



Poverty, Wealth and Social Justice in Africa

by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

This article examines from an African Christian viewpoint, the interface between wealth and poverty on one hand and issues of the church and social justice on the other. Christian presence in Africa has increased tremendously since the middle of the 20th century. The result of this growth in Christianity over the years is that the majority of Christians in the world are now found living

in contexts of poverty, although it must be admitted, they do not all share in personal poverty (Bediako 1995:128). This makes mainstreaming discussions on social justice in relation to the work of the church in Africa imperative. The reason is because significant numbers of those who profess Christianity in Africa live within conditions of political uncertainty, internecine ethnic conflicts,

social and cultural abuses, deprivation, marginalization and general underdevelopment.

The essay looks at the meanings of wealth and poverty, select significant causes of poverty, and the responses of the church in Africa to life-negating situations arising from the unfair distribution of wealth. Conditions of poverty and wealth in any society have implications for social justice, which remains a major concern of the gospel. Social justice, in this context, refers generally to situations in which the resources of communities and states, legal systems and power structures in all their forms, are consciously and systematically deployed for the benefit of all members of the community without discrimination. The idea is to ensure fairness and the protection of fundamental human rights. This means social injustice exists when there are conditions that are considered to be below acceptable standards or expectations as far as human welfare is concerned. Social injustice amounts to a state of being inferior in quality or insufficient and being denied access to those material things that ensure basic human survival and justice for all.

Colonialism, corruption, unfair international trade practices, and the processes of globalization have conspired in perpetuating poverty in Africa in the midst of her enormous material and immaterial wealth. However, certain aspects of the religious cultures of various African societies, environmental degradation, corruption and the wrong uses of political power are to various degrees also implicated in the

entrenchment of poverty and the denial of social justice to people. In recent times, certain teachings of Christian new movements in Africa, such as the prosperity gospel of the new Pentecostals, have also tended to skew the message of the gospel in favor of the rich, famous and powerful of society. The message of prosperity within contemporary Pentecostalism, for instance, has often treated poverty as arising out of the curse of non-payment of tithes and offerings, a teaching which leaves the materially poor constantly wondering whether they still matter in God's economy as revealed in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mindful of the fact that issues of social justice are not marginal to Old Testament prophecy and the ministry of Jesus Christ, this essay proceeds on the premise that in Christian teaching, the church is called into being to ensure that the world is a fair and just place. It is not simply a political, but also an important religious obligation to ensure that there is enough to eat, that there is justice especially for the poor and marginalized, and that all persons are treated with dignity as God's people and created in his image. As an extension of the continuing work of God in creation, the church is mandated not only to get directly involved in the provision of appropriate material interventions in people's lives as needed, but she is also required to use her prophetic voice to challenge conditions of systemic poverty caused by the abuse of power and misuse of resources that lead to social injustices in Africa. Placing the issues of poverty and wealth on

the agenda of the church in Africa must therefore be seen as a logical consequence of the growth in Christian presence on the continent. This is because for the poor, faith could be the foundation of their sense of community, and the basis of their hope, especially in African countries where religion is often a strategy for survival (Belshaw, Calderisi, and Sugden 2001: 3).

Wealth, Poverty and Religion

Wealth refers to conditions of material abundance and the ability to fend for oneself and community without unnecessary difficulty and hassle. In that sense wealth is the opposite of poverty. In material terms a person or community is described as poor when due to lack of money, resources or support, its members live in situations of systemic need, hunger and deprivation. Those who lack the basic needs of humankind, that is, adequate food, clothing and shelter, and who have no legitimate means of securing such necessities of life, could be described as being materially poor.

In traditional African societies wealth was related to the ownership of farmland, domestic animals, or even slaves. In the colonial era, African economies became dependent on such cash crops as Cocoa and mineral wealth including gold, diamonds and bauxite. These were exported for foreign exchange but in large parts of Africa such natural resources have been over-exploited leading to environmental degradation such as pollution of rivers and the desertification of arable lands. Unfor-

tunately the resources accruing from this exploitation of natural resources in Africa have also been misused by political authorities to the disadvantage of the citizenry. The processes of globalization means Africa has had to join modern economies in which wealth is usually conceived of in terms of money, investments and properties that generate considerable returns. Situations of wealth and poverty could be relative because they depend on a number of factors including cultural values, social standing, and the standards of living in particular societies.

