

# **LOVE FOR THE POOR:**

## **GOD'S LOVE FOR THE POOR AND THE CHURCH'S WITNESS TO IT**

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## AFFIRMATION FROM THE FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION

So many things might be said and, indeed have been said, by Christians about the faith of Christians and human poverty and the fostering of human well-being that we believe is God's intention for all. So many words to speak of Christian conviction that deprivation and need and the suffering they cause are contrary to the God's intention. And there are so many ways in which to arrange those words.

In the summer of 2004, at Accra, Ghana, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in its 24th General Council agreed together to the document "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth".<sup>1</sup> Speaking specifically from their Reformed tradition, those who affirm the document offer a confession of Christian faith in the face of the economic injustice and the ecological destruction of the world in our time.

In a parallel manner, *Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It* speaks from the specific resources of Faith and Order thought. This tradition has been developed, deepened, and built up over the ninety-five years since Episcopalians and Disciples of Christ in the United States first began to speak of the need for a worldwide discussion on the right articulation of Christian faith and the right organization of the Christian community. Faith and Order language and concepts are a shared theological heritage by which Christian communities can think and speak together about shared concerns. This text aims to offer words that Christians across the widest spectrum of Christian traditions can embrace together.

Among the most significant of the core Faith and Order constructs that our decades of work together have produced is that of the "Tradition of the Gospel". The 1998 World Council of Churches Faith and Order text *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* reiterates and extends this central construct:

The “one Tradition” signifies the redeeming presence of the resurrected Christ from generation to generation abiding in the community of faith, while the “many traditions” are particular modes and manifestations of that presence. God's self-disclosure transcends all expressions of it. How can Christians and churches share in the gift of the one Tradition as they confess and live according to Scripture? How are they to read their own traditions in the light of the one Tradition? As has been noted above, the Fourth World Conference addressed the issue of hermeneutics in an ecumenical perspective, opening up the many traditions to the recognition of the one Tradition as a gift from God. Recognition of and continuity with the one Tradition, however, should not be confused with a mere repetition of the past without any recognition of the present. The Holy Spirit inspires and leads the churches each to rethink and reinterpret their tradition in conversation with each other, always aiming to embody the one Tradition in the unity of God's Church.<sup>2</sup>

In our interim time, before the unity of the churches has been fully lived into but after we have learned to hope for it, the voices of our separate traditions and our voice together must be woven one with the other. *Love for the Poor* draws together insights from multiple locations and moments in the Christian story. Early drafts of *Love for the Poor* were shared with those who attended the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Accra. Whether at any particular moment we speak out of our separate traditions or we speak together as a sign and instrument of our unity, speaking is only the beginning. After speaking must come action.

*Love for the Poor* presents calls to action as well as calls to reflection. It counsels a sense of urgency in attending to the economic issues of our time. It urges true repentance and renewed worship. The Church must engage in dialogue with partners of goodwill in the search for solutions to complex political problems in order to carry out clear social analysis and effect structural change. *Love for the Poor* asks each church to consider reorienting its antipoverty efforts to coincide with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and that the churches together give greater resources to the theological task of recovering their common voice regarding the Church's responsibilities to those living in poverty. The text commends a theology of the cross, not one of self preservation. It calls the international development community to account for its tone deafness regarding the role

of religion in alleviating the suffering of those who are poor.

Lastly, *Love for the Poor* calls for a renewed commitment to the ecumenical task. Acting together to address poverty allows the churches to deepen ecumenical solidarity and to build new ties to Christian communities that have not historically been a part of the ecumenical movement. Through consultation, mutual cooperation, and shared administration, the Church can model its unity in the world in its ministries to those in poverty.

Being a preacher myself and a teacher and historian of preaching, I take a particular satisfaction in the way that *Love for the Poor* ends with proclamation and prayer. It concludes with ringing words from Martin Luther King, Jr. calling us to still have a dream that one day all of God's children will have food and clothing and material well-being and with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will perfect our love in Jesus' name.

I want to thank Shaun Casey, John Crossin, OSFS, Eric H. Crump, A. Katherine Grieb and Beverly Mitchell, of the Washington Theological Consortium, Mennonite Thomas Finger, Wesleyan Donald W. Dayton, Pentecostal Terry L. Cross and all from the Faith and Order Commission who gave their critical assessments of drafts of the text for their generosity in giving so much of their time and talent to this project. Beyond a small office staff Faith and Order is a voluntary enterprise in which leading scholars and theologians donate their time and expertise in service to Christ and the unity of his Church. We owe them a debt of gratitude for this fine text.

At its October 2005 Commission meeting, the Faith and Order Commission adopted *Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It*. The Commission joins me in commending it to your prayerful reflection.

O. C. Edwards, Jr.  
Co-chair Faith and Order Commission  
All Saints' Day, November 1, 2005



## FOREWORD

Debilitating poverty continues to be painfully present in the United States. If our faith in Jesus Christ truly leads us to follow Him and respond to the call of the Holy Spirit, then how can we ignore this fact?

In 2000, the officers and governing board the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America determined that one of the Council's key areas of reflection, concern, and action in the subsequent decade must be poverty in the United States. It was quickly evident that one of the tasks this commitment required was an investigation of the theological issues that might divide the churches on the subject and an articulation of common theological perspectives that might serve to unite the churches in our common action and advocacy. *Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It* is a response to that need.

This book is the result of many efforts, so we, the President and the General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States, wish to express our deep gratitude to all those who have contributed so much thought and energy to this work. The faculty members of the Washington Theological Consortium who became partners in carrying out the study that led to *Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It* deserve our special thanks.

We are grateful as well to the Commission on Faith and Order which acted as a resource in bringing the text to completion, adding voices and insights from the wide variety of Christian communities and theological disciplines that are represented on the Commission. Many of the Faith and Order Commissioners have expressed their desire to join with us in recommending *Love for the Poor* for reflection and study. The Commission on Justice and Advocacy has also been a resource, reviewing the text and offering suggestions. We look forward to their utilization and application of the study group's insights in their work in the future.

As we bring *Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It* to print for the first time, we are just beginning to comprehend the extent of the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina along the Southern coast of our nation. The fact that this disaster makes the book's message even more timely and urgent only magnifies our sadness. The Gospel directs us to show loving care for those among us who are poor, and the member churches of the NCCCUSA and our partner Christian communities have much work ahead in carrying out this principal Gospel task, and in urging one another and the wider community of persons of goodwill in our nation to respond wisely and generously to the needs of our day.

Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr.  
President

Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar  
General Secretary

Feast of the Holy Cross  
September 14, 2005

## PREFACE

Concern for the poor, love for the poor unites Christians across time and in the present. This love creates an opportunity for Christians to speak and act together with followers of other religions and with all people of goodwill.

In many places throughout the world, the Church is in settings of abject poverty and ministers alongside of the poor and in the midst of poverty itself. In the United States, many of our churches are privileged to enjoy a much more comfortable material life. Yet, shockingly, even here there are many church communities, many families, and many individuals that do not share adequately in the material abundance of our setting.

This document intends to speak on behalf of and to a Church that is both poor and rich in worldly goods and yet has a mandate to love all human persons regardless of their social or economic status. The individuals who have created this text have varying experiences of poverty, some have extensive ministry experience, some have much more personal experiences of economic deprivation, all have long-standing concern.

