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Strategies Towards Dignity in the Experience of Poverty Among Two Predominantly African-American Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Birmingham, Alabama

Roy E. Gaiter Sr

Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

STRATEGIES TOWARDS DIGNITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY
AMONG TWO PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES
IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

by

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Adviser: G. Russell Seay

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: STRATEGIES TOWARDS DIGNITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF
POVERTY AMONG TWO PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES IN BIRMINGHAM,
ALABAMA

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Date Completed: March 2014

Problem

African Americans have a higher rate of poverty than any ethnic group. The dearth of dignity through slavery and beyond became a societal pathway to poverty. Seventh-day Adventist African Americans in Birmingham Alabama are not exempt from this predicament. The Norwood and Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist churches are located in the midst of communities of poverty. Some members live in these and other poverty distressed areas. This study is to determine the extent of poverty and the lack of dignity of members of these two predominantly African American churches. The church community is uniquely positioned to share the message that all human beings are made in

the image of God. Although the church community has been slow and fail to communicate a clear message of dignity essentials as love, freedom, and equality it is still equipped with divine conviction from God's word on the dignity of humankind and the sense of duty towards humanity.

Method

This project used the questionnaire method to gather information about beliefs, behaviors, poverty levels, and other related indignity experiences of African Americans of the above-mentioned congregations. The questionnaire was distributed to consenting members age 18 years old and above. The purpose was to determine the level of poverty and other relating factors among African Americans at the Norwood and Ephesus churches. In addition, dignity seminars were conducted to highlight how dignity awareness contributes to an elevated sense of worth and purpose regardless of statuses.

Results

African American members of both Norwood and Ephesus churches in Birmingham, Alabama experience high rates of poverty. Yet 50% of respondents (both churches together) indicated that they had "hopeful dreams for a better day." They instituted adjustments in their experience that allow them to express hope for a better future. The seminars explored strategies to understand and improve their dignity. Evaluations of the seminars were conducted with both churches. The evaluation question, "Did this seminar raise your awareness that true worth comes from God" was the highest affirmative response of all questions. Accordingly the objective of raising the awareness of dignity was verified among the participants.

Conclusion

The study speaks to the erosion of dignity among African Americans as a result of poverty and arising from the institution of slavery. The participants learned that in spite of their economic situation, possessing dignity is crucial to their involvement in society and that dignity occurs as a result of their origins -- being sons and daughters of God with unique qualities and abilities of intelligence and moral contemplation.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

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Roy E. Gaiter Sr.

March 2014

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Personal History

This journey began, as a result of having lived through stress, frustration, and the stigma of poverty. My experience led to a passionate pursuit of a debt-free existence for those whom God directed me to serve as leader.

A debt-free existence involves intervention strategies, budgeting, and spending. These strategies can be a challenging endeavor, even for those who have stable earnings. Those in poverty, however, experience circumstances differently than those who are experiencing debt. While those in debt often lack necessary management skills, they often have more than adequate incomes. The poor on the contrary, have little or no income therefore have virtually nothing to manage. Persons in debt are often able to disguise their financial circumstances, while the poor, bare the stigma of their circumstances, often publicly, and are treated in ways that question their dignity. They find themselves socially excluded and restricted from valuable opportunities than those simply in debt.

Many African Americans have an exceptionally monumental undertaking before them. Their deficiencies in many aspects, contribute to a laborious life filled with mountains of roadblocks and setbacks. These deficits came about through a system of

indignity and inequality through slavery, discrimination, and restrictions. These include restrictions in opportunities, education, health, jobs, and income.

African Americans have grown to distrust the government and law enforcement because local and state governments would not allow peaceful protests for freedom. For example, Hagler-Geard (2012) of ABC news writes, marchers, “were attacked by state and local police with weapons and tear gas as they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, injuring 17 protesters in what came to be known as “Bloody Sunday.”

African Americans could not gain an education of the state schools in Alabama, and some other places. According to D. Elliott (2003), Alabama’s Governor, George C. Wallace, expressed his position on June 11, 1963, as he “stood at the door of Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama in a symbolic attempt to block two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, from enrolling at the school.” According to a NPR article (2013), titled “Segregation forever” Wallace vowed on January 14, 1963 in an earlier inaugural address, “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever.”

Siemaszko (2012) explains, from “May 2 to May 10, 1963, the nation bore witness as police in Birmingham, Ala., aimed high-powered hoses and . . . dogs on black men, women and even children” under the orders of Bull Connor, then commissioner of public safety.

In addition, a Virginia historical society article titled “Equal access to public accommodations” (n.d.) states, “Blacks could not use restaurants, bathrooms, water fountains, public parks, beaches, or swimming pools used by whites. They had to use separate entrances to doctor's offices and sit in separate waiting rooms.”

Though these painful incidents are part of the historical fabric of African Americans, distrust, frustration, and resentment have had the unfavorable influence of hindering their forward progressively movement. Discrimination in the labor market is discouraging nevertheless African Americans would do well to continue the quest for education, in order to overcome the predicament of discouragement. Education is one of the single most important aides for rising out of poverty and enhancing dignity.

In the medical arena, many African Americans viewed White doctors and medical institutions with suspicion, especially after they were targeted with deception according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) in the “Tuskegee study of untreated syphilis in the “Negro male.” African Americans thought they were being treated for the disease; they were unaware that they were given medications that were useless from 1932-1972. The adverse effect of this experience for many African Americans has been a reluctance to receive medical treatments. This unfortunate decision, however, is devastating to the prevention and cure of diseases among African-Americans.

Although each person is responsible for his or her own actions, laws that produce a lack of opportunities and inequalities, regardless of ethnicity, is difficult to overcome. Therefore, as President Obama suggested, “African Americans understand that culture matters but that culture is shaped by circumstance” (2006, p. 255).

The lack of financial resources has been a major stumbling block to African Americans. In fact, African Americans have a higher rate of poverty than any ethnic group in America. Their experience demands more opportunities, equality, and freedom to exist with dignity.

In a peculiar way, there have been discussions on whether embedded in African Americans are innate pathologies which cause them to be welfare recipients suited for poverty, prone towards criminality, and deviant behaviors. According to Adelman (n.d.) creator and producer of “Race the Power of Illusion”

Ethnic cleansing, affirmative action battles, immigration restrictions- all place race at center stage in contemporary life. Race is so fundamental to discussions of poverty, education, crime, music, and sports that, whether we are racist or anti-racist, we rarely question its reality. . . . One hundred years ago many whites felt that high African American disease and mortality rates were caused not by poverty, poor sanitation, and Jim Crow but because black people were inherently infirm and destined to die out. When influential Prudential Insurance Company statistician Frederick Hoffman compared death and disease rates between white and black people in 1896, he attributed the disparities to a “heritable race trait” among Negroes, ignoring the impact of poverty, poor sanitation, and over-crowding on health and mortality. Today, it is still popular to attribute group differences in performance to innate “racial” traits.

What is noticeable about this statement is the list of *issues* African Americans are faced with: diseases, high mortality rates, poverty, poor sanitation, and Jim Crow laws introduced after slavery whose nature was to discriminate against those of African heritage. In addition, the erroneous idea that African Americans are created differently with “heritable race traits” which contribute to their early demise, presents dignity as inaccessible to African Americans, and an insult is to their Creator.

As an African American child I was not aware that I lived in poverty. No one came to me and said, “You are poor.” Like any typical child, regardless of social-economic context, play was central to my life. It was within the context of play that I encountered my first glimpse of poverty. My Christmas toys were the toys of another family’s previous Christmas. In other words, they were “hand me down” toys. At that time I was overjoyed to receive them. It was in reflecting later that I became conscious of my poverty.

One unforgettable day, city officials came visiting and nailed a sign on the front of our house, which deemed it “Unfit for Human Habitation.” I knew there were holes in the kitchen floor, and plaster falling from the ceiling, but what I did not know nor my parents was that the foundation of the house needed underpinning in order to prevent it from collapsing. It was these experiences that awakened me from childhood innocence to a concern for my own family’s poverty and lack of dignity.

Despite the conditions of the house, my parents worked hard. It could never be assumed in the slightest way that laziness contributed to our living circumstances. My mother worked extremely hard doing domestic work, sometimes walking for miles then walking back, to cook, and work before going to bed, while my father worked for the railroad. Neither parent had the privilege of finishing their early education, because their time was needed to take care of their individual family matters when they were children. Because my parents were either eldest and near eldest in their respective families, they were required to help their parents around the house and raise the other siblings. This meant they could not complete their education.

What were the experiences which led my parents and other African Americans to be marginalized, to working certain jobs, living in certain neighborhoods, and for the most part lacking in education, thereby only attaining income levels of poverty? This question begins to unravel as the enormity of the history of slavery unfolded.

White (1948), one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, documents,

In this land of light a system is cherished which allows one portion of the human family to enslave another portion, degrading millions of human beings to the level of brute creation. The equal of this sin is not to be found in heathen lands. (p. 259)

While institutional slavery in America is over, the legacy of slavery remains in the form of despair. The outline of despair is evident in indignity, marginalization, exploitation, and restriction found among African Americans. Poverty is another element in the African American experience affecting income, housing, health, education, opportunities, and employment.

African Americans, and others who are poor, continue to pursue a true reality of “somebodyness” in the midst of poverty. For some, poverty informs what they have, and sometimes with a devastating impact, who they are, and who they are not. Consequently, poverty and the lack of dignity constrict and compound, more than poverty alone. A divine perspective is needed. The churches assistance is needed towards elevating the awareness, worth, and dignity of humanity.

Historical Background of the Problem

Much of the poverty among African Americans that exists came as a result of slavery among its people during the early 1600s to the year 1865, when the Civil War ended. The simultaneous construct of slavery, poverty, and the erosion of dignity were unavoidable to the lives of African slaves in America from the very beginning.

This project attempts to address areas where the dignity of African Americans was wrought with dishonor and disparities that complicated the life experience and existence of African American people to this day. As a result, poverty became a familiar inevitable outcome, although other deficiencies are included.

African slaves suffered untold humiliation, and became inescapable victims of wounded dignity. They also became aware of, and exposed to, an involuntary discovery

of “known quantities of poverty” among themselves, in contrast with the wealth among their masters and others, that persisted into post slavery years.

Practices of subservience akin to the slavery experience and the work African Americans did to sustain themselves after slavery continued for the most part leaving them in poverty, while dignity became a casualty through a system of discrimination and segregation. Therefore, one cannot speak of poverty among African Americans without talking about their historical dilemma of indignity. The two are experientially inseparable.

Statement of the Problem

Payne (2005) defines poverty as “the extent that one does without necessary resources” (p. 7). This issue crosses all ethnic groups and religious affiliations. In the midst of this dilemma, the lack of dignity is a concern, especially among African Americans. This lack of dignity (worth) became a pathway to poverty.

African Americans continue to experience poverty at a higher rate than other “racial” groups. In the United States, according to a five-year estimate from 2005-2009, the U.S. Census suggest poverty among African Americans nationally were estimated to be 25.1% below poverty, while Whites were estimated during the same time to be 10.8%.

African American Seventh-day Adventist church members in Birmingham, Alabama, are not exempt from poverty and indignity. The Norwood and Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist churches in Birmingham are located in the midst of poverty-distressed communities.

Fagin (n.d.) identifies a protracted exerted relationship of economic poverty and a lack of dignity as human beings were placed into hierarchal racial categories.

In the 1600s François Bernier was one of the first Europeans to sort human beings into distinct categories. Soon a hierarchy of physically distinct groups (not yet termed races) came to be accepted, with white Europeans, not surprisingly, at the top. Africans were relegated by European observers to the bottom, in part because of (black) Africans' color and allegedly primitive culture, but also because Africans were often known to Europeans as slaves. Economic and political oppression resulted in a low position in the white classification system, or what can be termed racial subordination.

Varshney (2002) though not speaking to the experience of African Americans, his words become applicable, "Both poverty and denial of dignity together constitute a more serious force . . . than poverty alone" (p. 23).

Statement of the Task

The task of this project is to develop and implement means for developing dignity and hope as it relates to African Americans in poverty. The project will then discover if and how the awareness of dignity contributes to meaning and purpose. The program will be evaluated to determine its impact.

Justification for the Project

For African Americans slavery played an enormous role in stripping away dignity. Part of the aftermath of this inhumane institution that continues to plague African American's dignity is poverty.

The federal government has programs and a welfare system for those in poverty that includes: Federal Food Stamps Program; WIC, a supplemental nutritional program for women, infants, and children; school lunch and breakfast programs; Nutritional Services Incentive Programs (NSIP) for the elderly; Section 8, a government subsidized housing program for those who have low income; and others. These programs are vitally

important to sustaining, minimum standards of life's existence for those in poverty.

However such programs do not extend far enough in addressing issues of human dignity.

The capacity of the church community, which reflects the image of the Creator, is distinctively positioned to share the message that God creates human beings equal, with purpose to love God and give glory to Him. The church community is also instructed to love their neighbor who is bestowed with mutual dignity. The church community also shares God's compassion to those in need, with expanding its mission of genuine concern for others.

While human beings are ultimately provided for and dependent on God for their provision, the church community shares a willingness to communicate sacrifice and service as part of their purpose for living. Although the church community at times has been slow or failed to communicate a clear message of dignity essentials such as love, freedom, and equality, it is still equipped with divine conviction from God's Word on creation, the dignity of humankind, and its sense of duty to humanity.

The wider local community's involvement is encouraged as well. All available resources of practical support for those in poverty will lead to development and inspiring hope towards dignity for humankind.

Expectations From This Project

This project will give hope to people living in depressed communities, especially to those who consider themselves to be individuals without it. The nature of this hope is rooted in biblical utterances, which extend beyond financial circumstances to the worth of all created in the image of God.

This project will help those in poverty, particularly African Americans, to see

reasons for their poverty. It will reveal the history of the past and give strength and courage to African Americans who are proud of their African heritage, and stress the importance of love towards those who are not African American who courageously gave their lives fighting against oppressors of dignity.

This project intends to promote service to others, irrespective of one's financial status. It supports a common connection with all of humanity. Those who are privileged of moving from poverty to plenty will sense the need to give back to others who are still struggling through life.

This project will help pastors and leaders to know and understand the thoughts and feelings communicated to them by those in their congregation and neighbors who live in communities of poverty. The importance of recognizing the social conditions of their neighbors helps pastors and leaders to understand their needs with a genuine concern for ministry in the community.

This project will give purpose and meaning to those in poverty. The importance of meaning is seen as those of poverty understand they are valuable in the sight of God. Although many cannot easily escape from their social status, they can escape from spiritual poverty.

This project will contribute to dispelling myths about those in poverty and how those myths relate to African Americans. Certain mistaken beliefs regarding African Americans reveal errors about their humanity, errors about an assumed inferiority, and errors of a biblically-endorsed view of slavery which provided for immense exploitation of a people.

This project also provides a working tool for understanding poverty in a limited

way. Its primary emphasis is the experienced indignity of African Americans and poverty. Additionally, and equally, it seeks to appreciate the bestowal of dignity to all humankind.

Delimitations

This proposal is not an attempt to solve the problem of poverty. It does give a limited African American historical context of the scope of their existence and how that existence impacted the high rate of poverty among them. It does not suggest in any way that African Americans are the only ones that experience poverty, nor that others did not experience slavery of some sort. Nor does it suggest that the poor is without dignity. The poor and rich alike have dignity, and both have wounded dignity. It does suggest, however, that African American's experience of slavery and discrimination was institutionalized with negative ramifications that inhibited and questioned their humanness, capabilities, rights to education, including the reading of the Bible, and lacking in economics.

It is not to convey that African Americans were left to fight slavery, discrimination, and poverty alone. For without the help of influential Whites, Latinos, Asians, and others, who dared to stand valiantly against inequality and injustices, the road towards dignity would have been much longer and more severe.

Limitations

Indignity, slavery, and calculated poverty of African Americans are without support in the Bible. The endorsement of such ideas from a biblical standpoint is nonexistent. The circumstances surrounding the mistreatment of African Americans

therefore came later. Therefore any expectation of biblical poverty or slavery among African Americans exclusively is unfounded.

Felder (1991) says,

In fact, the Bible contains no narratives in which the original intent was to negate the full humanity of black people or view blacks in an unfavorable way. Such negative attitudes about black people are entirely postbiblical. (p. 127)

The project application does not assume that it is a comprehensive study of poverty or a complete detail of the historical experiences of African American history. It may have only an indirect benefit to predominately Anglo, Latino, Asian, or African American suburban churches.

Terms and Definitions

Poverty is defined by Payne (2005) as “the extent that one does without necessary resources” (p. 7). This most certainly includes income, food, and housing. In the African American *experience* of poverty, it is seen as lacking the necessary resources including income, food, and housing over the years through unwarranted controls of freedom and discriminatory practices that inhibits obtaining those resources accumulatively.

Turner (1974) defines poverty in this manner,

To start with a definition of freedom is likely to cause dismay to many science-minded. . . . If one assumes that all men need to exist and do so in modest or greater proportions as their environment and development allow, then it becomes apparent that a major impediment to self-assertion of the poor is that their environment is labeled, organized and spoon-fed to them by persons who do not share their economic, ethic or cultural experience. Indeed to be “poor” is to be regarded as generally incapable of originating significant thought or action of any kind. The poor having “failed” therefore more “capable” persons must decide for them. Alas, such judgments are self-fulfilling in the most disastrous way, for the less people steer themselves and the more they stagger at others’ commands, the less “capable” will they appear, especially to those who program them. (pp. 2, 3)

Dignity then becomes very important, as it is seen as the worth of an individual

that is bestowed on humankind from the Creator God. The bestowal of this dignity is free and equal, without qualification to race, sex, or socio-economic status.

In the historical experience of many African Americans, life was lived with confusion and questions besieging their dignity. Many considered them different from others and treated them inhumanely, curtailing African Americans freedom to exist.

Through institutions, laws, and governments, permission was given to treat African Americans differently. Today these underlining myths and beliefs regarding African American's intellect, biological differences, and other assumptions, still exist.

The use of the term African Americans is used as descendants of those who were brought or arrived in America from Africa as slaves and includes those of free African heritage. These may also include Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Hispanic.

Though America's independence from British control was not established until the year 1776, African slavery was already a part of the fabric of its early existence. These African slaves helped to bring the nation to its economic status by immoral indignity and the labor of poverty.

Description of the Project Process

Theological reflection will center on several themes. First, that God endows all humankind with dignity. Second, though sin brought about the origins of poverty, nevertheless dignity was to continue for the poor. Third, that God supplies the provision for those in poverty, giving dignity to the poor. Fourth, that the call for ministry includes compassion for the poor. Fifth, there will be an exploration of biblical examples of how Jesus treated the economically and spiritual poor.

Current literature will be reviewed that includes books and articles addressing the

experience of African Americans in poverty from current and historical perspectives. Additional literature is reviewed that focuses on the churches responsibility to poverty individuals, and principles and strategies to educate church members and those in the community to participate in a dignity endeavor.

Surveys will be distributed and collected from two Seventh-day Adventist churches in Birmingham (Ephesus and Norwood) to obtain poverty attitudes and experiences. These attitudes and experiences expressed in the study will be evaluated.

Two predominately African American Seventh-day Adventist churches in Birmingham, Alabama (Ephesus and Norwood), will be studied to identify relational experience factors to poverty. The Ephesus Church is considered to be the mother church, birthing the Norwood Church in the summer of 1985.

Strategies will be developed to strengthen dignity and aid those in poverty. Their function will be to connect the original purpose of the Creator's highest dignity for humankind as sons and daughters to understanding the tyranny of past history that contributed to the erosion of dignity and elevated poverty among African Americans. These strategies will also be developed for those in poverty to improve the quality life, hope, and dignity to overcoming a seemingly hopeless existence, to hope for a better day.

Others who have a desire towards restoring dignity and making a difference in peoples' lives are encouraged to do so. For it will take a united effort of all Americans and those of the Christian community.

A report of the experience will be shared with churches involved, along with others to enlighten them on the experiences of poverty and its erosion on dignity. Others are also invited to give feedback to strengthen the learning experience with any advisable

information that gives reason for needed modification and expansion for teaching effectiveness and learning absorption.

The impact of this project will continue to inspire and give optimism to those who wrestle with poverty and worthlessness.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO POVERTY WITH A CONCERN FOR DIGNITY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

Introduction

Poverty has been seen as a social ill for so long that little theological reflection is made about its cause or God's requirements to maintain dignity towards those of poverty. However, a biblical concern for the human predicament of poverty is imperative if true compassion and dignity is to be communicated towards the poor.

This chapter attempts to address poverty from a theological and biblical perspective with a particular concern for the dignity of African Americans. In addition, the purpose of this chapter is to contrast the backdrop of how the poor were to be treated from biblical instructions given by God and the plight of African Americans and their ill treatment to better understand their poverty circumstances.

Poverty is not specifically a problem *only* among African Americans, no more than sin is unique *only* to one ethnic group. Nor are African Americans the largest racial group of poverty-stricken people in the United States. That distinction belongs to Whites whose population is greater. However, African Americans have the highest percentage of poverty among any racial group in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Press Release (2005) African Americans had the lowest median income of all races with the severest poverty rate percentages (24.7%).

From the outset it must be said that many comments that relate to humanity, in the arena of poverty and dignity, are inclusive of *all*, including African Americans. There are other statements; however, that apply only to African Americans given their struggles

with this issue. Though African Americans are not mentioned specifically in the Bible regarding poverty or dignity, the global *issues* of poverty and dignity involves all of humanity.

To pro-slavery thinkers, African American's humanity was regarded as nonexistent, and their subjugation was considered moral, as seen in an article by Ross (1990)

The proslavery rhetorician who grounded his argument in the denial of the humanness of the slave, in the reduction of the slave to a chattel, was insisting on his own innocence. Slavery was not, for him, a matter of subjugation and denial of the principal of freedom. Slavery was instead a natural, even moral, disposition of another species of creature. In this vision, slavery no more tainted . . . than the penning and use of his cattle. (p. 4)

Effaced by the erroneous opinions of misguided individuals, African Americans were considered in some farcical way as sub-human. These opinions would play their part, subverting by suspicion their humanity, intellect, abilities, and dignity; thus eventually contributing to poverty circumstances. The fact is African Americans are undeniably included in the creation of God in the image of God with the bestowal of dignity.

The degrees to which African Americans have been affected and the manner through which they have been the recipients of injustice, constantly need to be rehearsed and updated, to understand reasons behind their poverty disparity.

History plays an important part to learning and correcting the mistakes of the past. Divine providential history challenges human history's past and present, cultivating a course of dignity for all people, despite human interferences. It is therefore the biblical record of poverty and a fraction of the historical experience of African Americans that will be employed to cast light on a course towards dignity.

God's Initial Purpose for the Poor

God in the Old Testament reveals support, protection, and compassion towards the poor and initiates biblical instructions. Furthermore, the New Testament brings to light the ministry of Jesus to all people, including the poor, beggars, lame, blind, widows, and others, thus conveying essential dignity to all humankind, despite their demoralizing circumstances.

The purpose of Jesus' coming was stated in the Old Testament through the Prophet Isaiah, who is considered to be the suffering servant. In addition to this Jesus was identified *with* sufferers.

Spoken of in Isa 61 and recorded in Luke 4; Jesus makes His inaugural address of ministry, as He identifies with the year of Jubilee imagery. Ringe (1995) shares this comment,

Isaiah 61 builds on the imagery of the Jubilee year mandated in Leviticus 25. According to the laws effecting the Jubilee year, every fifty years Israel was to declare a "year of liberty" marked by four types of "release" or "rest." (p. 68)

Jesus made clear His intentions of releasing and relieving the poor and oppressed, as recorded in Luke 4:18:

The spirit of the lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

After reading the scroll, Jesus then made this announcement from Isa 61:1, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). While this statement, according to Ringe (1995), was "the inaugural celebration of God's reign . . . to a new participation in God's reign of justice and peace" (p. 69), it was His actions which really testified of His intentions to those who were lost, poor, and oppressed; assuring them of salvation and

healings, and giving them continual seasons to celebrate dignity without waiting for another 50 years.

Humanity Made in the Image of God and Poverty as a Result of the Fall

Originally, humanity was endowed with honor, a godly character, and exceptional dignity. According to Robinson (1974), humanity was made “in the image of God (Gen 1:26, 27), to have dominion over every living thing . . . God has raised man far above the world” (p. 62). The implication of Robinson is that all of humankind was exceptional in their original place in life.

There are clear distinctions in intelligence of humans to value God and evaluate creation above and beyond the rest of the creation. In addition mankind’s moral capability and stewardship capacity of dominion over the rest of creation and of its resources is God-like.

The phrase “the image of God” has had vigorous arguments over its meaning according to Pollard (2011),

The word translated “image” (Hebrew, tselem) is used to convey the idea of the “shadow” or “reflection” of God.” While theologians have argued about what constitutes “the image of God,” textual clues in Genesis 1-3 suggest that (1) the “image of God” is that quality of human existence that differentiates it from the rest of creational life, since the phrase is only applied to the creation of human beings; (2) those features of humanity that give humans their unique similarity to and relationship with God; (3) those particular endowments, such as conceptive and discursive rationality (Genesis 2:19, 20), individual and communal relationality (Genesis 2: 23, 24; 5:2 moral and ethical agency (Genesis 3:14, vocational responsibility (Genesis 2:15), and aesthetic sensitivity (Genesis 2:19).

Calvin (1960) says. “Adam bore God’s image, in so far as he was joined to God (which is the true and highest perfection of dignity)” (Vol.1, bk. II, xii, 6.). While

mankind was made in the image of God, mankind is still *made*: with a moral character, from the dust of the ground and elevated above other creatures. White (1958) says, “Christ alone is the express image” (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God.” (p. 45).

Genesis 3 indicates that sin brought about a moral decline in human nature and the relationship to fully discern bestowed dignity. Adam and Eve in disobedience began to blame each other and hid themselves-fearing God. The difficulties of poverty and other ills also had its beginning early in the history of humankind because of sin. Consequently, the ground was cursed (Gen 3), resources weaken and death ensued.

Kidner (1967) ponders the movement of humanity from a sinless state to a moral decline, and confirms humanity as “a creature fashioned from earthly matter, God-breathed and God-like, whose spiritual history runs from innocence to disobedience and on a moral decline which the beginnings of civilization can do nothing to arrest” (p. 26).

Evolution: An Alternative View of Humanity

A brand of so-called science offered an alternative account of the genesis of humanity—evolution. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was an English naturalist and according to the Oracle ThinkQuest Educational Foundation (n.d.), Darwin was the person “who laid the foundation of modern evolutionary theory with his concept of the development of all forms of life through the slow-working process of natural selection.” The idea of this theory is that life started from a simple form by chance and developed into a more complex form as it is today. As it developed over time, allegedly millions of years, the fittest of those forms according to the theory “naturally survived” and prevailed over weaker forms, changing in variation to what exist today.

The evolution account provided atheists the tragic idea that there is no need for God, which erases dignity from all formulas of humanity's beginning. Zacharias (1990), a renowned Christian apologist, writes, "On the heels of the Darwinian theory, theism itself was under severe attack, and an atheistic mind-set was now a 'scientifically supported' reality" (p. 16). The implied outcome of this thought is that the forces of atheism and science began to weaken and disregard the claims that there is a God and promoted a trumped-up story of a superior humanity over a "weaker" humanity.

The evolution theory is not the first conception nor will it be the last to lend itself towards doubting God's creating of man in His likeness. Nor is it the present intention here to debate science, evolution, and religion. The danger ahead, however, is that if there is no God then there is no dignity for anyone. The existence of humankind and their lineage (roots) is diminished to simple life forms, rather than a Creator. This danger includes the denial of dignity and humanity of African Americans. Those doing so participate as full-time atheists or *selective* part-time atheists, denying the God of creation. Any denial of God's created humanity is a denial of the God of creation.

Chesterton (as cited in Zacharias, 1990) a well-known philosopher suggests that to believe in the nonexistence of God would be analogous to waking up some morning, looking into the mirror, and seeing nothing. With no reflection, no perception, no idea whatsoever of the self, there would be nothing to conform to, and nothing to modify. (p. 24)

All Humankind Endowed With Dignity From God

Dignity is God bestowed. It was bestowed before the fall, and even after the fall humankind's dignity was not totally eliminated. White (1943) makes a strong statement concerning dignity and its importance when she writes, "Preserve your God-given dignity in the fear of God" (p. 485).

The tone of the message suggests that humanity though fallen *still* has dignity, and God-given dignity should be paramount and protected. Preservation of one's dignity then means that it should be safeguarded and protected.

Dignity should be seen as *God-worth*, which translates to *self-worth* if self is properly seen in relationship with God. When looking into the mirror it is important that the reflection seen does not overshadow the fact that God created humanity in His image.

There is a dignity of self-worth that is different from the God-worth dignity. Self-worth without acknowledging God gives too much credit to one's own self and thinks of one's own self. God-worth dignity rightly understood acknowledges God as the bestowal of worth that rises to its highest level.

White (1937) focuses on God as the bestowal of dignity when she states these words in reference to 1 John 3:1; "It is not possible for humanity to rise to a higher dignity than is here implied. To man is granted the privilege of becoming an heir and a joint heir with Christ" (p. 17). Note the words in the text of 1 John 3:1 concerning a *bestowal upon humankind*, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be call the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1). To *know* that there is a heavenly Father who has bestowed love and dignity on His children through His worth is the *highest dignity*.

Alex Haley's Roots: A Chronicle of Ancestral Dignity

Roots, a well-known book, originally started as a chronicle of the ancestry of Alex Haley. It was later made into a movie revealing an account of slavery in America. For the first time many watched the details of slavery, previously unknown to even many African Americans.

Perhaps the most poignant scene in the saga of *Roots* was when the slave master wanted to break the will of the new slave, Kunta Kinte, by getting him to understand that he would be receiving a “new” name—Toby. Kunta Kinte believed, however, that his parents gave him his name at birth. He also believed that the Creator God sanctioned it.

Kunta Kinta was held up towards the sky on the eighth night of his birth in a mini consecration service with the words spoken, according to Haley (1976), “fend killing dorong leh warrata ka it eh tee (Behold the only thing greater than yourself)” (p. 3). Baby Kunta was linked with his God. How could he now deny who he was?

Consequently, Kunta Kinte rebelled because Toby was not his given name at birth. The name of Toby had no meaning for him. The whip, however, designed to forcibly punish and instruct by means of pain and suffering would be applied again and again to impose the acceptance of this new name.

Dignity Resists Identity Change

After a strong and bitter resistance, Kunta Kinte finally acknowledged the new name forced by a whip. The new African slave was just one of many stripped of their freedom and sense of dignity. With excruciating pain he exhaustingly exclaimed, “My name is Toby.” When the punisher was finished however, one of the slaves who had been on the plantation for a while and responsible for mentoring new slaves to their life in America, cried sympathetically to the horror he had just witnessed and utters to Kunta Kinte, “You know who you be, Kunta; that’s who you always be. Kunta Kinte” (video source taken from the movie *Roots* on YouTube).

Dignity is a person's to keep and to preserve no matter what the situation is because it is God-given. Even when some believe it can somehow be beaten out of you, it lays dormant waiting for the day to blossom and give fruit.

