

Poverty And Wealth

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Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Corina Villacorta and Harold Segura as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Multiplex session on "Wealth, Poverty and Power: Effectively Responding through the Global and Local Church." Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the authors and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

Mission and "signs of the times"

The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization is being convened at the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, marking the first centennial celebration of the historic 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. The choice of Cape Town as the venue for the meeting also has profound historical significance. It was in Cape Town in 1810 that William Carey, quite understandably referred to as the "Father of Modern Missions", first advocated holding an international missionary conference.

Thus, both the year and the venue of our meeting highlight the importance of world missions and the urgency of the task of world evangelisation. Within this context and to contribute to the legacy of missionary vision, we bring the desire to renew our commitments to God and to the tasks He has entrusted to us. This conference provides an exercise in discernment during which we must look to the past to assess and appreciate what has been accomplished, acknowledge the present, teeming with challenges, and prepare ourselves to engage the future with a renewed vision of what the Lord and master of the mission requires of us.

"What does God require of us?" (Micah 6:6-8) and "What task has he assigned us to do?" (Acts 9:6) are two inevitable missionary questions that face us. At the first meeting in Lausanne in 1974 (seemingly the remote past), the final Declaration asserted that "Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand".

The two basic criteria included in that declaration still guide us as we discern intrinsic qualities that shape our missionary work: incarnational presence and compassionate dialogue. These criteria require us to examine our world through the lens Jesus used in his ministry. He interpreted "the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:1-3) and, from that perspective, he acknowledged the world's sorrows and responded to them according to the will of His Father. The Master's mission developed through deep engagement with the world in which He lived. He encountered, together with the Father, the sorrows of the world in light of its needs, and applied the healing and controversial balm of kingdom values to the world's situations. His responses were consistent with the merciful will of the Father who sent him to "seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Seeing the world clearly and "showing up" in the very midst of its anguish and fears is integral to our witness of faith. How can we discuss holistic evangelisation without first acknowledging the world's sorrows, sorrows that are increasing exponentially every day? We cannot ignore the fact that while scientific progress, technological breakthroughs and achievements in other fields of knowledge are astonishing, the rate of poverty, exploitation and social exclusion is rising at an alarming rate. Additionally, while the accumulation of wealth by individuals and large corporations is unprecedented in modern times, the magnitude of poverty and inequality that millions of people experience today continues to be unacceptable and appalling.

While we study statistics in an attempt to view the whole picture, the millions of people unable to meet the basic needs of food and shelter are much more than simply statistics appealing for

compassion or solidarity. Their reality poses challenging questions about our evangelisation and missionary task: How can we talk about God and witness His love in the midst of so much poverty? How can we express God's love? How can we be witnesses to the abundant life? What does the announcement of the good news of His Kingdom of love mean?

As we address the challenges of this new century, a renewed and revitalized understanding of the meaning of Christian social responsibility is crucial. We have a moral imperative to pursue justice in the world, to engage in the struggle against poverty, to join our voices in a denunciation of immoral wealth and to defend human rights and dignity. We are still called to carry on the work implicit in the declaration from the Congress of 1974: "We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression" and further on that: "The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist"(1). It is important to note that since 1974, more than 250 million people die in the world of poverty related causes; 85 million of them are under the age of 5 (2).

In Manila (Lausanne II, 1989), these commitments were upheld by declaring, "The authentic gospel must become visible in the transformed lives of men and women. As we proclaim the love of God we must be involved in loving service; as we preach the Kingdom of God we must be committed to its demands of justice and peace" (3) (Manila Manifesto, 4).

These expressions of missionary accountability resonate with greater urgency today as we consider the overwhelming reality of structural sins brought on by the startling inequity present in our world today. The stark reality of wealth and the stark reality of poverty mutually explain each other. One cannot be understood apart from the other. It is not only a matter of furthering our comprehensive understanding of mission, but also of acknowledging the integrated realities of the evils affecting our world. They are social situations that are explained in a systematic way. Poverty cannot be understood in isolation without reference to the immoral levels of wealth in the world.

