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Rethinking in Sociological Context the Christian Lifestyle and its Implications for Poverty Discourse in Nigeria

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Rethinking in Sociological Context the Christian Lifestyle and its Implications for Poverty Discourse in Nigeria

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I. Introduction

In the third world countries, which Nigeria belongs, poverty is a recurring debate because it is a phenomenon, which affects the life and living patterns of a large number of Nigerians. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics shows that – 60.9 %--- Nigerians suffer from poverty. Because of this among other things, many scholarly works unraveled the meaning of poverty, its causes, measurement, effects, and remedies from the socio-economic, eclectic, international security, political, environmental, and technological perspectives. All these studies have paid insignificant attention to the Christian religious style of life as a factor in poverty discourse. Therefore, this paper discusses the content, context and intents of the Christian religious life styles and its intellectual implications of a holistic understanding of the meaning, causes and effects, and solution of poverty.

II. What is Poverty?

It is problematic to have a clear definition of poverty because of its complexities in terms of its content, contexts, and intent. But, we shall employ a working definition for it- , particularly the one offered by the World Development Report, 1990, which defines poverty as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living

[1] To the best of our ken, the term minimum standard of living includes the availability of good food (balanced diet), good shelter (house well ventilated, well equipped with accessories in the kitchen, bathroom, sitting room within the context of regular supply of power energy that is essential to empowering them), clothing (the one that takes care of the rainy and dry seasons respectively) and finally security (availability of security that enhances the safety of life and property). Any person or group of persons who lack the aforementioned minimum standards of living is suffering from poverty. Asides, Walton, argues that poverty could also manifest in inadequate income, malnutrition, lack of access to social services, and lack of social and political status[1]. In other words, we can say that those who suffer from poverty are the group of people that can be called the poor. The poor, according to Aluko and Edozien, are identified as:

a) Those whose inability to contribute to the production process is insufficient. That is, those who are unable to pay adequately attention to the productive process to warrant an income that would make them live above poverty level.
b) Those for whom the economy has failed to provide jobs, that is those who are willing and capable of earning an adequate income if only jobs are available.
c) Those whose opportunities to participate in the productive process are limited on the basis of undue emphasis on differences in: sex, age, race, etc.[2].

Apart from a few reasons, which Aluko and Edozien have identified as the causes of poorness and inadvertently poverty, we still have some other salient factors such as unemployment, disaster, poor government policy, laziness, complacency, and underemployment. Others include personal and physical deprivation, social deprivation, cultural deprivation, political deprivation, economic deprivation. Looking at this index *vis some vis* the experience of the Nigerians, we can safely say that many Nigerians are poor. It is the recognition of this fact that Nigerian government and non-governmental (including religious centers) agencies have rolled out policies and programs aimed at alleviating poverty. For example, in recent times, we are familiar with the Buhari programs for the

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Youth particularly the start-up loans program under the auspices of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, the Bank of Industry, the Bank of Agriculture and other cognate Federal agencies[3].

Despite of the several efforts made at addressing poverty, the scourge remains unsolved. This development probably accounts for several perspectives at, which the phenomenon has been approached in terms of what poverty means, its measurement, causes, effects and solution. We shall shed light on a few of the literature pertaining to it. The purpose of this is to fill the lacuna in the existing literature.

III. Poverty Discourse in Nigeria

Reflecting on poverty in Nigeria, Anyanwu provides conceptual information about it and how it is complex to have unanimously acceptable definition of poverty. He observes that poverty could be defined in both relative and absolute terms, and such gives room for some nuance in terms of a proper understanding of the concept- poverty, its technique, and strategies to measure, and address it, respectively. He writes:

> A study of poverty must begin with a conceptualization of poverty. A search of the relevant literature quickly shows that there is no consensus on any meaning of poverty. Because poverty affects many aspects of the human condition, including physical, moral, and psychological, a concise, and universally accepted definition of poverty is elusive[4].

What we can infer from the above is that every attempt made towards an understanding poverty is still relative. It is on this account that certain factor, which is imperative to a proper understanding of the term like Christian religious style of life is missing. This is the s gap that this paper intends to fill as it underpins the sacrosanct nature of religious belief as a factor of what poverty is or is not.

