From saving to empowering to including

Changing understandings of poverty at the Brotherhood of St Laurence

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Introduction

To explore the Brotherhood of St Laurence's changing understandings of poverty is timely with the appointment of Paul Smyth as the new Director of Social Action and Research at the Brotherhood and as Professor of Social Policy at Melbourne University. In responding to the theme 'Ending poverty and promoting social inclusion', there is the opportunity to look forward and to do things differently, but it is also important that that we are informed by the understandings and lessons of the past.

A similar exercise was undertaken just over 10 years ago, in June 1993. The Brotherhood Library staff organised a daylong history seminar, *Looking forward, looking back: The Brotherhood's role in changing views of poverty* (ed. Magree 1993). A comment from Connie Benn[1] at the seminar underlined how important it is to understand history. Connie observed that the move away from a casework approach towards the structural approach to dealing with poverty in the early 1970s occurred, at least partly, because a substantial body of international research documented the deficiencies of casework as a response to poverty (Benn 1993). She comments on 1960s research in the United States and Canada in the following way:

> In the 1960s, evidence about the failure of the effectiveness of casework piled up. My favourite study was the Cheumung County Evaluation of Casework Services to Multi-problem Families. This rigorous research study, carried out in an American public assistance agency, found that an intensive casework program with one group of clients on assistance had no appreciable effect when compared with a control group also receiving assistance and not casework. A new report, 'Poverty in Canada', published at the time also found that casework services to people in poverty had no real value and merely fostered resentment in people who were forced to receive casework in order to obtain financial assistance. (Benn 1993, pp.24–5).

Today we use case management extensively to respond to a range of poverty-related problems, such as reliance on income support, and unemployment and joblessness. Perhaps we might have used it in a more discriminating and cautious way if we had remembered Connie's lessons about the limitations of casework.

Such insights are very relevant to the Brotherhood's own work, but they clearly have a much broader value. The Brotherhood's understandings of poverty have influenced many other Australians over the years and have informed the development of policies at different levels of government. For myself as a young person studying both economics and social work at Melbourne University in the 1960s, the intellectual appreciation that poverty was not a problem of individual behaviour was greatly assisted by the Brotherhood's work. But equally important was the emotional acknowledgment of structural inequality. This emotional acknowledgment did not come about through books and journal articles, but through a student placement experience at the Brotherhood in 1969. The placement allowed for intensive contact with people experiencing poverty who possessed incredible

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[1] Connie Benn is a previous Director of Research and Policy at the BSL and was the Coordinator of the well-known Family Centre Project from 1972 to 1975.

strengths but were always living on the edge. In her reflections on working at the Brotherhood in the late 1950s with the Family Service Project (FSP, discussed further later), Janet Paterson (1993, p.5) comments:

> The FSP was my personal university. It was the dominant influence on my approach to the new job … I learned about people who were chronically poor – how they coped with a world that was different from the one I knew, with less education, less money, … I learned to admire their survival skills (even those that were illegal) and their resilience in the face of deprivation, absence of material comforts and life's pleasures – recreation and holidays.

The 1993 seminar was informed by the recollections and insights of a number of people who had been involved with the Brotherhood over the years. However in this paper, I attempt to cover the terrain alone.[2] And so my paper is necessarily selective and incomplete. It is very much informed by *my* interpretation of the meanings of events and writings. Others may see things differently. The title of the paper is *From saving to empowering to including* and it could also have contained the words 'rehabilitating' and 'redistributing'. The point of the title is that although the Brotherhood's historic understandings of poverty have always put more emphasis on a structural view of poverty, there are still important and subtle shifts over the years, especially in the articulated responses to poverty. As Janet Taylor (2000) points out, a structural view of poverty can still mean very different things. For example, it can mean the need for changes to the social security system or for a wholesale restructuring of the economy. Further, the structural view does not necessarily mean that there is no role for promoting individual agency as a response to poverty. So we should not assume that the Brotherhood's structural understanding of poverty has not changed over the years.

