

## **Exploring Theological and Biblical perspectives on wealth and poverty**

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**Abstract:** The subject of wealth and poverty is one of the major themes in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The continent of Africa is one of the regions hugely affected by poverty. As such, there is an ongoing discourse about the biblical view of wealth and how it may be used in tackling the canker of poverty. At one breath, our contemporary materialistic culture is seducing Christians to accept the idea that poverty is a curse from God, whilst on the other extreme, wealth is viewed as an impediment to entering the kingdom of God. While a complete eradication of poverty remains a formidable challenge, particularly in vulnerable contexts, there exists an opportunity for more concerted efforts to alleviate the plight of the impoverished. As a contribution to the scholarly discourse, this paper examined what the Bible reveals about wealth and poverty and made relevant theological deductions for African church in dealing with wealth and poverty. This is timely against the backdrop that the “centre of gravity” of Christianity is in Africa which makes it befitting to address the menace of poverty from the biblical standpoint. The paper conducted a theological study of relevant biblical passages. The fact that one’s wealth does not necessarily indicate their acceptance by God and the need to share material resources were emphasized. Though the authors had the African continent in mind, the paper also applies to other contexts which share Africa’s socio-economic realities.

**Keywords:** Bible, God, Poverty, Wealth

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**Citation:** Boaheng, I, Boateng, K. A & Boahen, S, (2024). Exploring Theological and Biblical perspectives on wealth and poverty. *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)*, 5(1), 82 – 93.



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## INTRODUCTION

The exploration of wealth and poverty stands as a prominent theme in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Poverty continues to be a major problem in the world even up till today. Although it has varying definitions emanating from diverse socio-political and socio-economic contexts across the globe, Essamuah and Tonah identify unacceptable physiological and social deprivation that an individual or community experiences as a basic framework (distinctive feature) of poverty (Essamuah and Tonah, 2004). Poverty manifests through different lenses. However, studies on poverty usually focus on social and economic perspectives. Socially, it signifies the struggle to afford fundamental necessities and is assessed by social indicators such as education, housing, security, access to medical/health care, electricity, shelter, and, at times, even basic sustenance (Boaheng 2020). It may be considered as constrained human capabilities and limited access to the means for realizing these capabilities. Economically, poverty is often measured in per capita income, considering an individual or group's capacity to meet essential needs (Boaheng 2020).

Different meetings, seminars, fora and conferences have been organized to deal with this issue and still the problem of poverty looms large. In a scholarly contribution, this paper scrutinized the biblical insights into wealth and poverty, drawing pertinent theological deductions applicable to the African church's engagement with these issues. Through a theological examination of relevant biblical passages, the paper underscored the crucial point that an individual's wealth does not inherently signify divine approval. Additionally, it emphasized the imperative for sharing material resources, shedding light on significant principles that can guide the

African church in navigating the intricate dynamics of wealth and poverty.

### Biblical Terminologies for Poverty

The subject of wealth and poverty is one of the major themes in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. In this introductory section, the paper considers key biblical terms for poverty and wealth, beginning with Hebrew terminologies. The Hebrew word *'ebyôn* derives from the root word *ābāh* which denotes "to lack," or "to be in need" (Boaheng 2020). Appearing over seventeen times in the prophetic literature, the word *'ebyôn* usually denotes economic or legal distress, destitution of the people of Israel. Isaiah (14:30 and 25:4) uses it as a noun in the sense of physical insecurity and homelessness of the Jewish people. When used as an adjective, "*'ebyôn*" means "being in want," "needy," "poor" or "to be subject to oppression and abuse" (Exod. 23:6,11, Deut. 15:4,7,9; 24:14, Job 29:16, 30:25, 31:19, Psa. 37:14, 82:4, 35:10, 140:13 Isa. 29:19, 41:17, 25:4 32:7) (Brown 2006). In addition, *'ebyôn* may refer to spiritual need (Isa. 29:19) or material need that makes one vulnerable (Exod. 26:6; Deut. 15:4; 24:14; Psa. 49:2; 112:9; Isa. 25:4 and Amos 2:6; 5:12).

