

THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY TO THE URBAN POOR WITH SPECIAL CONTEXT OF EMERGING URBAN SLUMS OF VIZIANAGARAM, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

God looks at the rich and poor equally and both need the salvific experience in God. Gospel is real good news for the poor, because they are looking for equality and dignity. It is important that we realize that God insists that we need to share our resources with the needy and the marginalized. However, Jesus looked at the people differently, and accepted the religious, social, economic and cultural outcaste groups and transformed their lives. The Slum Dwellers of Vizianagaram are also socio-economically challenged and backward. Politically they have very little or no voice at all. In the context of the urban poor, the occupation, lifestyle and behavioral patterns of the slum dwellers make them distinct from others in society. Thus, they are considered outcasts, sinners and oppressed in the society without dignity and identity in the society. The urban middle class man does not even consider them as the citizens of the city, and treat them as unwanted elements. A total indifference to the needs of community development in the slums is to evade the Church's ethical responsibility of Christian social involvement. The church has a better option to play its role and active involvement in eradicating the poverty, oppression and social degradation of the slum dwellers. In reflecting upon the Christian response to human need , church should have recognized the central place of the local church as the vehicle for communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ both in word and deed.

Keywords: Church, God's Concern for Poor , Holistic Mission, Slums, Theology of Ministry , Transformation of the Poor Urban Poor,.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a significant shift in perspective in theology in recent years while the basic purpose of theological reflection has remained the same. Since the early 1970s interest in how diverse cultural contexts shape theology. There have been calls for rethink theology in the light of global realities. While acknowledging their indebtedness to the creeds of the early church,

the confessions of the European reformation, and the spiritual awakenings of the revival movements of modern times, Ro and Eshenaur, the writers of the declaration dismissed much of western theology as irrelevant to non-western concerns:

Western theology is by and large rationalistic, molded by western philosophies, preoccupied with intellectual concerns especially those having to do with faith and reason. All too often, it has reduced the Christian faith to abstract concepts which may have answered the questions of the past, but which fail to grapple with the issues of today. It has consciously been conformed to the secularistic worldview associated with the Enlightenment. Sometimes it has been used as a means to justify colonialism, exploitation, and oppression, or it has done little or nothing to change these situations. Further more, having been wrought within Christendom, it hardly addresses the questions of people living in situations characterized by religious pluralism, secularism, resurgent Islam, or Marxist totalitarianism. (The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts 22–23)

Paul Hiebert is one the proponent of doing theology in the context. Craig Ott and Harold quotes Paul Hiebert, who calls for the church to move beyond both the colonialist and anti colonialist approach to embrace a responsible global perspective that acknowledges both commonalities and differences among peoples and that admits both positive and negative elements of local cultures and religious traditions. The arrogance of the past is to be replaced by an incarnational witness that lives out the unchanging truth of the gospel in local settings. (Globalizing Theology 29). In addition to the widely accepted “three selves” for non-western churches – self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, Hiebert advocates a fourth self: self-theologizing.

Theology in the west has developed under unique historical circumstances and unable to meet the pressing needs of the non western churches. Theology must be relevant and must make a difference: It must address people’s concern, and it must transform the structures of every day life. Much more attention and sensitivity given to how the cultures and circumstances shift the response to the gospel. For this purpose the terms like “localization” contextualization” “indigenization” and “inculturation” of theology introduced. Attempts were made to understand how the gospel is taking root in local circumstances amid shifting realities.

Western theology was largely unaware of and uninterested in context due to their “philosophical abstractions, church doctrines, and biblical texts rather than concrete situations and experiences”. (“Context” in (Fabella and Sugirtharajah 58). As Paul G. Hiebert, a missionary anthropologist argues the need for studying the Scriptures and also sociocultural context of the mission field we serve, so that the communication of the Gospel can be presented in the ways people understand. (Hiebert 10) The new kind of Christianity has a particular sensitivity of context, procedure and history. As “All theology is ultimately ‘contextual’ that is it arises from a specific historical context and it addresses that context” (Parratt 3). The new appreciation for the context aroused and context become primary for the new theological task. With all concerns and combination of many factors, the significant shift in perspective in self awareness and theology emerged among the churches in new regions and long existed churches with many names such as “indigenous theology, ethno theology, inculturation, contextual theology and local theology” (Schreiter 5–6).

Context of Ministry in Doing Theology for the Urban Poor of Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, India

The city of Vizianagaram is located about eighteen kilometers from the Bay of Bengal. The meaning of Vizianagaram is the City of Victory. According to the India census, “[the] population of Vizianagaram in 2011 is 227,533; of which male and female are 111,596 and 115,937 respectively. Although Vizianagaram city has [a] population of 227,533; its urban/metropolitan population is 239,374 of which 117,412 are males and 121,962 are females” (“Vizianagaram City Census 2011 Data”). The different Hindu Emperors of Kalinga (Ancient Orissa) ruled this area up to the medieval period. Vizianagaram is a veritable melting pot of different people, cultures, and languages. In Vizianagaram people speak different languages like Telugu, Oriya, Hindi, and Urdu. Because of factors like business, education, historicity, and rich traditional heritage, various people groups from Madhya Pradesh, Chattishgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, and Kerala settled in Vizianagaram and tried to establish their own cultures and fashions. Numerically, the principal religious groups are Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Hindus are 98.78 percent of the population. Roman Catholic missions brought Christianity to Vizianagaram in the eighteenth century. International organizations such as The Leprosy Mission, World Vision, One Mission Society, Compassion International, and other protestant missions have missions in Vizianagaram. Small independent churches were established resulting in great ministries.

