



# The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

## Lausanne Occasional Paper 22 Christian Witness to the Urban Poor

The Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) are historically important documents that have emerged from global consultations involving widely recognized evangelical leaders. The LOPs have been placed in the Lausanne Website to make more accessible and understandable the historical context and development of the various aspects of world evangelization.

*Christian Witness to the Urban Poor*

*Report of the Consultation of World Evangelization*

*Mini-Consultation on Reaching the Urban Poor*

*held in Pattaya, Thailand from 16-27 June 1980*

*Sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization*

### Prefatory Note

This report, *Christian Witness to the Urban Poor*, is one of a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) emerging from the historic Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980. The report was drafted by members of the "MiniConsultation on Reaching the Urban Poor" under the Chairmanship of Rev. Jim Punton, who also served as International Co-ordinator of the pre-COWE study groups on Reaching the Urban Poor. Final editing was by Dr. Colin Marchant.

The major part of this report went through a draft and a revised draft, which involved all members of the mini-consultation. It was also submitted to a wider "sub-plenary" group for comment, but the responsibility for the final text rests with the mini-consultation, its chairman and editor.

The report is released with the prayer and hope that it will stimulate the church and individual members in reaching this large segment of the population.

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### 1. Description of the People

#### A. Overview Worldwide

In 20 years from now, the world's population will have increased by 2 billion people. In 20 years, 80% of the world's population will live in the Third World countries. In 20 years, 12 of the 15 largest cities will be in the Third World, and 60 cities will have populations exceeding 5 million. These figures were released by the United Nations on the very day COWE began.

Forty-five percent of the world's population already live in cities; of these, the majority are the URBAN POOR. They constitute the largest world empire unreached for Christ. They have not seen or heard the Good News. HOW SHALL THEY HEAR?

#### B. Poverty Worldwide

The World Bank reported in 1978 that "the past quarter of a century has been a period of unprecedented change and progress in the developing world. And yet, despite this impressive record, some 800 million individuals continue to be trapped in absolute poverty: a condition of life so characterized by malnutrition,

illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency" (*World Development Report*, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 1978).

These figures give only the extent of absolute poverty. If we add those in the Third World whose poverty is not absolute, and those within the developed world who are poor in relation to others in their own societies, we will recognise this as a growing tragedy of gigantic proportions within God's family. It will surprise many to know the extent of poverty in developed countries. The most recent survey of poverty in the United Kingdom concludes that 5 million (that is, 9 in every 100) are living beneath the state poverty line, and 14 million (that is, 26 in every 100) are living in "relative poverty" (*Poverty in the U.K.*, Peter Townsend, 1980).

The disparity between nations and within them was dramatically brought home to us within the consultation itself. Western minds faced the fact that the ever-helpful waiters who served us in the hotel received for one month's pay less than we were paying for one day's stay.

### C. Urban Poor

In the northern hemisphere, the urban poor live predominantly within inner cities. In the southern hemisphere, they cluster mainly around the cities. Most of those in the northern hemisphere would be classified as relatively poor, whereas almost all in the southern hemisphere are absolutely poor. Despite many differences in the groupings of the poor, the Brandt Report and research by UNA and the WHO clearly indicate that urban poor worldwide have in common:

- feelings of powerlessness, insignificance, frustration, and despair
- fearfulness of the future
- low health expectation
- inadequate housing
- unemployment or underemployment
- insufficient money
- poor provision for education
- a higher rate of crime
- political turmoil

There are large, long-established reservoirs of the poor in the inner cities of Europe and North America; floods of work-seeking rural dwellers pouring into the cities of Latin America, Asia, and Africa; increasing streams of refugees from natural disaster and political repression. The urban poor are to be found in the CALLAMPAS (mushroom cities) of Chile, the BUSTEES of India, the GOURBEVILLES of Tunisia, the SECEKINDU (built after dusk and before dawn) of Turkey, the GHETTOS of the U.S.A., and the SLUMS of Australia. Such settlements are often a third to a half of the urban population.

The urban poor are a fast-growing, harsh reality. Despite political initiatives and concerned social action, urban poverty appears to be intractable. The situation has not been helped by the relief policies, in which so much hope has been placed. The gap between the rich northern hemisphere and the poor southern hemisphere is widening—while 25% live in unprecedented affluence, 75% are trapped in poverty. The disparity between the rich and the poor within the countries of the northern hemisphere exists and is widening. There is an apparent determinism of economic laws which perpetuates the problems of the urban poor.

The church as a whole is trapped in an ignorance about the urban poor, the causes and consequences of their poverty, and the extent and gravity of our complicity in it.

### D. Urban Poor in Two Places

Statistics and documents can distance us from the stark reality of human poverty. From reports prepared for COWE, we present two contrasting cameos written from pastoral experience:

From India:

The migrants who have come in from the village are easily exploited, live in the worst housing slums, are unorganised, and, if they find work, provide the dirty services from which others benefit. They have no skills because of the break, made by coming to the city, with their traditional rural skills. For these people, everything is determined by their rural and feudal background. They come to their own relatives, their own caste and language groups, with which they have ties. These provide no security for them. Unless they can find a job in a few days, they are thrown out of their homes. The major concern is survival. They have little time for anything else. However horrific the national figures for deprivation in India are, they will be higher among this group. So while illiteracy nationally stands at 90%, among this group it will be 90-100%. They lack everything.

