Towards A Contextual Theology Of Poverty For Ghana

Research Description
A Thesis Submitted to the South African Theological Seminary for the Degree of Master of Theology in Systematic (Public) Theology

Author: Isaac Boaheng
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TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF POVERTY FOR GHANA

BY

ISAAC BOAHENG

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE SOUTH AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FOR THE DEGREE OF

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in

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PROMOTER: PROF. BILL DOMERIS

The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Theological Seminary.
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Isaac Boaheng
Sunyani, Ghana
27th March, 2019
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TO GOD BE ALL THE GLORY!

Isaac Boaheng

March 2019
DEDICATION

To my lovely wife Adu-Agyeiwaa Gloria, my caring mother, Mad. Mary Ampomah and my children, Christian Adom Boaheng, Benedict Adu Boaheng and Julia Ampomah Boaheng.

To all people who have experienced and/or are experiencing poverty in their daily lives. This is my little contribution to the public theological discourse on poverty. I hope it will help reduce your plights. God loves you all.
ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to formulate a contextual theology of poverty for the Ghanaian context. It began with an examination of the Ghanaian context in terms of religious, political, economic and social developments from the pre-colonial era, through to the post-independence period.

Next, exegetical analyses of three anchor passages that are very crucial to the subject, one each from the law (Deut. 15:1-11), the prophets (Is. 10:1-4), and the gospel (Matt. 6:19-34) were conducted to ascertain what Scripture teaches about the subject matter. The major findings from the exegetical studies include the fact that God frowns upon materialism, extravagance, love for riches, anxiety and worry that detract one from his/her loyalty to him but encourages contentment, simplicity, modesty and sharing of resources with others.

With the biblical teaching and Ghana’s poverty situation as contextual frameworks, the study critiqued the Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation, Ghana’s most influential model for Christian understanding of poverty and its alleviation. The study found some merits in Prosperity Theology for poverty alleviation but also discovered that it lacks contextual application to the Ghanaian socio-religious landscape.

The final part of the study presents a contextual approach to poverty based on three major partners namely, Scripture, tradition and the socio-politico-economic situations of Ghana. The theological formulation was done based on the following thematic areas: work ethics, material ethics, human development, female empowerment, cultural transformation, social and structural transformation, spiritual transformation, solidarity with the poor, fruitfulness to spirituality and work, solidarity with the poor, contentment, modesty and simplicity, job creation, financial ethics and fighting against extravagance in the Church. The contextual theology formulated not only addresses the theological and biblical needs of Ghanaians but also socio-cultural needs. The findings from the study confirm the hypothesis that a contextualized theology of poverty offers a paradigm for the understanding and alleviation of poverty among Christians in Ghana.
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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This introductory chapter deals with matters related to the research problem, aims and objectives of the study, the justification of the research, preliminary review of related literature, the scope of the study, methodology for the research, and definition of key terms. It serves as the foundation for the entire study.

1.1 Background to the Research

Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing the 21st century world (Stott 2006). No country in the world is entirely unaffected by poverty. Developing countries, however, tend to be affected by this social problem to a larger extent than developed countries. Ghana is a developing country in Africa, experiencing a multi-faceted poverty (Osei-Assibey 2014).

The poverty situation in Ghana varies geographically across the country. Poverty tends to be more intense in the northern part of the country than in the southern part (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] 2014; Osei-Assibey 2014). Among other factors, the high rate of illiteracy, poor saving-habits, and low income make people in the northern sector poorer than those in other parts of the country (GSS 2014). The result is the migration of people from the north to the south in search of greener pastures, which in turn leads to unemployment, high crime rate and increased poverty in southern settlements, where the majority of Christians in Ghana dwell (Boafo 2014).

The economic, social and religious challenges posed by poverty have attracted public attention. Of particular interest to the current study is the church’s response to the
issue. Many Christian scholars (including Otabil 1992; Asamoah-Gyadu 2012; Asante 2014; Boafo 2014) have deliberated on the way to deal with poverty among Christians. Different approaches have been proposed among Christians. One approach considers poverty as a requirement for entering the Kingdom of God (Williams 2001:81). Another approach finds the solution to poverty in a modest life (see Williams 2001:123). The third and the most influential response to poverty is Prosperity Theology model (Heward-Mills 2009). A fourth model finds solution to poverty in proper stewardship of resources (Asante 1999; 2014). In spite of the various attempts to end poverty, there seems to be very little improvement in living standards of Christians in Ghana. The need to improve human life is therefore a continuing theological concern. This research seeks to address the urgent need for a contextual theology that addresses poverty among Christians in Ghana. In the process, the study will examine Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation in the light of Scripture and the Ghanaian context. Then based on the findings from the examination of this popular theology, the study will proceed to develop a contextual theology rooted in Ghanaian traditional wisdom, Ghanaian socio-religio-economic situation and Scripture.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

The search for a solution to poverty among Christians in Ghana has received different answers, of which Prosperity Theology is the most dominant. However, it seems that this persuasive approach to poverty alleviation has failed to deal adequately with Ghana’s poverty situation because it lacks contextual elements. The concern of this study is to address, among others, the question as to how God expects Christians to respond to their state of poverty in the Ghanaian context based on Scripture and traditional wisdom. In this thesis, I will develop a contextual theology of poverty in Ghana, and in the process critique the popular forms of Prosperity Theology. The contextual theology will draw both on the teachings of Scripture and Ghanaian folk wisdom.

1.3 Research Question

The main research question is: How might a contextual theology of poverty function to contribute to the understanding and alleviation of poverty among Christians in Ghana? To deal fully with the above question, the study will consider the following subsidiary
questions: What is the poverty situation in Ghana? What is the biblical teaching on poverty and wealth? How effective and biblically grounded is Prosperity Theology model towards poverty reduction among Christians in Ghana? What contextual theology of poverty is relevant for Christians in Ghana?

1.4 Significance of the Research

The study is significant in several ways, including the following. Firstly, it will serve as another contribution to knowledge in the area of Systematic Theology. Also, it will enable both the church and the state to have a better understanding of the extent of poverty in Ghana and the urgent attention the situation demands. Further, it will provide a contextual model of poverty alleviation suitable for the Ghanaian context. Finally, it will serve as a springboard for further studies on poverty.

1.5 Motivation for the Research

The primary motivation for undertaking this research is my desire to formulate a theology of poverty that addresses the needs of poor Christians in Ghana. My family background and ministerial context also serve as additional motivation to undertake this study. My parents were peasant farmers who found it extremely difficult catering for the family. In ministry, I have encountered many poor people who really need answers to question about their poverty situation. These experiences have urged me to undertake this study in order to find solution to this problem. Finally, my desire to become a systematic theologian motivates me to investigate this topic in this area of theology.

1.6 Methodology for the Research

According to Mouton (2001) the choice of a research design is informed by two main factors, namely, the type of problem to be solved and how that problem will be scientifically solved. The kind of problem to be investigated in a research work is informed by the nature of the object studied. The proposed study focuses on developing a theology of poverty for Christians in Ghana. The research is a development from a literary investigation to a conceptual, philosophical construction. This study falls within the field of systematic theology, the branch of theology that deals with the overall biblical teaching on a particular subject for today’s readers (Peppler...
To the end of achieving its purpose, systematic theologians put together all biblical passages on a particular topic and then give a summary of what all these passages teach about the topic under consideration. The present study will use selected passages as representation of what the Bible teaches about the subject.

The study used Osborne’s (2006) model comprising a four-fold approach to systematic theology, including, Scripture, tradition/historical context, systematic formulation and practical implications. I consider this approach as the most suitable for this research because the study intends to develop a literary investigation to a conceptual construction. This model for the research is made up of four main steps, each of which is briefly outlined below.

The first step deals with the historical context of Ghana. It examines the socio-religious and political contexts of Ghana and the extent of poverty in Ghana. The planting and growth of the Christian faith in Ghana as well as traditional wisdom related to poverty and wealth is also considered.

The second step is an exegetical and theological study of key biblical texts related to the subject. This step is intended to give a suitable biblical and theological context for the study. Before outlining the other steps, I would give a brief description of what exegesis entails. Biblical exegesis refers to the interactive process of arriving at the meaning of biblical texts in its original context (Gorman 2010:10-13). Gorman (2010:12) identifies three main categories of exegetical approaches namely, synchronic approach (also labeled as narrative criticism, social-scientific criticism or social-rhetorical criticism), diachronic approach (historical-critical method) and existential approach. The synchronic approach deals mostly with the final form of the text as we have in the Bible. This approach uses various methods to analyze the text itself and to analyze it in relation to the world in which it first appeared (Gorman 2010:13).

The diachronic approach deals with the origin and development of a text. It also deals with how a text changes and develops with time. Gorman (2010:15) compares this method to the longitudinal section of a plant stem because it takes a “long view” of the text. It includes textual criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, source criticism, historical criticism and others. This and the synchronic approach are both “interested
in the historical or socio-political contexts in which the text come to life and the kind of literature texts are” (Gorman 2010:17).

The existential approach takes no interest in diachronic or synchronic reading of the text. It rather engages the text itself and tries to deduce the reality beyond it as testified in the text. This method uses the text not as end itself but a means to an end. This approach is as self-involving because “readers do not treat the text as a historical or literary artifact but as something to engage experientially—something that could or should affect lives” (Gorman 2010:18).

The study adopted a predominantly (but not exclusively) synchronic approach because such a method enables me to engage critically with the final form of the text. The decision to engage the final form of the text is informed by the fact that it is this form that readers and preachers read, and hearers hear (Gorman 2010:23). The approach used in this study comprises the following key steps:

a) Contextual analysis

b) Literary analysis including a study of the form (genre), structure and movement of the text

c) Detailed analysis of key parts of the text involving lexicology (the meaning of words), morphology (the form of words), grammatical function of words (parts of speech), syntax (the relationships of words), figures of speech, and so on

d) Theological synthesis of the findings

The third step of the study examines Prosperity Theology model within the in the light of biblical teaching and Ghanaian cultural setting to determine its appropriateness for Ghana. A dialogical approach is adopted whereby Ghanaian and other African scholars and preachers are engaged.

The last step formulates a contextual theology of poverty for Ghana. According to Bevans (1992:1) contextual theology is “a way of doing theology in which one takes into account the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the church; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change within that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for
equality, justice and liberation.” For Nicholls (as cited in Nihinlola 2013:38) it is “a dynamic process of the Church’s reflection…on the interaction of the text as the Word of God and the context as a specific human situation”. In short, contextual theology is what the word of God says in a particular situation. From these definitions, we identify three partners of contextual theology, namely, Scripture, tradition and socio-politico-economic situations of the culture the theology is addressing. Firstly, contextual theology is based on Scripture. Scripture is the final authority for any authentic theology, contextual theology being no exemption. The second element of contextual theology is tradition, by which is meant the teachings and practices of the Church since its establishment. The theologian dialogues with past and present scholars in order to arrive at an acceptable result. Thirdly, contextual theology is culturally-conditioned, meaning it takes into consideration both the worldview and the existential (social, political, economic) issues of the people for whom it is formulated. Since culture is dynamic a culturally-conditioned theology may change with time (Schreiter 1986). According to Nihinlola (2013:35ff) any theology built upon these principles will not only be contextual but global as well. All these thoughts informed the formulation of the theology of poverty suitable for the Ghanaian context (in chapter 6).

1.7 Delimitations

Delimitations of the study include the following. Firstly, among the many problems facing Christians, this study focusses on only poverty. Secondly, the study deals with the challenge of poverty within the context of Ghana. Thirdly, the study is limited to Christians and not people of other religions. Fourthly, the study does not examine all Scriptural texts relating to the topic; rather it examines only selected texts. Finally, among the various approaches to poverty in Ghana, the study focuses mainly on two models, Prosperity Theology model and a Contextual Theology.

1.8 Perspectives on the Concept of Poverty

Defining “poverty” is extremely difficult due to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of this term. Survey of literature on poverty shows that the various scholarly perspectives on poverty fall under three categories.
1.8.1 The Economic Deprivation Approach

The first perspective of poverty considers it as an economic concept. From this perspective, poverty is defined as a state of economic deprivation (Njoku 2008). Opinions about what constitutes “economic deprivation” vary. Scholars (including Citro and Michael (eds.) 1995; Njoku 2008 and Smeeding 2005) define poverty as the lack of essential necessities for human life or lack of the capacity to acquire these things. According to this view, temporal economic deprivation does not constitute poverty but permanent deprivation does (Njoku 2008). Therefore, a person who becomes homeless today due to natural disaster (such as fire-outbreak or flood) but gathers enough resources to put up another house in the next few weeks is not to be considered poor within the short duration of his/her homelessness (Njoku 2008 and Smeeding 2005).

Wagle’s (2007) perspective of poverty centers on income or the standard of living. He explains poverty as a state in which one lacks income or other economic resources required for maintaining a minimum living standard (Wagle 2007:18ff). Wagle (2007) however, considers it inappropriate to set a universal minimum income in defining who the poor is. For example, in Ghana those with a per capita income of less than two-thirds of the national average are considered poor (Donkor 2011:25). Wagle (2007:15ff) does not agree with such thresholds because, in his opinion, it is not just how much one earns but “the capacity to consume” that determines who is poor and who is not. Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas (2006:39ff) agree with Wagle and argue that someone may earn a relatively small amount but save more than one who earns relatively high income. Therefore, what matters is how much one saves, not just how much he/she earns.

1.8.2 The Capabilities Deprivation Approach

Sen is responsible for the second perspective on poverty. Sen’s (1999) approach employs two key terms namely, functionings and capabilities. By functionings is meant the things one succeeds in doing or being, such as being healthy (Sen 1999:74ff). Capabilities refer to the freedom to achieve valuable functionings, such as the ability to enjoy social life and self-esteem (Sen 1999:75). Sen (2004:79-80) pointed out at least two pitfalls of the resource-centric approach to the understanding of poverty.
First, he argued, human needs vary between communities, families and even individuals in such a way that different communities, families and even individuals need different amount of resources to achieve the same capabilities. Second, income alone cannot be used to measure poverty because it is but one of the factors that determine what people can do and be (Sen 2004:79-80).

According to Sen’s approach human-wellbeing relates directly to how capable one can freely do the things he/she values doing or being. This approach puts a premium on what the individual values rather than what policy-makers wish for them (Sen 2004; Hick 2014). Sen embraces diversity, substantive freedom, agency and participation. What one can do or be rather than what one has or feels determines whether he/she is poor or not (Sen 2004:77-79; Hick 2014:304). People with low levels of capabilities are considered poor and those with high levels of capabilities are considered rich. Poverty therefore refers to low level human capabilities and poor access to the means to achieving these capabilities (Sen 2009; Hick 2014:304-305). Sen (1999) describes poverty as low-level human capabilities and poor access to the means to achieving these capabilities.

1.8.3 The Social Exclusion Approach

The social exclusion approach to poverty is the third perspective on understanding poverty. This approach emerged in France in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of explaining the precarious situation of the disadvantaged and marginalized due to their inability to take part in the major economic, political, and social enterprises (Wagle 2007:42ff). The meaning of the expression “social exclusion” has metamorphosed over the years (Wagle 2007). In the 1970s many people became unemployed due to decline in business activities. In such a context the term exclusion was used to denote the process that led to the expulsion of people from the job market. Later in the 1990s, prevalent human rights issues led to defining “excludees” as those who are “partly or completely outside the effective scope of human rights” (Strobel as quoted in Wagle 2007:42)

The Social exclusion approach differs from the economic and capability approaches on the grounds that economic and capability approaches focus on individual characteristics and circumstances while the exclusion approach shifts attention to the
relational quality of life (social dimension) (see Wagle 2007). According to the exclusion approach, one may have high income and still be poor if there is lack of social order and hence, insecurity in the community. Moreover, the analysis of exclusion involves the study of societal structure and the conditions of the marginalized groups, such as minority groups and the landless. Social exclusion therefore involves cultural, institutional and social dimensions, dimensions which are absent in the first two approaches. It advocates for the need to redistribute opportunities and resources in order to improve the lives of the marginalized.

1.9 Poverty and Economic Inequality in Ghana

In their study on Ghana’s poverty situation from the 1990s to 2006, Coulombe and Wodon (2007:21) commended Ghana’s commitment towards the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), particularly her ability to reduce poverty by half in 2006 (9 years early than the MDGs target). Nonetheless, they observed economic inequality in the country and argued that Ghana could have achieved this feat earlier (before 2006) if the gap between the poor and the rich was checked. Their research brought to the fore the fact that the northern savanna part of the country was being left behind in the national reduction in poverty. The point therefore is that Ghana’s poverty reduction strategies did not benefit the northern savanna as much as they did in the middle and southern parts of the country (Coulombe and Wodon 2007:21, 25).

Ghana Poverty Mapping Report for 2015 recorded that most people in Ghana live below the poverty line, despite Ghana’s great achievement in poverty reduction (Ghana Poverty Mapping Report [GPMR] 2015). The report further revealed that, about one-fifth of the population (aged 15 years and above) were not educated. It also observed that most rural citizens lacked access to health facilities, and so they resort to herbs for treating their ailments. Further still, the study found that more than three-quarters of the population (aged 15 years and older) are economically active, with the majority being self-employed. The majority of the economically active people, were however, found to be still living below the poverty line because of their low income. The issue of economic inequality in the country was not left unnoticed as the report revealed a wide gap between people in the northern parts and those in the southern parts (GPMR 2015).
Osei-Assibey (2015) has also observed that the rapid economic growth and socio-political transformation of the country over the past few years has widened the economic gap between the rich and the poor, even though there has been a decline in the level of poverty in the country. Osei-Assibey’s study revealed an increase in Ghana’s Gini Index from 0.37 (in 1992) to 0.42 (in 2006), a reduction in the poorest average income from 6.9 (in 1990) to 5.2 (in 2000) and a rise in the richest income from 44 to 48.3 over the same time-frame. For obvious reasons, the growing income disparity tends to militate against poverty alleviation in the country. Osei-Assibey (2015:n.p) opined that the solution to bridging the gap between the poor and the wealthy lies (partially) in the country’s ability to process raw materials into secondary products before exporting them. He stated: the country’s “over dependence on primary commodity exports and capital-intensive extractive industries – mining and oil extraction – which have few or no linkages with other sectors of the economy, as well as the growing sophistication in the financial system” has the tendency of “undermining the country’s capacity to translate economic growth into strong job growth and narrowing of the inequality gaps” (Osei-Assibey 2015:n.p).

Cooke, Hague and McKay (2016) have observed an appreciable decline in Ghana’s poverty situation in recent times. Yet, the scholars revealed that the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer (Cooke, Hague and McKay 2016:2-3). More so, rural residents have a higher incidence of poverty compared to urban residents. They also observed that uneducated household heads tend to be poorer than educated household heads (Cooke, Hague and McKay 2016:4). Further still, they established that poverty rates increase from public sector workers to wage earners in the private formal sector, to the self-employed in non-agricultural activities to the wage earners in the private informal sector, to the households with non-working heads, and finally the self-employed in agriculture (Cooke, Hague and McKay 2016:4).

The poverty situation in the country has affected all institutions including the church. What response(s) has the church given to this problem? The next section takes care of this question.
1.10 Some Christian Approaches to Poverty in Ghana

A survey of literature on Christian response to poverty in Ghana revealed at least four approaches. The first approach comes from those who consider poverty as a requirement for entering the Kingdom of God. Advocates set their minds on things above (Col. 3:2), believing there is only little that they can achieve (see Williams 2001:81). The second approach finds solution to poverty in modest life (see Williams 2001:123). Such people control their consumption in order that the little they get will be enough for them and if possible, for others too. This self-imposed limitation is common among Christians during the time of fasting.

A third response is Prosperity Theology, with its focus on four specific areas, namely, material prosperity, divine healing, “sowing seeds” of prosperity and positive confession of faith (Kasera 2012). This kind of theology is emphasized by Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012). Poverty, according to this model, is caused mainly by malevolent spirits and their agents in the world, who prevent people from being successful (Kasera 2012; Kwarteng-Yeboah 2017). Therefore, the solution to poverty is found mainly in the healing and deliverance ministry (Kasera 2012; Kwarteng-Yeboah 2017).

The fourth model is based on Wesley’s principles, “Gain all you can; save all you can, and give all you can” (Asante 2014:130). Advocates of this model in Ghana include Asante (1999; 2014), Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah (2004) and Boafo (2014) who argue that poverty is multifaceted, affecting people not only materially but also psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, physically and socially. This model considers the poor as lacking control over the happenings around them as well as status in society (Asante 1999). Asante (1999) considers God as the ultimate owner of wealth and humans as stewards who have been entrusted with God’s resources for his (God’s) purpose. This model finds solution to poverty in proper stewardship of resources which includes sharing with the needy (Boafo 2014).

1.11 Conclusion

Theologians have made many important contributions towards finding solution to poverty. Yet, most of these studies are conducted from the worldview of authors from other countries. Most literature on poverty for the context of Ghana lack a thorough
engagement with Scripture and contextualization of biblical teachings. It is this concern for poverty study based on biblical (and theological) analysis and written for the context of poor Christians in Ghana that will guide the writing of this thesis. I hope to address these and other gaps that those who have written on the subject have not yet addressed. What is the poverty situation in Ghana now? The next chapter takes care of this question.
CHAPTER TWO

POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF GHANA

2.0 Introduction

According to Parrat (2004:9) “context is both the frame work and part of the sources material for doing theology.” In view of this fact, the present chapter examines the (Ghanaian) context within which the study was conducted in terms of religious, political, economic and social developments from the pre-colonial era, through to the post-independence period. Ghana is made up of five major ethnic groups including, Guan, Ga-Dangme, Akan, Ewe and Mole- Dagbani (Strokes 2009:245). The limited scope of the study does not allow a thorough discussion of all the main ethnic groups in Ghana and so I have adopted the Akan as a representative of Ghanaian traditional society. The choice of Akan is informed by their dominant influence on the social life of the country and the fact that the study itself focuses on an Akan area of Ghana. References to other Ghanaian ethnic groups are however made when necessary.

2.1 A Brief Look at the Akan

The Akan are one of the principal tribes in West Africa (inhabiting Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire, and some other parts of West Africa) that speak the Twi language. The name Akan is believed to have derived from Akane or Akana (meaning first), which was however been corrupted by early Europeans, who visited the coast of West Africa (Kyeremanteng 2010:26). Akan implies the implied superiority of this group of people as illustrated by the saying “Animguasee mfata akanniba” (Disgrace does not befit the Akan) (Kyeremanteng 2010:26).

The Akan are believed to have migrated from the Sahel to coastal West Africa to establish the Bonoman kingdom around the 12th century, with its capital, Bono Manso serving as a trading state between the Akan and neighbouring people (Ankrah...
The Bonoman kingdom was rich in minerals such as gold (Kyeremanteng 2010:36; Ankrah 2018:59). Bono-Techiman oral tradition has it that there was a Bono king, called Nana Twi (Tsi) whose language was referred to as Twi’s language, *Twi kasa* (Anane-Agyei 2012:2). This historical antecedent makes the name Twi very important in Techiman royal tradition (Anane-Agyei 2012:2-3). Later, the term Akan was used generically to refer to the various dialects spoken within the Akan territory (Kyeremanteng 2010:26). Bono, the language spoken by modern Techiman can therefore be traced to the ancient king Twi as the language from which other Akan languages developed (Ankrah 2018:60).

In modern Ghana, the Akan occupy eight of the sixteen administrative regions namely, Eastern, Ashanti, Central, Western, Western North, Bono, Bono East, and Ahafo regions and some part of the Oti region. The 2010 population and housing census revealed that, the Akan constitute 47.3% of Ghana’s population (GSS 2013). They comprise the Adansi, Akwamu, Asante, Asen, Akyem, Akuapem, Awowin, Ahanta, Nzema, Bono, Fante, Sefwi, Kwahu, and Twifo. They have many common political, social, religious, and cultural institutions, though there are local variations. Three Akan dialects (Fante, Akuapem and Asante) have well developed literature (Dolphyne 2013:xii). The Bono dialect (of Akan) is currently being put into written form due to the ongoing Bono Bible Translation Project undertaken by Bible Society of Ghana. The Akan social life is key in understanding their view on poverty and wealth. To this we now turn.

### 2.2 The Akan Social Life

The Akan and for that matter the Ghanaian social structure gives priority to the community over the individual (Kyeremanteng 2010:112). Each Akan belongs to a family comprising, the living, the dead and the yet-to-be-born. Two types of family exist for the Akan, the nuclear family comprising the spouses and their children and extended family comprising parents, children and grandparents. The extended family is very strong (Edu-Bekoe and Wan 2013:29). Pobee (1976:49) describes this interdependence in the Akan ontology as *Cognatus ergo sum* meaning “I am related by blood, therefore, I exist or I exist because I belong to a family.” Unity as well as peaceful co-existence is therefore key to Ghanaians (Edu-Bekoe and Wan 2013:29). The society is expected to give its members the sense of belonging through
acceptance, common ownership of resources (such as land) and sharing of individual problems (Edu-Bekoe and Wan 2013:29).

2.3 The Religious Context of Ghana

Ghanaian traditional religious view comprises four distinctive markers, namely, belief in God (or the Supreme Being), lesser divinities, ancestral spirits and the lower spirit powers (amulets and talisman) (Agyarko 2005:14). The emphasis on each of these components of the belief system, however, varies from one ethnic group to another.

2.3.1 Belief in the Supreme Being

The Akan expressed belief in God (Nyankopon or Onyame or Nyame) in various aspects of their traditional life long before their contact with Christian missionaries (Boaheng 2018:228-229). For example, Akan express their belief in God through proverbs. The Akan proverb obi nkyere abofra Nyame (No one points out God to the child) underlines the belief that God’s existence is self-evident. The proverb, se wopɛ se woka biribi kyere Nyame a, ka kyere mframa (If you want to say something to God, say it to the wind) underscores the belief that God is spirit and omnipresent. God’s love and care for humanity is evident in the proverb, aboa a onni dua no Nyame ara na ṣpra ne ho (It is God who drives flies from the tailless animal). That Nyame is the Creator and Father of humanity is expressed in the proverb nnipa nyinaa ye Nyame mma, biara nni ho a ọye asase ba (All people are God’s children, none is the earth’s child).

The Akan also express belief in God during traditional rites and ceremonies like outdooring, funerals, marriage, festivals and puberty (Agyarko 2005:3). The expression Nyame mpe bone, nti na ọmaa obiara din (God hates sin, that is why he gave each person a name) is used during naming ceremony to underscore belief in the existence of a holy God. Akan libation prayer recognises Nyame as one who is the controller of destiny and determiner of the outcome of the libation (Edu-Bekoe and Wan 2013:24). More so, cultural (Adinkra) symbols are used to express beliefs about God. For example, the Adinkra symbol Nyame aniwa (God’s eye), the shortened version of the expression Nyame aniwa ṣu asumasem biara (God’s eye sees all hidden things), emphasizes God’s omnipresence and omniscience (Arthur 2001:129).
2.3.2 Belief in Lesser Divinities

Mbiti’s assertion (1990:74) that, “the spiritual world of African people is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead” is true for the Akan. Traditional Akan world view recognizes a group of beings known as abosom (lesser deities), comprising idols, magical powers, totems and so on (Edu-Bekoe and Wan 2013:24, 27). Abosom derives from two Akan words abo (stones) and som (worship) and refers to the worship of stones, woods, and carvings rather than Nyame. The expression, lesser divinities, in the view of Mbiti (1990:74), “covers personification of God’s activities and manifestations, the so-called ‘nature spirits’, deified heroes, and mythological figures.”

Lesser divinities did not come into existence by their own volition but by Nyame’s divine ordering (Mbiti 1990). They serve Nyame to fulfill certain functions. They stand next to Nyame in the hierarchy of powers, each having their own area of competence (Asante 2007:35). Two groups may be identified, the first comprising mythological figures, or tribal heroes or heroines who took the forms of mountains, rivers, forests, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the mother earth (Omenyo 2006). The second category comprises divinities relating to different aspects of life, society and community, including divinities of the sea or the waters, rain, thunder, fertility, health or sickness, planting or harvest, tribal, clan or family life (Asante 2007:35).

2.3.3 Belief in Lower Spirit Powers

The Akan believe that the world is full of spirits residing in various places including stones, tombs, haunted homes, trees and so on (see Asante 2007:35). These spirits may receive reward and punishment in future based on their activities. They are next to God and lesser divinities in terms of power. The spirit world can be divided into two categories: the world of non-human spirits, and the world of the spirits of the dead (Edu-Bekoe and Wan 2013:27-28). Examples of lower spirit powers are asuman such as amulets, talisman or beads which people wear around their waist, neck or wrist (Omenyo 2006), sasabonsam, an evil spirit (associated with witches) which live on tall trees and mmoatia (dwarfs), some powerful spirit beings with feet facing backwards which lives in the forest and sometimes helps herbalists to get herbs (Kyeremanteng 2010:94). The Akan believe that these spirits affect their life either positively or
negatively. For this reason, it is important to ensure that humans do not disturb the spirits so that they may not harm the living.

2.3.4 Belief in Ancestors

Ancestors are spirits of heroes and heroines who, after death, have acquired superhuman powers and are able to affect the lives of the living (Asante 2007:35-37). The Akan, like most Ghanaians, believe that death is a transition of the soul of the departed to the world of the ancestral spirits where it continues to live. Thus, death is a journey to the underworld rather than a break with earthly beings (Asante 2007:36). The world of spirits or ghosts, referred to as Asamando or Asamanadze, is believed to be located somewhere in the deep of the earth (underworld, underground or netherworld (Asante 2014).

The qualifications for becoming an ancestor include: dying a natural death at a “ripe age” after leading a decent life; leading a life worthy of emulation; having children and a proper burial with elaborate funeral rites (see Mbiti 1975; Seale and van der Geest 2004). The roles of the ancestor include: presiding at family meetings and, like the police, ensuring that law and order is maintained in the society (Mbiti 1975). Ancestors also constantly watch over their families like a “cloud of witnesses”; punish evil doers and reward good deeds (Asante 2007:36). Their other role is mediating between God and human, for which reason prayers are offered through them.