In this paper I explore some of the shifts in understandings and responses. The paper suggests that the early years were characterised by the need to *save* people from poverty, then in the 1950s there is a much greater emphasis in the role of *rehabilitation* of individuals, with the significant shift in the 1970s toward *empowerment*. The need for *redistribution* also becomes more important from the late 1970s into the 1980s, and these days, *inclusion* has much currency. These changes over the decades are placed in the context of a changing Australian society, recognising that the Brotherhood has influenced, and been influenced by, the broader social and economic environment and its changing discourse. The paper concludes with some themes and issues that reflect the continuities and the discontinuities in understandings and responses over the years.

Saving the poor: 1930s and 1940s

When Father Tucker established the Brotherhood in Melbourne during the recession of the 1930s, action against unemployment dominated its early work. This was a time of very high unemployment, but also of very limited, and conditional, assistance to unemployed

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[2] However I am very grateful for the access to unpublished summaries of work undertaken by Brotherhood staff and available through the Library. These included *A summary of brotherhood employment services 1972–1998* (no author), *A brief history of Brotherhood housing research since 1942* (no author), the paper by Janet Taylor, *Getting social work research on the agenda: a Brotherhood of St Laurence perspective*, and a document by Patricia Newell, *Key areas of research in the past thirty years.*

people by governments in Australia, and of few services apart from those provided by charitable organisations (Bland 1976, Roe 1976a). The limited responses to unemployment and poverty were related to views that poverty was the result of either individual misfortune or failure, rather than structural factors, and that unemployment was short-term (Bland 1976). Father Tucker challenged these individualistic understandings. He was very influenced by the 1890s recession experiences of his father (Canon Horace Tucker) and by his father's view that poverty and unemployment were connected to economic and political factors (Scott 1993). However, Father Tucker still upheld individual responsibility and did not accept that men should refuse to work, for example (Carter 1967).

When unemployment declined during the 1940s, the problem of the insecurity of work and life became a focus of concern and comment. This focus on insecurity resonates with recent writings and debates about the insecurity of work and family life with the casualisation of the labour market and the uncertainty of many relationships (Green & McClelland 2003). Poor housing, slums and homelessness were also prevalent problems through the 1930s and 1940s and therefore the focus of much of the Brotherhood's work over the period, and of the efforts of other reformers such as Oswald Barnett (Davison 2000). Father Tucker campaigned for action against housing poverty and for the establishment of the Housing Commission. Davison (1983) discusses the earlier concern with slums and slum life, with a link seen between the dirt and the density of the physical environment and the residents' disorderly behaviour. A similar idea is portrayed in the Brotherhood film, *Beautiful Melbourne*, in which dirty children and sick adults are seen in the context of inadequate housing, filthy streets and dripping taps.

The understanding and response to unemployment, work insecurity and slums during this period can be interpreted as the need to *save* people from the effects of a poor environment and the hopelessness of unemployment and to enable them to recover hope and dignity and to be self-supporting (Carter 1967). The development of a settlement at Carrum Downs was to 'save' people through country air and a better environment (Carter 1967), alongside a push for more jobs. As the slum environment influenced the inhabitants' behaviour and prospects, eradicating slums was a key aspect to saving people from poverty. The notion of saving also fits well with the more religious tenor in the Brotherhood's writings about poverty in these early years. In 1935 in the *Church Times*, Tucker appeals for help for the Brotherhood's work, stating:

> Having saved nine families and with the hope of saving others, we aim at making our people as far as possible self-supporting and contained (Tucker 1935).

The period from 1939 to 1949 was a time of service expansion at the Brotherhood and also of the development of the post-war welfare state in Australia. In Australia access to income support was extended to groups such as unemployed people, widows and children; services were expanded; and welfare bureaucracies were established (Roe 1976b). The sense of the need for significant social reform was encapsulated by Chifley's 'Light on the hill' (Roe 1976b). However, while the Brotherhood developed a number of new services, including a homeless boys' hostel, a social service bureau and a club for aged pensioners, they were not seen as sufficient to deal with the underlying problems of poverty.

