

# **Religion and Security Issues**

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# Chapter Twenty

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## **EFFECTIVE POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME AS PANACEA FOR SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: THE ANCIENT ISRAELITE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH'S EXPERIENCE**

OKUNOYE, Job Oluremi<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Poverty and insecurity constitute two major challenges confronting Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. Both -poverty and insecurity are like Siamese twins that cannot be separated. As a matter of fact, higher percentage of the security challenges being witnessed in Nigeria is caused by poverty. Indeed, poverty in Nigeria has become a breeding forum for all social ills being experienced in the country today such as kidnapping, armed-robbery, ritual killing, pipeline vandalisation and the rest. The reason for this is not far-fetched; it is because “an idle hand is the devil’s workshop. “ Consequently, many of the unemployed youths in Nigeria engage in various criminal acts that constitute security threats to Nigeria. Bearing in mind the fact that one possible way of overcoming security challenges in Nigeria is to put effective and functional poverty alleviation programmes in place and which the Nigerian government has failed to do, this paper, therefore, examines various poverty alleviation mechanisms put in place in the Old Testament to effectively curb poverty and insecurity (food, economic, social and political insecurity) in ancient Israelite society. This is with a view that the contemporary church as collaborator with the government in finding lasting solution to the problem of poverty and insecurity would borrow a leaf from the experience of the ancient Israelite society in its attempt to respond to the cry of the poor and security challenges in Nigeria. The paper recommends that the church should actively be involved in the poverty alleviation struggles of the government (as the government alone could not do it) through effective and functional poverty alleviation programmes as practised in ancient Israelite society.*

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## **Introduction**

Poverty *has* become a global phenomenon, but the worst continent hit by this problem is Africa among which Nigeria is one. It is said that the rest of the world is gradually pulling itself out of poverty, but African countries, including Nigeria, are regressing into lower levels of deprivation, with the result that the number of the poor people in this region is expected to rise from 35 million in 1999 to 405 million in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Coming to the Nigeria situation, the phenomenon of poverty is a pervasive one because majority of Nigerians are wallowing in abject poverty in spite of their great natural wealth. What a paradox! Since the global economic downturn and the dwindling income from the sale of crude oil, more than 70 percent of Nigerians live below the poverty line while some 35 percent wallow in abject poverty, in fact, in real grinding poverty.<sup>3</sup> Manus says that Nigeria is represented as pitiably sitting in the bowels of poverty as the 154th of 172 countries in the world poverty marginal index.<sup>4</sup> The prevalence of poverty in the world has led to the inclusion of poverty alleviation or eradication in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>5</sup> The focus is to eradicate poverty and hunger, and this is supported by three targets of dealing with high rate of unemployment, hunger and low income. Several attempts have been made by the government of Nigeria from federal to local level to reduce the crippling effects of poverty by undertaking various poverty alleviation programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution Programme (GRP), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), etc. but the problem still persists and no appreciable impact has been made yet.

As a matter of fact, higher percentage of security challenges being experienced in Nigeria is caused by poverty.<sup>6</sup> It has become a breeding forum for

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<sup>2</sup>Don Pogreba. (2006). "Poverty in Africa". A Topic Paper Prepared for the National Debate Topic Selection Committee of the NFSHA. Accessed on 17/02/2013 from <http://www.nfhs.org>.

<sup>3</sup>C. U. Manus. (2009). "New Testament Perspective on Poverty Eradication in Nigerian Context: Reflections on Luke 4:17-19". A Paper Presented at the Theological Education Conference held at Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso.

<sup>4</sup>C. U. Manus. (2009). "New Testament Perspective on Poverty Eradication in Nigerian Context: Reflections on Luke 4:17-19". A Paper Presented at the Theological Education Conference held at Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso.

<sup>5</sup>S. F. Kehinde. (2009). "Striking a Balance between *Kerygma* and *Paraenesis* in the efforts toward poverty eradication in Africa". A Paper Presented at the Theological Education Conference held at Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso.

<sup>6</sup>J. O. Okunoye. (2011). "Management of Poverty and its Inherent Crisis and conflicts Nigeria: The Role of the Church". In B. R. Ismaila & P. A. Ojebode. (eds.) *The Nation & Management of Conflict and Crises*. Oyo: Omo-Oje Press & Publishers. 355.

