

## **Thuma Mina: Isaiah 6:8**

### **A theological/biblical and socio-economic and political rationale of why we should be involved in poverty alleviation and development as ASF**

**By Thabo Makgoba Bishop of Grahamstown**

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#### **1. Introduction**

Thanks for inviting me to your conference and to address you on the topic of poverty alleviation and development. It has been at least 25 years since I came to my first ASF and then felt lost at what these Christians were talking about. I have never looked back and now appreciate scripture where it says God did not give us the spirit of timidity but of courage. ASF has fostered that within me and many others before me and hopefully within you and those that will follow after you.

Having listened to the Archbishop and your comments this morning, I was forced to re-look at what I want to say to you this afternoon. The Archbishop painted in broad strokes key issues around your theme, and that is the role of a keynote speaker to some extent. He challenged us to put content and to critique the available tools at our disposal in terms of the contextual issues that we face in this century.

I want to also in broad strokes first make certain assumptions about ASF, the theme and then go on to attempting to address the task the Arch left before us, that of putting some content onto his challenges. But if I left it there, with some content, I shall have missed his other challenge, that of being rigorous in our dealing with content or critical thinking. I will first paint the context, biblical, socio-economic and political around the task that you have given me. Then I will provide a possible tool, that you could use in your interrogation of your content and context and then conclude with specific challenges or questions that you want to discuss in groups.

#### **2.0 The assumptions that I am making are as follows:**

You as ASF, have wrestled with the patterns in the Bible of the calling of the prophets and of Disciples and how costly this is; you have wrestled and tried to understand the context of Isaiah's calling and the content of his message from God. That as you commit yourself, saying yes Lord send me, we have heard your invitation, Who shall go for us, whom shall I send, you have noted the prior transformational issues Isaiah had to undergo and the contextual issues he had to speak into.

In brief, the heavenly hosts in Isaiah's vision had to convert Isaiah into a new being and messenger, from a person of unclean lips to a messenger of God's tidings. The last assumption I am making is like Isaiah, your response to God though robust will not be arrogant but marked by humility and awe at the very fact of being asked by God to be his mouthpiece.

Having made these assumptions, I want to paint the biblical context into which prophets and disciples were called and sent into.

### **3.0 Biblical context and content of the messengers.**

What is this calling and what is our context and how different is our context to the time when king Uzziah died? What is our context and what is so different from it compared to when the disciples were called and sent by our Lord Jesus Christ in first-century Palestine? The O T prophets were called mostly when earthly rulers had lost a sense of vocation as leading through Yahweh's direction and most of these prophets had to speak truth to power and some were corrupt themselves. We are not told much about their preparation for this enormous task but know that God spoke to them and they were converted, empowered and reminded that they were known by God before they were born, whilst they were in their mothers' wombs.

Jesus on the other hand also calls a bunch of unpromising fishermen, he disciples them over time and then sends them on electives or practice teaching two by two as apostles. The content of their message in words and deeds in Jesus a friend, healer, transformer who is sent from God the father to bring reconciliation. 2Cor 5:18 captures the context and content very well. Jesus is sent from God to do God's work of reconciliation of persons, and persons to God, and God to persons. Enemies are made friends and friends are made better friends. This is the agenda of God who is love and who for the love God has for us God offers Jesus to lay his life for this reconciliation.

The invitation to apostleship and grace freely given is not cheap; it comes with a tug of love so dear. Therefore in committing ourselves to being messengers we have to be prepared to share in his joys and suffering. Do we still want to be Thumad? Or do we want to review or are we just saying it as a wonderful theme, the harvest is plentiful and labourers are few. These are serious matters of life and death. Do we hear his instructions to those he sends: I am sending you like lamb amongst wolves carry not extra luggage, or lap tops or cell phones and in your dealings be sharp, gentle as doves and sharp as snakes. It is not just fashionable or nice to do.

The assumption I am finally making is you have considered these issues or will consider them as ANSOC, as you make the bold move into our context of hunger and poverty. Take heart we have done it in the past as youth and you can do it, there is no turning back.

