

# African Ecclesiastical Perspective of Religion and Poverty In The Nigerian Context

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## ABSTRACT

Christianity is one of the major religions recognized in Africa. It is one of the means by which poverty is fine-tuned to enhance human suffering at the expense of the gospel preached by the religious leaders in Africa generally and Nigeria specifically. The expectation of adherents of this religion is to be the agents of light and peace in the midst of darkness, but the reverse is the case. It is discovered that out of seven continents in the globe, Africa has the most hardworking people in the entire universe, while Nigeria Christians are the most prayerful nation. They work like an elephant and eat like a mouse. Ethnic violence and corruption are some of the causes of poverty in Nigeria. The focus of the paper is to expose how some Nigerian clergies used Christianity to increase human suffering. The panacea from these menaces is also discussed. Qualitative method through a historical approach was used to achieve this purpose. The paper concluded and recommended that Christianity has its "moral values" as part of human ethics. Some of these could be tapped and integrated with the laws of the country in order to reduce poverty to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Ecclesiastical, Perspective, Religion, Poverty, and Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century dispensation in Africa, religion has come to mean different things to different cultures, traditions and ethics. The immediate implication of this development is the free market enterprise, which has created a lot of misconceptions among all categories of people (Jemiriye and Sikiru, 2005) in the continent of Africa. The continent is made up of people of diverse religious backgrounds. Thus, one may not be surprised that it is a pluralist religious continent. (Ogunleye, 2012).The advent of Islam and Christianity brought religious pluralism and social upheaval to Nigeria by introducing different cultures and ideas (Imaekhai, 2010). Religiously, Nigeria is a pluralistic society, this can be explained by the institutional and cultural diversities of the ethnic groups of varying inhabitants. Today, African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity are the three main religions practiced in Nigeria, with Islam and Christianity being the dominant religions in the nation. The ecclesiastical perspective of religion and poverty refers to the untoward practices which are perpetrated by some Christian Clergymen as a result of poverty in Nigerian Churches. In a nutshell, it means evil or ungodly

practices in the 'Christian church' as a result of poverty in the nation. Poverty is the lack of enough income or resources to satisfy a person's minimum needs (Senesh, 1975). Salmen (1992) opined that poverty results from a lack of human, physical and financial capital needed to sustain a livelihood, and from inequalities in access to, control of, and benefits from resources, be they political, social or economic. Poverty can be found in almost all countries and regions of the world, despite the fact that the minimum needs of people are not everywhere the same, which varies according to place and time as a result of the hierarchical order of needs and wants.

The relationship between Christianity and wealth is yet to be understood by the adherents of this religion. Nigeria has become a global case study of how a nation can be deeply religious and yet not prosperous. What is the source of the belief that religiosity leads to prosperity?. The focus of this paper is to expose how some Nigerian clergies used Christianity to increase human suffering. The panacea to religion and poverty in Nigeria from an ecclesiastical perspective is also discussed. To achieve this purpose, qualitative method through a historical

approach was used. Nigeria is the giant of Africa with numerous tribes and each of them has its own way of practicing religion. There are over 250 different ethnic groups, with different languages spoken of many tribes and with different patterns of worship in the nation. In Nigeria of today, many traditional religions are practiced and there are many tribes as well as many languages, so also are many religions (Celestina, 2010). Most of the beliefs and practices of African Traditional Religion have been changed by the adherents of Islam and Christianity. It is almost everybody in Africa generally and Nigeria specifically that are interested in religion, because it is with us, part of our lives, and holds us together on a daily basis. Every member of the human race involves in one religion or other. Idowu (1976) supports this statement thus: We are all of us religious in the sense that we believe in the sacred and are committed to one 'faith' or another; in the sense of those who seek and try to establish a 'reasonable and acceptable suitable' religion; or in the sense of those who think that they are only interested in 'religion' without being involved in religion, except in so far as they seek to fill up life's aching void with spiritualism, astrology, magic, or some other forms of occultism. Therefore, religion can be regarded as the sole worldview within which events were explained by a particular culture and behavior arrangements/patterned in the Nigerian society. Isiramen, (2010) corroborates this as he remarks that, Religion permeated every facet of life of the people. It was particularly significant in inculcating and promoting discipline in all spheres of human endeavor and this it did successfully. Thus, the people behaved, putting into consideration the growth of the human person in relation to moral standards, spiritual values and the physical nature in a manner that could positively relate human beings to one another in a community of persons, as well as their creator. It is believed that Nigerians are religious, yes, but at the same time, we should begin to ask for the place of God in Nigeria society, because of its persistent poverty. It has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the very fabric of the Nigeria nation. It is acceptable that nearly three-quarters of Nigeria's population is poor (Isiaka et al., 2017). Africa is one of the developing worlds where living standards have fallen over the past decade (Kunhiyop, 2008).