Kunta Kinte's mentor was right theologically, for when there is an understanding and acceptance of who God is, then one begins to understand better who they are. Kunta Kinte was equally right. His name had meaning to him. He refused to have a name change because he was safeguarding his dignity—protecting his identity. Without family, friends, and familiar surroundings it was all he had left; the dignity of whom he was, through his name.

The words Kuni, Kunindi, and Kuninta may possibly be words from which “Kunta” is a derivative. They all are variations on a theme meaning to awaken, be awake, or to be aware (*Mandinka-English Dictionary*, 1995).

Imposed Treatment of a System of Indignity and Poverty

While verification of all written accounts of the book *Roots*, the movie, or the resulting meaning of the name Kunta cannot be confirmed with certainty, the scene of the name change however captures the essence of poverty among African Americans.

It is the scene of millions of African Americans throughout time, forced to change their awareness of who they are or should be in God to a relegated system of slavery and discrimination to an existence of poverty. This existence mimics Kunta Kinte, being forced to become Toby, as African Americans were forcibly regarded as inhuman.

In addition, African slaves were considered a security risk. Therefore laws were created that forbade them to be taught how to read and write. African Americans could not vote. Many years after slavery they were demanded to go to the rear of the bus to be

seated. They had to drink from segregated water fountains. They were educated in inadequate schools and were told to live in their “own” segregated neighborhoods.

Statistics show higher poverty rates among African Americans that relate to income and indignities suffered. African Americans attempted to make sense of these apparent contradictions of poverty and what exactly is humane treatment for humans.

African Americans did find some who were willing to risk compassionate concern towards dignity, such as William Wilberforce, a leader in abolishing the slave trade in England who lived from 1759-1833; William Lloyd Garrison, founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society who lived from 1805-1879; John Greenleaf Whittier, a Quaker and writer against slavery who lived from 1807-1892; Fredrick Douglas; Henry Ward Beecher, who lived from 1813-1887, and sister Beecher Harriett Stowe who lived from 1811-1896 and wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin about the life of slavery.

Physical and Spiritual Poverty Demean as Slavery

In like manner, poverty and its surroundings can potentially take one to a metaphorically foreign land. It can cause the poor to be slaves to their circumstances and demean human dignity. It can cause some to forget the God who created them, making it difficult to safeguard dignity.

Like Kunta Kinte, the pain and suffering which comes with poverty becomes too great, and they are forced to accept a name given by “masters” of every kind rather than the God-given name of being called “sons of God.”

God evidently knew spiritual poverty and harsh economic poverty can harm the sons and daughters of God, causing them to lean towards other solutions that would compromise the preservation of dignity.

Therefore God, in His mercy protected Israel throughout their history from perpetual erosion of dignity being called by His name. This awareness of God has always served as a significant role, from generation to generation. Identity and dignity were interwoven to give purpose and meaning for the people of God, and for the revelation of God to the poor.

Poverty not From a Vindictive God but a Derivative of sin

Earlier it was mentioned that the entrance of sin made poverty possible. It is from this premise that poverty emerged as a natural derivative of sin. Sin, according to the Bible (1 John 3: 8), is from the devil and he sinned from the beginning.

When one is asked about poverty it is not generally expressed in approving terms. It is lodged with other ills of our society such as hunger and sickness that are also troubling. These ills, like sin, are without a human permanent remedy. Therefore it is difficult to imagine that one can find dignity through sickness, death, hunger, and poverty.

When Jesus annunciated the reason for the presence of the Spirit of the Lord upon Him, He said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering the sight of the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year. (Luke 4:18, 19)

It is clear that God has enormous concern and compassion for those who are in poverty. Harrison (2003) argues that poverty's "origins lie strictly within human nature, and therefore it must not be regarded as a state or condition imposed upon humanity by a stern and vindictive God" (p. 317). The state of poverty came therefore, as a result of disobedience to God by Adam and Eve. Thus their beautiful Eden home was lost, the

ground that yielded food easily and abundantly was cursed, and existence became problematic (Gen 3:1-24).

The Nature of Poverty Among Israel

By the time of the called-out covenant-keeping people known as Israel, one can be certain, poverty was already in existence. Harrison (2003) states, “The first real indication of the nature of poverty among the covenant people of Israel occurs in the Mosaic law which governed national and individual conduct in the light of God’s desire” (p. 317). God said to His covenant people in the book of Deut 15:1-11, give to the poor and every creditor that lends to his neighbor shall every seven years release the debt.

Old Testament Descriptions of the Poor

There are five words in the Old Testament that describe the poor:

Ebyoen: this is a difficult word to follow because of its many applications. It is used more than 60 times in the Old Testament referring almost in its entirety to the poor materially. (Wolf, 1962, p. 843; see Deut 15:7; Ps 37:14).

Dal: one who is low, hanging down or socially reduced (Harris, Archer, Waltke, 1990; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1980, 1:190; see Gen 41:19, Exod 23:3, Lev 19:15, Job 29:12, 16).

Ani: to be forced to humbleness, submission by one’s enemy under distress or pain. This may be someone who had possessions or means before, but became poor through his own ill-advised distribution or acted upon by others (Harrison, 2003, p. 317; see Job 24:9, Ps 10:9).

Rush: “poor” in an economic or social sense (Harrison, 2003, p. 317; see 1 Sam 18:23).

Misken: socially a beggar having the sense of being inferior, relating to the word “dal” (hanging low) (Harrison, 2003, p. 317; see Lev 27:8, 25:47).

New Testament Descriptions of the Poor

New Testament words have various meanings; though not as numerous as the Old Testament the meanings are similar:

Ptochos: “poor” in a broad meaning both literally and metaphorically (Vine, 1966, p. 192; see Matt 11:5; 26:9, 11 for literal; Matt 5:3, Luke 6:20 metaphorically).

Penichros: poor and needy as with the widow in Luke 21:2 (Vine, p. 192).

Penes: a daily worker for one’s bread in 2 Cor 9:9 (Vine, p. 192).

Ptocheuo: one who is destitute, a beggar (2 Cor 8:9) (Vine, 1966, p. 192).

Poverty in the Old Testament

The word poverty is mentioned in the Bible 15 times. Most occurrences are in the book of Proverbs but the first instance where poverty can be found is in Genesis.

Yarash: to take possession off, dispossess, disinherit (Harris, Archer, & Waltke, 1990; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:409; see Gen 45:11, Prov 20:13; 23:21).

Resh/Rish: the root implies destitution (Harris, Archer, & Waltke, 1990; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:840; see Prov 6:11; 10:15; 13:18; 24:34; 28:19; 30:8; 31:7).

Mahsor: having a lack, in need of (*Strong, 1980*, [4270] p. 65; see Prov 11:24).

Haser: same as above, having a lack of (see Prov 28:22).

Poverty in the New Testament

The use of the word poverty in the New Testament is *ptocheuo*. It is used only three times (2 Cor 8:2, 9; Rev 2:9). Its meaning is the idea of a beggar.

Poverty in the Book of Proverbs

The book of Proverbs implies several ways for persons to fall into poverty both spiritually and materially:

1. The sleeping, slumbering, sluggard, the hands folding person will come into poverty (Prov 6:4-11; 20:13; 24:33, 34).
2. The person who simply romanticizes thoughts, feelings, and passions without being wise, knowledgeable, and dutiful will come to poverty (Prov 10; 10-15).
3. The hoarding of money and gifts, which could be given to others, paradoxically leads to poverty (Prov 11:24-26).
4. The person that refuses instruction (Prov 13:18).
5. The Bible speaks of the drunkard and the glutton coming to poverty (Prov 23:21). Nichol (1977b) says, “Drunkenness and gluttony are costly vices that refuse to be controlled by a shortage of money. They also handicap a man in his work and limit his earning capacity” (3:1025).
6. Persons, who seek for the vain things and vain persons and are not diligent, will come to poverty (Prov 28:19).
7. The person that hasteth to get rich is the man that hath an evil eye; he shall come to poverty. This may be the man that will do anything to obtain riches, even if, it is illegal or harmful to him, or to others (Prov 28:22).
8. The dangers of riches and the dangers of poverty are spelled out in Prov

30:8, 9. The dangers of riches are being full therefore not needing the Lord. The danger of poverty is that one might steal to be rich, therefore taking advantage of others.

9. Lessons of temperance are seen. For those who would be kings; they should not be given to strong drink. Those who are ready to perish and those who destroy themselves, by anaesthetizing themselves with strong drink, attempt to drown their misery, which leads to destruction and more misery.

Provision for the Poor and Salvation

There is a motivating ingredient for helping those in poverty—*love*. It is the greatest of all virtues according to the apostle Paul (1 Cor 13:1-13). With this in mind the God of love made provision for those in poverty. Wolf (1982) says that “God through the Mosaic legislation and the prophetic exhortation seeks social justice for the poor (Deut 10:17-18; II Sam 22:28; Isa 25:4; Amos 2:6; 4:1, etc.)” (3:843).

In addition, the New Testament uses the Greek word *ptochēia* that means destitution. This is the same word used of Christ who volunteered destitution for our sake (2 Cor. 8:9). Destitution is also the same meaning found in 2Cor. 8:2 and in Rev 2:9. The provision of God through Christ for our salvation came through His condescending poverty of humanity that humankind might become rich.

God’s Provision for Those in Poverty in the Bible

There are other references of love and provision towards those in poverty by God and His covenant-keeping people such as:

1. God remembering the poor (Ps 9:12; 10:12)
2. God having compassion and comforting the poor (Ps 34:6; Isa 49:13).
3. God caring for the poor (Job 5:15; Ps 107:41; 132:15; Jer 20:13).

4. The Bible warns against tyranny towards the poor (Exod 23:3; Lev 19:15; Isa 1:23; Ezek 22:7; Micah 2:2; Mal 3:5).
5. Judges were to protect the poor (Exod 23:3; Deut 16:19; Ps 82:3).
6. Interest was not to be forced from the poor (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:36; Deut 23:20).
7. The poor were allowed to collect food in the fields and vineyards and especially the remaining portions (Lev 19:9-10; 23: 22; Deut 24:19; cf. Ruth).
8. The poor had first privileges to the sabbatical fruits (Lev 25:6).
9. The poor and needy were to receive the blessings of the tithes (of thy seed and of thy field) in the third year (Deut 14:28-29; 26:14).
10. When presenting an offering at the temple the poor could bring an inexpensive offering (Lev 12:8; 14:21; 27:8; Luke 2:24).
11. Jesus considered the poor (Matt 19:21; John 13:29).
12. Jesus commended those who gave to the poor (Mark 12:42-43).
13. The preaching of the gospel included those who were poor (Matt 11:5; Luke 14:21).

One of the ways God was involved in the affairs of the poor came through God-given instructions and conduct on how the poor were to be treated. This treatment was always laced with dignity.

Several examples are cited in the Old Testament. In Exod 22:25 the poor were not to be charged interest. The text says, “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.” This was important in order that the poor would not find themselves deeper in debt and poverty.

There is an interesting scripture in Exod 23:3 that seems to go against the poor. However it had more to do with being impartial when it comes to justice. Its content suggests that the poor should not receive partial treatment, nor should the wealthy. Nichol (1977a) on Exod 23:6 says, “While v. 3 warns against favoring the poor, out of compassion for them, this prohibits discriminating against the poor because of his poverty, a far more common wrong” (1:626).

God called for special times when the poor would be benefited, such as in the seventh year. The land rested from cultivation and during this time the poor could reap whatever the land produced. After the poor had taken all they wanted, the animals could eat what remained. There were times when God commanded those harvesting the land not to “wholly reap the corners of the field” leaving it for the poor (Lev 23:22).

In addition to this, grain droppings were to be left in the field, not to be gathered, left purposefully for the poor. Grapes were also to be left on the vines for the poor and strangers to gather (Lev 19:9, 10).

God Provided Legislation on Behalf of the Poor

Whenever situations became difficult that led individuals to debt, servant-hood, or land loss, these were only temporary situations for God’s people. The importance of this fact gave hope, for they looked forward to the day of liberation when circumstances would change.

Though poor and subjected to servant hood, the poor were not cast out of the community of God’s chosen people. Instead, they were recipients of consideration, to detailed lessons on behalf of the poor.

Every 50 years (The Year of Jubilee) the people of God were reminded of their bondage in Egypt and the freedom they received from the hands of God. Therefore, legislation was instituted which provided dignity to the poor. There were three main features:

1. When in servitude to their own countryman they were allowed to go free in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:10; Exod 21:2, 3).
2. When they forfeited family land because of financial crisis they were allowed to reclaim the land (Lev 25:10).
3. The land would remain uncultivated in the fiftieth year. Also the forty-ninth year being a sabbatical year, it remained uncultivated and the poor were free to receive whatever was available through Gods' provision (Lev 25:11; Deut 15:1-18)

As was seen in some of the Hebrew word meanings above, one word in reference to the "poor" (dal) suggest that of "one who is low hanging down." Another (ani) gave the thought of being forced to humbleness. Other words suggest being destitute and beggarly. However God in his mercy devised ways to maintain dignity and restoration for His called-out people.

As regards servants, Exod 21:2 states, "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go free for nothing". Temporary servant-hood versus permanent servant-hood can readily be seen as a positive blessing despite having to serve. By the time of the New Testament the priest considered the poor to be sinners, Jesus came to show them mercy.

Opportunity for Service to the Poor

The problem of poverty will always be a part of society. Jesus recognized that the poor would always be with us (Matt 26:11). This text was quoted from Deut 15:11 where it says, “For the poor shall never cease out of the land.” Notice that these were not the only words intimated in the text.

A very important command was also given in the text concerning treatment of the poor. The text continues to say; “therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in the land.”

Lemert as cited in Myers-Lipton (2006, cf. p.57) suggests that words about the poor are said from “pious tongues” (cf. p. 58). “If the poor are always with us amid the obscene wealth of the privileged it is because the modern idea of human fairness has been all but abandoned everywhere but on the tip of pious tongues” (p. ix).

In addition, the entire verse in Mark 14:7 is seldom quoted, “For you have the poor with you always, and whensoever you will you may *do them good*: but me ye have not always.”

In no way does Jesus conclude that the poor should be abandoned. If anything, He stresses the desire and times to “do them good.” Lemert as cited in Myers-Lipton, (2006) says:

The poor is always with you is . . . a lesson of the human condition. The poor with us are ourselves; and we—whatever we may endure—will never return to the sacrificial work required until we recognize this most basic of the facts of life. (p. x)

The essence of Lemert’s statement demands that the poor are considered as us, for most people are willing to make sacrifices for themselves. The poor are not different from us. They simply have fewer resources.

White (1952) says, “The poor are always with us, in order that there may be a constant exercise in the human heart of the attributes of mercy and love” (p. 17).

Compassionate hearts or selfish hearts are revealed, depending on the response to the least of these.

It can be depressing to those who are poor to see the great wealth of others and conclude that God has no concern for them. Occasionally there are the pious, who live qualitatively better lives, which see the plight of the poor and conclude the reason for their condition is laziness or being maladjusted. Some may even conclude, as the Scribes, that the poor are worthy victims to be cheated, as the poor widows in (Mark 12:38-40) “Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.”

Humility and Serving

Humility is not a natural gift of fallen sinful people. Even to those who have been Christians for a long time, humility does not come easy. There is a connection, however, to humility and serving others. Humility and serving others can be seen as train tracks parallel to each other—on one side of the track is humility, the other service. In order for the train to arrive at its destination both sides must operate to avoid a train wreck. Humility and service are joined by the cross ties of the life of Jesus.

As early as the first miracle Jesus found it necessary to shun premature praise and honor; however, there were times when it did occur; yet compared to the constant adoration of the heavenly host, life on earth was different.

According to the Bible, praise is constantly given in heaven, and on earth men and women give praises to God (Rev 5:9-13; Ps 150:1-6). Genuine praise is an expression of

satisfaction, appreciation, and trust to God. God receives praise because He is worthy to receive it, for He alone has created the world and all that is in it. When Jesus came to earth He seemed to avoid praise. Especially was this true when others wanted to crown Him King before the time.

In 2 Pet 2:10 and Jude 8 the word *dignities* is used to denote honor that should be given to authorities, for example, the angels. Yet Jesus laid aside much of His glory. The Greek word for glory, honor, praise, and worship is *doxa*. Jesus veiled His glory in humanity, identifying with those He came to lift, giving in exchange to the lifted-up ones, dignity as sons and daughters of God.

Healing Ministry for the Hopeless

At the wedding feast of Cana the mother of Jesus called on Him to perform a miracle for the wine had run out. The answer to His mother was, “Mine hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). His answer was designed to ward off premature hosannas. There still was work to be done and people to be brought to saving grace. He did not come “to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Serving others became a priority for Him. Jesus also taught that if one had any desire to be chief he “shall be servant to all” (Mark 10:44).

Jesus’ service to others included healing an official’s son (John 4:46-54); healing a possessed man (Mark 1:21-27; Luke 4:33-37); Peter’s mother in-law was healed (Matt 8:14-15; Mark 1:32-39; Luke 4:38-39); people were healed at sunset (Matt 8:16-17; Mark 1:32-39; Luke 4:40-41); a leper was restored (Matt 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15); a paralytic man was able to walk (Matt 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:12-15); and the man

at Bethesda was healed by the poolside (John 5:1-17). Most of those healed were also considered as beggars, destitute, and poor.

In addition to those that were healed, countless others embraced Him as Lord and Savior and received spiritual healing. Often times, Jesus would be seen with publicans and sinners. When questioned about these kinds of associations, His response was, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 3:17). All the disciples, except Judas, embraced Him. Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, a centurion, and others all found Jesus to be a wise humble servant.

By the time of the feeding of the 5,000 many were ready to force Jesus into kingship. They would have done so, but Jesus dismissed His disciples and disbursed the crowd.

Serving others should never have the ambitious motive to be great; however, when service *is* given, someone takes notice of the good deeds, which one-day may be crowned with honor.

Appreciation of Praise From the Hopeless

A significant change was approaching; it was Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem. Jesus seemed to give His consent to crowning Him king. It was Jesus who gave instructions to borrow a colt to make His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The scorn that was heard all His life was about to be reassigned to praise. The dignity that was rightfully His was about to be expressed in its fullness. “Hosanna to the Son of God” was shouted.

What is noteworthy is the identity of the people who are shouting. They are the same ones who were recipients of His service. It is a list of people who were formerly

blind, lame, dumb, lepers, demon possessed, prostitutes, and others. They were orphans, widows, poor, and rich. They were Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans, Syro-Phoenician, and more. No one can say with certainty the total composition of the crowd, but service to others played a major role in their praise.

The community of the poor and needy could not be silenced. Even if they could, Jesus said in their stead, “the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:20). Dignity had been given to the people and they have returned it with praise. The poor and needy knew that God had given to them something that money could not buy; it is then that God-worth dignity is grasped and *praise* is given in return.

Questions will arise when one enters into service to those in poverty. Why are some rich and others poor? White (1952) responds,

The reason why God has permitted some of the human family to be rich and some so poor will remain a mystery to men till eternity, unless they enter into right relations with God and carry out His plans. (p. 17)

The best way to respond to those in poverty perhaps is not in words but in decisive action from the heart. When this is done the poor and those who seek to minister to the poor will make the following discoveries: (a) the gospel is preached to the poor as Jesus preached, (b) humility will be part of the learning process, (c) the poor are discovered not to be any different than others, (d) their praise for God is often deeply emotional with gratitude, and (e) reasons become clearer in the light of what God has done through Jesus that the poor are not to be neglected, but to the contrary, worthy of dignity.

Christian Duty to Physical and Social Needs While on Earth

When Jesus was on the Mount of Olives talking to his disciples, He taught them about a day when “the King shall say . . . Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34). He gave a reason for the invitation. The reason had a lot to do with compassionate treatment to unfortunate individuals: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and those in prison. Because compassion, love, and mercy were shown, Jesus said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me” (Matt 25:40).

The Christian has dual citizenship; heaven one day will be home. The teacher’s edition of the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, 3rd Quarter Summer (2008) says:

Jesus instructs His disciples to have a balance ministry. Certainly, they were to prepare people for the kingdom of heaven. But they were also to remember that, in an important sense, the kingdom was already with them. And that meant they were to have concern for people’s total needs-including physical and social. (p. 60)

Our duty to those living in poverty must be transformed from duty to privilege. We must continue to develop ways to help those living in poverty. Wolf (1982) exclaims, “It was the duty of the rich to help the poor, of the strong to protect the weak” (3:844). For those who see the love, the heart, and the compassion of God, it is more than a duty; it should be seen as an opportunity and a privilege.

Prosperity a Distorted Gospel

The modern-day so-called prosperity gospel distorts the gospel. Prosperity in this case is made the unusual standard for *identifying* the people of God. This would make the old adage true: “If religion was a thing that money could buy the rich would live and the poor would die.” It was precisely this prosperous standard that led many religious people

to disbelieve Jesus. This standard also caused Job's friends to ask about sins he had committed; given the fact his riches, possessions, and family members were gone and he was suffering without explanation (Job 1; 2; 4-23).

It is the nature of Satan to exalt a kind of supremacy, which makes others inferior by canceling their validity because they *feel* they are not blessed as others. It was in the Garden of Eden where Satan put to use the inferiority of what Eve thought she had against the superiority of "the gods." Eve was tempted to think there was more to be gained than what God had already given, for "that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes would be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). Having less than others does not make them inferior.

Prosperity Gospel a False Works-Based Gospel

Another danger of the prosperity gospel is one's own individual, works-based ingenuity for salvation and solving one's own crisis in life. An individual working up faith or claiming and obtaining faith by their prosperity does not automatically mean that their faith is real. The antidote for this may be what was confirmed to the prophet Habakkuk, "the just shall *live* by faith." Essentially, the faith of Habakkuk is a faith based and *lived* on *truth* that is firm and steady whether one is prosperous or not (Hab 2:4).

The prosperity gospel makes God like a Santa Claus, and *individuals* to being naughty or nice, while God reveals His hidden presents for only those who tap into His favor. In addition, the prosperity gospel exaggerates *individual* blessings. The Bible speaks of extended blessings to the "just and the unjust" (Ps 37; 73; Matt 5:45).

God Misrepresented Through Emergencies and Vindictiveness

There have been ministries that expressed the *emergency nature of giving* before God strikes them dead. Such a challenge was given from Oral Roberts, a well-known television minister, and repeated on national news stations. Alcon (2003) describes this misrepresentation of God, “God the Father (or was it the Godfather?) was portrayed as even more capricious and vindictive than the Mafia” (p. 70).

Letters having these same emergency characteristics are sent to homes of desperate, unsuspecting people of poverty and others; often expressing something good is about to happen if responded to quickly. The question should be asked: Does the God of the Bible become anxious to emergencies, and how would this process complement dignity?

Satan’s False Dignity and Identity Antithetical to Christ

Notice how Satan’s character is antithetical to that of Christ’s. The prophet Isaiah describes Satan’s fall and character in chapter 14:12-15:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell to the sides of the pit.

This fallen nature of supremacy over others can be subtle wherever it is found, covertly in the heart or overtly in hate groups. Regrettably this fallen nature continues from birth into adulthood.

If it means that others must be treated without dignity then it becomes a moral and social concern. Christians should contest this way of thinking, first, within themselves, and second, carefully in others.

Contrasted with Jesus as in 2 Cor 8:9 one can clearly see a difference in plans. Satan desires to lift himself up. Satan's plan is one-dimensional—Himself! The plan of Jesus on the other hand brings harmony to the whole chaotic universe.

Vicious Encounters on African Americans and Dignity

In regards to African Americans, they were first taken from the inland and coasts of Africa to work without being paid. Many would die at the hands of their materialistic captors.

Second, they were weak after a long and weary voyage across the ocean. Upon arrival they endured beatings. Their workday began early in the morning, from sun up to sundown. They were stripped from worship, while exposed to torture of mind, and body.

Third, vicious attacks were leveled against them, as mounting accusations led to guilty verdicts from corroborating accusers, lawmen, lawyers, and judges, although they were innocent of many crimes.

Questions of parentage were difficult, for they were displaced from their families, leaving them without identity. In addition, slave owners were allowed, without restraint, to father slave children through rape or fornication from irresponsible dads.

Finally, given their circumstances of poverty, and a denial of dignity, many African Americans have been on the receiving end of disgrace. Their lives were not considered worthy of the dignity they really deserved.

A Biblical View of Those in Poverty

Noland (1992) says of the gospels: "Although the term 'poor' in the gospels does not refer exclusively to those who were economically deprived, it does include them" (p.

28). Nolan suggests they were beggars that included lepers, lame, dumb, cripples, blind, and the deaf. Among these considered with the poor were widows and orphans without support.

In addition, day laborers, often without skills, and slaves would be a part of those who were named poor. Noland (1992) suggests, however, that starvation and destitution was not the principal suffering. “The principal suffering of the poor, then as now, was shame and disgrace. As the steward in the parable says, ‘I would be too ashamed to beg’ (Luke 16:3)” (p. 29).

Noland (1992) goes on to explain how devastating it was to be economically poor in New Testament times:

The economically poor were totally dependent upon the “charity” of others. For the Oriental, even more so than for the Westerner, this is terribly humiliating. In the Middle East, prestige and honor are more important than food or life itself. Money, power and learning gave people prestige and status because they make them relatively independent and enable them to do things for others. The really poor who are dependent on others and have no dependents are at the bottom of the social ladder. They have no prestige and no honor. They are hardly human. Their lives are meaningless. A Westerner today would experience this as a loss of human dignity. (p. 29)

White (1942) wrote that “Jesus sought to correct the world’s false standard of judging the value of men. He took His position with the poor, that He might lift from poverty the stigma that the world had attached to it” (pp. 197-198).

Jesus, Poverty, Dignity and Mission

Much of the time Jesus spent on this earth was with the poor. These were with those who were economically poor and those who were poor spiritually. He said I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5: 32). In an earlier verse Jesus said, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick ” (Luke 5: 31).

While he did spend time with those who were wealthy, such as Simon the Leper and the Rich Young Ruler, most of the time Jesus was in the presence of the poor.

Jesus Incarnation and Mission

Jesus' manner of coming known as the incarnation, tells in some incomprehensible way that God became part of humanity. Not only did He become hungry, thirsty, and fatigued; He became a partaker of the social ills of society. It should be recognized that Jesus could have displayed incredible magnificence and grandeur.

The biblical view of Jesus' treatment of those in poverty is tied to the purpose and manner of His coming to this earth. The manner in which Jesus came caught the world off guard.

When kings come to visit other countries, generally their garments, as well as their mode of transportation, announces their arrival, and their arrival is treated with royalty. This was not the case with Jesus.

Born of parents who were poor; Jesus' humble appearance caused others to overlook him as the Son of God. Not that they were unable to know Him, but that they misinterpreted His coming to be a majestic ruler overthrowing their enemies. This would happen in the second coming. His first mission was to save the lost.

Jesus' mission was not to be admired for His glory, but how far He would reach to the lowest depths of sin to save the lost. The Bible declares, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). In this single text, a portrait of dignity for those in poverty begins to take shape. Jesus desires to give His riches to the

destitute, who are “low hanging down (dal), materially poor (ebyoen), feeling poor, (misken), beggarly poor in spirit (misken/ptochos) so that they might become rich.

Giving the poor earthly wealth is *not* what is intended here. The riches are found in Christ the Savior who brings spiritual wealth. In addition, the righteous who are meek according to Jesus (Matt 5: 5), will someday inherit the earth. This treasury of resources found in Jesus is through His un-coerced willingness to become man, to give up or veil His dignity (glory), His worth, that we might receive the riches of His grace. This God-worth dignity of His glory and splendor was set aside. In doing so, He became poor, so that the poor might through Him become rich.

Jesus, Dignity, Identity and Internal Significance

There were those who made mockery of His claims to be the Son of God (Matt 27:33-44). Yet these claims were vital to purpose and meaning. Others wanted to stone Him because He declared Himself to be the Messiah (John 8:58, 59). Some even asked such questions as “Who are you?” “Where did you come from?” Others wanted to know contemptuously who His father was.

The degree to which there was confusion about the identity of Jesus is seen when Jesus asked His own disciples “Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” (Matt 16:13). The answers to these questions were a variety of Old Testament prophets: Elias, Jeremiah, and a newcomer of that day named John the Baptist.

When it comes to Jesus the most important question for an individual is the one Jesus asked following the exchange of answers to His original question. “But whom say ye that I am?” (Matt 16:15). How one assuredly answers this question, forms the foundation of faith, trust, purpose, and meaning.

This issue of who Jesus is was also important to Satan in tempting Jesus to sin. Satan's insinuation was, "If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread." Over and over he tried to get Jesus to sin either by doubting who He was or somehow causing Him to be overly proud of whom He was, thereby showing a measure of arrogance or display. Either way, Satan was looking for victory. However, like Kunta Kinte, He "knew who He be."

Jesus had no need to prove who He was because He knew he was the Son of God. In life He had a complete balance of humanity and divinity. He was fully God and fully man.

The idea of the Suffering Servant encompasses more than the death of Jesus on the cross. He was tormented with insults to break His identity and relationship with His heavenly Father. This relationship-identity became an issue early in life and continued throughout His earthly ministry. If this relationship-identity could be stripped away from Christ, thus causing Him to doubt His real identity and to focus upon Himself, then the mission would be wrecked.

Jesus Sacrifice the Riches to Preserving Dignity

The depths of His contrast and condescension can further be seen in Phil 2:5-8.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross.

The cross was an instrument of torture. It was designed to exert maximum pain and erase any dignity, praise, or any other glorified attribution one may have had in the past. The problem with this, according to the Bible, is that Jesus did nothing worthy of

death, and the one that could have allowed Jesus to go free said, “I find no fault in him” (John 19:6).

It was a lynching mob enthused by Jewish religious leaders to rid themselves, as they thought, of an imposter. In reality Jesus was winning thirsty, hungry, sick, captive, and sinful beggarly people of poverty to His kingdom. Thus, confirming His inaugural address.

While Jesus’ earthly praise was muted by choice, the poor were treated with dignity and their praise was beginning to swell. Many at first had no song in their heart, at least, not this new song. Nor did they have this new praise on their lips. Almost all of them came from backgrounds behind the scenes destitute of means, health, and spirit.

Jesus seldom lavished upon individuals what equated to monetary endowments, except perhaps, the over-filled nets of fisherman. However these fishermen were overwhelmed more by the treasure of Jesus’ heart than the fish caught in a net.

Dignity therefore must be a more enduring treasure than receiving earthy material possessions, otherwise when the possessions cease, dignity ceases. Dignity then is reduced to the deception of possessions.

Dignity (God-worth) is better received when it comes from God and registers within the soul. Then the leavening process begins to take hold and the individual is elevated to an internal and perpetual significance becoming dignified.

Jesus Maintains Dignity in the Midst of Vicious Encounters

Psalms 69:4 could be applied to how Jesus was regarded. “They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head.” Every insult Jesus bore from

humankind and Satan to destroy and humiliate became the foundation for building dignity in others. This fact can readily be seen in the following examples.

First, the early life of Jesus encountered Herod's jealous rage to kill "all the children that were in Bethlehem, and all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Matt. 2:16).

