Introduction

As the community of the disciples of Lord Jesus committed to continue his mission, we find that every new day is a challenge for 40 per cent of our sisters and brothers of the world population, with inadequate food and shelter; with no health care systems; not knowing how to read and write; not having an employment to earn a living; and with little prospects of improving their harrowing situations of dehumanization, humiliation and shame. This is aggravated by a process of awareness building that has filtered down through to the bottom of most societies due to various technological developments and communication, and this in turn makes the existing conditions doubly unbearable, frequently leading to frustration and acts of violence like the Maoist movement in India.

The relation between development and mission has been a moot point of discussion in missiological circles since the second half of the twentieth century, even though works of charity have always been considered integral to Christian practice. The Christian social tradition is a tradition of thinking
and acting, as the manifestation of the ethical intuition and commitment to the Gospel. Understanding of the Christian mystery that inspires social commitment has attracted deeper reverence from the majority of Christians since the end of the nineteenth century. According to the North American theologian Frederick Herzog (1988, p. 46), this expresses God's closeness to history.

Our age is experiencing the need to build up a just and fraternal world, and it is looking for a better understanding of the complex problems of development and social justice and the way the world is functioning. The community of the disciples of Lord Jesus needs biblically based theological principles to guide the link between development and social justice.

What this chapter tries to present is a firm scripturally based framework for development without the spiritual/physical wedge that normally bedevils theologizing. We will show how the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, does advocate a transformational development. Eventually, this chapter argues that the Christian mission is a manifestation of the transformational development with its relational emphasis accruing from the Kingdom ministry of Jesus Christ, as the manifestation of the transforming power of God. Though this chapter presumes a wider readership, it is written from a Catholic experience and relying on the Catholic social teachings.

Development is concerned with human beings and social systems so that they can organize their activities to satisfy their basic needs and non-material wants like education, knowledge, spiritual fulfillment and others in keeping with the basic human dignity, leading to the reduction of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Todaro and Smith, 2009, p. 12). Obviously, it is a question not only of income generation, but also of the quality of life as human persons with the freedom of choice to determine the course of one's life, with self-respect, triggering happiness.

Transformational development is different from the Developmentalism that was in vogue in the post-World War Two days. The success of the United States (US) economy created a euphoria, leading to the presumption that economic growth was the key to the solution of poverty. US model economic development was recommended to all the poor countries across the world, with the presumption that if the third world countries abandoned their agricultural societies and industrialized, their expanded gross national product and the subsequent improved status in international trade would relieve them of their national poverty. However, this whole developmental theory did not take into account how the US and other major powers through the Marshall Plan gained access to trade relations with Africa and South America, who held colonial ties with major European countries in exchange for aid to Europe for post-war reconstruction. This in turn moved the natural resources from the poorer nations to the richer nations. "The "new economy" of development theory developed "centres" or richer economies and "periphery" or dependent economies', observes Judith Merkle (2004, p. 113). The resources, balance of trade and brain power were monopolized in a dependent relationship with the first world, ending development, with increased poverty. This, along with the conviction that some nations are poor, not because they failed to develop, but because they have been prevented by others from doing so, and the conviction that some large segments of populations are excluded from active participation in shaping the social, economic, and political structures, has popularized the terminology of liberation over development, more so under the impact of liberation theology, which seeks to bring the Gospel to the concrete struggle for human liberation and social transformation. Poverty is not just a question of underdevelopment or the fruit of laziness; rather, it is the result of a well-laid out social system, though unjust, with its vice-like grip.

Today all would agree that no civilized people can feel satisfied when a section of their fellow humans exist in conditions of such absolute human misery, and this is reflected in the emphasis every religion places on the importance of working for the alleviation of poverty and inequality.

Biblical Perspectives

Old Testament

The biblical revelation begins with God's self-manifestation in relation to the dehumanized situation of some people (Exod. 3:6-7). Later, due to their unfaithfulness, Israel suffers exile from which they are restored to their land under the Persian emperor Cyrus. When we examine the prophetic literature, we see how the all-important theme is that of justice towards the poor (Isa. 58:6-7; Jer. 9:24; Hos. 2: 19; Amos 4:1; 5:24; Mic. 6:8). The God of the Bible is a God of justice, bringing peace through justice insofar as it is distributive justice that seeks all have enough to live. God is just because God stood against the Egyptian Empire to save some doomed slaves. God prefers justice to injustice, righteousness to unrighteousness, and therefore God is liberator. This ancient Jewish tradition was destined to clash with the Roman commercialization, urbanization and monetization in the first-century Jewish homeland (Crossan, 1999, p. 182).

For ancient Near Eastern peoples, land played a key role in their lives.

We can see a tension within the attitudes towards land tenure in the ancient Near East. On the one hand, there was the recognition that land was a unique resource that must receive special regulation in order to prevent the ruin of the people. On the other hand, there was a movement toward greater individual freedom in the use and disposal of the land, allowing for the possibility of latifundism (agribusiness) and the pauperization of masses of people. It appears that the ancient Near East was pulled in the latter direction, and it was in such a context in which Israel came into being. (Fager, 1987, p. 27 cited in Crossan, 1999, p. 182).
This could have been the background of the Jubilee legislation enshrined in Lev. 25. The logic behind divine justice is human equality, radical egalitarianism that manifests in specific laws. Inequality among God’s people is insistently shown to be against the justice of God. God is against indebtedness, control, enslavement and dispossession. Equality and egalitarianism are constitutive of biblical thinking. The core message of the Old Testament is that, Israel’s God is the one true God of all the earth and all nations because this God alone is a God of justice and righteousness for those systematically vulnerable, for the weak, the orphan, the lonely, the destitute and the needy’ (Crossan, 1999, p. 208).