The word *anaw* comes from the Arabic word for "lowly," "submission," "obedient," "bow down" especially, in relation to a person in captivity (Boaheng 2020, 48). *Anaw* can also mean humility, abasement (cf. Isa. 31:4) or the crisis of the entire nation (Psa. 76:10; 147:6; 149:4). It may be used in the religious and moral senses for a person's attitude towards God. Socio-politically, *anāwîm* (the plural of *anaw*) denotes oppression and injustice. In the Psalms, *anāwîm* is used to refer to "hunger" (eg. 22:26-27), "suffering" (eg. 69:32-33), "landlessness" (eg. 37:11) and God's relationship with and rescue of the poor.

Another Hebrew term for “poverty” is “*rush*” which denotes “hunger,” “being poor” or “being in want” (Boaheng 2020). When used as masculine noun “*rush*” is translated as “lack,” “needy,” or “to be destitute” (ref). It may also be used in the nominal sense to refer to a poor person (1 Sam. 18:23 and 2 Sam. 12:3). The term “*rush*” has its most appearance in book of Proverbs, appearing fifteen times out of its twenty-five appearances in the entire Old Testament. It is used to denote “low-spiritedness” (Prov. 16:19), “injustice,” “oppression” and “slavery to debt” (Prov 13:23, 14:31, 22:16; 22:7).

The word *dal* is another Hebrew term for “poverty.” It derives its root from *dalal* which means “to be inferior” or “to below standard set by a society” (Boaheng 2020). A totally exhausted and weak person, or a group of people who are unable to meet their economic needs may be referred to as *dal* (Boaheng). When “*dal*” is used on an individual, it denotes disgrace and can be considered as abuse and oppression (see 1 Sam. 2:8, Psa. 113:7).

In the New Testament (NT), the Greek term *ptochos* denotes being poor in wealth. *Ptochos* does not always relate to lacking material wealth. For instance, in the message to the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:17), the Church was considered “poor” not materially, but spiritually. This term may also denote being lowly, afflicted, destitute of the Christian values and eternal riches, helpless or powerless to accomplish a thing (Noel 1992). In Matthew 5:3 it is used metaphorically in the expression “poor in spirit.”

### **Poverty and wealth in Biblical Context Old Testament Perspective**

The Old Testament consistently depicts wealth as a blessing from God. Abraham, considered financially successful, received abundant blessings in the form of gold, silver, livestock, and a promised land, reflecting God's covenant with him (Gen. 12:7, 15:7,

17:8b). The possession of the land is intricately tied to the wealth of Abraham and the people of Israel. In subsequent generations, the patriarchal wealth extended to Isaac and Jacob, fulfilling God's promise to bless Abraham's descendants. Jacob's prosperity, marked by flocks, servants, and material wealth, led to envy from others (Gen. 26:13-14, 30:43). The concept of wealth expanded beyond tangible assets to encompass servants, emphasizing the patriarchs' overall prosperity.

The book of Ruth introduces Boaz, a wealthy and influential farmer in Bethlehem, exemplifying a positive attitude toward wealth. Boaz's generosity and concern for others, providing for Naomi and Ruth, showcase responsible stewardship of wealth (Ruth 2:1, 2:8-15). The monarchy era, from Saul to Solomon, further associates kingship with wealth, portraying rulers as endowed with material possessions and great wealth (1 Sam. 9:1, 2 Sam. 12:1-8, 1 Kings 3:13). Should one continue to consider other Old Testament books, one will come to the conclusion that true material possessions are a blessing from God, but they come with the responsibility of responsible stewardship, justice, and compassion.

God's love towards humankind is exhibited in various ways in which God attempts to address human challenges. In Leviticus 25:35-36, God instructed the Israelites to help the needy including the handicapped, orphans and widows. These people (poor) were to be supported without charging interest (ref). From this text, been indifferent to the plight of individuals living in poverty is sinful in the sight of God. It does not please God to see any of his children living in poverty. God assigns the responsibility of taking care of such people in the community to the wealthy. Even when it comes to the atonement, there was a command which gave room for the poor to substitute one-tenth

ephah of flour instead of two pigeons or the atonement lamp (Lev 5:7).