As Christians together, rich and poor, we have been made one community, one body in Christ. We have been anointed by the one Holy Spirit to proclaim to one another and to the world good news to the poor and release to those held captive by the many unfreedoms of economic want (Cf. Luke 4:18) and to make this good news manifest in human lives and well-being.

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has identified poverty as one of its four areas of major focus in these first years of the third millennium since the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The other areas of on-going focus of the NCCC, unity, the environment, and peace, have clear connections with the Council's concerns for the poor. Those in poverty more frequently suffer from the degradation of their physical environment than do the more affluent. Violent conflict is often both the result and source of poverty.

*Love for the Poor* is the result of two and half years of work on the part of theologians from six different Christian traditions and of wide consultation among the great Church. The task of exploring theological issues that might divide the churches on the subject of poverty and of preparing a text that, proposing solutions to such difficulties, can serve to unite the churches in their speaking on the subject was referred to the Faith and Order office and the faculty of the Washington Theological Consortium by the Faith and Order Commission of the NCCCUSA. Having received this work, the Faith and Order Commission offered useful suggestions and additions, strengthening the text. The text has been shared as well with the NCCCUSA Justice and Advocacy Commission, which has come into being since the *Love for the Poor* project was begun. Suggestions from that Commission have likewise been utilized in bringing the text to completion.

The study group's own work together has been less contentious than collaborative. Working from within our own traditions and eager to understand the traditions of others, we have been surprised at times—both by minor divergences and by major convergences of thought. The study, sharing, and dialogue that produced this text proceeded in a prayerful manner. The interchange was robust and substantive, leavened with humor and goodwill, but not devoid of unexpected discontinuities and differences. The resolutions offered here to these differences are rooted in shared appreciation of the value for ecumenical convergence of focus on virtues traditional to the Christian community.

Our approach, while differing in notable ways from some earlier ecumenical work on such matters, is also indebted to it. In contrast to the World Council of Churches program on "The Church and the Poor," among other earlier proposals, we have proposed a "reflection-action" rather than an "action-reflection" model.<sup>3</sup> It seeks *aggiornamento*, making the Church relevant to the needs of the present day, through *resourcement*, return to the sources, rather than through theological revolution. In common with the WCC's *Ecclesiology and Ethics* study we have proposed that some ethical norms are interior to the Church's self-understanding, rather than being secondary developments from it.<sup>4</sup> In con-

trast to that study, however, we have elaborated this thought within a horizon of the virtues offered to us in the New Covenant of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ rather than a covenant construct. Importantly, we have shared a vision of the human flourishing that we believe that God intends for all with the vision offered by the “Melbourne” text of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation.”<sup>5</sup> That text, which weaves together insights from the WCC member Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox churches, with Catholic and Evangelical voices, is one of the high-points of twentieth-century Christian collaborative thought.

The present text speaks within the context of the world-wide Christian community. But it speaks from and to a particular location: the United States of America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It proposes a shared theological framework for shared action. It is not intended to end ecumenical conversation and theological reflection on these issues. Rather it is intended to stimulate on-going reflection, new insights, and deeper recognition of the centrality of God’s love for those in poverty to every thing we understand about that love and everything the Church is called to be in response to God’s love of us.

Never has it been more important for all those of goodwill to unite in common concern for the poor of the world, including the poor among us, who are often invisible to the very churches who are called to love them for the sake of Jesus Christ. As Paul reminds us: “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

We urge the churches, ecumenical communities, and individual believers to read and study this statement reflectively and prayerfully, asking for the guidance of the Spirit.

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## INTRODUCTION

One thing surely unites the many and varied traditions of the Christian faith: the common tradition of love for those who are poor. The early Christian community received it from Judaism at their beginning, along with the Scriptures that mandated care for orphans, widows, strangers, and others in need of the community's special concern. The Eucharistic liturgies of the early churches almost certainly involved diaconal distribution of food to the poor. The New Testament writers remembered it as a particular concern of the Lord Jesus, who was reputed to have said "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The biblical tradition of love for the poor has been attested continuously throughout the history of the Church: it is prominent among the writings of patristic theologians; it was required by monastic traditions; it has been evident in the lives of many revered saints; and it has been preserved consistently throughout periods of reformation and renewal, up to the present day.

Love for the poor has formed a major part of the witness of the Church universal throughout all times and places. Love for those who are poor is one of the "practices" through which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church has proclaimed the apostolic faith, first articulated in the kerygmatic preaching on the resurrection of the Lord. It is an integral element of the Tradition of the Gospel that goes back to those who knew Jesus himself.<sup>6</sup>

Love for those who are poor has not always been understood in the same way and has been expressed in a variety of forms. Sometimes church traditions have spoken of the importance of hospitality and generosity for the Christian way of life. Sometimes the self-giving mutuality of the holy and undivided Trinity has been seen as a warrant for Christian interdependence. At other times, practices of almsgiving and works of mercy have been stressed. Often bishops and other church leaders have understood their roles to include advocacy for the poor; sometimes churches have engaged the surrounding culture, calling for systemic

change of corrupt and exploitative systems; reformers have consistently called the Church back to its own scriptural and dominical foundations by instituting concrete changes within. Even during eras of Christian history where particular church bodies resisted then prevailing practices or argued among themselves about social ethics, they fought about how best to care for those who are poor, not whether to do so. Whatever else may be said, love for the poor has been central to Christianity.

## **THE SCRIPTURAL WITNESS**

The Bible has a great deal to say on the subject of wealth and poverty. It is the ethical issue most widely discussed by the biblical writers.

While the highest concentration of biblical language about the poor and poverty in the Old Testament is found in the Wisdom literature, Israel's prophets often speak of economic injustices, Deuteronomic covenant language requires concern for the needy neighbor, the priestly legal material regulates concern for those who are poor, and the historical books consistently assess Israel's rulers in terms of their economic policies and practices.

Not surprisingly, Jesus of Nazareth is described by the writers of the New Testament as one who cared deeply for the poor and, indeed, shared their condition. The Gospel of Luke insists that as Israel's Messiah, Jesus was identified with the poor and outcasts from the beginning of his life to its end. The birth of Jesus took place where they fed the cows. He slept in the manger of a stable, the place that was left over because all the rooms were filled with people who could pay. When it was time for Joseph and Mary to redeem their firstborn son according to the law and to present him in the Temple at Jerusalem, they offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, the sacrifice permitted to poorer families who could afford nothing better. At the inauguration of his ministry, Jesus read from Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" and stated that this scripture was now being fulfilled. In his teaching

about discipleship, Jesus identified himself with the homeless. "Foxes have holes," he said, "and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Finally at the end of his life, Jesus showed solidarity with the very poor in the manner of his death. Jesus died on a Roman cross as a common criminal. Luke's Gospel is not idiosyncratic in its insistence that in the life of Jesus of Nazareth God's love for the poor is revealed. Each of the Gospels in its own way makes the same point.

