

## Africa and the Africans' Care for the Poor and Needy in the New Testament: Good News for Contemporary Africa and the Africans?

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### Abstract

This article entails a critical investigation of the attitude of Africa and Africans to the poor and needy in the New Testament and the contemporary attitude of Africa and Africans (especially leaders) to the poor and needy. The paper glanced through the scripture for what it says of the poor and needy and the various terms used for the poor and needy. It also examines the terminologies used for Africa and Africans in the New Testament and critically discusses Africa and Africans care for the poor and needy in the New Testament. The article further looked into African core values as it relates to the current attitude of Africa and Africans to the poor and needy. It draws a conclusion that the contemporary attitude is nothing but bad news as against the legacy of Africa and Africans in the New Testament.

**Key words:** Africa; Care; Oppression; Poor; Poverty; New testament

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### INTRODUCTION

The task of finding the attitude of Africa and Africans to the poor and needy in the Biblical scheme and especially in the New Testament is a noble one. The high rate of poverty and distribution of the poor in Africa today is

alarming. One Harber Sabane, an elected mayor of one of Africa's oldest cities of Timbuktu, Mali was quoted to have said some years ago "We are very, very, very poor" (Kunhiyop, 2001). In 2016, the top 10 poorest countries of the world were said to be located in Africa. These include: Malawi, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Niger, Liberia, Madagascar, Congo Democratic Republic, Gambia, Ethiopia and Guinea. No African country is listed among the top ten richest countries of the world which are: Australia, Canada, San Marino, Switzerland, United State of America, Brunei, Norway, Singapore, Luxemburg and Qatar<sup>1</sup>. The question is, is Africa really poor? Africa is rich in natural and human resources. African natural resources include: Crude-oil, Diamond, Gold, Coal, Lime stone, Iron and steel, Tin and Columbite, Timber, Coltan among other valuable natural resources that cannot be found elsewhere in the world and a vast fertile land for agriculture. Igwe (2010, p.13) note that Africa is unarguably one of the most fertile regions of the world and the richest continent on earth in terms of natural resources. Japan, one of the most powerful economies in the world has no raw materials (Igwe, 2010, p.68). What then account for Africa's poverty?

In Africa today, the rich are getting richer while the poor are also getting poorer. The poor are mercilessly marginalized, oppressed, neglected and deprived of the wealth of the continent by the leaders and their cronies. African leaders and their collaborators built and acquire aesthetic properties outside Africa with stolen wealth from Africa living majority of Africans in pains of poverty, malnutrition and the continent undeveloped. For instance in Nigeria as at February 2012, the poverty level was said to have risen to 71.5%. The Statistician General of the Federation, Dr. Yemi Kale lament that it remains a paradox that despite the fact that the Nigerian economy

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.zapmeta.ng/video/?q=world+poorest+ countries+ list Top 10 Poorest countries in the world 2016, Web. 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2016.>

was growing, the proportion of Nigerians living in poverty is increasing every year (Subair, 2012). Most Nigerians who depend largely on their farms for survival are now in Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDPC) across the nation because of the activities of Boko-Haram militants which have been described as ethno-religious crisis fuelled by poverty by a former Federal Road Safety Corps Chief, Osita Chidoka (Ehikioya & Ogundele, 2011). Herdsmen in search of grazing land for their cattle have equally massacre innocent souls and destroy farmlands culminating in shortage of food and increased poverty. Herdsmen have used their private business to displace farmers in their thousands from their farmlands and villages<sup>2</sup>. Such volatile social situations had driven several companies away and may hinder foreign investors. How can we reduce the increase in the number of the poor and poverty in Africa and Nigeria in particular?

In the light of the above, using the descriptive and narrative methodology, this paper examines the attitude of Africa and Africans in their care for the poor and needy in the New Testament and its implications for, or as a recipe for Africa and Africans attitude to the poor and needy in contemporary Africa. The paper brings to lime light the truth that Africa and Africans are not terrible or bad people to be feared or abandoned but are loving, hospitable and caring especially for the poor and needy irrespective of race or colour. The paper suggests that if Africa and Africans cultivate these values today there shall be peace, political stability, and socio-economic development.

## 1. THE POOR IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Let us take a glance into the scriptures to have a proper view of the poor. It looks like the foundation for poverty and the poor began from the book of Genesis. Of creation, everything was adjudged very good. The ground was good and man was to plough it for it to produce for man's survival (Gen. 1:31; 2:15). Things changed as a result of the fall, when God says to man

cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 2:18-19)

Therefore, poverty and the poor entered the world as a result of the curse on man for the sin committed.

