By THOMAS HOYT, JR.

The Biblical Tradition of the Poor and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Few persons conversant with history would challenge the statement that Martin Luther King, Jr., envisoned the Beloved Community as being inseparable from the alleviation of economic inequity and the achievement of economic justice. He focused our attention on social welfare (health care, quality education, housing, a guaranteed income); on social justice (challenging racism, materialism, militarism, and classism); and on the world society (speaking for peace and freedom for the whole community). He sought Community but realized that chaos was inevitable, given the neglect and abuse of the poor. The Beloved Community was symbolized by King as the promise land in which there is "economic and cultural stability."[1] Harvey Cox has perceptively observed that King made use of two traditional Biblical themes: the "holiness of the poor" and the "blessed community."[2]

We have witnessed a great deal of discussion of King and the possible influences upon his thought. Some have traced his thought to Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, George Davis, Karl Marx, Edgar S. Brightman, Martin Buber, Henry David Thoreau, A. J. Muste, Anders Nygren, and Mahatma Gandhi. To be sure, all of these persons and more had their impact upon King. In this article, however, we shall discuss the theme of the poor in the Biblical tradition with the presupposition that this is one of the primary themes influencing King's thought. We are concerned with what Biblical themes influenced his thinking rather than what literary figure had an impact upon him. We will concentrate our discussion upon the Old Testament tradition of the poor because the analogues there provided the hermeneutical norms for King's contemporaneous concerns.

THE TERMINOLOGY FOR POOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Vocabulary descriptive of the poor in the Old Testament is both diverse and problematic.[3] The Hebrew Old Testament uses most often

[1] "Out of the Long Night of Segregation." *The Presbyterian Outlook,* February 10, 1958, p. 6.

[2] Harvey Cox, *On Not Leaving It to the Snake* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967) p. 133.

[3] Regarding the terminology see Ernest Bammel, "Ptochos, Ptocheia, Ptocheuo", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Freidrick, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), VI:885-915; A. Kuschke, "arm und Reich in Alten Testament mit besonderer Berucksichtigung der nachexilischen zeit," *Zeit-schrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenachaft,* 57: 1939, pp. 44-57; J. Van der Ploeg, "Les pauvres d' Israel et leur piete, *Oudtestamentische Studien,* VII, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950) pp. 242-270; C. Van Leeuwen, *Le development du sens social en Israel avant y'ere Chretienne.* "Studio-Semitica Neerlsfivs," (Assen: Van Gorcum and Company, 1955), pp. 13-26; P. Humbert, "Le mot biblique ebyon," *Revue d' Historie et de philosophie Religieuses,* 32:1-6, 1952; Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh,* trans. Mother Kathryn Sullivan. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1964).

ebyon, ani, dal, rush and *anaw*. A brief survey of the major terms used to refer to the poor, show that *rush,* "to be poor, needy, famished," is used least of all but is a favorite world in Wisdom Literature. It is used a total of twenty-four times in the Old Testament, especially in Proverbs (14 times). It refers to poverty in the social sense without any religious nuance. The poor person is *ebyon* in that he desires, begs or is lacking something and awaits it from another. This word is used 60 times in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (24 times) and Prophets (17 times). The poor man is also *dal,* the weak, frail one. Of the 48 uses of *dal* in the Old Testament, most of the occurrences appear in the Prophets (13 times), Job and Proverbs (20 times). The poor person is also *ani,* the bent over one, the one laboring under a weight, the one not in possession of his whole strength and vigor, the humiliated one. This concept is found 78 times in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (32 times) and Prophets (25 times). Finally, the poor is *anaw,* which comes from the same root as *ani* but has a more religious meaning indicating humility and meekness before God. The word *anaw* appears in the Old Testament 25 times, especially in the Psalms and Prophets.

In the Septuagint, the Old Testament terms for the poor *ebyon, ani, dal,* and *rush* are usually translated by *ptochos* and *penes*. The *penes* is not poor in the modern sense but is less wealthy than the rich (plousioi). *Penes* denotes one who has few possessions and must therefore work for his livelihood. The *plousioi* can live on his income without working and is, therefore, in Greek parlance, a man of leisure. The *penes* could himself own slaves and participate in the political arena. On the other hand, the *ptochos* denotes complete destitution which compels the person to seek the help of others by begging. Unlike the *penes,* the *ptochos* has nothing and cannot help himself. *Ptochos* is the word chiefly used to denote the poor in the New Testament.[4]

All of these words were intially descriptive of sociological relationships which remained true even when different circumstances required that the words become descriptive of religious conditions. The fact that Israel's history is connected in a religio-cultural wholeness should speak against hastily separating sociological or religious meanings in any given period of Jewish history. The words do not change in meaning but rather their application probably changes.

Beyond the linguistic understanding of the poor, we must also recognize that the Hebraic mind was very concrete. The poor in the Old Testament are the widows, orphans, and aliens. These three groups of people are discussed in the Law Codes. In addition to the widows,

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[4] Although the love principle as encompassed by the life and teachings of Jesus informed Dr. King, it was the Old Testament which played a central role in his political exegesis. This is proper in that Israel assumed the vocation of living out God's demands for national political and religious life. It is for this reason that we have in this article confined ourselves to an understanding of the tradition of the poor in the Old Testament.

orphans, and aliens, the Levites are mentioned frequently in connection with the poor. All four groups are disadvantaged because of their inferior status, or because Yahweh was their special inheritance (Dt. 18: 1-8). They do not have full legal membership in the community. The Deuteronomic Code implies that the three groups (aliens, widows, and orphans) were ordinarily excluded from communal gatherings. This implication is derived from the fact that the three groups are specifically mentioned twice as participants in cultic celebrations.[5] There must have been a tendency to exclude the less fortunate from the festival merely because of their inferior standing. The orphan and widow lack an adult male who can represent them; and the alien because of his position, is not a full citizen. He cannot share in the ownership of the community's land because of the fact that he is not a member of the community in which he resides.

The widows and orphans could own land, to a certain extent, but the rights of neither the woman nor the child could be compared with those of an adult male. The widows and orphans are not to be equated with the alien altogether because the alien lacks strong family and tribal ties. Thus we may be dealing in the law codes with two distinct social categories: one concerned with the alien, the other with the widows and orphans, while the common denominator of social status based on land possession would allow these two groups to be closely associated and even joined together. This demonstrates that the concepts of the poor can possibly be broken down into separate parts, each of which is concerned with a different group of inferior social rank.

In the New Testament, those who are concretely poor include the blind, lame, leper and deaf since their physical conditions would have incapacitated them and thus relegated them to the status of beggars. Jeremias recognizes the wide use of the word for poor in his comment:

> Certainly those in need, the hungry and the thirsty, the unclothed and the strangers, the sick and the captives belong to the 'least' . . . But the circle of the "poor" is wider. That becomes clear when we collect the designations and imagery with which Jesus characterizes them. He calls them the hungry, those who weep, the sick, those who labour, those who bear burdens, the lost, the simple, the sinners.[6]

A linguistic and sociological analysis of the poor in both the Old and New Testaments would cause this article to extend beyond proper limits. Keeping in mind the vocabulary and sociological understandings of the poor, we will mainly give a descriptive analysis of the poor in the Old Testament.

