

THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH  
IN ERADICATING POVERTY

AN ESSAY SUBMITTED  
TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF DIVINITY (THEOLOGY)

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## ABSTRACT

Poverty is a scourge spreading fast like an epidemic disease all over the world, especially in the developing countries. The church however, is not left out, as her members are hard hit by it. This research focused on the roles of the Baptist churches in Ibadan East Baptist Association in eradicating poverty.

The twenty-six (26) churches in the Association were interviewed on their roles in eradicating the poverty scourge in their congregations, as well as their suggestions to put a stop to this trend in the churches. The research further made practicable recommendations both to churches and individual members on steps to take to get out of financial malnutrition and stabilize in sustainable blessings.

## **B. Recommendations**

The writer's recommendations will be two-fold, like two "edged-sword" which the Word of God depicts: to the church and individuals, whether affected by poverty or not. However, this does not apply to churches and individuals in Baptist churches only, but all churches and individual Christians.

### **To the Churches**

The Church of God is expected to show light of God to the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ! This light also embodies the act of seeing to the eradication of poverty of her members through care and efforts put up to make them fulfilled Christians and good citizens in all ramifications. Hence, the following recommendations:

The church should have a definite plan and budget to support the poor and the needy.<sup>1</sup> This plan and budget could be in form of budgeting for sizeable numbers of the needy or poor in the church or outside the church every year. The scheme could be used to assist them either for starting their own businesses, the training of their children in school or for the poor themselves to learn some particular skills. Some Baptist churches in the study area have already embarked on this as illustrated in chapter four, namely: Orita Mefa Baptist Church and Calvary Baptist Church.

Assistance by churches could be rendered, to provide knowledge and skills to members in need.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge and skills can be acquired through information sharing, workshop and seminars on creation of jobs, wealth, employment and investment opportunities at a highly subsidized rate. Most poor people are poor because of lack of skills to create wealth for themselves. Therefore, if they are given opportunities to develop their skills toward wealth acquisition, they will excel. The easiest way to get it done is through the church. The church has the financial, human and material resources to organize this. Besides, the individual churches' programmes on skill development at the denominational headquarters can also take the bold step of skill development, especially during their annual conventions. The Redeemed Christian Church of God has blazed the trail in this wise.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>S. A. Ishola, "Biblical Perspective on Poverty," in Poverty Must Go (Ibadan: Medical and Social Department, Nigerian Baptist Convention, 2004), 13-17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>During her Annual Convention in August 2004, the Redeemed Christian Church of God incorporated into 60% of her programmes: seminars and various skills development and investment opportunities.

Another pragmatic solution is to organize food and cloth bank for the needy within and outside the church.<sup>4</sup> These clothes do not necessarily have to be new clothes, but ones that are fair enough, which children have outgrown or the ones that older people are no longer using. This aspect is being practiced by churches, but on an emergency level. The writer is recommending that food and cloth bank should be on a permanent or consistent basis.

Added to this is periodic gifts and supports to help widows and orphans in educating their children.<sup>5</sup> This does not contradict our earlier point on consistency of church in helping the poor. Instead, it is meant to periodically render help for the widows whether they are poor or rich, to show the concern of the church for their welfare, since our findings show that they form the next to the highest percentage of the poor in the church.

Pastors can also use their pulpits effectively to teach the art of Godly prosperity.<sup>6</sup> Embedded in this is the attitude of giving by Christians to God, mission and the needy. It also entails faithful tithing by Christians. Biblically, the failure to tithe has rendered many Christians poor and perpetually in want. The persons to educate them better on this are the church pastors.

One cannot also rule out the role of prayer in eradicating poverty. Churches can organize breakthrough prayers for members who are in need

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<sup>4</sup>Ishola. 13-17.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

as well as those going into business ventures coupled with those on their business and jobs.

Mike Babatunde raises the issue of pastoral counseling for the poor.<sup>7</sup> Most church members are poor because they cannot discover their potentials, to make wealth. The church pastors can help in this regard, since they know the curriculum vitae of almost every member in the church.

### **To the Individuals**

It is not good to be poor. Although the Bible states that the poor will always be in our midst (Deut, 15:11), that is not the reason for any Christian to desire to remain poor. The Bible also says that a poor man is shunned even by his own relatives (Proverbs 14:20; 19:7). It is therefore imperative for the individual affected by poverty to also strive to get out of it. The preceding recommendations will help such individual in taking the right step.

One major cause of poverty we have identified in chapter three is laziness on the part of people to work. Hard work is therefore expedient for any member of a church of God. When a Christian is active and hard working in whatever job he is doing, such attitude will create and sustain wealth for him.<sup>8</sup> It is not that some people do not have jobs, but hard work is their problem. Hence, the desired blessing to get rid of poverty is not forthcoming. A lazy man will always live in penury (Proverbs 14:23; 16:26; 19:15, 24).

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<sup>7</sup>Mike Babatunde, "Godly Resource and Financial Management," in Poverty Must Go (Ibadan: Medical and Social Dept., NBC, 2004), 8-12.

<sup>8</sup>Ishola, 14-17.

Good planning to live within one's income is very important.<sup>9</sup> Good budgeting is the best financial planning that must be put in place in all personal finances. A good budget takes care of both the means of generating income and expenditure. If any person spends beyond his or her income, such a person runs into debt and is ultimately poor.

Just as the church needs to train her members in knowledge acquisition, so does each member need to desire to acquire knowledge and skills in his or her desired or chosen vocation. Every church member needs to discover his or her potentials, especially for self employment.<sup>10</sup> Those that are on their chosen career or employment should also thirst for further acquisition of skill. This is because we live in an age of information and competition. Seek information that is relevant to your field, this will make you excel in making wealth. If you are just entering the vocation, diligently seek knowledge about it. Throw away your pride and make sure you learn all you can about the business or profession, then start off on it. People should be reminded that on vocation (except theft, and armed robbery, advanced free fraud and smuggling) is dehumanizing and derogatory, provided it is bringing the required wealth and sustenance.

A closely related fact is the issue of creativity and innovation.<sup>11</sup> Handwork, if combined with creativity, results in breakthrough for wealth. This is what most of the unemployed and jobless members in the church lack. The writer came across Laolu Opadara of Scripture Pasture Church, Ibadan, in the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 16-18.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 14.

