

## **Poverty Alleviation in the Old Testament and its Implication for the Contemporary Church**

**Daniel Bem Apuivom, PhD.**

**Simeon Iember Aande, Ph.D.**

**Godwin Aondover Gbande**

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria's largest population is experiencing poverty due to corruption, economic recession, unemployment, and the outcome of rampant terrorism. Many citizens lack the basic necessities of life as food, clothes, good health and shelter. These challenges have led to this paper which dwells on poverty alleviation in the Old Testament and its implication for the contemporary church. The author has adopted exegetical approach to examine the Hebrew scripture in which much care and support was given to the poor, for God commands that the poor should be cared for. The purpose of the paper is to analyse the social responsibility carried out by the church of Christ which traces its origin from the Old Testament scripture; the contemporary church is well challenged for her lack of love as she fails to care for the poor up to the expectation. It has been discovered in the research that in the early church and during the white missionary era in Nigeria much care was given to the poor than what is done today. The paper has come to a conclusion that the care for the poor is a holy responsibility directed from God to make his justice to prevail. The paper recommends that the church should work together with government and concerned individuals to adopt different strategies to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. The research could be very vital if its suggestions are implemented as this could minimize the level of poverty in the country.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria as the largest country in Africa with over 170 million people is suffering from poverty. According to Chimodi Ucha, the assessment made by World Resource Institute showed that more than 70 percent of Nigerian population lives below the poverty line in the present decade (48, 49). Causes of poverty in the country include problems of unemployment, corruption, idleness, economic recession and effects of the outbreak of COVID 19. It has become very essential at this critical time of the country to study the mind and word of God about the current situation. What does the Old Testament Bible speak about poverty and poverty alleviation? Our understanding of the scripture could help the church to speak out and work out modalities that could remedy our critical situation. The content of this research is not only applicable to Nigerian situation; it could be application to whatever country, society or community that might be experiencing a similar situation. Though Nigeria is blessed with many natural resources that could take her out of poverty, but this is ineffective due to the corruptive nature of the country.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined:

**Poverty:** Poverty is defined by Julio De Santa Ana as “the unfulfillment of basics human needs required to adequately sustain life free from disease, misery, hunger, pain, suffering, hopelessness and fear.” (76) This definition describes accurately the situation of the poor. F. Banda defines poverty in the context of people’s “failure to afford basic needs such a food, shelter, medical care, education, employment and clean water” (19) S. T. Wara, I. R. Icaboya and F. K. Hymore define poverty following a similar thought of the above definition, according to them:

Poverty is hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read and write. Poverty is not having a job... poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom (15).

Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. Poverty as a social problem is a deeply embedded wound that penetrates every dimension of culture and society. Poverty includes sustained low levels of income for members of a community. It includes lack of access to services like education, markets, healthcare, lack of decision making ability and lack of communal facilities like water, sanitation, transportation and communications.

**Poverty Alleviation:** Poverty alleviation is a call to action by God for the poor; it is a call to change the world so that many more people may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.

### **Causes of Poverty**

There are various causes of poverty as discussed below:

**Ignorance:** Ignorance means having a lack of information, or lack of knowledge. It is different from stupidity which is lack of intelligence, and different from foolishness which is lack of wisdom. The three are often mixed up and assumed to be the same by some people. Knowledge is power. Unfortunately, some people, knowing this try to keep knowledge to themselves and hinder others from obtaining knowledge. Many religious organizations and individual Christians who want to help a community or individuals can help people or communities to be educated.

**Disease:** When a community has a high disease rate, productivity is low, and less wealth is created. Apart from discomfort, disease can lead to deaths which may result into poor widows, widowers and orphans in the society. “Being well not only helps the individuals who are healthy it contributes to the eradication of poverty in the community. Here, prevention is better than cure. The economy is much healthier if the population is always healthy” (Wara, Icaboya and Hymore 62).

**Apathy:** Apathy is when people do not care, or when they feel so powerless that they do not try to change things to improve conditions. Sometimes, some people feel so unable to achieve something due to lack of positive thinking and they jealous their family relations or fellow members of their community who attempt to do so. Then they seek to bring the attempting achiever down to their own level of poverty. Sometimes apathy is justified by religious precepts, “Accept what exists because God has decided your fate”. It is okay to believe God may decide that we should be motivated to improve ourselves. “pray to God, but also row to shore”, a Russian proverb, demonstrates that we are in God’s hands, but we also have a responsibility to help ourselves (Bartle 10).