The terms used for the "poor" in the scriptures, as shall be seen below, have both spiritual and material meaning. The "poor" in the spiritual perspective represents "the meek in spirit" "the humble or lowly" as contain in Luke 6:20 and James 1:9a. This paper however discusses the poor in the material perspective.

<sup>2</sup> *The Punch*. "7,000 Agatu still displaced, neglected, cries Rep." Monday, May 2, 2016, p.13. See also *The Punch* May 3, 2016.

## 2. THE POOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, there are a number of vocabularies for the concept of the poor or poverty. Together, the words paint the picture of the unfortunate victim of poverty in any society. It is used as 'ānî' (ynI[ ]' ) which means poor, weak, afflicted, and humble. These words having the same meaning includes *Anāh* and 'ānāw (Akao, 2000; Lawrence, 1991). *Anî*' (ynI[ ]' ) which occurs in biblical Hebrew about 76 times as a noun is frequently used in synonymous parallelism with 'ebyôn (Ayāb.a.) ) (needy) or *dāl* (LD:) (poor) and *rush* (vyrE) (poverty) which occurs 61 times, 50 times and 32 times respectively. *Anî*' (ynI[ ]' ) however, differs from the trio in emphasizing some kind of disability or distress (Deut. 24: 14-15 states an example of this emphasis) (Vine et al., 2000). The 'ānî' (ynI[ ]' ) like other terms, in daily life, is socially defenseless and subject to oppression. If wrongly oppressed, they can call on God for defence. This oppression can either be physical or spiritual as in Psalm 22: 24, Exodus 30:15, Ruth 3:10, Proverbs 10:15, Jeremiah 5:4, and a state of sickness as in 2 Samuel 13:4 (Vine et al., 2000). The *dāllim*, from the word *dāl*, (LD:) ) constituted the middle class of Israel- those who were physically deprived; and in the ancient world the majority of people were poor. An associated word is *dāllāh*; (tL;îD:)it occurs about eight times and means poorest (I Kings, 24:14). It emphasizes the social lowliness and poverty of the people whom it describes.

Also related to 'ānî' (ynI[ ]' ) is the word 'anut' (tWni[ / ]' ) which means "affliction" and the word 'Anāwāh', which means "humility, gentleness". 'anut' (tWni[ / ]' ) represents the state of pain and or punishment resulting from affliction (Deut. 16:13), while *Anāwāh* as applied to God, represents His submission to His own nature (Psalm 45:4). In all and among others 'ānî' (ynI[ ]' ) and *dāl*, (LD:) with its related terms, clearly paint the picture of the impoverished state, material lack and low posture of the poor as our concern in this investigation. In most references, the poor includes widows, orphans, aliens, and strangers because they all depend most times on others for their livelihood (Ex. 22:21- 27).

A glance through the Old Testament indicates that God had promised the Israelites prosperity before they went to the Promised Land if they obey (Deut. 15:4). However, because they were rebellious, many poor and needy were in the land. The Pentateuch contains laws concerning the poor. For instance, concerning loans there is a prohibition not to "be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbour's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for this is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep?" (Exo. 22:25-27 see also Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:20). The book

of Exodus warn against being partial (23:3) or impartial (23:6-7) at passing justice for the poor.

The laws of harvest equally required of the Israelites not to reap their fields to its very border nor gather the gleanings after the harvest, they shall leave them for the poor and the strangers (Lev. 23:22). However, farmers could grant gleaning right to someone favoured or to a certain poor as Boaz did to Ruth (Ruth 2:8-9). The laws of the sabbatical year and Jubilee state that the poor and needy be granted relief (Exo. 23:f; Lev. 25:1-7; Deut. 15:1-11).

There was however a change during the Monarchical period, one observes that these laws were deliberately disregarded. The political and economic changes lead to the rise of urban civilization and migration from villages to the urban centers. Kings were amassing wealth and enlisting people in the army. Wealthy landowners also took advantage of the wars and depression to oppress and marginalize the poor. Lands and properties belonging to the poor were seized (Mic. 2:1-3; Ezek. 22:29; Hab.2:5)

We note that the prophets spoke vehemently against the situation. Corrupt judges, priests, prophets, and rulers were condemned (Amos 5:7; Mic. 3:9-11; Is. 5:23; 10:12; Jer. 22:13-17). The story of how Ahab took over Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21 is a good example of injustice and a subjugation of human right perpetrated by the rich against the poor. Traders who exploit their customers were rebuked (Amos 4:1, 8:4-6; Mic.6:10; Is.3:14; Jer. 5:27f, 6:12). This seems to be the focus of the Old Testament. Even in the wisdom literature, Job claimed to have helped the poor and needy (Job. 29:12-20, 19:12). The Proverbs associates poverty with laziness, foolishness and short-sightedness (Pro. 10:4, 11:14, 19:1, 22, 28:6, 21:5) and in the Psalms; the enemies of the poor are the wicked (10:4-7, 35:10, 140:5, 9).