THE SEMI-NOMADIC AND SETTLEMENT PERIODS

The solidarity of the semi-nomadic tribes[7] excluded the possibility

[5] The feast of weeks (Dt. 16:11) and the feasts of booths (Dt. 16:14).

[6] Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971) p. 113.

[7] For exact terminological clarification, during the wilderness period, the followers of Yahweh should be designated semi-nomads in that they probably established the pattern of brief settlement in conjunction with frequent movement along the outskirts of the settled areas. See George Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *Biblical Archeologist*, 25: 66-87, 1962 who argues against nomad existence of Israelite tribes.

of a true distinction between the rich and poor in the desert. In the pre-Canaanite settlement, a kind of collective sensibility prevailed. The mobility of the society dictated that few possessions could be maintained. In fact, very little private ownership of goods was conceivable. Each member's dignity and identity was based on blood kinship with his tribal brethren. His status derived from service to his kinsman in the never ending struggle against natural difficulties and military enemies. Albert Gelin states that "hopes, trials, possession, all were shared. The blessings foreseen and promised by Yahweh were to be enjoyed by all."[8]

Since an individual rarely owned animal or tent exclusively, one can readily understand how the cooperative spirit was engendered. There were slaves among the semi-nomads, but even they were members of the family. Their lives were not basically different from others in the family. We may expect that poverty came as a result of natural causes, death of the breadwinner, sickness, senility, disability, deformity, etc. Significantly, however, in a simple nomadic society, poverty or distress was alleviated by relatives and neighbors.[9]

Wealth was measured primarily in terms of the sizes of the family and flocks instead of land. By such standards, the partiarchs as pictured in Genesis were relatively free of poverty and economic oppression. Although not completely free of ill fortune. Abraham was pictured as fairly wealthy. We do not hear anything about poverty until the famine which caused Jacob and his family to go to Goshen. The later editing of the patriarchal stories reflects an optimistic view of the relationships between piety and wealth. In fact, this tribal solidarity pictures God as the source of wealth. It can be said, therefore, of God in the prayer of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts." (1 Sam. 2:7).

If the semi-nomadic tribal existence had created a feeling of closeness, the *Exodus* experience and tradition nurtured a sense of mutual obligation. When Israel's subsequent history was reviewed, attention reverted to the Exodus event. According to Martin Noth, the "bringing forth out of Egypt connoted not merely the point of departure of the migration of the Israelite tribes but a mighty deed of the God of

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[8] Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh.* trans. Mother Kathryn Sullivan (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1964) pp. 16-17.

[9] Ephraim Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthrophy* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1924), p. 4; Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture,* I-II (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 46-60. See also a thorough discussion of the nomadic age in Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions,* I, trans. by John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), pp. 3-15; He gave a realistic picture of ancient Hebrew life and clear pictures of tribal and clan structures, not as they later were assumed to have been, but as they probably were. The clan name could be and was adopted by those who married into the clan and by those who sought membership in the clan. Submission to the law of the clan and acceptance of the clan gods were the tests of admission. It was assumed that the newcomers, once admitted, were of the blood line and legally entitled to carry the clan name.

Israel."[10] Deliverance from oppression was *the* event through which the later Israelite inevitably viewed his understanding of himself, God, and his people. The Passover festival helped to maintain the contemporaneity of the Exodus redemption. The Exodus, being an act of grace, should evoke a response in kind. Concretely, this meant that the weak, the poor, the needy were to be helped because of God's grace experienced in the Exodus.[11]

If the Exodus experience and tradition provided the impetus for corporate responsibility, the *covenant*[12] was the content of that responsibility.[13] The covenant gave Israel a sense of unique relationship with God. Exodus 6:7 expresses well this relationship. "I will take you for my people and I will be your God." To be the people of God connoted both privilege and responsibility. The words of the covenant, the Decalogue, specifically referred to faithfulness towards God and respect for one's fellowman. The covenant with Yahweh, continually forced Israel to face stern demands on her conduct.

This covenanted people faced a real test after a long period of wandering in the desert. They gradually laid claim to the land that Yahweh had promised. This meant settling in a land which "was feudalistic and (which possessed) ideals of artistocracy."[14] Movement of a semi-nomadic people into such a culture created religious and social problems. We will mention one of the main social problems of the settlement.

The settled life in Canaan brought to every Israelite an hereditary position in the divinely given land. Each tribe and family was given a permanent land grant. Originally, the Israelites established land reforms for the purpose of establishing an equal distribution of real estate. Each

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[10] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel,* trans. P. R. Ackroyd (2nd ed.) (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) p. 112. See also Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament,* trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) pp. 190 ff. where he emphasizes the centrality of the Exodus in Yahweh's activity.

[11] See Gerhard Van Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* II trans. D. M. G. Stalker, (Edinburg: Oliver and Boyd, 1962) p. 104. See Exodus 22:21; Duet, 10:18-19; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 15:15; Amos 2:10; Hos. 13:4; Mic. 6:3-4; Jer. 2:6; Ezek. 20:3-8. Cf. also Hilmer H. Ringgen, *Israelite Religion,* trans. D. E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 29, we are cautioned against making the Sinai story subservant to the Exodus tradition. Both could possibly be of equal significance. The only difference probably resided in the way the traditions were handed down. The Sinai traditions were handed down within the framework of a covenant renewal festival, while the Exodus traditions are rooted in other contexts, the most important of which was probably the passover cult legend. Cf. also Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* Rev. ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966) pp. 15-66, who regards the Exodus-Sinai covenant as the main act of the Biblical drama.

[12] We have special reference to the Sinai covenant and covenant although the origin and history of the covenant is inconclusive, the content of it is adequate to provide us with the stipulations relevant for our study. Law and covenant in our view, are intimately related to each other. See George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

[13] H. H. Rowley,: "The Antiquity of Israelite Monotheism", *The Expository Times,* LXI (1950), 337-38, is probably correct in his assertion that "Israel's religion was established on a covenant basis, and the covenant itself rested on the ethical emotion of gratitude for the achieved deliverance. It is not, therefore, to be surprised at that an ethical quality was given to that religion from the time of Moses."

[14] James Philip Hyatt, *Prophetic Religion* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947) p. 57.

family was concerned about the protection of its own land and very little speculation was the rule. Whereas wealth was measured in a pastoral society by size of families and flocks, in an agricultural economy wealth was judged by land holdings. Scholars have assumed, with reason, that the Canaanites lived in city-states already and had established social differences. Under these conditions, the Israelites began to seek more land for themselves. The poor emerge when the less successful of the Israelites merged into the less successful of the Canaanites.[15] P. Humbert thinks that the word *ebyon* which depicts a poor man reduced to the state of beggar, was adopted into Hebrew at this period.[16] With the appearance of the poor in society, laws were instituted which inveighed against oppression and encouraged beneficence. These laws are mainly depicted in the codes which we shall now review.

