

The Poor and Poverty: Biblical Inspirations of the Jesus-Church-Poor Group

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Abstract:

During the Second Vatican Council, there was an informal group of bishops called Jesus-Church-Poor, also known as the group of the Church of the Poor or the Church of the Poor group. Its participants sought answers to the question of the role of the poor and poverty in the Church and the role of the Church in a world where two thirds of the population live in poverty – as calculated at the time. The bishops and experts referred to the Holy Scripture in shaping their understanding and proposed solutions to the issue. This paper, based on unique and unpublished source materials from the archives of Bishop Charles-Marie Himmer, analyses the biblical argumentation present in the work of this group, based on texts by Paul Gauthier, Marie-Joseph Le Guillou and Donatien Mollat, and Alfred B. Trusso. On their basis, the characteristic features of biblical argumentation are determined in order to then build an operational research model useful in further research.

Keywords: Economic Inequality, Social Justice, Poverty, Second Vatican Council, Church of the Poor, Bible

Introduction

The archives of the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) contain original documents from the collections of Bishop Charles-Marie Himmer (*Fonds Himmer* – hereinafter referred to as FH), coordinator of the group's work – related to the informal group of bishops that met at the Belgian College in Rome during the Second Vatican Council. They are known as a group or movement of the Church of the poor, although the name "Jesus-Church-poor", appearing in reports on its work ("5ème Réunion," 1962), accurately reflects its goals and activities. It was one of the most famous informal groups at the last council (Melloni, 2015, p. 200). It was established to "discuss how bishops and the Church could live an authentic poverty, and their responsibility to the poor throughout the word. Those present decided to spread the idea of a Church of service, a Church of the poor, among the other Council Father" (O'Grady, 1965, p. 124).

In realising this intention, the bishops referred not only to the empirical phenomenon of the poor and poverty in the world, the deficiencies of their evangelisation and the issue of poverty in the Church. The Holy Scripture was cited in the justifications of positions and proposals for practical solutions. This issue has not been investigated so far (Beozo, 2015; Domezi, 2014; Gauthier, 1965a; Martínez Saavedra and Sauvage, 2019; Mennini, 2016, 2013; Pelletier, 1996; Pietrzak, 2023, 2022; Planellas Barnosell, 2014; Silva and Pikaza, 2015). Therefore, using the method of analysis and criticism of the literature, the paper will discuss the characteristic features of biblical argumentation on the example of three texts stored in the mentioned archives: *Jésus, l'Église et les pauvres. Réflexions nazaréennes pour le Concile* (Gauthier, 1962); *Annonce de l'Évangile et évangélisation des pauvres* (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963); and *La iglesia y la pobreza - Informe pedido por el „Centro Holandés de Documentación sobre el Concilio"* (Trusso, n.d.). Although they are not extensive and comprehensive studies, the issues raised allow for the construction of an operational research model that can be used for further research on the biblical justification for the relationship between Jesus, the Church and the poor and poverty.

The creation of such a model is justified both on theoretical and practical considerations and because the topic of poverty and the poor, and their correlate – wealth and prosperity – is not an existentially and axiologically neutral issue. Due to its strong emotional and ethical character, as well as the diversity of perspectives, this issue requires special critical attention, as it can easily be subject to wishful interpretations. It should be recalled that in science and technology, a model is a simplified representation of reality, which can take physical or theoretical form. Models enable the analysis, prediction of behaviour and testing of hypotheses about objects, phenomena and processes, as well as their simulation or reproduction (Barbour, 2016; Bertalanffy, 1968; Leatherdale, 1974; Pietrzak, 2019). Hence the usefulness of this category also in the study of the issue of the poor and poverty in the Bible.

1. Paul Gauthier

A key text in the genesis and work of the Jesus-Church-poor group was the brochure by Gauthier *Jésus, l'Église et les pauvres. Réflexions nazaréennes pour le Concile* (Gauthier, 1962). On 26 October 1962, at the first meeting of the group, it was decided to distribute it to all the participants in the Council hall ("Compte-rendu," 1962, p. 1). In 1963, the brochure was published in an expanded form with two chapters and two annexes (Gauthier, 1963). "Each of the Council Fathers found a copy of it on his pulpit in St Peter's Basilica" – Gauthier recalled many years later (Gauthier, 1990, p. 59).