The early Church seems to have understood itself as bound to care for the poor and those in need of help from the very beginning. The apostle Paul describes the one obligation laid upon him by the pillars of the Church: "remember the poor!" He spent most of his career raising money for the perennially poor churches of Jerusalem and held his congregations accountable for their treatment of the poor among them. Acts, the Epistle of James, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse to John, and other New Testament writings stress the community's obligations to the poor. They also suggest that the poor have gifts to offer, "spiritual blessings" Paul calls them, to those communities with the wisdom to receive them. Hospitality to the stranger who may turn out to be a messenger from God is commanded in Hebrews. Early Christian writings after the New Testament period are consistent with these early witnesses. The history of church reformers and defenders in every period of history shows a long line of saints who voluntarily identified with the poor or called the Church to remember the those who are poor or both. Indeed, there has never been a time when those shaped by the biblical writings have not been enjoined to love the poor.

Reading the Bible in an ecumenical context leads to a deeper appreciation of the many traditions of biblical interpretation within the Church. That the Bible says more on the subject of wealth and poverty than on any other ethical or political issue does not mean that our work as ecumenists concerned about the poor is thereby simplified. It has become clear in the course of our ongoing ecumenical conversation about Christian responses to poverty that each of us brings with us a set of strategic working assumptions about how to approach the issue biblically. As a result, we have been required to give attention to the complex issue of biblical interpretation in an ecumenical setting.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of doing Christian biblical interpretation in the present ecumenical context may not be immediately obvious to most readers of the Bible, but reading texts together turns out to be of substantial theological significance. Reading ecumenically invites us to pay attention to hermeneutical assumptions that go largely unquestioned when we read only with those of our own tradition or denomination.

This observation on our part led to a thought experiment in the form of a brief survey of possible biblical starting points for Christian biblical ethics as it treats the issue of poverty. It seemed useful, given the rich variety of options for biblical starting points for discussing poverty and for framing a Christian response to poverty, to try to assess the theological outcomes of these decisions. What seem to be the costs and benefits of framing the discussion in particular ways, of privileging particular biblical texts or themes?

We sought particularly to discover any patterns about biblical starting places and denominational or traditional convictions or other factors that might be of interest to our ecumenical discussion group and other such groups that might want to build on our work. One obvious desired outcome of our project was to identify any biblical starting point(s) that seem to have widespread appeal across several major traditions of Christianity and, alternatively, to identify any that would be completely unacceptable to one or more major traditions of Christianity. Such findings could conceivably be of use to Christians striving for a consensus or convergence of biblical approaches on which to ground our deliberations about Christian responses to poverty.

In the course of our discussions it became increasingly clear that an approach to Christian ethics that combines almost any of the biblical starting points or any of the traditional ways of using biblical texts in ethical reflection with attention to the Wisdom traditions and its stress on moral virtues seems to provide a way forward that has wide ecumenical appeal. Virtues theory is not only remarkably compatible with most strands of biblical teaching about wealth and poverty but it also has notable advantages over alternative ways of framing Christian ethics. A focus on moral formation and conformity to the mind of Christ reminds us that throughout the history of Christianity, the most widely

agreed upon evidences of the genuineness of Christian faith have been the concrete practices which express love for the poor.

## **INSIGHTS FROM THE EARLY CENTURIES OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

From the early Church Fathers and Mothers, we are taught to see an integral connection between our attention to and concern for those in need and the state of our spiritual health. There is a universal obligation to care for those in need. No one is exempt from the need to assist those who are impoverished.<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of theological bases in the writings of the early Christian centuries for the solidarity we share with the poor. The first is the solidarity which arises by the biblical understanding that humankind is created in the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:26) As members of the human race, we are primordially connected to one another. Regardless of our social location, we share an interdependence that must be recognized and respected.

Secondly, in his earthly ministry, Jesus clearly identified himself with the poor and marginalized. (Matthew 25:31-46) Our commitment to him as professed disciples will be measured by the extent to which we govern ourselves according to our Lord's own self-identification with the poor.

Thirdly, Jesus commanded us to love one another. An expression of that love is to do unto others as we would have them to do unto us. (Matthew 22:37-39; Matthew 7:12) Fourthly, we are called to remember that all we have belongs to God. (Psalm 24:1) We are only stewards of the resources and possessions we have. The God who creates abundantly and sustains us in that abundance has made ample provision for all. What we have is to be readily shared with others to ensure that no one goes without. Finally, by our justification through the atonement of Jesus Christ, we are freed from the bondage of sin, and empowered by the Holy Spirit in order that we might be equipped to love and care for one

another. Thus, we cannot remain in right relationship with the triune God if we fail to share what we have with others. The early Church Fathers and Mothers understood almsgiving as an integral part of faithful discipleship.

Care for those in poverty is a part of the good works that flow out of one's faith. Care for the needy is an important aspect of our identity as followers of Christ. Such care is not a tangential or optional element, but rather, an *essential* element of discipleship. Generosity is a Christ-like virtue. If we take this insight seriously, we can never be comfortable or complacent with the fact that there are those among us who cannot meet their basic human needs, or live under the threat of becoming poor through complex circumstances. Although care for the poor and needy is a universal obligation, church leaders are exhorted to take the lead in meeting this obligation not only by teaching and preaching, but, more importantly, by being living examples. From the lowest to the highest levels of leadership, all are called upon to encourage the cultivation of the virtues which would enable us to meet that obligation willingly and cheerfully.

As human beings created in the image of God, we share a common humanity. Christ blessed our humanness as "the Word made flesh ... who dwelt among us." The Gospel narratives reflect that in his public ministry, this same Jesus Christ purposefully identified himself with the poor and marginalized. Because of our common humanity, and because of Jesus' chosen identification with the poor and needy, they are to be understood as subjects, not objects, and are to be treated with the same dignity and worth accorded to others. For in reality, because of our creatureliness, we all share a common human poverty.

In the past as well as today, those who are poor are too often judged with scorn and forced to wear a badge of shame, even as they struggle to meet their basic needs. However, John Chrysostom admonishes us, " ... [W]hen you see on earth the man who has encountered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, do not seek an account of his life, but free him from his misfortune."<sup>9</sup> Gregory of Nyssa's admonition is even stronger than that of John Chrysostom and more pointedly Christocentric: "Do not despise those who are stretched out on the ground as if they merit no

respect. Consider who they are and you will discover their worth. They bear the countenance of our Savior.”<sup>10</sup>

Generosity requires us to be attentive not only to the poor “out there,” but to those in our midst who struggle to meet their basic needs. As a result of unemployment, underemployment or financial difficulty due not only to unforeseen circumstances, but also because of rising costs in a myriad of sectors, including healthcare, childcare, transportation, food, clothing, and housing, there are those in our midst who subsist precariously on the brink of poverty. In times of economic uncertainty, it is not always easy to discern the poor among us.

We are called upon to recognize that poverty and lack are often imposed upon others because of the greed, selfishness, and indifference which lead to inequity in the distribution of God’s resources. In light of our awareness, we are also obligated to engage in advocacy with those who have the power to institute changes on behalf of those who are denied the opportunity and resources to meet their basic human needs.

## **TOWARD A SPIRITUALITY OF JUSTICE**

The writers of the early Christian centuries we have identified present an important insight that can help us as we seek the rudiments of a spirituality of justice. These authors, whom Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants, and Orthodox venerate, all recognize a link between the spiritual well-being of believers and their generosity toward those in need. Athanasius ranked care for the poor as a spiritual discipline on the same level with watchfulness in prayer, purity of the fast, and study of the Scriptures.<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom considered almsgiving an act of worship, a spiritual exercise of the Christian experience.<sup>12</sup> He viewed almsgiving as an expression of the love commanded by Christ as love of our neighbor. It was a demonstration that we served God, not Mammon. In light of the wisdom of the early Christian writers, we contend that it is in the link between care for

the poor and spiritual well-being that we have a spiritual foundation for an ethic of justice-making. This ethic ensures care for the poor and inclusion of the marginalized in community.

