peace that will be consummated at the *eschaton*.

¹⁴⁵ We have further developed this theme under praxis of charity in the last part of this project.

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3.3.5.5. The Kingdom Demands Commitment to the Poorest of the Poor

The Spirit of God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and restore sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour (Lk. 4:18)¹⁴⁶.

At the decisive moments of the earthly ministry of Jesus, and at the heart of his main discourses about the Kingdom, Jesus stated categorically that his message of the Kingdom was to be a good news to the poor. At the beginning of his ministry he declared that the concern for the poor is his primary mission and the focal point of his 'manifesto' (cf. Lk. 4:18). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus re-interprets the Torah, gives a new commandment, and declares the poor blessed, while promising comfort for those who are mourning (cf. 5:1-4)¹⁴⁷. In many of his teachings and actions as we have seen, he consistently sought solidarity with poorest of the poor most of who were the sick, the marginalised, the outcasts etc. He sought to liberate individuals from sin, he challenged the cultural, social and political structures that impeded the full humanisation of the people as citizens of the Kingdom. He showed them that the Kingdom is a Kingdom of life, and indeed life in abundance (cf. Jn. 10:10).

Without excluding the non-poor from the Kingdom blessings, Jesus showed that this Kingdom is a Kingdom of surprises. It is the dawn of a new social reality where tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, Samaritans, Gentiles, women and the poorest of the poor etc would be accepted while those who consider themselves just and socially respectable may risk being rejected. But the greatest surprise about this Kingdom is that entry will depend especially on one's attitude towards the poorest of the poor. So for those who were hoping for the final eschatological Kingdom, Jesus reminded that the Kingdom message is inextricable from the final judgement when entry into the Kingdom will uniquely be decided by our solidarity with the poorest of the poor represented in the hungry, the thirsty, the prisoner, the marginalized who is isolated (Mtt. 25:31).

¹⁴⁶ As Jesus claimed for himself the prophecies of Isaiah for a new social reality, as he claimed for himself the mission of the Messiah, he announced to his audience that today this Scripture is being fulfilled in their hearing (cf. Lk. 4: 21).

¹⁴⁷ Here Jesus does not mean to glorify poverty but declares them blessed because they depend on God's protection and the blessings of his Kingdom.

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From the above, Pope John Paul holds that although the Kingdom is meant for all mankind, the poor and the most vulnerable are its primary beneficiaries. "To emphasise this fact, Jesus drew new especially to those who are on the margins of the society, and showed them special favour in announcing the Good News. What is more, he enables such individuals to experience liberation even now, by being close to them, going to eat with them in their homes (cf. Lk. 5:30), treating them as friends (cf. Lk. 7:34), and making them feel loved by God, thus revealing his tender care for the needy and for sinners (cf. 15:1-32)"¹⁴⁸.

John Paul II therefore challenges the followers of Christ to foster the Kingdom values especially, by showing active solidarity to the poor who are its primary beneficiaries. He argues that the liberation and salvation brought by the Kingdom of God should not just be a matter of theological discourse but should "come to the human person in his physical and spiritual dimensions"¹⁴⁹. This challenge to practical application of the Kingdom imperative is urgent in Africa today.

When the Kingdom values of conversion, justice, peace and love are promoted then can the Kingdom promises be felt by the poorest of the poor. At that instance then, they share in the dream of Isaiah:

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-the best meat and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole of the earth; for the Lord has spoken (Is. 25: 6-8).

3.3.5.6. The Kingdom as a Gift and Task demands Active Human Role

From the Exodus to the prophets, from the ministry Jesus to that of the early Christian community, there are convincing evidence that God needs human collaboration to execute his plans in history. In the New Testament in particular we see that the Kingdom of God which promises a radical transformation of the present reality is both a gift of God

¹⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 14.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., no. 14.

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and task entrusted to human beings¹⁵⁰. As God's project, man can only cooperate with God to *foster*, and not *force* it into the world as is seen in some parables of Jesus¹⁵¹. Through his miracles and other concrete actions, Jesus showed that the Kingdom of God cannot just be fostered through wishful thinking, desires or even mere words. Just as God acted to liberate the Jewish slaves, and again acted through the prophets, to liberate the poor and oppressed in Israel, so did Jesus act decisively to inaugurate the Kingdom in the world¹⁵².

Coming to the miracles in particular, we see that they show that God is the author of creation and is at work in human history. They show the omnipotence of God who acts in Jesus of Nazareth to inaugurate God's Kingdom in history. The power of God expressed in miracles are essentially the expression of God's love since his attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence are interwoven. Being at once omnipotent and omnibenevolent, God is both able and willing, even to suspend the laws of nature. This is to enable him to execute his divine plans and especially to come to the rescue of the most needy of his creatures. This power over creation is expressed through the miracles giving us a foretaste of the nature of the Kingdom of God. This is why Jesus engaged in practical actions of healing, exorcizing, and raising from the dead. So in the Kingdom, nature will be "exorcised", freed from any influence of Satan, it can then serve man, peace and harmony between man and nature will be restored. So,

Jesus seems to have understood his miracles as deeds of power that expressed and proclaimed the way in which anti-God forces were being overcome as divine power was finally and effectively saving human beings in their whole physical and spiritual reality¹⁵³.

¹⁵⁰ The Kingdom of God is a gracious gift of God, a token of his unconditional love to the world. Neither obedience to the 'Law' nor belonging to any religious group nor violent commitment to it is enough to bring about it. Being a gift, the Kingdom possesses all the characteristics of a gift so that its final coming is totally left to God to execute.

¹⁵¹ For example only God can make the seed grow (cf. Mk. 4:26-29), only God invites us to his eschatological banquet, and we are to beg God to act "Thy Kingdom come" (Mtt. 6:10). Like the virgins, we are only to be ready waiting for God patiently and vigilantly (cf. Mtt. 25: 1-13). So human beings are called upon to pray for the Kingdom.

¹⁵² While God takes the initiative to bring about the miracles, followers of Christ are called to undertake ordinary acts of charity to the poor.

¹⁵³ G. O'COLLINS, *Interpreting Jesus*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1983, p. 58.

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But despite the fact that the blessings of the Kingdom belongs to God to as exemplified in his miracles and command over nature, we are warned that we are not to be passive recipients of the Kingdom¹⁵⁴. The parable of the talents for instance portrays the Kingdom as a gift that demands responsible use and accountability. When unused or abused, punishment follows (cf. Mtt. 25: 14-30). Since the Kingdom demands a responsible stewardship, some theologians describe the task of promoting it as a kind of struggle against the anti-Kingdom forces.

B. Viviano seems to encapsulate the position of many liberation theologians when he posits: "Our engagement in this struggle to make the Kingdom of hope come true can be without illusions because we know by faith that no human program by itself will bring in the eschaton. Our engagement can also be without ultimate despair, because we believe that, no matter how great our self-created horrors becomes, God is faithful to his promise and he will bring the Kingdom which he has already drawn near to us in his Son"¹⁵⁵. On how man is to manage the gift and task of the Kingdom, another theologian, J. Sobrino suggests:

The gift is accepted precisely by carrying out the task entailed in it. Creating a profound human fellowship means accepting the gift of divine sonship. The God of the Kingdom does not allow us to choose between the two aspects. He who lets the Kingdom into his life by becoming a child of God will have to show the presence of the Kingdom by trying to make all human beings his brothers and sisters. Here the gift of the Kingdom is sonship and the task of the Kingdom is the bringing about of this sonship in the horizontal dimension through brotherhood, the creation of a community of brothers and sisters¹⁵⁶

So the gift-task nature of the Kingdom is like a two-way traffic of every personal relationship. We are challenged to respond to God's offer of the Kingdom as a task to be performed. Through the Incarnation, when God become man, he demonstrates that he needs man's cooperation in fostering his plans. The fact that Jesus chose human agents to

¹⁵⁴ G. LOHFINK, *The Exegetical Predicament Concerning Jesus*, in J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God as Principle for Action in the Church*, An unpublished lecture delivered by the above author during a meeting 'The Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, in Zeninghuis, Oegstgeest, Netherlands, 1999 in <http://www.sedos.org/english/fuellenbach.htm> (consulted 2-9-05).

¹⁵⁵ B. T. VIVIANO, in *ibid* (internet source).

¹⁵⁶ J. SOBRINO, *Christology at the Crossroads*, in J. FUELLENBACH, *ibid.* (internet source).

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'co-operate' with him during his earthly ministry is indicative that man is needed in building up the Kingdom¹⁵⁷.

Since human agency is needed in promoting the Kingdom of God in the world today, we have to emphasise that the Church remains a principal actor in this task as exemplified by the early Christians¹⁵⁸. It is true that we cannot really equate the present Church with the Kingdom of God as such. But as the principal promoter of the Kingdom values today, it is being realized more today that "the Church has no mission of its own, but the continuation of the mission of Christ"¹⁵⁹. So if the central mission of Christ is to preach the Kingdom, therefore the Church must imitate and obey Christ who mandates it to proclaim this Kingdom till the end of time. This to be done through casting out unclean spirits, healing the sick, preaching that the Kingdom of God is at hand, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons. Like Christ, its founder, the Church should be bold to say everywhere, especially to the anthropological poor in Black Africa: Go and tell the people what we are doing. Look the sick are properly cared for, refugees are rehabilitated, dialogue is initiated with other believers, justice is being demanded from our governments, education is now a priority in Africa and indeed the poor in Africa can proudly say, that our Church is a harbinger of good news¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁷ The reasoning here is that God has been gradually and alone, establishing his Kingdom throughout the history of salvation. But at the moment of the Incarnation when Jesus become a human being, God wanted to show humanity that he needed them to bring this project to completion. If we are called to imitate Christ, then we are equally called to follow his example in fostering the Kingdom and promoting its values through our active participation in God's project in and through Christ. If we accept that human agency is needed in promoting the Kingdom of God, a challenge follows. Just like Moses, the prophets and the apostles were chosen as the principal collaborators of God in executing his divine plans, the followers of Christ should realise that they are called to collaborate with God in this project.

¹⁵⁸ The traditional tendency to identify the Church with the Kingdom of God seems to be giving way to the position that the Church is at the service of the Kingdom and not synonymous with it.

¹⁵⁹ B. C. STAURT, "Response, cited in M. W. DUBE, *Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV/AIDS Global Economic Era*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XCI, no. 363, Oct., 2002, p. 547.

¹⁶⁰ Today many theologians from the developing world are emphasising that the Kingdom theology should be interpreted in the light of the present experiences of millions of people who are living in abject poverty. The position of most of the theologians from Africa, Latin America and Asia about the Kingdom of God can be identified thus: a) That the Kingdom of God belongs to this world as well as the world to come. b) That the Kingdom of God is indeed among us a concrete reality present in the world. c) That the Kingdom of God is both a gift of God and a task entrusted to man to be accomplished through man's cooperation. d) That the Kingdom of God is not purely identical with the pilgrim Church.

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That proclaiming the Kingdom in Africa today is an urgent task for the Church is highlighted by *Ecclesia in Africa*. According to this document, through her individual members and her whole community, the Church believes that she can contribute greatly towards making the family of man her whole community. The Church proclaims and begins to bring about the Kingdom of God after the example of Jesus, because the 'Kingdom's nature is that it encompasses all human beings-with one another and with God. The Church preaches the Kingdom that is inclusive and open to the rich and the poor, to the sinner and the saint, to Christians and non-Christians. Thus the Kingdom becomes the source of full liberation and total salvation for all people. It is with this in mind then, that the Church walks and lives intimately *bound* in a real sense to human history¹⁶¹. But while remainig a principal agent, for the promotion of the Kingdom values, *Ecclesia in Africa* reminds the followers of Christ that fostering the Kingdom of God requires collaboration and solidarity because,

the Kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness¹⁶².

How the Church has continued this solidarity with the poor after the example of Christ will be examined below.

¹⁶¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 68.

¹⁶² JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 15.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR IN MAGISTERIAL DOCUMENTS: *GAUDIUM ET SPES* AND THE AFRICAN SYNOD

3.4.0. Preamble

Since Pope Leo XIII published his *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, Catholic Social Teaching has assumed a very prominent place in Catholic theology. Various Papal encyclicals, Synods and Episcopal Conferences have continued to reflect on how the Church could play a more effective role in the society in which it finds itself. The desire of the Church to act as a social catalyst reached a new peak at Vatican II. In one of its most important documents, *Gaudium et Spes* the Conciliar Fathers expressed an unprecedented disposition of the Church to participate more actively in fostering the Kingdom values of peace and justice. Since the Council, various initiatives have been going on in the same direction. In 1968, the Latin American bishops met at Medellin to see how to translate the teaching of the Council in their society which was marked by massive poverty. The African Synod which was held in 1994 in Rome also became an important landmark in the Church's commitment for social justice in the region. Below are the matters of social concern as seen in *Gaudium et Spes* and the African Synod.

3.4.1. *Gaudium et Spes* and Option for the Poor

Pour une fois, nous avons la confiance filiale de proposer comme invités d'honneur à la clôture de la deuxième session les ouvriers et les pauvres de Rome, représentant les ouvriers et les pauvres du monde entier. Cette demande n'as pas besoin d'être justifiée pour le Vicaire du Christ et l'ancien archevêque de Milan¹.

On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII announced his decision to convoke a new Council. He did so less than ninety days after his election as successor to Pius XII. In addition the new Pope announced his plan to hold a diocesan Synod for the city of Rome as well. With the announcement coming at the end of a week long prayer for Christian unity, the Pope added that the ecumenical Council would happily lead to the desired and awaited modernisation of the Code of Canon Law as well as some aspects of the apostolic activities. The Council is motivated by the desire of the new pontificate to come to grips, in a clear and well-defined way, with the new spiritual needs of the present

¹ J. de BROUCKER, *Les nuits d'un prophète. Dom Helder Camara à Vatican*, Paris, Cerf, 2005, p. 61.

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time². Recalling the great fruits of such ecumenical Councils in the past, the new Pope was optimistic that the proposed Council was to serve two main purposes, namely strengthen religious unity, and kindle a more intense Christian fervor³. In the course of the sessions, the Council became increasingly interested in the matters of social justice especially as a way of expressing her traditional solidarity with the poor. The Fathers discovered that mission to the poor was an important mark of the Christian religion and cannot be ignored or relegated to an inferior position⁴. Although *Gaudium et Spes* treated other matters like the family, we are restricting ourselves to the issue of social justice and option for the poor in the document⁵. This is seen in the fact that,

although most of the Council's documents dealt with internal matters in the Church's life, the longest of them, *Gaudium et Spes*, (The Church and the World Today), grapples directly with problems of social injustice...⁶.

As a matter of fact, in the course of the Council, the question of option for the poor became so pronounced that a group of the conciliar fathers kept emphasising the need to underline that the Church is the "Church of the poor". Such participants like Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife in Brazil held that the Church began in a humble origin where mutual help and solidarity were its major characteristics. Pope John XXIII himself in his passion for *aggiornamento*, asked for the reading of the signs of the time. One of the signs of the time was the scandalous disparity between the rich and poor nations⁷. So one sees that *Gaudium et Spes* is the document that is most influenced by 'the signs of the

² Cf. G. ALBERIGO (ed.), *History of Vatican II, Vol. II, Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II Towards a New Era in Catholicism*, Orbis, New York, 1995, p. 1.

³ Ibid., p. 2. Since the scope of this work does not permit it, we are not going into the details of the history and preparation of this Council. We shall simply focus on one of the documents that deal with the Church in Modern World called *Gaudium et Spes* (GS). This document has direct bearing to our present project and sometimes in this study we shall simply use GS to represent the document.

⁴ Cf. G. ALBERIGO and J. A. KOMONCHAK (eds.), *The History of Vatican II, Volume II, The Formation of the Council's Identity, First Period and Intersession, October 1962-1963*, Orbis Maryknoll, 1997, p. 50.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* is divided into two parts. Part one consists of four chapters that spell out how the Council Fathers understood the mission of the Church for humanity. Part two takes on the specific areas of what are referred to as the "urgent needs characterising the present age" (J. A. SELLING, *Gaudium et Spes: A Manifesto for Contemporary Moral Theology*, in M. LAMBERRIGTS & L. KENIS (eds.), *Vatican II and Its Legacy*, BETL CLXVI 2002, p. 150).

⁶ R. M. BROWN, op. cit., p. 8.

⁷ Cf. G. ALBERIGO and J. KOMONCHAK, (eds.), op. cit., p. 42

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time’⁸ This is seen when one considers the immediate circumstances and writings that opened up dialogue and mutual interaction between the Church and the world. We shall see the document’s teaching about the dignity and rights of the human person and the importance it attaches to peace as bedrock of society. In the evaluation session we focused more on the direct teaching of the Church on economic development⁹. To really appreciate *Gaudium et Spes* and its preoccupation with the issues of social justice, we shall make a summary of the antecedent documents and initiatives that led to it.

3.4.1.2. Some Catholic Social Initiatives Before *Gaudium et Spes*

We have considered mainly the papal encyclicals that led up to, and actually influenced the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*. A few other influences have also been highlighted.

3.4.1.2.1. Some Papal Documents

Leo XIII, 1878: *Inscrutabili, The Church is the Mother of Civilization*

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Church was accused of being an obstacle to progress and development of modern culture. In his first encyclical, Pope Leo refuted these unjust allegations by showing the various civilising roles the Church has been playing in the heart of societies. By preaching the Gospel, the Church has fought, ignorance, superstition, slavery and indeed all sorts of misery that is the lot of humanity. She has encouraged the growth of arts and sciences and the development of civilised institutions.

⁸ Signs of the time refers to the various conflicting developments in modern history that seem discouraging but Pope John XXIII hopes the Church should see in the midst of such darkness, a few indications of hope since the Holy Spirit is ever at work in history. Observing ‘the Signs of the Times’ had become quite a topical theme as a result of Pope John XXIII’s popularising of that phrase. At the time of Vatican II, the signs of the times included the universalisation of culture, the rapid growth of science and technology, the intense socialisation of the human family, the emancipation of women, and atheistic communism (cf. G. ALBERIGO (eds.), op.cit., p. 34).

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* lays a foundation for a systematic discussion on socio-political problem of the world by offering a solid theological basis for its practical directives. It signals that economic progress can lead to contempt for the poor (GS 63.3). The document discusses human dignity/peace (GS.78), human work (GS 33-9, 67), human authority, (GS 74), and the relationship between the Church and the world (GS 40-4). The document equally tried to lay a foundation for discussing the issues of ‘development’ (GS 25-32, 63-72, 85-90), and ‘culture’ (GS 53-62).

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Leo XIII, 1881: *Diuturnum*,: The Authority of the Government comes from God

This document by Leo XIII is a reflection on civil authority. It shows the various interventions of the Church in social matters. The letter is dominated by the then recent assassination of the Emperor of Russia, Alexander II, killed by the Nihilists in March 1881. The Pope used the occasion therefore to reflect on the stability and foundations of political authority.

Immortale Dei, 1885: *An Ideal Christian State*

The Church contributes greatly to the prosperity of the nations for the benefit of humanity. The numerous social teachings of the Church show the truth of this assertion. Although her mission is a spiritual one, the Church has greatly influenced the social order for good. Christians are then encouraged to participate in national politics.

Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891: *On the Dramatic Condition of Workers*

This is the most revolutionary document of Leo XIII. It is acclaimed by scholars as the *magna charta* of ecclesial humanism¹⁰. This encyclical treats the unjust condition of workers and the urgent need to defend their rights from the capitalist exploitation. Indeed during the pontificate of Leo XIII dialogue between science and faith, modern philosophy and theistic philosophy, the State and the Church, exegesis and dogmatic affirmations not only became possible but was even promoted by the Church itself. This very encyclical will become the reference point for future discussions on the social question and invariably influenced *Gaudium et Spes*.

Pius XI, 1922: *Ubi Arcano*, *Christ Reigns on the Social Order*

After the bloody World War (1914-1918), the Pope explains the role of the Church in the critical condition of the world. The principal cause of the problem in modern world is the rejection of the supreme authority of God. The Church has a great role to play by emphasising the need for the world to accept the teaching of Christ. For the Pope, the

¹⁰ This encyclical was published in 1897 by Leo XIII. Since then the Church has become more and more involved in social issues. Systematic social doctrines were to develop gradually since then. Future Popes saw the encyclical as the point of reference.

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social teaching of the Church is aimed at promoting the 'Kingdom of Christ' without which there can be no true peace.¹¹

Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931: *Illustration of the Social Doctrine of the Church*

This document was published by Pope Pius XI on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. While recapitulating the epoch-making encyclical of his predecessor, Pius XI explained more precisely the method and goals of the social teachings of the Church.

Pius XI, 1937: *Divini Redemptoris*, *The Refutation of Communism*

Following the threat of communism to the faith, Pius XI in this document argues that all those who believe in God and indeed all men with the right dispositions can understand and even accept the doctrine of the Church. He thus refuted atheistic communism which menaced the Christian civilization which was inaugurated by Christ.

Pius XII, 1939: *Summi Pontificatus*, *In Defence of the Unity of the Human Family*

Pius XII, in this document defends the unity of the human race as a family and children of the same God. This unity is enriched by the diversity of nations and cultures. In this we see a real call for solidarity in the world. According to the Pope, this fundamental unity of the human family is the principal focus for all the Social Teachings of the Church. It has natural and supernatural foundations¹².

Pius XII, 1944: *The Future of Christian Civilization*

In 1944, while the Second World war was still raging on, Pius XII addressed the human family on the need and nature of constructing the future civilization. He was optimistic

¹¹ H. CARRIER, *Nouveau regard sur la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise*, Vatican, Conseil Pontifical, *Justice et Paix Publications*, 1990, p. 91.

¹² This document is very relevant to our discourse on solidarity. Its full implication is that humanity being one, the resources of the earth should be shared equitably for the good of all. The rich countries and groups of the world should thus see it as an obligation to care for the less-privileged ones among them. Even in the same society, the richer individuals should accept the brotherhood of man and so be ready to extend a hand of solidarity to the poorest poor in their midst. The accidental differences of tribe, race, religion, gender and status should mutually unite and enrich rather than separate humanity. This same Pope will later in 1941, at the 50th Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* hold that the Church gets its authority to intervene on social issues from her interpretation of Revelation, and from the natural order itself (cf. H. CARRIER, *Nouveau regard sur la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise*, p. 115).

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that it is the Christian civilization that has the capacity to inspire other cultures through her religious and moral principles of justice, fraternity and peace¹³.

John XIII, 1961: *Mater et Magistra*, and 1963: *Pacem in Terris*,

Pope John XIII published *Mater et Magistra* at the 70th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Among other things, this document presents a universal vision of the world. It addressed the social issues taking account of the radical transformation going on in the world. The growing economy and population increase were matters that concerned the Church which sees her role as that of a Mother and Teacher. *Pacem in Terris* is the famous message of peace addressed to all men and women of 'goodwill'. It was a message meant for the world which the Church has undeniably recognised as pluralist. This world in constant and rapid mutation needed some orientation. Peace was the central theme of this document.

3.4.1.2.2. Other Influences on Vatican II and *Gaudium et Spes* in particular

Another factor that influenced the Council, (even if indirectly), is the liturgical movement of Pius X. Although history may see this as essentially liturgical reform, it reintegrated the sacred dimension of the liturgy to the perspective of the people of God. This was a silent revolution which sought to elevate the Christian spirituality from the confines of individualistic pietism to the sense of the community. This opened for Christianity a better appreciation of the importance and even the need of the other. The influence of this reform will be felt sixty years later in the dogmatic constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Just as Pius X called the individual to be open to the 'people of God', so will *Lumen Gentium* challenge the Church as a whole to open itself up to the world in which it finds itself¹⁴.

¹³ In his discourse to the Cardinals on 26th February, 1946, Pius XII emphasised the need to foster the reign of God in the world. But he added that contrary to the world empires, the Church should target the conquest of human hearts above all (cf. *AAS*, 38, 1946, pp. 141-151).

¹⁴ C. MOELLER, *L'élaboration du schéma XIII, l'église dans le monde de ce temps*, Tournai, Casterman, 1968, p. 23.

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Another great influence on *Gaudium et Spes* is the Catholic Action initiatives of Pius XI¹⁵. This Pope called on the youth and indeed the whole of the Catholic laity to become active participants and collaborators of the priests in fostering the Kingdom of God among men¹⁶. Equally important is the active involvement of the Catholic Church with some international organisations like the UNO. The horrors of the Second World War revealed an interconnected world where only solidarity and mutual respect was ideal. One of the evident results of this is the approval and support given by the Catholic Church to the Declarations of Human Rights in 1948.

We can equally recognise the influence of the biblical and ecumenical movements that preceded the Council. Various ecumenical movements starting especially from the Malines Conversations in Belgium would all gradually open the Church to see the needs of others and appreciating their opinions. Among Christians themselves, and especially Catholics, there was a renewed interest in the Bible. This could be called a Biblical movement. “*Il y a là un fait majeur. La Bible, en effet, allait restaurer dans la foi et la pensée spontanée du croyant catholique le sens de l’unité concrète de l’homme, corps et âme, en chair et en os, vivant dans l’histoire, un lieu, en temps, qu’il doit avec la grâce de Dieu, sanctifier et racheter*”¹⁷.

Finally, of great influence on *Gaudium et Spes*, is the renewed interest in the writings and spirituality of the Fathers of the Church. A new reading and appreciation of the works of Augustine and the Greek Fathers brought to light Christian anthropology. The major contribution of this emphasis can be summarised in the dictum of Irenaeus that *Gloria Dei, vivens Homo*: the Glory of God is the man fully alive. Again some people like Teilhard de Chardin, J. Maritain, E. Mounier etc. contributed in highlighting the place and importance of man in creation and thus promoting a veritable Christian anthropology.

¹⁵ Although this encyclical was aimed directly at addressing the political conditions in Italy, its influence would later spread to the universal Church (cf. Pius XI, *On Catholic Action in Italy*, no. 1, 29th June, 1931).

¹⁶ Both *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* took up this theme in describing the nature and mission of the Church in the world.

¹⁷ C. MOELLER, op.cit., p. 27.

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With the whole of these influences on him, and with his own personal background as a renowned pastor¹⁸, John XXIII was to prove a humanist pope whose influence remained in the Council documents even after his death. His last encyclical *Pacem in Terris* summarises his vision for the Church in modern world. Reading the signs of the time, dialogue, aggiornamento, promoting the humanity of man in a peaceful and just world would thus lay solid foundation for Schema Thirteen, and later *Gaudium et Spes*¹⁹. From this we can really see Vatican documents like *Gadium et Spes* as,

the consensus that emerged after three years of private and public dialogue, debate and even controversy. It crowns a three year process of thorough and intense exploration by experts in various matters it deals with, as well as a process of education of the bishops and of the millions of people who followed the process of the Council²⁰.

Having presented the background and motivations of *Gaudium et Spes*, we shall now examine more closely its teaching on social issues like poverty.

3.4.1.3. The Social Question as a Major Concern of *Gaudium et Spes*²¹

The massive presence of the poor and marginalized in the world's cities has prompted an intense search in the Roman Catholic Church for a new understanding of ecclesiology oriented around a discussion of alleged God's bias for the poor²².

Before we examine the relevant themes in *Gadium et Spes*, we have to emphasise that social concern here goes beyond economic justice. The Council was seeking to foster the Kingdom values of peace, justice, love and respect in the world. So by social question, it refers especially to the mission of the Church *ad extra*, outside of herself and towards the

¹⁸ John XXIII wanted the Council to be more pastoral than doctrinal (cf. G. Alberigo, *Histrory of Vatican II*...., p.6).

¹⁹ C. MOELLER, op. cit., p. 32.

²⁰ D. DORR, *Option for the Poor, A Hundred Years*...., p. 152.

²¹ Due to its frequent occurrence in this chapter, we are using the abbreviation GS, and are also citing the numbers inside the texts instead of inserting them in the footnote.

²² H. CONN, *A Contextual Theology of Mission in the City*, in C.V. ENGEN(ed.), *The Good News of the Kingdom, Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, Orbis Books, New York, 1993, pp. 96-104, See especially p. 103.

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world. In other words, the Church is claiming to herself, both the authority and mandate to become prophetic in the society²³. This social mission is summarised below.

For the bishops coming to Rome, the Council, in the Pope's mind, would be a way to renew the mission of the Church in the face of the world's problems, poverty, and the desire for world peace

Here then are how the issues are tackled.

3.4.1.3.1. The Human Person, His Dignity and Rights

a. The Dignity of the Human Person

The doctrine about the human person and his dignity is not altogether new to Christian religion. It has been the focal point of most of the magisterial pronouncements: Papal, Conciliar and Episcopal. Catholic theology has equally developed a systematic body of teachings on man since the dawn of Christian scholarship. This teaching however reached a higher pitch since the last century and in a very special way at Vatican II.

So following the traditional Catholic doctrine on man, Vatican II which is sometimes referred to as the humanist Council, went further to expound how human life is to be lived in dignity. The Council based its teaching on the belief that man has an incomparable dignity because of his special vocation. "The dignity of the human person is the fact that he is created in the image and likeness of God and so by nature is ordained immediately to God, receives from his creator the light of reason, the power of choice, the flame of love and the domination of corporeal realities" (GS 23)²⁴. He is placed at the summit of creation and as its lord and master²⁵. He is elevated to the dignity of the son of God through God's absolutely gracious choice; because he has been redeemed by Christ who shed his blood on the cross; and lastly, because he has been

²³G. ALBERIGO and J. KOMONCHAK (ed.), op. cit., P. 5.

²⁴ Here Vatican II did not discuss human dignity merely from the perspective of natural law or from a natural theological perspective, but does so in the light of biblical teaching about man. Despite the changes in the wordings that came in the final draft of this document, the idea that man is made in the dignity of God remained permanent throughout the debates.

²⁵ The book of Genesis while narrating the account of the creation, gives the creation of man a special accent. While the bible describes how other creatures were made when "God said", there was for man a solemn divine proclamation "Let us make man in our own image" (Gen.1:26). So what distinguishes human beings from other creatures is that they are made in the image of God.

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destined to share in God's beatific life in eternity This is why we read that "*l'être humain n'est pas une créature comme les autres. Il est l'image que Dieu a placé sur terre au terme de sa création*"²⁶

Man is not just the apex of creation but constitutes its beauty. God gave man the vocation to unite in himself the whole of creation and then to unite the whole of creation to God so that man can enter more fully into the life of God. "*L'homme d'ailleurs a été créé à la ressemblance de Dieu...*"²⁷. Man's dignity is therefore ontological to his nature and consequently, man has absolute primacy over the material things²⁸. So *Gaudium et Spes* reinforced the biblical and Christian doctrinal understanding of man. It thus opened up a new and specifically Christian foundation of human rights and dignity humanity as God's adopted sons, brothers and sisters in Christ. Being created in the image of God and then redeemed by Christ, believers enjoy a special dignity and freedom of the Children of God²⁹.

Gaudium et Spes presents the image of a Church which discovered that it could not evangelise a people it did not understand. It could not offer the truth of the Gospel to a population whom it did not recognise as free to accept that truth. Salvation could only be

²⁶ A. MARX, *Genèse 1: 1-2, 4a*, in J. FISCHER, op. cit., p. 83.

²⁷ J-M. PELT op. cit., p. 153. But despite the plans God had for man, the book of Genesis teaches that instead of uniting all creation in an upward movement towards God, man moved downward toward that which was below him and which he was properly to subordinate. He abused his power to unite by disrupting the existing unity of the universe. It was given this circumstance that God himself became man in order to carry out man's vocation.

²⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* presents the dignity of man from both the *ascending* and *descending* understanding of man's vocation. The ascending approach is evident in the continued reiteration of the document that man's dignity is rooted in his being made in the image of God. This demands that man conforms his actions to his dignity as a reflection of the image of God. The descending note in the document shows that man does not acquire this dignity by his own achievements but gets it ontologically from God as its source. It is to be noted that, *ascending* methodology as a theology of man begins with the study of man as he is in the world while the *descending* methodology begins with considering the existence and activity of God as bases for understanding the place of man in creation (cf. R.D.E. WHELAN, *Human Dignity and Sin: from the Second Vatican Council to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis Publications, Rome 1995, p. 89).

²⁹ Much about creation theology that informed Christian anthropology can be read in the works of Karl Rahner, *L'homme à l'écoute du Verbe*, Mame, Paris, 1968, p. 102; M. SCHMAUS, *God and Creation*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1969, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 344; F. GABORIAU, *Le Tournant théologique aujourd'hui selon K. Rahner*, Desclée, Paris, 1968, p. 11; W. KAPSER, *Le Dieu des Chrétiens*, Cerf, Paris, 1985, p. 249; J. MOLTMANN, *God in Creation, An Ecological Doctrine of Creation, the Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985*, SCM Press, New York, 1985, p. 71.

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offered to persons who are really human and endowed with dignity and freedom³⁰. So the theology of *Gaudium et Spes* clearly rests on the affirmation that Christ is the summit of human dignity. Thus the document has an explicit Christocentric focus (GS 1-2, 45-46). Since Christianity teaches that the dignity of man is the dignity of God, it demands 'devotion' and 'reverence' for every man and woman³¹. The mystery of the Incarnation becomes thus a superlative and ennobling event for the human person since he is so precious that Jesus could die for him. This is the implication:

Now, if Christ is the Son of God and he died for me and for every other human being, then the individual being is worth beyond description. Human dignity is thus a gospel value that cannot be despised without greatly offending the Creator³².

By making an essential link between God and man, *Gaudium et Spes* is able to lay a solid foundation for a positive anthropology which recognises that man is created good and capable of realising his dignity. However, it is only in Christ that man most fully realises his true vocation and potentials³³. Given his vocation, man therefore cannot be used as an instrument, or exploited, to attain possessions of an economic nature. He can neither be subjected to society nor exploited for the attainment of goals in the political and social order. The human person can never be enslaved by the State to attain its goal of dominion and power. His dignity demands that social and economic life be organised in such a way that safeguards and promotes the human person³⁴.

One of the signs that this dignity is acknowledged and promoted lies in the enjoyment of freedom by man. Man is truly human with dignity, only when he is able to turn to the good freely. It is when he has the capacity and liberty to choose that which is good in accordance with his divine vocation. The implication of this is that because of his special place in creation, one may not violate with impunity the dignity of man which God

³⁰ J.A. SELLING, op.cit., p. 153.

³¹ This reverence for man should be understood in terms of man's origin from God and not an attempt to 'deify' man (cf. E. OJAKAMINOR, op. cit., p. 41).

³² Ibid., p. 41.

³³ It is within the context of the condition of modern man who finds himself faced with new challenges and opportunities unknown before that he (man) must look up to Christ to find a meaning in the midst of uncertainties (Cf. R. D. E. WHELAN, *Human Dignity and Sin: From the Second Vatican Council to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pontifical Universitas Lateranensis, p. 90).

³⁴ Cf. E. OJAKAMINOR, op. cit., p. 62-63.

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himself treats with great reverence. And for this very reason every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the Creator of the individual³⁵.

The Christian doctrine on human dignity has some important implications. The dignity is accompanied by the rights that flow from it³⁶. This can be considered the practical demand of Christian anthropology especially in the modern world. As a matter of fact, the idea that human dignity implies human rights has been recognised by various religious groups, cultures and ideological movements in the world. This dignity and rights are not constituted by any human declarations or institutions, they have only come to appreciate it better and more universally. On this dignity is founded many emerging discussions and pro-life movements and defenders of human rights in our epoch³⁷. United Nations epoch-making declaration of human rights is an effort to make respect for this dignity and rights, binding on all peoples. It is this dignity that constitutes the foundation of the equality of all peoples irrespective of age, race, creed, status, gender, ideological convictions etc³⁸. So the beginning, subject and purpose of all human institutions must be the human person³⁹. Drawing the inspiration from the teaching on the human person, the Council goes further to expound the implications of this dignity.

b. Human Dignity Implies Rights

Vatican II does not just teach about the dignity of the human person, it teaches equally that this dignity is accompanied by rights. "At the same time there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and

³⁵ Cf. LEO XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, no. 41, Also JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 37.

³⁶ The first of all these rights is that to life and defence of it. Without this, no other right can really exist. Hence anything that threatens life in any way targets the very bedrock of every other human value.

³⁷ On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The recognition and respect of these rights are binding on all the member states.

³⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Address to American President Bill Clinton at the conclusion of their private meeting at Regis University, Denver, Colorado, 12, August, 1993 (cf. English Edition of *L'Observatore Romano*, 18 August 1993).

³⁹ It is in an effort to protect and promote this dignity that Paul VI reiterated the mission of the Church to all peoples "not willing to circumscribe her mission only to the religious field and disassociate herself from man's temporal problems" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 34).

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whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable”⁴⁰. While accepting the importance of every human right, the Council does not accord equal weight to all of them. The right to life is fundamental because on it is built every other right⁴¹. Once denied, every other right falls into oblivion. This is to say that the right to life is the seedbed on which every other rights grow. Since man is made in the image of God, that right enables him seek his Maker which is his ultimate destiny. It implies and includes the right to conscience, the sanctuary of the human person. All these presuppose the equality of all men⁴².

That *Gaudium et Spes* is veritably pastoral, lies in its realism in identifying most vulnerable of the children of God who needed more protection, because their dignity is rarely acknowledged and their rights often denied. The document enumerates some of them as, “a foreign worker who suffers the injustice of being despised, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin of which the child is innocent, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: As you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me”⁴³. The basis of all these is that every human person is equal and should enjoy this dignity⁴⁴.

The document goes on to discuss in detail the various forms of crimes that directly endanger the image of God in man. Top in the list is what it calls, “all offenses against life itself”, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, all violations of the integrity of the human person such as physical and mental torture. Others include “all offenses against human dignity” such as subhuman living conditions, degrading working

⁴⁰ On its declaration on Religious Liberty, Vatican II acknowledges that “people nowadays are becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person, a growing number demand that people should exercise fully their own judgement and responsible freedom in their actions (cf. *Dignitate Humanae*, 1).

⁴¹ Some of the essential elements that enhance human life are categorically discussed by the Council. Based on his nature, it is imperative that man has ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuine human life: food, clothing, housing, freedom to choose a state of life, right to education, to work, to respect etc., (GS 26).

⁴² The discriminations against women, the aged, the handicap, and other marginalised persons is therefore condemned since all men are created in the image of God. And Jesus Christ died to redeem all men and confer upon them the same supernatural dignity and rights.

⁴³ GS, 27.

⁴⁴ Here attention is brought to the plight of the poorest of the poor especially the terminally sick, the handicap, the refugees, poor women and children who appear to have lost this dignity because of their existential status in society. Although these victims still retain their ontological dignity as created in the image of God, in a society governed by the law of production and sale, profit and gain, individualism and competition, this dignity is grossly threatened. Once such occurs even on an existential level, the poverty of the victim can then be termed anthropological poverty.

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conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit, etc. The effects of these are obvious: "All these and the like are criminal: they poison civilisation; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honour of the Creator"⁴⁵.

c. The Ethical Significance of Human Dignity: The Church as Arbiter

In the sphere of economics and social life, too, the dignity and vocation of the human person as well as the welfare of the society as a whole have to be respected and fostered; for people are the source, the focus and aim of all economic and social life⁴⁶.

Gaudium et Spes recognises that the discourse on human dignity and human rights have direct ethical implications. This becomes more apparent in the face of imbalances in the world social and economic order. Against the belief that the Church was being overtaken by modern civilisation, *Gaudium et Spes* reiterates that in every age, the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (GS 4). The document therefore binds itself to carrying out the arduous task of interpreting in an intelligible language the recurring questions of the meaning of the present life, and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other.

By being attentive therefore to the realities of the time, Vatican II realised that a new age is dawning in history with "profound and rapid changes spreading gradually to all corners of the earth" (GS 4). These changes bring with them serious problems that are always associated with growth⁴⁷. But the Council was very concerned about the moral and religious implications of such deep-seated changes which are causing upheavals in the life of modern man (GS 5). And since economic growth is one of the visible changes, the Fathers wanted to put in place the Catholic interpretation of socio-economy principles. The greatest moral challenge facing modern world is described as "uneven change, coupled with an increasing keener awareness of existing inequalities" (GS 8). In the midst

⁴⁵ Tied to human dignity is human rights. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNO 1948), different ramifications of this declaration is being explored and developed (cf. GS, 28).

⁴⁶ GS, 63.

⁴⁷ As opposed to the sense of pessimism which sees the modern world as secularised and doomed to extinction, *Gaudium est Spes*, was very positive about the seemingly difficult times. It thus recognises that modern world including the Church, was undergoing crises as growth, and so for good ultimately.

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of such changes that are accompanied by inequalities, Vatican II set out to address its message to modern man.

According to the Council therefore, man's social nature makes it apparent that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself depend on one another. "The world is keenly aware of its unity and of its mutual interdependence in essential solidarity, but at the same time it is split into bitter opposing camps" (GS. 4). Since man is at the centre of God's creation, Vatican II asserts that he must be the subject and goal of all social institutions. When man is placed as the centre of social, economic and political projects, he will be enabled through his dealings with others, through his reciprocal duties and through fraternal dialogue, develop his gifts and is able to reach his destiny. This destiny consists in his participation in the process of creating a society marked by social justice⁴⁸.

So if man is living in a world that is governed by economic, political and social laws, then there is need for a moral authority to regulate these vicissitudes of life. *Gaudium et Spes* therefore reiterates that the Church has the responsibility of being the moral guardian of the society as Mother and Teacher (GS 4). It believes therefore that it is part of its mission to explain, interpret, proclaim and defend the moral law and also ensure that all human activity conform to it⁴⁹. It reminds those who engage in the social, political and economic fields that they are subject to moral law. And her teaching and solidarity with the world, especially the most vulnerable, indicates the main lines of ethical orientation. It is the Church's duty to judge whether a given social, political or economic order is in conformity with moral law or in opposition to it. It is the duty of the Church to elaborate principles, criteria and directives for action that must guide those who actually engage in these fields.

While the Church does not propose a particular economic, political or social ideology for the society, it tries to "ensure that the social life, politics and the economy are in

⁴⁸ This role which man is destined to play is born out of the modern Catholic anthropology and Catholic humanism developed since Vatican II.

⁴⁹ Cf. E. OJAKAMINOR, op.cit., p. 71.

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conformity with justice, solidarity and fraternity”⁵⁰. Inspired by *Gaudium et Spes*, Paul VI would emphasise later:

Evangelisation would be incomplete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelisation involves explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realised, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development, a message especially energetic today about liberation⁵¹.

One important note about the above Christian understanding of man is that it emphasises that this dignity belongs to every human being, both the rich and the poor⁵². And this forms the bases not only for promoting the dignity of man, but also for fostering a “human society founded on brotherhood, solidarity, the mutual sharing of the goods created by God and destined to serve all and not only some, and on peace and concord”⁵³. If human beings have dignity that implies some fundamental rights, *Gaudium et Spes* goes further to discuss how these dignities and rights can be protected and promoted in the modern world. Peace in the world is presented as a prerequisite for promoting human dignity, rights and potentials. And economic solidarity with the poor is an important task to be pursued with peace. A brief study of these two themes is done here.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 71. Christians, the Church emphasises that the observance of the moral law is necessary for the attainment of eternal salvation. The Church cannot just teach that human beings are saved, but must indicate man’s role in doing so.

⁵¹ PAUL VI, *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, no. 29.

⁵² St. Paul indicts other religions and ideologies that discriminate against people on the basis of race, culture and social status. For there are no more Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters etc., (Gal. 3:28). This means that all forms of discriminations, slavery, exploitation and denial of inalienable rights are to be eradicated in the light of Christian revelation. Here lies the foundation of the idea of brotherhood of man, which is morally binding on all Christian believers and indeed all humanity.

⁵³ E. OJAKAMINOR, op. cit., p. 63.

3.4.1.4. Promoting the Kingdom of Peace and Fostering Economic Justice for the Poor

3.4.1.4.1. Peace as Bedrock of Society

One of the important contributions of *Gaudium et Spes* is that it realised that peace is one of the fundamental values of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus. Reading and interpreting the signs of the time, the document saw that peace is also the foundation for any meaningful discussion on social justice⁵⁴. A summary of the conciliar teaching on peace is presented below.

Vatican II was held at the peak of the Cold War and the arms race. It is therefore not surprising that the Fathers knew that the greatest threat to human existence was war, while peace held the key to man realising his true mission on earth. Living in a fast evolving world, the document teaches that peace born out of justice is indispensable for human co-existence, practice of religion and development. War was the supreme horror. *Gaudium et Spes* condemned total war (atomic, biological, chemical and conventional), describing them as grossly immoral. Such a war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with population, is a crime against God and man himself (GS. 80)⁵⁵. It is in the above sense that one can understand the assertion that “*la question des armes atomiques est un des points les plus brûlants qui aient été évoqués au Concile*”⁵⁶.

Peace is not merely absence of war. It is an ordering of society not just on any order but on one which it is to be brought into existence by the thirst of people for an ever more perfect justice (GS 78.1). Peace, it contended, is a positive value to be worked for. It

⁵⁴ The prophetic teaching of the document on peace as basis for any meaningful social progress is very much seen in the situation which many Black African countries found themselves since independence. The document's predictions and position on the dangers of conflicts and the need for genuine peace is significant because my years after *Gaudium et Spes* was written, conflicts and wars have been a common experience in Black Africa resulting in extreme poverty and other dehumanising conditions.

⁵⁵ In discussing peace, the Conciliar Fathers acknowledged that as the last resort, force might have to be used against an aggressor. The balance of terror (as between atomically armed nations) was frightful and yet in some ways it could be a way of keeping peace. The only hope was to persuade the nations to outlaw war and to set up a world authority to enforce the ban. In the meantime, however, nations might possess atomic arms to deter others.

⁵⁶ P. POSWICK, *Un Journal du Concile, Vatican II vu par un diplomate belge*, Paris, Francois-Xavier de Guibert, 2005, p. 556.

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demanding broadmindedness and inter-nation cooperation in all fields, particularly the economic field. *Gaudium et Spes* was a realistic document as it observed that war is a mere symptom of something more insidious: Injustice. "If peace is to be established, the first condition is to root out those causes of discord between people which lead to wars, especially injustice"(GS 83).

The Council remarked that developing nations needed help and encouragement. The population explosion had to be faced, and met with wholehearted economic expansion if genuine peace among all peoples could be achieved. What the document is saying is that true peace cannot be as a result of military victory; the danger of nuclear war exists still now; war and confrontation must be considered to be a factor for progress and the historical development of mankind; the use of scientific and technological achievements for war is immoral and cannot be permitted. The document tells us that even though peace and liberation are God's gifts, they do not happen on their own but have to be brought about through human commitment and effort (GS 66)⁵⁷. Again the document teaches that peace or liberation of the oppressed is not attained once and for all as gift to be kept but as a value to be constantly defended, renewed and brought nearer each time, towards the ideal. The third important contribution of GS is the link it makes between peace and justice. It is the passionate desire for justice that motivates people to work in solidarity for peace and progress.

Calling for active cooperation and solidarity on the international level (GS 83-87), the Council calls for all peoples to appreciate the interwoven nature of modern politics and economy. There are no two distinct international questions, one about peace and the other one about economics. The two are the same question. Unbalanced economic order in the world will naturally provoke all sorts of global strife and tension. That will invariably affect even the most economically, and politically stable, advanced nations and regions of the world.

⁵⁷ Human respect and the desire for peace would remain elusive until modern man decides to work for justice and seek the good of all human beings in all corners of the earth.

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3.4.1.4. 2. *Gaudium et Spes* and Economic Justice for the Poor

One of the important contributions of the *Gaudium et Spes* to the development of Catholic Social Teaching is that it clearly distinguished material poverty from spiritual or evangelical poverty. Its teaching on economic poverty therefore makes the document a major source of inspiration for a serious discourse on poverty in the world today. The document realises that the issues of human dignity and rights were closely tied to economic matters. This is why it focuses directly on the plight of the effective poor. The position and vision of the document for the poor and the oppressed is summarised thus:

God destined the earth and all that it contains for the use of all people and all peoples... Furthermore, the right to have a share of the earthly goods sufficient for oneself and for one's family belongs to everyone....If a person is in extreme necessity, that person has a right to take from the riches of others what he or she really needs. Since there are so many people weighed down by hunger, this sacred Council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the saying of the Fathers: Feed those who are dying of hunger because if you do not feed you have killed them. According to their ability, let all individuals and governments undertake a genuine sharing of their good(GS.69)⁵⁸.

In the above passage, one sees that Vatican II was aware that despite the progress made in the areas of science and technology, a great number of peoples in the world are still living in extreme want. By highlighting the expression *all peoples*, the Council reminds the readers that very needy and poor people are found in all parts of the world even in the industrialized world. By describing some people as being in 'extreme need' *Gaudium et Spes* underlines the fact that there are degrees of poverty. This means that among among the poor there are *the poorest of the poor*. One of the characteristics of these people in extreme need (or the poorest of the poor as used in this study), according to *Gaudium et Spes* is that they are weighed down by hunger (GS. 69)⁵⁹.

After identifying the reality of extreme poverty, the document then focuses on how to ameliorate their conditions. It appeals to those who are *better off* to share what they have

⁵⁸ This is Abbot translation emended.

⁵⁹ The Council Fathers offer us some inspiration on how to identify the poorest of the poor. Apart from hunger as mentioned by *Gaudium et Spes*, we equally saw some refugees and those living with HIV/AIDS as some of those in extreme need in Black Africa today.

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with the poor. But while the exhortation to share with the poor sounds like an appeal, the Council reminds the rich that it is morally permitted for these extremely poor and needy people, to *take* from the rich what the rich refuse to give willingly⁶⁰. It is only a matter of social justice that the fruits of the earth be equitably distributed. For the Council therefore, it is not just an optional gesture, or a mere expression of charity to the poor. The document states that those who are *better off* are obliged to come to the relief of the poor, and to do so, not merely out of their superfluous goods (GS. 69.1)⁶¹. This is only obeying the law of distributive justice and is thus mandatory even in situations where the poorer groups are not in *extreme need*.

Aware that the above position may appear like an infringement on the right to private property, the document upholds the traditional Catholic teaching on this but emphasises sharing with the poor as against expropriation of the rich. And in fact, there is a shift away from the undue stress which had been laid on the rights of property owners. In the document these rights have been relativised, not merely in principle, but in practical applications of the principle to the world of the time⁶². The purpose of all these according to the conciliar Fathers is to ensure that no significant group of people are left 'totally impoverished' (the poorest of the poor). And to do this, it calls for a more even distribution of the goods of the earth.

Gaudium et spes does not however wish to take a neo-Marxist position that pitches the poor against the rich in a class struggle. The Fathers of the Council were quite aware that there are many social structures that engender and perpetrate these inequalities and dehumanise the poor. To address such structural obstacles, the document advocates more equitable trade conditions in the world. The rich nations are exhorted to apply moral principles in doing business with the rest of the world. The need to regulate the laws of

⁶⁰ Here the document draws inspiration from the traditional Catholic moral theology that permits the hungry to take what they need even without the permission of the owner.

⁶¹ Here Vatican II comes out stronger than Leo XIII in his *Rerum Novarum*, where he was merely appealing to the rich, to give to the poor when they have provided for their own needs and what is appropriate in their state of life (RN 19). The difficulty with Leo XIII's position here is the concept of '*superflua*'. This idea allowed the rich themselves to calculate the amount of wealth they deemed enough for them and perhaps make a guarantee for their posterity. It is only when this is assured that they can give the surplus to the poor. But following the traditional saying that the love of having increases by having, shall the poor have to wait endlessly until the rich satisfied their needs and wants and those of their posterity?

⁶² Cf. D. DORR, *Option for the Poor, A Hundred....*, p. 156.

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supply and price of Third World products are called for. Although the Council Fathers did not venture into the minute details of International Trade, they were able to call the rich nations “to seek to form a community of nations devoted to the common good...”⁶³. For all these to happen the Council calls for a conversion in the mentality and attitudes of peoples, crystallising in visible structural reforms in socio-economic and political institutions.

3.3.1.4.3. The Unfinished Task of *Gaudium et Spes*

Vatican II was a revolutionary Council in matters of social justice and lays a new foundation for creative theological endeavours. When compared with the teaching of Leo XIII and Pius XI, the texts of *Gaudium et Spes*, represent a notable change of emphasis. *Gaudium et Spes* may not have said everything about the poor but it has laid a foundation for a theology and spirituality for a Christian approach to the question of social justice and of poverty in particular. The Council henceforth called all artisans of justice to avoid escapism on one hand and secularism on the other.

Since the end of the Council, a new concern for the poor has begun even at the heart of the Church. These concerns are now formulated in a progressive manner in a number of magisterial documents and theological writings⁶⁴. Studying the documents of Vatican II, and other encyclicals inspired by them, one finds some common features in them all. They follow a principle of continuity, each developing and improving on the teachings of those preceding it based on new situations. And since the success or failure of ‘aggiornamento’ depends particularly on attitudes to the problem of social justice, we need to constantly set out the main parameters of the Church’s model of society and of social justice⁶⁵.

And since *Gaudium et spes* can be said to be a launching pad for further pastoral and theological initiatives, we shall briefly examine how the Church in Africa has responded to the social challenges facing the continent as inspired by the *Gaudium et Spes*. Since the

⁶³ Ibid., 156.

⁶⁴ Pope John Paul II made a very important contribution in this regard with his publication of some of the social encyclicals, *Laborem Exercens*, *Centesimus annus*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* etc.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 303.

African Synod can be said to be the landmark in the history of the Church in the region we shall briefly study it, and see its relevance to our enquiry, on the issue of social concern and poverty in particular.

3.4.2. Solidarity and Option for the Poor in the African Synod

Although the African Synod was meant to foster organic evangelisation in the continent, a closer study of the documents associated with the assembly shows that social concern was an important matter to the bishops as we shall see now⁶⁶.

3.4.2.1. Putting the Synod in Perspective

The Special Assembly for the Synod of Bishops met in Rome, from April 10 to May 8 1994. But it will be appropriate to remark that the idea of an *African Council* predates Vatican II itself. The earliest initiative came with the publication of *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*⁶⁷. *Ecclesia in Africa* explains further that it was during Vatican II Council that African and Madagascar bishops decided to establish their own General Secretariat with the task of coordinating their interventions, in order to present to the Council Fathers, as far as possible, a common point of view. This initial cooperation among the Bishops of Africa later became permanent when they created in Kampala-uganda, the *Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar* (SECAM). This took place in July-August 1969, during the visit of Pope Paul VI to Uganda⁶⁸.

But the latest inspiration for the Synod came from the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians. It was indeed at Abidjan, Cameroon that this idea was elaborated and approved by this association in 1980. At first, the idea of an African Council was met with difficulties if not outright opposition. However, as the idea of the Council gained more and more ground in the region, some of those obstacles were gradually overcome or

⁶⁶ One can actually argue that what the Church in Africa did in 1994 was already done by the regional Church in Latin America. In 1968 the Episcopal Conference held the Medellín Conference to deliberate on the challenges of increasing injustice and poverty in their continent.

⁶⁷ Pope John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Africa* affirms that the idea of this Synod goes back to the inspirations and recommendations of Vatican II. It states that "indeed, the idea of some form of meeting of the African Bishops to discuss the evangelization of the continent dates back to the time of the Council. That historic event was truly the crucible of collegiality and a specific expression of the *affective* and *effective* communion of the worldwide Episcopate. At the Council, the Bishops sought to identify appropriate means of better sharing and making more effective their care for all the Churches (cf. 2 Cor 11:28), and for this purpose they began to plan suitable structures at the national, regional and continental level" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 2).

⁶⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa* no. 3. It was after so many years of evolutionary activities in the continent, precisely from 1977 to 1983, that some Bishops, priests, consecrated persons, theologians and lay people expressed a desire for an *African Council* or *African Synod*. It would have the task of evaluating evangelisation in Africa vis-à-vis the great choices to be made regarding the Continent's future. Its main mission was how to promote an *organic pastoral solidarity* within the entire African territory and nearby Islands (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 5).

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at least minimised⁶⁹. The most important moment in the history of the Synod came however when the bishops of Africa and Madagascar while meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in 1983 became favourable to the idea of a plenary African Council. They even proposed a theme for the Council: "*Evangelisation-Inculturatio of message, evangelisation-human promotion*"⁷⁰.

From this brief background, we can appreciate the expectations of African bishops, theologians and peoples when on the 6th of January, 1989, Pope John Paul II announced his intention to convoke a Special Assembly of bishops for Africa⁷¹. And in July 1990, at Lome, Togo the working document (*Lineamenta*) for the Synod was promulgated at the general assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). The Synod was to be entitled, *The Church in Africa and Her Evangelising Mission Towards the Year 2000: You Shall Be My Witnesses* (Acts 1:8). Even after the initial reaction by some Africans that the proposed Council has been turned into a Synod, there was still a lot of hope that a well-prepared and well executed Synod will bring the desired effects on the continent.

3.4.2.2. Poverty and Oppression as Challenge of Evangelisation in Africa

In Africa, the need to apply the Gospel to concrete life is felt strongly. How could one proclaim Christ on that immense continent while forgetting that it is one of the world's poorest regions? How could one fail to take into account the anguished history of a land where many nations are still in the grip of famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights? This is all a challenge to evangelization⁷²

On the 10th of April 1994, the special Synod on Africa opened with a solemn mass in St Peter's basilica in Rome. Despite the solemnity of the liturgy, the synod Fathers knew that the African continent needed something more concrete, urgent and decisive in the

⁶⁹ Some people outside the continent feared that such a demand for a specific Council for Africa would not do any good for the universal, Catholic Church. Some African theologians did not see the need for such Council too. Yet the proponents remained optimistic. The Ecumenical Association of African Theologians used the General Assemblies of their group in Yaoundé (January 1983), and Kinshasa (February 1986), to press on for the need of the Council.

⁷⁰ H. N. KUIZA, op. cit., p. 8.

⁷¹ J.S UKPON, *A Critical Review of the Lineamenta*, in M. BROWNE (ed), *African Synod, Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, p. 32.

⁷² *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 5.

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continent than a mere solemn liturgy. The situation was made worse by the fact that just three days before the synod (7th of April, 1994), there began the Rwandan genocide that remains one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history⁷³. It was thus in the spirit of the above situation that Cardinal H. Thiandoum of Senegal, in his inaugural report at the synod, named conflict and wars as some of the greatest challenges facing the continent⁷⁴. The consequences of incessant conflicts include what he described as 'extreme poverty', disease (especially HIV/AIDS), illiteracy and ignorance. The report of Cardinal Thiandoum thus offered the direction for most of the deliberations of the Synod thus making the issue of social justice a dominant question at the Synod⁷⁵.

The Synod would deal with such issues in Africa as increasing poverty, urbanization, international debt, the arms trade, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, demographic concerns and threats to the family. Other fundamental challenges facing the Synod included, the liberation of women, the spread of AIDS, the survival of the practice of slavery in some places, ethnocentricity and tribal opposition⁷⁶. The Fathers held that

⁷³ M. CHEZA, *Repères chronologiques*, in M. CHEZA (ed.), *Le Synode africain, Histoire et textes*, Paris, Edition Karthala, 1996, p. 21-24.

⁷⁴ Cardinal H. Thiandoum is the Archbishop of Dakar in Senegal. He was the general reporter for the special synod on Africa. He made his inaugural report on the 11th of April 1996 where he gave some guidelines for the proceedings of the synod. He referred to the Synod as 'journeying together' under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (cf. A. O. ONWUBIKO, *The African Synod*, SNAAP Press, Enugu, 1994, pp. 48-49). Cardinal Francis Arinze would equally highlight the important question of inculturation as a main task of the Synod when he asks rhetorically if the Church is at home in Africa and Africans at home in the Church. Others like Cardinal B. Gantin and Rev. Fr. J. Okoye tried to help put the Synod's mission in perspective (cf. Ibid., p. 49).

⁷⁵ Cardinal Thiandoum set the pace and summarised the root causes of African problem as bad government, economic mismanagement and corruption. Cardinal Arinze while accepting this, argues that African leaders alone cannot be blamed for all the evils in the continent since there are also other corrupt leaders who are not Africans. Cardinal B. Yago of Abidjan thought that Christian leaders are not involved enough in politics as to foster justice. Other notable interventions on the same issue came from Archbishop L. Mosengwo of Kisangani, Bishops J-M. Cisse, G. K. Mamputu of Matadi who speaks of African ecclesial communities that continue to live in poverty and misery. Bishop E. K. Owando of Congo, Bishop M. Okolo of Nigeria blamed the Church for hitherto, not showing "genuine compassion for the people" and bishop P. K. Bakyenga thinks that the Church should train personnel even among candidates to the priesthood who will be more politically sensitive (cf. A. O. ONWUBIKO, A. O. ONWUBIKO, *The African Synod...*, pp. 56-62). Later Archbishop of Obiefuna of Onitsha Nigeria would remind the Synod that the problem of tribalism and racism in the continent must be addressed as a major cause of the ills in the continent. Many people even among Christians, see the blood of tribe as thicker than that of baptism. He argues therefore that only by promoting the image of the *Church as a family of God* that the Christians could speak with one mind and spirit and enhance genuine solidarity. Without this, they cannot act as a united force against the evils in the continent (cf. Ibid. p. 65).

⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid., no. 51.

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those who are abjectly poor would find it difficult, if not impossible to be 'good Christians'. The implication of this is that the full life, the life in abundance promised by the author of Christianity cannot be reconciled with the indigence and destitution experienced in Africa⁷⁷. A. O. Onwubiko of Nigeria summarises the mood thus:

What is becoming increasingly clear is that the subject of justice and peace in Africa is now part of the evangelisation process and part of the proclamation of the Gospel⁷⁸.

Of all those suffering from social injustice, oppression and poverty, the Synod Fathers observed that women were among the worst victims in the region. So we shall briefly see their position about the condition of women, and then end with their teaching about other victims in the region.

3.4.2.3. Confronting Social Injustice especially Against African Women

Most of the discussions on the plight of African women are to be understood especially from the Christian notion of the fundamental dignity of the human person created in the image of God as well as the role of women in the family⁷⁹. Concern for African women was high in the agenda of the Synod⁸⁰. While not identifying every woman as a victim of such oppression, the Synod observed that African women constitute some of the poorest of the poor in the region. They are the most exploited and abused in the continent. This is why most of the discussions during the sessions, as well as the final documents, focused on how to improve the condition of African women described as very precarious⁸¹. Below they identify the specific ways that African women are oppressed culturally, subjugated psychologically and impoverished economically.

⁷⁷ They maintained that preaching a God of justice to victims of oppression, preaching the God of life to those dying slowly, preaching divine Providence to those who have nothing is an obstacle to the Gospel message

⁷⁸ O. A. ONWUBIKO, op. cit. p. 56.

⁷⁹ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 82 underlines that human beings are imbued with dignity derived from the Creator. The document then continues to affirm that in Christian marriage this fundamental and natural dignity takes on even a greater significance. "The mutual love of baptized spouses makes present the love of Christ for his Church. As a sign of this love of Christ, Marriage is a *Sacrament of the New Covenant*" (Ibid., no. 83).

⁸⁰ While family was seen to be the bedrock of the African society, many of the interventions at the Synod showed that African woman is the bedrock of the African family. *Ecclesia in Africa* re-emphasises this at the end of the Synodal discussions (cf. Ibid., no. 40).

⁸¹ G. KBIEBAYA, *Ceux que le Synode ne peut oublier*, in M. CHEZA, op. cit. pp. 57-58.

3.4.2.4. Factors Responsible for the Oppression and Pauperisation of African Women

In our definition of poverty, we tried to demonstrate that it is not limited to economic matters. Poverty among other things is about powerlessness. A study of the condition of many Black women as seen during the Synod shows that there are a combination of many factors responsible for the woeful condition of many of them. One can actually describe many African women as victims of triple oppression. This means actually that women are often culturally subjugated, sexually exploited and economically oppressed⁸². Studying the Synod documents one sees that they grouped these oppressions under insidious cultural practices, lack of educational opportunities and economic oppression of women, and failure to accept the role of women in modern African families.

3.4.2.4.1. Some Oppressive Cultural Practices

According to the Synod Fathers and *Ecclesia in Africa*, in the continent of Africa, there exists a number of cultural practices that deprive women of their right and indeed oppress them⁸³. The cultural and socio-economic structures in Africa give women a subordinate status⁸⁴. These practices militate against their proper humanisation⁸⁵. At best women are often considered the property of their husbands and instruments of procreation and housekeeping. Other forms of oppression include female circumcision, forced and arranged marriage.

3.4.2.4.2. Economic Exclusion

Often African women are not given equal opportunities like their male counterparts right from the family to the society as a whole. Many women especially in Africa receive lowest pays but endure the worst working conditions. Given the number of children

⁸² Y. YABART, *Un soufflé venant d'Afrique, communauté au Nord-Cameroun*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1986, p. 62. See also. D. SANDGREN, *Christianity and the Kikuyu, Religious Divisions and Social Conflicts*, Peter Lang, New York, 1989, p. 71.

⁸³ E. A. no. 121. There are ample evidence that many cultures of the world tend to oppress women.

⁸⁴ Cf. D. ROBERT, *Revisioning the Women's Missionary Movement*, in C.V. ENGEN (ed.), *Good News of the Kingdom, Mission Theology of the Third World*, Orbis Books, New York, 1993, p. 113.

⁸⁵ In many African societies women are considered properties of their husbands. At the death of their husbands they undergo oppressive ritual experiences and in most cases denied the right to inherit their husbands property. This is more so if the widow had no child and especially a male child to perpetuate the family lineage. Traditional Igbo society in Nigeria is an example.

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which some women have to care for, it often becomes impossible for them to engage in other gainful economic activities. Many of them are thus forced to depend on the hand-outs which their husbands give them. In a polygamous family, the woman discovers that despite the number of children she has, she is obliged to care for them as well. There was once a woman who complained of being maltreated and excluded from the economic gains of the family. This woman was crudely reminded by her husband: "*Je t'ai épousé pour travailler*"⁸⁶. The poverty of many women can also be seen in the health sector where many of them die at child birth and other forms of tropical diseases⁸⁷. Today, it has been discovered that most African women are poorer, and have a higher record of diseases today than at independence⁸⁸. Since the outbreak of HIV/AIDS in the region, it is observed that Africans have the highest number of HIV/AIDS in the world, and two thirds of the patients in the continent are women⁸⁹.

3.4.2.4.3. Denial of Educational Opportunities

The Synod Fathers observed that despite the progress being made in the continent, women are still generally denied the educational opportunities that would have helped them to wriggle out of their economic and cultural subjugation. They pointed out that the highest percentage of illiteracy in Africa is found among women. And once groups of people are denied the right and opportunity for education, they often become the footstool of others in the society. It was observed that while the traditional African culture can be blamed for the said oppression and marginalisation of women, the Church in the continent has not done much either to change the status quo. For example it was observed that, there is no single theological institution in the whole of West Africa that is consecrated for the education of lay women so that they can contribute to the growth of the society⁹⁰. In response to this, *Ecclesia in Africa* would later state: "With specific

⁸⁶ Y. YABART, op. cit., p. 63.

⁸⁷ It was observed that the health crises in Madagascar is aggravated by the AIDS pandemic that threatened the existence of many people especially those who are already poor (cf. A. O. ONWUBIKO, op. cit. p. 63).

⁸⁸ Cf. M. LEJEUNE and P. W. ROSEMARY (ed.), *Business Ethics in the African Context Today*, Uganda Martyrs Press, Nkozi, 1996, p. 129. A number of initiatives have been taken towards alleviating the condition of women as a Canadian Motherhood Project in Nigeria shows. According to their recent report, "in the last decade, more than 2,500 women have been helped...They have been rescued from a life of destitution" (L. AYONOTE, *Woes of Wasted Womanhood*, in *The Newswatch* December 1999, p. 49).

⁸⁹ Cf. K. H. HOOMKWAP, *Women in the Society*, in M. CHEZA, op.cit, p. 77.

⁹⁰ One may argue that there is no need to consecrate special institutions for the theological education of lay women. But given the high quality of education in the major Seminaries in West Africa one admits that

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regard to the Church, women should be properly trained so that they can participate at appropriate levels in her apostolic activity”⁹¹.

3.4.2.4.4. Ignoring the Role of Women in African Families

The African Synod will be remembered especially by the importance it attached to the role of the family. According to the bishops, Africa takes the family as its fundamental unity and source of dynamism, joy and hope. But they observed that there is an irony about the African family structure. Generally, men are said to be the head of the family, but women are its pillars⁹². In spite of their roles in the families they are considered inferior in the system⁹³. For example at the death of the father of the family, children rally round their mother who despite the hardship continues to keep the family going. But the absence of a mother through death often brings an irreparable loss that disintegrates the entire family. Again, the plight of many widows leaves much to be desired, especially if they have not had any male child. The Synod Fathers observed further that if African children are the future of the continent, then any oppression against women will have a direct negative impacts on the children. The Synod regrets that there is not yet corresponding cultural, political and economic initiatives put in place to protect African women and empower them for the challenges of the time. They frown at the fact that women are not often accorded human dignity and are often excluded from decision-making even on matters that touch their lives. Women living in rural areas are often the worst victims.

Apart from the collective positions of the Synod Fathers, there were some individual contributors who insisted that addressing African poverty problem is directly linked to the fate of women in the region⁹⁴. Another contributor made a case for a general

even religious women are discriminated against in this regard. *Ecclesia in Africa* took up this theme again, and appealed to various leaders in Africa to value the contribution of women and empower them even more to make the continent a better place

⁹¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 121.

⁹² Today however, many women now find themselves as the heads of families.

⁹³ Bishop M. Bhasera of Gokwe in Zimbabwe told the Synod Fathers that if African women lack respect in general, then the rural women are the worst hit despite the fact that “rural women living in the great hardship are the mainstay of their families” (A. O. ONWUBIKO, *The African Synod...*, p. 147).