Emerging Slums in Vizianagaram

The most notable phenomenon in Vizianagaram today is the massive urbanization that is engulfing the city. Slums are expanding widely in Vizianagaram. The city’s economic and industrial development attracts many rural poor. The slums and pavement dwellers are poor rural migrants from lower castes and backward communities who have migrated to the city through caste, kinship, and village networks in search of a better life. The Urban Local Body reports that Vizianagaram district has 127 slums, which is 46.77 percent of the population of the district (Center for Good Governance). In Vizianagaram itself are eighty slums, which is 38.66 percent of the city’s population.



Vizianagaram District Map

Vizianagaram City Map

The living conditions in slum areas are characterized by overcrowding, poor environmental conditions, scarcity of health and family welfare services, and total absence of the minimum level of residential accommodation. The people in slums live in huts, tin sheds, and tents of plastic sheets, old clothes, bamboo, or pieces of wood. The conditions are filthy. The slum

dwellers normally work as unskilled laborers, small shop owners, hand cart operators, rickshaw pullers, and milk vendors. They do menial jobs in provision shops, mechanical sheds, fruit stalls, tea stalls, and cinema theaters. Others are cobblers, sweepers, painters, coolies, auto-drivers, and the like.

Migration is the cause of the growth rate of urbanization. Migration is a phenomenon that happens on a large and continuous scale and has been the major cause of urbanization all over the world. Migration poses many opportunities for the mission of the church. Along with the state level trends, the district of Vizianagaram also shows a high growth rate of slums. According to the Urban Level Body, in the Vizianagaram district 224 slums are identified with 46.77 percent of slum population (Hand Book of Vizianagaram 54) In Vizianagaram city itself are eighty-nine slums that are identified with 38.66 percent of the population. The complex socio-economic conditions of the slums give an option to the church to share the gospel. The situation of the peoples' lives in slums prompts the responsiveness to the gospel witness. The slums have become mission fields in themselves. The church is in great need of finding the effective strategies that help and fulfill the biblical mandate to evangelize the urban poor as well as relieve their physical need. The fulfillment of the missionary mandate requires "the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, the planting and growth of the church, the extension of Christ's Lordship over all areas of community life, and reclaiming of the whole cosmos from the control of Satan and his servants" (Greenway 52)

The existing Churches and organizations are concentrating on preaching Christian faith which is essential and it is the true priority and prime responsibility. And at the same time it is one of the greatest needs of Christian mission today to have a sensitive awareness of the world around us, as Jesus was sensitive to the physical and emotional needs of the people to whom He preached the good news. The Christian mission has to serve those who are destitute and neglected with compassion and love and should have concern about the welfare of the people in their situation and conditions.

The great need of the churches and organizations is to be equipped to meet the challenge of strategically reaching the urban slums and to find innovative ways of ministering to them. In the light of urban growth reality, the church has to develop radical, innovative, and creative and contextual theologies to reach slum dwellers. I realized that, for an effective minister to the urban poor I must develop a theological foundation for the ministry towards the urban poor. In this context I began to re do a theology which helped me to reach the slum dwellers of Vizianagaram with the gospel of Jesus Christ and brought a significant transformation.

3. 1. A Theology of Holistic Salvation for the Urban Poor

There is a great need to develop a theology of Holistic Salvation to reach the urban poor with the gospel of Jesus to the urban poor effectively.

3.1.1 Theology Holistic Salvation

Theology of ministry is closely dependent one's theology of salvation. The scope of salvation determines the scope of ministry enterprise. People who live in urban communities also need the salvation of God as they are part of God's concern as any other lost people on the earth. Edgar J. Elliston and J. T. Kauffman states, "Commitment of God cannot be changed: Neither

the place of residence; the density of the population; the existence or absence of complex social, economic, or political networks; the abundance of physical, social, or spiritual needs—in short nothing changes God’s commitment to bring people into his kingdom” (Elliston 66). The Great Commission clearly states the goal of making disciples of all nations including every ethnic group or every people group. This mandate of making disciples includes the urban communities. Linthicum points out “church is called to introduce the salvation of God to its people and leave the rest to God.” (Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan* 171). Church ministers who are focused on the lostness of people can be used of God to bring the church into existence.