The parameter for measuring poverty is the priority of Englama and Bamidele in the poverty discourse. The two scholars are of the opinion that apart from the problem of definition, there is also a problem of designing a universally acceptable measurements of poverty. Despite of this problem, they argue that the starting point in determining poverty is the specification of a consumption pattern or norms regarded as the basic or minimum for , which anybody who falls below the line is considered poor, while those above the line are regarded as non- poor[5] . With this background information, Englama and Bamidele were able to provide a useful template for measuring poverty from two distinct perspectives. The perspectives are described as the identification of the poor and the aggregation of their poverty characteristics into over- all measures to build a poverty profile. No doubt, their work has provided meaningful light into the measurement of poverty but, this may not be absolute because it may not capture a religious group, who decided to life a life of poverty like some Christians. For this reason, we can still see a gap in the measurement template as this paper provides information about the factor of religious style of life in understanding the meaning and measurements of poverty line in Nigeria and perhaps across the globe especially where religion is volatile.

Some other scholars have also shown concern about strategies toward poverty alleviation. One of such is Uniamikogbo who gives an analysis of the role that the government of Nigeria has been playing in poverty alleviation[6]. He dwells basically on the Structural adjustment program of the government (SAP). The SAP was adopted by the Federal government of Nigeria in 1986 to correct the policy distortion and structural imbalances in the economy. Uniamikogbo observes that the program has no doubt achieved some levels of progress at the aggregate level in terms of strategies for poverty alleviation. However, in the same vein, the program has also resulted in deteriorating economic and social conditions because most rural areas of the countries lack access to primary social services. In our mind, the pitiable result arising from the application of the program is connected with the fact that some issues that have implications for poverty alleviation like a religious style of life was not captured in the vision of the program. This probably explains why it is imperative through this study to know what implication a religious style of life could have in poverty measurement and alleviation to be specific. A good understanding of this position justifies the thrust of this paper.

IV. The Concept of Style of Life

It is difficult to define style of life absolutely because it has assumed a new definition different from what it used to be twenty years ago. As a working definition, style of life could be defined as a way of life of an individual or group of individuals. The way of life points to some peculiarities and nuances associated with how an individual or group of individuals eat, dress relate, behave, interact, walk, work, dance, sit and his/her overall disposition to life, death, work, riches, poverty, sorrow, pain, happiness, anger, grief and many others. Some lifestyles are intellectually, spiritually and secularly oriented. For instance, Sociologists identifies different types of life styles associated with life generally, income, occupation, consumption, social, political, military, sexual, spiritual or religious preferences, marketing, musical, subculture and recreation[7].

For the purpose of our studies, we shall concentrate on the Christian style of life implies an understanding of poverty. What we are arguing in essence is that the styles of life of some categories of

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Christians are grounded in poverty mentality. The attitude of such Christians, which have to do with their beliefs and values give a different understanding of what poverty is or is not, thus making it problematic to design accurate, and conventional measurement for poverty as exposed by Anyanwu among others[8]. Therefore, for the purpose of emphasis, we classified into five categories Christian styles of life that have implications for holistic poverty debate in Nigeria. We shall discuss as follow.

a) Poverty Life style

A good example of this as some Catholic orders such as Carmelites, Dominicans, and Jesuits whose members are required to take vows of poverty in the course of their religious observance. It is important to note that these men and women voluntarily decide to live a life of poverty as a way of taking after Jesus who lived a life of poverty, chastity and obedience to God. Members of the orders always strive to consecrate themselves as perfect as much as possible, like Jesus Christ. By so doing, the Church wants her priests to life luxuriously, and this is the reason while Canon 282.1 states that:

> The clergy are to follow a simple way of life, and are to avoid anything, which suggests worldliness. Lavish vacations, expensive designer clothing, and luxury vehicles would probably fit into this category. Elsewhere the code asserts that the clergy are to shun everything that is unbecoming to their state in life (c. 285.1)[9].

