

(1Cor 7,14). If an unbeliever is sanctified in her or his believing partner in marriage, *a fortiori* it must be true if both of them are believers! Marriage is a way of sanctification – obviously for those who are called to this state of life.

*Sanctification* in a partner means being helped to sanctity: we do not become perfect just by and for ourselves, but together with others. And this is even truer in the closely shared married life. One partner draws the other one so that if one grows in holiness, the other partner grows, too. But balance has to be kept: not only can one take, but one also must give, since one can hardly pull both partners ahead; one cannot paddle on both sides of the boat for a long period of time.

It is true also the other way around: if one goes down, she or he sinks the other partner too. The beauty of a marriage consists in this: partners can help each other. On the other hand, it can also be challenging and arduous when one of them starts to misuse the advantages and fails to contribute to the common reservoir.

Life in marriage provides many occasions to grow in holiness. It is enough to open one's eyes and discover those typical situations and circumstances that enable one to grow and to pull her or his partner toward the good, as well. These all are small things, but in a global sense they are valuable and important.

Sacrifice for the good and comfort of a partner, readiness to listen and adapt and the desire to also help and fulfil the unexpressed needs of a partner are things that help to grow in holiness – and not only for the one who performs them. The reciprocal relationship in marriage makes each partner prosper through shared holiness. Such behaviour is possible only by keeping in mind the “introduction” to marriage: its goal is not to make oneself happy, but one's partner.

Pavel HANES

# The Response of the New Testament Church to Material Needs and Materialism

Has not God chosen those,  
who are poor in the eyes of the world,  
to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom?  
(James 2,5)

*First of all, the period of the New Testament Church has to be defined. The “New Testament Church” – is it the Church in existence in the time of Jesus Christ and his disciples, ie. in the period before the beginning of Paul's mission to the Gentiles? Or does it also include the period of the Apostolic Fathers?*

*There is no universally accepted answer to this question. Different answers are given by different authors. For example, Adolf HARNACK offers a very dissimilar answer to any given by a Roman Catholic theologian. One possible solution is given in Rudolf BULTMANN's book Primitive Christianity.<sup>1</sup> BULTMANN maintains that Christianity is a syncretistic religion, but all his quotations describing early Christianity are taken from the New Testament. In spite of some reservations with BULTMANN's theology, I use his definition of the period, and limit the theological discussion to quotations from the New Testament. Other quotations are given for historical and illustrative purposes.*

*As I see it, the response of the New Testament Church to material needs was diaconate, and her response to materialism was warning against the spiritual and ethical dangers of wealth. The first consisted mainly in actions and the second consisted mainly in words. These two things – words and deeds – are inseparably united in the response of the New Testament Church to the problems of the world, although we*

<sup>1</sup> BULTMANN Rudolf, *Primitive Christianity* (trans. FULLER R. H.). New York, 1956.

have always to remember what Helmut THIELICKE says: “The specifically Christian element in ethics does not emerge at the level of acts and in ethical programs. (...) The specifically “Christian” element in ethics is found only at the level of motives.”<sup>2</sup> This simply means that one cannot tell whether words or deeds are Christian just by listening or observing. Before we say anything we must understand that the response of the New Testament Church to the issues of material needs on the one hand and materialism on the other was her focusing on the right motives in correcting the respective problems: she concentrated her energies on building up faith and Christian love.

That is why it is not enough to be interested in the history of Christian social action, we need to study also the interpretation of those actions in the texts that explain them and give them specifically Christian meaning.

## I. The New Testament Church and Poverty

The way in which the New Testament understands poverty is based on the theology of the Old Testament. Here the words describing the poor are mostly – especially in the Psalms – closely connected with oppression, humility and piety.

Here the poor are God’s poor; they are oppressed and expect and get help from God. Their attitude has nothing to do with the Marxist idea of *risen proletariat* demanding its historical rights using revolutionary violence. The Lord God identifies with the poor as described in the Bible (Proverbs 19,17).