⁹⁴ Bishop J. Njue of Embu, Kenya, in particular was emphatic when he reasoned that more than ever, the future of the African continent depends much on the role assigned to women in the continent. This role will be better played when women are considered as human beings and not accorded an inferior status as is

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appreciation of the status of women in Africa today. According to bishop A. T. Sanon, of Bobo-Dioulasso of Burkina Faso, even the Synod seems to assume erroneously that every woman is a wife or a mother⁹⁵. In all these interventions, the trend of thought among the Fathers is that if the family is the pillar of the African society, women are the pillars of these families. The implication is that any harm done to women is a harm to the family, and as such undermines the entire fabric of the African society⁹⁶. The final report of the Synod based on the intervention of the participants gives a summary of the plight of African women⁹⁷.

The Synod Fathers ended by challenging themselves to pressurise various governments in Africa to formulate legislations that will protect and promote the rights of women. Such legislations should accentuate the laws of heritage in marriage, the status of widows especially childless ones, the rights of a second wife as in a polygamous marriage, the protection of the rights of children born out of wedlock and those of such 'unwed mothers'. Another area where women should play roles but are often neglected includes the formation of priests. Since priests will have women predominantly as their pastoral allies after their ordination, women should then be more involved in seminary formations. Religious women should be given equal opportunities like their male counterparts for a more advanced intellectual formation. This will arm them to better engage in the liberation efforts for African women⁹⁸.

The Synod equally examined the condition of other poor people in the continent as summarised here.

prevalent in many communities. The Church, he says, must be at the forefront of defending and promoting the right of women, not as an option but as a moral obligation tied to the prophetic mission demanded by the proclamation of the Good News. Only the Good News can challenge the traditional attitudes towards women who are still victims of involuntary prostitution, concubinage, abandonment, rape etc (cf. J. NJUE, *La femme dans nos sociétés*, in M. CHEZA, op.cit., pp. 62-64).

⁹⁵ He proposes that any discussion on the plight of African women must not be limited to the mothers in Africa. He contends that too much emphasis on women as mother risks to forget that there is now an emerging population of celibate women who tend not to have a traditional respect in the old African social order. Single mothers, celibates, religious women etc, must be integrated in the dream of a liberated African womanhood (cf. M. CHEZA, op.cit., p. 77).

⁹⁶ We shall see below how the continued echo of the plight of African women would find resonance in the final, official documents of the Synod

⁹⁷ We have to note that the condition of many Christian women in Africa are getting better than those of their Muslim counterparts (cf. A. N. MUSHETE, *Les thèmes majeurs de la théologie africaine*, 1989, p. 94)

⁹⁸ This is one of the most positive contributions among the individual contributors since it not only identified the plight of women in Africa but made concrete proposals for solutions.

3.4.2.5. Other Victims of Oppression

Apart from women the Synod equally considered the refugees as some of the most vulnerable person is the continent. *Ecclesia in Africa* summarised the position of the bishops on this issue.

One of the most bitter fruits of wars and economic hardships is the sad phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, a phenomenon which, as the Synod mentioned, has reached tragic dimensions⁹⁹.

One of the dangers of incessant wars in Africa is that human life seems to have lost its sanctity and value¹⁰⁰. The Synod Fathers and the apostolic exhortation equally identify the sick as another vulnerable group in the continent. And among the sick, the victims of AIDS are singled out. Coupled with their physical ordeals, those suffering from AIDS suffer from social stigmatisation as well. The impact of this is that economically, socially and psychologically such patients remain some of the poorest of the poor in the continent¹⁰¹.

3.4.2.6. The Synod of Hope and Its Symbolic Invitations for Future Action

That the problem of social justice and destitution in the continent was a major preoccupation of the Synod can be seen in the symbolic actions of the Fathers at the end of the assembly.

Like *Gaudium et Spes* the final document of the Synod makes a link between justice, peace and development. They called for an integral development that will aim essentially at the promotion of human dignity. No. 49 of the final document of the Synod discusses

⁹⁹ Meanwhile *Ecclesia in Africa* has this to say on the plight of refugees: "The ideal solution is the re-establishment of a just peace, reconciliation and economic development. It is therefore urgent that national, regional and international organisations find equitable and long-lasting solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons. In the meantime, since the continent continues to suffer from the massive displacement of refugees, I make a pressing appeal that these people be given material help and offered pastoral support wherever they may be, whether in Africa or in other Continents" (JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 119).

¹⁰⁰ The Fathers traced some of the causes of wars in the continent to tribalism, racism, religious intolerance and thirst for power (leading to totalitarian regimes). The victims of these ills, according to the Synod have been silenced as innocent victims who have resigned themselves to conditions that could be described as anthropological poverty.

¹⁰¹ The Synod Fathers and especially the apostolic exhortation blamed irresponsible sexual behaviours for the spread of the disease. They then called on all and sundry, to come to the aid of the patients, while effort is made to find a permanent cure to the disease (cf. JOHN PAUL, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 116).

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the issue of arms and debts as the bane of the Black race. No. 50 summarises the health condition in Africa under malnutrition, lack of hygiene, the growing percentage of sick people in the continent and the escalating number of avoidable deaths. HIV/AIDS, was specifically singled out as one of the greatest dangers facing Africa¹⁰². Again that solidarity with the poor was a major preoccupation of the Synod is seen in its continued echo in *Ecclesia in Africa*, which is the apostolic exhortation following the Synod¹⁰³.

Another symbolic act of the bishops was that they re-emphasised the need to tackle Africa's problems from its root-causes. Thus while thanking all those engaged in ameliorating the condition of the most vulnerable in the continent, they called for an end to the activities of some foreign nations who sell arms that fuel wars in the region. Also they called for a serious discussion on international debts. Once again, they re-iterate the need to empower women through education arguing that to educate a woman is to educate a whole people¹⁰⁴. They called for rigorous economic planning, creation of employment, increased productivity as well as more regional cooperation to promote a prosperous and stable economic, social and political Africa¹⁰⁵.

The final symbolic act of the bishops which still aimed at ameliorating the economic condition of the poor in the region was a direct address made to other Christians of the world. With them, they sought to foster more solidarity and collaboration. The older Churches in Europe and America were specifically addressed here. As an expression of solidarity to their counterparts in other parts of the world, the Synod Fathers wrote a joint open letter addressed to other bishops in Europe and North America. They called on

¹⁰² A theological response to human suffering is indispensable for any true inculturation (cf. P. C. OKUMA, op. cit. p. 61)

¹⁰³ We have seen much of this document in this study.

¹⁰⁴ Since the Synod, other regional Episcopal teachings have continued to call for respect for women. At the AECWA conference in Enugu the bishops of West Africa were once again reminded that "the test of a good society is its attitude towards women" and that "no society can develop without this vital resource" (U. J. OGWU, *Key Note Address*, in *The Church as an Agent of Reconciliation and Social Transformation*, in AECWA Publications, 2002, p. 17)

¹⁰⁵ M. CHEZA, op. cit. p. 265. The Synod equally demonstrated that building the Kingdom of peace, love and justice is not exclusive to the followers of Christ. This is why they made a passionate appeal to the international community to intervene immediately to salvage the continent from a condition described as pathetic.

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them to intervene especially in the matter of foreign debts which is a major cause of the continent's woes. According to them,

Africa is the home of hundreds of millions of the poorest people on earth. They are shackled with the burden of unpayable debts, which is both a symptom and a cause of their poverty. It is a symptom because they would not have borrowed if they were not poor; it is a cause because the crushing burden of debt repayments makes them poorer still¹⁰⁶.

The last part of this session will examine how the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* and the African Synod have inspired a theology of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa.

3.4.3. *Gaudium et Spes* and the African Synod: The Foundation for a Theology of Solidarity with the Poorest of the Poor

From our enquiry so far, our challenge now is how the *Gaudium et Spes* and the documents of the African Synod has inspired us towards evolving a theology of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today

3.4.3.1. The Inspirations of *Gaudium et Spes*

Just as the bishops and people of Latin America claim that Vatican II has inspired them towards a new pastoral and theological action, *Gaudium et spes* has equally inspired us in proposing a theology of solidarity in for tackling the challenges facing the Black continent today.

3.4.3.1.1. Vatican II and the Church of the Poor

Marxism and Neo-Marxism seem to have used and abused the concept of poverty so much that a chasm and even tension and hatred is encouraged between the rich and the poor. The poor generally came to be identified as the oppressed and sympathisers of the liberation cause. So in most of the official documents of the Church, the concept of effective poverty was used with caution. But at Vatican II, the Church, especially Pope John XIII took a bold step like Leo XIII speak of the poor as concrete human beings with

¹⁰⁶ THE BISHOPS OF AFRICA, *Forgive Us Our Debts, Open Letter to Our Brother Bishops in Europe and North America*, in M. BROWNE (ed), op.cit., pp. 114-116.

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concrete needs. This is why we read that John XXIII spoke to the bishops and faithful of the countries on the periphery of the international stage, in the ancient metaphor of the Church as a 'Mother'. He also spoke of a "Church that is and wishes to be the Church of all particularly the Church of the poor"¹⁰⁷.

From the Council onwards the Church's identification with the poor became more intensified. The opening words of *Gaudium et spes* affirms this as the Church publicly showed her active solidarity with humanity in their joys and sorrows (GS, 1). The massive interest in Catholic Social Teaching and increased practical commitments of the Church through various commissions and initiatives show a Church that wishes to identify with the poor.

3.4.3.1.2. Plurality demands Collaboration and Solidarity

One important inspiration of Vatican II and *Gaudium et spes* in particular is that it shows a Church which is "open to the world, accepts pluralism of modern society, seeks dialogue with those who have different outlook, all with the aim of making the world a more human place in which to live"¹⁰⁸. While avoiding any sort of conformism to the world, Vatican II seeks to render service to the world by challenging some of its values. While seeking to be involved in the world, the Council remains open to very different and open future. Vatican II challenged a world structured in favour of the *rich and the powerful*. Its vision is to have a more just world even in favour of the oppressed and the poor, a world in need of liberation. Accepting the pluralism of modern world, the Council advocates dialogue for mutual co-existence and for building up the Kingdom of God.

Vatican II equally makes it explicit that the Church is called to play a prophetic role (GS 40-45). Being prophetic the Church assumes the role of making the human family more truly human (GS 40.3). This is to be done by proclaiming and fostering human rights (GS 41.3), building up of a human community and initiating action for service for all, but most especially the poor in every society (GS 42. 2). Even while seeking solidarity with political communities and authorities, the Church shows its readiness to relinquish

¹⁰⁷ G. ALBERIGO and J. A. KOMONCHAK, (ed.), op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 168.

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privileges in order to retain the freedom of witness, of judgement, and of action in a truly prophetic manner (GS 76).

3.4.3.1.3. *Gaudium et Spes* moved Beyond ‘Liberation’ to ‘Development’

Another important contribution of *Gaudium et Spes* is that it tried to go beyond the theme of liberation to discuss development. In the document, the notion of development became very central in official Church document. It functions as an organising principle for the whole treatment of socio-economic problems. Beyond mere liberation from poverty, development would involve and ensure there is a more equitable distribution of resources including land (GS 71, 78.1). It would ensure a better sharing of the fruits of economic activities between nations, and between the more privileged and the less-privileged in the same nation (GS 66). Other issues raised are the right of workers to share in the management and whole process of economic planning (GS 65, 68. 1-6), the right of workers to establish trade unions, and as a last resort, to use strikes in defence of their just rights (GS 68. 2-3), and the use of improved methods of production (GS 66.1, 68. 1).

Gaudium et Spes equally taught about the importance of investing resources to promote development (GS 65.3), the need to ensure that workers can live in dignity and have opportunity to develop their talents, even at work (GS 67). Another concern is the protection of workers against unemployment and other negative consequences arising from economic development (GS 66.2-3). The document reminded modern men and women that while working, planning and exploiting resources, the welfare of future generations must be put into account (GS 70). Finally, *Gaudium et Spes* showed that it is not just concerned about the poor, but also seeks to address the root causes of poverty. The called on modern world to should ensure a balanced trade relationship between richer and poorer nations, and organisations are to be established to regulate this trade (GS 86. 6).

From the above we see that Vatican II saw development as something beyond economic considerations¹⁰⁹. People are called to participate in the divine work of creation and

¹⁰⁹ A balanced notion of development is one in which economic values are linked to other fundamental human values like freedom, dignity and participation. The Council above all made a very important contribution to our present quest by offering a theology of work.

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Christ's redemptive work so as to foster the Kingdom of God among men¹¹⁰. While proposing cooperation among nations, the Council however calls for the respect of the values and cultures of all peoples in seeking development (GS 58. 2-3)¹¹¹.

3.4.3.1.4. New Challenge for Theological and Pastoral Creativity

Vatican signalled a new collaboration between the Magisterium and theologians. As a matter of fact, right from the preparatory stages of the Council, there was clear sign that theological experts were not only welcome to join the deliberations but also, called to bring in new insights into the nature of the Church and the challenges facing it. The involvement of some of the best theologians of the time especially as members of the 'Theological Commission' was a significant recognition of the importance of theologians and theological research in the life of the Church¹¹². Some authors actually saw the two main pillars of Vatican II as 'the pope's inspiration and the works of the 'Theological Commission'¹¹³.

The theological creativity initiated at Vatican II continued after it, resulting in some theological and pastoral movements in the Catholic Church. According to the proponents of liberation theology in Latin America, what they are doing is only a response to the challenge of the Council. They claim that there would never really have been a liberation theology if there was no Vatican II. From the Council, liberation theologians saw a Church moving from a static to a more dynamic self-understanding. The Church recognised God present in history as voice and empowerment that touches the entire human family. It endorsed "new humanism", in which human beings are defined above all, by their joint responsibility for history and for one another. The Council affirmed the

¹¹⁰ D. DORR, *Option for the Poor, A Hundred...*, p. 171.

¹¹¹ This refers to the principle of subsidiarity discussed in the later part of this work.

¹¹² The 'Theological Commission' which was latter called 'The Doctrinal Commission', worked closely with renowned theologians like M-D Chenu, Yves Congar, Hans Küng, J. Danielou, K. Rahner, J. Ratzinger, E. Schillebeeckx, H. de Lubach etc. The contributions of the intellectual teams in the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium all show the importance which the Council attached to theological innovations as a means of fostering a relevant Church in the modern world (cf. G. ALBERIGO and J. KOMONCHAK (eds.), op. cit., p. 4).

¹¹³ Cf. Ibid. p. 2.

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deals of modern pluralist society, defended people's civil rights, took into account the total range of promised salvation, including people's deliverance from oppression¹¹⁴.

From the above we appreciate the claim that "*la théologie de la libération naît lentement et progressivement à partir de Vatican II*"¹¹⁵. For J. L. Segundo, one of the proponents of liberation theology, the greatest influence of Vatican II on liberation theology lies in its methodological approach to issues. This is to say that the Council recognised that faith throws light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions that are fully human¹¹⁶. Chenu's position that Vatican II opened the way for the birth of Liberation theology can serve as a good conclusion to this discourse¹¹⁷.

What inspiration do we draw from the teachings of the African Synod?

3.4.3.2. The Inspirations of the African Synod

The teachings of the Synod mark the beginning of a new era of doing theology in the continent as well as offer the inspiration for a more systematic pastoral commitment in the region. We are going to discuss the achievements of the Synod under the following headings: African consensus, call for Nonviolent commitment for Social Justice, the dawn of a prophetic Church, and a call to develop African theology to address African needs.

3.4.3.2.1. African Consensus

First, a thorough study of the Synod and its documents reveals that there were no obvious ideological tensions between different delegates. An atmosphere of friendliness and freedom of expression dominated the Synod. Although the time was short, the delegates were able to come to learn one another, shared ideas and experiences and discovered that despite the vast nature of the continent, that they had a lot in common. That linguistic and

¹¹⁴ Cf. G. BAUM, *Theology and Society*, Paulist Press, New York, 1987, pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁵ M. ACALA, *Théologie de la libération, histoire, courant critiques*, in B. CHENU (ed.), *Théologies des libérations*, Cerf/Centurion, Paris, 1985, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ Cf. J.L. SEGUNDO, *Faith and Ideologies in Biblical Revelation*, in N.K. GOTTWALD, (ed.), *Bible and Liberation, Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Orbis Books, New York, 1993, p. 94.

¹¹⁷ B. CHENU, *Théologies chrétiennes des tiers Monde*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1984, p. 20.

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geographical barriers were not allowed to hinder the task before the Synod, explains why the bishops achieved so much in so short a time. So unlike Vatican II, which noticed a sharp division between “progressives” and “conservatives”, delegates to the Synod saw “the need of the African Church” as a common and urgent task. They did not see the need to introduce innovations in the Church, nor did they want to reverse the great teachings of Vatican II. African delegates to the Synod expressed in reality the African sense of solidarity, unity, and community.

In many of the issues discussed, the delegates demonstrated the true African sense of consensus in which the ‘middle position’ provides a unifying element. They felt that their mission was to emphasise those elements in the teaching of the universal Church that are urgently needed by the Church in Africa. It is this sense of cooperation and working in solidarity to achieve goals, that we wish to develop a unique African theological option. This assertion is confirmed by a noted African theologian who having studied the Synod affirms that “their unity of purpose can become a powerful incentive for African theologians and pastoral agents”¹¹⁸.

3.4.3.2.2. Call for Active Political Participation

Another contribution of the Synod to a theology of solidarity lies in the fact that their major concern was how to present the Gospel as a goodnews to millions of poor people in Africa. So, by the privileged place given to the issues of social justice, human rights, reconciliation, democratisation and fight against poverty in Africa, the Synod can rightly be called a Synod of hope. This hope is not just for the poor in Africa, but also gives an official backing for creative theological and pastoral actions in the continent. This is a revolution for the Church in Africa which has traditionally tended to shy away from active engagement in socio-political issues as noted:

We have not always done what we could do to form the laity for life in the society, to a Christian vision of politics and economics. A protracted absence of the lay faithful from this field has led to them to believe that the faith has nothing to do with politics¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁸ Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *The Synod of Hope...*, p.205.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

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The bishops at the Synod called all Christians to become actively involved in politics and expressed the readiness of the Church to travel along with the people for the establishment of democracy in the continent.

3.4.3.2.3. The dawn of a Prophetic Church

The Synod portrayed an African Church that is ready to assume a prophetic role in the continent. The courage and audacity with which the delegates condemned the *forces of death* in Africa is unique. They addressed without fear the dictatorial and corrupt leaderships in the continent. The bishops accused the African elite of embezzling public funds, of institutionalising corruption and abusing human rights. And to the African citizens in the general, the message was clear. Speaking with the mandate of their prophetic calling, they demanded an end to war, oppression, racism, ethnicism, rivalry, inferiority complex, injustice, dictatorship and corruption. Only a prophetic Church can so exhort, condemn and commend its people for their tenacity in midst of the multifarious challenges facing them¹²⁰. Thenceforth just as Medellin Conference became the decisive event in the Latin American Church, so is the Synod the landmark for the African Church.

3.4.3.2.4. Call to Develop African Theology to Address African Needs

The final inspiration from the Synod is that it threw a challenge to African theologians. It not only acknowledged the importance of doing theology and theological research, but equally called for more rigorous commitment to theological research. This call was not just made to professional theologians, but also to all major seminaries and institutions. They were called to define African cultures and values with vigour and transmit same effectively. In doing so, they would be fostering evangelisation in the region, as well as seeking the meeting points with other cultures of the world. The Synod demonstrated the importance it attaches to theological innovations in the continent, by the way the bishops and theological experts worked in harmony. When the Synod described itself at a Synod of Hope, one of the main desires is that African theologians seek ways of developing

¹²⁰ J. M. WALIGGO, *The Synod of Hope...*, p. 207. We have to remind ourselves that the tragedy in Rwanda happened just at the beginning of the Synod and continued throughout the period of the Synod. This worst event in the history of independent Africa taught the delegates the urgent need to get the Church involved in taking a stronger position in defence of human life and dignity in the continent.

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African theologies that can help to address the pressing problems of the continent especially that of social injustice and anthropological poverty. Today African theologians believe that this,

hope and optimism are realistic if we plan carefully for the implementation of the Synod, if we *develop theologically* what has been provided and translate it into liberative pastoral action¹²¹.

3.4.4. Closing Remarks on *Gaudium et Spes* and the African Synod

We have seen that *Gaudium et Spes* and the African Synod are two landmarks in the Catholic Social Teaching. We have seen especially how the documents of the two assemblies have become a source of inspiration to our present study. The desire to tackle the problem of poverty and the challenge for developing a relevant theology for doing so has been our main preoccupation in this chapter. We shall end however by pointing out that the documents of the two assemblies have their limitations and that further theological reflection is called for to complement these deficiencies. One unfinished task at Vatican II and African Synod is that they did not give concrete pastoral guides on how to tackle some of the problems they raised. This is to say that there are more theories, pronouncements and communiqués which are not based on praxis. The problem of extreme poverty cannot however be solved without praxis. This is because, today in Black Africa,

Conflicts still abound in most areas of the people's life...What and how to address these issues...The reality of poverty, hunger...injustice, famine, wars and appropriation of authentic cultural values of the people seem to be far away from being accommodated... These are still staggering facts before our faces in the continent today¹²².

The next part of this research project will be consecrated to seeking concrete, pastoral and scientific ways of addressing the problem of extreme poverty in the region. We have limited ourselves to Paulo Freire inspired pedagogical, philosophical and social principles for the praxis of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 205. Note that the emphasis in the quote is mine.

¹²²P. C. OKUMA, op. cit., p. 55.

PART FOUR

PRAXIS OF SOLIDARITY AS INSPIRED BY PAULO FREIRE'S METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

So far we have tried to expose the nature of poverty which is prevalent in Black Africa today. We equally saw that the word of God and the teachings of the Church see extreme poverty, which is penury as destructive to human selfhood and therefore an anti-Kingdom phenomenon. We are thus called to work to establish such conditions that would enable people achieve their true ontological vocation by being humanised. How Paulo Freire's inspired methods and principles can help us do this is hereby presented.

CHAPTER ONE

4.1. PAULO FREIRE: HIS THE LIFE, LEGACY AND INSPIRATIONS

This last part of our study is dedicated to seeking systematically practical strategies for the liberation, empowerment and humnisation of the poorest of the poor. Although we have of strategic options for addressing this important challenge, we shall base reflection on Paulo Freire inspired methods and principles. I have to note immediately here that I am only interpreting Paulo Freire essentially as a theologian. Another remark is that my major focus is on two of his books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), and *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 1974. Since this work is not on Paulo Freire as such, we have limited ourselves to these two books where we found useful ideas to guide us in our theologico-pastoral approach to the problem of poverty in Black Africa¹. To help us understand the whole of this part of our work, a brief presentation of the life and works of Freire have been presented.

4.1.1. Paulo Freire: His Life and Childhood

Freire was born on 19th September, 1921 of a middle-class family in the city of Recife which is the capital of the state of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil². As for religiosity, Paulo's father had no formal religious affiliation but respected the beliefs and opinions of others. This included respecting the religious belief of his wife who was a Catholic. When Paulo grew up and opted to become a Catholic like his mother, his father also

¹The part has four chapters. The first two which are conscientization and dialogue are essentially theoretical. They are equally designed for a longer term reform. The last two chapters are more practical and are designed to tackle poverty in a shorter term. These are cultural action which is a kind of nonviolent engagement. The other is praxis of charity. While the first three chapters are mainly inspired by Paulo Freire's anthropological, educational and political philosophies, the last chapter on charity is essentially a personal contribution that I wish to make on this regard.

² Cf. P. FREIRE, *Letters to Cristina...*, p. 38.

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respected this choice. And his Catholic up-bringing would indeed have a strong influence in the development of his thoughts. As for the socio-economic background of Paulo Freire, his parents belonged to the middle-class as his father was an officer in the military police of the state of Pernambuco.

Although born into a middle class, the economic crisis of the late 1929's affected his family and they degenerated into abject poverty. Consequently they were forced to leave Recife and settled in a city called Jaboatao in the same region of Recife³. According to Freire him, his family was forced to move to Jaboatao "like people looking for salvation"⁴. And it was there that Paulo spent most part of his adolescent life⁵. It was indeed in Jaboatao, that Paulo realised that all was not well with the society in which he was born. Among other things, he experienced extreme poverty and hunger in his family. The same was applicable to most of their neighbours as people hardly had three meals a day. These experiences made a deep impression on Paulo and would determine the course of his entire life mission later. Despite all these challenges the young Paulo discovered that he should not resign himself to fate so he resolved to do something to save himself and even to help others. When he was seven, he took a vow to dedicate his life to struggle against hunger not just for himself but, "so that other children would not have to know the agony he was then experiencing"⁶.

4.1.2. Academic Pursuit

After the sojourn of the Freire family at Jaboatoa, the young Paulo returned to Recife to begin his high education. The poverty condition that shackled the family did not help matters as Paulo found it extremely difficult to pay for his studies. And added to lack of funds, he discovered above all that in the classroom, he could neither think properly nor assimilate effectively in an 'empty stomach'. This became the very first experience he acquired concerning the causal link between education/learning and poverty. And as if to make matters worse, Paulo's father died in 1934 when Paulo was only thirteen and was struggling to acquire formal education. All these obstacles affected Paulo intellectually

³ Cf. Ibid., p. 49.

⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵ Cf. R. SHAULL, *Forward to Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York, 1997 impression, p. 12

⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

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and psychologically. But rather than becoming stumbling blocks for him, he turned them into stepping stones. He believed above all that education held the key to liberating people especially the poor from the shackles of poverty and other forms of dehumanisations⁷. The first experience he had about the need to continue his education was that he later started teaching Portuguese language in Colegio Oswald Cruz in 1947, in the very school he had attended himself⁸.

So he doggedly pursued his education up till the university level with special interest in the philosophy of education. He equally became a law graduate but did not practice as a lawyer but rather devoted his time to developing a systematic type of education that can liberate, empower and reform the society. His marriage in 1944 to Elza Maia Costa Oliveira, a primary school teacher, helped him all the more to maintain his focus on education. This helped him to develop his own effective educational model. To make him very effective in his chosen career as an educationist, Paulo began to read very widely and learning the languages. And by 1943 he could read in Spanish, and in 1944 he mastered French and in 1947 he could write in English.

In 1959, in his doctoral dissertation entitled, *Educacao e atualidade brasileira*, (Present Day Education in Brazil), he began to express some of the educational themes and issues that were to be developed subsequently in his educational career⁹. He was later appointed Professor of History and Philosophy of Education in the University of Recife. He equally got involved in the education programme for adult illiterates in Brazil. As a Professor and educationist, Paulo exhibited an unusual sense of originality and creativity. He could combine his own background experience, his encounter with adult illiterates and his intellectual exposure to formulate a methodology of teaching and learning that was extraordinary. But while it appealed to many on the margin, those in various authority positions saw his method and engagement as subversive and threat to the status quo¹⁰.

⁷ Cf. D. GOULET, *Introduction to Education for Critical Consciousness*, Sheed and Ward, 1974, p. ix.

⁸ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of Hope. Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York, 1966, p. 13.

⁹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Letters to Cristina...*, p. 87.

¹⁰ We must note that apart from his campaigns for adult education, he engaged in other educational and social reform movements like the movements for popular education in the early 1960s in Brazil. The most important of these were the Movement for Popular Culture (MCP) in Recife, the Cultural Extension

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4.1.3. The Power of Education and Major Influences on His Life and Works

Right from his childhood and through his entire career, Freire believed in the power of education as the praxis of liberty, because “it frees the educator no less than the educatees from the twin thralldom of silence and monologue”¹¹. As a victim of poverty himself, Freire made a fundamental option of associating more closely with the victims of poverty like himself to see how to help them. This helped him especially to learn that the poor, whom he also called the dispossessed, had a peculiar psychology and culture. Theirs is ‘*the culture of silence*’¹². This silence, unusual disposition of ignorance and lethargy was the direct product of the whole economic, social and political domination of which they were victims. These victims were neither encouraged nor equipped to know or to respond to the concrete realities of their world. Being in their special world in what he called ‘submerged’ condition, Paulo realised that critical awareness and response were practically impossible for them. Many poor people were not educated and educated people were not among the poorest of the poor around him. So just as Paulo vowed to dedicate his life fighting poverty and hunger, he equally turned his whole life and energy to the field of education seeing it as a tool against poverty and oppression.

First he realised that he himself had to be educated in order to help others. But soon he realised that the elite in the society knew the liberatory power of education, and so systematically prevented the poor from acquiring it. Even in the case where the dominant elite could not prevent people from going to school, they offered them the wrong type of education that will not allow them to think critically, so that they will neither challenge nor change the status quo of oppression¹³. This latest discovery became a challenge for Paulo. He thus rejected the traditional methodology of education and set out to propose a new educational method that can be termed ‘*the Pedagogy of the Oppressed*’¹⁴.

Service (SEC) at the University of Recife (now the Federal University of Pernambuco: UFPE) and the “Bare feet can also learn to read” campaign in the neighbouring state of Rio Grande do Norte. Here he got his first chance to try out his method with three hundred sugarcane sharecroppers.

¹¹ D. GOULET, op. cit., p. ix.

¹² Ibid., p. 12. See also S. B. BROOKFIELD, *Developing Critical Thinkers, Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*, Open University Publications, Milton Keynes, 1987, p. 43.

¹³ Cf. A. DARDER, *Re-inventing Paulo Freire, A Pedagogy of Love*, Westview Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 2.

¹⁴ The death of his father in 1934 when he was only thirteen years old added to his challenges, but did not weaken his resolve.

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Freire had a number of main influences in his life. Although Paulo's father, did not practice any formal religion, his mother was a Catholic and Paulo was brought up in a strong Catholic tradition. The influence of this religious up-bringing could be seen later in Freire's thoughts which is marked by Christian humanism. His thoughts were later to become a major influence in developing some Catholic thoughts like the theology of liberation after Vatican II. Another important influence on him remained the experience of poverty and hunger in particular. Degenerating from a middle class to experience extreme poverty spurred Freire to devote his entire life in fighting poverty, oppression and other forms of dehumanisation of the human person.

As for the intellectual influences on Freire, one realises that Christian anthropology, existential philosophy and the reformist and humanist movements of the last century attracted his interest. Of particular note are the lives and works of J-P. Satre and E. Mounier, Erich Fromm and Louis Althusser. Others include Ortega y Gasset, Mao, Martin Luther King, Ch Guevara, Unamuno and Marcuse¹⁵. Although Freire does not profess to be a Marxist, the influence of Marxist philosophy can be discerned in his thoughts. As for his Marxist tendencies, he often repeated that his romance with Marx did not suggest he was divorcing Christ¹⁶. So while acknowledging the influences of these men on his own thought, one observes that Paulo has developed a perspective on education and politics that is uniquely and authentically his own.

4.1.4. Freire Outside Brazil, His Last Days and Legacies

Freire's reputation and unique pedagogical initiative made him very popular in his native Brazil. While some saw him as a reformer, others saw him as a rebel and anarchist¹⁷. Eventually, the *coup d'état* that took place in Brazil in 1964, became the turning point in his life and future career. He was first imprisoned and later released, and then 'encouraged' to leave the country. So he left to Chile where he spent five years working

¹⁵ Cf. R. SHAULL, op. cit., pp.12-13.

¹⁶ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Letters to Cristina...*, p. 87.

¹⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 86.

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with UNESCO and the Chilean Institute for Agrarian Reforms for adult education¹⁸. As his popularity increased, Paulo was appointed a consultant at Harvard University's School of Education, USA, while working with a number of groups for developing new educational experiments in rural and urban centres. He equally served as Special Consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. While working at Geneva, he got involved with many developing countries which he helped to fashion effective educational policies and practices. It was especially at this period that he came to know about the African educational and developmental challenges.

In Africa he adapted his emancipatory pedagogy to have a psychosocial impact in the people. His method is more popularly known in Africa as Development Education Programme (DEP) with each country modifying the name to their context. In Eastern African countries like Kenya, Freire's psychosocial method was known as DELTA (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action). Freire's educational strategy was equally practiced in the African countries like Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau where he personally worked closely with the governments and educational policy makers in the post-independent epoch¹⁹. Other countries in West Africa have in one way or another, been influenced by Freire's psychosocial methods. His inspiration has led to the emergence of such concepts as Development Education and Leadership Services (DELES). A typical example of his activities and influences in Black Africa can be seen in his book, *Pedagogy in Process, The Letters to Guinea Bissau, Letters to Guinea Bissau*, Seabury Press, New York, 1978.

After his sojourn outside Brazil, in 1980, Paulo Freire returned to his native country and continued with his work. In 1988, the Workers' Party (PT), which Freire had helped found, won the Municipal elections in Sao Paulo. He was invited to take over the post of Municipal Secretary of Education. Paulo would later resign from this appointment and

¹⁸ His experience in this Institute in Chile was to open for him yet another horizon for his understanding of educational processes, handicaps and prospects. His comparison of the technical education with conscientization is central to understanding him, and this we will do later in this work.

¹⁹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of Hope*..., p. 120.

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consecrated his time to reading and writing. On May 2nd 1997, Paulo Freire died having left a lot of books and articles where his various liberatory and humanising theories can be found. The most systematic and most influential of these works remain *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in Brazil in 1967. A closer reading of Freire shows that most of his later works are the elaboration of the themes highlighted in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Later he came to realise that, “exile over time allows new situations to reinsert us in the world”²⁰.

Perhaps the greatest legacy which Freire has left is that he has shown the power that is inherent in effective education. Apart from the coherency he sought to demonstrate in his theories, Freire’s personal life, experiences, struggles and success makes him a subject of peculiar relevance to our study of poverty in Black Africa. His capacity for building a coherent thought from interdisciplinary fields becomes a beacon for us as we try to seek appropriate theological language and methodology for addressing the Black African problem of extreme poverty.

Since we are adopting and adapting Paulo Freire’s theories and methodologies to tackling the problem of poverty in Black Africa, we wish to briefly summarise some of his fundamental thoughts about the human nature and the emergence of an oppressive society. This will lead us to examining the nature of the new humanism that all liberatory pedagogies and praxes should aspire to promote according to Freire.

4.1.5. Freire’s Humanism as Basis of his Philosophical Anthropology

In his work, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974), Freire discussed the nature and place of human beings in the world. First, he presented human beings as special creatures and contrasted them with animals. To be human is to be in relationships with others and with the world²¹. As a human being one is able to experience the world as objective reality that is independent of oneself, a reality that is knowable in itself. Animals on the

²⁰ P. FREIRE, *Letters to Cristina...*, p. 5.

²¹ Man is a being of relationship especially because he is separate from the world and yet open to it.

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contrary are submerged in reality and so cannot relate hence they can be called creatures of mere *contacts*. So unlike animals men are both *in* the world and *with* the world²².

As for the nature of these relationships, one observes their plural and complex nature. Men's temperamental differences, their differences of experiences, their historical and geographical conditions make it that facing widely different challenges of the environment or other challenges, men do not react in single pattern. Confronted with such challenges men usually organise themselves, they choose the response they think is best, they test themselves and the act. These actions are themselves constantly adjustable so that the way the same people act at a given situation today may differ from their action the next hour.

Men consciously manifest such dynamism as described above because they are beings of reason, freedom and choice. Because they are beings with reason, men relate to the world in a critical way. By this is meant that men are capable of grasping the objective data of reality together with the interconnected links in them. This apprehension is possible via reflection and not 'reflex'²³. Through this critical perception of reality men discover their own temporarity. This discovery becomes for men the central issue of their existence since they can thus transcend a single dimension of existence by reaching back to yesterday, recognising themselves and the world today and then projecting upon the tomorrow which is the future²⁴.

So the realisation of the dimensionality of time is revolutionary for man since he is no longer a prisoner within the permanent 'today' where he perceives himself as simply dumped. The discovery of temporarity helps men to appreciate the dynamism of history and the dynamism of their relationship with the world. Aware of temporarity men discover also that they are not mere passive creatures but are called to intervene in reality in order to change it through their creative activity. So men are precisely human because of their ability to create, recreate, integrate themselves into different contexts and

²² Freire's position here is equally expressed by others (cf. L. BOFF, *The Lord's Prayer...*, p. 54).

²³ Reflex in this context means instinct.

²⁴ Freire believes that the discovery of the dimensionality of time is fundamental in the history of human culture since it clearly distinguishes man from the animals since animals do not have history (cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 3).

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responding to challenges. By objectifying themselves, by discerning issues in reality and being able to transcend them, men enter the privileged domain of History and Culture.

Finally we cannot understand Freire's humanism without appreciating the main motivation in his life. Based on his conception of the nature of the human person and what he considered man's ontological vocation, Freire confessed that it was the love for humanity especially the poor and the dehumanised that motivated him all his life²⁵. His understanding of committed love has a particular note about it.

For him love is not just a mere feeling, nor romance nor the long-suffering and self-effacing notion associated with some religious traditions. Love is not about absolute consensus, or unconditional acceptance, unceasing words of sweetness, or endless stream of hugs and kisses. His notion of love which he consistently fought to uphold is an armed love, the fighting love of those convinced of the right and duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce. This is "a love that could be lively, forceful, and inspiring, while at the same time being critical, challenging, and insistent"²⁶. According to some authors, love in the writing of Paulo Freire is a very different and much tougher force than love in the popular culture; it is an active commitment and not a passive and often a selfish emotion²⁷.

4.1.6. Challenges facing Human Beings and their Possible Reactions to them

Having presented the ideal nature of human beings in the world, Freire observes that many people are either ignorant of their human vocation or are denied it by other people and systems. Freire therefore argues that the vocation of being authentically human is not to be taken for granted since many people are deprived of it. To explain the various ways that human beings can live in the world, Freire compares and contrasts the terms *integration* and *adaptation*, as well as *Subject* and *object*.

As human persons, they are inserted in nature, but are called to transcend it. Freire posits that integration occurs when one is able to adapt oneself to the reality before him. This is coupled with the critical capacity to make choices and to transform the reality in

²⁵ Cf. P. FREIRE, *L' éducation dans la ville...*, p. 128.

²⁶ A. DARDER, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²⁷ Cf. J. W. FRASER, *op. cit.* pp. 175-176.

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question. When one is not capable to make choice, or is coerced to act by external forces, the individual is no longer integrated but rather adapted. He is said to have adapted because he has merely 'adjusted' his person, his choices, his wishes and indeed his destiny to satisfy the wishes of those who 'prescribe' for him²⁸. From his interpretation of integration and adaptation, Freire concludes that the integrated person is a *Subject* while the adjusted person is an *object*. Adaptation represents a weaker form of self-defences and is essentially characteristic of animals even though men exhibit it as symptomatic of dehumanisation. Language is a special human feature and dialogue a high expression of it²⁹.

Having made his analyses, Freire tries to apply his observations to concrete human circumstances. According to him, throughout history men have been faced with different challenges demanding resulting in either integration or adjustment. "As men relate to the world by responding to the challenges of the environment, they begin to dynamize, to master, and to humanise reality. They add to it something of their own making, by giving temporal meaning to geographic space, by creating culture"³⁰. By creating, re-creating, deciding etc history is created so that they not only create history but are created by it, and participate in it. The dialectic is that men make history and history makes them.

Each historical epoch is characterised by a series of aspirations, concerns and values as they search for fulfilment. And each historical epoch is fulfilled to the degree that their themes and challenges are grasped and the tasks solved³¹. The ability of each epoch or group to perceive the task and especially their capacity to tackle the challenge will determine whether they will be humanised or dehumanised, whether they are Subjects or mere objects. While acknowledging the importance of solving the task facing their epoch, Freire gives priority to the ability of the people concerned to grasp the themes to be

²⁸ Freire gives the example of how men and women who are innovators or revolutionaries are criticised as 'maladjusted' because they refuse to conform to the norms and realities which are unjust but which majority never cared to question. Freire does not however explain if all types of adjustments are to be interpreted as weakness. We adjust to new environments, we adjust to the desires of our beloved ones, we adjust our budgets to meet new challenges. Indeed in most cases those who adjust more easily to new challenges are regarded as geniuses. If the author limits himself to his refusal to adjust to the reality of oppression in his native Brazil, his position becomes more acceptable.

²⁹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *L' éducation: pratique de la liberté*, Paris, Cerf, 1971, pp. 60-61.

³⁰ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 5.

³¹ Each epoch should not only perceive its task or challenge but must equally evolve solutions to them and above all, recognise when those values are superseded so that they do not become anachronistic.

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tackled and then secondly to develop an open and critical attitude to the challenges before them. Without this awareness, there can be no critical judgement and without critical judgement solution cannot be realistic, human and durable³².

Having noted the importance of intellectual reflection and grasping to the reality seen as a challenge, Freire observes that men do not often have the enabling opportunities for using their reason in a human way. Many people, according to him are so crushed, diminished, and converted into spectators and then manoeuvred by 'myths'³³. The result of these is that these men are tragically frightened, and even destroyed and annihilated. They tend therefore to be less human and so instead of venturing to discover and improve their realities, their primary goal becomes the search for security and self-confidence³⁴. So if men are unable to perceive critically the themes and needs of their time and intervene to direct or influence them, they become 'Objects' and not 'Subjects' of change.

4.1.7. The Human Society in Transition: The Example of Brazil

Having described the place of human beings in the world, Freire goes further to describe the nature of human society which is in continuous mutation.

First, he observes that the oppressed are aware that change is taking place but they are submerged in. This makes them unable to discern its dramatic significance. As society begins to move from one epoch to another, the need for critical and flexible spirit becomes indispensable. For the poor and the oppressed, lacking such a spirit, they cannot perceive the marked contradictions which occur in society as emerging values seeking affirmation and fulfilment. Changes bring contradictions and clash of values as the old

³² Here Freire gives importance to intellectual appreciation of reality over human emotions.

³³ In this context 'myth' refers to half-truths as used by the dominant elite and the oppressive class as instrument of propaganda against the poor and oppressed.

³⁴ Feeling their precariousness, men even engage in all forms of artificial solidarity which Freire describes as 'gregariousness'. While this attitude is common among the oppressed poor, Freire indicts modern men and women of being victims of modern myths perpetrated by the media and other ideologists. All these lead to the loss of capacity for choice. Ordinary modern man is excluded from the orbit of decision-making since the 'elite' prescribe products, programme ideas etc, and the hapless majority simply swallow them and conform without question or reflection. Modern man is submerged in change and is now his own prisoner. This is because he has lost the power of critical perception and stamina to challenge and intervene in many issues that concern his life.

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values seek self-preservation in the wake of new realities³⁵. This moment of epochal transition can be described as a cross-road of the society and its people. It is a time of decision and “only, however, to the degree that the choices result from critical perception of the contradictions are they really and capable of being transformed in action. Choice is illusory to the degree that it represents the expectations of others”³⁶.

According to him, the period of such radical and revolutionary change took place in Brazil between 1950s to 1960s when new values started replacing old ones. And two main groups emerged in the society, namely the ‘elite’ and the ‘masses’. These two groups unfortunately were not integrated in the transition. While the elite were ‘superimposed’ on the society, the masses were submerged in it. The elite were pawns of invading alien cultures which they were importing while the people/masses had nothing of their own to contribute but rather resigned themselves to merely following and being ruled by the elite .

So it was observed that if Brazil was to undergo the radical transition, all the old values of the former closed society would have to assume new meanings. Any distortion of these perceptions of the new aspirations and new concepts would lead to an artificial transition, a false ‘open-society’ and massification and domestication of the maladjusted people. It was therefore in the context of urgency to give direction to the society under the ‘throes of birth’ that Freire placed the important task of education.

Thus, in that transitional phase, education became a highly important task. Its potential force would depend above all upon its capacity to participate in the dynamism of the transitional epoch. It would depend upon our distinguishing clearly which elements truly belonged to the transition and which were simply present in it³⁷.

³⁵ These contradictions are perceived between the ways of being, behaving, understanding and valuing things which belong to the past but seek to survive even when they are losing their relevance. Freire describes this clash or encounter of two epochal values as ‘shock’.

³⁶ p. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p.7.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 8-9. In Brazil as in other societies undergoing change, the new values were not very easy to come by. Sacrifices, confrontations, advances and occasional retreats accompanied them. But while the pusillanimous saw each retreat as the end of the transition, others realised that retreats do not deter transition nor do they constitute a backward movement. At worst, retreats retard or distort transitions but transitions will inevitably occur. And society will continue with its normal rhythms as it waits further moments of transition. This continuous social mutation has been described by other authors as ‘waves of change’ (cf. A. ROMISZOWSKI, *Trends in Corporate Training Design and Development*, in M.

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Brazil like many developing countries discovers that the new society has peculiar characteristics. The first was that the old society which was characterised the importance of raw-material economy determined by external market forces. Eventually this gave way to a new order as the era of industrialisation dawned. With industrialisation which reached a high crescendo in the last century, there was a rupture that shattered the equilibrium holding the old closed society. Another important change was political. As the wind of democracy blew harder, people's desire to participate in the political life of the society created a new reality that unsettled the elite and their foreign allies who had hitherto manipulated and exploited the people without any challenge. As the traditionally 'submerged' masses participated more in social and political matters, there came opposition and violence. Brazil like any other society thus underwent a very turbulent period of socio-political upheavals³⁸.

In the course of all these social mutations, the elite tried to slow down the rate of change or even to stop it since it threatened their position. At first they reacted spontaneously against the revolt of the masses. When that could not work, they created social assistance institutions and armies of social workers to give immediate relief to the oppressed and thus calming them³⁹. This method did not last long as the masses organised better and better under their new found awakened consciousness. The next strategy of the elite class was to clamp down on the leaders of these defenders of democracy and their commitment which was tagged 'subversive'⁴⁰. But it is remarkable that while the elite were generally very rich aristocrats, they were not in control of the government and this made them vulnerable despite their wealth. To end this uncomfortable quandary, they needed, in

MULDER and A. ROMISZOWSKI, et al (eds.) *Strategic Human Development*, Swets and Zeitlinger, Amsterdam, 1990, p. 17).

³⁸ Freire observes that those who champion the cause of change are regarded as *radicals*.

³⁹ The oppressor and the elite fearing the threat of conscientization of the people will invent a number of strategies to anaesthetise the people. When threats, intimidation and other forms of manipulation fail, the oppressor could use various acts of charity to soften the resolve of the hungry and needy poor. Each time the masses expressed their grievances, they were served with food and medicine, etc to calm them temporarily. According to him, in order to have the continued opportunity to express their *generosity*, the oppressors must perpetrate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount for this generosity which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. Freire notes that even when "the content and methods of conquest vary historically; what does not vary as long as the dominant elites exist is the necrophilic passion to oppress" (P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 122).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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addition to the power they already possessed-the government, which at least in part they did not possess. Eventually, a *coup d'état* was to solve the problem⁴¹.

4.1.8. The Oppressed and the Challenge of Promoting a New Humanism

In the whole process of change taking place in the society, Freire observed that a group of very poor and oppressed people remains most vulnerable. He describes their condition to demonstrate why their liberation and humanisation is both necessary and urgent.

First the poor/oppressed are human beings ontologically but their 'humanity' have been thwarted by injustice, exploitation and the violence of the oppressed. By dehumanising them, their ontological vocation of being fully human is *distorted*. And although this distortion occurs in history, it is not a historical vocation. The oppressed and the poor as human beings are aware that they are downtrodden but they are so submerged in their condition that they do not perceive the ideal humanity destined for them in their 'silence'⁴².

Again, even when they dream of freedom or real humanity, they do not dream of real freedom. Instead they dream in an individualistic way and even see the oppressors as the model of humanity. And again, even though the poor/oppressed dream of being free, they are at once afraid of freedom. So Freire shows that poverty and oppression go beyond lack of material necessities. The psychological distortion of the human person does a more insidious damage to the poor than the physical impacts. It is in the midst of these conditions that one understands Paulo Freire's meaning of active solidarity with the oppressed and the poor. To be true solidarity, it should not only aim at the liberation of the oppressed poor but also should seek to liberate the oppressive elite whose own humanity is diminished as they dehumanise others. Below is his summary and project of any veritable agenda of solidarity.

Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is radical posture. If what characterises the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master..., true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to

⁴¹ In Brazil when a military coup took place in 1964, some agents of reform like Paulo Freire were persecuted and imprisoned (cf. R. SHAULL, *op. cit.*, p. 12).

⁴² Cf. S. B. BROOKFIELD, *op.cit.*, p. 43

transform the objective reality which has made them these 'beings for another... True solidarity is found only in this act of love, in existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet do nothing tangible is to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce'⁴³.

What is his new vision of humanity? For him, the task of humanisation of man is a moral imperative since dehumanisation is a distortion of the true image of man. Here Schools and educators are presented as principal agents in this humanisation process⁴⁴. Freire bases all his discussion on the basic assumption that man's ontological vocation is to be *Subject*. Man acts upon his world to transform it and this leads to a better self and better world. Freire has another fundamental conviction, namely, that every human person, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence' he may be is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Human beings are active beings, capable of reflection on themselves and on the activity in which they are engaged. They are able to detach themselves from the world, reflect on it and act on it⁴⁵.

No matter how poor, ignorant or oppressed that one may be, no matter how much others try to treat the poor and oppressed as 'objects' of use or 'problems' to be solved, they are never totally deprived of their intrinsic vocation of being human. For Freire the dignity of the human person is such that fostering it should always determine every project in human history. Technology, education, politics or any other project that does not seek to promote the humanity of man is faulty and even alienating and dehumanising.

In all these, Freire continues to underline his unshakable faith in the capabilities of the human person. And it is on this optimism (sometimes criticised as utopic), about the possibilities of man that Freire builds his entire philosophical anthropology. For him one of the concrete affirmations that we appreciate the dignity of the other and believe is that we can dialogue him or her as a person, a Subject. This dialogue finds a special expression in education. It equally entails involving the people in determining their destinies through the political process. According to him, "democracy and democratic education are founded on faith in men, on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, of their continent, their world, their work, the

⁴³ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.30.

⁴⁴ Cf. P. FREIRE, *A Response*, in P. FREIRE (ed.), *Mentoring the Mentor, A Critical Dialogue with Freire*, Peter Lang, New York, 1991, p. 313.

⁴⁵ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 105.

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problems of democracy itself⁴⁶. One of the ways that human beings express their capability (no matter how poor or ignorant) is through acts of creation and recreation of realities through culture⁴⁷.

Aware that his vision about man may appear too exaggerated, in his book *Education for Critical Consciousness*, he refutes his critics by arguing that his humanism is not abstract, but concrete and rigorously scientific⁴⁸. It is not a mere ideal, a kind of Platonic ideal man but rather a realistic and realisable humanism. This humanism does not deny the sad evidence of weakness of the human nature which we experience every day. This humanism is based on science as opposed to what he calls '*doxa*'⁴⁹. It is not just the wishful thinking based on purely humanitarian gestures. It is on the contrary a humanism that is concerned with the humanisation of men and women, rejecting all types of manipulation as the contradiction of liberation.

It is a humanism which sees men and women as being in time, and in the world, and is engaged in action to transform the structures in the world, in which they are 'reified'⁵⁰. "Its critical hope rests on an equally critical belief, belief that human beings can make and remake things, that they can transform the world"⁵¹. Freire ends his discourse on new humanism with a challenge to all those who wish to engage in the liberation and humanisation of the poor and oppressed: "This undertaking requires something basic from any one of the Subjects participating in it-that they ask themselves if they believe in the people, in ordinary people, in the peasants. If they are really capable of communing with them, of 'proclaiming' the world with them"⁵².

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁷Cf. Ibid., p.42.

⁴⁸ He rejects the idea of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, in which the abstract ego can be imagined to exist independently of material composition of the human person as whole. The ego exists and thinks but does these in interrelation within the psycho-somatic composition of the integral personality. This is why Freire holds that authentic education should not be limited to the *intellectual development* of the students.

⁴⁹ This means 'mere opinion'.

⁵⁰ This is Freire's term used to express the condition of men and women now regarded and treated as objects and *things* and not as persons.

⁵¹ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p.144.

⁵²Cf. Ibid., p.164.

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4.1.9. Justification for Using Freire-Inspired Principles in this Study

Earlier in the general introduction, we briefly explained that African and liberation theologies, Catholic Social Teaching and the writings of Freire greatly inspired the choice of topic and methodology. Since the chapter on the praxis of solidarity is heavily influenced by Freire's principles and methods, we shall repeat in a summary of why we deem him a useful guide for the praxis of solidarity.

First, Freire lived and experienced extreme poverty as so many people are doing today in the sub-continent. Secondly, Freire showed that one should not resign oneself to the condition of oppression and poverty as if they were divinely ordained and unchangeable. Third, Freire wrote from a developing part of the world which shares many similarities with the African society today. Another reason why Freire is relevant for Africa today is that he is not a stranger to the African predicament. His experiences in some of the countries in Black Africa gave him both a theoretical and practical framework to appreciating the situation⁵³.

Another reason is that his theories and principles have been adopted and adapted in many parts of the world as having 'universal' relevance. Specialists in many fields of human endeavour, political, economic, social, theological and educational have been influenced in one way or another by his theories and principles⁵⁴. Paulo Freire's theory and principles have been inspiring also because of his ability to contextualise and decontextualise simultaneously. How he applied the fruits of his experience from one country to another remains remarkable. And above all, his ability to engage in intersubjective reflection and praxis helped him to combine philosophical, theological, sociological and educational principles effectively in tackling the difficult issues of oppression and poverty.

⁵³ Most of his activities in Black Africa are recorded in his book, *Pedagogy in Process, Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, Continuum, New York, 1978.

⁵⁴ His theories had serious political implications leading to his imprisonment and exile from Brazil. The presidents of Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau in the post-independent era were influenced by his political educational system. He influenced the political agitators in Apartheid South Africa. His thoughts influenced the theologians of liberation in Latin America. Freire has been a motivator in many educational reforms around the world (cf. D. HOPKINS, *School Improvement for Real*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 19).

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For us as Catholic theologians, the influence of his Catholic up-bringing is remarkable in his life and works. Although he romanced with Marxism, he never rejected Christ. His anthropology of man, which is often criticised as being too optimistic is based on the influence of Christian anthropology on him. And finally, his theory of conscientization in particular would later become an important element in Latin American theology of liberation⁵⁵. We shall study the theories of conscientization, dialogue and cultural action.

⁵⁵Reading through the documents of the Latin American Bishops Conference at Medellin one discovers that the use of the expression *conscientization* has the same meaning and goal as in Paulo Freire's books. It is from Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife in Brazil, that Freire got the expression 'conscientization' (cf. P. MAYO, *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education, Possibilities for Transformative Action*, ZED Books, p. 63). Liberation theology in particular understood the concept as basic to their enlightenment commitments to the poor. Again, Liberation theology claims for example that their methodological approach to their theology which begins action, engages in reflection and comes back to practical action is similar to Freire's theory of conscientization. In conscientization, reflection and action must always go together to effect change (cf. L. BOFF and C. BOFF, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Burns and Oates, London, 1989, p. 39).

CHAPTER TWO: CONSCIENTIZATION AS ADVANCED EDUCATION

4.2.0 Preamble

Education is a process which enables individuals to attain a certain self-understanding and understanding of the aspirations, goals and objectives of the community. The principal aim of education is to enhance a holistic and integral way within the context of the values of the human community. Education prepares people for adult life in the society which include the creation of sustainable life support system of justice, openness to people of other cultures, and sharing of life with those outside one's ethnic zones⁵⁶.

We have seen earlier in this project the various definitions of poverty. We have also examined some of the main causes of poverty especially in Black Africa. Paulo Freire and recent research findings have confirmed that there is a direct co-relationship between lack of education and poverty. Indeed education is one of the fundamental human rights⁵⁷, and to deny one such right is described as "incompatible with the dignity of a human person"⁵⁸. Today, UNESCO, many governments, donor-agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, and scholars are focusing more and more on education as a major anti-poverty project especially in Black Africa. Below is what we mean by education in this study.

The word education is coined from two Latin words 'ex' and 'ducere'. Literary this means to lead out, to bring something that is hidden to surface. By education here we mean the process of teaching and learning of specific skills and as a means of transmitting the values and accumulated knowledge of society from one generation to another. In this sense, education is equivalent to what social scientists term 'socialisation or enculturation. Research shows that education is as old human civilisation but one main

⁵⁶ F. NWAIGBO, *Ethnicity and New Image of Nigeria. Explorations in Creation Theology*, in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol. 17, 2005, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 26). This right to education includes the right to the type of education which is integral. This means "an education that is directed towards the full development of the human being in all aspects, intellectual, spiritual, moral, etc.; an education that promotes the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms; an education that empowers one to participate actively and intellectually in the social, economic and political life of one's country; an education that promotes understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, leading to the maintenance of peace in the world" (*International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, art. 13; *Convention against discrimination in education*, art. 5).

⁵⁸ *Convention against discrimination in education*, arts. 1 and 2.

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focus here is on formal education⁵⁹. For Paulo Freire, education is simply the praxis of liberty that fosters the humanisation process⁶⁰.

In this chapter, we shall seek to establish the relationship between education and poverty. This will enable us to argue that an effective education is one of the most powerful strategies for alleviating poverty⁶¹. Using Nigeria as an example, we shall show that the prevalent rate of poverty in the country is linked with the its poor educational practices. Equally in this chapter, we shall examine various types of education that could serve as a means of liberation, empowerment and humanisation of the poorest of the poor especially in the Black African sub-region⁶².

4.2.1. Why Conscientization is a Principle of Theology of Solidarity with the Poor

It is interesting to note that,

since the 1980s, international organisations have re-discovered the value of education as an engine of economic and social development. This has led to a renewed interest in the international cooperation in the field of education. In the context of the 'Millennium Goals,' *Education for All*, has become one of the focal points in the eradication of poverty"⁶³

As a matter of fact, a number of important studies carried out in both the developed and developing countries show that there is a direct corelationship between levels of education attained and general levels of poverty in the life of the individual or in the community in question⁶⁴. The corelationship can be outlined in the following areas,

⁵⁹ A very good history of formal education linked to the schooling process has been written by M. DEPAEPE of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium (cf. M. DEPAEPE, *The School, Cornerstone of Modern Society*, in *Guide of the Municipal Education Museum of Ypres*, Ieper, Stedelijkje Musea, 1999, pp. 3-20).

⁶⁰ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 56.

⁶¹ We will later study literacy education, political education, moral education and other forms of technical education aimed at authentic human development.

⁶² Again, we are inspired by the principles proposed by Paulo Freire's liberatory pedagogy, otherwise known as *conscientization*. And for practical purposes, many of our concrete examples will be drawn from the Nigerian experience.

⁶³ Cf. I. NICAISE, *Education, Knowledge and Development (Co-operation)*, in *Education and Society*, unpublished text for the Master in Education Programme, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2004/2005 Academic session. See p. 5. The author is a professor in the faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences in the above university in Belgium.

⁶⁴ One of the most authoritative studies on this topic was carried by three European researchers, R. Luijckx of the Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, W. Muller of the Manheim Centre for European Research, and R. Pollak of Manheim University. This report is titled, *Persistent Inequality? A Descriptive*

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inability to pay school fees, lack of motivation from poor illiterate parents, poor health factors, low earning due to poor education, enlisting children to help their parents and other cultural attitudes.

The effect of all these is that the cycle of poverty persists in what can be called 'transgeneration poverty'. Another link between poverty and education can be traced to health factors. Many illiterate and poor people often suffer from hazardous health conditions emanating from their poor knowledge of hygiene, lack of access to good drinking water, and other forms of health facilities. So many of children tend to be outside from school due to health and other family needs. In African today children living with HIV/AIDS exemplify the corelationship between poverty, poor health and poor educational performance. The case of Paulo Freire is a practical case because, the "hunger which Paul Freire had suffered hampered his progress at school, but he recovered the lost ground and eventually studied law"⁶⁵.

Another relationship between education and poverty is cultural. Experience shows that in many African societies many of the poorest poor persons are women. This is because

Reassessment of the Evidence for European Countries. The report was prepared for the EURESCO Conference which examined the causes and consequences of low education in contemporary Europe. The conference took place from 18th-23rd September, 2004 in Granada, Spain. The main target of the research is to reassess the empirical evidence concerning the main conclusion of 'Persistent Inequality' with more recent data and larger samples selected from a number of European countries. The research examines the work of Shavit and Blossfeld which have tried to explain the reasons for the persistent inequality between people of different classes of the same society (cf. Y. SHAVIT and H. P. BLOSSFELD (eds.), *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1993). The main contribution of this research is that today especially in Europe, a number of factors have helped to narrow the gap between the upper, rich class and the lower poorer class. Despite the variable factors, the educational opportunities available to all classes of European citizens have helped to lessen the gap between the nobles and the peasants. Thanks to education, the child of the peasant can compete for excellence with the children of the upper, rich class and the nobles. This is what is technically described as 'declining inequality' by the researchers. They outlined a number of factors that have directly influenced this. The main reasons can be summarised from R. Eriksson study especially in Sweden in 1996. They include the introduction of comprehensive schooling and variation in economic conditions, notably declining income inequality, low levels of unemployment and generous financial aids to student etc. (cf. R. ERIKSON, *Explaining Change in Educational Inequality, Economic Security and School Reforms*, in *Can Education Be Equalised? The Swedish Case*, in R. ERIKSON and J. JONSSON (eds.), Westview Press, Colorado, 1996, pp. 95-112). Other related research findings on the correlation between education and social equality also exist. They include, B. RICHARD and J. JONSSON, *A Multinomial Transition Model of Analysing Educational Careers*, in *American Sociological Review*, 65: pp. 754-772; A E. RAFTTY and M. HOUT, *Maximally Maintained Inequality: Expansion, Reform, and Opportunity in Irish Education, 1921-75*, in *Sociology of Education*, 66: 41-62; R. D. MARE, *Social Background and School Continuation Decisions*, in *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 75: 295-305.

⁶⁵ P.MAYO, op. cit., p. 14.

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women are mainly discriminated in educational matters as many see investing on them as unnecessary waste of resources⁶⁶. Another cultural factor relates to the issue of family planning. Many people are either ignorant of effective methods of family planning or take pride in having many children. They believe that the more children one has the more hands one gets for the farms, rearing of cattle and for women, more dowry from prospective suitors. Rarely do children from such families get enough education that can lift them from the cycles and shackles of poverty. Polygamous families are often the worst-hit.

Apart from the authoritative research on how education can affect social equality as carried out by the three European scholars as studied above, another research was carried out again in 2002, by OECD⁶⁷ in some countries in Africa. These are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Senegal and Madagascar and they all equally show a direct corelationship between poverty and education⁶⁸. These studies show that good education enhances the earning ability of those who possess it. Households with higher level of education are less likely to be poor since the returns of education rise with the level of education one attains⁶⁹. Education serves utility purpose because it is nearly as valuable for the self-employed as it is for those in formal sector jobs⁷⁰

⁶⁶ The fact that a woman is meant for household jobs, bearing children and indeed will be given away soon or later to another person in marriage discourages parents from sending them to school. This is changing now.

⁶⁷ OECD is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It came into force on 30th September, 1961 with the goal of fostering and sustaining economic growth and employment among its members and so ensuring standard of living among its members. It equally aims at helping non-members in economic developments. Most of the countries of the present European Union are members and they have been major actors in promoting education in the developing world, especially in Africa.

⁶⁸ C. MORRISON, *Education, Poverty for OECD*, (Brief, 19, 2002, p. 23).

⁶⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Other experts have confirmed this position as reported in the research. See *Success for All, Educational Strategies for Disadvantaged Youth in Six European Countries*, in G. WALRAVE; C. PARSON; D. VAN VEEN, and C. DAY (eds.), *Combating Social Exclusion Through Education*, Leuven/Apeldoorn, 2000, pp. 271-286. These authors propose social equality in education which means enhancing a democratic education, offering equal opportunities and unhindered social mobility for all. Through financial and material aids to poor pupils, through compulsory education and enshrining learning rights in the countries law, through equal treatment of all, curricular reforms and pedagogical innovations, the researches believe that education would become a more effective strategy for combating social exclusion and poverty in the society. Issues related to this theme can be found in such works as, *Education and Poverty*, Conference of Major Religious Superiors, (CMRS), 1992, Dublin; I. NICAISE, *Poverty and Human Capital*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999; I. NICAISE, and M. DOUTERLINGE, *Alternating Education: Its Impact on the Labour Market Entry of Disadvantaged Youth in Flanders(Belgium)*, Hoger Instituut Voor de Arbeid, Leuven, 1990; OECD, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*, OECD, Paris, 1997. The position of all these works is that there is an undeniable link between education and poverty. Enhanced education can help to improve

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So whether it is in Paulo Freire's rural Brazil, or in the poorest African countries or in Nigeria, there is ample research evidence to link poverty with the level of one's educational attainment. A close study of the Nigeria shows how poor educational strategies engender poverty.

4.2.2. Ineffective Education as a Major Cause of Poverty: Nigerian Experience

One of the greatest heritages of the colonial government and the Missionaries in Africa is education⁷¹. In most West African nations like Nigeria and Burkina Faso, mission schools stood as a symbol of true development and later would produce the elite that took over leadership in the Church and in the independent States⁷². Despite the perceived importance of education, the sector has been experiencing a lot of crises especially since the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970. Despite the various initiatives taken to tackle the challenge, the system is still shackled with a lot of problems as summarized below⁷³.

the condition of the poor and the excluded in the society. One can argue that the increased welfare of women today in the society testifies that a more inclusive education can greatly improve the condition of the disadvantaged.

⁷⁰ Cf. C. STOTT, *Adult Learning Must Be Transformational*, in *Adults Learning*, Vol. 17, no. 5. Jan. 2006. In a globalised world with a very high mobility, one discovers that while many countries are doing all they can to attract the services of people with skills in what is termed *brain-drain*, those with little or no education, force themselves out of their countries as illegal immigrants. This is to say that the more skills people acquire, they more they are 'marketable' as human capitals. A good analysis of the issue of globalisation and distribution of welfare between educational groups has been made in some studies. See especially, A. ADEPOJU, *Issues and Recent Trends in International Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in *International Social Science Journal*, 52(30, Sept. 2000), pp. 383-394. It could be argued that with the increased activities of the World Trade Organisation and globalisation, there would be transnational movements. But it is only those with skills/education can benefit from the system.

⁷¹ The promotion of education by the Missionaries and the indigenous Church in Congo for instance in remarkable event though it was often shrouded with controversies. This is especially because the colonial authorities saw the education of the natives as 'dangerous' since it could help them develop critical awareness which could lead them to demand for independence. The missionaries however saw educating the natives as tool of evangelisation. The post-colonial government in Congo later realized the power of education for development but feared that it could be used as a tool for neo-colonialism. The Congolese bishops found it difficult to convince the political leaders that "Catholic education was not a power of itself but a service to the people and to world" (M. DEPAEPE, *'Rien ne va plus... The Collapse of the Colonial Educational Structures in Zaire, 1960-1995*, in *Education and Society, International Journal in Education and Sociology*, XVI, 1 (1998), p. 41.

⁷² Cf. M. SOME, *Christian Base Communities in Burkina Faso, Between Church and Politics*, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. XXXI. no. 3, 2001, p. 279. Both the missionaries and the colonial governments in Africa knew the power of education. Working together, these two bodies made incredible achievements among the local people since education is a necessary means for the progress of civilization in a country.

⁷³ The number of schools in Nigeria vary rapidly. As at 2001, there were about 48,242 primary schools with 16,796,078 students in public schools and 1,965,517 in private schools in Nigeria. In addition, Nigeria had 7,104 secondary schools with 4,448,981 students (cf. The Guardian Newspaper, May 6, 1999). Most of these schools were in dilapidating states. Nevertheless, the increased need for higher education during the oil boom of the 1970s in Nigeria, coupled with political pressure, led to the establishment of many universities in the society. And 'an explosive expansion in enrolments' during this period marked the beginning of 'the decline in quality' of education in the society. In two decades, the number of university

4.2.2.1. Inadequate Funding and Poor Management of the Limited Resources

Lack of funds has been blamed as one of the main problems with education in Nigeria. This problem is manifested in inadequate amount allocated to education in the national budget, improper management of educational funds, inability to pay teachers' salaries. It was in order to rescue the ailing educational system in Nigeria that led the then Obasanjo administration to introduce the Universal Primary Education in September 1976 with Tunde Adeniran as the minister of education⁷⁴. But soon the scheme ran into problems of bad planning and lack of firm financial control. Of the expected 2.298 students to enroll into the programme, 2.992 turned up instead⁷⁵.

As for the actual budgetary allocation to education, we see the following. In 1977, the government allocated N1. 3 billion Naira (Nigerian currency) to education. Each of the States in Nigeria received 45% of this amount for the educational programme. Annual allocation continued to fluctuate especially during the military rule. In 1992, the share for education in the budget was 2.7%, 7% in 1993, 10.3% in 1994, 11.1% in 1995, 10.8% in 1996, 11.6% in 1997, and in 1999 education got N28 billion Naira which is only 9.7%. It was in order to promote education as the greatest tool for development that a special Committee on education "VISION 2010" recommended that Nigeria should spend at least 26% of her annual budget on education. Poor educational programme in Nigeria is compounding the poverty in the country. Today, there are 38,649 primary schools with the enrolment of 15. 5 million students in Nigeria. Yet of this great figure, National Technical Examination Board reports show that about 68.9% of these schools lack basic

students increased eightfold, from about 55,000 in 1980 to more than 400,000 today. Now Nigeria has about 36 public universities, 46 polytechnics and 64 colleges of education. In addition, four private universities have been approved and registered by the federal government. They are: *Bowen University*, Iwo, Osun State; *Babcock University*; *Igbinedion University*, Okada; and *Madonna University* (cf. V. DIKE, *The state of education in Nigeria and the health of the nation*, in <http://www.afbis.com/analysis/education10204234737.htm>).