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all social vices in Nigeria such as kidnapping, looting of government treasuries, pipeline vandalisation, armed robbery, killing and all sorts of detestable and anti-social practices. In Nigeria, poverty manifests itself in various ways such as food insecurity, poor clothing, poor housing, poor transportation system, poor educational system, poor health facilities and services, erratic power supply, lack of potable water and so on. But of all these manifestations, food insecurity is the mother of them all, because it is the maximum degree or condition of poverty.<sup>7</sup> Absence of food is usually associated with annoyance, sorrow, quarrel, violence, diseases and death. In Nigeria today, not many Nigerians are able to satisfy their basic need of food. It is believed that Nigerians are generally angry and violent. This leads to the popular saying that ‘a hungry man is an angry man.’ Thus, it could be deduced that the various violent actions and reactions being witnessed in Nigeria and which constitute security problem is, to a larger extent, as a result of hunger. Majority of people in Nigeria go into armed-robbery, prostitution, child abuse, human trafficking, kidnapping, and ritual killing primarily to secure daily food. Every other thing they may acquire later is secondary to their original purpose. So, the more the starvation increases, the greater the level of insecurity in the society.<sup>8</sup> Sadly, there are a few rich and powerful individuals who still sponsor or engage in violent or criminal acts in the country perhaps for religious, political or economic (or all) reasons. All hands must be on deck, therefore, to restore the desired peace and security to our society.

As earlier said, poverty is an age long global phenomenon. From the biblical perspective, it could be observed that the same ill plagued ancient Israelite society. As a result, the Old Testament (OT) speaks so much about taking care of the poor. Necessary provisions were made for the poor in the ancient Israelite economic system as certain rights and privileges were given to them through various legislations. Consequently, the ancient Israelite society was able to manage her poverty effectively through various effective poverty alleviation programmes, most especially during the pre-monarchical era. In fact, Yahweh denounced poverty in a very strong term, saying “Acre should be no poor among you” (Deut. 15:4). This paper, therefore, examined the poverty alleviation mechanisms put in place in the OT and using them as a paradigm for achieving peace and security in Nigerian society.

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<sup>7</sup>J. O. Okunoye. (2011). “Management of Poverty and its Inherent Crisis and conflicts • Nigeria: The Role of the Church”. In B. R. Ismaila & P. A. Ojebode. (eds.) *The Nigerian Nation & Management of Conflict and Crisis*. Oyo: Omo-Oje Press & Publishers. 355.

<sup>8</sup>Sheu, El-Hafiz. (2009). “Poverty, Bane of Human Trafficking in Nigeria”. *National Mirror*. Wed. March 25. 4.

## **II. Conceptual Definition of Poverty**

Poverty is an extremely complex phenomenon, but nevertheless it is easy to recognise. It is an intricate phenomenon that is susceptible to diverse definitions and conceptualisations. In other words, poverty means different things to different people. For example, what poverty means to somebody in a village differs greatly from what it means to somebody who lives in a city. Similarly, what poverty means to the developed countries differs from what it means to the developing countries. Poverty, as a phenomenon, exists at the global, national, community, household and individual levels. At the national levels, poverty represents a state of general socio-economic under-development, low productivity, low and stagnating national income, inadequate availability or social and infrastructural facilities and services, and a general inability to provide a decent level of living for the ordinary citizens.<sup>9</sup> At the household or individual level, poverty refers to the inability to meet the most basic needs of foods, clothing and shelter.<sup>10</sup>

According to Nwaura,<sup>11</sup> poverty can be seen in a mechanical perception as lack of basic needs or income. An example of this is the case of per capita income definitions used by international organizations. However, income alone cannot be a valid measure for poverty. Poverty can also be perceived as deprivation in terms of living in a deteriorating or an unpleasant environment, or as the inability to meet basic needs.<sup>12</sup> Poverty can further be seen from a mental or cultural perspective as isolation, loss of direction, hopelessness, apathy and passive suffering. It can also mean the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development such as denial to lead a long healthy creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, dignity, self-respect and respect of others.<sup>13</sup> All these are summarised in the definition of poverty given at the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March 1995:

Poverty has various manifestations including lack of income and productive resources, sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods, hunger, malnutrition, ill health, limited or lack of access to education, and other basic services, increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homeless and inadequate housing, unsafe

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<sup>9</sup>G. A. Oshitelu. (2001). "Religion and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria". On/a, Vol. xxiii. 79.

<sup>10</sup>G. A. Oshitelu. (2001). "Religion and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria". Onto, Vol. xxiii.79.

<sup>11</sup>P. N. Nwaura. (2005). "A Spirituality of Resistance and Hope: African Instituted Churches' Response to Poverty". Or/to, Vol. xxxvii, June and December. 65.

<sup>12</sup>Nwaura, 2005, p. 65. "A Spirituality of Resistance and Hope: African Instituted Churches' Response to Poverty". Onto, Vol. xxxvii, June and December. 65.

<sup>13</sup>P. N. Nwaura. (2005). "A Spirituality of Resistance and Hope: African Instituted Churches' Response to Poverty". Onto, Vol. xxxvii, June and December. 65.