CODES IN EXODUS, LEVITICUS AND DEUTERONOMY[17]

Israel's law codes were constantly modified by time and circumstance. They grew through experience, judicial decisions and practical necessity.[18] Thus, the codes and the laws in them cannot be used to reconstruct historically a full and accurate picture of Israel's society at any given time. This does not mean that the customs and practices described in the law codes are unhistorical, but due to the role of tradition, one must be very cautious as to what periods in Israel's history he ascribes any one practice as actively observed or enforced. For a large part of Israel's history, Israelite law depicts much of the flexibility that characterizes other ancient codes. Israel's codes often applied to concrete instances of social justice. This sense of justice derived from a keen sense of the Exodus and a need for the living feeling for the demands of the covenant.

The poor are defined by the law codes mainly in social and economic terms, but with theological reflections, since Israel's social structures were conceived as determined by the divine will. The poor are the landless, the social outcasts, and the dispossessed. By implication, they stand in contrast to the wealthy, the landowners, those whose membership in the community is obvious. The codes incorporate the poor and needy into society and extend to them the same rights and protections that are enjoyed by the landed classes. Any crime against them,

[15] CF. E. Bammel, "Ptochos" *TDNT*, VI, (1968), 890.
[16] P. Humbert, "Le mot biblique ebyon," *RHPR*, XXXII (1952), 3.
[17] The three major codes which deal with the poor are: (1) The Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23, which probably stems from a pre-monarchial agricultural setting; (2) The Deuteronomic Code, which was probably the nucleus of the reforms of King Josiah (see Ernest Wright, "Deuteronomy: Introduction and Exegesis," IB, 320); and (3) The Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), which entered the pentateuchal narrative after the exile. Its legal decisions on behalf of the poor, however, reflect primarily a pre-exilic *sitz im leben* when exploitation by the wealthy, expropriation of land, and enslavement as a result of debt were common occurences. Cf. Robert G. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), pp. 191, 212.
[18] von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II, p. 394.

particularly the attempt to deny them their rights by excluding them from the community, is branded as criminal and unjust. Since there is a great deal of carry over from one code to the other, we shall consider the codes together. We shall show in the text some divergences and agreements of the codes.

Deuteronomy 15:4 proclaims, "There ought to be no poor man in your midst." Of course, this admonition implies that there were poor people. We have pointed out that the Israelites in their semi-nomadic state probably favored the nomadic ideal which recognized no gulf between the rich and poor. With settlement in Canaan, a sociological shock took place. There were still those in the agricultural life of Canaan who came to the rescue of their brothers in distress, but there were many individuals who turned to the competitive spirit, which in turn led to exploitation of their countrymen. The Deuteronomic writer was probably influenced by this semi-nomadic ideal and the remembrance of the covenant. Yahweh had promised that Israel would prosper and this prosperity would extend to each and every Israelite if the covenant would be kept inviolate. In other words, one of the main features of the covenant was the total elimination of poverty. Thus, the very existence of poor people in Israel would be considered a sign of covenant violation. In theory there should be no landless in Israel. At the same time, there was a recognition of the real state of the Israelite in a sedentary society: "for the poor will never cease out of the land. . ."[19] The blessings of the covenant would not apply to each and every Israelite. The perpetual nature of poverty, however, is not cited as reason for ignoring the poor, but as proof of the great need for laws and customs which would prevent a worsening of their situation and perhaps even ameliorate it. Repeatedly, therefore, the poor were to receive special consideration (Deut. 10:18; 15:11; 24:17; Ex. 22:19-26). They had a right to a portion of the land's fruits (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21). For the sake of the poor, the landowners were required to leave gleanings in the field.[20] This latter stipulation was initiated mainly for the landless ones: Widows, orphans and sojourners. These three groups symbolize the poor par excellence of Israel. Gleanings were to be available as gratitude for redemption gleaned by Israel in the Exodus (Dt. 24:22) and anticipation of Yahweh's favor upon a generous spirit (Dt. 24:19b). The owner of the land was also remembered in that the poor gleaners were cautioned against taking exorbitant advantage of the landowners' generosity (Dt. 23:24-25).

The poor should receive profitable work and those who employ laborers should pay their workers every evening or be in danger of in-

[19] Deut. 15:11. The statements in 15:4 and 15:11 appear at first glance to be contradictory. It seems, however, that in verse 4 the ideal of a nation striving to live according to the commandments of Yahweh is better described; whereas verse 11 presents the reality of a nation always recurrently disobedient, and consequently always failing to manifest true brotherhood under the direction of Yahweh.

[20] Dt. 24:19; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22ff. The practice of gleaning is shown in the book of Ruth 2:2.

curring the divine wrath of the Lord (Lev. 25:35; Dt. 24:15). Apparently the worker needed his day's wages in order to buy his daily bread. The poor should receive a tithe every third year (Dt. 14:28-29; 26:12-15). This latter stipulation was a modification of the requirement in Num. 18:21-32 of an annual tithe which was to go to the Levites as their inheritance. Prior to the Deuteronomic code, which centralized worship at Jerusalem, the Levites received these tithes in local sanctuaries annually. Now, however, they were to use locally the tithe collected every third year. This tithe, in addition to being used by the displaced Levites, was to be used on behalf of the widows, orphans, and sojourners (Dt. 26:13; 12:19; 18:1-8; 14:27). To use modern descriptive terms, such welfare was both religious and social.

In ancient Israel, the small farmer often found himself in want. If the harvest failed, he lacked food for his family and grain for the next seeding. If drought parched the earth or locusts devoured the crops, he had to abandon himself to the charity of his brother Israelites or to the greed of the local money-lender (Ex. 22:24). The true Israelite lent generously to the poor. He did not force his debtor to pay at an unreasonable time. He asked nothing during a sabbatical year, when the Israelite could receive no returns from his fields and could not easily find labor (Dt. 15:1-5). The true Israelite accepted no interest (Ex. 22:24; Dt. 23:20-21; Lev. 25:35-38).

As a pledge, the Israelite was forbidden to take articles which his debtor needed for livelihood (Dt. 24:6). If he took the poor man's mantle, it was mandatory that it be returned by evening.[21] Israel's laws considered the debtor a victim of misfortune. His affliction was a judgment of his nation's sin (Dt. 15:16; 28:12, 44). The laws sought to protect the seized debtor from oppression (Lev. 25:39-43; Dt. 15:12-14). They exempted the widow and orphan from such a fate (Dt. 24:17, 19, 21).

The codes initiated other major stipulations to aid the poor. The powers of the creditors were limited (Ex. 21:7-11; 22:6; Dt. 24:6). The sabbatical year was proclaimed[22] whereby fields would lie fallow and the poor could glean in them (Lev. 25:4), slaves would be set free (Ex. 21:1ff), and debts would be remitted (Ex. 21:2; Dt. 15:1ff.). Fallow fields and gleaning by the poor is based on two theological assumptions. The first is that the land belongs to Yahweh. The Holiness Code developed this idea and related it to the theology that the land is Yahweh's gift to Israel and that He remains its true and proper

[21] Ex. 22:25-26; Dt. 24:10-13. This stipulation is understandable in the light of the fact that wardrobes were meager, and outer garments, served a dual role. During the day, the mantle was worn as an temperature drop after sundown was also to require an extra garment at night for health's sake.

