

## Towards A Church In Solidarity With The Poor

Poverty attracts attendant afflictions which progressively dehumanize. To be rich is not the greatest good to befall a person. To be poor may sometimes be the greatest evil!

1. At the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Nairobi, November 20-December 10, 1975), as reported from the Hearing on the Programme Unit "Justice and Service", part II on Development and Justice, it was stated: "The development process should be understood as a liberating process aimed at justice, self-reliance and economic growth. It is essentially a people's struggle in which the poor and the oppressed are and should be the active agents and immediate beneficiaries. Seen in this perspective the role of the churches and the WCC is to support the struggle of the poor and the oppressed towards justice and self-reliance". This resulted in the following decision by the CCPD Commission immediately after the Nairobi Assembly: the main focus of ecumenical development work should be "to assist churches and their constituency to manifest in their theological outlook, styles of life and organizational structures, their solidarity with the struggle of the poor and the oppressed".
2. Such a decision implies first that the churches should be in closer relation with the poor sectors of society. Although there are situations in which the poor are present in the churches, frequently the poor do not feel that ecclesiastical institutions are representative of them or their situation. Many churches

---

\*OFFICIAL CCPD DOCUMENT ON THE CHURCH AND THE POOR TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES FOR ITS CONSIDERATION. PUBLISHED BY JITC AT THE REQUEST OF JETHER PEREIRA RAMALHO, CHURCH AND THE POOR PROJECT, WCC.

and Christian groups are now becoming aware of the broken relationships between the Church and the poor during the last centuries. Their attempts to overcome this separation have been instructive. They are learning through involvement that it is not enough to be a "Church for the poor", but that they are called by the Spirit of God to be a "Church with the poor."

3. CCPD next initiated an action/reflection process with its partner groups. This process has shown how central the concern to become a Church in Solidarity with the poor is for churches trying to participate in the work for justice and development and hence struggling against the root causes of poverty. As a first step in this action/reflection process, studies were made of the relation between the churches and the poor in different periods of church history. As a result of these studies, two volumes were published: Good News to the Poor (presenting how Christian communities answered to the challenge of the poor during the first five centuries of Christian history and the late Middle Age) and Separation Without Hope? (focusing on the relation between Churches and the poor sectors of different societies during Western colonial expansion and the Industrial Revolution). These two books were published in preparation for a meeting held in Ayia Napa, Cyprus (September 1978), where participants from different parts of the world, representing different CCPD partner groups, engaged in ecumenical reflection about the present relation between the churches and the poor. Their work will be presented in a third volume in this series entitled Towards a Church of the Poor (to be published in August/ September).
4. Based on this work, combining action with reflection, including research of churches' actual involvement, we now submit to the WCC Central Committee this document. It attempts to bring into focus first, the situation of the poor in Church and society and the mechanisms which create and perpetuate poverty; second, the struggles of the poor and their goals; third, the response of the churches to the challenge manifested in the plight of the poor; and finally, some proposals in order that future participation of the churches in development should be shaped through sharing the struggles of the poor. What follows is based on the renewal and dynamism experienced by churches in many parts of the world through their attitude of solidarity with the poor. This document is formulated on the basis of their experiences.

## I. THE PLIGHT OF THE POOR

5. It is not the same to be poor in India and in Europe, in Brazil and the United States of America, in Ethiopia and Canada, in the Caribbean and Australia. That is, poverty is not the same in all countries of the earth; there are poor who live in developed countries who can be considered much better off than the poor living in the developing world. Nevertheless, it can be stated that to be poor is, not to be able to satisfy basic human needs: food, housing, health, education, job and social participation. In this sense, as it is very often pointed out in the Bible, to be poor is the same as to be oppressed.
6. Poverty is not only a phenomenon of the contemporary situation. The scandalous dimensions of poverty, however, increase as sectors of the world community become more affluent. It must be noted that, despite the world's economic growth in the last thirty years (including the developing countries), only limited benefits have reached the poor. In many situations the poor now share a decreasing share of the results of economic growth. Quantitatively speaking, the number of poor people is growing in most countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Nor has poverty been fully eradicated in most affluent countries. Statistical data do not often bring to mind the human dimension of the suffering of millions living at the very margin of existence-with inadequate food, shelter, education and health care. In developing countries especially the masses are increasingly deprived of the material means to meet the basic needs of human existence.
7. This situation is a scandal made especially poignant because of the availability of so many scientific and technical resources to combat it. The scandal becomes even greater, for poverty is increasing at the same time that an affluent minority enjoys great comfort and abundant luxuries as a result of the concentration of wealth since the industrial revolution. This imbalance between the rich and poor indicates an injustice that must be overcome. The widening gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" must be corrected at both the domestic and international levels of our societies.
8. World resources and economic growth appear to be controlled by a combination of social, economic, political and cultural mechanisms which are in turn manipulated by a few powerful sectors of society for their own profit. The result of this process is impoverishment for millions of people. It was love of eco-

conomic gain and profit that drove powerful nations armed with technology to subdue militarily other nations and people rich in resources and culture. Although that period is over, a similar process is in operation today; the lust for economic gain continues to find expression through economic and political powers which oppress the weak. The accumulation of wealth is structured into the capitalist system, while the agents and structures most evident in its global functioning include the transnational corporations and neo-colonialism. The neo-colonial structures and transnational corporations claim to help resolve the problems of poor peoples, but they appear to exploit the resources of the earth, use cheap labour without resolving the problem of unemployment, and impoverish the natural environment while they ignore the need for equitable distribution of profits among all social sectors.

9. Unavoidable results are increasing hunger, lack of health care and growth of diseases, perpetuation of illiteracy among the masses, overcrowded slums on the periphery of cities. Migration from rural areas to such slums is a typical problem, unfortunately not a recent one. People pressured to leave their places of origin, usually with few possessions, seek a better life in urban environments. Their misery is visible in rapidly growing slums in both affluent and poor countries. These are only examples of the deterioration of the quality of life of the poor, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the world population. The poor's suffering is a consequence of structural violence, which often provokes them in turn to react violently. The plight of the poor is a manifestation of how God's will is being denied. As it is known, God has made human beings in his image, highlighting the centrality of human life in creation. When the poor are living in conditions as have been described, it is evident that God's designs are not being followed.
10. This situation demands immediate attention, imaginative decisions, urgent action and radical solutions. The scandalous plight of the poor needs more than responses to the consequences of such problems. We must realize that it is not enough to describe the situation: if changes are to happen, then the difficulties must be attacked at their origin.
11. Prevailing mechanisms which create and consolidate poverty emerged as part of the modern historical process. Most were developed in the last four or five centuries, especially during the period of Western colonial expansion, and above all during

the Industrial Revolution. This process of domination operated by progressively imposing a particular structure on all human beings and relationships everywhere. Within this socio-economic structure a new relationship developed between people and between humanity and nature, aiming at the appropriation of economic surplus and wealth by those who handled and controlled power, to the detriment of the powerless, the poor. This kind of structure aims at private accumulation of wealth and goods.