### 3. THE POOR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are three main words in the New Testament used for the poor. The first word for the poor is rendered *ptóchos* (πτωχός) in Greek (Douglas, 1987, p.809). It is an adjective used in broad sense for the poor in the society. It comes from the verb *ptossein*, which means to cower or crouch; and it describes not simply honest poverty, and the struggle of the labouring man to make ends meet; it describes abject poverty, one who has literally nothing and who is in imminent danger of real starvation. The second word for the poor in Greek is *penichros* (πενυχτός). This simply describes the man for whom life and living is a struggle; the man who is the reverse of the man who lives in affluence. It is used for the needy and then poor in the society as in the case of the widow in Luke 21:2-3. The third word is *tapeinos* which literally means "humble, lowly", in the sense of having a low or humble status (Louw & Nida, 1989, p.61). This word is used in

LXX to translate the Hebrew word for "poor," "without possession" (Reinecker, 1980, p.722). Davids however, is of the opinion that the word by itself does not necessarily mean "poor," because it usually means "unimportant" in the social sense as in 2 Corinthians 7:6, 10. But in the context in which it appears in James 1:9a, he believes, its meaning as "poor" is appropriate as it stands in parallel to *plousios* (rich) (James, 2000, p.76). Perhaps the poor in this category were not quite destitute but were very much economically vulnerable and could easily find themselves in the class of those who were really poor through bad harvests, taxes, nonpayment of allowances and wages, increased rents, high cost of living and debts (Bauckham, 1999, p.189).

Scanning through the New Testament, one may say it is the scripture for the poor. Jesus mission statement from the beginning of his earthly ministry in Luke 4:18-19 says:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Throughout the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the poor had a prominent role. He stated clearly that himself was poor, because "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20; Lk. 9:50). In his Sermon on the Mount, he says "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3; Lk. 6:20). At another occasion he commended the poor widow for her generosity over above the scribes who exploited the poor (Mk. 12: 38-44; Lk. 21:1-4). Yet at another instance, he asserts that the poor you will always have with you (Matt. 19:16-21) re-echoing the passage in Deuteronomy 15:11. Jesus teaching gave hope to the poor, show his displeasure over their exploitation and encouraged the "haves" to give to the poor. Jesus emphasized the spirit of giving to the poor in the Parable of the rich Fool (Lk. 12:13-21). He condemned the rich, not totally because of his riches but because of his failure to assist the poor (Matt. 19:23; Lk. 16:19-29). He equally welcomed Zacheus decision to sell his possessions and give some to the poor and also pay restitutions (Lk. 19:1-10). His Parable of the Great Banquet is an indication that the poor is significant (Matt. 22:2-14; Lk. 14:16-24).

Jesus equally demonstrated compassion and care for the poor in his earthly ministry. He fed the crowd during his outreach ministry (Matt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:32-44; Lk.9: 10-17). He was moved because the crowd had nothing to eat. He showed compassion when he met the urgent need of a widow. He raised the Widows' son at Nain (Lk. 7:11-17). He pointed out that caring for the poor, needy homeless and the likes is tantamount to a care for him and God.



The early church continued in the ministry and pattern of Jesus in caring for the poor. The book of Acts demonstrates that the poor and needy must be cared for (Acts 2:44-46, 4:34-35). In Acts 6:1-6, based on the advice of the disciples, the Church chose seven men to take care of the needy. More so, in the Epistles, the churches were encouraged to be involved in the collection and sharing of gifts to the poor (Rom. 12:13; 15:2; 1 Cor. 16:1-3, 2 Cor. 8:4, 9:1-2; Gal. 6:10). Paul commended the Church of the Philippians for their generous gifts (4:15-16). James in his epistle condemned the unjust treatment of the poor by the rich in the church and the society (Jas. 1:9-11, 2:1-12, 5:1-6). The above submissions suggest that the scripture has no support for the neglect of the poor and needy either in the church or in the society. This brings us to the identity of Africa and Africans in the New Testament.