God’s salvation is good news for humanity through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. From this basic conviction the Christian missionary movement has been motivated, throughout its history, by the desire to mediate salvation to all. The “soteriological motif may indeed be termed the throbbing heart of Christian mission” (Bosch 393). Along with the shift in respect of understanding the relation between church and mission, there also been shifts in the understanding of the nature of salvation the church had to mediate in its mission. The reflections on mission in the early church has revealed that salvation was interpreted in comprehensive term, just not only with soteriological motif. David J Bosch says that “The early Christian mission was political, indeed revolutionary” (Bosch 47). The idea of “religion as a private affair”, divorcing the “spiritual” from the “physical” was an unthinkable attitude in the light of all embracing nature of God’s reign ushered in the early church. (Bosch 48). The new relationships that came into being in the community. Jew and Roman, Greek and barbarian, free and slave, rich and poor, woman and man, accepted one another as brothers and sisters. In the words of Hoekendijk, “it was a movement without analogy, indeed a “sociological impossibility” (Hoekendijk 249). The way in which the early church cared for the world together was pre-eminently through their practice of love and service to all. Harnack Adolf devoted an entire chapter of his book on the mission and expansion of the early church to what he calls “the gospel of love and charity. Through meticulous research he pieced together a remarkable picture of the early Christian’s involvement with the poor, orphans, widows, the sick, mine workers, prisoners, slaves, and travellers. “The new language on the lips of Christians”, he summarizes, “was the language of love. But it was more than a language, it was a thing of power and action” (Harnack 149). David Bosh describes “This was a social gospel in the best of sense of the word and was practiced not as a stratagem to lure outsiders to the church but simply as a natural expression of faith in Christ. (Bosch 48).

3.1.2. Salvation as a Shalom

Several significant biblical and theological concepts were developed during the twentieth century that substantially reoriented an understanding of church and mission. *Missio dei* is one of those concepts. The concept of shalom emerged along with the concept of *missio Dei*. According to Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile and Darrell L. Guder, the *missio Dei* can be significantly related to God’s complete redemption of humanity along with the whole creation (Van Gelder and Zscheile 30; Guder 3-4). The majority at Willingen clearly leaned toward the former understanding. Others soon began to act on the latter understanding. A key figure for this approach was Johannes C. Hoekendijk, a Dutch missiologist who published several volumes during the 1960s and was influential in helping to shape the conversation within the

World Christian Counsel (WCC) at that time. His primary approach was to shift the focus of God's work in the world to that of establishing shalom, a concept that reframed previous understandings of Christology: "This concept in all its comprehensive richness should be our leitmotif in Christian work. God intends the redemption of the whole of creation" (19-20).

Hoekendijk Called Shalom as a secularized concept, a social happening, an event in inter-human relations. The gift of Jesus to his followers to be shalom, a gift that humans cannot earn or manufacture. Shalom became the identifying mark of authentic church as he broke the hostility and draws the humanity as one body with him (Eph. 2:14-17; Heb.7:2). This shalom is "God's continuing act of redemption, its intended scope being the restoration of the whole creation to its proper harmony" (Linthicum, Transforming Power 38). The real intent of shalom is the full restoration of God's creation as ruled by a righteous and just God which is the culmination of God's redemptive activity.

The Christian community's actions in proclaiming the gospel that is holistic, taking seriously the human condition—spiritual, material, social, political, and economical—is grounded in God's own actions and mission in reconciling the world to himself through his Son, Jesus Christ. Darrell Guder summarizes that, "The mission is not simply an occasional activity or a program of the church ; rather it defines the church's core identity, where all disciples are called to be missionaries in their spheres of life. Sider says that whatever their rhetoric, rich Christians who neglect the poor are not the people of God. (Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger 66). The scriptures show that God's actions in dealing with humanity were always holistic; they concern the total development and wellbeing of the person. The reality of sin and its resultant effects, such as evil, decay, wars, ignorance, injustice, and poverty, all point to the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ must and should address these various human needs, if total restoration of humanity is to be achieved. The gospel, to be transformational, must address the existential life of a person in its entirety. This shalom is what God has done for humanity since the creation of humans.

3.1.3. Holistic Mission of the Church is to Proclaim the Holistic Gospel

The mission as a Christian community should and must be patterned after God's actions. The model for preaching a holistic gospel or engaging in a holistic mission in a world ravaged with poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, ignorance, high infant mortality rate, and disease is primarily a theological one. First and foremost, the ground for a holistic gospel is theological, embedded in the character and nature of God who works principally to transform the whole person, by providing the resources needed for such a person to live. God's own intention for humanity is to bless them in all aspects of their lives—spiritually, mentally, socially, and economically. The church has followed different traditions over the years, but the issue is not either/or but both/and. The attempt to prioritize evangelism or social action is based on a western dualistic presupposition that has its root in the enlightenment tradition and has no place in non-western and biblical thoughts.