12. This structure, at the beginning arose in the name of freedom. This freedom was not of all human beings, however, but of trade and commerce. This is a form of freedom which today, perhaps more than ever before, continues to determine patterns of domination. Freedom of prices, freedom of trade, freedom of enterprises. It is as if human liberty had come to be seen in terms of this freedom of the market. The more this free market progressed, the more market laws came to be spoken of as the norms of liberty. The reign of liberty became the reign of the free market and the mechanisms which regulate the market became superior imperatives.
13. A whole system of market laws developed. When all are subjected to these structures then equality and equity are lost. Some profit from the system, others pay for it. This differentiation is related to the evolution of asymmetric relations of domination and dependence. In the development of the process, oppression became ever more anonymous and impersonal: no personal relationships of domination were established between those in power and those who submitted to them.
14. The mechanisms through which the market is controlled were promoted by those who received the greatest benefit from the free operation of merchant relations; the laws of the market enabled them therefore to perpetuate their operation. Those who did not possess capital resources necessary for participation in the market mechanism became dependent on the dominators. Dependence then became and continues to be a structural phenomenon. It developed within an international structure which enabled particular people, mostly white, of certain social classes and from given regions of the world where accumulation was taking place, to emerge as the dominant groups, while people of other races, classes and regions became dominated.
15. During recent decades an important change took place in these

structures of domination. Freedom of capital became related to ownership of technology, making possible the emergence of contemporary transnational capital. The economic growth of the dependent countries can now be controlled by a transfer of technology through which the sending countries create dependence on transnational capital. Technological transfer does not operate in response to the demands created by people's expectations but tries to obtain maximum possible profits. Transnational capital is now pursuing profit on an international scale. Dependent nations (most of them with a mainly poor population), on the other hand, are competing with one another to attract foreign capital. To do so, they must create situations which will attract it: low wages, large-scale unemployment, strong governments capable of suppressing any attempt on the part of poor people to assert their economic and social claims. However, resulting processes of modernization imply for people, that their culture is being violated as well as other people's rights. The effects of modernization do not always mean that poverty is eradicated. As a matter of fact, for many poor modernization has meant a deepening of their conditions of oppression and dependence.

16. The priorities in determining areas of economic growth are set by the economically powerful; goods necessary to satisfy the basic needs of the poorest sectors of the population are not of a high profit potential and receive little emphasis. The poor's participation in the economy is limited to the purchase of a few subsistence items. As this process advances the gap between high and low income groups widens, unless mechanisms of redistribution of income are devised for the benefit of the poor. Alongside this rapid increase in the disparity in incomes, a still more harmful phenomenon has developed. Given the technological advance of the already industrialized countries, the establishment of new industries in poor countries competitive with established industries in technologically advanced countries, is very difficult. If it happens, it is to a large extent under the control of transnational capital; and indication of this is that management is progressively transnationalized. Generally, transnational corporations invest in capital-intensive technology, with the result that the industrialization process does not help resolve the unemployment problem.
17. A consequence of this situation is the increasing marginalization of the poor. Social, economic, political and cultural mechanisms of domination generate situations where the poor are

victims of institutional injustice, at both international and domestic levels of society. That is, economic growth exists, but its product is unevenly distributed. Satisfaction of the basic needs of the poor is postponed as a low priority. This marginalization excludes people from processes of decision-making affecting their own lives. In the same way that the underdevelopment of the many helps the development of the few, it is possible to say that the poor subsidize the rich, and that their marginalization prevents them from threatening or challenging the position of the privileged and powerful.

18. This is clearly demonstrated by the increase in authoritarian regimes in countries where the poor form the majority of the population. In most cases (there are exceptions) repressive governments try to control the poor who wish to change their conditions of life. Repression is used to hinder the poor from acting against forces which victimize them. It is in this context that one must analyze the reformulation in some countries, both affluent and poor, of the doctrine of national security, oriented towards the security of a given socio-economic-political system and not towards the people's security (including the security of the poor, which should comprise the possibility of enjoying a decent human life). A system of oppression which uses the poor, which needs the poverty of many in order to survive, is being developed on the basis of authoritarian state structures. The result is frequently the militarization of society. The poor, then, are subjected to the control of those in power, and are manipulated by interests which profit from social differentiation and economic inequity.
19. The Church of Jesus Christ is a sign of the new humanity that God will create through redemption and spiritual renewal. In this sense, there is an element of transcendence in the reality of the Church. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that the marginalization of the poor is often manifested in the life of ecclesiastical institutions. Though it is true that the churches have been historically a place where the poor felt at home, it is also possible to say that many ecclesiastical structures reflect or tend to reproduce the structures of the societies to which they belong, including social differentiations and, in some cases, marginalization of oppressed groups. Some of these structures were transplanted from colonial centres and imposed on subject peoples. Parts of these structures still reflect hierarchical and authoritarian patterns. Others are mainly open to groups who enjoy social prestige; they mirror a petit bourgeois

world view, with values and ethical standards of the middle strata of society. Most governing structures of ecclesiastical institutions do not really allow the active participation and meaningful presence of the poor who seek to give concrete form to their religious perspectives.

The scandal of poverty in today's world is therefore a challenge to the churches at all levels of church life. It calls on the churches to respond with concrete decisions. The churches must clearly express repentance of the way that they have accepted the plight of the poor, even within themselves. They have to make concrete commitment to the poor, which implies involvement in the struggles of the poor for a just, participatory and sustainable society. In so doing, the churches will take positively into consideration the values and traditions of popular sectors of society and be open to manifestations of popular religiosity. The contribution of people's piety to the development of Christian institutions, an element of the churches' history, can once again become a creative factor. In this way the churches can be a sign of what it means to give priority to the poor. This emphasis on the poorest sectors of society is often lacking in the development programmes and other socio-economic strategies geared to economic growth, no matter the social cost.

20. The community of believers in Jesus Christ experience that as the people of God they are a pilgrim people. They are a people on the move. They have to be. That movement has meaning, an orientation: It is towards love among human beings and justice in the world as signs of a transcendent reality already present in history, the Kingdom of God. The poor are blessed because the Kingdom of God is theirs. But as the people of God are moving, even hesitatingly, against injustice, the cry of the poor and the destitute of our world is rising to a crescendo that sounds frightening to the ears of the rich and the powerful. The churches are challenged by the poor's claim, they are called to respond to it. The way to do so is not according to prevailing socio-economic and political patterns, but by trying to be a sign of the new humanity which God is creating through Jesus Christ, where "there is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female" (Gal. 2:28). This presupposes giving highest priority to the poor, to their hopes and their struggles to overcome injustice and eradicate poverty.