#### 4. AFRICA AND AFRICANS' IDENTITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The term "Africa" or "Africans" does not appear in the first and second Testaments of the Christian Bible. Cain shows that the massive land called "Africa" by everyone today has not always been called so. The oldest and most indigenous name for the massive land is "Akebu-land" or "Garden of Eden" meaning "mother of mankind" (Cain, 1982, p.102). Cain (1982) note that the Ethiopians, Carthaginians, Moors, Nubians and Namibians, used this name. The ancient Greeks were said to have used the word "Ethiopia" to refer to the entire continent of Africa and "Libya" to refer to a limited part of the northern part of Africa (Adamo, 2006, p.21). Adamo echoed William Benton that the Greek word for Africa is "Aphrike" meaning "Sunny" or "without cold" and was chiefly applied to the northern coast of the African Continent. The Latin equivalent of Africa is "Apica" which also mean "Sunny" (Adamo, 2006). The concern for the search for the presence of Africa and Africans in particular in the bible is fairly recent. Over the years many Eurocentric biblical scholars have the inclination to "de Africanize" the *Bible*. The issue is that most translations of the *Bible*, *Bible* dictionaries and encyclopedia, Bible commentaries and the likes were done by western scholars. Walter however says "we affirm the truth that certain Biblical persons are black in the absence of proof to the contrary. The ground on which such presumptions may take place is founded upon the pervasive presence of so many explicitly black people who inhabited the world of the *Bible*" (Walter, 1990, p.4). We may state categorically that the presence of Africans in the *Bible* is no longer a subject of debate. The New Testament parades the significant roles Africa and Africans played in caring for the poor and needy among other important roles played. At this juncture, let us succinctly examine the major terms used to identify Africa and Africans in the New Testament. Such terms include:

Egypt, Ethiopia, Cyrene, Niger, Alexandria, and Libya among others.

**Egypt:** The term Egypt along with the cognates appears thirty three (33) times in the New Testament. No nation or continent is so mentioned like that of this African nation. The Greeks, Romans and Jews of the New Testament times had contact with Egypt especially the then great city: Alexandria, which was named after Alexander the Great, the son of Philip of Macedon. In fact, from the records of the early childhood of Jesus Christ, Egypt provided asylum for the child and his parents until the death of King Herod (Mtt. 2:13-21).

**Ethiopia:** This term and its cognates were mentioned twice in the New Testament. Philip on his way between Jerusalem and Gaza met an Ethiopian Eunuch who was in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopian (Acts 2:27). Adamo says that, scholars consensus is that the word "Ethiopia" originated from the Greeks to designate African people both at home and abroad in terms of colour of their skins (Adamo, 2006, p.23). This term which the Greek geographers generally used to refer to the black people was said to have been derived from the words "burnt" and "face". Thus, Ethiopia literally means "burnt-faced person" of Africa and African Diaspora. The Greeks probably coined this term to describe the Africans based on their "environmental theory" that the dark colour of their skins and the coiled or woolly hair of the Africans heads were subjected to the intense heat of the southern sun.

**Cyrene:** The term "Cyrene" occurs seven (7) times in the New Testament. This was the principal city of the ancient district of North Africa popularly known as Cyrenaica. The city was also known as Pentapolis. It eventually became the capital city of Cyrenaica where Libya is presently located. Adamo reference Herodotus IV who says that the city was founded in 630BCE by Dorian Greeks from the Island of Thera and Crete. The land was very fertile especially for the production of Silphium (a plant in high demand for spices and medicine) on which their wealth depended. In fact, the plant became a badge for their coins. The city was highly prosperous but the prosperity disappeared because of too much exploitation of the land. The supply of Silphium finally came to an end during the time of Emperor Nero (Ibid., p.31).

Prominent Cyrenians mentioned in the New Testament are: Simon who helped Jesus carry the cross to Golgotha (Matt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21) and Lucius who was one of the Prophets and teachers of the primitive church in Antioch (Acts 13:1). Other Cyrenians were said to be present in Jerusalem at the Pentecost (Acts 2:10). There is the possibility that Cyrenians were members of the synagogue of the Freedman when opposition arose against Stephen (Acts 6:9). After the church scattered because of the persecution, some men from Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks about the good news of Jesus

Christ and the hand of God was with them (Acts 11:20-21). This is an indication that they had believed in Jesus before preaching about him.

Various Temples were said to have been found at Cyrene around the nineteenth century; first by the Americans (1910-1911) and later by the Italians just before the Second World War (Ibid., p.32). Buttrick writes that the Temple of Apollo which was found to have been rebuilt several times was later transformed into the Christian church in the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) century CE. Other Temples and buildings were also found which were designated for the cult of Roman emperors; such as Baths and a Theater (Buttrick, 1986, p.754).