For instance, the early 1960s were dedicated to winning people to Christ. The church's work then, focused mainly on evangelizing the world and discipling the nations. Concern over the integration of evangelism and social concern under the rubric of mission has generally not existed because of low view of social concern as inappropriate and unnecessary response of

believers who are faithful and obedient in following Christ. Mission agencies used to emphasize evangelism and church planting do so in spite of their own significant labors to improve the social conditions of people in the areas of health, education, clean water, agriculture etc. However, since Vatican II, evangelicals, ecumenical Protestants, and Catholics have shown great concern for the poor, the oppressed and the powerless in our world today. These Christian communities sought ways in which to help reduce the sufferings of people. In line with the developments of Vatican II, the Lausanne Congress in 1974 tended to move the poor to the top of its agenda. Here a holistic gospel was proposed. Holism came to be understood by some as ministry through word, deed, and sign. Others saw holism as ministry to the whole person—spirit, mind, and body, while some emphasized transformation of entire cultures and societies. Others see holism as partnership with socio-political action and evangelism. The church should focus on the total transformation of people. The church should aim for total transformation in various disciplines such as spirituality, morality, education, economics and environment. Following the lead of John R. W. Stott, the basic emphasis is that evangelism and social action are partners and reflect the Christian response to the commandment to make disciples and the commandment to love the neighbor (Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* / 27). In this partnership, evangelism, according to the Lausanne movement, remains the primary partner (Stott, *Making Christ Known* 23). The variation on this discussion is that both are primary because both belong to the total mission of the church. Hence, the service of social concern must be seen as a spiritual activity (Nicholls and Wood 186). Charles Ringma cites, “The biblical story reflects God’s concern for the whole person, the community, and the created order. God’s redemption and shalom is for all of life and not simply our souls” (Wright, *The Mission of God* 434). Samuel Jayakumar states that holistic mission overflows as Christian heritage from the early Christian service to the poor and oppressed (228). McConnell states that “Holistic mission is the commitment to all that the church is called to do, which includes the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.” (Corrie et al. 449). The great commandment preceded the Great Commission. David M. Best states, “For people who accept the authority of Scriptures as reliable for instruction and guidance, the biblical Great Commission and Great Commandment are important and informative” (“Urban Imperative.” TS. *Mission Strategy USA/Canada*. 17). The church should not separate the Great commission (To make disciples of all peoples) from the Great Commandment (to love one’s neighbour as oneself). The church should commit to live out a distinctive life style and proclaim the good news of Jesus by word and deed. Proclaim the gospel involves the proclamation as well as demonstration. Proclaim the gospel of salvation is much more than conveying a message.

3.2. Incarnational Theology of Ministry to the Urban Poor

The incarnational theology of ministry is one of the strategy to reach the urban poor. The incarnational model must begin with Christ. Ross Langmead describes that, “The idea that the divine meaning of the cosmos was embodied in the life of Jesus. He has played a remarkably central part in the history of Christian belief, so much so that Christianity can be characterized as the religion of incarnation, which implies the way for the Christians to follow in mission.” (Langmead 29). John Stott suggests that “under the authority of Christ we are sent, renouncing privilege, safety, comfort and aloofness, as we actually enter into other peoples worlds, as he

enter ours; humbling ourselves to become servants, as he did; and sharing the good news with people where they are” (Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* 58). C.R. Padilla suggests that “The mission of the church arises from the mission of God” and should therefore, follow the incarnational model of Jesus Christ”. (“Holistic Mission”, in (Corrie et al. 157) Christ’s incarnation among the poor, his miracles, and his suffering model for us are what our ministries should look like. Gibbs and Bolger in *Emerging Churches* says that “ The poor and marginalized are critical to who we are. If you don’t know and aren’t known by poor people, you have a crisis at the center of your Christianity. Knowing and being known by the poor people are essential”(Gibbs and Bolger 148). If God is with the poor, then Christians should give high priority to giving to the poor. Jesus Christ broke through the barriers of history and eternity to be with us. He underwent all the physical and emotional experiences of human beings. Christian ministry must begin by learning to know people and identifying with the people, partnering with them.

Disciples of Christ are out of step with the missional character of the gospel when they stay within the walls of the church, ministering in isolation from the needs of people living without hope. This approach draws on the best of both models of the incarnation addressed above: the divine and the human. In what has become the common incarnational approach to ministry, Christians recognize the divine uniqueness and supremacy of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The full human is also seen in the way God entered into life, condescending to walk vulnerably and humbly as one of us. In the words of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, “When we talk of incarnational mission, we hope to, in some real way, directly draw inspiration and motivation from the unique act whereby God entered into our world into the human condition in the person of Jesus Christ” (Frost and Hirsch 35). Sociologist Stark notes that Christianity “grew at a rate of 40 percent per decade for the first three hundred years of its existence” (Swanson and Williams 5). Many factors were behind the spread, “but beyond these external factors, the early Christians lived in a way that the world noticed something different about them, for they had a distinctive life style that could not be ignored” (86). Swanson, Williams, and McNeal state that early Christians lived an incarnational life in the midst of persecution and oppression (84). Stark writes about the low value attached to the lives of children and infants in Greek and Roman cultures (85). The early Christians lived an incarnational lifestyle in spite of the great dangers of following the model of Christ’s incarnation. Incarnational lifestyle demands a life of commitment to follow the model of Christ.