2.4 Introduction of Christianity into Ghana

History traces the introduction of Christianity into the west coast of Africa to 19th January, 1482 when six hundred (600) Portuguese merchants and explorers, led by Don Diego d’Azambuja arrived at Elmina in the Gold Coast. They had come in pursuit of missionary and economic agenda, among others (Boaheng 2018:208-209). A symbolic suspension of the banner of Portugal from the branch of a tree, the erection of an altar and performance of Eucharistic rites under the tree, marked their arrival (Kpobi 2008:68). After this, d’Azambuja went to the chief of Elmina, Nana Kwamena Ansah, for a formal introduction of his group and their faith. The group promised Nana Ansah a military alliance and trade relation with Portugal on condition that he became their convert (Boaheng 2018:208). Nana Ansah agreed to the proposal and offered a piece of land on which the St. George Fort and a chapel were built (Boaheng
2018:209). From here, Christianity spread to other parts of the country. Later, the
death of the missionaries brought an end to missionary work in the Gold Coast (Kpobi
2008:68).

Serious missionary attempts to reintroduce Christianity started in the 1730s when
various missionary societies began to visit the country (Foli 2006:14). The Moravian
United Brethren, in 1737, sent Chretien Protten, who had a Danish father and a
Ghanaian mother and had just completed his theological education in Denmark, to the
Gold Coast (Foli 2006:14). Protten’s efforts were most visible in Elmina, where he won
some souls for Christ (Foli 2006:14-15). In 1742, the Moravians also sent another
mullato, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein (an ex-slave) to Elmina (Kpobi 2008:72).
Kpobi (2008) is of the view that Capitein was the first minister to have been sent to
work among Africans in the Gold Coast because, he (unlike his predecessors) was
specially ordained to convert Africans. His ministry was frustrated by several
unfavourable conditions until he “died five years later” (Kpobi 2008:72).

In 1751 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel of the Anglican church appointed
Rev. Thomas Thomson as the first Anglican missionary to the Gold Coast (Foli
Thomson sent three Ghanaian boys to Britain to receive formal education, but only
one of them, Philip Quaque, survived and returned home in 1766 after his ordination
as an Anglican priest (Foli 2006:17-18). Rev. Quaque, who was also a school master,
ministered for 50 years without much achievement in disciple-making, though he
maintained the Cape Coast School.

The Basel Evangelical Mission Society (which was founded in 1815 in Switzerland)
sent four missionaries namely, K. F. Salbach, J. G. Schmidt, G. Holzwarth and J. P.
Henke to Christianborg in Accra on December 18th 1828 (Boaheng 2018:211). After
their death, three more missionaries, namely reverends Peter Peterson Jager and
Andreas Riis (both Danes), and Christian Frederich Heinz (from Saxony) arrived in
Accra in 1833 to continue the missionary work, but only Riis survived (Kpobi 2008:75).
After four years of missionary work, Riis had no convert due to the indigenous people’s
perception of Christianity as a white people’s religion (Foli 2006:19-20). Later, (in
1843) the Basel mission introduced West Indies (Jamaicans) into the Akuapem
missionary field which led to the conversion of many indigenous people (Kpobi
2008:76). The Basel mission worked in the country until World War I when they left because of political pressure.

The Wesleyan missions commenced their operations in the Gold Coast on January 1st, 1835 (Foli 2006:22). Rev. Joseph Dunwell was the first Methodist missionary to come to the Gold Coast. He planted the Methodist faith strongly but passed on after only six months. Other missionaries like George Wrigley and Peter Harrop, who came after Dunwell also died soon after their arrival because of the hostile environment. Later, Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman was also sent to the Gold Coast. Being a mulatto, Rev. Freeman could cope with the African weather and ills. He lived longer than all his predecessors, working both in Ghana and other parts of West Africa, including Badagry and Abeokuta (Boaheng 2018:211).

North German missionaries from Bremen arrived in Cape Coast on 5th May, 1847 (Foli 2006: 24). They had sent four men to Gabon for mission work but failed due to opposition from the French authorities (Kpobi 2008:82). The four of them came first to Cape Coast. Two of them stayed at Cape Coast while the other two went to Gabon for feasibility studies. One person died from each group. When the surviving missionary from Gabon came back (due to French opposition) to meet his counterpart in Cape Coast, they (James Graff and Lorenz Wolf) decided to move to Christianborg to seek missionary advice from other German missionaries who were living there (Kpobi 2008:82). Having learnt that there were still many unreached people along the coast, the two decided to do missions in the Eweland. Starting from Peki on 14th November 1847 and penetrating mainly German Togoland among the Ewe, the Bremen missionaries worked in the Eweland until World War I forced them out of the country in 1919 (Boaheng 2018:212).

2.5 The Political Context of Ghana

The Political system in pre-colonial Ghana was characterized by decentralized form of governance, whereby the leadership of the society was entrusted to local traditional leaders (chiefs/kings) (Kyeremanteng 2010:55). The traditional structure of leadership is hierarchical. At the family level the family head, abuasuapanyin, has the highest authority. The odikro is the head of small village and the ɔhene is the head of a town. The ɔmanhene (state or paramount chief) is the head and highest authority in every
traditional area (Kyeremanteng 2010:55). Chiefs were the custodians of land in pre-colonial Ghana (Asante 2007). Therefore, they ensured that natural resources particularly land, rivers, timber and other resources were preserved.

The introduction of colonial rule with its indirect system of administration, comprising new political structures such as the civil service, local government ordinances and taxation, led to the reduction of the duties of the chief to cultural matters (Kyeremanteng 2010:55). The colonialists formulated byelaws to regulate the rights and responsibilities of chiefs and their traditional councils. Chiefs were reduced to collectors of royalties charged on certain farming and mining operations. The interferences from the colonial rule eventually weakened the authority and influence of many chiefs (Kyeremanteng 2010:55).

In 1957, Ghana became independent. The years that followed were characterised by social and political violence and bloodshed through coup d’état and military rule (Owusu 2008:6ff). In 1992, the country decided through a referendum to go back to constitutional rule. For more than two decades now, Ghana has enjoyed political stability with seven peaceful general elections of a four-year term each successfully conducted. Today, Ghana is among the politically stable nations in the world (Asante 2007:69ff).

What impact have colonialism, Ghana’s independence and political stability had on Ghana’s economic growth? We shall attempt a response to this question when we discuss the economic context of Ghana in the next section.

2.6 The Economic Context of Ghana

Pre-colonial Ghanaian economic activities involved the management of the resources available to the people. Most Akan tribes (such as Asante, Bono and Akyem) lived in the forest and therefore engaged mainly in the cultivation of cocoa, and crops cultivated for consumption such as yam, plantain, cocoyam, cassava and orange (Odotei 1995). Northern Akan engaged in yam, maize and beans cultivation.

People in forest areas, in addition to farming, engaged in hunting activities. Locally manufactured equipment such as traps, clubs, spears, bows and arrows and guns were used for hunting games such as grass cutters, antelopes, rats and occasionally
leopard and elephants. The capital town of the Brong-Ahafo region is *Sondwaeɛ* (corrupted Sunyani). It is derived from *Sono* (elephant) and *dwaɛ* (butchering centre). Oral tradition has it that the city acquired this name because it was the place for the butchering of elephants.¹

Ghanaians also engaged in livestock rearing (Odotei 1995:63). The vegetation of the north which is basically grass made livestock rearing very suitable. Northern people kept goats, cattle, and sheep and employed herdsmen to take care of them. A larger family size ensured that many livestock could be taken care of in terms of feeding and keeping oversight. In Accra, places such as Ningo Prampram, Osu and La were suitable for livestock and poultry keeping (Odotei 1995:63ff).

Indigenous Ghanaians engaged in different crafts (Odotei 1995:63). Blacksmithing was common among the Akan. Blacksmiths smelted iron from a special type of stone to make cutlasses, hoes, fishing hooks and other iron tools. Oral tradition of Techiman has it that blacksmithing originated from the Bono kingdom and later spread to some other Akan communities and to the other parts of the country (see Anane-Agyei 2012). Goldsmithing was also common in Akan communities as well as Kente weaving (Odotei 1995:63). Bead making was common among the Fante, Ewe and Ga. “Beads were very highly prized, especially Aggrey beads known by the Ga as *koli* and *adiagba*” (Odotei 1995:63). Traditional Ewe women also spun threads.

Those living along the coast such as the Fante and Ga were mainly fishermen (Odotei 1995:60). Fishing activities were common in areas such as La, James Town, Cape Coast and other places. Men fished and women processed them by smoking, salting or drying due to their highly perishable nature (Odotei 1995:60ff). The women also engaged in salt production. Daboya in the Gonja state in the north also had salt deposits (Odotei 1995:64).

Trading took place between communities (Odotei 1995:64). Initially the barter system of trade was used. Later, gold and cowry shells (locally known as *sedeɛ* or *srewa*) were introduced as means of purchase (Odotei 1995:67). People from inland travelled to the coast to buy fish and salt while those from the coast travelled to inland to buy

¹ I got this information from my grandmother, Mad. Adwoa Badu.
foodstuffs (Odotei 1995). The Cape Coast community, for example, due to the inadequacy of farm produce and the abundance of salt and fish had to establish trade relation with other communities that had abundant food (Odotei 1995). Ga got foodstuffs such as plantain, yam, cassava, and so on from Akuapem in exchange of fish and salt. Kente were transported from Ashanti to other parts of the country. Northerners brought beans and yam to the south in exchange of salt, fish and other commodities. The poor road network hindered the progress of trade relations among societies.

The question of economic merits and demerits of colonialism in Africa has been a subject of debate among scholars. According to Settles (1996:n.p), the goal of colonialism was “to exploit the physical, human, and economic resources of an area to benefit the colonizing nation.” The little developments we experienced were geared towards achieving this agendum (Settles 1996). At the end, the natural development of African economic life was halted. Settles (1996:n.p) contends that “African economies were advancing in every area, particularly in the area of trade” prior to colonialization. Toyin (as cited Sangmor 2013) observes that colonialism led to the introduction of Western education which elevated the level of education in Africa. Boaheng (2018:219) on the other hand, argues that the educational policies of the colonial masters ended up breaking the tie between educated Africans and their families, to the extent that the elite felt ashamed of their roots.

Odotei (1995), acknowledges that colonialism brought about some infrastructural developments, such as roads, harbours, schools, hospitals and so on. Yet, in her view, these infrastructures were put in place to serve the interest of the colonialists (Odotei 1995). For example, the road and railway networks ended up enhancing the transportation of raw materials to the harbors for export. In addition, colonialist influence on the demarcation of borders ended up generating partisan politics, ethnic conflicts and civil unrest, which eventually retarded economic growth (Bayeh 2015).

Both Amoah (2009) and Settles (1996) assert that the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the negative impact of colonialism was generally a contributing factor to the poverty situation in Ghana/Africa. Settles (1996:n.p; see also Asamoah-Gyadu 2012:56; Yeboa-Mensa 2012:92) argues that the slave trade led to the high demand for slaves which eventually subordinated the indigenous African economy to the
interests of Europe in that the trade replaced “European manufactured products for those products which normally would have been made locally.” Eventually, Africa became a source of human resource and a consumer, not a manufacturer of goods. Rather than the colonial masters helping our country to turn our raw materials into finished goods so that Ghana could export products and increase her wealth, they took the natural resources away at virtually no cost (Settles 1996). In terms of human resource, the slave trade deprived the nation of her best people, people who could contribute immensely to the country’s development. Greedy local leaders sold out not only their natural resources but their best people as slaves (Cannon 2009). Cannon (2009) observes that our local selfish leaders took advantage of their trade relations with the Europeans to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses, a situation which has led to the negative perception people have about Ghanaian leadership and their wealth.

After independence, Ghana’s first president, Nkrumah, established strong economic foundations based on the production and export of cocoa (of which Ghana was the world’s leading producer), gold and timber (Owusu 2008). The country’s relatively good transportation network, high per-capita income, low national debt, advanced educational system, and sizable foreign currency reserves were all positive indications of a brighter future (Owusu 2008). Unfortunately, Ghana’s political independence has not had much impact on her economy (Owusu 2008:9). Today, Ghana is faced with many social problems of which poverty is very crucial. Ghana’s economy is not getting any better despite the revenue from the recently discovered oil deposit (Ghana Business News [GBN] 2015).

2.7 Wealth and Poverty in Ghanaian Traditional Wisdom

The Akan word for poverty is ohia (the lack of, being in need) and for the poor person is ohiani (one who lacks something) (Nkum and Ghartey 2000). The term ohia is not the same as “ahokyere” (state of “want”). The former is more serious than the latter, the latter being a temporal situation. The Akan refer to wealth as ahonyadeɛ (or sika). In traditional Ghanaian society, material wealth is measured in terms of possession of “farmland, domestic animals, or even slaves” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012:57). The Akan concept of wealth or prosperity includes not only material success but also fullness of life and peace. Prosperity is understood in terms of wealth, longevity and fertility (see
Anim 2010:70). With this background, I proceed to consider some of the traditional Ghanaian wise sayings related to wealth and poverty.

2.7.1 Poverty as Social Exclusion

As mentioned earlier, Ghanaians hold a communal worldview. For this reason, everyone needs to feel part of and be accepted by the community as human existence depends more on community support than individualism. The saying *sikani nua ne sika*², (The sibling of a rich person is money) underscores the fact that a wealthy person’s need for companionship is satisfied by his/her wealth (Anim 2010:70). The above saying does not mean that wealth is the literally sibling of the wealth but that wealth creates opportunity for the wealthy to have many companions. More often than not people tend to visit the rich more frequently than the poor for the obvious reason that they might get something from the rich. Another saying is *ohiani nni adamfoo/yonkoo* (A poor person has no friend). No one wants to visit the poor because the poor has nothing to offer them. Therefore, to be poor is to live a lonely life.

The saying *ohiani ne sikani nni agoro mmom* (The poor man and the rich man do not play together) is also a form of social exclusion. We have mentioned early that Akan communities are highly hierarchical. Only those at the same social level move together for which reason there is also the saying *nsee goro tipɛn tipɛn* (Birds of equal status play together). Therefore, in traditional Ghanaian communities, the poor befriend the poor and the rich befriend the rich. Some rich families do not allow their members to marry members of poor families.

2.7.2 Wealth as Something Desirable

That indigenous Ghanaians consider wealth as something desirable is expressed in many sayings. The saying, *sikani di mfemfrimadeɛ* (The rich eats what is sweet) points to the fact that all desirable things in the community eventually get to the rich. There is also the saying that, *sikani funu wo animuonyam kyɛn ohiani a ɔte ase* (The corpse of a rich person is more respected/glorious than a living poor person). In other words, it is worse to be poor and be alive than to be rich and to die (even) young. This saying assumes that the poor has no hope in life and lives aimlessly almost in his life time.

² The proverbs used in this section come from my mother, Mad. Ampomah Mary and late father, Mr. Noah Nti.
The rich, no matter how short he/she lives has the opportunity to taste the sweet things in the world and so dies a happy person. The respect he/she gains after death in terms of the kind of tomb for the burial, the number of people who wail at the funeral, and the manner the corpse is handled is far better than a poor person.

### 2.7.3 Poverty is Dehumanizing

Traditional Ghanaian societies consider poverty as dehumanizing and undesirable, hence the saying *ohia yɛ animguaseɛ* (Poverty is a disgrace/dehumanizing). Poverty exhibited through lack of food, shelter, and clothing, usually makes one lose respect and dignity in the society. The poor in our society are not respected; they are insulted and not taken seriously. The saying *ohiani do ne ba a onhunu* (The poor is not able to convince his/her child of his love) underscores the point that poverty may prevent a parent from showing his/her affection to his/her child. Another proverb, *ohia na Ꮗmɑn ɔkannи yɛ aboa* (“It is poverty that turned an Akan person into an animal”) also points to the dehumanizing nature of poverty (Anim 2010:70).

### 2.7.4 Poverty Brings out Creativity

That necessity is the mother of invention is depicted by the saying *ohia ma adwene* (Poverty makes one think (creatively), or causes one to be creative). This is depicted by the proverb *ohiani nni hwee a, ɔwɔ tɛkyɛrɛma a Ꮗde tutu ne ka* (If a poor person has nothing else, he/she has at least a [sweet] tongue with which to defer the payment of his/her debts).

This point is expressed by Ghanaian musician Kakaaku in a song entitled “*Ohia ma adwene*” (Poverty leads to creativity). The song depicts two animal characters, a tortoise and a mona monkey, as two close friends. The monkey’s mother died and it asked the vulture to inform the tortoise about his bereavement. Upon hearing the news, the tortoise told the vulture that he should express his condolences to the monkey and tell him that he will be there to mourn with him on the day of the funeral. The vulture mocked the tortoise since he (the tortoise) had no wings to fly to the top of the tree where the funeral was to take place. After a while, the tortoise told the vulture that on the day of the funeral he should come to the house and pick up a sack which he would put at a given location and take it to the monkey, informing him that he (the monkey) was on his way.
On the day of the funeral the vulture came and picked up the sack, carried it to the monkey and told him what the tortoise had asked him to say. The monkey wondered how the tortoise could attend the funeral. After opening the sack, he found the tortoise in it. Clearly the tortoise’s lack of wings to fly made him invent a way to get to the destination.

2.7.5 Poverty Should not Let One Give up Hope

Traditional Ghanaian society deals with the issue of poverty by encouraging the poor to help themselves to improve upon their lives rather than giving up hope. This is a form of social creativity. By social creativity is meant “a social mechanism employed by groups to resist pressure” (Kissi 2017:31). Applying social creativity, someone who has been defeated by another person in a competition may decide to avoid any comparison with the one who defeated him/her. The defeated then chooses to compare him/herself with those he/she is able to defeat. In so doing, people are able to comfort themselves even in times of crises.

Traditional Akan people use social creativity to manage their poverty situation with the hope of getting their lives improved. The proverb *ehia wo a nwu na se wonwuec a wonnim nea wobenya* (Do not commit suicide because of poverty, because you do not know what good thing may come your way) advises the poor to live with the hope of overcoming their situation some time to come. The proverb *se wowo nkwa a, wowo adec nyinaa* (If you have life you have everything) underlines the fact that longevity is a source of hope. Until death, one’s life situation may change at any time.

2.7.6 The Communal Worldview of Wealth

Earlier, it was noted that poverty leads to social exclusion. Social exclusion contradicts the African communal lifestyle. Therefore, traditional society opposes this situation by sayings such as, *wo ni di hia a, wonnyae no nkofa obi nyɛ na* (If your mother is poor, you do not forsake her and adopt another). This saying underscores the fact that poverty should not lead to the breakdown of the African communal (familial) relationships. The communal world view of Ghanaian societies is reflected in the ownership of wealth. In Ghana, wealth is community-centred in that no matter who it belongs to, it is intended to be used for the wellbeing of the entire society. This fact is expressed in the proverb: *sika peredwan da kurom a, ɛwɔ amansan*, “If there is a sika
peredwan in a town, it belongs to the whole community.” That is to say, the value of wealth is found in the generosity of the owner.

Therefore, in Akan communities it is wrong for one to accumulate wealth while others are suffering. Wealth is a common good that is intended to be shared with the needy to ease their plight (Anim 2010). This is one of the ways of dealing with poverty in the traditional society. The common ownership of land which is a major means of human survival also promotes poverty reduction in the society.

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2.8 Some Causes of Poverty in Ghana

Since no one is born a poor person, certain factors must be responsible for it. Environmental destruction is one of the major causes of poverty among Ghanaians (Asante 1999:185; 2014:115). At the same time poverty can also lead to environmental destruction (Asante 1999:185; 2014:115). Ghana is blessed with different natural resources for her socio-economic development (Asante 2007; 2014). The use of wrong methods in harnessing these resources create serious environmental problems (Asante 1999; 2014). Overexploitation of Ghana’s natural resources and unsafe practices including excessive cutting down of trees, illegal mining activities, chemical means of harvesting fish, and so on, may lead to diverse environmental problems like land degradation, soil erosion, pollution of rivers, streams and lagoon, air pollution, and desertification (Agyei 2012). For example, people living in the forest zone resort to cutting down of trees for firewood or charcoal, a practice which leads to desertification and makes the land unproductive such that it no longer supports plant life (Odotei 1995). Such a situation does not only cost the country and individuals huge sums of money but also makes people become poorer due the lack of resources for production.

Poor agricultural practices also contribute to (rural) poverty in Ghana (Adjei 2012:48). The agricultural sector is one of the important contributors of Ghana’s economic growth and employs majority of Ghanaians (Ghana Living Standard Survey [GLSS]-5 2008). Yet, various governments have not been able to ensure food sufficiency and ready markets for farmers to encourage their efforts and to help improve their living standards. Technological advancement in the sector is very slow and so farmers
continue to rely on rainfall for cultivation (due to lack of irrigation facilities), and on human labour for cultivating their crops (due to lack of technologically-advanced farming equipment) (Adjei 2012:49). The capital-intensive nature of labour-intensive farming practice restricts many farmers from making large farms. Many farmers are only able to cultivate a little more than what they can consume. Also, pest control methods are not effective and so pest invasion sometimes reduce yield drastically. Few years ago, some army worm infestations invaded many farms especially in the Brong-Ahafo region and ended up reducing farm yield (Tanko 2017:n.p).

Most roads leading to farming communities are unmotorable (Adjei 2012:49), thereby making it impossible for some farmers to transport their produce to urban areas for marketing. As a result, many farm yields in farming communities get rotten, a situation that both causes financial loss to farmers and discourages potential farmers (Adjei 2012:50). The lack of available markets makes farmers compete for buyers, a situation which eventually gives buyers the chance to determine the price of foodstuff without taking into consideration what the farmer has invested in the production. The nation’s inability to add value to farm produce through processing also makes farmers sell their produce such as cocoa, coffee, and cashew as raw materials at cheap prices (Osei-Assibey 2015). The results of all these factors is that, at the end of the year, many farmers are unable to pay their creditors (let alone have profit), in spite of their hard work. Many farmers therefore enter every farming season with debt incurred in the previous one and begin the cycle of poverty once again.

In Ghana, poverty may be politically driven (Donkor 2011:29ff). Government policies are expected to benefit the citizens. Unfortunately, in our part of the world, politicians mostly formulate policies that turn out to establish and legitimize some form of exploitative means of distribution of opportunities, income and wealth, relying on the use of state power (Kisseeadoo 2014). The available resources are used to satisfy the wants of a few while many lack basic life necessities. More so, legislatures legislate laws to endorse (and promote) a huge gap between the salaries of politicians and of other civil workers, the result of which is nothing but economic disparity (Kisseeadoo 2014). Certainly, unless wealth is redistributed and incomes made to be more equal, poverty will continue to anchor its roots in Ghana.
The high level of corruption and mismanagement of funds, especially in the public sector, is another contributor to Ghana’s poverty situation (Adjei 2012:51ff). In Ghana, corruption is very common (Adjei 2012:52). Many public officers use their position to illegitimately amass wealth for themselves instead of promoting the welfare of the citizenry. Some politicians steal the nation’s money and deposit them in foreign bank accounts. The police force which is expected to ensure justice involve themselves in corruption, especially on our roads. The church which by its nature is expected to be corruption-free is involved in high levels of corruption. The media are always filled with stories of misappropriation of government funds, an act which eats so deeply into the nation’s economy. Other evidence of corruption can be found in the many exposés by Ghanaian investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas, his latest exposé being the Number 12 which centred on corruption in football in Ghana and some other African countries (Zurek 2018). The unreasonably high cost of projects executed by the government as compared to the cost of similar projects undertaken by the private sector points to nothing but corruption (Adjei 2012:51ff). Corruption undermines national development, weakens the economy, leads to economic inequality among citizens and makes a country poorer (Adjei 2012:52).

Poverty among Ghanaian women may have some cultural underpinnings (Adjei 2012:57-58). According to Awumbila (2004), women in Ghana experience greater poverty than men because of gender inequalities in accessing resources like land, labour, capital, education and health. Traditional northern customs deny women the right to access resources such as land, buildings, livestock, poultry, water bodies, farm produce, bullocks, radio, bicycle, motor, and labour (Kyei as cited by Adjei 2008). Many widows who could have improved their lives with the resources left behind by their deceased husbands still live in poverty because traditional customs do not allow them to inherit such resources (even after the demise of their husbands). This custom may be rooted in the fact that the dowry (in the form of cows, dogs, cowries and cash) paid during marriage is regarded as giving the man and his family ownership of the woman (see Adjei 2008). The partriachal nature of traditional Ghanaian society is therefore a hinderance to the fight against poverty among women.

Another culture factor that contributes to poverty among women is widowhood rites (Adjei 2012:57). Widowhood rites in most Ghanaian societies ban the widow from work
throughout the period. Akan and Ewe traditions require the widow to undergo certain rituals such as seclusion, prescribed dress-codes, walking barefooted, fasting for extended periods of time (Asante 2014). Such requirements are not compatible with undertaking any business venture during the entire period of widowhood. Most Akan widowhood rites take up to a year to complete. One could imagine how a poor widow can cater for herself and her children during her period of widowhood and even afterwards.

The lack of education is another key contributor to income poverty (GSS 2015); it both causes and perpetuates poverty. Ghana’s illiteracy rate is high (GSS 2015). Education is one of the forces that fosters sustainable development. Skills needed to acquire job, establish a business, manufacture, and to manage available resources, among others are all acquired through education. Imagine how difficult it is for an illiterate to keep basic records of his/her daily business activities or prepare a financial account of his/her yearly activities. There are instances whereby people, for lack of knowledge, unintentionally sell their goods at prices lower than the cost price. Illiteracy can lead to poor health or nutrition deficiency, gender inequality, and poor productivity, all of which hinder economic progress.

Furthermore, large family size has the potential of making people poor. Generally speaking, Ghanaians, like other Africans, have the desire to keep large families. An Akan woman who gives birth to the tenth child is rewarded with a sheep, referred to as Badudwane (tenth-born sheep). As it turns out to be, it is the poor who usually desire to have more children, not the rich. Most of these people are farmers and having a large family ensures that more farm hands are available. At the end, the large family turns out to increase expenditure and reduce their chances of saving. Most children from such families do not get the opportunity to attend school. The little resources available to the family are shared among a large number of people, making it very difficult to break out of the cycle of poverty.

Inadequate access to employment opportunities is another reason why many Ghanaians are poor (Poku-Boansi and Afrane 2011; GSS 2015). There is a strong correlation between unemployment and poverty. People can save if they are gainfully employed. However, Ghana is currently experiencing a very high unemployment rate (see Poku-Boansi and Afrane 2011:74ff). Today, there are many graduates in Ghana
who wander the streets without anything gainful to do for a living. The rampant gathering of unemployed graduates and various demonstrations on our streets attest to this fact. Most people are unable to afford the basic necessities of life, including, food, clothing and shelter (Adjei 2012). The obvious results are the high crime rate, illegal mining, and so on, that characterize the country currently (Poku-Boansi and Afrane 2011:74ff).

Last but not least, people may become poor due to laziness. Laziness may comprise an unwillingness to engage in productive activity. Laziness is a common problem in Ghana, especially among people from wealthy homes. Many people from rich families want to enjoy life but they are not ready to work hard. They normally depend on the bread winner in their family for survival. In the event of the death of the bread winner, these people are left on their own to struggle for a living. They consume whatever was left by the deceased without working hard to add to it. After consuming what they have, they are left poor throughout the rest of their life time due to their lazy attitude.

2.9 Some Effects of Poverty in Ghana

2.9.1 Inadequate Food and Housing

Lack of food is a problem to Ghana despite the large land available to us (GLSS-5 2008; Donkor 2011:31; GSS 2015). The majority of the populace are farmers and yet the country is not self-sufficient in food. Ghana continues to import food such as rice, millet, and maize which could have been produced in abundance if the agricultural sector was strengthened. Farmers, as noted earlier, are not able to produce abundantly because of the over-reliance on traditional methods of farming. Potential farmers are discouraged because farming is not a lucrative job. The results of the lack of food include malnutrition, hunger and poor health. In places where food is available, poor people find it difficult to afford it.

Shelter is also one of the basic necessities of life. Ghana’s astronomical population growth and increasing urbanization demands rapid increase in housing facilities especially the urban areas. About fifty eight percent of houses in Ghana are constructed with mud and lateral brick (Adjei 2012). The affordable housing policies implemented by the government has not dealt fully with the housing deficit in Ghana.
In cities like Tema, Accra, Takoradi, Kumasi, and Sunyani, it is not uncommon to find people dwelling in units such as kiosks, streets, tents, and cargo containers.

2.9.2 Poor Health Facilities

Ghana’s poverty situation is attested to in her health care system (Donkor 2011:32; Adjei 2012:66). Hospitals are the main health care facilities available to people. The lack of funds for training health personnel has resulted in a very high doctor to patient ratio (Adjei 2012:66). People queue from morning till evening without getting access to a qualified health personnel. Some people have to travel long distances before coming across a health facility. The result is that many patients deteriorate before reaching a health facility; some even die on the way to the facility (Adjei 2012:66).

Most of our health facilities are in deplorable situations (Adjei 2012:66ff). Lack of beds is a reality even at the nation’s premier hospital, Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, Accra. Quite recently, a man died in the process of being transferred from one hospital to another for lack of bed (Ghana Web 2018). There are places where people have to sleep on the floor, benches or trolleys while receiving infusion. At the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (the second largest hospital in the country), it was reported that many women deliver on the floor because of lack of beds (Peacefmonline.com 2017).