Though Israel was restored to its own land from exile in Babylonia, it continued to experience suffering under foreign overlords, a suffering interpreted as punishment for Israel’s sins. Hence, the promise of forgiveness, spoken by the exilic prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, continued to ignite the mind of Israel, making the post-exilic prophets speak of the liberation still to be completed (Wright, 1996, p. xvii). They described this liberation by employing the language of the return from exile: the new exodus. It is against this background that Jesus announced that God’s reign is at hand (Mk 1:14)—the very centre of his mission.

Jesus’ Ministry

The coming of the Kingdom of God was not a matter of abstract ideas or timeless truths or a sort of new religion, a doctrine or a soteriology, but was the pinnacle of Israel’s story and its climax, its decisive moment (Wright, 1999a, p. 35). However, at the same time, Jesus was gripped by a strong sense of vocation from God whom he experienced as ‘Abba’, implying a specific role as the Son. In this sense, his mission was manifesting the Father (Jn 12:45; 14:9). Through all that he did and said, Jesus not only manifested God but also showed how God’s reign was breaking in and through him, through his ministry.

At the time of a tense and unstable political situation in Palestine under the Roman rule and in the context of Galilee becoming more urban and cosmopolitan, there was a crisis of culture and uncertainty. The Roman rule made life for the Jews the antithesis of everything they believed about themselves and their relationship with God. The imperial Roman theology claimed the emperor as God and Roman culture as the unifying element of the empire. At this time of change and crisis, hopes about God’s reign and God’s messiah were high. The Jesus movement was in sharp contrast to the Roman urbanization that dislocated the common rural folk, pushing them from poverty to destitution. Jesus’ primary focus was on the peasants dispossessed by Roman commercialization and Herodian urbanization in the late twenties in lower Galilee (Crossan, 1999, p. 325).

The coming of the Messiah as presented by the gospels was radically different from the way people had understood God and God’s ways. God does not come in clouds of glory, but in a way unimportant and unrecognized. Even Jesus’ own family does not understand what is happening (Mk 3:21). At about 30 years of age, he left his work and his family and inspired a group of people that was willing to leave everything and journey with him. He wandered the countryside for about 1 to 3 years preaching, teaching and healing. The central point was that God’s reign has broken into history through him and in him. This he manifested in the most unconventional ways: he touched the untouchables and stood against systemic injustice, particularly that of the religious institutions; he showed that God is not pleased by the blind following of laws of rituals and ritual purity, but by entering into the lives of the victims of these laws, whom he characterized as the little ones: the blind, the lame, the leprosy-affected, the elderly, those with bodily oozing, those who knew nothing of the law, the poor, those who mourn, hunger, the persecuted, widows, the list goes on. Through all these he showed how the divine reign, foretold and passionately hoped for by the prophets, was manifesting itself. It is a time when the oppressed go free, when those who are bound are set at liberty and when the blind receive sight. He showed through his ministry how the Kingdom would look and how his followers could associate themselves with him in this work by reversing the situations of those who mourn, who hunger and so on.

The Matthean beatitudes have been traditionally spiritualized to encourage the poor and those suffering to continue in their dehumanized situation, but promising a spiritual reward! Warren Carter (2000), however, has convincingly argued that the Matthean gospel is a counter-narrative, standing over against the status quo of the domineering imperial power and synagogue control. In this vision, the first part of the beatitudes (Mt. 5: 3-6) refers to righteousness and the oppressive situations of distress, which God’s reign will reverse as shown in the second part (vs. 7-10). The first part critiques the political, economic, social, religious and personal distress that results from the powerful elite, who enrich their own position at the expense of the poor who mourn and hunger for righteousness, who are meek because they are helpless. The remaining four beatitudes are concerned with human actions to reverse the situation of the poor. Through the human actions of compassion, mercy, justice, and disinterested service, God manifests God’s reign; they enact God’s purposes for just societal relations. Thus the poor will experience the coming of the Kingdom (Carter, 2000, pp. 136–9).

The Lucan Manifesto

The Lucan inaugural proclamation of Jesus (4:18-19) is considered to be a sort of manifesto of Jesus. It is linked with the great Jubilee year that is described in Lev. 25:10-17 insofar as the text Jesus quoted, Isa. 61:1-2, was the synagogue reading for the celebration of the Jubilee. By quoting this very passage Jesus is claiming how the Jubilee, the acceptable year of the Lord, has come in him. The Jubilee was good news to the poor insofar as the main ingredients of Jubilee were the return of the land as well as
freeing the slaves and giving them sufficient means of livelihood. The poor benefited by the arrival of Jubilee. It was a divine revolution to retrieve the original equality and fraternity, which the Israelites enjoyed when all had their own fig trees and vineyard (1Kgs 4:25), a symbolic expression of social and economic well-being. Due to human weakness, this ideal situation could be destroyed. However, Yahweh did not want such an unnatural situation to continue endlessly and hence, we have the Jubilee prescription.