Wealth, which basically implies possessing more than many others, can lead to individualism and the blind pursuit of selfish interests at the expense of those others. To ensure equity, land in particular which enabled people to eke out a living was not supposed to be sold for money in traditional African society. It belonged to the ancestors who as its custodians were keen to ensure that those with large swathes of it did not deny the poor access to land for economic survival. Modern economies and urbanization have not done much to help such African communal values that enabled people to care for each other. This has heightened and aggravated poverty and deprivation on the continent. The misuse of the wealth of the various countries by their leaders has only worsened the situation leading to aggression and conflict in Africa such as we find in the oil rich regions of Nigeria. The faces of poverty as encountered in Africa have come to include hunger, disease, and the development of conditions of squalor

that lead to dehumanization and social injustice (Adeyemo 2001: 33). In the context of religion, it is generally held that the idolization and inappropriate uses of wealth could lead to attitudes and lifestyles that may be at odds with genuine spirituality.

Thus conditions of wealth and poverty may have spiritual connotations as we learn from the Beatitude 'blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.' Even in traditional African societies, wealth is not always conceived of in material terms. It encapsulates good health, vitality, the power of procreation and communal well being. A wealthy individual who does not pursue communal interests is considered a worthless person and such people are not even 'beatified' as ancestors when they pass away. In contradistinction to this state of affairs, we live today in a world in which the rich are celebrated for their individual wealth because it brings them to public attention and gives them access to that which may be denied to the materially poor. With the breakdown of traditional communal systems of care, respect for ancestral values regarding the use of natural resources and in the modern context, disregard for fundamental human rights, wealth in Africa has led to the abuse of power and corruption, particularly in politics.

Material poverty also has a way of perpetuating itself in ways that lead to emotional and spiritual poverty. This is because the stresses and hardships that material poverty brings is what leads people to channel their energies into crime and emotionally disturbing

behavior such as drugs and prostitution. In Africa, the factors contributing to poverty would include: rapid population growths and high levels of spatial mobility and dislocation. All these have taken place within contexts of economic stagnation, recurrent political crises, spiraling debt burdens and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (Oppong 1997: 158). Poverty also accounts for the prevalence of the HIV AIDS pandemic and such infectious diseases as tuberculosis. The emotional and spiritual types of poverty however, do not affect only the materially poor. The rich may also, as a result of other problems in life, dissipate their wealth in abusing alcohol, drugs and other forms of immorality that creates disconnections between a person and the spiritual anchor of his or her life. It is to those people that religion often addresses its message by inviting them to come for fulfillment (cf. Isaiah 55: 1ff.).

Africa: the Christian and Socio-economic Contexts

The fact of Christian growth amidst the persistence of poverty in Africa is what has led international non-confessional bodies like the World Bank to collaborate with churches on the continent in articulating responses to poverty and the use of wealth in ensuring social justice. In the foreword to one of the publications resulting from these efforts James D. Wolfensohn then President of the World Bank and George Carey the then Archbishop of Canterbury acknowledged the common ground between faith and development because

“in most developing countries, religious leaders are close to the poor and among their most trusted representatives”, and that “spiritual ties are often the strongest in societies otherwise rent by ethnic discrimination, conflict over resources, and violence” (Wolfensohn and Carey 2001: vii).

The increasing pauperization of the human person and society constitutes the biggest challenge not just to the agenda of African traditional and economic communities but also to the mission of the church on the continent. The failure of political leadership and economic systems to deliver the expected relief from material poverty and ensure social injustice means that increasingly, people look to religious leadership in Africa for a sense of purpose and direction. In this vein it must be noted that poverty poses a significant challenge to Christian affirmation, fidelity, and stewardship in Africa and as Ogbu Kalu of Nigeria notes, poverty and its alleviation may become core factors in the future of Christianity in Africa (Kalu 2008: 58).

