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HARNESSING FINANCIAL EDUCATION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN GHANA: DOES RELIGIOSITY MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the directional relationship between religion and poverty: whether religious belief systems contribute to the persistence of poverty, or whether socio-economic deprivation fosters increased religious adherence. It interrogates whether poverty can be conceptualized as a function of religious influence, or conversely, whether religious commitment emerges as a response to economic hardships. This study examines the degree to which religiosity affects financial literacy and its consequences for poverty reduction in Ghana. Using qualitative textual analysis of Christian and Islamic texts, supplemented by secondary academic sources, it investigates how religious teachings influence financial attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Grounded in the Capability Approach and theological ethics, the study highlights paradigms such as the "teach-a-man-to-fish" model to emphasize the synergy between faith-based values and sustainable development. Thematic analysis indicates that internalized religiosity, in conjunction with focused financial education, fosters frugality, debt aversion, and economic resilience among low-income populations. The research bridges gap between religious values and poverty policy, offering insights for faith-based institutions, financial educators, and development stakeholders in sub-Saharan Africa. These findings challenge conventional poverty interventions by demonstrating the transformative role of religiously embedded belief systems in driving financial empowerment. The significant original contribution that this study makes is the "teach-a man-to-fish" paradigm, as an effective and sustainable poverty alleviation strategy in Ghana.

Keywords: *Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Religiosity, Financial Education, Teach-a-man-to-fish*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Studies of human behavior have long sought to understand how people make decisions (Nawi et al., 2022). Individuals may make decisions either hastily or cautiously, but beyond the decision-making style, the underlying motivations are equally important for analysis. A range of factors influence economic decision-making, including sociological, political, security, academic, economic, business, environmental, health, and religious dimensions. Among these, the religious factor has received comparatively less scholarly attention, particularly in relation to its impact on financial literacy and economic behaviors (Nawi et al., 2022; Klein, Samuels, & Epley, 2017). In affirmation, Ali and Hassan (2019) note that existing scholarship on the intersection of religiosity and poverty, remains relatively limited, thereby underscoring the relevance and necessity of the present study.

Christine Schliesser (2014) argues that dominant theories and practices of poverty alleviation have often failed to adequately integrate the religious dimension. While some researchers contend that religious observance bears little or no relationship with poverty reduction (Hakim & Hakim, 2024), others point to religion's transformative potential in economic development. This debate becomes particularly relevant in Ghana and the broader African context, where religion is both deeply embedded and paradoxically seen either as a contributor to poverty or an untapped asset in the fight against it. Despite claims that religiosity may entrench economic stagnation, empirical literature from Latin America, Asia, and Africa underscores the important role religion plays in community-based poverty reduction (Hakim & Hakim, 2024; Rono & Aboud, 2003).

There is a notable lack of research on leveraging religious institutions and values for poverty alleviation in Ghana, highlighting a promising new direction in financial literacy that connects faith and financial behavior (Nawi et al., 2022). Financial literacy boosts planning, saving, and financial resilience (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2011). Atkinson and Messy (2012) extend financial literacy to include attitudes and behaviors, forming a global assessment framework. Berger (1967) sees religion as a sacred canopy guiding norms and legitimizing behavior, including economics.

In Ghana, limited financial access and strong religious influence heighten poverty's persistence despite institutional efforts (Boaheng, Boateng and Boahen, 2024). Major religions advocate for the eradication or reduction of poverty (Hakim et al, 2025). Islam promotes this through *zakat*, "alms-giving," emphasizing part of one's wealth belonging to the poor (Suryani Dyah & Fitriani Laitul, 2022). In Christianity, Luke's theology frames poverty as a pressing social issue requiring action (Lk.12:15, 33-34; 16:19-23). Christianity emphasizes addressing poverty now and injustice now, not just in future (Hananti & Subandrijo, 2021).