There is high infant mortality (Adjei 2012:68). Ambulances are not available, a situation which causes many preventable deaths. Health care delivery costs the government so much that almost each year, external loans and grants are needed to run our health sector. Aside this, the poor condition of service for health workers usually leads to strike actions which leads to further deaths. The country’s effort towards immunization is on the ascendancy. Yet, many of children below three years have not been vaccinated against the six childhood killer diseases (GLSS-5 2008).

2.9.3 Poor Education System

Ghana’s educational system has undergone different reforms and policies aimed at making it affordable for all (GLSS-6). The introduction of the Capitation Grant, Free School Feeding and Free School Uniforms in Basic School and Free SHS policy are examples of these measure aimed at increasing the Net Attendance Rate (NAR). NAR refers to the “attendance rates of children at Primary, Junior High School (JHS) and
Senior High School (SHS) is the number of children of official schooling age (as defined by Ghana Education Service) who are attending Primary, JHS and SHS as a percentage of the total children of the official school age population” (GLSS-6 2014:37). There is no doubt that these policies (mentioned above) “continue to act as catalysts in accelerating school attendance at the lower levels” (GLSS-6 2014:38). Yet, many children of school-going age still remain uneducated (Adjei 2012:69).

Poverty in the education sector also manifests itself in terms of infrastructure and logistics (Adjei 2012:69ff). School under trees is still a reality in Ghana. Many school buildings are so dilapidated that they have become death trap for occupants. There are many schools which have to close down whenever it rains because of serious leakages. Logistics such as Information Communication and Technology (ICT) laboratory and equipment, Science laboratory and equipment are lacking in many schools (Adjei 2012). The result is that pupils learn without any practical applications and so they are not able to put what they learn into any practical use after school, a situation that further worsens the unemployment rate in the country (Adjei 2012:69). Coupled with this is the lack of qualified teachers in some schools (Adjei 2012:70). Some teachers handle more than one class in the basic school where each class requires a teacher. Class size is big making monitoring and evaluation less effect.

2.9.4 Other Socio-Economic Problems

There are a number of other socio-economic challenges associated with poverty in Ghana. “Child streetism” is one of such problems (Boafo 2014:233). Some poor parents send their children onto the street to search for money to supplement the family’s income. Others are born on the street from teenage pregnancy and because they have no home, they live on the street. Still, some children move from rural areas to the city to look for greener pastures and end up becoming children of the street as porters and hawkers (Boafo 2014:233).

Another socio-economic challenge of poverty is the high incidence of internet fraud (sakawa) (see Poku-Boansi and Afrane 2011:74ff). This may take place anywhere, whether in the city or rural areas. Some youth also engage in the act of using juju (black powers) to mislead wealthy people (usually foreigners on the internet) to send them huge sums of money. The rituals involved in sakawa may comprise one or more
of the following: carrying a coffin at mid-night through one’s neighbourhood; using human parts or blood for a specified ritual; meeting and interacting with a spirit and/or a strange being at the cemetery at mid-night (Boafo 2016).

The high incidence of prostitution, nude pictures and videos is also the result of poverty (see Poku-Boansi and Afrane 2011:74). Some youth use their naked pictures and videos to attract their foreign pals of the opposite sex to send them money. In the end, some of these pictures are leaked either by the people themselves or by their foreign counterparts, especially when there is misunderstanding between them.

2.10 Conclusion

Beginning with the socio-religio-political context of Ghana and ending with the poverty situation in Ghana, this chapter has maintained that poverty has been in Ghana since pre-colonial times. Among other things, the African communal view of life, the traditional wisdom about poverty and wealth and the factors that contribute to Ghana’s poverty situation have been discussed. With this foundation laid, I now proceed to the next part of the study which deals with theological and exegetical study of selected texts on the study subject.
CHAPTER THREE

EXEGESES OF DEUTERONOMY 15:1-11 AND ISAIAH 10:1-4

3.0 Introduction

The present and the next chapters place the subject of poverty in the biblical context, to enable us appreciate what Scripture teaches about the subject matter. These chapters on biblical teaching on poverty, together with the previous chapter, provides the contextual framework within which the study was conducted. The limitations of time and space made it imperative for me to focus on three anchor passages, one each from the law (Deut. 15:1-11), the prophets (Is. 10:1-4), and the gospel (Matt. 6:19-34). The choice of these passages was informed both by their relevance to the study subject as well as my desire to present a focused examination of passages from as many genres of Scripture as possible. The method used in studying these texts is the exegetical method (explained in chapter one).

3.1 Literary Context of Deuteronomy 15:1-11

Deuteronomy is the last book of the Pentateuch. The title “Deuteronomy” derives from the Greek word deuteronomion which means “second law”, “repetition of the law” or “second telling of the law” (Deere 1983:259; Lasor, Hubbard and Bush 1996:111; Longman and Dillard 2006:102; Schubert 2018:103). In this book, Moses repeats the laws God had given Israel at Mount Sinai to a second-generation Israel who were just about to cross the River Jordan to possess the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 15:1-11 consists basically of laws meant to guide the Israelites in their relationship with God and their fellow Israelites particularly regarding debts. The preceding immediate context (14:22-29) consists of laws about tithing. The LORD gave Israel stipulations regarding the payment of three tithes, Levitical tithe, festival
tithe and charity tithe (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a). The laws on the last two tithes are found here. The festival tithe was contributed towards the celebration of the major Jewish festivals. The LORD promised to choose a place at which they will celebrate these festivals. Verses 28-29 then talk about God’s social security for the poor (orphans, Levites, aliens and widows), in the form of a tithe paid every three years. This is immediately followed by our text which deals with how Israelites are expected to relate to the poor living among them.

What follows our text is the law on release of slaves (vv. 12-18). God instituted this law so that those who sell themselves into slavery due to poverty could be freed. The freeing of slaves was to be done every seven years, that is, in the sabbatical year. They were to remember the difficulties they went through as slaves in Egypt and to appreciate the need to free their own slaves. In doing so, the LORD promised to bless their works (v.18). We turn now to read the text closely.

3.2 Close Reading of Deuteronomy 15:1-11

3.2.1 The Sabbatical Debt Release (Deut. 15:1-3)

The passage begins with the command: מיקֵץ שֶׁבַע-שָׁנִים, תַעֲשֶׁה שְׁמִטָּה.

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant remission of debts”). The expression מיקֵץ שֶׁבַע-שָׁנִים occurs also in 14:28 and can be rendered “Every sabbath year” (NRSV). The word שְׁמִטָּה (from samat) means “cancel debt”, “release”, “remission (of debt)” (Zodhiates and Baker eds. 1996:1558). It also means relinquishing one’s rights, either temporarily or permanently. This term is unique to the book of Deuteronomy (where it occurs in 15:1, 2, 9; 31:10). A debt refers to borrowed money or property that the borrower is legally bound to pay back to the owner. Economic pressures could make one sell his/her land and even the family into slavery (Vogt 2008:38).
The Deuteronomic samat law with its demand of a complete remission of debt in the sabbath year is a further development of the earlier seventh-year law which required that people ceased from their labour (see Exod. 23:1-11; Lev. 25:1-7). The poor were then to glean from the resting farms while the others survived on the six-year food savings. In addition, Hebrew slaves were to be released in the sabbath year (Exod. 21:1-6). In the current passage, the people (in addition to resting in the sabbath year) are asked to cancel debts in every sabbatical year in order to ensure that a temporary misfortune (due to drought or sickness, for example) did not become a burden forever. God used this law to teach his people to be generous and to free themselves from the love of money and accumulation of material wealth (cf. Matt. 6:19-34; 1 Tim. 6:10). Foreigners were however required to repay their debts in the sabbatical. Chianeque and Ngewa (2006:232) is of the opinion that foreigners were exempted from enjoying the release of debt in the sabbatical year in order to prevent them from exploiting Israel due to their generosity.

The key exegetical question is whether the remission is temporal or permanent. The view that the debt was not to be discharged permanently and absolutely, but passed over to the following year without demanding payment in the Sabbath year is supported by the contention that there was total suspension of agricultural activities in the Sabbath year and so debtors could not have enough money for their basic needs let alone the payment of debt (Deere 1983:290). It follows therefore that foreigners were required to pay their loans in the Sabbath year because they, unlike the Israelites, did not observe any sabbatical year but engaged in their usual economic activities (v. 3).

Contrary to the above view, I contend for total and permanent cancellation of debt, for the following reasons. Firstly, such a position is consistent with the numerous biblical teachings God’s generosity towards the poor. Secondly, it agrees with the immediate context of the text (see vv. 9-11). Thirdly, the practice of permanent cancellation of debts is in consonant with the requirement in the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year (that is, the year following the seventh sabbatical year; see Lev. 25:8-12) (Deere 1983:290). Leviticus 25:10 presents the concepts of liberty from “the burden of debt and bondage it may have entailed” and return of “both the ancestral property if it had been mortgaged to a creditor and to the family which may have been split up through debt-
servitude” (Wright 2004:202). Fourthly, permanent cancellation of debt was required to ensure the attainment of the poverty-free community projected in verse 4 (Deere 1983:290). Fifthly, Israel’s potential to acquire great wealth in the Promised Land also favours the permanent cancellation of debt (v. 5) without making the creditor poor. Sixthly, this position finds extrabiblical support from the misharum decree of king Ammisaduqa of Babylon (1646-1626 BC) that demanded that creditors no longer pursue payment of debt (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:185).

The sabbatical year release is grounded on “the divine ownership of the land (Lev. 25:23) and was described as ‘a Sabbath to the LORD’ (Lev. 25:4) and ‘the LORD’s time for cancelling debts’ (Deut. 15:2)” or “the LORD’s release” (Wright 2004:296). It is “the LORD’s release” (v.3) because he requires it as the owner of all resources for ensuring that his divine (Sabbath) economic principles prevail. Therefore, while obedience to the sabbath regulation was obedience to God, the regulation was made for the humanitarian goal of helping the poor and the needy (cf. Exod. 23:11; Lev. 26:6; Deut. 15:2, 7-11) (Wright 2004:296). The point then is that one cannot claim to worship God truly and yet practice injustice against others (especially against the poor) or ignore his/her responsibility of showing compassion to the needy (Wright 2004:297). This is one of the mechanisms God established to ensure that neither poverty nor wealth developed to an extreme.

The sabbath economy instituted by the LORD needs to be examined further in order to lay a solid foundation for the theology developed in the rest of the Bible. In Exodus 16 the people of Israel grumbled against God when there was shortage of food in their camp. They compared the economy of Pharaoh in Egypt, characterized by hoarding and abundance under which they lived as slaves, with their current economy in which they seem to have little to eat. They even wished to return to Egyptian bondage (v. 3). In response to their complaints, God promised to rain manna from heaven for them (Ex. 16:11ff).

The principles that guided the gathering of the manna were as follows (Myer 1999:2). Firstly, each family was required to gather what was just enough for their needs (vv. 16-18). The new economy different from the Egyptian economic in that under the former, every family had her needs met without oppression while in the latter Israel’s needs were met through oppression by Egypt. Again, the new economy, unlike the
old, was devoid of people having “too much” or “too little”; everyone had enough, not more, not less (cf. 2 Cor. 8:14-15). Secondly, the manna was not to be “stored up” (vv. 19-20). The Israelites were not to build store houses and hoard the manna as the Egyptian economy did (see Exod. 1:11). The prohibition of hoarding the excess manna was meant to teach the people to trust the LORD daily for their survival. Those who did not trust God’s provision and so stored up excess manna for the next day, had the stored manna infested by maggots (v. 20). This was intended to discourage greediness and establish the fact that tomorrow’s life does not depend on today’s accumulation but on God’s daily provision for his people.

Thirdly, the Israelites were required to gather only in six days and on the seventh day take a rest from the gathering (vv. 5, 26). It was this periodic rest for the land and for human labor, which, having been expanded in the social justice code (Exod. 23:10-12), finally developed into the sabbatical release of our text (Deut. 15:1). The sabbath rest “goes against human attempts to control nature and maximize profits” (Caleb 2002:41). The earth is the LORD’s (Ps. 24:1-2) and so its fruits are a gift which must be justly distributed to meet people’s need rather than seeking one’s own and hoarding them.

Fourthly, the LORD’s call on Israel to “keep the Sabbath” (Ex. 16:29; 20:8) was meant to teach them to depend on him. The sabbath rest involves a ceasing from the active provision of one’s livelihood. If after ceasing from active work, one still gets food to eat then, it stands to reason that the supply of one’s need comes primarily from the LORD (the ultimate Provider) and not from human toils. This principle is further developed by the prophets (including Amos 5:7-12 and Is. 10:1-4) and by Christ in Matthew 6:19-34.

3.2.2 The Poor-Free Economy (Deut. 15:4-6)

אמרו, כי לא יהיה בך עיוון: כי ברכה יברך, יהוה.

אשrael, ושיר יהוה אלהיך ננוול נחלות לרשמה.

רק אשר ישות משמוע, بكול יהוה אלהיך.

לשמר kullanım אח-כל-ה zajat, ושיר אנכי מצות לי. 6

כי יהוה אלהיך ברך, ושיבר דבר לך; והשבת צוים רבם.
There are two key exegetical issues to address in this section. Firstly, the opening statement, (אֶפֶׁס, כִי לֹא יִהְיֶׁה - בְׁךָ אֶׁבְׁיוֹן) poses some translation difficulties as to whether it is to be understood as a command or a statement. Is it saying that “there will be no one in need” (NRSV), or that “there ought not (‘must not’ (NJB) or ‘should not’ (NIV)) be anyone in need”? The second issue has to do with the relationship between the above statement or command and what comes after it. Bullinger (cited by Thomson 1995:214) renders it as, “that there be no poor among you.” This situation will be achieved because of the debt release in the sabbatical year. The loss incurred by the creditor will not lead to poverty because God will richly bless him/her. Bullinger (cited by Thomson 1995:214) reasons further that the continual presence of the poor among the people forecasted in verse 11 will be partly due to sin and partly be a condition for teaching people to be compassionate by sharing.

Vogt (2008:40), on the other hand, argues that by use of the restrictive adverb אֶפֶׁס כִי (meaning “however” or “notwithstanding”), Moses is contrasting verses 1-3 with verses 4-6. Moses’ argument is that in the Promised Land the law on debt release (v. 1) will become unnecessary because God’s blessing upon his people will make everyone have enough for his/her needs. This however, Vogt (2008:40) argues, is dependent on the people’s faithfulness to their covenant with the LORD. He draws attention to the fact that the poverty-free community of verse 4 was predicated on Israel’s obedience to כֹּל-הַמִּצְוָּה הַזֹּאת (the whole command) God gave to them through Moses (v. 5), which included “the full integration of marginal groups and the poor into the life of the nation.” He reasons further that if Israel obey the LORD and “care for one another, and to share the bounty of blessings with the entire community” (Vogt 2008:40) no one (including the Levites, aliens, orphans, and widows) is to be considered poor because they will all have enough for their basic needs. Such care for the poor is not to be regarded as charitable act but as a communal responsibility of sharing available resources with the needy. In such a situation there would be no need for debt-slavery or any year of release.

I find merit in Vogt’s argument for the following reasons. The realization of such an ideal situation is dependent on the people’s faithful obedience to God’s law. The LORD is not saying that Israel will have no poor regardless of how they may break their
promises of obedience to his commandments or the obligation of brotherly kindness under his covenant with them. The type of covenant between the LORD and Israel is such that the benefits Israel was to derive were dependent upon her faithfulness to the keeping of the covenant. Therefore, the text should be understood as follows: Israel’s faithful obedience to all the commandments of the LORD (including their responsibility of sharing resources with the poor), will ensure that there is no poor among them. To ensure that there is abundance to share, the LORD will abundantly bless them (provided they obey all his commandments [v. 5]). The expression רַק אִם (lit. “only if” or “provided only”) at the beginning of verse 5 seems to give support to this position (Archer 1982:150). The result of this situation is that Israel will not borrow from but lend to other nations (v. 6).

3.2.3 Generosity to the Poor (Deut. 15:7-11)

The economy, which promised wealth, also commanded the care of the poor. According to verse 7, the presence of the poor in the community should lead to free-will giving from the rich to help improve the poor’s condition. The term אָׁחִי translated...
“your brother” is to be understood generically as referring to one’s siblings, kinsmen, allies, or fellow countrymen (Bratcher and Hatton 2000:n.p). The verb תְׁאַמֵּץ, meaning “to strengthen” or “to harden”, is used to prohibit deliberate denial of one’s help to the needy (Bratcher and Hatton 2000:n.p). The heart is the seat of one’s will and emotion, the part of the body with which one decides to give or not to give (see Liddell and Scott 1961:887ff). The idioms “hard-hearted” and “tight-fisted” means lack of compassion and stinginess. Therefore, a hard heart does not give generously but a soft heart does.

In verses 8-9, Moses warns the people not to let the year of release of debts become an obstacle to their generosity towards the poor. This point was necessary because of the tendency that many lenders might not be willing to lend when the sabbatical year was approaching so that they could prevent a situation whereby their loan given to the poor ends up becoming a giving to the poor. From the perspective of the LORD, lending to a brother is a form of ministry rather than a business transaction (Wiersbe 2007:339). It follows therefore that the sabbatical year was not only instituted as a test of faith, but as a test of love too (see Wiersbe 2007:339). Failing to lend to the poor because of an impending sabbatical year was failure to trust the LORD to bless. If the rich really loved God and their neighbours, they would give to them cheerfully (cf. 2 Cor. 9:7).

In verse 10, Moses assures the people that their generosity towards the poor will be rewarded by the LORD in the form of abundant blessing upon their work. This sounds like Proverbs 11:25 which states, “The generous soul will be made rich, and he who wasters will also be watered himself”. Finally, Moses predicts that לא-יֶׁחְדוּּל אַבָּלוֹן (“There will always be poor in the land”). This statement, which alludes to Mark 14:7 (cf. Matt. 26:11; John 12:8), seems contradictory to verse 4. How are we to reconcile verses 4 and 11?

Chianeque and Ngewa (2006), and Wiersbe (2007) agree that the situation described in verse 4 is subject to total obedience of the law but because Israel would not obey the LORD completely, there will always be poor among them (v. 11). Israel would have been the richest nation in the world if they had obeyed the LORD. Their adoption of foreign religious life led to the poor being with them always. Their failure to observe the sabbath rest deprived the land the rest it needed. Their seventy-year captivity compensated for this (2 Chron. 36:14-21) (Wiersbe 2007:339). Therefore, the situation
in verse 4 is the ideal situation predicated on the perfect and consistent obedience to the holy standards of God (Wiersbe 2007:339) while that in verse 11 is the real situation.

3.3 Literary Context and Structure of Isaiah 10:1-4

Isaiah 10:1-4 belongs to the first part of the book (chs 1-39). It fits within the so-called “Book of Immanuel (7-12)” and prophesies about the incursion of the king of Assyria into Immanuel’s land (8:8). Isaiah 9:8-10:4 forms the immediate literary unit within which the text under consideration lies. The unit is structured by the repetition of a refrain in 9:12, 17, 21 and 10:4 (Mackay 2008:247). The same refrain is found in 5:25 and this has led to the contention that these passages were originally connected (Mackay 2008:247). The section 9:8-10:4 belongs to Isaiah’s ministry to the northern kingdom of Israel, with Judah mentioned only in 9:21. I believe however that the message was relevant to the southern people too. The prophecies are basically a series of punishment that Yahweh was going to bring upon his people if they continued to be disloyal to him.

Structurally, Isaiah 9:8-10:4 divides into four strophes (Scott 2004:238). The first (9:8-12) predicts the severe punishment that was about to be meted on Israel. The second strophe (9:13-17) supplies the reason for severer punishment for Israel as her stubborn refusal to turn to God. In the third strophe (9:18-21), Isaiah gives pictures of the destructive power of evil in the society as a fire in the forest and its consequence as lawlessness and violence of beast in the forest. The fourth strophe (10:1-4) “marks the transition from the presentation of past events illustrating the sins and punishments of Ephraim to the present condition and threatened doom of Judah” (Scott 2004:238).

The unit under consideration (10:1-4) can be divided into four parts. The first (v.1) deals with an oracle against those who decree and those who write unjust decrees. In verse 2 the prophet describes injustice in his community in four clauses, while the third verse has a series of rhetorical questions addressed to the oppressors in the community. The last verse concludes with a statement about God’s wrath. Together, the unit under consideration deals with injustice and oppression in Isaiah’s society, especially as manifested in the courts. The main theme of the text is sin and retribution. The section that follows the pericope under consideration (10:5-12:6) deals with
Isaiah’s contrast between the Assyrian empire and God’s millennial rule. Here, Isaiah predicts the fall of Assyria which will be followed by God’s glorious empire.

3.4 Socio-religious and Economic Context of Isaiah 10:1-4

The socio-religious and economic situation that informs the understanding of Isaiah 10:1-4 is the moral and religious corruption that characterized Isaiah’s community. The nation had turned to idolatry (2 Chron. 28:22-24), taking Yahweh as one of the gods (Nsiku 2006:835). At the same time evil had grown to its maturity in the form of personal immorality and political corruption, pride, luxury, selfishness, and oppression. The government, with the judges and courts, had become corrupt and unjust for they had made decrees that were contrary to God’s moral principles (10:2). Their laws were to the disadvantage of the widows and the orphans (10:2). The courts were against the needy as cases sent there for redress were ruled in favour of the rich who paid bribes to the judges. The poor and the less privileged in the society were exploited for material gains and were also denied justice (10:2).

The pericope therefore sets out to warn people to desist from their evil deeds or to expect God’s wrath to be poured upon them. This warning to Israel sounds like that of Amos (see Amos 2:6-7; 5:11-12; 8:4-6). On this, Domeris (2007:103, 108) has stated that in the biblical world the ruling elite exploited the peasant majority through a variety of mechanisms, including rents, pledges and fines, interest on loans, taxes and labour obligations. Isaiah’s fight against the exploitation of the poor is deeply rooted in the law that states, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly” (Lev. 19:15). The message of the text will be unravelled as we proceed to read it more closely.

3.4 Close Reading of Isaiah 10:1-4

3.4.1 Pronouncement of Woe (Is. 10:1)

וּהֹוי הָחֹּקָקִים חִקֵּקֵי־אָוֶּן וֹּמְׁכַתְׁבִּים עָֽמִּל כִתֵֹּֽב

The word וּהֹוי (woe, doom, ah) is a word of warning. It may be a prophetic adaptation of the lament over the dead. In the current context it is used to signify a condemnation of evil behaviour which includes:
i. Decreeing unrighteous decrees (v. 1)

ii. Writing grievousness—making oppressive laws for the society (v. 1)

iii. Turning aside the needy from fair trial (v. 2)

iv. Taking away the rights of the poor (v. 2)

v. Preying the widow (v. 2)

vi. Plundering the orphan (v. 2)

Isaiah uses the expression הַחֹֹֽקְׁקִֵ֖ים חִקְׁקֵּי־אָָׁ֑וֶּן (“those who decree unjust decrees”) to point out the corruption in the judicial system of Judah. This phrase suggests that the leaders of Israel had instituted decrees that were contrary to the Mosaic standard. This was one of the reasons for the impending woe announced by the prophet. The use of power to the advantage of the governing authority at the expense of the powerless underscores Domeris’ assertion that “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (2007:121).

The word אָוֶּן (aven) usually translated “unjust”, has a wide range of meaning including “evil”, “wicked”, “sin”, wrong”, “wrong”, “calamity”, “false”, “iniquity”, “injustice”, malice”, or “unjust” (Strong 1990:1363). Here, it serves as an adjective describing the kind of laws/decrees the governing authority of Judah established. These decrees were contrary to God’s laws in the Mosaic Code against injustice (see Deut. 15:7-8; 24:17-18).

The decrees were the result of careful thought among the leaders. Therefore, it was not ineffective leadership that Isaiah was dealing with but deliberate wickedness (Mackay 2008:259). Any attempt by the poor to improve their living could not succeed because of injustice against them. This idea of the vulnerability of the poor is well captured in the statement, “A poor [person’s] field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away” (Prov.13:23). Mackay (2008:259) notes further that, the expression “unjust decrees” suggests that the leaders misused power to the disadvantage of others, probably through “deceit and cunning.” They passed laws that made their exploitative practices technically “lawful.” How sad it is that the powerful in the society could enact poverty by decree!
The second part of the text uses the term עָׁמָׁל (\textit{amal}) to describe the decrees written by scribes. \textit{Amal} means severe “labouring” or “toiling” (Wilson n.d.:455). The decrees written by magistrates were regarded as oppressive (burdensome) because they imposed elaborate and unpleasant restrictions on the poor, denied justice to them and served as a source of trouble and suffering for the needy. The perversion of justice evident in this text is well captured in Habakkuk’s lament, “Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted” (1:2-4).

### 3.4.2 Reasons for the Pronouncement of Doom (v. 2)

לְׁהַטֹֹּות מִדִין דַלִִּים וְׁלִגְׁזֹֹ֕ל מִשְׁפִַ֖ט עֲנִיֵֵּּ֣י עַמִָ֑י לִהְׁיֹֹ֤ות אַלְׁמָׁנֹות֙ שְׁלָׁלִָּ֔ם וְׁאֶׁת־יְׁתֹומִִ֖ים יָׁבֹֹֽז

The prophet uses this verse as a polemic against the leaders and lawmakers of his time who used their power to oppress the poor (see also Prov. 28:3; 31:14). Four accusations are listed here against the rulers (in addition to two in verse 1). Firstly, the leaders turn aside the helpless from fair trial (v. 2a). The term דַלִִּים (\textit{dalim}) translated “helpless” derives from a root signifying “smallness” or “lack of importance”, “lowly” and means people who are at “economic disadvantage” in their societies (Mackay 2008:260). Leaders (especially judges and magistrates) ignored them probably because they could not offer bribe. Some of the poor might have even refused to take their cases to court for redress because they viewed the system as unfair. This was a reality in Isaiah’s context and in the Psalms (eg. 94:20; 82) where righteous poor person finds “no human redress in the society” and then, “appeals only to God” (Wright 2004:171).

Secondly, they rob the justice of the needy of God’s people (v. 2b). Israel’s laws were meant to protect the needy, not to exploit them. The term ānî has a wide range of meaning including “the poor, afflicted, oppressed, powerless, needy, helpless, humble, weak, distress, suffering, wretched” Onyinyechukwu (2010:67). According to Hastings (1988:19) ānî originally meant one who bows down due to oppression or one who suffers some kind of social injustice. In biblical terms, however, ānî may also refer to a person who is poor in the sense of being impoverished (cf. Ex. 22:25; Lev. 19:10; Deut. 15:11; 24:14ff; Job 24:4-11; Ps. 9:18; Prov. 14:21; 31:20) (Renn 2005:742).
Domeris (2007:18) opines that the financial bankruptcy of ānî makes him/her socially defenceless, subject to oppression, and an occupant of a lowly position, looking up to someone higher than him/herself for survival. Ānî appears in the Psalms (together with the adjective w'ebyon) to signify a state of inward lowliness rather than material poverty (cf. Pss. 40:17, 70:5, 86:1). For example, in Psalm 109:22-24, the state of being “poor and needy” is associated with a “wounded heart”, “an evening shadow”, and being “shaken off like a locust.” In the present context it refers to “affliction suffered by the impoverished and the weak—either the disability arising from their economic deprivation or their distress arising from their exploitation by others” (Mackay 2008:261).

The word יד (dal) is an adjective which means poor in the sense of “one that has become exhausted, low, wasted, and weak in substance or natural strength” (Wilson nd: 317). It derives from the root dālal, which means “to be low”, “inferior” or “languish” (see Wilson nd: 317). Onyinyechukwu (2010:67) notes different translation of dal including “poor”, “weak”, “haggard”, “helpless”, “humble”, “needy”, “scrawny.” In addition, dal may connote social poverty or lowliness (see Lev. 19:15).

Dal commonly occurs in the Wisdom literature and poetry, occurring about 14 times in Proverbs alone. In most cases the people described as dal are objects of disgrace, whose lot God promises to restore (cf. 1 Sam. 2:8; Ps. 113:7). Other times, dal (the poor) are subjected to abuse and oppression by the wealthy (cf. Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6) (Renn 2005:742). To sum up, dal refers to helplessness that comes as a result of poverty. The expression לְׁהַטֹֹּ֤ות מִדִין֙ דַלִִּ֔ים (“keep back the needy from their rights” v.25), therefore means the needy were not accorded their God-given and/or traditionally entrenched rights (cf. 29:21).

The word עמי (ami meaning my people) “expresses the affront of God’s special relationship with the whole people that this evil legislation constituted” (Grogan 1986:78). Israel was a people God really loved and wished could live up to his expectation. Ami also expresses Isaiah’s empathy for the people of Judah (cf. 9:21) to whom his prophecy was directed.

Thirdly, they make widows their prey (2c). The term אַלְׁמָׁנֹות corresponds to the Greek word chera which refers to a person whose husband is dead and has not remarried.
The root of this word means “unable to speak” and that of the Greek word *chera* means “left empty” (Renn 2005:1043). In the state of widowhood, women lost their social status, financial support, source of companionship, and property and became “empty.” As people of low social class, widows often suffered oppression, exploitation and mistreatment (cf. Jer. 7:6; Ezek. 22:7). The leaders of Isaiah’s time took advantage of the widow because they were defenceless.

Isaiah picture the leader’s as hunters out to trap their prey, the widows (cf. Ps. 10:9). The word *שְׁלָלִָּם* comes from the root which means “to draw out,” “to strip,” “to spoil,” “to plunder” or “to make [something] a prey” (Wilson nd:326). Isaiah’s use of this word underscores the seriousness of the leaders’ attack on the widows.

Fourthly, they plunder orphans (v. 2d). The term יְׁתֹומִִ֖ים (*yetomim*) is the plural of *yatom* which means an orphan or a fatherless person. Orphans were also among those who were poor in Isaiah’s society. The leaders plundered orphans by taking from them their rightful inheritance. The prophet accuses the leaders of treating orphans like war booties.