Those of us from the Protestant tradition, with its emphasis on the notion of justification by grace through faith, do not take the step lightly of connecting care for the poor and spiritual well-being. Reflecting upon the Church in history, we recognize that at various moments within that history, new circumstances and different pressures have sometimes come to bear which have called for shifts in our theological perspectives on time-honored traditions, including the relationship between care for the needy and our spiritual well-being. Such a shift occurred in the Western church in the Middle Ages. As Europe underwent urbanization and vast numbers of poor and near-poor were making their way into urban areas, the church's system of poor relief was being overrun. Along with those who had undertaken voluntary poverty (such as members of the mendicant orders), and those who were genuinely impoverished through harsh economic conditions, there were too many "sturdy beggars" – those who chose to make their way into the system under false pretenses.<sup>13</sup> As a result, old distinctions, which had surfaced even in the early Church, between the deserving and undeserving poor, received a fresh hearing. Protestant reformers, such as Martin Luther, had concerns that almsgiving or care for the poor would be linked to a "piety of achievement."<sup>14</sup>

Luther and John Calvin and other theologians from the Reformation period affirmed the place of good works as the *fruit* of our justification by grace through faith in Christ, not its cause. In his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, Martin Luther observes that the Christian should "be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor."<sup>15</sup> The spiritual freedom to do so arises out of justification by grace through faith. Luther notes that in Ephesians 4:28, the Apostle Paul "commands us to work with our hands so that we may give to the needy."<sup>16</sup> Luther elaborates on this text from Ephesians as follows:

This is what makes caring for the body a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to

acquire, and lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each caring for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ [Galatians 6:2]. *This is a truly Christian life.* Here faith is truly active through love.<sup>17</sup>

Luther reiterates this link between faith and works of love in his commentary of the book of Galatians:

Because thou hast laid hold upon Christ by faith, through whom thou art made righteous, begin now to work well. Love God and thy neighbour, call upon God, give thanks unto him, praise him, confess him. Do good to thy neighbour and serve him: fulfil thine office. These are good works indeed, which flow out of this faith and this cheerfulness conceived in the heart, for that we have remission of sins freely by Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the danger of the possibility of a "piety of achievement," John Calvin pressed forward in his concern for the impoverished. "The mansions of the rich are the slaughter-houses of the poor," he charged.<sup>19</sup> In a sermon Calvin delivered in Geneva in 1555, he makes a particularly sharp indictment of the affluent of his day: "The sin of resignation, indifference, egoism tries to divert attention from the blatant fact of poverty by thousand and more things."<sup>20</sup>

Calvin's view of the proper Christian response to poverty was to assume responsibility for the alleviation of that poverty: "If someone is rich it is easier to see what kind of person he is than if he is poor, because a rich person has the means to do harm. If he treats his neighbour without brutality he shows wisdom. Wisdom means realizing that God provokes in the poor the love of the rich for his neighbour. God tests our love. If a rich person is generous, if he tries to do good to the needy and does not lift himself up in haughty pomp and arrogance he makes a good grade in the exam."<sup>21</sup>

For Calvin it would be a grievous error for the rich to remain indifferent to the cries of the poor, because he saw a unity between the poor and the wealthy and inextricable spiritual connection between the two groups.<sup>22</sup> Out of this theological framework, Calvin wrote:

We must see: They are our poor, our needy ones. Our Lord offers them to us as if he intended to say: "I want that the rich mingle with the poor, that they meet and have fellowship, that the poor receive and the rich give and thereby get honored by both alike. If a rich person is in a position to act benevolently and the poor person realizes that he receives in my name, then both will praise me."<sup>23</sup>

The same concerns to love God and neighbor shaped the branches of Protestantism sometimes referred to as the "Radical Reformation" in powerful ways. Care for the poor has created core dimensions of the self-understanding of these communities and continues to do so into the present.

Within the Reformation era, many of the original converts to the Anabaptist movement were poor to begin with, and as new members of the fledgling community their situations often became more precarious due to persecution, which could include confiscation of goods and loss of employment. Anabaptists shared four central practices: economic sharing, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and a form of church discipline which might best be called mutual discipleship.<sup>24</sup> They did not consider economic sharing simply a social ministry. Rather, different Anabaptist communities interlinked their four common practices in various ways. For instance, members of many Anabaptist groups pledged themselves to each other with body, life, and goods during their celebrations of the Lord's Supper, linking their recollection of the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood with their own pledging of themselves to one another.<sup>25</sup> Distribution of goods to the needy often occurred immediately after this service. Other configurations included a pooling of the economic resources of all and the constructing of self-sustaining communities of production and consumption.

A renewed emphasis on "love for the poor" was central to the rise of Protestant Pietism in the seventeenth century. A variety of influential organizations for the service of the poor were founded at Halle, the site of the great Lutheran university closely associated with the Pietist movement. The resulting energies for the care of those in poverty channeled into the "inner mission" movement, or "home mission" as it came to be called in North America,

the ancestor of many present-day collaborative church-based and para-church emergency housing shelters, soup kitchens, clothing distribution centers and medical services ministries.

These concerns later found a home in the “Evangelical Revival” and the rise of Methodism through John Wesley in the eighteenth century. Deeply influenced by such figures as Chrysostom, Wesley advocated an egalitarian understanding of the Gospel that called for intimate and personal acquaintance with those in poverty. This involved a weekly visitation of the poor and the acceptance of hospitality in their homes—an “absolute duty” of the Christian, the neglect of which could endanger one’s “everlasting salvation” (Sermon 98, “On Visiting the Sick”).

In the nineteenth century, the themes of concern for and acceptance of the poor on occasion became church dividing, often in struggles over the practice of pew rentals as a means of supporting church building and maintenance programs. Opponents of this practice felt that it led to a “respecting of persons” in conflict with the Christian Gospel, especially as repudiated in the book of James. The poor were embarrassed by the fact that they had no pews of their own and had to sit in the “free pews” in the back that advertised their disadvantaged status. Churches opposed to this practice were called “free churches.” In New York City, the churches that followed the evangelist Congregationalist/Presbyterian Charles Grandison Finney, the fountainhead of modern revivalism, and thus arguably of the broader present-day Evangelical movement, belonged to a special “third presbytery” that consisted only of “free churches.” Perhaps the most radical expression of this motif was found in B. T. Roberts, founder of the Free Methodist Church - “free” meaning not only “free pews” but also free worship, more populist music, and freedom for the slaves. In the founding editorial of *The Earnest Christian* (1860) Roberts argued that “preaching the gospel to the poor” was the “crowning proof” of the messiahship of Jesus. This concern must characterize any church that claimed to follow in his path and belonged to the *esse* of the church in a more profound way than other claims to church order, as for instance, the office of bishops. From this Roberts argued that the whole life of the church, its buildings, worship, music, diaconal prac-

tices, everything, must be organized to welcome and honor the poor as the favored ones of Christ.