Furthermore, Cathy Ciardi while alluding to whose style of life falls into the category of the order writes:

> Members of such institutes generally receive a small monthly stipend, perhaps $100 per month in the U.S., for personal expenses. With this tiny amount, they can buy a birthday gift for a relative, or go to a restaurant occasionally for lunch, or get a pack of cigarettes. They often have full-time jobs, maybe as university professors or hospital administrators, and as such, they earn full-time salaries-but they cannot touch this money as their paychecks are immediately turned over to their religious superiors. The cars they drive, the houses they life in, and sometimes even the clothes they wear are not the property of the religious themselves, for these things as a rule, belong to their religious institute.[10]

b) Poverty as a blessed style of life

The second category of religious style of life has to do with some group of Christians who believe that wealth as an offense to faith. According to historian, Kahan, this strand of Christians asserts, that the Day of Judgment is viewed as a time when "the social order will be turned upside down, and the poor will turn out to be the ones truly blessed[11]. Perhaps this set of Christians may have been inspired by the Thomas Aquinas' thesis stating that "Greed is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things." The position of this type of Christians who are not many in number, but are found in Nigeria is similar to that of the third century Manicheans who saw the spiritual world as being good and the material world as evil with the two being irreconcilable in conflict with each other[12]. This category of Christians encourages their member to shun worldly things in order to follow Jesus. As an example, they are fond of citing some Biblical passages such as:

Mark 6:8–9: Take nothing for the journey.

The bottom line here is that this group of Christians is not ready to engage in any profit - making work that can liberate them from the shackle of poverty.

c) Wealth as an obstacle to faith

In a similar vein, we have another category of Christians who consider wealth as an obstacle to faith and, by so doing, choose a life of poverty to develop and sustain their faith in the Lord. This category of Christians must have been influenced by Martin Luther interpretation of Mammon (or the desire for wealth) as "the most common idol on earth"[13]. They also rely on the story of Jesus' interaction with the rich ruler Mark 10: 17–31, where he seemingly pronounces that wealth as an obstacle to faith. According to Miller, who reflected on this school of thought, it is not the rich man's wealth per se that is the obstacle but rather the man's reluctance to give up that wealth to follow Jesus. He cites Paul's observation in 1st Timothy that, "people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." 1 Timothy 6:9. He also observes citing 1 Timothy 6:10 that "the love of money is the root of all evil. On this note Miller emphasizes that "it is the love of money that is the obstacle to faith, not the money itself [14].

For this group of Christians, what is important in life is not money or meeting specific standards of living but developing and sustaining one's faith in the world. Using the conventional yardstick for measuring poverty, this type of Christians can be categorised as poor. Their poorness is not a function of poor salary or unemployment. It is rather predicated on style of life that shuns fat salary that would make them rich and, which ultimately could cause them to sin. In order to remove the desire for wealth and material possessions as an obstacle to faith, this type of Christians have taken vows of poverty/ voluntary poverty, which is manifested in the form of asceticism, charity and almsgiving.

d) Wealthy Style of life

There is a category of those who choose a wealthy life because they are of the opinion that wealth

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is an outcome of faith. They want to live in wealth so as to rise above the poverty line because they believe in having wealth and the need for Christians to be wealthy as a manifestation of their faith in God. People in this group belong to the prosperity school of thought, hence the emergence of prosperity gospelling in the history of the Nigerian church. According to Ayantayo:

> `Prosperity gospelling' simply refers to strong teaching about prosperity and the need for Christian to be prosperous while on earth. Within such premise, the emphasis is strongly placed on material possession or acquisition, which could be manifested in possession of cars, houses, fatty bank accounts, cash at hand, clothing, abundance, fortune, and success in all endeavours. Prosperity is therefore portrayed as divine favor, , which Christian must seek and possibly pursue with vigour[15].

Furthermore Ayantayo trace the origin of the prosperity gospelling to Late Arch Bishop Idahosa (founder of the Church of God Mission, Benin City, Nigeria) whose theology was that the whole world is owned by God and God is the God of riches and that Christians are the children of God and princes and princess and only the best is good enough[16]. It is observed that such kinds of Christians are fond of quoting biblical passages such as:

Deuteronomy 8:18 : It is God who gives you the power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Philippians 4:19: And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 128:2: You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

2 Corinthians 9:8: And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Psalm 1:3: He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

2 Corinthians 8:9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Jeremiah 29:11-14: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me, and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from, which I sent you into exile.

Nehemiah 2:20: Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

Deuteronomy 28:12: The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

Proverbs 30:8-9: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Proverbs 10:22: The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it[17].