### 3.4.3 Three Rhetorical Questions (Is. 10:3)

In the first two verses, Isaiah speaks about the rulers, but now he speaks to them about the results of their sins which he formulates into three rhetorical questions illustrating how helpless and hopeless they (the leaders) will be in the day of the LORD’s visitation (Mackay 2008:261).

The first question is: “What will you do on the day of reckoning when disaster comes from afar?”). The word יָם (*yom*) may refer to a 24-hour day. In the present context, however, it refers to an unspecified duration of time within which the impending judgement will take place. In this sense it reminds us of the “Day of the reckoning” (cf. Hos. 5:9) which refers to the period of time of God’s wrath.
The word פְּקֻדִָּה comes from a root (paqad) which denotes “an action of a superior with respect to an inferior” (Mackay 2008:261). Paqad has a wide range of meaning including “to count, to call into account, to look after” (Zodhiates and Baker 1996:1544), “custody”, “mustering”, or “punishment”. It underscores the fact that God is going to ask the rulers to account for whatever he has entrusted into their care. The picture that comes to mind is that of stewardship and accountability illustrated by Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). God requires good stewardship not only of power but also of every other resource he has given us, including time, money, wisdom and others (Asante 1999).

The question עַל־מִי תָּנֵ֣וּסוּ לְׁעֶׁזְׁרִָּׁה (“To whom will you flee for help?”) suggests that no power can deliver the people from the impending judgement. The false gods they worship cannot prevent the desolation; neither can their own power do so. The oppressors in the community will be shown no mercy on the day of reckoning. Presently, they feel secured and self-sufficient by their position and power, but on that day, they will feel the need to ask for help from others (Mackay 2008:261).

The question עָקֹּץ תַעַזְׁבִ֖וּ כְׁבֹודְׁכֶֹֽׁם (“Where will you leave your wealth?”) draws attention to the fact that on the day of reckoning, the possession of ill-gotten wealth will make one an object of divine destruction. It underscores the fact that wealth without righteousness is useless: “Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Prov. 11:4). While the majority of translators use “wealth” for כָּבוֹד, the idea of “dignity” and “honour” are also possible and in this sense, it refers to the honoured place the judges had in the society (Mackay 2008:262). They receive glory because of their wealth but on that day, they will be objects of shame. Those who forced others to serve foreign gods will also not be left out.

3.4.4 God’s Answer (Is. 10:4)

In the first part of the verse, God gives an answer to the rhetorical questions in verse 3. He states, בִלְׁתִֹּ֤י כָׁרַע֙ תֵַּ֣חַת אַסִִּ֔יר בִלְׁתִֹּ֤י כָׁרַע֙ תֵַּ֣חַת הֲרוּגִ֖ים יִפָּ֑לוּ בְׁכָׁל־זֹאת֙ לֹא־שֵָּׁ֣ב אַפִֹ֔ו וְׁעוּדִ֥ו נְׁטוּיָֽׁה׃ בִלְׁתִ ("Nothing remains but to crouch among the captives"). This suggests that there is nothing the evil legislators can do but to submit to the impending punishment. The word כָּרַע means to bow the kneel or apposition in between standing and knelling (Mackay 2008:262). It must be differentiated from barak
which means to kneel or to bow. Isaiah used the word כָׁרַע in the expression בִלְׁתִי כָׁרַע תֵחַת אַסִיר to give a picture of these powerful leaders cringing along the way into exile, or trying to hide behind others to avoid being seen or killed (Mackay 2008:262). Something is wrong with the Hebrew script

The word naphal (which has been conjugated as יִפָֹל) means to “fall, lie, be cast down, fail, violent death, fall away, go away, fail, fall out, turn out, waste away, be inferior to throw down, knock out, to overthrow” (see Wilson nd:155). Those who perverted justice for the poor were to face God’s Judgment, in the form of captivity or death.

3.5 Conclusion

The exegetical analyses have established that poverty has been with humanity since human history began and that God has always been on the side of the poor. Some theological principles revealed by the exegeses include: God is the ultimate owner of all resources; God cares for his people, especially the poor; God’s provision for our needs is enough for those who trust in him; our love for God should result in generosity to the poor; God abhors accumulation of resources at the expense of others; the poor will always be present due to our fallen nature (which makes it impossible for us to obey God completely).

Again, this chapter has established that God is the ultimate authority; God cares for the underprivileged and the marginalised; God’s provision for our needs is enough for those who trust in him; our love for God should result in generosity to the poor; God abhors accumulation of resources at the expense of others; the poor will always be present due to our fallen nature (which makes it impossible for us to obey God completely); leaders have the responsibility to ensure that justice prevails; there is the need to speak for the downtrodden and ungodly acquisition or use of wealth attracts God’s judgment. The study now proceeds to the final passage, Matthew 6:19-34 to uncover what this passage has to say about the subject.
CHAPTER FOUR

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 6:19-34

4.0 Introduction

The last chapter provided a representation of what the Old Testament teaches about the subject matter. In the present chapter we examine a New Testament passage about the issue under consideration. Since Jesus is God incarnate, it is very important to consider his teachings before formulating any kind of theology. On the subject of poverty he gave many teachings both by words and by deeds. The present study finds Matthew 6:19-34 as one of the key passages that betray Jesus’ idea about how wealth should be handled and how the poor are to live. Do Jesus’ teaching about wealth and poverty in this text cohere with what the Old Testament passages examined in the previous chapter teach? Let us find out below.

4.1 Setting and Audience of Matthew 6:19-34

The text shares the same geographical setting with the Sermon on the Mount, of which it is a part. Matthean tradition holds that the Beatitudes were pronounced on a mountain in Galilee (see 4:23-5:2). Fenlon identifies this mountain as Karn Hatti (the Horns of Hattin), a mountain which receives its name from the little village at its northern base and from the two horns which crown its summit (see Amevenku and Boaheng 2016:71). Karn Hattin is located in “Galilee in easy distance of Nazareth, Cana, and Mt. Tabor to the southwest, of Tiberia and Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee) to the east, and of Capharnaum to the northeast, in the centre, therefore, of much of the ministry of Jesus” (Felon as cited by Amevenku and Boaheng 2016:71).

Jesus’ original audience were people who came from all over the surrounding regions including Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the area across the
Jordan River (cf. 4:23-5:2). They consisted of Jesus’ disciples and a much larger group of people from the various places stated above. These people included representatives of Pharisees, tax collectors, Sadducees, Roman soldiers, farmers, day labourers, the marginalized, and so on (Tryon 2006). The majority of people in these localities experienced Roman control and oppression (Picard and Habets 2016). This probably informed Jesus’ address to the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who thirst for righteousness and those who are persecuted (cf. 5:3-12).

According to Tryon (2006) Jesus also intended his message to be taken to the Roman and religious elites (particularly those in Jerusalem) who were not present at the time that he spoke to the crowd. He argues (convincingly, I think) that the economic hardship most of the audience present at the time were facing was caused by these elites who exploited others to amass wealth, and so it is not likely that Jesus would deliver a message against the accumulation of wealth without having those who are the root cause of the economic problem in mind (Tryon 2006:171). If so, then Jesus while directly addressing the crowd was also indirectly addressing the power-elites wherever they were.

4.2 Socio-economic Context of Matthew 6:19-34

According to Powell (2009:41) the world of Jesus’ time was characterised by economic inequality. The economic gap between the rich and the poor continued to widen as the rich took advantage of their social status to exploit the poor and to amass wealth for themselves (Powell 2009). The poor continued to lose their farmland due to high debt.

People’s interest in accumulating wealth was whipped up by the teachings of some religious leaders that, wealth is a sign of God’s blessings and poverty a mark of divine displeasure (Powell 2009:41). Consequently, people attached much importance to wealth and pursued whatever economic advancement was available. Powell (2009:42) describes the economic disparity in these words, “virtually everyone in the New Testament times believed that there was only so much ‘stuff’ to go around and that some people had less than they needed because other people had more than they needed.” Jesus’ use of wisdom sayings and parable to speak against those with vested economic and political interests must be interpreted within this contextual framework (Powell 2009).
The Greco-Roman world was highly hierarchical with various classes. Scheffler (2011:118-119) has argued that any society in the Greco-Roman world that had a population of half a million or more was more complex than consisting only of two main classes, rich and poor, or patrons and clients. He presents Friesen's seven-fold economic class system for the Greco-Roman world, which I present below (Scheffler 2011:119).

Table 4.1: Friesen’s seven-fold economic class system for the Greco-Roman world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Class</th>
<th>Class Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Imperial elites</td>
<td>The imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty,</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>few freed persons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Regional or provincial elites</td>
<td>Equestrian families, provincial officials, some Retainers, some decurial families,</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>some freed-persons, some retired military officers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Municipal elites</td>
<td>Most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>freed persons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Moderate surplus Resources</td>
<td>Some merchants, some traders, some freed persons, some artisans (especially</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the minimal level)

- Many merchants and traders, regular wage earners artisans, large shop owners, freed persons, some farm families

| (6) At subsistence level (and often below minimum level to sustain life) | Small farm families, labourers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (especially those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop or tavern owners | 40.00 |

| 7) Below subsistence Level | Some farm families, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, disabled, unskilled day labourers, prisoners | 28 |

The table indicates that the population of lower-class citizens (5-7) was more than 80 percent. This means that the Greco-Roman society had a very high dependency ratio. The rich took advantage of the situation to set their own standard of evaluating human dignity.
Some philosophers in Jesus’ time, with the perception that material wealth is inherently evil, encouraged contentment and modest living, and condemned wealth (Keener 1999:232). Keener (1999:233) notes further that Jews viewed wealth positively, as a sign of blessing (as noted earlier) or negatively according to how people used it. This view was based on the Deuteronomistic tradition that God’s blessing in terms of abundance will be experienced by the obedient and that the disobedient will experience loss and lack (Deut. 28). Some of the Jewish writers however recognized the spiritual dangers of wealth (see 1 Enoch 63:10; 94:8; 96:4; 97:8; 1QS 10:18-19; 11:2). With this background, I now proceed to read the text more closely.

4.3 Close Reading of Matthew 6:19-34

4.3.1 Two Treasures (Matt. 6:19-21)

19 (a). Μὴ θησαυρίζετε υμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
(b). δόποι σής καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει,
καὶ δόποι κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν·

20 (a). θησαυρίζετε δὲ υμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ,
(b). δόποι οὕτε σής οὕτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει,
καὶ δόποι κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν·

21 δόποι γάρ ἔστιν ὁ θησαυρὸς σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδία σου.

This unit comprises a negative command (v. 19) and a positive command (v. 20) followed by a proverbial justification of the commands (v. 21). It shows the contrast between two treasures (one on earth and the other in heaven) and propounds that what one treasures is informed by what he/she values.

The opening verse (v. 19) begins with the Μὴ θησαυρίζετε which could be rendered “stop storing up” or “stop treasuring,” rather than “do not store up” (Carson 1984:177; Blomberg 1992:76). The present tense of the verb underlines the fact that the time has come for the people to take a decisive break in their act of storing up treasures on (Carson 1984:177). We noted earlier that most of Jesus’ physical audience ranked
very low on the socio-economic ladder and worked from hand to mouth. The elites on the other hand were accumulating wealth “through the mechanisms of taxation, control of land, control of labour and manipulation of money” (Tryon 2006:171). Against this backdrop, one may deduce that the command “Stop storing up treasures” had the few elites who were physically present and those absent as primary targets (Tryon 2006:171). However, it also served as a caution for the poor who might later enjoy economic advancement and begin to store up earthly treasures. The message was that those currently busily treasuring earthly treasures must stop and those contemplating similar or same practice in future should not try it at all.

The verb θησαυρίζετε (“storing up”) derives from thesaurizo and refers to the act of keeping one’s treasures in a safe place (Liddell and Scott 1961:800; Renn 2005:985; Vincent 2009:45). According to Renn (2005:985), the noun form thesauros (treasure) occurs about twenty times in the New Testament in the sense of “valuables” (cf. Matt. 2:11; 6:19; 13:44; Heb. 11:26), “treasures” of the heart (cf. Matt. 12:35; Luke 6:45; 12:34), or heavenly “treasures” (cf. Matt. 6:20; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22; 2 Cor. 4:7). The earthly treasures to which Jesus refers include clothes, precious metals (gold, silver, bronze, and so on), expensive or valuable things, mansions or wealth that people can own, and anything that is perishable. Thesauros derives from thesauro, a term which was used by ancient Jews to refer to “a place for storing valuables” or a storage room (see Liddell and Scott 1961:800ff; Youngblood 1995:1274). This term corresponds to the Hebrew word osar, which refers to the treasury or storehouse of the temple (see Josh. 6:19) (Renn 2005:984). Usually what we keep in the store room is not something we really need for everyday life. Against the background of the foregoing discussions, I am of the opinion that Jesus was speaking to those who had kept certain things they really did not need whilst others lacked the basic necessities of life.

The personal pronoun ὑμῖν (“for yourselves”) underscores the fact that the wealthy in Jesus’ community considered wealth as belonging to them alone (Tryon 2006:172-173). They did not have a communal sense of wealth held by the Akan (see chapter 2). Neither did they regard themselves as stewards of what ultimately belongs to God. As stated earlier, the wealthy used every available opportunity to get more wealth without considering the plight of the poor. They systematically stripped the
country of its surpluses and hid them in the fortified cites and in their homes to increase their wealth (Tryon 2006:172-173). This was a mark of greediness and selfishness in that a chunk of the national wealth went to few people while the majority struggled to survive on virtually nothing. (Recall that the lower-class citizens of a typical Greco-Roman community were more than 80 percent).

The principle Jesus teaches is that wealth should be used for the benefit of the entire community. Generosity (sharing with others) as opposed to selfish accumulation (storing up “for yourselves”) is the Christian model. This does not mean that one cannot save money. Kingdom ethics require that one makes and saves money (not at the expense of others), and use it in a generous way to help others improve their lives (Tryon 2006:173).

The word βρῶσις (brosis) translated “rust” actually refers to “[t]hat which eats”, “the act of eating food” (Rom. 14:17), or food itself (see John 4:32; 6:27, 55) (see Liddell and Scott 1961:332; Vincent 2009:46). In the present context, however, it signifies the corrosive effect on metals as well as the destructive effect of possibly burrowers like woodworm or insects (Carson 1984:318ff). Ancient people were aware of the corruptible nature of wealth. For example, Ben Sirach encouraged his people to give freely to the needy rather than let it rust, for in sharing with others, one would be storing up treasures according to God’s commandments (Sir 29:10-11; cf. 34:5; Pirke Abot 2:8). This text teaches that wealth is perishable but can be used in a way to attract God’s blessings.

Treasures that could not easily corrupt could be stolen by thieves who could break in or dig through (διορύσσουσιν, dioryssousin). Typical first-century Palestinian houses, like most rural settlements in Ghana, were made of mud through which thieves could easily bore holes and enter (Vincent 2009:46; Carson 1984:318). It was a common practice for people to hide their money in strongboxes in their own homes or in holes beneath their floor. Gold, silver, and costly garments were common signs of wealth in the Greco Roman world (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9) because they were the means by which people stored excess wealth (Tryon 2006:173). While these items were not easily corruptible, they could easily be stolen from the owner. The point then is that earthly treasures are transient, vulnerable, and have no eternal value. Here too, one finds that the message is most suitable for the wealthy elites because they were the only people whose homes
contained the commodities mention in the text. The rural peasant farmers and other poor people did not have them and so they could not easily become targets for thieves (Tryon 2006:172).

The word δὲ (rendered “but” or “instead”) at the beginning of verse 20 shows a contrast between the previous verse and the present one. Instead of accumulating earthly treasures, Jesus urges his audience to accumulate heavenly treasures because these are free from the effect of decay and theft (cf. Luke 12:33). A key exegetical issue is to define “treasures in heaven” and determine “how to store them.” The expression θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ (“treasures in heaven”) is of Jewish origin. It refers to all that results from our earthly activities that have eternal significance or persist beyond the grave (Carson 1984:177). The way to store up heavenly treasure includes “doing righteous deeds, suffering for Christ’s sake, forgiving one another” (Carson 1984:177).

I am of the opinion that within the context of the Sermon on the Mount suffering persecution for Jesus’ sake (Matt. 5:12), loving one’s enemies (5:46), generosity to the poor (6:2-4), earnest and sincere prayer (6:5-6), and true fasting (6:16-18) are possible ways of accumulating heavenly wealth.

Is material poverty a sign of spiritual wealth? Jesus’ view about wealth and poverty was different from the philosophic view that wealth is inherently evil. For Jesus, even though possession of wealth is not inherently evil, one should not accumulate wealth when others in the society have too little for life. In other words, one’s material possessions should be used to serve others (19:21; cf. Luke 3:11; 12:33-34). That wealth should be used in promoting the kingdom of God underlines Jesus’ demand that the young rich man sells his possessions and share to the poor before following him (Luke 18:22). This advice to the young rich man should not be understood as Jesus endorsement of material poverty.

It was people’s misplaced priorities due to materialism that prompted Jesus to teach against accumulation of riches; it was not the mere possession of wealth that he opposed (Carson 1984:177). In the wider context of Scripture, wealth is not inherently evil because the Scripture requires that we care for our families (1 Tim. 5:8), commends us to work hard and to invest prudently to provide for the future (Gen. 41; Prov. 6:6-8), encourages us to enjoin the good things God has given us (1 Tim. 4:3-4; 6:17), which obviously includes wealth. Paul teaches the same truth by contending
that, it is not money itself but the love of money that is evil (1 Tim. 6:10, 17-19). The love of money is evil because it leads to social, economic and religious problems that contribute to the poverty of others in the society. Therefore, “what Jesus forbids is the selfish accumulation of goods; extravagant and luxurious living; the hardheartedness which does not feel the colossal need of the world’s under-privileged” (Stott 2013:131). The foregoing analysis leads to the conclusion that it unbiblical to equate material poverty to spirituality as some people mistakenly do.

The radical financial principle set by Jesus in the two previous verses is rooted in the fact that ὥσπορ γάρ ἐστιν ὁ θησαυρός σου, ἐκεῖ ἐσται καὶ ἡ καρδία σου (“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”) (v. 21). The term καρδία (kardia) corresponds to the Hebrew words leb and lebab and can mean physical heart (cf. 1 Cor. 14:25) (see Liddell and Scott 1961:887). However, in the present context, Jesus uses kardia metaphorically to refer to one’s inner-self, will, interests, concerns, and feelings (Vine 1966:206-207; Blomberg 1992:77). A person’s heart (or real interest) lies where he/she has invested. Jesus encourages the accumulation of heavenly wealth not only because of its eternal value but also because “a heart that sets its affection on [earthly] wealth will be a life lived in contrast to the demands of obedience in God’s Kingdom” (O’Donoghue 2011:44).

The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21) provides a useful commentary on this verse as well as a link between verses 19-20 and verse 21. This parable is Jesus’ response to someone who asked him to order his (the person’s) brother to divide their inheritance and give his part to him (v.13). Jesus could have used existing Jewish laws on inheritance to solve the problem at stake. However, he chose to tackle the root cause of the problem (that is greed) which the Jewish law was not meant to deal with. According to Calef (2014:114), Jesus, like a radical prophet aimed at dealing with the root of the issue, which is greed or covetousness. This is evident in his warning “Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (v.15). Calef (2014:114) observes that the “word, pleonexia, translated ‘greed,’ means literally ‘the desire for more,’ and in the Greek ‘the abundance of possessions’ (en tō perisseuein) suggests ‘more than is enough.’” This means that Jesus was not speaking about the mere possession of possessions, but rather the unquenchable desire for more than what is sufficient for
one’s basic needs (Calef 2014:114). Jesus used the rich fool to explain the kind of greed his is talking about.

The rich man had a bumper harvest from his land, which according to biblical tradition was the result of God’s blessings. It is clear from the story that the man’s barns were full and yet he decided to tear them down and put up bigger ones in which to store his new surplus. The man put his trust in his wealth without thinking of God’s priorities, and so thought to himself, “I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry’” (v. 9). Obviously, the man considered his stored-up food as a security for the years to come. The result was that he lost everything he had, not through corruption or robbery but through death. In the words of Calef (2014:114) the man did not recognize “the fact that his ‘soul’ or ‘self’ (Greek, psychē) is not a property over which he has ultimate control; for it belongs to God, is simply on loan, and can be ‘demanded’ back at any moment.” This story underscores both the dangers associated with and the right use of riches as well as human mortality and the destructible nature of earthly wealth.

### 4.3.2 The Sound and Bad Eyes (Matt. 6:22-23)

22 (a). Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὁ ὀφθαλμός.

(b). ἐὰν οὖν ἦ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ἁπλοῦς,

(c). ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται·

23 (a) ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρὸς ᾖ,

(b) ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται.

(c) εἰ οὖν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν, τὸ σκότος πόσον.

The main thesis of this section is that just as good eyesight is required for the functioning of the body, so right perception of reality is required for earthly life. The opening statement is Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὁ ὀφθαλμός (“The eye is the lamp of the body”). Literally, it is through the eye that the body finds its way. A good eye will illuminate the body but a bad one will put the body in darkness (v.23). The eye may be a metaphor for the heart: “The heart set on God as to hold to his commands (Ps.
119:10) is equivalent to the eye fastened on God’s law (Ps 119:18, 148; cf. 119:36-37)” (Carson 1984:178). In the metaphorical sense, the expressions to “set the heart” and to “fix the eye” on something are interchangeable (see Ps. 119:10, 37).

The term ἁπλοῦς usually translated good/healthy can be rendered “single”, “straightforward”, “simple”, “innocent”, “clear”, or “healthy” (see Vincent 2009:46). It carries the impression of “a piece of cloth or material, neatly folded once and without variety of complicated folds” (Vincent 2009:46). A single-eyed person never covets his neighbour but follows Christ, doing what is good in simplicity of the spirit (Bonhoeffer 2015:118). Bonhoeffer (2015:118-119) is of the opinion that: “The singleness of the eye and the heart corresponds to that ‘hiddenness’ which knows nothing but the call and word of Christ, and which consists in perfect fellowship with him.” Such eye has no darkness because it is illuminated by Christ. The expression is therefore used to make the point that the spiritually healthy person is not double-minded or indecisive (v. 24 cf. James 1:7-8) about his/her loyalty to God.

The word πονηρὸς (translated “bad” or “unhealthy”) could mean “evil” (cf. Rom. 12:9) (Liddell and Scott 1961:1447). Therefore, the expression ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρὸς could be rendered “evil eye.” “Evil eye” may be understood variously. For example, it may be understood as wicked intention (cf. 1 Sam. 18:9); but such a view does not fit the present context. It may also refer to “grudging, selfish character (cf. 20:15)” (Johnson 2004:319). The Jews used the expression “evil eye” to signify stinginess, jealousy, miserliness and selfishness (see Prov. 23:6; 28:22; Sir. 14:8-10) (Grogan 1986:178) and good eyes for generosity. An example of this usage is found in Deuteronomy 15:9 which says, “…and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing.” The context of this text, as we discovered, was God’s instruction to Israel to be generous in releasing each other from debts. Here, and also in Matthew 20:15 the expression “evil eye” means “greedy.” Jesus’ use of “evil eye” in the present text seems similar to its usage in Deuteronomy 15:9 and Matthew 20:15. Carson (1984:178) however, proposes two interpretations: “Jesus is saying either that (1) the [person] who ‘divides his [or her] interest and tries to focus on both God and possession …has no clear vision, and will live without clear orientation or direction’…or (2) that the [person] who is stingy and selfish cannot really see where he[or she] is
going; he [or she] is morally and spiritually blind.” In my opinion, the first interpretation is compatible with verse 24 while the second is compatible with verses 19-21.

4.3.3 Two Masters (Matt. 6:24)

24 (a). Οὐδεὶς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν.

(b) ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἕνα μισήσει καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσει,

(c) ἢ ἕνος ἀνθέξεται καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου καταφρονήσει.

(d) οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾷ.

Verse 24 begins with the assertion that Οὐδεὶς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν (“No one can serve two masters”). The verb behind “serve” is not diakoneo (“to serve”), but douleuo (“to be enslaved to”) (Zodhiates and Baker 1996:1612). The corresponding nouns are diakonos and doulos respectively. Therefore, Jesus is talking about slavery, not just service. In the ancient world, every doulos was a diakonos, but not every diakonos was a doulos (Zodhiates and Baker 1996:1612). That is to say, every slave rendered services but not all who rendered services were slaves. According to Longenecker (1984:48) slavery was prevalent in Greco-Roman world and the lives of the middle and upper classes were depended on the services of slaves. He estimates the number slaves in the Roman Empire as one third of the population.

The slave-master relationship in the Greco-Roman world was such that the slave belonged entirely to the master, the master sharing this right with no one (Zodhiates and Baker 1996:1612). This situation made it impossible for one slave to belong to two different masters at the same time. He would have belonged absolutely to one, but could not have belonged to two owners simultaneously. The Akan expresses this fact in the proverb, wontumi mta wo ani mmienu nhwe toa baako mu (“You cannot look into a bottle with two eyes [at the same time]”). Therefore, just as it is not possible for one to devote all his/her services to two different people at the same time, so could a slave not be owned entirely by two masters at the same time.

The next part begins with γὰρ (“for”) which signifies that the reason for the first part is about to be supplied. The reason why “no one can serve to master” is that ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἕνα μισήσει καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσει, ἢ ἕνος ἀνθέξεται καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου καταφρονήσει
(“the slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other”). Jesus’ use of love and hate are not to be taken absolutely. To hate someone in this context must be understood as showing preference for one as against the other rather than “active dislike” (Talbert 2006:123). The verb ἀγαπήσει (from agapao) should be understood as valuing something greatly (see Blomberg 1992:79; Zodhiates and Baker 1996:1571). Therefore, no one can have two masters because such a situation will inevitably lead the person to show greater value and preference for one master over the other.

The application of the above fact is that οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾷ (“You cannot serve God and mammon”). The word μαμωνᾷ (mamona) derives from the Aramaic term which refers to possessions, wealth or property (Liddell and Scott 1961:1078; Blomberg 1992:79; Youngblood 1995:794). Both Hebrew and Aramaic roots of this term connote something that one places his/her trust in rather than God (Carson 1984:178). The verse demands a mutually exclusive choice between God and mammon. Since it is not possible to be slave to both God and mammon simultaneously, one has to make a choice between them. In the view of Stott (2013:132), “anybody who divides his allegiance between God and mammon has already given it to mammon, since God can be served only with an entire and exclusive devotion.” God cannot be served with a divided loyalty because we are to serve him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength (Deut. 6:5; cf. Matt. 19:22-23). This love requires that we show concern for others in terms of providing their needs. I conclude therefore that, one’s disposition is set in accordance with who/what the person is serving, God or Mammon.

4.3.4 Prohibition of Worry (Matt. 6:25-30)

25(a) Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν,

(b) μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε],

(c) μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσησθε·

(d) οὐχὶ ἢ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστιν τῆς τροφῆς

(e) καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος;
26(a) ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

(b) ὅτι οὐ σπείρουσιν οὔδὲ θερίζουσιν οὔδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας,

(c) καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά·

(d) οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν;

27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἕνα;

28(a) καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε;

(b) καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν·

οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὔδὲ νήθουσιν·

29 (a) λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν

(b) ὅτι οὔδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ

περιεβάλετο ὡς ἓν τούτων.

30(a) εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ

σήμερον δόντα καὶ αὐριόν εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον

(c) ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιέννυσιν, οὐ πολλῷ μᾶλλον ύμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι;

31(a) μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες,

(b) Τί φάγωμεν;

(c) ἢ, Τί πίωμεν; ἢ,

(d) Τί περιβαλώμεθα;

32(a) πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν·

(b) οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρήζετε τούτων ἀπάντων.

Verse 25 introduces the second major part of our passage. This part begins with a prohibition about worry (25a) and it is then followed by four reasons for the prohibition.
The opening expression is Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν (“Therefore I say to you”). The use of Διὰ τοῦτο, “therefore” or “this is why”, underscores the fact that what follows is deducible from what has been said (vv. 19-24, but particularly v. 24) (O'Donoghue 2011:53). What forms the basis of verse 25a is the contention that believers must detach themselves from whatever hinders their complete loyalty to God and absolute submission to his will (O'Donoghue 2011:53). λέγω ὑμῖν (“I say to you”) affirms the authority behind Jesus’ teaching (Hagner as cited by O'Donoghue 2011:53). Jesus used this expression very often in the six antithesis of Matthew 5:21-48 to show that his words carry the same authority as those of the Father.

The word μεριμνᾶτε (from the noun merimna) translated “to worry” means “[to] be distracted by cares” (Newman and Stine 1993:n.p). The command not to worry is again appropriately understood as a command to stop an action in progress (Blomberg 1992:79). Believers are not to worry but to trust God’s power to provide for real needs (6:25-34).

The reasons for the prohibition of worry as evident in verses 25b-32 could be summarized as follows (cf. Johnson 2004:320-321). Firstly, human calculations are mostly defeated by the “intricacies and inviolabilities” because we do not owe the world, neither do we understand how it works. That is the reason why Jesus asked: Which of you can by worrying add a single hour to his [or her] life?” (v. 27) Secondly, since God has given us life freely, it is fair to believe that he will cater for us. To make this point Jesus asked: “Is life not more important than food and the body more important than clothes? (v. 25) Thirdly, since God provides for creatures such as birds, flowers, and even grass as they fulfil their nature, it stands to reason that if human beings fulfil their nature (“not idleness, but trustful work”) God will not disappoint them. Fourthly, making calculated care for garments and clothing makes one behave like a pagan whose mind is set on earthly things: “For gentiles seek all these things” (v. 32).

