

A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO POVERTY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the contemporary poverty in Nigeria and proposes a theological response to the problem using social science pre-constructed data and exploring Biblical revelations to evolve a theological response to the problem. Analyses reveal high proportion of absolutely poor arising from historical mismanagement of resources and corruption, political crisis and instability as well as external debt burden. Spatially, the southern states fared better than the north owing to differential natural and human resources endowments. Efforts of governments at poverty alleviation (being recent, less than five years) are not long enough to exert the desired impact. The Bible recognizes several causes of poverty much of which are to blame on the poor themselves while others are externally forced on them. Quite ruinous and portending sorrow, shame, and misery, divine intervention, involvements of the poor, their relatives and the church are essential to finding solution to poverty. Premised the failure of the society, the insufficiency of the involvement of the Church in poverty alleviation, the necessity to integrate the spiritual and material dimensions of faith and empowerment as the best charity, the Deutero-Lukan principles enunciated in Deuteronomy 15: 1-15 and Luke 4:18-19 are employed to set the agenda for the Church. The challenges include political participation, greater involvement in education, integration of economic and religious beliefs, pastoral counseling, incorporation of environmental education in seminary curriculum, care of youth and the aged, and the intensification of the preaching and practice of the gospel of peace to create environment for prosperity. The conclusion is that the church should prevent poverty by empowering its members and the community in which it finds itself rather than charity, which is only a palliative measure.

B CONCLUSION

The thesis of this research, borrowed from Jonathan Sacks is that 'the poor man is helped by being given the chance not to be poor and the best charity is that which helps the poor dispense with charity'.¹ This means that the Church should not wait for poverty to occur. Rather it should prevent poverty. This is why we put poverty eradication at the heart of the ministry of the Church. Jesus came to preach the good news to the poor and give freedom to the oppressed and imprisoned. He expects the Church to continue the ministry as a community rather than individually which effort may not protect the integrity of the poor. It is the reason why poverty eradication is placed at the heart of shepherding. Thus the Church under the pastors cannot shy away from addressing the issue of poverty. James emphasizes that doctrines with no practical effect are worthless.²

Finally the question asked and answered by Edward Rogers is pertinent when he asked: which of the efforts of the nutritional scientists, economists and social engineering is new? None, of course. Edward Rogers asserts that:

There is no thrill of adventure in a programme which consists in adding a little bit more of what we have tried already, no progress in polishing the brass work of a becalmed ship. We need again the wind of God to send us on our way.³

¹ Jonathan Sacks, Wealth and Poverty: A Jewish Analysis, (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 1985), p. 5.

² John Drane, Introducing the New Testament, (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1986), p. 421.

³ Edward Rogers, Living Standards: A Christian looks at the World's Poverty, (Naperville: SCM Book Club, 1964), p. 120.