In Zimbabwe for example the African independent churches have led the way in the reclamation of devastated land through a program of tree-planting. These African churches have developed a remarkable prophetic earth-keeping ministry that is helping Zimbabwean society recover for the purposes of agricultural land that has been over-exploited. Their efforts have been described as an “environmental ministry” that relates directly to African Christian peasant perceptions and experience of ecological deterioration such as deforestation, water pollution,

drought, and depleted wildlife resources (Daneel 2007: 47). Unfortunately there have also been great failures in love on the part of the church in certain parts of the continent, especially Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi and Rwanda where the proverbial African traditional sense of community and care for neighbors broke down and church buildings became locations of ethnic cleansing instead of places of refuge and protection for those under attack.

African Indigenous Perspectives of Wealth and Poverty

There are a number of reasons why poverty is prevalent in non-Western contexts like Africa. First, in Africa, poverty is as much a cultural fact as it is an economic one and so its meaning is embedded in the language and culture of the people (Kalu 2008: 59). Kalu suggests that a collection of the vocabulary around a certain subject matter—in this case poverty—“will enable a reconstruction of the social systems that communities employ in negotiating the continuities amidst the invasion of change agents” (Kalu 2008: 60). How this cultural understanding works in practice deserves some attention. Among the Igbo of southern Nigeria for example, Kalu explains, a persistent lack of material things is *ubiam*. It is used in situations where an individual does not produce enough to exchange for what he or she lacks. A more sustained or structural form of deprivation is expressed as *ogbenye* and implies that a person is so poor that he

or she cannot afford daily bread. But it has other implications besides being a description for abject poverty. *Ogbenye* is also used when an individual lacks kinship support, relations, family network, and social security. This makes the presence of kinship and community networks such an important part in the understanding of wealth, the elimination of poverty and the institutionalization of social justice. In the words of Kalu: "Poverty is a combination of the lack of material things, knowledge, skill, dignity, sense of well-being, political voice, and the social support system of family. ...A person is not regarded as poor as long as the kinship system with its coterie of extended family remains functional" (Kalu 2008: 62, 63).

Second, although poverty could also result from natural catastrophes outside human control, it is fundamentally a matter of distribution of the adequate provision that has always been there (Hughes 2008: 12). Floods, droughts, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions could all get out of control and bring in their wake poverty, epidemics and deprivation. These natural catastrophes may be understood to be caused or aggravated by human exploitation of the environment. This has led to conflicts over land leading to ethnic cleansing with its attendant dissipation of energies and material resources that has created refugee camps around the globe. In traditional Africa, there is not such a wide distinction between natural and supernatural causes of calamity. The environment, for example, is seen as being enchanted with the presence of the supernatural. Natural and eco-

logical disasters may therefore be attributed to breaches of the moral code of the ancestors such as the shedding of innocent blood in conflict situations. As a result of this cosmological idea the earth-keeping movement has built into its environmental recovery program a process of confession of ecological sins as part of Eucharistic celebrations. Thus part of the prayer said during tree-planting states: "Let us make an oath today that we will care for God's creation; so that he will grant us rain. An oath, made not in jest, but with all our hearts; admitting our guilt, appeasing the aggrieved spirit by offering our trees in all earnest; to clothe the barren land" (Daneel 2007: 54).

Third, in spite of the strong sense of community part of the root of poverty in Africa lies in certain socio-cultural practices which have survived colonialism, the forces of modernity and the process of globalization. Although the sacred laws governing the enchanted environment play a role in preservation, they could at the same time hamper the productive uses of land because sometimes the rules could be so rigid that they prevent people from working on the land even for productive purposes. The treatment of women through religious and cultural taboos is another source of impoverishment in Africa. Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye has pointed out for example that African women are impoverished through powerlessness and the inability to influence the decisions that conditions one's life (Oduyoye 2002: 60-61). Widowhood rites, for instance, can be very dehumanizing in African

societies leading in some cases to long term emotional scars and material deprivation. The threat to a widow is the tendency to treat her as if she was the cause of her husband's death through witchcraft. Elom Dovlo explains how witchcraft and poverty may be related by noting that powers attributed to witches include the ability to inflict material loss through fire, theft, crop fail-

ure, or poor spending. Witches are also believed to cause sterility, impotence or diseases such as leprosy. They are held responsible for addictions such as drunkenness, for poor performance by school children, or for insanity, death, and other misfortune (Dovlo 2007:68).