⁷⁴Cf. W. A. AINA, *Education/ Health, So Far, So Silent*, in *THE NEWSWATCH*, September 1999, p. 22. The vision of this programme was to provide education to every Nigerian child since educating a child is to liberate him or her from ignorance and poverty that often accompanies it

⁷⁵ This created immediate logistics problems resulting in shortage of teachers, classrooms, writing materials and textbooks for the students. Additionally, the lack of strict financial discipline led to the inflation of figures by the States for the purpose of collecting more funds from the Federal Government. The woeful failure of this system led to the creation of yet another educational programme called the 6-3-3-6 system of education. This system became a failure for the same reasons confronting previous reforms.

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infrastructure while 77% have no textbooks while 36% have no writing materials⁷⁶. Today Nigerian children are the worst victims of this poor educational system⁷⁷.

Lack of adequate fund or mismanagement of it leads to series irregularities in the educational sector. All these lead to the production of half-baked graduates from many Nigerian educational institutes. Moral education which is an effective way to fight these social ills is often neglected. Today religious bodies, parents and teachers do not seem to coordinate properly for the integral formation of the students. And the schools that belonged to mission schools have been forcefully taken over by the government⁷⁸.

4.2.2.2. Unmotivated Teachers and Ineffective Teaching Strategies

Another problem with the Nigerian educational system has to do with the role of teachers. Since many of them are unmotivated⁷⁹ and unqualified, many Nigerian teachers still maintain the traditional method of education described by Paulo Freire as *banking method* of education as presented below.

The traditional educational practices are generally and fundamentally *narrative*⁸⁰. By this we mean that there is the narrating Subject (the teacher) and listening object (student). This type of education fails to test of active construction between the teacher and the student. Often the teacher talks about reality in motionless, abstract and predictable way thus making the topic alien to the existential experience of the students⁸¹. At other times the teacher acts as if the student is an empty vessel that needs to be filled⁸². As containers to be filled, students are not often active participants in the learning process. It does not “stimulate students to process and reflect on content, recognise relationships among and implications of its key ideas, think critically about it, and use it in problem-solving,

⁷⁶ Cf. W. A. AINA, op. cit., p. 22.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ibid. p. 25.

⁷⁸ Cf. J. C. A. ZIMOHA, *Return of Mission Schools in Imo*, in *THE LEADER*, Vol. XLII, no. 11. (June 2001), p. 9.

⁷⁹ Lack of motivation manifests itself on such areas as their not being paid regularly. There are also issues of not having effective teaching aids as well as the teachers not going for further training.

⁸⁰ Cf. R. YOUNG, *A Critical Theory of Education, Habermas and Our Children's Future*, in Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1989, p. 75.

⁸¹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, p. 52.

⁸² The goal of the teacher is to inject and ‘fill’ the empty students with what he believes to be the rich ‘content’ of his lesson. The consequence of this type of education is that it makes object of the students rather than transforming them into Subjects

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decision making or other higher order applications⁸³. Recent research findings further justify Freire's critique⁸⁴.

Perhaps the most vivid and most popular imagery of traditional education is derived from the experience of banking⁸⁵. The above type of education is like an act of depositing money in the bank⁸⁶. Here the teacher is the depositor and the student deposited on. Instead of communicating with the students the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. Implicit in the banking approach to education is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world. A person is merely *in* the world, and not *with* the world or with others. The individual is a spectator, not a re-creator. The individual is not understood as conscious being but rather as a empty 'mind' passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside. Since the mind is seen as a passive receptor, the educator arrogates it to himself the sacred duty of 'regulating' the way the world and all its realities can enter the students.

Traditional education as practiced does not debate or discuss themes but gives lectures, does not work *with* students but works *on* them⁸⁷. It leaves the students with lack of creativity, lack of transformation and indeed lack of real knowledge⁸⁸. And because this knowledge is uncritical⁸⁹, instead of challenging an oppressive situation, it helps to maintain it⁹⁰. Instead of empowering the students, it rather alienates them. Today one

⁸³ Cf. J. BROFY, *Teaching*, Educational Practices Series, 1. This is a publication of International Bureau of Education, (IBE), Geneva, Switzerland, 2000, p. 19. The author is a professor of education in Curtin university of Technology, Perth, Australia.

⁸⁴ Cf. S. VOSNIADOU, *How Children Learn*, Educational Practices Series, 7. International Bureau of Education, (IBE), Geneva, Switzerland, 2001, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Some scholars further explain what Freire means by describing it as a process "in which a knowledge store is built up like a bank account, by many small deposits" (R. YOUNG, op. cit., p. 96).

⁸⁶ Inspired by Freire, R. Dale discovers that this type of education is not limited to the classroom but can be used as instrument of propaganda as well by right wingers who impose their way of thinking on others through various mechanisms so that their "knowledge and ideologies become common sense simply by pouring them in the heads of people" (R. DALE, *The State and Education Policy*, Open University Press, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 9).

⁸⁷ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 38.

⁸⁸ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 53.

⁸⁹ Cf. S. VOSNIADOU, op. cit., p. 20.

⁹⁰ Cf. E.D. HIRSCH, Jr. *The Schools We Need, and Why We Don't Have Them*, Doubleday, New York, 1996, pp. 6-7.

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discovers that the result of this type of education is the emergence of half-baked students who are unable to confront the challenges that come their way after graduation

4.2.2.3. Unfavourable Learning Conditions

A teacher effectiveness and student learning capabilities are often limited by a number of factors. In many Nigerian schools there is inadequate supply of materials, frequent changes in recommended textbooks and other such policies. Learning condition is unfavourable when classrooms are crowded, or are in poor state of repair and when some schools use open spaces and under the trees as the only option. Learning can be difficult if not impossible when schools lack desks, furniture, recreational activities and even toilet facilities.

Other unfavourable conditions that affect output include poor working conditions and low remunerations for teachers, frequent strikes and lack of qualified teachers. The menace of secret cult in Nigerian schools and general indiscipline in the country encourage examination malpractices. Often tension exists between the government and teachers unions over financial and policy matters. So there is no effective collaboration between the various agents of learning⁹¹. And the worst is that many people are not motivated to study. This is because they know that they have little or no hope of finding any job at graduation.

4.2.2.4. Poor Assessment Mechanisms

Another big problem with Nigerian educational system has to do with the mechanism of assessment. This problem has given rise to a number of other problems such as examination malpractice, over-emphasis on paper qualification, fraudulent criteria for admission and abuse of students by the teachers and other school administrators. Educational experts agree that once the mechanism of assessment is problematic, the

⁹¹ Today teachers often do not see themselves as committed for the integral well-being of their students. They generally end their influence on the students in the classroom. And with parents struggling to make ends meet, little or no time is left in influencing the child. Again there often exists some tensions between parents and some school authorities. The trust between parents and teachers have been greatly eroded by allegations that teachers impose unauthorized levies and mismanage school funds. In the higher institutes of learning there are allegations of abuse of students to help them pass examinations, lecturers are accused of extorting money from the hapless students through the handouts and other commercial activities.

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entire educational system will falter and this is the case in Nigeria today. Below are some of the important elements needed for proper assessment.

The first is that the purpose of assessment should always be made explicit using the criterion-referenced approach. It must also be continuous, multi-dimensional, varied and balanced. Such assessment must be ongoing and should be seen as an integral part of the learning process. It must be accurate, objective, valid, fair, manageable and time-efficient⁹². An authentic assessment findings must be bias-free, communicated clearly, accurately, timely and meaningfully. Authentic Continuous Assessment should record the cumulative evidence of learner's achievement and those records should accompany all learners throughout the learning paths: 1)diagnose learners strengths and needs, 2) provide feedback on teaching and learning, 3)provide basis for instructional placement, 4)inform and guide instruction, 5) communicate learning expectations, 6) motivate and focus learner attention and effort, 7) provide practice applying knowledge and skills, 8)provide a basis for learner evaluation (eg. grading) and 9) gauge programme effectiveness. From the above criteria we discover that the Nigerian system is beset with many challenges and unless adequate measures are taken, education cannot play adequately its liberatory and developmental roles⁹³.

Our study above reveals that the Nigerian educational system bears the main marks of Paulo Freire's description of ineffective educational system that can empower and liberate people while transforming the society. We have seen that education is an important anti-poverty strategy. We have equally seen that Nigerian educational policies have failed to live up to the challenges. So let us examine Paulo Freire's theory of

⁹² Marks are said to be valid if the questions asked in the assessment require the same kind of thinking skills as stated in the syllabus. So one is to be evaluated on what he/she has been taught in the given course which is consistent with the stipulations of the syllabus.

⁹³Cf. D. HOPKINS, *School Improvement for Real*, Routledge/Falmer, London, 2001, p. xiii. Since the average Nigerian knows the importance of education, the failure of the Federal Government to promote education has led to the emergence of many educational alternatives. Thus today we have five main types of schools in Nigeria. These are the mission schools, Privately owned schools, local government schools, State owned schools and local community schools. Increasing the number of schools have not helped education to play its role of liberating and empowering the people especially those from the poorer background in Nigeria. This deficiency could be explained by the fact that the Nigerian type of education has not been able to prepare students effectively to face the practical challenges of life outside the school. The much needed effort to relate theory and practice as proposed in the theory of conscientization is not effectively implemented. Certificate thus takes precedence over performance.

conscientization/emancipatory education as an option for Nigeria and other African states. We shall try to adapt the theory to the Nigerian context in particular.

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4.2.3. Conscientization as Liberatory Pedagogy for the Humanization of the Poor and Oppressed

A very important attribute of solidarity is that it makes the marginalised realise that they too are active subjects of history. Waking up to the crude fact that they are oppressed and to the awareness that they can and must obtain a better integration moves them to action and thus to influence the course of events and transform their own history and history of the world. The poor begin to realise that history is not subject to fixed logic but rather that it is open to human initiative. This leads them to a critique of the status quo and to work for a change of the unjust situations. Society is then seen as a social project for which all, including the poor, are responsible.⁹⁴

4.2.3.1. The Concept of ‘Conscientization’

Originally the term *conscientization* was coined in Brazil even before Freire. It was used to label a kind of political self-help adult education designed to help the poor to discover their humanity considered ‘disfigured’ or even ‘stolen’ away from them’. But today, the term ‘conscientization’ has become closely associated with Paulo Freire who has popularised it in the academic circles⁹⁵. With Freire the concept came to acquire an epistemological, pedagogical and socio-political connotations⁹⁶. So what does conscientization mean here?

According to Freire, *Conscientization* represents the development of the awakening of critical and deepened consciousness which grows out of a critical educational effort based

⁹⁴ E.OJAKAMINOR, *Catholic Social Doctrine, An Introductory Manual*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2000, pp. 80-81.

⁹⁵ The term is said to have been used by some authors before Freire. Freire himself acknowledges to have borrowed the term from Helder Camara, the Archbishop of Recife Brazil. But ever since then Freire has given it a deeper meaning and interpretation as the focal point of his theory and praxis (cf. P. MAYO, op. cit., p. 63).

⁹⁶ We have noted that Freire’s educational movement actually grew from his practical experience among illiterate adults especially poor peasants in his native Brazil. During this programme, he soon realised that literacy should not be treated as an isolated endeavour since it has causal relationship to socio-economic and political realities were casually. It was in the process of designing an effective education understood as the practice of freedom that he opted for the praxis of conscientization. He saw the relationship between illiteracy and powerlessness as a result of the peasants’ inability to participate in politics. So Freire committed himself to conscientize them, to raise their consciousness, thus motivating them to change their conditions hitherto perceived as fatalistic. A comprehensive expatiation of the concept and praxis of conscientization is expressed in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Most of our discussions on conscientization in this project is based on the inspiration from the above book.

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on favourable historical conditions⁹⁷. It is about the reflection on the condition of existence, a kind of critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be in a 'situation' perceived as an objective-problematic situation. It is about practicing of thinking⁹⁸ so that practice is perfected⁹⁹. It is the process whereby the oppressed emerge from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is gradually unveiled. Being an active constructive process, it enables people to reflect on their *power* of reflection¹⁰⁰. It changes them through the process of transforming their realities via active dialogue. This is possible through a gradual decoding of their world so that the reality and mechanisms of oppression and dehumanisation are grasped.

So conscientization as a process of developing *critical consciousness*, is a form of *emancipatory learning*. It helps the learner to be able to critically assess the kinds of ideas, contexts and relationships which are usually 'taken for granted' or accepted as inevitable, in order to question the root causes of their oppression. Through the process of *conscientisation*, or developing *critical consciousness*, excluded groups can learn to identify, interpret, criticise and finally transform the world about them. Crucial to this process is the notion of *praxis* -by which Freire means, 'reflection and action upon the world in order to change it'. More simply, it means being able to make the connection between experience, understanding and social action to bring about social change¹⁰¹. It is a process which people must do for themselves because liberation or emancipation cannot be handed down from above in the top-down paradigm. It must have the bottom-up feature so that change is coming from the people themselves, is multi-dimensional, is sustainable, transformative and pervasive¹⁰²

Through the process of conscientization the poor begin to replace the inevitability of their own oppression by developing autonomy, independence, responsibility and fuller

⁹⁷Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 19.

⁹⁸ This is possible through the process of 'taking distance' from objects, so that one can really reflect on one's relation to such objects.

⁹⁹Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 16.

¹⁰¹ Later in his works, Freire seemed to prefer the concept of *praxis* to that of 'conscientization'. This may not be unconnected to the various interpretations and misinterpretations that came to be associated with the term conscientization. Indeed conscientization came to be regarded as a kind of magical experience, or even religion with Paulo Freire as its high priest or *guru*.

¹⁰²This is opposed to prescribed or imposed type of change that is dictated from others rather than the people who actually need the change (cf. D. HOPKINS, op. cit., p. 41)

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humanity. In practice this means shedding the kinds of pejorative labels that are regularly attached to minority and excluded groups by dominant groups. These labels which can become internalised, include for example, apathetic, lazy, scroungers, irresponsible, unreliable, etc. Instead of going along with the 'conventional wisdoms' prescribed by oppressors and internalising them, minority groups can begin to see themselves in a new light as inherently capable and creative.

Since Freire popularised the term 'conscientization', a number of scholars have continued to further interpret and critique the concept thus shading more light to its use and application. M. Locke sees the ability to perceive social, economic and political contradictions as well the readiness to act against them, as the essence of Freire's conscientization¹⁰³. For L. Khoi of the University of Paris, "*il s'agit de promouvoir chez l'opprimé une conscience critique de sa situation objective, ceci grâce au dialogue*"¹⁰⁴. For other scholars, conscientization implies a dialogic education in which teacher and student engage together in a critical approach to reality so that the once-oppressed classes can experience a liberation of consciousness, and regain an awareness of man's role as 'subject' in the world¹⁰⁵. Liberation theology and liberatory pedagogy see 'conscientization' as central to their praxis of liberation¹⁰⁶. This is to say that it is the heightened awareness of which the poor have about the causes of their poverty and a determined commitment to addressing the challenge¹⁰⁷.

And interestingly, in a recent work conscientization has been given a very theological interpretation that makes it even more relevant to our work. According to E. C. Frazier, a feminist liberation theologian, "conscientization is the work of the Holy Spirit leading one to the truth of one's situation and thus to an understanding of one's call to action in

¹⁰³ M. LOCKE, *Power and Politics in the School System, A Guidebook*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1974, p. 134. See also E. FIORENZA, *The Practice of Biblical Interpretation*, Lk; 10: 38-42), in N. K. GOTWALD and R. A. HORSLEY (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation, Politics and Social Hermeneutics*, Orbis, New York, 1993, p. 172). We must note that Fiorenza sees conscientization from the feminist perspective and as such thinks that as oppressed people the primary task of feminist movements is to conscientize the womenfolk as well as the society on the reality of women oppression.

¹⁰⁴ L. T. KHOI, *L' éducation : culture et société*, Paris, Sorbonne, 1991, p. 256.

¹⁰⁵ M. YOUNG and G. WHITTY, *Society, State and Schooling, Politics and Education Series*, The Falmer Press, Sussex, 1977, p. 35.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. L. BOFF, *Ecology and Liberation, A New Paradigm*, Orbis Books, New York, 1995, p. 118.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. A. F. MCGOVERN, *Liberation Theology and its Critics, Towards an Assessment*, Orbis, New York, 1989, pp. 27-28.

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that situation. The communal action is the mission of the Church. This awareness reshapes biblical understandings of death as structural injustice and life, or resurrection, as the struggle toward humanization and freedom”¹⁰⁸. Since conscientization is a process, it has phases as presented below.

4.2.3.2. Stages of Conscientization

To understand the notion of conscientization, one must know that it is not a kind of sudden revelation or awareness of some reality that one experiences in the journey of life¹⁰⁹. It is rather an on-going process developmental process from the lowest level of human consciousness to the highest, where one acquires real critical consciousness¹¹⁰. There are in general three levels of human consciousness.

4.2.3.2.1. Intransitive Consciousness

The notion of intransitive consciousness is best understood with the concept of Freire’s anthropology where human beings are both in the world and with the world but at the same time possess the capacity for transcendence. So when Freire’s writes about intransitive consciousness, he refers especially to the lowest part of the human nature which he shares with the lower creatures. At this level of consciousness, which can be termed the magical, fatalist level, nothing is questioned about one’s world. Here external forces are perceived to be in charge and there is *nothing* that can be done to alter the reality no matter how awful it may be. Freire calls this stage ‘intransitive consciousness’ to show the level of insensitivity of those who are there.

¹⁰⁸ E. C. FRAZIER, *The Holy Spirit*, in M. A. De la TORRE (ed.), *Handbook of U. S. Theologies of Liberation*, Chalice Press, Missouri, 2004, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Some mystic experiences do not fit into the description of conscientization because conscientization involves an active and persistent engagement of the human will and intellect in an epistemological quest for a new understanding. Since conscientization must have *empirical* knowledge and knowledge of the *practices* prevalent in one’s environment, it means that in it, the agent must be ‘an active subject’.

¹¹⁰ Some scholars explain these stages from different perspectives. In his introduction to Freire’s work in English, D. Goulet summarises the process of conscientization. First, there is the participant observation of the educators ‘tuning in’ to the vocabulary of the universe of the people. Second there is an arduous search for generative words in the people’s language, third, there is the codification of these words aimed at stimulating thought in the people ‘submerged’ in the culture of silence. The teacher who coordinates all these seeks then to initiate dialogue. This leads finally to the participants becoming aware of their traditional predicament and as well as rejecting their roles in the world as ‘objects,’ they seek to act as Subjects of their own destiny (cf. C. A. TORRES, *The politics of Nonformal Education in Latin America*, in P. MAYO, op. cit., pp. 64-65).

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At this level of consciousness human beings are *submerged in nature* and are indeed dominated by the material world. Those in this level of consciousness are primarily preoccupied with meeting their biological needs as they surrender themselves to fate. Plants and other lower animals do share this sensitivity with human beings. In this stage reality appears fixed, and given, and the dominant cultural fictions seem indistinguishable from the natural order. Individuals here are reduced to *silence*¹¹¹. But despite being in this pitiable condition, the human spirit and capabilities remain present but dormant. This permits eventually and possibly, for the human consciousness to advance to another level.

4.2.3.2.2. Semi-transitive Consciousness

Midway between being totally unaware and critical consciousness, people begin to sense that they may have a vocation that is higher than those of animals and other lower beings¹¹². Here their consciousness is becoming *transitive*. Here people do not actually understand what has been going on but at least they begin to realise that they may have *some* control over nature and over their own lives. The first sign that this is happening is that people begin to ask questions about themselves and about things as they are. This is what Freire calls 'semi-intransitivity'¹¹³.

Despite their ability to question their existence and the perceived oppression, people in this level still feel themselves totally dependent and feel incapable of doing anything to change the status quo. Being a kind of naïve consciousness, the victims no longer see society as closed, determined and fixed. They now realise that their socio-economic, political and cultural environment is created by human beings like them. Still they are unable to act, as their recognition of oppression are naïve in their inability to ascertain the nature of the relationship between socio-political power and their lived world. However at this level, this new awareness elicits the oppressed the desire to take some instruments

¹¹¹ Another author, Brookfield, an expert in adult education refers to this level as one where existence is seen as essentially chaotic, with no meaning or rationality (cf. S. B. BROOKFIELD, op.cit., p. 43).

¹¹² They know that they are in the world and with the world but can also be 'detached' and distance themselves from the world of nature.

¹¹³ According to Freire, "naïve consciousness sees casualty as a static, established, fact, and thus is deceived in its perception" (P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 44).

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of control into their own hands¹¹⁴. Despite the deficiencies of level of consciousness, it serves a gateway for another.

4.2.3.2.3. Critical Consciousness

The highest level of human consciousness is what Freire calls 'critical consciousness'. It has both personal and social dimensions to it. On the personal dimension people become more aware of who they are and what their vocation as human beings is. They begin to realise that human beings are 'uncompleted' creatures and are endowed with great potentials. They realise that they are called to be Subjects and not objects and that they are called to dominate nature and not be its victims¹¹⁵.

The outward manifestation of this awareness is that people begin to investigate their conditions critically. They begin to analyse their problems rigorously as they see the connectedness of reality. According to Freire, "*la conscience critique est la perception des choses et des faits, tels qu'ils existent concrètement, dans leurs relations logiques circonstanciées*"¹¹⁶. Here one achieves an in-depth understanding of the forces that shape one's life, and becomes an active agent in constructing a different, more just reality¹¹⁷. This stage is generally political in nature and elicits action. It engenders action since those who understand who they are, their mission in life, and the sad reality of oppression and dehumanisation would generally tend to act to change the status quo. This is because they realise that liberation is not only possible, but imperative so that they can be more human, and make history rather than remaining its victims¹¹⁸.

Freire summarises the effects of conscientization. The critical transitive consciousness is characterised by the depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's 'findings, and by their

¹¹⁴ Those in this level of consciousness exhibit a lot of immature human traits like being simplistic, emotional, sectarian, fanatic, etc. It is a very dangerous stage because people who are there have the tendency to think that they have grasped the 'truth' about things and so can easily be manipulated. Generally, they fail to see the interconnectedness in the reality (cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 44).

¹¹⁵ This means that they see themselves as cultural beings.

¹¹⁶ P. FREIRE, *L' éducation: pratique de la liberté*, Paris, Cerf, 1971, p. 109.

¹¹⁷ S. B. MERRIAM and R. S. CAFFARELLA, *Learning in Adulthood, A Comprehensive Guide*, Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1999, p. 325.

¹¹⁸ Cf. J. K. KINCHELOE, op. cit. p. 65.

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openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analysing them. It is also characterised by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics. Critical awareness is also marked by receptivity to new realities, for reasons beyond merely novelty. It does not reject the old realities just because they are old but does so because of some inherent problems in them. Instead of arbitrary reception or rejection of realities, it accepts what is valid in both old and new. Critical transitivity is characteristic of authentically democratic regimes and corresponds to highly permeable, interrogative, restless and dialogical forms of life¹¹⁹.

He further explains that *“cet éveil de la prise de la conscience rend l'homme perméable. Il lui permet de vaincre le désengagement de l'étape antérieure et l'engage pratiquement tout entier. A ce moment, exister devient un concept dynamique. Il suppose un dialogue sans fin de l'homme avec l'homme ; de l'homme avec le monde ; de l'homme avec son Créateur »*¹²⁰. Again, conscientization as liberatory process frees the victim of oppression and liberates them from self-deprecation¹²¹. Conscientization refers to the possibility of dignity and power among the poor, as they become radically 'aware' of their plight and then opt to change it¹²². Through conscientization, the person or persons so empowered acquire new self-understanding on the personal level including roots of what they are now and what they can become in the future.

The conscientized person or community is able to break through prevailing 'mythologies', ideologies and propagandas to arrive at a new level of awareness, especially awareness of the reality of oppression that keeps them poor. Here education is not just about learning new skills, it is especially about the enactment of freedom that creates a new human person who ceases to be an 'object' of history but an active 'subject' of history. Finally conscientization elicits action from those who have acquired

¹¹⁹ C. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 18

¹²⁰ P. FREIRE, *L' éducation: pratique de...*, pp. 60-61.

¹²¹ Cf. M. FINGER and J. M. ASUN, *Adult Education the Crossroads, Learning Our Way Out*, ZED Books, London, 1988, p. 84.

¹²² Cf. R. M BROWN, *Gustavo Gutierrez, An Introduction to Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, New York, 1990, p. 68.

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it and they commit themselves to the process of social transformation¹²³. Freire warns that conscientization should never be conceived as an event but as a process. To think otherwise is to fall into some difficulties like 'massification' and 'domestication'¹²⁴. So constant effort should be made to ensure that the gains and pains undertaken to arrive at the level of conscientization are not lost¹²⁵.

We have seen the nature of conscientization. It is a process and engenders action. For Freire, it has educational, political and economical implications. It is indeed the bed-rock of the humanization project and should be the guiding principle that permeates every praxis of liberty. Despite the criticisms against Freire's theory of conscientization as we shall see later, it still remains a useful guide for our study in Black Africa. In our present study therefore, the task before us now is how to evolve *conscientization-inspired* types of education that will simultaneously, liberate, empower and humanise the poorest of the poor in Black Africa. What kind of conscientization-inspired educational strategy can serve as an anti-poverty strategy in Africa today? We shall consider the power of literacy, importance of political education, moral education/conscientization and agricultural education for food production.

¹²³ As a matter of fact it is this practical dimension of conscientization that gives it the true sense of praxis because praxis is a combination of reflection and action. As praxis of liberation therefore conscientization is essentially characterised by the following elements. First, it does not end in abstraction and is grounded on *experience* of the world. Conscientization emphasizes that truth is for the purpose of *change*, of transformation. Truth is perceived here as something that is 'done'. Conscientization is about empowering people to change their situations themselves rather than imposing solutions on them. The most effective type of conscientization takes place when there is communal *reflection* and action (cf. R. A. HORSLEY, *Liberating Narrative and Liberative Understanding, the Christmas Story*, in N. K. GOTWALD and R. A. HORSLEY (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation, Politics and Social Hermeneutics*, Orbis, New York, 1993, p. 164). Finally authentic conscientization contains in itself the tools for auto-correction. This makes conscientization an on-going process (cf. R. M. BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 68).

¹²⁴ This emotional reaction results from the fact that as the people emerge into a state of critical awareness, they discover that the elite regard them with contempt and in reaction they tend whenever possible to respond aggressively. The frightened elite sensing that the legitimacy of their power is being challenged, often regroup by adopting different kinds of strategies to pacify and even domesticate the masses. The various strategies adopted to quieten the sensibilities of the oppressors is what Freire calls 'massification' (cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 32).

¹²⁵ Freire seems to contrast conscientization with 'massification'. Conscientization facilitates the passage from naïve to critical transitivity, increasing men's ability to perceive the challenges of their time. But massification aims to quieten the sensibilities of the oppressed as they emerge from their usual stupor to critical awareness and action (cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 32).

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4.2.4. Empowering the Poor Through Transformative Adult Literacy Programme

Freire's work in Brazil, Chile, Tanzania, Guinea Bissau etc. has shown that the acquisition of literacy is one of the tools that can help to empower and liberate the poor from the shackles of poverty¹²⁶. Indeed, "there is some historical evidence that literacy is intentionally restricted by the elite few in power, if they feel threatened by the illiterate factions"¹²⁷. In many societies especially under dictatorial and oppressive regimes, many of those who do not read or write find themselves at the periphery of political life¹²⁸. Today, many adult educators have been trying to develop effective adult literacy programmes to help empower adults many of who are both poor and illiterate¹²⁹.

4.2.4.1. The Nature of Literacy

There is no unanimous definition of the concept of literacy¹³⁰. This is because "literacy cannot simply be identified with reading and writing. One can write in an essentially oral style or one can speak in a manner characteristic of a book"¹³¹. In recent times, there has been a shift to see literacy as process and not just an event. This perspective of literacy calls for a return to Dewey's perspective of looking at literacy as an activity which young children engage in even before receiving formal reading and writing instruction. "This area of study, which is becoming known as 'emergent literacy' replaces the terms

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 50. His first literacy programme started in Recife, Brazil with five illiterate adults of whom two dropped out on the way (cf. *ibid.*, p. 42).

¹²⁷ M. MASON and J. ALLEN, *A Review of Emergent Literacy with Implications for Research and Practice in Reading, Review of Educational Research*, no. 13, 1986, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Cf. P. MAYO, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹³⁰ It is very difficult to give a permanent and universally accepted definition of the concept, literacy. This difficulty arises because the environment, the social expectations, the reading activities for determining whether a person is literate is often contextual. So the definition of literacy is always in flux as evident from various UNESCO documents. In 1951, it defined literacy as the reading and writing of a short personal statement. In 1962, it modified this to include the various skills of reading, writing, and math necessary for a person to function effectively in a group and community setting, the actual use of literacy skills for personal and national development (cf. J.M. MASON and J. ALLEN, *A Review of Emergent Literacy with Implications for Research and Practice in Reading, Review of Educational Research*, no. 13, 1986, p. 5).

While the ability to understand and manipulate a script remains central in the discourse on literacy, it is pertinent to know that different scripts are based on different competencies. One can distinguish important script traditions: Logoscripts which employ distinctive characters to represent different morphemes or unit meanings are used in Chinese tradition. Syllabaries which use signs to represent symbols are associated with the Cree Indians of North America. Alphabets on the other hand use distinctive signs to represent syllables. They are becoming dominant in the literary world today. So one who is literate in one type of language may be considered illiterate in another.

¹³¹ D.R. OSLON, *Literacy*, in E. DE CORTE and F.E. WEINERT (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Developmental and Instructional Psychology*, Pergamon, Oxford, 1994, p. 430.

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‘reading readiness’ and ‘early reading and writing’¹³². Below are some of the understandings of literacy.

When one interprets literacy in its relationship to schooling, then any person who has not attended any schooling at all is considered ‘illiterate’. Those who have done primary school of about four to six years have what is called ‘basic literacy’. Those who have completed higher school are said to have acquired ‘high or functional literacy’¹³³. When considered independent of schooling, literacy becomes associated with one’s ability to manipulate a text. In this sense, general familiarity with the nature and function of a script is called basic literacy, familiarity with the use of a script for a specific set of functions is called ‘functional literacy’. And competence with the formation and interpretation of specialised texts in a domain of expertise could be called ‘elite literacy’.

Paulo Freire would later interpret illiteracy more widely by affirming that one should not restrict the definition of ignorance to illiteracy, but would include the lack of experience for participating and intervening in the historical process¹³⁴. In all these, the main notion of literacy revolves around the ability to read and write conventionally¹³⁵. Since there are many theories of adult education and literacy, we wish to underline that our focus is on Freire inspired adult education/literacy programme which is summarised here.

An effective, literacy programme especially for the poor and adults is the one which recognises the political nature of all educational interventions. It is also a theory which calls for socially transformative adult educational initiatives. It focuses on change at the

¹³² Cf. J. M. MASON and J. ALLEN, op. cit., p. 3. The study of emergent literacy represents a new perspective that stresses that legitimate, conceptual, developmental literacy learning which is occurring during the early years of a child’s life. This understanding shows literacy as a process of ‘becoming’.

¹³³ Of course this understanding runs into difficulty since many people have been able to educate themselves without attending any formal school. Other recommended texts on literacy and language are hereby furnished: P. E. MUAKA, et. al *Teaching reading*, INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF EDUCATION, Brussels, 2003; W. SCHNOTZ, *Learning of Reading Comprehension*, in E. De Corte & F. E. WEINERT (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Developmental and Instructional Psychology*, Pergamon, Oxford, 1996, see esp. pp. 562-564; A. HILDYARD, *learning and Instruction of Writing*, in E. De Corte & F. E. WEINERT (eds.), op. cit., esp. pp. 577-580; E. L. JUDD & H. WALBERG, *Teaching Additional Languages*, International Academy of Education, 2001.

¹³⁴ Here Freire signals that pure literacy is not useful on its own if it does not enhance action and change (cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 41).

¹³⁵ Cf. J.M. MASON and J. ALLEN, op. cit., p. 32.

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roots of systems and not just the symptoms of what are perceived as structurally determined forms of oppression. An effective adult education is one that contains the language of possibility and hope that the poor and adult learners are capable of learning and capable of engaging in social reforms¹³⁶. An effective adult education is one that is understood as a life-long learning seen as a process which is not limited to schooling but involves a variety of sites of pedagogical practice. Such transformative adult education is the one that contains in some way or another the Freirean inspired concepts of critical and political thinking that lead to emancipation and empowerment. How then can this literacy model help to empower the poor in Black Africa ?

4.2.4.2. Literacy as Empowerment Strategy

Many adult educators agree that if poverty is about powerlessness, one of the main functions of literacy is to empower the student both personally and collectively.

On the personal, if inferiority complex and self-deprecation are characteristic of many illiterates, the acquisition of literary competence will help in boosting self-confidence and lead to self-actualisation. The bishops of South Africa emphasized this in the face of educational inequality in their country. They observed that many poor people are illiterate and this “creates artificial feelings of superiority and inferiority”¹³⁷. The effect of effective adult education is described by Freire.

*Des lors l'analphabète se mettrait au travail pour modifier ses attitudes antérieures. Il se découvrirait, par son jugement critique, comme l'artisan de ce monde de la culture. Il découvrirait que, tout autant que le lettré, il renferme aussi en lui un potentiel de création et de re-crédation*¹³⁸.

Literacy can help the poor in Black Africa in a number of ways. First, such education helps to empower poor persons economically because, today, “access to career is heavily

¹³⁶ P. MAYO, op. cit., p. 24.

¹³⁷ BISHOPS OF SOUTH AFRICA, *The Call to Conscience*, in S. MUYEBE and A. MUYEBE, op.cit., p. 73.

¹³⁸ P. FREIRE, *L'éducation: pratique de...*, p. 114.

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dependent on upon the knowledge and skills one can offer”¹³⁹. When one becomes literate, one could gain some employment that involves simple calculations and documentation. Through adult education they could read advertisements about employment opportunities¹⁴⁰. Indeed research shows that “for both children and adults, the ability to read opens up new worlds and opportunities”¹⁴¹.

Apart from the psychological and economic advantages of adult literacy, it helps people to participate more effectively in the democratic public life. It is a historical fact that rising levels of literacy were closely related to the great social reformations. For example, the ability to read the Bible for oneself and to discover its meaning was a fundamental basis of Protestantism and the private study/criticism. And updating of objective accounts on the basis of observation were important to the rise of modern science¹⁴². Today, many adult educators realise that as the level of the people’s literacy rise, their commitment to such issues as trade unions, political matters and other civil liberty movements become more effective¹⁴³. So if the majority of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today are illiterates and literacy holds the key to development, the challenge becomes how to evolve an effective adult literacy/enlightenment programme that can bring about reforms.

4.2.4.3. Propositions for Effective Literacy Programme

First, there is need for enlightenment campaign that will enable people realise that there is a corelationship between powerlessness, poverty and level of literacy. Today too much emphasis is laid on formal/school education for younger people. Through conscientization, the government and the poor themselves will appreciate the fact that adults are the main economic and political actors in the society, and yet many of them are among the poorest in the continent today. Investing on their education is important.

¹³⁹ M. FINGER and J. M. ASUN, op. cit., p. 128.

¹⁴⁰ In Nigeria where English language is the official language of commutation, reading, writing and speaking basic English would open a horizon of business opportunities for the poor outside their ethnic and linguistic circles. And with the growing use of information technology in Nigeria today, basic reading and writing techniques would be invaluable in social, economic and political intercourse.

¹⁴¹ PANG et. al., *Teaching Reading, Educational Practices Series*, 12, International Academy of Education, Brussels, 2003, p. 6.

¹⁴² Cf. D. R. OSLON, op. cit., p. 429.

¹⁴³ Cf. P. MAYO, op. cit., p. 117.

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Through conscientization, poor illiterate adults would come to realise that knowledge “is organizationally and culturally beneficial as well as personally liberating”¹⁴⁴.

The second task is to evolve an effective adult educational programme. Since Paulo Freire’s method is considered one of the most effective today, we shall propose it for Nigeria and for other African countries. It as model which could be adapted in any other context¹⁴⁵. A typical Freire-inspired programme can be summarised thus: The first step concerns the concepts and terminologies used. Since many of the candidates in Freire’s programme were adults, and since the term ‘school’ has traditional connotations that suggest passivity and technicality, Freire’s educational programme was named *Culture Circle*. Instead of a teacher the group has a *Coordinator*. And instead of having lectures they have *dialogues*. And in place of pupils they have *group participants*. And since every educational system needs a syllabus, the programme had *codified units*¹⁴⁶.

As for the actual learning process, in the Culture Circles, group debates were organised either to clarify situations or to seek action arising from that clarification. The group participants themselves are to provide the topics to be tackled. The themes that have direct bearing to the lives of the people such as nationalism, development, illiteracy, voting, democracy, poverty etc were among the topics discussed¹⁴⁷. These and other themes were presented in a methodological way to the groups in form of dialogue by using of visual aids facilities. As for those to participate in these circles, the choice is left for the organisers but the poor, the ‘illiterate’ and the oppressed who show a desire for a better life are to be given priority consideration.

Since these adults have come to learn for pragmatic reasons, the issues and topics of utmost importance to their real lives shall be marshalled out. The organiser(s) and the group would then start analysing the words and expressions proposed. Since the group

¹⁴⁴ S. BROOKFIELD, op.cit., p, 43.

¹⁴⁵ Freire’s adult education programme has been adopted in many countries. His work with the World Council of Churches in Geneva helped to disseminate his theory of adult education to many developing countries. He tried it in Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau (cf. P. Freire, *Pedagogy in Process, Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, Seabury, New York, 1978).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. P FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Each group in a given circumstance is to figure out the themes most pertinent in their particular context.

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calls itself a culture circle, they could start from analysing the concept of culture critically¹⁴⁸. While analysing the important concepts, the practical process of learning to read and write should not be isolated from the overall nature of education as a praxis of liberation¹⁴⁹. Adults are encouraged to *communicate* graphically¹⁵⁰. Since dialogue and collaboration are the main strengths of this type of education. Freire insists that “this teaching cannot be done from top down, but only with the collaboration of the educator”¹⁵¹.

In all these Freire maintains that the role of the teachers are vital hence the need to train them to be effective. He proposes a typical procedure for effective literacy and transformative education for adults and the poor¹⁵². And while advocating dialogue as major means of this type of education, Freire holds that teachers should play the vital role of coordination by maintaining a “permanent tension in the relationship between authority and liberty”¹⁵³. Teachers have to be creative and flexible since “the educator is

¹⁴⁸ The discussion starts with the idea of ‘culture’ as contrasted with the concept ‘nature’. Culture is presented as a systematic acquisition of human experience. The discussion goes on to express the fact that in a *lettered culture*, this acquisition is not limited to oral transmission, as is the case in *unlettered cultures* which lack graphic signs. Adult participants are immediately exposed to the fact that even though their oral transmission of values is cultural, it is better to read and write because written materials are more durable, more accurate, and can reach wider public. In such stimulating, critical and highly motivating system of education, “the illiterate perceive critically that it is necessary to learn to read and write, and prepares himself to become the agent of this learning” (P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 48).

¹⁴⁹ Problem-posing education entails among other things the ability to understand what one reads and to write what one understands. This will be used in practical life to solve concrete human problems.

¹⁵⁰ Acquiring literacy is not to be done in the slavish effort like memorising sentences, words or syllables. It is rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one’s context. Generative words which are full of meanings and symbols are proposed as models in these discussions.

¹⁵¹ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical ...*, p. 48. Freire’s optimism about the efficacy of the method and the capability of the human mind to know often finds justification in the results that follows almost immediately the programme takes off. Some of the illiterates who followed the programme react spontaneously. One persons simply confessed: “I want to learn to read and write so that I can stop being the shadow of other people”; For another: “I am not angry at being poor, but not knowing how to read”; and yet for another “I want to learn to read and write so I can change the world” (Ibid., p. 50).

¹⁵² P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 52. From the beginning to the end, dialogue is encouraged. The procedure is simple: First, prepare the materials in forms of slides, filmstrips and posters. Secondly, project the codified situation together with the graphic generative word accompanying it. Thirdly begin the debate about its implications. Fourthly, after exhausting the analysis and decoding the situation, the coordinator then intervenes, calling the participants to make a link between the word and the situation projected to them. ‘Thinking words’ and not ‘dead words’ are most effective since they motivate thought. Cards and other appropriate methods could be used to help internalise the situation while at once provoking thought and action in the participants. In all these the educator continues to arouse the desire to read and write in the participants so that they become their own motivators even long after the session.

¹⁵³ We have to appreciate why Freire in his latter works started emphasizing the place of authority in his discourse on dialogue. It was discovered over time that, in effort to stimulate critical thinking and to

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a politician and an artist who must use the science techniques but must never become a cold, neutral technician”¹⁵⁴. Such teachers should understand the peculiar needs of the adults in such areas as adult assessment, collaborative learning¹⁵⁵, motivation and respect for the adults¹⁵⁶. They should be able to help adults become self-directed learners capable of engaging in a metacongnitive¹⁵⁷ use of knowledge¹⁵⁸. The combined use of local language and the official language of the country should be encouraged.

In all these, there should be concerted effort to focus on the goal of the programme so that it does not imitate the traditional method of education that cannot empower the people. It must aim at transforming the people’s culture¹⁵⁹. Again this education cannot

practice dialogue, some teachers were tempted to force students against their disposition to speak. In this way dialogue is converted into a form of coercion that prevents open, spontaneous, free and genuine exchange. While the students are to speak in the exchange, Freire sees it as part of the mission of the educator to negotiate the difficult dialectical tension between freedom and authority in an effective way. When students keep their freedom and the teacher maintains his authority in dialogue, the ideal effect is achieved. In the political sphere, the struggle for liberation entails on one hand, a deep responsibility to exercise individual discipline freely, and on the other, the need to exercise authority freely in the interest of the democratic life (cf. SHOR and FREIRE, *Education for Liberation*, in A. DARDER, op.cit., p. 117).

¹⁵⁴ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process*..., pp. 28-29. There is need to train and equip adult educators who are specialised in andragogy (cf. M. S. KNOWLES, op.cit., p. 58). ‘Andragogy’ refers to adult education.

¹⁵⁵ Despite the fact that adults are to be self-directed in their learning, there should be some collaboration between the adults and their teachers even when the former are learning alone. This is what Knowles, an adult educator means: “Accordingly, a basic element in the technology of androgogy is the involvement of the learners in the process of planning their own learning, with the teacher as a procedural guide and content resource” (M. S. KNOWLES, op. cit. p. 59). Collaboration, cooperation and mutual exchange programmes are very effective strategies. This collaboration should be incorporated into the educational programme. It should equally be the key concept among adult learners themselves. It should equally be done between various organizations and groups that are sponsoring and promoting adult education. Finally collaboration should take place between teachers, students and researchers on adult education.

¹⁵⁶ For Knowles, having lived longer, adults accumulate a reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing source for learning.

¹⁵⁷ This means the ability to apply the acquired knowledge in other contexts especially in problem-solving and in concrete life experiences after learning.

¹⁵⁸ Planning to promote this will help adults to manage, monitor and largely provide themselves with feedback on their progress or lack of it. Again the program should enhance help adult learners to manage the arduous task of transferability and applicability of knowledge as a life-long process of learning. Those planning adult education program should know that self-directed learning differs essentially from the traditional technique of transmission of knowledge. In the programme, instead of working to pass along information or ‘get information across’, teachers should try to introduce learners to the essence of their content in ways that engage what they already know and expand their ways of thinking. Instead of indoctrinating the students, as in banking system of education, the programme should make teachers act as animators, facilitators, guides, supervisors, coaches, co-learners and friends thus helping students become self-reliant learners. This calls for respecting the feelings, emotions and invaluable experience of adult learners as a primary source of learning and teaching. To ensure that learners become self-directed learners, the programme should try to encourage the students to become independent and critical thinkers who are able to judge their own progress or lack of as adults.

¹⁵⁹ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical ...*, p. 81. Here various examples are used to distinguish between nature and culture. By working on nature to change and enhance it, man creates culture. The wild flower in

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afford to remain neutral about the socio-political and economic conditions in which the people live and operate. This is to say that the conscientization will remain the philosophy guiding its practice, which means it has to be political and action oriented¹⁶⁰. The success of the programme will be judged above all by how much it is able to enhance adults' desire for self actualisation, freedom and responsibility¹⁶¹.

The ability of the various stakeholders to work in collaboration for fostering effective education programme for the poor and adults especially in developing countries is important¹⁶². Paulo Freire's methods, could be *adapted* and applied in each context with special attention on his codification/decodification process¹⁶³. And there should be regular assessment of the programme to ensure a sustained educational development that motivates, inspires and empowers especially the poor adults in Nigeria and elsewhere in Black Africa. Women, nomads and other disadvantaged groups should be given special attention in the programme¹⁶⁴.

the forest is a product of nature but once gathered into a bouquet it becomes a cultural object. The stone on the hill is natural, but once used as instrument for making fire it becomes cultural. While the cat chases his prey with claws and teeth, man 'hunts' his prey with bows and arrows, with guns, traps and ever improving methods. Soon the pride and humanity of the oppressed are restored as they discover that the house they build even if it is made of mud and thatches, their hunting tools their own types of dressing, etc are all cultural elements. They now appreciate that by learning to read and write, by learning to participate in politics and in new technological programmes, they are merely improving on what they have traditionally lived on since the dawn of time. "They discuss the fact that transformation has meaning only to the extent that it contributes to the humanisation of man, and is employed towards his liberation. They finally analyse the implications of education for development"(P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 69).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 56. This means also that such education should not be presented as something neutral. It should aim at making the participants 'political' so that soon they become capable of *dissociating ideas* which is another degree of awareness. This is the antidote to the domesticating power of propaganda, and the beginning of emancipation and true empowerment.

¹⁶¹ Cf. S. B. MERRIAM and R. S. CAFFARELLA, *op.cit.*, p. 257.

¹⁶² There should be collaboration in such areas as financing the programme by government and donor agencies like UNESCO, provision of expertise by NGOs and Church personnel, and an on-going emphasis on the need for such programmes by all the stakeholders in the project.

¹⁶³ Cf. P. MAYO, *op. cit.*, p., 138.

¹⁶⁴ N. NICAISE of the K.U.Leuven, Belgium, presents further means of enhancing the education of the disadvantaged in what he terms threefold typology for a more equal education. These include early childhood stimulation programmes, material and financial support to students, multi-service schools and other forms of enhancing equal treatment of all students. This does not annul the positive aspects of the theory of meritocracy (cf. I. NICAISE, *Policies to Combat Social Inequality in Education...*, pp. 8-9).

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4.2.5. Empowerment through Political Education and Participation

If poverty is about powerlessness, then the acquisition of political power and political participation is to be considered one of the means for empowerment of the poor. This has been the main position of Freire. Indeed his entire theory of conscientization revolves around this idea. Under this topic therefore we shall briefly summarise the nature of Freire's political education and then discuss possible agents that can help promote it so that it becomes a veritable tool of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today.

4.2.5.1. Nature of Political Education according to Paulo Freire

Freire believes that despite the emphasis on education as an emancipatory strategy, education alone cannot bring about the desired social transformation. So for him education or conscientization in particular is not an end in itself. This is to say that education will enable people participate effectively in politics and only such effective political process can bring about authentic social transformation. It is on the basis of the above statement that one can understand Freire's theory of political education. He maintains that the democratic and political angle of education should be developed so that education ceases to be seen as neutral project. For him, education is a political act, and in every educational practice, there are ideological and political challenges facing those engaged in it¹⁶⁵.

Indeed Freire's criticism against many traditional educational practices is that they fail to see this link between education and political emancipation. The elite are quite aware that they cannot permit the emergence of effective education that can liberate the consciousness of the people and lead them to ask question and eventually become a threat to the oppressive status quo¹⁶⁶. The practical demonstration that Freire's pedagogy has a political undertone is that when the military ruler took over power in his native Brazil,

the methodology he developed was widely used by Catholics and others in literacy campaigns throughout the North East Brazil, and was considered such a threat to the old order that Freire was jailed immediately after the military coup in 1964¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁵ A. DARDER, op.cit., p.56.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁷ R. SHAULL, op.cit., p. 13.

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So Freire's 'theory' of conscientization is based essentially on his anthropology that man is political by nature. And as long as man does not realise or develop this political consciousness, Freire believes that such a person is not yet *authentically* human¹⁶⁸. Through political education people become critically conscious of their predicament. They appreciate it as transformable by themselves, and not just accepting the oppressive situations as if they were human destiny. Political education helps to make the poor and the oppressed perceive the reality of oppression, not as a closed world in which there is no exit, but as a limited situation or challenge which they can, and indeed are morally bound to transform. When the poor are thus conscientized they realise that they too have responsibilities and rights in the society.

So underneath the whole theory of conscientization, is Freire's desire to make people politically literate. This implies among other things developing a democratic awareness and democratic value awareness. It means understanding the basic task of politics not as a prerogative of some elite, or 'professional' politicians. This is a major breakthrough in the lives of the common people and the poor since they now refuse to surrender their destinies to the decisions of a few individuals and political groups. An important element in the process of political education is that the more collective it is the more effective it tends to become. This is because such changes require collaboration and solidarity among the people as they aspire to transform the world and make it more human¹⁶⁹.

One result of political education is that it enables the people, especially the poor, to become aware of the relationship between their present condition and the decisions of the government. They realise that power belongs to the people. One of the manifestations of this new awareness is their desire and ability to participate in the democratic process especially through exercising their franchise. Through political education the people become critical of the statements of political leaders. They become interested in party manifestos and judge critically when they are being manipulated. Given the power of the

¹⁶⁸ This means that such a person has not yet started the process of self-actualisation which will enable him or her become a real 'subject' in the world.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. F. X. GANNON, *Developing Societies: Missionary Orientation Toward Education and Social Change*, in W. J. RICHARDSON(ed), *Revolution in Missionary Thinking*, Maryknoll Publications, New York, 1966, p. 239.

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media in modern times, those who are politically literate are then able to question some of the media reports and realise that the media is a possible tool of propaganda and manipulation.

4.2.5.2. Authentic Political Education Leads to Action.

When Freire maintains that conscientization is about reflection and action, that is praxis, political education offers a good example. This is to say that, both in Freire's native Brazil as well as in many other oppressive or developing societies, political education and critical awareness remain the seeds of effective action and social transformation. An example can be cited here.

During the critical years of the apartheid regime in South Africa, one of the political leaders Steve Biko attested that political enlightenment was the most effective tools in the campaign for equity in the country. According to him, when challenged to think critically, the poor and especially many Black South Africans were then able to grapple realistically with their misery. They realise that Apartheid politics was oppressive. They came to realise that all races had the same dignity and rights, and that apartheid was a historical invention of a minority to oppress the majority. Through political education, people learnt that freedom does not come easily, yet is a possibility and a fundamental human right. Through political education, people realised that action should follow awareness and so began the process of liberation that would end the regime.

By becoming politically enlightened, the people of South Africa began to transcend their traditional dependency syndrome, their fears and their inferiority complex. They began to reject all kinds of paternalism and demanded equal rights. They refused to be treated as objects and as such started aspiring to be masters of their destinies. They equally realised that awareness alone would not buy them freedom hence they marched reflection with action. And so came down the Apartheid regime¹⁷⁰. Of historic importance also is the

¹⁷⁰ Cf. S. BIKO, *The Testimonies of Steve Biko*, Penguin Books, London, 1978, p. 28.

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political education in the United States of America under Martin Luther King that led to the right of vote to the black minorities in that country¹⁷¹.

4.2.5.3. Salient Remarks on Freire's Political Education

To end therefore, we can say that for Freire, any education, especially in favour of the oppressed that fails to mobilise the people towards the transformative and humanisation process has missed its main task as praxis of liberty. This is why Freire criticised many traditional forms of education as sterile and even as tools for the perpetration of oppression. As one who always tried to march his theory with practice, Freire never hid his political affiliations even at the height of his popularity as one of the greatest pedagogues of all times. In Brazil, he joined political and social movements, in Chile he did not shy away from political commitments, in post-independent Guinea-Bissau he saw education as bedrock for stable political order. After his long sojourn abroad, Freire did not shy away from accepting the post of Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo under the auspices of a political party¹⁷².

In fact, it is better to speak of *politico-pedagogical* principles of Paulo Freire to underline the point that for him education is political and politics educates. It is therefore given the importance of political education as inspired especially by Paulo Freire that we shall now examine how political education can play an effective role as a tool for the liberation, empowerment and humanisation of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today. One main task here is to study some principal agencies that can help in fostering political education for social transformation.

4.2.5.4. Important Agents of Political Education

Since human beings by nature live in societies, there are rules for social interaction even in the most primitive of societies. But in formal democratic society, these rules become

¹⁷¹ After series of enlightenment campaigns against segregation, President Johnson signed Voting Rights Act on the 6th of August 1965. It was a major victory both for non-violent resistance and champions of political education, not only in the United States but all over the world (cf. J. M. WASHINGTON (ed.), *I Have a Dream, Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, HarperSanfrancisco Publishers, New York, 1986, p. xxix).

¹⁷² His engagement with the political leaders of Guinea-Bissau is an example of how he wished education to be used as a political tool. One can read more on this in Freire's book, *Pedagogy in Process, Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, Seabury, New York 1978.

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more systematised. This demands therefore that the process of socialisation should include the act of political education. For Freire, political education is a major task of conscientization as we say earlier. So who then are the important agencies that should formally promote political education especially in the Black African setting today. We are limiting ourselves to the role of the *governments/civil institutions, the Church* and *other agencies* especially African scholars/researchers.

4.2.5.4.1. Civil Institutions, Agencies and Governments

Perhaps the United Nations and its various agencies constitute the primary political teacher in modern times. In its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations holds that “everyone has the right to take part in the governance of one’s country, directly or through freely chosen representatives”¹⁷³. The charter on Africa further underlines that “all peoples shall have a right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination”¹⁷⁴. The above declarations show that irrespective of their status, the rich and the poor have right to participate in the decisions that concern their lives and destiny.

Apart from the United Nations, we equally read that: “it is the duty of the state to ensure that all its citizens have access to an adequate education and are prepared for the proper exercise of their civic rights and duties”¹⁷⁵. Various transformations are taking place especially in the Western countries today. These transformations are generally attributed to the increasing level of social consciousness of the people especially regarding their rights and responsibilities¹⁷⁶. For Vatican II, the rapid transformation and progress made in some parts of the world has helped to establish a politico-juridical order which provide better protection for the rights of women and men in public life¹⁷⁷. Through increased

¹⁷³ United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, art. 21, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. United Nations African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, art. 20

¹⁷⁵ *Gravissimus Educationis*, (GE), no. 4. The documents however reminds governments, of the principle of subsidiarity as it concerns education. This is to ensure that there is no monopoly of education as that would be prejudicial to the natural rights of the human person and inconsistency with the reality of pluralism in the world today.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. GS, no. 73.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Ibid., no. 73.

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political awareness, demand is made for the promotion and protection of people's rights especially that of the weakest members of the community¹⁷⁸.

4.2.5.4.2. The Church as a Political Teacher: Catholic Social Teaching

From the time of the Apostles to the post-Vatican II era, the Church has been trying to play her prophetic role which is proclaiming the Word and making disciples of all nations¹⁷⁹. Since *Rerum Novarum* was published, this prophetic role of the Church has assumed more political and civil dimension resulting in a systematic body of doctrines now known as the 'Catholic Social Teaching'¹⁸⁰. Below we shall see a few official positions and teachings of the Church on political education and participation.

Vatican II upholds the declaration of the United Nations on the right of education to all people and this include the right to political education¹⁸¹. The Council describes political education as of paramount importance so that all peoples can participate actively in the march of civilisation and the social progress of the age¹⁸². Vatican II holds strongly that if "all citizens will be able to play part in political affairs, civil and political education is vitally necessary for the population as a whole and for young people in particular"¹⁸³. Apart from the teaching of the Council, individual popes have equally emphasised the importance of such education¹⁸⁴.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 73.

¹⁷⁹ N. SEGEJA and M. OJARA, in D. KYEYUNE (ed.), *The Prophetic Role of the Church in AMECA Countries: Pastoral Challenges and Response*, in *New Trends for the Empowerment of the People, Proceedings of the Third Interdisciplinary Session of the Faculty of Theology and Department of Religious Studies Held 1-3 April, 1996*, p. 52.

¹⁸⁰ Catholic Social Teaching or Doctrine aims at providing Catholics with the blueprint for coherent social commitment. The need to understand and apply these teachings to the African context today has become urgent.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *GE*, 1.

¹⁸² Cf. *Ibid.* Preface page.

¹⁸³ *GS*, no. 75.

¹⁸⁴ Since we saw some of these documents as antecedents to *Gaudium et Spes*, we shall simply list them without further commentaries. They include, Leo XIII: 1878, *Inscrutabili*, The Church is the Mother of Civilization.; Leo X111, 1881 *Diuturnum*, The Authority of the Government comes from God.; *Immortale Dei*, 1885, An Ideal Christian State; Leo X111, 1897, *Rerum Novarum*.; On the Dramatic Condition of Workers.; Pius XI, 1922; *Ubi Arcano*.; Christ Reigns on the Social Order. Pius XI, 1931 *Quadragesimo Anno*.; Illustration of the Social Doctrine of the Church.; Pius XI, 1937; *Divini Redemptoris*, *The Refutation of Communism*. Pius XII 1939, *Summi Pontificatus*, In Defence of the Unity of the Human Family; Pius XII, 1944, The Future of Christian Civilization, John XXIII, 1961, *Mater et Magistra*, and 1963, *Pacem in Terris*, Paul VI, 1967, *Populorum Progressio*.; Paul VI, 1971; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II, 1987, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and 1991, *Centesimus Annos*.

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On the local front, the Church in Africa sees political education and participation as of citizens. This is seen especially during the last African Synod where politico-social issues featured prominently during the preparation, working session and the final documents from the Synod.¹⁸⁵ The message of the Synod on this matter is summarised thus: "The bishops called on all Christians without exception to educate themselves on democracy"¹⁸⁶. And the Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, further challenges the Church in the region to intensify her prophetic mission especially on political matters so that she becomes in reality voice of the voiceless. This is urgent so that everywhere the dignity of every individual will be acknowledged and people will always be at the centre of all government programmes¹⁸⁷.

On the Nigerian scene, the bishops believe that political ignorance is a major cause of the country's economic and political woes¹⁸⁸. The bishops recommend that systematic and sustained political education is urgent in the country as means of empowering the poor. When people are politically enlightened, they can think critically, analyze socio-political issues independently. And so they are able to resist the constant manipulation of the masses by the elite and the politicians¹⁸⁹. They bishops affirm the role of the Church as an agent of political education.

First and foremost, the Church will provide education for justice for both the victims and for the perpetrators of injustice. The objective of educating the victims will be to enable them know their rights and empower them to demand that they be respected by all and sundry....The oppressors too need to be educated to know the plight of the oppressed. More often than not, they do not really know what that plight is, some of them at least might desist from their unjust actions, maybe even join in the effort to eradicate injustice altogether¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁵ For example, of the 64 propositions emanating from the working session of the Synod, 12 were dedicated to social issues and concern for the millions of destitute in the continent (cf. G. EHUSANI, *A Prophetic Church*, P.P.I, Publications, Ede-Nigeria, 1996, p. 82).

¹⁸⁶ J. WALIGGO, *The Synod of Hope at the Time of Crisis in Africa*, in M. BROWN (ed.), *The African Synod, Documents, Reflections and Perspectives*, Orbis, New York, 1996, p. 206.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 70.

¹⁸⁸ According to them, an ignorant person does not know his rights and obligations and is not informed about the laws that protect him nor where to seek redress. An ignorant person is an easy prey to exploitation by the elite. They observe that various ethnic and religious conflicts in the country are as the result of the elite manipulating the ignorant masses for political and economic gains.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. CBNC, *Civic and Political Responsibility of the Christian*, no. 12, (1979), in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 88.

¹⁹⁰ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *Church in Nigeria, Family of God in Mission, Lineamenta for the First Pastoral Congress*, 1999, no. 228.

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Other Episcopal Conferences in Africa equally see political education as the bedrock of sustainable democracy and a stable society where justice will be done for the poor and the weakest members of the society.

The bishops of Zambia teach that politically enlightened citizens are those who not only know their civic responsibilities but actually exercise them in various ways¹⁹¹. They call on the electorate to realise that there is a close link between political activities and poverty in their country. They call on citizens to watch out for those parties and candidates that have people-oriented programmes for the country. The bishops of Zimbabwe hope that through political education citizens could “have sufficient political consciousness to know where their true interests are, to express their opinions as full citizens, to enjoy their full political rights and responsibilities”¹⁹². The bishops of Malawi reminds the citizens that by acquiring political knowledge and exercising one’s civic responsibilities, one is performing a ‘sacred’ duty for the nation and the Church¹⁹³.

The bishops of Tanzania reminds the poor in particular that apathy to political matters will only worsen their conditions since they can no longer participate in the choice of good leaders¹⁹⁴. The bishops of Sudan are aware of the divisions and incessant conflicts in their country so they educate the citizens by reminding them to eschew any form of religious or racial bias in exercising their political duties¹⁹⁵. In Kenya the bishops remind the politicians that politics is for the good of the people and not for promoting the interest of a political party or group of individuals. They remind their people that truth, integrity

¹⁹¹ To the electorate in Zambia the bishops exhort: “Good elections require intelligent and responsible participation of all voters. We therefore encourage all Christians to get themselves informed of the manifestos from various political parties. These manifestos are supposed to have the programme of action that the parties propose to follow in order to serve the good of the people” (Catholic Bishops of Zambia, *Building for Peace*, nos. 9-11, in S. MUYEBE and A. MUYEBE, op.cit., p. 132).

¹⁹² BISHOPS OF ZIMBABWE, *Road to Peace*, in Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁹³ Cf. BISHOPS OF MALAWI, *Choosing Our Future*, nos. 8, in Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. BISHOPS OF TANZANIA, *The Christian and His Counterpart*, no. 408, in Ibid., p. 126. One must not forget the role that the Church played in Congo in promoting politics in the country. In a society that was undergoing a painful process of change, the able leadership of Cardinal Malula led the Church in that country to realise that, “*les Eglises locales ne pouvaient pas rester en marge des ces mutations profondes de la société....Pour l’épiscopat du Congo, c’était le moment de faire des propositions radicalement neuves qui furent largement reprises dans les textes du Concile Vatican II*” (F. L. LUBOKO, *Le Cardinal J. A. MALULA, un pasteur prophétique*, Kinshasa, Editions Jean XIII, 1999, p. 47).

¹⁹⁵ BISHOPS OF KENYA, *Duties and Rights of Catholic Citizens*, in S. MUYEBE and A. MUYEBE, op. cit., p. 133.

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and justice that are anchored on God's commandment should guide all political decisions and activities¹⁹⁶.

4.2.5.4. 3. Other Agents of Political Education

Today, a number of African intellectuals and other groups have continued to play an active role in promoting political education in the continent¹⁹⁷. Perhaps one of the most influential authors engaged in the political enlightenment of the poor and oppressed in Africa today is Jean-Marc Ela¹⁹⁸. Jean-Marc Ela felt what could be termed his 'prophetic' calling out of the experience of suffering and poverty in Black Africa today¹⁹⁹.

Jean-Marc Ela like Freire appreciates the power of the poor. Having interacted with them especially as a pastor in his native Cameroon, he realises that the poor peasants have a lot of potentialities. But unfortunately, these potentialities are stifled by the unjust systems in which they live. Jean-Marc Ela challenges the Church in Africa to do more in educating the poor masses as true act of solidarity with them. Since he perceives the co-relationship between poverty and ignorance, encapsulates the importance of such education in the continent.

How many illiterate people are paralysed today by their ancestral (and modern) fears in societies in which the accumulation of new knowledge operates according to the model of an elitist culture? Ignorance here is not limited to inability to read and write. It extends

¹⁹⁶ BISHOPS OF KENYA, *Pre-Election Concerns* no. 18, in *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁹⁷ Some critics like K. Kaunda of Zambia is of the opinion that there are enough intellectuals in Africa. But these intellectuals did not receive the correct and relevant type of education needed for social and integral reforms in the continent. K. Kaunda is particularly saddened by the lack of commitment on the part of Church intelligentsia. "Let me be frank and state that I am disappointed in the failure of the clergy, with certain exceptions, to discharge this prophetic function. Is not a proportionate amount of their time and intellectual talent solely devoted to matters of domestic ecclesial concern? Would it be unkind for me to say that many of the clergy have completely shut themselves off from the ongoing life of our nation and argue endlessly about the jot and tittle of the Law; theological niceties are equally irrelevant to the salvation of the individual soul and the soul of the society. As a humble Christian, I am saddened that so much of the Church's intellectual talent is unavailable to stimulate and challenge our society" (K. D. KAUNDA, *A Humanist in Africa, Letters to Colin Morris From Kenneth Kaunda*, Longmans Green, London, 1966, pp. 100-101).

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Marc Ela is contemporary theologian and a Catholic priest of Camerounian origin. He claims not to write theological treatises but seeks to respond to the urgent needs of the poor people whom he sees as marginalised and exploited by the elite and their allies.

¹⁹⁹ According to J. M. Ela, much of what he writes are derived from his practical experience of the oppression which poor people are experiencing in especially in Northern Cameroon (cf. H. G. KUIZA, *Jésus-Christ, peut-il être Africain ?* Paris, Hovine, 1993, p. 127). Indeed reading Ela, one remarks that in his writings, he tries to educate the oppressed peasants and at once challenge the political elite who operate in the structures of injustice. Basing his discourse on the mission of Christ, Jean-Marc combines liberation theology with theology of Inculturation in his search for an African theology that will liberate, humanise and empower the poor and other victims of oppression in Africa.

to the functioning of political institutions, to the mechanisms of economics, to laws of society. In the face of the manifold harassments and blind bullying of which they are victims, the illiterate African masses are ignorant of the very law designed to protect them. Their very fear of defending themselves even when they know they are in the right, itself constitutes a stumbling block, one from which many human groups need to be liberated²⁰⁰.

Ela highlights the fact that there are some African traditional dispositions that combine with ignorance of modern socio-political and economic mechanisms to oppress rather than liberate the people.

Apart from J. M. Ela, other authors in Nigeria have been at the forefront of promoting political education. Eugene Uzukwu and G. Ehusani have written profusely on the prophetic role of the Church. Others include E Mveng, B. Bujo, P. Kanyandago etc. Since many of these authors see the Church as principal agent for political education that can help in ushering in a new Africa where the rights of all especially the poor are recognised and respected²⁰¹. This education will enable all citizens to benefit from, and enjoy the resources of their countries²⁰². Till now, people have not been able to confront the root causes of their problems because they are grossly ignorant of them²⁰³.

4.2.6. Proposals for Effective Political Education as an Empowerment Strategy

Our study of Paulo Freire's theory of conscientization which includes what can be termed his political philosophy has helped us to realise there is a need for a more effective political education in Black Africa today. That almost all the countries have been experiencing serious political instability leads us to make the following propositions. Each of these propositions is of course subject to adaptation in each country in the region.

²⁰⁰ J-M ELA, *A Black African Perspective: An African Reading of Exodus*, in R. S. SUGIRTHARAJAH (ed.), *Voices from the Margin, Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Orbis Books, New York, 1991, pp. 256-266.

²⁰¹ Cf. P. KANYANDAGO, *The Church's Role Regarding Education for Human Rights in AMECA Countries*, in D. KYEYUNE (ed.), op. cit., p. 146.

²⁰² There has been many pronouncements in many official Church documents calling for the promotion of human rights especially of those who are marginalised (cf. *GS* nos. 29, 49, 73. See also *DH*, nos. 6 and 7). All state the fundamental right of human persons and the moral obligation which one has to respect the rights of others (cf. P. KANYANDAGO, op.cit., p. 154).

²⁰³ Cf. N. SEGEJA and M. OJARA, op. cit., p. 58.

4.2.6.1. Alternative African Democratic Model?

We saw in the earlier part of this study that political ineptitude and instability remain the main problems facing the countries of Black Africa today. Among other reasons, one can argue that the way in which many African countries adopted the Western types of democracy at independence contributes to the present impasse. As a matter of fact, at the dawn of independence, some African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania urged African elite not to accept without modifications the political systems of the out-going colonial governments. They argued that even though democracy is presented as workable political system, its values should be accepted but its mode of application re-defined in Africa. Like Freire, these leaders warned that unless Africans seek their own democratic models of governance, they would eventually find themselves in what Freire calls *cultural invasion*²⁰⁴.

Negritude which is both a literary and movement associated with Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal were all efforts to develop the type of political system that will not only address the African politics but also be relevant to the African personality in its integrity. Since almost all African countries adopted without *inculturating* the political structures of the out-going colonial governments, today the region remains the poorest and one of the most unstable in the world despite the abundant human and natural resources found therein. The need for searching other democratic models for countries in Black Africa has thus become more urgent than ever. This is because today, we do not seem to have real nation-states as critics say that what Africans have is more or less, a “conglomerate of tribes, clans and families”²⁰⁵.

So inspired by Freire political and educational principles, African elite, the political class, researchers and other agencies should see it as their duty to find alternative democratic models that are based on the African political, cultural and economic realities²⁰⁶. Nkrumah’s socialist model, Nyerere’s Ujaama which is a combination of Western

²⁰⁴ Artificial and cosmetic type of democracy that is imported from another culture without root deep root in the place where it is practiced.

²⁰⁵ E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 194.

²⁰⁶ Cf. B. BUJO, op. cit., p. 166.

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democracy and African socialism could be modified to suit the African countries²⁰⁷. In searching for more effective democratic models for African countries, we should underline that just as Freire saw conscientization as the bedrock of authentic humanisation and social transformation, so should the philosophy of Negritude be used as the bedrock in proposing African political options. This becomes important since the challenge of anthropological poverty in the continent touches the political, economic, cultural and psycho-social lives of the people especially the poorest of the poor.