Second, is Satan's attempt to cause Jesus to doubt Himself through temptations found in Matt 4. Satan is far more successful when humankind is in their weakest state. In like manner, the plan to cause Jesus to fall was at a time when He had been fasting for 40 days. The importance of this fact to those in poverty is, at times, these difficulties become a corridor to eternal defeat, near the door of the disadvantaged. However it is also a time when need is recognized; therefore, calling on Jesus in weak and difficult moments is made available through the poverty of Christ (2 Cor 8:9).

Unless there is a call and connection to God in weak difficult times, salvation and strength is left to the individual, which is no salvation at all. Jesus was weak; yet He was victorious over the schemes of Satan and is able to support and defend the perplexities of others with dignity.

Jesus' connection with heaven and the pre-incarnate missionary plan was crucial to how He treated the poor. He would not be deterred for the sakes of humankind, "he became poor, that . . . through His poverty" humankind might lack nothing.

Third, one of the most vicious encounters Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day took place in John 8. Notice how these leaders insinuated ambiguity about the identity of the father of Jesus by asking, "Where is thy father?" signifying the lack of a heritage, or an uncommon heritage (John 8:19). They deepen their scorn by saying, "we

be not born of fornication” (v. 41). This was not a subtle statement. They implied Jesus *was* born of fornication. Going still deeper, they added these words: “Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil” (v. 48). Given the fact that Jews were not warmhearted towards the Samaritans, this could not be seen as a compliment.

Finally, if Jesus has a devil, then He is not credible. There is no purposeful reason to listen to Him. This entire cluster of assaults Jesus endured on behalf of sinful, poverty-stricken people is ironically some of the same lodged against the poor and neglected. They are attacks about family origins and family structure.

Jesus Volunteers to Become a Servant

The act of Jesus was totally voluntary and motivated by love for undeserving impoverished sinners. No one else but God was qualified to correct evil in the world, and although Jesus became a man, the Bible says He was “equal with God.”

This simply means that Jesus did not relinquish being God, but rather deciding to become a servant, a (*doulos*) bondservant. All the praise that one would normally receive as a dignitary was laid aside, and in the place of receiving dignitary status, which is what Satan wanted for himself, Jesus chose to become a bond slave.

To become a man when you do not *have* to, and to become a servant because you *want* to is humbling enough. As a bond servant a person becomes obedient to a master. Jesus volunteered for this God-servant relationship, which implied obedience to a master. He would become obedient to the Father’s will for the salvation of humankind.

It is one thing for God to become a man. It is quite another to become a servant *to* men. Nevertheless, to descend even lower to the realms of *death* is unthinkable. Riches, it seems, vanished to poverty, and yet when Jesus died, poverty became riches.

Appreciation for this sacrifice can only be understood when one considers Jesus' pre-incarnate, eternal-elevated position. He was willing to die for the sins of the whole world and pay an extravagant price for poor, destitute, and beggarly human beings.

Jesus Elevates the Poor

Jesus' elevation of the poor in all its aspects was exceptional. The New Testament contains a variety of case studies of individuals who were treated with dignity, while Jesus was treated with contempt.

There are three examples worth citing on how Jesus treated those who were poor. One was with a blind man who had the additional problem of poverty. The second was a woman that was poor, and yet rich. The third one is a rich man who ironically had the additional problem of the poverty of the soul.

Jesus Elevates the Blind Beggar

A blind man was on the roadside begging. Hearing a multitude of people passing by, he is told that Jesus is in the crowd. It was enough to be blind; but to be poor and blind was difficult. Can a poor man who is also blind call upon Jesus? Or would his poverty exempt him from Jesus' compassion? Would the fact that he had never laid eyes on Jesus because of his blindness disqualify him to receive help?

It was believed in his day that if you were blind, God's displeasure was upon you. Harrison (1982) writes, "This dread affliction was frequently attributed to sin (Exod. 4:11; John 9:2), and as such, could be cured by God alone" (p. 448). Therefore the poor needed to fight through many falsehoods before faith could be firmly planted on the truth. A cry toward God in the right direction could prove to be sufficient faith.

Therefore the blind man cries, “Jesus thou Son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 18:38). The term used here suggests that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. It was a term that was understood in that day to refer to the coming Messiah.

Some in the crowd wanted to silence him, “that he should hold his peace: but he cried out so much the more” (Luke 18:39).

Persistence towards the goal is an important ingredient to success. It must be said however, that no amount of persistence will ever bring a resolution to spiritual needs. It is resolved only by grace. Jesus, however, hearing his cries asked that the blind beggar be brought to Him, to whom Jesus said; “Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.” The man was healed “and immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God” (Luke 18:43).

Jesus Elevates the Poor Woman With the Widow’s Mite

The second example of how Jesus treated the poor is seen in the story of the widow’s mite. It is a story that is unique in its contribution and meaning to the end of time.

Before this scene occurred, Mark writes about a warning Jesus gave against the religious teachers of the law in his day. “Watch out for the teachers of the law . . . They devour widows’ houses and for show make lengthy prayers,” (Mark 12:38, 39 NIV) Hiebert, (as cited in Gaebelien, 1984) says, “to rob the poor and the bereaved under the guise of personal piety doubles the guilt” (8:740).

There are those that say they have worked hard to get where they are. This is not true for all, for some have devoured widows’ houses. Their riches were built upon the credulous backs of countless workers who were forced to work for free.

Jesus had the opportunity to sit across from the treasury where offerings were placed. In line were people dressed in extravagant clothing and with large pretentious offerings. Jesus ignored all their showiness as He focused on a widow and her offering, consisting of only two mites (Luke 21:2).

Jesus invited His disciples to witness the widow, and then said something that seemed strange. She had “cast more in than they all” (Luke 21:3). Those that went before her put in an offering according to their abundance, but she put in all she had.

According to Gaebelien (1984), the measurement in giving is attached to the “proportion, and also in the spirit in which she gave; it was the latter that she was richer than all of them” (8:740).

Jesus Elevates Zacchaeus—The Irony of the Rich who are Poor

The third example of those who received God-worth dignity was Zacchaeus. He was not poor in terms of material goods for he was quite wealthy (Luke 19:2). This is a classic example of the irony of those who are rich but are in poverty.

There are at least two areas of poverty in the life of Zacchaeus. He had a need to have a relationship with God for he was empty on the inside, and a relationship with others. He exerted much energy to see Jesus by climbing a sycamore tree to have a better view. What Zacchaeus did not know was that Jesus was about to change his life from spiritual and social emptiness to a fulfilling relationship with God and others.

Because Zacchaeus was not just a publican, but also a chief publican, he probably did not have many friends. His work was to exact as much money from others in taxes on behalf of the Romans, and any amount he was able to keep beyond what the Romans

demanded was his to keep. In essence he worked for the despised Romans and embezzled money for himself.

Jesus saw something in the heart of Zacchaeus that others could not see. No one suspected the abject poverty in the soul of Zacchaeus. Many times riches can disguise the view of the casual onlooker; observing only the outside often blinds the rich and the poor alike.

The Bible says, “Jesus came to the place, and looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house’” (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus was so delighted that someone would pay any attention to him at all, but to be recognized by name from the One that made all the difference in the world was unbelievable.

When someone is hated as much as Zacchaeus, any acknowledgement of him seen through the eyes of others would be treated with contempt. The scorn started to pour in. “And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, ‘That he [Jesus] was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner’” (Luke 19: 7).

There were reasons for disparaging thoughts and feelings concerning Zacchaeus. No doubt some in the crowd had been taken advantage of by Zacchaeus, but what they failed to realize was that God can transform the sinner because Jesus became poor that others might receive the richness of His grace.

The second area of poverty in the life of Zacchaeus was ironic; his riches could not fill the void of genuine relationships (cf. p. 52). His encounter with Jesus would change him into a kind-hearted generous person, no longer simply interested in his own affairs, but in the difficulties of the poor.

This became evident with these words expressed by a truly rich man. “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8) .

Zacchaeus is a prime example of the transformational change that is needed towards the dignity of the poor. Poor people, rich people, all people need dignity and in no way should they be judged to abandonment. For Zacchaeus was found completely whole with a new relationship with God, with people, and with himself. He is identified at last with the bestowal of dignity as a Son of Abraham—a believer in God, the highest dignity.

Conclusion

Poverty is not a problem *only* among African Americans, no more than sin is unique *only* to one ethnic group. While African Americans are not specifically mentioned in the Bible concerning poverty, sin, or dignity, they and others are included in the “*all*” of sin (Rom 3: 23) and its affects, therefore poverty came into existence as a result of sin and affected all humanity.

African Americans experience poverty at a higher percentage rate than other racial categories not because they are greater sinners. Through slavery and discrimination poverty accumulated; therefore, their dignity suffered an enormous assault.

Connectedness with God, others, and oneself is crucial to preservation of dignity, which many African Americans were stripped of by being sold and forced into numerous kinds of slavery, resulting in different kinds of poverty as education, economics, housing, food, physical and mental wellness.

The Creator God bestowed dignity upon humanity. According to White (1943), dignity should be protected and preserved, which gives its origins a higher status than a simple start from chance through evolving organisms over millions of years.

After sin, poverty among the covenant people (Israel) can be seen throughout the Old Testament. Deut 15:1-11 gives God's instructions for the care of the poor indicating God's concern for the poor while the book of Proverbs speaks of the many ways one can succumb to poverty.

The poor will ever be with us, according to the Bible, but it also admonishes that wherever they are, we should do them good. This is the part that seems to be forgotten by many. Scripture conveys clear evidence in the Old Testament and the New Testament that the poor were to be treated with dignity. The strongest example of doing well to the poor is found throughout the life of Jesus, who elevated the awareness of dignity to the poor. Those who were needy, beggarly, and destitute, discerned a different relationship level, as sons and daughters of God.

The danger of any existence without God is that there is no dignity for anyone. Ellen White suggests the highest dignity is found in humanity knowing the love that the Father has bestowed on humanity as sons and daughters of God (1 John 3:1).

African Americans make up only a portion of those who experience poverty; however, their circumstances are severe. In their experience, a social and moral mockery has occurred. Therefore attention to the travesty of indignity reveals an existence of poverty.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE ON THE EROSION OF DIGNITY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

Introduction

About four centuries ago, slavery among African citizens was introduced to America, which brought about a continual progression and erosion of dignity. Among African American descendants, this shameful introduction produced consequences and, in many ways, altered the lives of everyone in America socially, politically, culturally, and even religiously.

This literature review will trace the erosion of dignity and human rights through mistreatment of African Americans in contributing to poverty, in four parts: (a) it will explore human dignity, (b) it will focus on the impact and implications of slavery and dignity, (c) it will unravel discrimination and dignity, and (d) it will focus on how the first three parts helped to sustain poverty, past and present.

Human Dignity

Berger (2008), founder of the Roland Berger Foundation for Human Dignity, is quoted as saying, “Human dignity and human rights are precious goods that must be defended,” explaining why he has established the Human Dignity Award. He further states, “This issue will remain important as long as human dignity is being violated thousands of times each day around the world.” Berger speaks forcefully against the modern trafficking of slaves, which has changed the lives of many human beings forever.

Although slavery for Africans Americans ended in the middle of the 1860s on paper, the implication of human dignity and its relationship to human rights and slavery itself continued to exist. For African Americans living in poverty, dignity is constantly harassed by inadequacies, lack of opportunities, and ungodly treatment.

Definitions of Human Dignity

Literature debates the definition of human dignity in practice and theory. There are scholars like Howard and Donnelly who say people often “confuse human rights with human dignity” (1986, p. 801), whereas others see the need to separate the two. Indeed Howard and Donnelly believe “human rights and human dignity are quite distinct notions” (p. 801).

Human dignity is seen as the character that is uniquely who a person is, a person of worth and value. This definition is expanded and confirmed in its meaning (cf. p. 34) by Gewirth (as cited in an dissertation abstract by Shipungin, 2003) who writes, “Human dignity is defined as the inherent human worth of all people, regardless of their specific characteristic, behaviors, or feelings about themselves” (p. 5).

Human rights according to Howard and Donnelly (1986) indicate the “equal and inalienable rights, in the strong sense of entitlements” (p. 802). In other words, an individual is recognized as a human and therefore is entitled to human rights by a political regime.

Howard and Donnelly (1986) call human rights a “social practice that aims to realize a distinctive substantive conception of human dignity” (p. 802). It appears that they recognize the *worth* of individuals as human beings having rights, thereby treated

equally and fairly because they are human beings. Especially would this be true if political entity is based on fair and equal justice for all.

Though treatment of citizens and non-citizens may vary in many political governmental bodies, human dignity imposes human rights on these governments when others verify human dignity in that society.

Garbooshian's View of Dignity and Others

Garbooshian (2006) suggests “there is something special in man, whether this be reason, or man’s moral liberty, which allows him to choose right conduct or vicious conduct” (p. 2). Garbooshian further states:

Authors, going back to Antiquity have often contrasted these human attributes to those of the animal or brute kingdom. That is, authors, in encouraging man to use reason, referring to judgment and the comparison of ideas so as to act in a just manner, would distinguish him from the brutes. (pp. 2, 3)

Other definitions that span many years are cited in Garbooshian’s dissertation on human dignity, especially during the eighteenth century. These definitions or strands of dignity are important because they existed during the slavery of African Americans.

Therefore they become indicators and instructors of dignity in various ways of how humans were supposed to be treated at that time. The 12 definitions below, cited in Garbooshian (2006) bolster the fact that dignity for African Americans was ignored and became a constant struggle and in many ways deliberately injurious:

1. It is stated in the “Oxford Companion to Philosophy that Plato, among others, claimed that men could be distinguished from other beings in their rational ability . . . to the use of reason and contemplation . . . Reason is what can know the eternal . . . not subject to the imperfections of the body” (p. 3).

2. The *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* also defines human dignity as “the inherent worth or value of a person” (p. 3).

3. In addressing human dignity Pico della Mirandola, the author of *Oration*, is viewed by William Craven and many other scholars as asserting that “mankind has the free will to choose what he will become.” It further states that Craven believes, “according to Cassirer’s reading of Mirandola, man’s dignity is found in his ability to transform himself into the likeness of any being, and this creative power is God-like” (pp. 3, 4).

4. Another said, “Mirandola also believes that man achieves dignity through philosophy or contemplation of the divine through theology” (p. 4).

5. Garbooshian suggests, “Dignity in the eighteenth century referred basically to inherent worth or to man’s reflection of God through acts, through virtue, or charity and kind and useful acts towards others” (p. 4).

6. “Man’s ability to reason and to know God through reason” was also a consideration for some (p. 4).

7. “Man’s ability to gain salvation” was seen by some, especially by Christians in that other beings did not appear to have the same ability (p. 5).

8. Many believed during the Enlightenment that humankind’s dignity was “in his efforts, in his faculties and capacities as natural being” (p. 5).

9. Another Enlightenment definition suggested human dignity was “the consequence of man being created in the image of God” (p. 5).

10. Paul Oskar Kristeller, a scholar on renaissance humanism, “states that [Pico and Ficino] justify man’s dignity in terms of his metaphysical position. For

Ficino [a humanist of the middle to late 1400s] man's dignity is based on his ability to imitate or reach God." On the other hand Pico "dispenses with the concept of the Chain of Being by placing man outside the creation . . . with the ability to contemplate His creation" and to make choices with freedom concerning what he wants to become. "His dignity is found in the choice of the highest form in life, both moral and intellectual." It is asserted "that for Pico, dignity is not "something that is given to [humankind] with his birth . . . but rather something he has to attain . . . through his own effort" (p. 6).

11. Though "animals possess a likeness to man in their ability to feel and to be loyal, they are also considered solely dependent upon bodily functions and sensations." Humankind on the other hand is progressive, "defined as the ability to compare ideas and to form clear ideas and judgments . . . and his ability to form moral judgments, or to know right from wrong, and what is more to know the existence of God" (pp. 7, 8).

12. "In the Encyclopedie, from one signifying rank, to a meaning indicating inherent worth . . . the article "Esclavage," . . . denounces slavery on moral grounds. There slavery . . . violates man's natural, inherent right to liberty, which is the basis of his dignity" (pp. 9, 10).

The definitions are a mixture of how dignity is attained. Though all definitions may not receive the same significance, they do provide the thinking on dignity from antiquity to the Renaissance and from the Enlightenment and beyond.

Rosen (2012) says Immanuel Kant's understanding of dignity imparted something significant. Kant's morality however did not come from God; it came from within rational autonomous human beings.

Kant's conception makes an exception of human beings from the rest of creation. Only morality has dignity and only human beings carry the moral law within themselves, so it would be wrong to think of human beings as part of the natural world in the way that rivers, trees, or dogs are. Yet Kant's conception of dignity is at the same time deeply egalitarian. Dignity is something that all human beings have in common. (p. 24)

Debate of Dignity as Ranking Social Order or Wider Humanity in France

During the Enlightenment period the idea of human dignity took on a noteworthy meaning. Dignity for some meant that a person was a part of a ranking social order.

Meyer and Parent (1992) with an interest in human dignity, describe the debate of dignity in France.

On the one hand, some political thinkers used the idea of dignity to refer to a recognized and established social hierarchy-for example, the dignity of a king, of a noble, or of a bishop. For these thinkers a person's dignity was simply a function, or a sign, of an individual's elevated social rank. In contradistinction other thinkers understood the notion of dignity to have a much wider application-for example, the dignity of man or the dignity of humanity. (p. 4)

With this view, only social functioning elites could have dignity. This view is very different from being the possessor of dignity for simply being human. These debates of contradictions concerning dignity no doubt occurred in other localities but seemed to be exchanged in France and America in critical ways that excluded rank as dignity.

Secular Ideas on Dignity and Contrast to African Americans

The issues of indignity among African Americans are noticeable through the various meanings of dignity. The first idea of dignity advances the idea of equality

among humankind. Early in the establishment of the United States as with the Declaration of Independence the equality of all men created by their Creator existed on paper. Kateb (2011) author of many books and professor of politics emeritus, Princeton University writes, “All individuals are equal; no other species is equal to humanity (p. 6).

For African Americans this was not exact, it was only in theory and not in practice. Therefore leaving some to believe they could treat African Americans as inferior beings. This would then mean a path towards poverty. However the idea of equality was available for application.

The second idea of dignity already mentioned is the idea as “rank” of an individual or individuals. This is seen as an elevation or rise to status socially over others in a wider context (lords/vassals, masters/slaves, rich/poor, educated/uneducated, etc.). Those of “elevated rank” are those deemed to be possessors of dignity.

Therefore, if African Americans start with the idea of an existence lacking equality, then the second idea of rank as dignity left them with an existence of restraint, with limited movement to expand and improve opportunities; therefore favoring a pathway towards poverty. Opportunity is vital to dignity.

The third idea of dignity deals with the distinction and place of humankind from all other creatures such as animals, plants, or objects. Humankind is unique with superior qualities of intellect. No other species have the ability to be a steward for planet earth and the rest of the animal kingdom. In addition, the superior ability to contemplate, study, make judgments, and choose with emotions is without equal. Furthermore, humankind’s ability to build cars, airplanes, and computers places them in a category of their own.

African Americans have been erroneously regarded as outside humanity, beastly in nature, expected not just to work but work as beastly animals do. Consequently as with animals, payment and personhood was disregarded. This kind of arrangement between an employer and employee woefully supports indignity and a sort of uncommon humanity in a system operationally running towards poverty.

The fourth idea is the idea of treatment. This is seen when one is treated with respect. The historical mistreatment and disrespect of African Americans is detailed within this chapter as to the indignity of African Americans

The fifth idea is an attitude, position or stance. A person who stands in a dignified manner against injustice despite difficulties is a person of dignity.

African Americans were expected to docile in attitude. When dignity is omitted injustice is left to continue it violates the conscious. Martin Luther King's method became effective, using non-violent protest to bring about change. It was a resistance to be sure, howbeit, through strength, love and dignity.

Dignity of “All People” or “All Men” in America Except Slaves

Rather than give the leaders in America titles of nobility such as kings and queens the founding fathers considered “all people” of America with dignity. The visible debate of dignity was at the center of this discussion. Meyer and Parent (1992) states that

the constitutional ban on titles of nobility (Article I, section 9, clause 8; section 10, clause I) was both a hedge against corruption and a gesture toward a recognition of a dignity for human beings not based on social hierarchy. (p. 6)

African Americans slaves, on the other hand, were not the intended concern of the idea “all people” or “all men created equal.” Curry, Riley, and Battistoni (2003) speak of

how those of African ancestry were not considered equal when the Declaration of Independence was drafted.

Even in the seven northern states that formerly abolished slavery after the Revolution, laws discriminated against people of African ancestry, restricting suffrage and travel and segregating local schools. There is no denying the unequal treatment accorded to African slaves during the founding period. Under the law, slaves were treated not as persons, but as property. They could be bought and sold, compelled to work for their owner, and even physically abused. Laws prohibited slaves from being taught to read or write. Moreover, the institution was hereditary; a slave's children also belonged absolutely to her or his master. (p. 244)

African Americans, however, did seem to benefit in later debates and protests for their civil rights and liberties by bringing attention to the supposed inclusiveness of “all people” or at least “all men created equal” to mean them, too, even when others did not have the same recognition. African Americans knew themselves to be human beings, yet the ignorance of many slave owners and slavery sympathizers suggested otherwise.

Nevertheless, human dignity is bestowed upon a person; therefore, persons are valuable regardless of the city, state, or country where they reside. Political states can declare one to be without human rights, it cannot declare one to be without dignity. Rights may be taken away (that is rights given by states) but dignity (worth) remains, although the level and awareness of that dignity may not be known and even doubted in cases of ill treatment and enslavement.

Dignity and Responsibility of Christians

The matter of dignity among many Christians is a matter of faith. Many in the Christian community believe God bestows dignity in complete measure to humanity at creation without distinguishing gender, class, or race as criteria. Others even in the “Christian community” had doubts when it came to African slaves.

Dignity is indeed a matter of faith. It is also through that faith that a loving practicality is shown towards neighbors regardless of nationality. This practicality therefore *is* measured and expressed by social responsibility to each other.

Geisler (1971) stresses the point “that man is responsible for his fellowman is clearly taught in Scripture.” He continues his thought by adding, “What is apparently not obvious to some Christians is that this responsibility extends to social as well as the spiritual ones” (p. 178).

Therefore in a practical sense, when one is in poverty or treated ill-manneredly without fair justice because of their race, gender, or class, their perception of worth can become distorted. When this practice is promoted among “Christians,” Geisler would say this is a lack of responsibility. Practical faith says one should be concerned in a way to relieve suffering where possible.

Dignity in the Image and Shared Governance With God

In the arena of the “shared image of the Creator” and functionality, the idea of stewardship occupies an important place. Along with being created in the image of God; thus sharing characteristics that allow the capacity to have intimacy with God, humankind was given “shared governance.” The General Conference Stewardship Department of Seventh-day Adventist suggests “shared governance began at creation when God appointed Adam and Eve as rulers over this world. They were to function as His representatives, managing His affairs on earth” (2006, p. 11).

Dignity and Moral Philosophers

Pritchard (1972) suggests that the issue of “human dignity has not fared well under contemporary moral philosophy” (p. 299). In a practical sense, however, these

philosophers did see the need of addressing human dignity. Pritchard adds, “They can understand why blacks feel it is so important that their children develop black pride. They can feel indignation at oppression, exploitation, degradation, and injustice in any of their forms” (p. 299). Yet according to Pritchard, these same moral philosophers retreated from practical involvement for human dignity.

Dignity, Justice, and Attitudes

Pritchard (1972) also proposed that there is a connection between justice and dignity and believes there are “morally reactive attitudes” as Strawson (as cited in Pritchard) suggests in the experiences of life. “As indignation, resentment, guilt, and shame . . . they are typical manifestations of both a sense of justice and a sense of dignity” (p. 300). Pritchard further suggests,

Those who try to formulate substantial principles of justice should reserve a prominent place for human dignity. If this is not done, the distinctively moral aspects of justice will be absent; and the claims of justice will be at best legalistic and at worse arbitrary . . . the lower one’s regard is for his own dignity, the less perceptive he will be of injustices done to him . . . the lower one has for the dignity of another, the less perceptive he will be of injustices to that other. (pp. 300, 301)

Dignity of man Distinct From Other Beings

Morris (1946) calls the belief of inherent dignity of human beings an “atomistic way” of looking at man’s dignity. The atomistic way would say no more for humans than a rock would say for humans. It has atoms, does it also have dignity? Morris seems to believe that human beings exist with distinction from all other beings, but he cautions against those that see humanity’s dignity as simply body. He believes one must consider human values. In order for human beings to do this Morris (1946) believes there must be a consciousness of themselves. He does not pause here but believes with John Locke, an

English empiricist philosopher who lived from (1632-1704), that humanity must also have those “continuities which makes life human” (p. 58). For Morris the function of memory would be one of those continuities of human beings, in order to have an experienced life.

View of Dignity in Medieval Age

Dales (1977) contends that in the medieval age it was standard belief that dignity or worth came from the knowledge that humanity was created by God in His image, and that humanity possesses the capability to have dominance over all other creatures, therefore having dignity (p. 557).

Dales continues with the work of Robert Bultot, who has, as Dales says, done more special studies on dignity than anyone. Dales says Bultot reveals there was a weakness in medieval thought on dignity.

He asserts that dominated Augustinian concepts of dualism of body and soul, they lack firm conception of human unity and considered the image and likeness of God to exist in the soul only. It was not, he says, until St. Thomas, with the help of Aristotle, devised a clear concept of human unity that this defect in Latin thought on human dignity was remedied. (p. 558)

This remedy meant the person as a whole has dignity. It should not be divided between soul and body. Other studies focused on what humanity *is* and not just what humanity was able to *do*.

***Dignitas* Etymological Root Word for Dignity**

Schachter (1983) gives a rationale for having a definition for human dignity when he makes a valid point on why there is a need to come to a clear definition for dignity. His point is without a clear idea of meaning it may be impossible to “reject a specious use of the conception” (p. 849). He goes on to give the meaning by giving the etymological

understanding of the root word, dignity. Schachter writes, “The Latin ‘dignitas’ translated as worth (in French, *valeur*) is a good place to begin” (p. 849).

Psychological Implications of Dignity

Schachter (1983) goes on to give an analysis of the psychological implications of dignity when he states,

Indeed, nothing is so clearly violative of the dignity of persons as treatment that demeans or humiliates them. This includes not only attacks on personal beliefs and ways of life but also attacks on the groups and communities with which individuals are affiliated . . . destroying or reducing the sense of self-respect that is so important to the integrity of every human. (p. 850)

Poverty and Ancestry Humiliation an Affront to Dignity

The affront to dignity can also be seen on the economic side, which is difficult to ignore. Schachter (1983) contends,

We are led more deeply into the analysis of human dignity when we consider its relation to the material needs of human beings and to the ideal of distributive justice. Few will dispute that a person in abject condition, deprived of adequate means of subsistence, or denied the opportunity to work, suffers a profound affront to his sense of dignity and intrinsic worth. Economic and social arrangements cannot therefore be excluded from a consideration of the demands of dignity. (p. 851)

The above statement therefore stresses the need to alleviate the conditions of those in poverty to have their basic needs for food, housing, and employment met.

A last comment mentioning Schachter (1983) is his list of conduct ideas that are incompatible with dignity that offends a person’s worth. One example of this would be the humiliation of where one’s ancestry is from “that demean and humiliate individuals or groups because of their origins, status or beliefs” (p. 852). This Schachter would say is an affront to worth.

Slavery and Dignity

The first African to come to America according to one source was not a slave, at least not in the traditional sense as it has come to be known. The date of his coming was 1528, which predates the Dutch ship of 1619, reported to be the first ship to bring African slaves (cf. p.69, 90). In the civil liberty source, Head (n.d.) states,

A Moroccan slave named Estevanico arrived in Florida as part of a group of Spanish explorers in 1528; he became both the first known African American and the first American Muslim. Estevanico functioned as a guide and translator, and his unique skills gave him a social status that very few slaves ever had the opportunity to attain.

A Dutch ship arrived in America bringing African indentured servants in 1619 when colonies were being developed. Sylvester (1998) expresses this thought,

For the Africans on American soil, that horrible journey started with the developing territorial colonies at a time when workers were needed to keep the economy of this new country solvent. Therefore, by 1619, the use of indentured servants brought the first Africans to America at Jamestown, Virginia. Poor whites also worked during this period as indentured servants.

Slavery in America

In the early 1600s when the first African slave disembarked from a ship, dignity as it was intended was in jeopardy for African Americans. What followed in many ways was an attempt to expand and justify the horrors of slavery; therefore, the erosion of dignity.

The length to which this indignity was propagated and promoted from debauched moral, economic, and governmental agencies becomes the focal point of this section of the literature review.

Taken by force from the soil of the African continent, slaves suffered grim details of the dreadfulness of the Middle Passage (the journey from Africa to the Americas).

Diedrich, Gates, and Pedersen (1999) reveal “the injustice and brutality of tight-packing is unquestionable, the suffering and horror experienced by the slaves unimaginable. Add to that image the lack of proper diet, the unhygienic conditions that prevailed aboard the ships, affecting slave and crew alike” (p. 6).

The first swell of servants, as some suggest, was in the category of the indentured servants rather than slaves; though another source says it was likely to be both. The term “indentured servant” means something different than slavery. This difference between slaves and indentured servants is made clear in, “Africans in America” (n.d.)

It’s not clear if the Africans are considered slaves or indentured servants. (An indentured servant would be required to work a set amount of time, then granted freedom.) Records of 1623 and 1624 list them as servants, and indeed later records show increasing numbers of free blacks, some of whom were assigned land. On the other hand, records from gatherings do not indicate the marital status of the Africans (Mr., Miss, etc.) and, unlike white servants, no year is associated with the names -- information vital in determining the end of a servant's term of bondage. Most likely some Africans were slaves and some were servants. At any rate, the status of people in bondage was very confusing, even to those who were living at the time.

Slavery a Contradiction of Democratic Principles

Slavery in its full measure would soon follow, thereby eroding dignity. According to Boxill, (as quoted in Meyer & Parent, 1992) slavery, whether sold into it or forced, is without justification. “Any attempt to mount a case for black slavery would involve so blatant a contradiction that in the words of Locke it would have to be put down as an “exercise of wit” (p. 111).

In other words, such a conclusion as overlooking one’s own need to be free would amount to a contradiction, and that is laughable. Therefore it is humorous to the degree of unthinkable, to make a justifiable case for someone else’s slavery; given one’s own humanity and overwhelming desire to be free at that time.

To add to this sentiment, the passion for freedom was already present when one considers an article by Sylvester (1998):

Slavery as an issue in America was in constant conflict with the founding Democratic principles of this nation. Slavery therefore became the ultimate test of disunity within the union of states which were already at odds in a democracy espousing freedom for its people. At the center of this conflict were the Africans who were bought, sold, and used as workers on American soil.

Freedom was what the early settlers wanted for themselves when they fled from British dominion and control. Therefore it would be a “blatant contradiction” to support slavery when slaves desired their freedom and dignity, and yet it was condoned.

An interesting insight was placed forward by Garbooshian (2006) in her dissertation abstract which states, “The central focus of the international Enlightenment is not a move toward secularism, but consists instead in the underlying belief in human dignity.” In essence, instead of the idea of religion being excluded from schools and society where science and reason was expanding, it was human dignity taking a leading role in that expansion. She adds that human dignity was “at the center of religious thought, views on the place of religion in the state and in society, virtue, self-reliance, and anti-slavery sentiment.” This idea of human dignity then was prominent, whether one was pro-slavery or anti-slavery, and captured a leading role in the debates of society.