Advocacy became an important Brotherhood response. This advocacy was geared towards awakening the public to the existence of poverty and the need for significant reform, not only in societal structures, but also in attitudes and values such as selfishness and complacency. A quote by Father Tucker in one of the Brotherhood's *Dope and damnation* series of pamphlets illustrates his view that substantial change (beyond individual services) was needed. Unless that happened, service delivery could be the same as *dope*, as it could desensitise the community to the need for further action. Dope was defined as:

> Opiate, narcotic drug used in medical practice to make insensitive to pain. In social policy to administer palliatives rather than thorough going [sic] reforms (Tucker 1945).

Davison (2000, p.12) points to the Brotherhood's special 'universal perspective', a belief that all aspects of a man's life are interdependent, and that social problems must be tackled holistically'. The period also marked the early use of research to inform advocacy and to better understand poverty. The most significant example was the study of homelessness by John Reeves (1943). Again, according to Davison (2000, p.9), this study was part of the social survey tradition which 'was inspired by the ethical imperative of Christianity to "seek and save" those who were lost'.

And so by the end of the 1940s, four key aspects of the Brotherhood's response to poverty—service delivery, research and advocacy, informed by a social justice perspective—were established. But the Brotherhood's interpretation of each of the four aspects changed over the years. In the 1950s, the change was away from the religious dominance and saving the poor, towards the more professional approach of rehabilitating.

Rehabilitating the poor: 1950s and1960s

In contrast with the 1940s, in Australia there was only limited expansion of state responsibility for social policy and action against poverty in the 1950s and 1960s (Roe 1976c). The development of state action was mainly through increased support for voluntary organisations and the Brotherhood grew considerably as a social welfare organisation over the period, assisted by the appointment of Geoffrey Sambell as Director of Social Services in 1949. Sambell's approach helped the Brotherhood to be at the forefront of a professionalised approach to service delivery, with the appointment of social workers.

However, at the same time as the Brotherhood grew as a multi-service organisation, its reputation for innovation and action–research also developed through the Family Service Project at Camp Pell, Royal Park, commencing in 1955 (Carter 1976). The Family Service Project was a joint Brotherhood–Housing Commission project 'designed to bring so-called "multi-problem families" up to Housing Commission standards of acceptability' (Paterson 1993, p.5). Links were developed with the University of Melbourne, with Len Tierney undertaking research with the Family Services Project.

Another distinctive response developed by Sambell during the 1950s was work with other organisations, in the understanding that action against poverty required collaborative effort in service delivery and in research and advocacy. Through Sambell, the Brotherhood was

instrumental in the establishment of ACOSS and VCOSS. According to David Scott (1993), over this time the Brotherhood's activities became more structured and focused. The response to poverty was characterised by a combination of service development, professionalisation, work with other organisations and a more systematic and informed approach to advocacy. Submissions to government were another form of advocacy. They called for specific service changes, drawing on Brotherhood service delivery experience and research.

During a time of significant economic prosperity and low unemployment, poverty was frequently characterised as *missing out*—as the benefits of economic growth were not 'trickling down' to people in poverty and as government services (such as pensions or public housing) were not planned and delivered in accordance with their needs. Some people who experienced poverty were also seen to need special support and assistance (rehabilitation) to reach the standards required to take advantage of government services or to participate in the economic expansion of the time. Service delivery was also seen as fragmented and in need of better coordination. The emphasis on rehabilitation can be overdrawn but it was an important element in the Family Service Project and some contemporary submissions and writings.[3] The rehabilitation focus resonates with current approaches that aim to get people jobs through assistance with skills development, or through programs such as the Personal Support Programme, that provide support to people with a range of personal problems to assist them to become more employable and to take advantage of employment services.

