



The Book of the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 4:32-37 and Its Relevance to the Poverty Alleviation Programmes In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the Acts 4:32-37, that is the communal life of the early church, the original meaning of the passage vis-à-vis the poverty alleviation programmes. The work will also look into the challenges faced by these programmes in Nigeria. As we have it in the Acts of Apostles, they shared everything they had, never claim owner's right, their attitude was what is mine is yours, also, those with the means voluntarily sold some of their own property and brought the proceeds to the Apostles feet for distribution to the needy. The church did not practice common ownership but charity on a voluntary basis. It works for the church of remarkable growth and experience of power. However, successive Nigeria governments have continued to tackle menace of poverty in the country from the introduction of new salary scheme to public servants from Gowon regime, to boost the standard of living of workers up till now is to no avail. Despite all the various attempts at poverty eradications, the number of people within the poverty range continued to increase on the daily basis, the work will give the way forward for Nigeria. Poverty has been a sensitive subject which has led to so many seminars, conferences and workshops at national and international levels. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines poverty as a condition of being extremely poor: it is regarded as aberration, misfortune; deprivation and lack of basic amenities of life for human survival, Adebimpe says poverty represents a state of inadequacy or insufficiency World Bank declares poverty as inability to attain a minimal standard of living, pointed out that absolute and relative exists in a situation where income is low than even a minimum standard of nutrition, shelter and personal necessities cannot be maintained.

Keywords: Apostles, ACTS, Poverty, Alleviation & Nigeria

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1. INTRODUCTION

Both Luke and Acts are anonymous, tradition has designated Luke as the author of both writings. One of the earliest witness to the tradition was Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul (Modern France) Irenaeus concluded from those we passages that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul who accompanied him as these occasions, he identified Paul's travelling companion as Luke. John (493) comments that we have little direct information on Luke, but we can learn a lot from his writings; for instance, he wrote in a very natural and literate style of Greek, the name Luke is Greek name, and he was almost certainly a Gentile, Luke was cultured, knew Greek literary conventions for instance, he began both his volumes with formal prefaces which included dedications to a certain Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-2)



He had a concern for linking Christianity with world history. Also, was careful alone to date events by the reigns of kings ,governors and high priests. .Luke had a great concern for people like oppressed of his day, poor and those with limited privileges like women. Out of many reasons for writing the work, the author of Acts has still a further purpose, writer deliberately determined to remove the issue of Gentile dichotomy or discriminations in the churches then. The author divided the text into two distinct sections; 1-12, in which the chief hero was Peter and 13-28 in which the chief hero was Paul. He intended his Gentiles readers by perusal of 1-12 to brought to their understand and admire Peter, and his Jewish Christians readers by perusal of the rest book Paul as the chief hero. Acts is absolutely our only first- century authority for the momentous events which followed the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

2. ACTS 4:32-37 AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

In the Acts of Apostles *Neither said any of them*, According to Dunmelow() declares that this expression shows that the church of Jerusalem recognized the principle of private property. A disciple's property really was his own, but he did not say that it was his own; he treated it as if it were common property. Even the Anabaptist's principle that private property is unlawful, find no real support in the Acts. The communism was voluntary, in the same vein, while in his work John(505) says that there were two dimensions to this, first they shared everything they had. They did not claim owner's right, their attitude was what is mine is yours; second those with the means voluntarily sold some of their own property and brought the proceeds to the Apostles for distributions to the needy. The church did not practice common ownership but charity on voluntary basis. Barnabas is held up as a example of one who gave a particular generous gift, his nickname son of encouragement is borne out amply by the role he plays in the subsequent narrative.

.Ajakaye and Olomola (19)observe that poverty in Nigeria is caused by a multiple of factors. These factors include economic, social, cultural, environmental, political and natural factors. The key factors contributing to increasing poverty in the nation include; low and declining productivity unemployment, high inflation rate, large debt, burden and low income, causes of poverty manifest in the form of illiteracy, high prevalence of diseases, insecurity of life and property, intergenerational poverty and large household size. Cultural factors include gender inequality, limited access to land, credit and religious restrictions. Pollution, erosion and deforestation are environmental factors while political factors manifest in poor governance, corruption, limited participation in the governance, as a result of long period of military rule and top-down development approach, natural causes include natural disaster such as flood, earthquakes, drought, etc. While in another form, we have salient factors which causes poverty in Nigeria include the following; Over-population that is Nigeria is highly over populated with few resources to go round. low foreign reserve, Insurgency and war cannot overlooked at all, presently, Nigeria is faced with problem of Boko –Haram²; a Nigeria militant Islamic group which was founded in the year 2002 in Maiduguri by Ustaz Mohammed Yussuf. In 2004 it moved to Kanmma, Yobe State, where it set up a base called "Afghanistan" used to attack nearby police outposts, Yussuf is hostile to democracy and secular education system.