4.2.6.2. What the Church could Do

Since the Church has a divine and civic vocation as *prophet* and *teacher*, this role is to be intensified in Africa today in a number of ways²⁰⁸. For example, since the National Episcopal Conferences remain the most authoritative ecclesial voice in many African countries like Nigeria, there is need to translate most of the communiqués and teachings into various local languages so that their position become known at the grassroot levels²⁰⁹. The Social teaching of the Church can be a useful guide in this regard. The various organs of the Church like *Justice and Peace Commission*²¹⁰ could do more to raise the critical awareness of the people in political matters. The formation of effective Basic Christian Communities would be necessary as one of the channels of informing and forming people on their political and civic rights.

And since the Church has many institutions that influence the society in Africa today such as Catholic Universities, Pastoral institutes and seminaries, political education should feature in their curricula. This will enable the Church to produce priests, religious

²⁰⁷ Nyerere's *Ujaama* had its weaknesses but it was a bold experiment that could be improved on.

²⁰⁸ Cf. G. ALBERIGO and J.A. KOMONCHAK, (ed.), op. cit., p. 414.

²⁰⁹ One of the challenges facing African theologians, pastors and indeed the official Church in the continent is problem of communication. There are very many languages and dialects in many African societies. These make communication difficult. This is a problem constitutes an obstacle in 'selling' many government policies. And coming to the Church, the problem is even more compounded. In their recent research findings on the Africa, H. Derroite and C. Soetens see poor communication as a major obstacle to effective inculturation in Africa. Their finding can be summarised thus: "*Le vocabulaire du christianisme dépend d'un contexte civilisationnel complètement étranger au nôtre. La Bible utilise les images d'un univers pastoral tout à fait différent. La théologie, les textes liturgiques, les textes du pape et des évêques sont, pour la plupart des gens, en partie incompréhensibles. L'assimilation n'est pas immédiatement possible*" (H. DERROITE in H. DERROITE et C. SOETENS, *Le mémoire missionnaire, les chemins sinueux de l'inculturation*, Lumen Vitae, Bruxelles, 1999, p. 168).

²¹⁰ This is the Catholic organ that is charged with fostering the political and social mission of the Church.

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and lay personnel that could positively influence the polity in a nascent Black Africa²¹¹. Given the important role that the Church in Europe played in development of the European civilisation including politics, then the African Church should stand up to its mission as harbinger of African renaissance.

On the local community level, Freire's *Cultural Circle*²¹² could be adapted to the African context. It should tackle themes like leadership and governance, civil society, unions, self-help, political causes of poverty, the role of local and international donor agencies in the poverty reduction campaigns. And in doing all these the persistent need to empower the people on how to read and write remains urgent²¹³. Non-Governmental Organisations and international experts could be co-opted in fostering political education in African. Now that modern means of communication are largely available to many people in Africa, they should be used effectively to foster political education and participation. Since many of the poorest persons are equally illiterate, political conscientization could be in form of rallies, drama, street outreach and other forms of personal encounters in the rural and urban centres where the poorest of the poor are found.

4.2.6.3. The Need for More Political Participation

So far we have been discussing the educational dimension of politics in Africa. But like Freire, we must assert that education alone is not enough to bring about changes if concrete actions are not taken. So in addition to promoting political awareness, there is need to engage in the practical political process. Indeed, both Freire and other researchers have shown that if poverty is especially about powerlessness, then the *acquisition* and *use* of power becomes an anti-poverty strategy. If bad leadership and corruption have been proved to be the main causes of poverty especially in Nigeria, then the system needs more honest people to sanitise it. It is no longer enough to denounce evil in the country without actually providing alternative leadership style. Christians should equally be made to realise that while only a few can directly occupy political positions, others can equally participate through various democratic processes²¹⁴.

²¹¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 64.

²¹² Literacy and political forum.

²¹³ Cf. P. de MEESTER, *Où va l'Eglise d'Afrique?* Paris, Cerf, 1981, p. 178.

²¹⁴ Here the role of the laity in political participation should be particularly underlined.

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Active participation could take the forms of helping in the formation of political parties, ensuring that the Kingdom values are enshrined in the party constitutions. They could help in influencing the members of their party and engaging in effective enlightenment programmes. Others include conscientizing the people in democratic values, encouraging the people to register their names for elections, using all legitimate means of campaign for elections and by mobilising the people to participate in actual casting of votes. These are some of the ways that the Christian will be fulfilling his or her civic and prophetic roles in the society. By shunning these responsibilities, one is neither faithful to the Gospel principles nor playing his or her civic roles. To achieve these aims, each diocese and even parish should make use of existing structures and institutions like *Justice and Peace Commission* among others. More creative ways of mobilising the people from the grassroots should be evolved. While clerics are not directly to participate in partisan politics, they can advice, support and motivate lay Christians who are desirous and qualified to do so²¹⁵.

We shall end with a final remark that since conscientization is a process, the challenge of liberating, informing, forming, humanising and empowering the poor should be on-going and should be adapted in each context to be effective. We agree with J. M. Ela that this is an urgent task facing the African Church today as an expression of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed²¹⁶. Since political education and conscientization in general are on-going processes, African intellectuals, national governments and the African Union, should turn a new leaf in the continent. They should critically evaluate the present political structures with a view of finding alternative experiments²¹⁷. The Church can be very helpful in this regard due to its long experience in mission and inculturation of new values.

²¹⁵ In Nigeria "some priests and religious leaders who are social crusaders have been accused of dabbling into politics which is supposed to be the domain that should not be mixed with religion. The priests are often advised to stick to the pulpit and to concentrate in prayers, their true vocation and leave politics to politicians" (G. EHUSANI, *Nigeria, Years Eaten by Holocaust*, Kraft Books, Ibadan, p. 99).

²¹⁶ Cf. J-M ELA, *A Black African Perspective: An African Reading of Exodus*, in R. S. SUGIRTHARAJAH (ed), *Voices from the Margin, Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Orbis Books, New York, 1991, pp. 256-266,

cf. 256.

²¹⁷ Cf. E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 111.

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4.2.7. Moral Conscientization/Ethical Revolution as anti-Poverty Strategy: A Focus on Nigeria

Africa's economic problems are compounded by the dishonesty of corrupt government leaders who, in connivance with domestic or foreign private interests, divert national resources for their own profit and transfer public funds to private accounts in foreign banks. This is plain theft, whatever the legal camouflage may be. I earnestly hope that international bodies and people of integrity in Africa and elsewhere will be able to investigate suitable legal ways of having these embezzled funds returned. In the granting of loans, it is important to make sure of the responsibility and forthrightness of the beneficiaries²¹⁸.

4.2.7.1. Clarion Call for Moral Conscientization

Bribery and corruption have been considered throughout this work as then bane of African development and main cause of poverty. Many social analysts including religious leaders, theologians and other international bodies agree on the need for a spirited, systematic and sustained war against corruption in Africa. Pope John Paul II was among those who recognised this evil and joined the African bishops at the Synod in their call for a campaign against corruption²¹⁹. He observed that in many parts of Africa, human rights are trampled upon with impunity. This is why he calls for all stakeholders in the continent to get involved in promoting a culture of justice, openness and honesty²²⁰.

On the local front, the bishops of Nigeria have always insisted on the need for moral education in the country. Following the collapse of the educational system in Nigeria, the Bishops' Conference observed that the country was degenerating into moral decadence²²¹. They have thus been calling for moral education especially in the schools as a way of training future leaders and citizens of high moral probity. This, according to them is the way to ensure a renascent Nigeria²²². The bishops express their readiness to collaborate with the government in this arduous educational project so that moral

²¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 113.

²¹⁹ As a matter of fact, most of the interventions during the African Synod involved the ways of initiating moral reforms in the face of blatant corruption of many African leaders.

²²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, no. 98.

²²¹ CBCN *Peace through Justice and Love*, 1989, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 228.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

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formation becomes a essential part of the school system²²³. They conclude with a note of urgency by stating that “it is therefore in the their own (citizens’) interest as a matter of life and death to eschew corruption in themselves and do all in their power to eradicate it”,²²⁴.

Apart from the official ecclesiastical calls for moral conscientization, other authors have continued to emphasize the need for a moral reform. For a Nigerian author and philosopher, J. Uwalaka, the problem of corruption in the country can be attributed to the erosion of the African traditional sense of ‘right and wrong’ where all forms of evils were repudiated in forms of taboos. For him therefore, “if we want Africa to be truly reborn and flourish again, we must confide our leadership to men of conscience, men who say what they mean, and men who mean what they say”²²⁵. The civilization of love should be once again be made the foundation of such ethical revolution²²⁶. For yet another author, the African and Nigerian society can be described as ‘schizophrenic’. This is to say that the phenomenal increase in religious fervour in the region has failed to stem the tide of moral decadence which is sweeping the noble human values which were characteristic of traditional Africans. For him therefore,

there is something intrinsically wrong with widespread tolerance of corruption in a milieu that has the external dressings of piety and religion, while the roads to its socio-economic life and interactions are paved with rottenness, ethical chameleonic vacillations, social decay, infrastructural delectation, institutionalized brigandage, ethnic xenophobia, widespread tolerance of double standards etc.²²⁷.

Having seen that corruption is so prevalent and so destructive, one then wonders, why is this so and what can be done about it. For some authors like R. Rwiza of Tanzania, the problem of corruption and the poverty that it engenders has a lot to do with what he calls

²²³ Ibid., p. 61.

²²⁴ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, op. cit., no. 228.

²²⁵ J. UWALAKA, *The Legacy of African Traditional Religions, Humanism for the African Renaissance Project*, in T. I. OKERE (ed.), op. cit., p. 248.

²²⁶ Cf. Ibid., p. 249.

²²⁷ E. F. OGBUNWEZE, *Religion and the Socio-economic Realities of Nigeria, A Critique of Religion in a Corrupt Social Milieu*, in Ibid., p. 60.

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the “deformation of conscience and identity crises”²²⁸. We shall argue that the formation of the right type of conscience as moral education can lead to the emergence of a better Afro-Nigerian society. First let us see the nature and formation of conscience from the Christian and African perspectives. We shall then establish the relationship between moral education and the fight against poverty. Finally we shall present the principal agents of moral education and how they can do so more effectively in the fight against anthropological poverty²²⁹.

4.2.7.2. What is Conscience²³⁰?

An exhaustive study on the meaning of conscience is beyond the scope of this study. But in general, conscience refers to the ethical or moral principles that govern a person's thoughts and actions. Our main task here is to see how the formation of conscience through moral education in particular can help us in the fight against corruption, since corruption is one of the main causes of poverty in Black Africa. We shall limit ourselves to examining the salient facts about conscience as found in some official Catholic documents and as understood from the African traditional concept of the same. This will then lead us to examine some principal agents that can help in the formation of informed conscience in Black Africa today.

4.2.7.3. Conscience in Some Official Modern Teachings of the Church

The Catholic teaching on conscience is founded on the Scriptural teaching that man was made in the image of God (cf. Gen.1:26)²³¹. This teaching was further developed by

²²⁸ Many Africans are now exposed to new cultures and attitudes that challenge their traditional value systems. Often through immigration from the rural to the urban centres as they come in contact with other cultures. Many Africans tend to lose their traditional moral values even as they face identity crises. The fear of taboos and community solidarity often give way to moral laxity when one finds himself or herself in a new society where he or she is anonymous.

²²⁹ A good introduction to the classical notion of ethics has been given by D. M. TRIMVIEW in his work, *Ethics, Moral Evolution: From Customary Societies to Atomistic Individuals*, in M. A. De la TORRE (ed.), *Handbook of U. S. Theologies of Liberation*, Chalice Press, Missouri, 2004, pp. 101-109.

²³⁰ Although there is a debate about the existence of universal moral ethics, our attention is on Christian emphasis here will be on Christian moral educational model (cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 4).

²³¹ B. BUJO, *The Ethical Dimension of Community, The African model and the Dialogue Between the North and the South*, Pauline Publications, Nairobi, 1998, p. 61.

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theologians, especially St. Thomas Aquinas. Indeed St. Thomas' teaching on conscience has decisively determined the Catholic moral theology on conscience²³².

4.2.7.3.1. Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church

According to Vatican II, "conscience is the most secret core and the sanctuary of the human person. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths"²³³. So deep within themselves, men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. It is a voice ever calling on human beings to love, and to do what is good and avoid what is evil at every given moment. Through conscience, human beings are called to love God and their neighbour. Through conscience, "Christians are joined in others in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of the individuals and from social relationships"²³⁴.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains further that, through obedience to conscience, one hears the voice of truth and so maintains his dignity as a human being. Man is truly human when he prudently hears and obeys the voice of conscience which is the voice of God in him²³⁵. Through conscience, one assumes responsibility for his acts²³⁶. So important is conscience that both the Vatican II and the Catechism arrogates to man the right to obey one's *well-informed* and informed conscience before any other

²³² One important contribution of St. Thomas to the doctrine of conscience is linked with the *habitus*, or virtues. Here the main understanding of conscience is associated with the famous *synderesis*, the maxim: *bona est faciendum et malum vitandum*, -good must be done and evil avoided (cf. B. BUJO, *The Ethical Dimension of Community...*, p. 60). There have been further theological reflections on the doctrine of conscience but we are limiting ourselves to the more recent teachings of conscience in some official documents of the Church namely, Vatican documents, Catechism of the Catholic Church and Pope John Paul's encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993.

²³³ *G. S.* 16.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16. As a matter of fact, it is the Council's deeper insight into the dignity and freedom of the human person that guided its teaching on conscience. This deeper insight on human nature and dignity can also be seen in the teaching of the Council's document *Dignitatis Humanae*. Among other things the document states: "A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man, and the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty" (*D.H.* no. 1).

²³⁵ Cf. CCC, no. 1780.

²³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 1781.

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authority²³⁷. Since this right to obey one's conscience is reserved to a well-formed conscience, the task of *proper formation* of conscience facing all spiritual formators and other agents of socialisation. And it is precisely here that the need for moral education arises as the principal means of conscience formation²³⁸.

4.2.7.3.2. *Veritatis Splendor* and Conscience

In the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), John Paul II further explore the Catholic doctrine on conscience. Inspired by St. Paul and other theologians like St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, John Paul II explains conscience from many perspectives. In line with the Scriptures and especially the Pauline doctrine of natural law and conscience (Rom. 2:15), and in accordance with the position of Vatican II, John Paul II re-iterates that within each person is implanted a divine law, most deeply lived out in the 'heart' of the person, that is in person's conscience²³⁹. He tries to explain the nature of this law in many ways. First he refers to the judgment of conscience as a *practical judgment* which makes known what man must do or not do, or which assess an act already performed by him²⁴⁰. He equally states that the judgment of conscience has an imperative character and so man is obliged to act in accordance to it²⁴¹.

John Paul II underlines that our obligation to obey our conscience does not however deny our freedom as human beings²⁴². It is therefore from the double reality of human freedom and obligation to obey the voice of conscience that the Pope situates his teaching of the dilemma facing moral agents especially in modern times. He presents modern man as one who is facing a *moral dilemma*²⁴³. He uses the story of the rich young man, who came to

²³⁷ Cf. Ibid., no. 1782. A well-formed and informed conscience is generally one that is guided by obedience to the law of God and teaching of the Church. It is here that education and formation of conscience becomes indispensable.

²³⁸ Cf. Ibid., no. 1799.

²³⁹ Cf. Ibid., no. 54.

²⁴⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 59.

²⁴¹ Cf. Ibid. no. 60.

²⁴² Cf. Ibid. no. 61.

²⁴³ The idea of modern man being in dilemma is explained by the fact that he is faced with numerous choices to make and is exposed to new realities and challenges that lead him to ask serious and fundamental questions about what had been taken for granted traditionally. This dilemma is not restricted to non-Christians since even among Christians, there seem to be moral crisis. The is is exemplified in the fact that *moral authority* of the Church itself is now being questioned. John Paul II expresses this thus: "A new situation has come about within the Christian community itself, which has experienced the spread of

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Jesus seeking directives on how best to live his life, to show the reality of conscience and the need for its formation hence the search for directive by the rich man²⁴⁴. According to him, “the question which the rich young man puts to Jesus of Nazareth is one which rises from the depths of his heart. It is *an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man*, for it is about the moral good which must be done, and about eternal life”²⁴⁵.

Another important contribution of John Paul II’s teaching on conscience as it concerns our present study, comes from the fact that he re-iterates the necessity for the formation of conscience. This is because, “conscience, as the judgment of an act is not exempt from the possibility of error”²⁴⁶. On how this error can come about, John Paul II re-iterates that “conscience is not an infallible judge; it can make mistakes. However, error of conscience can be the result of invincible ignorance, an ignorance of which subject is not aware which he is unable to overcome by himself”²⁴⁷.

It is based on the fact that conscience is not an infallible judge that the Pope basis his teaching on the urgent need of formation of conscience. He reminds Christians in particular that they “have a great help for the formation of conscience the Church and in her Magisterium”²⁴⁸. For him unless one avails oneself to the authentic moral formators, one stands the risk of compromising the dignity of his conscience²⁴⁹, and above all one is exposed to being “tossed about by every wind of doctrine proposed by human deceit” (Eph. 4:14). And with reference to our present study, we can say that the wind of corruption and moral decadence blowing across the continent has to do with the issue of moral probity in the continent. This is to say that there is something wrong with the conscience which does not see cheating, stealing, embezzling public fund and other such aberrations as morally reprehensible.

numerous doubts and objections of a human, psychological, social and cultural, religious and even properly theological nature, with regard to the Church’s moral teaching” (Ibid., no. 4).

²⁴⁴ One day a rich young man came to Jesus and requested for directives : “What shall I do to inherit eternal life ?” (Mark 10:17-31).

²⁴⁵ Ibid., no. 8. John Paul II sees most of the crises in modern times as essentially moral, hence his emphasis on the need for a moral re-orientation.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. no. 62. See also *GS*, no. 16.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. no. 62.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. no. 64.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid. No. 63.

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So from the above presentation we can say that despite some new insights on the Catholic doctrine of conscience, both in official Church documents and in many theological writings, the “basic traits of traditional doctrine of conscience remain intact”²⁵⁰. Now, since our focus is on the co-relation between moral education and poverty/oppression in Black Africa, we shall now briefly examine conscience from African traditional perspective. We shall argue that a proper understanding of African traditional notion of conscience, and engaging in the formation of a enlightened conscience, through moral education, holds the key to bringing about a more just Africa. This is to say that the formation of enlightened conscience can serve as anti-corruption strategy. And effective anti-corruption strategy is imperative to solving African problem of poverty occasioned especially by moral decadence.

4.2.7.4. Conscience in African Traditional Society

According to B. Bujo, an African moral theologian, the African notion of conscience is to be understood in the context of African traditional cosmology within which their ethics is anthropocentric²⁵¹. It is very important to note here that despite treating conscience from an African traditional perspective, Bujo observes that the basic understanding of conscience as an African and as a Catholic theologian remain the same in essence. This is why he maintains that conscience in both traditions is the last internal judicial instance, which renders account only to God²⁵². Having said the above, Bujo then presents conscience more from a more African perspective.

4.2.7.4.1. The Individual Conscience and the Community

According to B. Bujo, the African traditional concept of conscience is the bedrock of the traditional society. This is understandable given that the entire social fabric is interwoven

²⁵⁰B. BUJO, op. cit., p. 62.

²⁵¹ He accepts previous studies that demonstrate that African ethics is essentially anthropocentric. This is to underline the importance of human relationship for moral action. While Bujo uses the concept of conscience from a technically moral perspective, we have to note that African conscience is presented sometimes from a cultural anthropological perspective. It is here that we appreciate the interpretation of African conscience under negritude as *the soul of the African personality*, the essence of the African man and women, that is their Africanness. J-M. Ela sometimes interprets the African conscience in this sense presenting it as something that is in need of liberation and humanisation (cf. J-M. ELA, *L'Eglise, le monde noir et le concile*, in J. D. MVUANDA, *Inculturer pour évangéliser en profondeur, des initiatives traditionnelles africaines à une initiation chrétienne engageante*, PETER LANG, Bern 1998, p. 144).

²⁵²Cf. B. BUJO op. cit., p. 62.

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around the notion of community. This means that in forming African conscience, “the entire educational system is oriented towards the promotion of community life”²⁵³. Such moral education is essentially impacted on the citizens through the ‘word’, an important tool of communication. Conceiving conscience essentially from a communitarian perspective, implies that for the traditional Africa, an action or behaviour is considered essentially good if it leads to the *building of the community*. In this sense therefore, the idea of individual conscience makes little sense since Africans see the existence of the individual as interwoven with that of the community.

It follows that when the individual does good, it affects the community and same when he does evil. The effects of this evil is felt especially when one does what is considered a taboo that does immense damage to the entire community²⁵⁴. Even when one commits an offence that can be termed a taboo in secret, it is believed that the adverse effects of such crimes would be felt by the entire community. In short the individual can then be said to *live in, with and for* the community²⁵⁵. One of the implications of the above position is that both the individual and the community have a standard criterion for judging the morality of an action. This is summed up thus:

The morality of an act is determined by its life-giving potential: good acts are those which contribute to the community’s vital force, whereas bad acts, however insignificant, are those which tend to diminish life²⁵⁶.

Another aspect of this community morality has to do with the ‘sense of shame’, personal *pride* and family *reputation*. People would generally avoid doing something that could tarnish their reputation or that of their family. On the positive perspective, philanthropy and other heroic achievements were rewarded as incentives for further good actions²⁵⁷.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁵⁴ Taboos refer to those offences considered outrageous, horrifying and considered unworthy of a human being. They are worse than modern concept of crime (cf. *ibid.*, p. 247). And it is precisely because of this interconnectedness in community that everyone, especially adults, gets involved in the formation of the younger children. It is considered morally wrong not to correct any child who is erring even if he/she is not one’s child or relation.

²⁵⁵ Cf. A. K. RUKWATA, *Pour une théologie sociale en Afrique*, Paris, Harmattan, 2004, p. 200.

²⁵⁶ B. BUJO, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Orbis, New York, 1992, p. 22.

²⁵⁷ In some tribes in Nigeria the community would honour their members who have performed heroic acts with traditional titles as a means of motivating them and an incentive to others to engage in philanthropic activities.

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It is in light of the above that one can understand why the entire traditional African community generally assumes the role of educating their younger ones and new comers according to the norms and values of the community. In traditional communities with close-knit families, extended families and tribal ties, it was indeed very easy for others to influence their new members in socialisation process which included formation of conscience. Although there were no formal law-enforcement agencies like modern police force, the level of crime was very low due to the high level of moral integrity inculcated in the people. This is because in a fairly closed society, "it is understandable that the content of ethical rules affects the members of a relatively autonomous society in a unique way"²⁵⁸. This is the social dimension of conscience.

Considered from the community perspective, people did good to advance the common interest and avoided eschewed evil in order to avoid the community wrath. But if this conscience and basis of morality is limited to this, the question of the autonomy of the individual and freedom of exercise the dictates of his conscience becomes a problem. So we turn to the other dimension of the African notion of conscience.

4.2.7.4.2. The Individual, His Conscience and the Transcendence

Apart from the community dimension of the African conscience, there is the vertical perspective characterized by a radical openness to the transcendental dimension. This perspective gives the African notion of conscience its individual and transcendental character.

Here God, the ancestors, the dead and other deities are in the invisible world are considered to be playing important role in human society. For the African, "*le monde dont nous parlons est le monde de Dieu comme source du projet éthique de la création*"²⁵⁹. So it is important to remark that "the reference to a religious foundation gives morality its sacred character and assumes compliance by the community"²⁶⁰. It is this divine and transcendental dimension that also gives the African conscience its personal character.

²⁵⁸E. ACHERMANN, *Cry Beloved Country, A Continent Needs Help*, African University Studies, Munich-Kinshasa, 1993, p. 154.

²⁵⁹K. MANA, *L'Afrique, va-t-elle mourir? Essai d'éthique politique*, Paris, Karthala, 1993, p. 178.

²⁶⁰J. UWALAKA, op. cit., p. 236.

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One cannot therefore do evil in secret since God and the deities are in constant surveillance on both individuals and the community²⁶¹. Those who are befallen with any big catastrophe like the legendary Job in the Bible, often had to consult the diviners to ensure that they had not offended the gods and the community inadvertently.

Having seen the important role that conscience played from the individual, social and transcendental perspectives, one can now appreciate how the rapid erosion of these traditional beliefs and practices are affecting the African personality the African society as a whole. With the breakdown of the traditional understanding of moral responsibilities, such issues as stealing public funds, embezzlement and other forms of corrupt practices that impoverish the continent seem to go on with impunity and without any sense of shame and pride. Let us take for instance, in many traditional African societies, theft was considered an abomination and those who engage in it are punished. Today, the moral crises has to do with the misplaced sense of values. Experience shows that those who ostensibly loot public treasury for instance, instead of being condemned and ostracised as in traditional society, they are even regarded as 'heroes' by their families and members of their tribe.

So with little or no serious legal institutions to complement the role of the erring conscience, Africans now find themselves in the present moral dilemma that is exemplified in the endemic corruption that is now rendering the continent destitute. How to use moral education to address such a big challenge therefore the main task facing us in this study. Although this task is to be undertaken by every one in the society today, we shall examine in more details some groups that we consider principal moral agents in Africa today.

²⁶¹ While these traditional views helped the African people's cope with a lot of social challenges facing them, some African authors hold that the cultural contact between Africans and other cultures have affected the bedrock of these beliefs and practices. Although it is wishful thinking to hope to go back to the past, through the process of inculturation, the traditional values could be adapted in a more dynamic, relevant and effective manner in a modern African society. This is based on the conviction that the original African personality has been affected but not annihilated (cf. J. D. MVUANDA, op. cit., p. 142).

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4.2.7.5. Some Agents of Moral Conscientization

The task of moral education should be a collective one given the social nature of the human person and interrelated nature of the society today. While recognising that others have some role to play in this regard, our particular interest is on the a typical Black African society. The agencies considered below have enormous impacts on the individuals and the society as whole²⁶².

4.2.7.5.1. The Family

Genuine African conscience cannot be formed in a cultural vacuum. This is why any discussion on conscience formation must be placed within context of the African family and societal expectations. The family as centre of social cohesion in African culture is responsible for the formation of good conscience for its members. For Christian families in particular, they should consider themselves the first ecclesial community called to announce and inculcate the Kingdom values of justice, love and respect for others²⁶³. John Paul II stated this categorically that, “it is in the family that the community of persons is formed”²⁶⁴.

Now, if the war against corruption and other forms of lawlessness is to be won in Nigeria in particular, the campaign should begin at home. Families are called to bring up their children, inculcating in them respect and love for others²⁶⁵. In Africa this training should assume a more community dimension so as to promote the traditional sense of common good in African families²⁶⁶. Today however the family alone cannot train their children as

²⁶² We shall begin with the family since given its importance as a primary agent of socialisation and above all given its importance in African culture. This will be followed by the schools since they have tremendous influence in the African societies today. In a continent where religion permeates every fabric of the people's lives, we have considered the role of the Church in the third place. We have considered the governments at their various levels as the fourth moral agent. This is because various tiers of governments in Africa can play important role especially through their legislative and executive powers. Finally with the wind of globalisation blowing ever stronger and with the reality of interdependence among nations and cultures, we shall demonstrate the war against corruption and especially fostering ethical values cannot be limited to the borders of one country. This position is informed by the fact that there is an international link involved in such fraudulent practices as money laundering, drug-peddling and embezzlement.

²⁶³ Cf. *GE*, 3. Pope John Paul II reminds parents that the proper education of their children is a fundamental moral and social responsibility (cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 36).

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

²⁶⁵ Cf. *G.S.* 48.

²⁶⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 43. Forming children could assume a more community dimension today by trying once again to involve the members of the extended family or even the clan in

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other factors influence them too²⁶⁷. This is where the Basic Christian Communities and especially the schools have vital roles to play.

4.2.7.5.2. The School as a Moral Reformer according to Paulo Freire

One of the contributions of Freire's pedagogy is that despite his emphasis in critical thinking as the heart of education, he maintains that education should never be treated as a neutral project without moral implications²⁶⁸. For him education must recognise the ontological vocation of human beings and aim at promoting it, otherwise such education is defective²⁶⁹. This role assumes more importance in the societies where injustice, oppression and discrimination are prevalent. For him, the school is a principal moral agent that can lead to ethical revolution²⁷⁰. It is wrong for teachers to only concern themselves with formation of the cognitive faculty of their students. His main concern is that schools at all levels should see their task as that of fostering integral human formation²⁷¹. This means that educational curricula should be so designed to address the emotional, moral, cognitive and physical needs of the student²⁷².

To achieve this, Freire underlines the need for collaboration between teachers, parents and the entire community so that education becomes a process that does not end in the four walls of the educational institution²⁷³. Teachers are reminded of their challenge in

teaching and directing younger people. Uncles, nephews, aunts, in-laws should not be afraid to give useful advice and assistance to the biological parents of a child. Other forms of assistance, both moral and even financial could be given since these also affect the lifestyle of the growing child in the family. The traditional notion that the failure or success of any member of the family is the failure or success of entire family should be encouraged. While the members of a nuclear family should guard their autonomy, they should not allow this to shut them off from others.

²⁶⁷ Cf. A. DARDER, op.cit., 158

²⁶⁸ During the missionary era in Nigeria, schools played an active role in shaping the country. Teachers were regarded not just as dispensers of knowledge but also moral guides in the society.

²⁶⁹ This is to say that education should be seen in its integrity as a project for the humanisation of man.

²⁷⁰ Although Paulo Freire did not emphasize the role of ethics in his earlier writings, he later came to realise that ethical/moral education is important to integral formation of the individuals and society. His teaching on ethics is not very systematic as it forms part of his general theory of the formation of conscience through conscientization. Indeed one can argue that when Freire describes oppression as an inhuman and dehumanising act, unacceptable hence considered evil, he is really taking a moral stand. Again when Freire insists on his confidence in the *goodness* and *capacity* of the human person, even the poorest of the poor, he is equally making a moral assumption based on his concept of anthropology.

²⁷¹ Freire makes a list of the essential qualities required in teachers so that they can promote the humanisation process through education. These qualities can be seen in his book, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*, Westview Press, Oxford, 1998.

²⁷² A. DARDER, op.cit. p. 94.

²⁷³ Ibid. p. 51.

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doing this especially as it concerns moral education. Freire addresses teachers as moral agents thus:

democratic educators must struggle so that it becomes clearer and clearer that education represents formation, and not merely training. And there is no possibility of having human formation without ethics²⁷⁴.

Teachers have a principal role to play in this regard hence he admonishes that one of the requirements of the present historical context is that the ethical formation of teachers should go hand-in-hand with the professional preparation of scientifically and technologically literate future teachers. He regrets that many traditional educational curricula have neglected the formation of teachers on sensitive ethical matters affecting the world²⁷⁵. Freire faults any educational and political praxes that refuses to take any ethical stand on issues that affect the society²⁷⁶.

While he agrees that teachers should respect the ethical convictions of their students, he holds that such common issues regarding justice, discrimination, should be addressed by the teacher. The teacher who does not *love enough* or does not pass moral values to students has actually failed in the humanization mission²⁷⁷. This is because such education has not succeeded in forming integral human beings, who among other things are people with high moral probity²⁷⁸. This is because human beings and their liberation and humanisation remain the real essence of any veritable human endeavour including education²⁷⁹.

²⁷⁴ P. FREIRE, *A Response*, in P. FREIRE (ed.), *Mentoring the Mentor, A Critical Dialogue with Freire*, Peter Lang, New York, 1991, p. 313.

²⁷⁵ Freire thinks that in a world that is becoming more and more pluralistic, people avoid dealing with ethical issues. This is because they are afraid of being accused of imposing a certain moral value on others. But for Freire, there is need to take a stand against some unethical practices in the society such as *ethics of market* which is often governed by greed. Teachers are equally bound to take stand against discriminations and other forms of inhuman activities that tend to go on, unchallenged by modern society. The school and teachers in particular are called to be the conscience of such society.

²⁷⁶ The more teachers and school fail to take ethical positions, the more they fail in their duty to form the integral human person and a more just society. He calls for a dialogical approach to ethical education so that it never bears the mark of indoctrination.

²⁷⁷ A. DARDER, op.cit., p. 92.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 122. What Freire is saying here is that one of the main tasks of education is character formation.

²⁷⁹ Cf. S. ARONOWITZ, in P. MCLAREN and P. LEONARD (ed.), op. cit., p. 12. Although Freire raises some moral issues in his works, like his understanding of love, the value of human life and dignity etc., he

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4.2.7.5.3. The Church

The Church sees moral education as one of its primary missions²⁸⁰. Through moral education and preaching conversion from personal and social sins, the Church will be contributing immensely in bringing about a renaissance Africa²⁸¹. *Ecclesia in Africa* has, in a very special way thrown this challenge to the Church in the region²⁸². Today, that many of the corrupt leaders and citizens especially in Nigeria profess to be 'practicing' Christians and Moslems. This "indicates a need for genuine (conscience) formation, which considers the whole person, in his or her physical, sociological, psychological and spiritual needs"²⁸³. By engaging in moral conscientization of the people, the Church will be guided especially by the principles of Catholic social teaching²⁸⁴.

The seminaries and other Church institutions should give moral education a pride of place. Local catechisms, competitions, drama, Sunday instructions and other forms of teaching should be designed in the campaign for moral reform in Nigeria and Africa. The Church should join forces with other agents to ensure that moral education is re-instated

did not produce a systematic teaching on moral education despite its crying need in the face of what he perceived as oppression an aberration of human goodness.

²⁸⁰ G.S, 50.

²⁸¹ The Church in Africa faces a lot of challenges here. Traditionally, there is the tendency to limit sin to the private domain. The emphasis here is on individual morality. While we cannot deny the fact that man is to be held accountable for his evil behaviours, we cannot equally deny the fact that our formation and especially our environment influence our actions significantly. The debate is whether we are the products of our society or its architects? In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire faced this problem and tried to resolve it by explaining that one can be *Subject* or *object* of the society. While we cannot exhaust the various dimensions of this discussion, Suffice it to say that the people are both the architects and products of their society (cf. J. ROLLET, *Libération sociale et salut chrétien*", in A. K. RUKWATA, op. cit. p. 234). The challenge here is that the Church should emphasize that moral education and conversion can best be verified by how it is exteriorised in the social milieu we find ourselves, in our relationship with one another and in our commitment to improving our society for our own good and for the good of others. The dialectic between the individual conscience and the society is well studied in the book by P. BERGER, *La religion dans la conscience moderne*, Paris, Centurion, 1971. See especially p. 41.

²⁸² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 75.

²⁸³ R. R. RWIZA, op. cit. p. 105.

²⁸⁴ CBCN, *Women in Evangelisation; Mary as a Model*, 1988, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op.cit., p. 206. While the Social Teaching of the Church remains a foundation for moral education and reform in Africa today, one must remark that these teachings in turn need to be interpreted in a relevant way in a given context if they are to be meaningful. In what can be described as *the dilemma of the African Christian*, one discovers that in the face of serious moral decisions, many African Christians find themselves at a loss. An example is an African government official who loots the national treasury on the federal level, and only to be considered a community hero and philanthropist at home. Explaining this to African public servants requires an understanding of the African sense of value especially when the community argues that they have been neglected by successive regimes. How does one explain to the community and their so-called hero that the end does not justify the means? These and more such issues compound the moral task of the Church in an African setting today. We can read more on the dilemma of the African Christian in J. D. MVUANDA, op. cit. pp. 145-146.

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into the school curriculum. Promoting a culture of honesty, integrity and respect for the rule of the law is part of this challenge.

4.2.7.5.4. The Government

We have noted earlier in this work that corruption in Black Africa exists both in the informal and formal levels. On the informal level we can mention issues regarding examination malpractices, forging documents and other forms of dishonest practices. While these remain problems in Africa today, the most devastating effects of corruption is to found on the formal level. This include such actions as embezzlement, nepotism and money laundering. So we cannot actually address the problem of corruption-occasioned poverty in Africa without tackling the issue of ethical revolution on the social and national levels. While acknowledging the difficulties involved in moral reform on this level, we have to state that it is not altogether an impossible task.

One of the ways of doing that is that, citizens should be involved in the choice of men and women with tested integrity to occupy public posts. This is a collective task and requires political and moral will on the part of the citizenry. As the era of military dictatorship seems to be ebbing away in many African countries, the ability and willingness to bring in ethics in politics will determine the stability of the new democracies. A number of measures can be put in place in the fight against corruption. First, there should be relevant legislative policies that will make accountability the watchword for public office holders. How the rule of law is helping the countries of Europe and America in this regard should inspire African law makers.

Again, due to the important role that the media is playing in the world today, journalists should intensify what can be described as their 'prophetic role'. This should include investigating, exposing and challenging the corrupt practices, that are ruining the African society and its economy. The media can equally serve as a channel for conscientizing the rulers and their subjects on the important matters about political ethics. Another important strategy is that the Church and other religious bodies in each country can intensify their roles by mounting pressure on the leaders to live up the expectations of those who voted them into power. Through conscientization, public office holders should

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be made to realize that graft, bribery, nepotism etc. are morally unacceptable. The wonderful work done by such international organizations as Transparent International (TI) should be carried out also on the national, regional and even community levels.

4.2.7.5.5. The 'International Community' and Brotherhood of Man²⁸⁵

Reducing global poverty is not just a matter of enlightened self-interest, it has also a profoundly ethical dimension. I believe that we all have a moral duty to ensure that everyone in this one world of ours has the chance to live a decent life²⁸⁶.

Earlier in this project we have highlighted that crises of external debts, unbalanced terms of trade, and corruption are some of the causes of extreme poverty in the continent²⁸⁷. So in a globalised world, if the problem of poverty in Africa is to be really addressed, there is urgent need to highlight the moral issues affecting Africa on the international level. One of these issues is that of foreign debt described as a wound in the conscience of the world. One of the main arguments advanced against such debts is that many of them are classified as *bad debts*²⁸⁸.

The Church is one of the main groups demanding a more just treatment of most debts in Africa today. During the African Synod, the effects of these debts on Africa was a main issue of concern. Again some Episcopal conferences in the continent have equally condemned the payment of such debts especially as it contributes to the aggravation of poverty in Africa²⁸⁹. Apart from African bishops, American Bishops Conference having

²⁸⁵ The concept of International Community expresses the emerging sense of global solidarity that is beyond the idea of a United Nations Charter.

²⁸⁶ H. KÖHLER, *Economic Development and Security, Speech on the Occasion of the 41st Munich Conference on Security Policy, in Adult Education and Development*, No. 64, 2005, p. 148.

²⁸⁷ There are various ways that the International Community can become involved in fostering peace and stability in Africa. One of such areas include helping to maintain peace as well as directly intervening in economic matters. The failure of the International Community in averting the Rwandan genocide is still regarded as one of the ugliest chapters of the history of the United Nations (cf. K. BAHUJIMIHIGO, op.cit., p. 14). Today while conflict is still weighing on the people of the region of Darfur in Sudan, the issue of foreign debt and unjust trade conditions both help to perpetuate poverty in Black Africa.

²⁸⁸ Many of the debts in Africa today are 'bad debt'. And a bad debt can be classified under four categories. These include, debts that cannot be serviced without placing a burden on already impoverished people; debts that in real terms have already been paid; debts incurred for improperly designed projects and programmes; and odious debts and debts incurred by repressive and dictatorial regimes.

²⁸⁹ Cf. CBCN, *The Bible the Word of God for Our Time, 1987*, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 187.

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made a critical analysis of the nature and effects of foreign debts in Africa declared it as morally unacceptable²⁹⁰.

Some African theologians have equally condemned the payment of *bad debts*. For them it could be described as a form of economic slavery²⁹¹. These theologians therefore call for a global solidarity in fighting debts. They are convinced that, “the debt burden is so unjust and its effects so evil that the failure of so many otherwise decent people all around the world today to pay attention to its devastating effects on Africa and other Third world countries is tantamount to a conspiracy and an acquiescence to sin”²⁹². Apart from the issue of foreign debts there are other areas that the international community can help Africans in the challenge of fostering a more just and more human Africa. One important area related to corruption is, helping African nations by discouraging corrupt leaders in the continent from looting their national treasuries and depositing the money in foreign banks. Refusing to transact business with corrupt African leaders could equally be a form of war against corruption in the continent.

That moral conscientization is needed as an act of international solidarity in the war against corruption is seen in the teaching, has an international dimension can be seen in the statement from *Ecclesia in Africa*:

A compassionate ear must also be lent to the anguished cries of the poor nations asking for help in areas of particular importance: malnutrition, the widespread deterioration in the standard of living, the insufficiency of means for educating the young, the lack of elementary health and social services with the resulting persistence of endemic diseases, the spread of the terrible scourge of AIDS, the heavy and often unbearable burden of international debt, the horror of fratricidal wars fomented by unscrupulous arms trafficking, the shameful and pitiable spectacle of refugees and displaced persons. These are some of the areas where prompt interventions are necessary and expedient, even if in the overall situation they seem to be inadequate²⁹³.

²⁹⁰Cf. P. I. ODOZOR, *The Challenge of Africa to the Western Conscience: U.S Bishops and Solidarity with Africa*, in E. UZUKWU (ed.), *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol. 17, 2005, p. 7.

²⁹¹Cf. J. M. WALLIGO, *The External Debt in the Continued Marginalisation of Africa*, in P. KANYANDAGO (ed.), op. cit., p. 60.

²⁹²Ibid., p. 18.

²⁹³JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 114. Other corrupting practices like collaborating with some African leaders to loot their national treasuries and illegal sale of arms to war-torn zones in Africa should

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4.2.7.6. Concluding Remarks on Moral Conscientization

There is abundant research findings that corruption is a major problem in Black Africa today²⁹⁴. Although this issue is very complex and interconnected, we have restricted ourselves to the role of moral education as form of conscientization in dealing with the evil. Our call for moral education is based on the moral assumption that in order to do what is good, one must know what is good²⁹⁵. Moral education can help in the fight against poverty because through it, the virtues of honesty, accountability, pride in work, tolerance, cooperation with others and other altruistic values will be inculcated into the individuals and community. Through moral conscientization, the war against corruption, abuse of human right, violence and other vices that breed extreme poverty in Nigeria and indeed Africa will be tackled effectively. Although we singled out some groups as champions of moral education, the campaign should be undertaken by all and from all fronts to be effective. Like Paulo Freire, we note that our project of moral education for ethical revolution is based on hope and trust, and on the capacity of the human person to do good and to avoid evil.

4.2.8.7. Empowerment through Technical and Agricultural Education

Productive work, because it is visibly collective, gives teachers and students a clear vision of goals for their own development. It enables communities to view the school as something that emerges from their own life, not something that is 'outside' or 'above'. The school is clearly perceived to be serving the whole national community²⁹⁶.

The economy of most of the countries of Black Africa is based on agriculture. Indeed agriculture accounts for almost half of the gross domestic product (GDP) of most of these countries. More than half of their cash crops are exported and over 70 percent of their labour force are primarily expended on agriculture. But inspite of the important role of

be seen as morally unacceptable by the International Community. The media and other pressure groups have much to do in this moral sensitization.

²⁹⁴ Cf. E. ACHERMANN., op. cit., p. 142.

²⁹⁵ This is why Vatican II states that, even though conscience is inert to man, "yet it often happens that conscience goes astray through ignorance which it is unable to avoid" (GS. 16.).

²⁹⁶ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 159.

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agriculture in these economies, one realises that the sector is not generally perceived as the mainstay of the countries' existence. This neglect has certainly aggravated the level of poverty in the sub-region²⁹⁷. Indeed we noted in the earlier part of this work that food is one of the basic human needs and that some of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa are victims of hunger. Our task here is to examine how agricultural education/food production can be an anti-poverty strategy. But first we shall make a summary of the agricultural project in a typical African society and explain how its weakness gives rise to hunger. We shall then focus on Freire's experiences before making practical propositions for effective agricultural and technical education in Black Africa.

4.2.7.7.1. Agricultural Education and Food Production: Its Relationship to Poverty in Nigeria

At political independence in 1960, the agricultural sector was given a pride of place in Nigerian economic policies. So central was agriculture in the immediate post-colonial policy it "generated much revenue that provided fund for execution of other projects. It provided employment to over 90 percent of the population and accounted for almost 80 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Food was very sufficient and cheap and there was no case of importation as it happened in the 1970s till the present time"²⁹⁸. The secret of the success was the support given to agricultural education, research and food production in the various regions in the country²⁹⁹. Nigerian agricultural sector however suffered a major setback during the civil war that ravaged the nation between 1967-1970. And after the war, the 1971-75 Development Planning did not give much importance to the agricultural sector and this became the genesis of the food crises that would follow. A Nigerian author describes this. "The agricultural sector witnessed a negative total average growth rate of 0.4% as compared to a total of population growth rate of 8%-9%"³⁰⁰. When Nigeria discovered oil in the late 1970s, the agricultural production and research were systematically relegated to the background as oil became the heartbeat of the

²⁹⁷ This neglect can be perceived in the areas of budgetary allocation of national governments, declining financial assistance by donor agencies, declining research initiatives, and inability to arrest a massive migration from the rural/agricultural areas to the urban centres.

²⁹⁸ A. C. EYIUCHE, *op. cit.* pp. 88-89.

²⁹⁹ The then Premier of Eastern Nigeria, M. I. Okpara invested so much in agricultural research activities hence meat, palm produce, and different sorts of crops were in abundant. The Western region of Nigeria established what came to be called 'Western Nigerian Development Cooperation' which provided loans and credit facilities and technical guidance to its citizens (cf. *Ibid.*, p.81).

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

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nation's life. With the oil boom came many other ills like mismanagement, corruption, poorly designed and executed projects.

Since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999, there has been various initiatives aimed at re-positioning agricultural research and food production at the centre of the economy. This is why, in June 2001, the country launched a National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The special panel headed by A. Joda (1999) and Committee report headed by A. Abdullahi (2000) both recommended agricultural education/research and rural development as the primary poverty alleviation strategy³⁰¹. Some of the propositions in the scheme include the improving on these agricultural areas: Nigerian Agricultural Co-operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), Agricultural Research Institutes and so on. Since hunger is perceived as one the first indicators of poverty, the Federal government initiative wished to undertake the following projects: Upland farm development, irrigation land development, grazing, strategic food and seeds reserve and development, farm and rural roads development, and supply of agricultural inputs. Also in the agenda are agriculture credits, food processing, marketing of agricultural products and price stabilisation. And like in Paulo Freire's Brazil experience, the government expressed a desire to develop what they called Agricultural Extension Services³⁰².

Despite these theoretical initiatives, their implementation have remained very slow if not redundant. And today, Nigeria imports most of its staple food from other countries. The number of hunger-related diseases and deaths are increasing and the poor are getting poorer due to the lack of this essential human need. What is Freire's critique of most traditional agricultural projects and what does he propose a remedy?

³⁰¹ Cf. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁰² This include various forms of agricultural activities including research, food production and preservation etc, (cf. *Ibid.* p. 7).

4.2.7.7. 2. The Nature, Problems and Prospects of Extension Projects³⁰³

That Freire's thoughts and theories are interwoven is seen in the example that he uses his theory conscientization in the domain of rural extension in Latin America in particular and other developing countries in general³⁰⁴. He focuses especially on the agrarian reform initiatives by examining the concept *extension*, and comparing it with the concept *communication*. While communication is an educational act, and so liberating, extension is depicted as enslaving and domesticating and indeed hinders human consciousness and impeding lasting change. Why did Freire single out agricultural education, food production and agricultural research as an important part of his pedagogy and emancipation praxis?

Perhaps the importance which Freire attaches to agricultural education can be found in his personal experience. Agricultural and indeed other forms of technical education not only enables the poor in particular to engage in labour as (cultural act), but also it helps to liberate from their culture of silence. Food is a basic human need and Freire found out, during his starving years as a child, that without food one cannot think and reason properly and those who have lost the capacity to reason and reflect have lost the basic human characteristic of being Subject³⁰⁵.

Another reason why he focuses on the technical and pedagogical issues associated with agriculture is that he realised that many of the peasants in Brazil worked so hard but remained poor. The initiatives by the government and other agencies to improve their lot generally ended in failure. His involvement in many such projects as extension project

³⁰³ We shall use the concept 'extension' to refer to the generality of the technical initiatives aimed at giving technical assistance, especially to the rural population of a country. We are directly inspired by Paulo Freire's experience of extension and technical projects in rural Brazil. Since agriculture was the main occupation of the rural people, Freire focused his attention on the significance and flaws of extension in this area. Our choice of Freire's contribution is due to the fact that most of what is described in rural Brazil then still happens in many Black African contexts today. Adapting Freire's contribution to the African context remains our target.

³⁰⁴ Freire sees the whole process of education as interconnected in the long and arduous journey to liberty and empowerment. He maintains that political education leads to political independence, and literacy is necessary to help the peasants understand the new production techniques which would enable them transcend their traditional means of production. And when the power of production has been acquired, only then can they possess economic freedom as active participants in social transformation (cf. DARCY DE OLIVEIRA, *Guinea-Bissau, Reinventing Education*, in C. A. TORRES, op. cit., p. 131).

³⁰⁵ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 12.

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also served an eye-opener to him. For these and other reasons, he sought to understand better the nature of extension projects. This include other forms of technical assistance designed to help the poor, and more especially the peasant farmers.

Another reason why Freire thinks that agricultural education is important is also linked with the relevance of Freire's thoughts to our present study. His discourse on extension projects is not limited to his Latin American experience because he also worked and experienced the same in Africa. His experience in the African countries of Guinea-Bissau and Tanzania convinced him that no education will lift the poor out of their predicament without improving their technical capacity for food production³⁰⁶. In Africa in particular, Freire sought how to "link education with productive work, avoiding full-time students and combining study time with working hours in intimate relationship with peasant"³⁰⁷.

Below then is his critique of extension projects especially in Brazil. He equally proposes solutions that could be applied not just in Brazil but other developing agrarian economies like most of Black African countries.

a. What is Extension Project?

According to Freire, the concept of 'extension' "involves the relationship between human beings and the world in order for human beings to be better equipped to change the world"³⁰⁸. It is principally aimed at establishing permanent technical relationship with the peasants and then trying to change their 'knowledge' for the knowledge of the extension agents. For him, extension is associated with an effort at transfer of technology from one place to another through the mediation of extension agents. They aim to extend their knowledge and technical expertise to the rural areas that are generally marginalised³⁰⁹. But Freire discovers that despite the desire to help the peasants and the huge investments made on these projects, they fail to improve the lot of the people. On research and

³⁰⁶ The lives of 90% of the population of Guinea-Bissau revolve around a piece of fertile land where the main crop is rice. There, it was discovered that agriculture is not just the foundation of Guinean economy, it is the entire Guinean economy (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process*..., pp. 20-21).

³⁰⁷ C. A. TORRES, op. cit., p. 129. An important experience which Freire had in Guinea Bissau was that, while the peasants he addressed were mainly in the rural areas, there existed equally large colonies of the poorest peasants at the peripheries of the cities (cf. Ibid., p. 130).

³⁰⁸ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical*..., p. 94.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 94.

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observation, he discovered that the projects have inherent flaws which we shall see below.

b. Some of the Flaws in Most Extension Programmes?

i. Programme Design

According to Freire, the first problem with many extension projects is that they are wrongly designed. The projects are designed in far away place and then transported and 'imposed' on the local population without their active collaboration. This is an expression of ignorance of human nature in general and epistemology in particular. The designers fail to appreciate that what they are planning is meant for human beings. And since the work of technicians belong to the domain of the human, it calls for a sound philosophical reflection before its application. This will enable the technical agents to realise that confronting the world is the true source of knowledge with its different levels and phases³¹⁰.

Technical agents who want to influence the peasants, must first realise that knowledge at all levels, necessitates the curious presence of Subjects confronted with the world. It requires their transforming action and implies invention and re-invention claiming from each person a critical reflection on the very act of knowing. True knowledge in whatever domain must recognise this process of knowing and in this recognition becomes aware of the intrinsic essence behind the knowing, and the conditioning to which that process is subject. The failure of this knowledge tends to transform people into 'things' and negate their existence as beings who transform the world. Freire observes that instead of helping the peasants and the poor, such projects often become means of further alienation and dehumanisation of the people.

³¹⁰ Take for an instance, for the extension agent, erosion may be a purely natural hazard. But for the peasant, erosion may have some religious connotations. It could be interpreted as a manifestation of the anger of the gods. It could be seen as a result of the evil activity of a jealous neighbouring farmer. As long as the technical foreign experts do not understand and address such issues relating to people's cosmology, the local peoples would not accept and cooperate with them. The experts may even be seen as offending the gods by doing what could be a *taboo* among the people. Here the people may, out of respect keep silent but refuse to cooperate. Or they can even turn against the guests as 'cultural invaders' who are desecrating their land and culture.

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ii. Methodology

Then comes the methodological problem. Extension designers and agents fail to realise that it is a form of educational praxis and so should be guided by known principles. So the method of approach is generally faulty. It is faulty because instead of educating the people which is a mutual enterprise, the extension agents see their task as that of persuading or even imposing their projects and new technological devices on the local people.

For Freire imposing or even persuading the people to abandon their traditional ways of doing so is a type of cultural invasion. It is an act of propaganda lacking in respect for the people no matter how much good will one may have for the people. Against this he complains: "I am unable to see how persuasion to accept propaganda can be squared with education, for true education incarnates the permanent search of people together with others for their becoming more fully human in the world in which they exist"³¹¹. Persuasion is not an educational language according to Freire, for in commercial, ideological or technical domains, persuasion like propaganda is always used for domestication³¹².

iii. Extension without Personal Conscientization?

Another problem is that extension projects and their agents fail to prepare the people for the anticipated change. According to Freire, one must realise that there is a dialectic between the language of development and the language of liberation. Modernisation is a purely mechanical process, responsive to the catalytic action of technicians, or manipulators who keep the locus of decisions outside society undergoing change. But to be meaningful and effective, any technical education like extension must focus firstly on human beings and their culture, otherwise they are practicing what Freire calls cultural invasion. This means that the agronomist should focus not just on the technical aspect of

³¹¹ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical ...*, p. 96.

³¹² Freire's rejection of the idea of persuasion is based on his basic understanding of the concept. For him to persuade implies fundamentally a Subject who does not dialogue with but tries to convince another in some way to accept what he or she is being told to do or accept.. In this case, the Subject is the extension agent and the object is the peasants. Authentic dialogue does not take place in this process.

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the people's lives but on their total cultural reality³¹³. Thus it is impossible to dichotomise human beings and the world, since the one cannot exist without the other³¹⁴.

To introduce new techniques and import new machines to people submerged in their oppressing environment without first conscientising them would result in 'magical perception' of these new realities³¹⁵. It is cultural invasion because it tends to make the people lose confidence in what they have been doing for centuries but at the same time failing to initiate them into the full mechanisms of the new method. Such a project will almost always fail and this leaves the people even worse off³¹⁶. Freire refers to this as *technological messianism*³¹⁷. He argues that there cannot be a truly technological breakthrough unless there is an accompanying conscientization of the people and real social reform³¹⁸.

Despite these weakness, Freire ends his study of technical education by asserting that when properly designed and implemented technical education especially for food production remains one of the effective ways of fighting poverty and empowering the poor. Below we see his propositions for effective technical education especially in the agricultural sector.

³¹³ Such attitudes include their perception of phenomenon like planting, harvest, erosion, reforestation, their religious attitudes, beliefs and values (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 94).

³¹⁴ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 102.

³¹⁵ Magical thinking occurs when people, especially the peasants find themselves unable to apprehend a given challenge in its authentic relationships with other realities. The usual tendency is to go beyond the true relationship to seek an explanation for what is perceived. This happens not only in the natural world but also in the historical-social world. A highly sophisticated machine of scientific formulae introduced in the rural village could become objects of curiosity, amusement or even adoration instead of being used as tools for agricultural work. Sometimes mistrust, total or partial rejection of these new methods and techniques are experienced in the rural places (cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 103).

³¹⁶ Without joining the local people in their magical thinking like, explanations about lack of rain, the overflowing of the river, the death of their livestock, it will be foolhardy and counter-productive to ignore these beliefs or worse still to condemn them as superstitious and idiotic.

³¹⁷ This idea is that technological revolutions have answer to the problem of the society so should be pursued at all costs. Although Freire does not reject technology as such, he warns that they could become tools of manipulation, dehumanisation and alienation.

³¹⁸ For him, for the new changes to be effective therefore, they must be borne from the old through the creative transformation emerging from advanced technology combined with the empirical methods of the peasants.

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4.2.8.7. 3. Freire's Propositions for Effective Extension Projects

To make extension and other technical projects effective for empowering the poor, Freire proposes the following. First, agronomists or any other extension agent should realise that his work is essentially that of a teacher and so he/she should follow the principles of pedagogy³¹⁹.

This means that the people must be involved as in every liberatory and empowering education³²⁰. Here are the essential principles.

The first of this principles is communication. The agronomist-educator, like teachers in general, must choose 'communicating' rather than 'extending'³²¹. By communicating, he/she shows that he genuinely wants to reach the people not by being abstract, but by being concrete, within a historical reality. This means that the expert sees himself/herself not as an 'actor' in the presence of 'spectators' in whom they deposit what they extend³²². Freire admonishes technical experts:

The work of the agronomists thus cannot be the schooling or even the training of peasants in techniques of ploughing, sowing, harvesting reforestation, etc. If they limit themselves to the simple form of training, they can in certain circumstances obtain a better work-output. However they will have contributed nothing (or nearly nothing) to the development of the peasants as people³²³.

The second principle that relates to the first is that dialogue should guide both the design and implementation of the technical project³²⁴. Such an approach to educating the

³¹⁹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 87. Freire's fundamental criticism of traditional agricultural projects/extension programmes is that both the attitude of the technicians and their methods are usually that of 'banking practice'. As we have seen such attitude makes the so called expert to treat the peasants as depository for propaganda from an alien cultural world (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 88).

³²⁰ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Letters to Cristina...*, p. 91.

³²¹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical ...*, p. 97.

³²² Due to the link between the peasants' worldview and their occupation, it is necessary that the agronomist-teacher learns people's way of life before any successful agricultural reform. Failure to do this, no matter how good intentioned, how qualified and gifted the agronomist and how much money that is put in the project, it is generally doomed to fail and worst still, it alienates the dehumanised people even more.

³²³ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical ...*, p. 110.

³²⁴ Freire demonstrates the successful use of dialogue in his work with peasants from various societies. According to Freire, "*on leur fait remarquer le progrès technologique représenté par le fusil par rapport à l'arc et à la flèche. On analyse la possibilité croissante qu'a l'homme, par son esprit créateur et par son travail, d'entrer en relation avec le monde et de le transformer toujours davantage*" (P. FREIRE, *l'éducation: Pratique de la liberté*, p. 136).

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peasants is a sign of respect and faith in the ability of the peasants³²⁵. Through such education the extension agents can share with the local people issues like hunger, nutrition, irrigation, transformation of nature and the need for agricultural reforms, etc³²⁶. He argues that "if agricultural production were merely concerned with things, and had nothing to do with the confrontation of human beings and their world, there would be no need for dialogue"³²⁷.

Another factor is that technical experts who wish to empower the poor should realise that such changes take time. Often the extension agents are mandated to finish their task within a given period so they often work in a hurry³²⁸. And since such hurried projects lack dialogue and are often carried out with out respect for the sensibilities and cultures of the people, and since they are executed in mistrust of the capabilities of the peasants, they often fail³²⁹. When eventually such projects fail, the peasants are then blamed as ignorant and unteachable³³⁰.

So Freire proposes strongly that those who wish in any extension programme, should realise that change takes time. They should realise that they are dealing with human beings and that changing or learning habits take time. The peasants cannot learn new habits mechanically within the short time frame often specified by the extension agents and their sponsors. In all these, he maintains that food production remains the mainstay of

³²⁵ Through a dialogical education, the peasants are meant to appreciate the fact that what their ancestors have been doing all their lives, what has been transmitted from generation to generation in their culture cannot simply be dismissed as barbaric and useless.

³²⁶ P. FREIRE, *L' éducation: pratique de...*, p. 152 .

³²⁷ P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 122.

³²⁸ This hurry puts undue pressure on them, and so they fail to take the necessary steps to achieve results. Being in a hurry, they are not able to enter the world of the peasants

³²⁹ For Freire, technical projects aimed at the good of the local people cannot be executed in such a mechanical way that it forgets the humanity and sensibilities of the local people. The political, cultural, economic and social exigencies of the people cannot be separated in proposing any reform for the people. Freire however, acknowledges that sometimes the peasants are slower than other people in learning such new techniques (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 118).

³³⁰ One can say that Freire is calling on social workers, donor institutes/agencies politicians and all other people engage in development programmes to realise that even though the peasants are poor, they remain ontologically human beings. So those who want to help the poor and peasants cannot arrogate to himself the title of 'agent of change'. To do so is to assume that the needy and the poor are mere passive objects to be transformed according to the mode of the so-called benefactors. Those who want to show true solidarity with the needy should first appreciate that both themselves and the poor are human beings. This is fundamental to ensure mutual respect and collaboration in the humanisation process. So no one should monopolise the title 'agent of change' in the sense of 'messianism'.

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any society. His experience in Black Africa (Guinea Bissau and Tanzania) in particular convinces him that, “any society that dreams of becoming a society of workers must have as its basis full employment and the production of socially useful goods, since these are fundamental in the formation of the new man and the new woman”³³¹.

4.2.8.7.4. Important Strategies for Effective Agricultural Education

Every effort must be made to improve the status of farming by introducing new methods and techniques to prove that farming is an occupation of dignity and honour; that it is worthwhile and lucrative. The rural area stand ready and waiting for us. The Church is long established in these areas and it must make its presence felt regardless of the cost. We have a very significant task-force in our priests and sisters who are ready to give dedicated service without looking for fee or reward....The Church as a missionary must take man by his very physical hand, wipe the tears from his material eyes, and feed him with material bread. Unless man sees Christ incarnate again in our flesh and blood, he will never be satisfied but will hunger for spiritual bread³³².

a. Conscientization and Labour

The first task before initiating any agricultural or technical development project in Black Africa today is to sensitize the people on the importance of agriculture as an anti-poverty strategy. The people have to know that the decline in agriculture has a direct link to their degree of poverty since food is a basic human need. Nigerians for example should be meant to realise that despite the abundance of petroleum products from the country, millions of people are still starving because they have neglected agriculture. The same story applies to many other Black African countries like Congo where abundant mineral and natural resources have failed to replace agriculture as the mainstay of the nation's economy.

This type of conscientization and sensitisation should include teaching the people the dignity of human labour and ethics of work. This is to say that labour should be presented as one of the activities destined for the humanisation process. It is here that the Church can play a very important role by expounding the Christian understanding of meaning

³³¹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process*..., p. 157.

³³² CBCN, *The Church and Nigerian Social Problems*, 1972, in. P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., pp. 71-73.

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and dignity of labour³³³. Through conscientization people will come to realise that human labour is meant for 'Subjects' and contributes towards the humanisation process. This is what Vatican II means when it states that, "workers should have the opportunity to develop their talents and their personalities in the exercise of their work"³³⁴.

John Paul II's teaching about the nature and dignity of labour especially in *Laborem Exercens* (1981), also offers useful insights in this regard³³⁵. Since many people especially the poor in Black Africa are farmers, there should be more emphasis on the importance of farming. This is why the Catholic bishops of Nigeria warn that,

unless the farmer is at the centre of the nation's economic survival, unless the farmer is restored to his respected and responsible position, the nation cannot be restored to its proven economic base which is agriculture³³⁶.

The bishops believe that through sustainable enlightenment campaign, research and encouragement to farmers, hunger and destitution in Nigeria and other African countries could be minimised through sustainable food production³³⁷.

Apart from the Church, the government, schools and other agencies should use the media, rallies, seminars, local educational centres, like Paulo Freire's Cultural Cycle to sensitise and motivate the people on the need for agricultural education and food production.

³³³ From Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* till today, the Magisterium of the Church has been consistently teaching the relationship between human work, human vocation and their relationship to the Creator.

³³⁴ *GS*, no. 67.

³³⁵ John Paul II gives us the most recent and comprehensive understanding of human labour which can serve as the basis for a systematic conscientization of the people on the nature of human labour. According to him, through labour man can earn his daily food and contributes to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives. Man is made to be in the visible universe, an image and likeness of God himself and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is *called to work*. *Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures*. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature. For John Paul II, agriculture remains the primary activity of man as working beings "Man dominates the earth by the very fact of domesticating animals, rearing them and obtaining from them the food and clothing he needs, and by the fact of being able to extract various natural resources from the earth and the seas. But man subdues the earth much more when he begins to cultivate it and then to transform its products, adapting them to his own use. Thus agriculture constitutes through human work a primary field of economic activity and an indispensable factor of production" (JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 5).

³³⁶ Cf. CBCN, *Save the Family*, Ibadan, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 84.

³³⁷ Cf. CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *The Church in Nigeria, Family of God on Mission*, no. 256.

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b. Participatory Action Research and Other Initiatives

Traditionally, research has been perceived as the prerogative of specialists. But Freire, adult educators and some modern community workers have evolved what is today called Participatory Action Research³³⁸. Its use in the *Ujamaa* villages in Tanzania has shown that if improved upon it can be useful in the agricultural sector of Nigeria and other African countries³³⁹. It will promote self-reliance as a bottom-up approach by which people can take their development into their own hands³⁴⁰. Such research method should provide the forum for collaboration between communities, schools, various research institutes, government and other agencies in promoting agriculture and food production. Since many rural peasants are women, they should be given special attention here³⁴¹. Effective curricula should be developed in this regard³⁴². Paulo Freire's initiatives in Guinea-Bissau and Tanzania could be improved on and adapted to other African countries.

c. Funding and Management

In recent years, the Nigerian government has come to realise that agriculture and not oil should be made the mainstay of the nation's economy. This new awareness led the government of Nigeria for instance to accord agriculture a high priority in the 1998 budget. They sum of N4.959billion³⁴³ was meant to execute some poverty alleviation projects in the agricultural sub-sector³⁴⁴. This tempo needs to be sustained and even improved upon. So counterpart funds, in respect to donor assisted projects in the agricultural sector should be accorded priority attention. For instance, loans and credits and other financial incentives could be given to very poor families and farmers. This

³³⁸ 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR), is practical approach to social change through collaborative learning. It developed in the late 1970s and 1980s and was very prominently used by Freire. Its first use in Africa was in Tanzania where the then president Julius Nyerere adopted it as part of Freire's liberatory pedagogy (cf. M. FINGER and J. M. ASUN, op. cit., p. 89).

³³⁹ These are basic communities where Nyerere wished to try out his proposed African socialism.

³⁴⁰ Cf. M. FINGER and J.M. ASUN, op. cit., p. 89

³⁴¹ Cf. M. M. NWOKEDI, op.cit., p. 48.

³⁴² A lot of new ideas could be included in such curriculum to tackle the problem of poverty, hunger and agricultural education. For instance students would be made to understand the ways in which agriculture influenced the settlement and development of different civilizations. They should also know that in a global economy, agricultural products creates interdependence among cultures and countries. Here the history of agriculture in Nigeria should be examined so as to reveal how the present over-reliance on petrol and other mineral products has occasioned inequality and poverty instead of minimising it.

³⁴³ This is Nigeria's national currency.

³⁴⁴ Cf. A.C. EYIUCHE, op. cit., p. 209.

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becomes more important during poor harvests or when natural disaster hampers production³⁴⁵. And finally, since the danger of mismanagement is always there, there is need to train personnel to monitor the use of these funds designated for research and loans³⁴⁶.

4.2.8.7.5. Salient Remarks on Agricultural Education

We have seen that food is one of the basic necessities of life. Many of the poorest people in Black Africa are starving. Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, victims of various natural disasters like drought and flood are among the most vulnerable. It is in the light of the above that any meaningful discussion on development of solidarity with the poorest of the poor must include issues about food production and other forms of technical education. Freire has given us the inspiration but his methods and practices should be ameliorated and adapted in each context. Indeed his idea of conscientization should remain a the point of reference here. It will enable people to realise that today there is correlationship the levels of poverty and that of agriculture/food production.

Conscientization will help us appreciate why so much money and initiatives invested in Africa has not yielded expected dividend. Inspired by Freire's experiences, we should ask ourselves how much the local peoples have been involved in choosing their priority needs? How many of the local people are being actually involved in executing some of the projects designed and exported to solve their perceived needs. Are acting in solidarity with and for the people? It is here therefore, cosnscentization involves both the benefactors and the beneficiaries of these anti-poverty initiatives.

4. 2.9. Evaluation of Education as Poverty Reduction Strategy

We have seen that conscientization which is one of the pillars of theology of solidarity with the poor has many dimensions. We have demonstrated that there is a direct link between illiteracy and poverty. We saw the need for promoting literacy especially among adults in the subcontinent. We have equally seen that the low level of political education

³⁴⁵ Cf. C. MORRISON, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

³⁴⁶ This is because in most developing countries the main obstacles to development both in the educational sector and otherwise have to do with poor administrative initiatives including the possibility of fraud and embezzlement (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 23).

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affects people's ability in socio-political participation. How political education can be enhanced has been discussed highlighting the principal agents that can do so.

And since corruption is a major problem causing poverty, we proposed effective moral education and conscience formation that can lead to ethical revolution for a renascent Black Africa. Finally we tackled the problem of agricultural education. Like Freire, we insist that agricultural education should not be limited to the schools but should include an urgent need to train indigenous personnel on the use of modern farming equipment³⁴⁷. Food production has been falling in Black Africa and this causes hunger, and hunger is a major symptom of extreme poverty. The need for new approach to agriculture was explored but it was discovered that many technical initiatives designed to help the poor rural farmers have failed. Paulo Freire has us identify the main causes of these failures. His proposal for a more effective agricultural education and food production has been found to be relevant both in his native Brazil and in developing countries. His experiment in some Black African countries like Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau can be used as source of inspiration.