During the 1960s there was increased questioning of the effectiveness of individualised service delivery aimed at overcoming personal inadequacies as a response to poverty. While the 1960s did not see significant social policy change in Australia, it was a time of considerable research and advocacy work within the Brotherhood, across the nation and overseas, especially generated by the War on Poverty in the United States and the development of sociology as a discipline. The Brotherhood's research developed strongly over the 1960s and dealt with the problems of housing, education, credit access and inadequate income support payments. The idea of the *culture* of poverty was very influential, drawing on the writings of Oscar Lewis (1962). However, Paterson interprets the Brotherhood's view of the culture of poverty at the time as a 'realistic adaptation to a socially perverse situation' (Harrington 1973, cited by Paterson 1993, p.5), with the main problem being situational rather than cultural or personal inadequacies. As Glennerster (2000) suggests, today writers such as Lawrence Mead see it in a more negative way. Mead talks about the underclass, and sees the welfare system and individual behaviour as the causal agents, rather than the operation of the economy and the absence of full-time work.

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[3] See for example the contribution of David Scott in the 1959 publication, *Seminar on multi-problem families*. This seminar was based on the Brotherhood's Family Services Project. Scott's key argument is the need for changes in the service delivery system so it is more oriented to the needs of such families; and while Scott rejects individualistic explanations of poverty, he still acknowledges the 'socially weak' families, who need additional help. Similarly, in Scott's 1965 article, 'Poverty in Australia', in *Dissent*, while he identifies the need for structural reforms (such as increases to wages and social security payments and the supply of low cost housing), he still talks about 'case poverty' and the need for social work assistance for those whose 'poverty stems from inadequacies in coping with life in a modern society' (Scott 1965, p.36).

The hidden nature of poverty and the need for voices of the poor to be heard was also beginning to be articulated by the Brotherhood in the late 1960s (Roe 1976c). The Brotherhood's submissions continued to become more sophisticated and the articulated need for a substantial awakening of the community to the existence of poverty at a time of prosperity was reinforced by Professor Ronald Henderson's research on poverty at the University of Melbourne. However the idea of the culture of poverty was still problematic, and the focus on rehabilitation of the 1950s was replaced with ideas of empowerment and redistribution[4] over the next two decades.

Empowering the poor through advocacy and action–research: the 1970s and the Family Centre Project

The first half of the 1970s was a time of hope and expansion in Australia. While the long boom had ended and unemployment was increasing, these problems were not yet recognised as part of a significant and permanent global economic reordering. Instead, with the opportunities provided by the Henderson Poverty Inquiry and the election of the Whitlam Government, priority was given to social, urban and community development and significant structural change appeared possible. It appeared as if Australia might embrace social democracy and reject the more residual approaches of the past for dealing with social policy and poverty. Using Townsend's model, Peter Allen (1993) characterises the change in the early 1970s in areas such as health, education and urban development, as moving from the old 'conditional welfare for the few' (p33) approach, with attempts to introduce policies based on the principle of 'distributional justice for all' (p.34) which required action against inequality.

The establishment of the Family Centre Project (FCP) at the Brotherhood fitted well with this changing climate. As previously mentioned, it meant a rejection of individualised responses to poverty that aimed through casework to improve individual functioning, and the adoption of an empowerment approach, requiring changes to societal structures. The Social Work Service with a caseload of around 600 families per year was closed down, in favour of the FCP that was to work intensively with 60 families (Benn 1993). In contrast with the Family Service Project some 15 years earlier, the aim was not to change the behaviour of the members of these 60 families who experienced serious chronic difficulties, but rather:

> To provide considerable resources to a group of poor families **so they can attain power over** the social and economic conditions which affect their lives (Benn 1993, p.25 – emphasis mine).