From Northern Ireland:

Those who inhabit the slums and twilight zones of Belfast are the less adequate who, because of their inability to cope, become more and more deprived. They have the less well rewarded jobs—if they have jobs at all. They see life in terms of immediate gratification and lack long-term goals. Not knowing how to budget their wages or their social welfare benefit, they spend unwisely and so their living conditions deteriorate. Those who have any will or spirit left may break out of the scene. The wounds are clearly visible. That some are self-inflicted does not make the festering any less easy to behold, or the pain any less real. Thus, the more deprived and 'beat-up' a community becomes, the more it deteriorates and the harder it is to bring new life.

### E. The Urban Poor in Each Continent

The Urban Poor are everywhere. Each continent was represented in the mini-consultation and gave us notes.

In LATIN AMERICA, rural dwellers have been pushing into metropolitan areas since the 1930s. Fifty-five percent of the population live around the cities in great urban conglomerations. Whole families come with expectations of work and money, but their hope soon becomes despair. Cities are unable to provide basic facilities, and employment is menial and often supplemented by begging and prostitution. Mere subsistence (10 in a one-room house) brings resignation or revolution.

In AFRICA, the peoples of central and eastern Africa are drawn to the cities by the lure of higher pay. They become de-tribalised and lose the taboos and constraints as their sense of belonging is eroded. Their numbers are being augmented by refugees fleeing oppression or driven by famine. In South Africa, urban blacks provide the labour force. Huge townships like Soweto part husband from wife. Voiceless and powerless, they neither belong to the white-dominated cities nor the homesteads they occupy. In African cities there are 60 million unemployed male adults and many others under-employed.

In ASIA, people are driven to cities for survival. With no available housing, they congregate with friends or families in the slums. Suffering from malnutrition, lacking education, ignorant of their rights, lapsing into fatalism, they become trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. So we have the exploited migrants in Calcutta without skills or organisation, and the families of Hong Kong requiring two or three incomes for survival, and the young people of Bangkok drawing money from prostitution.

In AUSTRALIA, unexpected poverty juts out. Lacking the deep-rooted industrial history of Europe, or the mass rural migration of Asia, this new continent of 14 million people has "over 2 million Australians living in various degrees of poverty . . . powerless . . . voiceless and unorganised" (*Australians in Poverty*, Peter Hollingsworth, 1979). Here the poor are identified as pensioners, unemployed, broken families, single parents, migrant families from Eastern Europe and refugees from Asia—added to the dispossessed aboriginals.

In EUROPE, beneath the obvious poverty of the very old, the chronically unemployed, and inadequate people—lies the deeper victimisation of redundancy, and a pervading sense of powerlessness. France has three million North African migrant workers drawn from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. They are part of Europe's 10 million "guest workers" imported in the 1960s from the poorer part of the Mediterranean, from Black Africa, and former colonies in Asia and the Caribbean. They live alongside the long-established working classes. Groups of prostitutes, drug-dependents, vagrants, and delinquents tend to gather in the areas of the

urban poor.

In NORTH AMERICA, one estimate indicates that 40/45 million Americans are within the ranks of the urban poor. Black people in the city centres, driven northwards by the revolution in Southern agriculture and lack of work opportunities, face discrimination and live in frustration. Migrant Hispanics suffer all the disadvantages of the black population with the added problem of language. Native Indians live alongside the undocumented aliens seeking anonymity, the abandoned elderly, the incoming refugees (from Laos, Kampuchea, Vietnam, Haiti, and Cuba) and the transients (alcoholics, single men, and seasonal workers). The lack of jobs, the collapse of the low-rent housing market and the cutback of public welfare services lead to a culture of despair.

## F. Another Side

Over against the overwhelming statistics and often appalling suffering of the urban poor, we have to set another side. Enormous reserves of creative energy are to be found among the oppressed poor. Social organisation, use of personal abilities, family togetherness, and industry are often combined to create a strong inter-dependency of living. Cultural values are carried and maintained and distinctive notes of dialect, music and beliefs characterise many urban poor groups. Within them there is an impetus for change which has powerful roots, and searches for the political machinery to effect structural revolution.

## 2. The Bible and the Poor

### A. Old Testament and New Testament

Through our ministry and mission in urban areas across the world, we know the reality of poverty and its debilitating, dehumanising consequences. We have known, too, the problem of riches, the great gap between rich and poor; and the often ruthless exercise of power which reduces people to poverty and keeps them in it. What we had not known, and we have been shaken to see, is the amount of space devoted in Scripture to the poor and to God's dealings with them and for them. That is why, for us, one of the most important sections of this report is the detailed concordance of Bible references to the poor (see Appendix).