One billion people live on less than \$1 a day. That number encompasses a multitude of people living in varying degrees of poverty "all of them poor, but some even more desperately poor than others" (World Bank, World Data Indicators 2010)

Poverty and mission

The social responsibility of churches is present in its missionary commitment. Throughout the long history of our faith, there are numerous experiences of significant commitments to "the poorest of the poor". These commitments have mirrored the words of the Master who also described his mission as preaching the good news to the poor, light to those in need, freedom for the prisoners and life to the full for all (Luke 4: 18-19; John 10:10).

These experiences of Christian social responsibility are genuine; so are the many and familiar controversies surrounding the implications of the gospel's demands for social responsibility. The tension is reflected in the two extremes of responses to the claims of social responsibility in the gospel. At one end of the spectrum, individuals and groups gravitate toward indifference to social needs and dedicate themselves exclusively to the task of verbally communicating the gospel, aiming to "attract more people to Christ". At the opposite extreme, individuals and groups make the struggle against poverty the exclusive aim of their mission. The latter are often motivated by their desire to make the Kingdom of God present in the "here and now" in all its social and political dimensions.

Lausanne declarations have addressed both groups. The former have been called on by the Lausanne movement to consider that:

The proclamation of God's kingdom necessarily demands the prophetic denunciation of all that is incompatible with it. Among the evils we deplore are destructive violence, including institutionalized

violence, political corruption, all forms of exploitation of people and of the earth, the undermining of the family, abortion on demand, the drug traffic, and the abuse of human rights. In our concern for the poor, we are distressed by the burden of debt in the two-thirds world. We are also outraged by the inhuman conditions in which millions live, who bear God's image as we do (4)

The latter are reminded: "reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation" (5). Creating a healthy balance between these two extremes reminds us that mission has different dimensions and is fulfilled by meeting humankind's varied and complex needs.

Further, in light of the statistics shared above, we are called now to sidestep the temptation to embroil ourselves in internal controversies and, rather, to engage in constructive action that addresses these realities. The millions of individuals living in extreme poverty demand our compassionate, caring and prophetic Christian presence. In 1989 we publicly repented in Manila, expressing the following: "The narrowness of our concerns and vision has often kept us from proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, private and public, local and global. We determine to obey his command to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" Matthew 6:33" (6) (Manila Manifesto, 4). This act of repentance continues to challenge us to concrete action in our daily work and lives.

2% of the population consumes the equivalent of 35% of the consumption of the poorest population.

The richest 10% of people have close to 50% of all income, while the poorest 10% share less than 2%.?; IFPRI 2009?

The faces of poverty

Children, women, immigrants and ecology show us the tangible face of poverty in specific ways. Each reflects poverty with its own face, feeling and voice. Each also reveals that poverty is not outside church doors, but rather inside them. There are millions of poor people in the so-called third world that profess faith in Jesus Christ! This is poverty that calls us to assume our prophetic role if we understand that one of the fundamental causes of poverty is injustice. Almost a century after the Declaration of the Human Rights, an incredible step taken by the states of many nations, we witness the violation of the dignity of the poor on a day to day basis as they experience the violation of fundamental rights.

The unequal distribution of resources and accumulated wealth is one of the most blatant ways in which injustice manifests itself. The existence of unprecedented levels of concentration and accumulation of wealth by individuals, corporations and nations is an indication that something is fundamentally wrong with the way humankind has organized the economy, power relationships and society as a whole.

Accumulation of wealth leads to dominance, unhealthy patterns of consumption and ultimately poor stewardship of the resources God has entrusted to us. The recent economic crisis has had a negative impact on poor countries. The Global Crisis slowed the process towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Although there are signs of recovery, the impact of the crisis affects longer-term development. Some of the effects are: unemployment, public expenditure reduction ? especially on health and education ? and lower foreign direct investment, as well as higher food and commodity prices.