From its beginning, the early twentieth-century Pentecostal movement was a movement among and with the poor. While some of its adherents have emphasized only the spiritual implications of the Gospel message and the experiential benefits of the Spirit's involvement in human life, Pentecostals have a living tradition of ministering to the physical needs of those who are poor. One might even see the Pentecostal doctrine of healing, a prominent feature of early Pentecostal preaching, as a specific ministry to people who were without insurance, without access to doctors or healthcare, without the "safety net" of more recent medical conveniences.<sup>26</sup>

Pentecostals believe that preaching the "whole Gospel" means a call that one's entire life should come under the Lordship of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit. This means that if one's spiritual being is in proper relationship to God, then one's physical, economic, and social dimensions should fall into proper line as well. In other words, the spiritual effects of the Spirit of God in one's life create demonstrable physical effects. To love the poor truly means to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that the transforming power of the Spirit of God will change the lives and livelihoods of those in poverty.<sup>27</sup> The Spirit's power is not just personal, but can use human beings to attack the forces of sin within the unjust structures of human societies.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever concerns Protestant reformers, both of the sixteenth century and in later periods, have had over the social welfare systems and the church of their day, they repudiated social practices which impoverished members of society. Even those of us who might be cautious about beliefs and practices which could encourage a return to a spirituality of "works righteousness" must acknowledge a genuine connection between our relationship to God and our relationship to one another. Obedience to the biblical command to love God and love our neighbor compels us through the activity of the Holy Spirit in memory of Jesus Christ. The responsibility to obey places a demand upon us that we pay attention to the link between our care for the poor and our spiritual well-being. This link is the foundation for an ethic of justice-making.

## HEROES OF THE FAITH AND AN ETHIC OF JUSTICE-MAKING

There have been numerous examples in the history of the Christian Church where individuals and/or groups understood this foundation for an ethic of justice-making. Adherents to the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant traditions can identify such examples within their particular expression of Christianity.

One exemplar who continues to enjoy popularity from diverse traditions within Christianity is Francis of Assisi (1181/82-1226). The witness of this medieval figure whose vital, Christ-like spirituality continues to attract admirers from various traditions and from people from all walks of life is especially pertinent for Christians today who are searching for a spirituality which recognizes the connection between the spiritual life and social justice.

Unfortunately, the word “spirituality” has been used promiscuously in our contemporary context. We define spirituality as the beliefs *and* practices that support us in living a life of faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are three elements of Franciscan spirituality which are important to emphasize as we articulate the rudiments of a spirituality of justice in our own time: 1) love for a vulnerable God, 2) imitation of Jesus of Nazareth, and 3) compassion for the poor. When these aspects of the Franciscan tradition are combined with attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, we have a Trinitarian foundation for spirituality which is conducive to a manner of discipleship which can enable us to serve those around us who are poor effectively.

### ***LOVE FOR A VULNERABLE GOD***

What evoked adoration from Francis was that God blessed humanity by the act of divine self-emptying as exemplified in the Incarnation. God, who is above all and responsible for all, expressed this love by becoming human. The Incarnation was a

voluntary descent into poverty and weakness.

This act of God in Christ led Francis to identify with that which is weak and impoverished. For Francis, God's act of love compels us to love that which is weak, despised, and vulnerable; for in doing so, we love what God loves. Such imitation of divine love enables us to see the presence of grace in all that God loves. Because of our connection to the world as creatures, the world becomes a precious place where the Incarnation represents God's chosen embeddedness in the physical world.

In Franciscan spirituality, the kenosis of God in Christ also helps to deepen our awareness of suffering in the world and empowers us to do something about it. This "love of God who made and loves the world enables us to grow in love of the world."<sup>29</sup> In following the example of Francis, who was obedient to the divine commandment to "love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds," (Matthew 22:37), we can "ent[er] into fuller knowledge of the world, particularly through standing alongside those who suffer in it, and this can enable us to know and do God's will."<sup>30</sup>

### ***IMITATION OF JESUS OF NAZARETH***

The kenosis, the self-emptying, of God in Christ Jesus was not just an act of God that drew Francis' adoration. Out of his love for this vulnerable God, Francis wanted to imitate Jesus. He taught his own followers to live a life of lowliness and voluntary poverty because that is what Jesus did. For Francis, the imitation of Christ represented a link between obedience and poverty. Poverty was not simply the absence of material goods. This poverty included a divestment of both external and internal impediments to complete obedience to the divine command to love and serve one another.<sup>31</sup> Poverty meant a life of self-denial, humility, and service.

The challenge for us in the twenty-first century is to discern how we might incorporate this insight in our own expression of the disciplined life of a follower of Jesus Christ, given that a simplistic imitation of Jesus, or even Francis, are impractical in our time. Whatever Francis and his followers may have done, and whatever we do insofar as we imitate Jesus, can only be done by

divine grace. The practice of responsible stewardship, self-denial, humility, and service requires the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

The insights of Latin American theologian Jose Comblin offer language from his spiritual tradition which helps to illustrate how the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in our own time leads to that conformity to the image of Christ that the Apostle Paul spoke of long ago: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you ... For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family" (Romans 8:10-11, 29).

The Holy Spirit is the source of faith. This faith constitutes wisdom or a higher knowledge in which the Spirit allows us to penetrate into the secret of the words and deeds of Jesus. The mystery of God that the Spirit reveals with regard to Christ is God's option for the poor. As Comblin explains, "The Son [Jesus Christ] became poor, 'taking on the condition of a slave.' The Father became like the poor by giving his Son over to poverty. As a result, it is in the poor that we see the face of God; it is in the poor that the Spirit shows us the face of Christ."<sup>32</sup>

If we truly see the face of God in those who are poor, as a result of the work of the Spirit in us, then our care for one another will be more than superficial. The progress of Christian life includes a struggle against the evil that dwells within a person. The Holy Spirit guides this struggle, known as asceticism. The goal is liberty from self-indulgence and freedom for service to others. The Holy Spirit can help us to meet the challenge of living our lives in conformity to the image of Christ in our time and under the circumstances that we find ourselves in today.

Those of us who have much in the way of material resources are called upon to examine how we use the material goods we have. This involves attention to solid principles of responsible stewardship of our goods and resources. This examination of stewardship will require a practice of avoidance of ostentation or conspicuous consumption.

There are those of us who find it difficult to meet the needs of our family. Although not utterly impoverished, we may find ourselves one step away from financial disaster. Those who are poor and those who could become poor may feel that our lives already seem like one long asceticism because we find ourselves constantly in a state of physical self-denial and burdened by cares. However, the poor and near-poor are also susceptible to the trappings of riches. In that case, our self-denial may be required in a different manner from that of the more affluent. And, as our lives may be transformed through the successes of our own hard work, through successful intervention in solidarity with us by others in our churches, or the gratuitous intervention of God in our midst, we are called in turn to become those who stand in solidarity with others, witnessing to God's love for the poor.

There is none, rich or poor, who are exempt from the need for the work of the Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ that we may serve our neighbor in love. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot pray. Without unceasing prayer, we cannot begin or sustain the path that leads to imitation of Jesus. Prayer was the chief discipline of Francis of Assisi. Prayer was the means by which Francis knew and expressed love to God. His devotion to God freed him from the temptations and impediments to service to others and strengthened him to give unreservedly to the poor.