**Niger:** This term appears only once in the New Testament in Acts 13:1. Adamo cites Joseph .H. Thayer who writes that the word Niger is a Latin word meaning "black" (Adamo, 2006, p.12). Of the five prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch being mentioned here, only the nativity of two of them (Simeon called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene) were mentioned. This might not be unconnected with their colour and identity as Africans which seem significant to the author of the book of Acts. More so, Copher asserts that the New Testament uses the word Ethiopia and Niger as the equivalent of the Old Testament word Cush which means black (Copher, 1997, p.98).

The Ethiopians were not the only people with thick lips, tightly coiled hair, flat noses which the Romans in their experience describe as Niger. Even the Roman literature describes swarthy, or dark skinned people as Niger asides other terms employed. In Franks' view, the people in this category are Africans including the Egyptians, Libyans, Moors, some Indians and certain persons of mixed parentage with black and white (Frank, 1970, p.3). The Greek word commonly used to describe the Ethiopians colour in the classical period is said to be melas (melaz) and its compounds. In Latin, the adjective most frequently used for the Ethiopians who are of black skinned is "Niger" as equivalence of Ethiopia (aigioy) (Adamo, 2006). Adamo echoing Frank Snowden posits that the legendary Ethiopian king called Memnon (600 BCE), who fought in the Trojan War at Troy was sometimes referred to as Memnon Aethiops and other times as Memnon Niger (Ibid.).

We must note here that while the Greek word Niger was also represented with the word Niger by the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the American Standard Version, the New International Version and the Jerusalem Bible Version; The Good news Bible, the new American standard version, the Living Bible and the New Living Translation translated it "the black person." Adamo equally observes that the translation of Niger to Niger is a disservice to the black people all over the world. We may say that it is probably part of the plot to render Africa and Africans insignificant in the biblical history (Ibid.).

**Alexandria:** This term appears about four times in the New Testament (Acts 6:9, 18: 24, 27:6 and 28:11). Alexandria was one of the chief cities of Egypt and one of the most significant cities of the ancient world. Alexandria was created by Alexander popularly called "Alexander the great." He invited Jews to come and settle there. It was because of the Jews living in this city that the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek. This is known as the Septuagint (LXX). McCain claim that a tradition states that the translation was done in seventy-two days by seventy- two elders, six from each of the twelve tribes of Judah (McCain, 1996, p.5).

**Libya:** This term appears only once in the New Testament to refer to Africa and Africans. In acts 2:10, Libyans were among those who heard the disciples speak in their own tongue on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. Some among the Libyans may have shared the Pentecost experience with their people back at home. What then can be said of their attitudes to the poor and needy in the New Testament?

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## 5. AFRICA AND AFRICANS CARE FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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We shall at this point examine how Africa and Africans demonstrated their care and loving spirit in assisting the needy and less privileged irrespective of colour and race. It is important to note that the translation of the Old Testament Bible into Greek known as Septuagint (LXX) was on the African soil-Egypt; to meet the needs of over two million Jews living in Alexandria. These Jews who were born and bred outside Palestine could no longer read the Hebrew Bible written in Hebrew language. Ptolemy, Philadelphus II personally initiated and sponsored the translation. If this translation was not done, it would have been almost impossible for these Hellenistic Jews living in Alexandria to be able to read the Torah and the prophets among others so as to perform their religious rites. It is important to note that the land of Africa and its leaders were very receptive to these Jews that they almost forgot Palestine; having being Hellenized under Alexander the great who Asaju says the Egyptians welcomed as their new "Pharaoh" (Asaju, 1999, p.26).

The gospel of Matthew 2: 13-17 presents the account of the escape to Egypt of Joseph, Mary his wife and their baby Jesus. They remained there until the death of Herod. The account suggests a dying need to save the life of the baby from a ruler by name Herod. King Herod ruled as at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. Herod, out of fear, jealousy and anger based on the prophecy that a ruler shall come out of Judah to deliver her people, had wanted to kill the little boy. Out of the continents in the world, they were led to the continent and land that could meet the need of the time. Africa preserved the life of the acclaimed

Saviour of the world. Baby Jesus got asylum on African soil, ate African food, and drank African water among other bliss of the African continent during the period he and his parent sojourn in Africa (Egypt).