**Dishonesty:** When resources that are intended to be used for community services or facilities, are diverted into the private pockets of someone in a position of power, poverty will result in the community.

**Dependency:** People who don’t work to earn income by themselves but depend on other people or organization for survival, when there is failure from those who make the provisions, the recipients will suffer poverty.

**Effect of war:** War resulting into casualties and refugees will lead to poverty.

**Overpopulation:** When a country is overpopulated there is every tendency of encountering poverty by the indigenes.

**The practice of polygamy:** In Northern Nigeria where many poor Muslims are religiously allowed to marry four wives, many give birth to children without financial ability to train them. They look for food on their own, on the streets as almajiri beggars.

Other causes of poverty according to Wara, Icaboya and Hymore include:

- a. Inadequate physical assets, such as land and capital.
- b. Inadequate access to the means of supporting moral development in poor regions.
- c. Inadequate access to markets where the poor can sell goods and services.
- d. Destruction of natural resource leading to environment degradation and reduce productivity (63).

### **Terms for Poverty in the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament)**

In the Hebrew Scripture there are several terms that designate poverty these are: ani/anw, ebron, dal and rasj. It is very difficult to distinguish the meanings inherent in these terms, and the context in which they are used should be used to determine the exact meaning.

i). The term **ani** occurs 75 times in the Old Testament and anw 21 times. Scholars generally agree that these terms have the same basic root and are therefore distinct in meaning. It can be translated as poor and humble, the later referring to a more spiritual meaning. Material poverty is implicated in Leviticus 19:10 “you shall not gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard: you shall leave them for the poor, (ani) and the sojourner”. Humility is implied in Numbers 12:2 “Now the man Moses was very meek (anw)...” (see also occurrences in Prov. 15:15, Ecc, 6:8; Am 2:7; Ps 149:4).

ii.)The Hebrew term *ebjon* occurs 61 times in the Old Testament. Originally it referred to “beggars” and later it was used to describe the “socially weak”, “miserable” or “poor” person. In Job 31:19, Job claims that he always helped the “poor man without covering” (see also Dt 15:9, 11 and 15).

iii). The term *dal* can be translated as “low” helpless, “insignificant” or “poor” and occurs 48 times in the Hebrew Bible. In Leviticus 14:21, the offering of the “poor” is referred to. “If he is poor (*dal*) and cannot afford much, then he shall take one male lamb for guilt offering...” (see also Ps 41:1-2; Is 14:30; Pr 14:31).

iv). The term *rasj* occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Bible. It usually refers to material poverty. This term appear in 2 Samuel 12:3, 2Samuel 13:8, Ecclesiastes 4:14; Ps 82:3. (Scheffler 3). It is important to note that in the Hebrew Bible, the terms for poverty usually refer to material poverty or destitution, but in some instances the term also has a “spiritual” or metaphorical meaning (e.g humility).

### **Poverty Alleviation in Torah and Historical Books**

In the Old Testament, several mosaic laws on poverty are expressed in the covenant code (Ex 21:1-11, 22:21-24, 22:25-27; 23:2,6,23:), holiness code (Lev. 19:10, 19:13, 15, 25) and Deuteronomic code (especially Dt 15:1-18). These laws prescribe that the poor be treated kindly (Scheffler 7). The Pentateuch does not present these laws as having a universal or inclusive application, but rather as laws that are meant to be obeyed within the context of Israel itself, which is conceptualized as a family (see the term “brother” in Dt 15:2). (Otto and Roux 97-115)

Three people within the community of the covenant people Israel experienced the harsh condition of poverty. These ones were the orphans or fatherless, widows and strangers or sojourners. In a society structured upon the male as the

worker, the widow and orphan struggled to survive since they were powerless they depended upon the good will of others (Deut. 24:17). “The Torah views poverty as an involuntary social evil to be abolished, not tolerated and represented the poor (who included widows, orphans and aliens) as people to be scoured, not blamed” (Scott 217). The Torah has specific provision for the poor. The poor are allowed to glean from the field (Lev. 19:9, 10). They are to harvest crops on the fields in the seventh (Sabbatical) year (Ex 23:11). The Torah affirms the reality of the problem of poverty in the world. Deuteronomy 15:11 says “there will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your brother and toward the poor and the needy in your land. This truth is reechoed, in part, by Jesus in Mathew 26:16, saying, “The poor you will always have with you”. “The Torah therefore rejects and prevents methods of robbery and social oppression” (Adewunmiju 4).

