

RELIGION and POVERTY

Pan-African Perspectives



PETER J. PARIS, editor With a foreword by JACOB OLUPONA

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PETER J. PARIS, ED.

Foreword by

JACOB OLUPONA

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Dedicated to the memory of

REV. DR. LEWIN WILLIAMS, 1936–2006,

*president of United Theological College, University of
West Indies, and a pioneer Caribbean theologian*

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FOREWORD

Jacob Olupona

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY AND ITS

ALLEVIATION IN AFRICA AND THE AFRICAN

DIASPORA AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The essays in this volume critically examine the relationship between religion and poverty in African and African diasporic societies, problematizing the intersection of religion and poverty in the lives of the African peoples and their descendants in the Caribbean and North America. Emerging from a series of seminars and lectures held in several regions of Africa and the African diaspora over the past several years, the volume reflects the increasing convergence of theory, practice, and policy as it relates to the problem of poverty, its causes, and its alleviation. Though no central thesis guides the volume, it does suggest that, just as religious institutions and religious practices can contribute to and exacerbate poverty, religion can also play a potentially important role in poverty alleviation. Underpinning the evolving nexus between theory and practice is the difficult lesson that the academic pursuit of religious traditions must be seen in relation to the social and political situations under which faith communities live, flourish, and, at times, perish.

The volume sets out to provide an in-depth understanding of the problem of poverty in the experience of African people on both sides of the Atlantic, not only to examine the causes of poverty but also to provide answers for its alleviation in a way that will be beneficial to faith communities and the men and women currently struggling under the burden of poverty. In this volume, poverty as a concept and an analytical category is provided a broad, multi-disciplinary focus in which phenomenological, theological, and sociological meanings and ethnographic investigation combine to provide an overview of

the phenomenon. Though most of the scholars are theologians by training, the project is given a broader context than a purely doctrinal and scriptural investigation might have; it moves beyond the traditional notion of spiritual poverty set out in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).¹ Rather, the essays in this volume tackle the existential and substantial meaning of poverty understood as the lack of daily necessities such as water, food, and medicine and as a reflection of the hideous social crises of our time such as disease, crime, violence, war, and prostitution. Locating poverty within the broad nexus of the social, cultural, and religious nexus of the postcolonial era in Africa, the contributors provide a necessary sense of urgency and realism, arguing convincingly that poverty disproportionately affects peoples of color who are the poorest of the poor in the global community.

The Problem of Poverty

The phenomenon of poverty is often best grasped in relation to other highly pertinent issues such as violence, bribery, and corruption, as well as prosperity and riches. Paul Bouvier calls our attention to the social reality of our time that “today the poor are no longer individuals, but entire nations that become increasingly poor, while other nations become increasingly rich.”² He sums up the most serious poverty predicament of our global world in these words: “today’s proletariat consists of entire nations of victims of economic difficulties and the mechanisms of trade, carrying the burden of foreign debts and unable to overcome their lack of technological development.”³ No statement better sums up the conditions and contexts under which millions of people of African descent live today. Several of the case studies set out in this volume show that abject poverty in many regions of the world is intimately connected to environmental mismanagement and the exclusion of the very people whose lands and resources have made other nations rich from a share of the wealth. A classic case of widespread suffering brought on by environmental mismanagement is the situation of the Ogoni people of Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. In order to maintain its high levels of oil exploration, the state forcibly acquired Ogoni lands, disabling an entire region of the local resources and livelihood. The Ogoni were denied access to and control over both material resources and the social resources, processes, and institutions that defined and reinforced their place. An integrative approach to alleviating poverty is, then, best suited to the project of understanding poverty, as it reveals the connection and causal relationship between poverty and environmental crises in many African and diasporic societies.

What, then is the nature of the poverty crisis? The comprehensive concept of poverty developed in this volume offers fresh insight and understanding into the problem of poverty in Africa and its diaspora. John Iliffe, who has written a substantial work on the African poor, classifies African poverty into two groups. One group comprises those who clearly “struggle continuously to preserve themselves and their dependents from physical want.” Iliffe thinks that most Africans at some time fall into this level of poverty. The second group, fewer in number, is composed of the poorest of the poor and destitute, whose poverty has reached epidemic proportion. Facing starvation, they are beset by disease and malnutrition.⁴ Paradoxically, it seems to us that disproportionately high levels of poverty occur in countries with great visible wealth and resources, such as Nigeria, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Such profound poverty in the midst of plenty engenders anger and frustration on the part of civil society, who watch helplessly as their nation’s wealth is looted by a small number of so-called filthy rich individuals and powerful international conglomerates. Echoing several of the theologians who contributed to the present volume, Father E. Mveng, a Cameroonian Catholic theologian, provides an encompassing and insightful description of poverty, or what he calls “anthropological poverty,” which goes beyond “economic or financial deprivation”: a deeper condition of poverty, a psychology in which one’s own humanity is impoverished and one’s very humanity is denied.⁵ A popular African proverb says that while “the poor person labors in the heat of the sun, the rich person enjoys the fruits of the labor under the shade” (*osise wa l’oorun, eni maje wa ni iboji*, as the Yoruba version goes). Found in various versions in other African societies, the proverb is a metaphor for the severity of the gap between the poor who work tirelessly to survive and the rich, the principal beneficiaries of the labor of the poor, who enjoy the enormous wealth generated from the fruits of the poor person’s labor. The proverb further reflects the African and African diasporic condition and experience of poverty, the poor people’s own understanding of their situation and lot in life under various historical and social situations, be they economic and social poverty and subhuman living conditions generated by the transatlantic and trans-Saharan slave trades, colonialism, postcolonial democracy, or military rule by African themselves.

As several chapters in this volume demonstrate, studying poverty in Africa and its diasporic communities requires that we begin with the poor’s own description and understanding of their conditions and state of being. Whether these sources of knowledge are found in myths, rituals, metaphors, poetry, prose, or biographical narratives from the mouth of the common folks or from those Elizabeth Isichei calls “the village intellectuals,”⁶

the narratives often describe the relationship between unequal individuals and peoples.