[22] Ex. 23:11; Lev. 25:6. See also Martin Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 186, 190 contends that the original sabbatical year was to be "a sabbath to the Lord." In Lev. 25:2, 4, 6, the sacral meaning of the sabbatical year is retained. In Dt. the sabbatical year assumed humanitarian meanings in that spontaneous growth was to be the property of the landless community and undomesticated animals.

owner; thereby, the Holiness Code's sabbath year law represents a return of the land to the deity: the sabbath year is a Sabbath for Yahweh (Lev. 25:4, 6). The second premise is that not only does Israel not have full possession of the land, but Israel cannot even use the produce as desired. The Holiness Code enacted the Jubilee,[23] when liberty would be announced to all Israel's inhabitants, when each would return to his own family and automatically receive back his own possessions every fiftieth year. The theological justification for the year of Jubilee was that both the land and people belonged to Yahweh and neither could be sold forever.[24]

The Holiness Code also provided for the release of land and slaves through a law of redemption. If a brother became poor (Lev. 25:25, 35, 39) and was compelled to sell his land or himself, he or his land could be reclaimed if redeemed by a kinsman (Lev. 25:25, 48-49). If he had no relatives, he could redeem it himself if he should become sufficiently prosperous (Lev. 25:27, 49). The relationship expressed here is not between one man and a parcel of land, but between the man's family or clan and the plot of land. This principle of redemption of land rests on the conviction that the land has been allotted to Israel by Yahweh and that this original division should never be altered. Therefore, a tribe or a family of the tribe could never be permitted to sell its allotment or any portion thereof. If the land was sold, a way of reclaiming it must be provided. It seems that this law in Lev. 25:25-28 concerns an Israelite who has become poor and has been forced to sell his ancestral property in order to meet his obligations. The lawmaker in this case is speaking of the impoverished man who is without the means of sustaining himself. Help for this poor man, however, seems to be based on the fact that poverty forces an Israelite to sell his ancestral portion and thereby results in an alterration of the divinely ordained distribution of the land. It seems that protection of the poor and needy is a consequence of the theological interest in keeping the divine order of society intact. This theology of land tenure of the priestly circles probably developed as a direct result of the impact of the Exile, which both removed Israel from her land, and affected her subsequent return.

THE PROPHETS AND THE POOR (PRE-EXILIC)-AMOS, HOSEA, FIRST ISAIAH, MICAH

In the eighth century B.C., the kingdom of Israel and Judah faced severe political and military threats. Within this situation, the classical prophets arose to denounce the grave sins which they felt were leading the nation to destruction. One of Israel's chief sins was oppression and

[23] Lev. 25:8ff. For an excellent bibliography and a detailed treatment of legislation connected with the Jubilee, cf. R. G. North *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954).

[24] See Lev. 25:23, 42; Edward Neufield, "Socio-Economic Background of Yobel and Smitta," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali,* XXXIII (1958), 53-124.

exploitation of the poor which in effect symbolized a fundamental breakdown of the legal, social and economic structures of the community. There was in the mind of the prophets a necessary correlation between oppression of the poor and a corrupt and unjust society.

The prophet Amos was characteristic of the social position of eighth century prophets. We shall use his pronouncements and denouncements as a basis for looking at the prophetic oracles of the eighth century in general.[25]

Under the monarchy, the people had grown to expect material prosperity. Instead, they found that large commercial and landowner classes, court officers and military leaders arose who revelled in wealth and luxury,[26] while the majority of people suffered from need and exploitation. Amos, along with other eighth century prophets led an assault on every kind of abuse which would keep the poor in poverty or create new poor people. The situation in the eighth century may be described in the following manner.

There was a perversion of justice by a servile court which was only too willing to do the bidding of the rich. (Am. 2:7; Is. 1:23; 5:23; 10:1-4, Mic. 3:9). The poor man had been driven from his land and left homeless by greedy oppressors who took possession of his land because of his inability to make proper payments (Mic. 2:1-3; Is. 5:8). Some of the chief men responsible for the oppression of the poor included kings (Am. 3:15; 5:11; 6:4-6), elders, princes (Is. 3:13-15), and judges (Is. 10:1-4). Generally, the oppressors were violent ruling classes (Am. 4:1; Mic. 3:1-2; 6:12) and unjust functionaries (Am. 5:7).

There was a general condemnation of fraudulent commerce and exploitation. The excessive exactions of wheat levied upon the poor peasantry is decried by Amos (5:11). Micah denounced the commercial deceit of the urban society (6:9). The poor are sold poor grain (Am. 8:7). Wealthy landowners and merchants encouraged in oppression by greedy and insensitive females (Am. 4:1-3; Is. 2:16-24) were unmoved by the sorrow of their neighbors (Am. 6:6; 5:10, 13). It seems that the desire for luxuries by the rich exaggerated indulgences and lust for profit at the expense of the poor.

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[25] We do not feel a need to point out the various sources in the prophets, nor to point out all of the Hebrew and Greek words for the poor in each prophetic writing. Cf. Van der Ploeg, "Les Pauvres d' Israel et leur Piete," 236-270. We will present some distinctions of pre-exilic and post-exilic understandings of the poor but our major emphasis is not a source critical analysis of the Old Testament.

[26] Julian Morgenstern, *Amos Studies* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1941), I, 401f. says in reference to the time of Amos: "The general program of Joash of Israel and of Jereboam II must have been therefore, that of the internal development of their respective kingdoms.... Day by day prosperity in steadily increasing measure was returning to the Northern Kingdom. Both agriculture and commerce thrived, and the wealthy became even wealthier. But correspondingly, the poor became ever poorer both in number and in degree.... More and more, for one reason or another, through one means or another, the entire land came into the possession of the few, the court officers, the military leaders, and the successful merchants."

Morgenstern very aptly summarized the life of a poor eighth century man who had been dispossessed of his land and made dependent on the wealthy for his livelihood:

> In such a society the poor had little chance. Involved in litigation with wealthy and powerful neighbors, witnesses were turned against them by one consideration or another. Perjured testimony was offered and was readily accepted by judges as corrupt and self-seeking as those who bribed them. Pledges were taken for the payment of debts, and even when the latter were duly paid, the pledges were not returned. Very many, unable otherwise to pay their debts, would be sold, no doubt by court order, or else would sell a son or perhaps a daughter, or even their very own selves, as slaves in the hope that thereby enough might be realized to discharge the debt.[27]

The picture we get reveals that oppression of the poor had extended to the point of being intolerable, therefore, making reform imperative. The reform that was needed had to begin with the national religion which had degenerated to external ceremonialism (Am. 4:40b; 5:21-24; Is. 1:12-17; Mic. 6:6-8), characterized by institutional pride and ethical neglect (Am. 3:10; Mic. 2:8). Justice and righteousness were ignored as expendable virtues (Am. 5:7). It was religion minus morality which allowed and contributed to the oppression of the poor. Micah tried to depict man's proper approach to Yahweh as he defines Yahweh's requirements in prophetic terminology:

> He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh, require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8).