His spirituality was dialectical: movement between involvement in God and involvement in society. His experiences of society fed into his life of prayer, and in turn led him back into society.

### ***COMPASSION FOR THE POOR***

The third dimension of Franciscan spirituality we would emphasize is compassion for the poor. Compassion for those who are poor is more than sympathy. It is solidarity that refuses to use more than needed to avoid robbing from those without. It recognizes that our existences are tied up with one another and with the whole environment. Compassion recognizes a real kinship with the rest of creation. Anything that thwarts our harmony with one another and with all of creation gives us a holy restlessness. We cannot be content with disharmony that

arises out of unequal access to and distribution of the resources that would enable all of us to live the abundant life.

Through their love for the self-emptying God, which led to their commitment to imitate Jesus - the Incarnate One - Francis and his early followers were motivated to serve and enter into solidarity with the poor. Their motivation for service was derived from compassion, not mere sympathy. With sympathy we give charity, but remain unmoved by the plight of those who suffer. We give, if at all, out of our excess. But with compassion, we are moved; we suffer with others and their pain becomes our pain. We are moved to act in sacrificial ways. In Francis and his companions, this compassion meant a *commitment* to suffer with those who suffer.

*How can [we] believe in Jesus Christ and let things stay as they are?*, a more recent follower of Francis asks.<sup>33</sup> Reflection upon the spirituality of Francis of Assisi may lead us to ponder that God freely chooses vulnerability, not as a way to support the status quo, but in order to meet our needs and transform our lives. Our spirituality and praxis ought to do the same.

## **THE INNER LIFE AND THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE**

The spirituality of Francis is holistic in that it maintains continuity between the inner and outer life. It is a *lived* spirituality. For Francis, his experience of life among the most wretched of society was a fundamental influence in his whole relationship to God. His profound love of God extended to a love for the world which God has created. In this perspective, a strong prayer life is a form of action upon ourselves, it builds up in us a capacity and a desire for further action in the world. The Cistercian monk Thomas Merton, an admirer of Franciscan spirituality, observed the importance of solitude, silence, and stillness. They are necessary tools that help us “recuperate spiritual powers that may have been gravely damaged by the noise and rush of a pressurized existence.”<sup>34</sup>

Our engagement in the struggle for just societies should arise out of a deep experience of the love of God as the underlying reality of the world. Our concern for the world, and for those who suffer in it, arises out of our love of God who made the world, loves the world, and is active at all times in making his love known within the world. A spirituality of justice encompasses an active inner life of faith and prayer that can sustain us in our work of service to others. It requires consistency in our theology and our praxis. In the words of Jesus to his disciples in the Upper Room before his arrest, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).

## **THE VIRTUE OF PRUDENCE**

In all our churches, we pray for the world. We pray that God's will for human well-being may be carried out on earth as it is in heaven. We pray for specific needs and concerns as we become aware of them. We call on the name of Jesus in our own sufferings and on behalf of others who suffer.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, primate of the Orthodox Church in America, speaking at a prayer service for the United Nations community in New York, in October 2003, used language that other churches can fully affirm for themselves: "The true ministry of Orthodox Christian faith, of the Orthodox Christian communities, is loving service to God and to humanity." "We believe that every human being carries the image and likeness of God. When we honor the human being, we honor God. When we serve the human community and the common good, we are imitators of God, we are disciples of Christ, we are full of the Holy Spirit."<sup>35</sup>

In order to carry out our own work of love and care in the world we must make decisions on how to proceed, how to honor human beings, how to serve the human community and the common good. We need divine guidance so that we may indeed be imitators of God, disciples of Christ filled with the Holy Spirit. We

must pray, therefore, for divine guidance in our decision-making as we seek to lead a life in conformity with Christ.

The temptation to make our decisions pragmatically with little attention to divine guidance may be quite strong. It takes time to become attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We must not only be well-informed on the issues related to justice, but also pay attention to the interior movements and exterior signs of the guidance of the Spirit. This process is often referred to as discernment. Here we speak of the process as an exercise of the classic Christian virtue of prudence. At its best, this process leaves all who participate with a sense that the decision is God's work and not merely our own.

Our love for God leads to actions of love for others. Prudence can be seen as one way that God speaks to the Christian community, not separate *from* but *dependent on* Scripture and Tradition and rooted deeply in the life of prayer.

After wide consultation, the Catholic bishops of the United States in their 1987 statement *Economic Justice for All* articulated principles that may be seen as a common resource for all the churches of the United States as they seek to act with prudence. The Catholic bishops taught that practical judgments in matters of wealth and poverty are to be guided by the following:

1. *Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.* Human dignity comes from God and the economy is to serve people.
2. *Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community.* The human person is intrinsically social and needs to participate in community.
3. *All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society.* People need a minimum level of participation in the economy and should not be excluded.
4. *All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable.* The justice of a society can be seen in its treatment of the poor.
5. *Human rights are the minimum condition for life in community.* These rights are economic as well as civil and political.

6. *Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights. This is not solely the role of government, but government has a role.*<sup>36</sup>

The exercise of the virtue of prudence is key to taking these principles and making them operative in the real world. Prudence, considered classically, is moral wisdom in making real judgments. It is not self-interested or cunning but rather concerned for the truth and for the good of others.

Prudence might be defined as “reason perfected in the cognition of truth.” Here reason means our receptivity to the truth of reality whether this reality is “secular” or “spiritual.” The prudent person, prudent community opens himself/herself/itself to the reality of things as they are with the help of other members of the community and partner communities.

**Prudence** is interrelated with the other virtues. In particular, **humility**, **generosity**, and **hospitality** bear on decisions in regard to poverty. The humble person is a realist. She or he sees self and others as they truly are. Each has talents and gifts; each has deficits and limitations. Humble persons can be generous, sharing their talents and gifts with others and working to change unjust systems. They serve as Jesus did. This service is hospitable. It accepts others and shows concern for human needs, whether physical, psychological or spiritual.

The Christian community comes to prudent decisions after a patient dialogue among its members and with experts. This dialogue seeks the truth. Prudence is a virtue of individuals embedded in relationships in community. There is no personal wisdom without the wisdom of others.

Listening for divine guidance in prayer and in dialogue with others is necessary for prudent decision making. Silence is absolutely necessary in order to pay attention to God.

Wisdom is not just from the present. The Christian community carries accumulated wisdom with it from ages long before and from the recent past. This experience can be consulted. There is,

for example, ample record of the experience in ethnic and racial congregations in the United States. They have had remarkable success in helping new immigrants settle in this country and resettle in each new city. Drawing on the wisdom of the past, we come to address the current situation.

## THE PRESENT SITUATION

In our time, the pursuit of economic justice requires that we investigate the reasons for the persistence of grinding poverty in staggering proportions throughout the globe, as well as the poverty found in regions of our own country, at a time of technological advancements which could allow us to defeat this ancient foe. The pursuit of economic justice also requires attentiveness to the array of forces that impede the more equitable distribution of the world's resources for the sake of the common good.