59% of the poor are below 18 years old, in Latin America and the Caribbean alone, 72% of the poor are below 18 years old ?CEPAL, Stat Data Centre?

Children's poverty reduction is lower than general poverty reduction, 0.81 globally. That is, for each percent point reduced in poverty only 0.8 is reduced in child poverty. ?Eduardo Nunes PhD. and World Bank, World Data Indicators, 2010?

Poverty and the Environment

Of increasing concern is the fact that the economic interests behind production systems are imperilling life as we know it on the planet today, depleting natural resources at an alarming rate. The main parties responsible for the emission of pollutants are industries that possess infrastructures worth billions of dollars. These infrastructures will need to be transformed, and/or dismantled in order to create environmentally friendly means of production of goods and services. Unless key actors are willing to give up resources, wealth and power, there is no way to turn back and rescue the earth's sustainability.

Any analysis of the acquisition of wealth and resulting poverty today must also address extreme consumerism, particularly in sectors that have acquisition power. Many of these consumers are members of our churches and, in most cases, are unaware of or insensitive to the psychological and social consequences of 'creating' new desires. Those responsible for production stimulate consumption in thousands of irresponsible and unethical ways. As we raise our prophetic voice, we must speak about the thoughtlessness of antichristian consumerism. We must also deepen the dialogue about our relationship to God's creation and explore together the impact of heedless consumerism on our spiritual sensitivity and thus our relationship to the Creator.

Church growth and the spread of Protestantism have increased since Lausanne I; however, we are challenged by the injustice that still impacts lives in every corner of the world. We need to ask ourselves why it is that church growth does not diminish injustice. Why are Christian ethics not transforming our societies? Where is the impact of Christianity when it comes to organizing the economy and sustaining the ecology?

In this context, how do we walk with the Church as it wrestles with these problems? How do we, as part of the body of Christ, help the church recognize its role and potential contribution? How do we move to a higher level of engagement with churches around these issues, bringing a sense of urgency and holism to its daily life and ministry? What is the mission demanding from us?

A person in a high-income economy uses more than 12 times as much energy on average a person in a low income economy. Any mitigation and reverse pattern in climate change require an immediate gas emission reduction in countries of G8.

Time to Act

The following section offers possible avenues to explore as we seek higher levels of engagement for the Church and for all of us as Christians.

First, we need to continue to build and deepen the sense of the holistic mission of the church, a mission that is integral but also integrated. The task of world evangelization at this historical juncture is demanding a more comprehensive role for the church at both local and global levels. Churches are increasingly embracing this integrated role in the expression of their mission. States, NGOs, and increasingly private corporations are coming together to find ways to address issues of poverty and inequality. Some churches are integrating their actions into these efforts. One example is the shared endeavour towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. There are only five years ahead of us to meet the deadline to achieve the MDGs and so much more that churches and Christians can do.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote: 'Haiti's plight is a reminder of our wider responsibilities. A decade ago, the international community began a new century by agreeing to act to eliminate extreme poverty by 2015. Great strides have been made toward some of these ambitious 'millennium goals', variously targeting core sources of global poverty and obstacles to development - from maternal health and education to managing infectious disease. Yet progress in other critical areas lags badly. We are very far from delivering on our promises of a better future for

the world's poor? (7).

To increase their effectiveness, churches need to become more effective partners, to negotiate and to cede power. The church has an important role to play as part of civil society, collaborating with the state at local and national levels, as well as demanding from the state transparency and accountability to its people, especially the most vulnerable.

Joint collaboration between local faith communities, service Christian organizations, civil society and government institutions is a strategic priority that must be recognized and attended to urgently. The fight against poverty demands the involvement of the greatest number possible of stakeholders; the magnitude of the problem requires astute and effective collaboration that enables impoverished people to be agents of their own development.