At the time of Jesus, the poor, the blind, the lame and the bonded were eking out a dehumanizing existence insofar as they had to beg for their livelihood—they were not considered to be fully human. Jesus not only quoted Isaiah but also systematically carried out his claim of ushering in the year of the Lord, through his healings and other symbolic gestures like the oft-repeated all-inclusive table fellowship, thereby manifesting that the poor of any sort are restored to their human dignity and reinstated into the society. The many table-fellowships of Jesus described in the gospels, in the words of G. S. Key (1983, p. 85) ‘are not only a well-known, historically certain feature of his ministry, but a highly significant feature as well’. Crossan (1994), one of the best of the Historical Jesus scholars, upholds open commensality as a leading aspect of Jesus’ ministry. Crossan (1994, p. 71) writes: ‘Open commensality is the symbol and embodiment of radical egalitarianism, of an absolute equality of people that denies the validity of any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of any hierarchy among them’. Joachim Jeremias (1971) too writes about the significance of the frequently held Table Fellowships of the Lord:

They are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus (Mk 2:17), eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the feast in the end time (Mt. 8:11 par.), in which the community of saints is already being represented (Mk 2:19). The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in the table fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God (Jeremias, 1971, pp. 115–16).

Even the Johannine gospel, the object of frequent spiritualization by commentators, has to be understood from this perspective of justice and righteousness to the poor. The key text used for the spiritual understanding of John is 3:16: ‘God so loved the world... whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’. However, this verse is to be read along with the following verses, more so vs. 20:

For all who do evil hate the light, and do not come to the light, lest their deeds be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been wrought in God.

It is an engagement with the world choosing the deeds of light over those of evil. It is a question of how one responds to people and structures that are dark, evil and bring death to the world.

Jesus not only cures the leprosy-affected person but also makes sure that he is reinstated into the society (Mk 1:44). He does not allow human relationships to be derailed due to sickness or bodily situations. His ministry was the definitive divine revolution of recapturing the original equality and acceptance, a society without discrimination and hierarchization.

**Human Centred Ministry**

From what has been said so far, it is already clear how the ministry of Jesus was centred on human beings. In fact the very Incarnation, the single most important aspect of Christianity, was the affirmation of the human person, for as the Second Vatican Council document Gaudium et Spes insisted, through his Incarnation, Jesus united himself with every human being (GS 22), with whom, I would suggest, he was united already at the moment of creation. Hence, the Incarnation is the affirmation of the glory and dignity of the human person. Donal Dorr (2007) argues how the title ‘Son of Man’ has actually to be translated as ‘the Human One’ (ho huios tou anthrpon), which in turn is the affirmation of the humanity that Jesus shared with every single individual. Dorr (2007, p. 24) goes on to say: ‘The title may even hint that Jesus is “THE human” – one who is the epitome of humanity’.

Thus, Jesus is the representative and fulfillment of humanity’s aspirations. Not only what Jesus was, but also all that he did, point to how humans are to live a full human life with all its glory and dignity.

Jesus’ oft-repeated breaking of the Sabbath laws is in fact a relativizing of the Divine in terms of the human person. For the Jews, the Sabbath rules could not be broken since they were given by God, the Absolute. But Jesus’ standard attitude is, the Sabbath is made for human beings, that is, for their well-being (Mk 2:27).

Similarly, the purity pollution laws are to be seen in the context of the significance of the human person. Jesus touched women (Mk 1:21), touched leprosy-afflicted people (Mk 1:41), called the polluted and polluting woman who touched him, ‘My daughter’, (Mk 5:34), defended the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3-11), accepted the hospitality of a tax collector (Lk. 19:1f.) and so on.

Jesus showed how the way to God is through the neighbour (Mt 25:31-46). In fact, as far as the final judgment is concerned, the way we treat the neighbour is the only thing that counts. The Christian specificity is this concern for the human person, the neighbour, anyone who is wounded in any way (Lk. 25:30-37). Restoring the dignity of the human person was his mission manifesto as we saw it is his very identity as the Messiah (Lk. 7:22-23).

Daniel Groody (2007, p. 49) draws attention to how Jesus, by becoming a Galilean, identifies himself with a rejected group so that he can reveal the
lie of the world that degrades human beings. Jesus showed how the reign of God is the radical inclusion of all, by welcoming all, especially those whom the world of his time rejected (Lk. 14:13-14). A sector that he showed special concern for was that of the women in the society. The typical outlook on women at the time of Jesus is manifested in the thanksgiving by Jewish men that God had not made them women! (Megilla, 2007, p. 122).

At the time of Jesus, the wife was considered to be her husband’s property and in many ways disadvantaged (Gnilka, 1997, p. 64). Yet Jesus, contrary to the prevailing presumption, pronounces how a man can commit adultery against his wife, and this was revolutionary (Mt 19:9). We have already spoken of the compassionate way Jesus treated women.

Jesus was speaking in terms of the Jewish hopes of the times, viz., Israel’s God is ushering in God’s reign, which affects the entire world in its space and time (Wright, 1996, p. 203). Wright (1999, p. 38) elsewhere shows how, when the Jews looked forward to the coming of God’s Kingdom, they did not think of the end of the space-time world, but rather that God is going to act dramatically within the space-time world, as he had done at the time of the Exodus. Jesus was showing how divine reality is breaking into their midst, doing what they have been longing for, through his very presence and ministry.