## II. THE STRUGGLE OF THE POOR

21. The poor at different times have been a decisive factor for historical change: their pains, their sacrifices, their readiness to pay the cost for justice and human freedom, have made possible many of the social advances which some people presently enjoy. The Bible records this historical force of the poor and oppressed, e.g. the liberation of Israel from pharaonic power in Egypt, or the liberation from the Babylonian captivity. It is as if the historical force of the poor were related to the right hand of God doing justice in the midst of history. That is, it seems necessary to be open to how the poor and the oppressed struggle for justice and liberation, and how they bring about change for a better society.
22. How is the struggle of the poor against poverty and oppression manifested? Sometimes it is quiet, silent, but continuous and persistent. Sometimes it is violent and full of anger. Other times it develops in non-violent ways. Sometimes it is an attempt to win space from whence the poor can move ahead more forcefully. But other times it is a struggle only not to lose what has been won earlier. Sometimes it grows as a spontaneous struggle, while other times it is highly organized. In short, the struggles of the poor are expressions of the polyvalent character of history: they manifest the pluriformity of people's struggles for more justice, freedom and participation.
23. From among its various forms, at least three aspects must be taken into consideration. The first aspect to be taken into consideration is awareness-building among the poor. They must identify the real causes of the deprivation they suffer, and be aware of their potential to create conditions of change for justice. The change brought about does not usually satisfy fully the poor's expectations; nevertheless through steps big or small they progress on their way to eradicate poverty. For this purpose, however, it is necessary for them to become aware of who they are, what they want, how they can get it (if not totally, at least partially), when they have to move, where to do so, and on whom they can count. These questions are being answered by the poor as they become free of the cultural captivity imposed on them by the dominators. It is mainly through action that the oppressed discover their potential for struggle for justice and liberation. The poor must become protagonists of the struggle against poverty; otherwise there is no real possibility of changing their situation.

24. In most human societies, attempts have been made, and are still being made (by individuals and groups: governments, churches, benevolent institutions, etc.) to ease or eliminate poverty. Only too often such attempts have failed simply because efforts were focused on working "for" rather than "with" the poor, and generally without attacking the oppressive forces that generate impoverishment. If liberation and justice among human beings are to be achieved, it will necessarily be the result of the struggle of the poor. If their struggle is to be efficacious, awareness is a must. But awareness is also necessary for those who want to express solidarity with the cause of the poor: they must learn what the poor are seeking and how they want to attain it, in order for their solidarity to be in line with the aspirations of the poor and not-as is often the case-a new burden imposed on the oppressed.
25. In awareness building, processes of popular education play a key role. The values, traditions and views of the poor are highlighted rather than the perspective of the oppressors affirmed. The poor must often rediscover the worth of their values and traditions and confirm them through action. The importance of elements related to people's traditional beliefs and convictions must not be neglected in processes of awareness building. They express great potentialities in the struggle for the goals that the poor are pursuing.
26. The second is resistance to injustice, oppression and marginalization. There are situations in which people can no longer tolerate the conditions of their existence. Some then move openly against the causes of inequality and lack of freedom. In so doing, they may become an example for others, who share the same conditions of life, to act in a similar way. Often, those who countervail the forces of oppression have to pay for their actions with their lives. Others, perhaps acting more cautiously, resist in order to survive. The action of the latter does not have the same intensity as that of the former. Through action of these kinds, however, people's resistance becomes one of the major factors in curbing the action of oppressive powers. It must be noted that resistance among poor people, for example by American Indians (both North and South) or by Australian Aborigenes, has been going on for a long time. However, they do not give up. The poor's persistence in resisting intolerance brought on by dominating forces is the seed from which higher forms of the struggle can develop. It is an equal relationship of forces: the dominators are strong, the poor are

weak. The hidden force of the poor derives from their aspiration for justice and liberation.

27. The third aspect which must be taken into account is the need for organization. The struggle of the poor often emerges spontaneously, as a reaction against unbearable conditions of life, and must be understood as a positive element in human history, despite its lack of clear definition and its ambivalence. Much more positive and effective is the organized struggle of the poor, which indicates an awareness of their social force. Organization is the link between goals and action, between theory and practice. It is the dynamic element which keeps the relation between what people want to achieve and how, when, where to progress towards such goals.
28. Two elements must be borne in mind about organization. On the one hand, there is a need to develop organization for liberation and justice on the basis of the poor's awareness. This requires the ability to plan, the readiness to act, and a permanent critical analysis of actions to evaluate whether the different strategies undertaken are leading the poor forward in their struggle. If not, why not? What has been correct, what is not appropriate? It is clear that organization of this type of action involves methods of passive and active involvement. On the other hand, there is also need for organization for liberation and participation, which involves a process of liberating the oppressed so that they can participate in all aspects of the emerging society. Sometimes new participatory structures come into being in a short period; other times, this transformation is a lengthy process, in which the former oppressor still holds some power. Organization for liberation and participation at this stage requires great flexibility to use all available resources in order to keep the struggle of the poor moving. If organization breaks down, then what had been won can easily be lost. It must be noted that this element of the organization of the poor becomes stronger when it is manifested through institutions through which the poor can exercise their strength, rather than through non-institutionalized movements.
29. As expressed above, the organization of the poor must be related to the aims of their struggles. Obviously, this paper cannot consider all expressions of the struggle against poverty and oppression. It is possible, however, to indicate four goals which, in one way or another are being pursued by the poor through their actions.

30. In the first place, the poor, once aware of their situation, react strongly against those powers who impose on them trade mechanisms through which those powers can appropriate for themselves the surplus resulting from the process of social and economic production. As long as the "freedom of the market" means the freedom of those powers, a strong minority will always have the lion's share to the detriment of the poor and the weak. At the international level, injustice existing in prevailing market mechanisms is manifested in the deterioration of terms of trade, almost always against the interest of raw material producers (in recent years, oil-and coffee to some extent-have been exceptions). At the national level, consumers generally have no defence when the powers handling "free market" mechanisms are not under some kind of control. Then, one of the main goals of the struggle of the poor is to transform mechanisms which allow the control of the market by those powers with the force and the ability to operate freely to the detriment of the weak. This implies, on the one hand, the need to rationalize consumption, giving to all the possibility to satisfy their basic needs. This rationalization requires adequate planning and control of consumption, exercised with people's participation. On the other hand, and on a much deeper level, it also requires that people's participation be exercised at the levels of planning and production through some kind of socialization (not following a model which pretends to be "universal," but rather aiming to give to people the opportunity, to which they have the right, to decide on the shape of economic institutions, the social property of the means of production, distributive structures, etc.).
31. In the second place, another goal of the struggle of the poor is self-reliance, without which economic viability is impossible for a poor country or community. Without self-reliance, poor people are caught in the vicious circle of poverty and dependency. The poor are now realizing that this vicious circle cannot be broken merely by receiving aid; it depends on structural changes. This means leaving aside plans for national economic expansion that follow prevailing strategies for increasing the gross national product. Economic, social and cultural activities must be initiated which first of all satisfy the needs of the poorest sectors of society. In this sense, self-reliance is a philosophy of the poor with and among nations. The struggle for self-reliance implies that it has to be achieved at different levels: national independence, appropriate technology and self-

sustained growth. Self-reliance seeks to ensure that the person's producing pattern is related to his or her consumption pattern, and thus presupposes a drastic change in consumer attitudes prevailing in rich societies or among wealthy social sectors. The process of self-reliance rejects the extension of consumerism to poor communities and countries. The aim is to relate the place of material growth to actual human needs and avoid the irresponsible rape of resources and the environment.