To communicate the gospel better, the churches need to first incarnate themselves in that community for whom they are working. The church should become the flesh and bone of the people (Christenson 127). Christian workers have to become a part of the community, actively involved in the affairs of the community, and get to know first-hand, the physical and emotional experiences of the people. The church should be trusted by the people. The church should challenge and empower the poor with its presence. In short, the congregation needs to adopt the incarnational model, whereas to be with the community means to become a part of community.

Guder calls for the church to be incarnational, stressing the narrative of Jesus’ own life, at times seeming to call for an imitation. Guder believes that the church has been influenced and co-opted by western, enlightenment ideas, especially by defining mission in terms of progress,

success, the benefits of western culture, and expansionism. In the period of mission awakening “Love for Christ and people often manifested itself in a remarkable degree of commitment and dedication”. (Bosch 287). Moravians stood as exceptional. There can be no doubt, for those touched by the awakenings, soteriological interest remained paramount. Their love expressed itself as a desire to bring “everlasting felicity” to non-Christians; the savings of souls was more important than the planting of churches or the improvement of temporal conditions. (Berg and Wall 101). As heirs of the Christendom legacy, the church has inherited a reductionism of salvation (whereby salvation is understood in terms of where one spends eternity rather than in terms of the in-breaking kingdom of God) and of the church (whereby the church is viewed as the dispenser of this salvation rather than as a witness to the kingdom of God). The Incarnation describes not only the manner of his coming, but also prescribes the manner and character of the ministry of the Church to the world. The Church is to be incarnational, just like Jesus. With the emergence of a new understanding of missions, a massive shift from church centered mission to a God centered mission has been made. The understanding of the mission as the initiative act of God is evident, guiding the work of the church and determining the nature of the missional church (4). The Church should affirm that in Jesus Christ God was fully present and that he moved into our neighborhood in an act of humble love the likes of which the world has never known (Hirsch 131).

The mission of Christ is the model for the mission of the Church. Jesus did not stay in the safety, comfort, or immunity of the heaven but entered our world by emptying himself and condescending to serve humanity. The Ministry and teachings of Jesus is the basis for holistic missions According to Ronald Sider, “Jesus example, Jesus Commands, and Jesus gospel reveal that Christians are to love the whole person the way our Lord and master did.” (Sider, Churches That Make a Difference 46). The stories of healing in the gospels reveals that God incarnate had a high view of the importance of meeting people’s physical needs. Jesus example teaches that holistic ministry is incarnational. Jesus lived among the people whom he taught and healed. As Luisa Cabello said, “Jesus did not send a messenger, did not just reach out a hand to pull us up, but Jesus came himself. He became like one of us and lived among us.” (Luisa Cabello was a Pastor of a Hispanic and Anglo New Creation of Lutheran Church at Philadelphia) According to Frost and Hirsch

“when we talk of the Incarnation with capital “I” we refer to that act of sublime love and humility whereby God takes it upon himself to enter into the depths of our world, our life, our reality in order that the redemption and consequent union between God and humanity may be brought about. This “enfleshing” of God is so radical and total that it qualifies all subsequent acts of God in his world. (Frost and Hirsch 35).

So the incarnation of Christ, and the work of Christ flowing out of it, achieved more than our salvation. But it is a profound act of identification with humanity. It unleashes all of kinds of potential in the one being identified with. Hirsch says it is “beyond identification, it is revelation: by taking upon himself all aspects of humanity. (The forgotten ways,132). So people can know what God is like through Jesus. Michel Frost well articulated the concept of incarnation as Christ “Presence, Proximity, Powerlessness, and Proclamation”. (Hirsch 132). These are the archetypal for the mission of God through Christ. As Christ manifested the above concepts the

same things should be the model and should apply to the mission of God's people in the world and with the poor people.

3.3 Theology of Transformation of the urban poor

The church should focus on the total transformation of people. The church should aim for total transformation in various disciplines such as spirituality, morality, education, economics and environment. Following the lead of John R. W. Stott, the basic emphasis is that evangelism and social action are partners and reflect the Christian response to the commandment to make disciples and the commandment to love the neighbor (Christian Mission 27-30). The Webster dictionary gives two primary definitions for the word "transformation: 1) To change the form or appearance. 2) To change in condition, nature, or character." James McGregor Burns defines transformation as "[T]o cause a metamorphosis in form or structure, a change in the very condition or a nature of a thing, a change into another substance. It is a radical change in outward form or inner character" (24).