### **BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON POVERTY**

It is very important to understand the biblical stand about poverty so that Christ's light can shine forth into the darkness of African life in general and Nigeria in particular. From the biblical point of view, it is discovered that sin is the ultimate cause of poverty in our world today (Genesis 3:18-19). The Bible gives attention, not to poverty is lack of riches as a commodity, but to the relationships between people which poverty expresses (Bunting, 1995). The poverty that results from sin is both spiritual and material. For instance, when Jesus says

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). He is referring to those who recognize their spiritual poverty and are humble and meek (Kunhiyop, 2008). Sugden, (1988). argues that, the poor in spirit are those who because of their condition in this world is dependent on, and have turned to God. The term does not refer to spiritual deadness, atheism, or humility. However, due to the size of this paper, we will limit ourselves to only material poverty of those who are poor of wealth and material goods, lacking (Kunhiyop, 2008) even in the necessities of life. It is the belief of some Christians that, sometimes God prospered the righteous with material possessions (Psalm 112:1 to 3). At every stage of the Israelite's history, there were numbers of poor people among them. These include the women, social outcasts, orphans, sick, strangers, immigrants, prisoners, aliens, widows, children, slaves and physically handicapped. This is because these people were dependent on others for their livelihood and powerless to determine their own destiny and meet their own needs. Nixon, notes that the causes of Israelites poverty might be through the following: Through natural diseases leading to bad harvests, through enemy invasion, through oppression by powerful neighbors or through extortionate usury (Nixon, 1982). There was a rule or law guiding the wealthier members of Israelites communities to support their poorer brethren (Deuteronomy 15:1 to 11). The likely recipients to suffer poverty were the fatherless, widows and the landless aliens and most often than not, they were the victims of oppression (Jeremiah 7:6; Amos 2: 6 to 7a).

In the New Testament dispensation, there were various kinds of imposition of heavy taxes on the Jews. Probably, many were in a severe economic difficult situation, while others collaborated with the Romans which made a great amount or a degree of profits for them. The worldly-minded Sadducees were generally wealthy, as were the tax-collectors. (Nixon, 1982). During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, He identified with the rich and poor. Jesus and the Twelve were contented to go without the comforts of home life (Luke 9:58), and yet found accession for giving to the needy and helpless (those when compared with others are less privileged) (John 13:29). Nixon, in one of his accounts, describes it, The poor are often shown to be happier than the rich because it is easier for them to have an attitude of dependence upon God. It was to them that he came to preach the gospel (Luke 4:18; 7:22). It is they who are the first to be blessed and to be assured of the possession of the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20), if their poverty is the acknowledgement of spiritual bankruptcy (Matthew 5:30). A poor person's offering may be of much greater value than a rich man's (Mark 12:41 to 44) (Nixon, 1982). At this juncture, it can be said that God is with the poor. Those who are to receive the message of God must recognize that it comes from the poor disciples, and is for those who are prepared to receive from poor and humble people (Bunting, 1995). The early church experienced communal holding of wealth (Acts 4:34 to 35). The poor