In the Old Testament, if a poor person was hungry, he was permitted to eat in the field or vineyard of another (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). The considerable debts of the poor were waived in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25, 27:14). Jubilee was one of the feasts of the Jews which were to be celebrated once after fifty years. All properties would revert back to their original holders. It was to be a year of restoration where the poor who had been bought by the rich were to be released to reunite with their families. During Jubilee year, Israelites were to do three things, one, to give the soil a rest and not farm; two, to free Israelites slaves, and three to return the land and houses to the first owners or their children.

**The Sacrifice of Praise:** The children of Israel presented sacrifice of praise or peace offering (Leviticus 3 and 7). Peace offering was not to make peace with God but to celebrate the fact that they were now in peace with God. The occasion for the worship was praise for the Lord. The particular animal for this offering was not burnt up but would be cooked for communal meal. While it was on the altar, the worshipper would stand beside the altar and give praise to the Lord for whatever

blessings he had received. When the meal was cooked those who ate the meal included the worshipper, his family and friends, the priest and Levites present and the poor. Thus the poor were free at any time to come into the temple and peace offering meal is given to them to eat (Koepsell 2).

In the New Testament, sacrifice is no longer required but the praise is required. And Hebrews 13:15 instructs us to offer the sacrifice of praise to the Lord continually, that is the fruit of our lips that acknowledge him; but it adds the warning not to neglect doing good, or sharing what we have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. If we are praising God for his blessing in our churches as Christians, the poor should share part of our blessings. For the most grateful will be the most generous. The lesson from the sacrifice of praise is clear: Make your gratitude beneficial to the poor. We shall make sharing with the poor the natural outcome of our praise to God. Only them can we talk about genuine praise, true spirituality and authentic church.

In the history of Israel, extreme poverty did not constitute a major problem in Israel's earliest history after the settlement in the land. In fact the archaeological record of the early Iron Age shows that "survival strategies were in place that met the most basic needs for food and shelter. Of course, these strategies pertain to subsistence farming and peasant life seemed to have countered extreme poverty" (Scheffler 8). In this connection one can refer to the numerous water cisterns that were dug in the highland mountain to catch rain, basic houses that were built of sun-dried bricks and mud plastered roofs made of reed, the cultivation of olive, and the breeding of domesticated animals.

In the historical books the writers advocated specific values including the adoption of a positive attitude towards the poor. This can be seen in the inclusion of Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and the striking story of Naboth's vineyard (1 King 2:1-9), where the exploiting King is prophetically criticized and challenged. The chronicler presents a positive view about the involvement of governing powers to eradicate poverty. In



Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah narrates how he sacrificed his own rights in order to resolve the poverty in the country as prophesied in Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14.

### **Poverty Alleviation in the Prophets**

Here the research focuses on bringing about the basic teaching of the Old Testament prophets in relation to poverty alleviation. In the prophetic literature the rich and both the political and religious leaders are heavily criticized for exploiting and not caring for the poor, each book having its own unique emphasis as the context demanded (Scheffler 8). In several occasions, the prophets denounced the rich because they had neglected or mistreated the poor (Isaiah 1:23;10:2; Ez. 22:29; Am. 5:11-14). (Ayiemba, Theuri and Mungai 45).

In the days of prophet Amos bribery became a way the rich and mighty or powerful used to oppress the poor and the needy in Israel. Amos Spoke extensively in favour of the poor. This is evident in the prophets crying out for justice (Amos 6:12). The poor were also charged heavy house rents and made to pay taxes of grain at the expense of their rich landlords who took undue advantage of them (Amos 6:11). The righteous poor and needy was sold for money even in exchange for a pair of sandals in Israel and for this reason the judgment of Yahweh will not be revoked or fail to come upon the people (Amos 2:6). In Zechariah, God advocates for justice and care for widows and orphans, “thus says the Lord of hosts, ...show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart” Zechariah 7:9-10 NIV. The prophets teach that the materials response to the poor and hungry is a test of genuine love and authentic righteousness (Isaiah 58:10). To know God means doing justice to the poor and needy (Jer. 22:13-16; Hosea 4:12). God has concern for the poor (Isaiah 41:17) and judges the cause of the poor and the needy (Jer. 22:16).