According to the Old Testament understanding, the New Testament Church made a difference between the purely physical poverty and the poverty that found its expression in piety and humility. We can see this differentiation in Jesus Christ’s expression, *the poor in spirit* (Matthew 5,3). This expression is an exact equivalent of the Hebrew *poor and humble* (Psalms 9,12; 25,9; Proverbs 16,19).

Also the remark found in the Letter to Timothy shows that not everyone who is physically poor should be an object of Church’s care. This can be illustrated by the “definition” of who is “widow” – it is a woman who “puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help” (1Timothy 5,5).

To give somewhat closer view of how the Early Church cared for the poor here are few quotations: Philip SCHAFF says: “The churches (...) were largely charitable institutions for the support of widows and orphans, strangers and travellers, aged and infirm people in an age

<sup>2</sup> THIELICKE Helmut, *Theological Ethics I*. (trans. LAZARETH W. H.). Philadelphia, 1966. 19–20.



of extreme riches and extreme poverty.”<sup>3</sup> Here are some quotations from early Christian authors: CLEMENT of Rome wrote in the *Epistle to the Corinthians*: “Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect unto the strong. Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because God has given him one by whom his need may be supplied.”<sup>4</sup>

POLYCARP wrote to the Philippians: “And let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always ‘providing for that which is becoming in the sight of God and man’; abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unjust judgment; keeping far off from all covetousness.”<sup>5</sup>

And ARISTIDES, the apologist, wrote this testimony to the Roman Cæsar around the year 140: “Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their numbers is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity; and if it is possible to redeem him, they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.”<sup>6</sup>

Let us return to the Bible again. Although the Old Testament pays close attention to the poor, physical poverty does not mean that the poor should be somehow privileged. A good example of this principle is the warning given in Exodus 23,3: “Do not show favouritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.”

The same can be told about the New Testament attitude towards

the poor. In Luke 14,13 we read the appeal of Jesus Christ to always pay special attention to “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind”. And Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians goes so far as to change his topic when he tells of the instruction he got in Jerusalem not to forget the poor (Galatians 2,10). According to Luke 6,20, in Jesus Christ’s words, the poor are blessed: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.” It is because they are more ready to get something much better, something that the rich will get only with serious difficulties. And James states, without reservations, that God had chosen the poor “to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom” (James 2,5).

But despite the great emphasis in the Bible on the care for the poor, the social aid due to them is in many ways of a secondary order. For example, it was secondary to Jesus Christ’s mission to preach: when reminded of the sick and need waiting for him he gave a blunt answer: “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1,34–38). And in Luke 4,10 Jesus Christ quotes the passage from Isaiah 61,1: “The Spirit of the Lord (...) has anointed me to *preach good news* to the poor.” A similar principle is used by the apostles in the sixth chapter of the Acts of Apostles, when they refuse to abandon preaching and prayers, but they appoint deacons for social service (Acts 6,1–4). Social aid was also secondary to the devotion to Jesus Christ himself, seen at the occasion when Judas criticised the “waste” of precious ointment in Matthew 26,11.

The same assessment must be applied to what is sometimes called “Jerusalem communism” (Acts 2,44; 4,32–37). The meaning of this fellowship and sharing was in the expression of the spiritual unity of the Church, not in the total social equalisation. We can see it in the case of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5,4) whose gift to the Church was rejected because of their wrong motive in giving it.

Although 2 Corinthians 8,13 speaks about *equality*, its purpose clearly is not egalitarianism, as it does not refer to a forced response of the Church as a whole, but to a voluntary decision of an individual who has wealth. Besides, the spontaneity of Jerusalem communism later gave way to an organised diaconate. The beginnings of the diaconate are recorded in Acts 6,1–5. Later “charity initiatives” can be seen in the activities of Tabitha in Acts 9,36, and in the voluntary offering given as a ministry to the poor in Judea (2 Corinthians 9).