were called by God and their salvation brought Him glory (1 Corinthians 1: 26-31). The material wealth of the Laodicea Church was in sad contrast with her spiritual poverty (Revelation 3:17). Nigeria is the giant of Africa, blessed with the total population of which was estimated at 190.9 million people in 2017 according to the latest census figures (Trading Economics, 2017). and over 250 ethnic groups, houses three major religious traditions (Western Nigerian Information Services, n. d.). Each of these religions relates to the Nigerian society differently and fulfill different roles which are deeply rooted in the nature of each of the religion (Akamidu, 1993). Without gainsaying, poverty can be found in almost all the countries and regions of the world today. The minimum needs of people are not everywhere the same. This is because people's minimum needs vary from one continent to another and from one country to another according to place, time and season. The sources of religion and poverty in Nigeria include bad leaders, lack of job, banditry, insurgency, terrorism, bribery and corruption in diverse ways and unethical activities.

### **CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA**

Christianity in Nigeria is not lacking in scholarship. Nigeria is situated on the West Coast of Africa. Christianity had been firmly rooted in Nigeria in the twentieth century. Nigeria's first contact with Christianity could be dated as far back as the sixteenth century during the pre-colonial days through the Portuguese missionaries. (Ajayi, 1965). Benin experienced the first Christian missionaries from Portugal in 1514. In Warri, however, it did appear in 1575 as if the Portuguese had successfully planted their religion there. It is very important to note here that the first attempt at Christianizing Nigeria was a failure because Christianity so brought failed to demonstrate spiritual power to meet the physical and spiritual needs of Africans such as sicknesses, diseases, barrenness and demonic oppression among others. At the same time, it failed to satisfy African religious expression as it was purely intellectual and Europeanized. (Fatokun, 2013). But Lere (2008) argues that language, poor transportation, tropical diseases particularly malaria, funding problems and that the missionaries did not understand the culture of the natives were some of the factors responsible for the initial failure of the missionaries.

In 1841, the first Niger Expedition marked the beginning of the movement to re-establish Christianity in this country, following the failure of earlier Catholic Missions in Benin and Warri (Ajayi, 1965), among all the religions of the world, Christianity is unique. It is a religious faith professed and practiced by Christians and founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Christianity began in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, on 12<sup>th</sup> Day Sivan, A.D. 30 and spread throughout the Mediterranean world, Asia, America and Africa (Iluno, 2015). A new missionary movement came to Africa which began at the

end of the eighteenth century as a result of the failure of the Portuguese missionary enterprise to establish a lasting Christianity in Nigeria, Protestant churches of the evangelical revival in Europe initiated this at this time. A very large number of new missionary agencies and societies started at that time in Europe. Among these are the Baptist Missionary Society formed in 1792, the London Missionary Society founded in 1795. This stimulated evangelical Anglicans, Methodists and Scottish Presbyterians into forming the Church Missionary Society (which was founded in 1799), the Methodist Missionary Society and Basel Mission (Fatokun, 2013).

### **NIGERIAN ECCLESIASTICAL PERSPECTIVE OF RELIGION AND POVERTY**

In Nigeria today, there are numerous people, young and old, men and women, in nooks and crannies of the nation that practice Christianity according to the Biblical injunctions. A Christian, 'according to (Osaji, 2016) is that individual who has accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The person now experiences a new life, which is spirit controlled. He is henceforth, guided by the law and words of God as written down in the Bible. But it is disheartening in some Nigerian churches that, some of these leaders are full of untoward attitudes that lead to poverty, despite the fact that they have confessed Jesus Christ physically. Naturally, religion detests cheating, immorality in any way or by any means and acquisition of wealth through illegal and ungodly means. It can be said that religion is the foundation of morality in society. For instance, the missionaries who brought Christian religion to Nigeria made Religious Education and Moral Education compulsory to all students and this helped in no small measure to reduce social vices and crime rates (Osaji, 2016) among the Nigerian populace. At this juncture, it is necessary to mention some reasons that are responsible for poverty in some Nigerian churches. They include bad leaders, banditry, lack of contentment of the pastor, unhealthy competition and materialism, embezzlement, low wages, debt servicing, wars, poor attitude to work, natural disasters, unhealthy rivalry, terrorism and love of money, among others.