Another means by which God made provision for the poor and needy was through tithing. In Deuteronomy 14:28-29, God instructed the people of Israel to bring all the tithes of their produce at the end of every three years to support the fatherless, aliens, and widows who were living among them in their various towns so the poor may come and eat and be satisfied. In doing that, God equally promised to bless the Israelites in all their works. This is a requirement to assist those who have fallen into poverty and a special provision which the latter law illustrates in regards to the support to the poor in the society. Not only supporting the poor was a concern for God, he is equally concerned about providing judgement and he will hold those who oppressed the poor in the society accountable for their action. He commanded the Israelites not to take advantage of their poor employees either a brother or alien living among them (Deut. 24:14-15). They were not supposed to deprive the poor of justice. If they take advantage of such people, they will cry to the Lord against them and God who will hold on their sins against them (Deut. 24:16-18).

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 15 calls for generosity and compassion, reflecting God's heart for the less fortunate. In Deuteronomy 15:1-6, God outlines the principle of a "Year of Release" to be observed every seven years among the Israelites. During this designated year, all debts owed by fellow Israelites were to be forgiven, and no one was to exact payment from their neighbors. This provision aimed to prevent the perpetuation of poverty and financial bondage within the community, reflecting God's concern for economic justice and the welfare of His people. Deuteronomy 15:7-11 deals with the issue of lending to the poor. The passage encourages the Israelites to display open-handed generosity toward

the poor and not to harden their hearts or be tightfisted. According to God's instructions, they were to willingly lend to their needy brothers, recognizing that the Lord would bless them for their compassionate actions. The motive behind this lending was rooted in a sense of community and a shared understanding of God's providence (Deut. 15:10). The law on the release of slaves (Deut. 15:12-18) also shows God's compassionate provision for Israelite slaves who had become indentured due to debt. Every seventh year, these individuals were to be released, ensuring their freedom and offering them a fresh start. The release was accompanied by generous provisions, ensuring that former slaves could reintegrate into society without lacking essential resources. This regulation reflected God's concern for the dignity and well-being of individuals in vulnerable situations (v. 15).

In the historical books, the subject of poverty relates more to oppression of the people, which may be regarded as friendlessness and low-spiritedness in deal with people. 1 Samuel 1:7 narrates how Hannah was treated cruelly by her rival. Peninnah provoked her in order to irritate her which contributed to consistence weeping of Hanna to the extent of not eating (ref). Verse 15, presents how Hannah was deeply troubled according to her response to Eli. In 1 Samuel 12:3, during Samuel's farewell address, he charged Israel to testify against him if he had oppressed or subjected anyone to poverty.

The issue of poverty is also dealt with in the Wisdom Literature where the word *dal* occurs about fourteen times. Solomon in the wisdom literature related the cause of poverty to a mere talk (Prov. 14:23). Solomon is of the view that the result of work is profit but mere talk leads to poverty. Here, Solomon attributes the cause of poverty to a mere talk without any effort put in place to make the "talk" materialize. Laziness, then, is a key cause of poverty.

The poor, therefore, need to work hard to reduce their plight. Aside laziness, injustice is also considered as perpetuating poverty. Proverbs 31:9 encourages those with authority to speak up justice for the poor and helpless in the society.

In Proverbs 30:8-9, Agur expresses a desire for a balanced and content life. He prays for God to keep him from falsehood and lying, emphasizing the importance of honesty and integrity. Agur then makes an insightful request regarding his material circumstances. Instead of asking for wealth or poverty, he seeks God's provision of his basic daily needs. In verse 9, Agur states that if he becomes too wealthy, he might be tempted to deny God and rely solely on his own resources, forgetting his dependence on the Lord. On the other hand, if he were to experience poverty, he fears the temptation to resort to dishonest means such as stealing, which would bring dishonor to God's name. Therefore, the main message is a plea for God's provision that maintains a balance, leading to contentment, humility, and a continued reliance on God. This prayer acknowledges the spiritual dangers associated with extreme wealth or poverty and highlights the importance of seeking a middle ground that aligns with God's will. Poverty can lead to immoral behavior and attitude such as stealing, cheating, and other unwholesome practices in religion (Adeyaniu 2017). Similarly, the love for riches and/or its accumulation easily makes one idolize and places trust in wealth.

