Overcoming Poverty as a Collective Obligation: Christian Perspective.

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Introduction.
Resentment to poverty and the desire to be on the side of wealth no matter how problematic that may be to the interpretation of Christ's teachings is lived an issue today as it has been since the beginning of Christianity. Poverty had been a problem one may say even before Christianity. Hence for much of their recorded history, the Israelites were obsessed with the idea of taking possession of the Promised Land and enjoying its over-flowing milk and honey (Exod. 20: 17, Deut. 3:7; 20:5.21). Despite his sympathy and softness for poor, his gospel being preached to them and himself preferring to be identified with them. Jesus ever set himself fighting poverty.

The first Christians did not seem to have been entrapped into the confusion about wealth and poverty as we have today. Right from the on set they advocated the principle of community of possession whereby members sold all they had and paid the proceed into a common treasury administered jointly by the apostles, from which they distributed to each according to his need (Jn. 12: 6; 13: 29; Act. 2: 44- 45). Theirs was a concrete step to overcoming poverty, a principle adopted to ensure that no one was too rich while some were too poor, and a declaration that poverty was unacceptable.

In his analysis of African mentality Ndiokwere (1994) state:
Where life has been granted, then follows the qualities of life, namely long life, prosperous life, happy life, good life and so on. (p.65)

Nigerian Christians with their African mentality believe that wealth is desirable by all and sundry. There is therefore, no doubt that they cannot but get worried about the increasing rate of poverty in the land and seek ways of overcoming it.

The concept of poverty is elusive since it appears to defies objective definition. However for the purpose of this article we shall take "the poor" to be the less-privileged in terms of material resources, the deprived, the marginalized, and the under-developed.
Here we must recall the view of Torres and Eagleson (1982) that when we talk about the poor, we are talking about something collective. The isolated poor person does not exist. That is precisely why the eruption of the poor is so tough and aggressive. If it were simply a matter of individual poor people, there would be no problem. But since it has to do with classes, races, cultures etc. tension and conflicts are entailed. Torres and Eagleson further insist that to talk about the poor is also to point out the element of social conflicts, as the word “poor” is not a tranquilizing one. The poor person is the product or by-product of an economic and social system fashioned by a few for their own benefit. So a structural conflict is embedded in the reality of the poor.

The focus of the article is on overcoming poverty with the poor as a collective concept. Overcoming poverty for an individual poor *per se* is beyond the scope of the article. We intend to examine the topics under the headings: relationship between private property/life style and poverty, the role the Church and the common way out of poverty.

**Relationship between Private Property/Life Style and Poverty**

One big social factor militating against overcoming poverty is the delicate issue of private property or ownership. Beginning with John Chrysostom in the late 4th Century up to third world peasant of the 20th Century, questions have been asked and meanings searched for as regards to private ownership as a factual and legal phenomenon. Avila (1983) thinks that these questions and search for meanings are not about ownership in practice or “ownership as it is”. He goes on to say:

> They know that only too painfully well. Rather they are searching for the meaning of the concept ownership “as it ought to be”. They want to discover the living soul, the essence and purpose, the “within” the innermost meaning of ownership (p. 2).

Their viewpoint is not merely factual; it is ethical. They are searching for moral philosophical theory, one either logically realized or grossly betrayed by current practices and institutions. Indeed their question seeks to investigate the deeper reasons behind even this foundational idea, as they search for a model of how this powerful right enjoyed by some individuals really ought to be regarded. They are asking whether there is an ethics, a moral philosophy of ownership.