

**POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN NIGERIA
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL
TEACHING AND HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE**

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Abstract

Poverty is a perennial human problem which has spiritual, social and economic dimensions. However, extreme poverty which manifests itself in hunger, that is, food insecurity, and the lack of other basic necessities of life, is an assault on human dignity and an infringement on fundamental human rights. Poverty and food insecurity are certainly socio-economic problems, but with fundamental ethical questions. For this reason, it has become pertinent to reexamine the increasing situation of extreme poverty in Nigeria. This study has, therefore, for its objective to investigate the problem of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria from the perspective of Christian social teaching and human rights discourse. The paper is an exploratory essay which has adopted a qualitative method approach. Data was generated mainly from secondary sources, obtained through critical reading of existing literature in print and internet materials. The information obtained was subjected to content analysis and insightful findings were drawn. The findings reveal that poverty and food insecurity have been on the increase in Nigeria since 2004 in contrast to a relative growth in the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nigeria has spent very low percentage of its GDP on health, education and social welfare, thus fuelling extreme poverty and socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, human choices, policies and unethical behaviour have contributed to the existing situation. Nonetheless, Christian social teaching addresses such unethical misconduct. The study, therefore, recommended that government should increase its GDP spending on human development. In addition, Nigerian citizens, the rich, politicians, the clergy and pastors should reform their lifestyle to make the poor less dependent on palliatives and charity.

Key words: Poverty, food insecurity, hunger, Christian social teaching, human rights, social justice.

Background to the Study

On September 25, 2015, world leaders, under the auspices of the United Nations, adopted a set of 17 "Global Goals" with 169 targets in a document titled: *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development* (UN DOC, A/RES/70/1, 2015). The first two of these 17 goals have inspired this study with a focus on their application in Nigeria. While goal 1 states: "end poverty in all its forms everywhere"; goal 2 declares: "end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" (UN DOC, A/RES/70/1, 2015). In brief, the two goals have for their objective to end poverty and achieve food security for all as a more sustainable way of transforming our world. In its introduction, the United Nations acknowledged that "eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme

poverty poses: the greatest global challenge”. Nonetheless, it is “an indispensable requirement for sustainable development (UN DOC, A/RES/70/1, 2015). For this reason, the United Nations resolved to “end poverty and hunger everywhere” between 2015 and 2030.

The tragic situation of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria, one of the leading world's leading oil-producing nations, has made headlines both in international and national news. A report of Development Finance International (DFI) and Oxfam warned in 2018 that Nigeria was set to become the world's poverty capital when the country was, for the second time, placed at the bottom of a ranking of 157 nations (Quartz African, 2018). Another report from Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) also raised alarm concerning food insecurity in Nigeria in 2018. The report stated that 13 million people in Nigeria have been exposed to hunger in 2016 and that nearly 2.3 million, mostly in three states worst hit by Boko Haram insurgency, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe have been subjected to acute food shortage (*Punch*, Oct 21, 2018). On October 8, 2019, Nigeria was declared Nigeria the “world capital of poverty”, at Abuja, with an estimated 94, 470, 535 million people living below extreme poverty level (www.shipsandports.com.ng).

In November 2019, FAO report raised yet another alarm concerning food insecurity in Northern Nigeria. It stated:

The latest Cadre Harmonise Analysis (November, 2019) indicates that an estimated 2.6 million people face severe food insecurity in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, a reduction of nearly 300,000 people from June 2019. However, if no humanitarian support is provided, a projected 3.6 million people in the three states are likely to be severely food insecure from Aug 2020, traditionally the lean season in the North-East. ()

The reality of extreme poverty and severe food insecurity in Nigeria is an undeniable fact.