The Christian thinkers made us understand that the future of Christianity lies in Africa generally and more especially in Nigeria. This is not certain because of the way Christianity is being practiced with the knowledge of Christian history in other parts of the world. (Olawoyin, 2017). Christian religion harms our society instead of doing us good and our people are being abused and exploited in the name of religion. In support of this assertion, Ijabla describes some Nigerian Churches thus: It is a house filled with hypocrisy, greed, fraud, lies, pretensions, paedophilia, adultery, fornication, consumerism, and everything else that He preached against. Thieves are offered the front seats in Church; recognition is accorded based on the size of one's tithes

and offerings; Pastors now specify the exact amount of offerings they want and members run over themselves to be the first to make the payments and “claim” their blessings; the left hand is encouraged to see what the right hand gives so that the left feels “powered up” to out-donate the right hand; pastors are racing to acquire private jets and private universities, and out-do one another in accumulating worldly possessions; their members come to church to show off their cars and clothe (Ijabla, 2016). For the love of money is the root of all evil (2 Timothy 6:10). It is not money that is evil. The materialistic heart of obtaining it all the time in an illegal way is evil (Deuteronomy 16:19). The sorrows that they produced through their striving to be rich manifested the error of the greedy motives of their hearts (Dickson, 2011). It is disheartening today in some Nigerian Churches, to see Christian ladies imitating the negative lifestyle of the western world in skimpy dressing. Chippla Vandu as cited in Damola Awoyokun (Awoyokun, 2007) commenting in the Nigerian Punch says Our world, our society, is being set on fire by those who insist on turning their private fantasies into a general nightmare as a result of poverty in the nation, some Nigerian Church leaders do not see anything bad in nude dressing in the church. This is because the more the number of worshippers, the more the amount of tithes and offerings they will realize. In a similar experience shared by the “Concerned Members” of one Baptist Church, Agbowó, Ìbàdàn that the aggrieved members of the Church locked out the Church pastor and other members on one Sunday over allegations that the pastor was embezzling funds and abusing his office. The pastor was accused of running the financial affairs of the church alone and keeping over #4 million belonging to the church in his personal account (Sangolade, 2017).

The aggrieved members under the umbrella of “Concerned Members” accused the pastor thus in 2017, Our pastor has turned himself to the treasurer and financial secretary of the church, whereas we employed him. He spends our money singlehandedly without getting clearance from the financial secretary or church council (Sangolade, 2017). The unimaginable dishonest, illegal behavior and other forms of a misdemeanor that permeates some Nigerian Churches have entered Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) church where about 50 of the church pastors have been reprimanded over allegations of financial impropriety and embezzlement of church funds (Inyang, 2012). One of the most common crimes committed in the church is embezzlement. It is more than a sneaky treasurer, deacon or a church usher taking money from the offering plate. One of the most common modern ways a Church suffers embezzlement is through the Church or Ministry Debit card. Some ‘men of God’ commit this fraud by using the ministry/church debit card to pay for gas, meals, and other personal bills, such as groceries. Sadly enough, many pastors do not even know that they are guilty of committing such a crime (Rivera, 2010). Corroborating this further Rivera, (2010) wrote on what