Historical Causes of Poverty

In analyzing the historical causes of poverty, we must look critically at the historical process and evolution of the continent from precolonial times through the colonial and postcolonial periods and examine the political economy of African states and the local and global forces that play central roles in the unfolding of the contemporary social life and situation of the people. No amount of synchronic understanding or ethnographic analysis on the present state of poverty on both sides of the African Atlantic society will do justice to the topic of our deliberation if we fail to acknowledge, even tangentially, the historical trajectory of poverty in Africa and African diaspora communities. While the centuries-long transatlantic slave trade laid the foundation for the current state of poverty in Africa and the African diaspora, the colonial legacy and the postcolonial condition of African people provide the background for the endemic nature of this crisis in Africa today. The slave trade led to the destruction of family, family values, communal and peaceful coexistence, and intergroup relations. As the demand for slaves increased exponentially in response to the insatiable demand in the Americas, warfare increased and the continent was deprived of its able-bodied men and women. The social disruption and depopulation that warfare and human trafficking wreaked on Africa over several hundred years gravely affected the human, social, and cultural development of the region. One can argue that Africa and the African diaspora people have not recovered from this human tragedy, a telling point that makes the request for reparations even more keenly felt.

There is no doubt that in the precolonial period—at least dating back to the early nineteenth century, when Africa had established empires, kingdoms, and states—there was both poverty and affluence. The poverty of that time, however, took a different form. As J. D. Y. Peel reminds us in the case of the Yoruba people, poverty as a social condition was intolerable and rejected as a way of life.⁷ A Yoruba proverb portrays the stigma associated with poverty: “It is better to die young with dignity than to become old in abject poverty” (*Ki a ku lo'mode yeni, ju-ki a d'agba ka t'osi*). Old age typically signals respectability, comfort, and dignity; what the Yoruba saying underlines is that an old age that brings misery and poverty is disgraceful. The proverb also illuminates a cardinal element of Yoruba religious thought and practice: the Yoruba profess a this-worldly worldview, and the indigenous

Yoruba's religious quest to the *orisa* (gods) is that they provide to the supplicants the blessings of wealth, children, and long life (*Ire owo, ire omo, ire emi gigan*). The proverb's apparent rejection of the third of these blessings indicates the very high distaste the Yoruba have for abject poverty.

A more recent response to the crisis of communal and group poverty in African villages today is the growing link between ethno-religious identity and development. In Nigeria, Ghana, and other parts of Africa, for instance, village and town associations grow and meet in economic unity and social development. This often involves the reinvention of traditional value systems (of sacred kingship, totemic concepts, old lineage gods, and ancestors reinvented and reimagined in modern secular idioms). Although these groups are not necessarily linked to the worship of traditional gods, their members having largely converted to Islam and Christianity, they have established a platform for advancing economic unity and social development by appealing to the community as the sacred source of life. By invoking tribal myth and historic symbols and by galvanizing members of their communities at home and abroad to contribute to village, town, and community economic growth, they are responding to a crisis using their own metaphysical and epistemological worldview. Social, economic, and symbolic capital is rallied and tailored toward fighting communal poverty. These limited successes are unfortunately not matched by African governments, many of which have centralized control over natural resources. In general, traditional Africa was fairly well governed by traditional mores, customs, and laws that regulated the economy of the people and the nation-states in precolonial indigenous societies. There seems to have been greater accountability and greater commitment to the social welfare of the common people as well as significant checks and balances. Further, African beliefs and indigenous systems had real and symbolic meaning, and Africans were protective of children, women, the poor, and slaves. Reinvigorating these practices and traditions is an important aspect of long-term poverty alleviation in Africa and the African diaspora.

In the colonial period, as some of these traditions lost their power and as colonial rule and laws were introduced, Africans began to lose their sense of cultural identity and a new group of elites emerged to replace traditional rulers and to collaborate with the colonial powers. Although the colonial government reinvented aspects of indigenous culture that supported colonial rule, it also created new groups of elites from the natives. On a positive note, the tradition of market women's protest in colonial and postcolonial periods followed the traditional structure of ritual rebellion against what is perceived as oppression of poor people.

Though the 1960s brought the age of African independence, the magic of independence soon subsided as self-rule was haphazardly installed and the structures left by the departing colonialists undermined peaceful coexistence among different linguistic and ethnic groups that were forcefully situated under the jurisdiction of the same nation-state. In the first three decades of African independence, under systems of military rule, many African economies experienced significant growth as natural resources—particularly oil and minerals—were discovered. This was also a period when corruption was institutionalized and currencies were devalued to “inconvertible” foreign currency. Taking advantage of severely weakened developing states and the global economy, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exploited conditions that turned these countries into the poorest in the world and developed nations into the wealthiest. The “structural adjustment policies” of the World Bank and IMF encouraged massive loans that, lacking alternatives, developing nations were forced to take for survival. Therefore, it is not surprising that throughout this period in Africa military coups were hatched, with new despotic rulers in khaki uniforms emerging. This situation continued into the late 1990s in most countries, when, with the support of the international community, many African states developed new democratic, though largely economically deprived, governments.

Given the complex historical experiences of the African peoples and African diasporic communities in the Caribbean and North America, the conversation on poverty calls for a radical rethinking of African philosophical, social, and ethical norms to understand how modernization, secular democratic ideals, and political transformation of the continent since independence, have impinged upon the norms, cultures, and indigenous African life today. For instance, as Elizabeth Amoah notes in her essay in this volume, one of the fundamental qualities of traditional African life is communal and common ownership of land and property. Following their colonial legacy, however, many African nations quickly adopted privatized systems at independence. Indeed, the breakdown of Africa’s traditional common ownership of land and subsistence production is comparable to the massive closing of the commons in feudal England, when peasants were forcibly evicted from common lands and the commons were then used to develop agrarian capitalism, extend capitalist accumulation, and ensure a national wage-labor market. Privatization undermined the social welfare ethos predominant in rural African communities. The radical change from communal ownership to governmental control of communal properties provided the pretext for enacting many draconian laws and decrees by which very poor people in rural areas were deprived of their only earthly possessions: their lands. Lands were

forcefully acquired for redistribution among the new rich and city entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, in places such as Nigeria and Kenya, this practice became a national program and many watched helplessly as millions of poor people were left destitute as the ethos of communal sharing gave way to complete deprivation. An exception was former Tanzanian president Julius K. Nyerere, one of Africa's most respected elder statesmen and peacemakers of the region, who established the *ujamaa* village program of community-based farming collectives. Its failure due to mismanagement, however, led Western critics and cultural despisers to conclude, as did Peter Berger, that socialism has always been a failed ideology whenever it was practiced. Father James Schall's famous study *Religion, Wealth, and Poverty* claims that the actual cause of poverty in the world is ideological and insists that the "last great hope for the poor" is "democratic capitalism." Citing Tanzania, Schall wrote, "The best way to discover why Tanzania remains poor and depends on handouts is not to examine its soil or its rainfall, but to read the collected speeches of Mr. Julius Nyerere."⁸