However, since poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon, scholars have studied it from different perspectives. Sulaiman, (2008), studied poverty from its economic dimension. Ezeh, (2012), examined poverty and environmental issues. Yakubu (2020), studied the impact of poverty on national insecurity. Ojo (2012), explored an overview of food security crisis in Nigeria, while Etim, Duke and Ogbinyi (2017), investigated the implications of food insecurity and hunger on national security. This paper has opted to study the issue of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria from the dimension of the ethical questions at stake. The researcher is convinced that humans are moral agents who exhibit attitudes, make decisions and policies, establish and maintain structures that push millions of people into poverty and expose many more to go without food on the table. Put in another form, the researcher considers it pertinent to examine how poverty and food insecurity constitute an assault on human dignity and a breach of the fundamental human right to adequate food (UDHR, 1948, no 25). The investigation is carried out from the perspective of Christian social teaching and human rights discourse with the view to advancing a panacea.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is, therefore, to examine the problem of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria from the perspective of Christian social teaching and human rights discourse. The paper has for its specific objective:

- To present the reality of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria.
- To raise the ethical questions at stake.
- To elucidate how Christian social teaching addresses the problem and its relevance today.
- To advance a panacea.

Methodology

The study is an exploratory essay and, therefore, has used qualitative research method approach. A critical discourse analysis was used to generate data mainly from secondary sources: textbooks, journal articles, newspapers and internet materials. The data generated was subjected to content analysis and interpretation from which insightful findings were drawn.

Conceptual Elucidation

Poverty

A simple dictionary definition of the term “poverty” describes it as a state of being in want of the necessities of life. It is also defined as the state of being inferior in quality or insufficient in amount (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). Poverty is however a multidimensional concept which denotes a lack of the basic necessities of life: food, shelter and clothing, or insufficiency in the quantity and quality of the essential goods and service: income, health and education. Poverty has economic, social, political, spiritual and cultural elements. The economic aspect is often the most outstanding against which measurement is set. In this regard, poverty is described as the lack of sufficient material or financial resources necessary to meet one's personal needs by the prevailing standard of living. World Bank has set the international standard measurement of poverty on monetary threshold.

In 2015, World Bank set the international poverty level at \$1.90 per day. A person is considered poor if his/her income falls below \$1.90. Although this standard has been criticised for failing to take into account the availability of other indicators like sanitation, water, electricity, education and health as they affect the quality of life, it is still the adopted international standard for measuring poverty and this guides the discussion of the paper.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is a complex concept for definition. It is the antithesis of food security. According to FAO (1996), “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (World Food Summit, 1996). Four key elements stand out in this definition of food security:

- Availability, having sufficient quantity of appropriate food.
- Accessibility, the ability to have enough resources to access appropriate food.
- Utilisation, the ability to take nutritious food, to absorb and use the nutrients.
- Stability, a steady and stable flow of food supplies in the market.

The FAO has also defined food insecurity as “a situation when people lack secure access to sufficient amount of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and active and healthy life” (World Food Summit, 1996). As in the case of food security, the key factors involved in food insecurity are:

- Non-availability of appropriate food.
- Lack of resources to access it.
- Improper utilisation of the nutrients.
- Instability of food supply over a certain time limit.

The physical outstanding signs of food insecurity are hunger, under-nourishment and malnutrition. Hunger is the principal factor against which food insecurity is measured. The two key international standards for the measurement of food insecurity in a country are the

prevalent children underweight and the FAO calculations of the proportion of a population living below a minimum level of food-energy consumption (De Muro & Mazziotta, 2011).

In any given population, it is often the poor, that is, those living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day, who are the principal victims of food insecurity. The poor are the most vulnerable to hunger, under-nourishment and malnutrition. Herein lays the nexus between poverty and food insecurity since it is the poor who suffer food insecurity the most. It is, therefore, not surprising that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should prioritise the fight against poverty and food insecurity together as numbers one and two of the 2030 agenda.