Further, the use of the Kingdom symbol did not always imply a resurrection or life after death as in Israel’s basic world view did not imply them. Hence, the priority of making the salvation of souls as the aim of our mission cannot be fully justified. This does not mean a rejection of the latter; it only reminds us of how mission has to be integral as Jesus’ mission was, culminating in his resurrection, manifested also in his promise to the thief at his right on the cross, “Today you shall be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43), a salvation that Jesus describes elsewhere as having come already due to a changed life and social outlook (Lk. 19:9).

Jesus not only taught about the Kingdom, but enacted it in his own life and ministry through symbolic acts like the table-fellowships, dealings with women, healings, forgiving, feeding, casting demons and so on. Through these symbolic deeds and teachings, he was not only presenting a new vision of the Kingdom, but also, at the same time, challenging other visions of the Kingdom like those of the Pharisees and Essenes. In contrast to the traditional expectations of the Kingdom as a time of perfect adherence to the cultic rules (Sadducees), or the meticulous observance of the law (Pharisees), or the following of the monastic life of the Qumran community (Essenes), or a radical direct divine intervention (Apocalyptic hopes) or a violent revolution (Zealots), Jesus showed that the Kingdom is a matter of radical love and communion. When others saw God’s forgiveness in terms of the temple and cult, for Jesus it was welcoming the sinner, dining with them and accepting the unacceptable and unconditional forgiveness like that of the prodigal Father. In Jesus, God celebrates all that God has been and is. As Diamuid O’Murchu (2005, p. 5) has remarked, the divine involvement with humans that started 6 million years ago when the first humans appeared on the face of the earth and with that human salvation as well reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Kingdom and Salvation

Though we already had the occasion to see the Kingdom in the context of the Jewish expectations, we still need to speak about the traditional understanding of salvation associated with Jesus’ ministry, and more so with his death and resurrection.

Redemption was the central concept of Israel’s religion and life. Beginning with Exod. 6:6, there is an overwhelming understanding of the divine restoration, reflected in various biblical texts. The idea of redemption is reflected in no less than 150 verses of the Bible (Metzger, 1991, pp. 1040–1). This in turn makes the eschatological hope of YHWH’s saving intervention or visitation the focus of Israel’s faith, in the context of the lived experience of evil, represented by foreign rule. For Israel, what was important was their understanding of redemption as an existence of original equality and fraternity and as described in I Kgs 4: The prophecies made in the context of the deportations and exile, to console the people, lead to the hope of a future Messiah—redeemer. He need not have been a divine person; in fact, Cyrus is described as a redeemer in Is. 44:1.

The three central aspects of the traditional hopes were the return from exile, the defeat of evil represented by foreign rule and the return of YHWH to Zion. These Jesus applied to himself through his prophetic Kingdom announcement (Wright, 1999b, p. 80). The long night of exile, the present evil age would give way to the dawn of renewal and restoration, the age to come. This hope was associated with the royal settings, the king who would come would be the agent through whom YHWH would accomplish this great renewal (Zech. 1:8). This royal consecration had links also with the Temple as the central theme as exemplified by David, Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah. Judas Maccabaeus gave rise to a priestly and royal dynasty by cleansing the Temple. ‘Temple and kingship went hand in hand’, points outs Wright (1996, p. 483). Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, and his actions in the temple, constituted the messianic praxis. John Meier (1979, p. 99) writes: ‘Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple constituted a messianic demonstration, a messianic critique, a messianic fulfillment event, and a sign of the messianic restoration of Israel’. This in turn alarmed the chief priests who ruled the Temple and thus the Jewish religion and nation indirectly. Jesus’ symbolic action spoke unmistakably to the priests who were well versed in texts like Zech. 9.9f. The first-century mainstream Jewish leaders, the self-styled guardians of the Jewish faith, decided to eliminate him and they did it with the help of the Roman administration. The ministry of the Lord culminates on the cross. However, the God who affirmed him to be God’s Son and thus affirmed his
ministry at the time of the baptism at Jordan (Mk 1:11) and at the time of
the transfiguration on a high mountain (Mk 9:7), now intervenes and raises
him up and thus definitively affirming him and his ministry (Acts 2:22-24).

The disciples who had abandoned him at the crucifixion regroup
themselves in the light of their Easter experience. Easter is the key to the
recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. However, this recognition raises
the question of how the Messiah could die on the cross, a curse according
to Deuteronomy (21:22). Hence, we come across the explanation why Jesus
died for our sins; he became a curse for us (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 3:13) to fulfil
the scriptures.