In the Old Testament, "poor" can be translated by six major and three other terms—totalling about 300 references, and revealing a broad understanding of the causes, reality, and consequences of poverty. The poor person is the downtrodden, humiliated, oppressed; the man pleading and crying out for justice; the weak or helpless; the destitute; the needy, dependent person; and the one forcibly subjected to the powerful oppressor. The wide range of terms shows that "the poor" must be seen from many perspectives. Clustering around "the poor" are linked words like "the widow," "the fatherless" and "the stranger."

The New Testament uses a number of terms to describe the poor: the manual worker who struggles to survive on a day-to-day basis, the destitute cowering as a beggar, the one reduced to "meekness," the one brought low. We must include those weak and exhausted by heavy burdens and the leper, the widows and "the common people."

Throughout the Bible the majority of references indicate that the poor are the mercilessly oppressed, the powerless, the destitute, and the downtrodden. Nor is their poverty taken for granted in Scripture. It causes concern, anger, and protest. It is challenged and opposed. And its source is seen as injustice and oppression by the powerful. God's words about the poor have been to us like rocks in an avalanche. It is possible to duck the first few, but the massive thrust is inescapable. We urge others to study for themselves, using the concordances in the appendix, or reading some of the recent books on the subject.

We have discovered that when Jesus said, "The poor you always have with you" (Mark 14:7), he was pointing out that we are sinful in permitting poverty. For his allusion is to Deut. 15:4, 5: "There will be no poor among you if only you will obey the voice of the Lord."

### B. Jesus and the Poor

Born in a stable of humble parents and a refugee in early childhood, Jesus grew up in the despised town of Nazareth. In middle life he abandoned his craft to begin the messianic mission of good news about the unbreaking of God's kingly reign, journeying throughout Palestine, often with no place to sleep. After a brief ministry, he was put to death by the power elite of the day, crucified among criminals.

The central feature of his teaching was that in him, in his words and works, the kingly reign of God had broken into human history. Demonstrating that God's absolute future was already breaking into the present, Jesus healed the sick and exorcised demons, challenged the Sabbath regulations and predicted the end of the Temple, abolished the rigid food laws and associated with the nobodies of society, pronounced God's blessing on the poor and demonstrated his presence with the persecuted, declared the forgiveness of sins, and invited the outcasts and notorious to the kingdom banquet. All, without exception, were invited, and all, without distinction, were welcome—for this was to be a festival of grace and joy, a festival celebrating God's reign of grace.

The ministry of Jesus was open to all. He accepted the invitation to eat with the Pharisees (Luke 11:37)—but sharply denounced them; healed the daughter of the president of the synagogue (Luke 8:41) and the son of a centurion (Matthew 8:5); was supported by wealthy women (Luke 8:2-3); and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:42-47). The distinctive feature of his ministry, however, was that, while it was open to all, it was directed primarily towards those whom the orthodox and powerful regarded as beyond the fringes of respectability, outside the realm of salvation according to the traditions of his day. These included lepers, who had to live outside the camp (Luke 17:11-19); Gentiles who had no share in the privileges of Israel (Matthew 8:5-13; John 4:45-54); women and children who had no rights or status within the community (Matthew 9:20-26); notorious sinners, despised tax-collectors, drunkards and prostitutes (Matthew 11:9; 21:32; Mark 2:16,17; Luke 7:33-50; 15:1,2; 19:1,2).

Right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus declared in the synagogue of Nazareth that the words of the ancient prophet had come to fulfilment:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people" (Luke 4:18-19).

In his teaching on hospitality, Jesus commanded a host to invite "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:13). In the parable of the great feast, the host orders his servants to go out and bring back "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21) for all the invited guests had declined the invitation.

Many of his parables carried this free offer of salvation to despised outcasts and notorious sinners. They include the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-15); the two sons (Matthew 20:20-24); the two debtors (Luke 7:41-43); the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32); the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7); the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10) and the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14).

When John the Baptist was imprisoned and wanted to be sure of the authenticity—of the messianic ministry of Jesus, he was told, "The blind can see, the lame can walk, those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:5, 6).

### C. The Kingdom-Community and the Poor

The whole of the teaching of Jesus about kingdom has been increasingly recognised to be closely related to the new Israel, which Jesus called into being. The twelve disciples and those around them were the nucleus of a kingdom community, which the Messiah was to raise up. The kingdom is embodied in a new social reality which lives in the power of the Spirit. The central theme of the new household of God which Jesus inaugurated was grace. Forgiveness and forgivingness, acceptance and openness, and an indiscriminating love like that of God were to be its hallmark (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36). Here the least would be the greatest, the servant the ruler of all, in startling contrast with a society conformed to this world.