Judging from the poor assessment of Nyerere's program and Mugabe's current land redistribution program in impoverished Zimbabwe, one may conclude that African socialism and the adaptation of an indigenous African ethos to the fight against poverty are bound to fail. I am persuaded that this is not the case. The problem lies more in the implementation of the programs than in the ideological persuasion of these leaders. The partial success of Rwanda's ongoing National Poverty Reduction Program, based on *ubudehe*, "the traditional Rwandan practice and cultural value of working together to solve problems," clearly indicates how an indigenous-inspired poverty alleviation program can succeed. According to the architects of the program, "The objective of this *Ubudehe Mukurwanya Ubuduken* Program is to revive and foster collective action at community level. It is designed to work with and reinforce the on-going political and financial decentralizations process and to provide a direct injection of financial capital into the rural economy, aimed at overcoming one of the main obstacles to pro-poor economic growth."⁹

Responses to Poverty

A number of policy initiatives have recently been set forward to address the issue of poverty in Africa. Faith-based initiatives have proven particularly popular and deserve attention. Since 1960, membership in Christian faiths in Africa has increased over 80 percent, from 60 million (in 1960) to 300 million (in 2001).¹⁰ Faith-based organizations in Africa are thus situated to take

on significant roles in addressing underdevelopment and alleviating extreme crises. Many of Africa's most impoverished people are also deeply spiritual members of religious organizations. By joining religious social support networks, many achieve a sense of personal identity, unified community, and social solidarity and are able to call upon the combined resources of the faith organization to address the poverty and disease ravaging their communities. Using ancient religious teachings, religious denominations instill religious values as moral obligations to the faithful, who are obligated to alleviate poverty in ways that may be lacking in secular institutions, international development agencies, or local governments. Thus, on a global scale religious groups can serve as effective representatives for marginalized segments of third world peoples. Religious organizations can also compel national and local political leaders to discourage corruption in public, civic, and political life; to empower citizens to develop skills; to acknowledge rights; to elect responsible leaders; to address corruption of ethnic and political affiliations; and to dissuade Western governments from giving tax breaks to companies responsible for environmental disasters.

Indeed, in 2000 the Nairobi Conference entitled "Alleviating Poverty in Africa" was sponsored in partnership with the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa and the World Bank, participating in a Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA) training course for new bishops in Ibadan, Nigeria. The conference addressed the causes of poverty; political, economic, and social challenges; and ways to fight poverty by raising income and promoting empowerment, security, and opportunity in African nations. Seeing the spiritual as an essential component of development, these organizations committed to working with African communities to seek community-driven development, protect natural resources and environments, promote good governance by fighting corruption, and relieve debt. Further, some religious groups are directly embedded in the struggles against poverty by insisting through their lobbying groups that poverty be seen as a moral question of world economic policy. The Catholic social justice lobbying group, Network, for example, urges religious organizations to ask governments and corporations ethical questions regarding economic policy: How does policy affect the lives of people in poverty? How does policy improve the lives of people in poverty? How does policy affect their capacity to decide about their lives?¹¹

Faith-based initiatives are not without problems, however. I argue that many Evangelical and Protestant groups should redefine their mission from one that focuses primarily on the saving of souls from eternal damnation to one that directly addresses the misery and poverty lived by many of their flock. They must address spiritual as well as material needs by cultivating a

new mind-set similar to the notion of the “mission church” in the colonial era, in which the Bible and the plow were understood as mutually reinforcing. I understand faith-based initiatives as social programs developed by religious communities to eradicate and alleviate poverty, rejecting the popular understanding in the United States that faith-based initiatives, as defined by George W. Bush, are the state-sponsored redistribution of resources using the agency of religious communities. The latter understanding runs the risk of polarizing public opinion and engendering religious bigotry. Overall, however, religious bodies have long been involved in social welfare and charity without the support of the state. Beyond their peculiar meaning in America, faith-based initiatives imply the involvement of civil society at large, particularly in the postmilitary states of contemporary African nations.

The role civil society plays in poverty alleviation cannot be overemphasized. It has been widely argued that the chronic corruption in many failed African states has led to the growth of civil society. The excellent performance of the civil society in the postmilitary era, especially in the struggle for democratization, confirms that it needs to be strengthened today if nascent democracies in Africa are to survive. Progressive religious institutions constitute a significant segment of any nation’s civil society, and developing programs to eradicate and alleviate poverty should be seen in that context. In the African situation, it is counterproductive to build a wedge between religious institutions and other civil society groups, such as trade unions, universities, and other nongovernmental organizations involved in the critical work of social change or social engineering. The Western notion of separating the spheres of influence of religion, state, and civil agencies may be foreign to Africans, hence the union of these spheres should not be assumed inappropriate in alleviating and eradicating poverty in Africa today through sustainable development.

An unexpected locus for poverty alleviation may be the international monetary bodies (the IMF and the World Bank) in partnership with religious organizations, particularly churches. Regarded as credible partners, many churches in Africa are forging new partnerships with the World Bank, and these partnerships may prove beneficial as the bank not only provides expertise in specific aspects of poverty and public policy but also has special access to national and international decision makers. The bank brings a global perspective and financial resources to alleviating poverty, as the largest source of multilateral development assistance to Africa.¹²

Though partnering with the World Bank may make new opportunities available, it is essential that the church always maintain its prophetic voice

in such relationships or partnerships. Instead of denouncing partnership with the World Bank or the IMF as some churches have done, the church should insist on its prophetic tradition, which provides meaningful critique of global injustice while simultaneously sponsoring and collaborating with credible organizations. The story of the prophet Nathan related in the Old Testament book 2 Samuel illustrates the possibility of the prophet speaking truth to power. In 2 Samuel, the prophet Nathan was sent to reprimand King David for slaying Bathsheba's husband in order to take Bathsheba for himself to be his wife (2 Samuel 12:1–9). Nathan tells David the parable of a very rich man who had many flocks and a poor man who had only one precious little lamb and who raised the lamb lovingly as part of his family. Now the rich man, ignoring his many herds, took the poor man's lamb and had it prepared for dinner guests. On hearing the story, David became enraged at the perpetrator of this wicked deed, declaring that the rich man deserved to die because he showed no compassion. Nathan thus delivered the accusation to King David, "Thou art the man!" This old biblical story is useful in today's situation of unequal power among nations, corporations, and peoples. A skilled communicator, Nathan raised David's consciousness such that David was able, by acknowledging evil in one case, to recognize evil in himself.