Unfortunate as the phenomenon is, far more women are also accused of witchcraft than men and widows in



particular are treated as outcasts based on accusations that they kill their husbands for their wealth. When that happens, widows are maltreated and deprived of any share in the estate of their deceased husbands. If a widow is not fortunate enough to have her own biological children to take care of her, she could be consigned to serious poverty and denied social justice. Other cultural practices that contribute to poverty in traditional society include domestic slavery which arose from ethnic wars, and pawning. Domestic slavery conferred stigma that stuck through generations. The systems of domestic slavery have been outlawed in Africa and yet even today those perceived to be of slave ancestry are stigmatized in families and denied access to resources. The *Osu* caste system of the Igbo of Nigeria and the *Trokosi* practiced among the Ewe of Ghana are traditional shrine slavery systems that kept people away from society and deprived them of the benefits of formal education, social integration and the opportunity to live lives as full human beings.

Divine Rule, Human Rule, and a World of Need

The power that causes or prevents poverty is human power, Dewi Hughes notes in his book, *Power and Poverty*. In his words: "The vast number of human beings in our day who suffer because of poverty is overwhelmingly the result of the ungodly use of power by other human beings. Among those who use power to the detriment of others, rulers are the most culpable"

(Hughes 2008:12). The sub-title of Hughes' work, *Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need*, is most instructive. In the Christian context, there is peace and contentment, when human will and power are subjected to God's rule and used in the service of others. In both the Christian and traditional African cultures when human will and greed are elevated above divine will, there is poverty, disenchantment, exclusion and marginalization. The result of such human greed on the people of Africa is summed up by Nobel Laureate for Literature, Wole Soyinka as he speaks of his native Nigeria: "The health services of that nation are nonexistent; mothers die in childbirth for lack of the most basic drugs and a hygienic environment for labor. Infant mortality has reached epidemic proportions. The simplest, easily curable diseases, worsens for lack of treatment and kills" (Soyinka 1996: 123). The accomplices to the crime of the raping of the resources of Africa are Western nations that create secret bank accounting systems that enable the leadership to stash away cash in anonymous foreign accounts. In this vein, one World Bank report states as follows:

The extent of corruption is largely determined by the example set by a country's leadership. And once bad habits have become entrenched, they are hard to undo. Unfortunately foreign aid has greatly expanded the opportunities for malfeasance exacerbated by the venality of many foreign contractors and suppliers. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been si-

phoned off to private bank accounts outside Africa. The cost is not just the waste of funds, but also more seriously the profound demoralization of society at large (Geschiere, Meyer and Pels, 2008: 33).

Fifth, there are also those who are poor on account of various personal disabilities such as ill health and old age. The HIV AIDS pandemic, for example, has rendered many people poor because of lack of access to health care, stigmatization and marginalization by society. Thus if wealth brings power and influence, poverty is alienating, demeaning and dehumanizing and therefore an issue for social justice. HIV and AIDS Commissions in several African countries have recognized the important roles that the churches play in the lives of people. Thus in Ghana and Nigeria for example, churches have encouraged to undertake aggressive HIV and AIDS educational programs with the assistance of resources from the World Council of Churches in order to help stem the impact of the pandemic in societies.

We have noted that situations of wealth and poverty in relation to social justice are issues that concern religion. In the conversation between God and Abraham on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God tells Abraham that 'the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great' (Genesis 18: 20). What is meant here is the cry for justice of the victims of those wicked cities and presumably, their rulers. Thus as Hughes points out, it is right that Sodom and Gomorrah have been held up as su-

preme examples of moral putrefaction, "but it is the cry of those poor people who were being oppressed and exploited so that others could indulge their lusts that was God's priority" (Hughes 2008: 37). The point is that God's priority was to help those who were crying for help within the context of the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the biblical and Christian contexts wealth is expected to be shared or used in the service of others, especially those in need such as the Samaritan who fell among robbers in the Gospel narrative.