transpired. The pastor uses the church debit card to fill his/her car with gas and also buys a snack while at it. Most churches allow the pastor to do this because he/she uses the car mostly for church business. A Pastor or staff members use the church debit card to buy lunch while away from the office, to pay a cell phone bill, to buy personal items such as suits for the preacher to wear on Sundays, Bibles, etc. Unfortunately, some pastors know that it is wrong and it is an offense to do what they have done, but they could not control their untoward attitudes as a result of poverty. Poverty to them is the lack of resources to satisfy a person’s minimum needs. Men have accepted the idea that poverty was something certain people had to endure for a long time because resources were scarce, and the worker could do little to increase production (Senesh, 1975). For the pastor of Voice of Canaan Church, Cherubim and Seraphim, Azuri-Okene, in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State, was not ready to endure poverty for a long time. The pastor of the said church killed Mercy Moses, a sex worker at the Holly wood Hotel in Azuri community with the hope of raising #2.5 million from the ritual before he was arrested (Akubo, 2018). Many so-called ‘Man of God’ have tricked, duped, embezzled churches’ and individual’s funds. There are many others who bury humans as rituals in their church. An instance is a pastor of Holy Gathering Evangelical Church of God, a Cherubim and Seraphim Church, located in the popular cement factory area, Lafarge Cement Company, Papanlanto in Ewekoro Local Government Area of Ògùn State. The Pastor who was alleged to have had secret affairs with Raliat Sanni, a divorcee and mother of five. He confessed killing the victim alongside another acclaimed prophet, the spiritual head of Oba Onímájèmú Celestial Church in Iyaya Ègbédò. The victim was slaughtered like a ram and the blood collected in the seven calabashes before the head and hands were completely severed and placed in the bigger calabash, while the cult members ‘prepare’ the body, dug a shallow grave inside one of the church rooms and buried the remains of the victim. (Information Nigeria, 2018). Emphasizing this further, the Shepherd of Voice of Canaan Temple, Cherubim and Seraphim Aladura Church, Ozuri, in Adavi Local Government Area of Kogi State and two others were arrested over the ritual killing of a 19-year-old commercial sex worker. The Shepherd of the church hired the other two culprits promising them seven hundred thousand naira (#700,000.00). They were all arrested, thereafter, they led the investigator to an area called Uhobo in Ogaminana area of Adavi where the torso of the remains of the victim was dug out from a shallow grave (The Punch Newspaper, 2018).

In Itoki, Àgbàdò, in the Ifò Local Government Area of Ògùn State, a prophet allegedly used a pestle-like wood to smash the head of his lover after they had sex. The Prophet cut off the victim’s head, hands, and removed her intestines which he took to a pastor, the founder of Lion of Judah of Christ. The severed head and the two hands of the victims were buried at the back of the church

(Awoyinfa, 2018). At the early stage of Christianity, Christians lived a very peaceful and quiet life. They were of great care and concern for one another with strict moral discipline. In fact, it was particularly on the point of religious and moral purity that the Christians differed from pagan (Fatokun, 2011). Fatokun says 'marriage was well protected against divorce, polygamy and concubines. Christians engaged in the common occupations prevalent in their age (except those that they felt were not in harmony with their religious faith, like carving of idols).' (Fatokun, 2011). When Boer was writing about the conduct of the Christians in their community, he made it clear from the letter written to a certain Diognetus by an unanimous author, probably sometime between A. D. 150 and 180 that:

Though they follow local customs in dress and food and the rest of their living, their own way of life which they display is wonderful and admittedly strange. They take part in everything like citizens and endure everything like aliens, like everyone else they marry, they have children, but not a common bed they remain on earth, but they are citizens of heaven (Boer, 2003).