This category of Christian always struggles to life above the poverty line. In order words, we can say they have a negative attitude to poverty. Their style of life is prone to getting out of the shackle of poverty no matter the economic or other circumstances that could make them poor. They hinge their argument on their belief that God promises wealth and abundance to those who will believe in him and follow his laws.

e) Simplistic style of life

The style of life of this category of Christian is simplicity. The group believes so much in contentment. However, this does not mean that they are essentially complacent. They don't cherish wealth and are contended to manage what they have as long such will not affect their spirituality. In most cases they are intermediary positions between poverty and richness. This explains while they often quote biblical passages such as:

Matthew 6:25-26: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Matthew 6:32-33: For the pagans run, after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Philippians 4: 12 – 13: I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in

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want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Hebrews 13:5: Keep your life that is free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

1 Timothy 6:6-7: But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

Luke 12:15: Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

2 Corinthians 12:10: That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Psalm 37:3-4: Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Proverbs 16:8: Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.

Proverbs 28: 6: Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.

f) A synthesis of the implications of Christian life styles for the poverty discourse

Our concern at this juncture, having discussed the perspectives to poverty *vis- a- vis* style of life is to synthesis the interface between the two in sociological manner. We shall discuss the interface with allusion made to conventional definition of poverty, its measurement, effects and solutions in the body of literature earlier discussed.

We are beginning in the context of those who swear to an oath of poverty. Our position is that the conventional definition of poverty as an inability to meet or have a basic standard of living should not be taken and understood absolutely. What we are saying here is that, poverty is not essentially in ability to meet standard of living because in the context of specific Christian life style, poverty is a voluntary and deliberate thing. On the account of the above observation, we can submit that there is a need to enlarge the scope of the definition of poverty to include inability and deliberate decision not to meet the basic things of life. It is so because, the Christian life styles, which go with swearing oath of poverty or deliberate refusal seeing meeting the so called a standard of living is not poverty *per se* but rather a deliberate choice of the religious life of piety.

There is another group of people who choose to a life of poverty. They are regarded by Stott as the humble poor who are spiritually meek and dependent on God. Stott adds that, it is in this way that, the poor (in conventional definition made by Edozien) came to be synonymous with the pious in, which their social conditions becomes a symbol of their spiritual dependence[18]. It is the same set of people that the books of Zephaniah and Isaiah describe as the meek and the humble, who trust in the name of the Lord and the humble and contrite in spirit who trembles at God's words[19] .

We also want to raise issues regarding those set of Christians whose style of life is characterized by possession and material things, which, according to them are an outcome of faith in God who gives them power to get wealth that He may confirm His covenant as He swore to their fathers. Studies have shown the ways this sets of Christian employees pursue wealth with reckless abandon, which result in making some members of society poor. For example, some of them who have their private businesses or who work in government organizations are found of embezzling funds, underpay their workers by given them what can be called poverty salary.

This scenario was what Pilgrimage Christian Church, Suitland, Maryland in the United States of America describes as wage theft, which occurs when workers are not paid all their wages, denied minimum wage or overtime pay that they deserve or are not paid at all for the work they perform or exploited by employers wage theft among low wage workers is a well-documented epidemic[20]. Most of them exploit and oppress the poor to maximize all in the effort of getting wealth, which they sometimes ascribed as of their faith in God. We know that many wealthy men in Nigeria who traces their wealth to God are not faithful in their claims. The pursuit of wealth sometimes leads to the growth of individualism in, which there is only a concern about self and not others or where there is a concern for the rich and less or no concern for the poor. It is in this context that the view of Ayantayo on the side effects of prosperity gospelling is apposite when he observes that:

Another moral matter arising from prosperity gospelling as seen from the data is the issue of individualism, which the prosperity teachers unconsciously inculcate on their adherents. All in the desire to purse material possession to become prosperous, we discover that people are more concerned about themselves than the others. We have cases of people stepping on other people's toes in self-pursuance of prosperity. The slogan now is the survival of the smartest person. A smarter person is the one who is clever enough to maneuvre situations at his/her disposal to amass wealth no matter whose interest is affected. The smart person to our mind and in practical terms is a dubious man.

He also adds that:

It is our opinion that lust for materialism is one of the effects of prosperity gospel ling. The fact is that the quest for prosperity has heightened the desire for materialism among many Nigerians. Materialism is the

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tendency to value material things like wealth, money, cars, properties, clothing, high profit in merchandise and bodily comfort too much and the moral - spiritual and intellectual too little or not at all[17]. Materialism is not bad in itself, but the lust for it, which has made some to do away with morality to get prosperous. We discover that today instead of placing a high premium on state of morality of a person, the attention is now shifted to wealth or material possession of individuals. It is no wonder that immorality abounds in every facet of Nigerian social life.