### **Poverty Alleviation in the Wisdom Literature**

Wisdom literature expresses diverse views about poverty. In the wisdom literature especially the book of Proverbs generally advocates a charitable attitude towards the poor; the poor on the other hand are also reprimanded for being responsible for their own plight by being lazy, depending on the situation. In other words, wisdom tradition talks about poverty in a different dimension, yet it reflects the same concerns as the law and the prophets. In Proverbs, poverty is sometimes viewed as a self-inflicting experience as a result of lack of wisdom or one's laziness (Proverbs 6:6 11, 10:4,15 13:13: 18; 21:17, 24:30-34), while for Job "poverty is the product of political and economic exploitation of the poor" (Fitzpatrick 2). Job observed that the wicked drove away orphans, donkeys and snatches orphans from their mother's breast and made them slaves (Job 24:3,9). He argues his innocence through his defense of the poor (Job 29: 1, 16, 30:25, 31:16). In the Psalms, God is presented as the defender of the poor, especially widows and orphans. He is the advocate of the poor (Ps. 22:26).

### **The Model of Christ in Poverty Alleviation**

The New Testament has similar orders with the Old Testament concerning poverty alleviation. Jesus witnessed the state of poverty among the people and proclaimed the Gospel against socio-economic injustices and political oppression as implied:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty of sight to the captives; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people (Luke 4:18-19 see Isaiah 62).

This was a message of hope to those who were materially and spiritually depressed in life. The good news Jesus brought to mankind was not only meant for spiritual nourishment (saving

the soul) but it was also to take care of the physical needs of the body by setting man free from all manners of suffering, including social, economic and political injustices. This declaration by Jesus of his true ministry to the poor, elicited negative reactions towards him from the people which mysteriously led to his total rejection by his own people who saw him as a label against the corrupt and unjust social system (Guitierrez 73). The poor whom Jesus referred to were those who are materially poor, who die of hunger and disease, who are illiterate, unemployed and the exploited.

According to William O. Ondari, the life of Christ was one of poverty, an impression made from the familiar words of Isaiah 53 and also from Philipians 2:7 He “took Himself the form of a slave” and 2 Corinthians 8:9 “He became poor that through his poverty you might become rich” (14). Jesus was a poor man who spent his ministry helping the poor. The king of heaven had no room in the in where he could be born, but instead was born in a small; cold and rough stable and laid in manger. His parents were not wealthy and that an offering of the poor had to be given at his presentation in the temple.

The public ministry of Jesus was holistic. Feeding of the people, healing and preaching were inseparable. He spent more of His time healing and preaching. His ministry was to the whole person. He knew that people with hungry stomachs and diseased bodies need liberation physically in order to hear the word of God. He stood low to raise everybody, the lepers, the cripples, the demoniacs, the blind, the deaf, the prostitutes, tax collectors, women and children.

Ondari attests that the scribes and Pharisees taught and believed that material well-being went hand in hand with God’s blessing. A material rich man was seen as close to God because God is blessing Him. A poor or sick man was seen as one under God’s curse. But Jesus life and ministry showed the lie behind this theology and showed what was valuable and desirable in God’s Kingdom (14). He taught “blessed are you who are poor,

for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied” (Luke 6:20, 21). But to the rich He said, “but woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry” (Luke 6:24, 25). Jesus condemned not money and wealth, but what he condemned was the love of money which kept that young ruler from the kingdom.

### **Poverty Alleviation by the Diaconal Ministry in the Past and Contemporary Church**

Apart from the offices of overseers (Bishops) and elders who performed leadership and teaching duties, the New Testament created the office of deacons whose duties were exclusively social in nature. Acts gives great priority to the social obligation of the church towards its members, but the responsibility for proclaiming the word of God and prayer remains more important and is institutionalized in the offices of the elders and the apostles (Acts 6:3).