The Constitution and Maintaining Slavery

The drafting of the Constitution of the United States reflected the climate of the times as African American slaves were considered with contempt. Not that all those involved wanted it to be this way; political maneuvering, however, by southern slave holders wanted to maintain the slave trafficking trade.

According “Constitutional Topic” (n.d.), “Southern delegates had one thing in mind when it came to slavery: to keep it going to prop up the Southern economy. Indeed, many of the largest slave holders in the United States were at the Convention.”

The early Constitution became a pivotal document. It demonstrated who had dignity and rights as people, and became the center of debate over whether it was a pro-slavery or an anti-slavery document.

Finkelman (2000), an expert on slavery and the law, has written many books and scholarly articles. In one article from The U.S. National Archives And Records Administration entitled “Garrison’s Constitution The Covenant with Death and How It Was Made,” conveyed that William Lloyd Garrison, an abolitionist, called the Constitution in its earlier form prior to later Amendments, a “covenant with death” (p. 1). Finkelman also says in the same government source that “part of Garrison’s opposition to continuing the Union stemmed from a desire to avoid the corruption that came from participating in a government created by the proslavery Constitution” (p. 1).

The reason the early Constitution of 1787 was so objectionable and considered a pro-slavery document is that it would continue slavery and assure by law slavery through the Constitution, leaving no end in sight to abolishing slavery.

Finkelman (2000) says that Wendell Phillips, a graduate of Harvard who converted to the antislavery organization through the effects of William Lloyd Garrison, wrote in 1845 what happened in later years after the Constitution was adopted.

The slaves trebling in numbers-slaveholders monopolizing the offices and dictating the policy of Government-prostituting the strength and influence of the Nation to the support of slavery here and elsewhere-trampling on the rights of the free States, and making the courts of the country their tools. (p. 2)

In essence Phillips says the slave trade increased exponentially. Those who owned slaves also own the offices in government. They in turn used their influence to assure slavery in the Nation despite the concerns of the Free States.

During the Convention of 1787 there was considerable discussion. It also included apparent positioning on the Northern and Southern states thereby influencing slavery and the Constitution. In the final end, the slaveholders received much of what they wanted and gave little.

Slavery Implications in 1787 Constitution and Finkelman's Response

The next section is an interchange from a transcript of the 1787 Constitution from the source Charters of Freedom that contains the specific clauses in the 1787 Constitution that impacted slavery. Following each transcript is an interpretation that comes from Finkelman's article on Garrison's Constitution.

From Charters of Freedom transcript of the Constitution of the United States in its original form,

1. Art. I, sec 2, par. 3. Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this Union according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. (p. 1)

Finkelman (2000) comments on the above constitution when he says, "The three-fifths clause provided for counting three-fifths of all slaves for purposes of representation in Congress" (p. 4). In addition, the states that had the most slaves were the southern states. The contribution of "direct tax" could only be assessed to three-fifths of all slaves for that state (p. 4). What is noticeable is the fact that slaves were not benefited in the

increasing of the numbers. They could not be representatives to vote in Congress for a better existence for themselves.

What this means is that the southern slave states benefited by having more representation because of the slave trade; however, the southern states could only be taxed three-fifths when it came to counting slaves, which was a dishonorable benefit to those states that had slaves.

From Charters of Freedom transcript of the Constitution of the United States the Constitution speaks on the migration and importation of slaves.

2. Art. I, sec 9, par. 1. The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person. (p. 4)

Finkelman (2000) comments on the above constitution and states that

this clause prohibited Congress from banning the “Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit” before the year 1808 . . . the clause prevented Congress from ending the African slave trade before 1808 but did not require Congress to ban the trade after the date.” (p. 4)

This was significant in that slavery could continue. Even after the date of 1808 there was nothing in writing that gave Congress the power to discontinue slavery.

Again Charters of Freedom transcript of the Constitution of the United States speaks on fugitive slaves.

3. Art IV, sec 2, par. 3. No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due. (p. 7)

Finkelman (2000) comments on the above constitution where he states, “the fugitive slave clause prohibited the state from emancipating fugitive slaves and required that runaways be returned to their owners “on demand” (p. 4)

Finally from (Charters of Freedom transcript of the Constitution of the United States) states,

4. Art. V. The Congress, whenever two thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution, or, on the Application of the Legislatures of two thirds of the several States, shall call a Convention for proposing Amendments, which, in either Case, shall be valid to all Intents and Purposes, as Part of this Constitution, when ratified by the Legislatures of three fourths of the several States, or by Conventions in three fourths thereof, as the one or the other Mode of Ratification may be proposed by the Congress; Provided that no Amendment which may be made prior to the Year One thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any Manner affect the first and fourth Clauses in the Ninth Section of the first Article; and that no State, without its Consent, shall be deprived of its equal Suffrage in the Senate. (p. 7)

Finkelman suggests, “This article prohibited any amendment of the slave importation or capitation clauses before 1808” (Capitation-a form of taxation) (p. 4).

Essentially, the laws supported the importation of slaves and changes to the arraignment of dishonest taxation were prohibited before 1808.

This demonstrates the desire for power and superiority for some to exert it over others. These laws were crafted in the Constitution of the Nation for the purpose of maintaining economic position, which would cause death, prohibit freedom, and erode dignity.

Slavery and Slave Markets a Disgrace of Dignity

Elliott (1850) told how the African slaves were treated once they were procured from the African continent whether by force, fraud, or purchased from their land and brought to America.

The slave markets are very like cattle markets. The negroes are there examined like a horse, as to soundness of limb and capabilities for toil. They are exposed to the competitions of purchasers, sold to the highest bidder, and turned over to oppressive labor, under the excitement of the whip. (p. 44)

Collars Chains Prods and Whips

There was much discussion during slavery as to whether African slaves were human or beast. While this debate went on, they were treated as the latter. On this subject Steuter and Willis (2008) observe; “Collars, chains, prods, whips, and branding irons were employed to domesticate and control animals just as similar tactics were used on slaves to ensure they remained docile, subservient and unable to escape” (p. 42).

Making Black men as Brutes

Harrold (2005) indicates how Henry Highland Garnett a great orator and black political abolitionist who lived from 1815-1882 felt slave masters wanted to achieve this; “Masters, according to Garnett, sought to make black men ‘as much like brutes as possible’ by undermining their natural ‘love of Liberty,’” their intellects, and their faith” (p. 31). This statement alone confirms its fulfillment would basically sentence the slave as an animal. At the same time it reveals a humanity targeted for erosion.

Slaves a Security Risk if Taught to Read and Write

The ability to read and write for those who were slaves became a national security issue. According to Maddox (2009) “Slave codes prohibited all whites from teaching Blacks how to read and write. Prudence Crandall, a white Quaker teacher, felt the sting for attempting to educate Black girls. For her efforts, her school was burned in Canterbury, CT” (p. 31).

Fredrick Douglass' Address "Hypocrisy of American Slavery"

Douglas (1852) gave details of the unconscionable regard to slaves and how they were treated. Speaking from the argumentation of irony Douglass suggests,

The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern stature books are covered with enactments, forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of a slave to read or write. When you can point to any such laws in reference to the beast of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when the cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, then I will argue with you that the slave is a man!

Fines and Whippings for Teaching Slaves to Read or Write

Foner (1975) expresses another setback for slaves of African descent, while giving a biography on Daniel Payne who lived from 1811-1893 and became the first African American college president in the nation at Wilberforce University. Foner writes with reference to Payne:

In 1826 he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church and three years later opened a school for Negro children, which he conducted until the South Carolina legislature passed a law, on December 17, 1834, imposing a fine and whipping on free persons of color who kept schools to teach slaves or free Negroes to read or write." (p. 89)

African slaves were considered as property and this sentiment was even felt by those who claim to be Christian. Thus there was an attempt morally to justify slavery, therefore, spiritually sanitizing the erosion of dignity.

Celebrations of Dignity Worship and Leadership for Slaves

When reading was accepted; the Bible was a pivotal book for learning. Bost (as cited in Raboteau, 2004) reflects on slaves, reading, and religion when he says, "All the readin' they ever hear was when they were carried through the big Bible" (p. 239).

Although African slaves were treated harshly, yet seasons of worship and ceremonies brought restored glimpses of dignity. Raboteau (2004) says slaves insist “in these seasons of celebration that their lives were special, their lives had dignity, their lives had meaning beyond the definitions set by slavery. . . . And here, too some slaves found the place to exercise their talents for leadership” (p. 231).

These seasons of celebrations were designed to inspire optimism and compassionate concern for those who were considered “the least of these” in society. They also paved the way for worth and hope on the firm foundation that they were created in the image of God with the highest dignity, as sons and daughters of God despite their past, present, and future injustices.

Some in Christian Community Theologized Slaves Into Inferiority

Roberts (1974) confirms even in the Christian environment during the time of slavery and beyond, that there was “a clear attempt to theologize the black man into inferiority and theologize the white man into superiority” (pp. 77, 78). Furthermore Roberts suggest that, “slaves, obey your masters.” Colossians 3:22 became a favorite text for slavery preachers and theologians” (p. 76).

Boles (1988) writes, “Biblical justifications of slavery were increasingly popular as the mainstay of the South’s proslavery argument. As masters accepted this defense of their peculiar instruction, they confronted its logical corollary: divinely sanctioned masters have religious obligations to their servants” (p. 106).

Gesisler (1971) indicates, “At first glance, the Scriptures may seem to condone forced slavery. . . . However, it should be noticed that the Bible does not *command* slavery; at best it only permitted slavery” (p. 185).

Longenecker (1992) insists that New Testament Scripture householders, “were instructed to treat their slaves with consideration (1 Cor 7:21-22; Col 3:22-23). Following Paul’s tradition, the early Fathers asserted that the slave and his or her master were equal before God” (p. 386).

Carson (1960) writes on Col 3:22-24: “The overriding consideration is the Lordship of Christ, which transforms the quality of the service rendered. . . . It is also noteworthy that in contrast to prevailing practice Paul treats the slaves as persons, not as things” (p. 93).

Felder (1991) gives an accurate and appropriate summation when it comes to the Bible and African slavery in America when he says, “The Bible contains no narratives in which the original intent was to negate the full humanity of black people or view blacks in an unfavorable way. Such negative attitudes about black people are entirely postbiblical” (p. 127).

Abraham Lincoln’s Challenge to Slavery

Many episodes contributed to the final freedom of the slaves. One notable personality emerges from his position of President of the Nation, Abraham Lincoln. Elected in November 1860, Lincoln would eventually challenge slavery as an institution. When he became President in January 1861 he posted this warning to the South in his Inaugural Address, found on an online website, White House Presidents (n.d.).

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. . . . You have no oath

registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it.

Many appealed to the indignity of slavery. However it would take a Civil War to bring slavery to some extent to an “end.” The resolve to maintain the position of slaves as property among slavery sympathizers; therefore, resulting in a continual erosion of dignity, would produce thousands of deaths on the Union States of the North as well as the Confederate States of the South.

Lincoln is again quoted from a dedication address in the Gettysburg cemetery where the two opposing armies fought and died,

That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain--that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom--and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Lincoln saw the Nation deteriorating even before he was president, and in a speech in June 1858 in the hall of the Springfield, Illinois statehouse to 1,000 representatives who had chosen Lincoln to be their candidate for the U.S. Senate (Abraham Lincoln, n.d.).

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Convention. If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it. We are now far into the *fifth* year, since a policy was initiated, with the *avowed* object, and *confident* promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, *not ceased*, but has *constantly augmented*. In *my* opinion, it *will* not cease, until a *crisis* shall have been reached, and passed. “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*.

It should not be assumed that freeing the slaves was the motivation for the war when Lincoln finally became President. Lincoln wanted to keep the Union together, and this was a primary motivation. However, the dignity of African Americans was also an undeniable issue that needed to be resolved.

Lack of Dignity the Crossroads of Our Being

Burns (2009), a historical filmmaker was asked about his fascination with the Civil War. He responded:

We were destined to fight it the second we founded our country. The man who wrote the sentence of the Declaration that begins, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” owned more than 100 human beings. It is, as the great historian Shelby Foote said, “the crossroads of our being.” (p. 8)

The signal to end slavery and to slow the progression and erosion of dignity would come with a proclamation of emancipation on January 1, 1863, for slaves detained in the confederacy. By April 9, 1865, the Civil War came to an end, thus signaling the sacredness of life for African Americans that was inevitable, and for the nation to hold its truths sacred, “that all men are created equal.”

Discrimination and Dignity

Though slavery ended on paper, the erosion of dignity continued to plague African Americans in old and new ways. Cozzens (1998) writes, “Although blacks after the Civil War enjoyed freedoms and privileges that their slave ancestors could only dream of, they faced increasing discrimination during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.”

Segregation became an acceptable way of *toleration*; however dignity and equality remained in a crisis. The difficulties of dignity, in the African American experience after the Civil War, become the next assignment for reflection.

Discrimination Laws and Codes of Repressive Democracy

The quarantine social existence of the now “free” African American became a system of bondage, and made economic development difficult. Laws were in place, such as “Black Codes” which prevented social dignity from having its rightful existence.

Again, Cozzens shares this account,

Despite these major improvements, life for Southern blacks was far from perfect. “Black Codes,” designed to limit the opportunities of blacks, were passed in the South during Reconstruction. The Black Codes placed taxes on free blacks who tried to pursue nonagricultural professions, restricted the abilities of blacks to rent land or own guns, and even allowed the children of “unfit” parents to be apprenticed to the old slave masters. In effect, this was a continuation of slavery.

Black Code Laws were enacted immediately after slavery in the North and South to provide social separateness among “Blacks and Whites,” which was antithetical to dignity, restricting African Americans from opportunities, abilities, and at times movement. In essence, dignity by any definition was nonexistent even after the alleged ending of slavery, except perhaps, in one’s inner being. These unjustifiable laws such as Black Codes emerged into what is better known as Jim Crow Laws, melded into state and local laws in the south.

The origins of Jim Crow Laws according to Katznelson (2005) suggests that Jim Crow Laws “dates to the caricature of a black by that name first used in 1828 in a minstrel show for white audiences” (notes, p. 183). These laws were designed to prevent African Americans from enjoying their *new* freedom, and to continue deliberate inequality and segregation.

The problem with the Jim Crow Laws mentioned by Katznelson (2005) is that it is “a law which forbids a group of American citizens to associate with other citizens in the

ordinary course of daily living creates inequality by imposing a caste status on the minority group” (p. 7).

Laws such as these could not help the cause of dignity. African Americans in their nascent stage must begin in a substandard social position. The democratic promises they assumed were virtually non-existent.

Katznelson (2005) further states the 1947 Committee on Civil Rights was summed up this way,

Only the termination of segregation in schools, housing, public accommodations, and the armed forces, and only an end to lynching (there were six in 1946), police brutality, the denial of suffrage, and discrimination at work, in healthcare, and public services, the writers argued, could make American democracy whole. (p. 7)

Discrimination and an Elaborate Racial Etiquette of Personal Relations

Karon (1975) explains “an elaborate racial etiquette of personal relations governing the actions of blacks and whites when they meet each other, such as the code prescribed by the South” (p. 12).

Such an etiquette code according to Karon was designed “to prevent members of the two castes from knowing each other” (p. 18). In other words, as some southerners might say to “keep blacks in their place.”

The Jim Crow etiquette, not to be considered as Jim Crow Laws, which will be looked at later, did go hand in hand with the Jim Crow Laws. How African Americans were to conduct themselves according to the etiquette suggested inferiority, therefore indignity.

The following eight examples by Pilgrim (2000) were a part of the Jim Crow etiquette norms:

1. A Black male could not offer his hand (to shake hands) with a White male because it implied being socially equal. Obviously, a Black male could not offer his hand or any other part of his body to a White woman, because he risked being accused of rape.
2. Blacks and Whites were not supposed to eat together. If they did eat together, Whites were to be served first, and some sort of partition was to be placed between them.
3. Under no circumstance was a Black male to offer to light a cigarette of a White female—that gesture implied intimacy.
4. Blacks were not allowed to show public affection toward one another in public, especially kissing, because it offended Whites.
5. Jim Crow etiquette prescribed that Blacks were introduced to Whites, never Whites to Blacks. For example: “Mr. Peters (the White person), this is Charlie (the Black person), that I spoke to you about.”
6. Whites did not use courtesy titles of respect when referring to Blacks, for example, Mr., Miss., Sir, or Ma’am. Instead Blacks were called by their first names. Blacks had to use courtesy titles when referring to Whites, and were not allowed to call them by their first names.
7. If a Black person rode in a car driven by a White person, the Black person sat in the back seat, or the back of a truck.
8. White persons had the right-of-way at all intersections.

Though discrimination existed in the Northern States, there is no evidence of such an elaborate etiquette eroding the dignity of African Americans of freedoms and rights as it was in the South.

To ensure the keeping of the etiquette according to the Ferris State University

Educational article, “violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy” (p. 2).

Jim Crow Laws were basically exclusionary in nature according to Simkim (n.d.) who says, “This included laws that discriminated against African Americans with concern to attendance in public schools and the use of facilities such as restaurants, theaters, hotels, cinemas and public baths. Trains and buses were also segregated.”

U.S. Supreme Court Upholds “Separate but Equal”

A pivotal decision regarding segregation came from the United States Supreme Court. It was the case of Plessey vs. Ferguson. Ferguson was a judge in the Orleans District who ruled in a lower court decision against Plessey. Louisiana State Law provided so called “separate but equal” accommodations for its riders. This law was challenge by Plessey who was considered to be Black (one eighth) but whose complexion (seven-eighths Caucasian) was considered as White, as he took his seat in the White only section. The Supreme Court declared from a Cornell University source on Plessy vs. Ferguson its decision May 18, 1896,

that no person shall be permitted to occupy seats in coaches other than the ones assigned to them, on account [p538] of the race they belong to; and requiring the officer of the passenger train to assign each passenger to the coach or compartment assigned for the race to which he or she belong; and imposing fines or imprisonment upon passengers insisting on going into a coach or compartment other than the one set aside for the race to which he or she belongs; and conferring upon officers of the train power to refuse to carry on the train passengers refusing to occupy the coach or compartment assigned to them, and exempting the railway company from liability for such refusal, are not in conflict with the provisions either of the Thirteenth Amendment or of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

This law sanctions the erosion of dignity from the highest court in the land, distinguishing some humans as superior and others inferior, placing some in locations which they deemed inadequate and others esteemed in a different location, thereby

fostering an exalted opinion of one, leaving the other scorned.

This legalization of separation would continue for decades to come. Needless to say, African Americans found it difficult to appeal their dignity, equality, and freedom to the courts and even more so in the southern states.

“Separate but Equal” Challenged by Brown vs. Board of Education

It would not be until 1954 that the U.S. Supreme Court between Brown vs. Board of Education would successfully challenge laws of “separate but equal” in a landmark decision. This case involved Black children wanting to attend a segregated school in Topeka, Kansas, and similar cases in other states.

Find Law (n.d.), a professional source for lawyer’s, gives details of the case,

They had been denied admission to schools attended by white children under laws requiring or permitting segregation according to race. This segregation was alleged to deprive the plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment.

In the Topeka, Kansas, case, Oliver Brown, the father of one of the children wanted to enroll his young daughter. A Board of Education National Park Service (n.d.) explains how his name was selected. “Parents filed suit against the Topeka Board of Education on behalf of their twenty children. Oliver Brown, a minister, was the first parent listed in the suit, so the case came to be named after him.”

This case had far reaching implications towards dignity. African Americans across the country experienced restrictions on their abilities, freedoms, and other inadequacies, based not on being human, but color of skin. Another source, Brown vs. Board of Education (n.d.), characterizes the case:

Brown v. Board of Education was not simply about children and education. The laws and policies struck down by this court decision were products of the human

tendencies to prejudge, discrimination, and stereotype other people by their ethnic, religious, physical, or cultural characteristics.

The implementation of dignity for African Americans was constantly elusive; however, in 1954 the United States Supreme Court effectively dismantled America's apartheid system.

Daughterity and Bolton (2008) write about the growing frustrations. They explain how elusive the implementation of dignity became after the landmark decision, and how it helped to set up the early years of the civil rights movement.

The era also witnessed growing black frustrations with the efforts to achieve school integration, which helped to fuel the larger movement of the 1960s. In these ways and others, a better understanding of the state and local campaigns to implement *Brown v. Board of Education* sheds crucial light on the early years of the civil rights movement in the United States. (p. viii)

“With All Deliberate Speed” an Oxymoron Time Table for Court Action

According to Daughterity and Bolton the frustrations after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision among African Americans could be contributed to the fact that “implementation would be left to the federal district courts” (p. viii) of which many African Americans had little or no representation in the southern states. Daughterity and Bolton add, “The Court also offered an ambiguous timetable for action, urging a vague pace for change with the oxymoron, ‘with all deliberate speed’” (p. viii).

With large demonstrations and public marches, the Civil Rights period of the 1960s would no longer conceal the need for African Americans to be recognized as human beings with dignity and civil rights. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 endorsed by the United States Congress was designed to do for society what *Brown vs. Board of*

Education was designed to do in the educational school system, namely, to integrate and abandon restrictions based on race.

Stalled Debate for Civil Rights

Before the passage of the bill, the country maintained a segregated society, especially in the south, which meant inferiority existed, liberties were curtailed, and abilities were denied to African Americans. These denials were problematic to dignity and impacted poverty.

Loevy (1990) explains how difficult the debate was over the Civil Rights Act of 1964, lasting 83 consecutive legislative days.

The reason the debate was so long was that the bill that later became the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was subjected to a filibuster by a determined group of Southern senators. Senate rules normally provide for unlimited debate, which means that a small group of senators can attempt to kill a bill by simply talking it to death and not letting it come up for a final vote. As a result of this Southern filibuster, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was before the Senate for 83 consecutive legislative days—from March 9 to June 17, 1964. (p. 1)

The debate was finally ended by “cloture.” According to Loevy, cloture is “a motion to close debate by a 2/3 vote of the Senate. . . . [It was the] first important limitation of debate in the history of the United States Senate. . . . Comprehensive civil rights legislation could not have passed without it” (pp. 1, 2).

Martin King and John F. Kennedy Wage war for Civil Rights

The city of Birmingham, Alabama, was deep seated with discrimination, earning an unsavory name. Loevy (1990) gives a reason for this. “From 1957 to 1963 there had been some 18 racial bombings, leading many civil rights supporters to call the city

“Bombmingham” (p. 11). Bombs exploded in African American neighborhoods against targets of civil rights leaders and establishments, including churches.

The President of the United States at that time was John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the leaders of the Birmingham demonstrations. Both men contributed in tearing down systems that eroded dignity, especially discrimination.

Loevy (1990) observes that even in 1963, a speech given by Kennedy to the nation described African Americans as not “fully free.” Kennedy said to the nation:

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. . . . 100 years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free . . . and this nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free. We preach freedom around the world . . . but we say to the world . . . that this is the land of the free except for Negroes? (p. 17)

Birmingham, Alabama Before the Nation

The need of dignity for African Americans was brought into the homes of the nation by demonstrating at a time when the media had great interest in the protest. Loevy (1990) explains what the nation saw. “Television news film of nonviolent black demonstrators being abused, beaten, and arrested while they sat-in at Birmingham lunch counters were presented nightly in living rooms across the nation” (p. 15).

President Kennedy wanted to do more to help the cause of civil rights; however, in November 1963 he was killed by an assassin’s bullet. Five months before his death, Kennedy invited Black leaders to meet with him. Eskew (as cited by Shuttlesworth, 1997) said that Kennedy intimated that if it were not for Birmingham “we would not be here today.” If this meant his presidency; then the struggle for dignity by African Americans played a significant role.

African Americans and Obstacles to Voting

The dignity of African Americans in the south was hampered by obstacles that prevented them from voting. In “American Government Obstacles to Voting” (n.d.), the difficulties to voting is seen. “Southern states charged a fee before a person could vote, and a few added the unpaid fees from one election to another.”

Again in the Southern states, literacy tests were used to restrict applicants. The usual practice was to require an African American to explain some complex part of the Constitution, while whites were given an easier passage to read and explain.

Three other contingencies mentioned in the same source were “an endorsement of a good character from two or more registered voters” gave proof that a father or grandfather had voted before, and proof of residency for living in the community for a certain length of time. These were all done to prevent African Americans from voting.

President Lyndon Johnson and the Civil Rights Act

After Kennedy’s death, Martin Luther King would continue to discuss the need for dignity for all people with President Lyndon Johnson, who now assumed the presidency. It would be Johnson, not Kennedy, who would sign the Civil Rights Act that would abandon legalized segregation.

Johnson would also be instrumental in gaining the passage of the Voter’s Right Act. According to the “Civil Rights Division” (n.d.),

African Americans were substantially disfranchised in many Southern states, the Act employed measures to restore the right to vote that intruded in matters previously reserved to the individual states. Section 4 ended the use of literacy requirements for voting in six Southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia) and in many counties of North Carolina, where voter registration or turnout in the 1964 presidential election was less than 50 percent of the voting-age population.

More than any other achievement, President Johnson wanted to wage war on

poverty. He wanted to create what he termed The Great Society.

Gardner (n.d.) suggests, “Johnson wanted to create the ‘Great Society’--to end poverty, promote equality, improve education, rejuvenate cities, and protect the environment.”

Johnson’s plan was grand, and perhaps would have brought about a greater transformation on the war on poverty if it had not been for the other war in Vietnam, which cost billions of dollars to sustain. The Vietnam War was a war that Johnson inherited. Johnson was compelled to make a choice between the War on Poverty or the Vietnam War. It is said that he chose both—and would win neither.

Therefore poverty continues to be a crisis in American society. With slavery over and laws instituted to minimize observable discrimination, poverty was the next hindrance towards dignity. Poverty then continues to be a residue trail of obstruction to dignity for many African American communities.

Poverty and the Present Experience

The erosion of dignity for African Americans through slavery and discrimination has already been seen. The focus now will be on the erosion of dignity among African Americans whose experience of poverty retains higher percentages than all ethnic groups in America.

At the time of the Vietnam War, King as seen on YouTube (n.d.) suggested in a speech April 30, 1967 that, “It is estimated that we spend five hundred thousand dollars to kill each enemy soldier, while we spend only fifty three dollars for each person classified as poor.” This is indeed troubling, provided those statistics are true. Even if the

numbers were off 200,000 dollars, decreasing it to 300,000 dollars, the point is, the poor are miserably neglected compared to the cost of foreign wars and armaments.

Poverty the new Slavery

Bergner (2005) wrote on the need for church leaders to call for action on poverty, saying this about Jim Wallis leader and director of Sojourners:

Mr. Wallis called the daily death of 30,000 children due to poverty related causes a “silent tsunami” and pointed out that the yearly subsidy of an English cow is greater than the yearly income of most Africans. “Poverty is the new slavery.”

While this comment referred to international concerns and not specifically to the United States, the danger and hardship of those of poverty is akin to slavery. For African Americans, poverty is a compounded scenario given the many trials they had to endure.

Thurow (1969) observes the complexities of poverty for African Americans in their struggle to emerge from poverty, and how racial discrimination is an important factor.

Investigations of poverty reveal that racial discrimination is an important factor. Much of the poverty suffered by blacks can be ascribed to discrimination in one of its many forms. Thus programs designed to eliminate white poverty will not eliminate black poverty. Nor will the elimination of racial discrimination solve the problem of poverty. Discrimination and poverty are as intertwined as Siamese twins: they need two policies, one to fight the causes of poverty and another to reduce discrimination. (p. 1)

Therefore African Americans endure a double threat. Their poverty has indignity footprints.

Poverty the Recognizable Remaining Repression

Obama (2006), the first African American President of United States, suggests an issue that is volatile, that undermines progress and improvement of relations in the African American community, which “is the deteriorating condition of the inner-city

poor” (p. 249). For African Americans, poverty has become the natural recognizable remaining repression. These issues are not soon to go away and views surrounding poverty will continue to be debated.

Stricker (2007) explains how poverty has been viewed over many years:

Two hundred years ago, poverty was a pressing issue in the United States. . . . In those years, as in other times, the causes of poverty were debated, but most people chose one of two big explanations. The first blamed the poor; laziness or foolishness caused them to be impoverished. The second emphasized political and economic structures that failed to provide enough jobs and that dealt too much income to the rich and too little to the majority. (p. 1)

Harrington Followed Common Practice of “Culture of Poverty”

Harrington wrote a book that became huge in the debate on poverty. Frank Stricker (2007) observes, “Harrington simply followed common practice by describing the links between poverty and such social handicaps as inadequate education, old age, work in a low-wage industry, broken families, and racial background.” Stricker adds that this “emphasis was both accurate and misleading . . . (Did broken families cause poverty or vice versa?)” (p. 45). This idea also appeared to Stricker to socially divide us into the poor and not so poor and made it appear that the problems are different and even separating the poor and those who are not, politically.

The idea of a “culture of poverty” development suggested a sick people in a cyclical sick environment as the reason for poverty. Stricker (2007) suggests Harrington sees the poor in a “different mental world, a culture of poverty” (p. 45).

Stricker continues with the record of Harrington’s own words when he says the poor “should be defined psychologically . . . [as] internal exiles who, almost inevitably,

develop attitudes of defeat and pessimism and who are therefore excluded from taking advantage of new opportunities” (p. 45).

Oscar Lewis Credited With the Term “Culture of Poverty

Oscar Lewis is credited as coming up with the term “culture of poverty.” A *Time Magazine* (n.d.) article explains the difference between poverty and the “culture of poverty.”

Lewis draws a distinction between poverty and what he calls the “culture of poverty”—a perpetuation, at society's lowest levels, of the patterns of life that form, over generations and sometimes centuries, a kind of prison. It is a prison whose door stands open a crack, says Lewis, but it is also one from which the inmates do not readily escape: “It is much more difficult to eliminate the culture of poverty than to eliminate poverty per se.”

Although Lewis is not seen as “blaming the victim” by some, Philen (2007) states, “It involved recognizing that poverty doesn’t entail simply not having enough money, but also often entails the necessity for adaptive strategies for dealing with persistent poverty.”

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a former senator of New York, wrote a book called *The Negro Family* for which he received a lot of criticism. According to Stricker (2007),

some of the flak was due to defects in Moynihan’s work. It was loosely argued and it did not probe or thoroughly link two main explanations: that unemployment was the cause of black poverty and crime and that black family structure was the cause of poverty and crime. (p. 88)

According to Philen (2007), “the *Moynihan Report* used . . . a sort of *cultural* inadequacy or inferiority as the cause of persistent poverty.” What it amounted to for some was “blaming the victim.”

Culture of Poverty or a Taste of Inequalities

Crutchfield and Pettinicchio (2009, 623:135) detail a penetrating assessment that is very different from a “culture of poverty.” It is a “taste of inequalities.” Crutchfield and Pettinicchio state that there is an increasing “taste for inequality” that stands against the idea of the “culture of poverty” argument.