In the Cusco region of Peru, different public and private organisations have worked together over the last several years to implement projects aimed at improving conditions for children in the region. A model experience unfolded in the development project for the Lamay community, located in the Peruvian Andes, in a valley at 2,950 meters above sea level. One of the most relevant aspects of this experience is the active and responsible participation of the indigenous community.

In this particular case, the results of the participative work were remarkable (8): Between 2000 and 2006, the rate of children under three who suffered from chronic malnutrition decreased from 65.9% to 38.7%. In the past, the percentage of pregnant women who received medical attention in the first ten weeks of their pregnancy was only 14%, a figure that increased to 41%. Birth weight of children born in the Lamay health center increased from 2.7 kg to 3.3 kg. Significant changes in gender relationships were also observed in this community.

The collaboration toward improved health for children is now a model that other communities in the country observe and learn from. Guide mothers from Lamay visit other communities in the region to teach them the methods they use to monitor children's nutrition. For many of these Guide mothers, this represents their first trip outside their own district. Another important key to this and other exemplary models' success is community participation and networked collaboration with different social stakeholders. The regional government, encouraged by the results, uses both the child monitoring approach and the networked support as a model for the Children's Regional Emergency Plan. Additionally, students from Universidad del Cusco visit the area to learn from the health program as part of their practicum.

Thus in Lamay, in the sacred valley of the Incas, where land is taken care of with respect and where inhabitants are proud of their folklore and craftwork, we find one of the hundreds of good models that effectively address poverty and promote a decent lifestyle. In Lamay, there are other benefits as they work for improved children's health as a community effort. Agricultural production has improved and they have experienced an increase in income and food resources. Hope and solidarity are part of the inhabitants' testimony and they carry on with their work as joint agents of their own development. They provide an example that encourages optimism in the fight against poverty and demonstrates how we can be witnesses to the abundant life about which Jesus preached.

Second, churches east and west, north and south are taking action in new and renewed ways. They embody hope and they exercise love as they reach out in their communities. In many places, they constitute the only refuge for the poor who increasingly find themselves rejected, stereotyped and isolated. In many cases, churches are becoming the only possibility for authentic community for poor and wealthy alike. They represent a tremendous network of support - sometimes the only one - for the afflicted, the ill, the victims of discrimination and orphans of all kinds. In many communities, the church is the only place where one can learn about being family, about acknowledging the child, the woman and the disabled. Some churches are also becoming the place to learn and practice new ways of caring for and protecting the environment as new generations of Christians discuss and question patterns of consumption. We need to encourage the Church in all these roles.

Third is the need to renew the ethical vocation of the Church. This is congruent with her prophetic voice. There is a moral imperative to pursue justice, righteousness and the dignity of all human beings. This ethical vocation represents, perhaps, the greatest missionary imperative in the years to come. This imperative reflects the relevance of God's People and the message we proclaim. Centuries ago, evangelical churches were known for their commitment to the task of proclaiming the gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Our commitment requires something more of us today. It requires us to live out the gospel through our lives and our acts of solidarity and mercy.

We are called to active solidarity with the poor right from the very first books of the Bible. In Deuteronomy it says: "If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

This is, then, the focus and the challenge of a 21st century comprehensive mission emphasis. We are called to reverse the hardening of our hearts by opening them to the poor, actively demonstrating that God is close by, that He cries out with them for justice in the world and that, through us, He is mobilizing on their behalf.

© The Lausanne Movement 2010 Lausanne Covenant, 5 UNDP, Development Report Mortality table applied retrospectively Manila Manifesto, 4 Manila Manifesto, 4 Lausanne Covenant, 5 Manila Manifesto, 4 <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/Information> taken from Nuestros hijos e hijas son la prioridad (Our children, a priority) Area Development Program, Lamay, Perú. A World Vision Australia study, Australia, 2007