The word the apostles used in serving tables (*diakonein*) is the Greek word for "deaconing" (Lonard 1), the seven stated in Acts 6 were the first deacons. They took care of people's material needs in a spiritual way. The qualifications for deacons are illustrated in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The authority of appointing men and women as deacons and deaconesses is derived from the Bible (Acts 6, I Timothy 3:8-13 and Romans 16).

Deacons in the early church continued to organize ministry for the poor, orphans, widows, the sick and the needy. They were active in addressing concerns in and outside the church (Seaton). In I Timothy 5, advice is given about the support of widows, those young enough to work and provide their own needs and those with relatives capable of supporting them were excluded from the church register of widows. It would seem certain that the sense of social responsibility was strong towards those within the fellowship who were in real need. In the early church more money was spent on social concerns than on the

salaries of the elders and Pastors. Thomas Schirrmacher quoted the words of the Church Father, Eusebius that:

The church in Rome in the year 250 AD, for example supported 100 clergymen and 1500 poor people, particularly widows and orphans. Alois Kehl writes, never, in the whole of antiquity, had there been a society or a religious group which cared for its members as the Christian church did (3).

But by the middle Ages however, the office of deacons began to be ignored, with some churches abolishing the office altogether. The office was no more existing until the Reformation and the recovery of the authority of scripture that churches began to re-organize diaconal ministry (Seaton 4). According to Martin Luther, "the diaconate is a ministry for distributing the church's bounty to the poor, in order that the priest might be released of the burden of temporal concern". So deacons mainly assist God's people in tangible ways (Lonard 3).

Presently, the churches the author discovered to be operating diaconal ministry in Nigeria and elsewhere include NKST Church, Reformed churches, Presbyterian Church, Anglican Church, Lutheran Church and so on. The ministry of deacons presently in most churches includes feeding the poor, caring for the sick, visiting the elderly, and handling cases of benevolence. In some churches, they collect offerings or manage the finance. The role of deacons is generally and broad in that they are called to serve any who may be in distress. Their office is not that one of rule but rather of services. It is the duty of deacons to seek out the poor; it is not enough to assist only when asked. The church deacons or church's social workers should help to identify those members who need assistance and meet them at the point of their needs.

### **The Challenge of Poverty Alleviation in the Contemporary Nigerian Church**

The role of the contemporary church in poverty alleviation in Nigeria is very poor. James Num Hinga a former president of Nongo u Kristu u i Ser u sha Tar (NKST) (meaning Universal Reformed Christian Church) says that "because of the great amount of money required by NKST church synod and the money required to run local church affairs, the local church has little money to spend for social acts." Therefore 85% of the church's revenue goes toward buildings, staff salary/allowances and internal programs, only 15% goes to the needy. Another observation made by the author of this article about Roman Catholic and Presbyterian churches in Benue State indicates that the tendency of spending less money on social work is almost the same with other denominations in Nigeria. The author also observes that the white missionaries made more contribution to social works than the present NKST church led by Nigerians. A former Director of Mission of NKST Church Rev. J. T. Alan says that "The white missionaries were given enough money by their home church to train poor children in school, pay medical bill for the destitute, but during my leadership in mission, the church only provides salaries for missionaries." Social acts depend on the personal efforts of the individual missionaries.

The early church spent more money on social concern. But in modern Nigerian church, much money is spent for the salary of clergies and church staff, little money is spent for the provision of the socially weak members of the church. In the contemporary Nigerian church more resources is spent for church sanctuaries, landscaping, fancy throne-like furniture for priests to sit in. The New Testament Church did not spend much money on these matters, their churches were even more of house fellowships (Romans 16;5;10; Philemon 1). Their primary responsibility was to help the needy and support church workers. The true servants of Christ are those that serve for the needs of others not those that are served or serve for their own needs.

We should be troubled about the great inequities in our country, on one hand so many of us have so much, but on the other hand so many have almost nothing. Many people store enough food, have expensive homes, clothes and cars, there are many who are obese. But on the other hand there is a problem of poverty facing many people. But what is the church doing about this problem of poverty? Are the churches so poor that they cannot help? Not at all. The churches have huge complexes of facilities. Although there is nothing wrong with churches having such facilities or the money to develop them. But it is not justifiable when the needy are not cared for and much is spent on the facilities. It does not take long to calculate that numerous churches in Nigeria could certainly feed the poor people in towns and villages regularly.