We equally read in the second chapter of the gospel of Matthew of the wise men from the east who visited the infant Jesus for the purpose of worshipping him. The record says that they followed the star with their precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Adamo (2006, pp.52-54) argue for the African ancestry of the wise men and their gift. Our interest here is the love they showed to travel that far and not that alone, the care and concern for the need of the infant Jesus Christ. By African tradition, Africans do not make a visit empty handed. If Africans must visit, it must be with the presentation of gifts as a sign of good-will. Among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria for instance, a gift demonstrates love and care for the receiver. Therefore, these African wise men actually demonstrated the inmate Africaness in their action.

In support of Africans' giving spirit is the reference in Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31 to the Queen of the south. This re-echoes the visit of the queen of Sheba to King Solomon in 1 king 10: 1- 13 and II chronicles 4:1-12. Adamo posits that the Queen was from Africa. Our major concern here is the African giving spirit she possessed (Adamo, 2005, pp.94-100). The record says that while going on the visit, she went with a very great caravan, with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold and precious stones (I kings 10:2; II chronicles 9:1). The quantity of gifts suggest it was a well planned visit and not accidental. They were gifts given from the heart and not probably an eye service. Solomon was not poor or probably in need. This is not to say that the gifts were of no use to him. The report further attested to the fact that Africans do not visit without presenting useful gifts. Likewise, at the advent of the Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M) to Nigeria, Africans equally demonstrated this giving spirit. When Tommie Titcombe arrived in Yagbaland, he visited *Ogga* village but decided to settle at *Egbe*, which was the largest town in the then Yagbaland. The people of *Ogga* gave him a young helper named *Osanyingbemi* meaning "the *Osanyin* (Divinity) did well to give this child". The young child was later known as David Adeniyi (de la Haye, 1973, p.21). The fact is that, out of love and care for the poor and needy, the *Ogga* people gave the child to the white missionary to assist him in his daily activities like washing of clothes and utensils, to guide him on the culture and language of the people among other needs. It is suffix to note that this was not a paid service rendered to Tommie Titcombe, though the child may also have derived some benefits from the service.

The historical reliability of the story of Simon of Cyrene in the gospel account has been proved (Kieth, 1980, pp.40-41). Daniel in support of the historicity writes

that "Simon the Cyrene helped Jesus carry the cross. Simon, the man of Cyrene in North Africa." (Daniel, n.d., p.139). According to the gospel narratives, Jesus was carrying his cross to Golgotha the place of his execution when they met Simon on the way and requested of him to help carry the cross. It was not normal for the soldiers to show mercy on a condemned prisoner by forcing another person to help him/her carry the cross. It is probable that the roman executioners prefer to crucify him alive rather than him dead on the way and possibly crucify a dead man on the cross. There is the possibility also that Jesus had been up all night without food and had also been weakened by the cruel beating by the soldiers with a crown of thorns on his head (Matt. 27:29-30; Mark.15:16-19; Luke 22:63-64). Simon may have had the compassionate look on his face for Jesus when he saw how Jesus was treated and this may have attracted the soldiers to him, resulting in the call to help carry the cross. Adamo echoing Venture, gave a picture of the event as:

The centurion jerked his head in the direction of Jesus: "Come carry the cross, he ordered Simon. He (Simon) looked at Jesus lying in the dust, utterly exhausted. He looked defenseless, his hand limp and motionless, his narrow face reddened with blood. Simon saw how his wounds had bled into his sandals... "Where are your disciples? Why don't they carry the cross" shouted Simon to the prisoner. Jesus looked at him, his eyes gentle but filled with pain. He looked pleadingly as if he thirst and was begging for water, at the big man who stood menacingly over him... Simon shuffled forward... he closed his eyes and seized it. As he stood upright, he heard the mobs derision: "There goes a new disciple," they shouted. (Adamo, 2006, p.70)

It is clear from the above view that Simon the Cyrene with the African spirit to help the poor and needy saw a man in excruciating pain of carrying a heavy cross, a dying man in need of help and could not do otherwise than to render the help Jesus seriously needed at the time. This is a show of God's love demonstrated in John 3:16. Of all the Greeks, Romans, and Jews, among others present at the event, only the African man showed love, care and compassion enough to render assistance.