This statement says at least two things about the eighth century prophets which are useful to remember with regard to the poor: First, for the prophets the social question was supremely a moral one grounded in obedience to the commandments of God. Second, the statement summarizes the emphases of the three major eighth century prophets: Amos' justice, Hosea's *Hesed* (to love kindness), and Isaiah's faith (to walk humbly with your God).

Two motivating factors contributed to the prophetic denunciations on behalf of the poor. First, they remembered the Mosaic religion and were trying to adhere to its meaning. This tradition said that Moses led his people out of slavery, exploitation and alientation of Egypt so that they might reject poverty in their midst so as to avoid a re-occurrence of servile conditions similar to those of Egypt. Second, they spoke against the breakdown of covenantal existence that would allow insensitivity to the poor and needy. They wanted their fellow Israelites to know that the poor and needed were Israelites and members of the covenant, regardless of their landless and debased status. Thus, there was exhibited a great interest in social and political justice which hopefuly would alleviate conditions that fostered poverty.[28]

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 403.
[28] Cf. the burning bush dialogue in Ex. 3:7-22; 4:22-23a; 6:2-8, 13:3-10; 19:3-6; 20:2.

Even though the eighth century prophets spoke consistently of justice, they were not optimistic about the possibility of that justice materializing. Instead, doom was proclaimed for the nation (Am. 2:6; 4:12; 5:1), and justice for the poor became a part of the eschatological hope (Is. 11:4; 14:30; 29:19). While they anticipated a messianic justice, their activities were partly responsible for the immediate legislative revision as seen in the Deuteronomic Code already discussed.

THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

This prophet has been singled out for a brief comment because his work represents a change in the application of the Hebrew word for poor. This change occurs about the end of the seventh century B. C. Most scholars would date the career of Zephaniah in the reign of Josiah (640/39-609-8).[29] Albert Gelin thinks that "Zephaniah is a religious genius whose synthesis marks a turning point in history."[30] Prior to this period of time, the terms for poor denoted individuals or groups of individuals who were oppressed, disinherited or otherwise rejected by society. Now, since Israel as a whole was threatened with dispossession of her land, the entire nation could be termed as poor and needy. The Oracles of Zeph. 3:11b-13 illustrate well this transition.

> For I will remove from your midst your arrogant braggarts
> No more will you exalt yourself on my holy mountain.
> For I will leave in your midst a people poor and lowly.
> And they will seek refuge in the name of Yahweh, they the remnant of Israel.
>
> They will do no wrong and they will speak no falsehood.
> A lying tongue will not be found in their mouths.
> For they will feed the recline and there will be none to disutrb them.

Chapter 3 opens with exclamations of woe against the city of Jerusalem and its wicked leaders (vss. 1-4). Subsequently, Yahweh's righteousness and power is described in verses 5-7. As other nations have been destroyed so will Israel if she does not seek the way of righteousness. Zephaniah seems to have given up on Israel as a whole. In verses 8-13 he declares that Yahweh will sift out the wicked who are the ultimate cause of Israel's judgment. As a consequence of the purging, a faithful remnant will remain.

In verse 12, the poor are contrasted with the haughty as manifested from the structure of the poem. It is at this point that the synthesis is evident. Zephaniah has taken the words for real poverty of body and physical conditions and has transformed them. He has substituted poverty for pride and made it the authentic spiritual attitude (3:11). The poor are the remnant who will be left after the period of judgment. The poor are those opposed to pride or an attitude of self-sufficiency and are characterized by abandonment and trust in God. Poverty

[29] See Otto Eissfeldt, *Introduction to the Old Testament,* trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 424-425.
[30] Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweb,* p. 31.

becomes at this time an ideal which is accentuated during the historical experiences of Israel after the time of Zephaniah. The fall of the Northern Kingdom, coupled with the threat to Judah and Jerusalem, of a similar disaster, especially for Zephaniah, led to this change in terminology concerning the poor.[31]

THE PROPHETS AND THE POOR (EXILE AND POST-EXILIC) — SECOND ISAIAH, EZEKIEL, THIRD ISAIAH

In spite of the prophetic warnings of the eighth and seventh century prophets and the reform movements of Hezekiah and Josiah, the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587 B.C. This represented a catastrophe of the greatest magnitude. Israelites were subjected to torture and indignities, stripped of all their material possessions. From the point of view of the Jews, to be displaced from their land and forced to reside in a foreign one, was tantamount to being outcasts. The deportation of the most able people, left in the land of Judah only the poorest of the poor. These indignities however, were not to be compared to the loss of the House of Yahweh which caused a theological problem. The loss of the Temple meant for many the loss of God's presence (Ezek. 9:3; 11:23). Since God had cast off his people, they could expect even greater misfortune (Jer. 14:19; Lam. 1-2; Is. 49:14; 54:6-8). Zephaniah had already detected the pathetic plight of an exiled people minus their Temple, but it is during this period of the exile that the equation is really solidified: The poor = Israel and sometimes a purified remnant.

In the midst of a people whose past hopes and beliefs had been severely attacked by the ruthless blows of foreign armies, prophets like Second Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Third Isaiah delivered words of hope and challenge.

Second Isaiah. — This prophet spoke during the exile to an Israel whose past hopes and beliefs had been severely tested by the devastating blows of foreign armies. Israel was in despair and in danger of losing her national identity. But the great exilic prophet proclaimed the imminent salvation of Israel by Yahweh. There is an expectation of the return of the community of Zion to Jerusalem (51:11) where Israel would begin her history anew. The poet utilized many old traditions to express this message of hope. One of the chief ancient motifs was that of Yahweh, defender of the poor and needy. This motif was especially appropriate for Israel which had been subjected to torture, indignities and stripped of all her material possessions. Her land was occupied by foreigners and many of her able people were in exile in Babylon. Thus, the whole nation could be characterized as "the poor."

[31] See Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh*, p. 26 says "Words that once denoted sociological reality came to mean an attitude of soul." I contend, however, that even though the words denoting poverty may have been applied differently, they never lose their sociological character.

In referring to Israel, second Isaiah used several terms for the weak and wretched; among the most important are: deaf (See Is. 42:19 and 35:5), blind (See especially Is. 35:5; 42:7, 16, 19), poor (Is. 41:17, 49:13; 51:21 and 54:11), and needy (Is. 41:17). The terms deaf and blind are also categories of the poor who are specially protected by Israel and Yahweh. In the scriptures: Is. 41:17; 49:13; 51:21 and 54:11 we see how the poet has revived and reused the ancient poor tradition for a new situation.