Human Rights

Human rights are the inalienable and inviolable rights or faculties that are inherent in every human being as a member of the human family. Although the concept of human rights is old as human civilisation, its prevalent usage as a phrase has relatively a recent origin in the 20th century. The idea of human rights dates back to the Greco-Roman concept of natural law found in the writings of Plato (427-248) BC and Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43) BC and other stoics. Both Plato, in the Republic, and the stoics used the concept of natural law to refer to universal truths or a higher order of law, inherent in nature, which should serve as a standard for human conduct as well as the laws of the civil society and government. The natural law theory upheld that a universal force pervades the entire creation which acts as the foundation and reference point for human ethical conduct and positive law. In the Middle Ages, Christian writers, especially Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and later in the seventeenth century, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), developed the theory of natural law into natural rights to serve as benchmark for personal rights and standard of justice in conflict situation.

While Thomas Aquinas held the view that natural law is rooted in a divine law and can be discovered by the rightful use of human reason, Grotius, a Christian writer in the Age of Reason, focused more on natural law as a force pervading nature and accessible to human reason. Grotius' philosophical and legal writings have influenced many modern scholars of natural right including John Locke. Although the natural right theory has been criticised as abstract by utilitarian philosophers like Bentham (1780 - 1832) and his followers, the theory has continued to inform modern concept of human rights.

The concept of human rights, as a historical document, is however traceable to some key documents that emerged from the social, political, economic and religious conflicts in Europe and America. Such documents include: the English Magna Carta, 1215, the English Bill of Rights 1689, the American Bills of Rights 1776, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the citizen, 1789, as well as the German Weimar Constitutions, 1919 (Iwe, 1986). It was, nonetheless, in the aftermath of the atrocities of the Second World War that the United Nations, on December 10, 1948, adopted the document titled: *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* for use in national and international relations. The document enunciated 30 articles of fundamental human rights in the natural, civil, political, religious, cultural, social and economic domains in addition to a meaningful long preamble. Although the declaration lacks the status of a convention to carry legal obligation on member states, it has still the force of a substantial body of world opinion and enjoins on the members the obligation to incorporate the provisions enunciated in their national constitutions and laws. Moreover, the declaration has the force of moral obligation and forms the basis for universally accepted ethical standard.

The very first line of the preamble declares that the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (UN, 1948). The economic section of the document

which deals with the fundamental rights of every person to the use of the material goods of the earth is of particular interest to the reflections of this paper. Art 25 (1) states: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” (UN, 1948).

The Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical discussion of this paper is informed by the Christian principles on human rights and economic matters concerning poverty, hunger and wealth as expressed in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and in the writings of the Early Christians notably: Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostom. Their core teachings on human rights, poverty, hunger and wealth, were later elaborated in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and has been continued in our day through the tradition of *Catholic Social Teaching*, beginning with the encyclical of Leo XIII (1891), *Rerum novarum: On the condition of workers* to Pope Francis (2015), *Laudato si: On the care of our common home*. Among this corpus of papal socio-economic documents, the following are of particular interest to this work: John XXIII (1963), *Pacem in terris: Peace on earth*, Vatican II, 1965, *Gaudium et spes: The Church in the modern world*, Paul VI (1967), *Populorum progressio: On the development of peoples* and John Paul II (1987), *Sollicitudo rei socialis: On social concern*.

Christian understanding of human dignity and natural law is central to appreciating its teaching on the economic and social issues of poverty, food insecurity and human rights. From a Christian perspective, human dignity is the belief that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, the *imago Dei*, (Gen 1:26-27). Therefore, by their very existence, humans have an inherent, natural value and worth that must be recognised and respected. Every man and woman have also been endowed, by God the Creator, with reason, intelligence and freedom, thus making us moral agents and participants in the socio-economic activities as co-creators. This understanding of the human dignity of every person is a key factor in elucidating human rights and responsibility. Human dignity gives human rights its characteristic element of being natural, universal, inviolable and inalienable; it also imposes a correlative responsibility, thus making humans moral agents. It is what guarantees the inherent right of every person to the use of material goods of the earth to maintain “a decent and healthy standard of living” (John XXIII, P.T., 1963). At the same time, it places a moral responsibility on individuals and on the society to ensure that the goods of the earth are made available, sufficient and accessible to all persons.