Prophets in ancient Israel also dealt with the issue of wealth and poverty. Amos, for example, provides a profound exploration of God's dealings with the poor, emphasizing justice, righteousness, and the consequences of social injustice. He prophesied against the Northern Kingdom of Israel during a time of prosperity and affluence.

Following the decline of the kingdoms of Egypt and Assyria paving way for Jeroboam II to expand Israel's borders and take control of trade routes resulting in good economic fortunes, the wealth was not evenly distributed causing the widening of the gulf between the rich and the poor. This attitude of relegating the concerns of the poor to the sidelines which is diametrically opposed to God's concern for all is what occasioned him to send Amos, a farmer from the southern kingdom of Judah to go up-north to warn the people 30 years before the fall of Israel to their enemies. Amidst this prosperity, Amos confronts the people's ethical and moral failures, particularly their mistreatment of the poor and marginalized. Amos begins his prophetic message by condemning the nations for their various sins (Amos 2:6-7). He notes how the upper class in the society were trampling upon the poor in the dust (2:7). The wealthy elite are accused of selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. These acts of injustice highlight a society where economic gain takes precedence over human dignity and the well-being of the vulnerable. In addition, the prophet specifically addresses the wealthy women of Samaria, challenging their oppression of the poor and their indulgent lifestyles (cf. Amos 4:1ff). The women are rebuked for their exploitation of the needy and their callous indifference to the suffering around them. This denunciation underscores God's concern for justice and his expectation for the powerful to protect and care for the less fortunate. Amos also critiques economic exploitation (Amos 8:4-7). He criticizes the merchants who exploit the poor, using unjust business practices and deceitful measures to increase their wealth. Even the grain sold to the poor were mixed chaff swept from the floor

(v. 6). These economic injustices are condemned, and God promises to hold the perpetrators accountable. The text underscores the importance of fair economic dealings and ethical business practices, especially concerning the less privileged.

In Isaiah 25:4, the prophet Isaiah described God as tower of refuge to the poor and the needy in distress. The poor were suffering due to how ruthless people were oppressing and abusing them. This caused the prophet to use the words, "God is defender of the helpless" in the society and whenever people are oppressed and abused, they can turn to God as their refuge in hard times. Isaiah described the oppressive acts of cruel people as being like a storm beating against a strong wall. Ultimately, the Old Testament underscores God's concern for the oppressed and marginalized, calling for compassionate stewardship, generosity, fairness and a commitment to justice within the socio-economic framework.

Mica in discharging his duty as a prophet of God condemned the unjust scales and light weights with which Israel blatantly robbed the poor (Micah 6:1). The condemnation was not about wealth per se but the unfair and unjust means by which it was obtained at the detriment of the marginalized. Deductively, Micah condemned the means to an end but not the end in itself.

#### **New Testament Perspective**

The New Testament provides a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on wealth and poverty, drawing directly from the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ. Christ's message consistently emphasizes the importance of humility, selflessness, and a prioritization of spiritual values over material wealth. Matthew 6:19-34 outlines key aspects of Jesus' perspectives on wealth and poverty for his disciples (Dariani 2006; O'Donoghue 2011). He begins by cautioning against accumulating treasures on earth due to their perishable nature, advocating

instead for the storage of treasures in heaven, aligning wealth with enduring spiritual significance (vv. 19-21). Contrary to a blanket condemnation of acquiring material possessions, Ridderbos (1987) and Doriani (2006) argue that Jesus did not condemn all economic activities. To support this, references to biblical examples of toil and wise financial planning, such as in Genesis 41 and Proverbs 6:6-10, are made. Guelich (1982) highlights that the command in Matthew 6:19 not to accumulate wealth is followed by explanations, including the destructive nature of rust and moths. Brown (1975) shares the view that Matthew 6:19 employs metaphors like "rust" to illustrate the transient nature of material wealth.