The question as to whether Jesus is asking believers to remain idle and be fed by God is crucial to the present study. A careful reflection on the passage shows that, Jesus is not saying that Christians must sit aloof and wait for God to feed and clothe them. The KJV translation “take no thought” seems inaccurate and misleading because there are times when Jesus’ own thought reflected prudence (Luke 14:28-32) (Johnson 2004:320). Carson (1984:179) notes that the command not to worry “can be falsely
absolutized by neglecting the limitations the context imposes and the curses on
carelessness, apathy, indifference, laziness, and self-indulgence expressed
elsewhere.” The context within which Jesus ministered defined necessity quite
differently from our modern society. Jesus asked them not to worry about even the
basic necessities, let alone luxuries, because by so doing they portray that their
existence is dependent on such things. One reason why Christians do not have to be
distracted by cares is that their life, which is freely given by God, is far more important
than food or drink. Therefore, if God has given a greater gift of life, he will definitely
give a lesser gift of sustenance (Blomberg 1992:80).

Worry can be both appropriate and sinful (O’Donoghue 2011:55). Worry understood
as merely “concern” may not be wrong most of the time. One’s concern (worry) about
inability to take part in the Christian Lenten season may not be wrong. However, worry
that leads to misplaced priorities is sinful. The worry about basic life necessities have
the tendency of obscuring one’s priority of seeking God’s Kingdom and his
righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Jesus also prohibits worry because “anxiety or calculated
care in regards to such items as food and clothing is egocentricity” (Johnson
2004:320). I my view, the prohibition of worry must be understood in this light.

4.3.5 Kingdom of God and His Righteousness (Matt. 6:33-34)

33(a) ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ,
(b) καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.
34(a) μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον,
(b) ἡ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει αὐτῆς.
(c) ἀρκετὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.

The previous section ended on the note that believers must not worry about the basic
needs of life because their Father in heaven is aware of these needs and will provide
them (these things) as long as he lends them breath. The question that comes to mind
is, “If we are not to worry, what are we to do?” Jesus answers this question: ζητεῖτε δὲ
πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ (“But seek first his [God’s]
kingdom and his righteousness”). The verse begins with δὲ (translated “but”) which
could be translated “instead” or “rather”. It is used to show what believers ought to do rather than worry about life and its necessities. The Greek term πρῶτον (rendered “first”) means primacy or “above all else” (Newman and Stine 1993: n.p). Believers must put the kingdom of God and his righteousness first on their scale of preference.

The expression βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ (kingdom of God) needs to be examined. The term βασιλείαν, kingdom, refers to both concrete ideas such as realm, territory, domain, or people over whom a king reigns and abstract ideas such as sovereign authority, royal power or dominion (Geisler 2011:1347-1348). When applied to God, the term kingdom comprises “God’s overall reign in the universe, His present spiritual reign in His people, and His future messianic reign on earth” (Geisler 2011:1347). This kingdom has a future aspect (see Matt. 24) as well as a present aspect (see Matt. 12:28; Mark 1:5; Matt. 10:7; Luke 17:20).

The term δικαιοσύνην (dikaiosune) occurs seven times in Matthew’s Gospel, with five of the seven appearing in the Sermon on the Mount; two in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33) (Boaheng 2017: 18). Dikaiosune (translated “righteousness”) also means “justice”, “fulfilment of Law” (Liddell and Scott 1961:429) or “holy and upright living, in accordance with God’s standards” (Youngblood 1995:1089). The Old Testament uses saddiq (righteous) to define the relationship between the people of God and himself (see Gen. 6:9; 7:1) (Renn 2005:825-826). The one who meets God’s requirement is said to be righteous (see Matt. 3:15). In the present context where dikaiosune applies to the person of God, it refers to his essential attribute (Renn 2005:829). See also Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 21ff; 2 Cor. 9:9; Eph. 4:24 for such usage of dikaiosune. Jesus is therefore exhorting his audience to pursue holy life according to the holy character of God.

For Jesus, those who seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness are those who recognize the worth of human beings and hence work not only towards their survival but towards the survival of others as well (Tryon 2006:183). The point is that God’s provision for the needs of the needy will come (from him) through the wealth of wealthy. Getz (cited by Blomberg 1992:84) rightly states that, “[s]ituations occur where people’s needs are not met because followers of Christ have not been obedient in applying the principles that God has outlined in His Word.” The early church practiced this principle by selling their possessions and giving to the needy (Acts 2:44, 45).
Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth to give in order to the needy (2 Cor. 8:12-15).

The passage concludes on a restatement of the prohibition to worry. Worrying is future-oriented, meaning we worry about what is going to happen to us in the next moment or later. However, the future is not under the worrier’s control, but under that of a loving heavenly Father. Therefore, all we must be concern with is the circumstance of the present day, for tomorrow will worry about itself (v. 34). The one-day-at-a-time mentality taught in this verse alludes to in the petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us today our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). God promises to satisfy our needs, not our greed. The whole point is that instead of worrying about life, humans should do their best to serve God faithfully, and leave the rest to him.

4.4 Conclusion

The study reveals that the term poverty refers not only to lack of economic resources and economic goods (a condition of having “less than enough”), but also to political and legal powerlessness, oppression, and lack of good health. With regards to its economic dimension, poverty may be considered as lack of the ability to meet one’s basic needs. Included in this category are the sick, widows, slaves, physically disabled, orphans, children, the old, women, beggars, debt slaves, village dwellers and prisoners. Poverty has a communal/social dimension, whereby the society may be considered a poor one. The health and wealth of the community are closely related. A society may be considered healthy and rich if it exhibits justice, mercy or loyalty and compassion (Zac. 7:9-10). Injustice, oppression, exploitation, and disloyalty are some of the marks of an unhealthy and poor society.

Poverty can lead one to a state where the person loses his dignity as a human being in the face of the community. Due to poverty people become slaves, sometimes together with their whole family and serve others all the days of their lives (see Deut. 15:12-18). Even in that situation where the poor have become social outcast, they bear God’s image and so God still values him/her just like any other person. God sides with the disadvantaged when they are oppressed. “The point is rather that the poor are the first, though not the only ones, on which God’s attention focuses and that, therefore, the church has no choice but to demonstrate solidarity with the poor” (Bosch
1991:436). God “raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes, with the princes of His people” (Ps. 113: 7-8).
CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROSPERITY THEOLOGY MODEL OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION

5.0 Introduction

The Ghanaian religious landscape shows different theological models to the understanding and alleviation of poverty, four of which were outlined in chapter one. Of these models, Prosperity Theology model is the most influential. The focus of this chapter is to evaluate this approach to poverty in the light of biblical, theological and cultural contexts (expounded in the previous chapters), in order to determine how biblically, theologically and culturally appropriate it is for the Ghanaian context.

5.1 What is Prosperity Theology?

According to Kasera (2012:25) the term prosperity may refer to “literal wealth, success, and honour” or an upward movement “in something desirable: the state of succeeding or flourishing, [especially] financially.” Gifford (2007:20) defines Prosperity Theology as the belief that “God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty” and that one can have access to these blessings through “a positive confession of faith.” I propose a working definition of Prosperity Theology as the Christian belief that material prosperity and physical health are always the will of God for every believer and that these were accomplished by the Christ event and can now be activated through donations made to church leaders (a practice known as seed-sowing) and the positive confession of faith. Prosperity preachers emphasize four main teachings: material prosperity, faith healing, seed sowing and the positive confession of faith.
5.2 Major Teachings of Prosperity Theology

5.2.1 Material Prosperity

Prosperity preachers contend that God wills the financial prosperity of every Christian and that God’s favour (blessing) upon the faithful is manifested in terms of material prosperity, particularly financial assets such as personal and business success (Goliama 2013:143). Pastor David O. Oyedepo (1997:7), for instance, declares that poverty is completely outside God’s divine will for the believer. He reasons as follows: “Why … do you think that your lack excites God? Which father is excited to see his children begging all around? Have you ever heard somebody give a testimony, saying, ‘I thank God, two of my sons are beggars?’” (Oyedepo 1997:7). Upon this premise he declares, “Your children’s children will never beg! I want you to know that the prosperity God has planned for you has nothing to do with your profession, your career or your family background” (Oyedepo 1997:7). Pastor Joel Osteen (2007:41) adds his voice, saying, “It’s God’s will for you [the believer] to live in prosperity instead of poverty. It’s God’s will for you to pay your bills and not be in debt. It’s God’s will for you to live in health and not in sickness all the days of your life.” According to these preachers any believer who lives in poverty is living outside God’s will. This view, however, is not biblically true as I demonstrate later in this study.

In a recent study on Prosperity Theology among Neo-Pentecostals in Accra, Ghana, Kwateng-Yeboah (2017:45) identified four major causes of poverty according to Neo-Pentecostal theology, namely, supernatural causes, witches, demons, and generational curses. His study also identified laziness, institutional failure, corruption and poor-parenting as minor causes of poverty (Kwateng-Yeboah 2017:49). Though the study was conducted on Neo-Pentecostal Churches, there is no doubt it applies to Pentecostal and Newer Prophetic movements as well. Therefore, the major solution to poverty has to do with breaking the power of the spiritual force that hinders one’s progress in life.

Prosperity preachers cite a number of Scripture to support their position on material prosperity. For example, they contend that God’s promise of generosity to Abram (Gen. 12:1-3) and its fulfilment (Gen. 13:2) is available for every believing Christian on earth today. They deduce from Galatians 3:13-14, 29 that the death of Christ on the
Cross has made believers heirs of the Abrahamic covenant with its promises of wealth and health. Pastor Mensah Otabil (1992:24) contends that, it is simply not possible “for the person that operates under the blessing of Abraham” to get poorer. Thus, each believer has the ability to access this blessing, claim it, and possess it. Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams (1990:58, 102) argues that, “God never planned for (us) or any of mankind to have sickness, fear, inferiority, defeat or failure”. He refers to Genesis 1:29-30 and adds “[t]he Word of God is a tree of life that will produce riches, honor, promotion and joy.” He also connects the imago Dei (Gen 1:26), the fact that humans were created in the image of God, to material success (Duncan-Williams 1990:58, 102).

Prosperity preachers also deduce the promise of material success from Jesus’ promise of abundant life (John 10:10), his promised freedom (John 8:31-32), Paul’s assertion that Jesus became poor so that we may be rich (2 Cor. 8:9), James encouragement to his audience that they should ask freely from God (James 4:2) and John’s prayer for Gaius (3 John 2).

5.2.2 Faith Healing

Salvation in the hermeneutic and praxis of prosperity preachers is expected to yield a visible transformative and empowering effect not only in terms of material wealth but also in terms of the physical healing of believers. Bowler (2013:141) describes faith as “a force that reaches through the boundaries of materiality and into the spiritual realm, as if plucking objects from there and drawing them back into space and time” and by this she means, faith is the agent that makes what one wants become real in the real world, “transcending the separation between two universes for the sake of each believer.”

Like poverty, ill health, according prosperity preachers, is the work of the devil (Kasera 2012). No illness occurs in accordance with the will of God: “…it is the plan of our Father God in His great love and His great mercy that no believer should ever be sick, that every believer should live his full life span down here on earth and that every believer should finally just fall asleep in Jesus,” says Hagin (1979:21). Based on this view, most Ghanaian faith healers do not accept even the non-observance of basic personal hygiene as a legitimate cause of ailments (Amevenku 2015:87). Faith healers
also “find it difficult to accept medical science intervention in dealing with the problem of ailment as an example of God’s providential goodness” (Amevenku 2015:87). Their belief is that all diseases have spiritual antecedents and are therefore best cured through exorcism (Amevenku 2015:87).

Based on Isaiah 53:5, faith healers teach that the atonement of Christ brought physical healing to each believer. According to Copeland, “the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, poverty on Jesus at Calvary” (as cited by Lavender 2007:88). Other texts considered as supporting faith healing include James 5:13-18 and 3 John 2. This understanding of these texts, as I demonstrate later, is not in line with the broader teaching of scripture.

5.2.3 “Sowing Seeds” of Prosperity

Prosperity preachers contend that the believer’s right to enjoy God’s blessing is enacted through the sowing of “seeds of faith” to a spiritual leader who then reveals God’s plan for the giver’s prosperity to him/her (see Okosun 2018:83). To sow seeds of faith, according to prosperity teachers is the act of making financial donation or other gifts to church leaders, thereby sowing seeds in their ministry (Maura, Mbugua and Piper 2012:9ff). This is quite different from the act of telling people about Christ which is taught as seed-sowing in the parable of the sower (see Mark 4:1-20). Prosperity preachers urge their disciples to give generously to their church in order to receive abundantly. Oyedepo (2007:75) contends that God’s covenant with believers through (generous) giving bestows on the giver the right to economic empowerment. Oyedepo (2007:76) argues further that sacrificial giving is the only way to obtain “enduring wealth, as every other means of acquiring riches is time-tagged.”

Prosperity preachers use the analogy of sowing and reaping in 2 Cor. 9:6-11 (cf. Luke 6:38) to emphasize faithful and generous giving. On this, Bishop Dag Heward-Mills (2009:1) writes, “[p]rosperity in its basic form consists of someone sowing a seed and later harvesting the returns.” The mathematical principle behind the practice of “sowing and reaping” is deducible from the following quote by Copeland (based on Mark 10:29-30): “You can give $1 for the Gospel’s sake and $100 belongs to you; give $10 and receive $1000; give $1000 and receive $100,000” (as cited by Cotterell 2013:17). Here, one finds a hundred-fold financial return in one’s giving, aside other forms of
blessings, such as good health. Pastor Joyce Meyer also supports the hundred-fold material returns on the believer’s giving. She says, “Whatever you give up now will come back to you one-hundred-fold in this lifetime … If you want to have an abundant life, then I encourage you to ask God to help you live generously” (www.joycemeyer.org nd:np). Otabil states it this way, “God blesses us according to our deposits. If you have not deposited anything, you have no right to ask for anything” (as cited by Gifford 1998:80). He continues, “People think that you should give so that the Church has money. No. The main purpose is that you enter into a Covenant” with God so that he “will meet all your needs” (as cited by Gifford 1998:80). This kind of message with a “No giving, no material blessing” motif, fuels people’s desire to donate huge sums of money to the church in order to have abundant wealth in return.

Tithing is a very big issue for prosperity preachers. A Ghanaian US-based prosperity preacher is quoted to have ridiculed non-tithing members of his church that they are “useless in the vineyard!” (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:26). Most pastors of this kind use Malachi 3 as their basis to threaten their followers with curses for failure to tithe “faithfully” (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a). For Adeboye (2003) tithe paying is the believer’s passport to heaven. He writes, “Anybody who is not paying his or her tithe is not going to heaven. Some people have taught you that if you do not pay your tithes, God will not give you blessings. This is true, but a little more serious, you do not pay your tithes, and you do not go to heaven” (Adeboye 2003:44). Tithing then, as prosperity preachers assume, is both the key to material prosperity and the passport to heaven.

The principle of sowing and reaping applies to tithing just as it applies to other forms of giving. Heward-Mills (2009:1) contends, “[n]ot paying your tithes separates you from [the] most basic principle of sowing and reaping. When you do not pay your tithes, you harm your finances because you take away the foundations of your prosperity.” Heward-Mills (2009:1ff) further argues that though hard work is a good step towards a successful life, without fulfilling the tithing obligation one’s hard work may be in vain because the wealth of non-tithers is constantly eaten by devourers. With such teachings people are made to calculate ten percent of their income and give to the church with the expectation that they will receive abundantly in return.
5.2.4 Positive Confession of Faith

Prosperity preachers contend that to “name it and claim it” one has to exercise a positive confession of faith (Goliama 2013:145). It is further taught that prayer becomes efficacious only when it is said appropriately through faith because “faith begins with desire and when it is confessed then it is substantiated” (Goliama 2013:145).

Prosperity preachers encourage their members to have positive thinking about themselves and their lives (Goliama 2013:145ff). The law of positive confession is based on the fact that humans, being God’s image bearers, have dominion over creation (see Gen. 1:26-28). Positive confession is the means by which believers can exercise this dominion over both their soul and the environment. It involves having positive thoughts about one’s self and all aspects of his/her life. This is evident from the following quote by Osteen (2007:57-58): “God wants us to have healthy, positive self-images, to see ourselves as priceless treasures. He wants us to feel good about ourselves… God sees you as a champion… He regards you as a strong, courageous, successful, overcoming person.” This sounds very positive and uplifting to the human ego; yet, it is not supported by the overall teaching of the Bible.

Based on their reading of Romans 10:8, Prosperity Theology contends that “spoken word has power to bring desire into space-time existence” (Goliama 2013:145). Therefore, once a person says something and believes it is true, he/she can claim it. Osteen (2007:33, 72, 74, 306) writes, “God works by faith. You must believe first, and then you’ll receive … We receive what we believe. Unfortunately, this principle works as strongly in the negative as it does in the positive.” He continues, “God will help you, but you cast the deciding vote… [we must] get into agreement with God…It’s our faith that activates the power of God.”

Positive confession of faith is also based on the prosperity reading of Mark 11: 22-24. From verse 22, prosperity preachers exhort their followers to “have the faith of God” (Morris and Lioy 2012:103). It is taught that, with the faith which God used in creating the universe out of nothing, the believer can also speak and it will manifest. Based on this teaching Hagin contends that “It is unscriptural to pray, ‘If it is the will of God’ because “When you put an ‘if’ in your prayer, you are praying in doubt” (as cited by
Morris and Lioy 2012:103). All the believer needs to do is to profess what he/she desires with faith and possess it, to name it by faith and claim it.

5.3 Factors that Sustain Prosperity Theology in Ghana

Before considering the reasons for which Prosperity Theology thrives so well in Ghana, I will give a brief account of the immediate factors that catalysed the planting of this kind of theology in Ghana. Prosperity Theology was planted in Ghana at the time that Charismatic movement emerged. This period witnessed the circulation of books and cassettes of foreign prosperity preachers like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Reinhard Bonke and later on Benny Hinn, both in Ghana and Nigeria. Most Ghanaian preachers, with the exception of few (such as Pastor Mensah Otabil), drew ideas for the works of these foreign preachers. Most of these preachers even copied the dress code of their American counterparts. Other however, prefer to show their Africanness by wearing dresses such as Boubou, Teuxedo or Agbada or to wear suit with no clerical as a sign of their independence (Foli 2001:36). Some of Hagin’s books that had great influence on local believers include The Name of Jesus (1979), Words (1979), Redeemed from Poverty and Spiritual Death (1983) and How to write your own ticket with God (1979) (Larbi 2001:297). Oral Roberts had a TV programme which also made prosperity preaching become popular in Ghana and Nigeria (Larbi 2001:297). The interactions between Ghanaian Pentecostal leaders and ideas of foreign prosperity preachers became a channel for the acceptance and spread of prosperity preaching. It also cemented idea of prosperity preaching which some local pastors already had in mind.

The second factor has to do with the economic situation that prevailed in the country at that time. In chapter two, it was noted that Ghana’s post independent history was characterised by political and economic instability. The economic hardship in the country at this time made the country a fertile ground for planting the roots of prosperity teaching. The slogan for Roberts’ weekly programme (Abundance Life), “Something good is going to happen to you” and that of Hagin’s slogan “You can have what you say”, according to Larbi (2001:297), “became sources of comfort and hope for many, as people battled with the economic and social realities of the time.” People felt that the new teaching was the “Messiah” sent to deliver them from their economic woes.
The late Archbishop Benson Idahosa of Church of God Mission also had a role to play in the acceptance and spread of Prosperity Theology among Ghanaians. Idahosa, in 1977, held his maiden crusade in Accra, an event which was characterized by “great miracles, signs and wonders” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:111). His redemption hour TV programme was highly patronized by Ghanaians. His messages about wealth, health and freedom from evil powers became very attractive to many people who in turn spread it to other believers. He encouraged the establishment of new churches to expand God’s kingdom. He also trained many Ghanaians Charismatic pastors including the Archbishop Duncan Williams of the Action Faith Chapel International and Bishop Charles Agyin-Asare of Perez Chapel. His training shaped the theology of these people and then helped spread his prosperity ideas throughout the country. The above factors namely, the spread of American prosperity ideologies in Ghana, the harsh economic situation in the country at the time and the influence of Idahosa’s ministry were the immediate factors that made the planting and growth of Prosperity Theology a reality in Ghana.

With this background we now proceed to consider the reasons for which Prosperity Theology has become so influential in the religious landscape of Ghana. In the first place, Prosperity Theology appeals to many people because of economics reasons. Chapter two the study brought to the fore Ghana’s economic difficulties including high rate of unemployment, dependency ratio is high, low living standard, and lack of social amenities. Many people are struggling day in and day out to get over their predicaments who are ready to do anything required to solve their economic problems, but more especially if the demand comes from a minister of the Gospel (Temitope 2018:317).

Prosperity preachers usually buttress their sermons with testimonies so as to make them practical and real. A preacher may cite his/her personal material acquisition as an example to show his/her audience how the principle of sowing and reaping has worked in his/her life (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:163). Testimonies from members are also given either in the course of the sermon or at a different time. Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:93) cites the case of a woman who pledged five hundred Ghana cedis at Action Chapel’s “Jericho Hour” and later came back with the testimony of her returns including receiving thousand (1000) Ghana cedis, having a holiday in Cape Town,
South Africa, going back to the law school and passing an examination in which more than half of her mates failed and were withdrawn, having the opportunity to study in the United Kingdom, having 25,000 dollars as a donation to start an NGO, and receiving a divine promise of 40,000 dollars in two months’ time.

The principles of financial freedom preached, coupled with the testimonies from people claiming to have experienced the freedom preached, gives others (especially the underprivileged) the belief that once they give generously their returns will be overwhelming. Therefore, in my opinion, as long as poverty remains rooted in Ghana, Prosperity Theology is likely to have increasing adherents because of its appealing ideology to the poor.

The next reason for the high patronage of Prosperity Theology among Ghanaians is its appeal to emotion. Emotionalism is very appealing to Africans because it touches at the very heart of the traditional religious roots of the African (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). In prosperity-preaching churches, emotion serves as a test for truth: as people are made to feel emotionally good, “they deduce that what they are busy with is true, for if it were wrong, they would not have felt good in the first place” (Kasera 2012:65).

At a church service, someone may be so enthused by a sermon about principles of prosperity that he/she may end up jumping into the air and shouting, “I receive it”, “I claim it”, or “preach on” as a way of responding to the message being preached. Others may be touched so much that they shed tears of joy. Still others may walk forwards and lie on the floor to show how the message has touched their heart, or walk to the preacher and touch his/her feet or throw money on the ground in response to the sermon. The emotional effect of prosperity preaching churches attracts many people because they feel good at church services.

Many Ghanaians follow the Prosperity Theology because of spiritual reasons. Indigenous Ghanaian religiosity and spirituality cherish the power of a spoken word in shaping social relations (Kasera 2012:66ff). Once the word has been expressed, be it verbally or through gestures or merely by intention, then it can create or destroy. The spirituality proclaimed by prosperity teachers put human beings on a supernatural platform. For Oyedepo Psalm 82:6 “is the basis for the supernatural: you are no longer human, but superhuman. You are a son of God, so you are a god” (see Kasera
This spiritual upliftment preached by prosperity theologians makes the movement attractive to its adherents because people feel that they are on top of all circumstances of their lives (Kasera 2012:67). No longer do they have to wait upon God but they can demand of God what they desire and they can call upon any circumstance to change in their favour. Such a teaching, though popular, has no biblical warrant.

Prosperity Theology thrives well in Ghana because it promises to provide good health to its adherents. Freedom from evil powers is very important because (as we noted in chapter 2), Ghanaians maintain that every challenge in life is the work of the devil, be it witchcraft, ancestral curse, or others. This is portrayed in the saying, *Sɛ wotwe ahoma firi soro na sɛ amma a na biribi kura mu* (If you pull a rope and it does not come then something is holding it). African Christians expect healing to accompany their salvation experience: “healing and deliverance provide the ritual context for articulating a response to the inevitable shortfalls existing in the ‘redemptive uplift’ expected to accompany new life in Christ” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:164). The deliverance ministry is therefore required to expel any of these powers that work against people’s wellbeing.

Ampong and Benyah (2017:91) identify two kinds of deliverance in contemporary Christianity in Ghana and other parts of Africa, namely, personal deliverance which is administered to an individual by deliverance worker(s) or by the person him/herself through specific directions given by a spiritual leader and collective deliverance which usually happens to a group of people at a deliverance service. Prophetic directions towards deliverance take various forms. People may be asked to repeat certain words after a spiritual leader and then clap while praying with the belief that the clapping will send weapons to the spirits affecting their lives (Ampong and Benyah 2017:91). Liturgical substances such as anointing oil, soap, sticker, calendar, arms band, pomade, handkerchiefs, and holy water are believed to have the potency of exorcising demon after they have been blessed by a spiritual leader. This is what prosperity preaches teach, not what the Bible teaches. The Bible gives evidence of the use of liturgical objects in healing and deliverance; however, it does not consider any of these as the source of the power for healing and deliverance.
Quite recently, a Ghanaian pastor requested that his congregation bring their underwear to him to burn at night as part of the process of cleansing them and breaking any force that might be working against their wellbeing (Quarshie 2017). These and other exercises geared towards breaking the power of the devil against people’s success are very welcoming to most underprivileged Ghanaians who believe or have been made to think that the solution to their plight is their deliverance from the dominion of evil powers.

Prosperity Theology is widespread because of ignorance and the lack of critical thinking on the part of many of its adherents (Temitope 2018:317). Even though the Christian faith is firmly planted in Ghana, most Christians have poor knowledge of the Bible and how to interpret it correctly. It is a common practice that believers attend church on Sundays and listen to their pastor’s sermon, which they usually take in hook, line and sinker. Even among the clergy, there are many who are parroting other people’s theology, especially in matters whose understanding requires critical and intellectual analyses. Many people want “cheap theology”, already cooked and ready for consumption.

In such an environment, the popularity of one’s teaching becomes a yardstick for its authenticity. Most prosperity preachers have their own TV and radio stations through which their teachings easily spread and appear to the ignorant as “authentic” doctrine for the ignorant. More so, most adherent of Prosperity Theology refuse to have a critical assessment of the teachings and practises of their leader encourage them to consider. It seems people are made to believe that critical thinking cannot be applied to matters of religion and so people involve themselves in many unreasonable acts all in the name of Christianity. This trend has made the work of prosperity preachers a simple and easy task as their teachings become easily accepted due to their popularity (Temitope 2018:317).

5.4 Critique of Prosperity Theology

5.4.1 On Personal, Societal and National Development

Prosperity-preaching churches contribute their quota to the economic development of the nation through the provision of amenities such as micro-finance companies, lodging facilities, portable drinking water, and roads networks (Gifford 2004). The
operation of these and other facilities owned by prosperity preaching churches create employment for many people and hence contribute to the reduction of Ghana’s unemployment rate. It is interesting to note that some prosperity-preaching churches seek foreign aid from donors to fund some of the developmental projects they undertake (Kwateng-Yeboah 2016:82). The lives of many people have improved through these means. The nation also receives revenue from these facilities for national development.

In addition, prosperity preachers encourage entrepreneurship (Kwateng-Yeboah 2016:84). Some prosperity preachers organize entrepreneurial workshops for people whereby insightful lectures on topics such as job creation, writing a business proposal, seeking financial assistance, among others, are given. To help young entrepreneurs start their own enterprises, financial assistance (in the form of loan or a gift) is given to members. Through this act, many people have had their financial freedom and are now in the position to employ others. One adherent of Prosperity Theology stated (in an interview) that she became successful through prophetic guidance (akwankyere) and working capital she received from her pastor (Kwateng-Yeboah 2016:85).

Further, some prosperity preachers make donations to institutions such as prisons, orphanages, schools and others. Gifford (2004:115) records that the NGO Central aid of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) has, since the 1990s “been assisting good causes—for a cardio-thoracic unit, the physically handicapped, breast cancer, the blind and ...the Trokosi women.” These donations not only ease the plight of the people in these institutions, but also make it possible for these institutions to have excess funds to attend to other pressing needs. More so, there are churches who offer free medical screening, diagnosis and treatment of ailment for their members or chosen communities. Certainly, by attending to the health needs of the community Prosperity Theology is contributing to people’s socio-economic development.

The contribution of prosperity preachers in the education sector is also very commendable. Many prosperity preaching churches have established educational institutions in order to make education accessible to as many people as possible. These institutions are not established to just educate people but to raise people of integrity and character who can take up leadership positions when need be (see Frakue-Quarshie 2017:98). In most of these schools, the mode of payment of fees and
other charges is very flexible so that even the poor are able to complete their
education. Some of these institutions and the churches that established them buy
school uniforms, provide meals and housing to underprivileged students.

Some churches also award scholarships. Pastor Otabil, for instance, has instituted a
non-discriminatory scholarship scheme to help gifted but needy students in
Secondary, Technical and Vocational institutions in Ghana. According to Gifford
(2004:115-116), this scheme offered scholarships of an amount of 200 million cedis
worth to about 500 gifted but needy students from the 1990s to the 2000s. In Ghana,
poverty is a major barrier to education. Therefore, by offering scholarships to needy
students, the ICGC founder is helping the nation reduce the illiteracy rate and hence
improve upon people’s living standard. This is a very great contribution to national
development.

In spite of the above positive contributions to socio-economic development, I found
some flaws in attempts by prosperity teachers to improve people’s living standards.
Prosperity Theology fails to identify and deal with certain causes of poverty such as
environmental destruction, poor agricultural practices, poor road network, government
policies, corruption and mismanagement of funds, expensive funeral, large family size,
which were identified (see section 2.8) as some of the major causes of poverty in
Ghana. The exegesis of Isaiah 10:1-4 brought to the fore how injustice and oppression
could entrench the poor state of people. Usually, the wealthy use their power (social
status) to oppress and exploit the poor, making them poorer. Domeris (2007:95) rightly
points out that “[p]ower, rather than wealth, is the major distinction between the
oppressors and the oppressed, between the rich (strong) and the poor.”