32. In the third place, another goal of the poor's struggle is to change structures which create social differentiation. That is, social justice appears as a permanent revindication of the poor everywhere in the world. This presupposes, on the one hand, that collective values become much more important than individualistic ones; collective values must orient planning of production and distribution of income, and guide the formulation of social and cultural policies. On the other hand, social justice demands the creation of appropriate institutions oriented to the welfare and security of all, giving priority to the underprivileged. Only when this equalitarian and collective emphasis is accepted at the level of domestic policies will it be possible to promote international equality and justice (as, for example, is the aim of the proposal for a New International Economic Order made by the U.N. General Assembly some years ago). Social justice is present in the struggles for racial justice which involve Blacks in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe; American Indians in the U.S.A., Canada, Brazil, Bolivia, Guatemala; Aborigenes in Australia; etc. Social justice is also part of the women's struggle-perhaps the most oppressed among the poor-for the acknowledgement of their rights. Without social justice it is impossible to overcome oppression and to eradicate poverty.
33. In the fourth place, the poor are struggling for full participation in decision-making processes. They refuse to be considered as objects of "poverty policies" which were and still are elaborated without their involvement. They realize, however, that participation of this kind presupposes that all human beings who are able to work must have access to jobs. Unemployment creates dependency and marginalization which drastically reduce possibilities for participation. But employment does not only help satisfy basic human needs; it creates conditions for the poor to join forces with fellow workers in a common effort to create space where their participation in decision-making at the community level, in the trade union, or even in the corpo-

ration, becomes possible. It is no coincidence that the most participatory social structures, and the highest degree of popular participation, exist in countries where unemployment has practically disappeared.

34. The struggles of the poor are moving ahead following guidelines which appear in almost all situations. One is the search and rediscovery of people's values which better express the hopes and aspirations of the unprivileged. These are not the values of the market, but mainly those which express solidarity and mutual support among people. They are values which in one way or another try to help build a society where irrational appetites of domination and situations of human fear would no longer exist. That is, through the struggles of the poor there is a search for values for a truly human society, where fellowship among people can genuinely be practised.
35. Another guideline orienting these struggles is the search for a new social order where oppression does not exist. Poverty is basically created by situations of oppression, new institutions must emerge, institutions that express the experiences of the poor communities in their pilgrimage towards better societies. These institutions must necessarily replace those now existing, even as the accumulation of power and influence leading to social differentiation and injustice must be replaced by greater equality and justice.
36. There is also the search for new systems, in which human being will know existentially, and experience at the level of socio-economic structures, what liberation means. This cannot be considered utopian. Rather, any suggestion that the existing world order is the highest achievement to which humanity can aspire would be considered "utopian" by the poor, for they have "no place" in such a world.
37. The struggles of the poor aim at human liberation, especially at the social, political and economic levels of life. However, full liberation, as witnessed in the Bible, has a more comprehensive character, because it also involves spiritual freedom. It is this specific element that churches can provide to the struggles of the poor, in solidarity with them, when churches are called to participate in the search for JPSS.

### III. RESPONSES OF THE CHURCHES TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE POOR

#### Sign of Hope

38. Throughout the history of the people of God there have always been men and women of faith who have participated in the struggles of the poor, sharing their hopes, deeply committed to the cause of the oppressed. That was the case of Moses, of the prophets of the Old Testament, but also of the earliest Christian believers and those who have lived their faith in solidarity with the poor up to the present day in the Christian churches. They did so because they were poor themselves, or because they made an option for the poor, or because they believed that God's justice gives priority to the poor (cf. Ps. 72; Jer. 22:13-17; Is. 61; Luke 4:17-21; 6:20; etc.). Through this commitment they expressed their obedience to the living God.
39. For all humankind, the very existence of the Church of Jesus Christ is the most clear sign that things as they are will not remain forever. In the face of prevailing social differentiations stands the biblical affirmation that in Jesus Christ "there is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female" (Gal. 3:28). In the Church of Jesus Christ, the poor are lifted up because God in Christ made himself poor in order to make us all rich (II Cor. 8:9).
40. Churches' history, however, can also be written by accentuating how ecclesiastical institutions relate to the principalities and powers of this world rather than to the whole people of God. When ecclesiastical bodies accepted an alliance with the powerful, the poor were no longer considered as the "heirs of the Kingdom". Curiously, poverty was then exalted as an ideal, as a rule for life. But forgotten were the poor in the Bible who were dependent, the needy, whose life was limited and who therefore looked to God to change their condition and bring justice. Poverty as a rule for life can lead to forgetfulness of the evil perpetrated against the weak, of injustice and unrighteousness in human relation, at both personal and social levels. However, poverty stands for the human self-analysis before God, and leads to solidarity with fellow human being to accept a situation of poverty in order to be of better service to others. Unfortunately, when the poor were given low priority in the life of the churches, despite the idealization of poverty, ecclesiastical institutions frequently became part of oppressive systems. In such cases, the Christian community is called to

repentance.

41. Thank God, history can also be written by accentuating Christian communities and personalities who heard the cry of the poor and put the church institutions at the service of the poor. That was the case of the original Christian community in Jerusalem. That was also the spirit in which St. Paul asked the Christians of the first generation to share what they could, balancing their surplus against the need of others (II Cor. 8:13-14). It was also the feeling of many Fathers and Saints of the Church throughout history. Solidarity with the poor has always been an evangelical sign, a witness of God's justice, because of the priority Jesus Christ gave to the poor (cf. Lk 7: 22-23). Churches are once again realizing that it is not possible to be the Church of Jesus Christ if they fail to respond with love and justice to the challenge of the poor. This is an important sign. By becoming the Church of the poor, the differences and separation between churches and the poor, prevalent during the last few centuries of Christian history, can be overcome. That is the case of the Methodist Church in Bolivia. The majority of its members are Indians, synonymous with the poor, and this church is now becoming representative of these poor people: its programmes and priorities correspond to the expectations of the poor and not to the demands of the rich and powerful. It is also the case of churches in the Philippines, which have become advocates of the underprivileged of that country. This is the situation of many Christian communities in South Korea, where they are providing a space where the poor and oppressed can be truly human. In Amsterdam, the churches have become involved in the struggle of some young people for decent housing for the poor, giving a sign of their concern for justice and human beings. In Hungary, until some decades ago considered "a country of beggars", the Churches have been involved in a process of socio-economic changes aiming at the eradication of poverty in the country. In Johannesburg, where terrible situations of socio-economic and a racial injustice prevail, many Christian communities stand for the cause of the poor and oppressed. In Brazil, the renewal of the churches through the spread of basic ecclesial communities that strive toward a "popular church" (especially within the Roman Catholic Church, but also among other Christian denominations) is leading Christian people to be concerned for the weakest among the Brazilian population and to share their expectations and hopes. Of course, signs of hope are not lim-



ited to the cases listed above. There are also other examples today of signs of hope in the churches that begin with exclusive attitudes, conformity to standards of society, leading to a desire for a wider and deeper fellowship, identification with the poor and oppressed, wrestling with questions of hunger, new life styles and, in some cases, sharing the suffering of the poor people.