#### **4.0 What is our context today? Socio-economic and political issues of poverty and extreme hunger**

The question here is what are the causes of extreme hunger and poverty? What is the extent statistically (though I do not believe in Stats, but it does give some useful indication). In articles by David Eversrat the *Politics of Poverty* and another one by Anup Shah, *Poverty facts and statistics*, in broad strokes again, they identify the following as the causes of poverty:

- Structural adjustment
- Food dumping
- Corruption
- Unfair trade
- Under-development
- Colonialism and imperialism
- Political conflict

They, together with other sources, highlight the following statistics:

- 300 million people live below the poverty line
- Africa only continent that will not meet the MDGs target by 2015
- 75% HI V/AIDS cases are in Africa
- Inequality and unemployment persist
- High infra-structure and IT back log
- Malaria is costing the continent 1% growth p.a

There are Pastoral and moral issues around poverty and extreme hunger: I come from the second oldest diocese and the second biggest Province in South Africa and the poverty there is indescribable in some parts. Our neighbours Lesotho and Southern Free State, Mozambique Xaixai and many other place face hunger and poverty that no word can adequately express, yet the expenditure on ice cream, liquor, cigarettes and perfume in some parts of the world could totally alleviate some of the challenges that we face in our continent. There you are, the morality of food dumping, excessive drinking and eating whilst others starve.

The more serious pastoral issue is when poverty and extreme hunger leads to violent crime. The story of a Sterkstroom youth who comes from a very depressed village township, murdered and killed a farmer's wife wanting food and money. It was a difficult pastoral visit because the young man is a grandchild of our lay leader but of ills of poverty.

## **5. What is being done globally, Africa, SADC and locally?**

There are quite a number of initiatives that are being taken in the world to address the issue of poverty, and some of these contextual challenges that we are facing in our time. The list is long, and ASF could add to some of these initiatives. But before I share some of these, I want to pose a question: What is ASF going to do, as you commit yourselves to be sent by the Lord in the spirit of Isaiah? What message will you take to the poor and the needy of our time? What is ASF going to do, in terms of the initiatives that are being taken? Are you aware for example of the NEPAD in Africa? Are you aware of the Lagos Agreement, which is the precursor of NEPAD? Are you aware of the SADC initiatives like the African Peer Review Mechanism? Globally, or internationally you have the Millennium Development Goals. Maybe the issue should be a move from understanding these Millennium Development Goals to giving a critique of them, so that the ASF could have both a theological as well as a broader understanding of their implications. Are you aware of the Blair Commission, and if so, again, what is your critique of it, as Christian students?

Back at home, ASF needs to be aware of the move, and what facilitated the move, from the RDP to GEAR, and now to ASGISA. Give a critique of these government policies, and find out why they were formed. Are they really addressing the needs of the poor?

In other words, ASF has the privilege of having students at tertiary level, who are aware of the content of some of these initiatives, but it is important for you to give a critique of these contents. Furthermore, I want to leave with you a model (there are many models), but a model that you can use as you critique these documents, a model of social analysis which leads me into the sixth aspect of this paper:

## **6. What should be our response as ASF? Social analysis**

The model I want to leave with you, to offer this critique, is called Social analysis, linking faith to practice by Holland and Henriot. It has three aspects in terms of our response.

It talks about the capitalisation, that is there is a shortage of capital, a shortage of food, a shortage of money. The response is: You inject capital in order to boost economic activity, and this will directly and indirectly impact on poverty.

Distribution: You make sure that everybody enjoys the benefits of what is there.

Transformation: You push for radical transformation of the systems.

This social analysis model is suggested in a little booklet by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot: *Linking faith and justice*(1980).

Let me just go slightly deeper into these three aspects.

**Capitalisation (economic):** ASF for example can run a soup kitchen, an ambulance-type of dealing with poverty. Obviously this will not get you anywhere as you are students, and the extended backlog of poverty, as well as greed of those that have the means of control, is enormous. Most of you will not have the will nor the time to do justice to this aspect. Some may complain that you even come from those poor families, and are here to better your education, and hopefully inject money back into the economic systems of the country.

**Distribution:** ASF can challenge the government, CBOs, NGOs, big business and social welfare and all other wealth creators, and say: Could the resources not be distributed equally, and maybe you could evolve the process of distributing these resources. You could have placards, T-shirts, calling upon charitable organisations for equality, fairness and redistribution. Most of you can do this, in your offices, in your classes, in your board rooms, and from your university campuses. But it is obvious that the haves will continue unscathed and untransformed, for the redistribution will be insignificant.