In order for the Church to do its tasks in the current moment we commend the following challenges:

1. As we read the signs of the times and interpret them in light of the Gospel we counsel a strong sense of urgency seeing the threat of global poverty as one of the central signs of our time. Our investigation into the Church's response to those in poverty shows that from the outset the Church has practiced works of mercy to the poor as an integral part of its self understanding. In so doing the Church affirms that the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of all humans, especially those who are poor, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.<sup>37</sup>
2. A primary component of our response should be true repentance and renewed worship. The Church does not always live in solidarity with the poor. We have not always ministered to the world in fidelity to Christ's mission to serve and not be served. Likewise we believe that one means of aiding the Church in fulfilling its mission to those who are poor is the ongoing worship of God in Spirit and in truth. We urge every Christian tradition to renew its worship with an eye to the sustenance its worship brings

to the type of central and essential ministries we commend as part of our service to the poor.

3. Our investigation convinces us that the virtue of charitable giving alone is not enough to ameliorate poverty. While the Church has done great and marvelous works of charity throughout its history, we believe that social analysis and structural change are necessary in order to effectively reduce poverty given the systemic forces at work in the global economy that create and sustain poverty. At the same time we acknowledge that the Church does not possess any special gifts in the arena of social analysis. Rather, it must engage in fruitful dialogue with partners of goodwill in the search for solutions to complex political problems.

4. We recommend two forms of concrete action. First, we ask each church to consider reorienting their antipoverty efforts to coincide with the Millennium Development Goals adopted by 189 countries at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. The Governing Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA affirmed these goals February 14, 2005, sending a Valentine's Day love letter to the world. These eight development goals set ambitious targets to be met by 2015. Governments, aid agencies, and civil society organizations everywhere are resetting their work around these goals. (See below for a listing of the goals and targets).

Second, the Church needs to give greater resources to the theological task of recovering its voice regarding its responsibilities to the poor. We commend a theology of the cross, not one of self preservation. In the face of institutional struggle, it is tempting to adopt a theology that emphasizes self preservation at the expense of ministering to the world. We believe that before there can be resurrection there must be crucifixion. Thus we call the Church to recover its voice and identity through pouring itself out in service to the poor. We call for churches to match dollars spent in institutional expansion with dollars for ministry to those who are poor.

5. We call the international development community to account for its tone deafness regarding the role of religion in alleviating the

suffering of the poor. Too often secular organizations, governments, and intellectuals have not appreciated the historic roles played by the Church in serving the poor. We ask that governments and other poverty fighting agencies find creative ways to partner with the Church in the search for solutions to poverty. The Church brings vast human, spiritual, theological, and technical resources to the same struggle. Non-church actors need to develop the intellectual and technical capacities to partner effectively with the Church.

6. Finally, we commend a renewed commitment to the ecumenical task. No single church can do these things alone. Acting together to address poverty allows the Church to deepen ecumenical solidarity and to build new ties to Christian communities that have not historically been a part of the ecumenical movement. Through consultation, mutual cooperation, and shared administration, the Church can model its unity in the world in its ministries to the poor.

# MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND TARGETS

## **Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.**

*Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.*

*Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.*

## **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.**

*Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.*

## **Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.**

*Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.*

## **Goal 4: Reduce child mortality.**

*Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.*

## **Goal 5: Improve maternal health.**

*Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.*

## **Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.**

*Target 7: Have halved by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.*

*Target 8: Have halved by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.*

## **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.**

*Target 9: Integrate the principle of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.*

*Target 10: Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.*

*Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.*

## **Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.**

*Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally).*

*Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries (includes tariff- and quota free access for exports, enhanced program of debt relief for and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction).*

*Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly provisions).*

*Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.*

*Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.*

*Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.*

*Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies.<sup>38</sup>*

# CONCLUSION

## *OBLIGATION TO GOD*

In communities that have professed love for God, there have been inquiries as to how they might bear witness to that love. In Micah 6:8, the prophet proclaimed what the Lord required: to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. In Isaiah, the prophet proclaimed the kind of worship that genuinely pleased God: Not perfunctory fasts, but the loosening of the bonds of injustice and oppression; not empty cultic practices, but sharing bread with the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless and clothing for the naked (Isaiah 58). In the New Testament, one of the scribes wanted to know what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus summed up his answer in the “double commandment”: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength *and* to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31). In fact, he said no other commandment was greater than these. Moreover, Jesus made it clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the neighbor is one who shows mercy to someone in need (Luke 10:25-37). Thus, the expression of our love for God is inextricably linked to the quality of our relations with others. Care for the neighbor is a means by which we testify to the power of the resurrection of the Lord among us.

## *JUSTICE AND THE COMMON MEAL*

Baptism initiates us into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6). Having been made to drink of the one Spirit, we are brought into the kingdom of life and the community of faith. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper sustains us in our life in Christ. Just as earthly bread is the staff of earthly life, Jesus is the bread of everlasting life (John 6:35), and his blood is the cup of salvation. When we partake of the bread and the cup in our respective traditions, there are also other theological realities we are enjoined to consider regarding the communion meal.

First, this common meal is connected with Christ's command to love one another. The integrity of the communion meal demands our reconciliation with one another. If there is anything that impedes the flow of brotherly and sisterly love among us, we are impelled to seek reconciliation to avoid making a mockery of this meal of communion in Christ (I Corinthians 11:27-34).

Second, we cannot be reconciled to God and each other if we are indifferent to our neighbor in need. As the author of Ecclesiasticus says, "bread is life to the destitute and it is murder to deprive them of it. To rob your neighbor of his livelihood is to kill him, and the man who cheats a worker of his wages sheds blood."<sup>39</sup> If our action or inaction hinders our neighbor from receiving his or her daily sustenance, then our participation in the Eucharist is an offense to God.

Third, our participation in the Lord's Supper is not simply a cultic rite without connection to our daily lives. The Eucharistic meal has social implications.<sup>40</sup> When the Apostle Paul chastised the Corinthians for letting factionalism infiltrate their ranks, he linked the Eucharistic celebration to social consciousness of Christians. If the Church of Christ is indeed *one* body, then there are social responsibilities in that unity, particularly toward the needy ones. One link between the Eucharist and a just society is the love Christians practice towards one another.<sup>41</sup> The dehumanizing conditions of the poor call for a tangible response from all who gather around the Lord's table. The substance of Christian worship is service. As reflected in Isaiah 58, authentic worship is fulfilled in the praxis of service and liberation of one's poor sisters and brothers, of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan.<sup>42</sup> Holy Communion should arouse a desire to ensure that all have enough to eat, that no one goes hungry. Our sharing keeps alive Jesus' mission of reconciliation, forgiveness, and the removal of sins.<sup>43</sup>

### ***BEARING WITNESS***

Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel has said that "the presence of the poor among us is the measure of the absence of God's kingdom in a society."<sup>44</sup> Great voices of our churches in the

United States speak the same truth. In the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr., we hear this truth, as he urgently and eloquently focused on the degradation of human dignity by poverty:

About two years ago now, I stood with many of you who stood there in person and all of you who were there in spirit before the Lincoln Monument in Washington. *(Yes)* As I came to the end of my speech there, I tried to tell the nation about a dream I had.... I've seen my dream shattered as I've walked the streets of Chicago *(Make it plain)* and seen Negroes, young men and women, with a sense of utter hopelessness because they can't find any jobs. And they see life as a long and desolate corridor with no exit signs. And not only Negroes at this point. I've seen my dream shattered because I've been through Appalachia, and I've seen my white brothers along with Negroes living in poverty. *(Yeah)* And I'm concerned about white poverty as much as I'm concerned about Negro poverty. *(Make it plain)*