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environments and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life.<sup>14</sup>

Poverty, therefore, has economic, social-cultural and political perspectives.

According to Scott and Marshall,<sup>15</sup> poverty is a state in which resources, usually materials, but sometimes, culture, are lacking. In absolute terms, it refers to a situation in which the individual lacks resources necessary for subsistence while in relative expression, poverty refers to an individual's or a group's lack of resources when compared with that of other members of the society. This is a comparison of the standards of living. From a subjective perspective, poverty refers to a situation in which individuals or groups feel that they are poor; when they measure themselves against the standards of the day.<sup>16</sup> Each of the above mentioned forms of poverty is problematic because there is no universal standard for measuring and determining it. Lending credence to this claim, Johnstone holds that: "... economic deprivation consists of limited access to the material necessities of life. It may be objectively defined and measured as well as subjectively experienced. That is, although people may technically not be categorized as living at poverty level, they perceive themselves as poor."<sup>17</sup>

Poverty, according to Familusi and Oke,<sup>18</sup> is a condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is the lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water and health services. Those under the shackles of poverty are termed "the poor members of the society".

In the Old Testament, the term poor referred to the humiliated, vulnerable, and helpless victims. They could not earn a living or barter for its financial equivalent. They became dependants on the generous who were in the society, serving as slaves or hired servants. Family lands, which were available for farming and animal husbandry, were bought by the few rich fellows from the less

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<sup>14</sup>UNO. (1995). "Report of the World Summit on Social Development." New York: United Nations Organisations. 41.

<sup>15</sup>J. Scott and G. Marshall, (eds.) (2005). *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press. 512.

<sup>16</sup>A. Dzugba. (2007). *Contemporary Ethics: Theory and Issues*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited. 113.

<sup>17</sup>R. L. Johnstone. (2001). *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 91.

<sup>18</sup>O. O. Familusi and O. P. Oke. (2011). "A Christian Dimension to Poverty Discourse in Nigeria". *Orita*, Vol. XLIII/2 .7.

privileged masses, depriving them of means of earning a living as semi-nomadic herds or agriculture.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the poor in Hebrew language varies:

- (i) *ebyon* - for the alms beggar.
- (ii) (ii) *ani, anah, anaw* - for the needy, afflicted, distressed and wretched, suffering ill-treatment or social distress,
- (iii) *dal* - for thin, feeble, socially weak, impoverished and reduced; in means or property possession,
- (iv) *rush, resh* — for the famished in want and impoverished.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in the Israelite societal class stratification, there were different identities of the poor and poverty. They were determined by the base line, used as the demarcating state.<sup>21</sup> This informed the legislations and structures of care and amelioration of circumstances of the poor among the Israelites.

### **III. Causes of Poverty**

**Individual/community unrighteous conducts:** David E. Holwerda says “poverty results, primarily, from unrighteous conduct by either the poor individuals or the large community.<sup>22</sup> It is a product of deprivation of basic necessities of life. Major causes of poverty include invasion and war, drought and crop failure/famine, slothfulness and enslavement.<sup>23</sup> Poverty is an offshoot of the rich waste resources, which the poor are without today and which generation of humans will be without tomorrow. The dominant rich as a class, causes poverty of the poor by not setting limits to their desires, which demand that the deprived poor should satisfy the wants of the rich from the few available resources meant for meeting their basic necessities of life. Thus, poverty is caused by inaccessibility to resources and instruments of survival. As rightly put by May (1991), poverty is a consequence of “the unjust distributions of land and the rapacious assaults by the powerful on the lands of the poor.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Geraki T. Sheppard. (1997). “Poor”. In *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*. Georgia: Mercer University Press. 701.

<sup>20</sup>J. O. Akao. (2000). “Biblical Theology in Africa and the Issue of Poverty Alleviation.” *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Vol.xv, No 2. 42.

<sup>21</sup>J. O. Akao. (2000). “Biblical Theology in Africa and the Issue of Poverty Alleviation.” *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Vol.xv, No 2. 42.

<sup>22</sup>“*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 3, K-P*. (1986). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing. 905.

<sup>23</sup>*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 2, K-Z*. (1975). Chicago: Moody Bible Institute. 1381.

<sup>24</sup>Roy H. May. (1991). *The Poor of the Land*. Mary Knoll: Orbis Books. Xi; also. L. Boff. (1995). *Ecology and Liberation*. Mary Knoll: Orbis Books. 21.

