

## **Generosity and Solidarity - A Biblical Contribution And Perspective In Response To Poverty In Africa**

By

Medard Ruyendo (PhD),

Associate Professor, Kabale University, Uganda

Corresponding author: [mrugyendo@kab.ac.ug](mailto:mrugyendo@kab.ac.ug) or [mrugyendo3@gmail.com](mailto:mrugyendo3@gmail.com)

+256 782 677 330

### **Abstract**

Poverty has always existed but the Holy bible isn't silent about it but speaks about the poor and needy but at the same time commands the faithful to give generously to those that are less fortunate in society (( Deut. 24:17-22, 2 Cor. 8 & 9). The Word of God confirms that people who don't lack what they need as a consequence of the Fall that brought sin in the world (Gen.3). That is, sin lies behind all the economic, social, political, environmental and psychological factors that result in poverty (Andria, 2006). In addition, the Christian shouldn't only generously give but must be *a voice of the voiceless* in this respect. Christians in Africa and elsewhere shouldn't just give in times of calamities and emergences but should empower people who receive help to help others (2 Cor. 1:4). But all the said forms of response need to be effected in the promotion of solidarity that goes hand in hand with generosity as inspired by the Word of God (Acts 4:32-35) and as a way to deal with poverty. After all, '*a person is a person because of other people*', or '*I am, because you are*'" which is a proverb and a spirit of *Ubuntu*. The central objectives include: How does the Word of God guide us on solidarity and generosity? In what ways do other extra-biblical guides promote these two virtues of solidarity and generosity? Thus this is a bible- based article on two cultural values that could contribute towards the reduction of poverty but with other sources beyond the holy bible. That is, the Word of the Lord needs to guide the African generosity and solidarity so as to make them better tools towards the growth and development of Africa in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Key Words:** Poverty, Generosity, Solidarity, Christian Teachings

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### **Introduction**

Poverty in Africa is not a new topic for discussion or debate. Poverty in Africa is a reality that we live with on a daily basis. One does not need to venture far to see naked poverty in Africa. A few steps outside this building will be enough to bring the reality of poverty to the senses of any curious visitor (Shao, 2001). Indeed, as Shao (2001) said this is very applicable as one kilometer outside this university is enough to partly expose what poverty is about!

Poverty has always existed and is found wherever a poor majority lives next to a rich minority as is the case in most countries of the world. Defining poverty and measuring it are controversial issues. In the development literature, poverty was for many years defined primarily in terms of a lack of income (in money or in kind) necessary to ensure access to a set of basic needs. Over time, the concept of poverty was extended to include not only lack of income but also absence of access to health, education and other services. More recently, the definition of poverty has expanded further, to include various factors including powerlessness, isolation, vulnerability, and social exclusion

There is no single definition of the term 'poverty' that is appealing to all since many people or institutions define it differently based on their own perceptions or field of interest in the area of politics, ethics, religion, economics and others. This makes poverty a complex concept. This article is not aiming at various definitions of poverty but one or two will suffice. It is defined as the condition in which people lack the basic necessities of a decent life, such as food, clothing and shelter (Andria in Adeyemo (2006). For the Holy Father, (Pope Francis) he notes that:

The times talk to us of so much poverty in the world and this is a scandal. Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education, so many poor persons. Poverty today is a cry (Catholic Culture, 2024).

Hence such a scandal needs to be urgently addressed for the sake of justice in the world. Jesus also spelt out his ministry as that of defending the cause of the poor. This proclamation was given early in his ministry:

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 for the captives and recovering blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed '(Luke 4:18).

Nyaundi in Kanyandago (2002) points it out that the contemporary understanding of the poor focuses on those who have no material possessions, those who have disabling diseases, those who are displaced from their homes, the ignorant, those with no shelter, food, and those who are physically disabled. We need to note that the bible is ambivalent about the condition of poverty in that there are many statements where the rich are damned because they oppress the poor but at the same time record that riches are an indication of God's blessing to the rich.

Africa as a continent is synonymous with poverty though Christians in Africa are well versed with Jesus' teaching on riches and poverty. Are Jesus' words relevant today in this 21<sup>st</sup> century? To what extent have Africans paid a lip service to Jesus' teachings and other teachings as well in the Old Testament?