At Pentecost, the New Testament church was empowered by the Spirit to witness to the kingdom (Luke 1:16-18), and to be an anticipation, a "first fruits" of the new creation, the sign of the final gathering together of all things into God. It was called to follow its Lord in living the kingdom in this present age, and thus to be a bridgehead of the advancing realm of God. In Acts, we see Luke's portrayal of this kingdom community in the making, a community of grace. From the outset, all are accepted equally into this fellowship—irrespective of where they come from, or what they bring. Through the conflict over the admission of Gentiles, grace continues to force its way out to the last and the least. In Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35, and 5:12-18, the *koinonia* (Acts 2:42) brings together all members in brotherly and sisterly sharing, prayer and table fellowship, shared suffering and common ownership of property. The believers "devoted themselves to fellowship" (Acts 2:42), "held everything in common" (Acts 2:44) and "not one of them considered anything his private property" (Acts 4:32). "There was not

a needy person among them, for those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the sale and laid it at the apostles' feet; it was then distributed according to every individual's need" (Acts 4:34,35). It is not clear whether the first Christians resigned all the personal possessions to a common fund, or whether they retained personal use until it was needed to relieve the poverty of others.

The New Testament church sought to live out its life under the guidance of the Spirit in continuing the kingdom attitude towards material possessions. The service of God and the sharing of life in the fellowship took priority. Their security was in God's provision through his people and all property was at the disposal of the community. Social distinctions were abolished and poverty was overcome.

Paul's letters prescribe a way of life for a community living by grace. Though there is less explicit reference to the poor or to the sharing of this world's goods in Paul's writing, 1 Cor. 11 implies the emergence of status divisions and a consequent failure to share in the Lord's Supper. Paul calls for a society in which each looks to the good of the other, in which there is "distribution to the need of all," hospitality; and the weakest, the least, and the most deprived are given the greatest honour (1 Cor. 12).

The collection for Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8, and Gal. 2:10) had the special theological significance of a thank offering on the part of Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church. It was a reversal of the usual practice, as those who had received the good news of God's grace responded by sharing with the poorer church from which the mission had come. Paul took the opportunity to expound his own understanding of giving as the implementation of justice, "It is only fair that you should help those who are in need. Then, when you are in need and they have plenty, they will help you. In this way, both are treated equally" (2 Cor. 8:14). The source of our giving is the grace of Christ, to which our own generosity in sharing must be a response. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty" (2 Cor. 8:9). As we in turn continue the mutual interchange in a fellowship of joy and sorrow, gifts and needs, we realise the unity in Christ of a church founded on love.

The church, for Paul, is itself the living expression of a grace which chooses and uses what is weak, poor, and despised in this world (1 Cor. 1:18-30). In this church, the members are to mediate the gifts of Christ in mutual interdependence (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12), in self-humiliation and selfgiving (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 8:9), and to live in anticipation of the kingdom of God. This involves the establishment of divine justice in love already correcting the distortions caused by men's sins (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Thess. 4:11,12; 2 Thess. 3:7-12). Whenever this pattern of community appeared to be breaking down, New Testament writers comment strongly. In James, there is an attack on the rich, and a pleading for the cause of the poor (James 1:9-11; 2:2-4; 5:1-6). 1 John 3:16-18 points to a failure in sharing as the one concrete example in the epistle about love in action.

Overall, the New Testament presents an impressive picture of the church as the model of God's purpose for mankind. As this purpose was embodied and expressed in the life of Jesus Christ, so his followers, in the Body of Christ, continue to carry the Gospel to the world. This Gospel is proclaimed by word and deed, and the shared life of the church is the visual aid that illustrates and conveys the grace of Christ. Changed attitudes and relationships among Christians carry through into a fundamental sharing of life at all levels. This community of grace proclaims vividly the new order of the kingdom, transforming the lives of individuals and challenging the whole social order.

#### **D. The Good News to the Poor**

The proclamation of the "good news of the kingdom" and its embodiment in Jesus and in the community that fully shares his life comes as a judgement on the ingrained, distorted social patterns of this world. Its values are turned upside down and its structures are questioned. A new order, a new pattern is here, into which all are invited. All who hear, turn, and come in are accepted through the grace which opens up to all people this new life shared with God.

It is hard for the poor to accept this entirely unexpected invitation because of their previous exclusion from the good things of life and their relegation in the old order to the sidelines and margins. But now they find themselves accepted and invited in first of all (Luke 4:18-19). The invitation is addressed specifically to them, "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads" (Matt. 11:28). At last, the poor are able to see themselves as God created them, in their true dignity and worth. Now they are persons with something to contribute, something to share.

Just as they are inwardly healed and changed, so they are enabled to see the world through new eyes. They are no longer servants to the false structures that once threatened and trapped them. They see the central weaknesses, and know that the old patterns are already defeated and passing. In the new life of faith and the shared love of the believing community, they have fresh hope.

The rich also are summoned to discover themselves in God's sight and to recognise that they, too, are sinners in need of grace. For them it is much harder. They have so much they must lose (Matt. 19:16-21). It is hard for them to receive and respond to this invitation to live by grace, when security lies in wealth, power, and status. It is even harder to repent and, like Zacchaeus, to acknowledge that their wealth comes from a defrauding of the poor. Yet the same movement of grace can release the rich from their isolation and estrangement.