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**Global employment bias against the poor:** The global employment bias against the poor also increases due to rise in part-time work, cheap labour and casual job that lack security and unity of working class to form a self-organisation against the offering of wages below the growing cost of living. It affects the female gender more, likewise migrants and racial minorities because “it costs employers less and the economically desperate workers have little power to resist increased exploitation.”<sup>25</sup>

**Inferior mindset of the deprived group:** Poverty is also traced to the inferior mindset of the deprived group because “the poor are lazy, lack education, lack personal initiative, have too many babies...”<sup>26</sup> Inevitability of poverty is a result of class nature of social system, which places value on selfish individualism, measure of human worth in terms of money and a society that is run by “cut-throat dog-eat-dog competition.”<sup>27</sup> The social structures ensure continuity of the process of siphoning the wealth, which the working masses and poor created, to be embezzled by the high class and privileged few through legislation, political repression and restriction against upward social mobility.<sup>28</sup> Sexism in male domineering society also reduces women to a status of the poor as the possession and chattel owned by men. The unique world view and custom of the deprived group are repressed to become subservient to the structure and perspective of the dominating class. This produces identity problem for the poor, alienation from their cultural elements, and also turns them to use their skill, youthful age, and strength reared from the sponsorship from the poor group/family to serve the affluent class, at a meager wage - below the wage of their colleagues in an affluent group.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, it is a known fact that corruption is a bane of Nigeria; and this has affected every facet of the society. Nigeria is a place where political leaders with access to national treasury convert public funds to private use; it is a place where Congress works to undermine anti-corruption campaign; and it is a society with corrupt judiciary. Consequently, political corruption is pandemic in Nigeria, with bureaucratic and electoral corruption, bribery and fraud, embezzlement and extortion with favoritism and nepotism widespread on the political scene. Poverty

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<sup>25</sup>P. H. Green, (ed.) (1985). “An Ecumenical Approach to Economics: Labour, Employment and Unemployment”, *Ecumenical Reappraisal Report of the Meeting of the Advisory Group on Economic Matter* held in Geneva, Switzerland, October 10-13. 29.

<sup>26</sup>R.C. Linthicum. (1991). *Empowering the Poor*. California: MARC Books World Vision. 9.

<sup>27</sup>Juliode Santa Ana (ed.) (1981). *Towards a Church of the Poor*. Mary Knoll: Orbis Books. 28.

<sup>28</sup>A. A. Olaniyi. (2010). *The Dal in Exodus 30:15 and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria*. AJBS XXVIII. 2. 18.

<sup>29</sup>Juliode Santa Ana. (ed.) (1981). *Towards a Church of the Poor*. 28-29.

amidst plenty! What a paradox! This accounts for various security challenges confronting Nigeria.

From the foregoing, misuse of riches by the dominant class and indiscipline or idleness and haste or excessiveness of the poor also causes poverty.<sup>30</sup> R.E. Nixon summarises the causes of poverty in the Old Testament into seven divisions: (a) Natural disaster causing bad harvest, (b) oppression by powerful neighbours, (c) vicissitude of life of the fatherless and widows, (d) landlessness of aliens or Levites, (e) personal offering of self on sale to slavery, (f) invasion of enemy nation, and (g) extortionate usury.<sup>31</sup> Above all, the influence of about twenty-nine years of military rule in Nigeria (1966-1979 and 1983-1999) has created increasing rate of poverty, of authoritarian rule in social and religious governance, and of structures of social injustice.<sup>32</sup>

#### **IV Poverty and the Religion of Israel**

Poverty in the Old Testament is described in Hebrew terms and other variants such as **עֲנִי** (ani), **עָהֵב** (ana), **אָנָו** (anaw) and **דָּל** (dal).<sup>33</sup> These words describe a condition of economic lack or insufficiency. In other words, they express a condition of not having enough. Andria defines poverty as the condition in which people lack the basic necessities for a decent life such as food, clothing and shelter.<sup>34</sup> Asante defines poverty as the lack of opportunity to develop our abilities, to control our own lives because of economic deprivation and political injustice. He regards structural injustice; unfair distribution of wealth, unjust world economic order, demographic increase and environmental degradation as the root causes of poverty, particularly in Africa.<sup>35</sup> In treating the phenomenon of poverty in the history of religion of Israel, Akao<sup>36</sup> says that there is no single distinct

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<sup>30</sup>D. R. Spender. (1996). "Theology of Poor and Poverty". In *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Michigan: Baker Books. 671.

<sup>31</sup>R.E. Nixon. (1999). "Poverty" in *New Bible Dictionary Third Edition*. England: Intervarsity Press. 945.

<sup>32</sup>Matthew Kukah. "Contemporary Church". Accessed on 07/02/2013 from <http://www.ifro.org/html>.

<sup>33</sup>A.D. Verhey. (1996). "Poverty". In Bromily. (ed.) *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co. 921.