The state of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria 1990-2018

Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil producer and has been described as one of the fastest growing economies in the region with a significant Gross Domestic Product (GPD) growth recorded between 2002 and 2014 as revealed in the table below.

Table 1: Nigeria Annual GDP Evolution 2002-2018

Date	Annual GDP in figure	GDP Growth %
2002	93,983M.\$	14.6%
2004	130,345 M.\$	10.4%
2006	227,791 M.\$	6.7%
2008	330,260 M.\$	7.2%
2010	360,062 M.\$	11.3%
2012	460,952 M.\$	4.3%
2016	405,442 M.\$	-1.6%
2018	398,186 M.\$	1.9%

Source: [https://countryeconomy.com <gdp>](https://countryeconomy.com/gdp)

The evolution of Nigeria Gross domestic Product (GDP) discloses a growth performance of 14.6% in 2002, 10.4% in 2004; a rise to 11.3% in 2010 and a fall down to 6.3% in 2014; a plunging down to -1.6% in 2016, due to recession, and finally a rise to 1.9% in 2018. Unfortunately, despite this relative good performance of Nigeria GDP, largely from the oil sector, the oil wealth has not been translated into improving the living conditions of the masses. Poverty is on the increase and food insecurity drives millions to suffer hunger and malnutrition as indicated in table 2 below.

Table 2: Population of Nigeria Living below poverty line 1992-2010

Date	Population
1992	39.2million
1996	67.1 million
2004	68.7 million
2010	112.47 million

Source: National Bureau of Statistics as cited in www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17015873. According to this report of National Bureau of Statistics, 112.47 million Nigerians lived below the poverty line of \$1.9 in 2010. The figure is a significant rise from 68.1 million in 2004 and stands in contrast to the GDP which stood at 11.3% in 2010 and 10.4% in 2004 as indicated in table 1 above.

Furthermore, the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI) report on Nigeria is very instructive. Human Development Index (HDI) is a report prepared by World Bank and other international bodies to measure and indicate which countries are preeminent in mobilising the economic and potential professional of their citizens for long-term progress. It is a summary scale for evaluating a country's long term progress in three basic aspects of human development namely: a long and healthy life, education and a descent standard of living. A long and healthy

life level is assessed by life expectancy; education level is calculated by the mean years of schooling among the adult population at 25 years of age, while the standard of living is evaluated by Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.

Table 3: Trends in Nigeria's Human Development Index 1990 to 2018.

Date	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capital (2011 PPPS)	HDI Value
1990	45.9	6.7	-	3,221	-
1995	45.9	7.2	-	2,872	-
2000	46.9	8.0	-	2,828	-
2010	48.3	9.0	5.2	3,812	0.467
2015	50.9	8.4	5.2	4,793	0.484
2016	53.5	9.5	6.3	5,336	0.527
2017	54.0	9.7	6.5	5,203	0.533
2018	54.3	9.7	6.5	5,086	0.534

Source: UNDP, 2019.

The progress trend in each of the Nigeria HDI indicators between 1990 and 2018 reveals that the life expectancy at birth rose by 8.4 years, the expected years of school increased by 3 years, while the mean years of school gained 1.2 years. The standard of living, measured by GNI per capita, grew by 57.9 per cent. However, the total Human Development Index value for Nigeria for 2018 was 0.534, a figure that put the country in the rank of low human Development (LHD) category. Indeed, Nigeria ranked 158 out of the 189 countries and territories on the UNDP list for 2018. Furthermore, Nigeria's human capital spending is considered very low on three important dimensions, health, education and social protection, which have been considered key factors in reducing inequality and eradicating poverty. It is then not surprising that, in 2018, Nigeria should take the last position by ranking 157 out of 157 countries selected for a report on Commitment to Reducing Index (CRI). The position of last 10 countries selected in the CRI report stands as follows:

Table 4: Ten Last Countries on 2018 Commitment to Reducing Index report

Country	Rank
Bangladesh	148
Singapore	149
Lao PDR	150

Madagascar	151
Bhutan	152
Sierra Leone	153
Chad	154
Haiti	155
Uzbekistan	156
Nigeria	157

Source: <https://qz.com/africa/1421543/nigeria->

Furthermore, between 2003 and 2013 Nigeria's low spending on health did not fare very well when compared with some other sub-Sahara countries. Table 5 below is very revealing.

Table 5: Nigeria and selected countries' health expenditure and indicators 2003 and 2013

Countries	Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000)		Stunting (height for age below 2 SDs)		Malnutrition (weight for age below 2 SDs)		Health expenditure, total (% of GDP)	
	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013
Nigeria	201.0	128.0	38.3	36.8	28.7	28.7	4.0	3.7
Kenya	95.4	53.4	35.7	35.3	15.8	16.1	4.4	5.6
Ghana	91.3	66.5	-	28.0	-	13.9	3.1	4.6
Ethiopia	124.8	64.6	50.8	44.4	41.2	28.7	4.6	5.2
Rwanda	139.4	47.8	51.1	44.2	19.5	11.4	6.3	7.7
Senegal	112.5	52.5	19.6	18.7	14.2	15.7	5.4	4.5
Tanzania	106.9	53.3	44.3	42	16.4	15.8	4.1	5.6
Uganda	124.2	60.3	44.8	33.4	15.9	13.8	7.5	7.5
South Africa	78.1	43.4	-	-	-	-	8.3	8.8
Africa								

Source: Data compiled from World Bank, 2016

In 2003, Nigeria spent only 4.0 per cent of its GDP on health and the figure declined to 3.7 in 2013. These figures are less than half of what South Africa spent on health for the same period. The figures are also comparatively lower than other countries like Uganda with 7.5 in 2003 and 2013, and Rwanda with 6.3 in 2003 and 7.7 in 2013. The resultant effect of this poor spending on the health sector is seen in Nigeria scoring highest in the under-five mortality rate in 2003 and 2013 among the nine countries listed above. Nigeria and Ethiopia also scored highest in the rate of malnutrition at 28.7, but while Ethiopia dropped from 41.2 in 2003 to 28.7 in 2013, Nigeria remained stable at 28.7 for a full decade.

Malnutrition is indeed a strong indicator of food insecurity in a country. The malnutrition trend in Nigeria continued unabatedly leading FAO, at the World Food Day in Rome, in 2018, to raise alarm that 13 million Nigerians have been subjected to hunger since 2016. Hunger and malnutrition violate the fundamental human right to “a standard of living adequate for health and well-being” (UDHR, 1948, no 25). Furthermore, they have debilitating effects in the productive capacity of the victims, because they deny them opportunities and prevent them from attaining their full capacity in life. In addition, poverty and food insecurity hurt economies and create imbalance in economic power, which in turn, is translated often into political dominance.

Nevertheless, the choices and policies of a society, its economic and social structures, as well as the life-style of its individual citizens are also very significant factors in determining the rate of poverty and food insecurity in a country. Therefore, in the face of this social, economic and moral problem of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria, there is no room for a complacent attitude or inaction. Humans have a choice because they are moral agents responsible for their action or inaction.

Poverty and food insecurity in the light of Christian social teaching

The Christian approach to the issue of the right to the basic necessities of life has its foundation in the Bible particularly in the teachings of Old Testament prophets on social justice, especially Amos, Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. In addition, two key New Testament passages also throw further light on the Christian understanding and teaching on the right to and the responsibility for the basic necessities of life. The two passages underscore the attitude and action of Jesus and his uncompromising verdict on the respect or non-respect of this right.