However, the central point in this paper is about how generosity and solidarity in the biblical perspective could help in talking the problem of poverty. Jan (2014) notes that the spirit of generosity overcomes the spirit of poverty. He likes the generosity to massive power generators to supply electricity to big cities and that through God's generosity, light could be offered to those in darkness in relation to poverty. Mitchell (2008) emphasizes that justice and generosity toward the poor is very much of a priority with God and therefore should be very much of a priority in the life of his people. Thus, the contribution of generosity and solidarity in a biblical perspective will be analyzed in relation to poverty alleviation.

### **Problem Statement**

The bible is a gold mine of wisdom and knowledge for a Christian regarding poverty, wealth and development yet there is insufficient exposure on the critical contribution of generosity and solidarity towards its alleviation in the scriptures. Generosity and solidarity are central virtues that need to be promoted in the fight against poverty there is insufficient awareness of their role and place in the scriptures for a twenty-first century Christian. Jan (2014) notes that generosity is the power generator the Kingdom of God and that the spirit of generosity overcomes the spirit of poverty hence a need to promote generosity and solidarity. Mitchell (2008) emphasizes justice and generosity as tow core virtues that we should have toward the poor and that it is God's priority. Thus, this article aims at exposing the critical contribution of scriptures and other extra biblical sources and the implications therein as far fighting poverty is concerned in this twenty first century Africa.

### **Methodology**

This is a bible-based article about generosity and solidarity. Secondary data was obtained by reviewing existing literature on generosity and solidarity in relation to poverty on people's lives. This helped to analyze the current situation compared to different literature that exists. Articles, journals, and publications among others were reviewed from libraries and websites .Thus, the employed secondary sources included The Holy Bible and extra-biblical literature such as the Bible Commentaries on both the Old and New Testament respectively. There were also religious and ecclesial sources that were analyzed and interpreted in relation to the objectives and the problem of the study made .Then implications were drawn from the both the biblical and extra-biblical sources.

### **Review of Related Literature**

This section will consider the following objectives

- (i) To expound on the central concepts: generosity and solidarity
- (ii) To expose the biblical perspectives about generosity and solidarity in the Old Testament
- (iii) To discuss the New Testament teachings on generosity and solidarity in relation to poverty

### **The Central Concepts: Generosity and Solidarity**

Poverty, generosity and solidarity are interconnected concepts that are crucial for building a more equitable and compassionate society. However, regarding generosity and solidarity, it is noted that in ancient Israel, aliens, together with widows, orphans, and the poor, were always lifted up for special moral attention, and the Israelites were repeatedly reminded that they were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thus, care for those marginal to the community and thus in danger of being excluded from basic resources, was mandated both as a response to the needs of those persons and as a response to God's salvific care for the people of Israel. For Christians, to be generous is to be conformed not just to Christ but also to the loving divine parent, whose sacrificial self-gift into the world makes possible human fellowship in the divine life; "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). For the apostle Paul, he regarded generosity (as expressed in the gifts of other Christian churches to the Jerusalem church) as a proof of the genuine character of Christian love. Paul saw that this love is exemplified by Christ who, "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor" (2 Corinth. 8.9). Thus, generosity involves giving beyond one's means, though Paul also notes that those now giving out of their abundance may at some point be in need and be the recipients of the generosity of others.

Generosity was also a virtue in the classical pagan context. It is the third of the virtues of character discussed by Aristotle, following on the heels of courage and temperance. The generous person, for Aristotle, is one who gives of his or her wealth in a way that achieves a mean between wastefulness and covetousness. The generous person does not give indiscriminately, but seeks to give in a way that is good and fine. This, in turn, requires giving to the right people, in the right amounts, at the right time, with pleasure, and without looking out for oneself. Aristotle suggests that giving to those who lack good character, or to those who respond with flattery, is not true generosity. Generosity is proportionate to one's resources, so it is not contingent on possession of great wealth. However, it is closely allied to the virtue of magnificence, which for Aristotle does involve large-scale giving for worthy ends, in particular those that benefit the community as a whole (Generosity Research, 2024). Generosity also refers to the willingness to give freely of one's resources, including time, money, talent, to help others in need. Generosity can help alleviate poverty by providing essential support to those who are struggling.