The impact of poverty on gender relations in Africa, especially the status of women and the responses of women's religious, cultural, and social institutions to conditions of poverty is also profoundly important and is highlighted in Barbara Bailey's contribution to this volume. All available data suggest that poverty in Africa disproportionately affects women and children. The Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa in partnership with the World Bank issued a statement on gender and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, declaring that if Africa is to achieve equitable growth and sustainable development, then women must have access to and control of productive, human, and social capital assets.¹³

The church sees the inherent partnership between men and women as originating in Creation and its breakdown as sinful. But the church's missionary heritage created structured, unequal gender roles. Thus, the church must now provide space for women to express and contribute their resources and gifts in a more participatory and equal manner, thus enabling the full range of Africa's human resources to alleviate poverty. The church must increase awareness of injustices against women through empowerment programs and gender training for all worshippers. The majority of church members in Africa are women, making gender equality a moral imperative as well as a developmental objective that is central to the church's

survival. The church must remove the rigid structures of its community life in order to improve the status of women. Further, women must secure access to and control of a diverse range of productive, human, and social capital.

Religious groups can offer equitable provisions for women to articulate their resources and gifts, to address the female and child culture of poverty in Africa, to raise consciousness-supporting empowerment programs, and to offer gender-awareness training. Religious groups can change rigid structures of religious community life to promote women's leadership and to assess the impact of religious programs targeted to rural women, encouraging all segments of society to work together to alleviate poverty. Indeed, the Anglican Church's Mothers Union, the Women's Guild, and numerous other women's groups in many Christian denominations are doing precisely that. Peace depends on economic justice, social harmony, and spiritual sanctity of life. Religious groups identify the root cause of conflict in people's refusal to see any "good" in "the other" and its solution in the willingness to accuse and implicate one's self and one's own group as part of the problem. Forgiveness and reconciliation, based on this analysis, is the religious group's comparative advantage. In a conflict situation, religious groups can—and should—offer a permanent institutional framework that provides continuity and social stability.¹⁴

Conclusion

In 2005, when the developed world pledged to halve poverty in the world by 2015 and ultimately "make poverty history," there was a happy response from the African people that finally the developing world was awakening to its responsibility to aid the world's most impoverished peoples. All indications, however, suggest that not only has the developed world reneged on its promises, but it is not at all committed to "making poverty history." The Millennium Development Goals, as noble as they are, set a Herculean task for poverty alleviation because of the fundamental structures of the political, economic, and social orders that are entrenched in the world today, which render any meaningful reform improbable. All available statistics suggest that those who are most affected by the world poverty crisis are in the regions of Africa and the Caribbean, from where most of the case studies in the present volume originate. It is perhaps in the context of this crisis that the Pan-African approach and response to poverty was planned and carried out by some of the best scholarly minds living in the impoverished regions in question. *Religion and Poverty: Pan-African Perspectives* is a small but impor-

tant contribution to the pressing challenge that poverty in Africa and the African diaspora present to the world.

Notes

1. Biblical quotations throughout this book are from the Revised Standard Version.
2. Paul Bouvier, "The Mission of the Churches amid the Social Reality of Rich and Poor Nations," in *God and Global Justice: Religion and Poverty in an Unequal World*, ed. Frederick Ferre and Rita H. Mataragnon (New York: Paragon House, 1985), 113.
3. Ibid.
4. John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2.
5. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 914.
6. Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *Voices of the Poor in Africa* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 93 and 169. See also Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).
7. J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).
8. James V. Schall, *Religion, Wealth, and Poverty* (Vancouver: Fraser Institute, 1990), 15.
9. Africa Forum, "Ubudehe to Fight Poverty," *Africa Notes*, November/December 2002, 1.
10. Deryke Belshaw, Robert Calderisi, and Chris Sugden, eds., *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001), 3.
11. Neil Chethik, "Global Issues: Trends on Collision Course with Justice," *UU World* 14.6 (November/December 2000): 18–22.
12. Belshaw, Calderisi, and Sugden, *Faith in Development*, 8.
13. Ibid., 10.
14. Ibid., 14.

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Kenya 2001: Canon Clement Janda, Agnes Aboum, J. Ongong'a, Jesse Mugambi, Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Cardinal Morris Otunga (Kenya's first Roman Catholic bishop and archbishop), Eric Aseka, P. N. Mwaura, Kennety Ombongi, E. Gimode, Violet Kimani, Njuguna Njoroge.

South Africa 2002: Samuel Malesi Mophokeng, Rev. Molefe Tsele, Mangezi Guma, Hon. Thoko Didazi, Samisani Hlopha, Mandla Seleokane, Samuel Buti, Itumeleng Mosala, Mahlornola Skosana, Mathole Motshekga, Pulel Lenka Bula, Tahir Sitoto, M. Motlhabi, T. S. Malukeke, Russell Botman.

Jamaica 2003: Errol Miller, Jennifer Martin, Suzette Martin, Garnet Roper, Portia Simpson, Ann Shirley, Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Michael Witter, Rex Nettleford (pro-vice chancellor, University of West Indies), Omar Davies, Paulette Chevanne, Marjorie Lewis, Evelyn Vernon, Maitland Evans, Roderick Hewitt, Tekla Mekfet, Mario Castillio.

United States 2004: Albert Raboteau, Vernon Mason (and staff Tiffany Taylor, Angela Moses, John Cardwell, Edison Jackson, Patricia Gatling, Lance Ogiste, Claudette Devonish, William Hunter, Julio Madina), M. William Howard (and assistants Junius Williams, Shirley Grundy, Roland Anglin), Lawrence Mamiya, Edward Hunt, Fred Davie, Garvester Kelley, Nimi Wariboko, Jacob Olupona.

Some observers attended either all or some of the seminars at their own expense. They were Angelin Simmons, Glenda Erskine, 'Bola Ilesanmi, Njuguna Njoroge, Maselele Masenya, and little Dora Hopkins.

I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to all those at Duke University Press whose professional expertise and encouragement have combined to enhance the quality of this book. The associate editor Miriam Angress and the assistant managing editor Molly Balikov deserve special mention. It has been my pleasure to work closely with both of them on this project. Further, I wish to thank Jan Williams for her work in developing an excellent index.

Finally, but certainly not least, I extend a special word of personal thanks to my beloved spouse, Adrienne Daniels Paris, for her love and moral support throughout the program and beyond. The participants in the seminars appreciated her grace and enthusiasm so much that Elizabeth Amoah affectionately crowned her Queen Mother, the significance of which can only be fully appreciated by the Akan people of Ghana.

While teaching in Ghana in 1997 I was invited one evening to meet with a group of professors at the home of Dr. Irene Odotey on the campus of the University of Ghana to talk about the lack of meaningful relationships between African scholars on continent and those in the diaspora. During the conversation I asked the group to assess the value of a possible multi-year seminar that would comprise a number of African religious scholars for the purpose of studying some subject of common interest such as religion and poverty. All readily affirmed the idea and promptly offered many suggestions.