In Jesus Christ, God simply gave his best to the world and right from the stories of Abraham through the parables of giving that Jesus narrated, divine rule is seen at its best when those who believe in Jesus Christ and his mission of care for the poor emulate his example by doing something about the poverty and deprivation around them. Jesus also pursued social justice for the marginalized such as for the woman with an eighteen year old hunchback who was healed on the Sabbath but whose healing is challenged by the synagogue rulers on account of the fact that it took place on a sacred day. There was another woman with a twelve-year old hemorrhage who was excluded from community on the basis of a menstrual condition that rendered her ritually impure. The point is that in the Christian context, the revelation of the power of God, which brings justice and the elimination of poverty in its wake, reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus touched the untouchable, drove out unclean spirits, fed the hun-

gry and restored those marginalized by culture and tradition into society as full members.

African indigenous knowledge and philosophical thought systems demonstrate great awareness in responding to modern social problems such as poverty. This is where the church in Africa needs to take a cue from the society in which it exists to provide social safety networks for her people. In dealing with the issues of social justice, for example, the sacredness of human life and a sense of community, that is, the importance of the 'other' are central. Julius Nyerere, the post-independent leader of the East African country of Tanzania is quoted to have argued that "in African primal culture, 'nobody starved, either for food, or human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member'" (Kalu 2008: 56). Wealth is therefore seen in terms of fulfilling one's social, moral, and biological obligations (Appiah-Kubi 1983: 261). Thus although African social thought recognizes the value of individuality it makes the interest of the community the focus of individual actions (Gyekye 2004: 56; Magesa 1997: 65; Mbiti 1989: 2).

Wealth, Poverty, and the Global World Order

The conquest of weak nations through slavery, colonialism and continuing economic exploitation through unfair trade practices has in certain respects, turned globalization into a curse rather than the blessing of the nations. Thus in the

non-Western world the process of globalization has become a major cause of poverty and social injustice. Daniel Carroll, writing on the theme "The Challenge of Economic Globalization for Theology", draws attention to the need for wealthy nations to respond to the cries of the poor ones:

There is a need to see and move close to that greater part of the world's population, its unfortunate masses, as human beings and as theologians. Their plight prods us to seek how globalization might acquire a kinder face as well as to expose its capacity for evil; they remind us that globalization is a finite creation by fallen creatures in a fallen world and that our ultimate hope lies beyond and above this economic system, in the kingdom of God's Son (Carroll 2006: 11).

We live in an integrated world in which projects, transactions, and economies are no longer bound tightly to national boundaries. For those in non-Western contexts these changes in economic arrangements usually under the orders of the Breton Woods institutions have led to socio-economic dislocations and the pauperization of the masses. In his address to the Board of Governors of the World Bank in 1972, Robert McNamara the Bank's President, is quoted as saying that governments exist to promote the welfare of all their citizens and not just that of a privileged few. He called on governments of developing countries then to reorient their development priorities in order to directly attack the personal poverty of

the most deprived 40% of their populations. Governments of developing nations, McNamara suggested, must give greater priority to establishing growth targets in terms of essential human needs. Some of which needs he named as: nutrition, housing, health, literacy and employment. This must be done, he notes, "even if it be at the cost of reduction in the pace of advance in certain narrow and highly privileged sectors whose benefits accrue to the few" (Geschiere, Meyer and Pels 2008: 27).

Robert McNamara did not place the onus to mitigate the effects of poverty entirely on the poor and underdeveloped nations whose peoples bear the brunt of it. He also called on the political leadership of the wealthy world to match the resolve and courage of developing nations "with a greater commitment to equity between their own affluent nations and the grossly disadvantaged developing nations" (Geschiere, Meyer, Pels 2008: 27). "All the great religions" McNamara noted, "teach the value of human life" and so he suggested that "we now have the power to create a decent life for all men and women" (Geschiere, Meyer and Pels 2008: 28).

In response, there has been a massive transition by the African churches from just building religious organizations to providing refuge for witches banished from their traditional communities, HIV AIDS counseling centers, the provision of water wells in deprived communities and other such schemes that are helping to mitigate the effects of poverty. The causes of poverty and access to wealth could be explained in

diverse ways but it is striking that even the President of the World Bank, which to all intents and purposes is a secular organization, did recognize the importance of religion in the response to the effects of poverty. Christian organizations such as World Vision have stepped in to alleviate poverty in many parts of the world, especially those parts torn apart by war and strife.