For solidarity in his words, the Holy Pontiff explained that solidarity "is sharing the little we have with those who have nothing, so that no one will go without." The sense of community and of communion as a style of life increases and a sense of solidarity matures, he added. He invited Christians to consider that in some countries, over the past decades, families have experienced a significant increase in affluence and security as a positive result of private initiatives, economic growth and concrete incentives to support families and social responsibility. The benefits of these, in terms of security and stability "can now be shared with those who have been forced to leave behind their homes and native countries in search of safety and survival". (Vatican news. June, 2022). It also the practice of standing together in unity and support, often in the face of adversity or injustice. It involves recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of all the individuals and working collectively to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

The study also notes that solidarity is a promising ethical norm that helps focus the church's social involvement. This norm has a biblical-theological resonance and it bridges the gap between theologies of liberation and theologies of reconciliation. Solidarity ethics affirms the equal worth of human beings in God's creation; advocates the rights of all who

struggle for freedom; seeks justice for those who lack abundant life; and expects a unity of effort to achieve systematic change. Thus, the ‘equal worth’ of human beings is at the centre of this concept and the bible has a lot to share on solidarity in the next pages. (Hessel, T Dieter, and Solidarity ethics: a public focus for the church, *Review of Religious Research*, Vol.20, No.3 (Summer 1979): 252-263

Also Rajendra (2019) argues that recent works in Christian ethics have developed the concept of solidarity as a fundamental principle. He however notes that the definition of solidarity remains imprecise and diffuse. It is noted that Catholic ethicists have recently developed John Paul II’s classification of solidarity as a virtues which, in contexts marked by structural sin, enables us to see the other as another person linked to us in relationships of interdependence. These ethicists have explicitly linked John Paul II’s account of solidarity as virtue to the Aristotelian and Thomistic of virtue ethics. It is realized that Bommarito (2016) notes that solidarity is, at the heart, about unity with others and argues that acts of solidarity are often taken to be valuable as means to bringing about social change.

The importance of the acts of solidarity to him, seem to play a role ending or lessening the hardships people face. For Rasch & Arab (2017) solidarity is a key theme, as a social phenomenon, a moral appeal, and as a governance policy and that it operates across local, national and globalized scales. In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023), see the term solidarity as to have become prevalent in the early-to late nineteenth century in France and that since then it is used to describe a special relationship of unity and mutual indebtedness within a group. It is clear that its origins lie in French legal usage in which the Roman legal concept of an obligation in *solidium*- a joint contractual obligation in which each signatory declared himself liable for the debts of all together- had a place in the French *code civile* (Blais 2007; Hayward 1959, Wildt 1999). What could replace the old social ties of church, family and guild, all of which had been weakened by markets? What might ensure a sense of shared purpose and common good? As answer to these questions, ‘solidarity’ becomes a rallying cry in various movements. However, the nature of solidarity at hand is one that goes hand in hand with generosity in the scriptures. As Bommarito (2016) analyzed, the solidarity that lessens hardships that people face is often preferred.

Solidarity becomes increasingly important in Christians, especially Catholic, thought and practice beginning at the end of the nineteenth century and takes flight with the papacy of John Paul II. In response to the rising importance of socialism and class conflict in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Church realizes the need to address the situation of the worker. In the Church’s response, Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891)—a staple of Catholic social thought—tries to steal a march on the socialists by incorporating and reworking one of the socialist’s main rallying points, namely the idea of mutualism within worker’s associations. In those passages, Leo cites Ecclesiastes approvingly on the importance of fraternity:

It is better that two should be together than one; for they have the advantage of their society. If one fall he shall be supported by the other. Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up.

And further: “A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city”. It is this natural impulse which binds men together in civil society; and it is likewise this which leads them to join together in associations (Leo XIII 1891). Such togetherness is what is needed along with generosity for the sake of justice. The term solidarity has been used in social, political, and religious discourse for over 200 years. However, very little attention has been given to

defining and theorizing exactly what is meant by it. The idea of solidarity has had concrete influences in two arenas in contemporary social life—politics and religion. The concept of fraternité, or brotherhood, is a precursor to solidarity and shares some of its meaning.