In due course, a two-week annual seminar was launched in Ghana in 2000 and met subsequently in Kenya, South Africa, Jamaica, and the United States. Those countries were selected because each, except for the United States, scored among the lowest third of the 175 countries measured by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI).¹ Since 1990, when that index was developed by the Indian Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen and his colleagues, it has constituted the principal means for measuring human well-being globally. The index compares such variables as life expectancy, education, and access to health care, including such basic needs as safe drinking water, sanitation, and adequate daily nutrition. These measurements show that thirty of the thirty-two countries with the lowest HDI ranking are in Africa, which makes that continent the poorest in the world.²

Kenya was the only country we visited that was in the lowest HDI category, with a rating of 155 out of 178. Yet the others were not very far ahead: Ghana 139, South Africa 121, Jamaica 97.³ Even though the United States scored 17 in the HDI with an overall poverty rate of 12.8 percent in 2004, a disproportionate 40 percent of African Americans were classified as poor.⁴

Much of the available data supports the claim that poverty in Africa has steadily increased since the dawn of political independence on that continent one half century ago. In spite of the apparent intractability of the continent's poverty, most African scholars and civic leaders reject deterministic conclusions. In fact, our learned informants at every seminar were hopeful that



Participants in Pan-African Seminar on Religion and Poverty, Observatory Ridge, Johannesburg, South Africa, 14–24 July 2002. Front row (left to right): Madipoane Masenya (South Africa), (unidentified guest), Takatso Mofokeng (South Africa), Peter Paris (Canada/United States), Elizabeth Amoah (Ghana);

Second row (left to right): Esther Mombo (Kenya), Barbara Bailey (Jamaica), (unidentified guest), Simeon Ilesanmi (Nigeria/United States), Nyambura Njoroge (Kenya), Adrienne Daniels Paris (United States guest);

Third row (left to right): David Mosoma (South Africa), Glenda Erskine (United States guest), baby Dora and Linda Thomas (United States);

Fourth row (left to right): Noel Erskine (Jamaica/United States), Angelin Simmons (United States guest), Ray Owens (United States staff), Dwight Hopkins (United States), Katie Cannon (United States);

Back row (left to right): Kossi Ayedze (Togo), Anthony Pinn (United States), Lewin Williams (Jamaica), Joyce Williams (Jamaica guest). Missing from photo, Laurenti Magesa (Tanzania).

with adequate help from the Western nations, poverty in Africa would be eradicated in time. Moreover, in the year that our seminar was launched, such a viewpoint had been proposed by the United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, in his document “We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-first Century.”⁵ That proposal gave rise to the Millennium Declaration, which was adopted by world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit that same year.⁶ The principles of those documents have been fully embraced by the economist Jeffrey Sachs, who directs the Earth Institute at Columbia University. He makes the compelling argument that it is possible to solve the problem of poverty in Africa in a very short period of time.⁷ His extraordinary optimism is good news to the ears of African peoples.

Everywhere that our group visited, we saw the devastating marks of poverty: major deficiencies in health, education, clean water, security, and political freedom, which prevent people from competing effectively for a higher standard of living. Clearly, those conditions constitute the breeding grounds for civil violence, wars, widespread corruption, and various pandemics of malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases. Yet we also encountered countless signs of resiliency among local peoples who struggle fervently to eke out a living in the midst of immense adversity.

The second half of the twentieth century was dominated by various independence movements among African peoples, both on the continent and throughout the diaspora. As time went by, however, it became evident that the economic impact of colonialism and racial oppression had not been overcome by the various independence and civil rights victories. Rather, the majority of African peoples everywhere encountered new forms of social and economic impoverishment, which the Ghanaian historian A. Adu Boahen has attributed largely to the impact of colonialism:

If colonialism meant anything at all politically, it was the loss of sovereignty and independence by the colonized peoples. This loss of sovereignty, in turn, implied the loss of the right of a state to control its own destiny; to plan its own development; to decide which outside nations to borrow from or associate with or emulate; to conduct its own diplomacy and international relations; and above all, to manage or even mismanage its own affairs. . . . [C]olonialism completely isolated and insulated Africa. . . . It is in this loss of sovereignty and the consequent isolation from the outside world that one finds one of the most pernicious impacts of colonialism on Africa and one of the fundamental causes of its present underdevelopment and technological backwardness.⁸

Further, Adu Boahen explained how colonialists intentionally delayed Africa's industrial and technological development, destroyed the traditional diversity of agricultural cash crops by demanding a single-crop economy for each colonial country, and eradicated preexisting industries by increasing the importation of cheap goods in their stead.⁹ Thus he writes, "During the colonial period, Africans were encouraged to produce what they did not consume and to consume what they did not produce, a clear proof of the exploitative nature of the colonial political economy."¹⁰

Now, whenever African American scholars study the impact of colonialism on African and Caribbean societies, they readily observe that racial discrimination and segregation in the United States has had many effects similar to colonial occupation. As under colonialism, the ghettoization of African Americans in large urban centers has denied them equal access to the necessary resources for fair competition in the marketplace, which, by every social measurement, severely hindered their development for many generations. Thus, since African peoples have shared the common historic experience of oppression in one form or another, much common ground exists for moral discourse about these and related matters.

The ubiquitous presence of religion among African peoples is abundantly evident.¹¹ In its many diverse forms, religion constitutes their primary spiritual source of strength for survival, hope, and self-respect. Most important, whenever religious practices are under the control of African peoples, observers easily discern a holistic worldview that includes all dimensions of life. Thus, along with everything else, poverty among African peoples is quintessentially a religious concern.

The general purpose of this study was to develop a common moral discourse by studying religion and poverty through the multiple lenses of our respective academic disciplines.¹² Further, our group embraced a Pan-African consciousness similar to the one devised more than a century ago by various scholars and leaders from Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.¹³ As those early Pan-Africanists eagerly nurtured and promoted African unity in their common quest for political independence from European colonialism, so we also share a common desire to eradicate poverty among African peoples everywhere. Acknowledging many differing understandings of an African consciousness, we share with other Pan-Africanists the desire for deeper and more expansive unity among African peoples while preserving their rich cultural diversity. Since the curricula of theological schools and religion departments lack a Pan-African awareness, we offer this book as a much-needed resource for teachers and administrators in schools, colleges, and religious institutions on the African continent and throughout the diaspora.

Methodology

Our group of sixteen scholars from Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Jamaica, Canada, and the United States met with numerous well-informed specialists from universities, government, religious institutions, and nongovernmental organizations in each location for extensive fact-gathering and much intensive conversation. We also visited numerous programs in the respective regions to observe the various ways in which religious groups were responding to poverty and its consequences, the most prominent being unemployment, lack of access to education, the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, homeless orphaned children, and high infant mortality rates.