But despite the importance of education as means of emancipation and empowering the poor, one realises that often, education remains a long term project. This means that alone, it cannot bring practical and immediate solutions to the problem of extreme poverty as experienced in Black Africa today. So we consider other complements to education³⁴⁸. So we now consider another important and complementary strategy: liberatory dialogue.

³⁴⁷ Farming with old tools and methods frustrates many youths in Africa today. The result is that many a youth abandon agriculture in search of white-collar jobs in the large cities. And since the jobs are not usually there, these jobless youths divert their youthful exuberance to other areas that often create social unrest. Some take to drugs, prostitution and other crimes.

³⁴⁸ P. MAYO, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

CHAPTER THREE: DIALOGUE FOR THE LIBERATION AND HUMANISATION OF THE POOR

4.3.0. Preamble

We have seen in the earlier part of this project that violence and many forms of conflicts including wars have adverse effects in many Black African countries. How dialogue can help in bringing about more stability in the region will be studied in this chapter. To do this we shall explain more below why we think that dialogue is necessary in the region today. Then we shall examine the etymology and nature of dialogue with emphasis on religious/theological dimension of dialogue. This will be followed by Freire's theory of dialogue understood as the praxis of liberation and humanisation¹. Finally, we shall make some concrete proposals for the effective use of dialogue as an anti-poverty strategy. Meanwhile here are the main reasons why we are proposing dialogue as a major anti-poverty strategy in Black Africa.

4.3.1. Dialogue as a Principle of Theology of Solidarity

The concern about the other can no longer be denied or ignored. Global economic and political interdependence, rapid transportation, and the expanding communications super highway have given rise to a situation in which different cultures and their religious traditions are encountering each other as never before. In addition, an influx of immigrants from East to West, fueled by poverty and ethnic, political and religious turmoil is contributing to the growth of multicultural and multireligious societies that present possibilities for conflict or enrichment².

If the above description is true of modern world, it is even more true for Black Africa today as seen below.

First, in a continent marked by linguistic, cultural, economic, historical and especially, religious differences, we shall present dialogue as an effective tool for conflict prevention and conflict management. We shall show that instead of being sources of conflict, these

¹ Apart from Paulo Freire who popularised dialogue as an educational praxis for emancipation, it is to be noted that other important scholars like Hans-George Gadamer, David Bohm and Martin Buber, Jürgen Habermas have made valuable contributions in our understanding of the revolutionary power of dialogue and communication.

² S. J. DUFFY, *The Stranger within Our Gates: Interreligious Dialogue and the Normativeness of Jesus*, in T. MERRIGAN and J. HAERS (eds.), *The Myriad Christ, Plurality and the Quest in Contemporary Christology*, BETL, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2000, p. 3.

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differences can become means of mutual enrichment. Another reason for proposing dialogue in tackling the Black African problem is that in a continent torn apart by conflicts and wars, dialogue can serve as medium for reconciliation and reconstruction of the community and personal relationship. Many African states have discovered that after many years of arms hostility, only effective dialogue can help in healing wounds and bringing trust³.

The third reason why we propose dialogue is that it is a democratic value that has not yet been appreciated and used effectively in the continent. While dialogue is traditionally practiced as means of settling dispute on the family and community levels in traditional Africa, this practice has not yet been assimilated on the national, regional and political areas of the society. The incessant warfare, guerrilla wars and all forms of rebellion could be managed if dialogue is allowed to become a democratic value in Africa. Yet another reason why we propose dialogue as a principle of theology of solidarity with the poor in Africa is that the Church in the region has consistently called for the development of dialogical strategies as Kingdom of God value. The importance of dialogue was especially highlighted during the African Synod and theologians were challenged to develop strategies for achieving it.

Finally, apart from the importance of dialogue within the African societies themselves, we also need to emphasize that globalisation is now breaking the frontiers between nations and cultures. Therefore, Africans need not only to dialogue among themselves in tackling such issues as poverty, they are also to dialogue with other countries and civilisations of the world. Through such dialogue, people can begin to realize the fact that every nation has its own riches and wealth as well as its limitations and challenges⁴. Through such dialogical encounters, there will be mutual exchange of ideas and values. With the enhanced systems of communication and the increasing spirit of solidarity

³ One can cite many examples like Nigeria, Congo, Liberia, Rwanda etc., where eventually, dialogue and reconciliation offered solutions to what arms struggle could not achieve.

⁴ Since post-modern culture is characterised by increasing reality of interdependence, it becomes obvious that a nation, culture or group that becomes so narrow-minded and unilateral can easily slip into absolutism and isolation. The consequence of such conditions is conflict of ideas and interests with their disastrous effects. This is precisely why post-modern civilization is now exploring the options of dialogue as means of fostering solidarity among peoples.

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among peoples, such a dialogue will not only help Africans, but will also reveal that such issues as illegal immigration, terrorism, global-warming and extreme poverty can present dangers without frontiers. It is in the realisation of the importance of this type of dialogue that the United Nations Organisation declared the year 2001 the 'International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations'⁵.

4.3.2. The Etymology and Nature of Dialogue in General

Etymologically, the term dialogue is a compound word '*dia-logos*' derived from two Greek words *dia* ('two') and *logos* ('the word'). Dialogue as used in Greek language derives from *dialegesthai* which is to discuss. The English and French languages translate it as *dialogue*, though with different pronunciations. Dialogue can mean conversation between two or more people or, a conversation in a drama or a narrative. It could also be used as a literary work written in the form of a conversation as the book, *Dialogues of Plato*⁶. In the domain of music, dialogue is used to describe a composition or passage of two or more parts, suggestive of conversational interplay.

Dialogue can be used as a verb and a noun. It can be described as a process of allowing a stream of meaning to flow among, through or between those involved. This will create a 'shared meaning' among the parties in the dialogue thus serving as the glue or cement that will hold the dialoguers. Dialogue is thus a communication form for discovering the shared meaning moving among and through a group of people. This is to say that it is a group communication process aimed at exploring the nature and power of collective thinking. It can help at the transformation of the collective consciousness of individuals and the culture of the people. Since 'shared meaning' forms the basis of culture, dialogue involves becoming aware of the thinking, feelings and formulated conclusions that underlie a way of being with each other and the group's way of life, called culture.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace*, in *THE LEADER*, Vol. XLIII, no. 25, January 2001, p. 12.

⁶ Freire was very much influenced by Plato's dialogical approach to teaching and learning (cf. J. P. GEE, *Dilemmas of Literacy, Plato and Freire*, in P. FREIRE (ed.), *Mentoring the Mentor*, Peter Lang, New York, 1997, p. 230).

4.3.2.1. Dialogue: A Religious/Theological Perspective

There are many types of dialogue. But since we have demonstrated in the earlier part of this study that most of the conflicts in Black Africa, are linked with religious differences⁷, we shall make a brief presentation of dialogue considered from its religious/theological perspectives⁸.

4.3.2.2. Interreligious Dialogue for Solidarity and Social Justice

There is a general tendency to see interreligious dialogue as a merely religious affair. But recent official documents of the Catholic Church have been trying to expand the horizon of this activity to be more inclusive of other spheres of human endeavour. Religion can no longer be isolated from other aspects of life especially in an interconnected world. While religious issues are the most significant characteristic of this type of dialogue, we shall see that its implications go beyond religious confessions.

According to Vatican II the main motivation for interreligious dialogue and relations is because,

humanity forms but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extends to all humankind⁹.

As a matter of fact, the Conciliar Fathers realised during the working sessions of the Council that, dialogue with non-Christians had a far-reaching significance, including political, cultural and economic than mere profession of faith¹⁰.

⁷ One of the main causes of conflicts in some Black African countries like Nigeria and Sudan have to do with the poor relationship between Christians and Moslems in particular.

⁸ Only the important elements in interreligious and ecumenical dialogues which are relevant to our present study have been presented.

⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, no. 1.

¹⁰ The issues concerning African religions, the Jewish religion and especially the Muslims presented themselves more as cultural and racial challenges to the Fathers than as a religious one. According to Y. Congar, the event of the 'Holocaust' during WW II and Auschwitz in particular has both cultural, religious and political implications (cf. Y. CONGAR, *Mon Journal du Concile II*, Paris, Cerf, 2002, p. 366).

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Technically speaking, however, *interreligious* dialogue is a type of religious dialogue that involves religious, theological and spiritual exchange of ideas among peoples of different faiths. Since its inception in Jerusalem, Christians have faced the challenge of dialoguing with Judaism and other pagan religions. The issue of salvation outside the Christian faith, for example became a major theological and religious concern of the Church as it encountered other cultures¹¹. Since the early times therefore the Church has been trying to engage in dialogue with other peoples and cultures which reached a new peak at Vatican II.

Vatican II can be said to be the landmark in interreligious dialogue. In *Nostra Aetate*¹², the Council proclaimed belief in the basic unity of the human family and belief that religion should always strengthen that natural unity. Dialogue was proposed as means of fostering this unity. The Council while affirming the unique event of God's revelation in Jesus¹³, adds that the Church is ready to encounter other believers. It expressed its readiness to dialogue with them in a spirit of solidarity and as a means of fostering a common search for, "the truth which enlightens all men..."¹⁴.

So at Vatican II, the Church officially calls its children to enter with prudence and charity into *dialogue* with people of other religious belief¹⁵. Another boost to the Church's project for interreligious dialogue was given when on Pentecost, May 17, 1964, Pope Paul VI, established a Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions. The secretariat was later designated and renamed the Pontifical Council on interreligious Dialogue. This was followed with the publication of Paul VI's *Ecclesia Suam*, which deepened Vatican II teaching on dialogue¹⁶.

¹¹ Much about the encounter of Christians and other religions in the early times has been studied by historians. See especially the work of P. M. J. STRAVINSKAS, *Salvation Outside the Church? Our Sunday Visitor Press, Huntington, 2002*.

¹² This was a declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions.

¹³ Cf. *G. S.*, no. 22

¹⁴ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2

¹⁵ Vatican II took this innovative stand based essentially on its better understanding of the human person. This position is equally to be read together with the Council's teaching on Religious Freedom (cf. *DH*, no. 3).

¹⁶ Cf. C. KIMBALL, *Striving Together, A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations*, Orbis New York, 1991 p. 98.

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We must note an important fact about interreligious dialogue here. Although it is generally religious-inspired, it is not limited to discussing only religious issues¹⁷. As a dialogue of action, it offers believers of all faiths, the forum to strive to live in an open and neighboring spirit. It calls for the appreciation of the brotherhood of man. Today more than ever, in a globalising world, people of all faiths are coming to realise that many of the problems facing modern civilization, like conflicts and poverty “go beyond the boundaries of one particular religion”¹⁸. Let us remark that the willingness and ability of Christians and Moslems in Africa to understand the nature and importance of interreligious dialogue holds the key to solving the problem of religious wars and conflicts in the region.

4.3.2.3. Ecumenical Dialogue: Unity is Strength

Although the relations between Christians of different denominations in many African countries do not often result in open conflicts like wars, we must note that they need to co-exist in a more friendly way to foster solidarity in the region¹⁹. After many years of fragmentation, Christians realised that the evangelisation of the world would be ineffective in disunity. They equally came to realise that Christians cannot fulfill their prophetic mission of addressing social injustice in the world, if they themselves lived in discord and mutual mistrust. So they began the initiative of fostering Christian unity in what is called, *Ecumenical Dialogue*²⁰.

¹⁷ It is a forum for sharing theological and spiritual ideas but is not limited to these (cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF PEOPLES, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, in J. A. SCHERER and S. B. BEVANS (ed), *New Directions in Mission and Evangelisation Basic Statements 1974-1991*, Orbis Books, New York, 1992, p.187).

¹⁸ F. A. ARINZE, in *the Third Millennium: A Catholic Perspective*, in *The LEADER*, Vol. XLII, no. 23. November 2000, p. 30

¹⁹ As a matter of fact divisions among Christians is not limited to the African believers. Matters of heresy, apostasy and schisms marked the history of the Church (cf. P. M. J. STRAVINSKAS, op. cit., p. 30).

²⁰ Etymologically, *ecumenism* comes from the Greek word, *Oikumene*. Technically, ecumenism deals only with relations among Christians. Ecumenism has many perspectives including *theological* dimension which deals with formal conversations between Christian bodies on disputed doctrinal issues. The *spiritual* dimension refers to the matters of prayer for unity. And the *social* aspect is about possible ways of working together to advance the Kingdom of God's justice on earth (cf. Ibid. p. 31).

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Although ecumenical dialogue has been on for centuries, it was until the 20th century that it got a big boost from both the Protestants and Catholics. From the Protestant side, the landmark was the formation of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 as a fellowship of those who accept Jesus Christ as God and Saviour²¹. From the Catholic side, the need for Christian unity was also perceived and championed by the heroic initiatives of people like Cardinal Désiré Joseph Mercier of Belgium²² with the Anglican prelates²³. These and other initiatives culminated in the decisive event of Vatican II²⁴. The Council believes that the ecumenical movement was a sign of the Holy Spirit in our time. And the decree on ecumenism and interreligious *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism esp. Nos., 1; 4; 9; 11; 14; 18; 19; 21-23), was promulgated and specially tailored to deal with matters related to ecumenism²⁵. Since Vatican II, the importance of religious dialogue has also been highlighted especially in the writings of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II²⁶.

We shall end this short reflection on religious/theological perspective of dialogue by reiterating that in a Africa today, solidarity with the poor will necessarily demand solidarity among peoples of different religious convictions in the region. The realization that religious dialogue is not just limited to spiritual and theological encounters will help to use it as a force for fostering justice and promoting the Kingdom values. In a continent where tribal and ethnic differences are sources of conflict, religion could play an important unifying role. What we have been trying to demonstrate in this section is that Africans, especially Christians, should remember that in the immediate post-independent years,

²¹ Cf. C. KIMBALL, op.cit., pp. 92-93.

²² Cf. P. M. J. STRAVINSKAS, p. 37.

²³ The pioneer Anglican prelate to do this was Lord Halifax of the Anglican Church in the famous *Malines Conversations* under the papacy of Pope Pius XI (cf. Ibid. p. 37).

²⁴ Cf. W. KASPER, *That They May be One, The Call to Unity Today*, Burns and Oates, London, 2004, p. 11.

²⁵ In all these, Vatican II reminds those Catholics engaging in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue to be mindful of the 'hierarchy of truths'. The basic doctrine of the Trinity and Christology should not be mutilated in an effort to seek consensus with other believers (*Unitatis redintegratio* no. 11). Another hermeneutical principle that is carefully examined in dialogue is the ability to distinguish the *content* of faith from the *formulation* of faith. This is to ensure that mere linguistic formulations do not become obstacles to the noble mission of dialogue (cf. *GS*. 62).

²⁶ Paul VI made dialogue central in his inaugural encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1963). The Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity has since seen, and used dialogue as its main tool of operation. In his ecumenical encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), John Paul II explored the power, and need of dialogue to advancing Christian unity.

...the Church, whether Roman Catholic or Anglican, Lutheran or Presbyterian was the only institution of which the African was consciously and by outward initiation a member, and which was wider than his own tribe and wider than his own race²⁷.

4.3.2.4. Dialogue in Freire's Philosophical Anthropology

According to Freire, "dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the word, in order to name the world"²⁸. It is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanised. Dialogue occurs between partners who wish to name the world and transform it through their creative word. Dialogue imposes itself as the way by which people achieve significance as human beings, so it is an existential necessity. 'Word' is central to understanding Freire's theory of dialogue.

The essence of dialogue as a human phenomenon is *the word*, and it is this word that facilitates dialogue. Within the word, we find two dimensions, namely, *reflection* and *action*. Freire believes that there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis, such that to speak a true word is to transform the world²⁹. Inauthentic word is incapable of transforming reality since dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. A word that is deprived of its dimension of action leads automatically to weakening the power of its reflection. A word that is not true, and lacks the power to transform reality is void of its essence and so becomes idle chatter, mere *verbalism*, alienated and alienating. It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce evil since denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action³⁰.

As a pedagogical exercise, Freire sees dialogue as crucial in every aspect of participatory learning in the process of transformation³¹. Having flawed traditional system of education, which is described as too authoritarian and undemocratic, Freire explains that "*nous avons besoin d'une pédagogie de la communication, pour vaincre l'anti-dialogue*

²⁷ R. OLIVER, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, cited in D. M. BYABAZAIRE, *The Contribution of the Churches in the Development of Western Uganda, 1894-1974*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1979, p. 111.

²⁸ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 69.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³¹ We have to realise that Freire's theory of dialogue is interwoven with his pedagogy where it was actually developed.

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privé d'amour et de jugement critique"³². Here dialogue is seen as the pedagogical practice of critical reflection and action, which nurtures students' curiosity and

imagination toward a greater critical capacity to confront dialectically the content of their study and the task of constructing new knowledge³³. As a pedagogical exercise, dialogue becomes a reciprocal process in which the students learn from the teachers just as much as the teacher learns from the students³⁴. In critical dialogue the teacher asks thought-provoking questions and encourages students to ask their own questions³⁵. That dialogue may be abused should not discourage the teacher to engage in it³⁶. We conclude that, Freire's approach to learning is based on genuine dialogue between students and teachers. They are called to work as partners in a united quest for 'critical consciousness' leading to the transformation of the world³⁷. Freire goes on to explain how dialogue could be used effectively in this transformation, liberation and humanisation process.

For Freire democratic dialogue is a powerful exercise that could help the oppressed make their voice heard. Through it they can recover their 'stolen' humanity and then moving from being considered mere 'objects' to becoming real Subjects. This is the indispensable and fundamental condition for human emancipation³⁸. As the principle for authentic democratic relationship, especially for the humanisation of the oppressed and the voiceless, Freire sees dialogue as critical praxis. So critical dialogue becomes a collaborative discourse and reciprocity in which thought, action, and reflection combine in informed, enlightened, and committed action to dismantle and counter the hegemonic structures that support oppression³⁹. Through dialogue we are able to challenge mythical

³² P. FREIRE, *L' éducation : pratique de la liberté...*, p. 113.

³³ Cf. A. DARDER, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁴ Cf. P. MAYO, op. cit., p. 65. We know that even experts do not always agree with one another. So one can appreciate why Freire maintains that dialogue requires humility and is really a process.

³⁵ Cf. I. SHOR, *Education is Politics, Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy*, in P. MACLAREN AND P. LEONARD (eds.), op. cit., p.26.

³⁶ Cf. J. P. GEE, op. cit. 238.

³⁷ Cf. MCALREN, *Life in Schools...*, p. 235.

³⁸ Cf. S. ARONOWITZ, *Paulo Freire's Radical Humanism*, in P. MACLAREN AND P. LEONARD (eds.), op. cit., p.18

³⁹ Cf. P. MACLAREN and T. T. da SILVA, *Critical Literacy, Resistance and the Politics of Memory*, in *ibid.*, p. 56.

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thinking, seek the truth together, expose contradictions in words and actions, and thus proceed towards correct action.

Dialogue helps us to recognise interrelationships, the connection between personal and social beliefs and attitudes. Dialogue as a process of conscientisation and as its result, helps those who are submerged in silence to begin to ask questions, as they pass from mere automatic and instinctive reactions to reflective ones. Dialogue is an act of solidarity because it represents a powerful and transformative political process of interaction between people. It requires the interactive and on-going participation with and among people hence; because “we cannot be involved in dialogue alone and in isolation”⁴⁰. As an essential act of solidarity, dialogue is an opportunity available to one to open up to the thinking of others so that one does not wither away in one’s isolation. Those engaged in dialogue reflect on what they know, their lived experiences, and on how these influence the way they read their world. The collective, critical and emancipatory elements of dialogue is summarised thus:

Through dialogical relationships, students learn to build learning communities in which they freely give voice to their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions about what they know and what they are attempting to understand, always within the context of a larger political project of emancipation⁴¹.

Below Freire presents the technical elements in a liberatory dialogue as well as the process for achieving transformative and democratic society that is really human.

⁴⁰ A. DARDER, op. cit., p. 103.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 103.

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4.3.2.5. Essential Elements of Liberatory Dialogue according to Freire

We shall see in this section, the essential qualities that should exist for dialogue to be authentic and so effective.

4.3.2.5.1. Love

The most fundamental element needed for true dialogue is profound love for the world and for people⁴². This is the only condition for the creation and re-creation of the world and is essentially the task of responsible 'Subjects'. *Love* is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself⁴³. Those to engage in dialogue should have this passionate love to make the world a better place. Once we are able to remove our emotional barriers through dialogue, our natural feelings begin to flow as we begin to see the humanity of the other and not just the other's race, creed, status or weaknesses. True dialogue borne by love leads to freedom on both the personal and collective levels. He believes that freedom and love are essential for the transformation of the world⁴⁴.

4.3.2.5.2. Humility and Suspension of Judgment

Another element for true dialogue is *humility*. Naming the world through dialogue cannot be done through arrogance⁴⁵. Dialogue, being an act of naming and creating, learning and acting is broken if the parties involved in it lack humility. This means that I cannot project ignorance into the other in the act of dialoguing. To be effective, those involved in dialogue must accept one another as being in partnership. The idea of self-sufficiency or the impression of possessing absolute knowledge is radically incompatible to the very nature of dialogue⁴⁶.

One expression of humility in dialogue is the suspension of judgment. Humility expressed in the suspension of judgment is necessary in dialogue because our normal way

⁴² We shall see Freire's notion of love under Cultural Action in the next chapter.

⁴³ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 70. We shall develop this theme further in the next section of this work when discussing compassion as an act of solidarity and instrument of liberation for the poor.

⁴⁴ Cf. P. FREIRE (ed.), *Mentoring the Mentor, A critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire*, Peter Lang, New York, 1997, p. 325.

⁴⁵ Such humility is more expedient for teachers who should be disposed to learn also from their students (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 9)

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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of thinking divides things up and creates what seem to us the ‘ultimate truths’⁴⁷. Although this does not mean abolishing our convictions and positions, it simply calls us to ‘hold it in front of us as we seek for further considerations. Suspension of judgment helps us become more open to other ways of viewing the same thing. When we suspend our judgment, our main interest is no longer on who is speaking, but rather, on what is being said. Suspension of thoughts, impulses and judgments is not passivity but rather involves attention, listening not only to others, but to oneself.

Through the process of interaction, interpretation, inquiry, rethinking and reflection, we dig deeper into matters that concern us, leading generally to breakthroughs in solving problems that once overwhelmed us. This is to say that dialogue is a search for new possibilities. Effective dialogue often leads us to discover that our original perspective may still be acceptable to the other parties, or that it needs to be expanded or even totally changed. Suspension of judgment is essential because it helps build trust and openness in the dialogical encounter since all those involved are assured that, they can freely express their opinions without fear of being ridiculed, judged or condemned. Freire wonders: “How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? How can I dialogue if I am closed to and offended by the contribution of others?”⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ In the course of time and experience our egos become identified with what we believe and assume. This may lead us to shut ourselves off from further learning. Often half truths, prejudices, assumptions, generalisations and inferences become ‘dogmas’ for us. But if we have the humility and courage to ‘suspend our judgment’ we are then capable of seeing other points of view as we critically examine ours. It is this demand for humility that distinguishes dialogue from other types of discourses. Unlike dialogue, *inquiry* involves a co-investigation of a question, the resolution of a disagreement, the formulation of a compromise all in an effort to resolve a given problem. *Conversation* involves a more open-ended discussion in which the aim is intersubjective understanding rather than answering a specific question. *Instruction* which according to Freire is common among many educators, is one of the most anti-dialogical dispositions. It could be dictatorial. Humility in dialogue requires that it does not become a *debate*. Debate involves an exchange and less about reaching agreement or finding common answers. It is often about testing positions through an agonistic engagement *for or against* other positions. While it may help clarify positions, debate is more about justifying one’s position and so it is not dialogue. So Freire asks: “How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?” (P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 71.)

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

4.3.2.5.3. Faith

A third element for true dialogue according Freire is an *intense faith* in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, create and re-create. It is faith in their vocation to be fully human, a vocation which is the birthright of all peoples⁴⁹. Through faith we realise that people differ at various levels, in background, outlook, belief, experience etc. Instead of being afraid of the other, faith enables us to celebrate these differences. We realise that if well-managed, our differences can help us grow and can create new possibilities and opportunities. This faith however is not a naïve one that excludes critical evaluation of what is being said⁵⁰. For Freire, this faith in the people finds its best expression in the risk of trust. Trust is important because “a real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust”⁵¹.

4.3.2.5.4. Hope

Finally, in every dialogue, there is an aspect of hope. His philosophical anthropological persuasion convinces him that hope is an ontological requirement for human beings⁵². This is rooted in the belief that men are ‘incomplete,’ and so are in constant search for completion in communion with others. In hope we keep the vision and optimism that change is possible no matter how slow or difficult the conditions may be now. It is not in form of fatalism or naïve idealism. Once dialoguers expect nothing to come out of their efforts, their encounter will become empty, sterile, bureaucratic and tedious⁵³. This hope

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 71. Freire reminds his readers that all human beings should be free and have intrinsic capabilities. He is actually addressing the elite who think that they are more human than the poor, simply because the elite have privileged positions. But once the teacher is able to empower the poor, they overcome their domestication, fear, complexes etc., and then they begin the actual humanization ‘journey’ (cf. A. DARDER, op. cit., p. 104).

⁵⁰ Critical disposition helps to discern an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them. Critical thinking contrasts with naïve thinking which sees reality as static devoid of dynamism. Naïve thinking has for goal the holding fast to the guaranteed space and trying to adjust to it, thus denying temporality (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 73).

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 43

⁵² This is to say that hope was fundamentally rooted in ‘inclusion’ of our being human.

⁵³ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 73.

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is not just an emotional disposition but is critical itself, and also generates critical thinking in the parties concerned⁵⁴.

This critical hope is realised through various forms of communications in dialogue, testing our prejudices and searching out meanings. Without this hope, one is left with only cynicism, pessimism and despair. And these are the forces of political strangulation used for the preservation of the oppressive status quo⁵⁵. While faith in humankind is the *a priori* requirement for dialogue, trust is its rewarding effect. For this trust to be real, those in dialogue must avoid false love, false humility and feeble faith in others. To evaluate and nurture this trust, parties are to constantly observe if their words coincide with their actions⁵⁶. In fact hope inspires us to know that history is a possibility and men and women are agents that bring it to realization⁵⁷. Freire concludes:

Founding itself upon love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence⁵⁸.

4.3.2.6. Preparing for Dialogue and Overcoming Antidialogical Dispositions

One of the important contributions of Freire's theory of dialogue is that his theory is rooted in praxis or is derived from practical experience. Below therefore he proposes some practical dispositions that one has to assume before engaging in an effective liberatory dialogue. He equally presents us with the possible obstacles to be encountered.

The first disposition certainly is to know what dialogue is all about especially as an activity rooted in human nature. So as we saw above, the essential elements of love, humility, faith and hope must be present. Added to these fundamental dispositions, Freire

⁵⁴ At this juncture Freire brings in the idea of creative and conscientizing education which is only possible through creative dialogue. We have seen the efficacy of this type of education in comparison with uncritical and anti-dialogical education.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. DARDER, op. cit., p. 86.

⁵⁶ Freire judges it to be farce if one is preaching solidarity with, and for the poor but contradicts it with one's practical actions. One cannot be promoting the principles of democracy but contradicting it through practical policies.

⁵⁷ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Introduction to H. A. GIROUX, Teachers as Intellectuals, Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Bergin and Garvey Publishers, New York, 1998, p. xxviii.

⁵⁸ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 72.

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also cautions that for dialogue to be effective, one must be prepared for it. This becomes more exigent in technical dialogue where one must be armed with the facts and figures not only of the theme to be discussed, but also about the persons with whom one is to engage in dialogue.

The disposition for a 'communicating encounter' with the other is central to effective dialogue. And this language of communication must be attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. This is possible when those animating dialogue understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed⁵⁹. Freire acknowledges that dialogue is a difficult and demanding praxis. But he maintains that the time and energy spent in preparing for dialogue is not wasted. This is more rewarding if the animators eventually succeed in presenting the issue to be discussed as a problem demanding a joint solution and not just as lecture to be given to the oppressed⁶⁰.

Apart from Freire, some authors warn that dialogue may not also be possible despite our effort. But they hold that while mutuality is ideal in a dialogical encounter, one should not be discouraged or deterred to initiate dialogue even if there is no reciprocity from the other party⁶¹. While dialogue between equals or on the personal level generally flows almost spontaneously, Freire cautions those engaging in dialogue with 'oppressors' like

⁵⁹ Freire proposes a painful but rewarding method of investigating into the language and frame of mind of the people if one wishes to engage them in creative dialogue. This investigation itself is to be carried out through dialogue. The investigation is not to focus on *persons* but rather on the *thought-language* with which the men and women concerned refer to reality. Focus should also be on the levels at which they perceive reality, and their view of the world in which their generative themes are found. Those preparing for dialogue cannot force their own values and worldviews on others. Equally important is that they too should not abandon their own worldviews and values uncritically. They must set the aims they want to achieve ever before them. They are to register in their notebooks, peculiarities of the people, like the way they talk, their lifestyle, their behaviours at various situations: at work, leisure, worship, meetings etc. To be noted also is their mode of relating, and the roles played by women, men, girls, boys and children. Having noted all these, the investigators can then evaluate in their meetings the best way to engage in meaningful dialogue with the people concerned. Codification, decodification, consideration and reconsiderations are to follow the emerging realities from the study. While this pre-dialogical stage may be difficult, Freire holds that in the end it demonstrates that we recognise the humanity of the people, their specificities as historical and cultural beings as opposed to animals.

⁶⁰ The themes identified for discussion are then tackled with the participants at the forum designated for this. Freire presents the success of 'Cultural Circle' experiment in Brazil as an example that can be modified in other contexts.

⁶¹ Cf. C. KIMBALL, op. cit., p. 86.

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dictators and the privileged elite, to look out for the following challenges that they will encounter in such dialogue between unequal parties. Such challenges are termed ‘anti-dialogical’ dispositions and are presented below.

4.3.2.6.1. The Conqueror and the Vanquished

According to Freire, the first characteristic of anti-dialogical action is the desire for conquest. The anti-dialogical individual, in his relationship with others, aims at conquering them by any means he can. Sometimes these could be in form of brutal force, repression, manipulation or solicitous acts like paternalism⁶². Since every act of conquest involves a conqueror and a vanquished, the conqueror imposes his objectives on the vanquished and makes them his possession. Freire summarises the passion to conquer: “The dominant elites today, like those of any epoch continue to need to conquer others – with or without bread and circus. The content and methods of conquer vary historically; what does not vary (as long as dominant elites exist) is the necrophilic passion to oppress”⁶³.

4.3.2.6.2. Manipulation

Another anti-dialogical characteristic is manipulation. Through manipulation, instead of liberating, dialogue becomes an act of domination, dehumanizing, with many necrophilic consequences⁶⁴. Freire sees manipulation as a strategy, around which revolves all other acts of conquest and domination in dialogue and human relationships. Its objective is to make the other person conform to the objectives of the manipulator. The greater the naivety, inexperience and immaturity of the victim, the more he falls victim to the trap of manipulation⁶⁵. Indeed manipulation occurs only when the weaker party in the dialogue

⁶² Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 119.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 122.

⁶⁴ Great orators and manipulators could seize an opportunity of dialogue to further enslave the unsuspecting parties in a dialogue or in a deal. What Freire is saying happens when dialogue takes place between two unequal parties where the weaker partner often becomes more vulnerable.

⁶⁵ Often the weaker ones, in their desire to be great, are fed with the myth that they will become powerful, rich and independent like the elite. If ever they succumb to these, their manipulation becomes even much easier for the oppressor. In certain historical conditions, manipulation is accompanied by means of pacts between the dominant and the dominated party. Considered superficially, one gets the impression that dialogue has taken place. But in reality, however, these pacts are not dialogue, because their true objectives are determined by the unequivocal interest of the dominant elites. The unbalance trade between the

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expresses some element of awareness which the oppressive party sees as a threat. Manipulation occurs when the people refuse to be mere spectators and decide to participate in shaping their destiny. So there is no need of manipulation in a situation where the people are entirely 'submerged' in oppression offering little or no resistance at all. What are some of the results of manipulation as an anti-dialogue activity?

First it leads to the domination of one party by another. The next is that it can lead the people into an unauthentic type of *organization*, so as to weaken the united effort of the disadvantaged party. Manipulation also aims at 'anesthetizing' the people so that they can no longer think. This is because thinking, and especially thinking critically, can lead the people to engage in a revolution⁶⁶. Through manipulation the oppressor initiates a series of deceitful activities, attitudes, propagandas and myths designed to increase the alienation and passivity of the oppressed⁶⁷. Indeed Freire holds that there is no oppressive reality which is not at the same time necessarily antidialogical. Also there is no anti-dialogue in which the oppressors do not untiringly dedicate themselves to the constant conquest of the oppressed⁶⁸. Freire states that being creative, dialogue "must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another"⁶⁹. One should neither

developing countries and the industrialised ones is an example. Negotiations between debtor nations and their rich partners have so far led to the perpetration of destitution in Black Africa today. The same applies to the issue of subsidies that hampers economic growth of many developing countries especially in the agricultural sector.

⁶⁵ Emerging aggressive response of the oppressed can force the oppressor to initiate dialogue. And the more frightened the elite are the more they double the tactics of manipulation.

⁶⁶ Often the crafty party in an anti-dialogue manipulation identifies the leader of the weaker party and then concentrates all their manipulating tactics on him. This includes persuasion, gifts, offering of privileges, threats, defamations, etc. Once the leader falls victim of these vicious machinations, Freire describes such a person as an 'amphibian'. This imagery comes from the fact that the person now lives in both elements (water and land). This is to say that he can shuttle between the dominators and the people who are dominated. He pretends to be playing a mediatory role. Under such a circumstance the once 'charismatic leader' of the people, suddenly or gradually softens, seeks compromises, and in turn becomes a manipulator of the people (P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 130-131).

⁶⁷ Some of the myths often used include the idea that dialogue and negotiations are still going on between the parties, that they are acting on agreements reached by the parties, that theirs is a free society where every one has freedom of self-expression. Other myths are that all persons are free to work and live wherever they want, that one can seek a job elsewhere if one is dissatisfied with the present status quo, that all men, all races and genders are equal etc. Other myths and propaganda state that the elite are generous by occasional acts of charity. (Yet such charity are not done unconditionally). They equally propagate the myth that the elite are so privileged simply because they are more industrious than the rest of the society. People are poor because they are lazy, they are generally responsible for their woes. Above all these, often the oppressors exploit the religious situations and teach that rebellion is a 'sin' against God and that religion should not interfere with the socio-political and economic order (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 121).

⁶⁸ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 122.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

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name the world for others nor 'deposit' one's ideas and beliefs on the other in the name of dialogue. In the final analysis it is the action that follows the dialogue that proves its sincerity even though action and dialogue should ideally be concomitant.

4.3.2.6.3. Suspicion

It is very significant to remark how Freire notes a sharp contrast between authentic dialogical disposition and anti-dialogical one. This contrast comes out very clearly in how he treats the issue of trust or lack of it. In the first place, the elite and the oppressors do not generally see the peasants and the poor as worthy partners in dialogue. But in a few cases, where the two parties dare to engage in such venture, there is a general sense of mistrust in the consciousness of the oppressed. Having lived in a situation of oppression for so long, the oppressed are like people whose humanity have been stolen. They see themselves as 'tenants', 'properties' and as 'reified' objects. This tendency to show distrust could so control their lives, that it begins to affect their relationship with genuine people intending to dialogue or to help them⁷⁰.

More often than not, the mistrust of the poor and the oppressed is justified since in reality the elite and the oppressors often manipulate the weak. In the end Freire holds that this distrust is mutual. The oppressed and the poor harbour some misgivings about the intentions of the 'oppressed'. For one, they have a deep feeling of internalised inferiority complex and fear of the oppressors. And again they know that they cannot match the manipulative skills of the oppressors⁷¹. The oppressors are equally frightened and distrustful. They have internalized the belief that the oppressed, poor, and illiterate peasants know very little and are generally lazy. They equally fear the possible outcome

⁷⁰ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, pp. 120-121. Freire's particular experience here was in rural Brazil where the poor peasants could not believe that their landlords and the elite could ever engage in a sincere dialogue with them. This is understandable, given that rigid vertical structure of relationship has been the norm for so long. It is within this rigid vertical relationship that the peasants' consciousness is historically developed and tends to become part of them. With no experience of dialogue, with no experience of participation, the peasants were often unsure of themselves. They have been consistently denied their right to have their say, having historically been subjected only to listening and obeying. It is thus normal that they almost always maintain an attitude of mistrust towards those who attempt to dialogue with them.

⁷¹ Freire recounts the fact that often when dialogue is encouraged between the educationist and the peasants, sometimes the peasants interrupt to say: "Excuse us, sir, we who don't know should keep quiet and listen to you who know". (This statement was made by a Chilean peasant and reported by Alvaro Manriquez of the Institute for Agriculture and Livestock Development in that country. It is cited in P. FREIRE, *Education for Critical...*, p. 121).

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of such dialogue. It may dangerously lead to awakening the consciousness of the oppressed with its disastrous consequences for their position of privilege.

To conclude, Freire understands dialogue as an important human activity and a form of communication that is linked to his theory of conscientization. For him, authentic dialogue, insofar as the participants are involved in mutual give and take, involves a certain reciprocity. It thus differs from controversy and contention, in which each participant aims to defend his own side and prove that the other side is in error. It is the opposite of confrontation since the very essence of dialogue is that the parties involved should come closer to one another. Indeed it equally differs from lecturing and teaching. As a liberatory activity, Freire sees dialogue as a vehicle for problem-posing education and conscientization and humanisation of oppressed people and the poor.

From the above, we see Freire's understanding of liberatory dialogue. How it could now be used in fostering solidarity for the liberation and humanization of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa will now be seen. The main focus is how to use dialogue for conflict-prevention, management, resolution reconciliation. Although there are various agencies that can foster dialogue in Black Africa today, we are limiting ourselves to the role of the Church. This is because the Church in Black Africa can not only promote dialogue, but can also act as an *agent of reconciliation* in the continent. The strategic groups with whom, and for whom, this dialogue should target will be presented also.

4.3.2.7. The Church as a Principal Animator of Emancipatory Dialogue

We saw in the beginning of this chapter that religious dialogue is not just about the issues of faith but also is a form of encounter. This applies especially so for interreligious dialogue. In many Black African countries where many citizens have lost confidence in their governments, the Church remains a very influential agent of reconciliation and mobilisation. Although Islam also wields similar influence in many Black African countries, we shall limit ourselves to the role of Christianity a principal animator of liberatory and reconciliatory dialogue in the region.

4.3.2.7.1. The Reconciliatory Mission of the Church

From *Pacem in Terris*, through *Gaudium et spes* to the African Synod, the Church teaches that peace is a Kingdom value that should be pursued in a special way to help in ushering in a more just social order. If the Church is emphasising the role of dialogue for social stability, then this takes a new urgency in Black Africa today. One can mention just two countries like Sudan and Nigeria where conflict has been a major source of problem. These two countries in particular are symbolic because of their uniqueness. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has over 250 tribes. On the religious level, Nigeria has one of the highest Muslim populations in the world, as well as one of the highest Christian populations in Africa. As for religious harmony, there is rampant conflict between Christians and Muslims with disastrous effects. Diversities among Christians and the existence of African Traditional Religionists make co-existence even more difficult. As for Sudan, it has the largest landmass in Africa and is equally divided along religious, racial and tribal lines. It has seen one of the worst conflicts in the modern history and now remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

4.3.2.7.2. The African Synod and Dialogue

Aware of the effects of conflict in Africa, dialogue was one of the five major sub-themes of the last African Synod⁷². The importance of effective dialogue as a means of reducing poverty became very clear given the fact that the Rwandan genocide was at its peak during the African Synod⁷³. This is why, from the preparation, through the sessions and in the post-Synodal documents, dialogue was consistently proposed as a means of fostering a just and peaceful society that can help salvage Africa. As a matter of fact, the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the synod itself describes evangelisation as dialogue⁷⁴.

⁷² Dialogue was one of the five major sub-themes of the last African Synod. So the nature of dialogue and the need to nurture and practice it within and outside the Church was a central issue in most of the discussions and documents of the Synod. Dialogue was discussed in its general nature, then in its place in the Church, then with other Christian Churches, then with Islam, with African Traditional Religion and with New Religious Movements. Although other religious groups exist in the sub-continent, it is to be noted that the majority of the people in Black Africa belong to either African Traditional Religion, Christianity or Islam. While the Synod called for inculturating the genuine religious values in African Traditional Religion, it decried the serious problems in the relationship between Christians and Moslems.

⁷³Cf. E. GRASSO, *Dialogue avec l'Afrique, essai théologique sur l'actualité*, Presses Universitaires d'Afrique, Yaoundé, 1997, p. 48. There is a good account of the Rwandan conflict in the work by K. BAHUJIMIGO, *Témoins de Dieu dans un pays meurtri*, Kigali, Palloti Press, 1998.

⁷⁴ Citing Paul VI, the working document describes dialogue as being at the core of the Church itself. In a very precise way the document distinguishes two main types of religious dialogues. Dialogue with other

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At the Synod the bishops proposed dialogue in many facets of the region's life but they singled out religious dialogue as urgent. This religious dialogue in turn focused more on the relationship between Christians and Moslems in the continent⁷⁵. It was observed that in many places, intolerance, oppression, wanton destruction of life and property are perpetrated by people who claim to be defending or promoting Islam. Describing the constant confrontations in the continent as provocations, the Synod proposed prayer, and dialogue of love and life as solution. While rejecting the meeting of violence with violence, the Synod reminded those provoking religious conflicts in the continent that Christians have a right to self-defence and the disarming of the unjust aggressor⁷⁶.

In his post-Synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II, re-emphasised the need for dialogue in the continent at three levels. First the document calls for openness to dialogue as the Christian's attitude *inside* the community itself⁷⁷, then ecumenical dialogue among Christian believers⁷⁸, and thirdly dialogue of civilization as means of fostering peace in the continent, irrespective of people's religious beliefs. *Ecclesia in Africa* singled out the strained relation between Christians and Moslems as a major source of concern to the Church. It called on both religious adherents to "to commit themselves to promoting a dialogue free from risks of false irenicism or militant fundamentalism, and to raising their voices against unfair policies and practices, as well as the lack of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom"⁷⁹. And since African Traditional Religion is generally accommodating, the Papal Exhortation calls for a serene and prudent dialogue with it, especially through inculturation.

Churches and Ecclesia Communities is usually called ecumenism, whereas interreligious dialogue refers to dialogue with other world religions (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris, of the Special Assembly for Africa, 1993*, no. 18)

⁷⁵ Cf. J. ONAIYENKEN, *What We Saw and Heard at the African Synod*, in *The Bulletin of Ecumenical Theolog of The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians*, Vol. 6. no. 2, 1994, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ This is a dialogue between bishops, Episcopal Conferences or Hierarchical Assemblies and the Apostolic See, and between Conferences of different nations of the same continents. Such dialogue is to be carried on in each particular Church between the bishop, the presbyterate, consecrated persons, pastoral workers and the lay faithful (cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 65).

⁷⁸ *Ecclesia in Africa* equally calls for the intensification of dialogue between all the baptized brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations so that the unity which Christ prayed for may be realised. The document even went as far as proposing some concrete ways of fostering such dialogue (cf. *ibid.*, no. 65).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 66.

4.3.2.7.3. Dialogue according to the Episcopal Conferences of Nigeria and Sudan⁸⁰

The bishops of Nigeria have been proposing dialogue as an option for dealing with the incessant conflicts in Nigeria. In the face of the political crises and political unrest that nearly escalated into war in 1994, the bishops of Nigeria called for dialogue⁸¹. Again in 1998, when a military dictator that ruled the country nearly dragged the nation into religious conflict, the bishops called for dialogue and reconciliation. But while calling for dialogue and reconciliation, they strongly condemned the military leadership that dragged the nation, a secular nation into an Islamic organization. They warned that their call for dialogue does not prevent the Church from defending her faith and people in the face of unjust imposition of one religion on the nation⁸².

As the conflict in Nigeria is still increasing, there has been persistent call by individuals and groups for a national conference in the country⁸³. In February 2002, the bishops of Nigeria reiterated: "We renew our call for a national conference that will examine the sources of conflict and propose measures to heal the divisions. To say no to dialogue is to say yes to violence"⁸⁴. The Christian Association of Nigeria which is made up of Christians of all denominations, has equally called for national conference arguing that only such a forum will help to break the cycle of violence, insecurity and instability menacing the nation⁸⁵. Nigerian bishops end with a note of optimism:

Most of the problems causing conflicts in the nation can be prevented, and what has gone wrong put right, if there is a commitment to dialogue. Authentic democracy entails a culture of dialogue. For us Christians, Jesus the Son of God established the eternal dialogue between God and man and united himself in some sense with every human being. He, thus, provides the basis for us Christians to dialogue

⁸⁰ These two countries have persistent conflicts and wars respectively. These conflicts have both ethnic and political problems. And above all, religious factors underline most of these conflicts. This is why dialogue for reconciliation is needed.

⁸¹ The different factions involved in the political disturbances are called to respect the rule of law. Those detained for various political reasons were to be released unconditionally so as to restore the confidence of the people that dialogue is sincere (cf. CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA, CBCN, *A Call for the Change of Heart and for the Rule of Law*, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op.cit., p. 312).

⁸² Cf. CBCN, *Let us be Reconciled Lest We Perish 1998*, in Ibid., p. 377.

⁸³ Cf. A. OJO, *Sovereign National Conference is the Answer*, in *THE SOURCE*, Vol. 6. no. 25, April 2000, p. 15.

⁸⁴ CBCN, *Healing the Wounds of the Nation, 2002*, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 434.

⁸⁵ Cf. J. AGBAKWURU, 'CAN' calls for National Conference, in *THE LEADER*, Vol. XLII. no. 6, April 2000, p. 10.

with others. Consequently, we cannot but prefer dialogue to violence, and propose it as the way to collaboration, harmony, solidarity, and unity...The need for a forum for dialogue and negotiation as aid to national reconciliation is here highlighted⁸⁶.

In a war-torn Sudan, the Episcopal Conference of the country has been advocating dialogue as a solution to the conflict. Since the war was essentially religious motivated, the bishops blame it on “lack of genuine dialogue between Christians and Moslems”⁸⁷. They praised the efforts of the various groups like the Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) as it embarked on dialogue for the peace process⁸⁸. Realising the disastrous effects of the conflict in the country the bishops state: “We are paying a terrible price for the absence of dialogue or the kind of dialogue which is nothing but political or social window-dressing”⁸⁹. Like Freire, they insist that a liberatory dialogue should result in action because “dialogue that remains forever on the level of theory, discussions and exchange of ideas cannot be called meaningful”⁹⁰.

4.3.2.8. Targeting some Groups for Emancipatory Dialogue especially in Nigeria

We have selected important groups upon which emancipatory dialogue can be directed. Their choice is based on the principal role they can play in fostering peace and development in the region.

4.3.2.8.1. Learning to Live with Moslems

Much has already been said about Christian-Moslem conflictual relationship in this project. Given the long history of conflicts, wars, mistrust, mutual apathy, rivalry and even ‘enmity’ that have marked the relationship between the two religions for a very long time, one must recognise that there is no quick solution to the problem of peaceful co-existence between the two religions⁹¹. But inspired by our study of dialogue and its power, we shall make the following propositions.

⁸⁶ CBCN, *The Jubilee and National Reconciliation*, in P. SCHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 413.

⁸⁷ BISHOPS OF SUDAN, *The Family of God the Father on a Journey Toward Justice, Peace and Reconciliation*, in S. MUYEBE and A. MUYEBE, op. cit., p. 138.

⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 138.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹¹ Unlike in the past centuries where the world was divided into Christian and Islamic worlds, today Christians and Moslems live together in the same family, same community and same country. No matter how difficult this task may be, it has become imperative given that adherents of the two faith must find a way of fostering solidarity between them.

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The first step for fostering Christian-Moslem relationship is that there should be improved education for mutual understanding between the two religions. This is where Paulo Freire's emphasis on conscientization becomes very relevant. Experts agree today that, "uniformed or erroneous views about the other, be they conscious or unconscious, are at the root of many problems plaguing Christian-Muslim relationship"⁹². This means that Christians and Moslems must overcome the ignorance of the past, forget the injustices of the other times, and renew their knowledge and appreciation of one another⁹³. There is need to make intentional effort to *unlearn* some of what we *presume* we know about Islam as well as study emphatically the religious faith and traditions of Islam⁹⁴. This is also the challenge Muslims must accept about the Christian faith⁹⁵. Through enlightened faith, the adherents of the two faiths could realise that their differences do not undermine the common humanity they share in common, and that the image of one God presented by names is present in the other⁹⁶. This is indeed the starting point for other commitments.

Secondly, there should be improved opportunities for dialogue between the two faiths both on the official, community and personal levels. This is dialogical *encounter*. Through personal contact and mutual respect, peaceful co-existence could be fostered. The special values that the Islamic faith brings into the society should be appreciated so that Moslems can be seen as partners in progress and not enemies. Such positive, but challenging attitude will help Christians avoid the fatal pitfall of identifying all Muslims with Islamic fundamentalists.

⁹² C. KIMBALL, op. cit., p. 107.

⁹³ Cf. B. BORRMANS (collection), *Interreligious Documents 1, Guidelines for Dialogue Between Christians and Moslems*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Paulist Press, New York, 1990, p. 113.

⁹⁴ And to do this, there is need for the two religions to educate themselves on the doctrines and traditions of each other. This especially is to help dispel the instinctive distrust and prejudice that characterise their relationships. Areas of convergence between the two religions could be a good starting point.

⁹⁵ Christians should appreciate the presence of Muslims in their territory as well as weigh the degree of their influences in the given community. In the spirit of dialogue, and as means of dialogue, Christians should be sensitive to the norms and sensibilities of their Moslem counterparts so as to avoid provoking some avoidable issues of contention. The values that the two religions hold in common like their common foundation in the faith of Abraham could be a good starting point.

⁹⁶ Cf. A. J. HESCHEL, *No Religion is an Island, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis, New York, 1991, p. 8.

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Thirdly, since charity is an important value for Christians and Moslems, it could become a meeting point for the two faiths. The adherents of the two religions could mutually get involved in various charity projects in service of the poor in the areas where they find themselves together⁹⁷. Issues of common concern like poverty-related matters of hunger, unemployment, homelessness, exploitation by both Christian and Moslem elite, etc. could bring different communities of faith together. In Nigeria, given the role that sports is playing in fostering national unity today, sports competitions could be used on community and national levels as a means of further improving the relationship.

Fourthly, Christians should not just see dialogue with Moslems as a strategy for maintaining a (fragile) peace. They should equally not see dialogue as a strategy for proselyting⁹⁸. However, they should in a deep sense of respect for others' belief see such encounter as an opportunity to show the Christian values of respect, tolerance and love. Of special concern should be the condition of women. Often African women suffer double oppression, first from many traditional practices, and secondly under some Islamic practices. The way Christians respect women by according them equal status and dignity with men, encouraging them to participate actively in public life, seeking elective government offices, reaching the heights of academic excellence in the country, could impact positively on their Moslem counterparts in the long run.

Finally, Paulo Freire has helped us appreciate that there are possible dangers in dialogue if not well undertaken. Christians should therefore be educated in the principles of practicing dialogue. Dialogue should not be seen as an act of cowardice, but rather as a heroic act of love, courage and wisdom. Christians should be ready to defend themselves and their beliefs in the face of any provocation. And Christians should always see

⁹⁷ The Islamic theology of charity is complex. Although Moslems are called to love especially their fellow Moslems, they are nonetheless commanded to express their faith through charity also. And this charity can be directed to any of God's creatures. We can summarise their doctrine on charity thus: "*En Islam la charité s'impose seulement parce qu'elle est un commandement de Dieu; il faut aimer son prochain parce qu'il faut obéir à Dieu et celui qui n'aimerait pas son prochain ne serait pas 'soumis' obéissant à Dieu*" (C. EHLINGER (ed.), *François Varillon, Un Chrétien devant les grandes religions*, Paris, Bayard Editions/Centurion, 1995, p. 64).

⁹⁸ Dialogue in this sense should be seen as the praxis of the missionary vocation of the Church not so much as to *convert*, as to *announce* (cf. *L'évolution des modèles missionnaires*, an interview with J. MASSON in, H. DERROITTE and C. SOETENS, op. cit., p. 127).

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dialogue and reconciliation in a comprehensive way so that prayer is never neglected⁹⁹. This is important because such prayer is a confession that reconciliation and healing cannot be perfectly achieved by human effort alone, they are God's gifts¹⁰⁰.

4.3.2.8.2. Catholics and Other Christians¹⁰¹

If the Nigerian society is to work in solidarity for helping the poor today, then there is need for improved relationship between Christians of various denominations in the country¹⁰². According to Nigerian bishops, "ecumenical dialogue is the basis for cooperation in economic, political, social and religious dimensions of our country"¹⁰³. While Christians and Moslems often engage in open and direct confrontation that is often violent, different groups of Christians in Nigeria live in a more insidious antagonism. The Catholic bishops of Nigeria describe the situation: "Lack of charity and humility has characterized the relation between Christian Churches whose pre-occupations have been the winning of converts"¹⁰⁴. The establishment of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to promote unity and cooperation among all Nigerian Christians has not brought much change¹⁰⁵. So today, various religious leaders could, through dialogue, share pastoral duties and responsibilities. Above all, they can work in solidarity *for* and *with* the poor to enhance their conditions¹⁰⁶.

⁹⁹ Dialogue should be presented as an encounter between peoples made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Perceived in this way, dialogical encounter should include, issues of forgiveness, prayers, reconciliation and healing. Interdenominational activities should be encouraged as part of the praxis of dialogue

¹⁰⁰ Cf. J. MATTHEY, *Reconciliation as God's Mission, Church as Reconciling Community*, in *Theology Digest*, Vol. 52, no. 2, 2005, p. 111.

¹⁰¹ Technically, this type of dialogical encounter is called ecumenical dialogue. But the general experience is that understood formally, such dialogue tends to be too formal and bears all the marks of anti-dialogical dispositions like suspicion, manipulation and the desire to conquer. So we are discussing dialogue here less from the doctrinal emphasis and more as an encounter between followers of Christ who share the same Kingdom values like peace, justice and love.

¹⁰² Formally Catholics and Anglicans were the two main Christian groups in the country. But today a lot of Independent Churches have sprung up. They can no longer be ignored in any project of dialogue in the country. Such cooperation is needed in the spirit of Vatican II so as to banish the traditional resentments, mistrust and unfounded fear of syncretism (cf. G. THILS, *Syncretisme ou catholicité*, Tournai, Casterman, 1967, p. 149).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, no. 244.

¹⁰⁴ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *Church in Nigeria, Family of God on Mission...*, no. 245,

¹⁰⁵ Much of their activities have actually remained on the theoretical and official levels thus failing to touch the lives of the ordinary Christians.

¹⁰⁶ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *op. cit.*, no. 247. In some parts of Nigeria where there is a true ecumenical spirit, various Catholic pious associations like the Legion of Mary, St. Vincent the Poor

4.3.2.8.3. Government, the Church and Dialogue: A Difficult but Necessary Task

Perhaps the most difficult area which the Church will encounter challenges is in seeking to dialogue with the governments and the political class. From Freire, we realise that anti-dialogical dispositions including manipulation are rampant among the political office holders. The idea that politics is a 'dirty game' should not be used as an excuse for shying away from engaging the ruling class in sincere and effective dialogue. Through her principal agencies like the Justice and Peace Commission and as National Episcopal Conference, the Church could dialogue with the various tiers of government in the region. Through such dialogue, the Church would not just be playing her role as a 'prophet' who denounces evil, but also acting as 'Mother and Teacher'¹⁰⁷.

Encouraging and engaging the government in dialogue could serve a number of purposes. First it could become a forum for fostering the conscientization of the ruling class so that they bring more morality into politics. Again such dialogical encounters could help in abetting the politics of violence and assassination of political opponents as is rampant in some countries like Nigeria. Through such dialogue, the Church can present herself as institution that transcends the ever present problem of tribalism that occasion nepotism and favouritism, the bane of the continent. The Church in Black Africa can play a role in fostering liberating dialogue and reconciliation after the example of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the post-Apartheid Peace and Reconciliation Commission, in South Africa¹⁰⁸.

So today, the Church in Black Africa could influence the government and lawmakers to encourage research on dialogue, crisis prevention and management. Above all, the Church as a moral agent, should through dialogue remind the ruling class that the fundamental basis for lasting peace and stability is the practice of social justice. Through justice, the poor and the minorities are treated as Subjects and not objects of political and

Society, the Charismatic Renewal Movement, Madonna Mercy Family etc., do join non-Catholic faithful to help the most needy of their communities.

¹⁰⁷ In Africa the effort to promote dialogue is often frustrated by many totalitarian and dictatorial governments in the sub-region.

¹⁰⁸ Apart from South Africa, the Church in Congo has also played a historical role in fostering peace in that country. Dialogue eventually helped to minimise the tension between the government of Mobutu and the Catholic Church (cf. M. DEPAEPE, op. cit., p. 43).

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economic exploitation and manipulation to win elections¹⁰⁹. Apart from using dialogue to prevent or manage crisis, dialogue could also be used in other liberatory roles. Such areas including dialoguing for better working condition for the citizens, dialoguing for equitable distribution of national resources and so on.

Coming to the global level, effective dialogue is also needed urgently. It could be used to address such issues as debt-cancellation, negotiating for equitable trade conditions, bilateral relationships between nations, immigration matters. Others include foreign interferences in some parts of Africa, illegal sale of arms and so on. Through dialogue aimed at raising awareness, developing nations will impress it on the international community that some of these issues facing the poor countries could eventually affect the rest of the world. Here the international dimension of social justice like equitable distribution of the earth's resources should be part of this enlarged dialogue¹¹⁰. If the government could use its various organs like the media to promote the culture of dialogue, one can be optimistic that violence, intolerance, wars and other forms anti-dialogical activities in the continent can give way to a more stable Black Africa. This is a pre-requisite in the war against poverty.

4.3.2.8.4. Dialogue with the Poor and the Oppressed

Perhaps the most important contribution of Paulo Freire to the theory of dialogue is his insistence that every human being has an ontological worth and should be seen as 'Subject' and never an 'object'. This is why he maintains that in the classroom, on the political arena and in other forms of social life, the oppressed and the poor should be included in emancipatory and empowering dialogue. According to him this is the greatest expression of love, respect and recognition of the dignity of the poor. Dialogue is not just an abstract exercise, but is essentially a means of establishing a relation and an encounter characterised by love and respect¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁹ Only a more equitable distribution of national projects, a more transparent system of governance and more concern for the poorer citizens in the country can motivate the people to creative dialogue.

¹¹⁰ According Arinze, 20% of humanity consumes 80% of the earth's resources, leaving only 20% to four-fifths of humanity. Certain rich countries restrain food production for the sake of balancing market prices, while there are poor countries whose inhabitants do not have enough to eat (cf. F. ARINZE, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue...*, p. 26).

¹¹¹ Cf. D. LOCHHEAD, *The Dialogical Encounter: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, in C. KIMBALL, op. cit., p. 86.

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So today in Africa, the Church has to emphasize that one of her primary vocations is to engage in the mission of *presence*. This presence is to be enhanced by dialogue between the Church and the poorest of the poor in the society. Through dialogical encounter, the Church will understand better the language and agony of the poor before embarking on any project with, and for them. Dialoguing *with* the poor is the prerequisite for dialoguing *for* the poor. Thus those who propose dialogue must first be those who listen to the voice of the voiceless. This type of dialogue could take the form of counseling and motivation. This is because apart from their material needs, the poorest of the poor are also victims of emotional destitution and often social stigmatization¹¹². Dialoguing with the poor could take many forms like counseling and listening to hear their own version of the story. Many of them actually may be responsible for their woes. Through conscientization, they can change some habits, cultural practices and mentalities that contribute to their destitution.

4.3.2.8.5. Dialogue as an Encounter with the Other

Apart from the collective level, we equally need to intensify dialogue on the personal level in an effort to root out the causes of oppression, exploitation and conflict. This could be done in areas of interpersonal relationships like the family, mixed marriages, celebration of local feasts, inter-faith celebrations. It could also take the form of doing business together, establishing community projects and focusing on services to the poor, the sick and the marginalised of the community. Through dialogue the pastors of souls could sensitize groups and individuals on their responsibility to the needy persons in their midst. In Africa where many communities are divided and wounded by conflict, dialogue could assume a more reconciliatory character. This will involve a process of purification of memories, prayers, forgiveness of sins both on the personal and structural levels. These dispositions are nourished by the fact that for Christians, God is the ultimate source of reconciliation¹¹³.

¹¹² The example of Jesus who personally encountered the sick, the social outcasts and other poor persons, should be a model for this type of dialogical encounter. Through such dialogical encounters the poor could be encouraged to change their attitudes and conditions that cause or perpetrate their poverty. To know that every life is a history will help us to treat the poor as individuals and not as a *mass* of people.

¹¹³ Despite the specific groups chosen above, one realises that there are other interest groups that could be involved in the dialogical process. Thus the media, business people, NGOs, social movements, trade

4.3.2.9. Other Important Remarks and Challenges for Dialogue

We have considered dialogue from various dimensions and seen especially Freire's theory of dialogue. We must admit that dialogue is not always easy and possible, yet with D. Dorr, we maintain that it remains a powerful tool in dealing with the challenges discussed. From his long experience as a missionary, educationist and influential scholar in Africa, D. Dorr underscores the importance of dialogue in a region like Black Africa because,

dialogue serves the function of ensuring that the opposition is not cut off; it ensures that the structures which seek to promote the common good do not become too restrictive. It is essentially important in a situation characterised by militancy, since it can help the participants to eliminate purely personal attitudes and preferences, and enable them to agree on what is objectively required. In this way the opposition, can at the same time contribute to a deepening of human solidarity¹¹⁴.

And since the Church has been presented as principal agent for fostering liberating dialogue in Black Africa¹¹⁵, we shall end by noting a few more areas where much more needs to be done.

First, the Church should learn more about the nature of dialogue as well as its praxis as tool of solidarity and reconciliation¹¹⁶. Secondly, the Church should work in solidarity with other stakeholders in the region in promoting dialogue. Here the government, various religious bodies, civil liberty groups, Non-Governmental Organisation, the media, schools and educationists should be co-opted in drawing relevant programmes for enhancing dialogue.

Another challenge is that there should be relevant organs in the parishes, dioceses and even on the inter-diocesan levels for the promotion of dialogue. While the Vatican has a Secretariat for promoting dialogue, many dioceses and parishes have not seen the need

unions, diplomats and local communities and their leaders, cannot be ignored. It is the realisation of this complex situation that makes the call for dialogue in Nigeria, and Africa in general difficult but urgent task.

¹¹⁴ D. DORR, *Option for the Poor, A Hundred Years of...*, p. 305.

¹¹⁵ Cf. M. A. NWOSU, *The Role of Dialogue in Resolving Religious Conflicts in Our Country*, in *THE LEADER*, Vol. XLII, no. 19. October 2001, p. 18.

¹¹⁶ This could be done in a number of ways like organising seminars and lectures on the role of dialogue in a society. Dialogue could be made part of the curriculum in the seminaries and other ecclesiastical institutions in the region.

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for such organ on the grassroot level. This is a big omission since the real problem of dialogue and conflict is often perceived on the grassroot levels. Such dialogue will not only focus on the religious dimension, but should also serve as conflict-prevention and management between people of various tribes, languages, creeds and interests within a region. And the culture of dialogue should be allowed to blossom to replace the culture of hatred, division, distrust and violence in the region. This is the foundation of real healing and reconciliation¹¹⁷.

And on the academic level, African theologians especially, have a big challenge facing them. There is need for more research into the nature of dialogue, and in particular, the type of dialogue that can address specific African problem of conflict and its attendant consequence, poverty. An effective theoretical framework like that of Freire is needed as a guide. His theory could be adapted in specific African contexts together with the African traditional ways of reconciliatory dialogue. Its essential elements which include mutual love, humility, faith and trust must be mastered. The obstacles described by Freire as antidiological dispositions and actions should be anticipated. Today, the sentiment of many Black Africans can be summarised thus:

We want dialogue now, and the dialogue must be now so that we can save the Niger Delta, so that we can save Nigeria, so that we can save West Africa, and we can be a blessing to Africa. And we will be telling the international community, proving them wrong, that the only thing that comes out of Africa is war, poverty, disease and so on¹¹⁸.

By way of criticism, we shall end by admitting that dialogue has its own limitations. For instance, dialogue may not always be possible at all times and circumstances. Dialogue cannot be forced on those who refuse to engage in it. Sometimes dialogue comes as a last resort after much damage has been done. And dialogue takes time and may require some

¹¹⁷ Cf. U. J. UGWU, *Key Note Address* presented to the Bishops of English-speaking West Africa on, 26th August 2001, at Enugu-Nigeria, in AECAWA Secretariat Publications, *The Church as Agent of Reconciliation and Social Transformation*, 2002, see esp. pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁸ This is actually the statement by a civil liberty organization called *Joint Action Committee on Nigeria* (JACON). They insist that national dialogue and reconciliation is needed to address especially, the problem of conflicts and social injustice both in Nigeria and other African countries (cf. O. DOUGLAS, *We Want Dialogue Now*, in *Africa Today, The Voice of the Continent*, (Nigerian edition), Vol. 6. no. 2. February 2000, p. 35).

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expertise to be effective. For these and other reasons, we shall examine other complementary strategies for tackling poverty in the region.

Since concrete transformation requires concrete action, we shall now study the theory of *Cultural Action* which is Freire' theory of nonviolence.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSFORMATIVE CULTURAL ACTION AS NONVIOLENCE

My rebellion against every kind of discrimination, from the most explicit and the crying to the most covert and hypocritical, which is no less offensive and immoral, has been with me from my childhood. Since as far back as I can remember, I have reacted almost instinctively against any word, deed or sign of racial discrimination, or for that matter, discrimination against the poor, which, quite a bit later, I came to define as a class of discrimination¹

4. 4. 0. Preamble

Throughout this work, we have maintained that conflict and political ignorance are some of the main troubles with Black Africa. In typical Black African region, people are either nonchalant in participating in the socio-political arena or they take up arms to express their grievances. But some historical events have shown that there is a way of expressing one's opinions as strongly as democratically. Over the years therefore some individuals and groups have achieved some social reforms without actually going to war as is rampant in Black Africa today. Although their goals and historical epochs may differ, their method of confronting social injustice tend to be similar. Today their philosophies and methodologies have come under the name of nonviolent engagement. We shall explain further why we are considering such action an important strategy in tackling extreme poverty in Black Africa. Some of the main theories of nonviolence will be presented with emphasis on Paulo Freire's type of nonviolent commitment, and social participation for the liberation and humanisation of an oppressed people.

4.4.1. Nonviolence/Cultural Action as a Principle of Theology of Solidarity

A number of reasons prompted us to propose nonviolence as one of the principles for the praxis of solidarity.

First in a continent marked by a high rate of conflicts, violence and constant war, which aggravate poverty, it is only reasonable that all options for dealing with these unrests should be tried. We have earlier proposed and discussed dialogue as an option. But since many actors in the conflicts are not always ready for dialogue resulting in more unrest, nonviolence is therefore presented not as a substitute for dialogue but its complement. The overall aim of every authentic nonviolence engagement is to persuade the 'opponent' and oppressors to negotiate solution through dialogue. In this case therefore nonviolence becomes another perspective of fostering peace, an attempt to overcome violence itself.

¹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of Hope* ..., p. 144.

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By presenting nonviolence as a way of life and not just an organised action for collective protest, we should be laying a foundation for a more tolerant society where people could accept and respect differences. Although nonviolent engagement for social transformation may have its own deficiencies as we shall see later, it is nonetheless preferable to guerrilla warfare and other forms of open arms hostility as is rampant in many African countries. We are arguing that if dialogue and the principles of nonviolent agitation were known and practiced, many of such hostilities described above could be averted. Nonviolent resistance will thus ensure that both the end and means of promoting the Kingdom of God could make reconciliation, healing and solidarity with the poor easier.

The second reason for proposing nonviolent option in Africa is that in a context where the government and other law-makers themselves do not respect the rule of law, it may take the citizens to remind them to do so in a civilised way through nonviolence. For instance a government that holds that all its citizens are equal and yet women, minorities, disable persons and political opponents are constantly marginalized should be reminded of the contradiction between the values of equality and the actual practice of the same². This explains why most of the nonviolent movements in history are carried out by people at the margin of the society. In Nigeria for instance, the Christian minorities in some parts of the country are subjected to various forms of oppression including compliance to 'Sharia Law', and yet the Nigerian constitution holds that the country is a 'secular' State³.

The third reason why nonviolence resistance is advocated is that it is a democratic act. If government decisions which are considered unjust are not protested, then the system can

² A host of 'silenced groups' could use nonviolence as a medium of making their voices heard. These include the terminally sick, HIV/AIDS patients, disabled persons without social security. Others are refugees considered and treated without dignity, woman especially widows, who are brutalised under inhuman cultural practices. Others are children who are trafficked for money and forced into child labour. The Christian minority who are labouring under the burden of imposed Islamic laws could react nonviolently to register their protest.

³ *Sharia Law* is Islamic code of law derived from the Koran and from the teachings and example of Mohammed. Although it should be applicable to Muslims, the fact that religion and politics are interwoven in Islam makes this law to affect non-Muslims. And *secular state* is where religious liberty is practiced and no particular religion is regarded as a State religion.