This sect opposes the western education, culture and modern sciences and therefore, started the massive killings innocent Nigerian men and women, young and old, police officers and security operatives. Up till now, they still operate and all efforts made by the government to stop them, prove abortive. This affects the economy of the country at national and international levels as lives and properties were destroyed. Akomolafe (5)explains that Since Boko Haram emerged from the shadows about four years ago, once armed militarily, one of the obvious economic concerns was the almost immediate drop in foreign direct investment (FDI)³According to the World Investment Report (WIR)⁴2013,FDI flows into Nigeria dropped by 21% in Just one year. The monumental decline in (FDI) over such a short period of time sent ripple effects throughout the international community, creating a negative domino effect.(FDI) into Nigeria has a direct impact on trade, while also ensuring progression of economic development to the south (FDI) inflow also supplements the available domestic capital by stimulating the productivity of domestic investments. A scientific study found that a unit increase in FDI into the Nigeria oil sector will increase the country's GDP⁵ by approximately 16 units.



This shows that the Nigeria oil and gas sector, which is the mainstay of exposure to foreign direct investment. Between the lack of jobs, and increasing violence with the likes of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram!, Akomolafe (6) claims that there has been a mass movement of Nigerian citizens looking to settle in areas not impacted with violence. The problem is this; the areas not affected by the violence are most often areas that have nothing in terms of sustainable economic activity that would allow a person or family to survive. Living in the dangerous regions is where there is hope for employment. The rush to escape from the Northern part of the country that has been hard hit is already affecting the profitability of businesses in the region. Even it has got to the level where accredited banks have begun to close down some branches due to the huge decrease of economic activity, then a number of employees at these businesses are demanding to be re-assigned to that less volatile. Many financial analysts seem to be of the opinion that the impact on foreign investment will largely be determined by geography. Also added, Adebimpe and Raheem(628) observe that Mismanagement of resources either through direct siphoning of money and materials to private gains or through sheer wastage by embarking on white elephant projects, then rural-Urban migration, which had taken man able bodied men from the farms into the urban centre in search of elusive white-collar jobs.

3. THE PROFILE OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

The followings were the policies and programmes put into places to move the country and her citizens from poverty to prosperity; "National Accelerated Food Production Programme" and "Nigeria Agricultural and Co-operative Bank" of 1972 by Gen. Yakubu Gowon, The "Operation Feed the Nation" of 1976 by Gen. Obasanjo Olusegun. The "Green Revolution Programme" of 1979. Alh. Sheu Shagari. The "Go Back to land" by Gen. M. Buhari. The "Directorate for Food and Rural Infrastructure" of 1986 by Gen. I. Babangida with other projects like People banks, community banks better life for rural women by Mariam Banagida. The "Family Support Programme" by Mariam Abacha others are: "Family Economic Programme" "Petroleum Trust Fund", "Millennium Development Goals" and "Poverty Alleviation Programme".

4. BIBLICAL INJUNCTION ON POVERTY AND CAUSES OF POVERTY

Causes of Poverty from the biblical view, poverty has many causes which may be from the following; it may be as a result of slothfulness and laziness (Pro.6:10) or drunkenness or careless living. Even stubbornness and folly can caused poverty(Pro.13:18).It might be of oppression, deformity, old age and greed(Exo.10:4-5).It might also be of calamity, plague, war, disease, fraud, usury over which the victim has no control, some were poor voluntarily, the Levite may have been voluntarily want to be poor, they were without land, many prophets and Rabbis had no regular income, Jesus became poor for the sake of the people, the rich man was asked to sell all what he had, slavery is another causes of poverty.Lev.25:29

The scripture never clearly describe poverty; the terminology the image and message evoked sympathy for the poor and summon protest against oppression. The treatment of poor is not romantic or ascetic neither impartial nor objective. Basically, individual members of any given society, who are victims of poverty, are normally referred to as *poor*, while such a nation which suffering from it, is tagged poor nation. Some of the words representing poverty in Hebrew *Rush* means in want Prov.6:11,10:4,22:4, *Dal* which is impoverished; reduced to poverty due to exhaustion of one's natural strength or fertility possibly caused by gambling and drinking.Prov.10:15,14:31 *Heser* and *Aniy* wretched, very bad, hateful, miserable, pitiable, worthless or contemptible 14:31 *Ebyon* meant destitute helpless and *Yarash*

The Old Testament and Jewish thinking is that the poor stands under God special protection, among the evils attendants upon human existence there is scarcely any as generally feared as poor, every other kind of evils can be easily forgotten but that committed to the poor, God is the one that will stand for the poor. The Bible teaches that; we should help our brother Deut. 15:7, 24:14. God will deliver the poor from trouble Psalm 9:18-19, Ex. 23; 23, poor should not be excluded from the joy of the festival Deut16:1-11, interest should not be extracted from the poor. Hebrew judge were to give the poor full protection.