42. It is clear that these signs of hope are emerging in some places, yet they highlight a process that is spreading and growing in strength. They are signs of how Christians who try to be faithful to Jesus Christ are crossing frontiers that separate people, and are learning again to be the Church of the poor. These Christians live by the grace of God, are ready to share what they have; in breaking bread around the Holy Communion table they symbolically break the chains that oppress poor people. These manifestations of Church renewal are a joyful and hopeful sign: they indicate a new level of life in the ecumenical movement, where the unity of the Church is closely related to the unity of humankind, overcoming domination, oppression and other elements which create unjust social differentiations.

Biblical guidelines for responding to the challenge of the poor

43. For people outside the churches, the Word of God becomes a living and challenging message through the involvement of Christian communities in biblically warranted action. For those within the churches, the rediscovery of the biblical emphasis on the poor as those privileged by God's will is leading Christians to confront the plight of the poor and how it must be tackled. On the one hand, there is a vast number of biblical words related to the problems of the poor or, on the contrary, related to those who live in wealth at the expense of the underprivileged and oppressed. Contemporary Christians familiar with this vocabulary hear a biblical call to express solidarity with the needy. On the other hand, most of the writers of books of the Bible severely judge the contradiction between poverty and its suffering, and material affluence at the cost of suffering. This is the case of the prophets and many writers of Psalms in the Old Testament; in the New Testament this is very clear in the Synoptic Gospels, in the letters of St. Paul, in the letter of James and in those to Timothy. For these writers, such a contradiction is not only social or economic, but also has a theological (spiritual) dimension: the distance between rich and poor shows a rejection to God's will. The contradic-

tion denies God's purpose in his creation of humankind, is against the covenant with his people and against this gift of a new fellowship for human beings, that is, the Church.

44. The Bible does not deal with these situations in abstract terms. The writers of the different books are not so much interested in poverty as in the poor themselves and the oppressive acts of those who have the possibility of lessening the misery of the poor, but refuse to do so. For some biblical writers that refusal is incompatible with the will of God (cf. Lk. 16:1-15; 18:18-27; etc.). God is right. His rightfulness is expressed through the permanent, untiring love which always looks for the salvation of all human beings. When many of these beings, like the poor, are hindered from living like human beings, then it seems obvious that once again human sin is resisting to follow the path indicated by the will of God.
45. The Bible basically approaches the situation of the poor through two main lines. The first is what might be called justice among human beings. The Torah evokes a society in which the wealth of the land of God would be equally distributed among everyone, and if part of the land were accumulated by someone during a certain period of time, the land should again be distributed (Lev. 25). Though it is true that the Year of Jubilee with its land reform was never applied, nevertheless it calls to action for distributive justice.
46. Laws for redistribution, then, were promoted and authority was given to the King of Israel to keep these laws in operation: "that he may judge thy people rightly and deal out justice to the poor and suffering" (Ps. 72:2). The Year of Jubilee and the sabbatical years related to it were attempts to overcome the injustice of poverty by structural and institutional means.
47. When the mechanics of the military, economic and political powers in Israel increasingly operated to widen the gap between rich and poor, and when the kings refused to defend the Torah with its emphasis on the rights of the poor, prophets openly and strongly denounced this defection. They criticized royal authorities and attacked oppressors in the name of God (Amos 4:1; 5:11-12; Isa. 3:14-15; Ezek. 16:49; 18:12-13). For Isaiah, as an example, the king must protect the poor (Isa. 11:4) as a sign of the messianic justice to which he should consecrate himself.
48. The New Testament witnesses Jesus Christ, the King of jus-

tice, has come, and with him his messianic Kingdom. In Jesus the Year of Jubilee becomes real: "he has sent me to announce good news to the poor" is the first public statement of Jesus (Lk. 4: 18). This line of justice is clearly developed in the Gospel of Luke, where the salvation of the rich depends on the decision to follow Jesus to the extent of abandoning all possessions for the benefit of the poor (Lk. 18:18-27; 19:1-10).

49. The second line in the biblical approach to the situation of the poor is solidarity with the household of God. On the one hand, solidarity with the poor within the community of believer, but on the other, solidarity with the widow, the orphan and the dispossessed outside the community of the faithful. The kind of relationship among the people of God must be a token of God's solidarity with human beings. This is why, in the book of Deuteronomy, it is written that in the land "of milk and honey" there will never be "any poor among you" (Deut. 15:4). According to the message of the prophet Ezekiel, the fact that the poor were badly treated and that no one could be found to defend them, was the main cause of God's judgement of the people of Israel when its leaders were sent into exile (Ezek. 22:29-31).
50. In New Testament times, with the birth of the Church, solidarity and fellowship were practised at the spiritual and material levels of the Christian community (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35). The solidarity of Jesus Christ who though rich, became poor,—“yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich” (II Cor. 8:9) was for St. Paul the new theological basis by which the Church was to live through grace. It is important to note that this grace was never spiritualized, but became concrete in the Christian communities of the Early Church in their way of living together: “it is a question of equality” (II Cor. 8:14), of balance and justice.
51. When the congregation broke this solidarity, James did not hesitate to call this a “pouring of contempt”, a blasphemy against “the honoured name by which God has claimed you” (James 2:7).
52. Both biblical lines are grounded on deep convictions of faith. In the Old Testament, God is the God of those in need. He takes the side of those who have no helper. The Temple is the house of God where the poor find protection and justice (Ps. 68). God is their justification and their saviour (Ps. 34: 6). This does not mean that the Bible idealizes the poor; for exam-

ple, the poor are not pious because they are poor. No romanticism is allowed about them. However, because God is on their side they provide a motive for the manifestation of God's justice and love (cf. John 5:1-9; 9:1-7). Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of salvation, being poor himself: he was "gentle and humble-hearted" (Mt. 11:29), key words of the Bible to characterize the poor. Jesus' vicarious poverty (cf. Phil. 2:7; Mt. 25:31-36) creates a new community, not grounded on pride and prosperity, but on grace and love.