Gauthier presents the justification for the relationship between Jesus, the Church and the poor in parts one and two of the brochure¹. They can be grouped into nine interdependent theses: the first two concern Jesus, the third the spiritual tradition of Christianity, and the remaining six the Church. The whole

¹ Gauthier refers to the following biblical texts to support his theses: Isa. 3:14; 61; Amos 2:6-7; Matt. 5:3; 10:5-9; 10: 9-17; 10:40-42; 19:24; 25:31 (4x); 25:34; 25: 34-40; Mark 6:3; 6: 8-13; 9: 33-35; 9:37; 10:24; 14:7; Luke 3:10; 4:16; 5:5; 5: 17-20; 5:27; 6:24; 9:1-3; 9: 46-47; 9:48; 10:4-7; 10:4; 10:16; 12:16; 16:9 (2x); 16:1-15; 16:19; 16: 19.25; 18:25; 19:18; 21:12; John 12:7; 13:20; 13:29; 15:20; John 17:24; Acts 2:44; 4:34-35; 9:5; James 2:1-2.6-7; 2:5ff; 5:1; 5:1-6.9; 2 Cor. 8:9; 8:9-14; 1 John 3:16-17.

is consolidated by the thesis that the Gospels and letters of the New Testament clearly indicate the relationship between Jesus Christ, poverty, the poor and the Church, and that the Christian spiritual and mystical tradition confirms this relationship. However, its theological explanation is still insufficient (Gauthier, 1962, p. 13).

Thesis one: Jesus lived like a poor man.

To confirm this thesis, Gauthier reminds that Jesus was born poor (in a manger) and ended his life crucified outside the town in extreme poverty, even misery. He lived in a working-class, modest family of rural craftsmen. When he reached a sufficient age, he worked as a carpenter until the age of 30 (Mark 6:3). This unique priest, he emphasises that he wanted to live and work as a rural worker: "All his life and all his teachings were marked by his origin and his condition. He spoke and acted like a carpenter. He was not a prophet from noble Judea, but from humble Galilee. He was dressed just as all the other people of his humble world were dressed – he dressed like a working man, and not in purple. He lived in an ordinary simple house and not in a palace". In the synagogue of Nazareth, he presented himself as consecrated by the Spirit of the Lord and sent to evangelise the poor (Luke 4:16). The carpenter and the carpenter's son, in his most intimate being, reveals himself as Christ, messiah and prophet, consecrated and sent by the Spirit, closely associated with the poor (Gauthier, 1962, pp. 14–15).

Thesis two: Jesus identifies with the poor.

Jesus Christ is the saviour of all people, but he identifies in a special way with the poor of all times. This is clearly and explicitly indicated in the pericope of the last judgment (Matt. 25:31): The Son of Man coming in his glory identifies himself with all who are in misery and need. However, Jesus, being a divine person, differs from the poor, both his physical body and his Eucharistic body differ, writes Gauthier. Here he recalls the gesture of Mary of Bethany, who anointed the body of Jesus in connection with his death (John 12:7), thus worshipping him, God incarnate in man. Today he is present in a mysterious way in the Eucharist and in the Church. Gauthier argues that one can also speak of the social body of Jesus, which is also the poor. Jesus is truly present in them, although not in the same way

as in his time on earth, but today in the Eucharist and in the Church. This mysterious presence in the poor creates a space in which Christian love is to exist. In this perspective, Gauthier interprets Mark 14:7 – the poor, the social body of Jesus, are always present to be loved and helped for his sake, and through them to love him too. The identity of Jesus with the poor is therefore not a purely moral or symbolic identity. In the Eucharist, in the Church and in society, Jesus mysteriously maintains relationships with all people, but in a special way with the poor, through his will and love. He is the centre of this relationship. Hence, the Eucharist and the Church cannot be separated from the poor. The poor have a right to be in the Church, which is a community created also for their salvation. Therefore, in ancient times, ecclesial life and the Eucharist were associated with offering (of goods) and sharing with the poor. Christ in the heavenly Church, as emphasised by Gauthier, will gather all those who have given him in the poor food and drink, clothing and shelter, welcomed and given love in the person of the needy and hard-working (Matt. 25:34). Gauthier also quotes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19), the words spoken by Christ at the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:5) and the Epistle of James (Gauthier, 1962, pp. 15–17).