They contend a “number of social problems are produced by persistent poverty, which exists not because of perverted values among the poor, but rather because of values in the larger society that are accepting of social inequality” (p. 135). Crutchfield and Pettinicchio further state:

This culture of inequality reaches its highest form among modern-day social Darwinists who believe that the problems of the poor, the unemployed, and the uneducated are due to their own failures. This view holds that the government intervention to help these groups will lead to further dependency. Such efforts, according to the argument, only waste the money of hard working taxpayers. (p. 135)

These modern-day social Darwinists in essence see the problems of the poor as a case of the “survival of the fittest.” It is assumed the problems stem from the poor themselves, as ignorant, lazy, and just plain failures.

Crutchfield and Pettinicchio would disagree with these Darwinists. They contend the “taste for inequality” is the observable manifestation of the presence of a culture of inequality. The former is the operationalization of the latter (pp. 135, 136). In essence, the “taste of inequality” keeps the culture of inequality operating in society.

More Prisoners Than 14 Other Countries Combined— A Taste of Inequalities

Crutchfield and Pettinicchio confirm that there are more prisoners than 12 other countries combined by giving an example of the taste of inequalities.

Where that taste becomes broadly accepted among the citizenry, a culture of inequality is likely to invest less in social welfare and to respond more punitively to crime. Of particular interest is how the United States, which has had unprecedented increases in imprisonment as well as cutbacks in welfare programs, compares to other nations. (p.136)

In other words, money is spent more on the prison system and social control that calls for increases in budget, while the social welfare of citizens is reduced.

The implication of this misplaced revenue for prisons would be better spent uplifting those in persistent poverty rather than needless incarcerations, which many incarcerations could have been prevented if this “taste of inequalities” did not exist.

When it comes to incarcerations Crutchfield and Pettinicchio say the United States has 1,208,711 prisoners. This was more than Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Great Britain, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden combined (p. 140).

Politicians Reduce Racial Injustice to Historical Fact not on Contemporary Life and run for Office on a Taste of Inequalities

Crutchfield and Pettinicchio show how this impacts dignity:

During the post-Great Society years, and especially since the election of Ronald Reagan, the United States has experienced widespread, popular acceptance of culture of inequality values. . . . As a result of this increase in the collective tastes for inequality, racial injustice is essentially reduced to a historical fact with little or no bearing on contemporary life chances of people of color. Thus, affirmative action is now defined as discrimination against the privileged. (pp. 136, 137)

Crutchfield and Pettinicchio further state how the “taste for inequality” impacts on incarceration, how crime is viewed, and politicians run for office based on this taste.

Most crime is viewed as a consequence of rational choices by people unable or unwilling to defer gratification. In turn, society responds harshly to punish offenders and to deter the “not-yet-detected”. . . From 1973 to 1997, incarceration numbers in the United States increased fivefold . . . is explained in part by a growing taste of

inequality as well as politicians' willingness to run for office on platforms that pander to the view that substantial inequality is acceptable and even just." (p. 137)

The connection due to incarceration should be obvious. The breakup of homes of those who should be the breadwinner or an equal partner (African American male) is in prison. Needless to say these incarcerations have brought about a strain on families and family incomes.

African Americans Disproportionate Number of Incarcerations

In an article titled "Prison Population Exceeds Two Million" (n.d.) the numbers illustrate an alarming connection in this manner.

About 10.4% of the entire African-American male population in the United States aged 25 to 29 was incarcerated, by far the largest racial or ethnic group—by comparison, 2.4% of Hispanic men and 1.2% of white men in that same age group were incarcerated. According to a report by the Justice Policy Institute in 2002, the number of black men in prison has grown to five times the rate it was twenty years ago. Today, more African-American men are in jail than in college. In 2000 there were 791,600 black men in prison and 603,032 enrolled in college. In 1980, there were 143,000 black men in prison and 463,700 enrolled in college.

African Americans families suffer in disproportionate numbers to incarcerations. These inequalities place a monumental burden on African Americans families. They become captives of indignity. They suffer as prisoners enslaved from employment, opportunities, and human justice. They become disheartened, discriminated against, and demoralized, as duplicating the previous past system of slavery.

Although China has four times the population of United States, Martineau (2008) writes,

The United States has less than 5 percent of the world's population. But it has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners. Indeed, the United States leads the world in producing prisoners, a reflection of a relatively recent and now entirely distinctive American approach to crime and punishment. Americans are locked up for crimes — from writing bad checks to using drugs — that would rarely produce prison sentences in other countries. And in particular they are kept incarcerated far longer than

prisoners in other nations. Criminologists and legal scholars in other industrialized nations say they are mystified and appalled by the number and length of American prison sentences.

Even though China executes a number of their prisoners as do the United States, the United States prison numbers are far disproportionate to African Americans. Thus many poor African Americans and others have met their demise through incarcerations and executions. Some poorly represented because of inadequate resources, others later found to be innocent of the charges facing them through DNA testing. Those however, who commit violent crimes irrespective of ethnicity from any community should be subject to justice. Still, those living in the poorest communities need fair and equal justice, thereby avoiding the criminalization of young men and women on an assumed profile of ethnicity or resources. Needless incarcerations mean family units are broken, employment is difficult, and when one is released poverty once again a negative accompaniment with a lack of dignity. Therefore Crutchfield and Pettinicchio's assessment of the "taste of inequalities" show validity that African Americans dignity is not yet equivalent to some.

Virtually Every Black American Will Experience Poverty

To underscore again the uphill journey for African Americans, a research conducted and partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cornell's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Ithaca, and Federal Hatch funding, noted by Friedlander (1999) revealed a stunning statistic about African Americans and poverty: "more than 90 percent will have lived below the poverty line by age 75." Quoted within the same news article, the research cites the alarming fact "that

virtually every [Black] American will experience poverty at some point during their adulthood.”

Conclusion

All of the struggles along the way can be summed up as struggles for human dignity. The simple meaning of dignity is “worth.” Garbooshian’s work provided shades of that worth through other definitions. African Americans sought dignity through slavery, an earlier constitution, discrimination, civil war, codes, laws, Supreme Courts, local courts, and poverty. They still live with wounds, and scars, with broken homes that for many will last for the rest of their lives.

Impoverished neighborhoods are the result of years of mistreatment, disproportionate incarcerations, oppression, and lack of opportunities. Pressed down and exploited, through ignorance and misunderstandings, African Americans were seen as inferior and incapable by many in society. In addition, some in the Christian community doubted their worth as well.

These undesirable experiences of African Americans dignity and poverty are related. It also led some to an improper assessment of personhood due to these experiences. Obama (2006) the 44th President of the United States sums up the history and personal stories of many African Americans and the effects and experiences of the poor living in neighborhoods of poverty:

These are the stories of those who didn’t make it out of history’s confinement, of the neighborhoods within the black community that house the poorest of the poor, serving as repositories for all the scars of slavery and violence of Jim Crow, the internalized rage and the forced ignorance, the sham of men who could not protect their women or support their families, the children who grew up being told they wouldn’t amount to anything and had no one there to undo the damage. (p. 252)

Therefore when it comes to African Americans, Freeman (1998) suggests
“researchers and policy makers need to better understand such questions as: What have
been the consequences of certain historical periods on African American educational
experiences? How have these experiences shaped their contemporary experiences?”

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Approach

This study is an attempt to better understand the extent to which African American Christians in two Seventh-day Adventist churches experience and relate to poverty. It also attempts to better understand dignity through the dilemma of present poverty and the historical experiences of African Americans in the Norwood and Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist churches.

Poverty among African Americans represents more than a simple debt issue. It also represents a dignity issue. Through history African Americans have been exploited, therefore their rate of poverty is higher than other ethnic groups. Reasons for a higher rate of poverty are attributed to their historical predicament of slavery, discrimination, segregation, and policies that affected them adversely.

The implications and distortions of how they were viewed complicated their lives. Consequently, these evils brought about certain attitudes, behaviors, misunderstandings, subjugated actions, and feelings that helped deprive many African Americans, leading them to minimum economic standards and resulting to poverty.

In addition, dignity struggled through inaccurate implications and distortions regarding the nature, culture, and meaning of African Americans. These implications and distortions gave birth to continuous financial hopelessness and limited opportunities.

Financial Worth and Dignity

For many, dignity is seen through the prism of financial worth. For many African Americans, there is little or no reason to expect different financial results in the communities where they live if that community is a community of poverty. Persons living in these poverty-stricken areas who pay rent to landlords, who care little about the conditions becomes a waste of resources for it yields them virtually nothing. Even if they own their own houses in these communities, the net worth is very small compared to those who live in other communities where the net worth and incomes are more.

These difficulties are not just for African Americans outside the walls of the church. These difficulties exist within the church influencing, perhaps, spirituality and dignity.

The Experience of two African American Congregations

There are members of the Norwood and Ephesus churches that live in these communities of poverty. Their experiences as it relates to poverty and indignity are examined. It is clear that they are affected as present-day victims of poverty and oppression.

To determine what some of the problems were a research instrument was devised to determine those problems and collect such data to be analyzed. Determining the extent of poverty in those congregations including income, education, employment, family home location and structure, feelings and opinions about poverty, worship and how it relates to African Americans treated with a lack of dignity and restrictions in the past.

A study was conducted using a survey to reach the goals of the research and ascertain information on the congregations of two predominately African American

Seventh-day Adventist churches in Birmingham, Alabama, relating to poverty. These churches include the Ephesus and Norwood Seventh-day Adventist churches.

The project used the questionnaire method to gather information about beliefs, behaviors, and observations of African Americans of the above-mentioned congregations. The Norwood Seventh-day Adventist Church congregation participants and the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church congregation participant's response percentages to the questions are reported.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Method

Colorado State University (n.d.) in an article states that there are advantages to conducting surveys: "Surveys are useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. No other method of observation can provide this general capability. . . . Many questions can be asked about a given topic giving considerable flexibility to the analysis."

The questionnaire method has the ability to gather lots of information; however, the information received depending on the participant has possible reliability issues in that incorrect information can be given differing from an empirical scientific controlled method.

There are two other methods of consideration that had possibilities known as case studies and comparisons. Although they are not used here their significance will simply be mentioned. The Asian Institute of Technology Methods and Research Design (n.d.) gives an explanation of this method,

Case study: the background, development, current conditions and environmental interactions of one or more individuals, groups, communities, businesses or institutions is observed, recorded and analyzed for stages of patterns in relation to internal and external influences. Comparison: two or more existing situations are studied to determine the similarities and differences.

There are, however, comparisons as well as assessments of conditions and influences that impact participants that influence the findings. The assessment and data of the experiences of respondents are recorded.

Research Procedure and Purpose

The research aim involved collecting information from humans. Therefore for the purposes of this study some information required the participants to indicate information that was sensitive to the respondents. At the same time their responses were anonymous allowing them to be comfortable as they registered their answers.

The information was interpreted and reported. The questionnaire was general in nature to any adult ages 18 and above who was willing and able to answer the questions provided. This included people of all social, economic stature with greater to less education, wealth, etc. Only those members from the above mentioned congregations were allowed to participate.

Levels of Poverty Determined

Beginning questions asked the respondents to indicate factors of income levels, education, gender, and household size. These questions became the core indicators of understanding who were in poverty and relating factors attached. This inquiry of income determined the level of their poverty. The information from those at the poverty level provided valuable information of their experience.

These levels of poverty were compared with the U.S. Government determined levels of poverty income and household sizes. Individuals, who are not now in poverty, still provided valuable information and experiences of their past, as well as the experiences of African Americans in general.

Education Level and Poverty

Educational levels potentially serve as indicators of income. The more educated a person is, the wider the opportunities to serve in various capacities. Education provides and in some ways determines whether or not a person has reached a professional level, which enhances potential predictability of income. Educational confidence in the job market is reassuring, though patience, and action is required.

The article “Realize the Dream: Quality Education is a Civil Right” (n.d.) expresses concern and the importance of education, especially among those of poverty with low income who are minorities.

Having quality teachers may be the most important aspect of a child's education. Research shows that all children can learn and achieve when given good instruction. Three consecutive years of good teaching has a powerful effect on student achievement; unfortunately, three years of bad teaching also has a powerful effect. With high performing teachers, 60th percentile students raised their performance in both math and English to the 76th percentile. With low performing teachers, 60th percentile students fell to the 42nd percentile in reading and the 27th percentile in math. Students who need effective teachers the most - low income and minority students - are far less likely to have qualified and experienced teachers than white students and students in more affluent districts. High-poverty schools have a 50% higher rate of low-scoring teachers (bottom quartile SAT/ACT scores). Education Week, “Quality Counts 2001.” Minority students are twice as likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers (with less than 3 years' experience).

In high poverty school areas, high poverty home conditions are a factor to effective learning; therefore, the entirety of the above quote is debatable. The home environment of students of poverty could be beyond crisis level. Penalizing teachers' abilities to educate students then makes little sense if the poverty conditions are not considered. Although children from any environment can be taught, children who endure a lack of nutritious food, rest, books, and health are disadvantaged of resources;

therefore, requiring additional understanding, diligence, and patience from principals, teachers, parents, and students is needed.

In regards to gender, more females participated in this research than males, for both churches have larger amount of females than males. In many cases adult females are head of households with one or more children. When one is single, be they male or female, with low paying jobs, little educational history, and raising one or more children, it is often times a recipe for poverty.

When the above combination includes unemployment the greater the chances, that poverty exists. These combinations only give structures of families in poverty, it could also include those who are divorced or separated from the other spouse who is the more educated person in the family, leaving the other without skills and resources of income. In addition, illness enters life experiences crippling the physical means of sustaining an income. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that married couples are not those of poverty.

Unemployment Factors

The statistics on African Americans and unemployment is troubling. The U. S. Department of Labor Statistics (2011) shares important information on the “employment status of the civilian population by race, sex and age.” The Department shows that African Americans have a high rate of unemployment.

African Americans therefore have a higher rate of poverty. Employment is not the same as being out of poverty. There are many who work, making low wages, and who are also married or single that have increased household sizes and very low income. This type of scenario still places families into poverty.

Participants register differences, and the research churches have a different profile from each other; however, those differences are not analyzed in great detail. The research findings are given in a later chapter.

Structural Design of Questions

The structural nature or research design of the questions is close-ended. A mixture of yes or no questions followed with the number of times one has participated in the activity when the answer was affirmative helped to ascertain the depth of involvement.

Other questions requested the respondent's reply to a range of answers from a greater to lesser degree. Many questions were designed to give options when answering to insure flexibility in their response.

One of the problems anticipated was the reluctance of indicating income. Disclosure of income is a highly sensitive area. However, for those whose incomes are large or small, it was not necessary to register the exact income. They simply checked the box (), which indicated their category of yearly income. Some respondents were not able to remember their yearly income amount as it is not something they think about often.

There were those who chose not to participate. Their reasons for declining are unknown though all are given an opportunity that fit the acceptable age criteria.

The questionnaire collects data from the two African American Seventh-day Adventist churches regardless of economic issues. Opinions, behaviors, and feelings will inform the research of their experiences. The questionnaire maintains is constructed in an easy to read, easy to understand manner. With a little over twenty questions the approximate time frame for respondents to finish was between 10-15 minutes. See sample of survey in Appendix A.

The use of the advanced money systems often indicates economic difficulty and a drifting toward poverty. Certainty of this can only come from knowing the individual's circumstances. However, a high *probability* of a drift remains when these systems are used often. The second question suggested the *severity* of the possible drift towards poverty.

Designing questions for research purposes takes time and effort. The closed-ended questions used a one-answer system or multiple answers. An online service tool from Survey Monkey (1999-2011) shares information about two types of questions.

Closed-ended questions are those with pre-designed answers with a small or large set of potential choices. One type of closed-ended question is a "dichotomous" question which allows respondents to choose one or two answer choices (e.g. Yes or No), while another type is the "multi-chotomous" question, which allows respondents to choose one of many answers. (pp. 9, 10)

Conclusion

The existence of poverty within the African American Seventh-day Adventist community is apparent. What is not so evident is the degree poverty exists; at least in the two churches in the research. An attempt was made in the two churches of research, Ephesus and Norwood, to discover their experience of poverty.

In this attempt the dignity of African Americans are evaluated by progress or regress from responses through opinions, feelings, and circumstances of their experiences. As a residue of slavery, inhumanity, and indignity, African American Adventist responded to questions to determine what degree they have experienced poverty and the lack of dignity related consequences.

CHAPTER 5

THE ANALYSIS OF TWO CHURCHES AND DIGNITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Statement of Purpose

The issue of poverty among African Americans includes more than the lack of resources for life and living. It also consists of past deliberate, dehumanization, and suppression. The impact of that past still resonates through systems and structures and expressions of human hearts today.

Results from the questionnaire information from two predominately African American Seventh-day Adventist churches reveals current issues, opinions, feelings, and habits that reflect their historical adjustments to poverty. The content shows that African American Seventh-day Adventists are not exempt from the experiences of African Americans in general in regards to poverty. They face the same struggles; though some lifestyles are different.

The findings show that in certain areas such as physicals African American Adventist are doing well. This could be a result of a strong health message contained within the teachings of the church. Therefore poverty was not much of a factor to regular health checkups. Other areas did show connections to poverty experiences to African Americans in general.

The composition of the questionnaire results of the two churches (Norwood and Ephesus) is recognizably different in that the Ephesus church is the mother church. Its members are stable with a long history. The longevity of their existence also helps to

secure their place as a worshipping community to meet the needs of its members.

The approach of this chapter is to present the significant findings of the questionnaire that correlates poverty among Seventh-day Adventist African Americans and African Americans of poverty in general. In this way the experience of poverty for African Americans in the Adventist church and outside is revealed.

Establishing Poverty by Government Sources

The U. S. Census Bureau of 2009 establishes poverty thresholds by size of family and income. It determines the maximums of income and family sizes as measures of meeting that threshold. These measures are for statistical purposes for understanding people, ethnic groups, households, and regions. A U. S. Census Bureau Report (2009) provides the poverty thresholds for poverty incomes and family households.

These poverty incomes and family households are listed in this manner: one person \$10,956; two persons \$13,991; three persons \$17,098; four persons \$21,954; five persons \$25,991; six persons \$29,405; seven persons \$33,752; eight persons \$37,252; and nine persons \$44,366. However, families with incomes below \$25,000 are generally considered to be of poverty.

The “Federal Poverty Guidelines” (2009) establishes poverty ranges to determine financial aid services by income and family size as well. Many times this aid is in the form of food vouchers in order for the poor to eat. This government source provides poverty income guidelines and family household sizes to indicate those in poverty. They are listed in this manner: one person \$10,830; two persons \$14,570; three persons \$18,310; four persons \$22,050; five persons \$25,790; six persons \$29,530; seven persons

\$33,270; eight persons \$38,010; and \$3,740 is added to each additional person, thereby making nine persons in a household \$41,750 dollars.

While the starting and ending figures for determining poverty by Census thresholds or Human Services differ, they are similar; in fact, they overlap each other at times.

The approach taken for this study is to combine the two: (Census Thresholds/Health and Human Services) on income and family size therefore determining poverty of respondents. Following is an example of what respondents saw on the questionnaire with two persons in the household: 2 () \$13,991 [U.S. Census Poverty Threshold] and \$14,570 [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines] listed on the survey. Respondents are asked to mark accordingly “which best describes your yearly income?” There is a separate question for respondents to indicate their household size.

The first number that is 2 in our example above represents the number of individuals in the household from the two governmental establishments. The () parenthesis represents the place where respondents will place a check (x) indicating this was their yearly income if it applies to them.

The money figures are a combination of the lowest starting point of either the census threshold and/or human services guidelines. The poverty threshold for a family of two is \$13,991. The poverty guideline for a family of two is \$14,570. Therefore poverty income for a family of two, in combination, is \$13,991-\$14,570. The higher numerical figure is the higher of the two combinations for income and family size of two.

The indication of the number in the household and corresponding poverty level is immediately known. It becomes evident that respondents who fall within the criteria of both government establishments of poverty levels are considered individuals or families of poverty for a family size of two.

There are several models with class stratification categories. Although there is variation, it is generally accepted that families under \$25,000 are considered as individuals of poverty. Individuals whose annual income of \$25,000-50,000 is considered lower middle class. A respondent whose income is above \$50,000 to \$75,000 is known as the middle class, and the last category for the purposes of this study is the upper middle class \$75,000 to 100,000.

Norwood Yearly Income

The Norwood church respondents show there is significant poverty of African Americans, whether Christian Seventh-day Adventist or otherwise among African Americans.

Forty-four percent (44%) revealed that they are in poverty. This is an alarming rate. There were also others who were considered near poverty or the lower middle class.

Four percent (4%), though not the head of household, indicated poverty circumstances regarding their income to be between the ages of 18-25. This likely means someone else is responsible for income. If this person was single and living on his or her own, they would be in poverty according to the U.S. Government which states poverty yearly income for one person is between (\$0-10,956). Their present employment after four years of college does not yield sufficient income support.

Eight percent (8%) of the respondents gave similar responses as above, one received a bachelor's degree, and the other attended college in the past or is presently attending without specification to length.

Four percent (4%) of the respondent indicated income between (\$0- \$10,956). The same individual listed themselves as the head of household with a total of three individuals in the household. They did not finish high school and presently is unemployed.

What the survey does not reveal are the circumstances surrounding the lack of employment, or the inability to finish high school. Sickness or some other malady could be involved. While difficulties assail all humankind, African Americans consistently experience poverty in higher percentages.

Four percent (4%) of the head of household and a family of four indicated a poverty level income. For those with a household of three (\$17,098-18,310) when the income should be beyond (\$22,050) for a family of four. However this person and their family are benefited because this is a family with husband and wife. If the spouse is also employed this family would not be considered as a family of poverty.

There was also 4% that had similar responses with an income household poverty level of two (\$13,991-14,570) when there were three in the household. This income should be beyond (\$18, 310).

The analysis of another revealed 4% of respondents were in poverty. What was interesting was their poverty level. They are negatively a step *below* the income level of their family size. In other words, there are steps within a poverty level category that reveal dire circumstances.

It begins to worsen as (4%) of respondent are actually close to two steps below. It becomes complicated when there are several children and the marital status is single.

Another 4% showed their income was two steps below as well. They were married with others in the household. The education was high school level and their level of income (\$13,991-14,570) may or may not be a reflection of education. At any rate, a tragedy with either spouse could be devastating for this family.

Another 4% reported an income of (\$13,991-14,570) with two in the family and married. If the spouse works that would place this family outside the poverty boundary.

An additional (4%) indicated six levels below the poverty level for their family size. However they do indicate marital status. Unless the spouse shows good income, others in the household are needed to work, if of age, to help provide for this family, otherwise it is almost next to impossible to exist. With (44%) of respondents of the Norwood Seventh-day Adventist Church indicating poverty, there is cause for alarm.

Ephesus Yearly Income

The Ephesus Church is the mother church of the Birmingham area churches. Its profile is somewhat a reversal of the Norwood church. Most of the respondents were in the higher categories of yearly income. Although Ephesus circumstances were not as severe as Norwood, almost 15% or (14.3%) indicated poverty levels.

As the mother church, history and stability played an important part in the foundation of its members. Incomes were favorable and mostly outside poverty levels.

However (9%) of the respondents reported the lowest poverty levels (\$0 - \$10,956). Twenty two percent (22%) of the (9%), indicated the lowest poverty incomes (\$0 - \$10,956), as well as being the head of household.

There was no indication that any of the three were employed for (2) indicated unemployment while (1) did not answer the question on employment. The respondent who did not answer the question on employment was likely to be retired according to their age, though this is uncertain.

The next lowest poverty level (\$13,991-\$14,570) revealed (6%) of the respondents in that category. They are *not* in poverty for they were the only ones (single) in individual households. They are mentioned here because they are “*near poverty*” though both indicate some college education.

Three percent (3%) indicated the third lowest level (\$17,098 - \$18,310) of poverty. There were (2) who indicated this level, however only (1) was in poverty according to family size. What is important here is this income of poverty is for those who only have three individuals in the household. This person has four persons in the household therefore indicating poverty.

Additionally, (3%) indicated poverty incomes lower than adequate for their household, however, they indicated they were married. If the spouse is employed poverty circumstances can be averted. What we have seen in the Ephesus profile, though not as severe as Norwood, is almost (15%) are in poverty.

It is noted that the U. S. Census (revised May 2012) indicates in “2010, 46.2 million people were in poverty.” The same source stated “between 2009 and 2010, the poverty rate increased for Whites (from 9.4 percent to 9.9 percent), for Blacks (from 25.8 percent to 27.4 percent), and for Hispanics (from 25.3 percent to 26.6 percent.” Asians remained at 12.1%.

Norwood Level of Education

The lack of education is tied to levels of income. Education is therefore important to the stability of dignity awareness, and wider usefulness. In the developmental context of Jesus the Bible says, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

African Americans at one time were denied the right to education supported by unjust laws as noted in Chapter 3. The enormity of those decisions and other denials still has ramifications.

Educational difficulties increase when there are issues and challenges of poverty, such as: health issues, nourishing diets, adequate tools for learning like computers, books, and sufficient educational facilities.

The Norwood Church respondents show the difficulties among Seventh-day Adventist African Americans regarding education. All respondents except one completed high school. What was encouraging were those who made an attempt to go to college, and those who are now completing a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree.

The profile of education among the Norwood church appears in this manner. Four percent (4%) did not complete high school; (16%) completed high school or finished their GED; (40%) had some college courses; (28%) had bachelor’s degrees; (12%) had masters; but there were none with doctoral degrees. It should be noted that (60%) did not have a bachelor’s degree.

Ephesus Level of Education

The Ephesus Church level of education, though better than Norwood, especially in the higher educational degrees, still had its issues. Almost half the respondents, 49% did not have bachelor's degrees. It was very similar to the Norwood church.

This was somewhat troubling, for none of the respondents were between the ages 18-25. Once removed from the educational environment it is difficult at times to start back. It is likely that most of those who indicated some college will not enter again. What is not clear, are the reasons for the high incompleteness rate for college, for both Ephesus and Norwood. Did poverty play a factor here? Was dignity wounded? The answers to these questions cannot be answered with any certainty, however, given the historical past, which affects the present, it is probable.

Nevertheless Ephesus showed 3% did not finish high school; 6% finished high school or GED; 40% had some college courses; 28% of respondents have bachelor's degrees; and 23% have a master's degree, about twice as many master's degrees than Norwood. No one indicated that they had successfully completed doctorate degrees. It should be noted that there are those in the congregation who have doctorate degrees, however those individuals did not fill out the questionnaire.

Greene and Winters (2002) report,

The national graduation rate for the public school class of 2000 was 69%. The rate for white students was 76%; for Asian students it was 79%; for African-Americans it was 55%; for Hispanic students it was 53%; and for Native Americans it was 57%.

Norwood and Employment and Unemployment

When asked about employment in the survey, (12%) of respondents indicated (No) they were not employed. Out of this twelve percent, (8%) were in the age category

18-25 and 4% ages 26-35. Those mature in age were able to find jobs but most of those jobs were low-income jobs. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents indicated a yearly income below \$26,000. Almost half, of those below \$26,000, (48%) indicated yearly income at or below \$18,310.

This was disconcerting, because it is basically employment-generated income that keeps a family going. However most of the respondents were employed, even though, they were low paying jobs.

It should be noted that this is a time of recession, having a job in this economy is important. It should also be noted that the nation's unemployment figures are in the higher single digits of unemployment. According to the U.S. Department of Labor "the unemployment rate fell by 0.4 percentage point to 9.4 percent in December" 2010.

African American's unemployment is in the double digits. In an E-mail from S. Hipple (personal communication, January 18, 2011) an employee with the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics asserts, unemployment of African Americans 16 years and older nationally was at 15.7% the end of 2009. In Birmingham, African Americans unemployment is reported by S. Hipple to be 17.1% at the end of 2010.

Ephesus and Employment and Unemployment

Almost one third of Ephesus respondents (29%) indicated that they were unemployed. However, (70%) of these were at retirement age. This could mean good news for this is the time when work is normally scaled down. Nevertheless the elderly need income too, and are sufferers of poverty as well.

Weiss (2009), reporting on economic security for unmarried women, states,

More than one in five (22.2 percent) women living in poverty are elderly women age 60 and older. Losing a husband to death or divorce can be devastating to women's

quality of life and greatly increases risk of poverty. Because the vast majority (95 percent) of today's elderly population has married at some point, older women who are poor are almost all previously married. The new Census figures bear this out. Widows accounted for nearly half (45.6 percent) of poor women age 60 and older in 2008, and 65 percent of those over 75. An additional one-quarter (23.5 percent) of poor women 60 and over were divorced or separated. By the end of their lives, nearly all poor elderly women age 75 and older are on their own—more than 80 percent of poor women this age are unmarried and more than three-quarters of these live alone.

At Ephesus (29%) of respondents receive \$25,991 dollars or less as a yearly income for employment. These figures did not consider whether there is a spouse or if that spouse makes sufficient income so that there is no need for the other spouse to work, nor did it consider retirement or other issues. The figures simply reflect the responses.

African Americans clearly experience low wages for their labor and higher unemployment. The numbers reveal their difficult economic and social condition.

Norwood Gender and Marital Status

When it comes to gender most churches have more females than males. When there are families where the husband and the wife are working, poverty is usually reduced.

The fact is, however, when it comes to poverty families, single households comprise a greater percentage of poverty than married households. Weiss (2009) states,

Women are more likely even in better economic times to face poverty than men, and unmarried women have higher poverty rates than married women. Yet the marital disparity has worsened since early in the decade. The poverty rate of unmarried women was 13.4 percentage points higher than married women in 2000, but it was 14.6 percentage points higher in 2008. The risk of poverty for women of color is even greater, especially for those who are unmarried. Thirty percent of unmarried black women and 29.5 percent of unmarried Hispanic women—of any race—were poor in 2008, compared with 18.5 percent of unmarried white women.

Norwood and Ephesus gender profile indicated a number of singles as head of household. Norwood reported (60%) females and (36%) were males. Four percent (4%)

did not indicate gender. Of these (60%) females who responded, (47%) indicated head of household while 53% indicated they were not.

When it came to marriage, (40%) of females indicated they were married, 47% were single and 13% were separated. What we see once again is more singles than married. A few young single females were still at home with parents.

The males indicated (44%) were married and (56%) indicated they were single. When it came to head of household (67%) of males indicated they were head of household. While (33%) indicated they were not.

Ephesus Gender and Marital Status

Over twice as many females than males responded to the survey than males. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of females to (29%) of males and (3%) did not respond to the gender question. The survey shows the variation between genders in the Ephesus church or the willingness of females to participate more than their male counterpart.

Of the (69%) responding females, (50%) of those recorded they were married. Forty-two percent (42%) were single and (4%) recorded they were widowed, and (4%) did not respond to the question.

The male respondents were stable when it came to marital status. Ninety percent (90%) of responding males indicated they were married. Eighty percent (80%) of those males indicated they were head of household.

What we see in both the Ephesus and Norwood Churches are males with greater marital percentages than females; and greater number of females whether single or married overall than males.

Norwood on Home Rental and Ownership

Almost half the respondents surveyed at Norwood owned their homes. While this was better than many communities it is not what it should be. When the respondents were asked if they owned their house or were renting (48%) were owners and (40%) were renters. There were also (12%) of respondents who did not answer the question. All who did not answer the question were between the ages of 18-25 most likely living in their parent's home.