So yes, the dream has been shattered, *(Amen)* and I have had my nightmarish experiences, but I tell you this morning once more that I haven't lost the faith. *(No, sir)* I still have a dream *(A dream, Yes, sir)* that one day all of God's children will have food and clothing and material well-being for their bodies, culture and education for their minds, and freedom for their spirits. *(Yes)...*

I still have a dream this morning *(Yes, sir)* that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill will be made low; the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

I still have a dream this morning *(Amen)* that truth will reign supreme and all of God's children will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. And when this day comes the morning stars will sing together *(Yes)* and the sons of God will shout for joy.<sup>45</sup>

May our worship and praxis reflect the reality of kingdom living within our communities of faith. Although we expect to be judged by our preaching and teaching, Jesus Christ himself warns us explicitly that he will judge us in terms of our conduct towards other human beings, particularly the least among us (Matthew 25:35-36). In his *Treatise on Good Works'* exposition on the

command against stealing, Luther attributes the saying, "If you do not feed [the hungry], then as far as you are concerned, you have killed [them]" to Ambrose of Milan, and he observes "and in this commandment are included the works of mercy which Christ will require at the last day."<sup>46</sup> Clearly, God's solidarity is with those who would be recipients of our caring and sharing. It is only as we demonstrate our fidelity to God's command to love our neighbor as ourselves that the world will know that we are Christians, not only in word but in deed.

Through the practices of Christian care for the poor, love, giving, and wise advocacy, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the "Tradition of the Gospel" is handed on from one generation to the next, establishing a continuing witness in the world to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit perfect our love in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Accra, Ghana, Document GC 23-e. Available online at [http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news\\_file/doc-181-1.pdf](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/doc-181-1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, in Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, eds., *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Geneva: WCC, 2001), para. 32, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church* (Geneva: WCC, 1977); Julio de Santa Ana, ed. *Separation without Hope? Essays on the Relation between the Church and the Poor during the Industrial Revolution and the Western Colonial Expansion*, (Geneva: WCC, 1978) and *Towards a Church of the Poor; The Work of an Ecumenical Group on the Church and the Poor* (Geneva: WCC, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, eds., *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation, and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: WCC, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," in *International Review of Mission* 71 (1982): 427-51.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, in Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, eds., *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Geneva: WCC, 2001), para. 35, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> See *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* and essays in *Interpreting Together*.

<sup>8</sup> Justo L. González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. and intro. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Love of the Poor": 1 'On Good Works,' in the Appendix, *The Hungry Are Dying, Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 195.

<sup>11</sup> David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 189.

<sup>12</sup> R. A. Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God, The Pastoral Theology of John Chrysostom* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 152-153.

<sup>13</sup> See Lee Palmer Wandel, "Social Welfare," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, general ed., Hans J. Hildebrand (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 77-83.

<sup>14</sup> We are indebted to Carter Lindberg for this phrase. See Lindberg, "The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Welfare in the Early Reformation," in Emily Albu

Hanawalt and Carter Lindberg, eds. *Through the Eye of a Needle, Judeo-Christian Roots of Social Welfare* (Kirksville, MO: The Thomas Jefferson UP at Northeast Missouri State University, 1994), 177ff.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in John Dillenberger, ed. *Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 73.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 74. Emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, "A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," in Dillenberger, *Luther*, 111-112. John Calvin affirms this connection between faith and works. For example, in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chapter xiv, para. 8, Calvin reiterates the Reformation insight that good works are a by-product of faith, when he writes, "They have spoken very truly who have thought that favor with God is not obtained by anyone through works, but on the contrary, works please him only when the person has previously found favor in his sight." Passage quoted from *Calvin's Institutes, A New Compendium*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Louisville, Kentucky/John Knox Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, quoted by C. F. Dummerth, "The Holy Spirit, Calvin and the Poor," *Asia Journal of Theology* 8.2 (1994): 408.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: an Introduction* (Kitchener, ONT: Pandora Press, 1995), 91-93, cf. 391-396.

<sup>25</sup> See Balthasar Hubmaier, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, ed. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 87-88, 396-400; Hans Schlaffer in *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*, ed. Cornelius Dyck (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press), p. 205; Peter Walpot in *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, ed. Daniel Liechty (New York: Paulist Press), 169-170, 188; Pilgram Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), pp. 279-280; Dirk Philips in *The Writings of Dirk Philips*, ed. Cornelius Dyck, William Keeney and Alvin Beachy (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), p.123; John Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism* [Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993]; Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], pp. 186-197, cf. 234-243.

<sup>26</sup> For historical perspectives see Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2001),

especialmente 199ff. and Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 119.

<sup>28</sup> A variety of Pentecostal and Evangelical voices add to the quest for a spirituality that is holistic, with a continuity between the inner and outer life, a quest for justice and a search for the implications of the physical dimensions of the Gospel. See Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*, 2, ed. J. C. Thomas, R. D. Moore, S. J. Land (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1999); Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999); Darío López Rodríguez, *El Nuevo Rostro del Pentecostalismo Latinoamericano* (Lima, Peru: Ediciones Puma del Centro de Investigaciones y Publicaciones, 2002); and Darío López Rodríguez, *La misión liberadora de Jesús: El mensaje del evangelio de Lucas* (Lima, Peru: Ediciones Puma, 2004); and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino and Everett Wilson, "Latin American Pentecostals: Old Stereotypes and New Challenges," in *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*, ed. E. L. Cleary and H. W. Stewart-Gambino (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 227-246.

<sup>29</sup> Terry Tastard, *The Spark in the Soul, Four Mystics on Justice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Mark Galli, *Francis of Assisi and His World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 142.

<sup>32</sup> Jose Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 132

<sup>33</sup> Tastard, *Spark*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> John Michael Talbot with Steve Rabey, *The Lessons of St. Francis, How to Bring Simplicity and Spirituality into Your Daily Life* (New York: Plume, 1997), 59.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in *The Orthodox Church* vol. 39, no. 11 (2003): 1.

<sup>36</sup> See National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Tenth Anniversary Edition of "Economic Justice for All"* (Washington, DC: US Catholic Conference, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> See Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, Association Press, 1966), esp. para. 1 and 4.

<sup>38</sup> See *Human Development Report 2003*, UN Development Programme (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> From Ecclesiasticus 34, as quoted in Enrique Dussel in Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *Beyond Philosophy, Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2003), 42.

<sup>40</sup> See World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), Eucharist paras. 22-26; World Council of Churches Commission on Mission and Evangelism, *Sharing One Bread; Sharing One Mission: The Eucharist as Missionary Event*, Jean Stromberg, comp. and ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983) and Chris Ukachukwu Manus, "The Liberating Power of the Eucharist," *African Ecclesial Review*, volume 42, nos. 5/6 (2000): 217-227.

<sup>41</sup> Manus, "The Liberating Power of the Eucharist," 224.

<sup>42</sup> Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Roger Mahony, "The Eucharist and Social Justice," *Worship* 57 (1983): 56.

<sup>44</sup> Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The American Dream," sermon preached July, 4 1965.

Available on-line at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermonsFrame.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther, "Treatise on Good Works [1520]," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44/1: *The Christian in Society* (Translation by W. A. Lambert revised by and ed. by James Atkinson; Philadelphia: Fortress Press [American Edition], 1966: 109.