Jesus further explores the concept of a "single eye," stressing the importance of maintaining a clear and undivided focus. Here, a healthy eye symbolizes spiritual clarity and perspective, while a divided or unhealthy focus results in darkness (vv. 22-23). The metaphorical contrast illustrates the significance of maintaining spiritual integrity and singular devotion, particularly in matters related to wealth. The declaration that one cannot serve both God and Mammon (material wealth) (v. 24) encapsulates Jesus's uncompromising stance on the incompatibility of dual allegiance. Jesus wants his followers to prioritize their commitment to God over the accumulation of material wealth. Addressing concerns about basic needs, Jesus directs attention to God's care for birds and flowers as evidence of His faithful provision in nature (vv. 25-32). This serves as a powerful illustration of God's character as a caring and attentive provider. Jesus urges his listeners to trust in God's faithfulness, reminding them of the futility of excessive worry about life's necessities. Finally, Jesus provides a succinct command to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness

with the rippling effect that God would provide their earthly needs (vv. 33-34). To sum up, Jesus' teaching in this text centers on the prioritization of spiritual treasures and trust in God's provision over an excessive preoccupation with material wealth. This teaching encourages believers to align their hearts with eternal values and to live free from anxiety, trusting in God's faithful care for their present and future needs (Carlston 1987).

In addition, Jesus warns against the dangers of the love of money (Luke 16:13) and frequently challenges societal norms regarding wealth and status. Jesus' parables, like the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), underline the spiritual peril of neglecting the needs of the poor. This narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the eternal consequences associated with indifference to the less fortunate. Jesus' commendation of the widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4) further highlights the value placed on sacrificial giving. The widow's mite, though small in monetary value, symbolizes the significance of heartfelt generosity and commitment to God's kingdom principles.

The gospel narrative in St. Matthew 26:11, recounts the anointing of Jesus with perfume at Bethany by a woman in the house of Simon the Leper which the disciples criticized as wastage of resources since the cost of the oil could have been channeled into uplifting the socio-economic status of the poor. Igbari rightly observes; the fact that the disciples recognized the poor here indicates that among the Jews, the culture of caring for the poor and the economically disadvantaged in society constituted a basic tenet of their traditional thought and life (Igbari,2016). The response of Jesus Christ to the complain of the disciples echoed the teachings of Deuteronomy 15:11 which emphasizes the perpetual existence of the poor. He however commanded his hearers to be sensitive

and sympathize with the existential needs of the marginalized in consonance with God's compassionate love towards humankind.

In the early Christian community portrayed in the book of Acts, believers demonstrated a radical approach to wealth and poverty. Acts 2:44-45 describes the believers sharing their possessions and resources, ensuring that none among them was in need. This communal lifestyle reflects the transformative impact of the gospel on their attitudes towards wealth and the communal responsibility to care for one another. Through that, the early Christians were able to if not eliminate, then reduced poverty among the brethren in the church of God. The early church did not let a brother or sister among them suffer when others have it in excess. In our view, even though the communal ownership of wealth may not be applicable today, the passage should encourage believers to share their wealth with the needy. This offers us crucial principles for today's church to copy as a good example to reduce the level of poverty in our Ghanaian society especially among the young people.

The teachings of the Apostle Paul in his epistles further elaborate on the Christian perspective on wealth. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul emphasizes contentment, stating that he has learned to be content in any circumstance, whether in abundance or in need (Phil. 4:11-13). This contentment is rooted in a reliance on Christ for strength and a recognition of spiritual values that transcend material wealth. Paul champions the virtue of generosity, as seen in his directives to the Corinthians to share with those in need (2 Cor. 8:13-15). His commitment to supporting the impoverished Jerusalem church through the collection reveals a practical embodiment of his teachings on caring for the less fortunate (Rom. 15:25-27, 2 Cor. 9:6-15) (Freeman 1992).