53. In the Bible, the entrance of the poor into the Kingdom of God is never a problem. It is the rich who "find it hard to enter" (Mt. 19:23). However, the rich are never locked up in their affluence: they are invited and challenged to liberate themselves from the pseudo-security of their wealth and experience the real security of the love of God which must be manifested in the love of one's neighbour (I John 3:10). The rich, then, are invited to enter the Kingdom and participate in the fellowship of believers, but only on the condition that they do not trust their riches and wealth, but Jesus only and his grace. They too should be liberated from the power of their prosperity making it available for justice and solidarity, that they may accept poverty and follow Jesus unconditionally. So, poverty is attacked as a scandal and at the same time people are asked to share what they have and live by the grace of God himself, trying to be pilgrims on the path of Jesus through history.

#### A theology of the underside of history

54. Many church leader, already concretely identified with the poor, are now asking theological questions from the perspective of the needy and the oppressed. The theological reflection that this approach generates is leading many Christian communities around the world to important discoveries and a new awareness of their faith and its implications.
55. One discovery is that theology, like any ecclesiastical activity or Christian group, is always walking on a knife edge: the risk and danger of ambiguity are unavoidable. In following Jesus there is always the danger of detour, of falling aside from the correct road, of being unfaithful and betraying him. That was the danger confronted by many of the churches to whom New Testament letters were addressed. This detour occurs when ecclesiastical institutions and believers are caught in the web woven by the powers and principalities of this world.

56. Theology has often suffered this kind of captivity in history: there have been and still are situations where theological reflection has fallen victim to prevailing positions and perspectives in dominating centres. When such a thing happens, the community of the faithful is called to liberate theology from its captivity. In our time it is urgent that theological work be liberated from the perspectives of affluence and from centres where abuse of power is widespread. Only then can theology be an expression of solidarity with those to whom God in Jesus Christ has promised his Kingdom.
57. This process of liberation of theology must be aware of the social, economic, political and cultural situations in which the Christian churches find themselves. It must arrive at a clear analysis concerning mechanisms of oppression which create poverty and marginalization in those contexts. Analysis of reality is an important ingredient of theological work since the reality of this world is the scenario of the action of the people of God, and most important, of the Holy Spirit. This analysis needs to be made, however, from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Their positions, their involvement and their revindications must receive serious attention in this approach. This can be done by sharing the efforts and struggles of the poor, and especially by becoming identified with them as much as possible.
58. Theology must always be humble, trying to be aware of its own shortcomings. Then, it is necessary for theological work to abandon privileged positions in the centres of domination, in order to become rooted in the life of the poor. That was the case of the community of Jerusalem, according to the witness of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, initiating a tradition which was followed in early Christian history by many Fathers of the Church, and then continued by Saints such as Saint Basil, St. John Chrysostom, etc. When this happens, theology becomes attentive to the call of God through the poor: through the answer given by theology, in faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the anxiety, grief and hopes of the poor, the victims of domination and injustice again realize that the proclamation of God's message is really "good news to the poor".
59. Theology, then, becomes a helpful instrument instead of a hindrance in the struggle of the poor. The Christian community tries to serve the poor through the understanding of faith, seeking to be faithful to God's will. Again, the risks and dangers

are inevitable; ideological positions of the parties involved on the historical scene must not at any price be absolutized, thereby taking the place that only God has. In the contexts in which the churches work, however, it seems clear that the idolatry of profit and money, as well as the idolatry of materialistic life, should be strongly rejected. They do not help the cause of the poor. Theology, aware of the poor's suffering, no longer adheres to structures, powerful institutions and ideologies, but is rather concerned with people; in its response to people theology gives priority to the weakest, the poorest and most oppressed, following the example of Jesus Christ.

60. The theologian's particular task is to lay bare the relevance and power of Christian symbols in the way toward and in the struggles for liberation. These symbols, too numerous to enumerate here, include the Kingdom of God, justice, love, hope, the Exodus, koinonia, conversion, and corresponding negative terms which the Bible and important traditions in the history of the Church bring to bear on man's historical existence. Theology thus fulfils at least three functions in the context of the struggles of the poor: first, an apologetic function of the hopes and claims of the poor. This role arises within the fellowship of the people of God and militates against social differences and discrimination. It proclaims and practises solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. In this sense, theology is both description and a call to faithfulness. Second, the critical function of unmasking mechanisms of oppression. It is a prophetic task: to question ideological, political, social and economic systems which, contrary to the will of God, destroy innocent people. At the same time, it tries to bring the invisible poor into view, allowing the voiceless to speak, the disinherited to make their positions known. In this sense, theology identifies and denounces the sinful nature of the human condition, issues a call to repentance, and voices an edifying challenge. Third, a correcting function, identifying where liberation is happening without sacralizing or absolutizing historical processes. This understanding frees the churches for involvement as a Church of the poor: involvement is possible as a sign of faithfulness to the divine imperative; involvement is necessary if hope is to be transformed into social reality. The theologian accompanies the Church of the poor, helping it to interpret new situations. The theologian is a pilgrim, wandering through an uncertain history with the people of God, sharing in their celebrations, involved in their commitment to the poor.

61. Theological discourse is thus carried on within the hermeneutical circle. It relates to the whole person as a social being. It rejects partializations and underscores the convergence and intrinsic relationship among faith and faithfulness, righteousness and justice, salvation and liberation. The Christian community becomes the vital space where historical struggles relate to eschatological expectations. It proclaims the inseparable union between theology and ethics, and emphasizes that there is but one history, denying a separate salvation history unrelated to the social context in which persons live. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all of life; through him all things will be made new.
62. Theology affirms solidarity with the downtrodden, assumes their burden as its own, and takes its stance within the Christian witness. It supports the proclamation of good news to the poor. This does not mean that it becomes Manichean. The world is not divided into separate powers of good and evil. The poor are not made good through exploitation. The exploitative rich, however, cannot become good except by turning away from oppression.
63. Socio-economic and political institutions resort to mechanisms of defence. Institutions deny that they prejudice the poor and try to justify their existence through their claims to advance economic growth and increase GNP. They also attempt to align their image with the aspirations of the people. They exploit people's weakness and fears. The churches, when they are with the poor, must attempt to perceive the true social role of dominant institutions and analyse the consequences for the poor. The church of the poor, fortified with a coherent theological self-understanding, will be attacked, as the poor are attacked. Occasionally it will be wrong, but it must always attempt to be faithful. It must be judged, however, as other contingent human activity is judged. Special standards must not be applied to it.
64. The option for the poor does not imply that previous theological doctrines have to be put aside. On the contrary, most will be affirmed. Many will be reinterpreted. They will be placed, however, in a new theological constellation. That is, the option for the poor in theological work must help theology to re-examine its own assumptions. Theology done in the context of the struggles for liberation and justice of the poor may be expected to widen its application, further its intention to be self-corrective, and submit a broader spectrum of traditional Chris-

tian symbols to theological reflection.