Both those who were poor and those who were rich, on entering into the death and risen life of Jesus Christ, find their place together in his kingdom community. Here those who know themselves accepted in him, can accept each other. Here the Magnificat is made visible. The mighty are put down from their seats, the poor lifted up and the hungry fed.

But those who cling to their wealth must, like the rich young ruler, be sent away empty.

### **3. The Urban Poor and Evangelism**

Despite the universal and growing presence of urban poor people in the world and the biblical mandate compelling concern for the poor, there is often a great gulf between the church and the poor. This emerges as we face four questions:

- How do the poor view Jesus?
- How do the poor view the church?
- Why is our evangelism failing?
- Where are the signs of hope?

#### **A. How Do the Poor View Jesus?**

The dominant view which appears to be common to urban poor in both developed and developing countries is that the Jesus they have heard about is, at best, indifferent to the poor—at worst, he is seen as the God of their oppressors. The real Jesus has not been rejected by the urban poor; they simply have not heard of him.

To many of the poor urban black and other ethnic minorities of North America, he appears to be a white, blue-eyed, middle-class mystic who presides over the status quo and the establishment. Some, however, do distinguish between the Jesus of the church (who is the white man's Jesus) and the Jesus of the Bible (who is one with them). In Latin America, the poor are increasingly seeing Jesus as their liberator from oppression. In Europe, most urban poor who know of Jesus at all would see him as the Jesus of the ruling middle class. Many of the world's urban poor have not even heard of Jesus. A majority of them live in Asian cities. Some who have heard his name know him as the God of the Christians, one God among many.

#### **B. How Do the Poor View the Church?**

The church which they see is often the urban middle-class church whose worship, style and structure is alien to them. Many of the black urban poor of North America find the church irrelevant to the social, economic, and political context of their lives. They often see the church associated with the system which they believe oppresses them. Recent events indicate anger at, and lack of respect for, the church. Vandalism in churches and scornful attitudes displayed towards leading black churches demonstrates this. In Latin America, many urban poor see the institutional church as being largely identified with the ruling powers, an ally of the military rulers, and partner of the powerful and the oppressors. There is, however, increasing evidence of church leadership in Latin America dissociating itself from that identification with oppressive regimes and taking up the cause of the poor. Such courageous identification with urban poor by Archbishop Romero in San Salvador led to his assassination. The majority of urban churches in Asia are middle-class, although many owe their origin to evangelistic efforts among the poor. Their development in this direction has resulted in their alienation from the urban poor, who find little in common with them. They see them as Western-oriented and indifferent to involvement in political action for social change.

### C. Why Is Our Evangelism Failing?

Most evangelistic efforts among the urban poor have borne little fruit. Despite heavy investment of people and plant, we are largely failing in the evangelistic task. During the mini-consultation, the reasons given for this failure clustered round the question of culture/class, the life of the church itself, our methods, the place of Scripture and theology, and the pressures of the urban poor setting.

Culture and class—The Christian church is seen to be trapped in a middle-class, establishment culture. There is an image of the church as aligned with the rich and powerful, which is confirmed by the social mobility drift of Christians from the urban poor to the middle-class areas and attitudes. This is often enhanced by incoming external evangelistic efforts exuding success and respectability, the imposition of the committee approach with its agendas, minutes, and accounts, and the control by professionals of church life.

The life of the church so often blocks the gospel. One national group said, "Within ourselves we discover an unwillingness to accept fully the pattern of the Incarnation. Even when we set out to work with the urban poor, we find that our institutions and organisations actually shield us from the painful realities of poverty and divide us from those who are poor." The long-established gulf between the church and the urban poor has often removed spiritual expectancy, and a fatalistic resignation has immobilised effort and prayer. Alongside this has gone Christian evasion of the corporate sins like racism and social injustice. Above all, we confess to a lack of love both within and from our congregations. All these factors contradict our words, and the gospel is neither seen nor heard.

Wrong methods—The church has neglected the contextualisation of its leadership, structure, forms of worship and ministry among the urban poor. Our evangelistic and service programmes tend to work for, rather than work with, the urban poor. This lack of identification and attitude of superiority has led to a paternalism which is quickly identified, resented, and rejected. Furthermore, our missionary methods have been too verbal and conceptual, and insufficiently experiential and concrete. Where individuals or groups have struggled to reach the urban poor with the Gospel, they often find that their methods receive little support from the historic congregations because of racial attitudes, inherent complicity with the status quo, and the inability to be open to change.

Inadequate Scriptural theology lies beneath our failures. The biblical message has been neglected or scaled down. Time and again, evangelical thought spiritualises or allegorises words like justice, salvation or covenant. We have not taken seriously the teaching of the Scriptures on "the poor" and we consider the appendix on biblical words essential reading. Many of the urban poor cannot receive the biblical message for themselves because translation has not taken place, or illiteracy prevails. Theological thinking has been over-printed because it has not been done "from the underside," from the perspective of the poor. This has often led to a verbal, privatised approach—without a total theology spanning the whole of life.