Thesis three: the spiritual tradition identifies Jesus with the poor.

The Christian spiritual tradition over the centuries, recognising the relationship between Jesus and the poor described above, has not only humbly served the poor. It also identified with the poor through Jesus. Gauthier recalls such figures from the history of Christianity as St Martin of Tours, St Julian the Hospitaller, St John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria, St Serapion, St Francis of Assisi, St Peter Claver, St Vincent de Paul, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, Charles de Foucauld, Victor Chocarne. Among his contemporaries, he mentions the figure of Tulio Botero Salazar, Archbishop of Medellín in Colombia, who shared his fortune with the poor, dedicated his bishop's palace for educational purposes to the poor and lived in a poor neighbourhood.

Gauthier asks the following questions: "Why did Jesus identify himself with the poor? Perhaps because together with him they carry the burden of this world's

sin, because they are more closely associated with the Redemption, both as saved and saviours? Have they not, indeed, a privileged place in the Mystical Body, a place that theology must now assign them?". Jesus established a mysterious relationship with the poor, including children, because of the primacy of being over having and because of redemption. The poor and children, who do not have material wealth, remind the world of the primacy of being over having. His words are significant here: "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Matt. 16:26). In this context, Gauthier adds: "Until it is clearly laid down by the Church, this truth will be grotesquely distorted in that mystique and dialectic which turn the proletarian and the child into idols, whereas Jesus Christ alone can confer on them their authentic worth as human beings and their Redemption in him" (Gauthier, 1965b, p. 68),

Thesis four: the poor, the servants of Yahweh, occupy an important place in the tradition of the Old Testament.

The relationship of the poor with the Church is a logical consequence of the relationship between Jesus and the poor described above. However, the relationship between Jesus and the Church and Jesus and the poor are not the same, each has its own characteristics. It is approximated by the analogy of the marital relationship between a man and a woman, which, while preserving the specificity of each person, does not absorb the other, but complements it.

To explain the Church-poor relationship, Gautier refers to the Old Testament theology of Israel as a people, especially the poor of Yahweh. Israel was a small people in the midst of powerful empires, without great culture, economic or military power. However, it was chosen by God and became His sacrament among other peoples, a community awaiting the "Perfect, Consecrated Sacrament, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth". In the threat of contamination by contact with the neighbouring peoples, God in the desert, in the context of the experience of captivity and poverty, speaks to their hearts. The chosen people, the nucleus of the future Church, discovered the proper scale of values and lived in hope of the coming of the Saviour. An important role here is played by the theology of the suffering servant of Yahweh (Messiah), who is chosen to evangelize the poor (Isa. 61) and the message about

the danger of wealth, invective against wealth and the rich (Isa. 3:14; Amos 2:6-7). Their aim is to save the mystery of choosing Israel, its servant, and thus they are not merely moralising. Gautier also claims that the choice of Israel as Yahweh's servant is related to the mystery of Yahweh's poor, announcing and preparing the founding of the Church by Jesus. Just as Israel must become Yahweh's people of the poor in order to become like the Messiah, so the Church must become like Jesus (Gauthier, 1962, pp. 19–20).

Thesis five: in the Gospel, the kingdom prophesied by Jesus belongs to the poor.