<sup>34</sup>Solomon Andria. (2006). "The Book of Deuteronomy". In Tokunboh Adeyemo. (ed.) *Africa Bible Commentary*. Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers. 231.

<sup>35</sup>Emmanuel Asante. (2000). "Root Causes of Poverty and Displacement in West Africa: A Theological Reflection". In E. Martey & M. Gerald, (eds). *The Gospel and the Displaced in Africa: The Case of the W/Africa Sub-region* Accra: Presbyterian Press. 18-22.

<sup>36</sup>J.O. Akao. (2000). "Biblical Theology in Africa and the Issue of Poverty Alleviation." *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Vol. XV, No 2. 41-59.

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thread of thought. He points out that during the period of the Patriarchs, Israelites' history knew no distinction between the rich and the poor, for every member of the family or clan had equal rights and status. In Canaan, however, during the monarchy, Yahwistic theology came with the view that poverty or misery, as it happened in Eden, can only be the sign of man's infidelity and the consequent hot displeasure of Yahweh. But on the eve of the exile, Israelite theology, according to Akao, redefined its stance on the issue of direct connection of poverty and suffering with sin and disobedience. In the Writings, the sages tried to make the Israelites know that poverty or misery could be a trial of their faith. From the post-exilic era down to the New Testament period, poverty was no more considered as a curse but a virtue in ancient Israel.<sup>37</sup>

At the settlement in the land of Canaan, the Israelite society accepted that, poverty had come to *stay* - "The poor will never cease out of the land" (Deut. 15:11). Thus, the Old Testament makes general provisions for the care and welfare of the poor and needy in the Israelite society. It does this in the form of legislation in the context of the covenant with Israel. The Lord affirmatively declared that, "There should be no poor among you if only you will obey the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 15:4-5). The prophets became very vocal against the ill-treatment of the poor, and declaring Yahweh's hot anger against those who perpetrated it (Amos 8:4-6, 5:11-12; Micah.3:14-15 etc). God defends and protects the poor and oppressed against their enemies (Psalms 4: 5-6; 34: 9, 15-22).

So far, it is understood that poverty consciousness began to manifest itself in the religious or historical life of the Israelites from the monarchical period due to the inequalities brought about by social stratification. But God, who has been claimed to have had preferential option for the poor,<sup>38</sup> put in place various poverty alleviation measures as discussed below in the ancient Israelite society.

### V. The Old Testament Stipulations for the Care of the Poor

There was no question of doubt on the existence and the reality of the plight of the poor in the Old Testament, particularly during the mosaic period. Thus, "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be open handed toward your brothers and towards the poor and the needy in the land."<sup>39</sup> Certainly, it was God's concern for the welfare of the poor that led to the

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<sup>37</sup>J.O. Akao. (2000). "Biblical Theology in Africa and the Issue of Poverty Alleviation." *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Vol. XV, No 2. 41 -59.

<sup>38</sup>John S. Pobee. (1987). *Who are the Poor? The Beatitude as a Call to the Community*. Geneva: Wee Publications. 12.

<sup>39</sup>Deut. 15:11.

institutionalizing of some basic laws in the mosaic legislation to protect their interest. These include:

**The gleaning principle:** “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it, leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the works of your hands.”<sup>40</sup> The law or principle of gleaning was an established method of preventing debilitating poverty among the people of God and refugees in the land. The poor widows, Ruth and Naomi, were able to survive because of the practice of this law.<sup>41</sup>

**The giving principle:** “If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the town of the land do not be hard hearted or tight fisted towards your poor brother. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he wants.”<sup>42</sup> With this principle, those that have in Israel were encouraged to share with their fellow brothers that were poor and never to be stingy towards them. This same sharing and giving principle should be cultivated today.

**The tithing principle:** “At the end of three years, bring all the tithes of that year’s produce and store it in your towns so that the Levites, who have no inheritance of their own, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your, towns’ may come and eat and be satisfied.”<sup>43</sup> This tithing principle, called charity or poor tithe is the focus of this research work. We can see that one of the original purposes of tithe paying in the Old Testament was to help the poor. It is quite amazing that in most of our churches today, the poor widows, orphans, strangers and fatherless are never remembered in the distribution and expenditure of the church’s tithes. Hence, this research work calls for the adoption of this kind of tithe by churches in Ogbomoso Anglican Diocese to take care of the poor specifically.

**Interest free loan to the poor Israelites:** “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien.... Do not take interest of any kind from him but fear your God... You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Christians

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<sup>40</sup>Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22.

<sup>41</sup>C. Adarigho-Oriako. (2008). *God’s Concern for the Poor*. Lagos: Nehemiah Projects International.64-75.