Thomas Aquinas once went into the office of the Pope, and the pope was sitting at a table counting money and stacking it in various denominations, he said to Aquinas, "Look Thomas, the church can no longer say 'Silver and gold have I none'". (Koepsell 3). There are different rational ideas that make us to disregard the poor in the church. Sometimes people say "The poor are poor because they are lazy" such people say, don't give money to the poor, it will only encourage them to be lazy". With all such rationalization, the church missed a terrific opportunity to minister (Koepsell 4).

Some people are bold to say "why feed the poor if they are only going to hell. Some people quote Jesus and say, "The poor you always have with you" as if he meant that we should therefore do nothing about it. Some Nigerian prosperity gospel preachers even speak as if it is sin to be poor. They say "if you have faith, then God will bless you, because you do not have to be poor..." All these are merely excuses to avoid responsibility. In other churches in Nigeria, special rights are given to the wealthy donors in the congregation. However James 2:1-13 energetically attacks the attempt of wealthy donors to exploit their position in the church.

### **Some Suggested Ways to Alleviate Poverty in the Contemporary Church**

The research has suggested diverse ways the church can alleviate poverty apart from the offering collected from church members. These ways include:

**Church Companies:** The church can establish companies which could provide funds for the church to lessen the burden of her members. The companies are essential to eradicate poverty among church members as job opportunities are created for the jobless and the needy. NKST church had Christian Agricultural Company (CAC) which had helped her members but it was not well managed and it is not functional. A company can provide funds for the church annually.

**Give Work Opportunities for the Poor:** The church should teach her members the necessity of work and maintain a list of meaningful work opportunities. The church can help her members start works such as agricultural works, painting, book binding, tailoring and other works that could enable a Christian to be self reliance and has something to offer to God's work. It is more valuable to provide job opportunity for the needy than to keep on providing food/ money and material things for them to remain dependent. It is an embarrassment for church members to be beggars; the poor should be assisted by the church they belong to. The well to do church members can help train the poor church members for work even if it costs their profit. Christianity does not intend to provide massive beggars like the amajeri and road beggars in the Islamic religion.

**Non-church Resources:** The church can choose to use resources in the community, including government resources to meet the needs of her less privilege members. The resources may include: help for people with disabilities, job training, and placement services and so on (Rawls 1). Even when church members receive assistance from non-church sources, the church should help them avoid becoming dependent on these sources.



**Recommendations**

The church has deviated from the original apostolic love where by the priority of the Diaconal ministry or officers in charge of church finance was to care for the needy and widows. In the contemporary church the priority of the church finance is to pay workers and make projects, little attention is given to the care of the poor and widows. For the church to serve successfully as Christ's ambassador her priority should be given to the poor.

Poverty is a great syndrome affecting mostly the developing countries as Nigeria. The church should adopt different ways of eradicating poverty. Some of the ways are discussed in this work. Moreover, the church in her gospel message and teaching should ginger civil servants and political leaders to embark on poverty alleviation. A major achievement that could regard any church or government as successful in ministry is to eradicate poverty. Individual Christians are not absented from performing individual roles to eradicate poverty.

**Summary/Conclusion**

This research has attempted to address a very important and challenging problem to the development of human society. Poverty is a multidimensional problem that includes the physical, spiritual, mental and psychological dimensions of human being. The causes of poverty are also multifaceted. The world has enough for everyone to have a comfortable life. But man in his greed has denied the fellow human being even the basic necessities of life as food, clothing and shelter. The contemporary church should realize that her mind and attitudes towards the poor should be that of God the creator who has responsibility towards the poor masses as taught in the Hebrew scripture and fulfilled by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Thus the church's role of poverty alleviation is deep rooted in the Old Testament.

The comparable economic and social situation of the poor in the Bible and that of the contemporary society suggests that church's involvement in poverty alleviation is a sacred responsibility under God's direction and is rooted in justice. The church should show justice by empowering the poor and granting them the means which they can use to gain control over their destiny and improve their own standard of living.

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