Our conclusion from the above is that it is wrong for anybody to make other people poor in the name of getting wealth, materials, affluence or living above the poverty line. The Bible opposes making people poor or dealing with the poor with indignation. In fact, *God cares about the poor, as reflected in a few biblical passages as follow:*

1. *Psalms 140:12:* I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy
2. *Psalm 12:5:* "Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise," says the LORD. "I will protect them from those who malign them.
3. *Psalm 34:5-6:* They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.
4. *Psalm 9:18:* But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish.
5. *1 Samuel 2:8:* He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honor. For all the earth is the LORD's, and he has set the world in order.

g) Matters arising

Arising from the synthesis, we want to proceed to what we consider should be appropriate Christian life styles towards dealing with the poor who are living below poverty line and the onus on the part of the rich who sometimes make them poor directly or indirectly with particular reference to Nigeria. We want to advance our argument leaning on the Bible, which both the rich and poor lay claim to in their understanding of the subject of poverty and wealth. The Bible assigns some responsibilities to the rich (who are either rich in a rightful manner or by oppressing the poor) to stem the tide of poverty among them. For example:

Psalm 82:3-4: "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Proverbs 22:9: "Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.

Daniel 4: Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed [poor], that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.

Matthew 19:21: Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.

Galatians 2:10: Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

James 2:5: Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

Deuteronomy 15:7-8: If in any of the towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you there is a Fellow-Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him. Instead, be generous and lend him as much as he needs.

Jeremiah 22:3: I, the Lord, command you to do what is just and right. Protect the person who is being cheated from the one who is cheating him. Do not ill-treat or oppress foreigners, orphans, or widows; and do not kill innocent people in this holy place.

Micah 6:8: No, the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to life in humble fellowship with our God.

1 John 3:17: Rich people who see a brother or sister in need, yet close their hearts against them, cannot claim that they love God.

James 2:15-16: Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!" – If you don't give them the necessities of life?

Isaiah 1:17: Learn to do right. See that justice is done — help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows.

Luke 4:18-19: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.

1 Corinthians 10:24: None of you should be looking out for your own interests, but for the interests of others.

Romans 12:13: Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers.

Proverbs 22:22-23: Don't take advantage of the poor just because you can; don't take advantage of those who stand helpless in court. The Lord will argue their

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case for them and threaten the life of anyone who threatens theirs.

Lev. 19:13: "You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning"

As a rider to the above, it is our opinion that religious organizations in Nigeria should intensify their various mechanisms of alleviating poverty among members of their congregation. Not only this, it is expected of them to life by the Biblical ethos of rich and poor relationships and those dealing with employees and employers relationships. It is also important to note that there are issues to be raised regarding the school of thought, stating that wealth is a sin. For instance, Jesus did not tell his followers to get rid of all their possessions, He only told them to put their devotion to God's rule and righteousness above material things; that they must beware of covetousness; and that, it is not possible to serve God and money simultaneously[21]. It is also important to note that, Joseph of Arimathea is described as both a rich man and a disciple of Jesus. The point we are making is that there is the need for a new orientation and proper interpretations of some biblical passages to, which people who think wealth is a sin lean upon. To condemn richness by virtues of the passages is a function of extremism. In fact, we can define those who belong to the school of thought as extremism - laced poverty.

V. General Remarks

We have been able to establish in this paper that Christian religious style of life is an important factor to consider in the poverty discourse. We can argue that poverty should no longer be defined absolutely as an inability to meet the basic standard of life in view of the fact that poverty could be a voluntary thing especially when some group of religious people voluntarily desire to life a life of poverty as a sign of piety and piousness. In other words, the term poverty is relative and goes with some exceptions. It is also evident in this paper that being rich is not a sin because Jesus did not tell his followers to get rid of all their possessions, after all, a few of them like Joseph of Arimathea and Zacchaeus the wealth tax collector was rich. What the Bible condemns is the rich exploiting the poor with their wealth. This is the reason why Jesus commanded them to sell their possessions to take care of the poor. In other words, there is the need for a new exegesis about the theology of wealth and poverty in Christendom. Therefore, it is obvious that rich Christians have obligations to help the poor ones who are suffering from poverty. From the above, it becomes imperative for Christians and non–Christians and all stakeholders in poverty matter to have balanced information and knowledge about all issues related to poverty such as poorness, materialism, richness, prosperity, asceticism.

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