<sup>42</sup>Deut. 15:7-8.

<sup>43</sup>Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-15.

<sup>44</sup>Lev. 25:35-37; Exod. 22:25.

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should desist from such action as asking for interest, profit, commission or certain percentage of money from brethren who come to them for financial assistance.

**The year of Jubilee:** “Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land... It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property.<sup>45</sup> The year of Jubilee, which was every 50th year in Israel, was the poor person’s right to receive back his inheritance. The jubilee principle also provided for self-help and self-development. With the land returned, the poor person could, again, earn his own living.<sup>46</sup>

**The Sabbatical Law:** “For six years, you are to sow your fields and harvest tire crops, but during the seventh year, let the land be unploughed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it”.<sup>47</sup> Poverty sometimes forced some Israelites to sell themselves to more prosperous neighbours. The sabbatical law ensures freedom to all slaves in the seventh year. Although we are not all farmers today to leave our land unploughed for the benefit of the poor, still we can still find several other means to help the poor among us.

In the Mosaic legislation, there are several other legislations which show God’s serious concern for the poor. These include daily payment of wages to a hired person (Deut 23:14, 15; Lev. 19:13), collateral taken from the poor should be returned same day, no mistreatment of widows and orphans (Ex. 22:22-24), and so on. Similarly, the poor in the wisdom literature (Psalms and Proverbs) are presented as God’s special or favourite children and God, their lover, defender, caretaker and avenger. Oppressing them attracts God’s wrath, while helping and identifying with them brings favour and blessings on the individual.<sup>48</sup>

In the prophetic literature, the prophets cried against economic exploitation, injustice and oppression of the poor in the land of Israel. Thus, the Israelites were fiercely warned by the prophets against mistreating the poor. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Zechariah, and the rest see justice to the poor as basis for which Israelites’ worship and fasting would be acceptable by God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Lev. 25:10-11.

<sup>46</sup>Lev. 25:10-11.

<sup>47</sup>C. Adarigho-Oriako. (2008). *God’s Concern for the Poor*. Lagos: Nehemiah Projects International.77.

<sup>48</sup>See Psalms 12:5 34:6:35:10:37:14:70:15;! 12:9; Prov. 22:9; 14:20-21; 21:13; 26:16; 28:27; 29:7,14 Exod. 23:10.

<sup>49</sup>See Isaiah 1:11-18; 3:14; 10:1-13; 41:17; 58:6-9; Jer. 5:23; 7:5-7; Ezek. 16:49-50; 29:29; Amos 2:6-7; 6:1-7; 5:12;Zech. 7:9-11; Mai. 3:5.

## **VI. Assessment of the Response of the Church to poverty alleviation in Nigeria**

According to Adewale, the African continent is the worst hit by poverty. The victims of injustice and other forms of oppression look to the church for succour. He declares:

Apart from the Catholic Church, one can dare to say that other Christian denominations have largely turned their eyes to heaven rather than attend to the pains of millions (most of who ironically are members of their various churches). The church continues to build “gigantic structural edifices, colossal business empires and her clergy feed fat, while the laity is weeping”.<sup>50</sup>

Adewale calls on the church in Africa to awake to her responsibility. He concludes by saying that, there is need for a theology in Africa that will take into account the needs and aspirations of the poor people.

The degree of poverty in Nigeria is very high, and government alone cannot manage it. According to Olatunde, “it is a monumental mistake for anyone to think that government should unilaterally shoulder the responsibility of managing poverty in the country.”<sup>51</sup> He commends the efforts of the government so far while he highlights some practical ways by which the church could help alleviate poverty. Some of these ways include: capital investment, professional assistance, addressing laziness, addressing corruption and sharing of resources.

Abogunrin,<sup>52</sup> states that the life and the ministry of Jesus established the model for the church to follow. Jesus denounced the religion and social structures that aided the oppression of the poor. Abogunrin adds that the Roman society was heartless towards the poor, but the Jewish scriptures urged charity and care for the poor. According to him:

The Church has led in giving the world schools and colleges, hospitals, orphanages, welfare centers, and progressive agricultural methods...But the situation in Africa... shows clearly that the Church has not done enough. Most

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<sup>50</sup>O.A. Adewale. (2003). “Christological Base for Social Praxis: Christology in Africa Context”. *Biblical Studies Series, No 2*. S.O. Abogunrin et al. (eds.) 365.

<sup>51</sup>Damilola Olatunde. (2006). *Deliverance from Poverty: Religious Approach to Managing Poverty in Nigeria*. Oshogbo: Bewas Printing Company. 76.

<sup>52</sup>S.O Abogunrin. (1986). “The Community of Goods in the Early Church and the Distribution of National Wealth” *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Vol. 1. No 2.79.