The first passage is on the feeding of the five thousand people Matt. 14: 13-21; Mk. 6: 30-44; Lk. 9: 10-17; Jn. 6: 1-14. In this episode, Jesus was faced with the problems of food shortage before a crowd of over five thousand people. In the narrative, while the synoptic gospels tell us that the disciples took the initiative to plead with Jesus to send the hungry crowd away, the gospel of John emphasises that it was Jesus who first invited the disciples to take action to procure food for the people, giving thus priority to their right to food as a basic necessity. What is important, however, is that Jesus recognized the right of the people to have adequate food and insisted on the responsibility of his disciples to take action. Jesus provided more than sufficient for all to have their fill and ordered the gathering of the leftover to avoid waste (Matt. 14:20).

This action of Jesus underscores the fact that it is morally unacceptable for rich individuals, corporate bodies and wealthy nations to hoard and waste food, while millions of people starve as victims of anthropological poverty. In modern society, it should be considered a moral obligation of justice and equity that the superfluous wealth of rich individuals and countries be mobilized and used for the benefit of and the service of hungry people and poor nations. Indeed, according to Paul VI: “We are not justified in keeping for our exclusive use what we do not need, when others lack necessities” (Populorum Progressio, 1967, no. 23). If waste, hoarding and greed are eliminated and available food is equitably distributed in socio-economic relations, no one perhaps may starve.

The second New Testament passage is on the final judgement of the nations, Matt. 25:31-46. The key criterion of this judgment is the practice or non-practice of provision of the basic necessities of life to anyone in need. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing” Matt. 25:35-36. Christian ethics demand action in favour of eradicating extreme poverty and food insecurity.

This is not just a matter of Christian charity, but rather a moral issue of justice and equity to assure that every person has access to the basic necessity of life. The neglect of such moral responsibility is a grave omission condemned by Jesus himself. It is such negligence and omission that are highlighted and condemned in the story of the Rich man and Lazarus as narrated in the Gospel of Luke 19: 20-31. Indeed, Jesus was unequivocal and uncompromising in his verdict that the respect or non-respect of the right to the basic necessities of life: food, shelter and clothing, is the condition *sine qua non* for entry or non-entry into the kingdom of God (Matt. 25:31-46).

Therefore, the attitude, action and teachings of Jesus have always formed the bedrock of authentic Christian teaching and practice on social and economic matters down the ages. The early Christian communities owned and shared everything in common in such a manner that no one was in need. When problem arose, the apostles made justice and fairness key factors in the daily distribution of goods and quickly appointed deacons to take charge of equitable treatment of the most vulnerable, the widows (Acts 6:1-6).

It was however in the fourth century that early Christian writers, especially Ambrose of Milan, 340-397 AD, and John Chrysostom, 347-407AD, started to develop a more systematic thought on the question of wealth, poverty and authentic Christian responsibility towards the poor. These early Christian writers defended the principle of the universal destination of material goods as God's gift to all people (Gen. 1&2). As such, the material goods of the earth are considered the common property of all, so every person has a right to the use of them (Evan, 2006). It was against this background that Ambrose of Milan wrote:

How far, O rich, do you extend your mad greed? Shall you alone dwell upon the earth (Is. 5:8)? Why do you cast out the companion whom nature has given you and claim for yourself nature's possession? The earth was established in common to all, rich and poor. Why do you alone, O rich, demand special treatment? Nature which begets everyone poor, knows no wealthy, for we are not born with clothing or silver. Naked it brings us into light (Cf. Job 1:21), wanting food, clothing and drink and naked the earth receives us whom it brought forth, not knowing how to compass our possession in the tomb (On Naboth, 1.2).

Ambrose Milan clearly stated that the earth was established in common for all, rich and poor. It is greed that makes the rich hoard the common material goods to the detriment of his/her neighbour. Ambrose asserted that what the rich donates to the poor is simply a restoration of what was usurped, for material goods belong to all. To this effect he wrote:

It is not anything of yours that you are bestowing on the poor; rather, you are giving back something of his. For you alone are usurping what was given in common for the use of all. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich, but there are fewer who do not use what I theirs than who use it. You are giving back something that is owed, then, and no something that is not owed (Naboth, 13.53).