3.3.1. Gods Concern for the Poor

Poverty, and the requirement for justice for the poor, are among the most emphasized themes of Scriptures. The poor are focused on the message of Scripture. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood opines that "God's concern about poverty is fundamental to any survey of Scripture and therefore also to the *Misero Dei*" (Longenecker and Liebengood 37). The Scriptures reveal God's deep concern for the underprivileged and oppressed of the society. Both the Old Testament and New Testament give different accounts in this regard. Here is a brief analysis of the etymology of the word poor in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. About three hundred references describe the causes, existence, and consequences of poverty in the Bible. The Old Testament, on the other hand, declares the mighty acts of God in the history of the Israelites. The Exodus history reveals the divine grace towards the poor and oppressed and also God's judgment against the oppressors. God heard the agony of his people and remembered his covenant with their forefathers. He took a personal initiative and delivered them from their slavery (Exod. 2:23-25; 3:7-8). Christopher J. H. Wright states, "The status of the Israelites in the Egyptian bondage reflects the condition of poor slaves who are a class of landless people, political refugees, displaced people, and outlaws" (Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* / 21). The story of exodus was the God's concern over the poor and oppressed and witness the redemptive act of God with his mighty acts on behalf of oppressed and downtrodden. Interestingly, the exodus story also reveals how God transformed them into a new community that was to show concern towards their poor and marginalized. God intended to form a God-centered political, economic, and religious community that began with the pain of oppression of the people (Linthicum, *Transforming Power* 83). In the Old Testament God's structural solutions to poverty are easily discerned in institutional solutions provided in the OT, such as the year of Jubilee or laws on gleaning. There are hundreds of verses about the national mandate of mercy towards the poor in passages about redemption, covenant, and corporate solutions. It is clear that for Israel citizenship comes with responsibilities of justice and mercy for the poor and the stranger. The biblical story of redemption hinges in large part upon the Exodus story, which is also where God demonstrates the importance of his followers' redemptive

involvement in the political process. Christopher Wright points out that pressing problems of human concern are of great importance to God in the Old Testament, including “political arrogance and abuse, economic exploitation, judicial corruption, the suffering of the poor and oppressed, the evils of brutality and bloodshed.” (Wright, *The Mission of God* 280).

The Wisdom books also reinforce God’s concern for the poor and oppressed in the society. Proverbs asserts, “He who oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him” (Prov. 14:31; cf. 17:5). Moreover, Proverbs also speaks of the cause and consequence of poverty and highlights obligation towards the poor. For instance, the book describes laziness as an inevitable cause of poverty (Prov. 10:4; 20:4; 13:4; 20:12; 24:33). Drunkenness and wickedness are identified as causes of poverty (Prov. 6:6-11; 1:15; 14:23; 23:21; 28:19; 13:18; 21:5; 13:2). In Job are forty-two references to the word poor and its related terms, including poverty.

Prior to their conquest, the Israelites who followed a nomadic and semi nomadic way of life did not have any great distinction between the rich and the poor. Moreover, they had more or less equal rights and status as defenders of the community. The new economic developments, after their settlement, created new class systems which resulted in social distinctions between the rich and the poor. In other words, the formation of the cities and towns brought about distinctions and widened the connection between the rich and the poor, the haves and have not’s, and the powerful and powerless. God gave political, economic, and religious systems to enable humanity to structure life together (Deut. 6:4-19; 6:4-6; 6:14-16). The religious system enables people to have a vital relationship with God rather than follow any other forms of gods such as power, prestige, and possessions (Deut. 6:6-9; 6:17-19). Unfortunately, the religious leaders who were assigned to lead the people into God’s way became the controllers (Ezek. 22:26) (Linthicum, *Transforming Power* 12). The preexilic prophets pleaded for a society where justice, equity, and peace would prevail at all levels (Isa.1:17; Hos.10:12; Amos 5:24). They insisted that even the weak, the helpless, the poor fatherless, the widow, and the different strangers have rights. The oppressors of the poor were urban based officials such as the royal administrators (Isa. 1:23; 3:14), elders (Isa. 3:14), judges and rulers (Isa. 10:1-3), landlords (Isa. 5:8-10; 7:23; 10:1-3), the rich merchants and money lenders (Amos 8:6), religious leaders (Amos 2:8; 4:4-5; 5:5, 21-23), cows of Bashan (Amos 4:1), wicked (Ps. 37:14), murderers (Job 24:14), the people of the land (Ezek. 37:14), and wealthy merchants (Jer. 5:27-28).

3.3.2. Ministry of Jesus as a Transformational Ministry

The ministry of Jesus seems to be closely connected with the poor and the marginalized in the society. The Apostle Paul writes, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus’ public ministry began in the Nazareth synagogue with the words of the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isa. 61:1-2)

The theme of good news to the poor which is mentioned in Luke 4:18-20, appears quite often. From the beginning of Jesus's ministry, the poor and outcast had a prominent place in the kingdom of God taught by Jesus Christ. In Luke 6:20 Jesus teaches, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Even Jesus's instruction to His disciples began with exposure to the poor and needy. Dr. Budijanto points out, "Instead of laying the theoretical foundation in a class room setting, Jesus began his disciple making process with real life experiences. He took the twelve men to meet face to face with the key stakeholders of the kingdom of God. For immediately following the calling of twelve, Luke records seven encounters (between chapter five and eight) Jesus had with the poor, the outcaste, and those who did not belong to the mainstream Jewish society -the amn with leprosy, the tax collector, a paralyzed man, a sinful woman, a Roman soldier, a demon possessed man, and an unclean sick woman. (Budijanto 12).