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no longer be called democratic in the real sense of it. So nonviolent actions could be an effective avenue for citizens to express their freedom of speech and freedom of assembly as enshrined in most democratic constitutions. Nonviolent actions could equally signal to duly elected government the grievances of the masses. In a world where public opinion plays a major role, such actions could equally help to government to perform better knowing that the real power belongs to the people through the ballot box. Today, nonviolent action and ballot are two most powerful tools of the citizens in a democratic system. In a continent where corrupt elite embezzle public funds with impunity, the realisation that people could protest against such practices would serve as check to such obnoxious practices that tend to become culture in the continent today.

A fourth reason for proposing nonviolence in Africa is that despite its weakness, it has served as the bedrock of reform in many parts of the world. M. Ghandi used it successfully to end the British rule in India. He equally used it as a means of fighting the obnoxious caste system in India perceived as a superlative exhibition of man's inhumanity to man. Martin Luther King Jr. used it from a Christian perspective to foster the right and destinies of Black Americans. Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela and a host of other prisoners of conscience used it successful to dismantle the apartheid regime in South Africa. The Solidarity Movement has been used successfully to dismantle the Communist regime in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe. Mass protests have been used successfully in the overthrow of many corrupt and inept regimes in the Philippines, in Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution'. In Nigeria the Nigerian Labour Congress which is an umbrella for all the trade unions in the country has become the only voice of opposition to the government and the only voice of the voiceless masses.

The final reason for proposing nonviolence as a way of life in Africa is that there are some aspects of the African culture that seem to even encourage violence. We saw that in African traditional religion, fear has an important role to play. People seem to live in constant fear of the gods, sorcerers, witches, wizards and other forms of invisible forces. All these result in people seeing life as a constant *battle and warfare* in order to ward off these *enemy forces*. Today many religious sects and charismatic healers are exploiting this fear element to exploit the masses with the promise to offer them divine protection.

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As a matter of fact, many people have been rendered destitute by such obnoxious religious practices. Other practices that thrive on fear, psychological and moral violence include female circumcision and forced marriage. For Freire, these are dehumanising and so make people objects rather than masters of their destiny⁴.

As an anti-poverty strategy and as a principle of African theology of solidarity dialogue will help us to redress some of the elements of African culture that may contain some seeds of violence. In traditional Africa, the warrior is considered a hero and his/her greatness is measured by the number of conquests made. In a culture where people live in constant fear of the sorcerers, witches and wizards, people find themselves ever at war in order to ward off these forces. If the principles of nonviolence are properly inculcated into the people they will discover that life is not all about constant battle against visible and invisible forces⁵.

By proposing nonviolence as theological principle, we are at once throwing a challenge to Catholic theologians to help further develop the theme as an element of Catholic Social Teaching. This is necessary because, despite the landmark of Vatican II, “the Council does not give an answer, or any clear guidelines that would enable those people suffering from gross oppression to work out an answer”⁶. So nonviolent theory is an attempt at resolving the dilemma facing a Christian: Should the oppressed and the poor wait patiently for the rich and the oppressor to be converted, and to render them justice when and how it pleases them? Or are the oppressed morally and legally bound to confront the rich and powerful when necessary?

Above all these, nonviolence from a Christian perspective will help the Church in Africa to live out the gospel message of challenging injustice and oppression without personally hating the operators of the system. Indeed, nonviolence is an expression of heroic love as

⁴ Nonviolence as a way of life will equally help African men realise all the more that women have equal right and dignity with men. Women should not be coerced into doing what is against their will, especially in choosing marriage partners.

⁵ Many religious sects, new religious movements and charismatic healers are capitalising on these fears, and ignorance to further exploit the poor masses, who see their lives as constantly being threatened.

⁶ D. DORR, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

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lived and taught by Christ and as developed by Martin L. King and other Christian nonviolent actors.

4.4.2. The Nature of Nonviolence and Nonviolent Theory?

Etymologically the expression ‘nonviolence’ is a compound word derived from the French word, ‘non’ which can be translated ‘no’, ‘not’ or ‘none’ in English language; and ‘violence’ which in general can be described a deliberate act of aggression intended or not intended to cause injury to the other. It equally implies the use of physical, moral or psychological force as a means to achieve an end. So nonviolence refers to an active form of struggle that deliberately refuses the use of weapons or tactics that causes bodily, psychological or moral injury or even death to the opponent perceived as the perpetrator of evil. Nonviolence can equally be described as a strategic response aimed at resolving an oppressive and violent situation in a democratic way. Nonviolence aims at raising consciousness about a situation and seeking ways of changing the situation through the use of moral force.

Although there are different types of nonviolence, and nonviolent theories, our main focus here is on the nonviolent theories as propounded by the *Ghandian-King* tradition, especially, and as presented in Paulo Freire’s theory of ‘cultural action’⁷. These main traditions present nonviolence as a new approach to the principle of ‘pacifism’. Unlike ‘pacifism’ nonviolence embodies a diversity of techniques for waging social conflict without the use of violence. It also offers the underlying political and philosophical rationale for the use of these techniques. As ‘advanced pacifism’, nonviolence presents more concrete strategies for enforcing change that go beyond the normal institutionalised political actions like voting, lobbying and dialogue. It is like a kind of moral warfare designed to resist repression without the use of arms and without the intention to hurt the opponent nor seek retaliation against him.

⁷ In these main traditions, nonviolence is presented as a theory, philosophy or strategy for social reform. It is used not as an end itself, but rather as means for freeing oneself and others from given socio-political or economic conditions perceived to be oppressive.

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Known as a one of the main proponents of the theory of nonviolence, Martin Luther King explains that it as a method that can be used to *absorb* the violence that is inevitable in social change whenever deep-seated prejudices are challenged⁸. For King, nonviolence is not an unrealistic submission to evil power. It is a very stern love that would organise itself into collective action to right a wrong by taking on itself suffering. B. Irwin and G. Faison identify three main forms that nonviolence takes. The first is *protest and persuasion*, the second is *noncooperation* and the third is *intervention*⁹.

4.4.3. Nonviolent Action in Biblical Tradition and Catholic Social Teachings

Tracing the Biblical inspirations for understanding the theory of nonviolence is not an easy task¹⁰. But despite this difficulty, we can still cite some inspirational passages where non-violence was successfully ordered by God and used to achieve the desired effects. The two dimensions of non-violence civil-disobedience and actual confrontation are exemplified below.

⁸Cf. M. L. KING, *Our Struggle*, in J. M. WASHINGTON (ed.), *Martin Luther King Jr. I Have a Dream, Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, Harper Press, San Francisco, 1992, p. 12.

⁹Cf. B. IRWIN and G. FAISO, in D. H. ALBERT (ed.) *Why Nonviolence? Introduction and Strategy*, 2001, <http://www.vernalproject.org/Opapers/WhyNonviolence1.html>. A critical study of nonviolence engagement shows that there are two main strategies, the positive action and civil disobedience. Under positive action the protesters engage in activities that will attract attention to their cause. This could be in form of strikes where they withdraw their services to correct injustice, Teach-ins where they organise an event or series of events, including public hearings, lectures, panel discussions, theatrical presentations, showing of films, role-playing and scenario exercises and other educational techniques, to inform the public about a particular issue. Sometimes they organise prayer vigils, fasting, peaceful marches and demonstrations etc. The more organised and more consistent these are the more effective. The next technique is more of abstention, even though it has a positive/active element to it. This is technically called civil disobedience which involves the refusal to cooperate with a set of laws. The goal is not to provoke anarchy since the protesters obey every other law. They do not intend to humiliate the lawmakers and enforcers but to persuade them to come to the negotiation table. So care should be taken to ensure that the law contravened has direct relevance to the specific grievance in question. This is more effective if such a law considered obnoxious really affects the lives of many people who have been living under its yoke but had no outlet to express their displeasure. An example is the segregation laws in apartheid South Africa or the 'Sharia' Law that affects Christians in Northern Nigeria. This is the most difficult aspect of the nonviolent resistance since it often brings the protesters in direct collision with the government who invoke the force of 'law' to crush the opposition. Once again the sacrificial demand of nonviolent movement presents itself. Ghandi, Luther King and Mandela were victims of such civil disobedience to what they perceive as 'unjust' and 'oppressive laws' (cf. D. BARBE, *A Theology of Conflict and Other Writings on Nonviolence*, Orbis Books, New York, 1985, p. 80).

¹⁰ The difficulty implied in such a task stems from the fact there are many cases of recorded killings and even wars that were even authorised by God. See for example the killing of the first born children in the book of Exodus as a means of forcing Pharaoh to let Israel leave Egypt (cf. Ex. 12:29).

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4.4.3.1 Nonviolence some Old Testament Texts

As civil disobedience, the Egyptian midwives refused to obey the law of killing Hebrew male children (cf. Ex. Chapters one and two). Thanks to this disobedience, the life of Moses was spared. And again, in the book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship idol despite the civil pressure on them. They declared defiantly: "We want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Dan 3:17,18).

As actual confrontation with those who perpetrate injustice, the encounter between prophet Nathan and King David is an example (cf. 2 Samuel 12). The background to this confrontation was that king David committed adultery with Bathseba when her husband, Uriah, was fighting in David's army. And to make things worse, David wanted to cover the injustice up by planning, and occasioning the death of Uriah, who was sent to the front lines of the battle where he was killed. With that done, Bathseba assumed a widow status and so could legally and morally become one of David's wives. Being so powerful, no one could condemn the king¹¹. It is at this juncture that prophet Nathan received the mission to confront King David (cf. 2 Sam. 12). In a very subtle way, Nathan told the story of the rich man who spared his many flock only to kill the only sheep belonging to one of his subjects. The result of this confrontation led King David to realise his misdeeds and especially how, instead of promoting justice he was actually perverting it¹². The purpose of these cases of civil disobedience is to repudiate any law that threatens those it is meant to protect¹³.

¹¹ The Prophet Nathan appears three times in the so-called 'historical books', twice in the Second Book of Samuel and once in the First Book of Kings. In the first appearance he told David to carry on with the building of the proposed temple but later he discouraged the king saying that God did not really require a house (cf. 2 Sam. 7). The second encounter he had with king David is more dramatic and confrontational where he confronts him with the double injustice of adultery and murder of an innocent subject he was to protect. In the third appearance Nathan is presented as being instrumental to the planning of the anointment of Solomon as David's successor (cf. 1 Kgs. 1).

¹² This story aroused David's conscience and his anger. It reminded him of his poor background, his job of keeping flock before he was exalted to the throne. The story reminded him of the difference between a 'butcher' and a 'shepherd' and his divine mission to protect his people. In his indignation, David shouted that the man who has done this injustice should die. The prophet seized the opportunity to confront the king; "But you are the man" (2 Sam. 12: 7). The prophet announced God's plans to address the injustice (cf. v. 11). And this led to the repentance of the king who confessed "I have sinned against the Lord"(v. 13).

¹³ Cf. D. BARBE, op.cit., p. 80.

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In the New Testament, the Gospel has a number of instances where Jesus was facing confrontations or he was confronting other people or situations. Space allows us to cite some of these pericopes without elaborating on them.

4.4.3.2. Non-violence in some New Testament Texts

Jesus became incarnate in a conflict-ridden society. But he commanded his followers to love their enemies. And he introduced into the ocean of violence in which he was immersed the pure water of 'active nonviolence'. This is a spirit and a method with the potential of creating new relationships among God's human creatures; relationships of truth and justice, and a communion of sisters and brothers¹⁴.

At the time of Jesus many groups existed in Israel waiting for, or working for the coming of the decisive reign of God. The *Zealots* believed that the holiness that will usher in the reign of God could only be achieved by expelling the Romans who were impure and adulterous occupiers. The *Essenes* believed that living the life of grace was impossible in the society of their time, so they withdrew from society and went into the wilderness. The *Pharisees* deemed themselves the 'separated ones', trying to live a life of holiness and purity in a very higher standard. Added to these religious groups were the political forces especially those of the occupying Rome and their allies at the heart of Israel. It was in the midst of these various forces and tensions that Jesus came with the Kingdom message. And all these inevitably affected the tone of his message as well as the disposition of its recipients¹⁵.

So the evangelists present the ministry of Christ as that marked by incessant confrontations. On the spiritual dimension we saw that the Kingdom preached by Jesus was in opposition to the Kingdom of Satan. The temptations and the exorcisms are typical examples (cf. Mtt. 4, Lk. 4: 1-12). When Jesus went to his native town of Nazareth, he was faced with confrontation and rejection (cf. Mtt. 13: 54-58, Mk. 6: 1-5). The Pharisees and the Scribes confronted him many times (cf. Mtt. 15: 1-20);). Jesus

¹⁴ Cf. A. S. BERNADINO, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

¹⁵ Cf. M. AMALADOSS, *Life in Freedom, Liberation Theologies from Asia*, Orbis, New York, 1997, p. 18.

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confronted the cities where he performed miracles for refusing to repent (cf. Lk. 10: 13-16). Peter confronted Jesus for speaking openly about his death, and Jesus retorted in a confrontational rebuke to Peter calling him Satan (cf. Mk. 8: 31-35). Jesus even confronted his death with courage, foretelling it a number of times and marching decisively to Jerusalem to face it (cf. Mk. 8: 31; Mk. 9: 31; Mk. 10: 33).

When he was arrested, he refused that the apostles should save him by the violence of the sword (Mtt. 26:52-56). Nonviolently, he confronted Judas for betraying him with a kiss (cf. Lk. 22: 47; cf. Mtt. 26:5). He confronted Peter for denying him three times (cf. Lk. 22: 61). Jesus confronted the soldier who slapped him during the passion demanding explanation for his action (cf. Jn. 18: 23). He confronted Pilate during his judgment reminding Pilate that he had no power even over him (cf. Jn. 19: 11). As a form of civil disobedience, Jesus insisted that any law such as that of Sabbath that ceases to serve human needs and God's glory should not be obeyed (cf. Mark 2:27).

Jesus equally prepared the apostolic community for confronting the menace of the various authorities that would threaten them after his death. To his followers he admonished: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt 5:11,12). The predictions of Jesus came true soon after his death as the civil and religious authorities went after them. They were not deterred from preaching the Goodnews and promoting justice in the midst of incessant beatings, imprisonments and other forms of persecutions (cf. Acts 5: 40). Peter urged believers to resist unjust laws and to obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29). And a St. Paul says, "we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance" (Rom 5:3).

4.4.3.3. Nonviolence: Inspirations from Catholic Social Teaching

From the time of the *Persecutions*, *Inquisition* and *Crusades*, one can say that violence has never been far from the history of the Church¹⁶. But in the course of time, the Church

¹⁶ Persecutions refer to the totality of the violent acts meted out for the Christians in the early years of the Church. It included arrests, imprisonments, and other forms of psychological and physical torture including execution. Inquisition refers to the official persecution of those considered heretics by the Catholic Church.

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came to realise that fostering peace in the world is a fundamental Kingdom value without which her evangelising mission will be ineffective¹⁷. So today one can say that the Church is a champion for peace. *Pacem in Terris* and *Gaudium et spes* are important ecclesial documents on peace. Indeed today, the Church is developing a systematic body of teaching that can address the various social challenges facing the world today among which is world peace. This body of teachings which are inspired by the Scripture, Magisterial documents and theological insights are now referred to as Catholic Social Teaching.

Perhaps one of the challenges facing Catholic Social Teaching is how to strike the balance between fostering social justice while maintaining the Kingdom value of peace. This is to say that even though the Church desires peace, she has not taken a purely 'pacifists' position in her social doctrines. Although the Church has not developed her own theory of non-violence, one can find in some official ecclesial documents, some of the expressions that are associated with theories of nonviolence. These expressions include, '*Participation*', '*Action*', '*Struggle*' and '*Liberation*'¹⁸

According to D. Dorr, one can say that it was right from the publication of *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII (1879), that some of these expressions began to appear in official Church documents. According to Dorr, the pontiff saw the need for active resistance by workers in the face of the exploitation and dehumanising conditions that many of them were victims. That workers have a right to form trade unionism and embark in industrial action (strike) became a turning point in the social teaching of the Church. For Dorr, this was revolutionary because, "the development of the trade union

They had special ecclesial courts and were formally constituted by the papacy in the 13th century. Crusades were military operations launched during the middle ages to defend the Church against Moslems (cf. E. PETERS, *Inquisition*, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 122-123).

¹⁷ On the First Sunday of Lent, 12th March 2000, in St. Peter's Square in Rome, Pope John Paul II made a public confession of the 'sins' of the sons and daughters of the Church through the centuries. Among the sins mentioned included the crusades, the inquisition and other forms of violence and infringed on people in the course of evangelisation (cf. J. U. NJOKU, *Solidarity and Collaboration without Boundaries: Shifts in the Social Teachings of Pope John Paul II*, in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol. 17, 2005, p. 66).

¹⁸ Although found in some documents of the Church, these expressions are used in nonviolent sense. They do not suggest an endorsement of warfare or the use of means considered 'immoral' to bring about change.

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movement in Western countries in this century indicates how effectively society can be changed by their action”¹⁹

Since *Rerum Novarum*, other official documents have appeared that can offer guides to Catholics who seek to maintain peace while promoting justice in the world through creative nonviolent engagement.

4.4.3.3.1. Nonviolence and Civil Participation in some Magisterial Documents

Let every person examine themselves, to see what they have done up to now, and what they ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action²⁰.

In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII explains that Catholic principles must be put into *concrete action*. He then enumerates the three stages which include seeing, judging and especially *acting*. Without *action* therefore all pastoral engagements remain merely theoretical²¹. One of the ways of acting therefore is by participating actively in government²². For Paul VI, *action* on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel. Such action should aim at the redemption of the human race from every oppressive situation²³. The Pope insists that harbingers of the Christian message of love must commit themselves to concrete transformative actions without which the Christian message of justice and solidarity will not be credible to the people of our times²⁴.

For the Pontiff, participation constitutes a right, and an obligation on the followers of Christ as they foster the Kingdom values. The purpose of this participation is to help in the liberation effort that will usher in a new humanity. God is the model of this liberation project and so calls on believers to follow suit. According to him,

¹⁹ D. DORR, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

²⁰ PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 48.

²¹ JOHN XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, no. 236.

²² Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 73.

²³ Cf. PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 35.

in the Old Testament God reveals himself to us a liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor, demanding from people faith in him and justice towards neighbour. It is only in the observance of these duties of justice that God is truly recognised as the liberator of the oppressed²⁵.

The Pope admonishes believers to *courageously* and consistently denounce injustice, with charity, prudence and firmness in sincere dialogue towards a more just society²⁶. Indeed for Paul VI, recourse to such resistance is always 'a grave temptation'²⁷, in 'situations whose injustice cries to heaven'²⁸.

Perhaps it is John Paul II more than his predecessors who came to realise that active social participation and solidarity do not exclude radical actions. He came to be known as the one who "supported the struggles against oppression in Eastern Europe and Central Europe..."²⁹. His experience in his native Poland greatly influenced his teaching on the nature and importance of Catholic action³⁰. Going further than Pius XII and Paul VI, John Paul II introduced the concepts of *class* and *struggle* into official Catholic documents³¹. According to the Pope, "Catholic social teaching does not see unions as reflecting only a 'class' structure, and even less as engaged in a 'class' struggle. They are indeed engaged in the *struggle* for social justice, but this is a struggle for the common good, and not against others". He argues: "Even if in controversial questions the struggle takes on a character of opposition toward others, this is because it aims at the good of social justice, not for the sake of "struggle" or in order to eliminate the opponent"³².

He recalls the "need for solidarity movements among and with the workers"³³. He justifies the use of strike in accordance with Catholic teachings and encourages workers

²⁵ Ibid., no. 30.

²⁶ Cf. Ibid. no. 57.

²⁷ Cf. PAUL VI, *P. P.* no. 30

²⁸ Cf. Ibid., no. 30

²⁹ U. J. NJOKU, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

³⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 61.

³¹ For D. Dorr, John Paul II's concept of 'solidarity' can be interpreted to mean 'class struggle' (cf. D. DORR, *op. cit.*, p. 245)

³² JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 20. Since he sees the trade unions as the example of the champions of these 'struggles', the pope explains that the purpose of unions is not simply to defend the existing wages and prerogatives of the fraction of workers who belong to them. It is also to enable workers to make positive and creative contributions to the firm, the community, and the larger society in an organised and cooperative way.

³³ Cf. Ibid. no. 8.

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to use it legitimately to defend themselves and society. Despite the apparent radical position of the Pope on the issue of strikes and other such actions that the workers can take. He reminds his readers that it only by such heroic solidarity that the Church can show herself really a Church that cares for the marginalized, and truly a 'church of the poor'.³⁴ The Pope seems to be aware that his position in this document may seem too radical in traditional Catholic sense. This is because the concept of *struggle* has generally become associated with Marxism. So he justifies his use of the concept of 'struggle' by stating that "it is right to struggle against an unjust economic system that does not uphold the priority of the human being over capital and land"³⁵. He calls on Christians to become really engaged in transformative action, and warns believers that "the struggle between good and evil will continue as long as time lasts"³⁶.

On the local scene, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, have through their teachings and actions been calling for effective action to combat injustice in the country. These actions, they insist must be based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. After the civil war in the country, in 1972, they called on all Christians to become active participants and catalysts for the reconstruction of the country³⁷. They challenged the military dictators that overthrew constitutionally elected leaders, and called on all citizens to become active players in resisting the military rule³⁸. For them, it was not just enough to denounce evils of the society from the margin, Christians should join politics to help usher in a more just society³⁹. The bishops equally confronted the ruling elite, warning

³³ One method used by the unions in pursuing the just rights of their members is *the strike* or work stoppage, as a kind of ultimatum to the competent bodies, especially the employers. This method is recognized by Catholic social teaching as legitimate under proper conditions and within just limits. In this connection workers should be assured the *right to strike*, without being subjected to personal penal sanctions for taking part in a strike. We should remark here that while admitting that it is a legitimate means, a strike remains, in a sense, an extreme means. It *must not be abused*, especially for "political" purposes. Furthermore it must never be forgotten that, when essential community services are in question, they must in every case be ensured, if necessary by means of appropriate legislation. Abuse of the strike weapon can paralyse the whole of socio-economic life, and this is contrary to the requirements of the common good of society, which also corresponds to the properly understood nature of work itself. It is the above understanding of the morality of strike action that led Vatican II to describe it as "a necessary, although ultimate instrument for the defence of workers' rights..." (GS, no. 68).

³⁴ Cf. Ibid., no. 8.

³⁵ Ibid. no. 35.

³⁶ Ibid. no. 25.

³⁷ Cf. CBCN, *The Church and Nigerian Social Problems*, in P. SCHNINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 58.

³⁸ Cf. CBCN, *Civic and Political Responsibility of the Christian*, in ibid., p. 91.

³⁹ Cf. CBCN, *Nigerian Elections 1983, Joint Pastoral Letter of Catholic Bishops*, 1983, no. 10.

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them that the continued condition of oppression of the people could give rise to legitimate uprising in the form of self-defense⁴⁰. They have consistently called on all Nigerian citizens to be ready to rise up and protest against all forms of social injustice: "Nigerians must learn to say 'NO' to bad leadership and insist on good government"⁴¹.

To teach by example, the Catholic bishops have collectively confronted the military rulers after another successful coup that overthrew elected civilians. They expect the citizens to be organised, and confront the military rulers also because according to them: "We did that when the army took over power in the wake of the thoroughly botched elections of 1983"⁴². Since the Church started playing active, even confrontational roles against oppressive governments in Nigeria, various government leaders have been trying to involve the Church leaders more in important decisions and policies especially in issues of social justice⁴³. For the Catholic bishops such is part of their prophetic mandate⁴⁴.

4.4.3.3.2. NonViolence from a (Classical) Theological Perspective

Considered from a classical theological perspective, nonviolence is the logic of crucifixion and leads the person of nonviolence into the heart of the suffering Christ. The purpose of nonviolence is to move the oppressors to recognize in their victims, the humanity they both have in common. Through the power of voluntary suffering, those who are oppressed can begin to see themselves not as helpless victims but will be enabled to engage in *loving resistance* against those who refuse to recognise them as human

⁴⁰ Cf. Ibid. p. 60.

⁴¹ CBCN, *Authentic National Pride*, 1991, in P. SCHNINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 248.

⁴² CBCN, *Listen: The Church Speaks*, in ibid., no. 45.

⁴³ CBCN, *Building God's Kingdom of Justice and Peace*, 2001, in ibid., no. 7. Apart from Nigeria, where the bishops occasionally stood up against the manipulations of the inept leadership, the Church leadership in Congo is recorded as not only denouncing but also confronting the dictatorship of president Mobutu. It is recorded that Cardinal Malula in particular led the Church to defend the oppressed. According to a Congolese author: "*Seule l'Eglise Catholique restait comme un bastion de résistance, et continuait à opposer une résistance aux tentatives de manipulation du président*". Later the entire Catholic hierarchy joined in the resistance and became a beacon of hope and pride of the faithful and other citizens in the country. The personal cost of such confrontation and resistance by Church leaders remained however very heavy. But these and other forms of resistance continued in various forms until the ouster of the dictatorial regime (cf. G. IWELE, *Mgr. Monsengwo, acteur et témoin de l'histoire*, Gembloux, Duculot, 1995, pp. 105-106).

⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid. no. 7.

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beings⁴⁵. It is only when we understand the vicarious nature of Christ's suffering that Christ himself shines out as the supreme model of nonviolent actor. This is because "on the cross suffering love received its fullest expression, even in the eyes of one who could not affirm Christ as uniquely divine"⁴⁶.

For Christians, the inner dynamic of redemption can also be understood in terms of non-violence. If the purpose of nonviolence is to move human beings by suffering love to the recognition of their common humanity, then it is the purpose of the cross to move us in the same way to a recognition of all human beings in Christ. To identify oneself in faith with Christ of the cross is to acknowledge that he is the ultimate self-disclosure of God in humanity, in the action of suffering love even unto death. This heroic love that was ready to suffer for humanity found its highest expression when Christ instead of cursing his executioners pleaded for them: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). By this action, Jesus was ushering in a new phase in human history when the power of love and forgiveness confronts the violence and cruelty of 'the old humanity'⁴⁷.

So those who suffer heroically in a nonviolent way do so, to remind the perpetrators of oppression about the cross at Golgotha. Nonviolent resistance from a Christological perspective therefore calls for the appreciation that Jesus never condoned evil but rather resisted it up to the heroic degree of suffering the most cruel death⁴⁸. So, "to profess a living faith in the Christ of the cross is to affirm the redemptive reality present in every cross of the suffering love enacted in history. Christ becomes present everywhere in the suffering servanthood and crucifixion. In and through this presence he redeems humanity from division and leads it into community"⁴⁹.

⁴⁵Cf. J. W. DOUGLASS, op. cit., p. 106.

⁴⁶ Op. cit., p. 106.

⁴⁷ People who inflict pain on others in any form may be compared to those who persecuted Jesus even though he was innocent. And just as those who inflicted death on Jesus are described as not knowing what they are doing, so can oppressors be described as those who do not appreciate the sacredness of the lives of their brothers and sisters. They seem to be ignorant of the fact that their victims share the same humanity with them.

⁴⁸ Cf. R. STIEVERS et. al., *Christian Ethics, A Case Method Approach*, Orbis, New York, 1998, p. 99.

⁴⁹ J. W. DOUGLASS, op. cit., p. 107.

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In recent times liberation theology has come to represent another effort to explain nonviolent engagement in a theological language. Although inspired by their peculiar Latin American context, their contribution has relevance to our present study.

4.4.3.3.3. Liberation Theology and Nonviolent Engagement

Although liberation theology denies advocating arms struggle, it is often interpreted as including nonviolent confrontation as an open option in fostering the Kingdom of God in an unjust context⁵⁰. G. Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest and theologian is generally considered one of the pioneers of this theology which he calls the theology of the Kingdom of God⁵¹.

The proponents of liberation theology in Latin America argue that the poor people in that continent have been victims of institutionalised violence for centuries⁵². So it took the prophetic courage, and confrontation of Bartholome de Las Casas for the natives, through heightened awareness conscientization, to realise that change was really possible⁵³. The oppressed natives learnt that confrontation against oppression, slavery and exploitation was not just *possible*, not just *right*, but indeed *necessary*. So despite the superior forces of the foreign powers, the natives started to revolt occasionally in search for liberation

⁵⁰ There are various orientations and even types of liberation theologies. But our focus is on the liberation theology of Latin America and especially those of G. Gutierrez and L. Boff.

⁵¹ Cf. G. J. DORRIEN, *Reconstructing the Common Good, Theology of the Social Order*, Orbis, New York, 1990, p. 101.

⁵² Theologians of liberation trace the origin of violence and oppression in their continent to the arrival of Portuguese colonialists who were fired by consuming passion for raw material, power and *La Virtud*, (a concept that encapsulates expressions of courage), the dream of grandeur and renown and the confidence in the invincibility that a militant faith inspires. The barbaric desire to subdue the Indians and exterminate them in case of resistance introduced profound shock on the natives, and facilitated the human and economic exploitation of the indigenes. It was after many years of such violence and unchallenged destruction of cultural, economic and traditional values of the natives that a Catholic priest, Bartholome de Las Casas emerged and confronted the Indian slavery and the theological justification of same by Palacios Rubios, who was one of the leading theologians of the time. Las Casas equally confronted the Spanish crown and argued that the Papal grant of America to the crown had been solely made for the purpose of conversion and so carried with it no temporal power of possession. He condemned the use of force to convert the natives. His famous statement to all the oppressors was that, it is better to have an Indian alive though *infidel*, than a dead Indian, who is a Christian (cf. Much of this information could be found in detail in M. H. LOT, *Bartholome Las Casas, L'Evangile et la force*, Paris, Cerf, 1991, see especially p. 11; See also P. I. A. VINCENT, *Las Casas, apôtre des indiens, foi et libération*, Paris, Editions de la Nouvelle Aurore, 1975, p. 111).

⁵³ Apart from Las Casas, some liberation theologians claim to draw inspiration from their modern *heroes* like Torres Camillo, a Catholic priest who turned guerrilla fighter and was killed. Their other *hero* is Archbishop Oscar Romero who struggled nonviolently and heroically in solidarity with the poor up to the extent of giving his life for the struggle. One can read much about him in these texts: J. R. BROCKMAN, *Oscar Romero, Bishop and Martyr*, Orbis, New York, 1982; M. L. VIGIL, *Oscar Romero, Esquisses pour un portrait*, Paris, Karthala, 1993, C. ANTOINE, *Le sang des justes, mgr. Romero, les jésuites et l'Amérique latine*, Paris, Desclée, 2000.

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and humanisation⁵⁴. Many decades of struggle saw a number of independent political nations in Latin America. But it soon dawned on the people that their victory was more apparent than real as political independence failed to secure them economic independence. There was a mere change of strategy as the foreign powers joined forces with their local elite planted at home to continue a more insidious form of slavery and oppression based on economic manipulation⁵⁵. The conflict in Salvador is presented as a typical example of this modern type of institutionalised insidious violence⁵⁶. This struggle took a new face in the continent during the 'cold war'⁵⁷.

Liberation theology and various liberation movements⁵⁸, all claim to be attempts at fostering the Kingdom of God in their continent in response to the challenge of Vatican II⁵⁹. The celebrated conference at Medellin marked for them the dawn of a new era of theologising and of socio-political engagement⁶⁰. The search for new approach to reform became necessary since various attempts to transform the condition of the poor have failed, which include *assistanzialism*⁶¹ and *reformism*⁶². This theology proposes a more radical interpretation of the Gospel message in favour of the poor since especially the continent is almost entirely Christian. It thus often interprets the prophetic message of Christianity as a struggle between justice and injustice, the power of oppression and the

⁵⁴ Cf. V. MELANDER, *The Hour of God?, People in Guatemala Confronting Political Evangelisation and Counterinsurgency (1976-1990)*, UPPSALA University Press, Uppsala, 1999, p. 17; See also L. and C. BOFF, *Qu'est-ce que la théologie de la libération?* Orbis, New York, 1987, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Cf. R. M. BROWN, *Gustavo Gutierrez, An Introduction to Liberation Theology*, Orbis, New York, 1990 p. 4.

⁵⁶ Cf. J. SOBRINO, I. ELLACURIA AND OTHERS, *Companions of Jesus, The Jesuit Martyrs*, Orbis Books, New York, 1990, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁷ Cf. C. ANTOINE, *Guerre froide et Eglise catholique, l'Amérique Latine*, Paris, Cerf, 1999, see esp. pp. 67-71.

⁵⁸ The proponents of liberation theology claim that the masses are the real founders of the movement (cf. L. BOFF, *Ecclesiology, the Basic Communities Re-invent the Church*, Orbis, New York, 1986, p. 35).

⁵⁹ At Vatican II, the Council Fathers called on regional bishops and theologians to interpret, adapt and apply the teachings of the Council in their specific regions. Theologians in Latin America claim to be responding to the challenge of the Council. So they have been seeking the appropriate theological and pastoral language for addressing the issue of extreme poverty in their continent.

⁶⁰ Cf. E. L. CLEARLY, *Crisis and Change, The Church in Latin America*, Orbis Books, New York, 1985, p. 33.

⁶¹ This means the strategy of giving aid to the poor without addressing the root cause of their poverty.

⁶² This an attempt to ameliorate the condition of the poor through structural programmes manipulated by the elite themselves.

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power of liberation. While this does not call for direct warfare, it does not however exclude nonviolent action as successfully used by Bartholome las Casas⁶³.

Today a number of African theologians like E. Mveng and Jean-Marc Ela believe that such nonviolent confrontation is an open option in many African contexts. This is because dialogue and other forms of interventions have failed to change the corrupt and inept leadership that pauperise the continent. Ela like many liberation theologians remind us that one cannot avoid conflicts and confrontations with the forces of evil and oppression. Jesus Christ himself experienced it and even died of such conflict. Thus for Ela, "*le conflit est inhérent à toute pratique évangélique. Déjà tout au début de son ministère, Jésus est harcelé, soupçonné*"⁶⁴.

Although the scriptures, theologians and Catholic Social Teachings can help us to understand the nature of nonviolence, they nonetheless do not offer us practical and coherent guidelines for using them as praxis of solidarity with the poorest of the poor. This compels us to further examine the contributions of some of the main actors of nonviolent engagement in recent times. We are limiting ourselves to the nonviolent theories of M. Ghandi, Martin Luther King and cultural action of Paulo Freire. Only a summary of their theories and actions is hereby presented.

4.4.4. A Study of Some Modern Nonviolent Theories and Movements

As stated earlier above, many theories and forms of nonviolent actions exist. But we shall briefly examine the nonviolent theories that are associated with Mahatma Ghandi in India

⁶³ Further reading on this theme can be found in other works. See for example T. C. BRUNEAU, *The Church in Brazil, The Politics of Religion*, University of Texas, Austin, 1982; B. CHENU, *Théologies Chrétiennes des Tiers Mondes*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1984; M. H. LOT Bartholome Las Casas, *L'évangile et la force*, Paris, Edition du Cerf, 1991; G. CALLIARI, *L'option communautaire, conscientisation des pauvres et évangélisation*, Paris, Edition du Cerf, 1991; R. PLANAS, *Liberation Theology, The Political Expression of Religion*, Sheed & Ward, Kansas City, 1986; K. C. ABRAHAM (ed.), *Third World Theologies*, Orbis Books, New York, 1986; J.L. SEGUNDO, *Faith and Ideologies in Biblical Revelation*, in N.K. GOTTFELD (ed.), *The Bible and Liberation, Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Orbis Books, New York, 1993; P. CASALDALIGA, *In Pursuit of the Kingdom*, Orbis Books, New York, 1990; M. A. VASQUEZ, *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crises of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987; T. M. P. CVALCANT, *Quand les pauvres lisent la Bible, un regard latino-américain*, in *Lumen Vitae*, Vol. Lvi. no. 4. (Oct.-Dec., 2001, esp. p. 4130; M. Löwy, *La Guerre des dieux, religion et politique en Amérique Latine*, Paris, Editions DU FELIN, 1998.

⁶⁴ J-M. ELA, *Ma foi d'Africain*, Paris, Karthala, 1983, p. 166.

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and Martin Luther King in the United States of America. Freire's own version is considered as well.

4.4.4.1. Ghandi and Nonviolence

The theory and praxis of modern nonviolence is generally associated with Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) who saw it as an alternative to violent revolution for social change especially in India⁶⁵. For him, the means and the end used for achieving any revolution are determinant of the end result and long time effect to be experienced. He believes that if the right means are used generally the ends will take care of themselves. While others sought to the end of the British rule in Indian and the apartheid in South Africa in a violent way, Ghandi sought a peaceful, democratic, but forceful action to bring about reform⁶⁶. It was in the process of all these that he developed what has now come to be the theory and praxis of nonviolence. Ghandi is known to have succeeded in linking mass action with nonviolent discipline and this contributed positively to freeing Indian from the British rule. Experts describe Ghandi as one "who rooted his non-violent faith in voluntary suffering without limit"⁶⁷.

Ghandi's nonviolence has three main elements. The first is the desire for self-improvement, a passion to make oneself a better person through a number of ways. The second is what can be termed the 'constructive programme' which is about concrete work for the creation of a new social order. The last element in his theory and praxis is the campaign against evil forces that blocked the way for the achievement of man's vocation in the world⁶⁸. In all these Ghandi was guided by the philosophical and spiritual principle

⁶⁵ Ghandi was born in India, educated in Britain as a lawyer, and worked in South Africa where he experienced the problems of the apartheid policy.

⁶⁶ His experience of humiliation in South Africa fired his passion to seek freedom and dignity for the oppressed (cf. C. CLEMENT, *Ghandi athlète de la liberté*, Paris, Découvertes, 1989, 40).

⁶⁷ J. W. DOUGLASS, *From Ghandi to Christ: God as Suffering Love*, in R. ELLSBERG (ed.), *Ghandi on Christianity*, Orbis, New York, 1991, p. 106). He was also the first to conduct a series of campaigns towards long term goals. Ghandi was very deeply religious, yet very practical and indeed experimental in temperament. He was not just a political strategist, but also a social visionary and a spiritual guide of his people. He was a great organiser who was able to bring his ideas into concrete application. He remained flexible in the face of each new challenge he faced.

⁶⁸ For Ghandi, caste system and the British colonial exploitation represented these evils. Although Ghandian nonviolence commitments led especially to Indian independence, the problem of caste system was not, and has not yet been abolished even today.

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called *Satyagraha*. This literally means, 'struggling for truth' or 'adhering to the truth'⁶⁹ This theory has two complementary dimensions. The first part called *Satyagrahi* or truth warrior, refers to the nonviolent activist who withdraws cooperation with injustice. This finds expression in such activities as civil disobedience⁷⁰. The positive dimension is the act of confronting unjust situation in a nonviolent way in expose the truth of the injustice perpetrated. In both sides of the same commitment the desire is for the conversion of the oppressor and not for conquering him, humiliating or even harming him⁷¹. Tolerance and love remain the pillars of his theory⁷².

4.4.4.2. Martin Luther King and Nonviolence

Martin Luther King is one of the main protagonists of the theory and praxis of nonviolence. During the Civil Rights Movement, in the United States, the young Luther King who got involved in the struggle, propounded the theory and praxis of nonviolence as an alternative to the violent options proffered by Malcom X and other Black Power activists. He was impressed especially by Ghandi who used nonviolent struggle to achieve independence for India. So King sought to develop a philosophy for nonviolent resistance. For him that was the only solution that could cure society's evil and create a just and more human world.

When King entered the theological seminary in 1948, he began to concentrate on discovering a solution to end social ills. Thanks to his Christian faith, King was impressed by the Sermon on the Mount. He saw the power of love as great force that can bring reform and usher in a more just society. Upon reading Ghandi and being influenced

⁶⁹ This is equally referred to as 'truth force' or 'soul force'.

⁷⁰ Cf. I. JESUDASAN, *A Ghandian Theology of Liberation*, New York, Orbis, 1984, pp. 61-62.

⁷¹ Today Ghandian students can identify the key principles of this theory and praxis of nonviolence. 1. Humiliating or deliberately provoking your opponent invites violence; 2. Knowing your facts and arguments well helps avoid violence; 3. If you are open about your cause, your opponent is less likely to be violent; 4. Look for common ground between you and your opponents to promote trust and understanding; 5. Do not judge others harder than yourself (alternatively do not judge others); 6. Try to trust your opponent. They will sense this trust; 7. Compromise on inessential matters to promote resolution; 8. Sincerity helps convert your opponent; 9. By making personal sacrifice you show your sincerity; 10. Avoid exploiting weakness in your opponent. Aim for integrity, not simply to win (cf. Susy Chen, *Ghandi's Ten Principles of Nonviolence* <http://www.zmag.org/interactive/content/display>).

⁷² Cf. M. K. GHANDI, *All Religions are True*, 22 March, 1928, in R. ELLSBERG (ed.), op.cit., p. 59.

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by him, King discovered that Ghandi furnished the practical application of the Christian doctrine of love especially in concept of satyagraha, which means truth-force.⁷³

Thenceforth, truth-force become more about love-force as kind of Christian theory of nonviolence. As nonviolent resistance became the force behind the boycott movements, his concerns were clarified, he committed himself to this method of action, and he realized that it was a powerful solution⁷⁴.

First, he argued that even though nonviolence may be perceived as cowardly, it was on the contrary an act of courage. Second, nonviolent resistance is not to humiliate the opponent, but instead to gain his friendship and understanding. Further, the use of boycotts and methods of non-cooperation, were the means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The result was redemption and reconciliation instead of the bitterness and chaos that came from violent resistance. The third point King advanced, was that in fighting against injustice and other forms of social evil, one should focus especially on the evil and avoid attacking the individuals who are operating the system as if it were a personal battle. Tension was not between the races, but was between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory it will be a victory not merely for fifty thousand Negroes, but a victory for justice and the forces of light⁷⁵.

Fourth, nonviolent resistance demanded the willingness to suffer. One must accept violence without retaliating with violence and must go to jail if necessary. Accordingly, the end was more important than safety, and retaliatory violence would distract from the main fight. King believed that by accepting suffering, it led to tremendous educational

⁷³ Cf. M L. KING, *An Experiment in Love*, in J. M. WASHINGTON, op. cit., p. 4.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ibid. p. 4.

⁷⁵ Highlights of King's nonviolence principles can be presented as a way of life for courageous people. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding. For King, nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice and not people. For him nonviolence may imply suffering, but suffering innocently for a cause is redemptive. And above all suffering such can educate and transform. Nonviolence is way of heroic lover and not hater. It is not an act of cowardice either. He believes personally that the universe is on the side of justice and truth and that in the end justice and truth will prevail. King proposes that nonviolent organisers and participants should keep in mind the goal of pursuing social change. First they should engage in gathering accurate information on the real situation of things before they act. One should never act if one does not have accurate facts and statistics. There should also be personal commitment to the cause. There should be room for negotiation for direct action, reconciliation and disposition for ushering in the healing process.

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and transforming possibilities. It would be a powerful tool in changing the minds of the opponents. King's fifth point about nonviolent resistance was that the universe was on the side of justice. Accordingly, people have a "cosmic companionship" with God who is on the side of truth. Therefore, the resister has the faith that justice will occur in the future⁷⁶. Indeed nonviolence is a kind of self-defence in the face of injustice that may lead to the destruction of lives, properties and values⁷⁷.

We shall now study in more detail, Paulo Freire's cultural action/nonviolence with particular focus on his propositions for organising such action. What is cultural action and how is it a nonviolent theory? What are some of the obstacles to be encountered as one engages in such a transformative action? Who are the principal actors in the action and what strategies are to be used?

4.4.5. Freire's Theory of Cultural Action as Nonviolent Engagement

4.4.5.1. What is Cultural Action?

According to Freire, cultural action is a systematic and deliberate form of action which operates upon social structure either to preserve the existing structure or to transform it. Cultural action differs from mere rebellion since the latter is a deliberate and systematic action which has a theory that determines its ends and thereby defines its methods. Cultural action can either create permanence or change, oppression or liberation. It is a process in a continuous 'becoming'. Unlike radical revolution which tends to bring about the disappearance of the 'permanent', cultural action accepts and even promotes 'permanence-change dialectic in the society.

Its main concern is the surmounting of the antagonistic contradictions of the social structure so as to enhance the liberation and humanisation of human beings. While cultural invasion uses the vicious methods discussed in this work to dominate others,

⁷⁶ King described what he thinks should characterise nonviolence hinging it on the Christian doctrine of love. While presenting the various types of love: *eros*-aesthetic love, *philia* friendship/biological love, he points out that *Agape* is the highest and should guide all the actors of nonviolence (cf. Ibid. pp. 5-6).

⁷⁷ Cf. M. L. KING, *Nonviolence, the Only Road to Freedom*..., p. 129.

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cultural action sees innovators not as invaders, teachers, or dictators but as those who have come to learn with the people and about the people's world. While cultural invasion often emphasises the importance of technological data which make the people mere spectators and specimen, cultural synthesis focuses on the lived experience of real human beings⁷⁸. In such integrated condition, both the reformers and the people explore reality together.

Cultural action confronts cultures, targets the people and their world and gradually leads to 'cultural revolution' which is indeed the *real* revolution⁷⁹. While cultural synthesis does not deny the reality of difference and world views, it calls for the celebration of these differences for mutual enrichment of all. While cultural synthesis calls for respect in the worldview of the people, it does not advocate a syncretic and naïve adaptation to such worldviews that are themselves anti-human and anti-dialogical⁸⁰. Just as the oppressor, needs a theory of oppressive action to perpetrate their injustice, so the oppressed need a theory of action in order to become free⁸¹.

Freire saw his cultural action for transformation as an expression of heroic and sacrificing love that is ready to suffer for the humanisation of the society. Again like Ghandi, Freire seeks to theorise, systematise and apply in practice, in socio-political arena, methods of resistance that do not aim at the death of the adversary and do not eliminate possibility of reconciliation and dialogue⁸². His theory of conscientization led to transformative cultural action in South Africa during the struggle against the Apartheid regime in that country. This makes his theory of cultural action all the more relevant in Black African today⁸³. Before Freire expounds his theory of non-violent engagement, he presents the mechanism

⁷⁸ Here it is no longer the experts who undertake the investigation alone. Instead they do so with the people whose world is being reflected upon.

⁷⁹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 161.

⁸⁰ An example can be drawn from a culture which approves such acts as human sacrifice, killing of twins, giving inferior status to women, the killing of handicap children etc. While learning to be part of their world, the cultural reformer should pose the problems involved in holding such views among the people he encounters. His ingenuity lies in helping the people to surmount such necrophill beliefs and practices without alienating them from their other cherished values.

⁸¹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 164.

⁸² Cf. D. BARBE, op. cit., p. 62. See also J. D. ROBERTS, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, Orbis, New York, 1994, p. 2.

⁸³ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of Hope* ..., p. 144.

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of a typical oppressive system. While their operations may differ in time and context, their strategies remain fairly the same.

4.4.5.2. Obstacles and Antidialogical Actions in Organising Nonviolent Engagement

Freire's theory of cultural action is precisely meant to deal with the antidialogical actions as used in an oppressive system to maintain the status quo. According to Freire, this is the method used by the elite and the oppressors to destabilise the masses once a level of awareness and start organising themselves for transformative action. Freire sees the instinct for *conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion* as the commonest antidialogical actions. They are obstacles to be overcome⁸⁴.

4.4.5.2.1. Conquest

Conquest is the first characteristic of antidialogical action used for oppression⁸⁵. Oppressors see their relationship with the poor and agents of liberation in terms of warfare. So they use all means at their disposal to conquer their rivals and to maintain their dominance over them. Some of their tools include inventing and disseminating various 'myths' and propaganda that will favour them and harm their 'rivals'.

4.4.5.2.2. Divide and Rule

Another strategy used by oppressive groups and regimes is 'divide and rule'. Sometimes when the poor masses start organising themselves for transformative action, the elite and the oppressive regime will use every possible strategy to destabilise them. Divide-and-rule takes in many forms depending on the time and context in question. Knowing the power of solidarity and unity of the oppressed, the oppressors invent many strategies to weaken the poor and the oppressed and so deter them from uniting as a common front to fight against their oppressive hegemony. This is seen from the fact that the ruling class

⁸⁴ Many of the obstacles encountered in dialogue are also present in this action stage of the liberation and humanisation. They may present themselves differently but they aim at the same goal which is to maintain the status quo of oppression.

⁸⁵ Here the strategy of conquest during dialogue is still applied to destabilise those engaged in cultural action.

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interprets such concepts as unity, organisation, and 'struggle' as dangerous, treasonable, felony, etc.⁸⁶.

Some of the commonest mechanisms of divide and rule is the use of government bureaucracy, or encouraging the people to focus on their local community needs and forget about the entire system⁸⁷. Sometimes the leaders of the oppressed people may be tantalised with very big personal offers like promise for a government post. Sometimes, very powerful leaders of the masses may be given the offer for further training and generally when they come back they become alienated from their own people⁸⁸. Once inoculated with the bourgeoisie appetite for success, the populist leaders would start serving as intermediaries between the masses and the oligarchy⁸⁹. In some cases the oppressors may infiltrate among the people purporting to help them in their struggle, but their main target is to weaken and destabilise the group from within. The oppressors may even encourage various factions of the transformative movement and set them one against the other. This is most commonly used against those organised in form of trade unions⁹⁰.

⁸⁶ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 122.

⁸⁷ People are encouraged to forget about the large picture and focus on their local community needs, their professional groupings, their religious and gender affiliations etc. Once governments start sponsoring these, the people naturally lose the *common focus* and struggle in confronting their common enemy. They become competitors among themselves.

⁸⁸ Instead of helping their people, often experts trained abroad become oppressors of their own people (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process*, p. 78). To counter the practice of training a few community leaders for the entire community, Freire proposes that cultural action as totalised and totalising process focuses its training programme on the entire community and not on few leaders. On practical terms Freire advocates that leadership should exist but they should spring up simultaneously within the community. If they cannot represent the community interest, they should be replaced by others emerging the critically conscious community. When the community grows in consciousness as a totality, it becomes more difficult to divide and exploit them.

⁸⁹ Once infected with the appetite for personal success, the people's leader becomes an 'amphibian' since he can now shuttle between the people and the oppressors. Once he feels at home with the position of the oppressors, he renders himself vulnerable to manipulation.

⁹⁰ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 125. One observes this where the leaders of trade unions are arrested, tried or even imprisoned to decapitate the movement. In all these divisive strategies, the oppressed remain powerless, even when they become aware of their predicament and tend to resist, they are haunted by the fear of reprisals. They are often blacklisted or/and lose their jobs. This renders them powerless and they fall deeper into destitution. Once their jobs are threatened, the oppressed may be frightened so they keep on working. Under such condition they no longer work for the dignity of labour but as slaves of work.

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4.4.5.2.3. Manipulation⁹¹

Freire discusses manipulation under liberatory pedagogy and discovers that it is also used by the oppressors during transformative actions organised for the liberation of the oppressed⁹². If the strategy of divide and rule does not weaken the resolve of the oppressed, the elite may invent what is technically called 'manipulation'⁹³. "Manipulation is the response of the oppressor to the new concrete conditions of the historical process. Through manipulation, the dominant elites can lead the people into an unauthentic type of 'organisation' and can thus avoid the threatening alternative: the true organisation of the emerged and emerging people"⁹⁴. It is used as a kind of anaesthetics aimed to keep the people from thinking. Once people begin to think, the natural consequence is the birth of revolution and this is what the shrewd elite know for certain and seek to prevent at all costs⁹⁵. To avoid being manipulated, there is need to engage the masses in continual conscientization and dialogue⁹⁶.

4.4.5.2.4. Cultural Invasion

Another fundamental characteristic of antidialogical action is 'Cultural Invasion'⁹⁷. It is used to spread possessive consciousness to those who possess little⁹⁸. The invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group and impose their own view of the world and their values upon their victims⁹⁹. In actual invasion, the invaders are the 'actors' in,

⁹¹ Although divide and rule, and all forms of antidialogical actions are forms of manipulation, Freire re-emphasises the destructive role it plays in his list of caveats in the praxis for liberty. He takes up some of the issues raised before under manipulation in dialogue and applies them in the praxis of liberation.

⁹² While many of the strategies of manipulation used in dialogue can resurface here again, manipulation of organised groups has its specificities.

⁹³ According to Freire, manipulation is used only when the oppressors discover that the masses are gaining some critical awareness and have begun to ask questions. For oppressors, unless there is this perceived threat, there is no need to manipulate the oppressed and the poor.

⁹⁴ False organisation leads to 'massification' which is a process that renders the people more manageable as bundle of *unthinking* agglomeration (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 129).

⁹⁵ Even dialogue which is good in itself, is feared by the elite in case such dialogue sparks some thinking in the people or reveal some masked intentions and strategies of the oppressive rulers.

⁹⁶ cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 133.

⁹⁷ This is an premeditated imposition of foreign values on another people as a kind of imperialism.

⁹⁸ Central to both possessive consciousness and cultural invasion is the 'illusion of deciding' which the oppressed may have. But the actual decision-making power is outside the invaded culture. The oppressed live in the illusion that they have freedom and that they have control over their lives. An example of this type of illusion is seen in the production and consumption activities where the poor and the oppressed find themselves depending on the production and market prices where they have little or no control.

⁹⁹ cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 133.

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and the ‘authors’ of, while the invaded are the ‘objects’ of their assault. Culturally invaded people generally lose the right of making choices. This is because the foreign ideas, values and even, the food they eat are chosen by others and they have to follow the choice. In every form of cultural invasion the underlying perversion is “both the personification of the commodity and the commodification of the person”¹⁰⁰.

Cultural invasion can rightly be described as being more insidious as any physical violence¹⁰¹. This is because it alienates the victims from themselves and from their cultural values¹⁰². Often the victims exhibit some signs of dualist existence and servile mentality¹⁰³. When all these fail the leaders may be threatened, intimidated, imprisoned, prosecuted or even assassinated. Here one sees that under the pretext of protecting the public order the oppressor often resort to violence, using the apparatus of government against the poor masses and their leaders. How then is effective transformative action to be organised?

4.4.5.3. Organising Effective Cultural Action and the Principal Agents

Before Freire discusses the essentials of a dialogical action, he briefly describes how the revolutionary group is normally formed. His discussion here is based on his understanding of the nature of human history and culture. Although this may differ from

¹⁰⁰ F. KAMMER, op. cit., p. 173.

¹⁰¹ There can be economic and cultural invasions. Invasion may also be practised by a metropolitan society upon a dependent society. It may be implicit in the domination of one class over another within the same society. In the industrialised society there exists also a type of cultural invasion where mass thinking becomes standardised as seen in their ways of dressing and tastes in food. Men begin thinking and acting according to the prescriptions they receive daily from the communications media rather than in response to their dialectical relationship to the world. Here behaviour is also automatised just as it is in the case of the oppressed people especially in a poor country. While Freire does not see technology as necessarily evil, he cautions against being manipulated, dehumanised and enslaved by it. According to Freire when cultural invasion/conquest takes place, the conquered or invaded people begin to respond to the values, standards and goals of their invaders. Inauthentic existence often occurs in the lives of the invaders as they struggle in futility to mimic their invaders. And by so doing, surrender all ambitions of questioning their condition of oppression. For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their own intrinsic inferiority.

¹⁰² This is visible in the passion with which the invaded people seek to adopt the lifestyle of their dominators. They dress like them, learn to talk and walk like them. They adopt their feeding styles, and in the process they lose their identity and pride.

¹⁰³ Freire uses the example of the home where children raised in an authoritarian home easily internalise this parental authority. This is inimical to the freedom of the children and can affect them throughout out their lives. Only radical action and re-education can redeem them (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 135).

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context to context, the historical and sociological factors are often present in each case. Freire discussed this under the following titles: *cooperation*, *unity for liberation*, *organisation*, and *cultural synthesis*.

4.4.5.4. Principal Actors in Cultural Action

Paulo Freire like other nonviolent theorists and actors holds that the two principal actors in any effective cultural action are the people and their leader (s). Both are indispensable for the action to succeed. Although presented differently, Freire holds that the leader comes from the people and is actually part of them. How the combined efforts of the people and the leadership can help organise and execute transformative action is hereby presented.

4.4.5.4.1. The People

One important element in Freire theory of cultural action is that it regards the people as the principal agents in the transformative and humanisation process. There can be no real change without the people for history of revolutions and changes show that not just for the people but by the people. Freire's position is informed by the fact the oppressor and the dominant elite can never permit nor sincerely participate in the cultural change that would be harmful to them. So the revolution is a prerogative of the oppressed themselves. Aware of its importance in determining their destiny and shaping their humanity, Freire reminds the oppressed and the poor that the task of liberation is a *difficult* mission. Any mechanical reform project that fails to carry the people along with it will necessary fail or remain inauthentic. This is because it does not treat the people as human beings, who are historical beings that make the society and its history.

Indeed there is no history without human beings; there is only history of humanity, made by the people and in turn making them. Oppression can only occur when the majority of the people are denied the right to participate in the making of history as Subjects. So the revolution allows people already objectified to begin to reflect and act upon the reality that oppresses them¹⁰⁴. As in the case of Guinea Bissau, Freire recalls that despite the

¹⁰⁴ Being merely aware of the unjust situation and reflecting upon it is only an academic exercise. There must be action which in turn must always be accompanied by critical thought because action without a critical thought ends in mere activism, anarchy and confusion.

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risks involved in any liberation struggle, people generally experience joy and take pride in being part of the process that ushers in a new socio-political and economic order¹⁰⁵.

The fundamental condition for making the people effective actors in the liberation process is to make them think and this is the essential task of conscientization. It is only by thinking that can they can understand the internal contradictions of the system of oppression. It is not enough for a few elite to claim that they are *thinking of* the people or even thinking *for them*. Merely thinking of their conditions or thinking for them is an insult on their humanity. This reduces the people to the status of mere objects that are thought about. The leader who merely *thinks of the people* from afar, or their condition as a mere abstract issue, has lost his/her status as a revolutionary leader. This is because the basic requirement is thinking and acting in solidarity *with*, and not just *for* the people¹⁰⁶.

If oppression is about one person dominating another, liberation is not about one person liberating another, nor is it about one person liberating himself. The essence of the revolution is that human beings in communion liberate each other¹⁰⁷. If the oppressed and the poor are drawn into the process of change as ambiguous beings, partly themselves and partly harbouring the oppressor-mentality, they will merely imagine they have reached power¹⁰⁸. The poor and the oppressed can only see the revolutionary reform as the praxis of liberation when they participate in it as thinking Subjects. Despite the importance of the people, Freire holds that they need effective leadership to achieve their aims.

4.4.5.4.2. The Leader

Freire does not present us with the exact source of these revolutionary leaders. For him they tend to spring up spontaneously in the course of a revolution¹⁰⁹. Whether this

¹⁰⁵ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 108.

¹⁰⁹ According to him, sometimes the transformative leaders may spring up from among the class of people who have hitherto belonged to the social strata of the ruling class (or even the so-called oppressors). For him, at a certain point in their historical existence and under certain historical conditions, these leaders renounce the class to which they belong to join the oppressed.

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adherence to the oppressed results from a scientific analysis of reality as act of love, and true commitment or not, Freire describes their action as “an act of solidarity”¹¹⁰. Freire then discusses the essential qualities of such leaders.

The first thing that such leaders should learn is that they are persons for the people. As popular leaders, they should realise that while the oppressors use divide and rule as their leadership strategy, revolutionary leaders as humanists, find their strength among the people where, and with whom they can flourish¹¹¹. So if the oppressor practiced cultural invasion, the revolutionary leader should do the exact opposite. What distinguishes revolutionary leaders from the dominant elite is not only their *objectives*, but their *procedures*. If they act the same way, the objectives become identical. If the oppressors used anti-dialogical strategies to rule the people, revolutionary leaders should use creative dialogue.

The leaders go to the people in spontaneously dialogical manner. There is an almost immediate empathy between the people and the revolutionary leaders: their mutual commitment is almost sealed. In their fellowship, they consider themselves co-equals.... From this point on, the established practice of dialogue between people and leaders is nearly unshakable. That dialogue will continue when power is reached; and people will know *they* have come to power¹¹².

Another important characteristic of revolutionary leaders is that they have to take the courageous decision to *love* and *trust* the people. This distinguishes them from the oppressors who do not treat them as real human beings but as objects¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ There may indeed be many reasons why former oppressors may want to join in liberating the oppressed. At the initial stages it could be very difficult for the two classes of people to understand and accommodate one another. But no matter their intentions, the important thing is that they now join the people, communicate and collaborate with them to promote the humanity of man. One can cite the example of many ‘white’ human activists that joined the Black Movements in the United States during the struggle for racial equality. The same could be said during the Apartheid regime in South Africa (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 144).

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹¹² Freire points to the fact that this sharing of power and solidarity does not, and should not diminish the position of the leader whose spirit of struggle, courage, capacity for love must keep growing (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 145).

¹¹³ Some of the methods of the dominators which we have discussed earlier may, unfortunately, be adopted by the leaders of reform and these include claiming to be ‘the messiah’, manipulation, cultural invasion and other antidialogical activities.

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Yet another important element needed in such leadership is that there will be readiness to work in sincere solidarity with the people. Unlike the oppressors who act on the people, to transform indoctrinate, and adjust them to a reality that is malleable, the revolutionary acts to *change himself* alongside the people. Freire warns a transformative leader not to fall victim of ‘banking type’ of programme planning¹¹⁴. Such a programme lays emphasis on the top down action¹¹⁵. Once this is done, the revolutionary is weakening his mission as he is no longer seen as part of the people in their struggle to be truly human. Freire reminds the leader that his mission is “to liberate, and be liberated, with the people- and not to win them over”¹¹⁶.

So the leader does not go to the people in order to bring them a message of “salvation”, but in order to come to know through dialogue with them, both their objective situation and their awareness of the situation¹¹⁷. He should not come with a foreign theory that is “ready-made” for example, by a group of so-called revolutionary leaders or from a purely academic circle. This runs the risk of making the people objects, and so end up in the tradition of the elite who do not believe that the people know anything¹¹⁸. Accepted that theory is needed, such a theory must be developed from the experiences of the people. It must be in a way a democratic theory, coming from the people, meant for the people and sustained by the people¹¹⁹. About this solidarity as important strategy in the revolutionary process, Freire states that, “the revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity. This solidarity is born only when the leaders witness to it by their humble, loving, courageous encounter with the people”¹²⁰.

¹¹⁴ This entails the error of the revolutionary leader approaching the people with already stratified projects which he persuades the people to accept.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 75.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹⁷ This will involve the evaluation their levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which they live.

¹¹⁸ In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discussed this topic extensively in the *banking type* of education which treats human beings as *tabula rasa* and receptacles.

¹¹⁹ The need to train leaders is emphasised from the experience at Guinea-Bissau. Soon after political independence the country needed serious, trained and committed leaders to guide them from the phase of war of independence to the phase of national reconstruction (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 166).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 110.

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Freire has an important advice to give to every revolutionary leader. He reminds them that they should constantly evaluate their relationship with the people as well as the degree of progress or lack of it in the humanisation process. According to him, the progress is to judge the level of *enthusiasm* expressed by the people in the common struggle for change. If no real solidarity exists between the people and the leaders, one discovers a general *apathy* and lack of enthusiasm on the part of the people. Leaders who do not realise the cause of the people's apparent apathy may interpret this lukewarm disposition as their lack of will, laziness or other intrinsic deficiencies. Leaders should therefore realise that it is dangerous if the people's enthusiasm begin to wane considerably.

For Freire, to keep the people's enthusiasm growing, the leader must be tactful enough to discern *why* the people are becoming cold and distrustful. The wisdom and courage to know how to bring them back with renewed vigour to the movement is one of the imperatives on the leader if the reform is to succeed. Constant conscientisation/dialogue is called for. This is important because one should not forget that having lived in a dehumanising and oppressive condition for so long, the poor and oppressed generally tend to develop dual consciousness that is characterised by fear and suspicion¹²¹.

Freire finally reminds the people and their leaders that the revolutionary change, the liberation struggle and the entire humanisation project is a *process*. This means that even in the face of apparent success, they must not to rest on their oaks as if final victory has been won. This is to avoid the dangers of counter-revolution¹²². As a cultural action, the revolution should be dynamic, systematic and should be sustained by education¹²³, and dialogue¹²⁴. This is to help them especially to learn the use of power during, and after the

¹²¹ It is a slow and patient task to help the common people shed off the fear and suspicion which they have housed for so long, in their psyches about leaders and oppressive systems.

¹²² Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 118. According to him, counter-revolution is carried out by *revolutionaries* who become *reactionary*.

¹²³ This educational quality is one of the most effective instruments for keeping the revolution from becoming institutionalised and stratified in a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy.

¹²⁴ The dialogue once initiated which galvanises the people for action, and used at the peak of the struggle, should equally be kept alive even when the revolution is succeeding.

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liberation struggle¹²⁵. Freire reminds the leaders that the task of revolutionary reform is not always easy especially when one is dealing with the poor and oppressed people whose response may be slow, incoherent and inconsistent. But imbued with the dialogical and democratic dispositions, leaders should see themselves as teachers who know that a person learns how to swim, not in the library but in the water¹²⁶.

4.4.5.5. Tools and Strategies for Organising Transformative Action

4.4.5.5.1. Positive use of Modern Technological Tools

Freire is a realist who knows that in modern times, science plays a vital role in shaping human society and so history. What attitude should the revolutionary leader have towards science?

According to him, the inhumanity of the oppressors and revolutionary humanism both make use of science and technology. But while oppressors use science and technology to reduce human beings into things, revolutionary humanism uses them to promote humanisation¹²⁷. All types of behavioural studies carried out on people of particular regions, race, class or sex which tend to categorise them into a single mould, should be flawed because they only help to reinforce the myths and ideologies of oppression. And unfortunately the oppressed often accept the definition and categorisation as scientific findings given to them by the very people and system that oppress them¹²⁸.

So Freire warns the scientific and humanist revolutionary to refuse the myths and propagandas disseminated by the oppressors and their tools of domination. To succeed, a revolutionary leader and a scientific humanist, should deal with human beings as those with dignity and ontological value no matter what scientific findings say about them¹²⁹.

¹²⁵ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 118.

¹²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 118

¹²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 114

¹²⁸ Examples of such abound when the results of researches carried out by some organisations and institutions in Europe and America are accepted as *gospel truths* that cannot be challenged. Often statistics given by a few organisations after a few samples in the developing world are projected and used as criteria for judging the whole population or even a region.

¹²⁹ A typical myth that has to be dismissed for example is the traditional perception that women are inferior to men. This is still believed in many cultures and used as a means of oppression against women.

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4.4.5.5.2. Cooperation

Cooperation and collaboration is an important strategy for emancipatory cultural action. If the theory of antidialogical action is characterised by conquest in which the Subject conquers another and transforms him into a thing, the dialogical theory of action is about cooperation and solidarity. In the latter case Subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform the world. The fundamental belief here is that in the spirit of cooperation, interdependence and solidarity, the *I* cannot fully exist without the *Thou*. Human society exists because of the link existing between the *I* and the *Thou*. Indeed the *I* and the *Thou* thus become, in the dialectic of these relationships, two *Thous* which become two *I*'s. So there are no conquerors and conquered in the theory of dialogical action. Everyone is a Subject and all are called to 'name' the world and to transform it together.

In this spirit of cooperation, Freire underlines that the role of the leader is not at all compromised. What it means in real terms is that the leaders in spite of their fundamental, important and indispensable role do not own the people. And they have no right to steer them blindly towards their 'salvation'. Once the leader sees himself as a liberator, then the salvation he comes to bring will be perceived as a mere gift to the people. But unfortunately this breaks the dialogical bond between them and reduces the people from co-actors of the liberation to objects of this action. Dialogue is always the means of communication in this cooperation, since authentic dialogue by its nature does not impose, manipulate or domesticate. Through dialogue cooperation is elicited in both parties so that adhesion to the struggle is achieved and maintained. And to be authentic, such adhesion should be between Subjects, who are free and human¹³⁰. Through cooperation people see reality as a challenge and a problem to solve and not a destiny to be blindly accepted. Through cooperation, people begin to place their trust on the leaders. But this trust in essence is reciprocal upon the trust which the leaders themselves placed on the people.

Despite the call for trust in the encounter between the leaders and the common people, Freire brings in a very realistic point. He calls on leaders not to have a naïve confidence

¹³⁰ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 149.

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in relating with the people. Although the leader is never to perceive or treat the people as objects, he (the leader) should be prudent enough to realise that the people may still be 'housing' their own mistrust for him. This mistrust is as a result of protracted inauthentic existence. So while believing in the potentialities of the people, caution is called for until their acquired *ambiguity* has been expunged¹³¹. Constant communion and cooperation with the people will eventually lead to the emancipation of the people from fear of freedom. This will make the reform more effective and faster. Dialogue although not a prior condition for cooperation, should be present in each stage of the evolving process. Freire's understanding of cooperation here has a deeper connotation since it should actually lead to deeper unity which could even be described as fusion. For him, "this fusion can exist only if revolutionary action is really *human*, emphatic, loving, communicative, and humble, in order to be liberating"¹³².

4.4.5.5.3. Unity for Active Solidarity

Another element for organising and engaging in transformative action is fostering unity. The irony here is that while the tactics of division is easy for the oppressors, the task of uniting the people is very difficult¹³³. While the unity of the elite is enforced by their antagonism with the people, the unity of the people is enforced by their unity among themselves and with their reformer-leaders. So to unite the oppressed requires an arduous task of *de-ideologising* so that they begin to realise the 'why' and the 'how' of their adhesion to reality. It is not merely by propaganda or sloganising, that the unity of the

¹³¹ As long as the *oppressor image* 'housed' within the oppressed is still there, its force is generally more powerful than its victims. And when this is still there it is not uncommon that the poor people can easily denounce the leaders who have come to help them in the humanisation process. The *fear of freedom* leads the people to this ambiguous action. So the leaders should not be credulous but should be alert for these possibilities.