While acknowledging the legitimacy of labor and earning one's keep (2 Thess. 3:10-12), Paul's overall attitude toward wealth is characterized by a focus on the eternal and the communal. He encourages believers to use their resources for the well-being of others and the advancement of God's kingdom. This reflects a profound understanding of the transient nature of material wealth and the enduring significance of spiritual treasures.

Addressing the affluent in his first letter to Timothy, Paul instructs them to be generous and willing to share (1 Tim. 6:17-19). In tackling the issue of false teachers and true contentment warned about the dangers of love of money which to him is the root of all kinds of evils. He cautions against the love of money and encourages a focus on righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.

The Letter to the Hebrews emphasizes the eternal nature of spiritual wealth over temporal possessions. Believers are encouraged to endure trials with faith, knowing that they have a lasting possession in heaven (10:34). The emphasis on enduring faith underlines the idea that true wealth is found in one's relationship with God.

The Epistle of James forcefully critiques the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy, condemns the hoarding of wealth and ill-treatment of laborers, asserting that the cries of the oppressed have reached the ears of the Lord. In James 1:27, the apostle commands wealthy individuals in the churches to care for the disadvantaged, such as widows and orphans. In 5:15 of his book, the apostle once again instructs the elders to care for the sick, encompassing both the rich and the poor among them. James admonishes his readers that the upper class in the churches should not treat the poor with contempt or insist on special privileges (cf. 2:1-9). The apostle's concern is not against wealth per se, but rather about the undue attention given to the rich

while neglecting the needs of the poor within the church. He opposes discrimination and nepotism, seeking equality between the upper and lower classes. The statement made by the apostle in 2:5 is not an endorsement that the poor are chosen by God ahead of the rich to inherit the kingdom of God. Rather, he asserts that both the poor and the rich can be chosen by God to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom if they love God. This is because the promise of the kingdom is for those who love God, with wealth or poverty providing no advantage to either. James further emphasizes in James 5:1-6 a strong condemnation of wealthy individuals, highlighting not only their accumulation of treasure on earth but also their mistreatment of those who work for them.

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON WEALTH AND POVERTY**

### **Avoiding the extremes of poverty and prosperity theologies**

In navigating the intricate landscape of wealth and poverty, various theological perspectives have emerged, each claiming to unlock the divine will concerning financial prosperity. A significant strand within this discourse is the prosperity gospel; a theological position that asserts that God desires financial prosperity for his people, framed as a covenant between the divine and humanity. Prosperity preachers argue that it is God's will for every believer to be rich. Therefore, one's lack of faith and lack of generous giving are the main reasons for being poor (Kwateng-Yeboah 2016; Oluoch 2012). These preachers encourage their audience to donate huge sums of money to them or to support God's work and then promise them of financial breakthrough thereafter (Kwateng-Yeboah 2016). Prosperity theology advocates materialism to the detriment of idealism, encouraging the accumulation of wealth rather than sharing resources with the less

fortunate (Kwateng-Yeboah 2016; Goliama 2013). The materialistic nature of prosperity theology causes its followers to become obsessed with money and wealth, turning life into the accumulation of wealth (Goliama 2013). Though this teaching is found in all strands of Christianity in African, it is more common among the Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Another kind of theology is the one that considers material poverty as a requirement for entering the kingdom of God. People are encouraged to become poor voluntarily as part of the steps toward pleasing God. The "poverty theology" considers riches is sinful and something that is against God's will for believers. It frequently incorporates the notion that choosing to live in poverty is a highly moral act. This theology has resulted in monastic-style living and poverty vows. It emphasizes passages from the Bible like "Blessed are you who are poor" (Luke 6:20, 24) and "Woe to you who are rich" (Luke 6:24). These verses explain what it means to be a disciple of Christ, provide guidelines for behavior, contrast kingdom standards with worldly values, and show what Christians should expect from God and what he will provide. Jesus in Mark 10:23, is not to say one has to be poor to merit the kingdom of God but he was pointing to some of the hindrances that wealth can cause to make a human find it difficult to draw nearer to God.