The good testimonies we heard from the Early Christians give us hope of future Nigeria. But it is shameful to hear dirty things about some Nigerian clergymen. For example, a Nigerian Pastor from Edo State was stripped and shamed publicly after he was allegedly caught naked in a hotel room with a female church member, saying that it was the woman herself who lured him into the hotel room against his will (Kamash, 2018). In another scenario, a pastor of Celestial Church of Christ Parish in Ilashe, Nigeria's Ògùn State was reduced to a toddler when some residents of Ilashe flogged him mercilessly for allegedly abducting and impregnating a 10-year-old girl (Kamash, 2018). The commercialization of religion today is one of the effects of ecclesiastical poverty that brought Nigeria as a country to her knees. For instance, the theology of giving. Some Christian Churches place much premium on the principle of "sowing of seed". This is a principle that goes with persuading members of the churches to sow their salary, stipend or some substantive money that are very dear to them with the expectation that God will bless them in multiple folds (Ayantayo, 2016). It is claimed that through this means, God can bless the giver. In order to be a beneficiary of Jesus' gift which could be, passport success in overseas trip, good job, success in business, beautiful houses, double promotion, overseas visa and journey mercy among others. Some pastors encouraged their congregations to donate money and other possessions in order to possess the afore mentioned earthly materials. Emphasizing this further, Ayantayo notes: The pastors often ask the congregation to sow fat so that they may reap bounteously. In the light of this, the church leaders design some offering such as "open offering" (the one that opens the heaven for blessings) "poverty eradication offering" (the one that removes poverty from one's life completely)" and "Success offering" (the one that brings abundant and unlimited success in all earthly

endeavor) (Ayantayo, 2016). The consequence of poverty is not hidden among Nigerian pastors. For example, in 2015 specifically, one of the political gladiators in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria; gave a sect of the Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N) pastors' financial gifts in preparation for 2015 general election. They all agreed to meet in one of the renowned seminaries in the state. To my dismay, without mincing words, some of them exchanged blows over a small amount of money. Poverty!

## **PANACEA TO RELIGION AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA FROM ECCLESIASTICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Although Nigeria is the hub of Africa in almost all things, including Christianity and its bastardization, many of the latter also happen in other African countries. However, it will not be out of place to explore ways in which poverty can be reduced to the barest minimum in the Nigerian context, if not totally eradicated. In light of this, the following are the suggestions:

### **Proclamation of the Gospel of God's Redemption as Revealed in Christ Jesus**

The Church should balance teaching about wealth and poverty. The message of the Clergy must be Christ-centered based on salvation and sanctification. In order to meet the need of the poor, the pastor's teaching must not be shifted from spiritual prosperity taught by the pre and colonial revivalists, spiritualists, and missionaries to materials (Ayantayo, 2016), but instead, the Priest must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom to the materially poor, welcome them into the fellowship and share in their struggles (Stott, 1984). Supporting this pleasant assertion, Ojo observes thus: Those who exploit the poor and those who became poor as a result of their sinful lifestyle need spiritual transformation that comes through the effect of the Gospel (Ojo, 2006/2007).

### **Better Wages /Remuneration**

It is discovered that some 'Clergymen' are poorly remunerated. This indicates great danger as they patronize the same markets and have families to cater for like other people in the society. Churches should exercise justice in their economic practices and pay better wages to their employees so as to avoid untoward attitude like heretic preaching that fetch them money and lead their listeners to hell. Church funds must be invested in socially responsible ways. Christians should have productive ventures to create goods and services so as to have enough to care for the pastor (Ojo, 2006/2007).

### **Be Conscious of Time Wasting**

King Solomon teaches about the essence of time and season in the book of Ecclesiastics (Ecclesiastics 3:1-8). It is noticeable that some Churches believe that

substantial time of the congregations should be spent in the church, not only on Sabbath day but also ordinary days. There are some programs in the church done at the expense of other secular business activities, which have implications for the livelihood of church members. Examples include 7, 24, 48, 72 hours 'alone with God,' or 'before the Lord'. Some church activities go on in the morning and lasting till afternoon apart from Sabbath or Lord's day which should be the productive part of time an individual ought to have used to do something productive capable of improving their standard of living. Ayantayo notes about essence of time in 2016, It is important to note that, time is the scarcest commodity in life and to a large extent we can argue that it is a thousand times more precious than money and when it is gone, it cannot be purchased for money, cannot be redeemed by silver or gold. Once time passes, it can never be redeemed. Nobody can hold back the hand of time because it does not wait for anyone. Many people have failed in life because they postponed what they were supposed to do in the summer till winter, some delayed what was to be done in the morning till evening whereas, procrastination is the thief of time. (Ayantayo, 2016). The Church should not be ignorant of time wastage, because there are time and season for everything under the sun. The clergy can also give timely warnings that will be taken seriously because he is a man of God from the platform of integrity and honor.