Admittedly, the difficulties of multicultural communication appear whenever Africans in the diaspora and on the continent come together. More often than not there is very little or no common ground among them. Usually, each strives to pull the other into his/her cultural orbit. Though such activity reveals a hospitable spirit, it alone is not a sufficient means for meaningful dialogue because the learning process is invariably one-sided. Clearly, the quest for unity among African peoples requires mutual understanding, which can be achieved only by respecting their diversity and relying less and less on the notion of common ancestral descent based on race or place of origin.

Apart from the negative experiences of oppression and poverty, what positive values do African peoples have in common? Elsewhere, I have explored that question in considerable depth by identifying and describing the basic moral and religious values widely shared by African peoples:¹⁴ values that were not obliterated by the horrific experiences of slavery, colonialism, or racial oppression under the doctrine of white supremacy. Rather, I argued that the moral virtues shared by African peoples arise from their common understandings of the interrelatedness of God, community, family, and personhood.¹⁵

This particular inquiry about religion and poverty was rooted in the awareness that the cultural diversity of African peoples requires academic scholars to develop communities of discourse for mutual understanding and practical action. Thus, the format of this study was modeled after a program that has been well tested over the past half century, namely, Operation Crossroads Africa.¹⁶

Since scholars work best when they have the freedom to develop their work in accordance with their own perspectives, it was agreed from the beginning that the participants would have maximum freedom in writing

their essays for this book. The editor's task would be that of bringing unity out of the diversity without sacrificing the latter. Thus, we sought to achieve with the essays what we try to do in our various disciplines of theological and religious studies: explore our subject matter through diverse perspectives. It should be noted, however, that all participants read one another's works-in-progress each year for the purpose of mutual encouragement, critical assessment, and common discourse.

In retrospect it was a good decision for the group to begin its travel and study in Ghana, formerly called the Gold Coast. That country not only has the distinction of being the first African nation to gain its independence from colonialism in 1957 but it is presently the site of two world heritage monuments, at Elmina and Cape Coast, which we visited. Built by the Portuguese and Swedes respectively in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, these monuments are massive castles, which for centuries constituted centers of European trade in gold and slaves. It is certainly fair to say that no part of our travels had a greater impact on the group than entering those castles and walking down into their dark, damp dungeons, where tens of thousands of slaves were warehoused while waiting for ships to carry them to a strange land where they would be permanently enslaved. Those fortresses stand today as vivid reminders of insatiable economic greed, unbelievable human suffering, and the complicity of Europeans, Americans, and Africans in the transatlantic slave trade.

Thus, part 1 of this book rightly begins with Katie Cannon, arguing that the deep roots of poverty lie in the slave trade. Barbara Bailey then demonstrates that the greatest impact of poverty is suffered by women and children.

Since poverty is both global and local, part 2 of this book analyzes the global challenges and local responses to poverty. Accordingly, Takatso Mofokeng carefully examines the nature of the so-called informal economy as an institutionalized local response, and Lewin Williams undertakes a theological analysis of the contemporary phenomenon of globalization.

Everywhere we went, we were concerned about the eradication of poverty. Thus, part 3 of this book presents analyses of four liberating strategies drawn from traditional religions, rituals of worship, biblical hermeneutics, and processes of decolonizing the mind. First, Elizabeth Amoah explains how poverty is understood in traditional African religions. Second, Linda Thomas and Dwight Hopkins demonstrate how religious rituals have the capacity to empower the poor. Third, Madipoane Masenya discusses her own *bosadi* method as a liberating hermeneutic for women reading the Bible in a patriarchal society. Finally, Nyambura Njoroge argues that the decoloni-

zation of the African mind requires the combined endeavors and insights of religionists, governmental policy makers, and literary writers in pursuit of genuine social transformation.

Further, our group was well aware of the ambiguities attending religion in general and Christianity in particular. Thus, part 4 comprises three analyses of the ambiguous dimensions of religion and its relation to poverty. First, Kossi Ayedze argues that since Christianity has often upheld poverty as a virtue, African Christians must now develop new understandings of the relation of wealth and poverty. Second, Esther Mombo argues that since the various programs for the alleviation of poverty in Africa are simplistic and ineffective, the true solution must come from Africans working cooperatively among themselves and with others. Third, Anthony Pinn argues that while poverty devalues the body and the various aesthetic acts of worship and celebration enhance it, religion in itself does not have sufficient power to eradicate poverty.

Part 5 of this book analyzes four theories for combating poverty that are deeply rooted in the cultural and political histories of African peoples. Laurenti Magesa critically evaluates the Tanzanian philosophy of *ujamaa*; Noel Erskine assesses the historical dialogical relations among African peoples in the Caribbean, the Americas, and Africa; Simeon Ilesanmi compares and contrasts civil and political rights on the one hand and developmental rights on the other; and Peter Paris argues for the primacy of the principle of self-initiation for all liberating struggles among African peoples, including that of poverty.

Now, let us look at each of the essays in a little more depth.

The Roots and Impact of Poverty

Clearly, no discussion of contemporary poverty in Africa can ignore the continuing impact of the horrific societal trauma of slavery on African peoples both on the continent and throughout the diaspora. Thus, part 1 of this book, “The Roots and Impact of Poverty,” rightly begins by looking at the connection between poverty and slavery.

The opening essay, by the African American ethicist Katie Cannon, is entitled “An Ethical Mapping of the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” a trade that she views as the originating cause of contemporary African poverty. She begins by discussing the way by which the fifteenth-century designation of Ghana as the Gold Coast lost currency when trade shifted in the seventeenth century from the exportation of products to the infamous buying and selling

of human beings; Ghana then became known as the Slave Coast. Both enterprises deprived Africa of its wealth in both material and human resources. Most important, she outlines the process by which the European demand for slaves was accommodated by the African suppliers. Thus, those on both sides of that horrendous enterprise disrupted and corrupted the religious and moral fabric of traditional African societies to such an extent that it has had an enduring deleterious effect on their economies and social systems up to the present day.

A similar probing inquiry is seen in the essay by the gender analyst Barbara Bailey of Jamaica, “Feminization of Poverty across Pan-African Societies: The Church’s Response—Alleviative or Emancipatory?” In defining poverty as material deprivation, social exclusion, and human degradation, she claims that its greatest toll is on women and children. She also observes that while most ecumenical initiatives tend to comprise strategies for reform, those at the local level are usually tactical responses to the immediate needs of ordinary people. She also discusses the plight of women and children, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and some of the important changes in the United Nations Development Program. With strong criticisms leveled against the rate of globalization processes, she challenges theological seminaries to include gender studies in their curricula as a necessary part of ministerial formation and the quest for economic justice for both women and children.