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churches do not have adequate programme for the poor masses... due to the fact that the vast majority of Christians in these areas are still living in abject poverty.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, Abogunrin condemns the nonchalant attitude of the affluent pastors and rich government officials to the poor. He challenges the church to “participate in the sufferings of the poor, the persecuted, the oppressed, the retrenched workers, the jobless, the displaced, the disinherited, the victimized, the broken-hearted, the homeless and the hungry Nigerians.”<sup>54</sup>

Oniya,<sup>55</sup> feels bad at the situation of poverty in Nigeria and how it has become a breeding forum for most of the social evils such as thuggery, armed robbery, kidnapping, child trafficking, ritual killing, misappropriation and looting of government treasuries, and all other dishonest practices. He says that the church must be specially and seriously concerned about how to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. He also remarks that the church must not only concentrate on evangelical programmes, but must equally mind the suffering of the people being evangelised as demonstrated by Jesus Christ while on earth (cf Matt. 15:32-39).’ According to him, Christ’s spirit of sympathy, compassion and empathy must be highly demonstrated by the church of God.

Also, Dada<sup>56</sup> expresses his dissatisfaction in that the church, which ought to serve as a communal rallying point for its members, is not living up to expectation. He therefore calls on the church in Africa to learn from the communal experience and efforts of the traditional Yoruba society in preventing material poverty through ‘*Owe*’, ‘*Aro*’, and ‘*Esusu*’. To address the problem of poverty in Nigeria, the church, according to Dada, must *tie* involved as a communal entity, pull resources together to help members and non-members by establishing Christian Cooperative Societies or a “bank to be called Christian Development Bank, just to help the poor ones and to help heal the ailing economy of Nigeria. He emphasises that the Church in Africa should move from individualism to institutionalism, a place where the weak, the poor and the dispossessed find succour as demonstrated by the early church. (Acts 2:44; 4:34-5:11). The church, therefore, should make frantic efforts to alleviate the suffering of the poor masses if her impact and relevance will continue to be felt. The church should be with the poor and not just

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<sup>53</sup> S.O. Abogunrin. (1986). “The Community of Goods in the Early Church and the Distribution of National Wealth”. *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Vol. 1. No 2.79.

<sup>54</sup> S.O. Abogunrin. (1986). “The Community of Goods in the Early Church and the Distribution of National Wealth”. *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Vol. I. No 2.79.

<sup>55</sup> Gbolahan Oniya. (2004). *Poverty Alleviation: A Role for the Church*. Osogbo: Christian Religious Publications. 1-15.

<sup>56</sup> K.O. Dada. (2000). “Communal Effort and Poverty Alleviation in Traditional Yoruba Society: Lessons for Contemporary African Church”. *Castilia* Vol. 3. No 1 June 2000. 100-107.

for the poor. There should be empowerment of the poor and micro-credit facilities must be made available. The church should collaborate with the government to raise the quality of life in Nigeria, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

## **VII. Effective Poverty Alleviation Programmes as Panacea for Security Challenges in Nigeria**

Categorically speaking, as a way to overcome security challenges and its attendant effects in Nigeria, the government, church and other civil organizations must put in place effective and functional poverty alleviation programmes as it was done in ancient Israelite society during the Mosaic era. In ancient Israelite society, necessary provisions were made for the poor through various stipulations earlier discussed. The poor were protected from being oppressed by the rich and both had access to basic necessities of life, especially food. Consequently, there was peace in their society. Today, many Nigerians go out without food. They cannot satisfy their basic need of food. The issue here is not that of balanced diet, but food that can sustain the soul and prevent an individual from death, which may arise from hunger. Many Nigerians are hungry, and so they are angry. This accounts for various security breaches being witnessed in all the nooks and crannies of this society. One way of restoring peace and security, therefore, is to make provision of food a topmost agenda of both the government and the church poverty alleviation programmes as indicated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Of a truth, there cannot be peace as desired by all without everybody having something on his/her table to eat. An adage in Yoruba says "*bi ebi ba tan ninu ise, ise buse*", "(when the issue of food is settled, the burden of lack/need is virtually gone). Another one goes thus "*eni ebi n pa ko gbo iwaasu*", "(a hungry man cannot listen attentively to a sermon). It is believed that a man's attention could be secured, having first been ministered to his physical need(s). Thus, all the struggles and clamours for peace could only be achieved when food is provided for all because majority of people primarily went into armed-robbery, prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, etc as a result of what they will eat.

