

the SBC Home Mission Board, state conventions, associations and local churches have hunger ministries. The state Brotherhood departments sponsor extensive disaster relief ministries. Literacy missions are common. There are extensive migrant ministries, ministries to prisoners, substance abusers and others in need. Often local churches have an impressive range of such ministries in operation.

Roman Catholics have a long tradition of formal documents on a great variety of social issues. These documents are issued by the Vatican, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops or by individual bishops.

Catholic Relief Services is our country's largest private provider of world relief. The annual Campaign for Human Development has supplied needed seed money for many local poverty groups throughout the country. Catholic Charities provides more services to the poor than any other private agency in the United States.

In many ways, the Southern Baptist and the Roman Catholic response to poverty has been most impressive. Separately, Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics have done important things to respond to poverty. Some Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist congregations do have cooperative ministries on hunger. All of this provides a strong foundation for our continued work against poverty, but for us to measure up to our scriptural call, much remains to be done. Are there even greater things which we could do together?

*Study Questions:*

1. What lifestyle changes would be necessary for our churches to live out our scriptural call concerning poverty?
2. Poverty in the United States has direct correlation to the decline of the family. How can our communities cooperate in ministries to strengthen families?

3. What are major factors in the cycle of poverty? What common response can we make to this scourge?

4. Some Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist churches in the inner-city areas of the major metropolitan areas have closed. Are there creative ways which we could explore to share facilities, programs and resources to maintain a Christian witness and ministry?

5. What are some ways our churches can work together to minister to the needs of the poor?

My answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Suggested Reading**

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*This text was produced by the Conversation sponsored by the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and by the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

Co-published by  
 Southern Baptist Home Mission Board  
 Interfaith Witness Department  
 1350 Spring Street, N.W.  
 Atlanta, Georgia 30367  
 and Our Sunday Visitor Pub.  
 Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.  
 200 Noll Plaza  
 Huntington, Indiana 46750

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 ROMAN CATHOLIC  
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# POVERTY

## A SOUTHERN BAPTIST AND ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

### I. The Life of Jesus

After 40 days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee to begin His life of ministry. At the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus defined that ministry by reading from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19, NIV). (All verses hereinafter are taken from the New International Version.)

Jesus came preaching a message which reversed the accepted values of this world. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke 6:20-21).

The parables of Jesus turned expectations upside down. For example, the poor received eternal reward, while the rich received an eternity of torment (Luke 16:19-31).

Hated foreigners became the model for being a good neighbor, while the religious officials were shown to be heartless and blind to suffering (Luke 10:25-37).

In both word and action, Jesus lived a life

of compassion for the suffering and needy. John the Baptist wondered if Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. In response, Jesus answered: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Luke 7:22-23).

The compassion of Jesus mirrors the image of God found throughout the Hebrew scriptures. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed" (Ps. 103:6). "Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them" (Prov. 22:22-23).

#### *Study Questions:*

In light of the scriptures:

1. How am I being called to personal change of heart?
2. How are our churches being called to corporate change of heart?
3. How must our churches confront materialism in our culture?
4. How should we respond in our life to Jesus' statement, "Blessed are you who are poor"?

My answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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### II. The New Testament Church

The Book of Acts describes the response of the early church to the preaching of the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . All the believers

were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:42, 44-45).

Because of this radical sharing, it could be said that "There were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34). Such ideals were hard to maintain, and soon divisions arose. The "Grecian Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1).

The letter of James shows that sinful human nature was very much at work in the early Christian community. Discipleship might not have been complete, but the message of James was uncompromising. "As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" (Jas. 2:1). "Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love Him?" (Jas. 2:5).

Paul gives the Church at Corinth the motive for generosity for the collection for the Church in Jerusalem. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9).

#### *Study Questions:*

1. What changes of heart and lifestyle are needed by the churches today to live out the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18)?
2. Are new priorities needed for the use of the resources of our churches?
3. Are new priorities needed for the ministry of the churches?

My answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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### III. Personal Conversion and Discipleship

Clearly, we live in an age of materialism and consumerism. "Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. . . . But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well'" (Luke 12:22, 31).

We enjoy freedom, not only in Christ, but also freedom to pursue personal wealth and happiness. It is hard for us to hear the call to discipleship, as difficult as it was for the rich young man who sadly walked away from Jesus because he had great wealth (see Luke 18:18-23). "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:13-14).

#### *Study Questions:*

1. What concerns control our response to the words of Jesus about possessions and generosity?
2. What personal response do we need to make to poverty and to hunger?
3. Practically, what does it mean to me to love my neighbor as myself?
4. How should our church react to excessive salaries expected by some today?

My answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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### IV. Southern Baptist/Roman Catholic Response

Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists have a tradition of ministry among the poor in various ways.

Both the SBC Foreign Mission Board and