External pressures bear down heavily upon the urban poor. Where there are totalitarian regimes of right or left, there is little freedom to share the gospel. In some areas of Africa and Asia, tribalism, caste, and ethnocentrism act as barriers to the open acceptance of the Gospel as strongly as class does in the West. Pre-occupation with survival, social struggle, political turmoil, inadequate resources, and unequal opportunities shape and blanket the people who know the pressures of urban poverty.

### D. Where Are the Signs of Hope?

Alongside our acknowledged failure ran the recognition that "green shoots" or "signs of hope" can be discerned. Pre-COWE groups and the mini-consultation itself revealed that these were evident at two levels—within the total mission of the church, and in the specific evangelistic task. Again and again, we discovered that a recurring model, experienced on all six continents, was the vehicle of the gospel among the urban poor at both levels.

In the TOTAL MISSION of the church, a wide range of Christian groups and agencies now operate among the urban poor. These include:

1. Social action groups—often centred on issues like race, housing, poverty, or justice.
2. Support and sharing groups operating on a "care and share" basis, and drawing individuals into group life.
3. Development groups with a holistic emphasis.
4. Renewal programmes establishing locally controlled, often co-operative, services to maintain economic independence.
5. Cell-groups coming together to develop a deeper, indigenous, urban spirituality.
6. The spreading of the simple life-style movement.
7. New and imaginative forms of training for both professional and lay members of the church.
8. The entry of Christians into the worlds of labour, politics, and economics.

In the EVANGELISTIC TASK, signs of hope both in numerical growth and widening outreach were seen in:

1. The rapid growth of Pentecostal churches in places like Latin America.
2. The emergence of black-led churches in areas like the United Kingdom.
3. The rich diversity of para-denominational churches including house fellowships, springing up among the urban poor.
4. The over-all realisation and growing concern for the unreached millions of the urban poor increasingly known within the wider church.

The focal point of these signs of hope was found in one model. Despite our diverse background and experiences, there was a consistency in our agreement on the vital place of the "base community." Although there was no attempt to pre-determine our agenda, our excitement grew as our attention was centred again and again on this model.

## 4. The Basic Strategy

### A. Statement

"We believe the basic strategy for the evangelization of the urban poor is the creation or renewal of communities in which Christians live and share equally with others. These communities function as a holistic redemptive presence among the poor, operate under indigenous leadership, demonstrate God's love, and invite men, women and children to repentance, faith and participation in God's kingdom."

That is the unanimous conclusion of the mini-consultation that grew from the contributions and debate of those engaged in several continents with the question of the evangelization of the urban poor. "Base Communities" are seen as the primary factor.

### B. Reasons

Three reasons support the statement—current experience, social rightness, and biblical pattern.

Current experience It is clear from evidence and experience that evangelistic work has already begun with the building up of small communities, teams, or cells. In Brazil alone, there are more than 80,000 "base communities" with over 2,000,000 people, largely rooted in Catholicism. Evangelical experience came from Hong Kong where—through such communities—600 people within 10 years have been drawn to Christ from among the poorest workers. In the inner cities of Britain, small, newly planted churches are growing up to cover people of many cultures and ethnic origins. Established churches entered renewal through the new life springing from "base communities" emerging in many denominations and areas.

Social rightness These communities convey the possibility of caring, healing, integration, and purpose to those who have known harshness, hurt, division, and hopelessness. Where economic pressures have affected the capacity to make choices or decisions, an accepting, or affirming group will encourage the development of gifts and the confidence required to face responsibility. This can only take place within a nurturing environment. In such a caring community, the way of Christ as a lived and living reality will become a genuine option for the poor. Although the groups vary in form and style according to the context, source, and leadership, it will become a redemptive presence with indigenous leadership rooted in society, demonstrating God's love, and encouraging participation in God's kingdom.

Solidarity in standing alongside others in the struggle for justice, equality, and opportunity, over against wrongful imprisonment, racism, and exploitation.

Awareness-raising in the understanding of the needs of a neighbourhood and the reasons for its plight, in the gathering of resources to bring change, in the training of basic skill in community development, and in the unlocking of individual skills and confidence.

Creative festivity as street festivals and family celebrations draw on the gifts of music, song, dances, video, radio, and theatre.

Discipling through personal evangelism, Bible study, training, and the bridges of friendship.

Renewal as new vision, vitality, and direction were given to tired organisations and structures.

Biblical pattern In "base communities" the "word is made flesh." Faith, hope, and love are experienced in action. The groups embody and express the gospel. Within them, is found koinonia-fellowship, body-ministry, and personal dignity and destiny. Through them, the Good News is announced openly, visually, and internationally. Within them, relevant Bible study and corporate prayer tie in with the everyday realities of life. Through them, joyful participation in worship, new styles of living within simplicity and stewardship and directness in evangelism confront neighbours and friends.