A more comprehensive exploration of the biblical narrative (as demonstrated earlier) reveals that both poverty and wealth theologies offer only partial truths. The scriptures present a nuanced view, suggesting that neither wealth nor poverty inherently possesses spiritual qualities. Success and suffering are not straightforward indicators of obedience or disobedience to God's will. According to the study, there is nothing inherently evil about money and making money but the means to make money is what determines either the money is evil or not. The Bible teaches that wealth

is a gift from God to his people (Deut. 8:11-18; Eccl. 5:19; Hos. 2:8). Money can be an evil thing depending on how one acquires it and what one uses it for. On the other hand, poverty itself is not necessarily a virtue. God is the source of wealth and all other good things. This is buttressed by God's promise in Deuteronomy 15 to bless Israel so that there would be no poor among them and that the Israelites would lend to other nations and not borrow from them (Boaheng 2020). This does not, however, necessarily mean that the poor are under divine curse or that everyone's wealth comes from God. Some people acquire wealth through illegal means, such as money rituals (ritual murder), embezzlement of state funds, corruption, illegal business transactions among others. People can also be poor for God's own purposes (eg Job). Therefore, the mere fact that a person is poor or rich does not necessarily indicate that person's standing before God. Therefore, the idea that every believer has to be rich is not theologically sound; neither is the idea that believers need to be poor in order to please God. These theologies erroneously encourage extreme rejection of material wealth and extreme desire for material wealth. Instead, the holistic biblical perspective invites African Christians to transcend these dichotomies and embrace a profound understanding of stewardship, generosity, and unwavering trust in God, contextualized within the realities of the African continent.

### **Responsible Stewardship**

The biblical perspective on wealth, examined so far, highlights the principle of stewardship, where individuals are viewed as stewards of God's resources rather than absolute owners. In contemporary Africa, this theological understanding can encourage a shift in mindset towards responsible management of resources. Africa is blessed with a lot of natural resources which make the continent potentially

wealthy. However, poor management and irresponsible steward has made these resources a “curse” rather than a blessing. Upon the appointment of an official to man an office especially in the political circles, the appointee together with their families go for thanksgiving not to thank God for the opportunity to serve the people but for the opportunity to amass wealth through dishonest ways at the expense of the populace. Noting the detrimental effect of corruption Igbari describes; “corruption” as a monster, as a pest that destroys whatever it feeds on. It is a dangerous element in human experience that renders individual or the society incapacitated if it is allowed to eat deep into the fabric of social, religious or political life of humans (Igbari,2016, p3). The paper calls for responsible management and harnessing of natural resources in Africa. In addition, the wealthy, seeing themselves as stewards of God’s resources, should be encouraged to share with the needy. Thus, the rich must have the sense of responsibility to engage in intentional redistribution, contributing to poverty alleviation initiatives, and ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources within society.

Responsible stewardship also requires consistent theological and practical opposition to and condemnation of exploitative practices and injustice, particularly towards the poor and vulnerable. In contemporary Africa, this theological perspective has profound implications for addressing poverty. The African continent is characterized by injustices, oppression and exploitations from the religious, social, and political spheres. Law makers make laws that favor the rich and gives them immunity against being prosecuted. There is the need for Christians to actively oppose systems and practices that perpetuate poverty, including corruption, economic

exploitation, and unfair labor practices. Theologically grounded activism can lead to advocacy for just policies, fair wages, and the elimination of practices that exploit the less privileged. The communal worldview of the African people can serve as a springboard in making the collective interest of the people the topmost priority of the society so that those who occupy positions will be selfless in the discharge of their duties in order not to resort to bribery and corruption with its attended economic exploitation among others. The church, as a moral and prophetic voice, must play a leading role in promoting ethical economic practices that prioritize the well-being of all members of society.