Empowerment was facilitated at the FCP through a four-power model—power over relationships, resources, information and decision-making. The project strongly encouraged participation not only in activities but also in decisions about how the service should develop and function. As Connie Benn stresses, the FCP meant a rejection of the

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[4] In the article in *Dissent* in 1965, David Scott discusses the concept of redistribution. Scott talks about the complementarity between social justice and redistribution, and economic growth. Scott (1965, p.36) quotes Gunnar Myrdal's point that, 'Redistribution and increasing purchasing power can be regarded as laying the basis for expansion by the economy as well as a furtherance of social justice'. Much of the Brotherhood's later advocacy in the 1980s and early 1990s was to reinforce this point, which was also taken up by ACOSS.

culture of poverty idea, but was a development approach that had a number of elements, including:

- changing institutions not people
- resource and not problem oriented
- individual self-actualisation rather than stigmatisation
- social change rather than social control
- participants' freedom to make life choices, determine their own lifestyles and make decisions as consumers
- professional accountability to consumers (paraphrased from Benn 1993, p26).

The action–research focus of the FCP meant that the lessons and value of the project could inform Brotherhood advocacy, which in turn would influence Australian social policy more widely. Brotherhood action–research could assist Australia to move towards social democracy by demonstrating the value of action based on distributive justice principles, which could then be adopted by governments of various levels. The action–research strategy along with the empowerment model was used in other projects at the Brotherhood throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, including work to empower older people (SPAN), innovative housing and different approaches to dealing with unemployment. It was also used to inform a number of policy-related submissions, including to the Poverty Inquiry, the Inquiry into Labour Market Training, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare and the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration (Benn 1993). Policy proposals in submissions during the 1970s were frequently detailed and innovative but also clearly related to principles of distributive justice and empowerment.[5]

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[5] See for example the report (BSL 1979) commissioned by the Victorian Department of Social Welfare to deal with the responsiveness of manpower (sic) programs to the emerging problem of long-term unemployment. The BSL report has detailed recommendations that are also informed by eleven principles, all of which have a strong structural perspective and a rights-based approach. They are very different from current approaches (by the community) to the rights of unemployed people. A summary (and slightly modified) version follows:

1. Every person has a right to an equal opportunity to develop as a person to the fullest extent through good quality education, health, housing and social services, without regard to their capacity to pay.
2. Systems of government and the institutions of society must be determined by people's needs and rights. In this context power should be decentralised and participation maximised wherever and however possible.
3. All persons have the right to the satisfaction of their basic needs, in particular, meaningful activity, to ensure that they are able to function at a level which maintains personal dignity and is commensurate with minimum standards established by society.
4. All persons have the right to adequate income to fulfil basic needs. This income should be available either through work or income security measures … Inability to obtain work is a function of economic, social and political forces in a dynamic and changing society and is not the fault of the individual.
5. Given the chance to obtain employment that is personally satisfying and challenging, all persons want to work.
6–9 All should have the right to work, to develop to their full work potential and to be employed in jobs that are not harmful, and society has a responsibility to maximise the availability of work. All different groups have a right to be involved in determining the nature of society.
11. Manpower programs should be planned and implemented to protect the rights of participants as employees. (BSL 1979, pp.25–6).

However, while many of the ideas generated by the empowerment model and the action research approach were taken up by others, the change of government in the mid 1970s, together with increased unemployment and economic difficulties, halted the move to social democracy. The Fraser Government moved to curtail government expenditure and economic instability and unemployment brought about a sense of crisis in welfare states in Australia and elsewhere. Programs to demonstrate increased government action had less chance of success in such a climate. Economic difficulties also meant a return to a dominant focus on unemployment as a reason for poverty. Groundbreaking qualitative research by Graeme Brewer[6] with unemployed people about the experience of unemployment demonstrated a different way of having their voices heard and gave the Brotherhood a distinctive reputation for this type of research. However, as economic problems of the 1970s continued into the 1980s, economics became the dominant discipline in public policy and also in poverty research and analysis. As a result, the idea of poverty as income poverty, the relationship of income poverty to inequality, and the importance of redistribution as a response all achieved prominence.