Prosperity preachers over-emphasize the evil causes of poverty so much that they
tend to pay virtually no attention to economic theories or factors that contribute to
poverty. Lausanne Group (2009) rightly observed that factors such as social injustice,
exploitation, oppression and unjust trade practices that have been identified as causes
of poverty are of no or little importance to prosperity preachers. The result of this kind
of theology is the rise in use of imprecatory prayers in contemporary Ghanaian
Christianity. Every believer has an imaginary enemy (otamfo) who is considered as
the agent of the devil working against his/her material and health progress (Amevenku
and Boaheng 2015:88-89). Consequently, people spend countless hours of
productive time at prayer centres, leaving their work unattended to with the hope that their lives will improve through some miraculous act of God. Unless prosperity preachers interrogate the structural injustice that causes poverty in Ghana and formulate a model to deal with it, their fight against poverty will not be able to achieve much success. This point however, does not take away the fact that Prosperity Theology contributes positively to the socio-economic life. Rather, it means that the efficiency of Prosperity Theology towards poverty alleviation would be enhanced if prosperity teachers tackle causes such as corruption and mismanagement of state resources, structural injustice and others.

In addition, Prosperity Theology has the tendency of impoverishing some of its adherents, despite the economic progress it offers to others (Kasera 2012). As members are made to believe that their returns will be hundred-times their giving, some people give excessively. People may even go for bank loans to support their church with the hope of reaping a hundred-fold. People may also donate just to prevent themselves from being considered as people of weak faith because their pastors teach that if one has faith and sows, he/she will receive material gain. Eventually when the expected return does not come, the person involved needs to pay the bank loan with other resources to be gathered. This may lead to bankruptcy.

Furthermore, Prosperity Theology widens economic gap between poor church members and their spiritual leader (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:163-176). We find these pastors having so much wealth in stock in churches where some members cannot afford three square meals. Kwateng-Yeboah (2016:87) gives this report about a certain prosperity preaching church in Accra: “Comparatively, while the prophet seems enriched by receiving money from believers as seed sowing, the majority of the church members experience insignificant change in their economic conditions.” Prosperity preachers afford the latest car, or any fashionable thing and surround themselves with security agents whose salaries are paid through the offering of the poor members.

5.4.2 On Promoting Positive Mind-set

Some prosperity preachers promote a positive mind-set that addresses inferiority complexes, non-achievement and backwardness in Africa (Togarasei 2011:344). Such pastors combine Prosperity Theology with Afrocentric nationalism and
professionalism. Pastor Mensah Otabil of the ICGC belongs to this category. Otabil differs from other prosperity preachers in that he does not consider evil spirits, curses and the like as major causes of poverty. For Otabil, irresponsible life, ignorance, lack of creativity, and others are the major causes of poverty. He is of the view that God has created humans in his image and that we must be creative and hard-working like God in order to succeed. He does not see the solution to poverty in anointing oil, healing and deliverance, giving and miracles. In this sense, Otabil is more in line with what wider Christian theology teaches.

Otabil identifies two factors that keeps Africans poor: their inferiority complex and those cultural practices that militate against socio-economic progress (Goliama 2013:320). Otabil’s Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia corrects the misconception that black people are cursed and hence not part of God’s plan of salvation. He considers the Western perception that Africans are poor because we are descendants of Canaan who was cursed by Noah, as a means of holding back black people (Otabil 1992:16). In his view whites have distorted the Bible to arrive at such a conclusion. Referring to Gen. 9:25, he asks: “Is the black race cursed?” He answers, “No, Ham was blessed” (Gen. 9:1) (Otabil 1992:18). His contention is that God blessed Noah and his sons (9:1) and so Ham carries that blessing (Otabil 1992:18). He argues further that Noah knew that once God had blessed Ham already, he could not curse him; that is the reason why he imputed the curse unto Canaan, the yet to be born son of Ham (Gen. 9:25) (Otabil 1992:18ff).

The principle that the one who God has blessed cannot be cursed by anyone is biblical (cf. Num. 23:20). Otabil (1992:38) traces the black race to Cush, the son of Ham, and contends that Cush was never cursed but received a double blessing as first born (see Gen. 9:25 and 10:6). For Otabil (1992:10) the truth must be told that blacks are not cursed; neither are they descendants of Canaan. Otabil (1992) then makes a case for the presence and impact of black (African) personalities in God’s salvific history for mankind. He cites a number of black people who played significant role in God’s plan in human history to push his argument further (Otabil 1992:10ff). For example, Moses, the person God used in delivering his people from Egypt, was brought up in Egypt and was well versed in Egyptian civilization (Acts 7:22). Otabil (1992:73) then urges blacks to rediscover their inheritance which is linked to God’s salvific history, consider
themselves as central to this plan, and do away with any mind-set that hinders their economic development. For Otabil (1992:72), without liberation of the African mind, there can be no socio-economic improvement: “We have to break these mental barriers to development.” Based on this assumption, he challenges blacks to “take control of their own churches, and stop subscribing to white stereotypes of blacks” (Otabil 1992:87).

At the same time, Prosperity Theology has the potential of having negative psychological effect on the poor, though we have also established earlier that it is a theology which is very welcoming to the poor. In any given prosperity-preaching church there may exist two classes of Christians, the first group being those of little or no faith evident in the persistent state of poverty and the second being those with sufficient faith demonstrated by their material success (Kasera 2012:118). That is to say, the poor are seen as either tight fisted or having little faith. If so, then the poor are to blame for their plight. This dichotomy eventually leads to a situation whereby the poor become deeply disappointed with the blame of why they are not prospering; the poor are likely to think that God has “cursed or neglected” them (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:176). The second group may feel proud as they tend to think that it is through their own efforts that they have expressed faith in God to deserve his material blessings, a thought which Deuteronomy 8:17 prohibits (Lausanne Group 2017).

Since prosperity preachers keep on telling their congregation that the principles of prosperity ought to work for everyone, the materially poor are sometimes overtaken by feelings of failure and guilt for not exercising appropriate faith to succeed (Kasera 2012:118). As the Lausanne Group (2008-209) observes, Prosperity Theology tends to victimize the poor by making them feel accountable for their penury, while at the same time failing to deal with the real cases of poverty. This psychological anomaly and inferiority complex that may result from this condition, demotivates people who are sincerely and eagerly working towards escaping the grip of poverty.

5.4.3 On Cultural Transformation

Some prosperity preachers promote positive transformations in the African culture. Otabil, for instance, is of the view that old, antiquated, unusable, unworkable traditions in African societies also contribute to the pain and suffering on the continent. Otabil
(cited in De Witte 2008:109) argues that structural adjustment does not bring as much change as "cultural understanding adjustment". Otabil (cited in De Witte 2008:109) further argues that Africa is underdeveloped because of her failure to modify some of her cultural practices. Otabil (cited in Gifford 2004:126) acknowledges the positive values in African traditions but opposes those that tend to dehumanize people, and fight against economic and spiritual progress. Otabil labels such as "cultural strongholds".

Otabil identifies inferiority complex as a major strong hold that prevents Africans from discovering their own greatness (Gifford 2004:126). Another strong hold is tribalism (Gifford 2004:126). Tribalism leads people to fight about their traditions and interests which eventually leads to loss of lives and underdevelopment. It also breeds ethnocentrism and makes people treat those of other tribes unfairly. Cultural stagnation, that is, living by the same old method even when time changes demand a change in way of life, is also another strong hold (Gifford 2004:127). For example, a 21st century country that still relies on rainfall for its agricultural activities or relies on labour-intensive method of production rather than using machines is bound to remain under-developed. Another stronghold comprises of fetishism and idolatry which is rooted in the African Traditional Religion. Otabil argues that these cannot bring about development, hard work can (cited in Gifford 2004:127).

"Village mentality" is another stronghold that, according to Otabil, hinders development (cited in Gifford 2004:127). He opines that every society in the world started as a village and so there is nothing wrong having villages in Africa or elsewhere (Otabil cited in Gifford 2004:128). However, once villages have turned into towns and cities or once people have migrated from villages to cities, they must live as a people in the city and not as if they were still in the village. Another stronghold is bad leadership, a challenge to most African countries (Otabil cited in Gifford 2004:128). Otabil contends that leaders have the responsibility of making sure that everyone gets a fair share of the nation’s resources (cited in Gifford 2004:129). If leaders do otherwise, then people are bound to suffer. For Otabil, a good leader is a servant, not a dictator (cited in Gifford 2004:128). It therefore follows that leaders can contribute to the socio-economic development of the country through selfless and dedicated service.
The final stronghold, according to Otabil, is apathy (cited in Gifford 2004:129). Otabil calls his audience to stand against what is wrong and not sit unconcerned. People must be bold to speak against how leaders care less about the plight of the populace (Otabil cited in Gifford 2004:129). Otabil also notes that some people wrongly assume that they were created as poor people and based on this assumption fail to work hard to improve their lives (cited in Gifford 2004:129). In all, Otabil calls upon Africans to design a new road map to our journey to socio-economic development. By these teachings Otabil emancipates his audience from inferiority complex and cultural practices that hinder their socio-economic progress.

5.4.4 On Church Growth

Through its great emphasis on pneumatological soteriology, Prosperity Theology has contributed to the rapid numerical growth of Christianity in Ghana. The 2010 Ghana’s population and Housing Census reports that 71.2 percent are adherents of Christianity (GSS 2010:40). Of these, Pentecostals have the highest membership (28.3 percent) (GSS 2010:40). The reasons for this observation are not far-fetched. Firstly, prosperity preachers tap into African religiosity and spirituality to contextualize Christianity for Ghanaians and make Ghanaians feel at home at their worship services (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). Secondly, the healing and deliverance ministry of Pentecostals has solved health and spiritual as well as financial problems of many people (White 2018:138). Prosperity Theology has shown that God’s material and physical care and provision for his people are very real aspects of his love toward us, because in the Bible we have so many instances of God making his faithful prosper. Pentecostals are also mission minded and so they tend to be aggressive in their task of evangelism, the result of which is the winning of souls which older churches did not evangelize or could not effectively evangelise (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). In addition, prosperity preachers usually organize large crusades and revival which may result in soul winning. The huge donations of adherents of Prosperity Theology makes it possible for churches to pay salaries of pastors on time, purchase modern equipment for services, propagate the gospel through the electronic media and establish good welfare package for members, all of these tend to attract people to the church (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:165-166).
5.4.5 On Wealth and its Accumulation

According to the teachings of the Bible, riches are gifts from God to his people (Deut. 8:11-18; Eccl. 5:19; Hos. 2:8). Wealth is not inherently evil; it may become an evil thing depending on one’s use of it. On the other hand, poverty is also not necessarily a virtue in itself. God is the source of wealth and all other good things. In the exegesis of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 the study came across God’s promise to bless his people abundantly such that they will have no poor among them and lend to rather than borrow from other nations. Throughout the Old Testament there are many other Scriptures (eg. Deut. 28-30) that are clear that material possessions may be a sign of God’s blessings. God’s promises of abundant wealth are however predicated on faithful obedience to his word (Deut. 15:4-5). This does not however, mean that anyone who is poor is under God’s curse or that the wealth of every person comes from God. Some people acquire wealth through evil means, such as ritual money (sakawa). People can also be poor for God’s own purpose (for example Job). Therefore, the mere fact that one is poor or rich does not necessarily indicate the person’s status before God.

The exegeses touched on wealth accumulation. Both the sabbath economy of Deuteronomy 15:1-1 (cf. Ex. 16) and Jesus’ kingdom ethics in Matthew 6:19-34 diametrically oppose the hoarding of material goods. In the sabbath economy, God taught his people that he is the primary provider of life resource by prohibiting Israel from engaging in physical work on the Sabbath, and in agricultural activities in the sabbatical year and in the year of Jubilee, and yet ensuring that they had enough food to eat during these periods of rest. The sabbath economy demands cancellation of debts every sabbatical year so that the poor can be relieved of the suffering and begin life again without any debt (Deut. 15:1).

In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus also drew attention to the fact that life characterized by hoarding of material things cannot take one into the kingdom of God because kingdom living requires that each citizen shares with others whatever he/she has. Solomon’s economy, characterized by wealth accumulation, could not make him better than the lilies of the field who have nothing store except their life (v.29). Rather, than

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3 God blessed many biblical characters with wealth, including Abram (Gen. 13:1-2; Isaac (Gen. 26:12-13) and Solomon (2 Chron. 9:13-22).
accumulating wealth one must use it to ease the financial burden of others (Asante 1999). Both passages underscore the fact that God has abundant resources for the world but the scarcity we are experiencing is due to people materialistic behaviour which has led to the hoarding of goods for themselves (Asante 1999:63-64).

Wealth accumulation should be avoided for at least three reasons. Firstly, accumulation of wealth erects barriers, leads to pride and envy which set a person apart from others. Bitrus (2006:1063) rightly observes that, “[h]uman beings generally fall prey to a sense of false security when they become wealthy and live comfortably. Their way of life insulates them from the real issues of life.” Secondly, (accumulated) wealth threatens one’s devotion to God because one cannot have allegiance to both affluence and God (Matt. 6:24). Any preoccupation or obsession with anything other than God is sinful and is displeasing to God because only he deserves our total attention, love and service. In view of Deuteronomy 6:5, it is idolatrous to be preoccupied with materialistic thoughts. The foregoing is the reason why wealth can actually prevent people from entering the Kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). Thirdly, wealth accumulation leads to the selfishness, exploitation and unnecessary popularity. Due to fixation of mind on material possession, people try to maintain their wealth through whichever means available, but mostly through the exploitation of other, especially the poor and vulnerable. Legislators may legislate laws that legalize their exploitative activities due to their materialistic mind-set (see Is. 10:1-4).

Some of these teachings about wealth and its accumulation (as we demonstrate below) are in sharp contrast with the teachings of Prosperity Theology. Prosperity Theology promotes a spirit of materialism at the expense of spiritualism. Teachers of Prosperity Theology teach accumulation of wealth rather than sharing of resources with the underprivileged (Goliama 2013:336). Prosperity Theology fails to promote a sharing of resources because the context within which it was originally formulated (Western context) holds individualistic view of life (each one for him/herself). The materialistic nature of Prosperity Theology makes its adherents so preoccupied by money and wealth that their focus in life becomes the accumulation of wealth (Oluoch 2012:144).
The members follow the examples of their materialistic-minded pastors. Gone are the days when pastors adopted a detached and very moderate lifestyle (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:165). In those days, minister toiled selflessly and wore themselves out for their church members at the expenses of their own personal material gain and comfort (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:164-165). Today, instead of living modestly, prosperity preachers live luxuriously and support this life style with donations from the flock (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:165). I do not see anything wrong with church members helping the pastor to improve his/her standard of living. The problem, however, as Asamoah-Gyadu (2015:165) notes, is that many of these pastors “take things far beyond merely making pastors comfortable” to hoarding of material goods.

Many contemporary prosperity preachers live in flamboyance, evident in their outfits, residential facilities, electronic logistics, vehicles, and so on (Dei and Osei-Bonsu 2014:393). The resultant effect of the materialistic lifestyle of prosperity preachers is unhealthy competition that usually exists among themselves or among their wealthy followers (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:165). Some prosperity preachers constantly use their material wealth, the success of their spouses and children, and other personal gains as illustrations in their sermons (myjoyonline.com 2018). Some even go to the extent of filming their wealth and showing it on the TV (myjoyonline.com 2018). While there is nothing wrong testifying about God’s goodness, these preachers overdo it and eventually use such sermon illustrations to show off or to brag about their wealth. By promoting the accumulation of wealth, Prosperity Theology threatens Christian values of contentment, kindness and charity. The writer of Hebrew exhorts his readers, “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (13:5). Jesus prohibited the love of money when he told his audience that they could not serve two masters (Matt. 6:24; cf. 1 Tim. 1:6). Kindness and charity are clearly taught in Deuteronomy 15:7-11, where Moses appeals to the rich to be generous to the needy as a form of service, not as a way of making profit.

5.4.6 On Voluntary Giving and Tithing

Prosperity preachers both teach and practice generous giving. However, the principles of giving advocated by prosperity preachers suffer some flaws. Firstly, most giving under Prosperity Theology is egocentric (centralized on the giver) (Kyle 2006:291). A
pastor who wants to buy a car may give a prophetic declaration that all his congregants should “sow” in his ministry by making an appreciable donation. For the one (pastor) who already has a car but wants a new one, the prophetic direction may be that the pastor gives his own car to a poor member first (Asamoah-Gyadu 2009). Later, when the pastor buys a new car from the wealth he has already accumulated, it becomes an evidence of God blessings to those who give generously (Asamoah-Gyadu 2009). The pastor gave away his car and God has given him a better one. From this point, members are encouraged to give generously towards the pastor’s ministry so that they will receive in abundance (Kyle 2006:291).

The egocentric approach to giving contradicts our findings from the exegeses of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and Matthew 6:19-34. In Deuteronomy 15:1-11, God asked Israel to cancel people’s debt at the end of every seven years (v. 1). At the same time, he prohibited the rich from refusing to lend to the poor when a year of debt remission was approaching. It is deducible from the study of Matthew 6:19 that God requires the rich to be generous to the poor, in order to store heavenly treasures. In my opinion, the reason why God wants the rich to give to the poor is not primarily that the rich will receive their money in return but that the poor will be relieved of their stress.

Secondly, while acknowledging that donations by prosperity-preaching churches help to improve the lives of some people, it must be noted also that much of donations given by adherents of this theology are end up been kept by the church leader as his/her property. We noted earlier that Prosperity Theology requires that one gives to a “man of God” through whom God reveals success plans to the donor. The resultant effect of this teaching is that most donations in prosperity preaching churches go to “man of God.” Members’ are not given much encouragement to give directly to the poor who are in real dire need of basic life necessities; donations must come to the church, which in turn is expected to give to the poor (Temitope 2018:319). Prosperity preachers hardly urge their members to give “to the needy on the street or sick in their homes and hospitals or prisoners in the cells” (Temitope 2018:319). After a long time of wealth accumulation, the pastor goes to an orphanage and makes a relatively small donation which he/she broadcasts through the social media with the effect of encouraging his/her followers to donate more and more to him in subsequent meetings. What he receives from his followers in return of his benevolence far
outweighs what he donated (see Temitope 2018:319). The point, therefore is that Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation could have greater impact on people’s live if adherents are encouraged to give directly to the needy in their societies rather than bringing their donations to the church leader who end up hoarding majority of these donations.

Thirdly, some prosperity preachers manipulate their members rather than allowing them to give freely and cheerfully. They use statements like, “[t]rue prosperity is the ability to use God’s power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life” or “[w]e have been called to finance the gospel to the ends of the world” (Temitope 2018:319). Further, some pastors may invite their members to come forward and drop their donation at their (the pastors’) feet in order to ensure that no one gives a “small” amount as no one likes to be regarded as the one with least offering (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:98). This is against the principle of free-will, secret, proportionate and cheerful giving (cf. Matt. 6:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:7). Christian giving should be rooted in one’s love for God, not in one’s desire to become rich (Deut. 15:1,7-9).

Fourthly, by teaching that material prosperity is preconditioned on giving, Prosperity Theology makes giving a business transaction: “If our giving is just an exchange involvement with God where we give so [h]e can respond to the giving in return” as prosperity preachers make us understand, “then that is a commercial (business) transaction” (Oluoch 2012:162). This transactional understanding of giving makes acts of kindness an investment rather than a Christian service and limits blessings that flow from this service to material prosperity. It also fails to recognize the working of God’s grace in human lives and circumstances. It amounts to a reduction of God to an object to be manipulated by those who give to him.

This practice contradicts the biblical view that giving is a form of ministry rather than business transaction (cf. Deut. 15:7-11) (Wiersbe 338-339). The study has established that riches come with the responsibility of sharing with others and also to guard against finding in them a false sense of security (1 Tim. 6:17). The Individualistic view of wealth is therefore unbiblical, whereas the communal view of it is in line with biblical teaching. Wealth is like manna that has fallen from heaven and belonging not to the one who gathers it but to God (see Ex. 16). It is the responsibility of the gatherer to ensure that those who did not have equal opportunity in gathering also receive a share in what
he/she gathers. The ideal situation which we must strive for, is that there be no poor (Deut. 15:4). However, since there are still poor among us (John 12:8), it is imperative for every believer to open his/her hands to them. This thought is in line with Moses’ exhortation to the Israelites to be generous towards the poor (Deut. 15:7-9). In Matthew 6, Jesus also taught his audience to be generous towards the needy. God has abundant resources for all but, in most cases, these resources are to be found in the hands of just a few people (Asante 1999). Jesus requires that believers consider themselves as stewards of God’s possession and as people who are responsible to God for what he has entrusted to them (Matt. 6:19; 25:14-30). God requires sharing of resources that comes from a pure heart rather than a legalistic mindset as a way of dealing with poverty in the society (Deut. 15:7-9).

Furthermore, prosperity preachers’ approach to the issue of tithing needs some considerations. Tithing was an Old Testament requirement for the people of God under the law. In the NT, where believers are under the covenant of grace, God does not demand a specific percentage of one’s income before blessing him/her (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a). Rather, he requires a sacrificial, systematic, proportionate, cheerful, consistent and enthusiastic giving towards the advancement of the kingdom business (see for example, Matt. 6:1-4; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8) (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:99-100). Amevenku and Boaheng (2018a) argue that though tithing was not abolished by Christ, most of its purposes have been fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ which culminated in his death and resurrection. They identified three types of tithes, namely, Levitical, charity and festival tithes (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:45-50). They find the fulfillment of the priesthood in the priesthood of all believers. The New Testament describes believers as a “holy priesthood” or “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9) who offer “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pet. 2:5). The tithe received by the Levites as inheritance instead of the land has been fulfilled in the sense that all believers receive an inheritance, that is salvation, in the New Covenant (Acts 20:32; 26: 18; Gal. 3:18; Eph. 1:11-12,14; 5:5; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4). The fulfillment of the Festival tithe is found in Christ, for example, when Paul describes him as our Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:88-89). They argued that, of the three, only the principle behind the charity tithe remains in the NT; even for that one, there has been a change in the practise (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a). They argue further that, one can therefore, encourage the payment of tithe
provided “it is understood as the believer returning thanks to God’s providence” (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:107). The legalistic demand of tithe by prosperity preachers with their threat of curses must certainly be rejected on the ground that, it has no biblical support (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:107). It is a biblical demand that the church uses greater part of her tithes (paid as one’s form of thanks to God) to care for the needy (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018a:107).

5.4.7 On Anxiety, Worry and Greed

Scripture is against anxiety, worry and greed. One of the rules that governed the gathering of manner was that no one was to gather more than what is needed for the family for the day (Ex. 16:16). This principle is found in the petition “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). Christ’s model of life explained in our exegesis is to be content with the necessities and not to worry about wants to the extent of getting one’s priorities displaced (Matt. 6:25). The passages teach contentment. No matter one’s economic situation there is the need to pursue higher goals which have eternal values.

Contrary to this teaching, Prosperity Theology directly or indirectly, breeds anxiety and worry (Kasera 2012). The accumulated wealth of adherents of Prosperity Theology is itself a source of worry in terms of losing it or maintaining it (Maura, Mbugua and Piper 2012). Instead of having “one-day-at-a-time” mentality (Matt. 6:34), disciples of Prosperity Theology expend much energy towards becoming wealthy and owning many possessions for their material life. This reminds us of the parable of the rich fool in that adherents of Prosperity Theology (like the rich fool) behave as if they have control over future happenings (cf. Luke 12:16-21).

Oyedepo teaches that prosperity is believer’s identity without which “one is a misfit in the Kingdom” (Oyedepo 2005:16). This means that the poor are of lesser worth than the wealthy in the kingdom of God. Such teachings definitely increase people’s desire to acquire wealth by all means. Such a desire makes people tight-fisted and greedy. Wariboko serves us well with this quote, “The more prosperity preachers can connect savory religious visions to the social and aesthetic values of the society, the more the idea of the divine is transformed into a drive-by window that fulfils orders” (as cited by Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:95). He states further that, “After months and years of this kind of production of desires and dreams, consumerism and greed take their abodes in
their victims’ deep unconscious, where they are very difficult to control” (as cited by Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:95).

Materialistic thinking leads to anxiety and unhappiness. Money and possessions require a constant worry about their acquisition, increase, and preservation. Wealthy people are always anxious to get more and more of wealth in order to maintain their social status. The parable of the rich fool teaches us that people who are seriously amassing wealth are likely to be obsessed by it so much that they may lose their life in the end. The continual, selfish search for happiness through material wealth, more often than not, leads to misery. Wealth gives the illusion of security.

On the contrary, the study has established that while worry may have some positive effects in some cases, in majority of cases it tends to obscure one’s view about God and his power. Worry and anxiety must be avoided because they overshadow kingdom values, lead to reversal of priorities (Matt. 6:25) and make people fail to see things as they really are (Matt. 6:26). More so, worry and anxiety are anti-Christian because they are a waste of energy (Matt. 6:27) and acts of unbelief (Matt. 6:28-30), which characterize unbelievers (Matt. 6:32).

5.4.8 On Hermeneutical Foundation

Prosperity Theology suffers from defective hermeneutics. Hermeneutics refers to the study of the interpretation of texts (Osborne 2007). Almost all the troubles associated with prosperity preaching are rooted in the methodology employed in interpreting scriptures. In some cases (as I will demonstrate shortly), prosperity preachers quote isolated proof texts and treat them almost exclusively as propositional truths or promises without taking contextual issues into consideration. Three examples will be cited at this point.

5.4.8a The Hundredfold Return Principle in Mark 10: 29-30

The promise of material wealth and health based on Mark 10:29-30 needs some attention. The context of the text seems to suggest that the reward for leaving our families to follow Christ is mostly the fellowship believers will enjoy with hundreds and thousands of other believers, not hundredfold wealth (cf. Mark 3:11-13; 1 Tim. 5:1-2). The gaining of homes seems to suggest that believers will have some material wealth
in the form of shared houses and goods (inherited through wealthy believers, cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). One thing most prosperity preachers fail to do is that the text also promises believers that they will inherit persecution. Pastor Paula White however, recognizes that the text also talks about persecution. However, she opines that the persecution Jesus is talking about is the devil who does not want us to enjoy God’s blessings (White 2013:13). Exegetical fidelity requires that the persecution be treated the same way the other part of the text is treated. Prosperity preachers’ act of ignoring the promises persecution or treating the persecution as symbolizing the devil betrays their use of illegitimate means to propagate their teachings.

5.4.8c The Threefold Prosperity promise in 3 John2

Prosperity preacher use 3 John 2 to support their teaching. The text reads: “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul” (NRSV). The current study found this teaching to be in error on two grounds, the first contextual and the second grammatical. Firstly, the context of the text reveals that John used 3 John 2 as a form of greeting rather than a doctrinal passage. Even though doctrines can be formed from a non-doctrinal passage (because all Scripture is profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16-17)), the original intent of the author as shown by the context is not primarily doctrinal. Secondly, the term euchomai translated “pray” means a desire or a wish rather than a promise John is giving to his fellow believer (see Lieu 2008:268ff; Johnson 2011). The term euodousthai means “to journey successfully”, “to succeed”, “to be-led-along-a-good-road,” or “to get along well” (Haas, De Jonge and Swellengrebel 1972:n.p; Lieu 2008:268).

Therefore, what John prays for is a good and safe journey throughout one’s life (cf. Rom. 1:10), rather than the enjoyment of material prosperity. Both the NRSV and the NIV brings out this meaning well when it translates this expression as “all may go well with you.” The text does no more than express John’s wish for Gaius. John’s wish however does not guarantee that Gaius will experience what he wishes for him. It is therefore not sound to derive any universal principle of material prosperity from this text (Johnson 2011:np).
5.4.8b The Principle of Sowing and Reaping in 2 Corinthians 8:9

We noted earlier that prosperity preachers teach that all Christians are supposed to be materially rich (for example, based on 2 Cor. 8:9 cf. 6:10). The text reads, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich” (NIV). Prosperity preachers assume that Paul was preaching about or advocating for an increase in material wealth. However, a careful examination of the context of the text indicates that the meaning of believers' riches must be determined by the meaning of Christ’s riches before the incarnation. The word plousios rendered rich is used to refer to the original state (that is, divine existence) of Christ before his incarnation (Omanson and Ellington 1993:n.p). The term eptocheusen rendered “became poor” signifies his incarnation (Omanson and Ellington 1993:n.p). Christ voluntarily left his heavenly riches and glory for earthly poverty shown in his birth, ministry, and death on the Cross.

Believers’ riches therefore have to do with their eternal glory rather than earthly possessions. Based on this fact, Omanson and Ellington (1993:n.p) caution translators concerning this issue: [W]hile this is clearly not intended to refer to material wealth, readers in many languages will easily understand the figurative sense in this context. If, however, there is any danger of this expression being taken literally, it may be necessary to clarify the meaning by saying something like ‘rich in the eyes of God.’” Clearly, what Paul is teaching here is opposite to the interpretation of prosperity preachers. Paul asks them to empty themselves of earthly riches so that they can have heavenly riches (cf. 1 Tim. 6:18-19; Matt. 6:19). That is the reason why Paul exhorts the Corinthians to give their wealth away to their needy brothers saying, “that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack” (2 Cor. 8:14; read v. 15 as well). Paul’s point is that “true wealth is of the spirit”, consisting “in faith, in love, in peace with God” (Filson 2004:368). Material prosperity teaching based on this text is certainly inaccurate.

Our analyses of the above texts underscore the fact that prosperity preachers sometimes twist Scriptures to support their theology. As Temitope (2018:317) rightly points out, that for prosperity preachers “It does not matter whether that interpretation is actually the mind of the [biblical] author or matches its contemporary interpretation following the authentic hermeneutic principles or not, as long as this interpretation suits
the purpose of gaining the desired goal.” Prosperity preachers’ selective use of scripture to support materialism, in my view, is the most serious problem Prosperity Theology poses to contemporary Christianity.