Mention must also be made of Lydia of Philippi (Acts 16:13-15, 40). Adamo carefully argue in favour of Lydias' African nativity (Ibid., pp.101-102). Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. She was converted to Christianity through the message preached by Paul (Acts 16:14-15a). Lydia like most Africans had the grace for hospitality. She demonstrated this grace by sharing her home with others. The truth is that she must have also prepared special African delicacies and may have even given gifts of her purple cloth to her visitors. Paul commended only the Church at Philippi for their generous gift. Perhaps, the presence of Lydia influenced the giving spirit of the Philippians (Phil 4: 15-19). This is a show of the love of God as explained in the words of Jesus "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed



me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me..." (Matt 25:35-36). Adamo posits that this has been the virtue of most Africans, though; they have been robbed and taken advantage of by foreigners and colonial powers (Ibid., p.102). However, I see this as the nature and character of God displayed by most Africans, and Africans are proud of it. These Godly characters seem embedded in the African values.

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## 6. CORE AFRICAN VALUES

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The pristine Africa society is one to be cherished. Africans did not live lives of individualism, capitalism and oppression prior to the era of slave trade. Africa harboured no criminals, thieves, kidnapers and the likes. In the so called primitive Africa community, traders left their product for sale by the road side till the following morning without fear of losing them. Whoever wanted to buy understood the price of the commodity by signs placed close to the commodity. He or she then dropped the money on the ground and no one touched it until the owner came around.

In traditional Nigeria society for example, people placed premium on integrity. This was when Nigeria still existed as a heterogeneous community. Among the Yoruba for instance, value is placed on morality, child upbringing and integrity among others. Family names were held in high esteem. People abstained from involvement in any vices in order to preserve the integrity of the family name. Africans in general and the Yoruba in particular do not believe in the concept of individualism. The child's upbringing belongs to the corporate body of kinsmen even if the child bears the name of the father (Mbiti, 1970, pp.128-139). So a child is taught to be of good character, respect elders, loyal to ones parents, honest in all public and private dealings, show devotion to duty and others. These cores African value systems helped to prevent corruption, selfishness and other vices hampering the growth of the nation today.

It is important to note that in Yoruba culture and religion, it is mandatory to take care of the poor and destitute. It is even a requirement for favour from *Olodumare* for good life. The Yoruba take care of even strangers not necessarily poor out of the belief that such persons could be the spirit of ancestors or angels wandering around. It is not that the poor did not exist, but the fact is that the poverty was shared by all. The community bore the burden together. The "haves" share with the "have not's." The traditional Yoruba (Africa) community is altruistic. It is in this spirit of caring for one another that one appreciates the Yoruba communal living. This is similar to the communal life of the early Church which was a community that had the thought of the good of all. In the Yoruba practice of communal living there is what is called "*Oko Owe*". This is the cultural practice whereby a farmer will choose a day in which he invites

people to assist him in working on his farm without paying for their labour. This practice helped many out of poverty and lack in the past.

Unfortunately, in Africa society today, these cultural values and practices are fast becoming a thing of the past. Could it be as a result of the change in our political system and economy as we observe in Israelite history? Probably, a change from Africa heterogeneous kingship system to a new and enlarged system of administration and the new discoveries in our natural resources to improve our economic life and civilization instill in us grid and desire to acquire wealth. Individualism, capitalism, selfishness, corruption, embezzlement, bribery, hoarding of wealth (money laundering), non-payment of workers' wages as outcome of dishonesty from the leaders and so on; now takes over our good, happy and so called primitive communalism. The question is; can these core values be a recipe for the contemporary Africa and Africans?

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## 7. A RECIPE FOR CONTEMPORARY AFRICA AND AFRICANS

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The present socio-economic situation of Africa is hopelessly discouraging. Africa economy has been seriously mismanaged by its leaders and their collaborators to the point that today, most African nations have become dependent on foreign nations. The government in Africa today is best described as "lootocracy". In Nigeria for instance, past leaders like Ibrahim Babaginda is known to have looted the treasury of not less than \$5 billion while Sanni Abacha (late) has about \$20 billion to his coffers (Atere, 2006, pp.71-83). Recently, the former National Security Adviser (NSA) Sambo Dasuki was arrested and is undergoing trial over \$2.1 billion arms deal. Report says that his properties along with others linked with the scandal were confiscated by the anti-graft agency in Kaduna (Abdulgafar, 2016, p.1). Most of this money has been siphoned into foreign banks or offshore bank account and possibly in strange names. Their slogan seems to be "getting the money out of the country and never bring it back". This appears to be the song all over Africa. Nigeria leaders like some other African leaders ruin their own economy to develop other people's economy. This suggests why the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) arrested the son of former Jigawa State Governor with \$ 400,000 on his way out of the country and was charged for money laundering along with his father<sup>3</sup>. This case is aside other money laundering prosecutions (Including convictions) for the EFCC<sup>4</sup>.