Though according to the gospels, the Incarnation took place as part of
the divine plan, rooted in God’s love and Jesus’ being put to death, in Neil
Ormerod’s (2007, p. 90) words, it ‘was the result of a fairly gruesome story
of power, politics, and elites, of people who very early in the ministry of Jesus set out to destroy him, discrediting his teaching and his mission (Mark 3:6)’. Scripture scholars interpret Pauline writings as
an act of atonement (Rom. 3:20), a justifying act (Rom. 5:9). This has been
further buttressed by the ‘cup of blood . . . sign of forgiveness’ (Mt.
26:28). However, as Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed (2004, p. 381)
have shown, for Paul, divine righteousness refers to distribution and not
retribution. God’s justice is God’s righteousness. God does what is just
by doing what is right. God is justice, that is, righteousness, it is the very
character of God. Crossan and Reed (2004, p. 382) argue that the modern
confusion regarding justification arises due to a wrong interpretation of
justice, that is, rather than seeing it as distributive, it is seen as retributive,
based on the modern law courts. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the primary
and basic meaning of God’s justice is distributive. When justice is done by
humans by distribution, retribution follows.

Similarly, the cup of forgiveness is to be understood in the context of
forgiveness in the gospels. As Wright (1999, p. 273) has stressed, forgiveness
is the sign of the return of YHWH, the eschatological times. Through the
cup Jesus asserts it is already now. The gospels attribute Jesus’ conflict with
the authorities to his human-centred interpretation of the law, his forgiving
sins and his attack on the Temple and the authorities, and these in turn
precipitate his arrest and execution. The subsequent theological reflection
to a large extent focused on the images contained in the Pauline writings.
Tertullian (1977, pp. 299-300) (ca. 160) developed the notion of ransom.
Gregory of Nazianzus questioned this motive of ransom, but Gregory of
Nyssa justified it by saying that it was a sort of deceiving the devil! Origin
made it a sacrifice, prompting God to grant propitiation and pardon for
sins (Ormerod, 2007, pp. 94-5). Today, as Wright (1999, p. 103) has shown,
by and large, scripture scholars like Meier, Sanders, Chilton, Crossan and
others would link Jesus’ death with the Kingdom proclamation and his action in the Temple. If at all we want to talk about the salvation from sin
that Jesus brought about, it is that of the overcome of selfishness. It is a
transition from self-centredness to other centredness. Selfishness is the root
of all sin that we come across everywhere, including among Christians.

Social Teaching of the Catholic Church

The modern social teachings of the Catholic Church were occasioned by the
depolarizing conditions of the poor in the wake of the industrial revolution
and the emergence of capitalism that forced the Church to search for justice as a
fresh expression of its own mission and service to the world. The enormous
human suffering resulting from the unresolved issues of industrialization
and the rise of socialism and communism challenged the Church to play
a proactive role, leading to Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, Rerum Novarum
(RN) (New Order of Things) of 1891. The encyclical led the way to the new
concept of ‘social justice’, where justice is applied to structural questions
such as the relationship between capital and labour; the family; the state;
equality and inequality; and ownership (Merkle, 2004, p. 93). The encyclical
declared the conditions of the working class where ‘a very few rich and
exceedingly rich men have laid a yoke almost of slavery on the unnumbered
masses of non-owning workers’ (RN 6) and argued for the workers’ right
for a living wage for a family rather than a wage determined by the law of
supply and demand and plighted for healthy working conditions.

Rerum Novarum became a trailblazer for a series of teachings on the
social mission of the Church from the Catholic Magisterium. On the fortieth
anniversary of RN, Pope Pius XI came out with another equally powerful
encyclical, Quadragesimo anno (QA) (Fortieth Year), occasioned by the Great
Depression, the consolidation of the Russian Revolution and the emergence
of fascist dictatorships in Italy and Germany. The Pope emphasized the
centrality of human dignity as the basis of all human rights. Pius XI argued
that all must receive their due share in the distribution of created goods
according to the demands of common good and social justice (QA n 58).

Both QA and RN were concerned with the conditions of the workers
and the poor in the first world. This was rectified by Pope John XXIII
(1961) in his encyclical Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher). The Pope
extended the notion of welfare for the poor beyond the capitalist system,
and internationalized the Catholic social teaching saying: ‘Perhaps the most
pressing question of our day concerns the relationship between economically
advanced commonwealths and those that are in process of development. The
former enjoy the conveniences of life; the latter experience dire poverty’ (MM
n 137). John XXIII’s Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth) (1963) outlined new
avenues of social justice in light of major changes across the globe. The Pope
recognized freedom and human rights as the foundation of the social order.

John XXIII’s approach is continued in the Ecumenical Council, Vatican II
that he convoked. Of all the decrees and declarations of the Council, Gaudium
et Spes (GS) (Pastoral Constitution on Church) deserves special mention as
it captures the Council’s approach to the poor and the marginalized of the world. The very opening words speak volumes: ‘The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, those too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ’. GS warmly welcomes modern human longing for dignity, brotherhood, participation, freedom and equality. It encourages the social movements that embody those legitimate aspirations (n 41). God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. ‘If a person is in extreme necessity, that person has the right to take from the riches of others what that person needs’, and exhorts all individuals and governments to ‘Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you have not fed them you have killed them’ (n 69). There cannot be true peace without a just economic world order. The distinctive contribution of Vatican II was the way in which it brought the whole social ministry to the centre of the Catholic Church’s mission through the Pastoral Constitution, GS.