5.4 On Work Ethics

In the context of Ghana negative work ethics such as laziness is a major contributor to the poverty situation people find themselves in (see section 2.8). Therefore, it is very important that any theology of poverty for the context of Ghana addresses this issue, in addition to others. Earlier (in section 6.1), we discovered that some prosperity preachers engage in human empowerment programs in areas of entrepreneurship and even go to the extent of giving initial capital to people to start their own businesses. However, on the whole, Prosperity Theology tends to make hard work and striving towards a proven means of making a living unnecessary because one’s donation and faithful tithing, as prosperity preachers claim, are the most crucial determinants of his/her success in life, not hard work (Kasera 2012:66).

In almost all cases, prosperity preachers illustrate their sermons with the life of people who gave generously and were blessed abundantly. They hardly take illustrations from people who studied hard at the feet of others, struggled in life and became successful due to hard work, determination, perseverance and God’s grace. Thus, Prosperity Theology fails to prepare believers adequately to develop endurance through hard work, suffering and to take responsibility for their actions (Kasera 2012:66). No wonder disciples of Prosperity Theology tend to look for quick ways of escaping economic hardships rather than enduring and working at it gradually. The simplistic approach to living a successful life overnight, as evident in Prosperity Theology, has led to the paradigm shift in people’s orientation and inclination from hard labor with determination to idleness (Temitope 2018:232; Soboyejo 2016:8).

5.4.10 On Self-denial, Pain and Suffering

One of the major mandates of the church is to nurture disciples to become like Christ. The process involved in this task is what we refer to as discipleship. Since God’s blessings according to Prosperity Theology, is predominantly seen in terms of material possessions, disciples of Prosperity Theology usually derive freedom, happiness, and worth from money and possessions. As such, adherents of Prosperity Theology
prioritize material possession, not God’s kingdom and his righteousness. This contradicts Jesus’ injunction that believers seek first the kingdom and God’s righteousness (Matt. 6:33). The process of discipleship requires self-denial. Unfortunately, while Jesus teaches self-denial (Matt. 16:24; Mark 9:34; Luke 14:26), Prosperity Theology teaches self-fulfilment (Soboyejo 2016:8). Today, self-denial has become unpopular in Ghanaian Christianity due to the influence of prosperity teaching. Prosperity Theology fuels people’s desire to become rich at all cost, thereby planting in them the evil of loving money (1 Tim. 6:10). Since adherents of Prosperity Theology treat wealth as an end in itself rather than a means to an end, people may use all means including corruption, oppression and social injustice to gain riches (see Soboyejo 2016). Prosperity Theology with its strong emphasis on “material formation” rather than “spiritual formation,” undermines Christian discipleship (Soboyejo 2016:8).

Prosperity teachers have zero tolerance for hardship and any form of suffering (Asamoah-Gyadu 2009). Even some prosperity-preaching churches refuse to celebrate the Good Friday because of its associated pain and suffering (Asamoah-Gyadu 2009). Contrary to this opinion, we find in the book of Job that, the sovereign God (in his own wisdom) may work according to some other unexplained and unexplainable ways to allow the righteous suffer—the issue of theodicy. God may elect people to suffer for his purpose just as some Old Testament saints faced challenges such as being flogged, chained, put in prison, stoned, sawed in two, put to death by the sword and so on (Heb. 11:36-40). These believers obviously experienced great financial need and privation not because they did not know about God’s promise of prosperity or lacked faith to claim it. I reason this way because they were people whose faith are commended.

In the NT, one finds many people suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Christ went through suffering of the highest kind. He also taught that people can pass through pain and suffering in order for God to use their situation to achieve his purpose (John 9:3). Paul’s exhortation about suffering came from his personal experience. He became poor and endured a lot of difficulties. He knew what it was like to be in need and what it was like to live in plenty (Phil. 4:11-13). He however boasted in his poverty and saw it as establishing his credibility as a servant of God (2 Cor. 6:3-10, see also 1 Cor. 4:8-16). Interestingly, Paul’s secret for getting along in “need” was not exercising a special
kind of “faith” that changed his circumstances, but learning to be “content” (1 Tim. 6:6-8).

It is therefore unbiblical to portray Christianity as a suffering-free religion. There cannot be a crown without a cross, as the prosperity preacher would want us to believe. Prosperity teachers' view about pain and suffering in the life of the believer is therefore to be rejected based on biblical revelation. Soboyejo (2016:8) this view when he argues that, prosperity preachers, with their zero tolerance for hardship, suffering, brokenness, or delay in life, undermine “the formation of Christian character.”

5.4.11 On the African Communal Worldview

The Ghanaian communal worldview of life is a survival mechanism in which people depend on one another. Pobee (1976:49) describes this interdependence in the Akan ontology “Cognatus ergo sum” meaning “I am related by blood, therefore, I exist or I exist because I belong to a family.” Earlier, I established that in the Ghanaian setting, one’s welfare is the responsibility of the whole family (see section 2.2). People spend huge sums of money on their extended family to ensure that each member of the family has a means of living. This is not only cultural but biblical as well. Christ’s example of self-emptying teaches that one has to look not only at his/her own interest but that of other too (Phil. 2:4-11). Prosperity Theology with its individualistic view of material success, militates against the interdependence of human beings (Goliama 2013:226). It fuels, in the individual, the hunger to gather as much wealth as possible and makes people become so preoccupied with wealth that they forget about friends and relatives. This contention is buttressed by the Lausanne Group (2009:n.p) of theologians who state that, “Prosperity Theology has stressed individual wealth and success, without the need for community accountability, and has thus actually damaged a traditional feature of African society, which was commitment to care within the extended family and wider social community.”

Kwateng-Yeboah (2016:88) also observes that in prosperity-preaching churches, the primary aim of giving is not “generosity of a Christian social responsibility” but “the individual’s search for his [or her] own wealth and success without any awareness of communal sharing of resources.” Thus, because money is a priority and the factor that controls the life and feeling of adherents of Prosperity Theology, there is a neglect of
people’s sensitive needs. That, in my view, is the reason why it is not uncommon to find disciples of Prosperity Theology living comfortably in poor communities without feeling the need to help their neighbouring poor people. Since Prosperity Theology fights against the idea of interdependence that sustains Ghanaian societies, it will be very difficult to achieve any sustainable success in using Prosperity Theology as the antidote to Ghana’s poverty situation.

5.4.12 On Eschatology

In essence and approach, Prosperity Theology is solely this-worldly. Too much emphasis is placed on this world that prosperity preachers tend to ignore teachings on the second coming and related issues. Prosperity Theology whether explicitly stated or not, contends that all the benefits of the Kingdom of God can be enjoyed by all believers here and now (see Idahosa 1987:7). However, the Bible teaches that though the Kingdom of God is inaugurated by Jesus in the First Advent, it will not be enjoyed fully until he returns again (see for example Matt. 6:10). Therefore, the teaching that there should be no sickness, poverty cannot be true for the present world of sin, but in the next. To place too much emphasis on realised eschatology and hence teach that believers should not experience illness is to deny the reality of physical mortality. Such eschatology, in my view, is unbalanced and a total deviation from Christian orthodoxy.

5.4.13 On Theological Formation

Prosperity Theology has an ambivalent attitude towards knowledge; it promotes anti-intellectualism and at times portrays Christianity as illogical. Kasera (2012:64) quotes Oyedepo as saying “God’s Word is not scientific; neither is it logical; God’s Word is divine.” By this assertion, Oyedepo is saying that divine knowledge is illogical. If so, then we need not approach Scriptures with our thinking capabilities (Kasera 2012:64). Yet, he calls on people to obey the Scriptures. Reinhard Bonnke is also noted for propagating the same attitudes of anti-intellectualism and experientialism. Gifford notes how Bonnke has removed critical thinking from his theology, and thus use experience as the ultimate judge of spiritual truth (Kasera 2012:64-65).

The situation in Ghana is not different. It is a common belief among Ghanaian prosperity preachers that ministry does not need any serious academic studies (Amevenku and Boaheng 2015:92). Therefore, instead of building solid theological
foundation through serious academic studies, most prosperity preachers are of the view that once the (prophetic) gift is working, academic work is irrelevant (Amevenku and Boaheng 2015:92). Some even go to extent claiming that the Holy Spirit will “drop” interpretations into their minds (Amevenku and Boaheng 2015:92). Their focus in ministry includes exorcism, healing and prosperity. Such ministers who are not ready to learn eventually become Biblicists.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on Prosperity Theology as a model for dealing with Ghana’s poverty situation. A general overview of this theology was given followed by a brief discussion of the factors that make it appealing to Ghanaians. The main teachings of Prosperity Theology were found to be material prosperity, faith healing, positive confession of faith and seed sowing.

One of the key questions about Prosperity Theology is its appropriateness for poverty reduction in the Ghanaian context. The study found some positive contributions of this model to Christianity in terms of promoting positive mind-set, cultural transformation, and personal, societal and national development. The study has demonstrated various flaws in the hermeneutical approach of this model. Prosperity Theology encourages unethical attitude such as commercialization of the gospel, materialism, covetousness which is idolatry, unethical and manipulative fund-raising techniques, and greed. It opposes the Ghanaian communal view of life and the interdependence in poor communities. It also fails to provide any sustainable answer to the real causes of poverty because it has an obscured view of poverty. Clearly, the Prosperity Theology model is not contextually, theologically, and biblically appropriate for Ghana. Based on this conclusion, the study formulated a theology of poverty that addresses the contextual needs of Ghanaians.
CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF POVERTY FOR GHANA

6.0 Introduction

In the last chapter, I evaluated Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation and found that while it has some positive aspects, the biblical and the cultural bases are weak. In view of this, the present chapter sets out to formulate a contextual theology of poverty based on the findings made by the study so far. The major stake holders in the formulation and implementation of this kind of theology comprise the poor, the rich, the church, the traditional society and the government.

6.1 Contextual Theology in Africa/Ghana

According to Bujo (1992:5) no serious effort was made at formulating an African Christian Theology until the 1950s and 60s. Bevans (1992:5-6) outlines (among other issues) two external factors that triggered the move to develop an African Theology: the “general dissatisfaction with classical approaches to theology” which fails to take African needs into consideration and “the oppressive nature of older approaches.” Bujo (1992:2) identifies Mulago’s 1956 publication as a ground-breaking document on African Christian Theology. This work was followed by Kagame (1956) and then some Africans theologians who published as a group in 1956 (Bujo 1992:2). In Ghana, Dickson (1974); Pobee (1976); Bediako (1988); Martey (1995); Asamoah-Gyadu (20012; 2013); Boafo (2014) and Asante (1999; 2007; 2014) are some of the scholars who have developed African Christian Theology for the Ghanaian context.

Nihinlola (2013:18) defines African Christian Theology as “the Christian Theology that is formulated in the African worldview.” By worldview is meant “the total understanding or conception of reality as a whole, either physically or non-physically, or as a
combination of both by individual or by a particular people or culture” (Otieno 1991:5). African Christian Theology must therefore be “Christian, biblical and African” (Nihinlola 2013:18). Martey (1995) has identified four theological trends in Africa based on issues related to culture, poverty, gender and race. He classified them into two major streams of African theologies, namely inculturation (or contextualisation) and liberation (politico-socio-economic) theologies (see also Nkansah-Obrempong 2007). Other forms of African Theology include Feminist Theology, Liberation/Black Theology and so on. Feminist Theology attempts to liberate woman from this situation, feminist hermeneutics exposes patriarchal structures (as well as other oppressive elements) within texts as well as the legitimizing and perpetuating of these interpretative structures while Liberation Theology attempts to unite theology and socio-political concerns of the society.

The contextualization of theology is not an option but a mandate to the church. Without contextual theology the word of God will always be alien to all communities that share different culture from the formulating community. Odunuyi (cited by Asante 2014:119) rightly observes that, contextual theology “requires deep analysis of the context of the people’s experience; hence contemporary theology has to be overtly contextual and take into account the whole scope of life’s offerings and challenges.” The task however is not always easy as it can easily lead to compromise and syncretism (Nihinlola 2013:19).

In terms of poverty studies, Asamoah-Gyadu (20012; 2013); Boafo (2014) and Asante (1999; 2007; 2014) are some of the leading Ghanaian scholars who have attempted to contextualize biblical teachings for the Ghanaian situation. The core of the teachings of these scholars on poverty and its alleviation in Ghana are based on four principles of John Wesley, which include:

a) Ultimately everything belongs to God;

b) Resources are placed in our care to, use as God sees fit;

c) God desires that we use these resources to meet our necessities (i.e., providing shelter and food for ourselves and dependents), and then to help others in need; thus
d) Spending resources on luxuries for ourselves while others remain in need is robbing God! (Maddox as cited by Lavender 2016:40).

This section is a further development of the efforts made by these Ghanaian scholars. We stated in chapter one that the partners of contextual theology, include Scripture, tradition and socio-politico-economic situations of the culture the theology is addressing. The theology to be formulated in this chapter will be a dialogue among these partners. The theology formulated below is based on the following thematic areas: work ethics, material ethics, human development, female empowerment, cultural transformation, social and structural transformation, spiritual transformation, solidarity with the poor, fruitfulness to spirituality and work, solidarity with the poor, contentment, modesty and simplicity, job creation, financial ethics and fighting against extravagance in the Church. The contextual theology presented below not only addresses the theological and biblical needs of Ghanaians but also socio-cultural needs.

6.2 A Contextual Approach to Poverty Alleviation in Ghana

6.2.1 Work Ethics

The contextual model of poverty proposed in this study begins with work ethics because the attitude of Ghanaians towards work does little to promote poverty reduction (see section 2.8). Also, work ethics is very important for the present study because work is part of the daily life of humans. Kudadjie and Aboagye-Mensah (2004:105) argue that work must relate to three areas of human life namely, human-divine relationship, human-human relationship and human-environment relationship. The biblical understanding of work is outlined below. Firstly, the Christian concept of work is informed by God’s nature and his activities. The two creation accounts (Gen. 1 and 2) illustrate that God himself is a worker. Zwingly (cited by Asante 1999:32) avers that, “[t]here is nothing in the universe so like God as the worker.” The opening verse of the entire Bible is that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1, NIV). The creation stories further reveal that God did not only create with word of mouth (as in Gen. 1:3, 6,9,14,20,24) but also with his hands (Gen. 1:26-27). Throughout history God has been involved saving, preserving and judging humanity (Kudadjie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:106). In the incarnation, God (in
Christ) affirmed the dignity of human labor by taking part in manual work as a carpenter (Mark 6:3) (Kudadjie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:106). Jesus makes it clear to us that the Father has always been working and he too must be working as well (John 5:17). Manual work is therefore not to be look down upon.

Human beings were made to be distinct from other creations in two respects—only humans were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and only humans “were given the privilege and responsibility to work” (Gen. 2:15) (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:106). As we can see, God ordained human work before the Fall. Since that time, human beings have made attempts to work and take dominion of the universe through crop farming and rearing of animals (see for example Gen. 4).

Even though human work is a pre-Fall institution, the Fall of humanity had consequences on the nature of work (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:107). As a result of the Fall, God cursed the ground. The result was that the earth became reluctant to produce food; it began to produce thorns and weeds (Gen. 3:17-18). It was through toil, sweat and tears that humankind could eat of it (Gen. 3:19). From this time, as Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah (2004:107) assert, “work will have to be accomplished in the midst of many tensions, conflicts and crises.” The consequence of the Fall on human work is illustrated in the story of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4). In contemporary times, “labour disputes, strikes, cheating at work places,” bribery and corruption, and loitering could be seen as the consequences of the Fall on human work (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:107). One may conclude that God’s purpose for human work was hindered, though not destroyed, by the Fall; therefore, human labor has both joyful and/or unpleasant dimensions (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:107).

Secondly, work is a divine command (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:108). Human work was not the initiative of humankind but a command from God (Gen. 2:15). Therefore, God wants everyone (including the poor) to work hard in order to improve their standard of living (Asante 1999). Through human work, God makes provision for human needs (Ps. 128:2). Nihinlola (2013:141) collaborates this thought when he asserts that, “God has designed the human life in such a way that work is a means to create wealth, possess material blessings and prosperity.” This view informs the Akan saying, *aniha mu nni hwee se ohia* (There is no other results of laziness than poverty).
I believe that Ghana cannot develop if we work less than what God expects us to do. It is through work that we affirm our true states as humans, creatures who bear the image of God.

Diligence is therefore the means by which humans participate in God’s efforts to heal and redeem all creation (Asante 1999). The poor should entrust their lives into God’s care and take advantage of any opportunities offered by the church and the government to enhance their living conditions. No one should sit aloof and expect God to supply his/her need through miracles. People must however not be discouraged when their efforts become fruitless because life is a struggle. Ghanaian traditional wisdom encourages the people to work hard to earn their living (see section 2.7). It also encourages those who have some challenges in life not to give up but to work hard again towards their success (see section 2.7). For example, the Akan saying, *abrabo ye adanadanee* (Life is a struggle) or *mia wo ani na ebeyeyie* (Strive hard, you will succeed”) serves as a source of comfort and encourage to those who fail in one enterprise. This is a form of social creativity that must be encouraged by Ghanaian societies in order to instil in the populace the attitude of perseverance. This dimension of the model addresses the shortfall of Prosperity Theology model which does very little to encourage hardwork (section 5.4.9).

Thirdly, Christians have limitations when it comes to work. God is infinite; he works forever; humankind is finite and works only as long as he/she lives (Ps. 146:3-6). Human work is not an end in itself but “a means of sustaining the individual and family; and a means of serving the community”; its end is to glorify God (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:109). Any economic enterprise that does not glorify God, help one’s neighbour and improve the society is not worth undertaking (Boafo 2014:220). In the Ghanaian context, the sale of alcohol falls under this category, due to its devastating economic and psychological effects on the individual and the society. In addition, bankers, ministers of the gospel, doctors, pharmacists, lawyers and leaders who made money through exploitation, stealing, fraud, and gambling act against the principle of love for neighbor (Boafo 2014:221). In my opinion, this principle would apply to those who cheat in examination, those who lie at their visa interview about their bank statements and/or their purpose of travelling, higher rank officials (for example, senior pastors) who pay their allowances and refuse to pay those of their
junior officials (for example, junior pastors) and those who use foul means to generate money in their organizations. This dimension of the contextual approach to poverty will help to deal with the current situation in the country whereby people use all available means to search for money regardless of the ethical implication (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004).

There is the need for humankind to rest from his/her diligent industry and still trust God for his provision. Work should not be at the center of the life of the Christian. The sabbath economy expounded in the exegesis of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 (and Ex. 16) point to the fact that God is capable of providing human needs even when human beings cease from active work. God made the Israelites cease from their physical activities during the weakly Sabbaths and sabbatical years (Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12-13); yet no one went hungry. Therefore, though hard work is encouraged, God expects us to take our rest and regain energy for future work. God’s sabbath rest (Gen. 2:2) serves as an example for humanity. God expects human beings to have some period of rest to revitalize itself, just as he wants the land be left to fallow after several years of cultivation (Ex. 23:21).

Therefore, no one is expected to undertake any economic enterprise that “harms the body, mind or spirit, or saps health or perverts one’s character or weakens one’s faith and joy in God” (Boafo 2014:220; Moltmann, Eberhart and Charlton eds. 2015:96; Macquiban 2016:420). This principle applies to works that deprives people of their food or sleep in the proportion naturally required by the body. It has something to tell people who have migrated to other places for greener pastures and undertake certain works that are detrimental to their health and yet consider them appropriate to gain wealth for their families back home. The reason for prohibiting the Christian from earning money by means that risks one’s life is that life is more valuable than food and body more than clothing. From our exegesis of Matthew 6:19-34 we note that food, clothing and shelter have instrumental values. They are not the reason why human live and so one does not have to worry about them to distract our loyalty to God (Matt. 6:25).

Fourthly, since human work is part of a believer’s calling from God, it must not only meet the needs of the worker but also those of the community (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:110; Boafo 2014:221). In this sense, human work becomes the means
by which believers participate in sustaining God’s creation. From this fact comes the
deduction that, believers should not engage in any vocation with the primary aim of
pursuing wealth or gaining favour from others. Rather, they must consider their work
as part of their service to God and humanity. Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah
(2004:110) rightly argue that “[t]he worth of human work is judged, not by how much it
makes a few people in the community rich and powerful but, by how much it serves
the cause of all humanity.” The point therefore is that one person’s work should not
be isolated from the life of the community; it must be regarded as an integral part of
the entire society. If work is to serve the community, then one’s work should not in any
way be detrimental to the life of one’s neighbour or to the environment (Boafo
2014:221). Undertaking an enterprise that harms or has the potential of harming one’s
neighbor, and does not exhibit the love Christians are required to show towards their
neighbors (Matt. 22:39). Human activities that pollute the environment or endanger the
lives of workers contradicts this principle. Illegal mining (popularly known in Ghana as
galamsey), illegal fishing activities, and similar ventures fall under this category.

The love factor in human work is depicted in Deuteronomy 15:1-11. In verse 1 God
required that creditors cancel the debt of their debtor every sabbatical year. Then in
verses 7-9 he encourages the rich to give freely to the poor even when the sabbatical
year was approaching. In both instances, God was teaching the people that their work
as money-lenders was not for selfish gains but for the service of the entire community.
Such service requires love for humanity. Therefore, business transactions must not
only be based on profit-oriented principle but the principles of love and mercy towards
others. That way, Christians would pursue heavenly goals rather earthly goals in their
worldly employments (cf. Matt. 6:19).

Building upon the foregoing discussion, Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah (2004:114)
contend that the labour relationship is an ethical one. They demand that cooperate
enterprises pay their taxes and appropriate salary of workers promptly; ensure the
safety and health of their workers by providing healthy working environment; maintain
good relations with their employees and refrain from threatening their works (Kudajie
and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:115). Modern-day employees who refuse to pay their
workers’ salary or statutory funds such as income tax and pension contribution fall
short of this standard.
The above understanding of work has some ethical implications for correcting some negative work attitudes common in Ghana. The first negative work attitude is “laziness and lack of devotion to duty” (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:112). Both attitudes may arise when people regard the work they do as not befitting them or when they consider work as a necessary evil (that is, they work just because work is inescapable). The discussion above has shown that work is part of what it is to be human; it is therefore not to be regarded as a necessary evil. As God’s image bearer, human beings are expected to be diligent and creative just as God is. It is therefore, unchristian to be lazy. Another negative work attitude is lateness. Lateness to work costs the nation huge sums of money (Nihinlola 2013). The “African-time” attitude is slowing down development in Ghana and Africa at large. There is the need for Ghanaians to be time-sensitive in order to have things done at the appropriate time without delay. Corruption at our work places as well as favoritism, poor supervision and management, informs people’s attitude to work and lead to low productivity. The church is to sensitize her members about the damaging effects of these unethical practices. The government should prosecute those who involve themselves in corrupt activities. Finally, “get-rich-quick attitude” is a challenge to the development of the nation and must be dealt with (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:112). It is this attitude that makes some youth engage in ritual money. The fight against this attitude must come from at least two institutions, the church and the society. The church must teach her members that money is not an end in life but simply a means. Attention should be drawn to Jesus’ teaching that life does not consist in abundance of one’s possessions (Luke 12:15). Based on the outcome of the exegesis of Matthew 6:19-34, the church should encourage her members not to worry about their lives but to trust God to provide them with their basic needs as long as he lends them breath. The one-day-at-a-time mentality taught in Matthew 6:34 must be promoted. The society must teach and encourage diligence and perseverance towards work. Proverbs that have such didactic values must be taught. For example, there is an Akan saying, *barima ne nom aduro a eYe nwono* (It is a man who drinks bitter medicine). In times of difficulties, this saying teaches that failure or difficulties is part of life and must be faced until it is overcome. While promoting such teachings the society should also not shower praises upon the wealthy and hail them without considering the source of their wealth. People who become rich overnight must be questioned about the source of their wealth.
6.2.2 Material Ethics

People’s attitude towards material wealth has everything to do with poverty reduction in their community (Asante 1999). In the context of Ghana, desire for wealth and its accumulation through whatever available means is one factor that militates against efforts made towards poverty reduction. It is therefore very crucial that our contextual theology outlines the biblically and culturally appropriate ethic of material things.

First there is the need to recognize and accept the fact that material things and any other resources are God’s, not humans (Asante 1999; Boafo 2014). This foundation of our material ethics is found both in the Ghanaian cultural teaching and Scripture. Ghanaians recognize Nyame as the Creator and owner of all that is, the source of rain and Sun (for which reason He is referred to as ototobonsu a obo awia). Just as our very being (soul and body) is not ours but God’s, so is everything we have His own, not ours. The Bible makes it clear that God is the Creator and Owner of all that is in the universe (cf. Gen. 1:1; Ps. 24:1-2; Hag. 2:8). Two of the biblical passages examined in chapters three and four (Deut. 15:1-11 and Matt. 6:19-34) underscore the fact that there is no individual on earth who has the right to claim complete ownership of whatever resource is available to him/her because whatever one possesses, has its source from God’s creation. Humans can use technology to change wood into paper and then transform paper into money; yet neither the wood nor the wisdom used in the process comes from him/her. This analysis applies to all that human has in possession (including vehicles, houses, electronics, airplanes, and so on).

The first principle leads to the second, the principle of accountability of material possessions. Humans are accountable to God for all the resources he has entrusted to them. At the judgement Day, each one will account for the resources entrusted into his/her hand (see Matt. 25:15ff). The Akan saying, sika wo ntaban (Money has wings) underscores the belief that apart from the final judgment God can even judge those who are not using resources in accordance to his will by taking what they have and giving to others. The Akan consider this as a dramatic event in why wealth flies away from the wicked trustee (as the above saying depicts).

The third principle is that material things are meant for the common good of God’s people just as spiritual things are (1 Cor. 12:7). God taught Israel to apply this principle
when he demanded that the rich open their hands to the poor. Money lenders could not use an approaching sabbatical debt release as an excuse for not lending to the poor (Deut. 15:7-9). African social and cultural values such as relationships, sacrifice for others, unity, peaceful co-existence, co-operation, hospitality and inclusiveness collaborate this biblical teaching.

Africans are interconnected by blood; hence the saying “I am related by blood, therefore, I exist or I exist because I belong to a family.” In the same way Christians are linked by a common Creator, faith, Lord, Spirit and baptism. The interconnection among Christians implies interdependence. Interdependence requires sharing of resources. People should willingly share their food, cloth, land, money and other resources with their neighbours as traditional African values demand (Nihinlola 2013:85). Asante (2007) notes that no traditional Ghanaian will be unconcern with the suffering of the needy in the community. Both the sabbath economy (of Deut. 15:1-11 and Ex. 16) and the one-day-at-a-time mentality (of Matt. 6:34) encourage sharing of resources. In God’s economy, wealth is a means to an end and not an end in itself (Asante 2014:116). Sharing of resources is therefore both African and biblical and must be a key ethical principle for the Christian community. Material things are to be used supply the material needs of other people.

Since wealth belongs to the entire society rather than the one to whom it has been entrusted, it is not acceptable to possess too much while others have too little. Therefore, accumulating wealth for one’s own benefits a sin; it hinders God’s plan to reduce the plight of the poor (Asante 1999). In order to build up the ecclesial community and preserve its unity, there is the need to cater for one another. Therefore, Christians “have a fundamental calling to create a community of radical sharing and mutual interdependence” (Goliama 2013:293). To achieve this, the African communal view of wealth must be upheld, developed and incorporated in whatever model of poverty one choses for the African context. The African church must reject the individualistic view of wealth held by westerners not only because it is unbiblical but also because it is not Ghanaian/African.

A Christian perspective of giving/sharing of material resources needs to be outlined at this point. These views were developed from Wesley’s economic principles listed earlier. Firstly, Wesley regards giving as service to God and humanity (Asante 1999).
Therefore, the primary motivation of giving should not be the material blessing that may accompany this act. Rather, those who give must regard it as part of the services they are rendering to God and their fellow humankind. Sharing one’s resources with others is a demonstration of love for God and humanity (as noted earlier). Wesley regards the act of sharing as the fulfilment of the great commandment of love for God and neighbour (see Asante 1999).

Secondly, Wesley’s thought on giving has a Christological dimension. He regards giving as a way of emulating Christ, who gave us everything including his life (Russie ed. 2011:73ff). The act of giving is, therefore, part of Christian discipleship. The disciple grows in giving as he/she grows in discipleship. In line with this thought, Wesley views tithing as a Christian practise but argues that the believer must strive to give more than ten percent because all belongs to God (Wesley 2017:36). This means that the believer’s giving must vary directly with his/her level of spiritual growth.

Thirdly, giving, in Wesley’s view, includes more than money. It may be in the form of labour such as farming, teaching, nursing, carpentry and so on. One’s vocation, seen as God’s call, must be done as a form of giving to individuals and to the society as a whole. Seeing employment as a calling helps us to think of employment not only in monetary terms, but in terms of a higher purpose of fulfilling our calling. Furthermore, frugal living in response to the needs of others is a form of giving. The believer may decide to cut down the expenses on his/her basic life needs (for a period) in order to have abundance to share with the poor. Such a life constitutes giving. The one who refuses to exploit others and the one who takes good care of the environment is also giving because such act goes a long way to help the government to save money (which would have been spent on maintaining the environment) for other projects.