As mentioned above, these and similar claims do not exclude anyone. However, Gautier draws attention to the unique role of the poor in the kingdom of God prophesied by Jesus, in the mystery of his love and the salvation of humanity. The Kingdom of God and the reign of God, according to Gauthier, is Jesus' great parable about the Church. It belongs to the poor. However, "it is the heart that counts and only those will possess the kingdom who are the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3)". They are the ones in the Gospel, the poor, ordinary people, great crowds who gather to come to hear Jesus and to be healed of their weaknesses (Luke 5:15). Those who are rejected, hungry and crying also come to him. Jesus' message indicates that the condition of the poor places them in a more favourable situation. Poverty is a model that makes it easier to introduce an attitude of unnecessary attachment to the goods of this world, strengthening humility, hospitality, openness to the suffering, devotion to God. In contrast, wealth causes the opposite situation, because the rich man received his comfort here on earth (Luke 6:24). To confirm these theses, Gauthier cites the text about the eye of a needle (Luke 18:25; Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:24-25), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man (Luke 12:16-21), on the function of wealth (Luke 16: 1-15). Sharing "wicked mammon" with the poor creates grounds for entry into the eternal tabernacles (Luke 16:9). Jesus will judge people according to their attitude to the poor, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (Matt. 25:31-46). "At the moment of death, everyone is poor and purgatory is to bring the heart to order", Gauthier concludes (Gauthier, 1965a, pp. 20–21).

Thesis six: Jesus established his Church on the poor.

The apostles, although they were not paupers, were poor people who made their living by working (Luke 5,5). Similarly, Matthew earned his living working as a customs officer (Luke 5:27). Jesus called them to follow him and leave these very sources of income. It is also true that Jesus had wealthy friends – Lazarus and his sisters, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, wealthy women. However, he established the Church on people living from the work of their own hands (i.e. people not living from the fact of owning goods and means of production that bring benefits and relieve the owner from work). According to Gauthier, in the Gospels it is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether Jesus is talking about the disciples or the poor (Matt. 25:40). In some cases, it is about the disciples, his apostles and believers (Matt. 10:40-42; John 13:20; Luke 10:16). Jesus also identifies himself with children (Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48) and encourages his disciples to become like them, not the great figures they secretly aspire to be (Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46- 47). Finally, in the pericope about the last judgment, Jesus identifies himself with the poor, ragged, sick and prisoners (Matt. 25:34-40). "Those who gave him food did not do so in the persons of his recognized disciples since they were astonished: 'When did we give you food?'(...) And yet the disciples are obviously meant here, because Jesus instructs his apostles and disciples that they themselves cannot be anything but hungry, poorly clothed and persecuted (Matt. 10:9-17; Luke 10: 4-7; 21:12). In this way the disciples and the apostles are simultaneously identified with the working and suffering Jesus and with all those who work and suffer.", Gauthier concludes (Gauthier, 1965b, p. 72).

Thesis seven: Jesus instructed his Church to follow the principle of "neither gold nor silver".

Jesus, as argued by Gauthier, never spoke about poverty in an abstract way and never demanded the so-called perfect poverty. He and the apostles had a common purse, for which Judas was responsible. Jesus also received shelter and hospitality from wealthy people. These facts prove that the poverty practised by Jesus and the apostles removes sectarian behaviour, uncompromisingness and numbness. The purse was available to the apostles, and Jesus never required

anything to be added to it. Gauthier suggests that it probably had to be filled by the apostles themselves and by the women. The Gospels do not record that Jesus was speaking this. What mattered to him was the poor, preaching the Gospel to them and serving the poor. Jesus gave the following instruction for living an apostolic life: "no gold or silver" (Luke 9:1-3; 10:4; Matt. 10:5-9; Mark 6:8-13). Selflessness here is a sign of the true love of Jesus and the power of the Gospel, "the sign of him who, being rich, made himself poor for love (II Cor. 8:9)". Peter understood and continued this attitude and spoke to the lame man in this spirit: "Gold and silver have I none" (Acts 3:6). This attitude in evangelisation is a sign of fidelity to the Master. "Should his disciples not be faithful to the will of their Master, should they not be identified with him, would they still be his witnesses? If the Eucharistic bread became corrupt it would cease to be the Real Presence of the Lord. If Judas baptized that baptism would be valid, but what apostolic witness could Judas provide? Gauthier asks (Gauthier, 1965b, pp. 72–73).

Thesis eight: the evangelical signs of the Church are the sharing of goods, the evangelisation of the poor and the unity of the Church.