It is important to stress that those who are the object of Church’s care must not misuse it. The well-known expression of this

3 SCHAFF Philip, *History of the Christian Church*. Oak Harbor, 1997. 499–500.

4 CLEMENT of Rome, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. KEITH J.). In MENZIES A. (ed.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, 1994. 240.

5 POLYCARP, *The Epistle to the Philippians*. In ROBERTS Alexander – DONALDSON James (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers I*. Peabody, 1994. 34.

6 ARISTIDES, *The Apology* (trans. HARRIS J. Rendel). In [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/aristides\\_02\\_trans.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/aristides_02_trans.htm).

principle is the following: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2Thessalonians 3,10). When the Church applies such strict principle for directing social aid, it will not become a questionable support of laziness and abuse. Her help is aimed at the weak (Acts 20,35) who, despite their efforts to find a job and work, still cannot support themselves.

The profoundly deeper Biblical meaning of material aid given to the poor is admirably expressed in the Greek word *alms*. In the LXX, the Hebrew words for *mercy* or *loving kindness*, *justice*, and, in one place, *truth* (Genesis 47,29), are translated as *alms*. These are the words that represent the ultimate meaning of Christian social action. It is an expression of God’s mercy; and it also speaks of justice in accordance with the law of God, in which love is central.

After all of the help provided, the poor receiving church-alms may still remain poor, but they know that God cares in the present, and they look forward to the Kingdom of God that is coming. We can summarize by saying: the purpose of giving material aid by the Church is kerygmatic, it is done to convey a message, the good news of God’s love and salvation.

## II. The New Testament Church and Materialism

The word *materialism* has a very wide semantic field; it has several meanings, but basically it is used either in its *philosophical* sense or in its *ethical* sense.

One can briefly summarise philosophical materialism by its definition that “everything has its origin in matter, and everything can be explained by the processes that occur in matter”. Materialism in its ethical sense can be described by the statement that says: “material goods are the most important things for the human being, for her or his existence and happiness”. 1Timothy 6,17 expresses such state of mind as the putting of “hope in wealth, which is so uncertain”. Another possible definition is “the idolatrous elevation of money and the material possessions it will buy as the goal of life”.<sup>7</sup>

These two aspects of materialism are often, but not always, interconnected. Consequently, we meet people who are convinced materialists in their worldview, but at the same time they are “idealists” and unselfish, who find fulfilment in cultivating the human spirit or in philanthropy.

On the other hand, there are philosophical idealists, or those who

have a religious worldview and believe in God, but their everyday life and ethics are determined by the pursuit of material goods.

First of all: if we wish to use the response of the New Testament Church as a model for the Church in our days, it is necessary to be aware of the differences between materialism in the times of the New Testament and materialism today.

In antiquity, materialism as philosophy was based on atheism and stressed the primæval matter; the ethical form of materialism concentrated on physical and psychical pleasures (Cyrenaicism and Epicureism). In contrast with the ancient materialism, the modern philosophical materialism puts stress on the laws of nature that have been discovered in modern times and on future of human society that will be brought about by progress. Modern materialism has replaced the hope of God’s promises by the necessity of the laws of nature, and the so-called *inevitable* progress of humanity has become psychological source of the sense of stability and hope. This is how modern materialism acquires the elementary features of *lawfulness* (the laws of nature substituting the laws of God) and also elementary aspects of teleology (the inevitable progress substituting the eschatological future that comes with the Kingdom of God). These opinions or doctrines were unknown to the materialists of ancient times.<sup>8</sup>

The response of the New Testament Church to material needs was clear, not only in what she taught, but also in what she did. In response to the materialism of the rich and wealthy, at first the Church limited herself to warnings and appeals that they should use their property in accordance with Christian love. Only later (mainly under the influence of the Greek Platonic dualism) communities were slowly created, that considered asceticism and poverty as the means to reach Christian perfection.