Ephesus on Home Rental and Ownership

The Ephesus Church was much better, most likely demonstrating their stability, education level, and development through the years. Their profile appeared different when asked to respond to home renter or ownership. Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents indicated they owned their home. There were (26%) who indicated they were renters.

Housing for African Americans Past and Present

The history of housing for African Americans was that those who held them as slaves owned them. However, one of the ways to emerge forward with dignity and create a heritage for one's family is home ownership.

In "Conditions of Antebellum Slavery" (n.d.), homes lived in by slaves is described as "they lived in crude quarters that left them vulnerable to bad weather and disease. Their clothing and bedding were minimal as well." Slaves had little rights to owning property especially in the south for they were considered as property.

Kelly, Baker, O'Donovan, and Brown, in "After Slavery" (n.d.) inform that,

freed people continued to work under their former owners for nominal wages that made little real difference in their material well-being. . . . Planters reacted with bitterness to the new 'free labor' arrangements by casting them out of their former homes, leaving the most vulnerable to patch together a bare subsistence as best they could, or to die in hunger and squalor.

A study on understanding the low African American home ownership rate in southwestern Pennsylvania suggests one of the factors for higher home ownership rates for African Americans in a city "that are more residentially segregated tend to have higher African American ownership rates" ("The Reinvestment Fund," 2004, p. 9). The city of Birmingham, which is racially segregated, has an African American ownership of "51.76%" (p. 36).

This is encouraging in one sense, for a little over half of African Americans own their home, which is higher than in many other cities. However, further study reveals it is low compared to Whites, for the same source says the "median home value was \$62,200" (p. 36) for African Americans in Birmingham. This median home value was in the top five of the lowest 103 cities cited. Therefore many homes were purchased in concentrated poor neighborhoods.

African Americans and Home Buying

When one considers net worth in finance, one's home is a major part of that net worth. The saying "location, location, location" in the realty business relates to the value of your home. That value can mean the difference between home value going up or down.

A home is usually the largest investment one will ever make. African Americans, who rent from others all their lives, pass on little in the form of financial net worth to their family, continuing a cycle of poverty for generations.

In addition, an article titled “African Americans: The State of the Disparity” (n.d.) shows the disparity and enormity of the problem.

When African Americans do buy homes, they receive the highest interest mortgage loans 30% more often than whites, even when their incomes and credit scores are the same. This differential in lending terms cumulatively costs African American homeowners more than \$6 billion dollars each year. (p. 2)

Another disparity of net worth is written by Blue (2008),

And anybody who’s paying any attention to what’s going on in America today understands, if you are African-American in this country today, you are likely to have a net worth of about 10 percent of what white families have.

The purchasing of homes can boost ones net worth, while one’s net worth can boost a greater standard of living. Blue agrees when she states:

Net worth is measured as the total value of a household's financial assets—such as bank accounts, property and vehicles—minus the household's financial liabilities. Though the measurement is an oft-used indicator of financial health, it doesn't always tell the whole story because the amount of income generated by a household's assets is a key factor in maintaining a desired standard of living. (2008)

Norwood on Getting Physicals Every Year

The responses on physicals were very encouraging. The Norwood Church is getting physicals. Of all the questions asked, the response to getting physicals was closest to 100%.

Ninety-two percent (92%) are getting physicals on a regular basis. Only (8%) of the members are not. That is two, too many.

When asked the follow up question, if it was because they did not have insurance, (4%) responded yes and (4%) responded no. This is encouraging for the Adventist community stresses the importance of health.

Ephesus on Getting Physicals Every Year

The Ephesus Church response was about the same as the Norwood Church. Those responding to the question on getting physicals every year revealed that (94%) denoted they were getting physicals every year. Only (6%) -- two were not getting physicals. Three percent (3%) indicated they did not because there was no insurance and 3% did not without explanation.

Dignity and Medical Physicals

Starling (1998) informs us that the top ten diseases that kill African-Americans are heart disease, cancer, accidents, strokes, homicides, aids, diabetes, pneumonia/influenza, asthma/bronchitis, and infant mortality.

She suggests that “suppose the entire city of Birmingham, Ala., vanished.” That would be about how many African Americans will die in a year. Starling stresses that the same diseases affects Whites as well. Furthermore, she states, “by the time most Blacks are diagnosed with these illnesses, they are more likely to die. . . . With regular checkups and simple changes in lifestyle and nutrition, many of these health threats can be avoided.”

Daniels, (as cited in Starling, 1998) referring to African Americans, said, “Most patients still feel that to go to the doctor, something has to be wrong,” but for some it is too late to reverse the problem. Another doctor suggests “a lot of confusion is due to a legacy of racism by the medical community and poverty in Black America.”

One of the problems for the poor is not having enough money to pay for expensive medicines. Some fail to fill their prescriptions making tough decisions between medicine and other bills.

However, the African American members of Norwood and Ephesus are doing well to maintain their physicals. Again, this may be due, to health education within the Adventist Church.

Norwood on Parents as Domestic Workers

Responders of the Norwood Church were asked to respond to the question “were one or both parent’s domestic workers?” Thirty-six percent (36%) indicated Yes and 56% indicated No. Eight percent (8%) did not answer the question.

Ephesus on Parents as Domestic Workers

Responders in the Ephesus Church revealed (46%) checked that they had one or both parents as a domestic worker. This is only four percentage points from half the responders. Domestic workers are seen as those who receive low wages for their work. The majority, however, (54%) did not have a parent as a domestic worker.

Dignity and Domestic Work

While it has been said that all work has dignity, many African Americans did not have an opportunity to decide where they worked, for they were kept away from the significant positions of labor. Domestic workers on the other hand worked on the land and cleaned houses in many neighborhoods which were not in the community where they lived, receiving low wages. What was revealed in the questionnaire, even in 2011, parents of many church members are employed on low paying jobs, normally assigned to African Americans.

In an abstract, Donovan (1987) details how the health care industry is becoming one of the places for new domestic work.

The home health care industry is emerging as a significant employer of low income and minority women in the United States. Many of the new nonprofessional jobs, such as home attendant and home health aide, are structured within subemployment systems that keep wages low and benefits few or nonexistent. This article suggests that the current conditions have historical roots in U.S. slavery and the persistent segregation of black women in work roles as domestic servants in private households.

Consequently, many minority children today who dream of distancing themselves from the legacy of domestic work, which is the legacy of compulsory slavery, find themselves instead with low income, nonprofessional jobs, inside sub-employment structures.

Breaking the cycle of what and how African American children see their parents, can lead them into a different course. Observational confidence is gained when a person believes there is more to their lives than a legacy that resulted from indignity. Confidence is also gained when parents are able to convince their children of their individual abilities.

Norwood and Government Assistance for Food

The question was asked have you ever received government assistance for food. Respondents from the Norwood Church clearly reflected poverty status at least in the past. Over half the respondents had received government assistance, indicating a drop of income to poverty levels. The profile of Norwood comprises the following: (52%) answered Yes while (42%) answered No. It should be noted that (42%) of those who answered No were in the age category of 18-25. The significance of this is that it is likely many of these are young adults still living at home.

To receive government assistance one must meet the criteria of poverty. For those who receive this assistance a certain amount of humility and indignity comes with it.

There was a significant change when asked if you are now receiving food assistance. Only (16%) answered (Yes) to the question. This would be consistent with those who indicated they were employed, which was (88%) of respondents.

Ephesus and Government Assistance for Food

When asked the question have you ever received government assistance for food, Ephesus showed they, too, were familiar with receiving food assistance. Their profile revealed (31%) of respondents received government assistance in the past, while (66%) had not received government assistance and 3% did not answer the question.

To the question of how many were now receiving assistance, only (6%) indicated they were; (89%) indicated they were not receiving assistance, and (3%) did not answer the question.

Government Food Assistance

Food assistance is available to those who qualify. According to “Social Security online” (n.d.), “federal, state and local governments provide many programs designed to help meet the nutritional needs of people with low incomes and their families.” Those available according to the same source are

Food Stamp Programs; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) [for elderly people]; The Child and Adult Care Food Program offers meals and snacks to children in eligible day care centers; The School Lunch and Breakfast Programs offer meals at schools to children. Low-income children get these meals free or at a reduced price; The Summer Food Service Program offers free meals and snacks to needy children during the months when school is not in session; The Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program provides low-income seniors (individuals who are at least 60 years old) with coupons during the harvest season that can be exchanged for eligible foods at farmers’ markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture programs.

According to Plotkin (2009),

a new report released this week by Washington University in St. Louis researchers found that 90 percent of black children will be clients of the national Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/Food Stamps) at least once by the time they turn 20.

The above quote stresses that this should be a time when a child is experiencing a sense of safety and security; instead it is a time of economic turmoil. Economic turmoil in turn adds physical and emotional stress in the home.

The burden becomes greater for African American singles. Plotkin (2009) says,

91 percent of children with single parents will be in a household receiving food stamps, compared to 37 percent of children in married households. Looking at race, marital status and education simultaneously, children who are black and whose head of household is not married with less than 12 years of education have a cumulative percentage of residing in a food stamp household of 97 percent by age 10.

Norwood on Feeling Lower Than Others on a Job

The Norwood respondent's perception on feeling lower than others on a job was that 36% felt they have worked on a job that made them feel lower, while 64% did not. The respondents of the Norwood church were younger; therefore, youth may have played an important role in the way they answered. For example, their history of employment would be low if one is in his or her twenties or thirties. Therefore there may not be enough historical job experience to indicate feeling lower on a job.

Ephesus on Feeling Lower Than Others on a Job

The Ephesus respondents were much higher on this issue. The older mature respondents could have played a part. Several respondents were a part of the 1960s civil rights era and they would remember the days when most African Americans could only work certain kinds of jobs.

Of those responding to the question of feeling lower than others on a job,

(54%) of respondents felt lower than others on a job while (46%) did not.

The Importance Issue of Feeling Lower on a Job

Dignity is at stake here. Even if one is doing the best they can do. Those who come behind as children are informed of life experiences, goals, and aspirations from what they have seen in and of their parents. A job that informs significantly inspires and suggests opportunities of labor in a wide variety of ways.

Pertinent questions as who are your role models? Who has been influential in the area of a career, becomes important to creating an environment towards significance. A person is always significant no matter what they do, and one can give significance to a job by being the best one can be. People take notice when a job is done well. There are certain jobs, though, that seem to be consigned to people because they “fit” “the least of these” in society.

Sugrue (n.d.) suggests that before the automobile industry in Detroit “auto plants were a big step up for blacks who had been disproportionately stuck in janitorial positions, personal service jobs, and menial farm labor before World War II.”

Stewart and Perlow (n.d) reveal that,

it is important to understand why biased employee selection occurs in the workplace. We examined applicant race, job status, and the evaluator’s attitudes toward blacks as possible predictors of unfair selection decisions. After completing an attitude toward blacks scale, one hundred and eighty-one people evaluated the qualifications of either a black or white applicant for either a high or low status job. Results showed no differences in the hiring decision. However, evaluators with more negative attitudes toward blacks reported greater confidence in their decision to hire the black applicant than the white applicant for the low status job compared to the confidence of evaluators with more positive attitudes. They also reported greater confidence in their decision to hire the white applicant than the black applicant for the high status job as compared to evaluators with more positive attitudes towards blacks. We observed the opposite results for less biased individuals. Evaluator ratings do not explain these findings. These data suggest that unfair discrimination may operate in subtle ways.

While one cannot say bias exists in every situation, those who are on the receiving end of this negativity sense their lower status employment; therefore, they feel lower than others. Thus those who responded to feeling lower than others are substantiated partly through negative bias attitudes towards them for being selected to do the low status job.

Norwood on Degree of Poverty in Neighborhood

At least 16% considered their neighborhood as (very much) one of poverty, while 8% considered their neighborhood as (somewhat) in poverty. There were (36%) who said their neighborhood was (not much) in poverty, and (40%) considered their neighborhood (not in poverty at all).

Ephesus on Degree of Poverty in Neighborhood

The Ephesus Church responders had (3%) to indicate their neighborhood was (very much) in poverty and 34% revealed their neighborhood was (somewhat) in poverty. Twenty-six percent (26%) denoted their neighborhood was (not much) in poverty while (34%) indicated their neighborhood was not in poverty at all. There was (3%) who did not answer the question.

Dignity and Poverty in Neighborhood

Norwood is a community of many burned out, vacant houses. The community is a prime example of neglected conditions of poverty that are often ignored and are left to languish in their misery.

Hopelessness is one of the problems that poverty neighborhoods face. Bolland (2003) revealed that in

a survey of 2,468 inner city adolescents, asking them questions about hopelessness, violent and aggressive behavior, substance use, sexual behavior and accidental injury,

nearly 50% of males and 25% females had moderate or severe feelings of hopelessness. (p. 1)

Norwood on the use of Advanced Money Systems

According to the Norwood Church (8%) of respondents used the advanced money systems 1-5 times. The users of these systems then go up. Sixteen percent (16%) of the respondents used the systems 6-10 times. Four percent (4%) used the system more than 10 times.

Of the (28%) of respondents who used the advanced systems, (43%) were considered at poverty levels. Others appear to have fallen into a consistent pattern of advanced system use for emergencies.

Ephesus on the use of Advanced Money Systems

The Ephesus Church respondents indicated (17%) used advanced money systems 1-5 times. Nine percent (9%) indicated 6-10 uses of advanced money systems. In addition, there were (6%) who indicated 10 and above uses of advanced money systems. This clearly shows the difficulty and desperation to have money despite the high interest and fees. Thirty-two percent (32%) used advanced money systems and (68%) had no use at all.

Out of those who indicated using advanced money systems (1-5 times) only nine (9%) was considered in the poverty level. The (9%) also indicated that they were married. If their spouse also worked, it is likely that none of the (17%) used advanced money systems (1-5 times) is at poverty levels.

For those who indicated using advanced money systems 6-10 times, (33%) were at poverty level, the others were not near poverty levels at all. Of the (6%), who indicated 10 and above uses, none were at poverty levels.

The use of Advanced Money Systems

The experience of poverty frequently runs through advanced money systems. However, in the experience of those participating in the survey, there was little evidence to support the widespread use of advance money systems by those of poverty. Those of poverty, like others, need finances to live life, those of poverty, however, make constant life adjustments to live.

Part of the adjustments to life, of those of poverty, is depending on others who are usually of poverty as well, to spread the word where help can be received. These adjustments also include paying to get checks cashed. However, the poor do not always have money; therefore, often do not have checking accounts.

Title Loans and Interest Rates

Putting one's car up for collateral to acquire title loans is another adjustment to life experiences. Those in poverty have difficult times holding a mortgage and paying rent, therefore cars often become their largest investment. These are traded for exorbitant expensive fees through high interest rates, which inflame an already exacerbated poverty situation.

Neiger (2008) reveals how much interest one could pay when making title loans.

Car title lenders are in a different category than credit card companies or banks and work around usury laws. Thus, title loan lenders are able to charge triple digit annual percentage rates (APRs). Yes, triple digits. It's not an exaggeration to see 250% APR and higher on these car tile loans and only a handful of states have passed strict laws that prohibit exorbitant percentage rates.

At these elevated interest rates, title loan companies are not giving out favors.

Instead they are doing themselves favors. Neiger (2008) explains their intentions.

The terms of these loans are crafted to keep borrowers in a cycle of debt and bring customers either to the verge of repossession or to actual repossession. Not being able to pay off the initial loan and then renewing it the next month costs borrowers even more money in interest, on top of the original amount they've already borrowed.

Many times these types of loans are made to people who are already strapped for cash; often they are people of poverty. Most of these loans are made in emergency situations, hopefully temporary in nature. Quite often the duration is often longer and costlier than the borrower expects.

The use of pawnshops is another adjustment to the difficulties of poverty. Slowly all the assets that one has become the assets of another and one's net worth is reduced to the lowest degree. Pawn shops in the past, and somewhat today, was a favorite place to obtain immediate cash because of their ability to receive a variety of goods in exchange for money. However the interest rates are high and the loan to the value of one's merchandise is low, as was seen in the example of title loans, leaving many customers in difficulty not being able to redeem their merchandise.

Morrissey (2010) shares these comments,

Pawnshop companies make money by giving short-term loans to customers who offer jewelry, electronics, tools, musical instruments and other merchandise as collateral or by purchasing merchandise outright from customers at a steep discount. Loan terms are typically one to three months in length, with customers expected to cough up monthly storage and loan-servicing fees of 10% to 20% a month. If a customer fails to make a monthly payment, the pawnshop, following a grace period, can sell the item.

In addition to pawn shops the same above article addresses payday loans. These are loans given in advance of payment to those in need from a working salary that are

short-term loans, typically seven to 30 days in length, that are not backed by merchandise. The loans typically carry interest rates of 10% to 20% for a two-week term, which translates into an annual percentage rate exceeding 300%. Industry experts say the APR is just theoretical since payday loans are meant to be very short term, lasting only until the borrower's next paycheck. Even so, a number of states, like Ohio, are imposing caps on the rates in an effort to stop what they consider to be predatory lending.

Large banks are now presenting payday loans to their customers. Choi (2011) notes,

Banks say their loans are intended for emergencies and are quick to distance themselves from the payday lending industry. But consumer advocates say these direct deposit loans, as banks prefer to call them, bear the same predatory trademarks as the payday loans commonly found in low-income neighborhoods.

She suggests that though the fees are smaller, they are still high. To assure the banks receive their money, the loan must be paid back through direct deposit. Although other banks are included in these loans, three banks were mentioned, Wells Fargo, Regions, and U.S. Bank participate in these loans.

The Real Customers of Advanced Money Systems

Desperate measures are seen in the frequent use of the advanced money systems. When a person looks at the availability of these systems in any city, what one will discover is these systems are mostly in poorer depressed areas but are located near military bases as well.

It does not necessarily follow that the persons using advanced money systems are those at poverty levels. It does indicate there is likely to be desperation for money from those areas. A factor for using these systems could simply be that individuals are overly extended in debt rather than poverty.

As far as Norwood and Ephesus Churches are concerned those who use the advanced money systems were likely to be those who were not in poverty. While people

of poverty use these systems, those whose incomes that are not at poverty levels are the real customers according to the findings. Persons on social security whose checks come once a month are also likely candidates.

Norwood on Ranking the Reason for Poverty

The Norwood Church was asked to rank reasons for their poverty. This was done by ranking from one to five (1-5) what they felt is the reason for poverty. Several answers were provided along with a blank sheet designated as (Other) to allow flexibility with their answers.

Although instructions were given to rank their answers, there were some who indicated only one answer for poverty. There were also some who indicated three answers.

Fifty-two percent (52%) followed the ranking instructions. Of these (42%) ranked (No job/low paying job) as the number one reason for poverty. Thirty-one percent (31%) indicated (Lack of education) as the number one reason for poverty. Fifteen percent (15%) thought (Drug abuse) was the number one reason for poverty and (8%) indicated (Circumstances beyond your control).

There were those who indicated only one reason for poverty who represented 40% of the responders. Of these, (40%) indicated (Lack of education) as the number one reason for poverty. Thirty percent (30%) indicated (Circumstances beyond your control) as the reason for poverty. There was a three-way tie of 10% for each (No job/low paying job); (Too many bills); and a write in response as (Other-as relationship with God).

Those who registered three responses represented eight percent (8%) of the responders. Of these (33%) indicated (No job/low paying job) as the number one reason

for poverty as well as (33%) for the (Lack of education) as the number one reason for poverty. Seventeen percent (17%) thought (Circumstances beyond your control) as the number one reason for poverty, as well as 17% for (Drug abuse) as the number one reason for poverty.

The Norwood respondents are split between no job/low paying job, and the lack of education as the number one reason for poverty. When respondents followed the full use of the ranking 1-5, No job/low paying job received more number one reasons than the lack of education.

The point here is that if you are not able to get a job you are not able to have adequate resources. No job and low paying job contributes to one's predicament of poverty.

Ephesus on Ranking the Reason for Poverty

Reasons for poverty from the Ephesus perspective when the ranking from 1-5 was followed were at (54%). Of those (26%) indicated the (Lack of education) as the number one reason for poverty. Following that (11%) indicated (No job/ low paying job) as the reason for poverty. Next was (Circumstances Beyond Your control) with (9%). There were three others with (3%) each as (Too many bills); (Drug abuse); and a write-in response (Other-negative mindset from the environment).

In addition, 3% did not answer the question on the reason for poverty, (6%) checked all possible answers equally without ranking them as the number one reason for poverty.

Thirty-one percent (31%) of the respondents chose only one answer instead of ranking them 1-5. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those who indicated one answer thought

(No job/low paying job) was the reason for poverty. Twenty-seven percent (27%) thought it was (Too many bills). Eighteen percent (18%) thought it was a (Lack of education). Nine percent (9%) of those who gave one answer wrote in (Other-I don't know) and nine percent (9%) wrote in their answer as (Other-Illness).

Finally there was (6%) who registered two answers. Of these six percent, (50%) thought (No job/low paying job) was the reason for poverty, while (25%) thought the (Lack of education), and 25% thought (Too many bills) was the reason for poverty.

The lack of education is the number one reason for poverty according to the respondents of the Ephesus Church. The number two reasons for poverty for Ephesus is No job/low paying job. The lack of education and jobs are mentioned in other sections of the findings. Therefore their importance will not be repeated in this section. It is important, however, to note education and jobs complement each other.

Norwood on Describing Their Situation of Poverty

Respondents were asked to respond to their poverty situation past or present. While possible answers were supplied to them in the survey, opportunity was given for them to give alternative answers. What would be helpful at this point is to reveal those responses. The question asked "If you are in poverty now or have been in the past, how would you describe your situation? The respondents checked the responses that applied to them.

Thirty percent (30%) checked (Hopeful dreams of a better day). Eighteen percent (18%) described their situation as (Embarrassing). Ten percent (10%) felt (Ashamed), while (10%) checked (None of the above), and another (10%) did not answer the question. Eight percent (8%) felt (Guilty).

Finally, there were three categories that received 5% each. They were (Helpless) (5%), (Different from others) (5%), and (Did not know I was in a poverty neighborhood) at (5%).

Ephesus on Describing Their Situation of Poverty

As with the Norwood Church, the order of the top two responses was identical. This confirms like-mindedness. Other answers varied and lessen in significance. Nonetheless, this is what the Ephesus church reveled concerning the question “If you are in poverty now or have been in the past, how would you describe your situation? The respondents checked the responses that applied to them.

Twenty percent (20%) of the total respondent answers indicated they had (Hopeful Dreams for a better day). Seventeen percent (17%) described their situation of poverty as (Embarrassing). Fourteen percent (14%) did not answer the question. Nine percent (9%) felt (Ashamed) as well as 9% indicated (Did not know I was in a poverty neighborhood. Eight percent (8%) described their situation as (Helpless). Six percent (6%) described their situation of poverty as (Different from Others) and 6% indicated their situation as (None of the above).

Though it was a small amount, it is too large that (5%) indicated (I Will Always Be Poor) and (3%) describes their situation of past or present poverty as (Guilty), as well as (3%) indicating (Other) without specifying what that would be.

Hopeful Dreams of a Better Day

The Norwood Church respondents and the Ephesus Church described their number one response to the situation of poverty as believing or feeling there are “hopeful dreams of a better day.” Those among the Christian faith look forward to a better day in

the future. African Americans slaves constantly sang songs which expressed a hopeful future such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” “There Is a Balm in Gilead,” “Deep River,” and others.

The Norwood and Ephesus Church responses no doubt reflected looking forward to a better *present* day as their slave ancestors. African American parents often expressed this better day theme to their children. Children who watched their parents work hard, washing and ironing someone else’s clothes, and cleaning someone else’s home, then arriving at their home physically tired, and emotionally belittled within, looked for a better day.

Another reflection of a better present day is the problem of unlivable chronic poverty. Poverty causes the poor to learn to cope with the experiences of life and adjustments. These habits and adjustments become patterns, which leaves those of poverty sometimes in a vicious circle.

Sometimes these adjustments veer towards alcohol, drugs, and other maladjustments in social life. Crime becomes a part of the adjustments to poverty, as victims, and at other times participants. Consequently, those who live in poverty and crime saturated areas not only look for a better day in the future, they look for a better day in the present.

Embarrassment

The second highest response of the Norwood Church is embarrassment. According to Goffman (1956), embarrassment or being flustered is sometimes “considered evidence of weakness, inferiority, low status, moral guilt, defeat, and other unenviable attributes” (p. 266).

What is significant about these attributes is that they also encircle meanings that describe the lack of dignity. According to the same source, embarrassment “occurs whenever an individual is felt to have projected incompatible definitions of himself before those present” (p. 264).

It can be said dignity of a “social encounter” and its makeup “then consist of effectively projecting claims to an acceptable self and the confirmation of like claims on the part of others. The contributions of all are oriented to these and built upon the basis of them” (p. 268).

Embracing the full weight of significance for many African Americans is lacking and this becomes evident as they look at the unlevelled playing field in a wide area of opportunities that leads to prisons of embarrassment and undeveloped dignity.

This may explain reasons why some African Americans withdraw in the face of difficulty, sensing the history of a different set of laws and a different kind of treatment. The full weight of “somebodyness” is absent. When African Americans sense their “somebodyness” even in difficulties many excel with determination.

Taylor (2010) expresses African Americans need to travel without embarrassment

The Negro Motorist Green Book was a publication released in 1936 that served as a guide for African-American travelers. Because of the racist conditions that existed from segregation, blacks needed a reference manual to guide them to integrated or black-friendly establishments . . . originally provided to serve Metropolitan New York, the book received such an alarming response, it was spread throughout the country within one year. The catch phrase was “Now we can travel without embarrassment.”

Effective godly, social encounters of dignity then include recognition that God creates all men and women equal. He loves us as His sons and daughters, we love our neighbors as ourselves, and we confirm those claims to each other.

Ashamed

Being ashamed can be personal, yet hinge on others. Allison (2009) quotes fourth and fifth graders on the relationship of poverty and learning.

That children who live in poverty . . . say that poverty is “feeling ashamed when my dad can’t get a job, pretending that you forgot your lunch, not buying books at the book fair” and “not getting to go on school trips.” Poverty is detrimental to student health and exclusion seriously undermines low income students’ confidence.

Ashamedness involves a circle of individuals and circumstances, parents and others who cannot get a job, pretending (what is not), to give a defense for and compensate for what one does not have, and inability to participate on a normal level as others.

The apostle Paul writing to Timothy speaks of his situation of suffering: “nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12). Paul placed his trust in God. Neither would he dwell on himself, nor his situation but his mission. Paul would also transcend his present situation to that which he had committed his life, namely, teaching and preaching the gospel to believers and non-believers.

Those who have been given positions of responsibility must transcend what dehumanizes and causes undo embarrassment and ashamedness on others, depriving them of dignity. In doing so, those who receive dignity are likely to pass the positive foundations of these transcendences to others.

Poverty also affects one’s health adversely. Bromley (2010) explains obesity and poverty,

People living near, at or below “poverty level” tend to be at higher risk for obesity and the health issues that come with it. There is a good reason for that; these folks can’t afford to eat healthy even though they may know what good health habits, healthy eating habits really are. Most do not eat well balanced meals and do not live healthy life styles. The two go hand in hand. Unhealthy diets lead to obesity and other health issues. Among these issues are heart disease, kidney disease, cancers, respiratory problems, joint and muscle diseases as well as learning disabilities and a variety of psychological disorders.

The final comment on ashamedness is in the area of exclusion. African Americans have known the full weight of social exclusion. The act of exclusion according to a previous quote undermines confidence. Steele (1992) highlights how confidence is undermined.

More than half of black college students fail to complete their degree work -- for reasons that have little to do with innate ability or environmental conditioning. The problem, a social psychologist argues, is that they are undervalued, in ways that are sometimes subtle and sometimes not.

This under-valuedness of Black college students that is subtle starts before they reach the college level, therefore exclusion can erode meaning in life. The confidence, which can be found from the presence of others to others, is important to achievement and important to life itself. Stillman, Baumeister, Lambert, Crescioni, DeWall, and Fincham (2009) confirm this threat of erosion when they say “social exclusion could threaten people at such a basic level that it would impair their sense of meaningful existence.”

While changes in laws and institutions are slow to creating change and a climate of inclusion, those who comprehend the problem can vision dignity as a start of meaningful relationships.

Norwood on Whether Poverty Affects Ability Achievement

According to Norwood respondents' poverty did affect one's ability to achieve. Twenty percent (20%) believe that poverty either (strongly) or (44%) somewhat strong affects one's ability to achieve. Out of the remaining respondents 8% believed poverty was not strong while (24%) said not at all with (4%) of the respondents not answering the question.

Ephesus on Whether Poverty Affects Ability Achievement

The Ephesus Church belief was stronger than the Norwood Church on the effects of poverty to one's ability to achieve. Better than two thirds felt poverty affects one's ability to achieve. Forty-two percent (42%) strongly believed poverty affects one's ability to achieve and 40% believed it was somewhat strong. The remaining respondents, (17%), indicated poverty not to be strong on one's ability to achieve and (9%) did not answer the question.

Poverty and the Ability to Achieve

Focusing only on income is only a part of what is needed for progress. De Oliveira and Duraiappah (n.d.), contend "poverty is multi-dimensional."

It is necessary to begin by adopting a fundamental philosophical shift that moves beyond income preoccupation and embraces the concept of opportunities, freedom to make choices and agency – the building blocks of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's Capability paradigm. A second shift calls for an ecosystem approach which acknowledges the three main services – provisioning, regulating/supporting, enriching – ecosystems provide for human well-being. The ecosystem approach also recognizes that these services are highly inter-dependant and synergistic with each other. For example, over use of the provisioning service will cause deterioration in the supporting/regulating service.

In this way the needs of those in poverty is expanded to human capabilities and opportunities not only through finances. Searching out abilities on the inside and with

others can be revealing towards inspiring goals, emphasizing values, and exploring passions to be acted upon that fits the individual.

Defining Poverty Holistically

There are other poverty scenario's that might be viewed. In fact some see discussing poverty of income as a narrow way of looking at poverty. This project does not deny that, however, it does follow the traditional lack of income view of poverty, along with trails of emotional, mental, spiritual, and social aspects of indignity towards African Americans, therefore denying their full potential.

It is important nevertheless, that these aspects are listed and seen from another perspective. Davis (n.d.) gives excellent definitions of other levels of poverty he believes should be considered as emotional poverty.

A person experiences emotional poverty when they have endured a traumatic experience that has so scarred them emotionally that they lack the ability to achieve emotional balance. Too, a person may have endured a harsh childhood or some other harsh environment that caused their emotional maturity to be stunted.

Another deficit of poverty is mental poverty. Davis shares how someone can have mental poverty.

Many people suffer from mental poverty. . . . Those who struggle with mental illness have some sort of dysfunction mentally that is beyond their control. . . . Mental poverty, on the other hand, happens when a person lacks the mental ability to live a productive life, though they do not have a true mental illness. This is something that they can overcome. Mental poverty can come from a variety of sources such as lack of proper education, abuse, constantly being put down, etc. These individuals have learned to deal with these unfortunate realities in their life by compensating in a way they only knew how. They are not mentally ill, in that their habits are due to a dysfunction mentally, but rather they are mentally poor due to a lack of knowing how to mentally deal with their reality. . . . Those who find themselves in this situation should take hope that they can overcome their mental struggles, whether it is extreme anxiety, extreme moods, etc.