In justification, Gauthier quotes the answer of John the Baptist, who, when asked by the crowds about what to do, replies: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same" (Luke 3:10). The breaking of bread was the content of the message of the prophets, and today, thanks to Jesus, it is the sign of the Church. This ability to share and recognise Jesus in the hungry and needy is a condition for entering his kingdom (Matt. 25:31ff.). The sign of the evangelisation of the poor is also the recognisable sign of the messiah announced in the Old Testament. If this were not the case, as emphasised by Gauthier, Jesus would not have been the Messiah, and the Church would not have continued his mission. Jesus also points to the sign of the evangelisation of the poor to the messengers sent by John the Baptist (Gauthier, 1962, pp. 23–24). Gauthier also indicates the need, from this perspective, to look at the issue of the unity of the Church. He claims that the sign of unity cannot be visible "if the body of Christ is divided: its ecclesiastical and baptised body on the one hand, and its suffering and labouring body on the other". He suggests

that "Perhaps it will be through the desire to manifest the unity of the body ecclesiastical and the body social and poor that the churches will find their unity at last the commandment to love God and men is the law of the Church itself". However, a question arises: "how should the Gospel be preached to the poor if those who are already rich with the Gospel do not share the bread of life and of the soul with those who have neither the Gospel nor bread?" (Gauthier, 1965b, p. 74).

Thesis nine: the eminent dignity of the poor in the Church.

According to Gauthier, the Church in Jerusalem understood the will of Jesus well and lived his Spirit also towards the poor. This is expressed in the Acts of the Apostles: "all the believers were together and had everything in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all men, as every man had need" so that "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 2:44; 4:34). And this was so important that to cheat in this respect was a sin against the Holy Spirit Peter had no indulgence for Ananias and Sapphira". The unique place of the poor in the Church is also confirmed by other New Testament writings. Gautier cites the attitude of Paul, who initiated the idea of helping underdeveloped communities as an act of faith in Jesus Christ and the Church. (2 Cor. 8:9-14); he also stigmatised that too often "one is hungry, and another is drunk" in contempt of the Church of God, without discernment of the Body of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:21-29); negative attitudes towards the poor were also condemned by James (James 2:5ff.; 5:1).

This tradition has been continued by the Church fathers, saints, theologians, clergymen and secularists. They acted and spoke in this spirit, condemning the selfishness of the rich and calling for the sharing and community of goods. They did this not because of philosophical, economic or social beliefs, but because of Jesus and faith in him. Gauthier cites the story of the Muslim chieftain Aygolant, who scandalised by the place of the poor at the court of Charlemagne; quotes a sermon by the French bishop and theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet on the exceptional dignity of the poor (Bossuet, 1992); mentions the then Bishop of Natal (Brazil), Eugenio Sales, who renounced the construction of a cathedral and used the funds to build houses for workers; cites contemporary social encyclicals from

Renrum Noverum by Leo XIII to *Mater et Magistra* by John XXIII (Gauthier, 1962, pp. 24–27).

2. Marie-Joseph Le Guillou and Donatien Mollat

In the archival collections relating to the second session of the council, there is a short and synthetic document by the Dominican Marie-Joseph Le Guillou and the Jesuit Donatien Mollat, *Annonce de l'Évangile et évangélisation des pauvres* (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963), which presents the topics raised by Gauthier in a slightly different way².

In justifying the evangelisation of the poor, the authors start from the universal salvific mission of Christ. He came to save everyone. He ordered the Apostles to evangelise all creatures (Mark 16:15). Therefore, the first duty of the Church is to proclaim the Good News of salvation to the whole world (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 1).

The authors draw attention to the fact that Christ accomplished the work of salvation, which is a mystery, penetrating the deepest recesses of human fate, even taking over the consequences of the lives of the most unhappy people. He humbled himself and accepted the death intended for slaves. In this context, the hymn from Phil. 2:6-9 about the *kenosis* of Christ is quoted (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 1).