Furthermore, the principle of stewardship includes compassion and care for the marginalized. The African church needs to engage directly with the impoverished in their communities. This involvement may take the form of charitable works, community development projects, and social programs such as human resource development by equipping members with entrepreneurship skills aimed at uplifting the less privileged. The African church taking precedence from the collaboration between the church and state in addressing poverty in the Bible could remind the government of the day of their obligation to roll out social intervention policies capable of bridging the gap between the economically advantaged and disadvantaged. The reluctance on the part of governments to enforce laws by prosecuting their members who enrich themselves through illegal means should be condemned by churches so that corrupt officials will be made to face their own music and deter others from emulating such irresponsible acts. The church, inspired by its theological convictions, can become a catalyst for change by fostering a culture of compassion and encouraging its members to actively participate in initiatives that alleviate

poverty and promote the holistic well-being of individuals and communities. Wealth distribution is required to achieve this. The next section further explains this.

### **Sharing of wealth**

The lament over the neglect of impoverished brethren within African Christian communities serves as a poignant reminder of the divergence between the ideal of biblical stewardship and the lived reality. While God may not demand the complete eradication of poverty, the scriptures unequivocally call for active care and assistance toward those in need. The obligation to care for family members and those within one's capacity becomes a sacred duty of all (African) believers.

At the core of this holistic perspective is a call to genuine generosity, an ethos that goes beyond the fixation on material possessions. Central to this holistic biblical perspective is the idea that genuine faith and trust in God should transcend a transactional relationship based on seeking external benefits. Instead, the emphasis is on fostering a profound connection with God for the intrinsic value of the relationship itself. This shift in focus should redirect African believers toward living by the true teachings of the Bible, aligning their lives with the principles of love, compassion, and stewardship that underpin the Christian faith in the African context.

Instead of accumulating wealth, there is the need to share wealth with the needy. In the realm of wealth accumulation, the holistic biblical perspective underscores the potential pitfalls of amassing riches. It warns against erecting barriers through pride and envy, emphasizing that the accumulation of wealth can distance individuals from the genuine problems of life. Such warnings align with the African communal ethos that stresses the interconnectedness of individuals within the community. Wealth

accumulation should be avoided for at least three reasons. First, the gathering of wealth builds barriers, fosters pride and envy, and isolates individuals. Bitrus (2006) rightly observes that when people become rich and comfortable, they often delude themselves into a false sense of security, alienating themselves from life's real problems. Second, accumulated wealth threatens loyalty to God, as one cannot be faithful to both wealth and God (Matt. 6:24). Preoccupation with anything other than God is sinful and displeasing to Him, as He alone is worthy of undivided attention, love, and service. Indulging in materialistic thoughts is idolatry, explaining why wealth can hinder entry into the kingdom of God (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). Third, wealth accumulation leads to selfishness, exploitation, and undesired prestige. Attachment to material wealth prompts people to maintain it through exploitation, especially of the poor and disadvantaged. Due to their materialistic mindset, legislators can enact laws legalizing exploitative activities (see Isaiah 10:1-4). Kingdom life necessitates a commitment to God and a focus on spiritual values (Matt. 6:19-34). Solomon's economy, marked by the accumulation of wealth, could not surpass the simplicity of the lilies of the field, which possess only life. Instead of amassing wealth, one should use it to alleviate the financial burden on others (Asante 1999). Both passages emphasize that God has provided abundant resources for the world, but the scarcity experienced is a result of materialistic behavior forcing the accumulation of possessions (Asante 1999).

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has explored the complexities of poverty and wealth from the biblical-theological perspective. The paper also offered a brief critique of poverty and prosperity theologies based on the biblical data examined. It found that instead of these theologies, a

holistic biblical perspective emphasizes responsible stewardship, opposition to exploitative practices, and the importance of sharing wealth. The African church is called to actively engage in compassionate community involvement, challenging injustice, and fostering equitable wealth distribution. The church needs to be a pace-setter and call on the state to ensure holistic engagement of the menace from diverse perspectives. The true essence of faith, according to this perspective, lies in a genuine connection with God, transcending transactional pursuits, and aligning one's life with the principles of love and stewardship.

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