**Populorum Progressio** (On the Development of Peoples) (1967), Pope Paul VI’s social encyclical, refers to the ‘political pressure and economic domination, aimed at maintaining or acquiring control of a few’ (n 57). Integral human development, a development of the whole person and of all persons and peoples is a guide towards social action. The importance of basic education and literacy is the key that enables people to assume responsibility for themselves, their lives and their world. Paul VI constituted the social wing of the Catholic Church, the Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace. The Synod of Bishops 1971, declared how action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world is constitutive of the Church’s mission. In the encyclical *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA) (A Call to Action) (1971), Paul VI recognized clearly the significance of political activity for solving economic and social problems (OA n 50).

John Paul II (1981) in the encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work) affirmed the priority of labour over capital and called for respect for human subjectivity and the dignity of the human person in the organization of labour and production. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), John Paul I (1987) called for solidarity as a remedy for the growing isolation of people from ties that would generate concern for the neighbour. Community formed through solidarity is related to sustainable development. Good society is not only a growing domestic product but it also includes a better quality of family life and friendship, satisfaction with work, more leisure and a sense of spiritual richness. John Paul II called for a moral understanding of development that includes the trajectory of human growth towards otherness and depth that is inherent in the Catholic social tradition (SS 28). The Pope reiterated his call for a change of life style, of models of production and consumption and of the established structures of power that govern societies, in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (Hundredth Year)

The social teaching of the Church is not just a listing of principles for social action, not strategies to solve problems of poverty, welfare, environment, globalization and others and not even the social action itself. It is much more complex. It could be described as the Church’s effort to provide a systematic normative theory relating to the social vision of the faith to the concrete conditions in which faith is lived. ‘It is an act of the church in context’, comments Merkle (2004, p. 12).

**The Social Mission of the Church**

In continuation with the Jewish apocalyptic vision, the primitive community saw the resurrection of Christ as ushering in the ‘new age’, the celestial world completely ruled by God, already now, as opposed to ‘this age’, which is sin-dominated. The full manifestation of the new age would take place at the second coming of Christ, and it was expected to be imminent. However, with the transition from the primitive community to the early community, we see the Hellenistic world view gradually mingling with the apocalyptic vision. The Hellenistic world view contained another dualism: that of the world of the senses and that of true understanding, the intelligible world, the spiritual world and the world of the senses. Through his ascension to the spiritual world, Jesus Christ becomes the mediator between the spiritual and the sensible worlds. The whole theology of victory over death is developed in the context of the Hellenistic dualism, of the world of the senses and the spiritual, the world of matter as opposed to the transcendent world. Whereas, Jesus brought a salvation connected with life on earth, now it is transferred to the other world! Hence, we can speak of the need to retrieve the prophetic ministry of the Lord that was affirmed by his resurrection.

The prophetic service of the Church is the logical sequence to its call and mandate to follow its Lord, who identified himself as a prophet (Mt 6:4, Mt 13:37; Lk 4:24). The Church has to judge itself by the content of its ministry rather than by the content of its doctrinal claims. It is not primarily the cult and the institution that make the Church what it is, but its continuation of the ministry of its Lord. It has to draw inspiration from the life and ministry of the Jesus as in history and has to identify itself with the cause for which he was killed and was raised again. We have seen how he had neither time nor interest in moving among the religious leaders of the time whose only concern was their own belly and their image. In fact, his strongest woes are pronounced against them (Mt 23:13ff). He was, by contrast, in constant fellowship with the little ones and the ‘no-people’, weighed down by the burdens imposed upon them by the religious rulers.

At the heart of the whole theology of involvement in development is the Christian faith in the truth that humans are created in the image of God and God has entered into a covenant relationship with all human beings. This human dignity calls for certain rights and freedoms that enable humans to
live as humans. In other words, the mystery of humans cannot be understood without the mystery of God.

The Church exists above all to be at the service of the poor and the victims of society, so that they can experience the fruits of the arrival of the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk. 4:19). Wherever and whenever artificial dependency is created in the socio-economic or even in religious fields for the benefit of the powerful, it generates dehumanization. This is compounded by laws of ritual pollution or laws that segregate sectors of humanity as permanently impure. This has no logical basis, but it is a sheer figment of the mind. Though God created them in God's own image (Gen. 1:26), this image is irrecognizably disfigured in them due to the inhuman treatments that they have to endure. The urgent need of any 'God-talk' today is the recovery of human dignity for these people.

Commenting on Jesus' association with the outcasts, Roger Haight (1999, pp. 106–7) argues: 'It seems fairly certain that Jesus directed his attention to people who stood outside the margins of society, and that this was a disturbing factor in his ministry and message for the religiously upright'. We saw how Jesus, through his association with sinners and tax collectors, became the externalization of the divine in rapport with the human. God's action in history is primarily manifested through his involvement with those on the margins and the dehumanized.

If Jesus' main concern was saving people from alienation, marginalization and negation and to restore them to wholeness, the Church's route should not be any different. Jesus needs followers for the mediation of God's compassionate love to all those who suffer, all those who are oppressed and all those who are forced to the margins. It is the project that he has bequeathed to the community of his disciples in the world, God's plan for history.

Jesus' mission is to be read in the context in which we live, in which human suffering and marginalization are crystallized into forms of oppression imposed by human beings on other innocent human beings. Human suffering has to become the focus of Church's service today. This, as Haight (1999, p. 26) rightly emphasizes, is 'not because Christology will bear messianic solution to these problems, but because Jesus cannot be the Christ and salvation cannot be real without having some bearing on this situation'. The God manifested in his ministry is not a God who is invisible, but the God ready to go through violation for the sake of the least and the lost. Antodaya (the rise of the least) is God's concern. We saw how this concern prompted Jesus to bypass laws regarding the Sabbath and purity-pollution. Moving in the same spirit, mission today has to be moulded in the experience of people.