Challenges of the Global and Informal Economies

Throughout our travels and study, we encountered in both Africa and the Caribbean abundant signs of two major economic realities, namely, processes of globalization on the one hand and informal market economies on the other. Two members of our group had a deep interest in those topics and wrote essays on them that have been grouped together in part 2 of this book. It should be noted, however, that virtually no one in our group, and only one of our numerous informants, had anything positive to say about the processes of globalization, largely because of the crippling conditions imposed on Africans by the loan programs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In his essay “The Informal Economy and the Religion of Global Capital,” the South African ethicist Takatso Mofokeng argues that the so-called informal economy was created by the poor throughout Africa and the Caribbean as a means of survival. Noting that traditional religious practices both resist and

accommodate external intrusion and domination, he discusses how the processes of globalization strive to co-opt this local economy for their own purposes. Further, Mofokeng discusses this peculiar market's social organization, religious ideology, style of management, types of enterprises, and current means of promoting itself through music, song, dance, and language.

The Jamaican theologian Lewin Williams, in whose memory this book is dedicated and who passed away before its publication, entitled his essay "A Theological Perspective on the Effects of Globalization on Poverty in Pan-African Contexts." In his endeavor to see a positive relationship between the contemporary terms "globalization" and "global village" on the one hand, and the traditional Christian understanding of *koinonia* on the other hand, he carefully demonstrates how certain economic practices of globalization often result in divisions and impoverishment. In a constructive way, he discusses how *koinonia* could become a remedial factor if allowed to function as a normative theological principle in the Caribbean, where a dialogue has been in process between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Caribbean Council of Churches. He concludes that such a dialogue could constitute a necessary condition for the efficacy of a *koinonia* approach.

Religious Strategies for Liberating the Poor

Throughout our study it was assumed that all peoples respond to oppression in dialectical forms of adaptation and resistance. In our endeavor to discover how religion relates to such responses, we discerned various cultural factors that contained both debilitating and liberating potentialities. These included (a) the conflict between Western and African worldviews; (b) the pervasive nature of patriarchy and the gradual change in women's consciousness; (c) religious rituals as empowering resources; and (d) contemporary agencies for social transformation. The four essays addressing these concerns are presented in part 3 of this volume.

In her essay "African Traditional Religion and the Concept of Poverty," the Ghanaian religionist Elizabeth Amoah argues that poverty is a very complex subject in traditional African cultures because their holistic worldviews unite the material and spiritual dimensions of life, thus rendering everything sacred in some sense. Most important, since human well-being constitutes the subject matter of traditional African religions, poverty represents its antithesis. Thus the causes of poverty can only be combated by utilizing peculiar codes and rituals that undermine their efficacy. Amoah claims that traditional African proverbs comprise the locus for such practices. She con-

cludes by calling upon Africans to look to their religious traditions for effective antidotes capable of restoring wholeness by delivering African peoples from the seductive powers of Western individualism and materialism.

In their jointly written essay “Religion and Poverty: Ritual and Empowerment in Africa and the African Diaspora,” the African American theologians Linda Thomas and Dwight Hopkins discuss the findings of their comparative ethnographical studies of selected rituals in South Africa, Jamaica, and Chicago. Their study demonstrates that despite social fragmentation, political dislocation, and economic disparity, the poor are strengthened psychologically and spiritually by the various rituals of water, touching, music, dance, and song. Contrary to the disrespect accorded African beliefs by most Western philosophies, Thomas and Hopkins argue that African Christianity unites the material and spiritual realms of life, as evidenced in the Zionist, Apostolic, and Aladura churches in Africa, the Rastafarians in Jamaica, and the nascent Afrocentric churches in the United States and elsewhere.

The South African biblical scholar Madipoane Masenya argues in her essay “The Bible and Poverty in African Pentecostal Christianity: The *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Approach” that although the Bible is enormously important among women in her Pentecostal tradition, it does not help them overcome structures of domination either in the Bible or in their own lives. Thus, she constructs her own approach to Bible reading, which she calls the *bosadi* method. It helps women become aware of patriarchal domination present both in the Bible and in their own lives. Using the book of Ruth as an example, she illustrates how the women in the text accommodated themselves to the dominant cultural forces of gender, class, and ethnicity. In light of Jesus’ actions of affirming and empowering women, her *bosadi* approach helps them discover how to emancipate their own consciousness while reading texts that are deeply rooted in patriarchal constraints similar to those in their own contexts.

Similarly, in her essay “The Struggle for Full Humanity in Poverty-Stricken Kenya,” Nyambura Njoroge, ethicist and longtime staff member of the World Council of Churches, calls upon the Kenyan government, religious scholars, and the churches to become advocates for social justice and human dignity by developing a consciousness that is void of all vestiges of domination and control. She challenges her readers to assume a new appreciation for the historic freedom struggle in Kenya as seen in the Mau Mau freedom fighters of the last century and the contemporary literary writings of people like Ngugi wa Thiong’o. In short, Njoroge challenges all Kenyan leaders and especially educators to help decolonize African minds and work for con-

structive social transformation through interdisciplinary, holistic methods of teaching, research, and writing. She concludes that Kenyans themselves must become the primary agents in delivering the nation from poverty.

The Ambiguous Relation of Religion and Poverty

It did not take long for our group to see that religion is not a simple phenomenon. Rather, in all of its many forms, it is both diverse and complex. This is true of Islam, traditional African religions, Rastafarianism, and Christianity. For example, the diversity of Christianity is manifested in its denominational structures, cultural variations, and theological and ethical understandings. Relative to our inquiry, however, the complexity of Christianity is seen in its ambiguous relation to poverty.

In his essay entitled “Poverty among African People and the Ambiguous Role of Christian Thought,” the church historian Kossi Ayedze from the Republic of Togo argues that Christian beliefs may lead to either improving or diminishing the lives of their adherents. This is vividly seen in the improved economies of Christian colonialists on the one hand and the oppression of Africans on the other hand. Ironically, however, Ayedze points out that while many colonial Christians accumulated much wealth for themselves, many Christian missionaries in Africa viewed poverty as a moral virtue. Unfortunately, many African Christians embraced that teaching, which, he contends, has helped slow down Africa’s economic growth. Ayedze does counter such teachings, however, by appealing to such major Christian theologians as Saint Augustine and John Calvin, who did not condemn wealth as such but, rather, criticized its means of acquisition and the purposes it served. Thus, he concludes that African Christians should rethink their views on wealth and poverty as a first step in the process of eradicating poverty from Africa and throughout the world.