Davis also speaks of spiritual poverty. He stresses the need for people to be connected to God.

Many find themselves spiritually poor. Spiritual poverty occurs when a person lacks a connection with God and feels as though they are alone in this life with no true purpose or hope beyond the here and now. Too, a person can be spiritually poor, though they have a relationship with God. This person may have been hurt by religion, the church or in some other way. They may still seek God, but feel so hurt that they just float aimlessly trying to find their way.

The final poverty listed by Davis is on social poverty. Those who lack the ability to have relationships with others amounts to poverty.

Social poverty occurs when a person lacks the ability to have whole relationships with others. Either they have not been taught how relationships work or they have developed certain habits that drive others away. Some have only been in bad relationships. These individuals lack the vision of what a good relationship looks like.

Many were surprised when a homeless man claimed to have a special gift as he stood on the side of the road holding up his cardboard sign that read need work. Standlin (2001) reports that a local news station decided to find out who this gifted person was. He was discovered to be “Ted Williams, the homeless Ohio man with the buttery baritone voice. . . . Williams, 51, says he fell onto hard times because of drugs and alcohol has been inundated with job offers.”

To be sure Ted Williams needed more than money. He needed a job, rehab, and social contact with family and individuals. So when poverty is considered; according to de Oliveira and Duraiappah (n.d.) the human well-being must be taken into consideration.

Human well being is therefore about the expansion of human capabilities—the ability to achieve what individuals have reason to value. Poverty is the pronounced deprivation of human well-being or in other words the pronounced deprivation of human capabilities.

How poverty interferes with achievement in developing countries is chronicled in an UNICEF article (n.d.) that leaves little doubt about the impact of poverty on achievement.

Poverty contributes to malnutrition, which in turn is a contributing factor in over half of the under-five deaths in developing countries. . . . The best start in life is critical in a child's first few years, not only to survival but to her or his physical, intellectual and emotional development. So these deprivations greatly hamper children's ability to achieve their full potential, contributing to a society's cycle of endless poverty and hunger.

Achievement is considered as one of the necessary attributes of dignity. Therefore when dignity is considered through the eyes of poverty, human well-being can be deprived of capabilities that ordinarily present itself in achievement.

Norwood on Discrimination's Role on Poverty of African Americans

The role of discrimination on poverty of African Americans to the Norwood respondents was evident. Thirty six percent (36%) of responders believed discrimination had a (great role) in the poverty of African Americans. Most respondents revealed discrimination had a (somewhat role) on poverty of African Americans, which was (44%). There was (12%) who recorded discrimination had (not much of a role) on poverty, while (4%) felt it had no role at all and 4% did not answer the question.

It is clear most of the Norwood respondents believed that discrimination played a role in poverty for African Americans. While there is a debate over the degree of that discrimination, Norwood believed it played a role.

Ephesus on Discriminations Role on Poverty of African Americans

Ephesus respondents had a stronger belief than Norwood on the role of discrimination on poverty among African Americans. Those who responded to the question “To what degree do you feel discrimination played a role on poverty for African Americans” (60%) believed it had an (great role) on poverty. Those who believed discrimination played a (somewhat role), were (34%) of those responding to the question. There was (3%) who felt discrimination did not play much of a role and (3%) did not answer the question.

Discrimination and Dignity

In Chapter 3 the subject of discrimination was addressed regarding African Americans and dignity. Therefore it will not be duplicated. However it is important to address again how discrimination factors into the erosion of dignity.

Discrimination denies freedom and poverty to flourish. Together they are a lockdown of expression to obtain with the inability to execute. They separate those who can from those who cannot.

A young man who worked selling vegetables on behalf of his family started a wave of protest in Tunisia. When he was denied basic rights to make a living his actions spearheaded protest in Tunisia and across other areas in the Middle East. Abouzeid (2011) reveals,

Mohammed Bouazizi never set out to be a byword. . . . But on Dec. 17 his livelihood was threatened when a policewoman confiscated his unlicensed vegetable cart and its goods. It wasn't the first time it had happened, but it would be the last. Not satisfied with accepting the 10-dinar fine that Bouazizi tried to pay (\$7, the equivalent of a good day's earnings), the policewoman allegedly slapped the scrawny young man, spat in his face and insulted his dead father. Humiliated and dejected, Bouazizi, the breadwinner for his family of eight, went to the provincial headquarters, hoping to

complain to local municipality officials, but they refused to see him. At 11:30 a.m., less than an hour after the confrontation with the policewoman and without telling his family, Bouazizi returned to the elegant double-storey white building with arched azure shutters, poured fuel over himself and set himself on fire. He did not die right away but lingered in the hospital till Jan. 4. There was so much outrage over his ordeal that even President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, the dictator, visited Bouazizi on Dec. 28 to try to blunt the anger. But the outcry could not be suppressed and, on Jan. 14, just 10 days after Bouazizi died, Ben Ali's 23-year rule of Tunisia was over. Though proud of the consequences of Bouazizi's self-immolation, his family is still indescribably sad. "Mohammed did what he did for the sake of his dignity," says his mother, Mannoubia.

Mohammed's expression against needless restraint, the need to provide for his family, and indignity was more than he could bear. Therefore it is important that we trace again the pangs that led to his self-immolation "for the sake of his dignity."

There is something instructive about the process of protest that led Mohammed's actions for the sake of dignity. It was repeated hundreds of times with African Americans in the city of Birmingham, Alabama, and other locations.

First his livelihood was *threatened*. Second, his vegetable cart was *confiscated*. Third, allegedly the policewoman *slapped* and *humiliated* him and said things about his dead father. Fourth he felt *dejected*. Fifth when he wanted to complain, the officials *refused* to see him. The final step is where he *protested*. At this stage he is resigned to lay his life on the line for the sake of his dignity.

The respondents from Norwood and Ephesus living in Birmingham are acquainted with these experiences of discrimination and steps towards the "sake of dignity." Therefore their estimation of the role of discrimination on poverty among African Americans was high.

Norwood on the Degree of Serving Others in Poverty

The Norwood Church is located in a poverty area. The level of income according to city-data.com of Birmingham-AL (2009) was “\$18,138 [in] 2009.” Therefore the Norwood Church constantly has visitors seeking assistance. The degree of people actively serving those in poverty according to the Norwood respondents was specified along these lines.

There was (24%) of respondents who were (very much) involved in serving those in poverty. Most of the respondents indicated they were (somewhat) involved in serving others, which is (40%) of those responding. The remaining respondents revealed they were (not much) involved in serving, which was (28%) while (4%) indicated not at all, and (4%) did not answer the question.

Ephesus on the Degree of Serving Others in Poverty

The community of the Ephesus Church is called Smithfield. It is also considered a poverty area. Its income is slightly above the Norwood community. The level of income according to city-data.com of Birmingham-AL was “\$19,452 [in] 2009.”

Of those responding to the question: To what degree are you actively involved in serving those in poverty, (37%) of those responding were involved. Those who indicated that they were (somewhat) involved were (51%) of total responders. The remaining respondents, 11% revealed they were not much involved.

Dignity in Serving Others in Poverty

As Christian believers we are called to serve. Begg (n.d.), gives an important comment on service, “When Jesus calls people to himself, he calls them to serve . . . all

of us are called to service. And service in the Bible's terms is not a preliminary or a pathway to greatness. Service is greatness."

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church the Department of Community Service is designed to meet the needs of the community by providing resources to those without food, clothes, and, at times, utilities. The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (n.d.) states,

Adventist Community Services (ACS) has been established as a humanitarian relief, and individual and community development ministry to fulfill the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States and Bermuda which is to serve communities in Christ's name.

The Norwood and Ephesus churches operate community services programs giving food to the needy and clothes to those who are disadvantaged. The Ephesus church gives food twice a week while the Norwood church gives food on Sundays.

Both churches are inundated with people needing help. At times they run out of food quickly for there are more and more people to feed.

P. Hissom, Winn, Lauger, Sullivan, and Hissom (2009), explain who the standard of dignity models when one is serving;

Jesus Christ is the standard for human dignity. In him the fullness of deity dwells (Col 2:9) and through his death humans may be reconciled to God (Col 1:22). His sacrificial death was the capstone of his obedient life as a servant (Phil 2: 8) and the reason God has exalted him to the highest place (Phil 2:9). . . . Without a standard, human dignity becomes a meaningless concept. . . . [There is] difficulty derived from trying to evaluate something, namely the inherent worth of human beings without a standard. (p. 5)

Therefore service to others is seen from the highest divine example—Jesus, and the worth of humanity is seen through His ultimate sacrifice and service. Service then becomes dignified.

**Norwood on do you Feel Persons in Poverty can Choose
What They Want to Become and Make it Happen**

Most of the responders of the Norwood Church felt it could be done but it would be difficult. Of those responding over half (60%) believed poverty individuals can choose what they want to become and make it happen. Others believed it would be only somewhat difficult. This was (20%) of the responders. Sixteen percent (16%) believed that it was not difficult at all, while (4%) did not answer the question.

**Ephesus on Do You Feel Persons in Poverty Can Choose
What They Want to Become and Make It Happen**

The Ephesus Church registered higher percentages than the Norwood Church. Ephesus recorded (68%) who felt that persons in poverty could choose what they wanted to become and make it happen, though it would be difficult. It should be noted, the Ephesus respondents are from a more educated background. Twenty-three percent (23%) of responders indicated that it was somewhat difficult. However (9%) indicated it was not difficult at all.

**Dignity on Feeling a Person in Poverty can Choose
What They Want to Become and Make it Happen**

The fact that there is such a high response from Norwood and Ephesus churches feeling that those in poverty can choose what they want to become and make it happen even though it is difficult can be encouraging. What needs to happen then is clearing some of those difficulties.

Organizations such as Education-Portal believe in “connecting people with jobs and dignity.” Driscoll (2011) interviewed Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) president Carla Javits who explains that,

For some people the challenge is the huge gap in work experience on a resume because they've been homeless for a decade; for others it's that they have been incarcerated and some employers just won't take a chance on them. Some young people have no work experience at all, and may not know many people who work so they are not prepared for the demands of a job—arriving on time, calling in when sick, dealing with negative feedback from coworkers or supervisors. The groups REDF works with really know and understand the people they employ, and are creative about providing the specific kinds of counseling, mentors and work environment that make it most possible for people to succeed.

The poor in many cases need a jump-start because their poverty circumstances at times places them behind. However these difficulties are not solved by having a paycheck. According to Javits, (as cited in Driscoll, 2011) it is “also about self-esteem, dignity, being part of something.”

So if dignity is important to obtaining employment. It is equally important to maintaining employment. Later evaluations of those who found employment, according to Javits (as cited in Driscoll, 2011), revealed that “among those interviewed two years after hire, 74 % of employees were still working, an additional 12 % were enrolled full-time in educational programs and wages increased by 32%.”

Therefore the poor are able to choose what they want to become and make it happen. However it is in conjunction with opportunities and with the aid of others to help clear difficulties.

Norwood on Whether Poverty Unfavorably Affects One's Worship With God

Most of the Norwood Church responders did not consider poverty affecting one's worship very strongly. Only (2%) responded that poverty affected worship (very much). Most 52% indicated that poverty's effect on worship was (somewhat). Twelve percent (12%) said the effect of poverty on one's worship with God was not much, and (12%) indicated not at all, while (4%) did not answer the question.

Ephesus on Whether Poverty Unfavorably Affects One's Worship With God

The Ephesus Church had similar responses as the Norwood Church. Ephesus responders revealed (23%) considered poverty affecting one's worship (very strongly). More respondents considered poverty affect one's worship somewhat, which was (43%) of those responding. Nine percent (9%) of Ephesus responders indicated poverty's effect is (not much).

One of the most significant results of the responders indicated poverty's effect on worship as (none at all) amounted to (23%) of responders. It is significant because there were as many who felt poverty had no effect on worship as those who felt poverty affected worship very strongly. There was (3%) who did not answer the question.

Dignity and the Experience of Worship

It is evident that Jesus involved himself with the poor. The Bible gives many commandments to ensure the dignity of the poor was maintained. White (2005) said that Satan attacks persons of poverty and others who are weak.

Satan has taken advantage of the weakness of humanity. And he will still work in the same way. Whenever one is encompassed with clouds, perplexed by circumstances, or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan is at hand to tempt and annoy. He attacks our weak points of character. He seeks to shake our confidence in God, who suffers such a condition of things to exist. We are tempted to distrust God, to question His love. Often the tempter comes to us as he came to Christ, arraying before us our weakness and infirmities. He hopes to discourage the soul, and to break our hold on God. Then he is sure of his prey. (pp. 120-121)

Jesus identifies with the poor. Some see the value of the poor in terms of whether they have any possessions. This has been the judgment of the world. White (1905 says much about that kind of judgment.

Jesus sought to correct the world's false standard of judging the value of men. He took His position with the poor, that He might lift from poverty the stigma that the

world had attached to it. He has stripped from it forever the reproach of scorn, by blessing the poor, the inheritors of God's kingdom. (pp. 197-198)

The Needs of Those Lacking Dignity in the Experience of Poverty

Church members from Norwood and Ephesus clearly experience poverty as many other African Americans. They are the grandchildren of present and past indignity. The solution to poverty will always be a combination of ideas, for there are a multitude of contributors to their circumstances. Many of these were articulated with the analyses of the above section. Some of them are obvious as the need for jobs that pay well; education that takes them well beyond the high school years; there is still the need to provide assistance to the many complex reasons for poverty.

African Americans have a great need for dignity in all areas. This idea goes beyond the obvious needs. For so long, they have been seen as those who could be exploited. Therefore their poverty circumstances on many areas must be tied to their indignity. Indignity that said they were not equal to the rest of humanity. Indignity that said to be content with a low rank or status, therefore not to elevation, opportunities, and an indignity that considers one as they would an animal and inhuman. Focusing only on income without the need for dignity leaves out a greater holistic view of poverty that involves the emotional, mental, spiritual needs, therefore, denying their full potential.

CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIES OF DIGNITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY

Introduction

Strategies towards dignity in the experience of poverty should be distinguished from strategies out of poverty. The strategies mentioned herein are designed to restore dignity, especially for those who experience poverty but not limited to those of poverty.

The high rate of poverty for African Americans lingers from the legacy of slavery, and all the injustices contained and issued from slavery accumulatively. Therefore many African Americans experienced treatment as worthless human beings without dignity.

The Creator nevertheless bestowed dignity upon humanity. It cannot be taken away; however, the problem for African Americans has been the denial of the awareness of dignity through institutions, laws, discrimination, and the taste of inequalities through ignorance and deliberate systems.

How then is dignity denied or diminished? Baker-Fletcher (1993) reveals how Martin Luther King understood dignity.

Dignity, for King, was fluid; it could grow or be diminished. The power of a socio-political system could add or subtract from one's social dignity, but could never take away that fundamental and inherent sense of one's personal dignity. If the socio-political system denied rights, as segregation did, then it had to be changed so as to grant rights that would allow dignity to grow. (p. 57)

In essence, King, according to Baker-Fletcher (1993), considered dignity as changeable depending on outside forces, especially social dignity. However, God (worth) dignity cannot be diminished. It is outside the hands of human beings. Nevertheless, even

the God-bestowed dignity is *interfered* with, through persistent negative situations, thus making dignity incongruous and frustrating the awareness of humanity to grasp the dignity bestowed.

Baker-Fletcher (1993) contends, “Theologically, the growth of dignity would lead to a moral telos for . . . society wherein dignity and human personality are given the highest place” (p. 57). That is to say an honorable end for society would be gained by the growth of dignity.

The basic premise of strategies to restore dignity for the most part is to (a) correct the denials and (b) grow dignity and human personality thereby moving towards restoring dignity.

With these guiding principles in mind, the backdrop of three simple dignity strategies emerged through what is understood of dignity from a theological view and the social life to strengthen dignity. These are (a) “Dignity as Sons and Daughters of God,” (b) “Dignity as Potential Within,” and (c) “Dignity as Historical Contemplation.”

Each strategy is presented on pre-determined days as a PowerPoint presentation with a (a) description of the strategy, (b) the implication of the strategy, and (c) a response to the strategy. This was important to the purpose and the identification with each strategy.

After each PowerPoint presentation, each participant was given a hard copy study guide on the subject matter of one of the three strategies to fill out, discuss their responses, and give comments on that particular subject. After prayer, questions and comments continued. Below are the strategies and the evaluations of those strategies.

Strategies Toward Dignity in the Experience of Poverty Among African Americans

Strategy 1 –The Sons and Daughters of God

Description of Dignity Strategy—“The Sons and Daughters of God” is the relational establishment of humanity to God, which gives the highest worth and privileges them as heirs and equality to all the riches of heaven through the sacrifice of Christ.

Implication of Strategy—One of the strongest desires is to belong. In the family of God all are invited to belong to God’s family. In doing so, we move from strangers, pilgrims, foreigners, prodigals, sinners, victims of poverty and indignity to the awareness of sons and daughters of God. African Americans are all too aware of the separation of the family. As sons and daughters of God we become heirs and joint heirs with Christ. Additional benefits of this strategy are dignity, spirituality, identity, meaning, and purpose.

Response of Strategy—To make a decision to become a part of God’s family as son and daughters is the highest dignity. Making this decision allows individuals to come to the Father daily, through an ongoing vertical relationship, and looking forward to a better day coming.

White (1937) in the book *Sanctified Life* shares concerning 1 John 3:1 the dignity of humankind.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (1 John 3:1). It is not possible for humanity to rise to a higher dignity than is here implied. To man is granted the privilege of becoming an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. To those who have been thus exalted, are unfolded the unsearchable riches of Christ, which are of a thousandfold more value than the

wealth of the world. Thus, through the merits of Jesus Christ, finite man is elevated to fellowship with God and with His dear Son. (p. 17)

The emphasis here is on a vertical relationship with God versus the oftentimes disappointments of horizontal relationships. Dignity is elevated through the worth of Jesus; therefore, acceptance in the family of God. Often times this dignity is discovered at an early age in the home. Parents have a responsibility to know God and then introduce God to their children. Unless one knows their worth in God, dignity loses much of its significance.

J. Hissom et al. (2009) declare, “There is no other person of greater worth than Jesus. . . . Without a standard human dignity becomes a meaningless concept (p. 5).

The revelation of Jesus reveals His purpose for dying for spiritually impoverished people. Contrary to the Jews in Jesus’ day, this also includes socially impoverished people of all humanity to accept His righteousness by faith, to an elevation of sons and daughters of God.

To be clear there is a transaction on the part of Jesus, and a transformation received by sons and daughters on the basis of trust, regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, or socio-economic status.

There is much confusion over the things which one possesses and dignity of individuals. What can be gathered from the statement is that the riches of Christ are more valuable than the riches of the world. Therefore any attempt to categorize one’s dignity, meaning, or purpose by earthly possessions of prosperity is unbiblical; otherwise those who have would acquire advantage over those who have not.

Gilkey (1959) says “the meaning of life for most people is quite simply dependent upon the achievement of these goals of economic material, social and emotional security”

(p. 166). Gilkey believes that one should have a deeper view of life than this. He adds, “The answer, of course, is not that they should have a deeper view of life’s meaning, but that sooner or later they will have to” (p. 166).

Circumstances experienced as slavery, discrimination, and poverty should not have happened the way it did, sanctioned by law and society. Beyond these circumstances; foreclosures, losing one’s job, sickness, tragedies, divorce, earthquakes, hurricanes, and death can be more that one can bear.

All these circumstances find their ultimate answers from the Creator God according to Gilkey,

Where a transcendent [magnificent] Creator is not known, the human meanings of life are defenseless against the onslaughts of destiny . . . If, however the meaning of life is founded upon a transcendent principle, and is known by faith, then courage and significance are possible even within apparent meaninglessness. (1959, pp. 190, 194)

Therefore knowing God by faith as sons and daughters is the highest dignity made possible through creation and the merits (worth) of Jesus. The benefits of this strategy are dignity, spirituality, identity, meaning, and purpose.

Strategy- 2

Potential Within

Description of Dignity Strategy—“Dignity-Potential Within” is recognizing that within every person God has given potential to expand the mental and physical abilities of worth.

Implication of Strategy—God has put potential within everyone. The benefits of looking within consist of: discovery, assessing potential goals, and passions that inspire possibilities of usefulness. Discovery gives confidence of one’s abilities and capabilities, inspiring worth through seasons of difficulty. Assessing potential gives awareness to activate that potential. Passion becomes restorative energy towards perseverance.

Response of Strategy—Individuals will seek God’s help to move forward. They will accomplish smaller goals first, and then as opportunities come, develop additional capabilities with every opportunity. Discovery and assessment gives options to explore and summons the courage to try those options to see where they lead.

Strategy 2: Dignity—The Potentialities Within

Although dignity is first and foremost bestowed by the Creator upon humanity, and cannot be taken away; mankind must take a look within to see these God-given abilities and potentials to spread their divine qualities. This look within is connected to the awareness that dignity is God bestowed, and does not originate from automatic self-developing genes within.

The human race lives in a fallen world, and human beings are inclined to restrict freedom, subjugate abilities, deny opportunities, and discriminate against each other.

Therefore it is important to understand first that the Creator has endowed all with dignity in spite of malicious constraints.

Second, that endowment or bestowal means something personally. Knowing there is an endowment or bestowal within suggests potential. This potential is connected to the person as receiver and in relationship to the powerful Creator God as giver.

Third, that hope is not abandoned due to denial of opportunities, suppression, and indignity of others. The awareness of dignity and potential opens doors often shut by the fatigue of difficulties.

Dignity is crucial. Recognizing that God has bestowed dignity on humanity and becoming sons and daughters of God by His grace elevates significance. This is critical; otherwise, life becomes a stumble. Without this, humanity is left to devising and arranging dignity to themselves devoid of a divine foundation.

To be clear, a person has dignity given from God. However, the ability to process that dignity in a fallen world is cluttered with questions like “Is there a God?” and; Why is the world so evil if there is? In addition, quality of life experiences such as poverty, discrimination, and other difficulties, diminish the awareness of dignity especially if one does not know God; and even if one does know God these evils can still cause one to doubt.

Using what Baker-Fletcher said of King’s understanding of dignity that it is “fluid; it [dignity] could grow or be diminished” (p. 57); then, one can see how dignity is unsettled. Baker-Fletcher (1993) adds King’s own words concerning three main problems hostile to dignity when he says, “Discrimination erodes dignity. Segregation smothers it. Patronizing attitudes belittle it. These are all equal in effect. Discrimination is the worst

disease inhibiting dignity's growth" (p. 146).

The high poverty among African Americans is related to all of these evils.

Therefore restoration of dignity is vitally important. Kelly (2010), devoted to freeing innocent prisoners, writes about the cycle of poverty, prisons, and inequality.

"Incarceration & Social Inequality," by Bruce Western (of Harvard) and Becky Petit (of the University of Washington), describes the sweeping injustice in our prison system as an "invisible, cumulative, intergenerational" inequality. They share depressing statistics on race, education, community and prison -- and they pinpoint an intense, isolated and not fully known form of American poverty. They write that the inequality of incarceration is invisible because of its intense impact on a portion of the population who live outside of the public eye. It's cumulative because a lack of education plus a prison record make it nearly impossible to get a job. A track record of joblessness or informal employment makes it harder to find work that society considers acceptable. More than one-third of African American men who drop out of high school will go to prison in their lives. Even for those former prisoners who do manage to find work and start careers after incarceration, earnings are impacted for decades. And this has an impact on the earner's family and community as well.

This cycle is repeated thousands of times for long periods. Unless there is intervention outside the prison walls and within, many children today will lose their freedom and end up with wounded dignity for the rest of their lives, trapped in a cycle of poverty. Knowing God, therefore, increases one's chances of being set free within.

Second, dignity should mean something personally. In other words if dignity is bestowed there is value. The thought of this alone is of great significance; however, what is its meaning. It means that dignity is useful personally and generally to, and for, others.

Personally, it gives freedom to think within about abilities, talents, goals, and worthy passions which one possesses from God. It asks questions like; What am I to become? It also gives freedom and authorization to execute that giftedness. In addition, it gives consent to learning, growing, and acting in ways towards the awareness and fulfillment of that giftedness.

The central idea is that one becomes a resource of the gift that has been placed within; awareness and conviction then confirms that dignity is bestowed. Along with this gift of dignity is meaning. Meaning then becomes useful towards realized achievement.

Whitworth, K. Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl (2007) contend that learning continues when it materializes within.

Curiosity generates the search, defines and directs it, but it is the exploring that creates learning. And it is the kind of learning that lasts, because it comes from within. With questions that imply a correct or a purely factual answer, we search our inner files for the response that fits: the right answer. With curiosity, we have the experience of exploring, uncovering, digging around, considering, reflecting. This is the learning that leads to sustainable change and growth. (p. 72)

In addition to looking within for potential, there are personality tests offered free on the Internet and others that cost, which match personality and abilities with careers, which would be worth confirming. Others who know you can also confirm abilities. Their thoughts and observations are another way to assess abilities.

In the church the Bible speaks of spiritual gifts that are given by the Spirit. These are found in 1 Cor 12:8-10, Eph 4:7-13, Rom 12:3-8 for the purpose of building or strengthening the body of believers.

Prayer for guidance is important as well. God gave gifts, therefore asking for His will to be done, and one's willingness to submit to His shaping. Blackaby and King (2004) give spiritual insight into this.

Anticipate that God will start working with you. God usually came to people in the Scriptures right in the middle of their ordinary routine, right as they were doing the last thing they knew to do. You do not need to be doing anything special for God to use you. Simply be willing to submit to Him at any time, at a moment's notice. (p. 291)

Third, though unjust circumstances occur, such as low resources and falling confidence, perseverance is still important. Hope and letting go of the pain is necessary to giving the entire disorder over to God. This will not be easy. Real fears and grief will be present. It is in these times when abandonment instead of fulfillment looks more promising than moving forward. Move forward anyway.

Blackaby and King (2004) write about hearing the truth of a Person while in a storm.

The disciples were in a boat in a storm. Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat. If you had gone to those disciples in the middle of the storm and said to them, “What is the truth of this situation?” What would they have said? “We perish!” Was that the truth? No, truth was asleep at the back of the boat. Truth is a Person. In just a moment Truth Himself would stand up, and He would still the storm. Then they knew the truth of their circumstance. Truth is a Person who is always present in your life. You cannot know the truth of your circumstance until you have heard from God. He is the Truth! And the Truth is present and active in your life! (p. 194)

The benefits of looking within are assessing potential goals and passions that inspire possibilities. This assessment gives options to explore, and courage to try. Pray for God’s help and move forward. It may be necessary to accomplish smaller goals first, and then as opportunities come, develop additional capabilities with every opportunity.

Strategy-3

History of African Americans a Moral Contemplation

Description of Dignity Strategy—“History of African Americans a Moral Contemplation” is the building of foundations and biblical and historical fortitude that supports moral reasons and examples to stand and withstand the onslaughts of discouragement and despair as poverty.

Implication of Strategy—Whether history is personal, societal, or biblical it is often important to current actions and the potential for moral implications. These implications allow individuals to see the rightness and wrongness of the past, strengthening and encouraging courageous resolve, to be guided by better choices. It also allows one to see how far God has brought them and give hope for optimistic outcomes.

Response of Strategy—Individuals will be inspired of the past and receive hope from the benefits of contemplating history. They will acquire a healthy identity, awareness of a human place in history, and purpose for being, rising out of the dung of inhumanity and indignity.

Strategy 3: Dignity—The History of African Americans a Moral Contemplation

History spans time past, present, and impacts the future. Sterns (1998) suggests the benefits of history:

History should be studied because it is essential to individuals and to society. . . . The past causes the present, and so the future. Any time we try to know why something happened . . . we have to look for factors that took shape earlier. . . . History also provides a terrain for moral contemplation. Studying the stories of individuals and situations in the past allows a student of history to test his or her own moral sense, to hone it against some of the real complexities individuals have faced in difficult settings.

Such is the history of African Americans. They have experience as others “real complexities and difficult settings.” Part of those complexities was the breaking up of families during slavery and the constant erosion of a proud identity. Slave owners and their sympathizers were determined that slavery and its aftermath would continue to sustain an immoral assumed “superiority” over African Americans.

For instance, it was immoral to enslave another for economic gain. It is immoral to separate families for personal gain. It is immoral, to find innocent African Americans guilty, and guilty murderers of African Americans innocent. It is immoral to drink from different water fountains based on race. It was immoral to have to sit in designated seats on the back of the bus base on race.

History records that these tragedies are not that distant from the present. In fact the guilty still go free and the innocent are labeled guilty. In addition, thousands of people are still living who experienced such immorality in Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama, and across the south as supporters and victims of this arraignment.

How then is history important to dignity for African Americans? History comes through and from a biblical past, a civilization, a group, and personal experiences. The answer to the question of how is history important to dignity is found in history’s ability to connect personally to people, thus producing reflection with people, personalities, and events forming from these an identity for moral contemplation and behavior.

Personal connections and identity gained through moral contemplation then is capable of struggling through injustices when brought jointly to a moral and just cause. In essence, history provides the moral contemplation and just cause that becomes the glue

that strengthens ones resolve to stand firm or move forward on that which is understood to be just and right.

Personal identity can become collective identity, as in the case of such immorality as the “dualistic ethics” towards African Americans. This “dualistic ethic” can appear in the treatment of one person, different from another based on the color of skin. Therefore the collective identity of the civil rights movement went to work, made up of people of different skin complexions, against what was seen as an unjust dualistic ethic.

Baker-Fletcher (1993) says it was King Sr.’s “understanding of a double ethic and his son’s theory of dignity becomes apparent . . . for King Jr. attacked economic and civil abuses from their basis in a dehumanizing ideology of . . . inferiority” (p. 5). Baker-Fletcher goes on to say “King Jr.’s concept of dignity originated in his family and church background” (p. 5).

The struggle for dignity and economic freedom, according to Baker-Fletcher (1993) was a struggle “against a system of hatred and not against individual persons involved in the system” (p. 6). When hatred is injected by reason of complexion and nationality or other “selective comparisons” into the fabric of morality, the outcome is distasteful in the sense that one “assumes superiority” over the other.

Pollard (2000) describes such distasteful outcome of hatred as ethnocentrism’s effect on society.

Ethnocentrism: assumes superiority of a group, clan, tribe, or race, is maintained by resentment of differences, defines itself by clan competition with others, attempts to validate itself by selective comparisons, [and] results in the divinization of the group. Divinization makes the group appear more spiritual, more chosen, more righteous, more privileged, and /or more deserving in the eyes of its members. Adolf Hitler’s ethnocentrism is a glaring and tragic example of this phenomenon. (p. 16)

Needless to say, this necessary concept of dignity should reside first, in the

family, and as early in life as possible as it was for King Jr. It is essential that it continues in the church as it did by King Sr. as his son listened to messages preached from the pulpit.

King Jr. employed two powerful historical documents, among others, for moral contemplation. The Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation are important to the history and framework of the United States. The words “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These words taken from the Declaration of Independence are simply inspiring.