The poverty of birth is the first sign of Christ as Saviour of the world, according to the message given to the shepherds in Luke 2:11-12. The confirmation of his service is the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1, according to which the distinguishing sign of the Messiah is that he is anointed and destined to evangelise the poor. Jesus invokes this sign in justifying his message to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:4-6; Luke 7:22-23) (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 1).

Jesus' words and deeds confirm that the time has come for a unique role for the poor. The first blessing, placed in the Sermon on the Mount, i.e. the fundamental

² Le Guillou and Mollat refer to the following biblical texts to support their theses: Ps. 22; Isa. 61:1; Matt. 9:36; 11:4-6; 11:29; 13:13-15, 18-22; 21:1-11; 25:40; Mark 5:30 6:31-34; 6:34; 16:15; Luke 2:11-12; 4:16-18; 6:17-18; 6:19; 6:20; John 7:22-23; 7, 49; 1 Cor. 1:28-29; Phil. 11:6-9; Heb. 4:15; James 2:4-5.

law of the Kingdom of Heaven, concerns the poor (Luke 6:20). In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees (John 7:49), who despised simple people, the crowds of the humble and those who did not know the law, the whole life of Jesus revealed "God's mad love" for the little ones, the rejected and despised by the world. In fact, various categories of people who were poor (not only materially), thirsty for the bread of the word (Mark 6:31-34; Luke 9:12-17), Christ the Good Shepherd gathered around himself "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34). They were the ones who followed him and sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all (Luke 6:19). Although they had many illusions, reckless attitudes, were unfaithful and unstable (Matt. 13:13-15, 18-22), this category of people was for Jesus the real field of influence of the Good News. It was in them that the Kingdom he preached found those predisposed to receive it. They were "born subjects" of the Kingdom of God (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 1).

Christ paid with his life for his attitude. It was an attitude that contradicted the values of the world. He exposed himself and caused scandal by the fact that he was staying and sharing a table with the disinherited, the humiliated and the sinners. "And if, in the end, He was condemned to death and rejected, it was as a poor man, deprived of all means of defence and power. On the cross, His prayer, Psalm 22, sums up all the suffering and all the misery of the world". Seen in Matt. 21:1-11 as a prophet, defender of the poor, king, protector of the poor, and in Heb. 4:15 a priest sympathetic to human weakness, Christ is the true Saviour of a meek and humble heart (Matt. 11:29). On the last day, he will pay attention to what has been done to "one of the least of these" (Matt. 25:40) (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 2).

Following the example of its Master, after Pentecost, the Church of apostolic times made visible the sign of the evangelisation of the poor. The community in Jerusalem was a community of saints and the poor. St Paul emphasised the importance of the poor and poverty in following the Saviour. He wrote about the logic of God who chooses the little ones, what is nothing in building the Church: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the

world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:27-29). Similar views were expressed by St James, who protested against any infiltration of a worldly spirit expressed in elevating the rich above the poor in the Church (James 2:5) (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 2).

For Le Guillou and Mollat, they stress that this emphasis must be visible at the heart of the Church, even if it leads, like Christ's attitude, to scandal. The Church must be open to the poor. Following the French bishop and theologian Jacques Benigne Bossuet (1627-1704), they claim that the poor are the "first-born of the Church and its true children", the Church is the "city of the poor" and they belong to it by right (Bossuet, 1992, pp. 45–47). "The poor are in the Church like a living expression of the mystery of grace that defines it". The Church would be contradicting itself if it "did not recognise in the evangelisation of the poor the clearest sign of its fidelity to the Lord and its universal mission". Today, more than ever, this recognition is important in the face of enormous global poverty. Like the Saviour, the Church must review apostolicity through the prism of poverty (Le Guillou and Mollat, 1963, p. 2).

3. Alfredo B. Trusso

At the request of the Dutch community involved in documenting the council, Fr. Alfredo B. Trusso, an Argentine biblical scholar, wrote a report entitled "La iglesia y la pobreza – Informe pedido por el "Centro Holandés de Documentación sobre el Concilio" (Trusso, n.d.). It is a condensed and brief synthesis of claims about Jesus, the Church, poverty and the poor³.