Today, most African Nations are almost or totally dependent on the Arab or Western Nations. Nigeria for

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.informationng.com/tag/money-laundering>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.giaba.org/media/f/305-Annexe> Web. May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

example, imports virtually all finished products including petroleum (of which she exports the crude) and even tooth pick. There are no good hospitals in Nigeria. Nigerian leaders travel abroad for medical check-up and treatment. The former president Shehu Musa Yar'dua died at a Saudi Hospital and his corpse was flown into Nigeria. Likewise, Gnassingbe Eyadema, a former president of the West African nation of Togo died on a plane flying him to a clinic in Israel that was due to treat him for a heart condition; a treatment that no hospital in Togo could handle. This was after 38 years of Eyadema's rule, yet he was incapable of providing such facility throughout that period (Igwe, 2010, pp.25-26). President Robert Mugabe took over the affairs as Prime Minister since independent from Britain in April 1980 with all the developmental structures already in place. In 2010, Igwe observes that Zimbabwe had been reduced to a beggar nation, unable to even feed its people. Everything had collapsed with over six million of its citizens on self exile in neighboring countries (Ibid., p.24). In December 2015, observers say Zimbabwe economic situation is likely to worsen the following year<sup>5</sup>. By February 5, 2016 report says that cash strapped and impoverished, Zimbabwe's economy faces severe challenges. Unemployment and poverty are endemic and political strife, land repressions are common place. Eventually, many Zimbabweans left the country in search of work in South Africa<sup>6</sup>. Yet, Mugabe sees nothing bad in remaining in office after about 36 years of presiding over the economic and special collapse of one of Africans most prosperous nations. Report says Mugabe like some other African leaders visits Singapore, a place he frequents to get medical attention<sup>7</sup>. Also, Mobutu Sese-Seko took billions of dollars out of Zaire, wrecking the Zairian economy (Ibid.). In Nigeria today, President Muhammadu Buhari also traveled to London for 10 days vacation. He is said to see an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist to treat a persistent ear infection<sup>8</sup>. The hope is that the #115b loot, recovered from ex-Air Chiefs, politicians, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials among others during current administration will be used to provide such hospitals and specialist in Nigeria, that the average Nigerians and Africans in general may benefit from. This is how Nigeria can truly be the giant of Africa. The present situation looks like; the Biblical prodigal sons' parable is true of the contemporary Africans and their leaders. Is this a good news or bad news for Africa and the Africans', as against the good news from the good legacy of Africa and the Africans' in the New Testament? What legacy is the present generation of Africans' laying for the future generation?

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.google.com>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc/news/world-africa->

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk> Web. 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> *The Nation*. "Ear Infection: Buhari off to UK" Monday, June 6, 2016.

It is important to note at this juncture, that the land of Africa is blessed in both human and natural resources. The xenophobic violence against foreign nationals in South Africa which started since 1994 in provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape, Free State, Limpopo and Kwazulu-Natal and which reared its head again in 2015<sup>9</sup> deserves to be examined. It looks not to be of Africa, it is also not the nature of God, and may be anti – development. Africa, as a land of asylum for Jesus should perhaps remain a friendly abode for foreigners, so as to attract foreign investors that may enhance socio-economic development of Africa. The Boko Haram militants, the Niger Delta militants (the "Avengers" blowing up oil pipe lines and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), the kidnappers, and the likes in Nigeria possibly need drop their weapons of destruction to make room for peace and eventual growth of the economy.

What has become of the cherished African core values in the contemporary Africa? As observed, perhaps the attitude of Africa and the Africans to the poor and needy in the New Testament times, the care, love and hospitality demonstrated are core African values and notes urgently needed in contemporary Africa by Africa and the Africans.

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## CONCLUSION

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This paper investigated Africa and the Africans in the New Testament world and their attitude to the poor in relation to the contemporary time. There seem to be a wide gap between the two worlds in the attitude to the poor and possibly concern for their native home. Africa and Africans as a land and people that cared and hospitable in Biblical time should not jettison these noble and enviable values. Contemporary Africans should emulate the Africans in the New Testament world by accommodating others, show love, be hospitable, care and give gifts. Africans should love their neighbours but not more than themselves. It is said that Charity begins at home. Instead of wiring the stolen resources, African ruling elites and their collaborators should invest at home. This does not in any way support corruption. It conceives the idea that Jobs may be created for the restive youths and gives a boost to the economy. Invariably this will send signals to foreign investors that Africa is a continent deserving attention for investment. This paper therefore advocates for the development of Africa by the Africans first, then foreign investors, for the benefit of Africa and the Africans.

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