The New Testament Church based her views of wealth and riches on the theology of the Old Testament, as she did in the case of the poor. The rich landowners in the agrarian society of the Old Testament were seen as only tenants of God (Leviticus 25,23). This meant that the real owner of the land was God. As the Old Testament society was agrarian, the land was the main source of wealth. And since it belonged to God, the ultimate source of wealth was God. This

<sup>8</sup> The adage of the ethical materialism in biblical times is quoted in 1Corinthians 15,32 (the words of Isaiah 22,13): “Let us eat and drink (...) for tomorrow we die!” Modern materialism, instead, believes in the wonderful attributes of matter and the teleological heading of evolution.

<sup>7</sup> SCHLOSSBERG Herbert, *Idols for Destruction*. Nashville, 1983. 88.

principle had its specific expression in the jubilee year, when the land had to be restored to the family that had originally sold it.

Although in relation to God no one was the owner of the land, the Old Testament nevertheless protected private property not only against theft (see the Eighth Commandment), but also against coveting (see the Tenth Commandment). Wealth was a sign of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 8,18). For example, it says that Israel "will lend to many nations, but will borrow from none" (Deuteronomy 15,6).

Against the background of such positive evaluation of wealth as the blessing of God, in the Old Testament there are numerous warnings about the vanity and deceitfulness of riches. "Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked" (Psalms 37,16).

Trusting in wealth leads to a fall: "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall" (Proverbs 11,28). It also leads to insatiable covetousness: "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (Ecclesiastes 5,10).

In the New Testament, probably the sharpest warning is that wealth can claim a person's love: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6,24).

A rich person finds consolation in her or his wealth, and so she or he does not look for the joy that comes from God (Luke 6,24). The parable that Jesus Christ told about the difficulty for the rich to enter the Kingdom is also famous: it is compared to the probability of a camel getting through the eye of a needle. The same meaning is conveyed by the story of the rich farmer who planned to rebuild his granaries, or by the story of Dives and Lazarus.

Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON wrote the following: "A man, who is dependent upon the luxuries of this life, is a corrupt man, spiritually corrupt, politically corrupt, financially corrupt. There is one thing that Jesus Christ and all the Christian saints have said with a sort of savage monotony. They have said simply that to be rich is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck."<sup>9</sup>

From what was said above, it should be clear that, despite the great danger, wealth does not necessarily mean that the rich person has a materialistic outlook on life. The New Testament sees the root of the problem mainly in covetousness (Romans 7,7–8), but also in

the love of money (1Timothy 6,10), in pride and trust in wealth, in the ruthless amassing of property, and in the oppression of the poor. This is the heart of the materialistic outlook and lifestyle. In the end, this leads to apostasy (1Timothy 6,10), one of the greatest tragedies in human life.

Although the New Testament does speak of voluntary poverty as an expression of following after Jesus Christ, this clearly is *not* its main response to the problem of materialism. The problem of materialism is not primarily seen in the quantity of the things owned, but in the attitude of the human heart to wealth.

The solution to this problem has to be an *inward change*. The command of Jesus Christ presupposes the inward liberty: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear, but have confidence that the Heavenly Father takes care of His children" (Luke 12,22–30). And the Apostle Paul challenges Christians to be carefree: "Those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away" (1Corinthians 7,30–31).

Rudolf BULTMANN comments on this passage as giving the "dialectics of participation and inner separation".<sup>10</sup> Such an attitude is totally dependent on the reality of the eschatological expectation of the Kingdom of God.

Also it is expressed vividly and colourfully in Hebrews 10,34: "You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions."

As we can see, in the New Testament the inward liberation of the heart is the precondition for the just *use* of wealth. Jesus Christ describes such liberation from wealth (mammon) with a very strong verb: *despise* (Matthew 6,24). But this sort of contempt does not mean that the despised mammon (wealth) cannot possibly be used for the purposes of the Kingdom of God.

Such perspective on wealth is very different from the Platonic dualism that flatly rejects matter as evil. In the Bible we can also see how Jesus Christ says in another place something quite different: "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16,9).