In her essay “Religion and Materiality: The Case of Poverty Alleviation,” the Kenyan church historian Esther Mombo views reparations, debt relief, and fair trade as ineffective and simplistic solutions to the problem of poverty. Similarly, she criticizes the teachings of the so-called prosperity gospel and the charitable services of many churches as inadequate means for alleviating poverty. Instead, Mombo argues that the eradication of poverty lies in long-term strategies and cooperative interdisciplinary work with economics, science, and ethics. Though some Africans benefited economically from the colonial and missionary enterprises, Mombo claims that most did not. In fact, many corrupt rulers helped expand poverty after independence.

Thus, she applauds the efforts of churches and nonprofit organizations in striving to alleviate poverty through education, the self-employment system called *jua kali*, as well as various programs in health care, agriculture, animal husbandry, and social services. Following a detailed discussion of various debt relief programs, she concludes that since the problem of poverty is structural, the primary agents for its eradication must be Africans themselves, working cooperatively with others committed to that pursuit.

The African American religious studies scholar Anthony Pinn argues in his essay “Warm Bodies, Cold Currency: A Study of Religion’s Response to Poverty” that there is a strong negative correlation between religion and economic poverty. He claims that even though the bodies of the poor are attacked by the conditions of poverty due to health issues and poor health delivery services, the aesthetic acts of worship, celebration, bodily purification, and spirit possession among the poor enhance rather than diminish the body. Moreover, he argues that when possessed by the divine, the bodies of the poor are infused with great value as compared with poverty’s devaluation of the body. Yet, he concludes, religion as such does not have sufficient power to eradicate poverty.

Practical Theories for Combating Poverty

Our travel and observation also taught us that just as there are many theories about the causes of poverty, so too are there many understandings of how to combat it. Four such theories are the Tanzanian concept of *ujamaa*, the Caribbean spirit of resistance, the human rights tradition, and various self-initiated practices. Each is discussed in part 5 of this book.

In his essay “Nyerere on *Ujamaa* and Christianity as Transforming Forces in Society,” Laurenti Magesa, a Roman Catholic Tanzanian theologian and priest, analyzes the theory of social change called *ujamaa*, which is an African philosophy of community that gained worldwide visibility under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1962–1982, and a devout Catholic. Magesa sees a close relationship between the *ujamaa* philosophy and the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Accordingly, Magesa argues that Nyerere’s legacy to the world is his conviction that Christianity and *ujamaa* are compatible because both hold that poverty dehumanizes people, who are made in the image of God and hence should be treated with dignity and respect. Magesa demonstrates how this view of humanity provides normative criteria for condemning the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. After discuss-

ing the contours of the great class divide in Tanzania and elsewhere, he claims that Nyerere's policies failed because of the strident opposition to ujamaa by the economic and religious powers of his day. Magea concludes that, like Christianity, ujamaa requires a conversation of the mind and the heart to desire human unity and equality among all peoples.

In his essay "Caribbean Issues: The Caribbean and African American Churches' Response," the Jamaican American theologian Noel Erskine compares and analyzes the cultures of resistance among African Americans and Jamaicans, both of whom endured centuries of enslavement and many other forms of oppression. They interacted with one another a great deal from the early nineteenth century onward, so their struggles became intertwined. He also discusses three important ventures: (a) the 1992 Caribbean/African American dialogue (CAAD), which identified three problems facing Caribbeans: racism, cultural identity, and the lack of democratic procedures in economic trade; (b) several consultations of African Caribbeans and African Americans in Cuba between 1984 and 1990 focusing on the work of the Pastor for Peace organization; and (c) the need for a revitalization of emancipatory partnerships between their respective churches.

In his essay "Africa's Poverty, Human Rights, and a Just Society," the Nigerian Christian ethicist and lawyer Simeon Ilesanmi argues that the protection of fundamental human rights is a necessary condition in all attempts to address poverty in Africa. Accordingly, he discusses the 1981 Banjul Charter adopted by the African heads of state, who affirmed the view that civil and political rights imply social, economic, and cultural rights. Subsequent to the adoption of that charter, "development rights" became Africa's contribution to the world's discourse on human rights. Following a discussion of Africa's extensive debt crisis, Ilesanmi's argument has three parts: the primacy of social and economic rights over civil and political rights, three objections to social and economic development rights, and the primacy of civil and political rights over development rights.

The volume closes with my essay "Self-Initiation: A Necessary Principle in the African Struggle to Abolish Poverty." Written from the position of an African Canadian-American social ethicist, it discusses the principle of self-initiation that has motivated all historic African struggles against oppression, including the independence movements in Africa, abolitionism, and the civil rights struggle in America. I conclude that since every significant gain in those struggles originated with the self-initiatives of African peoples, the eventual eradication of poverty among African peoples will be no exception.

Findings

The most important finding of this study was the discovery of much evidence to support the primary assumption underlying this project, namely, that African peoples share common concerns about the relation of religion and poverty in spite of the diversity of languages, regions, ethnicities, and theologies. Thus, we conclude that much common ground exists for continuing moral discourse and cooperative action on this crucial issue.

Second, the group's observations and discussions revealed that there are differences between Western and African understandings of poverty. The latter do not define poverty solely as a lack of material resources. In fact, many Africans who possess very little money or property do not consider themselves poor. Rather, they view alienation from families, friends, and communities as the state of true poverty, the intensity of which is increased by the lack of religious faith. Consequently, those who live in a family that is related to a larger community often do not think of themselves as being poor in spite of their lack of material resources.

Thus, it is amazing to see countless numbers of people working zealously and even joyfully in the midst of the densely populated squatter camps that are commonplace in so many African cities. It would be difficult for many outsiders to imagine the experience of living in such small, corrugated-iron-roofed dwellings, sharing communal latrines alongside public water pumps and open sewers, with children playing in stagnant pools of dirty water. Yet, in spite of the high infant mortality rate, the constant threat of disease, sickness, and death, the normal processes of living are sustained. One sees everywhere the hustle and bustle of countless numbers of people daily striving to eke out a living. Uniformed schoolchildren jostle one another in their daily walks from school as they happily hasten to their respective homes to assume their shared responsibilities of necessary work to sustain the family's life. Thus, many African people appear to be strengthened and even inspired by the habitual activities of their familial and communal life. They seem hopeful for a better day. Despondency and depression are overcome by the communal spirit of belonging, which fosters the virtues of compassion, sharing, and mutual respect for one another.

Clearly, the countless number of orphaned children on the streets of many African cities is a horrendous reality for all who have eyes to see. Separated from families and communities by the ravages of war and HIV/AIDS, a generation of children is growing up on city streets where they will never have known the loving care and protection of either natural or surrogate families. These are truly poor by African standards. Such a com-