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to inquire about Jesus, he replied, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22). Jesus' ministry was significantly aimed at freeing and accepting the oppressed. However, the total transformation of the individual as well as the society is implied. Jesus released people from various forms of bondage, oppression, physical disabilities, the religious condemnation and demon possession. More frightening still, Jesus connected salvation with peoples' reaction to the needy and underprivileged.

However, the ministry of Jesus cannot be exclusively labeled as a ministry to the poor and marginalized. Every strata of the society, including the rich, benefited. He accepted the invitation of the Pharisee (Luke 11:37), healed the synagogue leader's daughter (Luke 8:41), and the son of the centurion (Matt. 8:5). Without a shadow of doubt, Christians could say Jesus was aware of the conditions of the poor and reached out to them in a special way. He was willing, against the status quo, to identify himself with the poor. He strongly raised his voice for the neglected in society and sharply condemned those who made the lives of the poor miserable, and on many occasions encouraged the rich to sell their possessions and give to the poor. The good news is a significant theme in Jesus' ministry. The good news highlights deliverance and salvation but targets the poor and the oppressed, the despised and the alienated. The good news was not intended for only one group of people, as some may suggest. The message was for the rich and the poor, the sinner and the religious leader, male and female.

3.3.3. Early Church and Transformational Ministry

The early Church reiterated the Old Testament (Deut. 15:4) and Jesus' teachings about caring for the poor, oppressed, widows, and aliens. The early Church shared everything in common (Acts 4:32). Many sold their property and "laid them down at the apostles' feet and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (emphasis mine; Acts 4:36-37), which was used for the welfare of the needy in the church. The church collected funds for the minority widows in the church. Thus, "[t]here was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought them and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need" (Acts 4:34-35, KJV). Ronald J. Sider refers to the Christian philosopher Aristides, who painted the picture of economic sharing in the early

church (97). The communal aspect, especially the economic sharing, is a great witness of Christ's love and promoted the growth of the church rapidly. The radical discipleship in the early Church is a relevant model to follow in the world of poverty and need.

3.3.4. Ministry of Paul and as a Transformational Ministry

The Apostle Paul also helped the poor in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; cf. Rom.15:22-28). In Ephesus, Paul worked not only for self-support but also to supply the needs of his companions and to help the weak (Acts 20:34-35). Greenway observes that in Paul's theology and mission strategy, proclamation and compassion went together (Cities 62). Paul often emphasized the responsibility of every believer in helping fellow Christians in their time of need (Gal. 6:9-10). He also condemned the inequality shown between the rich and the poor in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11). The writing of James focuses on the poor and those of low social standing who are easily exploited and persecuted. He states that the Christian should respect the poor and behave justly towards them (Jas. 1:27; 2:1-13). The early Church insisted unity among the believers. Along with their preaching on the repentance and forgiveness of Christ they emphasized love, sharing, and serving one another (Acts 2:41-47). The Christian Church was intended to be centers of a living faith, where the fruits of justice, equality, and mercy could be seen.

3.4. Theology of Solidarity with the Poor

God has made clear through these roots of our faith that care for the poor is to be a priority. According to Vinoth Ramachandra, The biblical narrative is clear about God's solidarity with the marginalized, and his use of the humbled to be what Vinoth Ramachandra calls: "vehicles of his redemptive love to the rest of his creation." (Ramachandra 207). Solidarity with the poor prepares the ground for the ministry in urban slum communities. Solidarity involves a total personal commitment, being available to God for the transformation of the world into a just world, where all will live a fuller redeemed dignity and recover humanity. The solidarity is a methodology that urban church planters should adopt to motivate the movement forward for greater results. Solidarity immediately makes Christians think of the theme of God is with them. Solidarity multiplies and deepens stable relationships with residents. Because the church has its historical origin in Christ, Christian workers who carry forward know that through the incarnation of God is the type and cause of its unique relationship with the world.

The solidarity model must begin with Christ. His incarnation among the poor, his miracles, and his suffering model for us are what our ministries should look like. Jesus Christ broke through the barriers of history and eternity to be with us. He underwent all the physical and emotional experiences of human beings. Christian ministry must begin by learning to know people and identifying with the people, partnering with them. To evangelize the urban poor, the person must become voluntarily poor. The voluntarily poor are not ascetics but become poor in order to make the poor rich (Grigg 66). The idea of incarnation, of walking with and dwelling among the people, of identifying with their sufferings, needs and problems, is primary to mission among the slum dwellers. In order to communicate the gospel better, the churches need to first incarnate themselves in that particular community for whom they are working. Christian workers have to become a part of the community, actively involved in the affairs of the