But it must constantly be stressed that the prerequisite for the correct use of wealth is the inner involvement of Christian love, as

9 CHESTERTON Gilbert Keith, *Orthodoxy*. London, 1957. 199–200.

10 BULTMANN Rudolf, *Primitive Christianity* (trans. FULLER R. H.). New York, 1956. 207.

described in Luke 11,41: “But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”

Another example of Christian love determining the value of a gift is the widow of Mark 12,43. The apostle speaks about love and giving explicitly in 1Corinthians 13,3: “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

IGNATIUS, in the letter to the deacon in Antioch, also added the demand of orthodox doctrine: “Everyone that teaches anything beyond what is commanded, though he be [deemed] worthy of credit, though he be in the habit of fasting, though he live in continence, though he work miracles, though he have the gift of prophecy, let him be in thy sight as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, labouring for the destruction of the sheep. If anyone denies the cross, and is ashamed of the passion, let him be to thee as the adversary himself. (...) Though he gives all his goods to feed the poor, though he removes mountains, though he gives his body to be burned, let him be regarded by thee as abominable.”<sup>11</sup> Here we have an example how the New Testament teaching was applied shortly after the times of the apostles passed.

### III. Applying the New Testament Perspective on Poverty and Wealth Today

I have yet to answer the question how to use the above mentioned principles of the New Testament Church in our times. Today the responsibility for social care has been widely taken over by the state (especially in so-called “socialist” states), and as we have seen above, the materialism of present times has dimensions that were absolutely unknown to the people of biblical times.

In post-biblical times the Church came under the influence of Platonic dualism, and material assistance to the poor too often took on the character of a meritorious ascetic act, which meant that the giver received a career promotion in the Church as her or his reward. For example, at the Seventh Ecumenical Council there was a note that said: “Those who, on account of their large expenditure on churches and the poor, have been raised, without simony, to the clerical estate as a reward and recognition of their beneficence; and being proud of this, now depreciate other clergymen, who were unable or unwilling to make such foundations and the like.”<sup>12</sup>

11 IGNATIUS, *The Epistle of Ignatius to Hero, a Deacon of Antioch*. In ROBERTS Alexander – DONALDSON James (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers I*. Peabody, 1994. 113.

12 *The Canons of the Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council*. Canon V. (Carl Joseph von HEFELE’s note.) In SCHAFF P. – WACE H., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Second Series, Vol. 14. 559.

Much, much later, Marxism did not “preach” ascetic abnegation, but on the contrary, a certain kind of *eschatological expropriation* of the rich. That is the reason why the Church today is not so much under pressure to answer the problem of the Platonic elevation of giving (ascetic abnegation), but she has (especially in former Communist countries) to address the Marxist view of property and of people who are on the receiving side of social aid (theoretically regarded as “the poor”).

The way these beneficiaries of Marxist expropriation view themselves is very different from the self-image of the humble and pious *poor* in the Old Testament. This does not mean that social aid should simply be denied to those who are proud and haughty, but it does mean that it is necessary to *speak* about Christian love and mercy while administering social aid. Acts of love must be accompanied by the words of the Christian message.

The historical experience of the Christian Church shows that the response of the Church to material needs should not be based on the principle of abnegation (Platonism) or on the principle of expropriation (Marxism).

The aim of Christian aid is that both the giver and the recipient should give thanks to God, who is the real Giver of everything. This is achieved only when social aid is *interpreted* by the Word of God. Today, the demands for social aid are incomparably bigger and gratitude seems to be incomparably smaller than in the biblical times. The Church responding to the material needs of the present must speak both in her actions *and* in the words that interpret her actions. There should not be any dichotomy between social action and preaching of the Gospel. For only truth can fully liberate both the poor and the rich, and give the correct understanding to the giver and the recipient of the gift. The giver according to the Bible is not in the place of God (to be idolized, as the Marxist state is), the recipient is not entitled to receive help as a matter of course (as the proletariat) and the gift or aid is not the ultimate solution to the human predicament (as materialism would interpret it). The Church has to always remember the principle encapsulated in the words of Jesus Christ: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)

Also, talking about poverty, wealth and truth: we should never forget the division of the world today – into the rich North and the poor South. That means that we, Christians living in the North, have

to see our neighbours not only in the people of our own nation but also in those beyond our state's borders.