In the introduction to the report, Trusso states that "Jesus lived poor, loved the poor preferentially, and presented poverty as one of the fundamental features of his Kingdom. The Church – which is the living Mystery of Jesus – must reproduce the same attitude, must be an understandable 'sign' of Jesus' poverty.

³ Trusso cites the following biblical texts to support his theses: Matt. 4:18-22; 6:19-21; 6:24; 6:25; 8:16-17; 8:20; 9:35 and 38; 11:4-5; 10:8; 13:5; 13:22; 16:22-25; 19:1; 19:27-29; 25:31-46; 27:59-60; Mark 13:41-44; Luke 2:12; 2:24; 2:7; 2:8-11; 4:18; 6:20; 6:24-25; 9:3; 14:3; 12:13-21; 16:19-31; John 19:23-24; 2 Cor. 8:9; James 2.

This is how the early Christian community understood and practised it, empowered by the teaching and encouraged by the example of the Apostles of Jesus. The Second Vatican Council, which 'desires to restore to the face of the Church the splendour of the purity and simplicity of its beginnings' (John XXIII), is a privileged occasion for the Church to strip itself of everything that hinders it from being, in the eyes of the world, poor like Jesus". He adds that the report presents this issue, but is not an exhaustive study, rather a pastoral reflection based on facts (Trusso, n.d., p. 1).

The report consists of two parts. The first part entitled "Jesus was poor" is a collection of claims referring to the Holy Scripture. The second one, "The Church must be poor", presents proposals for the inculturation of the Church in the context of a world in which most of humanity lives in various forms of absolute or relative poverty. The report closes with a conclusion referring to 2 Cor. 8:9.

Thesis one: Jesus was poor.

This historical fact is undeniable: Jesus was born, lived and died in poverty; he was born in a manger (Luke 2:7); the sign given by the angels to the shepherds was poverty (Luke 2:12); His mother offered an offering to the poor (Luke 2:24); Jesus was seen and despised as the son of a carpenter (Matt. 13:5); during his public ministry he had no home of his own (Matt. 8:20); on the cross he died naked and stripped of everything (John 19:23-24); he was buried in someone else's grave (Matt. 27:59-60) (Trusso, n.d., p. 1).

Thesis two: Jesus loved the poor.

Among all social classes, he chose the poor and gave them special care. Trusso points out that this choice may have resulted from a preference for poverty itself or simply from a desire to share the fate of a class so neglected and despised in his time. In his opinion, this is a questionable issue. However, it is certain that Jesus loved the poor in a special way. The whole Gospel brings us face to face with the kindness and liking that Jesus had for the poor. Although he contacted other social classes, his service was especially directed to the simplest, poorest and most needy. The poor shepherds were the first to hear of his coming (Luke 2:8-11). The fishermen, his first apostles, also belonged to the group of the poor (Matt. 4:18-22).

He took pity on the masses of the people, surrounding them with special affection and activity (Matt. 9:35 and 38), and told the apostles to do the same (Matt. 10.8). In the synagogue of Nazareth, he declared that he had been sent to evangelise the poor (Luke 4:18) and indicated that one of the messianic signs was thus being fulfilled (Matt. 11:4-5). His care for the poor occupied an important place in his mission as Saviour (Matt. 8:16-17). Jesus defended the poor (Luke 16:19-31; Mark 13:41-44) and identified with them (Matt. 25:31-46). He admonished the rich for injustice and attachment to wealth (Luke 6:24-25) (Trusso, n.d., p. 2).

Thesis three: Jesus emphasised the importance of poverty and indicated that it is one of the conditions for entering the kingdom of God.