### **Generosity and Solidarity in the Old Testament**

While encouraging the development of a better world, we cannot remain silent about the scandal of poverty in its various forms. Violence, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, restrictive approaches to fundamental freedoms, whether of individuals or of groups: these are some of the chief elements of poverty which need to be overcome. Often these are precisely the elements which mark migratory movements, thus linking migration to poverty.” (Pope Francis, Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 8/5/13)

In his book *Generous Justice*, Keller (2010) argues that it is commonly thought in secular society that the Bible is one of the greatest hindrances to doing justice. Isn't it full of regressive views? Didn't it condone slavery? Why look to the Bible for guidance on how to have a more just society? But he challenges these preconceived beliefs and presents the Bible as a fundamental source for promoting justice and compassion for those in need. In *Generous Justice*, Keller (2010) explores a life of justice empowered by an experience of grace: a generous, gracious justice. Thus his book offers readers a new understanding of modern justice and human rights that will resonate with both the faithful and the skeptical." It is important to note that the bible is a 'gold mine' and a rich source of information including poverty eradication and reduction and especially in the promotion of generosity and solidarity as core values. Therefore, 'encountering the poor and those in need constantly challenges us and forces us to think. How can we help to eliminate or at least alleviate their marginalization and suffering? How can we help them in their spiritual need? The Christian community is called to be involved in this kind of sharing and to recognize that it cannot be delegated to others.

In order to help the poor, we ourselves need to live the experience of evangelical poverty. We cannot feel 'alright' when any member of the human family is left behind and in the shadows. The silent cry of so many poor men, women and children should find the people of God at the forefront, always and everywhere, in efforts to give them a voice, to protect and support them in the face of hypocrisy and so many unfulfilled promises, and to invite them to share in the life of the community". Pope Francis says the Church cannot offer comprehensive solutions to ending the problem of poverty but she can offer witness and gestures of charity (*Vatican News, Solidarity with the Poor*)

In the light of the Bible, a lot is said of what poverty is about. For instance, Nyaundi in Kanyandago (2002) notes that the Bible indicates that God is aware of the presence of the poor and that he is concerned about them. For instance, he mentions of the perpetual presence of the poor, "for the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in the land" (Deut. 15:11). We also see that God is asking his people to remember the poor. "And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner, I am the Lord God' (Lev.19:10). Furthermore, God condemns the rich and blesses the poor as in the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man said also died and was buried; and in the hades being in the torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:22-23). Thus, God creates both the

poor and the rich. “The Lord makes poor and makes rich, he brings low, and he also exalts (1 Samuel 2). This text is about a God who knows both the poor and the rich as their only creator. God is promoting and calling his people to practice justice between the haves and have-nots. He is fully aware of the presence of the poor!

The Israelites were called upon to be generous. They were specifically instructed to care for widows, orphans and foreigners (Deut. 24: 17-22).

<sup>17</sup> Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. <sup>18</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

<sup>19</sup> When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. <sup>20</sup> When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. <sup>21</sup> When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. <sup>22</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

The rich were to be shown generosity and justice. The Lord was good and provided for the Israelites when they were foreigners and aliens in Egypt. With a compassionate spirit, they were to be generous to those who were poor. To be generous was not an optional. Even today, Christians are to practice what is written and show justice and love to the deprived. To what extent is this done for the poor and the poor in the church? The command is that generosity must be done.

Elsewhere, Brown (1993) while commenting on the above text ( Deut. 24:17-22), he argues that the fatherless, widow and alien were the deprived members of any local community but they were objects of God’s special love and care. God was the father to the orphans, husband to the widow, and friend to the homeless. If the Lord cared about such weak people, nobody in Israel must allow them to be forgotten. Three basic human rights are treated here, their right to justice (verse 17) clothing (verse 17) and food (verses 19-21).