¹³²P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 152.

¹³³ A number of factors make the task of dividing the people easier than uniting them. First the dominators exploit their privilege by using the instruments of power which they control. Secondly, dominators organise themselves freely (given their fewer number) in the face of fundamental threat they face. But the leaders of the people find that they cannot operate without the people and organising the people is more difficult a task. Often the oppressed are ambiguous, emotionally unstable, and fearful of reprisals and fearful of freedom. Another factor lies on the psyche of the oppressed who are living in dualism. This is a kind of schizophrenic life. So in their world view they are divided between an identical past and present, and future without hope. It is only when the oppressed surrender the false self unity of the divided self can they become true individuals.

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oppressed is achieved¹³⁴. The object of dialogical-libertarian action is not to dislodge the oppressed from a mythical reality only to bind them to another forced unity. On the contrary, the objective of the dialogical action is to make it possible for the oppressed, by perceiving their condition to opt to work together to transform an unjust reality¹³⁵.

To achieve this indispensable unity, which is an act of solidarity, there is need to impress it on the oppressed the fact of their oppression¹³⁶. Until this ontological sense of dignity and right sense of identity is instilled into the oppressed, they cannot foster authentic unity and so cannot fight in solidarity for their liberation and humanisation. Freire explains that the unity of the oppressed occurs at the human level, not on the level of things.

Freire's belief in the power of unity and solidarity for effective social change is echoed by another author who maintains that unity is indispensable for any authentic reform¹³⁷.

According to A. Darder of the University of California,

history has repeatedly shown that significant institutional change can truly take place only as a result of collective work within social movement organisations. True, legal and policy strategies have had some impact, but ultimately the collective pressure of the masses has had the greatest impact in quickly mobilizing these forces. ... Within such a context of solidarity, we can powerfully reanimate political self-determination and with courage speak out boldly in defiance of social and economic injustice. Through our collective participation..., through the building of ethical communities for struggle and change, we can develop the critical strength, reflective ability, political knowledge, social communication, personal maturity, and solidarity across our differences necessary to re-invent our world¹³⁸.

¹³⁴ So for Freire, neither speech-making (slogans) nor mere activism is enough to usher in the unity of the people who have been living in visible or invisible mental servitude for so long. Once again the importance of conscientization is stressed. It will help to change their minds, arouse thought in them, explain the causes and effects of oppression, and then propose that through unity they can overcome their condition.

¹³⁵ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 154.

¹³⁶ Of course one can never engage in successful revolution without the people's support no matter how charismatic the leader may think he/she is (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 59). It is only when they actually perceive this reality that they will realise also the united action that can be effective. They now see that they are real human beings, have great potentials, have ontological dignity and imbued with rights. For Freire this is the most difficult task facing the conscientization and humanisation process. This is to say that such knowledge is fundamental in a liberation process since it will enable the people realise that they are called to be actors and not spectators, that they are the makers of history and not its victims.

¹³⁷ Cf. A. DARDER, op. cit., p.27.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

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4.4.5.5.4. Planning and Executing Transformative Cultural Action

Despite the populist emphasis which Freire lays on the liberation struggle, he maintains that no human community or enterprise can succeed without proper planning and effective execution of the transformative action. Such planning/organisation is necessary both in the process of liberation and also to sustain the gains of the revolution in a democratic society¹³⁹. Freire does not give a strict guideline for such planning and action since such will vary in each given historical circumstance. However, he maintains that there should be basic elements that should characterise such projects no matter the time and place they are undertaken. The indispensable elements are consistency, boldness, radicalisation and courage to love.

By consistency Freire means that word and action must march one another. To tell the people one thing and then do another in practice is anti-dilalogical and manipulative. It will weaken the revolution. Boldness urges the leaders and people seeking for change to confront existence as a permanent risk and to face the challenges they will meet very courageously. Cowards cannot get their freedom since freedom is not generally given as a gift to the oppressed and the poor. The planners and organisers should equally realise that ‘radicalisation’ should be part of the cultural action. This differs from sectarianism.

There is another important element that Freire highlights in planning and executing cultural action for change. It has to do with flexibility, freedom and use of authority. According to Freire, one of the hallmarks of effective leaders is their ability to be flexible in the reform process. This is essentially because they are dealing with human beings. Above all, reality is not static but dynamic, hence the possibility of emergence of some ‘unforeseen circumstances’ in the humanisation process. Leaders should be very alert to ready to change their strategies even when the non-violent action is in progress. Flexibility in this sense is not tantamount to inconsistency but rather an expression of freedom characteristic of Subjects in the humanisation process.

¹³⁹ This theme is well discussed under the role of the teacher as the leader in a classroom setting where the tension between authority and freedom is most evident (cf. A. DARDER, op. cit., p. 111).

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Linked to Freire's understanding of need for flexibility is his concept of freedom. For him, freedom here does not mean indiscipline or licentiousness. Once these two vices set into the planning and execution of the transformative action, anarchy sets in, and the process of humanisation is derailed. Here the main point is that while the cultural action should be include the people, the authority figure must be present and effective. The ability to balance freedom and authority becomes the mark of effective organisation process for reform¹⁴⁰. One way that leaders could exercise their authority is to delegate it. The danger of concentrating too much power on one or few individuals, is that it can lead to a kind of dictatorship. This is what Freire can call authoritarianism. Freire calls on the leaders to avoid the two extremes of licentiousness and authoritarianism in executing cultural action¹⁴¹.

Among the important elements that must be present in the planning and execution of cultural action is faith in the people¹⁴², and above all, the *courage to love*. Cultural action, apart from being non-violent should be motivated by love, even for the oppressors. This love is far from being an accommodation of injustice. It is rather a disposition to include 'everybody' in the vocation/mission of transforming the world for better for and on behalf of the whole humankind¹⁴³.

Having enumerated important elements and disposition for the actual execution of cultural action, Freire focuses especially on how to communicate the message and project to the people. First, he asks leaders to focus on "the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people"¹⁴⁴. Utilising certain basic contradictions of oppression, these concrete, existential situations must be presented to the people as a problem which challenges them, and requires a response not just an intellectual response, but especially concrete action¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴⁰ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 159.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁴² Cf. Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁴³ By highlighting the importance of love in cultural action, Freire shares the same ideas with other nonviolent actors like M. Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 77

¹⁴⁵ Failure to begin the programme with the people's own preoccupation will inevitably land the leader in a situation that Freire describes as *preaching in the desert* or banking action (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 77).

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To communicate effectively, Freire advises the leaders to choose the appropriate language that can touch the people, convince them and then elicit creative action in them. Freire warns the organisers of cultural action to avoid abstract language and jargons that mean nothing to the people, no matter how coherent these may sound for the elite and the intellectual. Such technical language could end up as mere rhetoric and alienating. For Freire, every other element discussed including use of scientific/technological tool, fostering cooperation and unity etc. will be ineffective if there is no proper communication of the ideals targeted. Leaders must understand the *structural conditions* in which the *thought and language* of the people are *dialectically framed*¹⁴⁶.

4.4.5.5.5. The Evolutionary Trends in Freire's Theory of Cultural Action

Since the publication of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where Paulo Freire discussed the theory of cultural action for the liberation of the oppressed, he has further developed and improved on his earlier teaching. He believes that every pedagogy is a process hence he tries to adapt his earlier teaching to a more democratic and civil society. A critical reading of Freire shows an evolution in his understanding of the theory of cultural action.

The first part of his thought was more militant in nature. Although this underwent change, its basic principles remain relevant¹⁴⁷. The second part of his teaching focuses more on how to use more democratic means to effect social transformation¹⁴⁸. Since most of his teachings on cultural action as discussed in this study is based on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (which is essentially the first phase of his thoughts), we shall summarise the content of the second.

Freire himself was aware of the evolution in his thoughts and to his critics he replies:

¹⁴⁶ The details of how to discover the people's frame of thought and language is well enunciated by Freire (cf. *ibid.* pp. 78-79).

¹⁴⁷ The period can be said to span from his student years in Brazil, up till the publication of the important work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970. The second part of his thought can be said to begin by his encounter with other cultures outside Latin America. In these other cultures, Freire realised that even democracy does not eliminate all forms of injustice and oppression. Such issues as racism, feminism and marginalisation of minorities became new forms of oppression that went beyond the material poverty of rural peasants in Brazil. Again, his increasing involvement in politics, and criticisms of his writings, played important role in this evolution.

¹⁴⁸ It is especially on this level that his theory of cultural action can be said to resemble the nonviolent theories of the Gandhian-King tradition as discussed earlier.

You need to keep in mind that my work is not limited to the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. It is exactly because of my growing awareness over the years concerning the specificities of oppression along the lines of language, race, gender, and ethnicity that I have been defending the fundamental thesis of 'unity in diversity', so that the various oppressed groups can become more effective in their collective struggle against all forms of oppression¹⁴⁹.

One important characteristic of Freire's second trend of thought is that his theory of cultural action developed over the years evolving from the language of 'quasi-warfare' to that of democratisation and empowerment in a civil society. This evolution in Freire's thoughts has led his readers to describe him as one evolving from the language of '*bullets and bombs*' to that of '*ballots*' and '*bills*'¹⁵⁰. His main concern in a democratic society now, becomes the pursuit of more rights for the minorities, marginalised groups and indeed the poor, not only in Brazil but also in any part of the world. In his new trend of thought, Freire did not abandon his earlier teaching on cultural action. What he did was to seek a new language and more relevant theoretical framework for addressing the persistent challenge of oppression and marginalisation. This is important because of his belief that every methodological error has an ideological root¹⁵¹. This calls necessarily for a correct theory of action because, "*sans théorie, c'est vrai, nous nous perdons en cours de route*"¹⁵².

In this second part of his thoughts, *schools* and the *critical society* are the two principal agents of transformation in a democratic society today. We summarise this below.

a. The School and Cultural Action

Since Freire always believed that schools should play active role in the socio-political and economic life of the society, he presents the essential challenges facing schools¹⁵³. He believes above all that the higher the level of literacy that the society has reached, the

¹⁴⁹ At first Freire tended to see the oppressed as a class of social victims characterised by material poverty. Today, he has come to realise that oppressors are not just a class of materially poor people. Freire himself confesses: "I have also encountered many teachers, some of them friends, who while being oppressed by the political system in which they operated, were in turn oppressors of their students" (P. FREIRE, *A Response*, in P. FREIRE (ed.), *Mentoring the Mentor...*, p. 310).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. J. D. ROBERTS, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, Orbis, New York, 1994, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 81.

¹⁵² P. FREIRE, *L'éducation dans la ville*, Paris, Editions Païdeia, 1991, p. 124.

¹⁵³ Freire's insistence on involving the school in any authentic transformative action came with his continued discovery of the power of education and the school in a democratic society. So schools were not really considered the principal actors in the initial theory of action proposed by Freire in the *Pedagogy of*

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easier it is for them to engage in an effective social transformation¹⁵⁴. Teachers are to be the vanguards of human rights. They are morally bound to engage in “a discourse about the defence of the weak, of the poor, of the homeless, and a practice that favours the haves against the have-nots; a discourse that denies the existence of social classes, their conflicts, and a political practice entirely in favour of the powerful”¹⁵⁵. Freire thinks it naïve for teachers to pretend to be neutral about the socio-political affairs in the community where they live and work since what happens to the society at large will eventually affect them¹⁵⁶. Freire offers teachers the guidelines that could be followed in organising transformative action that would lead to a more just society¹⁵⁷. Of course the principles discussed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remain relevant in this process¹⁵⁸.

b. ‘Critical’ Democratic Society and Cultural Action

Perhaps the greatest discovery which Freire made in his analysis of the phenomenon of oppression is that, the oppressed do not constitute a separate class of their own. Oppression expresses itself in economic, political, racial, religious and gender forms. Henceforth Freire started to seek democratic, political and economic strategies that would be used to tackle oppression in its multifarious expressions¹⁵⁹. Once again, Freire calls maintains that to create a society will be accountable, democratic and preoccupied with the its weakest members, there is need for conscientization.

the Oppressed. But since then he has insisted that the teacher often takes political and ideological positions even if he/she recognises it or not (cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy dans la ville...*, p. 43).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁵ P. FREIRE, *Teachers as Cultural Workers, Letters to those Who Dare Teach*, Westview Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 15.

¹⁵⁶ One can think of how political policies can affect the teachers, their careers and their lives. To insulate oneself from the political life then is tantamount to committing *suicide*.

¹⁵⁷ Once one perceives a situation that is undemocratic and repressive, one must not begin acting on his own but should develop what Freire calls the *ideological map* of the system in which one wants address. One should then carefully discuss the situation with some people so that they perceive the reality at stake. This is to help people seeking a change to act in solidarity. Freire warns: “I need to know whom I can count on before acting...” (P. FREIRE, *A Response*, in *Mentoring the Mentor...*, p. 322).

¹⁵⁸ When one considers the role that schools and universities play in many nonviolent protests, then Freire’s theory of cultural action stands vindicated. Industrial action by teachers and other forms of protests by students generally attract the sympathy of the society. As a matter of fact, parents are easily drawn into problems linked to schools because of their children.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *L’éducation dans la ville...*, p. 117.

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Freire's theory of cultural action which is based on the task of conscientization has become the basis for many civil liberty movements in repressive parts of the world. Inspired by the emancipatory initiatives in Brazil, Freire observed that peasants were able to form the trade union called, the 'Peasants League'. This became the platform in their struggle for the lands unjustly taken away from them. Freire sees this as "an example of the results of the agitation of the peasants and their spirit of organization"¹⁶⁰. His theory of cultural action also helped the people of Guinea-Bissau both during their struggle for independence and in the post-independence reconstruction¹⁶¹. Through creating a critical society, Freire's theory gave the theoretical framework in the struggle against apartheid policy in South Africa as we read: "Freire's pedagogy is about the movement of the community toward consciousness. It is no accident, ... that Freire's work was of importance to Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, a movement of critical consciousness and movement toward solidarity"¹⁶².

4.4.5.5.7. Towards a More Effective Use of Nonviolent Action for Change

From our studies about nonviolence and cultural action according to the Freire, we can make the following propositions of how to use it effectively in a typical Black African country. Of course these propositions are subject to adaptation in given circumstances.

a. Proper Education on the Principles and Praxis of Nonviolence

The first task facing those who wish to use nonviolence as an antipoverty strategy is to educate the practitioners on the principles and mechanisms of nonviolence. The fundamental principle for any nonviolent protest is to establish an atmosphere that can lead to negotiation. The belief is that negotiated agreement will lay the foundation for compromise and compromise in turn will help in settlement of impending or actual conflicts that cause poverty. Organisers should be knowledgeable of the mechanism and challenges involved in the action.

¹⁶⁰ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy in Process...*, p. 81.

¹⁶¹ Freire's principles of revolutionary struggle is said to have greatly inspired the first political leaders of the country after independence. Soon after independence, Freire was personally invited to help reconstruct the country in the second phase of the struggle for liberation and humanisation.

¹⁶² R. SCAPP, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

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b. Define the Goal to be Attained

It is important that the organisers of nonviolence define what problem that they want to tackle first and the goal they hope to achieve. For example, since corruption is major cause of destitution in the region, the organisers could protest against the corrupt practices of the elite who enrich themselves at the expense of the defenceless masses. The organisers should define the minimum terms they are ready to accept. These demands should be precise to ensure that both the organisers, participants and opponents understand clearly the demand made of them. Other specific issues to be protested against include the rigging of election, the extortion of money by the police, lack of employment especially for the youths, non-payment of salaries to civil servants, uncontrolled hiking of house rents by the landlords and unjust hiking of the prices of essential commodities like petrol, kerosene etc. Other issues that need to be protested against include the imposition of religious law like 'Sharia' in some parts of the country where other religious adherents co-exist with Moslems¹⁶³.

c. Publicity

By publicity here we mean that those organising transformative actions should use the media like the Television, the Internet, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines and other forms of communication to sensitise the public on what they are doing, how they are doing it, and when they are doing so. This is part of Freire's theory of conscientization. While some may see this as exposing the movement and its strategies to the machination of the opponents, experience shows that it is better to publicise the demand being made, the actions planned to tackle them, when and how. By publicising it, nonviolence shows itself a democratic, and not a clandestine movement. By publicising it, the opponent may have time to reflect on its dangers and may be moved to seek dialogue. Through such publicity, the movement may attract more sympathisers both locally and internationally.

As a matter of fact, the more many people are involved in the nonviolent action the more impact it generally makes in the reform process. Through publicity the opponent,

¹⁶³Experts in the Ghandi-King nonviolence tradition warn that too many demands should not be made at once so that the movement is focused and their goal attainable. So only one of such challenges mentioned above can be tackled at a time.

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especially the government, and other law enforcement agencies will become less suspicious of the cause¹⁶⁴. By making a prior publicity of the intended nonviolent activities being organised, generally tends to reduce the outbreak of violence¹⁶⁵.

d. Tenacity

Another step to be taken in organising any such protest against injustice is that the movement must be very well organised and their activities consistent while they remain insistent on their demand. While the opponent may be given some period of 'truce' during the campaign, to enable them (the opponent), consider the demands and proposals made, they should not be allowed to ignore them. Organisers and participants in the movement should realise that doing the battle only half way is worse than not doing it at all¹⁶⁶. The pressure should be maintained with a moral force.

The participants should realise that the opponent has many strategies for weakening the movements in what Freire calls antidiological strategies. Manipulation and intimidation are the commonest strategies. It is here that the courage and heroic determination for sacrifice will be tested during the movement.

e. Trade Unionism

In the event of economic-social disputes all should strive to arrive at peaceful settlements. The first step is to engage in sincere discussion between all sides; but the *strike* remains even in today's conditions, a necessary although an ultimate, instrument for the defence of workers' rights and the satisfaction of their lawful aspirations¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁴ Sometimes even the law enforcement agencies like the police may protect the nonviolent *agitators* instead of being against them.

¹⁶⁵ Sometimes however such publicity may lead to the opponents, especially authoritarian regimes to clamp down on the organisers to deter them from going on with the plans. They may even label the plans as an unjust assembly and so stop it. But it is here that the resolve of the participants will be tested. Luther King calls for civil disobedience in this case since the law prohibiting the movement is made in bad will and so should be considered 'unlawful'. Once the oppressors realise the resolve of the people and come to see that their prisons cannot accommodate thousands of people who may defy them, and are willing to be imprisoned, then the movement has chances of succeeding.

¹⁶⁶ Martin Luther King has this to say on consistency: "Our experience is that marches must continue over a period of thirty to forty-five days to produce any meaningful results. They must also be of sufficient size to produce some inconvenience to the forces in power or they go unnoticed" (J. M. WASHINGTON (ed.), *A Testament of Hope*...., p. 60).

¹⁶⁷ GS, no. 68.

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While a general or mass nonviolent movement could be effective, we shall note that the most sustainable type of nonviolent movements is carried out by trade unions. Trade unions are powerful agents in nonviolent movements because generally their means of livelihood is at stake and they see such actions as matter of life and death. Trade unions are generally more organised than mass protesters since the former have more stable and more experienced organisational structure.

Trade unions should indeed play more active role in protesting injustice because they hold a part of the society's economy. Examples abide where transport unions, labour unions, teachers' association, farmers and even security agencies have threatened to cripple the entire socio-economic and political life of the state. By threatening to go on strike or actually doing so, many cases of injustice have been redressed. Some of the most shining examples are the Solidarity Movement in Poland, the general strike of the Nigerian Labour Congress to protest hiking of prices of essential commodities and the Trade Unions agitations that led to the abrogation of the law considered hurtful to French youths¹⁶⁸.

Although strike action remains the last option, these unions have used it most effectively in many countries to agitate better working conditions, stop illegal retrenchment of their workers, and in pressuring governments to engage in people-oriented reforms and policies. It is therefore not enough for the Church to simply issue communiqués stating their support for such trade unions¹⁶⁹. Today the Church, through her relevant and competent agencies like the *Justice and Peace Commission*, should be involved in the activities of these civil movements. Among other things, this will help to show that the

¹⁶⁸ This protest championed by French youths took place in France from the early months of March to the early months of April 2006 when the government of Dominique de Villepin capitulated to the pressure of the protesters. Whether in Nigeria, Poland or France, the aim of the trade unions should always be to enhance honourable negotiations. They seek the right to be consulted, to be listened to, and be recognised as part of the political process with the right to bargain collectively for better working conditions (cf. P. GUMBEL, *The French Way of Reform*, Time Magazine, May 1, 2006, p. 27).

¹⁶⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church is very explicit on how to engage on such actions: "Recourse to a strike is morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit. It becomes morally unacceptable when accompanied by violence, or when objectives are included that are not directly linked to working conditions or are contrary to the common good" (CCC, no. 2435).

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Church actually cares about the plight of the people. It could also help the Church to influence these movements and possibly infuse them with gospel values. It will equally help to ensure that the movement remains focused on the demand for common good and not for the manipulation of a few selfish members. Those organising or participating in such movements should be *well-informed* of the mechanisms of nonviolent action. The Ghandian-King model of nonviolence as well Paulo Freire's contributions in this regard could be adopted and adapted in given contexts¹⁷⁰.

4.4.5.5.8. Closing Remarks and Critique of Nonviolent Engagement

Our study of nonviolence shows that it is a theory for effective social engagement for reform which rejects the application of the principles that will generally lead to violence. Nonviolence seeks to retain the liberatory power of the critique of dehumanisation while recognising the malleability and contradictions of identity, embracing the uncertainties and varieties of reason in knowledge. It respects the plural compelling conceptions of the good that can shape a just, democratic society. From the theory of nonviolence one recognises that the cultural and historical praxis that is the heart of being human is unending. Man cannot transcend his existence as an unclouded, limited, conditioned historical being. And this limit actually provides the opportunity of setting ourselves free in so far as one joins the political struggle for the transformation of the world.

Nonviolent engagement aims at the construction of bulwarks of resistance to dehumanisation as well as prepare grounds for self-determination. Although nonviolence abhors violence, we have to acknowledge that sometimes, some degree of violence may erupt, even if unintended. What is important then is the ethical and political awareness of the those organising and engaging in the movement. This is to say that theories of nonviolence often leave the reader in a dilemma, as to *whether* and *how* militant nonviolence could be practiced concretely. Ethical and political uncertainties may provide the grounds that weaken the justification of violence. Ethical theory and the tradition of common folk alike recognise that stringent tests must be met to warrant

¹⁷⁰ The procedure of formation, membership and government of trade unions and other civil liberty organisations should be observed so that the danger of being manipulated or hijacked by a few unscrupulous members are avoided.

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killing, even in self-defence. By advocating nonviolent action, we are generally operating on the level of ideals. This means that we can challenge, even radical situations of injustice, without actually, sacrificing the Kingdom and democratic values of peace, tolerance and love.

From our study of the Scriptures, some official Church documents and some theological writings, we can state that liberation, reconciliation and dialogue are complementary. Confrontations and even 'conflicts' are aspects of the commitment to the poorest of the poor. Catholic Social Teaching could serve as guide for organising various types of action of solidarity for and with the poorest of the poor. So we insist that there should be educational, media, and grassroots campaign designed to promote the principles and practice of nonviolence. It is as an effective way to change, heal, and empower the poor and their communities.

History of modern civilisation has shown that various solidarity movements have played effective roles not only in defending its members but also serving as pressure groups for reform. *Rerum Novarum*, Vatican II, and John Paul II have all shown that such actions, especially through trade unions are not only *permissible* but actually *recommendable*. The achievements of the *Solidarity Movement* in Communist Poland, the Nigerian Labour Congress, Amnesty International, Green Peace etc, show that the Church especially has not yet used this organ of reform in a most effective way¹⁷¹. On the individual level, the contributions of M. Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and other great reformations help to appreciate how one person can initiate a nonviolent action that can change the history of a society and destiny of the poor and oppressed in a radical way.

So there should be effort to teach the principles and praxis of nonviolence in our communities, to raise the awareness of unity as a way of life through exposure, to and

¹⁷¹ As the Catholic Social Teaching is becoming very important aspect of theology, Catholic theologians should see it as a challenge to formulate a Catholic nonviolence theory that will be truly Christian and yet able to influence modern society. This will equally help to correct what may be the weaknesses inherent in many movements that claim to be nonviolent. Today, prophetic actions of such groups as Amnesty International, Transparency International and the Red Cross show that pressure groups have become powerful forces in a democratic society. Individual Christians and groups could be inspired by the achievements of Ghandi in India, Martin Luther King in America, Nelson Mandela in South Africa and Desmond Tutu in South Africa.

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contact with role models; to pay tribute to, and collaborate with peace-conscious communities, organizations, programmes and people. Through nonviolence one hopes to instil important virtues in the society. It hopes to foster respect by honouring the dignity and inherent worth of every human being, especially the poorest of the poor who are often considered *non-persona* or at best burdens to the society. Nonviolence as a way of life, both on the individual and community level will help us realise that we live in an interconnected world where any harm done to the other will eventually have effect on all.

Through nonviolence we learn to fight for the rights of the poorest of the poor through promoting justice, equity and equality, and without recourse to warfare as is prevalent in many African states. This is even so since nonviolence is guided by the principle of love even for the perceived 'enemy'. It will make us lovers and defenders of truth. Nonviolence will enlarge our capacity to embrace differences without seeing those who differ from us as potential enemies to be defeated. It will help us to realise the power of the human spirit to triumph over injustice and suffering. Nonviolence will increase our capacity for dialogue, for the practice of forgiveness, for cultivating moral strength and especially for heroic sacrifice for others. Another power of non-violence is that as collective engagement the group would be able to confront situations that would otherwise be impossible to tackle if people acted individually. In the final analysis, we should remember that non-violent action should not be regarded as an end-in-itself. It must be used as means of achieving a greater good, and above all, it must be open for dialogue as *Gaudium et spes* admonishes: "As soon as possible, however, avenues should be explored to resume negotiations and effect reconciliation"¹⁷². Since nonviolent approach to social reform needs to be undertaken with great tact, we shall make a critique of it and highlight some difficulties people could encounter in the process.

Critique of Nonviolent Resistance

By way of critique, we must end with the caveat that nonviolent resistance should be seen as important praxis in a democratic society. Nonviolence like any theory is an ideal to be

¹⁷² G.S, no. 68.

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desired but which may not always be achieved. This is to say that it has its own risks which are presented below.

First, personal injury, social criticism and break-down of law and order are possible dangers in the praxis. In an totalitarian regime the dangers are even more, since such government tends to resort to more and more force to maintain order. Secondly, many organisers of nonviolence will soon discover that their movements easily get out of their control, and could lead to actual violence. Luther King himself experienced it in some occasions, like in December 1961 at Albany Georgia, where a nonviolent march ended in fiasco¹⁷³. Some of the guerrilla and terrorists movements in modern history may have begun as nonviolent protests, turned 'freedom fighters' and then ended as terrorists and guerrilla organisations.

Thirdly, there are various groups with diverse interests, ideologies and allegiances. These diversities make organising the action difficult and even after the success of the movement, internal bickering and conflicts could result. These can lead to more conflicts and even to open violence among the factions. The misunderstanding between the Black clerics and Luther King, who were supposed to be fighting one cause, is a typical example¹⁷⁴. Finally to think that the oppressors who are entrenched in their privileged positions can easily be 'converted' and become promoters of justice is rather simplistic. The fear that those who claim to be oppressed can also turn oppressors makes the idea of conversion too idealistic as an effective strategy for ushering a just society.

But in spite of these, the positive impact of nonviolence outweighs its disadvantages. One can argue that it is the ignorance of the power, nature and principles of nonviolence agitation that often leads its abuse. In Black Africa this has resulted in increased militancy, incessant conflicts and warfare. I submit therefore that nonviolence as a principle of African theology of solidarity is a lesser evil than war without end in the sub-region. From our study we shall finally remind ourselves that, "it is important to remember that the Church has tolerated, though not encouraged, the resistance that is

¹⁷³ Luther King was often imprisoned in the event of such public disorder (cf. M. L. KING, *Letter from a Birmingham*, in J. M. WASHINGTON (ed.), op. cit. p. 84).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

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proportionate to the violence of an unjust aggressor. This tolerance may not seem in strict conformance with the gospel, but it is a classical Catholic moral Doctrine¹⁷⁵. Since nonviolent action can be considered an evolving aspect of democratic practice still in its infancy stage, we are challenged to further reflect on how to make it a more effective strategy for fostering justice and promoting the Kingdom values of love, peace and justice. We now consider charity as another expression of transformative action.

¹⁷⁵ T. J. GUMBLETON, *Peacemaking as Way of Life*, in J. A. COLEMAN (ed.), *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought, Celebration and Challenge*, Orbis, New York, 1991, p. 312.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHARITY AS PRAXIS OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOREST OF THE POOR

4.5.0. Preamble

Charity is the second aspect of the transformative action and transformative action is one of the pillars of theology of solidarity with the poor. In this sub-section, we shall demonstrate why charity is a principle of solidarity. First we shall analyse two related concepts, charity and compassion, which will be used interchangeably in this work. From our interpretation, we shall demonstrate why charity is a dimension of transformative action and as one of the highest expressions of solidarity with the poor. We shall examine the principal agents of charity in Black Africa. Finally we shall end with some practical propositions for the effective use of charity as an anti-poverty strategy¹.

4.5.1. Interpreting the Concepts: Love, Charity and Compassion

The word love is one of the most elusive concepts in English language. It has many nuances and mean many things at different times for different people. In the study below, we shall try to explain its meaning from many perspectives. Although 'love', 'charity' and 'compassion' will eventually be used to express the same meaning in this work, charity remains the key concept.

4.5.2. The Contributions of Pope Benedict XVI

In his maiden encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI states that, "today the term 'love' has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings"². Aware therefore, of the ambiguity associated with the concept, the Pope chose to limit himself to what he calls "the understanding and practice of love in the Sacred Scripture and in the Church's tradition"³. For us, while we shall limit ourselves to the definition of love as the Pontiff, we shall go further to argue, and demonstrate that the

¹ Our discussion on charity brings with it a number of related concepts like love, compassion, caring, mercy, almsgiving etc. In general, all of these terms express a disposition to help someone.

² BENEDICT XVI, *God is Love*, 2005, no. 2. Benedict XVI who is a German and former Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, was elected pope on the 19th of April 2005 following the death of pope John Paul II on the 2nd of April the same year. *God is Love*, is his first encyclical. Before Benedict XVI, Karol Wojtyla (who later become later Pope John Paul II), had written on love in his book, *Love and Responsibility*. In what he called a metaphysical analysis of love, he explored the meaning of the word, love more from its conjugal perspective. Here he described love as attraction, as a desire and as goodwill. Psychologically he described love as sense impression and emotion, as sensuality and sentiment. In his ethical analysis of love he presents it as an experience and virtue, as the affirmation of the value of the person, as membership of one another, as choice and responsibility, as commitment to freedom. Despite the insight from John Paul II, our main interest here is on love as charity (cf. KAROL WOJTYLA, *Love and Responsibility*, Collins, London, 1981).

³ BENEDICT XVI, op. cit., no. 2

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praxis of love is not a Christian prerogative. In this regard, we shall show that in order to address the problem of extreme poverty in Black Africa, the Church, African traditional families and non-governmental organisations should work in solidarity for fostering the kingdom value of love especially for the poorest of the poor. Meanwhile, in this text we shall use the expression, *charity* as praxis of love and compassion⁴.

Although there are plenty of passages that speak of the importance of love in the Bible, the expression *charity* is not often used except in some translations where love is practically translated as *charity* to underscore a specific kind of love. It is in this sense that we can understand St. Paul when he admonishes us to walk "charitably" toward our weaker brothers (Romans 14:13-15)⁵. Pope Benedict XVI, after distinguishing *eros*, *philia* and *agape* as used and understood in the Greek language, focuses his discussion on Christian love. Here God is affirmed as love Himself and Jesus Christ the superlative exhibition of God's love⁶.

After the philosophical and theological exposition on love, Benedict XVI, then tackles the real issue of love of neighbour. Relying heavily on the letter of St. John, he argues that love of God is most genuine when it expresses itself in the love of neighbour. Using the example

⁴ The Greek word, *Agape* is often translated both as 'charity' and 'love' in the New Testament. As these words are used in different contexts and with different shades of meaning, a decision has to be made on which English word is the best to use in each case. But we must remark that the word 'love' has a wider shade of meaning which we cannot exhaust in this project. Even the very title of the Pope's encyclical shows the difficulty in interpreting the concept, love. The Latin translation of the document reads: *Deus caritas est*, the French translates the same as, *Dieu est amour*, and the English, *God is love*. We shall use three expressions love, charity and compassion in the same sense in this particular text as the principle of solidarity with the poor.

⁵ King James Version of the Bible tends to translate love as charity hence the abundance of the word in the letters of St. Paul. In this case we can say that the word charity, is a New Testament word and is found 9 times in 1 Corinthians 13. In 1 John 4 love is mentioned 27 times (unless you included the 3 times "beloved" is used). Scripture describes love/charity in different ways. It is the epitome of perfection in the Christian life. It is the "greatest" of the three abiding virtues (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:13). It is the "bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14) and the "end of the commandment" (1 Timothy 1:5). Of the seven things Peter exhorts the saints to add to their faith, love is the seventh (2 Peter 1:5-7). Obviously, the Christian life reaches its pinnacle in the practice of charity. Paul praised the Thessalonians because of their charity to one another (2 Thess. 1:3). In 1 Peter 4:8-9, Peter told the believers: "And above all things, have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging." John encouraged the saints, "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness often thy charity before the church..." (3 John 1:5-6). So according to the Scriptures, charity is the love toward others that suffers long with them and is kind (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4).

⁶ He posits the many acts of love performed by the historical Jesus as concrete expressions of this love (BENEDICT XVII, op. cit. no. 12).

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of the saints, the Pope argues that those who love God genuinely do express same heroically in the love of others. He cites Mother Teresa of Calcutta⁷ as an example⁸. In the final analysis, the Pope concludes that “love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment”⁹. Having said the above, the Pope now focuses on the “charity” as the Church’s manifestation of Trinitarian love. Here again, the Pope takes up the discussion on charity as praxis of love especially for the needy. He did not give a technical definition of charity but presents it as the practice of love of neighbour that is grounded in the love of God which is the responsibility of both individuals and the community of believers¹⁰. One can see that Benedict’s interpretation of charity is rooted in the life and tradition of the Church itself. This is because we know that right from her earliest times, the Church began to put in practice the type of love which Jesus Christ himself taught his followers¹¹.

Apart from Benedict XVI, other authors make valuable contributions to our understanding of the concept of charity as praxis of love. One of such contributions comes from Paulo Freire who tries to analyse it from anthropological, social and indeed Christian perspectives.

4.5.3. The contributions of Paulo Freire

Freire does not have a special theory of love that is independent of his theory of conscientization. His understanding of love is from his personal experience of it as well as from his Christian up-bringing. He believes that love must be incarnational in history and

⁷ He was a Catholic nun who launched a massive charity operation in the streets of Calcutta in India. She later became an international figure and founded a religious congregation called Missionary Sisters of Charity to continue her work. She died on the 5th of September 1997 in India and was given a full national honour at burial. She has been beatified by the Catholic Church. To know more about Mother Teresa, see M. MUGGERIDGE, *Something Beautiful for God, Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, Collins Publications, London, 1975; M. MUGGERIDGE, (coll.), *A Gift of God. Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, Collins Publications, London, 1975.

⁸ He would later make a connection between prayer and practice of love as he argues that heroic practice of love requires constant contact with God through prayer.

⁹ Ibid., no. 18.

¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., no. 20.

¹¹ The Pope traces the Biblical and historical development of the legal structures associated with organised charity as exemplified in the *diaconia*, service. The choice of seven deacons was intended to make this service organised and permanent. Indeed the three-fold responsibility of the Church would emerge as proclamation of the Word of God, *Kerygma-martyria*, celebration of the sacraments, *leitourgia*, and exercising the ministry of service, *diakonia* (cf. Ibid., nos. 21, and 24).

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expressed to concrete human persons in real flesh and blood¹². His love for life motivates his commitment to fighting against anti-life forces¹³. Based on his conception of the nature of the human person, and what he considered man's ontological vocation, Freire believes that universal love is an ontological vocation of humanity. He confessed that it was the love for humanity, especially the poor and the dehumanised that motivated him all his life¹⁴. Everything he did whether on the personal level, in the actual process of teaching or in engaging in any kind of work was guided by this unique desire: to enable others live full human lives. Freire's understanding of committed love has a particular note about it. It is not a mere emotional expression, and secondly it must result in concrete action for the good of the beloved.

First, Freire maintains that true love is not just a mere feeling, nor romance nor the long-suffering and self-effacing variety associated with some religious traditions. Love is not about absolute consensus, or unconditional acceptance, unceasing words of sweetness, or endless stream of hugs and kisses. His notion of love which he consistently fought to uphold is an armed love, the fighting love of those convinced of the right and duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce. This is "a love that could be lively, forceful, and inspiring, while at the same time being critical, challenging, and insistent"¹⁵.

Another characteristic of Freire's notion of love is that it is a very tough force which entails an active commitment to the beloved and not a passive and often a selfish emotion¹⁶. Conceived more as an activity than a mere feeling, Freire thinks that true love must find expression in concrete actions for the good of the person loved. Anyone who really loves should naturally engage in fighting the 'anti-life' and anti-Kingdom forces. Love is a passionate act of solidarity with humanity, a passion which is not deterred by fears, anxieties, imperfections and criticisms¹⁷. It demands sacrifice¹⁸. Poverty, ignorance all

¹²Cf. J. W. FRASER, *Love and History in the Work of Paulo Freire*, in P. FREIRE (ed.), *Mentoring the Mentor*, pp. 175-192. Indeed Freire's understanding of love and respect is emanates from the belief that the divine in each person has to be recognised and respected.

¹³ Cf. P. FREIRE, *L'éducation dans la ville...*, p. 128.

¹⁴Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁵ A. DARDER, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁶ Cf. J. W. FRASER, *op.cit.* pp. 175-176.

¹⁷ Cf. A. DARDER, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁸Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 70.

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forms of oppression are anti-life realities that every true lover of humanity should fight against.

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, Freire claims that educating the oppressed and the poor is one of the most effective ways showing them active love, since it liberates them from the anti-life forces. It is in this sense that we can understand his position that schools and teachers should regard themselves as principal messengers of love. As messengers of love therefore, Freire calls on educators to see their work not just as that of disseminating knowledge but above all as an act of sowing seeds of love and liberation. Through effective pedagogy, people are humanised, helped to be truly human, so that instead of being mere recipients of other people's humiliating charity, they become subjects themselves. Since education itself is a process of showing active love, Freire holds that even in the pedagogical process, teachers should allow love and respect for their students to guide them always. The courage to teach them in a dialogical and not a dictatorial way is both an expression of this love and respect¹⁹. The above understanding of love as an 'activity' and not just a feeling is what makes Freire's theory of education unique. This is to say that "Freire represents an approach to education that is filled with hope and love concretely located in action in the historical present"²⁰.

Other scholars have equally contributed in our understanding of the meaning of love and charity as shown below.

4.5.4. Other Contributions on Charity and especially on 'Compassion'

According to Defois, charity is a divine gift. It is not essentially a human effort, and should never be reduced to the practice of moral equity in relation to human beings. True charity

¹⁹ He maintains that dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination (cf. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 70).

²⁰ J. W. FRASER, op. cit., 196.

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has thus to be inspired by grace and must re-focus on the transcendental²¹. Defois argues therefore that apart from material assistance, there are other expressions of charity which should include respecting the other and praying for the good of another. Drawing an inspiration from traditional Catholic teaching, he maintains that ‘spiritual works of mercy’ should never be seen as inferior to giving material assistance to the needy. Defois therefore concludes that, “*toute pédagogie de la charité a une racine spirituelle*”²².

Another concept that is closely associated with charity is ‘compassion’. The concept, compassion comes from two Latin words *cum* (with), and *pator* (to suffer). So we can say that, “compassion thus means to suffer with, to share solidarity with, to show deep sympathy accompanied by the urge to help”²³. Compassion, therefore, differs from mere pity and enables us to embrace the concerns of others. Through compassion we widen our horizon, and feel with others in their struggles and especially their sufferings. For some authors like Henry Nouwen, the concept of compassion is almost synonymous with the idea of *caring* which involves action as an expression of compassion. In this sense both compassion and caring connote a deep awareness of, and sympathy for another's suffering, coupled with a determination to do something about it²⁴.

From the above discussion one can state that an important element in understanding the concept of compassion is that it does not just mean identification with people's sorrows. It also expresses a disposition to share in their joys as well. It is in this sense that we can understand St. Paul's exhortation when he urges Christians to “rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep” (Rom.12:15). Understood as a Christian disposition especially, compassion is presented as a gift of grace that enables to go beyond our natural selves and feelings towards others. It is a manifestation and incarnation of God's love²⁵. As a Christian disposition, compassion can be lived through a ministry of presence²⁶. Although God is presented as the epitome of compassion²⁷, Christians are

²¹ Cf. G. DEFOIS, *Les cultures à l'épreuve de la charité*, in P. H. PLEUROUX (coll.), *La charité à l'épreuve des cultures, IIIème colloque de la Fondation Jean Rodhain*, Paris, Editions, S. O. S., 1985, p.89.

²² J. REGNIER, *Pour une pédagogie de la charité*, in P. H. PLEUROUX (coll.), op. cit., p. 165.

²³ C. DRAGO, *Holistic Guidance, A Manual*, St. Paul Press, Mumbai, 2003, p. 105.

²⁴ Cf. H. NOUWEN, *La Compassion*, Paris, Fidélité, 1990, p. 7.

²⁵ C. DRAGO, op.cit., p. 106.

²⁶ Cf. H. NOUWEN, op.cit., p. 19.

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however called in a special way, “à vivre de telle manière que la compassion de Dieu se manifeste dans nos vies et dans celles des autres”²⁸. Since our main interest in this chapter is how love can be practiced concretely as poverty alleviation project in Black Africa, we shall see more Paulo Freire’s contributions in this regard.

For Freire, true compassionate love must find expression in concrete actions for the good of the person loved. He believes that universal love is an ontological vocation of humanity. This ontological vocation is based on the ethic of human solidarity. For him, anyone who really loves should naturally be engaged in fighting the forces that are antithetical to life. Poverty, ignorance and all forms of oppression are anti-life realities that every true lover of humanity should fight against. For Freire, the liberation and humanisation of the oppressed is best expressed through dialogical education²⁹. Furthermore, Freire perceives love as a passionate act of solidarity with humanity, a passion which is not deterred by fears, anxieties, imperfections and criticisms³⁰. It demands sacrifice, such that anyone engaged in the education of oppressed people is performing a heroic type of love³¹.

Without compassion as an expression of solidarity, each man and woman is left alone to carry the burden of his/finitude and its consequences³². Understood anthropologically charity and compassion acquire a deeper significance. This is because,

*être charitable, c'est ne pas seulement donner, c'est avoir été,
être blessé de la blessure d'un autre. C'est aussi unir toutes mes
énergies aux siennes pour guérir ensemble de son mal devenu le
mien*³³.

C. Drago from a psychological point of view equally sees compassionate love as an authentic expression of solidarity with the needy. This is what is meant by, “immersing

²⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 10.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁹ Cf. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 70.

³⁰ Cf. A. DARDER, op.cit., p. 34.

³¹ Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 70.

³² P. MADRE, *Souffrance des hommes et la compassion de Dieu, le scandale du mal*, Paris, Editions du Lion de 'JUDA', 1990, p. 107.

³³ D. GUILBERT (ed.), *Abbé Pierre. Testament*, Paris, Editions Bayard, 1994, p. 164. This work is part of the reflections made by Abbé Pierre and was compiled by his editor. Abbé Pierre who was born Henri-Antoine Groués in Lyon in 1912. is a Catholic priest. He is very popular in France as he is known to champion the cause of the poor and the marginalised.

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ourselves in the day to day life and empowerment of the poor, oppressed and the enslaved are integral to compassion”³⁴.

From the foregoing understanding of the nature of charity and compassion, the question that now arises: Why then do we think that the praxis of charity should be an important strategy in addressing the problem of extreme poverty in Black Africa today? Who are could be considered the principal agents that can promote a culture of genuine practice of charity in the sub-region today?

4.5.5. Why Charity is a Principle of Theology of Solidarity

Charity is one of the principles of theology of solidarity with poor in Black Africa because of the following reasons.

First, charity is at the heart of Judeo-Christian Scriptures. We have seen earlier in this work that despite his attributes like omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotent, the God of the Old Testament is essentially a God of compassion. From the creation account to the choice of Abraham, through the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, love was the principal motive. Although the prophets are presented as God’s agents of justice, the love of the oppressed in Israel and how to save them was a central mission of the prophets. Michael Schmaus encapsulates our position thus: “Although the Old Testament often emphasises God’s severity and justice for pedagogical reasons, nevertheless his concern and love remain in the foreground to the eyes of the believer”³⁵.

In the New Testament, we have demonstrated that the Incarnation of the Son of God was the superlative expression of God’s love. This love becomes more concrete through the various prophetic actions of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. His miracles, his teachings, his solidarity with the marginalized, and indeed his vicarious death on the cross, are all concrete expressions of God’s love. Inspired by the principal role that charity played in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the early Christian community saw the ministry of

³⁴ C. DRAGO, op.cit., p. 106

³⁵ M. SCHMAUS, *God and Creation...*, p. 41.

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compassionate love as its main mission and identity in the world. We can thus state that any theology that can be properly called Christian, must have its basis on charity.

Another reason why charity is considered as a principle of theology of solidarity with the poor is that charity is the basis of the traditional African sense of community. We saw earlier in the study of the concept 'solidarity' that the traditional Africans have deep sense of community. This sense of community is based on mutual love and deep sensitivity especially for the most needy in their midst. But it must be observed that this sense of community and mutual care seems to be very limited in scope³⁶.

This sense of solidarity and care for the most vulnerable in the community has been the strategy for the survival of traditional African peoples especially in their most challenging moments. So by proposing charity as principle of theology of solidarity with the poor, we wish to examine the nature of this practice more closely. While exposing its positive aspects, we shall equally point out the problems associated with it today. We believe that a proper understanding of charity from an African and Christian perspectives will equip us better to use it as an anti-poverty strategy in the region.

Yet another reason why charity is considered as a principle of solidarity with the poor is that, the expression charity in particular has come to acquire a new connotation and new force in modern times³⁷. Today, there is a general movement in the world leading to the 'explosion' of charity movements, activities and organisations outside the religious circles³⁸. Even various governments of the world today see it as part of their civic and political responsibilities to perform charity acts under various auspices like giving aids to the needy persons and countries. An African theologian can no longer deny the fact that the

³⁶ African sense of community and solidarity is often criticised as being limited in scope as it is generally expressed to members of one's family, community and ethnic group.

³⁷ Historically, various religious traditions like Buddhism and Christianity in particular have generally presented compassion and other forms of altruism as the pillar of their faith (cf. F. VARILLON, *Un chrétien devant les grandes religions*, Paris, Bayard Editions/Centurion, 1990, p. 173).

³⁸ When one considers the millions of dollars invested in the developing world through various charity groups, then one can actually hold that we are in an age of charity. Some of these groups tend to have more influence and credibility than some national governments in the developing world. Since they are generally non-partisan and independent, they even outlast some elected governments. Often they are more flexible and more effective and reliable than many erratic governments with vested interests including the desire to embezzle public funds.

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praxis of charity has become a powerful strategy as an anti-poverty strategy in the region. Given the above situation therefore, it behoves the theologian to find the appropriate language to explain the phenomenon that is certainly one of 'the signs of the times'. Modern civilisation seems to have refused the position of some social reformers of the nineteenth century who saw charity as the opium of the people. Often they claim that "a compassionate society is a sick society"³⁹.

Another reason for considering charity as a principle of solidarity with the poor is that related to the nature of the African society itself. Given the diversities in African societies, charity has the capability of uniting the peoples in the region irrespective of their differences. In a society with many languages and cultures, in a society where religious differences are seen as source of division and not of mutual enrichment, charity could effectively serve as a universal and uniting language. And this is possible when the poor in all religions, in all ethnic groups and in all political affiliations perceive the reality of poverty, oppression and the corrupt as their common and biggest enemies. When they reach this level of awareness, they also discover that their leaders irrespective of their religious, political or ethnic origins are often responsible for maintaining those unjust social systems.

In countries like Nigeria and Sudan in particular where religious differences are main causes of conflict and so poverty, charity could be used positively as uniting force. Through charity, Christians and Moslems, men and women, children and adults could be gathered together for a just cause. Being a solid part of traditional African lifestyle, various charity activities could help preserve the African sense of community, serve as a means of reconciliation, offer a forum for conscientization against oppression and above all be a means of reconciliation. In India Mother Teresa of Calcutta used charity to unite the Christians, Moslems and Hindus⁴⁰. Effective and organised charity therefore could play such role in many African societies today.

³⁹ H. J. NOUWEN, D. P. McNEILL et al, *Compassion, A Reflection on Christian Life*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1982, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Although a Catholic nun, Mother Teresa received so much respect and exercised great influence on many leaders of the world irrespective of their creed, race and economic status. That her funeral attracted sympathisers from all over the world shows that effective praxis of charity could revolutionise the world.

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4.5.6. Principal Agents of Charity

Having seen the important role that charity can play in the campaign against charity in Black Africa, we shall now ask ourselves: Who then should champion the cause of charity in the region? We shall restrict ourselves to the role of the families, the Church and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

4.5.6.1. African Extended Family: Its Nature as Model of Solidarity⁴¹

One of the main characteristics of traditional African family is that it is essentially the basic social unit and the centre of solidarity⁴². The concept of 'extended family' is used to express this unique solidarity. As an extended family, it means that parents and their children, grand parents, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, and cousins, in short people related by blood feel a great sense of solidarity⁴³. Extended family ties often exists even to the third and fourth generations. In the past, extended family was relatively self-standing in economy, society and religion. The special duties and rights of every man were ordered, though differing in detail from tribe to tribe⁴⁴. Oliver Onwubiko, an African theologian, encapsulates the importance of the extended family thus : "The extended African family is the sacred place where all the riches of our tradition converge"⁴⁵. Although one can discuss the extended family from many perspectives, our main concern here is, its role in caring for the most vulnerable of its members as an expression of solidarity.

As a closely knit-unit, the extended family system evolved a number of practices and mechanisms to foster solidarity among themselves. Although their love goes to every member of the family, the most vulnerable members of the family who could be considered among the poorest of the poor received more attention and protection. These include the elderly, the sick, widows, orphans, and other unfortunate victims among them. Traditional African families was generally considered a home for all the members where people shared

⁴¹ Although many agents of solidarity in the praxis of practical charity can be identified today, the task of caring for the needy remains the primary responsibility of the family.

⁴² Cf. V. M. OKEKE, *The Measure of Love, Lenten Pastoral*, 2005, no. 68 Snaap Press, Enugu, 2005.

⁴³ Cf. CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission*,. 1999, no.168

⁴⁴ Cf. E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 43. An exhaustive discussion of the relationship between the individual and the community cannot be made here. But suffice it to say that the individual is not absorbed in the family. Instead the relationship is analogous to that between the individual and the constituent parts of his body (cf. Ibid, p. 45).

⁴⁵ O. A. ONWUBIKO, *Echoes from the African Synod*, Snaap Press, Enugu, 1994, p. 142.

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their joys and sorrows together. But the highest expression of this solidarity is seen when some of the members experience some misfortune or great difficulties as presented below.

4.5.6.1.1. Caring for the Sick and the Elderly

In fact, sick family members are conscious of the family's duty to comfort, encourage, strengthen with words of faith that would help them enjoy the greatest human warmth and family affection they need to recuperate fast. This motivates many to make advance directives to be cared for at home if their illness becomes terminal. In the African context, the home is regarded as the most familiar place of rest and living⁴⁶.

When one thinks about the poorest of the poorest as the most vulnerable members of the community, the gravely sick immediately comes to mind. This is understandable especially in Africa where people place a priceless value on life and good health⁴⁷. So when a person is sick in traditional African setting, he/she generally experiences loving kindness and compassionate assistance from the family and relations. This care is intensified in the case of terminal illness. Family members especially women, feel it both as a privilege and duty to help the sick in many ways. This includes feeding them, cleaning them and keeping the house tidy, helping them take their medicine. The family takes turn to ensure that the sick or the dying is never for a moment left on his/her own. This is believed to help in minimising the fear of dying. Indeed day and night they keep trying to cheer the patient up and even encouraging him/her with words of hope, that God could reverse their conditions. They equally offer spiritual assistance by offering prayers for them either in the traditional way like divination or for Christians, by offering masses for God's intervention.

As for the care for the old in the family, we have to note immediately that generally in traditional African society, growing old is not a negative phenomenon. Rather it is seen as a sign of divine blessing, and a reward for a good life. It is in this sense that people take pride to announce that they are elders⁴⁸. Although the elderly person is seen as limited in the performance of certain duties and even incapable of begetting new biological life, such a

⁴⁶ E. ASOMUGHA, *The Hospice Movement Vis-as-Vis African Family experience. A Comparative Study*, in H. ACHUNIKE (ed.), *Evangelisation in the Third Millennium, A Contemporary Analysis*, Rex Charles and Patrick Press, Nimo, 2002, pp. 153-154.

⁴⁷Cf. Ibid., p. 141.

⁴⁸ Cf. B. BUJO, *The Ethical Dimension of the Community...*, p. 200.

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person is nonetheless, seen as the repository of the community wisdom. In a culture that is mainly oral in nature, the elders are highly valued as the source for knowing the family history, and custodian of the family property for example. Elderly persons are regarded as being closer to the ancestors and so often inherit automatically the family deity. This gives them social privileges and respect since, sometimes they even act as the family priest. According to Benezet Bujo the revered status of elders is made clear to children right from the earliest age. They are taught how to treat the orphans, the sick, the weak and the aged. They are often given the task of helping elderly persons in the farms, in fetching water or in cooking. Children are trained to stay with helpless elderly woman in the neighbourhood, sleep at her place, collect firewood for her etc⁴⁹.

Again, the family possessions like land, fishing waters cannot be appropriated by an individual, instead these are put at the disposal of all the members of the family. Often times, when the eldest person appears to own them, he is merely the custodian of such property. At death, it automatically goes to the successor in the family lineage⁵⁰. To ensure justice in the extended family, everyone used, but no particular person owned the family inheritance. Even when certain possessions like land and fishing waters could not be used at once by all, such possession goes to the eldest person who eventually leaves same for the next at his death. So much respect is given to elderly persons that even at death they are regarded as still playing important but different roles in the family set-up⁵¹. The elaborate funeral ceremonies accorded the dead testify to this⁵².

4.5.6.1.2. Protecting Widows and Orphans

Apart from many practices evolved to protect the elderly persons in the family, widows, orphans and those with special difficulties⁵³, receive special care and protection also. In a polygamous family, for example, "when the father dies, the oldest married son of the first wife becomes the 'father' of the surviving family. All the younger brothers and sisters, as

⁴⁹Ibid. p. 201.

⁵⁰ E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 45.

⁵¹ We have discussed this under the African traditional religion earlier in this work.

⁵² Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in Its Social Context...*, p. 127.

⁵³ The sick are considered among the weakest in the community and so receive special care. Many African communities now combine the traditional care for the sick and the dying with the pastoral care provided by the local church community (cf. op. cit. p. 126). It should be noted that while the families of many widows generally care for her, there still exist some cultural practices that actually oppress them. The African Synod Fathers had such practices in mind when they were discussing the plight of women in the continent.

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well as the widow owe him the same respect and obedience as they had for the deceased father”⁵⁴. Sometimes, the eldest son could even take the widow of his father, except his own mother to ensure that the widow and her children are protected in the unit. As a matter of fact, in such a traditional family set-up, “the children belong finally more to the extended family than to their biological parents. For this reason, they not only call their parents ‘father’ and ‘mother’, but also their uncles and aunts”⁵⁵.

In an extended family, therefore, one can hardly speak of an orphan or a widow since these are generally integrated into the large family unit. Nigerian bishops further explain the nature of this solidarity: “The African bestows on every member of his extended family the same love, care and concern that members of a nuclear family accord to one another. In the African family, each person’s business is everybody else’s business; each person is his or her brothers’ and sisters’ keeper”⁵⁶. E. Achermann, a missionary who has spent many years in Africa thinks that extended family should be a model of solidarity in the face of the extreme poverty and hardship experienced in the country today. According to him, “when an individual or small family unit inside the extended family falls on hard times, the others help those less fortunate. Wealthy individual families lend more help in case of the most varied needs to the community than those of lesser means”⁵⁷.

Although we have presented the model of extended family in Africa, many such families are undergoing very rapid change and today are facing serious challenges discussed below.

4.5.6.1.3. Challenges Facing Extended Family in Africa Today

First, a combination of socio-economic factors are fast eroding the African traditional family system. Urbanisation and the desire to take up other professions other than that of the family, less dependence of the family heritage like land and fishing waters among others, are all leading to migration from the rural areas where family ties are strongest. Urbanisation and even migration to other parts of the world is leading to the disintegration of extended families. The desire to acquire a better education outside one’s immediate

⁵⁴ Cf. E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 45.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁶ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, op.cit., no. 68.

⁵⁷ E. ACHERMANN, op. cit., p. 57.

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environment takes many younger persons away from home. Again, whereas, in the traditional setting, a man could inherit the wife of his brother or father and the children, today, such practices may be frowned at. This leaves the widow and her children to fend for herself and her children. The same is the case for orphans.

As for the economic factor, traditional families were content to have the basic necessities of life. Today, the desire to live a more sophisticated way of life is putting a lot of strain on the meagre income of the family. In a large family where one or two people have sustainable means of livelihood, like earning good salaries, it is difficult, if not impossible for these two to act as bread winners for the rest of the members that may number in tens or even hundreds.

Another problem today has to do with contact with other civilisations. The impact of Christianity and Islam has influenced the traditional way of life immensely. Whereas many people before generally took to the religion of their ancestors, today one family may compose of people with different religious beliefs and practices. In Africa where religion plays an important role, one discovers that it is difficult to forge a close relationship of trust with people whose faith radically differ or even appear incompatible with one another⁵⁸. The same goes with other ideological matters. People with variant, if not conflicting ideologies, even if they are of the same family may find it very difficult to live and work together in the same family.

Another factor that is leading to the disintegration of extended families is that as people mix with people from other cultures, they learn to live, and to survive alone outside their immediate environments. They are often influenced by such cultures especially where the autonomy of the individual is emphasised. Such external contacts and expose to new fields of learning may equally lead some people to question what they had hitherto taken for granted. Whereas traditional family set-up respects elders as repository of communal wisdom, very educated and well-travelled youths may discover that wisdom is not the

⁵⁸ A Pakistan Muslim may feel more affinity with a Muslim in Nigeria than his or her sibling in Islamabad. Also a member of 'Jehovah Witness' may feel more sympathy for his or her colleague than even for his or her biological parents.

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monopoly of elders in the family. Counselling services, schools and books may be preferred to getting counsel from an elder who may even be regarded as being out of touch with modern realities. With the advantage of “Residential Homes” and Daycare Centres, many working families may think it wiser to send their elderly members of the family to such places.

As a result of all these factors and more, one realises that the disintegration of extended families is one of the main causes of poverty in Africa today. Whereas, one was bound to care for the extended family and indeed one’s community before, today one finds millionaires and paupers living in the same community and even in the same family. Whereas the aged persons, orphans, widows and the weakest members of the family and community were protected in a deep sense of solidarity, today, such weaker members are often left to care for themselves. And in a society where the government does not have an efficient social security programme to care for these downtrodden members of the society, it is only logical that they constitute some of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa today.

4.5.6.2. The Church as Agent of Solidarity with the Poorest of the Poor

For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being⁵⁹.

We have seen earlier in this work that compassion and practical expression of it in charity underlined the whole life of Jesus Christ. From the Incarnation, through his ministry till his vicarious death on the cross, Jesus was demonstrating that concrete love lies at the centre of the mystery of salvation⁶⁰. Taking Francis Varillon as an example, we realise that the concept, ‘Church’ could be said to be synonymous with the concept of love. This is to say that *“dire que l’Eglise est une, sainte, catholique et apostolique, c’est dire qu’elle est un mystère d’amour... Il n’y a pas de communauté authentique si le ciment n’est pas l’amour”*⁶¹.

⁵⁹ BENEDICT XVI, op. cit., no. 25.

⁶⁰ Since we have mentioned how the immediate apostolic community followed the works of Christ in charity, we shall merely pick the salient points from our earlier reflection and then go further to examine the praxis of charity in the post-apostolic community.

⁶¹ F. VARILLON, *Joie de croire, joie de vivre*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1981, p. 121.

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4.4.6.2.1. Evidence from Tradition

Following the example of Christ, from the earliest apostolic times, the Christian community engaged in both social action and social reflection. We saw how this solidarity among them became a striking symbol of the followers of Christ. The task of caring for the less-privileged increased with the spread of the faith abroad. We see for example how Paul urged generous almsgiving in the special collection for the Christians in Jerusalem⁶². Deacons were appointed to make sure widows and orphans are cared for in the distribution of the community's goods⁶³. Slaveholders were summoned to a new relationship with their slaves. Jews and Gentiles, despite their differences melded into one in a community spirit of solidarity. Their solidarity especially in favour of the needy among them is described thus:

There was no needy person among them for, those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need (Acts 4:32).

Apart from the Scriptural evidence, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church down the centuries have equally taught that the goods of the earth were meant for every person. Failure to give alms is strongly condemned in the writings of Cyprian, St. John Chrysostom, Origen, Sts. Augustine and Clement of Alexandria⁶⁴. So right from the beginning of the Church, the Christian community has been a principal agent of various acts of charity⁶⁵. Benedict XVI attests that as the Church spread further a field, the exercise of charity become one of the main symbols of the Church and indeed a major power of influence especially among the civil authorities and the non-believers⁶⁶. The scope of this work obliges us to focus more attention on the Church's teaching of charity especially since Vatican II.

⁶² Cf. M. N. RAPH, *Discovering the First Century Church, The Acts of the Apostles, Letters of Paul and the Book of Revelation*, Paulist Press, New York, 1991, p. 152. One finds St. Paul's discourse on the Jerusalem collection in the following passages : 2Cor. 8 :8 ; 8 :10-11 ; 8 :20 ; 9 :8 ; 9 :13 ; Gal. 2 :10.

⁶³ Due to the importance of this ministry, neither the fraud by Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1), nor the dispute among the various components of the community (Acts 6:1-7) could discourage the community from performing this mission. The choice of the seven deacons confirms the role of charity as central to the mission of the Church.

⁶⁴ Cf. F. KAMMER, op. cit., p. 70.

⁶⁵ There have been many official charity engagements by the Church since the past decades. We can read more on this in a recent publication on official Vatican commitments for the refugees and prisoners during the Second World War by M. MARCHIONE, *Crusade of Charity, Pius XII and POWs*, Paulist Press, New York, 2006). (POWs here mean Prisoners Of War).

⁶⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, op. cit., no. 22.

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In recent times, a number of official Catholic documents have continued to emphasise the importance of charity as the most important of all Christian virtues. Vatican II, while recognising the practice of charity in the history of the Church affirms that “today these activities and works of charity have become more urgent worldwide”⁶⁷. The Council sees charity as an expression of solidarity with the needy. “Whenever women and men are to be found who are in want of food and drink, of clothing, housing, medicine, work, education, the means necessary for leading a truly human life, wherever there are men and women suffering from misfortune or illness, men and women suffering from exile or imprisonment, Christian charity should search them out, comfort and care for their needs”⁶⁸. The Council maintains that charity in favour of the needy is not optional but is binding on both individuals and on nations. The conditions for genuine exercise of charity is further expatiated⁶⁹.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents charity as the highest expression of Christian witness. While calling Christians to practice various spiritual and corporal works of mercy, it emphasizes that, “among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: It is also a work of justice pleasing to God”⁷⁰. Again, it reminds believers that, “it is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognise his chosen ones”⁷¹. Christians are reminded that God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them. Every law both in the Old and New Testaments must be understood in this spirit of solidarity with the poor⁷². Finally the same Catechism presents the compassion of Christ who gave himself voluntarily to enrich humanity as challenge to believers in their mission to the poor⁷³. That the Christian call to practice charity remains relevant and urgent today can be seen in the documents of two recent Popes. The contributions of the Episcopal Conference of Nigeria has also been summarised.

⁶⁷ A.A. no. 8.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid., no. 8.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid., no. 8.

⁷⁰ CCC, no. 2447.

⁷¹ Ibid., no. 2443.

⁷² The Catechism reminds believers that most of the juridical texts of the Old Testament were meant to protect the poor. Some of these include, “the jubilee year” for the forgiveness of debts, prohibition of interest on loans, the keeping of collateral, the obligation of tithe, the daily payment of the day-labourer, the right to glean vines and fields (cf. CCC, no. 2449).

⁷³ Cf. CCC, no. 2448.

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4.5.6.2.2. Charity as Praxis of Love according to John Paul II and Benedict XVI⁷⁴

Individual Popes have equally extolled the primacy of Christian charity as an act of solidarity with the needy. Most of the social encyclicals see charity as the motivating factor for the Church's engagement in social issues.

Pope John Paul II sees the practice of charity at the heart of his teachings on solidarity. In most of his encyclicals, exhortations and speeches, one finds a real juxtaposition of charity and social justice. In *Redemptor Hominis*, (1979), John Paul II presents in a special way the dignity of the human person according to Christian anthropology. So great is the human worth that Jesus died to redeem it. Christians are therefore called to imitate this love especially by practicing heroic charity to the poorest of the poor presented in the parable of the last judgment⁷⁵. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, (1987), John Paul II makes a link between solidarity and the practice of charity. In this context, he presents solidarity as a Christian virtue. It is an expression of charity which helps us to transcend ourselves and can thus lead us even, to love our enemies. So for John Paul II, such practical love could even reach the heroic degree that the Christian may even be ready to lay down his/her life for others (cf. 1Jn. 3:16).

In his *Christifideles Laici* of 1988, John Paul II presents charity as the heart of solidarity with the poor and the distinctive mark of the followers of Christ⁷⁶. According to him, while the Church engages in many other forms of apostolate in the world, in all ages, she is recognized by this sign of love. While she rejoices in the undertakings of others, she claims works of charity as her own inalienable duty and right. "For this reason, mercy to the poor and the sick, works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every

⁷⁴ We are focusing on the writings of these Popes since their works were written within the context of modern day experiences.

⁷⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 16.

⁷⁶ *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People*, was written by Pope John Paul II and appeared in December of 1988, after a special synod of 220 bishops in Rome. It was the 7th such synod since Vatican II. This document is exceedingly rich in its teachings on the laity. It incorporates and summarises most of the major statements on the laity coming out of the Vatican since 1960 (e.g., Vatican II documents, especially *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes*, and *Apostolicam actuositatem*; papal encyclicals like *Redemptor hominis* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*; and apostolic exhortations such as *Dignitatem mulieris*).

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kind, are held in special honour in the Church”⁷⁷. He calls on the laity in particular to engage in various works of charity in the society in the spirit of service since charity is the highest gift offered by the Spirit for building up the Church (cf. 1 Cor 13:13) and for the good of humanity. He calls on Christians to engage continually on charity works both individually and collectively as gospel mandate. Despite the various collective projects existing which aim at ameliorating the condition of the poor, John Paul II maintains that individuals cannot abandon the practice of charity on the personal level⁷⁸. He called on the laity in particular to maintain the traditional practice of performing charity for the poor as volunteers as part of their vocation in the Church⁷⁹.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II published his *Centesimus Annus*, and once again the primacy of Christian charity is emphasised. Here the Pope tries to make a link between the practice of charity and that of justice. “Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself is made the concrete in the *promotion of justice*”⁸⁰. He calls on those who are better off, never to see the demand of the poor as burden or as a source of annoyance, but rather as an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment⁸¹. Pope Benedict XVI has continued in the tradition of his successors especially John Paul II regarding the importance of charity.

We saw that in his maiden encyclical (*God is Love*), Pope Benedict is arguing that charity is both the heart, nature and essence of the Church without which her image will be disfigured⁸². He then discusses the relationship between justice and charity and disagrees

⁷⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 14.

⁷⁸ John Paul II argues that people may be tempted to neglect the practice of charity on individual level on the assumption that many charitable organisations and social service schemes now exist to do so. But he holds that paradoxically, individual charity is made increasingly necessary by the fact that institutions are becoming complex in their organization. They may pretend to be handling the social needs effectively, but that is not the case, given the increasing number of needy people even in the developed countries. He argues that many such projects lose their effectiveness as a result of an impersonal functionalism, an overgrown bureaucracy, unjust private interests and an all-too-easy and generalised disengagement from a sense of duty.

⁷⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles laici*, no. 41.

⁸⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, no. 58.

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 58.

⁸² Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 25.

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with those who think that the practice of charity is incompatible with the practice of justice⁸³. According to him,

love- *caritas*- will prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever is trying to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable⁸⁴.

Benedict XVI then urges the Church and individual Christians to wake up to the traditional practice of charity both collectively and individually and never allow themselves to be intimidated or deceived by the ideology that charity is now subsumed in the work of the State. But to be more effective, the Pope calls for a more organised form of charity by the Church from the local, regional, national and universal levels⁸⁵. While praising the cooperation between the Church and other agents of society, the Pontiff reminds Christians that Christian charity should safeguard its distinctive characteristic.

In a dialectical way, the Pope urges Christians to do charity only out of heartfelt love and concern for the needy. Such charity should be devoid of any ideological characteristics and must be carried out purely for the love of God⁸⁶. The pope then ends with a call to those responsible for organising charity. He insists that training is very necessary, and that prayer

⁸³Cf. Ibid., no. 26. While the pursuit of justice is the fundamental task of the State and politics, Benedict appeals to the principle of subsidiarity and argues that the State cannot however subsume in itself the fundamental rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups.