Wealth, Poverty, and the Prosperity Gospel

The historic Christian churches have often been accused of preaching a gospel that equates poverty with spirituality. In response, contemporary Pentecostalism now preaches material success with health in particular as a sign of God's blessing and favor. This is what has come to be known as the Prosperity Gospel. According to this Prosperity Gospel also known as the Faith Gospel, "God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty" (Gifford 1998: 39). Some of its proponents teach that "no believer should be ill, no one should die of sickness, and anyone who drives a mere Chevrolet rather than a luxury car has not understood the gospel" (Gifford 1993: 147). Although its origins are thought to lie within North American televangelism, the prosperity gospel has also gained currency in the non-Western world where biting poverty has become endemic. For many who have embraced this new type of Pentecostalism, it understandably offers the

best hope of rising from the ash heaps of poverty even though in most cases, the promised paradise through “name-it-and-claim-it” prayers, positive confessions, and the principles of “sowing” tithes and offerings and reaping rewards in material goods remain an illusion.

The interpretation of one Ghanaian charismatic pastor of Genesis 1: 29-30 is that “God never planned for [us] or any of mankind to have sickness, fear inferiority, defeat, or failure” (Duncan-Williams 1990: 102). Rather “the Word of God is a tree of life that will produce riches, honor, promotion and joy” (Duncan-Williams 1990: 58). The world operates on certain spiritual laws, according to these teachings and God, it is taught, has given us the choice “to implement the laws of poverty, or to implement God’s spiritual laws of prosperity” (Duncan-Williams 1990: 72). In this new type of Christianity, “believers no longer retreat among themselves in order to maintain the purity of their beliefs and their moral rigor... Salvation is now resolutely this-worldly and the evidence of new life has become as much material as spiritual. Moral rigor and strict personal ethics have not been superseded, yet the notion of transformation has been broadened to include the possibility of material change in everyday life” (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001 :7).

There is nothing wrong with having material things in this life. The Prosperity Gospel has partly caught on in African countries such as Africa because part of its worldview resonates with the understandings of religion in these con-

texts as a survival strategy. Indigenous African religion, as Blakely (1994: 17) and others point out, is often a means to an end. Religion aims at health, fertility, rain, protection, or relational harmony. There are a number of reasons why prosperity preaching may be problematic and two will suffice for our purposes. First, it leads to the exploitation of the poor by giving them the impression that they do not receive from God because they do not give enough. Second, the focus of the neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel gives it a materialistic orientation to life which almost all religions caution, could turn human hearts away from that which is ultimate to them in terms of reality. It is a message that further marginalizes the poor, the vulnerable, and the weak because their deprived status does not reflect the material orientation of the message preached. This means the Prosperity Gospel demonizes the poor and turns poverty into a curse rather than see it as resulting from an unjust economic, social, political, and moral order.

Wealth, Poverty, Immigration, and Justice

The impoverishment of society, we have seen results not simply from lack of natural resources and a so called inability to claim prosperity but through socio-economic and political systems and arrangements that simply do not favor the weak. In much of Africa, poverty in the rural areas has led to mass migration to the urban areas and these movements have put further pressure on socio-economic resources leading to

increasing figures in crime and prostitution. Women and children suffer a great deal in the processes of urbanization as they are forced to ask young children to do petty trading at traffic crossings in urban Africa.

Wealth, poverty, religion, and immigration are also connected at the international level. Intolerable levels of poverty in the Third World have led to mass migrations of young people to Europe and North America in search of greener pastures and opportunities. Nearly impossible visa processes also mean that a majority of economic migrants are undocumented. The implications of these are that first, many of them spend their time undertaking menial jobs with very little remuneration from employers who exploit their undocumented status; second, illegal immigrants have no access to healthcare; and thirdly, they cannot seek justice for their conditions.

New religious communities have been formed in those contexts to help people deal with the problems. Compared to the kinds of private religious practices that North Americans are familiar with, non-Western religion is group-related and less individualistic. The lives of immigrant communities are full of uncertainties but community support through the churches helps them keep hope alive. In the precarious immigration environment in the Western world religion is for many immigrants an outstanding way of coping with difficult surroundings (Asamoah-Gyadu 2008: 63-64).