Brown (1993) further points out that there is enough for all if only we would not hoard every grain to ourselves, strip the boughs bare, and clutch each single grape. Without the gleanings, millions more will perish. A compassionate God must be grieved about that, especially when he has said so much about our responsibility to the needy. The appeal in these verses is not primarily to humanitarian principles, however. It is based on the initiative of God, not the benevolence of man. Those in Israel who were in position to help others are reminded of what God had done and said. The Israelites must meet the needs of the oppressed because of their past experience and because of God’s command. The challenge with these texts is that though they are in place for Christians, little attention is paid to them and we see many poor people not attended to by the rich and well to do. The church is called upon to challenge and remind them of the real owner of everything who is God himself (Psalm 24) and that Christians need to be generous as God has always been very generous to the extent of giving to us His own Son to die for us on the Cross (John 3:16). When the Israelites were utterly without freedom, security and protection, God came to their help and intervened as their Saviour and Deliverer. Therefore, Christians need to act mercifully and generously

toward others. They must show God's love and justice through compassionate deeds. This is what is lacking in the world of today as far as poverty alleviation is concerned.

If such people, who lacked a husband, parents or land, did not receive help, they would be condemned to live in dire poverty. Poverty does not come from God, because all that he does is good (Gen. 1:25). He created a world that was intended to ensure that all human beings would have everything they needed (Gen. 1: 29-30). The reason that some people lack what they need is a consequence of the fall, which brought sin into this world (Gen.3). However, recognizing this fact is not the same as saying that it is a sin to be poor. Rather it is saying that sin lies behind all the economic, social, political, environmental and psychological factors that result in poverty (Andria in Ayedemo, 2006). We need to note that some people are condemned to poverty through circumstances that are no fault of their own. Their poverty is made worse by the selfishness of those who think only of themselves, their own family and their own ethnic or social group. Such selfishness widens the gulf between rich and poor, between the great powers and countries in the majority world.

Others may be poor because they are guilty of the sin of laziness (Prov. 20:4, 21:25, Matt.25:26) or lack motivation to do work of caring for the creation that God has entrusted to human beings (Gen 1:28). Also, some may fail to use the creativity or initiative that God has given to all human beings. Some questions may arise out of this discussion: if we argue that poverty is rooted in human nature, and that people are naturally sinful, must we give up the attempt to do anything about poverty? Must we give in to Afro-pessimism, accepting poverty as something we cannot change? God created every human being and he is concerned about their well-being.

Brown (1993) notes that life was very precarious for many in Israel and that during the hard and difficult times any member of the covenant community might find himself financially impoverished. Natural disasters (storms, earthquakes), drought, famine years, illness, bereavement, a dramatic change in domestic circumstances, and other serious adversities could mark the sudden end of normal income. Brown (1993) argues that severe poverty could be relieved and a person's children fed if a brother in Israel would come to his aid. A loan would tide the impoverished family over until a better day when the money could be repaid. But no Hebrew man or woman must make money out of another Israelite misfortune. Interest was not to be charged except in cases when the money was on loan to a foreigner. It was that the exacting interest would only increase the trouble for the destitute man or woman. If a Hebrew had been blessed by God so that he is in a strong position financially to help his brother, then he must do so as an expression of his brother, then he was to do so as an expression of his gratitude to God and not as a way of increasing his wealth:

Do not charge a fellow Israelite interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a fellow Israelite, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

Christians need to borrow a leaf from the Israelite community who were generous to their fellow Israelites regarding fighting poverty and promoting justice amongst them. This is needed in the contemporary Africa.

Deuteronomy (23: 24-25).”If you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. If you enter your neighbor's green field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.”

This introduces to us one of the ways to experience grateful sharing but this was for a short period of time (first *aid*). That is; the law provided for the meeting of an immediate need. A law of this kind brought immediate help to the hungry or the refugee without encouraging the idle thief; to remove either grapes or grain would be stealing and a violation of the eighth commandment (Duet . 5:19). God had been good and generous to the owner of the vineyard and the cornfield. He could afford to share the bounty with others. Out of this provision of the law, the Lord made sure that Israel's poor would not die of starvation.