### **Handle the Word of God with Care and Love**

The Clergy is expected to handle the word of God with care and love. The Church is to demonstrate love and philanthropic gesture to the poor. Our God is God of love. His desire is to end suffering and poverty. He demonstrated this by freeing the oppressed Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3:7 to 8). When people are enslaved, He is there to liberate them. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, "and now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love". In order that the Church continues, faith, hope and love must prevail. Faith and hope refer to the individual's personal relationship with God. However, love refers to the individual's relationship with his fellow brother on earth (John 13:34 to 35). Since the Church is the fellowship of God's people on earth, love must prevail in order to offer members an atmosphere of preparation for external dwellings (Dickson, 2011). Therefore, love is the primary objective of the faithful ones. Love is paramount among early Christian life. Fretz notes that the Feeling of brotherhood in Christ found expression, and the stress laid upon such love is evidence of the vivid realization of that brotherhood on the part of the early Christians. Within the circle of disciples, the love which Jesus inculcated burned warm and vivid, and one of the life of his followers in the apostolic age was their devotion to one another and their unselfish regard for each other's good. It was this thing more than anything else that gave its peculiar

character to their Christian life, and it did much to attract others to them (Fretz, 1970). In Christianity, love can be likened to a fire that kindles faith and light that brightens hope. Christians must follow the example of Christ by showing concern for the poor if actually, they are the Disciples of Christ in words and action.

### **Promotion of Economic System by Training Church Members**

To fight poverty, employment in various ways should be available to all Church members to prosper. The Christian church should endeavor to support and promote economic systems that meet human needs which will consider the poor as they are the objects of poverty. Therefore, training of members who do not have jobs in the Church will go a long way in meeting their spiritual and physical needs (Oke, 2019). Service to God does not affect economic activities in the developed countries of the world as God does not bless an idle person. In support of this, Apostle Paul says that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). What Apostle Paul wants us to understand is that Christianity is a behavioral principle of life, but not just a doctrinal belief. In the principle of this verse, it is a behavioral principle of life that the Christian must work. If he/she can work when work is available, but will not, then the church is under no obligation to give him food. It is the responsibility of the community of disciples to teach every disciple how to be responsible in carrying out one's life on earth (Dickson, 2011) If this was the responsibility of Apostle/disciple of old, it means that the Christian Church of 21<sup>st</sup> Century must strive to promote economic system by training church members who are poor, they should be equipped, so as to contribute wealth to the society.

### **Conclusion**

It is a reality that there is poverty in the world, even in some of the Nigerian Churches. The source of poverty is a result of our scrupulous attitude to life. Therefore, the Christian Church should not live and teach as if poverty is a virtue. They should rather withdraw from their sinful manner of living that can lead to poverty and teach those who are rich to remember those who are poor. The liberation message from the throne of grace is needed for those who become poor as a result of their volition through laziness. Fostering an attitude of willingness to practice generosity can influence the response to poverty by religion in Nigeria.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper recommends that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria

(PFN) should mandate all clergymen in the country that are yet to experience theological education to do so, as soon as possible. The essence of theological education is to correctly teach and understand the doctrinal truth of the scripture. This will prevent heresies and wrong doctrines as noted in some messages of non-theologically trained ministers. Apart from clerical work, pastors are advised to embark on small businesses such as poultry, small garden or other businesses that can generate some income, so as to alleviate poverty among ministers. Every citizen of the country should endeavor to be productive either by getting employed somewhere or through self-employment. This is because unemployment has led many people into the ministry-even without any call from God. The clergymen are advised to be a model of Jesus Christ in all their undertakings.

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