Ambrose based his social teaching on an analysis of the oppressive encounter between the wealthy king Ahab and poor Naboth in 1kgs 21: 1-15. He followed the tradition of the prophets on social justice, making liberal references to scriptural passages such as Is. 5:8-23; 58:6-9; Hos 10:12; 5:8-23; Mat 25:35-36; Job 1:21; 29:12-16.

In the same line of thought, John Chrysostom also wrote to condemn the economic inequality of his era, by which the rich amassed wealth through greed and corruption and grew richer and more powerful, while the poor starved and languished in poverty and crushing debt.

He wrote:

Not to share our riches with the poor is a robbery of the poor, and a depriving them of their livelihood; and that which we possess is not only our own, but also theirs (Discourse 2 on the Rich Man and Lazarus).

Why? Because God in the beginning did not make one man rich and another poor... He left the earth free to all alike. Why then, if it is common, do you have so many acres of land, while your neighbour has no portion of it? ... (Homily 12 on 1 Tm).

Furthermore, John Chrysostom admonished the rich:

Do you wish to honour the Body of the Saviour? Do not despise him when he is naked. Do not honour him in the Church with silk vestments while outside he is naked and numb with cold. He who said, "This is my body" and made it so by his word, is the same that said, "You saw me hungry and gave me no food. As you did not to the least of these, you did not to me," honour him then by sharing your property with the poor (Homily 50 on Matthew).

John Chrysostom also made it clear that he was not against wealth "per se", but the abuse and misuse of wealth and its wrong acquisition through greed and corruption, which he condemned because it reinforced economic inequality, robbed the poor of their right to the basic necessities of life and disregarded human dignity. "But those I attack are not the rich as such, only those who misuse their wealth. I point out constantly that those I accuse are not the rich but the rapacious. Wealth is one thing, covetousness another. Learn to distinguish" (Homily on the Fall of Eutropius).

In our modern era, the Catholic Church has continued this tradition of Christian discourse on socio-economic matters through its corpus called *Catholic Social Teaching*. The encyclical of John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (P.T.), (1963), discusses the issue of human rights from the Christian perspective. On the question of poverty and food insecurity, John XXIII stated that the right to life is correlative with quality of life, that is, the right to a decent and healthy standard of living. To achieve a decent and healthy well-being, every person has the right to the use of and the responsibility to make use of the material goods of the earth as the common property of all. He wrote:

Beginning our discussion of the rights of man and woman, we see that every person has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are necessary and suitable for proper development of life. These means are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and finally the necessary social means (P.T., 11). The right of every person to life is correlative with the duty to preserve it; his right to a decent standard of living, with the duty of living it becomingly (P.T., 29).

Gaudium et spes (G.S.) of the the Second Vatican Council, 1965, also lamented the scandal of the co-existence of widespread affluence and abject poverty in nations and in the international communities. The document condemned the socio-economic imbalance that makes the rich grow richer, while the poor languish for lack of the basic necessities of life. It observed that: "Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy" (G.S., 4).

It will be recalled that the above observation and statement was made a few years before the first crisis of food insecurity in Nigeria hit international news with the outbreak of hunger

and malnutrition in the South-East, in 1968, during the Nigeria/Biafra civil war, 1967-1970. Thousands of children were starved to death, while the political gladiators of the nation scrambled over the control of resources. *Caritas Internationalis*, the Catholic Relief Agency, played a key role in airlifting food and medical supplies to save lives of the starving population of South-East Nigeria. According to Ezeh, (2012), Cardinal Francis Arinze affirmed that *Caritas* planes flew into Biafra every night from 1968 to 1970, making as many as 40 flights in their best nights.