Redistributing towards the poor: the 1980s and 1990s

The early 1980s recession ratcheted unemployment up to well over 10 per cent of the labour force. Long-term unemployment and youth unemployment were significant policy issues, as they did not fall significantly with the subsequent economic recovery. The elections of the Hawke and Cain Governments provided renewed opportunities for the Brotherhood's work to inform policy change in a number of areas. In the 1980s these included the relatively short-lived and strongly contested employment creation and work experience programs, tax and income security change, action to support self-help by disadvantaged and disempowered groups, issues of homelessness and access to a range of services including dental care. Research, policy work and advocacy concentrated on child poverty from the early 1980s onwards, with the recognition that breadwinner unemployment and the growth of sole parent families had changed the face of poverty from older people to families with children. Understanding and responding to the female face of poverty and the unequal position of women was also a priority for research and for Brotherhood-wide projects such as the Affirmative Action Unit.

The Brotherhood drew on Peter Townsend's definition of relative poverty as having 'so few resources in relation to the average that the purchase of goods and participation in activities regarded as normal is not possible' (Townsend 1979) to inform its own understanding and to educate the community. This focus on poverty as a lack of resources fitted well with the dominance of economics in Australian discourse and public policy decision-making over the period. The economic dominance led to work on tax, income security, fiscal policy and unemployment. The resource focus, combined with an acceptance that Australian poverty was 'relative poverty' and therefore very connected to inequality, led to an increasing awareness of the need for *redistribution of resources* if poverty was to be tackled. This approach had been recommended by Professor Ronald Henderson in the *First Main Report* from the Poverty Report (Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1975). The report suggested that the cost of action to improve the incomes of the poor could be met by redistributing the benefits of economic

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[6] See for example, Brewer 1975, 1978, 1980.

growth towards the poor. However as Ian Manning (1998) has pointed out, this redistributive strategy at least partly relied on the continuation of the strong economic growth experienced by Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and was undermined by the return to economic insecurity from the mid 1970s onwards.

There were some opportunities for redistribution of resources towards the poor afforded by the Hawke Government in the 1980s, especially through the Minister for Social Security, Brian Howe, following the Social Security Review he commissioned in the mid 1980s. The resulting increase in income support payments, especially to low-income families with children, alongside improvements to services, has been shown as very important in improving the incomes and living standards of many (although not all) low-income people (Harding & Szukalska 1999). However the increases were largely financed by targeting and by tighter means tests, and so it could be argued that while there was redistribution towards the poor, it was more from the middle class towards the poor than from the rich to the poor. The prevalent view in government was that there was limited scope for broader redistribution through increased government spending. This view was reinforced in the mid 1980s by further economic insecurity generated by deterioration in Australia's trading position, in the late 1980s by the share market and property market collapse, and again by the recession of the early 1990s. But perhaps the most important reason for the perception that there was only a very limited scope for redistribution was the prominence of neo-liberal economics. Not only did economic policy dominate public policy, but also the form of economics, neo-liberal economics, favoured market solutions, deregulation, and lower levels of taxation and government spending (McClelland 2003). As a result the Brotherhood's response was increasingly couched in the economic language of efficiency and equity, as it contributed to new debates that commenced in the early 1990s about issues such as privatisation, wage deregulation and low wages, and the insecurity of work.

By the 1990s, it was recognised that Australia (alongside other Western industrialised countries) was undergoing fundamental economic and social change that was transforming work and family life and driving inequality, poverty and insecurity. The Brotherhood continued to work on the basics of unemployment, education and training, income support, access to services such as child-care, and providing a voice to low-income people. However it also became more concerned to debate and understand the nature, impacts and responses to more fundamental change, through projects such as the Future of Work and the Prevention of Youth Homelessness. It was also concerned to understand the dynamic and long-term nature of poverty, given the growth of long-term unemployment and joblessness: this interest was informed by projects such as the Income and Expenditure Project (in the 1980s) and the Life Chances Project in the 1990s. Action–research on how to provide pathways for young people to move from school to work further contributed, as did a growing interest in locational disadvantage.