The third aspect, called **Transformation**, calls for a radical transformation of the policies of this world, of SADC, of our country, a radical transformation of the IMF and the World Bank to deal with trade, justice, access to poor countries, a radical transformation of fair trade, on policies globally around bribery and corruption. This transformation needs not only political will and economic muscle, but it could be placed within the framework of human rights, and as Christians the framework of honesty, of compassion, and in terms of our country, serving people first (Batho Pele).

This is just a model that I am proposing to you, which you may use or discard, but at least it places this enormous issue of poverty within a framework that you could analyse critically, and know where your intervention is located.

## **7. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have painted in broad strokes, critical issues that affect our continent, around the issue of poverty. In broad strokes I have looked at discipleship and apostleship in the context of apostleship. What this conference needs to do is to go deeper into these issues, and to be especially grounded in the context of our people. To this effect I want to share a couple of examples of how poverty demeans, and how poverty strips people of their dignity.

When I was in Queenstown, a beautiful elderly lady, who seemed a responsible family member, used to raid bins and get food for her children. You could see that this pained her, but she had no option because of poverty, but to dig down in these bins. The second example is a recent story covered in our local newspaper, *Grocotts*, of people who were poisoned because they were eating fish that was dumped on a municipal dumping area, fish dumped when others are hungry. So dumping is a problem, and a major cause of poverty, because in the interest of profit people would rather dump food instead of sharing it with those that do not have.

You should look critically at the costs of alcohol, that we consume as students, cigarettes, perfume, and waste in terms of the food that we have in our dining halls, and let us spare a thought for the poor. Have what you can eat. Sacrifice alcohol, perfume, liquor, cigarettes and waste, and give this to the poor. We only need to go to Xaixai in Mozambique, to a certain part of Lesotho, to Malawi, to see what poverty does to people. It makes others prostitutes. It indirectly links with HIV/AIDS. It makes others thieves, others desperate.

So, as ASF I call upon you to give a critique of the initiatives of NEPAD, SADC, MDG, the Blair Commission, and ASGISA, and to give a critique of yourselves, the church, and other organs of civil society that purport to be helping the poor. Ask uncomfortable questions like Bishop Ramirez used to say: Why are the poor sick, as we give them the bread? Find out medium- and long-term developmental programmes that will help alleviate poverty. We are fortunate HOPE Africa is here today with you. Find out how you could form partnerships with HOPE Africa in the fight against poverty, corruption and food dumping. Give a year of your life after university to go into these poor rural areas to share your skills and your abilities.

Finally, I hope that as Christian students and as a Christian student organisation, you will not seek to do all these things alone, but that you will be involved in multi-faith initiatives, in ecumenical initiatives, that seek to pursue the development of leaders that are grounded amongst their people, moved by the pains and the poverty of the people, who are ready to serve their people and be involved in boardroom politics. May God bless you.

## References

Everatt, D, 2006:*The politics of poverty*

Holland, J and Henriot P, 1980,*The social analysis model, linking faith through justice*

Shah, A, 2006,*Poverty, facts and statistics*

An unpublished paper to the Commission on Hunger 2005

Unpublished paper to ELP Conference on Leadership, 2006

New Jerusalem Bible

HOPE Africa documentation and Annual Report 2005

Make Poverty History web site.

African Monitor, comments by Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane.

## For discussion

I was hoping to divide you into groups, but seeing that time does not allow, I want to read some of the questions that I would have posed in group work.

1. What should ANSOC be doing to alleviate poverty in their areas? Give practical examples, remembering the social analysis model that I offered earlier.
2. Luke 4:18 quotes Isaiah 61:1-2: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, to bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and announce the year of salvation to the oppressed. What are some of the theological/ biblical texts that you would like ANSOC to explore as they look at this issue of poverty alleviation and development?
3. How should the bishops in their dioceses be encouraging their members to deal with poverty eradication? Write a draft Memorandum to the Bishops of the CPSA suggesting practical action that they should implement in their various dioceses, in terms of poverty alleviation, remembering the model.
4. Critique the NEPAD, MDG and ASGISA, using biblical passages.

5. What is ASF going to do to address corruption, as it is a major cause of poverty?
6. Draft a resolution or statement to express ASF's position on this issue.