The vineyards and the fields of their neighbors were always open to them. The cry of the hungry was not to be heard within the borders of Israel. Brown (1993) clearly observes that in the contemporary world, millions are dying of starvation and that every believer has a moral as well as a spiritual obligation to do something practical every week to help those who long for food. To ignore their cry is to be deaf to the Lord's plea. However, a mere giving of food is like firefighting but does not provide a lasting solution. Thus the church apart from promoting generosity should go beyond and teach how to fight poverty through hard work and self-reliance other than waiting for aid.

Furthermore, the book of Exodus guides us on how we should protect the needy through generosity and being together with them. For instance the poor must not be charged interest by those that lend them money (Exodus 22:25). That is; it just meant that interest was prohibited on loans made to the poor and the taking of collateral had to be reasonable. If a cloak is offered as a guarantee that the loan will be repaid; the cloak must be returned to the borrower by sunset. A cloak was also a blanket, and forcing someone to spend the night without any covering would create hardship (Exodus 22:26-27). In our day it is not uncommon for the needy to be taken advantage of instead of being assisted. Those who cannot take their case to a higher authority ( or to have no rich uncle) are sent from pillar to post even when all they are trying to do is to claim what is theirs by right. God's words here should be heard as a reminder that while the needy may not have a rich uncle, they do have a caring father (Adeyemo, 2006). For God says, when he cries out to me, I will hear for I am compassionate (Exodus 22: 27b). However, all this applied to Israelites but not to the Gentiles. Nonetheless, we should show love and compassionate spirit without any distinction.

### **Generosity and Solidarity in the New Testament**

Some of the earliest converts to Christianity were Greco-Roman households that were built on filial and familial ties. Early Christian communities invoked the language of family to describe their relationship with fellow believers and thought of themselves as a family of faith. In the fourth century, monastic communities of religious men began to set themselves apart from society and refer to one another as "brothers" in the faith. By the sixth century, communities of women religious developed parallel models of sisterhood. The use of the idea of brotherhood within Christianity was theological as well as social. In his teachings, Jesus radically redefined family by claiming, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). That the language of brotherhood was definitional for understanding the relationships between early members of the Christian community is evidenced by the frequency with which Paul addresses the recipients of his letters as "brothers." This language is theologically consistent with the emphasis on God as "Father" that develops within the early Christian community. While the association of God with a father was present in the Hebrew Scriptures, the metaphor of God as Father becomes an important image for understanding God in the early church (Fortress Press, 2024).

The New Testament records various examples in the local churches of that period. There was once a famine in Jerusalem and Christians in the next environments had to send in

a lot of help (2 Cor.8). Paul encouraged Christians to help the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem under no compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7) In addition we see James encouraging Christians to have both faith and action to help the needy Christians in their congregations. That is, the real and practical concern for the destitute in their local church (James 2:18). He argues that it is totally inadequate to simply say, Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed” to a brother or sister who has nothing (James 2:16). Christians need to go beyond mere words, and must clothe and feed them if we are to demonstrate the authenticity of our faith in Christ (Andria in Ayedemo, 2006).

Jesus not only taught about the need to help the poor; his actions provided an example of compassionate care (Kunhiyop, 2008). This compassionate care should be promoted by Christians for other people. For the purposes of driving home the need to care for the poor, he declared that caring for the sick, needy, and homeless was actually caring for him, and that failure to care for them was equivalent to neglecting him (Matt 25:35-40).

<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’ <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’ <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ <sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

The implication for this biblical text is that Christians need to show practical love and compassionate especially the “haves to have not’s” in society. The parable is about the acts of mercy that we all can do every day. To be generous does not mean one should be wealthy, it does not depend on ability or intelligence. They are simple acts freely given and freely received. This text reminds us that people who should promote generosity should have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we can’t handover this responsibility to the church or government.