Towards the end of the 1990s the Howard Government had translated the problem of long-term unemployment and joblessness into a problem of welfare dependency and commissioned a Reference Group on Welfare Reform to develop recommendations that would reduce dependency and encourage self-reliance. The Reference Group (2000a & 2000b) responded by recommending that a fundamental goal of welfare should be to encourage participation by welfare recipients. While acknowledging the importance of adequate levels of income support, the Reference Group gave much less attention to

ensuring adequacy and to redistributive action to reduce income poverty, than to promoting participation, especially participation in paid work. The interest in participation was also responding to a growing concern about social exclusion, originating in Europe, but also seen in the new social policy discourse in the United States and the United Kingdom. Social exclusion was favoured over poverty as a concept, as it was seen to be more likely to capture the multi-dimensional and dynamic issues related to poverty, to have more policy currency and to better engage public understanding and attention (Jones & Smyth 1999). And so, by the beginning of the new century, promoting inclusion was developing as a dominant response to poverty-related problems.

Conclusion: themes and issues

Two distinguishing and enduring features of the Brotherhood's approach to poverty have been the adoption of a structural approach to understanding poverty, rather than seeing poverty as the result of individual incapacity or failure, and the related need to prevent poverty occurring through action at a societal level, rather than simply ameliorating its effects. These two features have been informed by a commitment to social justice arising from the Brotherhood's Anglican tradition and have contributed to the development of a strong research, policy development and advocacy capacity alongside service delivery. However this tradition also contains variations in how poverty has been understood and responded to over the years and has presented recurring challenges to poverty researchers and advocates for action against poverty. This concluding section attempts to draw together some themes relating to these continuities, differences and challenges. Mark Peel (2003) also notes several of the themes, in a recent book based on his extensive conversations with people experiencing poverty in Australia.

The first point is the recurring nature of some factors associated with poverty, either as causal agents or as elements of the experience of poverty. In particular, unemployment and joblessness recur as strongly related to the level and incidence of poverty amongst certain groups, especially with the end of the long boom. However one is also struck by the *return to insecurity* in work and in life generally as an issue in the late 1990s. Welfare state developments were meant to remove unacceptable risk and uncertainty, but economic globalisation, the dominance of neo-liberalism and governments' action to avoid risk have seen risk and uncertainty transferred downwards to vulnerable individuals and communities (Green & McClelland 2003). Another early issue that has resurfaced over the past decade is the issue of *slums and a bad environment*, these days characterised as *locational disadvantage*. In the early years, poverty was seen to be concentrated in the slums, where housing was poor and good jobs limited. Recent research indicates a growth in spatial inequality, especially in relation to work, income and housing (Baume et al. 1999). A study by Vinson (1999) for Jesuit Social Services identified a concentration of disadvantage in certain areas of Australia using measures of social disadvantage (for example low-birth weight, child abuse and child injuries, emergency housing) in addition to measures of economic disadvantage (such as unemployment, low- income and early school leaving).

However, the second point is that responses to problems such as locational disadvantage and joblessness have differed over the years, at least partly because of changing dominant interpretations of the causal factors. Current responses are mainly through community

development and community building projects that tend to see the causal agents as the lack of social capital within communities, rather than, for example, the absence of jobs and uneven economic development requiring national regional development strategies. Such different interpretations about what causes problems related to poverty are in turn strongly influenced by different ideological orientations, as well as differences in the social and economic environment of the day. Poverty is a 'wicked problem' (Bridgman & Davis 2004) with multiple associated factors that interact in a dynamic way, making it very difficult to be clear about cause and effect. This allows differences in ideological perspectives to play a major role in debates about causes and responses. The role of ideology is further reinforced by the fact that poverty is a 'thick ethical' concept (Travers & Richardson 1993) with a moral imperative for action and is therefore strongly influenced by differences in values.