In Is. 41:5-20 Israel is admonished not to fear but trust in the salvation of Yahweh. Verses 17-20 depict what Yahweh will do for Israel who is here called poor and needy. Yahweh's salvation is pictured poetically as provision of water and turning of desert into marshland.[32] In Is. 49:13, Yahweh's "poor ones" are Israel as detected by the parallelism with "his people." Is. 51:21 and 54:11 designate the people, exiled from Jerusalem, the name "poor." The people, as described by Isaiah, are outcast, crushed, and uncomforted, but they shall return to Jerusalem in a new city of surpassing splendor (54:11-12).

Ezekiel. — Ezekiel, writing during the exile, interpreted covenant obligation for a people without national, cultic or geographical identity. The people are protesting that the way of Yahweh was unfair (Ezek. 18:25, 29). Ezekiel catalogues a great deal of ritual offenses but also numerous violations of the moral law, such as murder, oppression of the poor and weak, disrespect toward parents, lewd conduct, adultery, usury, bribery, violation of sexual taboos, talebearing, robbery, and juggling with weights and measures (Ezek. 9:9; 11:12; 22:7, 9-12, 29). The people in exile are saying that Yahweh ought not to bring punishment on others because of the conduct of parents. Ezekiel accepts that proposition and works it out in detail. As a result, impetus was given to individual responsibility as a means of satisfying covenant loyalty. Ezekiel conjectures that the nation has forfeited its right to possess and live in the land because it had violated the covenant. Thus, although Judah is carried into Babylonian exile as judgment she will be restored as promised and as promise. This restoration as promise is a result of a merciful Yahweh and a repentant people who possibly represent the remnant (Ezek. 14:22, 23). In the prophet's mind, beneficence to the poor is tied to repentance of the new people of God. Each person is to assume responsibility for his own action in this regard.[33] Ezekiel's eighteenth chapter is very explicit on this latter point.

He depicts his principle of individual responsibility by giving three examples. First, in 18:5-9, a righteous and just man will be rewarded by observing Yahweh's statutes and ordinances. Second, in 18:10-13,

[32] This is a common theme of Yahweh's salvation: Is. 35; 43:6-21; 44:1-5; 48:20-22; 51:1-3; 55:1-12.

[33] Jeremiah had already propagated the idea that the fundamental nature of religion was man's sense of relationship to God – that the individual was at the heart of religion. This led Jeremiah to two other convictions: (1) that religion should be a matter of inner conviction, not outward compulsion, and (2) that man as an individual should be responsible directly to God for his conduct, not responsible through community.

if the son is ruthless and does not follow his father's teachings, he will be punished for his wickedness in spite of his father's righteousness. The third illustration in Ezek. 18:14-17 insists that the righteous son of the ruthless man who rejects his father's wickedness and instead does what is lawful, will be rewarded in accordance to his own righteousness. This latter teaching was probably liberating for the exiled Israelite.

The principle that each man will be judged according to his own actions, rejects the philosophy of collective guilt. Tradition had taught that a man suffered or prospered in large measure according to the wicked or righteous actions of his ancestors.[34] Ezekiel knew that his Israelite ancestors had oppressed the poor, and thus he would be under extreme condemnation should the old view be normative. It would have been very difficult for the future society of Israel, now in exile, to live under the burden of rebellion and sin of past generations. Thus, Ezekiel projects the liberating gospel: Each man will stand or fall on his own merits.

If one was to be righteous in his own right, one had to know what right actions entailed. Thus, interspersed among the three examples above was a list of actions that were to be performed or avoided for one to be considered righteous. The acts mentioned in these lists reflect the old Deuteronomic and Holiness Codes and consist of a mixture of social and ritual infractions.[35] Mostly, however, the transgressions forbidden by Ezek. 18:5-18 were moral rather than ceremonial thus stressing the individual's responsibility within community. For examples, Ezek. 18:12 condemns the violent son for oppression of the poor and needy; the concern for the lowly is represented in Ezek. 18:7 and 17 by the stipulations to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Of special note in all three lists of actions are the crimes of keeping a pledge and exacting interest which we have already seen in the codes. There is little doubt in the mind of Ezekiel that mistreatment of the lowly necessarily implies violence and injustice and is the most serious of crimes.[36]

In summation, Yahweh is depicted as one who will judge each man according to his ways. Thus, the people of the exile must repent individually. This individual repentance is exhibited by fruits characterized by the protection of the poor and defenseless, a central element in the determination of righteousness.

Third Isaiah. — 58:6-7:
Is not this the fast that I choose:
Releasing all those bound unjustly;
untying the ropes of the yoke;
Setting the oppressed free;

[34] Note 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Dt. 5:9 and Jer. 31:29.
[35] We need only compare this chapter with the legal responsibilities of Lev. 18:19-20; 19:13, 15, 26:35-36; 20:10, 18; 25:35-37; 26:1, 30; Dt. 16:18-20; 22:24; 23:19; 24:10-13.
[36] See Ezek. 22:29 where the people are chastised for their oppressive acts against the poor and needy and the aliens.

Smashing every yoke?
Is it not giving your food to the hungry:
Giving shelter to the homeless poor;
Covering the naked when you see him;
And not hiding from one of your own?

A post-exilic writing which shows interest in the poor is that of Is. 58:6-7. This text is from an early post-exilic work.[37] It comes at a time after the Babylonians had captured Jerusalem, carried away the aristocracy and artisans and devastated the land of Judah. The gap between rich and poor had been narrowed since all suffered economic hardship. Those who retained some degree of wealth and power continued to use it to self-advantage (Ezek. 34) and the poor were being pushed to the very borders of existence. Thus, domestic morals had broken down and individualism had taken the place of group responsibility. Trito-Isaiah calls for self-renunciation so that the proper use of the fast might ensue. Fasting in itself is not meaningful worship but must show itself in obedience to Yahweh through showing charity to the poor.

Fasting is not being rejected by the prophet, for this ritual was one of the common Jewish practices in times of crises.[38] Since no crises could compare with the destruction of the Temple and subsequent exile, one can readily understand the added significance of the fast as a medium of mourning during the time of Trito-Isaiah. Instead of the fast leading to contrition, repentance and prayer as originally intended, the community was using it for self-aggrandizement.

The kind of fast preferred by Yahweh is prefaced by verses 1-5. In the first two verses, Israel is informed of her sins. Verse 3 quotes the Israelites: we have fasted, yet Yahweh has paid no attention. This conveys the idea of the fast serving as a stance for bargaining with Yahweh. Verses 3b and 4-5 contend that God does not hear them because their fasting is self-assertive and therefore meaningless.

The prophet combines fasting with its original meaning and the pre-exilic prophetic emphasis on justice for the poor. He advocates worship with justice. In verse 6 four Hebrew verbs are utilized, all of which call for liberation of the oppressed. If one wishes to be heard by Yahweh, social justice must be exercised. Verse 7a-b further stipulates the constitutent parts of Yahweh's fast in terms of deeds of loving kindness to the poor: Bread for the hungry, hospitality to the homeless, and clothing for the naked.[39] Verse 7c cautions against hiding oneself from the plight of one's fellowman. It is only after the true fast has been performed that Yahweh will hear prayers and His

[37] Trito-Isaiah is designated chapters 56-66. Much of this material may be later post-exilic but the text presently under consideration probably represents a warning to Israel in process of restoration. The probable date is between 538-520 B.C. See Claus Westermann, *Isaiah* 40-66, trans. by David M. G. Stalker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 296, 304.