Unfortunately, hunger and abject poverty have once again resurfaced in Nigeria with a high record of 60.9% of the population living below poverty line in 2010, a trend that reached the point of declaring Nigeria the world's capital of poverty in 2018 as observed above. The empirical study of Ezeh, (2017), has revealed that corrupt practices, violent crimes and social injustice are three key factors that impede sustainable development in Nigeria, thus preventing millions of its citizens from enjoying the benefits of the nation's rich human and natural resources.

In view of this prevailing situation, Christian social teaching is relevant in addressing the moral malaise in Nigeria which robs its citizens of their rights to the use and enjoyment of their common material goods. Indeed, Christian social teaching carries with it important ethical implications and challenges. It demands a reform of lifestyle to reject greed and corruption in order to enable everyone to have a healthy and descent standard of living and thus, put a check to widespread socio-economic inequality. It challenges the rich to adopt a simple lifestyle that uphold fairness in the use of the common good and makes the poor less dependent on charity and palliatives. As noted by John Chrysostom: "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life" (Homily 11). Ezeh (2015), has also asserted that a reform of lifestyle, in the perspective of Christian social teaching, "transcends mere sharing of personal resources with the needy to adopting a lifestyle inclusive of the poor as a responsible partner in the common good."

Furthermore, Christian social teaching demands a reform of structures, laws and policies to benefit the poor and thus reduce poverty and inequality. This demands the Nigerian government to make laws and evaluate its socio-economic policies from the perspective of how they would affect the most vulnerable in the society. According to Paul VI:

It is not just a matter of eliminating hunger, nor even of reducing poverty. The struggle against destitution, though urgent and necessary, is not enough. It is a question, rather, of building a world where every man and woman, no matter their race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on them by other people or by natural forces over which they have not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man. This demands great generosity, much sacrifice and unceasing effort on the part of the rich person (*Populorum Progressio*, 47).

In the Christian understanding of the problem of poverty and food insecurity, Paul VI calls for a heroic Christian spirit of sacrifice and solidarity between the rich and the poor at the individual, national and international levels. Christian social teaching is therefore most relevant in discussing poverty and food insecurity in contemporary Nigeria because it addresses the question of greed, corruption and social injustice which has crippled the economy of nations, Nigeria in particular, reinforced inequality and rendered millions poor and hungry and advances a reform of lifestyle, policies and structures as panacea. This approach is, of course, complements the indispensable role of boosting agricultural revolution in curtailing poverty and food insecurity, which has been advocated by the UN Food and

Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and has been developed in scholarly studies like De Muro and Mazziota (2011).

Conclusion

The study has underscored the reality of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria. It has highlighted the ethical dimension of this problem as an unacceptable assault on human dignity and an infringement on the fundamental human rights of every person to a healthy life and well-being. The paper has also disclosed how the Nigerian successive government policies have consistently spent very low fund on the human development sectors of health, education and social welfare. Consequently, millions of Nigerians have been subjected to suffer hunger and live in extreme poverty, while a few enjoyed the luxury of the nation's oil wealth. Furthermore, the paper discussed how Christian social teaching could be relevant in ridding the country of greed, corruption and injustice and in awakening the conscience of Nigerians to their ethical responsibilities. In view of this, the study has made some useful recommendations.

Recommendations

- Nigerian government should increase its GPD spending on the human development sectors of health, education and social welfare.
- Social and economic structures should be reformed to enhance justice and equity, and make the poor inclusive partners in the use of the common goods of the nation.
- Nigerian citizens, the rich, politicians, the clergy and pastors should reform their lifestyle to make the poor less dependent on palliatives and charity.
- Palliatives to the poor by governments, NGOs, Religious bodies and rich individuals should serve only as short-term solution.
- Education on social justice should form an integral part of the school curriculum of all levels from primary to tertiary institutions.
- All levels of Nigerian governments should sponsor and prioritise farming, while Nigerians should revolutionise agriculture.

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