Conclusion

That God cares about poor people is a challenge that must be faced by Christian witness in Africa today. In spite of what contemporary prosperity preachers think, for example, Christianity does not make material wealth the ultimate aim of life. Indeed, to gain wealth wrongly including gaining it at the expense of the poor and weak is considered a grievous sin against God. The Bible further condemns irresponsibility in the use of wealth that shows itself in profligate expenditure and lack of concern for the plight of others. Thus in the context of both traditional religion and Christianity, the denial of social justice and the unwillingness to do anything about it are both unacceptable. Barclays concludes in *Ethics in a Permissive Society* that “no person or nation has a right to live in luxury while others live in poverty...The simple fact, platitudinous as it may sound, is that no man has the right to live like the rich man while Lazarus is at his gates” (Barclay 1971: 158).

The calling of the church in Africa as elsewhere is to be an instrument of intervention in lives that are all created in the image of the God who is righteous and who seeks social justice for all people. At the heart of poverty, we have noted, is the ethics of power—which may be evident in the wrong applications of culture, economic systems or the pursuit of materialism. Materialism, that is making pursuit of material things an end in itself, places things above the welfare of people—and so when those who have power over oth-

ers use it to benefit themselves, poverty results. The role of the church in these circumstances would be “to seek, judge, decipher the causes that engen-

der suffering, seek their cultural roots and tentacles in the ideology of power and act in solidarity, protest and denunciation” (Kalu 2000:49).

References

Adeyemo, Tokumbo, “Africa’s Enigma”, in Deryke Belshaw, Robert Calderisi, and Chris Sugden, *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa*, Oxford: Regnum, 2001.

Appiah-Kubi, Kofi, “The Akan Concept of Human Personality”, in E.A. Ade Adegbola (ed.). *Traditional Religion in West Africa*. Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1983: 259-264.

Asamoah-Gyadu, Kwabena, “Community” in David Morgan (ed.), *Religion, Media and Culture*, New York and London: Routledge, 2008: 56-68.

Belshaw, Deryke, Robert Calderisi, and Chris Sugden, *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa*, Oxford: Regnum, 2001.

Blakely, Thomas D., Walter E.A. van Beek and Dennis L. Thomson, *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, London: James Currey; New Haven: Heinemann, 1994.

Blomberg, Craig, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, Leicester: Apollos, 1999.

Boahen, Adu A, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Carroll, Daniel M, “The Challenge of Economic Globalization for Theology: From Latin America to a Hermeneutics of Responsibility”, in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (ed.), *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006: 199-230.

Corten, André and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, 2001.

Daneel, Marthinus L., *All Things Hold Together: Holistic Theologies at the African Grassroots*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2007.

Dovlo, Elom, “Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana” in Gerrie ter Haar ed., *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007.

Freedman, David N and Michael J. McClymond (ed.), *The Rivers of Paradise: Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus and Muhammad*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001.

Geschiere, Peter, Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (ed.), *Modernity in Africa*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey; and Pretoria: UNISA, 2008.

- Gifford, Paul, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Gifford, Paul, *African Christianity, Its Public Role*, London: Hurst and Company, 1998.
- Gyekye, Kwame, *The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience*, Legon, Ghana: Sankofa Publishing, 2004.
- Hackett, Rosalind I.J., "Religious Freedom and Religious Conflict in Africa", in Mark Silk (ed.), *Religion in the International News Agenda*, Hartford, CT: Trinity College, 2000: 102-114.
- Hughes, Dewi, *Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need*, Nottingham, UK: Intervarsity, 2008.
- Kalu, Ogbu U, *Power, Poverty and Prayer*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Kalu, Ogbu U, *Clio in a Sacred Garb: Essays on Christian Presence and African Responses 1900-2000*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008.
- Kirk, Andrew, *What is Mission: Theological Explorations*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999.
- Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.
- Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second Edition, London: Heinemann, 1989.
- Oduyoye, Mercy, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*. Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2002.
- Opong, Christine, "African Family Systems and Socio-Economic Crisis" in Aderanti Adepoju (ed.), *Family, Population and Development in Africa*, London and NJ: Zed Books, 1997: 158-182.
- Perbi, Akosua, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to the 19th Century*, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004.
- Pobee, John S., *Who are the Poor? The Beatitudes as a Call to Community*, Geneva: WCC, 1987.
- Schwarz, Hans, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Soyinka, Wole, *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.