High rate of unemployment is another factor that is responsible for prevalence of poverty in Nigeria. It promotes thuggery, touting, violence, ritual killing and, ultimately, armed-robbery. All these social vices constituted security challenges in Nigeria. Thus, poverty alleviation in term of job creation as indicated in the MDGs as a means of eradicating poverty should be given serious attention by both the government and the civil organizations. The church in order to actually involve in job creation can embark on a broader based economic venture, which could create employment for as many people as possible. The area to be explored

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could be agriculture, to which the government has not been paying much-desired attention, due to over-dependence on oil. It is not a gain saying that if the teeming population of the unemployed youths in Nigeria is gainfully employed, sanity/peace would be restored to our society. Poverty alleviation through job creation should not just be a political propaganda but a reality if the much-desired security of life and properties would be achieved.

Moreover, the care for the poor who fall within the low income bracket should be given the needed attention. The workers in this category are being poorly paid or remunerated, either by the government and or the private sectors. This is due to the rise in part-time work, cheap labour and casual job that lack security and unity of working class to form a self-organisation against the offering of wages below the growing cost of living. It affects the female gender more, likewise migrants and racial minorities because “it costs employers less and the economically desperate workers have little power to resist increased exploitation.”<sup>57</sup> A worker that is being poorly remunerated will not be efficient or effective in doing the job he is employed to do and in most cases designed other illegal means of sustainability. Perhaps this accounts for misappropriation of public funds and looting of government/private treasuries by some employees. It is believed that if every employee is adequately remunerated in term of salary and allowances as and when due, some of the social vices that constituted security threat today could be avoided. Every employee of both the government and private sectors should be adequately remunerated and should not be denied their daily/weekly/monthly wages as stipulated in the OT. This could be done through the implementation of a minimum wage for both public and private employees. No doubts, effective poverty alleviation programmes through provision of food (food banks), creation of job/ empowerment schemes and improvement of the condition of the ‘working poor’ would restore sanity/peace to our society.

### VIII. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research paper, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- (a) The poverty alleviation programmes of the government should be more focused and pragmatic and see to it that it is the targeted people who actually benefit from the programme.

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<sup>57</sup> P. H. Green, (ed.) (1985). “An Ecumenical Approach to Economics: Labour, Employment and Unemployment”, *Ecumenical Reappraisal Report of the Meeting of the Advisory Group on Economic Matter held in Geneva, Switzerland, October 10-13.29.*

- (b) The church ‘and other civil organizations should actively collaborate with the government in alleviating poverty, especially in the provision of food and creation of job.
- (c) Interest-free loans as it was in ancient Israel should be given to the poor by the government and other financial institutions as a way of empowering them.
- (d) A tithe called “charity tithe” which was used to provide palliatives for the poor in ancient Israel should be adopted by the contemporary church so as to have a strong financial base to fund its poverty alleviation programmes.
- (e) The few rich members of the society should show genuine love to the poor by giving willingly towards the course of raising the standard of living of the poor in the society as demonstrated in OT giving principle Deut. 15:7-8).
- (f) Policies against the oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful people should be made, implemented and constantly be reviewed by the government at all levels. Payment of minimum wage should be implemented by both public and private sectors. Salary/wages should be paid and as when due. Promulgation of law against employment of workers on part-time basis and or as casual workers for many years should be made and implemented to avoid exploitation of the poor by the rich ones.
- (g) The church should admonish the poor and the needy whose poverty is as a result of their laziness or poor work habits so that they may work harder in order to become rich. In other words, the church must always emphasise the dignity of labour.
- (h) The contemporary church, like the ancient Israel, should address spiritual as well as material needs by cultivating a new mindset similar to the notion of the mission church in the colonial era in which the Bible and the plough were understood as mutually re-enforcing. The church should serve as effective representative for marginalized segments of the society at the national, state and local levels.

## **IX. Conclusion**

It is no longer an issue to begin arguing on whether or not poverty has excruciating effect on many peoples in Africa, particularly, Nigerians. It is also not a problem talking on whether or not the government is doing something to assist the poor. The real problem is that efforts of different government and non-

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government agencies directed towards poverty alleviation have not been effective. Hence, the country is in a state of emergency security wise, and this is mostly connected with the poverty level in the society. Thus, the church in collaboration with the government needs to rise to the aid of the poor in an effective manner through effective poverty alleviation programmes. If the previous and present methods have not been successful, a leaf should therefore be borrowed from the ancient Israelite society. The Church, as a way of restoring and ensuring continuous peace and security in the troubled society like Nigeria, should take poverty alleviation seriously, borrowing a leaf from the ancient Israelite society that ministered effectively to the poor through various pro-poor programmes. There is no doubt that there will be peace, security of life and properties if the basic needs of the numerous Nigerians in terms of food, housing and clothing are provided for. These basic needs particularly, food could be met through the adoption of effective poverty alleviation programmes as recommended in this paper.

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