[38] See Jos. 7:6; Jg. 20:26ff.; I Sam. 7:6; II Sam. 12:16; Jer. 36:9; 1:1-2:27.

[39] These stipulations are reminiscent of the Deeds of Loving-Kindness which are to be enunciated later by the Rabbis, with certain amplifications.

people will be pleasing to him (Is. 58:9-11). Israel would be in her glory if she obeyed these commands. In the view of the prophet, she evidently did not obey, for restoration came geographically but not politically. It was not long before she was again suffering persecution.

THE POOR IN THE WISDOM LITERATURE

It was following the exile that much of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature was written or recorded in approximately its present form. This literature is therefore very important for an understanding of the estimation of poverty in post-exile Israel. This literature also projects the Jewish attitudes toward poverty which obtained in the intertestamental period. Especially do we detect a development toward equating benevolence and righteousness.

In the wisdom literature, poverty is viewed in contrast with wealth. We may observe especially the books of Proverbs and Job. In Proverbs, the predominant attitude is that wealth is a good thing. It is better to be wealthy than to be poor (Pr. 10:15; 14:20; 18:11, 16, 23; 19:4, 6; 22:7). One should also beware of the dangers of wealth (Pr. 10:2; 11:28; 13:11; 15:6; 21:6; 22:16; 23:5; 28:8). Wealth was to be distributed with generosity (Pr. 11:24; 25; 19:17; 21:26; 22:9; 28:27). There is a close causal relationship between one's position with respect to God and one's economic and social situation. If one is poor, there is very likely something wrong in his life. To be poor does not imply that one is necessarily wicked even though his poverty is good ground for suspicion. One may be considered a victim of poverty because of a rejection of instruction (Pr. 13:18), impatience (Pr. 21:5; 28:22), excessive pleasure (Pr. 12:11; 21:17; 23:20-21; 28:19), or laziness.[40]

To be poor is to be miserable, lonely and oppressed (Pr. 22:7). It is not astonishing that there were some poor ones in Israel who began to drink strong drink in order to forget their poverty and in order to remember no more their pain (Pr. 31:7). A fact of reality is pointed out repeatedly that the rich will always have friends while a poor man has few, if any (Pr. 14:20; 19:4; 19:7). But compared to the wealthy evil man, a righteous poor man's lot is preferable (Pr. 16:19; 19:1; 19:22) and compared to a foolish rich man, an intelligent poor man is better off (Pr. 28:11).

Generosity toward the poor was explicitly described as righteousness (Pr. 11:23-24; 21:26; 29:7). It is good to help the poor and weak

[40] Pr. 6:6-11; 10:4; 14:23; 19:15; 20:13; 24:33, 34. See Robert Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature,: *HUCA*, XVIII (1943-44), 77-118: theorizes that the favorable appraisal of wealthy and depreciation of the poverty stricken indicates that the Wisdom writings are products of the upper class. Other factors support his contention: He cites the use of appellative divine names which are characteristic of the upper class outlook as influenced by foreign encounters; the wisdom literature is cosmopolitan in outlook; those youth who attended the wisdom schools would probably have been sons of the upper classes; satisfaction with the status quo characteristic of the upper classes is evident in the wisdom literature and happiness was measured in terms of economic success (Pr. 13:18; 10:15). There are passages which refute Gordis' theory which he combats by ascribing them to later plebian interpolations.

through kindness (Pr. 14:31; 17:5), loans (Pr. 19:17), and liberality (Pr. 11:25; 21:26). God would help those who helped the poor by giving aid in time of need (Pr. 11:8; 21:13), prosperity (Pr. 11:24-25; 14:21; 22:9, 16), and deliverance from death (Pr. 10:2; 11:4).

In the prophetic literature, the poor, needy, afflicted, and oppressed were identified as the righteous as compared with their oppressors. In the book of Proverbs, however, the aristocracy were to become righteous, not by becoming poor, but by giving to the poor. The pragmatic approach preferred an avoidance of extreme wealth or poverty (Pr. 30:8-9). Those, however, who were wealthy were responsible for equalizing the economic situation. It seems that the righteous or wicked behavior of the wealthy or established is of much more importance than the rights of the poor and needy. This is true even though both rich and poor share a common humanity (Pr. 22:2; 29:13).

Job. — The book of Job is a sixth century B.C. work. It represents a very different kind of Wisdom Literature from the rest. The central issue is the doctrine of rewards or retribution. The book re-evaluates the whole traditional view that the rich are rich because they are righteous and benevolent. Job basically accepts the principle that the righteous are to be rewarded and the wicked punished but asserts that God does not maintain control of the world. He had been pious and adhered to traditional views. He knew that wealth was considered a danger (Job 27:13ff.), and should be distributed with generosity because all are creatures of God (Job 31:15ff.). Those who were deprived should receive kindness (Job 29:12ff). As a sign of benevolence, one's prosperity should continue (Job 42:10ff.). Thus, when the pious Job finds himself in utter poverty and in great misery, he protests. The old view: as one's piety, so one's prosperity, seems to be false.

It is clear that Job represented the thinking of many thoughtful people in post-exilic Jewry. The exile had shaken some Jew's faith in the properity theory of piety. As the people of the exile, Job feels that he has lived a morally upright life and has violated no commandments. In contrast to him, it seems the wicked prosper. Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elijhu, continue to project the pious view of poverty. They assert that his troubles came as a result of his sins (Job 22:10-11) and maintain that the prosperity of the wicked is temporary. The Theophany climaxes the book (Job 38:1-42:6) whereby Yahweh addresses Job out of nature not history: He has created and now upholds the world. Yahweh does not reveal his divine will but merely makes known that his ways are mysterious to man and is hidden in the vastness and complexities of nature. Job must accept his finitude before Yahweh's power and glory and say "amen" to the divine rule of the world. Aid to the poor is still to be maintained as a sign of the righteous man.

THE PSALMS AND THE POOR

In the law codes and the prophets, the poor ones in Israel were viewed as defenseless and in need of the protection of Yahweh. They needed protection whether they were reduced to dependence on the charity of more fortunate ones or whether they were able to work so as to earn just enough for their daily bread. Because the lot of the poor ones was hard, and ruthless men tried to take advantage of them, there arose the belief that somebody must intercede on their behalf. Thus, in the Psalms particularly, we detect a basic theme whereby the King and Yahweh are defenders of the poor. Let us briefly look at this tradition.