Christ demands our personal involvement as in Halo, (2000) regarding the caring for others in poverty. The text challenges those who claim they love God yet they are spiritually and physically apathetic about the poverty of their brothers and sisters near them, will not receive salvation. Practicing love through generosity is one of the ways to show God’s love. However, most Christians pay a lip service to this great teaching. Grudem & Barry, (2013) affirm that the bible lists the core Christian values such as generosity, hospitality and kindness in combating poverty. They also argue that such values are prevalent in poor countries though they do not give us the reasons or justifications behind that. There is one Christian community in Kabale Municipality in Southwest Uganda where a Home Cell group (smallest unit in the church) goes beyond mere spiritual aspect for each other but brings material things such as charcoal, clothing, money and other materials for those who have less of such and because of that gesture the cell church group has registered many people. Many come both for spiritual and material help. That is, it practically caters for those unable to help themselves. However, there a dire need to empower them other than depending on the hand-outs. Instead of handling the immediate needs, people must be taught how to “fish instead of giving them fish quite often”. This is supported by one of the African tribes in Western Uganda: *Nkugaburire, temara njara* (Cisternino, 1987). Literally, it means that charitable

help does not take away the causes of hunger or poverty- in this respect. The cause of hunger and poverty need to be identified and eventually addressed.

This takes us to the actual empowering of the poor though generosity is significant. Chepkwony in Kanyandago (2002) argues that the church has seemingly encouraged the poor to persist in their state of poverty by succoring them by means of alms, clothing, food and accommodation. He argues that in African Tradition the poor were up-lifted from their poverty in such a way that, as a result of the help, they worked hard to remove themselves from the situation. He brings an idea that although Christians should always be ready to cater for the needs of the poor, the emphasis should lie on empowering the poor to be independent and self-reliant in the future. Thus, it will reduce the dependency syndrome which partly contributes to poverty and laziness in some groups of people. The re-assessment of the teachings on love as taught by Christ is significant as far as generosity and solidarity is concerned. Chepkwony in Kanyandago (2002) notes that though there is emphasis on individualism, Christianity should concentrate on educating Christian communities to work together in liberating the poor amongst them. The idea of giving out money for the poor to the church, other organizations or even to the poor on the streets is an easy way of the situation. Joys and sorrows should be shared through giving to the needy beginning with the very poor at our next doorsteps instead of rushing for the street beggars they even don't know. Charity should begin at home.

Despite the call for the promotion of generosity and solidarity, Chepkwony in Kanyandago (2002) advances a great point that the Church needs to reevaluate the impact on its teaching about stewardship namely that the majority of Africans don't manage their finances and resources in general by not prioritizing their needs. Luxury living is manifested through the abuse of alcohol, marrying second and other many more women and other related poor mismanagement of little resources they have hence calling for good stewardship of the little resources they have to counteract poverty. Generosity and solidarity won't take place where stewardship is nonexistent. Elsewhere, the author of the Book of Proverbs notes that:

One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. People curse the one who hoards grain, but they pray God's blessing on the one who is willing to sell (Proverbs 11:24-26) .

However it appears paradoxical: how does the giving away of wealth increase wealth? But the paradox is resolved if we remember that the Lord is the source of wealth and the one administering justice (Matt: 16:25; Luke 6:38). Prov.11:25 is a synthetic proverb, developing further in the second line, the idea mentioned in the first line. What is commended in these verses is sharing one's resources with others. Hoarding and selfishness are condemned. However elsewhere, St. Paul underlines the place and role of generosity amongst Christians. He encouraged generosity among the Macedonian churches (Philippian and Thessalonian churches). Even though the Philippians and Thessalonians ere extremely poor and were experiencing severe trials, still they were filled with rich generosity toward other Christians in need. In particular they had contributed to the collection that Paul had been raising in the churches of Greece to send to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Generosity is not measured only by how much one gives; it is also measured by how much one keeps. A poor man can never give as much as a rich man; nevertheless, the poor man's generosity may be much greater than that of the rich man. Jesus praised the poor widow who put into the temple treasury only a fraction of a penny.

I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put everything all she had to live on” (Mark 12: 41-44).

Thus there are pertinent questions we need ourselves: how often do we give to the less privileged? Or rather do we complain about how poor we are and try to give as little as possible. Christians need to be reminded that our resources including money belong to the Lord God; we are just stewards (Psalm 24). If people knew that what they possess is not theirs they would gladly give out to those who are less privileged like the poor. It is also believed that the more we give the more we will receive (2 Cor. 9:6). This calls us not to be stingy (Hale, 2000).