### C. Consequences

Through the flexibility and diversity of base communities, Christian presence emerges to confront individuals within urban society at many levels. During the mini-consultation, we shared in the discovery of base communities operating in:

Residential Involvement as Christians choose to live as one of the poor, sharing their lives and neighbourhoods, living in interdependence with them.

Residential Communities as households, networks, and varying communities learn to share lives, possessions, and commitment to each other and the neighbourhood.

Service to others as Christians share in the struggle for homes, food, medical treatment, employment, legal advice, counselling, literacy; operate necessary amenities such as laundrettes, eating houses, crisis centres, etc.

### D. Preparation and Training

Before basic Christian communities can emerge, there must be a clearing of the ground. We call for the creation of radical (in the sense of rooted) Christian communities set within the urban poor. We must also call for preparation and training that is rigorously biblical and culturally authentic. We recognise that no training outside of the actual urban setting can begin to prepare or change Christians for effective ministry within the world of the urban poor. We acknowledge an urgent need for pastoral-evangelists who will incarnate the gospel in the cultures of the urban poor and from a position of servanthood proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

This preparation and training must include the following essential elements if ministry is to be incisive, effective, and lasting:

1. A rigorous understanding of Scripture which imposes no alien ideology upon the text, which is eager to discover the mind of Christ and place all thought and theology under the judgement of his Word.
2. An honest uncovering of deep-seated personal attitudes towards the poor which are unjust, ill-founded, and often prejudicial. These attitudes must be searched out in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.
3. An acceptance of the poor as they are, and an understanding and appreciation of their culture so that entry may be made with minimum trauma.
4. A realisation of the structural forces that operate in areas of urban poverty. This will include a thorough understanding of urban sociology, economics, and the "principalities and powers" that overshadow the lives of the urban poor.
5. An appreciation of the skills of community development, especially those involved in co-operative ventures leading towards economic self-reliance and a gathering solidarity of purpose and strength.
6. A knowledge of social institutions within the urban setting that shape society. These will include hospitals, schools, prisons, social welfare and leisure facilities.
7. An understanding of cross-cultural communication that will include the dynamics of culture shock, culture change, and communication blocks and bridges.
8. Training in inter-personal communication and enabling/equipping skills to encourage personal and group development, growth and action.
9. An awareness of appropriate ways of learning, decision making, leadership, communicating, and working with people.
10. An openness to appropriate spirituality among particular groups of the urban poor that will include leadership styles, structures, ways of celebrating, and life-styles.
11. A readiness to encourage new forms of leadership whether that be by the emergence and training of indigenous leaders or the exploration of tentmaking ministers as worker-priests or priest-workers.
12. The use of fresh skills in using and applying the Bible to daily life, leading to the dynamic interaction of Scriptures and life. This must include the ability to communicate in story, drama or other ways which are appropriate to the local mind-set and style of learning.
13. The understanding of the centrality of the home and family which uses natural sharing, openness, and accepted gifts in communication.
14. Direct experience in witnessing and discipling others into Christian maturity and growth.
15. The use of different models of base communities in church planting.
16. A growing evidence of consistent agape love between Christians and for non-believers.
17. The use of availability to regain credibility as the process of incarnation puts Christians alongside of, and open to, the urban poor.

### E. Recommendations

In the light of the basic strategy and the emerging experience that is carried in different models and alternative methods of ministry, and to ensure that all the essential components are carried through into our preparation and action, we ask evangelicals around the world to respond to the following recommendations:

1. High priority. We ask the churches and mission agencies to make the evangelization of urban poor a high priority in terms of personnel, financial support, and training. This priority will not only cover "incoming" missionaries but also the indigenous Christians, who will ultimately be the primary evangelists among the urban poor. This high priority is demanded by the accelerating scale of the opportunity and the paucity of our response.
2. Co-ordination. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, or some other body, needs to initiate and coordinate sharing and interchange among those actually engaged in the building of Christian communities among the poor. We recommend co-ordination that will link experience and resource-people through a switchboard operating across denominational lines. Groups such as the Evangelical Urban Training Project (EUTP) in the U.K.; the Inter-Seminary Theological Education (ISTEM) in New York; the Seminary Consortium on Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE) in Chicago; and the Hong Kong Industrial Committee could create a network that would facilitate the collection and development of a data basis for future planning and work.
3. Facing implications. The insights of the urban poor, and the gathered experience of those who work and live with them, will focus attention on the social,

political, and economic ramifications. Christian committees among the poor must inevitably raise searching questions about the relationships with rich churches, people of other faiths and ideologies, and economic and political power. We, therefore, recommend service and sustained study of the deeper implications behind the existence of so many urban poor people in our world, and the role the Christian church has played in this matter.

4. **Theological training.** Glaring oversights in curriculum and practical training for urban ministry have gone alongside blindness to the biblical teaching on the poor, justice, and the wholeness of salvation. We recommend that renewed or fresh attention be given to the overall teaching of Scripture which will result in increased research and a balanced, practical exposition in local congregations. We further recommend that all training include the non-formal, practical and tried methods emerging in many areas.