⁸⁴ BENEDICT XVI, op. cit. no. 28. The Pope holds that the even in the most advanced and industrialised societies, there exist new forms of poverty and alienation which material needs cannot satisfy. By this he equally cautions against the situation where the State thinks that it can offer a comprehensive service to its citizens in violation of the principles of subsidiarity. Here Benedict re-affirms the teaching of Pope Pius X who saw Catholic Action as both an expression of justice and charity. This is where corporal and spiritual works of mercy come together (cf. POPE PIUS X, *IL Fermo Proposito* (On Catholic in Italy, 1905, no. 3).

⁸⁵ He praises the great achievements of many Christian charity groups and movements as well as the cooperation between the State and the Church in this regard (cf. BENEDICT XVI, op.cit., no. 30).

⁸⁶ Even using charity as a means of converting non-believers or imposing the Church's faith on others will rob charity of its purity and nobility (cf. Ibid. no. 31).

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and humility should characterise their ministry⁸⁷. Benedict XVI ends optimistically in praise of love as the *force* that will save the world⁸⁸. Let us see the contributions of Nigerian bishops.

4.5.6.2.3. Charity in the Teaching of the Episcopal Conference of Nigeria

Since constant violence leading to destruction of lives and properties has been identified as one of the main causes of extreme poverty in Nigeria, Nigerian bishops have always called for the practice of forgiveness, compassion in the country. Often, their appeal for solidarity with the victims of such conflicts has been a main source of rehabilitation of victims. Actually, today, many of the poorest of the poor in Eastern Nigeria depend on Church organised charities especially in times of disasters caused by violence. They remind everyone that “the young are never too young to learn compassion. The old know now the miracle of reconciliation and reconstruction that has been achieved under God through *magnanimous compassion*”⁸⁹.

In 1975, they stated firmly that in a country as diverse and divided like Nigeria, the practice of charity should be seen a uniting force towards building a nation “where everyone can look forward to a fairer deal and a better life, and where no man will be oppressed”⁹⁰. Again, in 1985 when a number of African countries experienced severe drought and famine, Nigeria bishops took up the challenge and assured the countries concerned of their solidarity⁹¹. Later they organised a massive aid operation for the countries concerned⁹². Who are the principal agents of charity in Black African today?

⁸⁷ Through humility they realise that they are merely instruments in God’s hands and can only do so much. Only God is God and should be allowed to be God. And through prayer, they get discernment on the best way, and time to carry on their task. Without prayer those engaged in charity work may become easily discouraged by the great challenge of great suffering facing humanity. Like the apostles, they may be forced to fish the whole night and yet catch nothing (cf. Lk. 5:5). But with prayers, the love of Christ should motivate them to heroic service of God in the neighbour. But they should hope and wait for the master of the vineyard since they are only unworthy servants. Mother Teresa of Calcutta attributed her success especially to the spiritual importance she attached to her apostolate (cf. E. L. JOLY, *Mother Teresa, Messenger of God’s Love*, Paulist Press, Mumbai, 1988., p. 144).

⁸⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, op. cit., no. 39.

⁸⁹ CBCN, *Current Unrest*, 1975, in P. SCNHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 76.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 76.

⁹¹ Cf. CBCN, *Save the Nation*, 1991, in P. SCNHINELLER (ed.), op. cit., p. 252..

⁹² Cf. CBCN, *Christian Youth, Religion and National Building*, in ibid., p. 150.

4.5.6.2.4. Principal Agents of Church's Praxis of Solidarity⁹³**a. The Parish**

Historically the parish has been the centre of various Church activities like organised charity⁹⁴. Vatican II emphasized this mission of the Church by reminding believers that “the parish offers an outstanding example of community apostolate, for it gathers into one all the human diversities that are found there and inserts them into the universality of the Church”⁹⁵. For the Conciliar Fathers, the parish offers to believers especially the laity the opportunity to use their various talents including material and human resources in service of others and as an act of reciprocity for God's gratuitous grace⁹⁶.

The role of the Catholic parishes in the nineteenth century America can serve as a inspiration for understanding the historical role that parishes can play in Black Africa today. The nineteenth century American society reveals that various charity groups sprang up in the face of increasing social challenges facing the country then. They provided caring services to needy persons of all categories including orphanages, ‘foundling homes’, shelters for pregnant women and for aged persons. So powerful was the charity mission of the Church in America that, “by the turn of the century, eight hundred and twenty-seven voluntary charitable institutions under the Catholic auspices provided long-term care to the aged, the inform, and dependent children. During the twentieth century many such institutions became part of the formally diocesan Catholic Charities Agencies”⁹⁷. The inspirations provided by Catholic parishes in America helped in the evolution of the country's hospitals, nursing homes, urban and rural clinics and home health services. Aware of the importance of such charities as discussed, Catholic universities in America began to develop systematic educational programmes that would prepare people in social

⁹³ Here we shall present the historical role the parish has played in fostering charity in the society. The American parishes have been used as example due to their immense contribution in this regard. Using the American experience as example here is inspired by the fact that the present day African society bears most of the marks of the nineteenth century American society. Again we shall see some efforts being made by the parishes in some African societies like Nigeria as well as the challenges facing them today.

⁹⁴ Cf. F. KAMMER, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁹⁵ *A. A.* no. 10.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* no.10.

⁹⁷ F. KAMMER, *op.cit.* p. 66.

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work as a profession and the field of sociology⁹⁸. They aimed at “providing insights into the social forces that contributed to poverty and affected people’s ability to function successfully”⁹⁹.

Coming to the African context, one observes that at the time of the missionaries, the parish assumed a more comprehensive role in the lives of the people. Many missionary groups and individuals were known to have engaged in massive humanitarian activities in many parts of Africa. In Nigeria for instance, they built schools, hospitals, orphanages etc. Indeed many Africans were attracted to the Christian faith much more by the charity of the missionaries than by their teachings. In Nigeria today, most of the notable and efficient hospitals still in operation were built by the missionaries in different dioceses. But since many indigenous clergy took over most of the parishes, there has been a shift of emphasis from the missionary spirit. Charity in organised fashion is rare and inconsistent. On the other hand, priority is often given to the erection of magnificent church buildings, expensive presbyteries and other forms of structures¹⁰⁰.

It is in the face of the above role of the many parishes in Africa today that there has been a call for the restructuring of the parish to reflect the realities of the present century needs¹⁰¹.

⁹⁸ These new academic endeavours drew their programmes directly from the practical experiences acquired in the management of various charities in the parish and the diocese and sought to help people provide for the poor

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ There is constant levy and over-emphasis on donations and contributions. The continued agitation for parish autonomy has not helped matters as there is increased rivalry among neighbouring communities as each seek to become an ‘independent’ parish. With the perceived role of the parish priest as the *local chief* or community leader, the position of a parish priest tends to be considered more as symbol of authority than as servants of the poor. A number of African authors have warned against the dangers of this as a form of clericalism. (See for example the work by E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Orbis, New York, 1996. See also P. Okafor, *Authority as Service in the Nigerian-African Church, Challenge of the Twofold Apostolic Heritage*, in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol. 17, 2005, p. 114).

¹⁰¹ Cf. R. UGEUX, *Les petites communautés chrétiennes, une alternative aux paroisses, l’expérience du Zaïre*, Paris, Cerf, 1988, pp. 16-17. The author believes that Africa needs a model of Church that shows itself more as a family than an administrative entity. He examines the nature of the traditional parish and discovers its limits especially as found in many African societies today. Using Congo as an example, he envisages the parish as a living community where the lay people are given more role to play. While the parish priest retains his canonical position and plays the role of a coordinator, the members of the community, especially the laity should be meant to know that the parish is theirs. Ugeux believes that such idea and such organization of the parish will not only stimulate inculturation but will especially help in fostering solidarity among the people in the parish-community. Ugeux seems to have anticipated the recent choice of the image, *Church as family of God*, as adopted by the African Synod. Ugeux is a Belgian-born missionary in Africa.

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Such restructuring could lead to a renewed dynamism that will make parishes relevant and able to face new challenges¹⁰². The lay members of Christ's faithful should be allowed to play more active role in parish administration since they live closer to many of the poorest of the poor in the community. At the African Synod, the bishops called for the Church in the region to adopt the image of the 'Church as a Family of God'¹⁰³. Inspiration could be drawn from traditional African family structures and what *Ecclesia in Africa* calls *Vital Christian Communities*¹⁰⁴.

b. Religious Congregations and Pious Associations

According to Vatican II, "apostolic and charitable activity is of the very nature of religious life as their own holy ministry and the work of charity, entrusted to them by the Church and to be performed by its name"¹⁰⁵. So, even though each religious congregation or association has its unique charism, the practice of charity remains the main mission. This teaching is to be understood especially from the historical reality that charity was the bedrock of most of the monasteries and communities that inspired the congregations in the Catholic Church. Indeed, religious congregations and individual charismatic leaders promoted the development of a number of helping institutions-hospitals, hospices for pilgrims, orphanages, shelters for unwed. Like the parishes, these laid the foundation of what flourished in the nation states as various social security serves¹⁰⁶.

Today, many religious congregations and associations abound in Nigeria. The bishops of Nigeria hope that the image of the Church as family will inspire these religious communities to become centres of Christian love and solidarity especially in caring for the poorest of the poor in the society. For Nigerian bishops, such a spirit will help the communities realise that "what counts now is not our place of origin, our gender or our

¹⁰² Cf. R. MARSTIN, *Beyond Our Tribal 'Gods', The Maturing of Faith*, Orbis, New York, 1982, p. 89.

¹⁰³ O. A. ONWUBIKO, *The Church in Mission in the Light of Ecclesia in Africa*, Paulines Press, Nairobi, 2001, 90.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. J. GALLO, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: A new Model of Church*, in R. O. COSTA (ed.), *One Faith, Many Cultures*, A publication of Boston Theological Institute, Annual Series, Vol. 2 *Basic Christian Communities*, 1988, p. 97. Today, *Vital Basic Communities* is preferred to because of some ecclesiological difficulties encountered in using the latter (cf. O. A. ONWUBIKO, *The Church in Mission*..., p. 92).

¹⁰⁵ P. C, no 8. (*Perfectae Caritatis* is Vatican II Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of the Religious Life).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. F. KRAMMER, op. cit., p. 71.

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social rank, but our brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ”¹⁰⁷. Given that the Government alone has generally failed to provide the basic humanitarian serves needed in Nigeria and many other African countries today, the task of the religious groups as agents of solidarity has become more urgent. While some congregations profess practical charity as their principal mission, there is often a gap between what they profession and what they actually do in practice.

While some of these groups are doing well in terms of charity works, others are beset with a number of impediments to live up to their vocation. Unhealthy rivalry among many congregations, excessive desire to make profit, the materialist tendencies in the country have all tended to shift the focus of many religious groups from helping the poor to helping themselves. When one considers the great ministry of love and solidarity with the poor as practiced by Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the members of her congregation her sisters, when one reads the history of St. Vincent de Paul and his congregation, the Legion of Mary etc, then one realises that religious congregations and associations could play a powerful role as agents of solidarity with the poorest of the poor today.

Since the pastor remains at the centre of various ecclesia activities, we shall now see how he can become as a major actor in the Church’s mission to the poorest of the poor. In Africa, this role assumes more relevance given the privileged status of the pastor, especially Catholic priests, in many African communities today¹⁰⁸.

c. The Pastor

i. The Pastor’s Mission to the Poor: Its Scriptural Foundations

Various official ecclesial documents affirm that pastoral charity is at the heart of the vocation of the pastor. This teaching is based on the teaching that the mission of the pastor is derived from that of Christ himself who is the pastor *par excellence*. When the Scriptures teach that God is love (I Jn. 4:8), the priest who is considered a “man of God” becomes a symbol of God’s love. Indeed, without a genuine love of his neighbour, the vocation of the

¹⁰⁷ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission*, no. 20.

¹⁰⁸ We have to emphasise that by ‘pastor’ in this text, especially within the Nigerian context, we are referring to Catholic clerics. But the title of ‘pastor’ could be used to designate other animators who are performing ‘vicarial’ role in the ecclesial community.

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priest becomes less meaningful even, contradictory¹⁰⁹. This is so because, whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 Jn 4:21). As the good pastor, Jesus himself showed the connection between love for God and love for neighbour, emphasizing that "loving the Lord your God, with all your heart" cannot be separated from "loving your neighbour" (cf. Mt 22:36-40). As special ambassadors of the good shepherd, Jesus shows the pastor as one who does not seek his own interest or his own advantage, like a hired hand. The good shepherd loves his sheep to the point of giving his own life (cf. Jn 10:11, 15).

Apart from the Gospel texts, the Letter to the Hebrews further describes the nature of pastoral solidarity. It reaffirms that the High Priest, "taken from among men and made their representative before God...is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring" (Heb 5:1-2). Therefore, the eternal Son of God too "had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). As a result our great consolation as Christians is knowing that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

The pastor, therefore, finds in Christ the model of a true love for the suffering, the poor, the afflicted because Jesus is close to human beings having lived a life like our own. He endured trials and tribulations like our own; therefore he is full of compassion for us and "is able to deal patiently with erring sinners" (Heb 5:2). Finally, he is able to help those sorely tried: "Since he was himself tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb 2:18). Reflecting on the nature of these, John Paul II states: "Those who, in virtue of priestly ordination, receive the mission of shepherds are called to present anew in their lives and witness with their actions the heroic love of the good shepherd"¹¹⁰.

ii. The Pastor's Mission to the Poor in some Magisterial Documents

According to the official teaching of the Church pastoral solidarity is at the heart of the Christian mission. "Pastoral charity constitutes the internal and dynamic principle capable of uniting the multiple and diverse pastoral activities of the priest and, given the social-

¹⁰⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *The Priest is Called to be a Man of Charity*, (General Audience, Vatican City, 7th July, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *The Priest is Called to be a Man of Charity ...* (General audience). See also CCC, no. 876.

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cultural and religious context in which he lives, is an indispensable instrument for drawing men to a life in Grace"¹¹¹. This understanding of the role of the pastor in the Church is especially inspired by the Vatican II teaching on the priesthood. In *Presbyterorum Ordinis*¹¹², the Conciliar Fathers state that priests of the New Testament, by their vocation and ordination, are in a certain sense set apart in the bosom of the People of God. However, they are not to be separated from the People of God or from any person, but they are to be totally dedicated to the work for which the Lord has chosen them. They cannot be ministers of Christ unless they be witnesses and dispensers of a life other than earthly life. But they cannot be of service to men if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of men¹¹³.

Vatican II reminds priests that while they should not conform themselves to the standards of this world, "they are to live as good shepherds that know their sheep, and they are to seek to lead those who are not of this sheepfold that they, too, may hear the voice of Christ, so that there might be one fold and one shepherd"¹¹⁴. The passion with which St. Paul collected gifts to help the needy members of his community is presented as a model to priests (cf. 2 Cor 9). It is a means of fraternal solidarity among the followers of Christ (cf. Heb 13:16). *Presbyterorum Ordinis* enumerates the qualities that are expected in the pastor as sign of solidarity with the flock¹¹⁵.

In 1994, the Congregation for the Clergy reiterated the importance of pastoral charity at the heart of the Church's mission of love and solidarity with the needy. The document explains that informed by such charity, the ministerial activity must be a manifestation of the charity of Christ. With this charity, the priest will demonstrate in his bearing and conduct the total self-giving of himself to the flock with which he has been entrusted. Pastors are reminded of the difficulties involved in living this vocation but are encouraged to make concerted

¹¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Directory on the Life and Ministry of Priests*, Vatican, no. 43, January, 31, 1994.

¹¹² This is Vatican II document on the life and ministry of priests.

¹¹³ Cf. *PO.*, no. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

¹¹⁵ He must know his own sheep especially by contact, visits, relations of friendship, planned or occasional meetings, etc., always for a reason and with the spirit of a good shepherd. As Jesus did, he must welcome the people who come to him, remaining ready and able to listen, wanting to understand, being open and genuinely kind, engaging in deed and activities to aid the poor and unfortunate. He must cultivate and practice those "virtues which in human affairs are deservedly esteemed [and] contribute a great deal: such as goodness of heart, sincerity, strength and constancy of mind, zealous pursuit of justice, affability, and others" (*P. O.* 3). Prayer, the Eucharist and other forms of spiritual exercises are further proposed by this document to help the pastor in this arduous task of caring for the people (cf. *P. O.* 14).

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effort to do so for the love of their brethren. "Priests should therefore regard themselves as living signs and bearers of that mercy which they offer, not as though it were their own, but as a free gift from God. They are thus servants of God's mercy"¹¹⁶. Since Catholic priests often enjoy some prestige even beyond the boundaries of their religious groups, the Congregation for the Clergy challenges priests to play fatherly roles in the whole community especially in service of the weakest of the weak. This is irrespective of their religious or ideological leanings¹¹⁷. All this should be done in the spirit of love and service¹¹⁸.

On the local level, the Bishops of Nigeria have consistently called on priests to realise that they have special mission of loving and caring for their flock especially the most vulnerable. With the increased rate of poverty and suffering in the country, the Catholic bishops of the Eastern Region of Nigeria published a document that urges priests to give themselves more entirely, in a radical solidarity to the service of their community. While calling for service to the entire community the document challenges priests to make a special option for the poorest among the people¹¹⁹. A Nigerian author, Nathaniel Ndiokwere joins the bishops' position and argues that the increasing search for healing and security by the faithful should be seen as *sign of the time*. This is because, many people in their desperation, look up to the Church and pastors as source of refuge. According to him,

to make any meaningful impact on the masses, the Third Millennium Church must pursue with utmost vigour Christ's ministry of bringing healing to the many troubled minds of men and women all over the world-in the poorer and richer nations of the world, in developing, and developed worlds¹²⁰.

¹¹⁶ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, op.cit., no. 2. It reminds them that authentic mercy is gratuitous in nature, is an unmerited gift which has been freely given and completely unmerited.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Ibid. no. 3.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ibid. no. 3.

¹¹⁹ Cf. M. OKORO (ed), *The Igbo Catholic Priest at the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Self-Examination, Challenges and Expectations*, SNAAP, Enugu-Nigeria, 1999, p. 13.

¹²⁰ N. I. NDIOKWERE, *The Third Millennium Church, The Church Will Survive*, Morris Publishers, Nebraska, 1998, p. 282.

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From the foregoing, we realise that pastoral solidarity demands active commitment to the condition of the poor. The caring pastor who is in solidarity with his flock, is the one who knows what it feels like to be sick, aged, to be unwanted, to be a widow and to be materially dependent and destitute. And such authentic solidarity is not a matter of feeling sympathy, it is especially an expression of empathy and active solidarity¹²¹. The relevant pastor especially in Africa today should understand the meaning of the 'ministry of presence'. This is to say that the pastor should try to identify more and more with the needy, feeling with them, sharing their fears and hopes, their joys and sorrows¹²².

The sick, the aged, the handicap and especially widows and orphans should have a special care in the community. Through the practice of charity, the poorest of the poor should be able to see themselves as united by a sense of physical and psychic fragility to the pastor and the Christian community. An effective pastor should realise that people generally do not want to know how much their pastor knows, until they know how much he cares. The pastor should be able to demonstrate in word and action to the poorest of the poor: "I truly care about you. I really want your happiness and I will do all I can to assure it"¹²³.

Once again, we shall reiterate that Mother Teresa of Calcutta has shown the impact which a committed individual can make in the campaign against extreme poverty today. In a continent divided and wounded by wars, ethnic rivalry and hatred, the pastor is presented to the community as the symbol of love, tolerance, generosity and care for the weakest

¹²¹ As a matter of fact, the idea of the priest as another Christ is best expressed in the priest's diaconal role in the community. The diaconal vocation is a prolongation of the mission of Christ himself who went about doing good. So the ordination is not to be seen as an end in itself but rather as a mission for the edification of the Church and for strengthening and helping the brothers and sisters in the community. Scriptures refer to this as service of the community and of the brothers (cf. Col. 1:25; Eph. 4:12; 1Pet. 4:10-11). So in the New Testament, 'diaconia' is understood in the sense of service and not primarily in the terms of power or rights. The Christ-Servant image therefore symbolises this. This image of servant will equally help the pastor to carry out his work in a spirit of humility, responsibility and hope even in the face of great challenges. This is why Y. Congar reminds pastors and the community of believers that it is God who established the community and then appointed human agents for its edification (cf. Y. CONGAR, *Ministères et Communion ecclésiale*, Paris, 1971, p. 36).

¹²² Cf. R.S. LEE, *Principles of Pastoral Counseling*, SPCK, London, 1980, p. 62.

¹²³ J. POWELL, *Unconditional Love*, Fountain Books, London, 1978, p. 84.

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members of the community¹²⁴. The pastor in Africa today should play the role of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to help when other people have passed and ignored the plight of a desperate person (cf. Lk. 10-25-37). We shall conclude this by re-iterating the teaching and injunction of Vatican II to priests.

Although priests were to serve every body, the poor and the weaker ones have been committed to their care in a special way. It was with these that the Lord himself associated with, and the preaching of the Gospel to them is given as a sign of his messianic mission¹²⁵.

Although the Church has been historically identified as principal agent of organised charity, today one observes that charity is finding expression in many other ways outside the established Church. Space allows us to study only the emergence of Non-Governmental Organisations which became prominent since the last century. Can they be considered as agents of solidarity with the poorest of the poor today?

4.5.6.3. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as Agents of Solidarity with the Poorest of the Poor

The practice of giving aid to people in need can be said to be a common experience in many cultures. Many religious groups actually see the giving of alms as a cardinal expression of the faith. We saw in this work that the Christian religion has traditionally been known to be the champion in giving aids to people in need. But in more recent years, the practice of giving aid to needy persons has become very popular both by governments, philanthropic individuals and especially groups. In the discussion below our interest is on the role of organised groups reaching out to needy people in their own countries and especially outside their national borders.

4.5.6.3.1. The Nature and Important Features of NGOs

The term ‘Non-Governmental Organisations’ (NGOs) encompasses a vast category of groups and organisations that pursue activities aimed at relieving suffering, promoting the

¹²⁴ The work of some heroic missionaries in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide remains the testimony of the impact of the pastor especially among the poorest of the poor (cf. A. DUVAL, *L' évangile de QUIM: une vie pour le Rwanda*, Paris, Editions Médiaspaul, 1998, p. 37).

¹²⁵ P.O. no. 6.

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interest of the poorest of the poor, protecting the environment and indeed acting as the conscience of the world. NGOs are often referred to by other names as Civil Society Organisations, Charities, Private Voluntary Organisations, the Third Sector, the Third Tier etc. Although these terms could be used interchangeably to refer to NGOs, the technical use of the term can be traced back to the year 1945. This was so used by the United Nations to differentiate in its Charter, between participation rights for intergovernmental specialised agencies and those for international private organisation. NGOs became a force to reckon since the 1970s when they appeared as the 'Third Tier'. Thus they not only mediate between the Government and market forces, but above all, act to fill the *lacuna* which the two aforementioned bodies are either unwilling or incapable of fulfilling.

A number of factors have led to the increase in the number and operations NGOs today. First, since the end of the *Cold War*, and the dismantling of many dictatorial regimes in developing countries, private citizens have more freedom of expression and action as a form of solidarity with others especially the weaker members of the society. Again the improved communication network today has made people from various parts of the world to understand better, and identify more easily and readily with others in various parts of the world. While neo-liberal economists seize this opportunity to further their market interests, others see it as an opportunity to foster global solidarity with others especially with the less advantaged persons. Finally, one can see NGOs as instruments of control, imperialism and neo-colonialism designed by powerful nations and groups to influence and control activities and policies in areas that are otherwise impossible for them to penetrate¹²⁶. As for the important features of the NGOs, we can say that the United Nations generally refers to all types of private bodies as NGOs so long as they possess certain characteristics. These include being independent from government control and not intending to challenge the government either as a political party. Again they should not narrow their mission to the issues about human rights. Such organisation should not be a profit-making one. Finally, to

¹²⁶ Cf. A. SHAP, *Whatever are NGOs, Non Governmental Organisations on Development Issues*, 1st June, 2005. This is an article from an internet source and can be located in <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Poverty/NGOs.Asp> (consulted 19-12-05).

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qualify as an NGO, the group should not be violent in nature¹²⁷, or be used to foster some criminal activities¹²⁸.

As for the types of NGOs existing today, one can identify those operating on the local, provincial, national, regional or global levels. Since the 1990s, the concept of INGO is used to describe those groups that operate and influence policies and activities both nationally and internationally. Some NGOs have strong religious background without necessarily limiting their services to their adherents. For example there are World Council of Churches, Caritas International, World Jewish Congress and the International Muslim Union. Other NGOs do not belong to any particular religious groups and engage in the promotion of human rights and protection of the environment like. Examples are 'Amnesty International' and 'Green Peace'. Many others engage in various developmental projects and provide humanitarian and relief services such as Medecins Sans Frontiers that engage in health projects.

Since Economic and Social Council, (ECOSOC) was made a principal organ under article 70 of the United Nations, there has been an effort to streamline and categorise the various NGOs operating in the countries of the member nations. Through ECOSOC, the United Nations group all NGOs under three main categories. This depends on the relevance of the services they perform in line with the goals of the UN and on their competence and influence. Those in category 'One' have consultative status in the UN, those in category 'two' are those with special competencies. This include working in the fields of interest which is covered by the Council and have international representation. Those in category 'Three' constitute the rest of the groups, who are considered helpful partners of the UN, but who do not possess consultative status. It must be noted that many NGOs are dependent on one another, either on financing projects or in providing technical assistance where and when needed.

¹²⁷ This means that there should be no intention to use arms or other forms of violent activities to pursue their mission.

¹²⁸ Cf. P. WILLETS, *What is Non-Governmental Organisation?* Publication of Department of Sociology, Northampton Square, London, 2002, p. 4. They should have no direct and immediate contribution to make to the economy or the acquisition or/maintenance of power.

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Since our main focus is on how the NGOs has been and can become even more, an effective agent of solidarity in Black Africa today, we shall limit our study to their activities especially as it concerns the region. The goal is to see what they do already and how this can be made more efficient in the campaign against extreme poverty in the sub-region.

4.5.6.3.2. NGOs as Agents of Solidarity with the Poorest of the Poor

From our foregoing discussion, we can see that we can no longer propose solutions to Black African countries without involving the NGOs. Since the social and political structures in many African nations are grossly ineffective, the emergence of NGOs seems a very important 'sign of the time'. Thus today many local and international NGOs are contributing to the amelioration of the condition of the poorest of the poor and the marginalised individuals and communities. Below are some concrete and specific activities of the NGOs in the continent today.

First, many NGOs have become a source of attracting both local and international fund for various poverty alleviation projects in Africa. It is on record that more than 15 percent of total overseas development aid to developing countries are channelled through NGOs. Perhaps due to the increased cases of financial mismanagement, many international donors now choose to channel their development funds through voluntary agencies operating in Black Africa¹²⁹.

Secondly, many NGOs involve some very highly skilled personnel in their work. They are often able to work very efficiently, less bureaucratically, very rapidly. They are also generally known to execute projects less expensively than established government and other corporations engaging in various development/poverty reduction programmes. Since many of the staff of the NGOs may be working like volunteers and even 'missionaries', they are able to work under difficult and dangerous conditions. Government staff and those of multinational corporations would often refuse to work under a precarious condition¹³⁰.

¹²⁹D. HULME, *Social Development Research and the Third Sector*, in D. BOOTT (ed.), *Rethinking Social Development, Theory, Research and Practice*, 2005, p. 253.

¹³⁰Cf. D. HULME, op. cit., p. 253,

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Third, many NGOs which have been able to integrate well with the local communities, do generally offer engage in development projects, as well as offer employment to the local populations. This is often done in the form of direct labour and contracts. Although the remunerations received can be criticised as below average wage, in the home countries, they are considered very high in the local environments¹³¹. Other criticisms is that local workers are not generally covered by insurance. And again they and have no sustainable future since they work on contracts. These criticisms remain valid but one can argue that 'half-bread is better than none'.

Fourth, another act of solidarity by the NGOs in Black Africa today is that they often act as empowerment groups. Some act as grassroot activists representing the voices of the minorities like women, children and handicap persons. As citizens feel more and more marginalised and neglected even in the so-called democratic states in Africa, the formation of non-government organisations has been considered as a positive significant phenomenon. They have also been able to engage in various enlightenment campaign programmes like sensitising the local peoples on the prevention and management of such diseases a malaria, polio, HIV/AIDS etc. Just like many Extension projects in Brazil that helped the local farmers there, many NGOs today have been able to help local farmers in acquiring new agricultural skills that have helped to improve their productivity and thus reduce poverty.

From our study of charity so far, we can make some practical propositions for the effective use of charity as a tool of solidarity with the poor in Black Africa. We shall focus mainly on the role of the three principal agencies studied in this chapter. These are the African families, the Church and the Non-Governmental organisations¹³².

¹³¹ Apart from a few local NGOs, many other ones come from the developed economies. The disparity between the exchange rate between local and foreign donors makes it possible to do very much with very funds considered small abroad.

¹³² Our present order for discussing the role of the agencies is based on the fact that the family remains the primary centre of social cohesion. Though there may be religious differences, many families in Africa rally round their member who is in need. NGOs are discussed last because they are quite new in some parts of the continent.

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4.5.7. Propositions for the Effective Praxis of Charity in Black Africa

From the foregoing study, one sees that organised charity has come to become an important anti-poverty programme in many Black African societies today. Below are some of the ways that this practice can become even more effective in the region.

4.5.7.1. Rediscovering and Adapting the African Family/Community Solidarity

We have demonstrated the central role that solidarity and mutual care played in traditional African societies. But these practices are gradually fading away in modern Africa. So the urgent task facing various stakeholders in the continent today is how to *recover* and adapt the traditional family care to meet present challenges. The adoption of the ecclesiological image of the *Church as a family of God* is a laudable attempt at recapturing and adapting the African family value into the Church¹³³. According to Nigerian bishops, it is hoped that the image of the family will help in Christians, the African traditional sense of solidarity that has been a main source of support especially for the weak members. Such image of family will equally foster solidarity beyond the immediate family. This is because it could teach African Christians to realise that in Christ and through Christian a new family of God has come into being that transcends the ties of sanguinity. This will mean that each person relates to God as Father and to others as brothers and sisters in the one Church that is our mother¹³⁴.

Another urgent fact in discussing the role of the family as agent of solidarity in Africa today is that in the face of weak social services by many government in Africa today, the family is often left to bear the responsibility of its sick and weak members alone. Although the traditional family cohesion is seriously weakened today, the challenges facing families are increasing. So there should be other creative ways of fostering this solidarity and love¹³⁵. Today, the increase in the number of orphans in the continent due to such diseases

¹³³ Cf. O. A. ONWUBIKO, *Echoes from the African Synod...*, p. 142.

¹³⁴ Cf. CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA, *Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission*, no. 20. 1999.

¹³⁵ Despite being separated, families should try to evolve ways of communicating with one another especially today that the world can be described as a 'global village'. Families should be encouraged to have annual or bi-annual meetings when everyone is expected to attend. To make such meetings more attractive and relevant, modern African families could undertake development projects like establishing scholarship funds for the younger ones, having family insurance schemes to help members at their old age, rallying to help any

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as HIV/AIDS increases the need to foster family unity and mutual care. Since people with HIV/AIDS are still ostracised in many African communities, the family should manifest their solidarity with the person in time of such trial¹³⁶. Again, with so many children trafficked in Africa today, with so many abused and brutalised in official institutions, and with the increased number of street children in African big cities, the promotion of African sense of family solidarity has become urgent.

Despite the desire to promote the practice of extended family in Africa, there should be concerted effort to fight against many African traditional values that dehumanise rather than liberate the people¹³⁷. This is what Nigerian bishops meant when they asserted: "At the same time, the Christian family should be aware of some of the problems inherent in the extended family system"¹³⁸. Areas that are problematic in the traditional African family system such as over-dependency on richer individuals should be studied and corrected. Issues concerning the relationship between the *individual autonomy* and the *communal good* should be tackled. All said and done, African theology of solidarity should ever emphasise that "the family is called in a special way to be a salvific community dedicated to the wholeness, integrity, and salvation of each member, especially its sick members"¹³⁹.

4.5.7.2. The Church for the Poor and of the Poor

The first task in making effective use of charity as an anti-poverty strategy is to recognise that charity is at the heart of Christian message. This has to be emphasized for two main reasons. The first, from our study of the religious movements in Black Africa, we realise that many Christians in Black Africa seem to seek the promises of the Christian message while evading its responsibilities. Little or no emphasis is laid on charity, on compassion

member of the family who is overtaken by misfortune, establishing some family business ventures etc. Engaging in research on the family history, coming together to celebrate great events and to show solidarity in times of misfortune could all become incentives for fostering solidarity in modern African families.

¹³⁶ This integration becomes even more necessary especially in the cases of children whose parents have died of the disease. Although many of such children could be raised in foster homes or in government institutions, the importance of family solidarity cannot be over-emphasised knowing the psychological dimension of growing up.

¹³⁷ Some of these practices include parents forcing their children and wards into marriage, maltreatment of widows as well as denying female children their rights and inheritance in the family.

¹³⁸ CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIAN PUBLICATION, op. cit. no. 170.

¹³⁹ E. ASOMUGHA, op. cit, p. 155.

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and caring for the poor as the foundation of the Christian community, and as the most effective means of witness and evangelisation¹⁴⁰. So, it needs to be impressed on believers that they are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. They should equally realise that while Jesus remains the healer, liberator and provider, they too are mandated to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, visit prisoners, clothe the naked, welcome strangers. These are not only the signs of the believers, but also constitute the core message of the Gospel and criteria for the last judgement (cf. Mtt. 25:31-46).

Another challenge facing the Church and theologians in Black Africa today has to do with the difficulty of explaining the nature of Church's ministry of charity in modern times. Today, with the increasing role of the NGOs and other charity movements outside the Church, the traditional role of the Church as champion of justice seems marginalized. Again, many African theologians and social activists seem to ignore the role of charity activities in the region. Their over-emphasis on the primacy of justice is often done at the detriment of Church's ministry of charity. Pope Benedict emphasised this in his encyclical, *God is Love* and called for a balanced between charity and justice¹⁴¹. The Church is thus called to play an effective role that can lead to the integral well-being of peoples. This implies fostering the Kingdom blessings in the political, economic social and spiritual domains. Even when, and where, governments and NGOs provide some social services for the people, the Church is not thereby dispensed from fostering her traditional mission of practicing charity¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ Today, Jesus is often conceived as a superman, a hero, liberator and healer. Jesus is presented essentially as the one who heals our diseases, finds us a job, gives us prosperity and security. Such vertical understanding of the Gospel message promotes people's relationship with the divine while shying away from their responsibilities towards the neighbour. So one demand of the theology of solidarity with the poor is that it calls for a balanced understanding of the Christian message.

¹⁴¹ We saw the important role that the Church played through various charity movements and organisations played in combating poverty. However, since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church's charitable activity. Marxism and neo-Marxists claimed that the poor need justice and not charity. So works of charity—almsgiving—are seen as the way that the rich try to avoid to the obligation to work for justice. Charity is thus seen a means of soothing the consciences of the rich-oppressors, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights. So it is argued that instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the *status quo*, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity. There could be some element of truth in this claim. But it was then used as an absolute truth and a pretext for attacking both the Church and charity initiatives in the past century (cf. BENEDICT XVI, op.cit., no. 26).

¹⁴² This is based on the principle of solidarity.

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Other inspirations from our study, especially from Benedict XVI could be pointed out. This include that the pastors of souls should see the praxis of charity as a very important mission in their organic ministry. There is need for more formal preparation for those who are to engage in organised charity since professionalism has become important in the modern society. Besides this, another element is that, charity should never be abused if it is to be pure and effective. Effort should be made to avoid the tendency of using charity and giving aids as a means of control, 'selling' some ideologies, or even spreading the faith¹⁴³. Another important element needed in the praxis of charity is that it should be done in humility and with trust in divine providence. Since Christians realise their dependence on God, they should add the spiritual dimension of prayer to their various charity commitments. With the Pope, we end with a note of optimism by reminding Christians that that effective praxis of love/charity has the power of changing the world and making it better, even where other forms of actions have failed¹⁴⁴.

4.5.7.3. Harnessing the Power and Influence of NGOs

Another important aspect of the use of charity as an effective principle of solidarity has to do with the role of the Non-Governmental Organisations. We have noted their increasing role in the fight against poverty in Black Africa today. But a number of measures have to be taken to make them even more effective.

First, there is often not yet enough involvement of the local communities in various development projects in Black Africa¹⁴⁵. To be more effective, it should be noted with Freire that technical projects should not be separated from the overall comprehensive human development. Time is therefore needed to introduce the project in the community.

¹⁴³This idea is equally evoked by Freire in his critique of some charity projects. He believes that despite the importance of charity, in the humanisation process, it could be abused in various forms. According to him one of the most prevalent ways of corrupting it is found in modern programmes of aids and other forms of assistance. He describes this in such terms as, *false generosity*, *paternalism* and *assistentialism*. As vitiated charity, Freire maintains that some of the so-called development projects have damaging impacts on the beneficiaries. Like many proponents of dependency theory, he holds that vitiated charity is often based on the assumption, or presumption of lack, deficiency or inadequacy of the beneficiary (cf. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 26).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, op. cit., no. 39. The main point here is that there should be a proper catechesis on the nature and importance of charity in, and by the Church. This is necessary in view of the rapid mutations taking place in post-modern world.

¹⁴⁵ This is precisely what Paulo Freire criticised as cultural invasion. Often many foreign organisations arrive in local communities with very good projects. But often, unfortunately, they do not really involve the local populations enough in their planning and execution.

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Local leaders have to be involved and due respect must be given to the people's way of life so as to achieve maximum results. The claim of expertise by some foreign organisations, does not often help them to appreciate sensibilities and the in-put of the local populations, and this hampers the overall effects of these projects.

A second challenge is that NGOs should not allow themselves to be used as instruments of control and manipulation especially by the donors. Whether these donors are local philanthropists, or foreign ones it is expected that these aids should be done in a humanitarian spirit of brotherhood of man. The cases where some people use aids as instrument of propaganda, manipulation or advancing an ideology or for religious conversion should be shunned as morally unacceptable. This is why Freire explains that one may even be doing violence to others in the name of charity.

Thirdly, while most of the NGOs focus on direct humanitarian and emergency relief efforts, it must be observed that limiting these activities to these areas is not healthy for the overall development of the poor and the needy. We have seen again and again in this project that poverty is not just about lack of possession but above all, about powerlessness. While the provision of basic human needs like food and shelter should be aimed at the *short-term*, there should be a *long term* programme that will equip the beneficiaries for *self-reliance*. This is what Freire means when he holds that true generosity must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Despite the temporary good one may think to have achieved through such generosity, it remains essentially dehumanising since it fails to abolish the situation of oppression. Only true love tends, and indeed, is capable of restoring the humanity of the poor and the oppressed¹⁴⁶.

Again, given that numerous actors are involved in the development programmes in many African societies today, there is need for collaboration among them. Instead of duplicating their activities, various NGOs operating in a region should collaborate and coordinate their development efforts. The traditional rivalry among many NGOs operating in the same

¹⁴⁶Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 71.

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region should give way for integrated effort and solidarity¹⁴⁷. This collaboration should involve the local peoples themselves, the various religious groups in the area since religion has much influence in many communities. The local peoples themselves should be involved in identifying their priority needs like health, portable water, electricity, education, shelter etc. This is to say that, “emphasis should be placed on complementation, collaboration and coordination between Government, Donor Agencies, NGOs and local communities on the other”¹⁴⁸.

Another important issue is that there should be a standard accounting system among the NGOs. Often due to the moral authority and humanitarian sentiments associated with their work, many NGOs are accountable neither to their donors nor to the beneficiaries. There have been cases of abuse of fund and some are accused of spending the greater percentage of their resources in various administrative matters. This leaves the intended beneficiaries and projects with very meagre amount. Once accountability is assured, NGOs should use the mechanisms at their disposal to attract even more funds from donors who would otherwise not help, for fear of helping nations whose governments are noted for corruption.

Despite the *independent* nature of the NGOs, they may not always operate efficiently without government involvement¹⁴⁹. While avoiding the dangers of being used and controlled by the government, such issues as legal backing would be necessary for NGOs operating in a given territory¹⁵⁰. Different government platforms, like the media may be useful in the effective implementation of the programmes of NGOs. Those volunteers working in dangerous areas in the country could get government protection¹⁵¹. NGOs should equally try Freire’s conscientization method and other forms of moral persuasion to sensitise and influence governments to perform their civic responsibilities to their suffering masses. Indeed without the government, the NGOs will be overwhelmed by the problems

¹⁴⁷ Cf. N. GIBBS, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁴⁸ FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA Publications, *National Poverty Eradication Programme, A Blue Print for the Schemes*, June 2001, p. 47.

¹⁴⁹ Sometimes some of the foreign donations come from direct government sources abroad. The ‘USAID’ which is the American principal donor agency for overseas projects is an example. Other national governments are also often work in close association with some of the NGOs in their country.

¹⁵⁰ The Federal Government of Nigeria has made it compulsory that all the NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) operating in the country should be fully registered and catalogued (cf. FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIAN PUBLICATIONS, *On National Poverty...*, p. 38).

¹⁵¹ Some areas of operation are ridden with conflicts, diseases and terrorist acts like kidnapping.

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besetting Black Africa today. While NGOs can be called the third sector in a civil society, it must be stated firmly these voluntary organisations do not in any way replace the legitimate responsibilities of various local, provincial, national and international governments. They are only complementing the lacunae in government and other market efforts.

NGOs should adopt flexibility in their operations. An NGO that comes in to help victims of famine in Africa, for instance, should not just focus on sharing food without paying attention to the medical dimension of their mission. Those engaged in education for example, should realise that hunger and health issues are inextricably connected to the issue of education. Attending to refugees may involve basic knowledge of crises management and even prevention since most conflicts are on-going. Management skill, human relation skills, basic knowledge of the local people's cultures, their language and taboos would go a long way to making the NGO workers not to do what Paulo Freire calls 'tourism to the poor communities' but really being in solidarity with them¹⁵². This love and respect will help them avoid any form of paternalism, messianic attitude and cultural invasion. Ability or willingness to enter into sincere dialogue with the people is one of the main signs of this love and respect. All the stakeholders should realise that both the donor, the social workers and the local beneficiaries are involved in mutual process of liberating human beings and mutual enrichment. Freire warns that, "when the educator, when the helper in whatever form, fails to see others as a whole person, then the liberating nature of the work has been lost"¹⁵³.

4.5.8. Concluding Remarks on Charity as the Praxis of Solidarity

We have argued here that love and compassion express themselves in the praxis of charity. Although charity is an important feature of the great religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we restricted ourselves to the praxis of charity in the Christian religion. Our bias is on the Catholic tradition. We argued that despite being the principal agent for the praxis of charity, the Church should work in collaboration with others to promote various charity and humanitarian activities in modern times. The African

¹⁵²Cf. P. FREIRE, *A Response...*, p. 307.

¹⁵³J. W. FRASER, *op. cit.*, p.191.

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family and Non-Governmental Organisations are presented as dependable allies in the campaign against poverty in Black Africa. We equally saw that in performing many charitable works today, there is a danger of abuse. Paulo Freire's critique of false generosity and the teaching of Pope Benedict in *God is Love* remain useful guide in the praxis of charity as an anti-poverty strategy especially in Black Africa.

PART FIVE : GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL PROPOSITIONS

In this last part of our work, I wish to summarise as well as highlight the main points discussed in the entire study. I will equally make some important observations, point out the difficulties encountered in the work and then end with some propositions for further reflection on the subject.

5.0. Summary and Evaluation of Our Work

We explained that the topic and scope of this research is motivated by my personal experience of those who were in extreme need in Nigeria and the neighbouring countries of Chad and Niger Republic. As a parish priest I encountered people whose poverty and need went beyond material ones. From then I got gradually interested in the psychology of the poor. I eventually founded an Non-Governmental Organisation called *Madonna Mercy Family International* to care for the most vulnerable people especially in Eastern Nigeria. That work availed me of more opportunity to understand the reality of extreme poverty and stimulated me to enquire into its causes and its protracted effects on people both in Nigeria as well as in some other Black African countries.

5.1. On the Causes and Effects of Extreme Poverty

As for the explication of the main terms in our title, we took time to interpret the concepts *solidarity* and *poverty* from many perspectives and fields of specialization. By choosing the expression 'solidarity' I wanted to show that the concept is rich both for Africans and for the Catholic Social Teachings since it has both anthropological and ethical connotations. The contributions of John Paul II was given a special attention. In general, we discovered that the concept is a Christian call for action for promoting social justice. The concept of poverty was equally studied. It was discovered that 'poverty' is very ambiguous concept which could be interpreted differently depending on the context and time. But we distinguished two main types of poverty, namely material and spiritual poverty. Since the problem of material destitution in Black Africa is our main preoccupation in this project, we studied it more extensively. One of the most important conclusions was that both in Bible, in the official teachings of the Church and the writings of many theologians, material destitution is considered evil and should be fought against.

General Conclusions and Final Propositions

Coming to the causes of poverty, we singled out bad leadership, corruption, violence, and foreign debts for special consideration¹. This does not however exclude other factors like levels of educational attainment in the sub-region, the reality of harsh weather conditions, general indiscipline, cultural factors that dehumanise people and impede development and so on. Since the expression poorest of the poor is rather uncommon in many ecclesial and theological documents, I took time to explain that they are the worst victims of Black Africa's poverty and could generally be found among refugees, those living with HIV/AIDS and those who are starving.

5.2 God's Solidarity in African Traditional Religion and the Old Testament

Having presented the nature, causes and effects of the extreme poverty, we then went into a theological reflection in its proper sense. Our main task was to answer the question: What does God and the Church think and say about the dehumanising condition of the poorest of the poor in Black Africa? To answer this question, we considered the African traditional notion of God and the role he plays in their lives. We discovered that for traditional Africans God was generally conceived as the Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnibenevolent and is indeed the origin and protector of their lives. Apart from God the Creator, there are other smaller deities and spiritual beings. Among the spiritual beings, the Ancestors occupy a prominent place since they are generally benevolent spirits, who seek to promote the well-being of their living relatives. The abundant prayers and sacrifices offered to these deities show how much influence they are believed to have in the lives of the living. But due to the contact with other civilisations and religions, one observes that African cosmology has been in mutation.

Today many Africans have adopted either Islam or Christianity. We focused our attention on the activities and dispositions of modern African Christians. While there are other reasons for the increasing religious fervour in the Christian religion, we discovered that many people are now attracted to the new religious groups and Pentecostal movements

¹ Our main argument here about foreign debts is that if the world is now described as global village, if the idea of the brotherhood of man is to be credible, if liberalism and neo-liberalism aims at the humanisation of all peoples, and not to exploit and enslave them, then the ethical dimension of international relationships should be given a priority. If international solidarity is to be fostered, then the moral issues concerning unjust payment of foreign debts and other practices leading to the perpetration of poverty in Black Africa should be fought.

General Conclusions and Final Propositions

outside the traditional Christian denominations. We demonstrated that increasing insecurity and poverty in Black Africa has a link with the rapid spread of the new movements. Indeed we can affirm that "*ce sont souvent les pauvres qui sont attirés par les sectes*"². This is to say that while traditional Africans sought the assistance of the 'God of their fathers' and deities for protection and blessing, modern Africans now do the same from the Christian God.

We examined some Old Testament Scriptures to see what God thinks and does in the face of threats to his people. A study of the Exodus and the prophetic writings shows that God is not just the origin of life but also its protector. God abhors injustice whether against the Hebrew slaves or against the poorest of the poor in Israel. This study was of immense help to us because it helped us to realise more that among the poor in Israel, there were the poorest of the poor. These were found mainly among the widows, the orphans, the slaves and the strangers. Many laws and direct intervention of the prophets were designed to protect these poor. We then turned to the New Testament.

5.3. God's Solidarity with the Poorest of the Poor in the New Testament

We saw that God's solidarity with the poor eventually reached a new peak in the New Testament with the Incarnation of the Son of God. Through his teachings, his miracles and other prophetic acts, Jesus was demonstrating that the Kingdom of love, justice and peace was being inaugurated in history. His message therefore was presented as a good news to the poor since it promised liberty to captives, sight to the blind and was to usher the Lord's year of favour (cf. Lk. 4:18). And at the end of his public ministry, he warned that those who showed solidarity with the poorest of the poor would inherit eternal life (cf. Mtt. 25:35-40). This means that any act whether it is good or bad, contributes in promoting or retarding the Kingdom blessings³. Since the theology of the Kingdom is the central message of the New Testament, we spent quite some time to study it. Below are some important findings.

² J. VERNETTE, op. cit., p. 192.

³ Cf. D.C. SIM, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 145.

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We discovered that the Kingdom theology is a very difficult one which many theologians have continued to examine for many years now. We discovered also that the Kingdom of God promises to be something eventful with both spiritual and visible significance in history. It was also seen that the Kingdom is a gift of God but human beings are called to play an active role in promoting it in history. One of the best ways of doing this is through active solidarity with the poorest of the poor (cf. Mtt. 25:31). Another important discovery is that both the promotion of the Kingdom and the effects of its blessing is meant for all peoples irrespective of their religion or status. About this Karl Rahner states:

Wherever individuals or groups make reasonable efforts for greater decency, more love, greater justice, more humanity, one may say that all these efforts are concrete realisations of a real faith in the Kingdom of God which comes to us from God in history⁴.

Again, we discovered that the poor have privileged place in the Kingdom project as seen in three decisive discourses of Jesus. "In the discourses in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk 4:14), the Sermon on the Mount (Lk. 6:20-49, Mtt.5:3-12) and the judgment of the nations (Mtt. 25:31-46), Jesus highlights the poor as the addressees and protagonists of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' project is for those who are poor, depressed, captive, blind, hungry, hated, foreign-looking, ill and excluded. They are both the addressees and the promoters of this project. God accepts the human touch of the poor and dregs of the society. They are divine revelation and sacrament in the world. They are the historic exponents of *Missio Dei*⁵.

Another important discovery about Jesus as one who inaugurated and promoted the Kingdom is that love was the primary motive in all he did and said. In Jesus we see the mercy of God incarnated in human form. He is the high priest in loving solidarity with those he represents (cf. Heb. 4.15). He is the merciful doctor at table with the sinful sick (cf. Mk. 2. 15-17). Jesus is the dedicated shepherd who knows all his sheep by name and is ready even to die for them (cf. Jn. 10:1-16)⁶. During his earthly ministry, he generally took

⁴P. IMHOF (ed.,) op. cit.,p. 150.

⁵ P. SUESS, *Missio Dei and the Project of Jesus: The Poor and the "Other" as Mediators of the Kingdom of God and Protagonists of the Churches*, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XCII, No. 367, Oct. 2003, p. 557.

⁶ In Christ we see a twofold emphases on his redemption. First, he came to re-establish the life of community and love hindered by sin. And second, he came as the new liberator of his people just as God liberated Israel

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sides with the weak, with all those criticised on the basis of the established canons: the prostitute, the Samaritan heretic, the tax collector, the Roman centurion, the person blind from birth, the paralytic, the hunchback, the pagan Syro-Phoenecia. Jesus had no fear of the consequences of solidarity with the outcasts. He was vilified, insulted, accused of keeping bad company, labelled subversive, heretical, possessed, insane, and more. He challenged his followers to follow his example of heroic love in promoting the Kingdom. Thus in imitation of its founder and as a response to his mandate to practice charity, the apostolic community lived and taught this solidarity as active love among themselves and for others. It became the most striking symbol that distinguished them from traditional Judaism (cf. Acts 4: 32-35).

5.4. Summary of Magisterial Documents

In the course of its history, the Church has tried to follow the footsteps of Christ and continued to teach that solidarity as active love for the poor is the hallmark of the faith. We saw that at Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* was specially dedicated to demonstrating Church's dedication and solidarity especially with those who are suffering, like the poorest of the poor⁷. While not really equating earthly progress to the Kingdom of God, the Conciliar Fathers emphasised the need for this reign of God to be experienced in this present world⁸. The Fathers of the Council, like the prophets of the Old Testament try to impress it on believers that our relationship with God is measured not just by our pietism but by the authentic relationship we have with our fellow human beings.

In the document, the bishops of Vatican II acknowledged the intimate bond between the Church and all humanity. Jesus' mission on this earth was not only to free the human heart from sin, but also to free men and women from disease, oppression and everything that hinders their development as humans created by God and destined for eternal life. When we profess our belief in the resurrection of the body, integral salvation is implied. Every authentic dimension of human existence is to be saved and brought to wholeness. The fathers also teach that the followers of Christ should see it as their mission to help people,

from the slavery of Egypt. Jesus sought integral healing and liberation for the poor. Jesus entered into solidarity with the poorest of the poor and indeed the oppressed.

⁷ Cf. *GS*. no. 1.

⁸ Cf. *GS* no. 9.

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especially the less-privileged to come to their full humanity. This is to work in collaboration with God in restoring human beings to the original plan of God who created men and women in his image, and also redeemed by Christ. As a matter of fact, Christian revelation teaches that the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection is not just eschatological. It is already in act now in history⁹. Paul VI succinctly calls it “a transcendental and eschatological salvation which indeed has its beginning in this life”¹⁰. Christ’s victory over death and sin is at the same time victory over injustice and other evils of human history. Perhaps the most inspiring thing about Vatican II and *Gaudium et Spes* in particular, is that it was a launching pad for further theological and pastoral initiatives. And our goal in this study therefore is how “to continue the work of Vatican II in the formulation of a theology that is communicable, credible and convincing...”¹¹.

We equally studied the documents of the African Synod of Bishops and discovered that the assembly equally toed the line of *Gaudium et Spes*. Among other things, it shows that the bishops saw the problem of poverty and oppression as part of the evangelisation task. In the midst of wars and extreme poverty, preaching the Gospel message becomes difficult if not impossible. Among the worst victims of poverty in Africa the bishops emphasised the plight of women. The pertinent question that arose from these chapters is: How then do we engage actively and effectively in the campaign against the anti-life and anti-Kingdom forces in Black Africa? To answer this question we turned to the last part of the work dedicated to the praxis of solidarity.

5.5. Praxis of Solidarity

We had many strategic options for action but we opted for Paulo Freire inspired liberatory and humanisation principles. This choice was informed by the fact that Paulo Freire came from a developing world like Black Africa. He himself had an ugly experience of extreme poverty but was able to wriggle out of it to become a model for those fighting poverty. Again he was able to engage in interdisciplinary study where he combined many fields of

⁹ It will be realised fully at the end of time but is already in action through the power of the resurrection (cf. Phil 3 :10).

¹⁰ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

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knowledge and came up with some anti-poverty strategies. Also the choice of Freire is informed by the fact that his works have become recognised in many parts of the world as important for the empowerment of the less privileged. Finally, Freire had a firsthand experience of the Black African condition having worked in some countries like Guinea-Bissau, Tanzania and the others. He helped them to develop a psychosocial development programmes aimed at empowering especially, the poor. Our study of Freire, together with other inspirations from African theologies, liberation theologies and Catholic Social Teaching eventually helped us to formulate what we have called the pillars or principles of theology of solidarity. These principles which include conscientization, dialogue and transformative action are hereby summarised.

5.6. The Principles of Theology of Solidarity

We saw that conscientization can be described as an advanced education. Its aim is not just to disseminate knowledge but rather to help in the integral humanisation process. Through conscientization, people can begin to ask serious questions about the causes and effects of events that affect their lives. When people become authentically conscientized, they generally seek to engage in action to change the inhuman conditions that they may find themselves. This is why Freire holds that conscientization consists of both reflection and action. From our study of conscientization, we realised that engaging in a systematic process of raising awareness in Black Africa today is not only necessary but urgent.

a. conscientization

Such conscientization process should be allowed to permeate the entire social fabric of the region. It would encourage literacy empowerment, political participation, moral/ethical revolution and indeed agricultural and technical empowerment of the people. I believe with Paulo Freire that today there is urgent need to promote critical thinking in Black Africa. When people are so empowered they see the need to participate effectively in fostering democratic values in a democratic way. It is only then that the society can undergo the transition from the culture of 'bullets' and wars to that of ballot box and dialogue. When this happens, even the poorest of the poor will then move from the culture of silence and exclusion to that of speech and participation. Such a culture will then help the stakeholders

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in the society to engage effectively and collectively in dismantling the unjust social structures that breed poverty and oppression.

b. Dialogue

We examined the role of dialogue as a principle of solidarity as well. It was discovered that every authentic expression of solidarity should include the praxis of dialogue. With the religious, geographical, ethnic, economic and political diversities in Black Africa, tension, conflicts and open arms conflicts have been a common experience. We proposed that dialogue should be used effectively for conflict prevention, conflict management and as strategy for reconciliation. Its effective use at the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa shows that Africans are capable of dialogue and reconciliation despite the economic, political and racial diversities in that country. Today, South Africa is not only the strongest economy in the continent, but also the youngest and most stable democracies in the whole of Africa.

But despite the importance of education and dialogue as the principle of solidarity with the poorest of the poor, we realised that the two strategies have their weaknesses when used alone. This is true when one considers that the process of cultural change is gradual and can be called long term projects¹². So the immediate challenges like actual hunger, natural disasters, conflict, refugees, lack of shelter and diseases cannot adequately be addressed by education or dialogue alone. This is why we propose the principle of action.

c. Cultural Action

The last principle for the praxis of solidarity is thus transformative action. The expression, *action*, is both important to Paulo Freire, to Catholic Social Teaching, to liberation theologies and to us. This is because, while education and dialogue may be effective tools against oppression and unjust systems that breed extreme poverty, sometimes some concrete actions may be needed in the short term. This action is divided into two namely, nonviolent engagement for social justice and charity as a praxis of love. As for nonviolence, we examined the theories as propounded in the Ghandian-King tradition. We combined the contributions of Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King and Paulo Freire to

¹² D. HOPKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

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come up with nonviolent action that can fit into a democratic system. One can say that even though Catholic Social Teaching often points to the possibility of engaging in transformative actions like trade union strikes, there is not yet a coherent Catholic theory of nonviolence. This study is just meant to elicit further reflection on the subject.

The second part of our proposed action for the praxis of solidarity is charity. We discovered that throughout the history of the Church, various charity movements have emerged to address pressing needs in the society. Great theological works have equally been written to extol the primacy of charity over other Christian activities. Despite the criticisms levelled against charity as a means of social transformation in the nineteenth century, recent upsurge of various charity movements as anti-poverty strategy shows that it remains a formidable force for change. Although many of modern charity movements do not have direct affiliation to the traditional Church practice, the Catholic Church still remains a principal historical agent of charity and a model for others.

We have equally acknowledged the roles played by traditional African families and communities as well as Non-Governmental Organisations in modern times. The study leads us to conclude that the various agents of charity discussed above should work in solidarity and not in confrontation in fostering the Kingdom value of love/compassion especially towards the poorest of the poor in Black Africa. With Freire however we have come to realise that charity can take many forms and shapes such as engaging in liberating pedagogy that will not only give immediate food to the hungry but will empower them, humanise them. In this sense therefore both the champions of justice and those who provide immediate succour to the needy are all engaged in the praxis of solidarity with the poorest of the poor. But Freire's special contribution to our enquiry here comes from his understanding and warning that charity can be abused.

d. Charity

There are many ways that charity which is the praxis of love can be abused. When such abuse occurs Freire refers to it as 'false charity'. One of the ways to know when charity is being abused is when it becomes an instrument of conquest and domination by the privileged class and oppressors. Freire sees it thus as a method of conquest. According

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to him, compared to other forms of domination, “the content and methods of conquest vary historically; what does not vary as long as the dominant elites exist is the necrophilic passion to oppress”¹³. He sees ‘assistentialism’¹⁴ as an example of abused charity. This is because, in order to have the continued opportunity to express their *generosity*, the oppressors must perpetrate injustice as well. He thus describes as unjust, many social systems kept to serve as the permanent fount for this generosity which causes death, despair, alienation and even more poverty.

Solidarity must be a genuine expression of true love which demands opening one’s heart to the feelings of the poor and the needy as fellow human beings. According to him, “*ouvrir son âme, c’est d’abord se laisser ‘baigner’, ‘tremper’ dans les eaux culturelles et historiques des individus engagés dans l’expérience*”¹⁵. He calls for proper distinction between solidarity *with* the poor and solidarity *for* the poor. While the former is authentic, the latter generally tends to be paternalistic and dehumanizing. Here is his proposition for the praxis of authentic solidarity.

Solidarity requires that one enter (s) into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture. If what characterises the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master...true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which means being for another. The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with,...when he stops making pious sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks and act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis¹⁶.

5.7. Final Remarks

2. Poverty like the Problem of Evil remains part of Human Experience

Despite the effort to ameliorate the condition of the poorest of the poor, we are called to be realistic that poverty cannot be totally eliminated in the world. Jesus himself reminds us that the poor will always be in our midst (cf Mtt. 26:11). He himself teaches us that suffering is indeed a human experience such that even the Son of God did not escape it. Yet

¹³ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 122.

¹⁴ Paternalistic expression of charity that creates dependency on the recipients.

¹⁵ P. FREIRE, *Education dans la ville...*, p. 101.

¹⁶ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 31-32.

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amidst human suffering, God's love is not taken away for he is always present as he was during the passion of Jesus himself¹⁷. As followers of Christ, we know that God does not glory in the suffering of his creatures but has done something about it to save its victims from it¹⁸. Hence even though the victory over sin and death achieved by Christ in his cross and resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering from human life, it has at least thrown a new light for a better understanding of human suffering¹⁹. By his passion, Christ is able to raise human suffering to its limits and at the same time transforming human suffering to a supernatural level, a level of love. Again, we are reminded that the Christian virtue of compassion and solidarity may demand vicarious suffering and even material destitution for a given cause. The history of many European missionaries to Africa demonstrates the nature of this vicarious suffering. We wish to end this study by acknowledging the limitations and difficulties encountered in this work as well as making some important propositions.

5.8. Difficulties and Limitations in our Work

Coming to the end of this study, I must confess the limitations and the difficulties I encountered in the process.

First, the problem of poverty is part of the problem of evil. A coherent explanation of the reality of evil has not yet been given by scholars. So both in African Traditional Religion and in Judeo-Christian Scriptures, reconciling the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God with the sad reality of evil, suffering and extreme poverty remains a puzzle. I have only proposed some ways of ameliorating the condition of the poor but poverty cannot be taken away completely.

¹⁷ Indeed suffering is one of the great evils in the Old Testament. This could be occasioned by sin as seen in the punishment of some offence. So the Old Testament sees suffering/evil as something to be avoided at all costs. In the New Testament, given the positive and mature disposition that Jesus adopted towards suffering, one may be tempted to minimise the evil nature of suffering. But it is in Gethsemane and at Golgotha that the real evil of suffering is revealed. At Gethsemane Christ pleaded with his father: "Let it pass from me" (Mtt. 26:39), and at Golgotha Christ felt abandoned at the climax of his anguish as he questioned: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me" (Mtt. 27:46).

¹⁸ Cf. I. M. DAU, *Suffering and God, A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, Pauline Publications, Nairobi, 2002, p.223.

¹⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 1984, no. 15

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Secondly, I have to note that my work is essentially a theological one. I have not engaged in sociological, economic and political analysis of how to handle poverty. Perhaps a guidance counsellor may do better than me in proposing measures for dealing with the poorest of the poor. This is because some of the very poor contribute to their condition and so need more personal help and guidance to overcome their difficulties. Ours, though interdisciplinary in method remains all the same, a mere theological approach. Again, since poverty is not an exclusive African phenomenon, it must be noted that there could be various attitudes and criteria for judging poverty in each society. Solutions proposed in a typical African society may appear all together ineffective in another region of the world. Even in the same subregion in Africa enormous differences abound.

Another difficulty that I must admit in this work is the use of the expression *Black Africa*. Despite my vast experiences in other Black African countries, and despite the striking similarities among them, I realised that the scope of the work should have been limited to one or two countries. This would have given me more opportunity to rely less on documents from those countries, to engage in more practical action there like I did in the Black African countries of Nigeria, Chad and Niger republic. However this research has elicited in me the desire to study these other countries more closely in a globalising world.

Again, the choice of Freire's principles was a difficult one. This is because his principal book that inspired me which is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was written over thirty six years ago. Freire's thoughts have evolved ever since. So interpreting the first Paulo Freire and the latter Freire has not been very easy. And interpreting a book written for a Brazilian reader in Black Africa is difficult. And finally to translate Freire's work into a theological language proved more difficult than I thought at the beginning of this research. The only encouragement in the face of these challenges come from many students of Freire both themselves who affirm that,

Freire... provides a rationale for the development of alternative forms of 'progressive' social and political thought, including an Afrocentric conception of the social world, of knowledge and of culture, related both to Africa itself and to the African in Disapora, populating in Latin America and North America.²⁰

²⁰ P. MCLAREN and P. LEONARD (eds.), op. cit., p. 3.

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5.9. Propositions for Further Reflection

The most important proposition that I want to make at this juncture is that to deal with the problem of extreme poverty effectively in the region, there is a pressing need to find a way of promoting African sense of solidarity and community. A number of African authors believe firmly that the biggest problem of Africa today is not material destitution but cultural destitution. By this they mean that the traditional survival strategies which sustained the people even in dire need are now being abandoned. The continent is rich in natural and human resources but growing destitute in the spirit of sharing. Below are the few emphatic statements that show that solidarity holds the key to Black African dilemma.

According to Julius Nyerere, the former president of Tanzania, the African community spirit is a recognition that "in African traditional society, one is always an individual within a community. We care for the community and the community took care of us. We neither needed nor wished to exploit our fellow men"²¹. Another African author like M. Kpakal Francis, maintains that African communities themselves are the real source of life and support for people even in need. This is because, for traditional Africans, man exists "naturally and easily enmeshed in a web of relationships. These relationships provide the most prolific, the most profound, the most intense sources of motivation for living and for action"²². In his own position, K. Kaunda, the former president of the Zambia affirms that for Africans, the sense of community and solidarity is what can play a role in supporting people even when they do not possess much material wealth. This is to say that solidarity is what sustains Black Africans in their midst of their problems because,

even the victims of circumstance, such as the poor and the unemployed, can always summon a smile and, and if given a little chance do a little dance. This is not irresponsibility, it is gratitude. Whatever they do not possess, they do possess the gift of life itself and this is compensation for what is denied them²³.

Apart from African authors, those who have studied the survival strategies of many poor communities in Black Africa report on the importance of community support. Writing

²¹ J. NYERERE, *Ujaama*, in A. SHORTER, *African Culture and the Christian Church, An Introduction to Social and Pastoral Anthropology*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1978, p. 197.

²² M. KPAKALA-FRANCIS, *The Church in Africa Today, Sacrament of Justice, Peace and Unity*, in M. BROWNE (ed), *African synod, Documents, Reflections, and Perspectives*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, pp. 119-130, cf. 121.

²³ K.D. KAUNDA, *A Humanist in Africa, Letters to Colin M. Morris from Kenneth D. Kaunda, President of Zambia*, Longmans Edition, London, 1967, p. 36.

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about his experience in Africa, J Vanier writes: "We have a lot to learn from the African and the Indian. They remind us that the essence of community is a sense of belonging"²⁴. And for B. Baum, "material poverty...is not a tragic condition for the members of a community that has survival skills and a strong sense of social solidarity. This, in fact is how humanity has survived for thousands of years. But poverty becomes tragic and leads to the destruction of body and soul when there is no such community"²⁵. So the ability to sustain and develop this sense of solidarity in a modern Africa therefore holds a major key to dealing with the problem of anthropological in the region.

Another proposition that I make is that there is urgent need for more African scholars to engage in effective research programmes for dealing with the continent's problem of poverty. Participatory Action Research (PAR), as proposed by Freire should be encouraged so that the people themselves, and even the poorest of the poor become involved in seeking solution for their problems. Theology of liberation and theology of inculturation should play complementary and not confrontational roles in the continent in seeking solution to the continent's problems²⁶. And whether it is Latin America or in Africa, I think that the positive contributions of liberation theologies should be acknowledged. If not for any thing, liberation theologies have awakened the Church and the human race to the cry of the massive poor in the world²⁷. Catholic Social Teaching should be able to appreciate divergent theological opinions like liberation theology, theology of inculturation and theology of solidarity with the poor.

I must recognise that in this work we have focused more on how the Church can play an effective role in fostering the Kingdom of God in Black Africa today. I am aware that Moslems have also important contribution to make in this matter given their numerical strength in the region. The scope of this work, my experiences and the documents at my disposal made me to limit my reflection to Christians and their role in the region. Another remark is that these four principles proposed in this work should be applied contextually. In

²⁴ J. VANIER, *Community and Growth, Our Pilgrimage Together*, Paulist Press, New York, 1979, p. 3.

²⁵ G. BAUM, *Spirituality and Economic Development*, in *Theology Digest*, Vol. 48, No. 3, (Fall 2001), pp. 245-251, cf. p. 249.

²⁶ Cf. D. STINTON, *Jesus of Africa, Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, in T. MERRIGAN and J. HAERS (eds.), op. cit., p. 299.

²⁷ Cf. J. HAERS, op. cit., p. 132.

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some circumstances, dialogue may be more urgent and relevant than education. In others, charity could become a priority as in the case of some humanitarian crises like dealing with victims of natural disaster or refugees. So the principles are neither hierarchical, strict, or linear. They are flexible and adaptable.

As my last word in this study, I have to state that my work does not pretend to provide an exhaustive treatment of the subject matter of poverty and solidarity. Rather it is meant to introduce the subject so as to invoke in the reader further reflection and reading and possible action. And if I have raised as more questions as answers, then think my objective has been partially fulfilled.

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