Generosity is not foreign to Africa; it is part of our culture. And we know that one does not need to be rich to be generous. We share the little we have. There is even a proverb, “*In friendship, even a crust of bread is shared*”. Africans need to model our generosity on the generosity of the Heavenly Father, who promises to provide our daily bread (Matt. 6:11). But this bread does not normally drop from heaven, as the manna did in the wilderness (Exod. 16:4). He created the world that would meet our needs for food (Gen.1:30). Thus, following his example, we must not just provide emergency food supplies, but must act to change the situation. We must empower the person who receives help to help others (2 Cor. 1:4). We must not insist on our own preconceived ideas as to how help is to be offered. Rather, we must support the poor in the use of their own creativity and imagination to find a way out of their poverty since experience has shown that people can be very resourceful (Ayedemo, 2006).

We need to address the roots of poverty such as ignorance, unemployment and even corruption and supporting the socioeconomic structures that will empower the victims of poverty. The empowerment of the people will also restore some confidence and hope in their lives. This will encourage them to look for their own homegrown solutions to their problems instead of perpetually waiting for others to bail them out of their misery through temporary relief of grants (Ndungu in Kanyandago, 2002). On empowerment, Shao (2001) notes that the challenge to African churches is to empower Africans to realize the full potential of their talents and creativity and to mobilize their contribution to the development and progress of their communities.

Pope Francis' Mass for the 7th World Day of the Poor in St. Peter's Basilica, a moving event that underscores the urgent need to combat poverty urges us to spread charity and love, highlighting that "Poverty is a scandal." The World Day of the Poor calls for global compassion and generosity towards the needy. "Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor," is a profound reminder of our collective responsibility (Vatican, 2024).

In the message the Holy Father raises the value of solidarity: What is it in relation to poverty? This is precisely what solidarity is: sharing the little we have with those who have nothing, so that no one will go without. The sense of community and of communion as a style of life increases and a sense of solidarity matures (S. L. Media, 2024). The values of freedom, responsibility, fraternity and solidarity are very central in uplifting the poor. And as Christians, we need to have charity, faith and hope as the basis of our lives and our actions towards poverty alleviation.

### **Conclusion**

By practicing generosity and solidarity, Christians can work together to create a more just and equitable society where everyone has opportunity to thrive. Poverty disables both the individual and Christian community socially, politically and religiously as well. However, part of the contribution towards the alleviation of poverty that always neglected and very slow at the same time is to promoting generosity and solidarity biblically. God wants justice for the poor and oppressed to be upheld as an indication of love towards a neighbor. Giving and sharing out of the little we have in life forms a firm foundation for the fight against poverty. There is therefore a need to recognize that all that is in the world belongs to God and human beings are just stewards and caretakers (Psalm 24) - God is the owner and “land lord” of everything on planet earth. Human beings need to show generosity but should empower the less privileged to be creative other than giving hand-outs. That is, we all must use the gifts of God as diligently as we can and that God will reward each of us according to our work and faithfulness (Matthew 16:27 & 2 Corinthians 5:10). We should not omit to do the good when we have the opportunity (sins of omission) to do it for the less privileged.

### **Recommendation**

The study had the following recommendations. First, the scriptural approach to generosity and solidarity should be upheld, but the Christian poor (as well as other poor) need to be empowered other than promoting ‘hand to mouth’ syndrome. This empowerment calls for creativity and the use of God-given gifts on this planet earth. Second, Christians need to advocate for policies that promote economic justice and social welfare. Engaging in community-led initiatives that empower marginalized and less privileged groups is vital. Third, There is need to sensitize Christians about Christian stewardship and its place in matters of poverty and wealthy. All we have belongs to God (Psalm 24) Generosity and solidarity is thus encouraged to support the marginalized. The need for being community – conscious is thus encouraged. Fourth, Christian solidarity is the way to go. There is need to have both generosity and solidarity against poverty through sharing resources for the cause of justice and love of a neighbor. The more we give the more we shall receive (2 Cor.9:6) and fifth, Practice hospitality: Generosity and solidarity call us to open our homes to the less privileged, strangers and even to immigrants

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