community, and get to know firsthand, the physical and emotional experiences of the slum dwellers. The church should be trusted by the urban poor. The church should challenge and empower the poor with its presence. In short, the congregation needs to adopt the incarnational model, whereas to be with the community means to become a part of community. Incarnational ministry also involves raising our voices for the voiceless slum dwellers, to work for their rights in the society (Sugden 299). On the other hand, when churches take the side of the slum dwellers, they may be accused and regarded suspiciously. Stiff opposition may come from the precipitators of evil in the society. Just as Jesus willingly suffered for the oppressed in the society, the churches must also be ready to die for bringing back the dignity and identity of the slum society. However, the people will come to realize that the churches exist for their welfare and as a result support the cause of the church. God has made clear through these roots of our faith that care for the poor is to be a priority. The biblical narrative is clear about God's solidarity with the marginalized, and his use of the humbled to be what Vinoth Ramachandra calls: "vehicles of his redemptive love to the rest of his creation." (Ramachandra 4). The church must enable the poor to build Christian communities where they can increase their dignity, independence, freedom, self-determination, and contribution. Churches and mission organizations should train local leaders who can fit into the culture, can understand the feelings of the community, and are able to fulfill the physical, spiritual, social, and emotional needs of their people.

CONCLUSION

God looks at the rich and poor equally and both need the salvific experience in God. Gospel is real good news for the poor, because they are looking for equality and dignity. We must take note that the Scripture does not condemn all the rich and elite, because there are true men of God who are rich and wealthy. However, it is important that we realize that God insists that we need to share our resources with the needy and the marginalized. However, Jesus looked at the people differently, and accepted the religious, social, economic and cultural outcaste groups and transformed their lives. The Slum Dwellers of Vizianagaram are also socio-economically challenged and backward. Politically they have very little or no voice at all. In the context of the urban poor, the occupation, lifestyle and behavioral patterns of the slum dwellers make them distinct from others in society. Thus, they are considered outcastes, sinners and oppressed in the society without dignity and identity in the society. The urban middle class man does not even consider them as the citizens of the city, and treat them as unwanted elements.

In Vizianagaram, the slum dwellers today are looking for respect, identity and dignity which the society has always denied them and still continues to deny them. For this, they are ready to listen to the good news which will uplift their social status, the economic enlistment and spiritual nourishment. For them the good news is not individual salvation, but social transformation. Self worth and dignity is the major question in the minds of the urban slum dwellers in Vizianagaram. The Gospel is the answer to them. However, it needs to be presented to them in the same way as Jesus did. The Good News to the poor is about total transformation of the individual and society. We must see the whole man in his total need. If you only see the mental need, you will become an educator. If you only see his political oppression, you will become revolutionary or a politician. If you see only his spiritual need you will become a

religionist. It is in seeking the whole man with strongest emphasis on the spiritual dimension that you become a Christian witness, a missionary, an evangelist, a communicator of God's word. It is not just a spiritual liberator but also a social emancipator and reformer. Hence it is in the Good News alone that the slum dwellers of Vizianagaram can find true worth, identity and dignity that will transform their entire society from being the oppressed to finding true freedom in Christ.

A total indifference to the needs of community development in the slums is to evade the Church's ethical responsibility of Christian social involvement. Besides it also leaves behind the impression that the church is only concerned about the spiritual needs of the people and not their day-to-day concerns. Contrary to the fear that social involvement projects might hinder further evangelistic opportunities in slums, a Church sponsored community development programs would perform two integrated missiological functions. They help fulfill the Church's responsibility to the socially disenfranchised segments of humanity in the slums. The need at this juncture is to be able to combine evangelism and Christian social responsibility together in such a way that it will not be suspected of as a conspiracy but received as a genuine concern for serving the total needs of the slum dwellers.

A holistic ministry of theology to the slum dwellers is an inevitable as the situation demands. It is the very poverty of the slum dwellers that will enable the slum dwellers to be more open to the Gospel than perhaps anyone else. Today the church must proclaim and live the whole gospel. It cannot relegate concerns for everyday human needs to government and expect to be relevant to people. It provides for the care and nurture of its members, help feed the poor, heal the sick, counsel the distraught, care for the widows and orphans, and preach the gospel. It must avoid the mental dichotomy that separates evangelism from social ministries and see both as ways to bear witness to the transforming power of the gospel. The goal of the church is not simply to help the poor people to meet their daily needs, but to see them transformed by the power gospel and empowered to be people of dignity and worth in society. The Church has to change its outlook and attitude for crying out its missionary voice and should stand for the welfare and life transformation of the slum dwellers. The church has a better option to play its role and active involvement in eradicating the poverty, oppression and social degradation of the slum dwellers. In reflecting upon the Christian response to human need, church should have recognized the central place of the local church as the vehicle for communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ both in word and deed. And church should be challenged to implement in our organizations a positive transformation demonstrating the values and His kingdom mission. Church should know and affirm that the kingdom of God which Jesus Christ preached is both present and future, both Societal and individual, both physical and spiritual.

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