What are to be dismantled today are not so much of religious differences as it was thought in the past, but the disgusting structures of dehumanization. These structures made Antony Raj (1988, p. 51), an Indian Dalit theologian, write: 'I feel that it is better for us Dalits to die on our feet than live on our knees before insolent men'. Jesus, through his ministry of identification with the poor and challenge of the structures that keep them dehumanized, sets into motion the resistive forces that seek to challenge the social, cultural, economic and religious structures today.

'What do you want me to do for you?' (Mt. 20:32), Jesus asked the blind man. The dehumanized and marginalized poor of today are asking the Church: that we may see, so that we can live as human beings, accepted and respected as such; that we may have equal opportunities. It is the blindness of the powerful of the society that condemns these to lead lives bereft of human dignity. The Church's mission today, above all, is in this sphere of human existence. The poor want a share in decision-making so that they can benefit from the fruit of their labour and the product of their creativity.

If mission today does not take up the cry of the poor for the recovery of their lost human dignity and restore justice to them, it is empty of the Christian content that Jesus in his ministry had so much insisted upon. He is not concerned with the mediocre solutions of following the letter of the law but appeals to the generous depth of the human spirit, as we see in the case of the rehabilitation of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3–11).

Our mission must be ruled by the methodological orientations of Jesus Christ, whose tireless concern for individuals left him with little time to eat or sleep (Jn 4:7ff). He spares no words over the arrogance of the official religious powers that had little regard for individuals (Mt. 23:13ff). The Church, collectively and as individuals, must renounce making use of power for crippling others, or for instrumentalizing and dehumanizing others. This could mean, for instance, religious and ecclesiastical authorities would not use power for subjugating the members of their congregation, but only to serve them (Mk 9:35). The Gospel should never become a power for domination and marginalization.

The prophetic hermeneutic of the Gospel in our times cannot tolerate any exploitative, divisive or oppressive force. The poor of our time must feel that the God of the Bible is with them and has heard their cry and seen their affliction (Exod. 3:7ff), through the creation of an egalitarian and participative society. Informed by the vision of Jesus in the Gospels, the community of his disciples must come to the aid of people who need to be helped. The basic objective of mission is not the future of Christianity or the Church, but the future of humankind as a whole plus that of planet Earth, which has come to be victimized as merely a resource to be plundered as much as possible to satisfy the greed and pleasure of the relatively few who can afford it. The earth, of which we are an integral part, also shares a lot of the disfigured and exploited poor, crying for recognition and restoration.

The social fabric of modern humanity is intertwined with two realms of existence: politics and religions. We must collaborate with both. A real concern and genuine care for the weak, the poor and the oppressed cannot be achieved fully without associating ourselves with political life; the empowerment of the weak and the dispossessed cannot be attained without
political collaboration. Today we need a sort of political spirituality as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi. In his first letter, Peter instructs Christians to always give an account of the hope that is in them (3:15-16). We have to ask ourselves how we can bring hope to the people. In the light of the praxis of Jesus, we cannot push that hope entirely to an eschatological level, something that happens 'when we die'. Christianity is not an alternative to this world; it is a guide to live well in this world so that this world itself can be transformed into the pre-figuration of the world to come. We have to insist on the salvific character of history and life in history. Our involvement in history must make God's presence effective. It is a question of the relation between salvation and liberation.

Mission today must change the perspective from the past crusade against other religions, including its aggressive proclamation with claims of exclusivism, to an effective solidarity with the suffering. It is a participation in the brokenness of people, in their hopes, disappointments and anxieties. Instead of an imposing and dominating attitude, we should have the spirit of fellow-pilgrims. As we stand in common origin and common destiny with the rest of people (Nostra Aetate 1), we are pilgrims along with them. In this pilgrimage of solidarity, we become people manifesting the God-experience in Jesus Christ. This in turn becomes an attraction, an invitation, a sharing in the form of storytelling, leaving the decision to the listener. That is the type of proclamation to which the modern world is ready to listen.

Jesus was interested in people and their problems. He backed up his preaching with the deeds of compassion and acceptances; he promoted the Jubilee spirit of equality, sharing, participation and reconciliation. Similarly, we are invited to shift our emphasis from an attitude of uniqueness to the God-experience and the living of the same experience. True, there is a danger that the God-experience can tend to remain on the vertical level and it is precisely here that Christianity can make its contribution: the true path to God is through the neighbour. Thus, mission becomes a process of mutual complementarity and harmony as Pope John Paul II (1999, n 6, p. 15) has taught.

Religions take pride in themselves and in their cultural values, but they are often open to mutual enrichment in the midst of the plurality of religions. This requires a greater awareness of the dignity of the individual. Modern massification tends to anonymity, leaving little room for the individual. As opposed to mass movements and mega media projects, Christians must remind themselves how Jesus' approach was personal, directed to the individual. Our society at every level and in every place requires this concern for the individual.