5. **Prayer.** We recommend that the whole church of Jesus Christ be called to a renewed emphasis of prayer for, and from, the urban poor. This must include the confession of our self-centredness and blindness, informed intercession for the needs of God's people and God's world, and thanksgiving for the presence and work of the Holy Spirit among the urban poor.

## 5. Therefore . . .

### A. Three Models

The use of the basic Christian community as the primary agent of evangelism within the context of the urban poor will mean changed emphases at two levels. Within the actual situation, local Christians will work out for themselves authentic community patterns that will encourage indigenous leadership, allow all to use their gifts, and create living fellowships. These street centres will come together for "cathedral-events" but will remain the key-blocks in the life of each church. Those born outside the urban poor (who will be those reading this booklet!) will have to enter into an understanding of the situation and their own role through one of three models which are now emerging in different parts of the world.

**Change in existing institutions of theological education** is already evident. Seminaries, graduate schools, Bible colleges, and other Christian centres of education should be encouraged to develop courses in urban ministry with specialised faculty, either fulltime or visiting. The establishing of an information and resource linking network, the developments of in-situ training, the theological underpinning of urban ministry, and the opening of the doors of institutions to the realities of urban life will start concern and commitment towards the major mission fields of the urban poor.

**Emergence of biblical discipleship methods:** The majority of training opportunities for urban ministry exist outside of the formal educational institutions. This non-formal education tends to be more life-related, realistic, less expensive, and transferable to the actual setting. Biblical discipleship offers the model where, in an intensely personal manner, a group cluster around a person with experience and skills. In this way basic concepts, principles, and skills are not only shared but also developed through actual experience. Modelled on the incarnational life-style of Jesus with the twelve disciples, such a mode of preparation for ministry has many advantages. The message, style of ministry, structures and forms of ministry are thoroughly contextualised. Spiritual disciplines like prayer, the application of the Scriptures, and personal counselling are learned through direct observation and participation. The growth and life of Christian communities is understood from within.

**Training centres** set among the urban poor offer a third model for Christians moving into urban areas. Current examples of effective ministry, existing community networks or service centres could link together the traditional institutions, the biblical discipleship cells, and the geographical setting of the urban poor. Inter-disciplinary, non-formal, professional and lay, participant-observer . . . these centres would offer a nexus for realistic training and preparation for long-term ministry.

### B. A Personal Checklist

For those reading this book we commend an alphabetical checkup and application.

**APPENDIX IS PRIORITY!** The biblical words and their message will give both foundation and understanding. Study or skim, check or criticise—the exercise will convince you about the attitude and concern that God has for the poor. Deeper study can be carried out through the works listed at the end of the Appendix.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY IS A SIGNPOST.** Note the titles, the nationality of the writers, the accelerating rate of appearance and the number of evangelical writers. The books become signposts indicating the direction the people of God have taken and must face.

**CONTEMPORARY NEWS ILLUSTRATES** both the significance and extent of the urban poor situation. Geographically the internal struggles of El Salvador, riots in the U.K., victims of war in Lebanon, welfare cuts in the U.S.A., or the racial tensions of South Africa illustrate the universality of the dilemma. Socially, redundancy and unemployment in the Western nations, population increase in Africa and India, or political turmoil in Latin America illustrate the depth of the urban poor question.

**DO SOMETHING!** Response is demanded at many levels. The simple life-style movement, programme of study, political activism, financial support, church commitment, or denominational strategies, all offer options.

**ENTER INTO UNDERSTANDING.** Read this booklet alongside those on Secularism, Marxism, and the large cities. Live among, become part of, and hear the cry. The road of the incarnation is the only way into understanding, identification, and kingdom proclamation.

**FACE THE UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS** that the Scriptures and the human situation put together for Christians. These questions cover the very structuring of our society, the discrepancies in resources, the "suburban captivity of the churches," our disobedience to biblical mandate, and the very personal issue of our own life-style and commitment.

"He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people." (Jesus Christ, in Luke 4:18,19)

"Christ is either neglected or honoured in the persons of those who need our assistance. So then, when we are reluctant to assist the poor, may the Son of God come before our eyes, to whom to refuse anything is a monstrous sacrilege." (John Calvin in his commentary on Matthew 24:45)

## Appendix

Web Editor's Note: At this point the original LOP contained an Appendix presenting the Old Testament vocabulary for the poor. Due to transliteration issues, that Appendix is not accurately reproducible in .html format and has been omitted here. **For the full Appendix in Adobe Acrobat form, [click here](#) (note: the file is 604 KB).** To get Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is necessary to view the form, click [here](#).

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 DNTT "New International Dictionary of NT Theology," ed. Colin Brown (3 vols., 1975-6, Paternoster)  
 EDOT "Expository Dictionary of the OT," ed. Unger and White (1980, Nelson)  
 IBD "Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible," ed. Buttrick (5 vols., 1962, Abingdon)  
 TDNT "Theological Dictionary of the NT," ed. Kittel (9 vols., 1964-74, Eerdmans)  
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