The Sermon on the Mount, a summary of his programme, highlights the role of poverty in Christianity. Jesus spoke of the need for a spirit of poverty, but he also presented poverty manifested in the lives of those who are actually poor. He taught that the spirit of poverty gives value to material poverty, and, let us add, determines the right attitude to goods in a situation of prosperity and wealth. Jesus also taught that it is easier to have this spirit when you are materially poor than when you live in wealth. He recalled that the "spirit" of poverty leads to the incarnation of material poverty. He preached the happiness of the poor (Luke 6:20); contrasted the service of wealth with the service of God (Matt. 6:24); rebuked those who strive for material possessions (Matt. 6:25); warned against the danger of wealth that chokes the Word of God (Matt. 13:22); emphasised the futility of material possessions (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 12: 13-21); encouraged an attitude of detachment from material possessions as an element of perfection (Matt. 19:1; Luke 14:3); reminded of the fact that it is difficult for the poor to be saved (Matt. 16:22-25); announced a reward for those who renounce their possessions (Matt. 19:27-29); commanded the Apostles to fulfil their mission in poverty (Luke 9:3) (Trusso, n.d., pp. 2– 3).

Thesis four: The Church cannot fulfil its role as a sign, the sacrament of Christ *par excellence*, if it appears rich in the eyes of the world.

This thesis is based on the principle of compliance and non-contradiction with the theses about Jesus. Poverty cannot only be part of teaching but must also be manifested in the life and mission of its leaders, i.e. bishops, priests and ecclesial

institutions. A sign is not a sign if it is not visible and perceptible, Trusso adds. Therefore, following the example of Jesus, the Church must be poor, love the poor preferentially and present poverty as a special value. Trusso then presents practical recommendations on how to implement these postulates. In this part he does not refer directly to the Holy Scripture.

To conclude this part, it is important to emphasise that the work by Gauthier, Le Guillou and Mollat and Trusso is not of a nature to exclude those who are considered non-poor. The aim of the study was different: to renew the spirit of poverty in personal and ecclesial life, about which Paul VI wrote in *Ecclesiam Suam* (Paul VI, 1964, 55–57). In this respect, Gauthier's words are significant: "The poor in question represented, of course, the whole of humanity, and Jesus had not come in the first place to resolve social problems. However, it remains true that humanity cannot be saved except through Jesus Christ, who made himself poor, and who addressed himself by preference to the poor, to peasants and working men, to ordinary folk" (Gauthier, 1965b, pp. 63–64).

Conclusions

Although the above texts are not extensive theological works, on their basis it is possible to indicate four areas that should be taken into account when creating an operational research model of the Jesus-Church-Poor relationship. Namely: the poverty of Jesus; his special love (preference) for the poor; Jesus' elevation of poverty to the status of a pattern of life; following Jesus in fulfilling the mission of the Church, resulting from the principle of non-contradiction and compliance with His teaching and example.

The analysed texts, dealing with Christological and ecclesiological topics, need to be clarified and deepened. According to the hermeneutical principle of St Augustine: "Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet" (The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New), the interpretation of the topic of poverty and the poor requires consideration of the history, experience and theology of biblical Israel. It is also

necessary to take into account exegetical and historical studies, providing data for the interpretation of poverty and related issues. This need was already recognised by the authors of the discussed texts (Trusso, n.d., p. 1). The simplifications and schematic approach in the presentation of biblical issues are due to the fact that these texts were intended to initially introduce the biblical grounds to the participants of the Jesus-Church-Poor group meetings.

The analysis results in an operational research model, i.e. a set of issues organised thematically. The issues identified by Gauthier, Le Guillou, Mollat and Trusso should be confronted with other studies and supplemented with aspects important for the debate on poverty, omitted by these authors. For this purpose, it is worth using both publications from the period of activity of the Jesus-Church-Poor group, (np.: Gauthier, 1965a; Gelin, 1954; Mercier and Le Guillou, 1964) as well as newer studies (np.: Dupont, 1967; Pietrzak, 2002; Rhee, 2017; Witczyk, 1997). Further studies, in addition to these four areas, should consider the following issues of the Old and New Testaments: the concepts of poverty and the poor, prosperity and wealth; the hermeneutics of these concepts in the context of the main ideas of biblical theology (e.g. creation, covenant, incarnation, salvation, Kingdom of God, discipleship, followership, evangelical poverty, mission, eschatology, experience of the first Christian communities); the historical-social-religious context of the issues of poverty, prosperity and wealth in the times of biblical Israel and in the 1st and 2nd centuries after Christ.

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