In addition, Wesley’s concept of giving has a soteriological dimension in that one should not just help the poor through giving but also lead them to salvation in Christ. For this reason, he argued that social concern must involve personal contact and visitation. Therefore, Wesley’s social concern for the poor was not only meant to relief the poor from their plight but also to win them for Christ. He also argues that social concerns for the poor should go beyond charity to building a Christian community in which justice and compassion will develop among interconnected group of people.
6.2.3 Human Development

According to Boafo (2014:237) human development is core to all forms of economic development. By human development is meant steps towards improving the quality of the people we have in our society. Economic development in the 21st depends not so much a country’s natural resources but her human resources because it is with skills that natural resources can be managed and harnessed efficiently (Boafo 2014:237). Ghana, like many other African countries, have many natural resources but lack the technical expertise required for harnessing these resources. It therefore follows that Ghana needs to promote balanced universal education that lead to improved living conditions.

In addition to technical, scientific and vocational development, the Ghanaian context requires leadership and citizenry development as part of strategies towards poverty reduction. Ghana is currently experiencing mediocre leadership and irresponsible citizenship and this situation makes it imperative to have a theology of human development that attends to this need. Leadership is “an influential relationship that is God-given to develop others” (Nihinlola 2013:138). Leaders are made, not born. The major task has to do with identifying people’s potentials and helping them develop such God-given potentials. This requires frequent leadership training and seminars for the youth so that they can also take over the mantle when the aged are no more. Those in leadership position must also make conscious effort towards grooming the youth so that they can take up leadership position appropriate time.

Leadership development should also stress the servanthood role of the leader. The understanding that leaders are to be served must be opposed by the biblical teaching that leaders are to serve (Mark 10:42-43). Ghana requires “selfless committed leaders, who are ready to serve the people rather than themselves” (Abogurin as cited in Nihinlola 2013:138). The need for a proper understanding of power is key to this step. The Greek word *exousia* suggests “absolute unrestricted authority (eg. Luke 12:5)” when used of God; when used of human it refers to “delegated authority” (Rom. 13:1-2) (Asante 1999:68). People entrusted with power from God have the responsibility of ensuring the “wellbeing of their subjects” (Asante 1999:69). To achieve this, there is the need “to promote justice, ensure peace and tranquility, a fairer distribution of income and a wiser use of resources, particularly the human and natural resources”
The obvious conclusion is that humans are accountable to God for their stewardship of power entrusted to them. Through leadership development Ghana will be free from the hypocrisy, mediocrity and incompetence that currently characterize political and ecclesial leadership (Boafo 2014).

In addition, there is the need to develop the citizenry to be responsible citizen not spectators. For the society to develop, there is the need for its citizens to give constructive criticism about what is happening around them. Ninhilola (2013:140) identifies complacency and illiteracy as two major factors that need to be dealt with. Complacency among Ghanaians is attested by the “lack of passion for excellence” (Nihinlola 2013:140). There is the need for the country to strive towards excellence in all aspects of human life.

To achieve this there is the need for us to get our people educated. The reason is that illiteracy hinders many aspects of life, including political, religious, social and economic. In chapter two we established that many Ghanaians are poor due to lack of education (see section 2.8). Education is required not only for socio-economic development but also for political participation. According to Nihinlola (2013:140) “[b]ecause of illiteracy, the electorates do not know their power of their vote, their rights to elect and change their leaders in a democracy.” People may sell their votes during elections because of illiteracy. People receive machete, salt, meat, money and so on, to vote for wrong but popular candidates (Nihinlola 2013:141). Illiteracy may be the reason for which citizens tolerate maladministration, tyranny and oppression or “compromise their welfare and allow politicians to deceive them” (Nihinlola 2013:140-141). In my view, Ghana needs to structure and conduct her education to make her citizens more efficient for contributing to national development.

6.2.4 Female Empowerment

In Ghana, women and children are the most destitute when it comes to issues related to poverty (Boafo 2014:240). This makes it crucial for the country to make conscious effort at educating and empowering women. Females must be encouraged to enroll for formal education. According to Kwegyir Agrrey, “[i]f you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation.” Women are key in the upbringing of children and so whatever education they acquire will contribute
to the quality of children raised. This will go a long way to reduce the number of female head porters on our streets.

In addition, cultural practices that hinder socio-economic progress of women must be discarded. For example, widowhood rites with its prohibition from work as well as customs that deny females the right to own socio-economic resources must be looked at. Traditions that bans females from contributing to socio-economic development must also be dealt with. Females must be encouraged to take active part in the democratic process of the country.

6.2.5 Cultural Transformation

In my view, the culture of a society informs its socio-economic progress. This fact makes it important that our contextual theology of poverty touches on Ghanaian cultural practises. Stott (2006) rightly asserts that, the process of communicating the gospel cannot be isolated from the human culture from which it comes, or from that in which it is to be proclaimed. Therefore, to be effective, the gospel can and should permeate the ethos of a group, its essential attitudes, its institutions and all its structures without necessarily becoming an obstacle to the promotion of the African heritage (Asante 2007:48-51). It is important to realize that, the Ghanaian culture, like any other one has both positive and negative aspects (Asante 2007:51). The extremes of rejecting every human culture and adopting every human culture must be avoided (Asante 2007:48-51). What the church needs to do is to seek to transform culture to make the society a better place to live.

Cultural practices that contradict the Christian faith must be rejected; the rest could be adopted (or modified) to enhance the gospel (Asante 2007:51). Therefore, the gospel-culture encounter must result in a radical change in such areas of the African culture as gender injustice, child marriages, widowhood rites with its associated exclusion from work, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation of the vulnerable, expensive funerals, child trafficking and child labor, and shelving crimes such as rape.

Expensive funeral needs special consideration because of its huge impact on the economic life of Africans. I give the following recommendations. Firstly, there is the need to educate the populace on the implications of over-spending on funerals. In this regard, the study calls on traditional and religious leaders to sensitize their followers.
on the need for a more cost-effective and simple way of organizing funerals. Secondly, people should not copy blindly the affluence of those who are economically sound. Families should not borrow to organize expensive funerals because they want to have a funeral similar to that of another family. As much as possible, funerals should be organized within the means of the bereaved family. No family, whether economically sound or not, should use all the available resources to organize funeral. To this end, expensive caskets with its decorations, announcements which are duplicated (on FM stations, Television stations and newspapers), bill boards of deceased, prescription of different mourning cloths for a funeral, giving out of souvenirs with the picture of the deceased and the use of many musical groups at one funeral should be discouraged by the church. The study suggests that the cost food, drinks and entertainment must be minimized since a funeral is not for enjoyment but mourning. After all, no amount of display of wealth at a funeral can bring the dead back to life or change his/her eternal destiny. The third principle has to do with the duration of corpse in the morgue. Preserving corpse scientifically for a long time, for whatever reason, tends to increase the cost of funerals. Dealing with the dead promptly, usually under 24 hours of one’s demise, is highly recommended. However, as a general rule, a dead person should not be kept at the morgue for more than two weeks. Fourthly, the use of alcohol at funerals must cease since most people get drunk and cause confusion at the end. I subjoin Palmer-Buckle’s assertion that “the surest way to remember the dead is not the type of coffins used to bury them nor is not the type of cloth or T-shirt worn during their funerals, but doing something positive for the dead which would benefit the living” (Newton 2014:n.p). Therefore, I contend that once the cost of funerals is reduced there will be available resources which can be channeled into assisting the society in such areas like health and education.

6.2.6 Social and Structural Transformation

Poverty alleviation cannot be achieved without a radically transformation in our societies (Asante 2014:117). Dulles (cited in Asante 2014:118) observed that, “a failure to accept the social implications of the gospel would be a lack of responsiveness to the Gospel itself.” The church is therefore expected to speak to contextual issues such as injustice, bribery, corruption, smuggling of goods, hoarding of goods, among others that prevail in our societies and contribute to poverty of the people. Some
practical steps towards social transformation include, the call on Christians to be responsible, compassionate, law-abiding citizens; to speak for the voiceless and oppressed; to maintain or restore righteousness and justice; and to advocate for the fair sharing of the national cake (Amevenku and Boaheng 2018b). Christians are charged to oppose policies that cause poverty or widen the economic gap between the rich and the poor. They are to make useful suggestions to the governing body as to how poverty can be handled in the Christian way. The society is expected to monitor government to ensure that the right structures are in place for economic empowerment of the citizenry (Asante 2014). People should participate in the governance of the country as patriotic, law abiding citizens to make life meaningful in the society. The society is expected to criticize its leadership objectively in order to foster development.

Asante (1999:186) believes that part of the solution to Ghana’s poverty situation is to address the problem of structural injustice. He identifies two ways in which structural injustice may occur: injustice in an organizational activity, for example, exploitation and oppression of the poor and injustice in an organizational design (Asante 1999:186). He observes how indebtedness poor countries are to developed countries (Asante 1999:187). Year after year, poor countries pay their debts to developed countries without hope of ever paying off all that they owe. One thing that comes out clearly from this analysis is the unfair distribution of the world’s resources. Asante (1999:186) observes that the world’s production is geared towards the needs of the rich minority. He observes that in order to satisfy the drinking need of the rich, vast amount of land which could have been used to cultivate nutritious local crops are usually used to produce cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and tea (Asante 1999:186). Also, a lot of grain needs to be produced in order to feed cattle to produce beef for the rich. These commodities (cocoa, coffee, tea, beef and others), according to Asante (1999:188), are not really needed by the poor who form majority of the world’s population. Poverty situation in Ghana and other countries cannot be tackled without address this problem.

At the heart of the message of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 is economic justice and compassion. God required the Israelites to cancel the debt of their fellow Israelites every sabbatical year. This requirement is based on God’s divine ownership of resources (Ps. 24:1-2). This principle was one of the mechanisms God established to ensure that neither poverty nor wealth developed to an extreme. Matthew 6:19-34
places a limit on the extent to which ownership and control of basic resources of production could be concentrated in the hands of few people (see especially, vv. 19, 24). Both passages underline the need to care for the poor. Asante (1999:190) concludes then that, “justice and mercy are the guiding principles of social behavior for the Bible.”

The foregoing points to the need for a new economic paradigm that promotes economic justice. Also, there is the need for world leaders to find a way of sharing the world’s resources equitably. Asante (1999:193) concludes that “[w]hat we need more than anything else in our present situation is the rejection of the Master Economy and its system of values and the adoption of a Servant Economy with its new system of human centered and nature-oriented values.” To this we add that it would not be out of place for wealthy countries to cancel the debt owed by poor countries just as God required the Israelites to do. This will offer poor countries an opportunity to reorganize their economy in order to get better.

6.2.7 Spiritual and Moral Transformation

The fight against poverty involves not only economic solution but also spiritual and moral remedies. Africans are highly spiritual and so the importance of the spiritual dimension of any kind of theology for Africa cannot be over-emphasized. In view of the fact that poverty may have spiritual antecedents, the Church should encourage her members to develop her counselling, healing and deliverance ministries. The church must seek the power to deal with forces that retard the socio-economic growth of believers. In my opinion, this task must not be left for certain denominations (such as Pentecostal and Charismatic churches) but should be encouraged and practiced in all Christian denominations. While there is nothing wrong with Christians praying for God’s blessings, favor and prosperity, over-emphasis of spiritual solution to poverty to the neglect of other practical steps must be checked.

In addition, Christian spirituality should not undermine the need for hardwork. Genuine spirituality, as Nihnolola (2013:143) rightly points out, “is a wholistic concept, a balance of good relationship with God and meaningful co-existence with fellow humans.” Unfortunately, I have observed that there are Christian leaders in Ghana who teach their members to assemble every day to pray for miracles and blessings. People
believe these leaders, acts according to their instruction and pay dearly with the burden of poverty. Therefore, what Ghana needs at the moment is a balance between worship (prayer) and work. The proposed model therefore calls for a balance between time spent at worship centers and time spent on work. As Nihinlola (2013:143) argues, “church vigil becomes false spirituality when it is not combined with or if it hinders practical work.” A church-going contractor who executes government contract poorly is not spiritual. A church leader who evades tax or import expired goods is not spiritual; neither is a church member who cheats in examination. A church-going civil servant with lackadaisical attitude towards work lacks spirituality. By developing true Christian spirituality the country can be freed from bribery, corruption, and mismanagement of state funds which hinder the socio-economic progress of the nation.

6.2.8 Solidarity with the Poor

That poverty is a form of social exclusion was noted in chapter two of the study. This makes the poor encounter psychological problems. Also we noted earlier (in section 5.4.2) that prosperity teachings have created negative psychological effect on the poor. Some poor Christians feels disappointed by God because they have been giving and yet have not received the expected material blessing. Others feel neglected or cursed by God because of their economic situations. There is the need to deal both with the psychological effects on the poor created by prosperity teachers and the social exclusion of the poor by the Ghanaian society. Following the example set by Jesus in his ministry, the Ghanaian church must also identify with the poor and the social outcast. One way of achieving this is for ministers to live among the poor in their communities. This will offer them the opportunity to observe, listen and share the problems the poor go through. As Bongo (cited by Wilson and Letsosa 2014:6) puts it, “[b]y being with them in their distress, taking their side, supporting them pastorally and showing them God’s love, one starts gaining their trust and acquiring existential knowledge of that situation.” This move is a development of Wesley’s principle of visiting the poor before donating to them rather than just sending one’s donation to them through another person. The church should consider putting up mission houses within as many poor communities as possible. Chapels must also be built within poor communities.
The church as a body must make the poor and marginalized in the society (such as women and orphans), the targets of her social services (which includes counselling and career guidance). The church must intensify her visitation to the poor and use it as a platform to share the gospel. Boafo (2014:234) rightly states that “[m]ission alongside the poor in Ghana must consider setting up Inner City Mission centers to provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the poor in the cities.” Such mission must include the provision of the basic needs of the vulnerable including orphans, street children, widows, and others. This is intended to reduce the number of people hawking in our streets or begging for alms.

6.2.9 Developing Attitude of Contentment, Modesty and Simplicity

Both the biblical teaching expounded in this study and the traditional Ghanaian life support simple and modest life. Matthew 6:19-34 brings out the need for contentment, modesty and simplicity in life (see also 1 Tim. 6:6-10). These virtues will help the Christian to avoid worry and anxiety that tend to distract them from the Lord. According to Asante (2014:116) contentment, modesty and simplicity can only be applied if believers learn to distinguish between “necessities of life and wants.” The choice between available commodities (for example cell phone, food, furniture, or dressing mirror) is therefore crucial to the Christian. Asante also believes that right choices among commodities can be made if believers are able to distinguish between commodities of intrinsic value and those with instrumental value. He writes: “... even though the human has instrumental need for food, clothing and shelter, which are basic values to be taken care of, given that the human also has a spiritual component, there are ends beyond these instrument needs, which the Christian must pursue to fulfil his nature” (Asante 2014:117). Having made this distinction, one can chose appropriately based on his/her scale of preference.

The biblical data examined in the study show that human life has extrinsic value while items such as food, clothing, shelter, and others have instrumental value (Matt. 6:25). It is for this reason that Jesus maintains that life does not consist in the abundance of wealth (Luke 12:15). Asante (2014:117) maintains that the human being “eat to live” but “do not live to eat.” This means that food is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Hence, it is unethical to consider food or wealth as the reason for which Christians live. Therefore, no matter one’s economic situation there is the need to
pursue higher goals which have eternal values. If so, then there is no justification to engage ungodly vocation such as robbery or prostitution as means of one’s survival. Asante (2014:117) rightly states that “the right use of things [resources] is defined and informed by the law of love, other-centeredness, the needs of neighbor.” Therefore, the law of love must be the guiding principle for any choice made in one’s life. Love for neighbor requires modesty and simplicity in order to get surplus to share with others. At the same time, modest living will save one from the dangers associated with accumulated wealth.

6.2.10 Job Creation

One of the major factors that contribute to poverty in Ghana is unemployment (see section 2.8). Our discussion on work ethics has pointed out that every able-person has to engage in one kind of work or the other. For people to work, there must be some job opportunities available. The state has the biggest role to play in creating jobs for the populace (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:118). With the government leading the campaign against unemployment, entities such as individuals, non-governmental organizations, the Church and others should also help in providing jobs for the unemployed. The government should work out policies that can expand the nation’s economy and industry (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:118). There is the need to set out industrial policies that can help Ghana process some of her raw materials into finished good before export. This will not only create employment by will increase government’s revenue as well. The road network of the country should be improved to facilitate easy transport of food stuffs from farming communities to the cities (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:118). This in turn will encourage many people to engage in farming because they would be certain that their yield will not be left to rot in the farm due to bad road network. As another strategy of making farming attractive, the government should work towards making ready market available to farmers. In other words, there should be government agencies who will buy or determine the price of farm produce. This will help fight exploitation of farmers by buyers. With vast land available in Ghana, many unemployed people can engage themselves in farming if it becomes lucrative enough to attract them.

Ghana’s high unemployment situation can also be dealt with through the expansion of vocational and technical education (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:118). This
kind of education has the potential of giving learners the practical skills required for employment. People with such expertise can be assisted to start their own enterprises (Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah 2004:118). The church should also educate her members on job opportunities available and how people can also start their own businesses. Financial assistance and/or any other form of assistance needy should also be provided by the church.

6.2.11 Financial Ethics

This aspect seeks to address the issue of gambling and hoarding of resources, and financial investments undertaken by Christians in Ghana. Unethical use may include hoarding and all kinds of gambling such as betting, pools and raffles, sweep stakes and similar use (Asante 1999:64). Hoarding money or other treasures such as food or fuel, is a sign of selfishness. It opposes the idea of Christian stewardship which teaches sharing of resources. Gambling is wrong because it “makes luck or chance the determining factor of human’s decisions” (Asante 1999:64). Humans are to be responsible beings whose life is not conducted not by chance but by purposeful planning ahead under God’s providence (Asante 1999:64). Gambling is contrary to the fundamental principle that humans should work for a living. “Gambling replaces the link between work and income with chance and income”, says Asante (1999:65). Using God’s resources to sponsor ungodly activities such as beauty pageants, liquor production and promotion are also some of the unethical means of use of wealth in Ghana that must be discouraged among Christians.

Between 2013 and 2016, some financial institutions and supposed fun clubs (including DKM, God is Love, Jastar Motors, Perfect Edge, Little Drops and others) sprang up in Ghana (especially in Brong-Ahafo region, now Bono, Bono East and Ahafo regions) and promised to offer their customers very high interest rate (some of them as high as 200%) (Boaheng 2017:24). At the end these institutions collapsed and customers’ deposited were lost (Boaheng 2017:24). At the same time there are some financial institutions in Ghana who charge high interest on loans given to their customers (Boaheng 2017:24ff). The biblical principles taught by Deuteronomy 15:1, 7-9 include the fact that Christians are not expected to charge huge interest on loans. I reason this way because God expected the Israelites to cancel debts in every seven years. It is deducible from this principle that God does not want debt to be the burden of the poor.
through their life time. By reducing interest on loan to the barest minimum, God desire for the Christian community will be accomplished.

In my view Christians should always consider the sustainability and credibility of the enterprise. Afterwards, there should have been some consideration in relation to Christian financial ethics. We have noted earlier that “God’s command in Genesis 2:15 that humankind should work and till the land and his subsequent statement that humankind will have his/her daily bread from the sweat of his/her brow, is an indication that God does not sanction enterprises that aim at making everybody rich, even the lazy” (Boaheng 2017:24). Therefore Christians (in their attempts to seek financial gains) should apply biblical principles regarding the source and the sustainability of the source. The get-rich-attitude of the young people must be discouraged. People must work hard through the guidance of God in order to succeed. Investments whose with unknown principles of their sustainability must be avoided.

6.2.12 Fighting against Extravagance in the Church

The extravagant nature of the contemporary church needs attention. The Church is expected to confront materialism and exploitation of members by phony pastors for financial gain. Unfortunately, the church itself in the 21st century has become very materialistic. The gospel message is commercialized, and too much attention is given to the church buildings. The high expenditure on church buildings raises questions. Are buildings a legitimate ministry expense? If so, what kinds of buildings and how many buildings are legitimate? Can this extensive accumulation of material wealth be justified in the light of the world’s needs?

Alcorn (2011:430) argues that, “Spending money on buildings for ministries is inherently neither right nor wrong” because in certain cases, we glorify God “through the financing, construction, and use of a building.” However, we dishonour God when church building results in “massive indebtedness, disunity, extravagance, pride, and misuse” (Alcorn 2011:430). Alcorn (2011:430) balances his argument by further noting that it is not always right to criticize the church for spending money on buildings and not giving it to the poor or not using it for missions is not always justifiable, because “by providing for a growing congregation’s needs, a building can serve purposes of evangelism and edification, broadening and deepening the home base so that much
more money, prayer, and personal involvement are ultimately given to missions and to the poor than otherwise would have been.”

I see nothing wrong with the wise use of church funds in putting up practical and attractive—but not extravagant—buildings as an investment in eternity. On the other hand, there are some buildings which could have served the churches purpose but are pulled down for the sake of putting up a more expensive one to acquire name for the church. As Alcorn rightly argues the church must to ensure that “the construction of a building doesn’t detract us from giving to meet needs and evangelize our community and the world” (Alcorn 2011:431) Therefore, there is everything wrong “when a church spends more money paying interest on its construction loans than on world missions. If missions spending declines during a building program, this reflects poorly on a church’s priorities” (Alcorn 2011:431). Churches that major in chapel buildings tend to externalize the body of Christ, and thereby forget that the human beings—not the physical building—are God’s dwelling place. (1 Cor. 3:16). The proposed model therefore demands that the church focuses on building people, not building buildings. It is only when the church applies the principle of contentment, modesty and simplicity that it will have enough fund to help alleviate poverty in the society. As it is now the church is always in a very dire need of funds for one project or the other. This situation makes it turn a blind eye to its social responsibility of helping the poor through sharing of resources. The earlier the Church does something about this situation the better.

6.3 Conclusion

The model of poverty formulated in this chapter is multi-faceted, touching on the individual, the state and the church. This means that the fight against poverty cannot be achieved single-handedly. The need for collective efforts from different stakeholders is very crucial. The implementation of this model is expected to yield: improved health, increased literacy, increased income, spiritual growth, and improved investments. In addition, it will help reduce the seductive effect of wealth on Christians, help develop modest living and reduce greed and anxiety in life. It will also help Christians to focus first on the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and in so doing accumulate heavenly treasures.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Findings

After introducing the entire study in chapter one, I set out in chapter two to place the study in the context of Ghana. It was established that Ghana is one of the poor countries in the world. It was found that poverty has been with Ghanaian since pre-colonial times. However, it the situation worsened in the colonial period. In the post-independence period it worsened further. Factors contributing to Ghana’s poverty situation include (but not limited to) environmental destruction, poor agricultural practices, bad leadership, corruption and mismanagement of public funds, negative cultural practices, expensive funeral celebrations, lack of education, large family size, inadequate access to employment opportunities, laziness and spiritual activities.

Chapters three and four of the study outlined biblical teachings about wealth and poverty based on three anchor passages, Deuteronomy 15:1-11, Isaiah 10:1-4 and Matthew 6:19-34. The study discovered a wide range of meaning for poverty from different Hebrew and Greek terms. One thing that became very clear was the fact that “poverty” means more that lack of economic resources and economic goods (a condition of having “less than enough”). It includes political and legal powerlessness, oppression, and lack of good health.

The study found that God is the source of wealth and all other good things. Wealth is neither inherently an evil thing nor a good thing. It is how it is used and one’s attitude towards it that makes it bad or good. Poverty is not necessarily a virtue in itself. Neither is wealth a measure of godliness. The Bible frowns upon materialism, extravagance, love for riches, anxiety and worry that detract one from his/her loyalty to God. It
however, encourages contentment, simplicity, modesty and sharing of resources with others. The study also found that even though God does not command voluntary poverty, God usually sides with the poor and helps them to improve their lives. God is concerned for justice and right relationships among his people.

The fifth chapter dealt with Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation among Christians in Ghana. The study found that Prosperity Theology model is based on at least four fundamental ideas. Firstly, material success is God’s intention for humanity. Secondly, Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross earned not only redemption from sin but also deliverance from its penalties: namely, poverty, demonic interference, and sickness. Thirdly, God has put the laws of faith in place through which believers could access the power of the cross. Fourthly, not only should Christians express confess their faith, they must sow seeds in order to receive from God.

The study found some merits in the Prosperity Theology model, some of which are listed below. Firstly, Prosperity Theology model contributes positively to Christianity in terms of its numerical strength. Again, this model deals with some cultural issues that hinder economic progress, such as inferiority complex among blacks, gender injustice, widowhood rites and others. Most importantly, the Prosperity Theology model contributes to personal, societal and national socio-economic development.

Nonetheless, a number of flaws were found to be associated with this model. Firstly, this model is built on faulty biblical foundations. Secondly, as this model promises wealth to donors, the need to work hard and strive towards a proven means of making a living becomes unnecessary to those who are able to give to the church. Thirdly, the attitude of this model towards pain, suffering and poverty does not prepare converts to develop the character of perseverance through trials and to take responsibility for their actions. Fourthly, in essence and approach, Prosperity Theology model is so much this-worldly that it tends to develop a defective eschatology. Fifthly, this model breeds an ambivalent attitude towards knowledge, promote anti-intellectualism and hence portrays Christianity as illogical. The study found that the Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation does not fully deal with Ghana’s poverty situation due to its lack of contextual application.
The study then moved on to develop a contextual theology of poverty in Ghana. The contextual model formulated by the study, unlike the Prosperity Theology model, passes both the contextual and the biblical/theological tests. The major biblical ideas incorporated into the contextual model include: God’s ownership of all resources, human stewardship of God’s resources entrusted into their care, communal view of resources or sharing of resources, the need to ensure justice in the society, solidarity with the poor. In addition, contextual issues such as lack of education and the cultural factors that fight against economic progress such as expensive funeral celebration, and norms that deny females the right to access economic resources have been taken care of.

7.2 Assessing the Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is that, a contextualized theology of poverty offers a paradigm for the understanding and alleviation of poverty among Christians in Ghana. The findings from chapters five led to the conclusion that the Prosperity Theology model of poverty alleviation is not appropriate for the Ghanaian context because it fails to deal adequately with some contextual issues. Based on this conclusion, the study formulated a theology of poverty that addresses issues peculiar to Ghana. The study has shown that the proposed model is both biblically and culturally appropriate for Ghana. From this analysis, therefore, the hypothesis of the study needs to be maintained because it has been proven to be valid. The study has proved that any model of poverty reduction that lacks contextual elements is inappropriate for the task it seeks to undertake, no matter how popular it may be.

7.3 Contributions to Knowledge

The study has contributed to knowledge in a number of ways. At the beginning of the study, the lack of contextualized theology of poverty for Ghana was noted as a major academic gap. This study has contributed to academia through the formulation of a theology of poverty that attended to the contextual needs of Ghana. The study has laid a very strong foundation for future researchers who may wish to study a related subject matter or on the general concept of poverty.

Another contribution of this study is its treatments of three major biblical texts that have heavy influence on the biblical understanding of the subject matter. The exegetical
method used has helped to unearth major truths about wealth and poverty which hitherto had not been applied to the Ghanaian context. Finally, the findings made and the recommendations given in this research will go a long way to help individuals, churches, governmental and non-governmental organizations who may wish to embark on practical ways to alleviate poverty.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

Like any other research, this research is not conclusive on the subject matter it studied. There are therefore uncovered areas which future researchers can consider. Few of such areas are outlined below. Firstly, the thesis focused on three main biblical texts as representatives of what the entire Bible teaches about the study subject. In reality the passages considered in this study do not give a full biblical view of the subject. Based on this, it is suggested that a more extensive work that deals with all major texts related to the subject be conducted in the future.

Secondly, the present research lacks a quantitative component, that is empirical data. It is recommended that future researches include quantitative data collection methods (such as questionnaires) in order to give a more engaging account. The desire to include field survey in this study is a motivation for me to undertake a similar study at the doctoral level.

In addition, future research can be undertaken to examine prophetism in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity and its impact on the economic life of the people.

Another possible fruitful study could be the examination of how the main line historic churches in Ghana are responding to the pastoral challenges that Prosperity Theology model of poverty reduction poses to them.

7.5 Concluding Remarks and Implications

The main task of the thesis was to formulate a contextual theology of poverty for Ghana. Such a theology was expected to be biblically grounded and culturally appropriate at the same time. This was achieved in chapter six of the study where a contextual theology based on biblical teachings and Ghanaian wisdom about wealth
and poverty was formulated. In this last section, I outline some major conclusions of the proposed model and implications for the individual, the church and the state.

Firstly, it is unbiblical for the poor to do nothing about their state, thinking that poverty is a requirement for entering the kingdom of God. Each person must work hard under the guidance of God to improve his/her life.

Secondly, wealth should not be considered as a sign of righteousness. God is the sources of all good things. Wealth comes with a responsibility to ensure that the needy are cared for. Those who have wealth have the responsibility of ensuring that they do not idolize it.

Thirdly, the church must intensify teachings on wealth and poverty to help members understand God’s will on this subject. The church is to teach stewardship, contentment, modesty and simplicity not only by words but also by example. This means that extravaganza in ministry must be checked.

Fourthly, the church should also help in the nurture of leaders who are poised to exhibit Christ-like leadership principles in all spheres of life. This is one way of dealing with the bad leadership we usually experience as a nation.

Fifthly, the church should also work towards a general societal transformation through teachings about the devastating effect of sin not only on the sinner but also on the society. The disciple-making task of the church must be reworked in order to make disciples rather than church members.

Sixthly, the church must work together with traditional leaders to do away with negative and outdated cultural practices that hinder socio-economic development.

Lastly, the proposed model requires that the government collaborates with national, international and multilateral partners to plan and implements plans to enhance the economy. Education, good governance, crime prevention and combat, tackling the cancer of corruption and the development of local, agricultural industries and manufacturing are some possible ways of ensuring this. Good roads, water, sanitation, energy supply and renewal, mining and local industry, and the provision of health infrastructure, the prevention of post-harvest loses
More so, the government must work towards bridging the economic gap between the rich and the poor. In the sharing of the national cake priority should be given to communities which lack basic social amenities such as portable drinking water, motorable roads, electricity and others.
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