This leads to the third point, which is that one of the significant divisions in social policy and in political ideology is the difference in priority given to understanding social problems either as structurally or socially determined, or as arising from an individual's behaviour. While the Brotherhood has historically given priority to the structural understanding of poverty, there has still been some acceptance of the role of the individual that has varied over the years. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was some very important and relevant criticism about the emphasis on individual and group pathology within the Brotherhood and within social policy generally. As we have seen, this criticism was associated with the development of the empowerment approach to responding to poverty, with a strong emphasis on structural change. But at least some of the structural change (adopted and advocated by the Brotherhood) was directed to improving the power of individuals to make their own decisions. In this sense, an emphasis on empowerment saw people not as passive recipients, but as active agents. It could be argued that this emphasis on individual agency and empowerment was lost in the 1980s and the 1990s, when redistribution of resources became more prominent. Currently in Australia and elsewhere, we are seeing a very strong backlash against the structural/rights approach that tended to dominate social policy from the 1980s. Much of the critique is an ideological attack on the structural understanding of social problems. However, Deacon (2002) makes the useful point that when the focus of social policy became restricted to *only* dealing with the structural determinants of material inequality, it neglected the importance of human agency in making meaningful choices. But in accepting this point, we should still see structural solutions as central. Many current policy approaches (such as welfare reform) do not do this and we have gone much too far the other way.

The fourth point is the hidden and invisible nature of poverty. The need to challenge 'hidden' poverty is especially apparent in Brotherhood writings during the 1960s, when Australia was doing very well economically and average incomes were growing. However, one also detects it in the very early days. Father Tucker had to *awaken* the community to poverty in the 1930s and 1940s. It is also apparent more recently in the late 1990s, through the Conceptions of Poverty project. A key finding of that project, in which Brotherhood researchers talked to diverse groups in the community about their understandings of poverty, was its hidden nature (Johnson 2000). The community did not understand *relative poverty*, and saw poverty in absolute terms and as a *third world* phenomenon. There are a number of possible explanations for this continuing problem: communication failures, the media's disinterest, the problems of giving the poor a voice in their own right (another

continuing challenge) and problems with acceptance of the very idea of relative poverty. Poverty is a kind of inequality seen to be morally unacceptable (and therefore demanding action) because it causes unacceptable hardship and suffering. However, unless that hardship and suffering can be demonstrated, the community will continue to deny that it does exist in Australia to any great extent.

Bringing poverty to the community's attention through the demonstration of its personal and social costs can be problematic. Focusing on the problems and dangers arising from poverty can make the poor a group to be feared (Peel 2003) and can also deny the diversity of the lives of people who experience poverty. Generally people who experience poverty do not like to be labeled as poor (Peel 2003, Taylor 2000). This problem, alongside other problems that have been identified with the focus on poverty, has led some to suggest that we should replace poverty with social exclusion as the policy relevant issue. While the new interest in social exclusion has some benefits in pointing to the multi-dimensional and dynamic nature of poverty, it needs to be used with discrimination as it risks focusing only on the attributes and behaviour of the excluded, rather than on the broader institutional arrangements that continue to marginalise them. Bowring, referring to the focus on social exclusion in the United Kingdom, cites Goodin who notes that:

> couching the argument in terms of 'inclusion of the excluded' constitutes an argument for just pushing them over the line. They remain borderline. (Goodin 1996, cited by Bowring 2000, p.308).

This is even more relevant in Australia, where the response by the Howard Government to social exclusion through its recently introduced welfare reforms has been much more narrowly based than in the United Kingdom. The Government has provided very limited services and supports that aim primarily to push people into paid work of any kind. And so these kinds of policies of inclusion can become the policies of exploitation and marginalisation. The challenge in responding to poverty through promoting inclusion is to ensure that inclusion-based policies enlarge rather than restrict people's personal choices and power. In short, inclusion should also promote empowerment. But insofar as inequalities of power mirror increasing inequalities of resources, redistribution is also needed.

There are problems with responses that are not broadly based and that do not combine elements of all past responses, especially the combination of *inclusion,* with e*mpowerment* and also with a good dose of *redistribution*. And, to conclude by returning to the Brotherhood's beginnings, we should not forget *saving*, as protecting people from harm should remain a fundamental imperative.

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