Today, like the prophets of the Old Testament, the Church must be able to read and interpret the signs of the times from God's viewpoint. This involves conflict and risk insofar as the message may go against the vested interests of the privileged and the powerful, the monopolizers of the riches of the world whose selfishness and callous blindness deprive many of their right to have the basic requirements for leading a life consonant with human dignity.

Prophetic service is two-sided, involving God and God's perspective as well as that of humans and human equality, which has been derailed by the greed and selfishness of the powerful. Hence, prophetic ministry is different from sheer social reform. Prophets provoke people to their true religious commitment where one cannot detach the divine from the human. Jesus' mission was certainly focused on God, whom he experienced as the intimate parent (Abba), but expressed in terms of his concern for the neighbour. It was a proclamation of the nature of humanity, derived from the nature of God. In other words, human beings and their life context is the field in which the Church has to exercise and manifest its mission. As Gustavo Gutierrez (2000, p. 184) has pointed out, mission is not only a question of geographic space but also a matter of human space as well. The 'human landscape' is the true locale of mission.

God is not a monster whose sole concern is self-glory, but one who is honoured when a neighbour is accepted and respected. This is the greatest need today. One may say that we do not need new religions as much as living the existing religions according to the will of God, leading to the divine reign, the divine 'Household', God's future. The Christian role is not that of denying the validity of other religions, but of affirming the humanity of human beings. A Christian must be engaged with humanity and all that is related to it, because the God whom the Christian has experienced in Jesus Christ follows the same path. There is no Christian service divorced from human life in history.

The Christian preoccupation should not be over the 'right' religion that leads to God, but the right channels through which God reaches humans today. The latter becomes the test of the former. In the midst of injustices and oppression condemning millions to a dehumanized existence, God, as we have experienced in Jesus Christ, is not thinking of the embellishments of the liturgy or the niceties of the doctrinal formulations, but the elimination of the inhuman conditions in which the poor are embedded. Theology must express itself in a 'humanology' grappling with the human problems that we face today.

Most Scripture scholars would emphasize the apocalyptic character of the kingdom movement where the socially, politically and economically marginalized people experience the divine vindication. Following Jesus is not primarily a matter of believing Jesus' words, rather it is a matter of accepting Jesus' lifestyle, following his programme of ushering in the divine reign for the poor of our times, here and now. Albert Schweitzer (1970), Scripture scholar, realizing the true spirit of the mission of Jesus, gave up a teaching career in Europe and preaching religion, to become a medical doctor and serve the people of Africa, at the age of 35, for Schweitzer was convinced that eschatology in Jesus is apocalypse, that is the end time in God's manifestation today, here and now. A similar picture emerges from the vision of Jan Jaworski, chief surgeon, Kundiawa Hospital, PNG, qualified in general surgery, orthopaedics and traumatology, vascular surgery and other
medical fields, becoming a Catholic priest at the age of 44 to bring the blessings of the Kingdom to the people of PNG combining priesthood and medical profession.

When we are confronted with the spectre of starvation deaths, violence, the commoditization of human persons, international conflicts not infrequently ignited by the powerful nations of the world, global warming triggered by human consumerism, the diverting of food crops for the production of biofuels and the spread of HIV/AIDS, we are reminded of God’s concern: ‘I have seen their affliction, I have heard their cry... I am sending you to lead my people out of Egypt’ (Exod. 3:7-10).

Struggling for the creation of a new humanity in the midst of suffering and dehumanizing forces is a key aspect of mission today. It is a struggle to win historical selfhood and subject-hood for the non-people of our times. The emerging new humanity can only be understood in the context of alienation, exploitation and marginalization. This makes the search for community inseparable from the search for new humanity. In the existing situation of the poor crushed by fears, fear of not having anything to eat, fear of eviction, fear of extortion and fear of violence, we cannot be in a genuine community. In the eyes of the powerful, the poor are the problem people. This is a gross misdesignation. The misdesignated and the dehumanized must be restored to their right to name the reality they experience. Naming the reality is the biblical symbol of empowerment (Gen. 2:19-20).

Conclusion

This chapter is basically an attempt to integrate and apply Christian ministry in the light of the Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church, challenging any dualism that bedevils normal Christian thinking, limiting God’s transforming work to spiritual realities and assigning earthly matters to secular specialists. A truly holistic approach to Christian ministry rooted in biblical truth is essential to the Church’s mission today. The God of justice and righteousness for all the earth, a God who stood on the side of the oppressed and the exploited, and opposed every form of systemic evil, is the God whom we encounter in the Bible. The same perspective is continued in the Kingdom ministry of Jesus, which was a distancing from any form of injustice and discrimination. People could experience what it might mean to be if God were ruling. In this perspective, engagement in development is proclaiming the gospel always, not in word but in deed. This aspect of the Christian mission is reflected in the teachings of the Catholic Magisterium, which can be summarized as: Between misson and development/liberation, there are three-fold links: anthropological, theological and evangelical. It is making the Gospel a good news to the people.

Notes

1. I am influenced by Bryant L. Myers for the phrase transformational development.

2. In September 2000, the United Nations (UN) adopted eight Millennium
Development Goals to be achieved by 2015: (1) eradicate poverty and hunger; (2) universal primary education; (3) equality of gender and empowerment of women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) sustainable environment and (8) global partnership (Todaro and Smith, 2009, p. 24).

References

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