The tradition that Yahweh was the defender of the poor probably derived from the transference of royal responsibility toward the poor. The king was considered as a man whose responsibility to Israel was the execution of righteousness (Ps. 18:20, 24; 72:1-2, 7; 89:14, 16), which involved protection of the rights of the defenseless and consequentially guaranteed them justice. The ancient Near Eastern societies had already, prior to establishment of Israel's monarchy, propagated the concept of royal responsibility toward her weak and poor ones.[41] Israel could well have been influenced by her neighbors.

Yahweh is described as a refuge for the oppressed (Ps. 9:9; 12:5; 14:66); a defender of the poor and unfortunate (Ps. 82:1-4; 109:31; 140:12); a deliverer of the afflicted (Ps. 25:16-17; 34:6; 35:10; 70:5; 40:17; 107:41; 109:21-22); and a provider for the needy (Ps. 68:10; 145:13-16; 147:3). He was sensitive to the plight of the poor (Ps. 9:12; 69:33; 146:8-9) and vindicated them (Ps. 113:7-8). He helps the poor not because they are righteous or in any such sense deserving of his help. It is their cause, not they themselves, that is just and right.[42]

On the other hand, in the Psalms there is reflected not only the worship of the economically deprived but also the politically oppressed and religiously faithful. Yahweh is pictured as being concerned for the righteous (Ps. 14:5-6; 34:15-22; 37:12, 14; 69:28ff.; 140:12-13; 146:7-8), and the faithful saints (Ps. 12:15; 18:25-27; 34:9; 132: 15-16; 149:405). Yahweh was concerned for the righteous because it was they rather than the wicked who feared him (Ps. 22:23, 25; 34:7, 9), sought him (Ps. 9:10; 22:26; 34:10; 40:16; 69:32; 70:4), knew and loved his name (Ps. 9:10; 69:36), and his salvation (Ps. 9:10; 69:36). In a real sense the poor in the Psalms are righteous, probably because they avoid the temptation of pride, and their opposites are the ungodly oppressors. The oppressors in the Psalms are not termed the rich but the wicked. There is little doubt, however, that the characterization of the wicked as proud, greedy, prosperous, presumptuous, and

[41] See F. Charles Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* XXI (1962), 129-139.
[42] Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien,* I (Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1961), pp. 116-118.

oppressive (Ps. 10:3-11; 37:14-15; 94:1-7; 109:16-19) reveals that they were the wealthy and powerful. There probably were hostilities between the faithful Jews on the one hand, and the rich Gentiles and Jewish apostates on the other.

In the Psalms, it seems that religious loyalty in spite of political oppression from foreigners and from ones own countrymen, in combination with economic deprivation contributed to the equation of piety and poverty. The origin of the equation of poor and pious is uncertain. Some have argued for a pre-exilic date,[43] an exilic date,[44] and a post exilic origin.[45] The extent of the equation has also been a source of contention.[46] Even though the origin and extent is debatable, no one has disagreed with the fact of such equation.

CONCLUSION

In light of our discussion on the poor tradition of the Old Testament, what can we say about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his use of the same? We could say many things, but will limit our observation to one main point: the political character of King's exegesis.

King never used exegesis as an end in itself. He tried to employ a kind of socio-political exegesis whereby he was addressed by the text and thereby addressed the text to the oppressed and oppressive communities. He obviously was not interested in scholarly treatment of text variants, in the form, place, expression, scope of texts or differences in world views. He further realized that the Old Testament is a diversified collection of writings reflecting many different outlooks, situations, and contexts, in spite of all that can be said for its underlying unity. For historical, linguistic, textual and other reasons the Old Testament meaning is sometimes far from clear. To understand, to explain or even to explain away contradictions and obscurities, and above all, to make the Scriptures as a whole speak to a new generation, King cut across technicalities and picked up a unifying theme: God's concern for a poor/oppressed people. This theme was intended to speak directly to a noppressed and oppressive community.

[43] A Causse, *Les Pauvres d' Israel* (Paris: Librairie Istra, 1922), p. 83; Albert Gelin, *The Poor of Yahweh*, p. 29; and Van der Ploeg, "Les Pauvres d' Israel et leur Piete'," 268, affirmed a pre-exilic origin.

[44] Isodore Loeb, *La litterature des pauvres dans la Bible*, II (Paris: Cerf, 1892), p. 146.

[45] A. Rahlfs, *Ani and Anaw in den Psalmen* (Gottingen: Dieteriche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1892); W. W. Baudissin, *Die Altestamentliche Religion und die Armen* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912) pp. 209ff. Baudissin also credits Second Isaiah with being the first to equate Israel with the poor and needy (p. 211).

[46] Scholars arguing for a religious colouring of *anaw* as opposed to a non-religious coloration include Alfred Rahlfs, *Ani and Anaw in den Psalmen*, p. 54 who makes it clear that one can only be *ani* in relationship to men, but not *anaw*. *Anaw* can only be one's attitude in relation to God. "The anawin are the slaves of Yahweh" (p. 78). Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien VI: Die Psalmendichter* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybrvad, 1924), pp. 58-65 sees no distinction between the two. He argues that since the basic meaning of ani, "bent down" can have a passive meaning of oppressed, miserable, or a reflexive meaning it could also have the religious nuance of being bent before God as a servant who acts according to his divine will. This nuance is not a later development but belongs originally to the concept of the word. See also Van Leeuwen, *Le developpment* ... who argues that although the poor became synonymous with the righteous at an early date, *ani* is not deprived of its essential social connotation.

King came to Black people and brought a message of hope to the poor and oppressed in the language they knew so well. There was hardly a black man or woman who was not familiar with the language of the biblical narrative, and so when he drew on the story of Moses and the Exodus all black folk knew precisely what he was talking about. They were familiar with the account of how God had delivered his people out of their bondage. Moreover, there was a close parallel to the living conditions of the two peoples, separated by such great distances in time. Both peoples were being held in bondage in a strange land; both peoples were treated harshly by their masters; both peoples were accused by their masters of being poor because of their laziness; both peoples felt a close affinity with Yahweh as their defender and protector, and both saw a relationship between poverty and piety. In fact, the whole Biblical drama could be told in terms of the relationship between God and a poor, oppressed people.

The exegetical approach adopted at any particular period will be closely connected on the one hand to the estimation held of the Scriptures as a whole and on the other hand to the entire social context. King saw both the Old and New Testaments as providing archetypical experiences which were conducive to the "spirit of the age." Thus his method was to retell the story which would force the oppressors to again hear the sound of freedom and cause the oppressed to experience hope and motivation for the pursuance of freedom. In effect, this was political exegesis which helped to propagate a crystalization of, what we today call, Black Theology. Even though we are not legitimately to use the Bible to verify our own pet ideas, we must at the same time assert that there is no such thing as presuppositionless exegesis. It yet remains to be seen how this method will work in Biblical exegesis, but James Cone's[47] and Von Rad's[48] approach in their theological program may offer cures for the future. One thing is sure, Martin Luther King, Jr. has helped us understand that God identifies with and empowers the powerless and that the Bible is relevant to political theory and practice.

[47] See James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1969); *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), and *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

[48] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol. I and II trans. by D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1962-65).