Allow the poor to present less expensive offering in the Temple. The Old Testament kings were asked to solicit for the poor. Jesus has a prophetic concern for the poor, mercy to be show even to debtors Luke 7:41. Oladosu(231) says that Jesus did not only preach the good news the poor nor contributed for the needs, he equally encouraged the man to distribute to the poor and inculcate the attitude of mercy toward debtors. Paul shows his eagerness at alleviation the blindness of the poor. Apart from identify with them in character and attitude. The first fellowship of believers seems to have re-enacted the clan egalitarianism of the patriarchal period,

5. EXEGESIS OF ACTS 4:32-37

Vs 32. *De piethons ton pisteusanton en kardia kai psuche mia* –(yet multitude of the one's believing was heart and soul one) Πιστευσαντων (*pisteusanton*) that is one's believing, entrust is aorist action genitive plural masculine Ψυχη simply breath, i.e. (by implication) spirit, abstractly or concretely (the animal sentient principle only; thus distinguished on the one hand , which is the rational and immortal soul; and on the other, which is mere vitality, even of plants.

Αυτοις-autos (ow-tos)' from the particle au (perhaps akin to the base of, through the idea of a baffling wind) (backward); the reflexive pronoun self, used (alone) of the third person, and (with the proper personal pronoun) of the other persons. In KJV⁷: her, it(-self), one, the other, (mine) own, said, (self-), the) same, ((him-, my-, thy-)self, (your-)selves, she, that, their(-s), them(-selves), there(-at, - by, -in, -into, -of, -on, -with), they, (these) things, this (man), those, together, very, which.

ελεγεν –(lego) leg'-o simply a primary verb; properly, to "lay" forth, i.e. (figuratively) relate (in words (usually of systematic or set discourse; whereas and generally refer to an individual expression or speech respectively; while is properly to break silence merely, and means an extended or random harangue)); by implication, to mean. In KJV: ask, bid, boast, call, describe, give out, name, put forth, say (-ing, on), shew, speak, tell, utter. υπαρχοντων- (huparchonta) hoop-ar'-khon-tah is neuter plural of present participle active of noun; things extant or in hand, i.e. property or possessions. King James Version: give the meaning as goods, that which one has, things which (one) possesseth, substance, that hast. αυτοις –(autos) ow-tos' from the particle au (perhaps akin to the base of, through the idea of a baffling wind) (backward); the reflexive pronoun self, used (alone) of the third person , and (with the proper personal pronoun) of the other persons. In KJV: her, it(-self), one, the other, (mine) own, said, (self-), the) same, ((him-, my-, thy-)self, (your-)selves, she, that, their(-s), them(-selves), there(-at, - by, -in, -into, -of, -on, -with), they, (these) things, this (man), those, together, very, which. απαντα (hapas) hap'-as from (as a particle of union) and absolutely all or (singular) every one. in KJV: all (things), every (one), whole.

Κοινα –(koinos) that is koy-nos' probably from; common, i.e. (literally) shared by all or several, or (ceremonially) profane. In King James Version: put it as common, defiled, unclean, unholy. huparchonta hoop-ar'-khon-tah neuter plural of present participle active of noun; things extant or in hand, i.e. property or possessions. KJV: goods, that which one has, things which (one) possesseth, substance, that hast.

huparchonta hoop-ar'-khon-tah neuter plural of present participle active of noun; things extant or in hand, i.e. property or possessions. in KJV: goods, that which one has, things which (one) possesseth, substance, that hast Χρειαν -chreia khri'-ah -employment, i.e. an affair; also (by implication) occasion, demand, requirement or destitution. In KJV: business, lack, necessary(-ity), need(-ful), use, want.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for sincerity and transparency on the side of the government of the day just like the Apostles were in power that time. Even the government agencies should emulate the 7 Deacons chosen that time, in the formulations and implementation of policies to tackle the menace of poverty in the nation. Policy should be targeted at the poor as the beneficiaries and affected. Since we see it clearly in the Acts they were in one accord with sincerity, even they were all in one heart and mind, there were no needy among them, because they met their target at the end. It is highly recommended that government should improve in the provision of basic amenities in other to reduce the rural –urban migration palaver; this will make the able men to abide in the rural area and settle there. There should be continuity of policies and projects, projects and policies need not to be abandon at all since is writing in the paper.



Short term measured should be discouraged and this time around government should embark on the data base monitoring and evaluating projects. Being a religious state, religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is that one look after orphans and widow in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted. The call to poverty relief has always been core business for the people and the church should shown more examples , as Apostles laid their hands on the 7 men poverty alleviation was raised to the status of serious mission. There is need to have ministry in this nation commissioned for the same purpose with radical commitment.

Endnotes

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²Boko-Haram -The term comes from Hausa *boko* meaning Animist, western or otherwise non-Islamic education and the Arabic word *haram* meaning sin that is forbidden. They were classified as a terrorist group because their activities clearly contravenes section 15(1)(2) which states as follows;

15(1) any person who knowingly-
(A) Seized, detains or tempts to seize or detains
(b.) threatens to kill, injures or continues to detain another person
in order to compel a third party to do or abstain
from doing any act, or Gives an explicit or implicit condition for
the release of the person held hostage, commit an offence under
this act and is liable on conviction to life imprisonment. ...

³FDI-Foreign Direct Investment According to the World Investment Report

⁴WIR.2013.FDI flows into Nigeria dropped by 21% in just one year--- from\$8.9 billion in 2011 to \$ 7 billion in 2012. The loss of \$1.9 billion for a country in desperate need of money such as Nigeria.

⁵ GDP-Gross Domestic Product

⁶ KJV- King James Version

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