How these words of history are employed for moral contemplation follows: *We hold*—we treasure, we grasp, we embrace—*these truths*—these certainties, these realities, these genuine, and these facts—*to be self-evident*—obvious, clear, plain—*that all men are created equal*—all men regardless of ethnicity, are formed and fashioned—*equal*—one and the same, equivalent.

The energy these words generate is influential, mighty for moral contemplation, and instructive towards dignity. To be made by the Creator in such a way, outside the boundaries of humanity, is encouraging. These words of history are important because they were crafted as a declaration of the forming new country.

The Emancipation Proclamation is another historical speech, formed at the time of the Civil War, which freed the slaves by executive order from President Lincoln to fight. It was meant for states mainly in the south that still held on to slavery and wanted no part in the Union. Though this proclamation did little to free the slaves, it did free them to

fight for their freedom and bring the country to later structure, a more “perfect union.”

Balser (2010), reveals that a portion of the proclamation states:

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

It was unpopular for Lincoln to proclaim the emancipation for the war was still being fought. The North could lose in the end. However while Lincoln was in the midst of unpopularity, Balster said, as he morally contemplated the merits of the proclamation, “I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper.”

The benefits of contemplating history are acquiring a healthy identity, an awareness of a place in history, and a purpose for being, rising out of the dung of inhumanity and indignity to heirs as sons and daughters of God.

Evaluation of Dignity Seminar

The dignity Seminar was conducted at the Norwood Seventh-day Adventist Church during the Sabbath worship (11:00 a.m.) morning service for three consecutive weekends. The Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church Dignity Seminar was conducted on three consecutive Wednesday nights during Prayer meeting (7:00 p.m.).

For the purposes of this project three seminars were performed. The three included: (a) Dignity as sons and daughters of God, (b) Dignity as the potential within, and (c) Dignity—History and moral contemplation. Dignity Bible study guides were handed out on each Sabbath at Norwood. One dignity guide covered the lesson for that day and the same on Wednesday evenings at Ephesus.

A PowerPoint presentation was presented on dignity, covering its many definitions and why it is significant to the experience of African Americans and its implications to poverty. In addition, three PowerPoint presentations, one each, were included in the dignity study for that day.

One observation should be noted. In the African American church, the worship hour is almost sacred; it is used only for the traditional sermon. Therefore presentations would be better offered in the evening, on another day, or in a retreat type setting. However, over all the seminars were well received and the experience was magnificent.

Participatory responders of the dignity seminar from the Norwood Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church are provided. An example of the evaluation and results of the evaluations are seen below.

Conclusion

Although life is better, African Americans are keenly aware of the setbacks of the past and the roadblocks of the present. There are still battles to be fought to free society of unjust laws and inequities towards dignity.

Strategies that enhance dignity are needed to improve the quality of life for all humankind. African Americans particularly have an enormous task ahead given deliberate barriers past and present. Much of the poverty that is seen in African American communities that make up the highest poverty rates among ethnic groups is due to the indignity towards humanity.

No one can have dignity alone, to the exclusion of others. For dignity is bestowed upon all humankind from a Creator; therefore, to act in dignified ways towards each other is essential to society. No person is more valuable than another. Neither is dignity contingent upon wealth or skin complexion.

For sure there are other ways to improve dignity. The three examples used in the Dignity Seminars are foundational particularly to African Americans, though not limited to them. However, the three dignity strategies were key to the basic understanding of dignity as (a) the high status of their origins, (b) the understanding and dispelling the notion of rank as criteria for dignity, and (c) that humankind have unique qualities and abilities than the rest of creation in intelligence and moral contemplation.

Greenwood (1967) gives a statement of purpose for a dignity center, “There is an ingredient in every life which must be found if people are to be worth anything to themselves or their community . . . and they will find it and call it dignity” (p. 97).

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

The recommendations and findings are collaboration with this study project, its participants, and how others can contribute. Certainly, pastors and congregations are positioned to speak on the subject of dignity and poverty from a biblical perspective. They need not be the only ones. Therefore conjunction with this study, leaders and professionals in their area of expertise are considered. Within these areas of expertise, recommendations and findings are given that leaders and professionals as well as pastors and congregations can work towards the awareness of dignity and resources to those of poverty.

To Leaders and Pastors

Leaders would do well to give consideration to this research, studying how they can be involved with restoring the awareness of dignity to African Americans and other ethnic groups. This is the most significant recommendation of the seminar. What many acknowledged is the fact that all mankind has dignity bestowed upon them by God; therefore cannot be erased by poverty, slavery or discrimination.

Pastors and congregations play significant roles towards moving dignity forward, lifting the clouds of the daily and weekly struggles of persons in their congregations and visitors who come to church for a spiritual cease fire. Pastors and congregations would do well discovering the needs of these hurting ones, aiding where possible the spiritual, physical, and emotional healing to those who endure life without hope-filled solutions.

To Potential Married Couples and Counselors

For financial stability of families, marriage has proven to be a good practice, although finance should not be the main reason for marriage. The fact is many singles with children are burdened with raising a family with little income. The dignity seminar helped to dispel the myth that wealth determines worth. The recommendation in regards to family, however is that two incomes in most circumstances are better than one. This is certainly the ideal; it is not the case in all situations. Those who contemplate marriage, and counselors of marriage, would do well to read this work for the purpose of raising African American families and other families with dignity and to help to end poverty circumstances.

To Social Change Leaders

There was a time when African Americans in the south, who achieved high educational endeavors, also lived in the community. They were highly visible and they worshiped in the community. The churches became not only places for worship; they also inspired dignity role models. When these achievement models were also models of social change, places of worship stimulated both redemption and social equality.

The dignity seminar profiled how important these social leaders are to dignity. It is recommended that social leaders are included in discussions on dignity to provide inspiration. The contribution of these local leaders can expand and emerge where applicable in places of their vocation and other places as mentors of dignity.

To Policy Makers

Policy makers would do well to make laws that are fair to those who are rich as well as the poor. The seminar highlighted several personalities and policies that had an

influence on dignity and poverty in positive and negative ways. Therefore the seminar traced how these policies affected others. Furthermore policy makers are the support the poor and unemployed need. Instead of cutting funds on programs designed to lift the poor from their dilemma, funds should be increased thereby helping those in poverty to find jobs, to care for their families, thereby also stimulating the economy.

To Educators

Education is always a significant contribution to income as well as employment. Whenever education was low, income was interrelated. The application, therefore, is to have stable incomes through education, which helps strengthen the rise from poverty.

In the research a considerable amount of African American Seventh-day Adventists started college, but did not finish. Respondents were not asked to give reasons for starting and stopping their educational process. Did poverty play a factor here? Or was it simply fatigue or some other reason? Future research on why African American Seventh-day Adventists and or African Americans in general drop out of college would be interesting.

To Potential Home Buyers

Housing ownership for Ephesus and Norwood was over 50%, which is about what it is for other African Americans in Birmingham. Home ownership increases net worth. It also allows responsible stewardship of their property. In addition, applying the benefit of homeownership helps to break the cycle of poverty or at least leave a heritage for children.

To Patients and Health Professionals

The only recommendation on physicals is continue to get them every year. The findings in this study showed that African American Adventist in the study churches are doing well, although, African Americans in general have waited too long to see a doctor. The best medicine is prevention, and medical checkups prevent going to the doctor and discovering an illness that could be prevented.

To Employees and Employers

In regards to domestic work, one should ask themselves would this work be enough to support a family. The findings of this study advanced work questions to consider: Is this temporary employment or do I see this work as a professional career? Is the work challenging and complex enough or is it drudgery? If it is drudgery, am I doing my best? If the answer to most of these questions are no, then it is recommended that one pursue another line of employment.

Many people have worked jobs that made them feel lower than others. Work that keeps a laborer in a prolonged feeling of lowliness or ill treatment needs an adjustment. When one is overlooked and used to train others who are constantly moved to higher positions increasing their incomes, then inquiry should be made for understanding why that person was not considered for higher positions. If the answers are unsatisfactory, the issue at times is best to be solved by moving to another place of employment. However, in the case of blatant discrimination, it is possible it needs to be referred to appropriate counselors.

To City Leaders

The degree of poverty in one's neighborhood is important to raising a family. The constant picture of need and despair leading to violence displays a distorted picture. Hopefulness is diminished and dreams fade in this type of environment. Yet, among abandoned houses and buildings, one can find in these neighborhoods human diamonds waiting to be discovered. It is recommended that city leaders consider issues of safety, housing, health and others. Those who have been blessed to be in these positions are encouraged to give back in order that families can escape the despair, to living a life full of hope.

To Consumer Protection and Money Management Individuals

In the findings of the research those of poverty were not the ones who were using advanced money systems the most. Prior to the research, poverty individuals were believed to be the ones who used the system the most. Instead it was mostly individuals who were employed, though those who are retired use these systems. The recommendation would be that individuals consider enrolling in money management seminars whether a person is poor, over extended, or retired. These seminars would show money-advanced systems, only to make a weak financial condition worse.

To Human Resource Leaders

On the subject of the reasons of poverty one must consider jobs as critical. For African Americans, diversification in the workplace is helpful. Laws which war against unfair hiring practices in the workplace need to continue. Human Resource workers are needed to train would be applicants in the necessary preparations of job interviews.

To Principals and Presidents of Universities

African Americans are a long way from level opportunities, in education. Nonetheless education is important to acquiring good paying jobs. Affirmative Action was designed to give opportunities in this area. Education is not just important; it is essential. Mentors are needed to help navigate young persons from elementary school to college to keep them on track towards development preparedness. Much needed grants and financial assistance should be found before students arrive at learning institutions. Again this study found too many African Americans not finishing college.

To Social Services Leaders

In regard to government welfare, this research revealed over half the people had been on government welfare subsidies in their life in one church. The other church registered around a third had been on assistance. It was evident more were certainly eligible for the service but perhaps did not apply. Rather than have families suffer without food, it is recommended one utilize the service temporally until one's life situation is better.

To Sociologist and Psychologist

While poverty past, present, or future is not desirable; it is better tolerated when there are hopeful dreams of a better day. African Americans respondents in this survey overwhelmingly recognize and look for a better day. They are aware of their present plight. There are times when the poor are ashamed, embarrassed, and helpless, however it was found they are not hopeless and looked fore a better day.

To Those Seeking Employment

The recommendations for employment are to become educated well enough, so that one is professionally employed. This means that one is able to practice that profession almost anywhere in the world. Help on resume writing enhances confidence when going for interviews. Start early in the morning and be willing to persevere. Find out as much as possible how one is to dress when going on interviews. Know as much as possible about the organization before the interview. Be prepared to answer questions about how you would be able to contribute to the organization. Always hold on to present employment until the next employer hires to keep financial continuity.

To Civil Rights Leaders

Discrimination has played a role in poverty among African Americans throughout history. Despite discrimination's awful past, present, and future, one should dwell on the dignity they know they possess and move forward. This is not the same as forgetting one's historical experience. Instead the dignity seminar noted the experience. The use of the African American historical experience was highly effective in pinpointing the present circumstances as well as strengthening the resolve to move forward to a greater egalitarian awareness of dignity.

To Community Leaders

Poverty affects achievement and complicates life. Resources are needed to function in life even at a minimal level. Therefore it is important to know where the social, educational, financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual resources are in the community. How are jobs ascertained? Pastors are part of the coalition of community leaders. Improvement in any one of these areas serves to enhance life and restore dignity.

To Motivational Speakers

It is recommended from the seminar that one write out achievement goals. Look for passions that reside within. Start moving towards those goals and build on them keeping a journal of the progress. Share those achievement goals with others and believe in your heart it will be realized. As with motivational speaking the study and dignity seminar is a message of *inspiration* to help people.

To Service Organizations to Humanity

Serving others is recommended for the purposes of allowing one's attention to focus on someone else. The findings and recommendation stressed a way to move from one's own despair, is to be involved with others who need help. Serve others with dignity. This is to say when one is treated with dignity one's worth is awakened. Serving others gives insight of a common humanity of all people and their need to be treated with respect and dignity.

To Professionals and Optimistic Achievers

Living in poverty and yet having the ability to choose what one wants to become and to make it happen is possible. There are many individuals who rose from poverty and became lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers, and even presidents. The path to these accomplishments is a path of hard work regardless of status. Those of poverty start from a deficit trying to balance a need to work, looking for work, and to take care of those needs while pursuing dreams of choice. It is recommended that one not pursue their dreams alone. Find those who are already at the top of their dreams and ask for help to realize those dreams.

To Worship Leaders

Poverty and worship start from the same premise. Both come from need or a lack of something in life. Poverty is a lack of resources for everyday living. Worship happens when one discovers emptiness inside. This lack and emptiness causes those lacking to run to abundant sources to fill their physical and spiritual need. Others tend to run to unacceptable sources that impair the awareness of dignity. The degree, to which one is impaired physically, because of their poverty, can affect worship. Still poverty individuals are coming to worship by the millions. The recommendation then is the same as Jesus said, “and whensoever you will you may do them good” (Mark 14:7).

Summary

For some the dignity of African Americans was doubted. This led to ill treatment of those of African ancestry. It also led to the experience of poverty in high percentages. This treatment was contrary to the dignity the Bible prescribes in treating the poor.

Sustained slavery became problematic to African Americans, for by its nature one is denied resources. Poverty for African Americans ran parallel with slavery and continued its damaging denials, even though institutional slavery was over.

Chapter 1 introduced the dilemma of the problem of poverty among African Americans. Their rate of poverty is reported to be higher than any other racial group, and dignity is blindsided by a cycle of helplessness and near futility.

Chapter 2 addressed the entrance of poverty and God’s response and plan toward the poor from a theological reflection. It also showed the compassion of Jesus towards the poor, elevating them to a higher level of dignity.

Poverty among African Americans and mistreatment towards them are not supported by the Bible nor mentioned there. The contrast of dignified treatment towards the poor mentioned in the Bible and the later treatment of poor African ancestry was incongruous. The Bible's poor were to be treated with dignity. African Americans by contrast would experience indignity.

Chapter 3 expanded the treatment of African Americans and the erosion of dignity through four parts. Part one: addressed human dignity. Part two: looked at indignity and slavery among African Americans. Part three: explored discrimination of African Americans and dignity. Part four: combined the understanding of the previous parts showing the progression of indignity and poverty past and present.

Chapter 4 explained the method of research for understanding the extent of poverty of two predominately African American churches in Birmingham, Alabama. The two are the Ephesus and Norwood Seventh-day Adventist churches. The method used was the survey questionnaire, which provided a great deal of information concerning poverty of participating respondents.

Chapter 5 reported the analyses of the research of the two churches in Birmingham, Alabama. These findings revealed the opinions, feelings, and habits reflecting a continuation of the historical past of indignity and poverty. The analyses also suggested African American Seventh-day Adventists are not exempt from poverty or dignity.

Chapter 6 provided three fundamental strategies of dignity to African Americans and others who have indignity along with the experience of poverty. Since African Americans have suffered indignity and poverty through hundreds of years, these

strategies suggest, they, like others, matter as human beings. They are of great worth as sons and daughters of God.

Conclusion

In the narratives of Gen 3, poverty had its first introduction. God later intervened with instructions on how the poor were to be treated. They were to be treated with dignity.

Examples of dignity towards the poor are seen as God's compassion for the humble poor (Ps 9:12; 10:12); the Bible warns against tyranny towards the poor (Exod 23:3; Lev 19:15; the poor were allowed to collect food from vineyards and fields (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22, Deut 15:7-9, 11, 18; and the book of Ruth. Jesus also treated the poor with dignity. Jesus commended those who gave to the poor (Mark 12:42-43); Jesus also gave consideration to the poor (Matt 19:21; John 13:29).

African Americans, however, experience poverty at a higher rate than any other racial group in America. From its inception, the inhumane institution of slavery impoverished African ancestry and eroded dignity. Garbooshian (2006) places dignity "at the center of . . . anti-slavery sentiment."

The substance of this project dissertation speaks to the erosion of dignity through the experience of poverty, one of the visible legacies of slavery and discrimination against African Americans.

Burns (2009) states why he thinks the Civil War was inevitable,

We were destined to fight it the second we founded our country. The man who wrote the sentence of the Declaration that begins, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," owned more than 100 human beings. It is, as the great historian Shelby Foote said, "the crossroads of our being."

Poverty in its simple definition is the lack of necessary resources for life or living; however, the definition is expanded in the African ancestry experience. Poverty is the lack of necessary resources; it also includes denials or censure of resources. It is the inability to execute and obtain them. Human characteristics as freedom, dignity, and equality are resources that were legislatively made unavailable to African Americans. Therefore poverty for African Americans was unavoidable.

Many African Americans and others have experienced “generational poverty,” meaning the adjustments to poverty have been passed down to the next generation without a successful remedy. Conversely, discriminatory generations with a “taste of inequalities” that helped to continue poverty’s predicament still lingers. These intolerant generations went beyond the slavery years by denying the ability to vote, the right to education, laws of fairness, living in certain neighborhoods, drinking from unlabeled fountains, riding where you want on a bus, medical and employment opportunities. The result has left African Americans generations behind lacking resources that poverty demands is needed now to make a difference.

At the beginning of this research the African American rate of poverty was “24.7%” for 2004 according to the U.S. Census. Five years later, says the article “Poverty Rate Among African Americans” (2010), the poverty rate among African Americans nearly doubled that of White Americans.

In 2009, the poverty rate for African Americans reached 25.8 percent—almost twice as high as that of the general population. One in three African American children now live in families that have trouble providing for them.

African American Seventh-day Adventists are not exempt from poverty and the erosion of dignity. Their heritage is interlocked with the African American society in general; therefore, their experiences of poverty and dignity erosion are related.

The highest dignity is being sons and daughters of God. Dignity begins with essential equal humanity for all generations. As sons and daughters of morally conscious individuals, love and compassion is to be expressed to others with fairness.

According to Crutchfield and Pettinicchio (2009),

A number of social problems are produced by persistent poverty, which exists not because of perverted values among the poor, but rather because of values in the larger society that are accepting of social inequality. (p. 135)

Second, dignity is measured as progress and achievement. Martin Luther King Jr., according to Baker-Fletcher (1993), said, “Dignity for King, was fluid; it could grow or be diminished” (p. 57). Baker-Fletcher also adds, “Hope for King is not a vague theological or ethical concept, but is based upon measurable progress” (pp. 56, 57).

In the experience of African Americans the poverty rate is the highest, the unemployment rate is the highest, the lack of health is high, the lack of education is high, and incarcerations also high according to MSNBC news (2007). More Blacks are in jail rather than college. “More than three times as many black people live in prison cells as in college dorms.” That means then the erosion of dignity is also high.

It is important that African Americans recognize and that they be recognized of their God-given dignity in the greater society of humanity. All humanity having the same recognition of each other would lead to a better society. For humanity is once again faced with a declaration which says, “all men are created equal” and a society that has a long history of a “taste of inequalities” still at “the cross roads of our being.”

King (1963) concludes with these words of optimism for our condition in his book called *Strength to Love*, “Every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. It can spell either salvation or doom. In a dark, confused world the Kingdom of God may yet reign in the hearts of men” (p. 155).

APPENDIX A

SURVEY

POVERTY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANS

(BY FILLING OUT THIS SURVEY YOU ARE GIVING PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH)

1. ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. What is your age?

☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-32 ☐ 33-40 ☐ 41- 45 ☐ 46-52 ☐ 53- 59

☐ 60- 67 ☐ 68- 74 ☐ 75 Above

3. Are you the head of household?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. What is your marital status?

☐ Married ☐ Single

5. How many persons are in your household?

☐ 1 Person ☐ 5 Persons ☐ 9 Persons

☐ 2 Persons ☐ 6 Persons

☐ 3 Persons ☐ 7 Persons

☐ 4 Persons ☐ 8 Persons

6. Which best describes your yearly income?

1. ☐ \$ 0 - \$10,956

8. ☐ \$37,010 - \$37,252

2. ☐ \$13,991 - \$14,570

9. ☐ \$40,750 - \$44,366

3. ☐ \$17,098 - \$18,310

10. ☐ \$40,367 - \$45,000

4. ☐ \$21,954 - \$22,050

11. ☐ \$45,001 - \$50,000

5. * ☐ \$25,790 - \$25,991

12. ☐ \$50,001 - \$55,000

6. ☐ \$29,405 - \$29,530 13. ☐ \$55,001 - \$60,000
7. ☐ \$33,270 - \$33,372 14. ☐ \$60,001 - Above
7. What is your level of education?
- ☐ Did not complete high school
- ☐ High school or GED
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's
- ☐ Doctorate
8. Do you own your house or rent?
- ☐ Own ☐ Rent
9. Are you able to get a physical from a doctor every year?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No
10. If the answer is no is it because you don't have insurance?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. Have one or both parents worked as a domestic worker?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No
12. Have you ever worked a job that made you feel lower than others?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No
13. How long have you been a Seventh-day Adventist Christian?
- ☐ 1-5 Years ☐ 11-15 Years ☐ 21-26
- ☐ 6-10 Years ☐ 16-20 Years ☐ 27 and above
14. To what degree of poverty would you consider the neighborhood where you live?

☐ Very much in poverty ☐ Somewhat in poverty ☐ Not much ☐ Not at all

15. Have you ever used advanced money systems such as pawnshops, title loans, or advance checking systems in the last two years because you were in need of money?

☐ yes ☐ no

16. If the answer is yes how many times do you feel you used them?

☐ 1-5 Times ☐ 6-10 Times ☐ More than ten

17. Rank the items below from 1-5 what you feel is the reason for poverty?

☐ No job/ low paying job ☐ Too many bills

☐ Lack of education ☐ Drug abuse

☐ Circumstances beyond your control ☐ Other_____

18. Have you ever-received government assistance for food before?

☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Are you receiving government assistance now?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20. If you are in poverty now or have been in the past, how would you describe your situation? Check what applies to you.

☐ Helpless

☐ Different from others

☐ Ashamed

☐ Did not know I was in a

☐ Guilty

☐ Poverty neighborhood

☐ Embarrassing

☐ I will always be poor

☐ Hopeful dreams of a better day

☐ None of the above

☐ Other_____

21. Are you employed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

22. To what degree do you feel discrimination has played a role in poverty for African Americans?

☐ A great role ☐ Somewhat role ☐ Not much role ☐ Not at all

23. Do you believe poverty affects one's ability to achieve?

☐ Very strongly ☐ Somewhat strong ☐ Not strong ☐ Not at all

24. To what degree are you actively involved with serving others who are in poverty?

☐ Very much ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not much ☐ Not at all

25. Do you feel a person in poverty has the ability to choose what they want to become and make it happen?

☐ Yes, but very difficult ☐ Somewhat difficult ☐ Not difficult at all

26. Do you feel poverty unfavorably affects one's worship with god?

☐ Very much ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not much ☐ Not at all

Questions are made to provide in many cases flexible answers and to understand somewhat the probability and severity of circumstances as seen in the question below.

1. Have you ever used advanced money systems such as pawnshops, title loans, or advance checking systems in the last two years?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. If the answer is yes how many times do you feel you used them?

☐ 1-3 Times ☐ 4-6 Times ☐ More than ten

APPENDIX B

Dignity: Study Guide

Lesson 1

The Highest Dignity “Sons and Daughters of God”

1. What does John say has been bestowed upon us? 1 John 3:1

Behold what manner of _____ the _____ hath _____ upon _____, that we should be _____ the _____ and _____ of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2. What gift was given so that we might live? 1 John 4:9

In this was manifested the _____ of God _____, because that God sent his only begotten _____ into the _____, that we might _____ through him.

3. How is the Father described? Psalms 68:5

A father of the _____, and a judge of the _____, is God in his _____ habitation.

4. What is the difference between the Father and us? Isaiah 64:8

But now, O Lord, thou art our _____; we are the _____, and thou our _____; and we all *are* the work of thy hand.

5. How did Jesus say we are to pray? Matthew 6:9

After this manner therefore pray _____ which art in heaven hallowed be thy name.

6. What did Jesus say the Father would give us? Luke 12:32

_____ not, little flock, for it is _____ good pleasure to give you the
_____.

7. According to Paul who are the richest people on earth? Romans 8:16-18

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then _____; heirs of God, and _____ with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this _____ are not worthy to be compared with the _____ which shall be revealed in us.

APPENDIX C

Dignity: Study Guide

Lesson 2

The Potential Within

1. When God made mankind, who were they like? Genesis 1:26

And God said, Let us make _____ in _____, after our _____:
and let them have _____ over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over
the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the
earth.

2. Was man expected to do work before sin? Genesis 2:15

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the _____ of _____ to
_____ it and _____ it.

3. Does the Bible suggest we are able to reason? Isaiah 1:18

Come now let us _____ together saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

4. Do people have the ability to make life choices? Deuteronomy 30:19

I call heaven and earth to _____ this day against you, that I have set before you
_____ and _____, _____ and _____ therefore _____,
that both thou and thy seed may live.

5. Where does God search for worth in man? 1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on the _____, or on the _____
of his _____; because I have refused him: for the Lord _____ not

as _____; for man _____ on the _____, but the Lord _____ on the _____.

6. What was God's thought of His people? Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the _____ that I think toward _____, saith the Lord, _____ of _____ and not of evil, to give you an _____ end.

7. How important is hope and memory, of God? Lamentations 3:21-23

This I recall to my _____ therefore have I hope. It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his _____ fail not. They are new _____: great is thy faithfulness.

8. Since mankind is in bondage to sin; what is needed to set them free? (John 8:36)

If the _____ therefore sets you _____, you shall be _____ indeed.

7. Write the names of two individuals that inspire you on the lines below. You may choose from the list of historic personalities below or the name of any other individual that inspires you.

Charles Drew	George Washington Carver	Malcolm X
Garret Morgan	President Barrack Obama	Rosa Parks
Harriet Tubman	Eleanor Roosevelt	Nelson Mandela
Sojourner Truth	Mahatma Gandhi	Booker T. Washington
Wilberforce	Colin Powell	President L Johnson
Jim Zwerg	Oprah Winfrey	Helen Keller
John Lewis	President John F. Kennedy	Thurgood Marshall
Ben Carson	Martin Luther King Jr.	William L. Garrison
Socrates	John Wesley	Thomas Edison
Jackie Robinson	Abraham Lincoln	Muhammad Ali
Simon Bolivar	Geronimo	Daniel Inouye

1. _____

2. _____

10. List the God-given abilities you feel you possess.

11. If money were not a problem, what would you do if you could do anything?

12. What would it take to get you there?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

APPENDIX D

Dignity: Study Guide

History and Moral Contemplation

Lesson 3

1. What was not to be found in Gilead? Jeremiah 8:22; 22:13; 46:11?

Is there no _____ in Gilead? Is there no _____ there? Why then is not the _____ of the daughter of my people recovered?

Woe unto him that _____ his house by _____, and his chambers by wrong that useth his neighbour's service without _____, and giveth him not for his _____

Go up to Gilead and take _____, O virgin the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many _____; for thou shalt not be cured

2. How did slaves interpret the work of Jesus to those in need in the New Testament? Mark 1:34

And he (Jesus) _____ many that were _____ of divers _____, and them that were possessed by devils. "Balm in Gilead" The Balm of Gilead was salvation.

3. What are the important words in the Declaration of Independence for those who need dignity? Circle the important "dignity" words to you.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

4. What words from this portion of the Emancipation Proclamation are important to dignity? Circle the important “dignity” words to you.

“And by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and parts of States are, and henceforward shall be, free; and that the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.” *Emancipation Proclamation-Abraham Lincoln*

5. What does the 13th amendment to the constitution say about dignity?

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

6 Review Martin Luther King Jr. speeches

7. Write the names of three events one personal, biblical, and historical event for moral contemplation that inspires you on the lines below. You may use this list or your own.

End of Civil War	Creation
Life & Crucifixion of Christ	Plessy v. Ferguson
Martin L. King speeches	Noah and the Flood
Abraham & the test of Faith	Voters Right Act of 1964
Declaration of Independence	Joseph in Egypt
Moses & Wilderness Experience	Brown v. Board of Education
Emancipation Proclamation	David’s Victories & Defeat
Montgomery Bus Boycott	Battle of Waterloo

Daniel in the Lion's Den	Barrack Obama President
Martin Luther & Reformation	Heaven a Going Home Story

8. List one personal, biblical, or historical event for moral contemplation that inspires you.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

APPENDIX E

Example Evaluation Form of Dignity Seminar

Pastor Roy E. Gaiter Sr., Facilitator

Please take a few minutes to evaluate the seminar using the following rating scale:
5=Excellent; 4=Good; 3=Average; 2=Fair; 1=Poor; 0=Not Applicable

Did the information on dignity motivate hope?

5 4 3 2 1 0

Did this seminar help you understand that your value as a person is not related to how much money you have?

5 4 3 2 1 0

Did this seminar raise your awareness that true worth comes from God?

5 4 3 2 1 0

Does this seminar inspire moral contemplation to persevere beyond your own past and present experiences as it did for others through their historical experiences to accomplishing God's greatness in you?

5 4 3 2 1 0

Did this seminar raise your awareness that you are a son or daughter of God?

5 4 3 2 1 0

Would you recommend a dignity seminar to family members, neighbors and friends?

5 4 3 2 1

APPENDIX F

Norwood S.D.A. Church Evaluation of Dignity Seminar

1. Did the information on dignity motivate hope?

Excellent= 12; Good= 7; Average= 4; Fair= 1; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

No Answer= 1

2. Did this seminar help you to understand that your value as a person is not related to how much money you have?

Excellent= 12; Good= 8; Average= 3; Fair= 0; Poor=1; Not Applicable= 0

No Answer= 1

3. Did this seminar raise your awareness that true worth comes from God?

Excellent= 17; Good= 4; Average= 3; Fair= 0; Poor=1; Not Applicable= 0

4. Does this seminar inspire moral contemplation to persevere beyond your own past and present experiences as it did for others through their historical experiences to accomplishing God's greatness in you?

Excellent= 12; Good= 8; Average= 4; Fair= 0; Poor=1; Not Applicable= 0

5. Did this seminar raise your awareness that you are a son or daughter of God?

Excellent= 14; Good= 4; Average= 6; Fair= 0; Poor=1; Not Applicable= 0

6. Would you recommend a dignity seminar to family members, neighbors, and friends?

Excellent= 12; Good= 5; Average= 3; Fair= 2; Poor=1; Not Applicable= 0

No Answer= 2

APPENDIX G

Ephesus S.D.A. Church of Dignity Seminar

1. Did the information on dignity motivate hope?

Excellent= 12; Good= 2; Average= 0; Fair= 0; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

2. Did this seminar help you to understand that your value as a person is not related to how much money you have?

Excellent= 12; Good= 1; Average= 1; Fair= 0; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

3. Did this seminar raise your awareness that true worth comes from God?

Excellent= 14; Good= 0; Average= 0; Fair= 0; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

4. Does this seminar inspire moral contemplation to persevere beyond your own past and present experiences as it did for others through their historical experiences to accomplishing God's greatness in you?

Excellent= 13; Good= 1; Average= 0; Fair= 0; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

5. Did this seminar raise your awareness that you are a son or daughter of God?

Excellent= 13; Good= 1; Average= 0; Fair= 0; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

6. Would you recommend a dignity seminar, to family members, neighbors, and friends?

Excellent= 13; Good= 1; Average= 0; Fair= 0; Poor=0; Not Applicable= 0

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