The task of national and international church organisations is to remind Christians in the rich North about real poverty and to change what Ronald SIDER describes in his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*: "Present economic relationships in the worldwide body of Jesus Christ are unbiblical, sinful, a hindrance to evangelism and a desecration of the body and blood of Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup>

But the more immediate problem for us here is the myth that materialism brings happiness and fulfillment. Such an idea is glittering mirage that the consumer society of the North is pursuing but is not able to grasp. One analyst, Russell KIRK, says:

"The real conflict in our age is between opposing types of imagination: or, to speak more accurately, among a variety of types of imagination. (...) So the great contest in these declining years of the twentieth century is not for human economic interests, or for human political preferences, or even for human minds: not at bottom. The true battle is being fought in the Debatable Land of the human imagination. Imagination does rule the world."<sup>14</sup>

The imagination of contemporary people is, in its essence, hedonism transformed into the transcendence of an unassailable faith. Materialism of this kind unashamedly makes parallels between the experience of buying goods or an experience of sexual intimacy and experiences of religious faith.

Hans SCHULZE describes this process as follows: "In the hedonistic-aesthetic conception of the world, the world offers itself as a cosmetic object. Inability to change one's thinking (or the excessive effort that this would require) on the one hand corresponds with the possibility to step up and refine the commercialisation of needs and to create new needs. So life here is pretty good, despite the fact that the unsolved problems remain unsolved. The obvious symbols of the problem are: detergents and their demonstrable efficiency; home appliances, like dishwashers, washing machines and TV sets; nicer living, like furniture, a family house and a second flat; holiday, caravan and aeroplane trips; fashion; the entertainment industry, like shows, illustrated magazines and public gossip; flirting and sex without any risk. For a long time now it has not been the reification (*Versachligung*) of the world, nor demythologisation that it is about.

13 SIDER Ronald, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. London, 1982. 99.

14 KIRK Russell, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky*. In COLSON Chuck (ed.), *Against the Night*. Ann Arbor, 1989. 171.

Much more it is about new ideology, about new pseudo-reality, about the new unreality of the world of illusions, about 'technology and science as ideology'.<sup>15</sup>

The experience of ownership is short term and can not substitute for the depth of religious or interpersonal relationships. Materialism ends in insatiability. Aldous HUXLEY called the commercial catalogues of modern society "The Newest Testament" to emphasise their place in people's minds.

A rich materialist of biblical times could have been surrounded by expensive things and maybe by slaves. But his modern parallel can, thanks to mass production, be constantly running after newer and better things, and, with the help of technology, she or he can create a virtual reality that blunts her or his ability to perceive the "real reality".

Modern materialism often defends its position by appealing to economic principles that have the status and authority of the laws of nature, although they are too often just an expression of human selfishness and greed.

"If language is not competent for this purpose – of the criticism of materialism – then what else could allow us to accomplish this task, without which human beings do not have much significance? Today, of course, this task seems negligible, compared to the importance of making refrigerators or refining oil. Anyone who tries to interfere with such efforts by means of words is considered to be nothing but a conjurer."<sup>16</sup>

The Word of God was and still is a powerful tool of the Church of Jesus Christ. The message of the New Testament Church is that the Church of today must rely on the Word of God and its power to liberate human mind from the power of its idols – the idols of the wealthy as well as the idols of the poor.

15 SCHULZE Hans, *Theologische Sozialethik*. Gutersloher, 1979. 283.

16 ELLUL Jacques, *The Humiliation of the Word*. Grand Rapids, 1985. 34.