

**A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM
OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

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M.Th.

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE
NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
OGBOMOSO**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF THEOLOGY**

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JUNE 2005**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the well-known global phenomenon of poverty and its effects on Nigeria, one of the developing countries in the continent of Africa. There is a stratified structure where the economic, political, cultural, and even religious aspects maintain and promote the dominance of the rich and the powerful over the ordinary people. Most importantly, the Church that has been commissioned by the Lord of the church to alleviate the dehumanizing situation of the poor has also failed in its sacramental duties. This has led to a continuous widened gap between the affluent and the poor.

This devastating problem is evaluated from the biblical understanding and a triple strand paradigm is presented as a response from the discovery. The theological response thus proposed is that of justice, work that promotes human development, and church solidarity with the poor that does not manifest only in assistance to the poor, but is also visibly active in non-violent revolutions against the unacceptable plausibility structure in Nigeria.

The response to the problem of poverty is characterized by a Theocentric focus with the message of grace and hope with the understanding that the leaders in country who have a wrong concept of governance of coercion, subversion, exploitation, manipulation and connections will experience radical transformation. This will

ultimately show in the far-reaching implication on the socio-political, economic and even spiritual life of the nation.

A. Conclusions

Few conclusions can be drawn from the thesis. These are:

First, the biblical imperatives concerning the poor are clear. But most of the efforts for the church in dealing with this and other issues have been more in discussion and implementations have in been encouraging. The churches in Nigeria have failed to see that the challenge of poverty constitutes a theological crisis for the church as well as a political, social and economic crisis for Nigeria and other countries that are going through the same problem. There is a

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massive amount of biblical and theological work to be done simultaneously with our practical response to such pressing issues like poverty. After all God does not formulate theology. He does not even read or need it. But human beings do. Therefore issues that are central to human life and existence that are necessary for service and enhancement should be taken seriously.

Second, God intends the fullness of life for the human community to be a present reality not only the end point of history. The erroneous belief that eschatological elements of the salvation history theme has fullness of life only will the future have led many to devalue the present world as of little ultimate consequence. The old Hymn "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through" has become a source of considerable indifference in the church. If God's coming kingdom will establish justice, how can we be little concerned that justice is often absent in the present? Is it God's will that his creatures experience the abundant life here and now before the end point.

Third, the political structure that continuously acts in injustice, oppression of the poor poses the challenge of the conscious evangelization. Often, those who obtain the people's mandate into political leadership positions claim they are Christians and are sent by God. No doubt God ordains authorities but most of them are not in the kingdom of God yet. The gospel must be presented to them, their wrong ways clearly condemned so as to call them to repentance.

C. Recommendations

With all that is discussed so far, it becomes expedient to ask: what should be done.

There are usually different views and perceptions on the issue of solving or alleviating poverty. While some believe that, as a social problem, poverty cannot be completely eradicated others hold the view that it can be exterminated by changing radically the structures of society. Some have even blamed the failure of such programmes experimented by the various bodies who have tried their hands on those who serve as instruments for the purpose.

In spite of all the different views for and against, the truth is that it can be tackled and if not completely eradicated, the wide gap between the poor and the rich can be bridged to on insignificant point. For this to happen the individual citizens, the government and the church have a responsibility.

1. The Individual

Individual citizens of Nigeria need to see themselves as members of this country who have an equal right like every other person. This is due to the fact that God created all equal as humans and the law of the land also marks such provision. However, the idea of equal right should not be misconstrued that we will enjoy the wealth of the country equally without hard work. The individual as they develop a good work ethics takes away the idea of laziness and that of other will give to

me from them. The understanding that God encourages us to work for our personal economic development and that he rewards a diligent worker should motivate people to use their hand, brains and other things given to them to do positive work that will bring joy to them.

In Nigeria today, most of our youth are lazy and unproductive simply because they only wish to benefit from the inheritance from their families. No doubt families, communities and individuals should support and encourage people in their struggle, but even when such is not coming, there are still things one can do for the person to survive. In the oil producing areas in particular, many are not ready to work but wish to and some are actually earning good money at the end of each month under the disguise of security. Others would prefer to be involved in bunkery business just to make millions over night. This is a serious wrong worldview that must be changed.

2. The Government

Among the many roles the Government can play to relieve those who are under the struggle of poverty the followings are noted. The government should first of all see to it that justice is consciously pursued in this nation. The rich must know that their privileged position does not give them the right to oppress and even take the little that the poor have. Those in authority should also rule with the right motive of servant hood and not to consider such positions as a time to take from the "national cake". Many leaders today who are stealing the public funds and siphoning to other countries must be brought to judgement