Ecclesial Implications

65. We thank God that the churches in many ways are increasingly expressing their solidarity with the poor. We encourage them to reinforce their decision to follow this path. It indicates that churches are repenting of the way they have often behaved towards the poor. As churches, we recognize the need to be humble, trying to correct historical failures and contemporary failings in order not to lose faithfulness to God and his love.
66. Churches cannot only be confident that they are called to be a privileged instrument of the Holy Spirit of God in his work of salvation, they are also called to witness to the Holy Spirit's liberating and redeeming activity in this world. This confidence can be expressed through solidarity with the poor and oppressed.
67. Churches are also called to become aware of their own captivities. This can imply a new readiness to create opportunities for conscientization, challenge and conversion of the rich. At the same time churches are also called to witness the liberating power of the gospel through involvement in struggles against unjust, oppressive and dehumanizing mechanisms and structures which victimize the poor. That is, churches must consider their participation in the efforts and struggles of the poor. It is mainly through these struggles that people's development makes its way, that social justice and freedom for the unprivileged win space in history. Churches are called not to be separated from movements where the Holy Spirit is active.
68. The proclamation of the Gospel to the poor is a sign of the new age inaugurated by Jesus Christ. As witnessed in the Scriptures, the situation of the poor, and what the Holy Spirit can do among them, is a wonderful locus for the manifestation of God's love and power. This implies that evangelization to the poor, with the poor, for and by the poor, must be considered one of the churches' highest priorities.
69. Church liturgies, hymns, music, celebrations can help to express the hopes and fears, the expectations and problems of those who live in need and who long for the manifestation of God's justice.
70. The Bible is a book of hope, concern and solidarity with the poor. Reading the Bible from the perspective of the poor must



be stimulated. Many Christian communities, renewed by the Holy Spirit through their openness to the challenge presented by the poor, point to the Bible as crucial for their self-understanding. Despite conflicts of interpretation that sometimes arise when the scriptures are read from the perspective of the needy and oppressed, only in this way can the Bible become the liberating Word of God for those who are living at the base of human society.

71. Decision-making bodies of ecclesiastical institutions should create adequate possibilities for the organic participation of the poor in the whole life of the Christian community. Thereby churches will avoid presenting an image which often mirrors prevailing unjust structures of the societies to which they belong. This is also applicable to ecumenical bodies.

#### IV. THE WAY AHEAD: PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

The call to become a church of the poor is also a call to be more faithful to Jesus Christ. The challenge is big but grace is abundant. The opportunity to be involved in the work of the Kingdom of God, for whose coming we pray, with those who will inherit it, is something for which we are most thankful to God. There are Christian communities already answering this call. Based on their experiences the following proposals are made:

1. Alignment: If the Church is born from the Holy Spirit and among the poor, it must judge every aspect of its life from the perspective of the poor. Solidarity can be real only when the Church is where they are. Solidarity can be continuous oppression. The Church can then become a tool of the poor as their Lord works through it. Churches whose members come from the poor classes become the front line of the Church's efforts, bringing from their Bible study and action/reflection reliable guidance in the struggles for justice. Churches whose members are not primarily poor can express solidarity with them through participation in their struggles, directly or through advocacy, thereby giving "voice to the voiceless". In those situations, however, churches must carefully align themselves with the poor and their viewpoint, using as a plumbline for all decisions the simple question: "Will this act express solidarity with the poor?" In this way Churches' lives become a faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We propose that the churches align themselves with the poor by sharing, mainly in direct ways, their struggles, and by judging every decision by whether it helps the poor fulfil their

hopes and expectations for more justice.

2. Bible: Churches in solidarity with the poor witness to the importance of the rediscovery of the Bible and its relevance for daily life. In their struggles for justice, poor people are reading the Bible and finding that it comes alive in new ways as the liberation to which it witnesses is seen as liberation in action. Overcoming the dichotomy between spiritual and historical interpretations that plagues Christian communities of privileged people, the poor immediately see the Bible's relevance for their lives. As they discuss the concrete problems of their communities, as they fight against different kinds of oppression, they practice Bible study in action. In the conflicting options for liberation in Scripture they find indications which help them understand and prepare for their conflict. The poor are developing a didactic of conflict which opens up new understandings of the scriptures. As someone generalized, the Western churches have emphasized a rational approach to the scripture; the Eastern ones, a mystical; and the Third World and poor, a militant and active approach. Mind, heart and will-all three are part of what it means to be human. The new vitality of Bible study among the poor restores wholeness and offers to Churches of the poor and those with and for the poor exciting possibilities of Bible study in action.

We propose that the churches develop and support action/reflection study of the Bible among those who share the struggles of the poor.

3. Theology: For a Church committed to the option of being a Church in solidarity with the poor, some powerful theological concepts, shaped in historical experience under other commitments, stand as obstacles to new directions. Popular values and popular religiosity, even though sometimes indicative of the poor's alienation, express their resistance to oppressors. Therefore, theological concepts and ways of understanding the faith must be reformulated taking in the perspective of the liberating praxis of the poor. This plumbline measures the distortions of established structures of thought and provides clear guidance for construction of the new. The task is not easy; some familiar structures of theology assume an aura of certainty that must be radically rejected. The commitment to become a Church in solidarity with the poor can provide motivation and strength for plowing under the old and planting the new. Without this new commitment the credibility of ecclesiastical bodies

is at stake. Serious efforts to ground the church's theological work in the fresh life and perspective of the poor must be undertaken by the Church; those already existing on this level must be encouraged.

We propose that churches search out groups of the poor from whose struggles new theological insights may be arising, and commit resources of biblical and theological analysis to participation in those actions. We also propose that the WCC and its member churches support programmes which can help the development of theological thought rooted in the practice of the poor for justice and liberation

4. Solidarity, Empowering the powerless: Faithfulness to the Word of God in the world means siding with the poor in their struggle for justice. The aims and purposes of participation in people's struggles have to be defined according to each situation. Generally speaking, it involves the search for liberation and what it means to be truly human. The Bible points to Jesus as the perfect expression of humanness. Unfortunately, often structures and systems as important expressions of sin hinder human growth to the stature of Jesus Christ. The poor have internalized many of these structures. In these situations the challenge is for a radical change of society. However, this is not to give a ready-made ideology to the poor.

The purpose of work for liberation is to create awareness and power in the people so they can become the subject of change for the kind of society they want to live in. This process of empowering the powerless to become the subjects of change occurs mainly through helping them organize themselves to face immediate local power structures. Such conflicts and confrontations in the micro-level, help people become conscientized and organized to deal with major issues on a larger scale.

We propose that the churches enhance the power of the poor by providing communication linkages for it around the world, redirect traditional mission energies toward liberation praxis with the poor, and use this engagement for learning from the poor themselves.

5. Involvement as the basis for reflection: The learning does not emerge from cool thinking remote from action, but from the struggle itself. Careful analysis is nevertheless required so that learning can overcome oppression and liberate people. An essential part of active learning is reflection within the context in

which action occurs. Analysis of strategy and tactics must be made carefully, anticipating resistance and the need for alternative approaches. The learning process can be understood as the help that action can give in analysing the realities which the poor face in their liberating praxis. Living in misery under the powerful conditioning forces of modern society hides contextual realities from people. Traditional schooling methods do not unite active engagement with relevant analysis so as to overcome blindness. To avoid either more activism or escapist analysis, new ways must be developed to forge practical analysis out of the struggle, and to use that analysis in an ongoing praxis for justice, participation and liberation.

We propose that the churches commit resources, including community organizers and action educators, to the task of developing ways of analysing the structures and contexts within which the struggles for liberation occur; that this commitment take place in engagement with the poor, and that the methods thus learned be used in the formation of agents for the search of a just, participatory and sustainable society.

6. Struggle in situations of conflict: "The fight is the best teacher", said a community organizer in a slum of Buenos Aires. Deep in the movement for liberation lies an inevitable contradiction with the oppressive forces that dominate the lives of poor people. Struggle in the process of liberation must be accepted and understood as necessary. Struggle serves as a means of liberation, and can be prepared and used in the strategy of liberation praxis. When poor and oppressed people stand up for liberation against the powerful who oppress them, that very act humanizes and empowers them. The established ecclesiastical bodies have been conditioned historically to avoid conflict and to expect the Church not to disturb the calm of ongoing life. That conditioning must be overcome when fundamental causes are at stake. Since in many cases conflict is unavoidable, the potential for violence in the reactions of the powerful must be anticipated. But whether dealing with strong forces of oppression in structures of society or with embedded patterns of attitudes and behaviour, some violent reaction to change must be faced. In situations of oppression, the poor are objects of aggression, committed against them daily. Churches must decide what their position will be in relation to this institutional violence. Again the plumbline of identification with the poor is essential to maintain clear directions within conflict. The Church needs to work with integrity to support the stand

of the poor, and abandoning pastoral sensitivity and community support that frees persons for change.

We propose that the churches seek out active partnership with movements involved in struggles in situations of conflict, and that through participation they should work towards new models of liberation.

7. Education: The education of the people of God must be consistent with the commitment to be a Church in solidarity with the poor. Pedagogic practices that reinforce value systems of privilege, rationalize behaviour patterns of the dominant classes, and promote only private pietism and other worldliness must be radically challenged and transformed into those which foster fellowship and solidarity. Christian popular education for liberation must create awareness of the forces operative in a particular context and lead to action for or against them. This is people's education. It starts in the experience of the people where they are, and builds successive levels of awareness as they struggle against oppressive forces. This approach to education in the Church calls for radical change in the learning which domesticates, imposes and reinforces elitism, passive behaviour and negative self-images on those being educated. Getting rid of concepts that oppress requires getting rid of the educational structures that educate for dependency.

We propose that the churches develop radical new experiments in action/reflection models of learning.

8. Formation of Agents of Change: The preparation of agents for the work of a Church who stands in solidarity with the poor also involves radical changes in the inherited patterns of training for church leadership, both clergy and lay. Only those committed to sharing the struggle of the poor, and after having demonstrated an appropriate understanding of it, should be called for the work of agents, and their selection should involve the direct participation of the people.

Their readiness can then be directed further into identifying with the people, thus discovering in fuller measure their own identity. First, they must learn together with the people in the praxis of liberation, sharing their insecurities and dangers, learning not to draw attention to themselves. Second, they must be ready to withdraw when the people's strength is such that it no longer requires their support. Their development must include preparation in understanding the ideological

framework of societies. Theological education and lay training need to provide active engagement in struggles for liberation with a corresponding new and deeper education in the contextual, ideological and theological dimensions of the liberating praxis of the poor.

We propose that the churches change their programmes of lay and clergy education to explore radically new methods of engagement and to develop educational patterns for the building of a just, participatory and sustainable society.

9. Assistance in the quest for justice: Liberation movements of the poor need support structures and linkage among themselves. Faced with global forces of oppression, the struggle for liberation begins with local poor people fighting against specific oppressive forces. This struggle needs the collegial support and protection of networks of the poor. The Churches have an important role to play, for they have direct access to the poor through congregations and connectional structures that can help provide support. In some countries and historical moments, churches are almost the only institutions which can provide that support. Sometimes these support structures need to provide livelihood to protect agents of liberation against economic pressure. Sometimes they need to facilitate communication for mobilization of force against those who oppress them. Sometimes they need to challenge local groups struggling for justice and liberation to look at the broader situation and to ally themselves with other movements. Organization of the poor beyond the local situation of struggle runs the risk of becoming bureaucratic and remote from the communities at the base. But attempts must be made, and the Church with its extensive network of persons and groups and resources can be of great help at this level of the liberation struggle.

We propose that the churches activate their own network of support for the struggle of the poor, analyse their potential for change, and develop means of strengthening the connectional structures that can support the struggle against poverty and oppression.

10. Church Organisation: A Church Organisation which stands in solidarity with the poor needs to get rid of encumbrances and burdens of heavy structures which alienate the poor. When the churches re-evaluate their structures from the viewpoint of the poor, they discover that much of their institutional inheritance is detrimental in the struggle against oppression and may actu-

ally reinforce oppressive structures. However, the churches should provide a lean and muscular body for the struggle. They offer free space for people to resist and to organize their conflicts, and they provide sanctuary for the hurt. Their pastoral and prophetic functions help to unite people in liberating praxis, exposing their own administrative apparatus as often overbuilt. Flexibility becomes a prime fight; and undue accumulation of structures limits that flexibility. The ecclesiastical institutions need to reconsider their own organisation in order to reappraise radically the structures needed for the new commitment to become a Church in solidarity with the poor.

We propose that the churches reconsider their organizational structures to permit maximum deployment of resources to the struggles for a just, participatory and sustainable society.

11. Throughout Christian history, churches have repeatedly invited all Christians, in accordance with their state of life and following the direction of the Holy Spirit, to lead lives of voluntary poverty-in imitation of the poor Christ, as a means of spiritual growth, and as a sign of solidarity with those whom the sins of others have forced into the unnatural and inhuman misery of actual, involuntary poverty. Such freely assumed, evangelical poverty raises ones' consciousness of what actual poverty really means, and thus motivates and strengthens sincere Christians to identify with the poor and to struggle with them in heartfelt solidarity. It makes the Church more visibly a Church of the poor.

In our own time, many Christians from different churches have also adopted a degree of voluntary poverty by assuming what has been called a new life-style-curtailing luxuries, reducing consumption, and generally simplifying their lives. This movement may have originated primarily out of environmental or other concerns, but it could become a powerful means of expressing the Church's solidarity with the poor.

We propose that the WCC investigate ways in which movements for voluntary poverty and new life-styles could be better related to and enhance the participation of Christians in the struggle of the poor and express the Church's solidarity with them.