Although both state and religious institutions identify poverty as a major social concern, practical solutions remain elusive (Manao & Amtiran, 2021). Poverty is a deprivation of capabilities, demanding multidimensional solutions rooted in moral and religious imperatives like *zakat* (Suryani Dyah & Fitriani Laitul, 2022), while Christian theology, particularly in Luke's Gospel, calls for addressing systemic injustice and economic inequality (Hananti & Subandrijo, 2021). Weber's (1905) Protestant ethic thesis, connecting religious values to economic success, is re-examined in Ghana through Pentecostal, Islamic, and traditional lenses.

Poverty reflects how religious values shape financial behavior, not a sign of failure or piety (Adnan et al., 2020). Religiosity shapes financial choices such as debt aversion, saving and generosity (Klein et al., 2017). Faith-based institutions effectively deliver social services and foster trust in low-trust financial ecosystems (Cnaan, et al., 2002; Ehrbeck, et al., 2012). This underscores that religious networks can deliver ethical, culturally rooted financial education that transforms behavior and supports poverty alleviation in Ghana.

This religious plurality raises important questions. Is religion a factor that contributes to poverty, or does poverty increase religious adherence? Is poverty a function of religion or religion a function of poverty? Does religion sanctify poverty, or does poverty seek legitimacy through religion? More importantly, can religio-financial resources be intentionally mobilized to address Ghana's persistent poverty? This study investigates these questions by integrating religious doctrine with financial literacy frameworks. The study finds that neither does religion legitimize poverty nor does poverty romanticize religion. Rather, religion as a development partner, has valuable tools to contribute to poverty alleviation in Ghana in a sustainable way.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Poverty and Poverty Levels in Ghana

Poverty is one of the most enduring and complex challenges in human history, with no universally agreed-upon definition due to its contextual and multidimensional nature (Amofah and Agyare, 2022; Boaheng, 2020). The United Nations (1998) defines poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It includes not having enough to feed and clothe a family, lacking access to education and healthcare, exclusion from meaningful participation in society, and exposure to insecurity and marginal environments. Poverty here, has transitioned from econometric to basic needs to social implications to multi-disciplinary formulation (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2010). This holistic perspective reflects not just material deprivation but also social and political exclusion.

This broad conception aligns closely with the Ghanaian worldview of poverty. Agyekum (2017) emphasizes that poverty in Ghana is characterized by limited access to social, economic, and infrastructural services, disempowerment, voicelessness, and unfair developmental practices. Harrison (1981) highlights how poverty manifests through restricted access to land, social inequality, and systemic injustice. Amofah and Agyare (2022) define it operationally as the lack or difficulty in accessing basic amenities such as food, adequate housing, healthcare, education, and social inclusion.

However, to move beyond descriptive accounts and engage robustly with academic discourse, it is crucial to ground these explanations in well-established theoretical frameworks. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (1999), reframes poverty not merely as income deprivation but as a lack of substantive freedoms and capabilities to live a life one has reason to value. Similarly, Townsend's Relative Deprivation Theory underscores poverty as the inability to participate in societal activities considered normal (Townsend, 1987). The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed by Alkire and Foster (2011), quantifies poverty across health, education, and living standards, and is widely applied in global development evaluations. Further developments in this index have enhanced its applicability to country-specific contexts, including Ghana (Alkire, Kanagaratnam & Suppa, 2020).

Incorporating a participatory lens, Robert Chambers (1995) advocates for recognizing the lived experiences of the poor and their knowledge in understanding poverty. Chambers' work on participatory rural appraisal is critical for interpreting data such as the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS), which, although rich, remains underutilized in capturing voices from below. Nancy Fraser (1995) also contributes to a more intersectional understanding by linking poverty with misrecognition and marginalization, emphasizing that gender, identity, and institutional exclusion are as central as economic deprivation.

Empirically, Ghana's economic trajectory has been commendable. The country has consistently outperformed the sub-Saharan African median in terms of GDP per capita since the 1990s (World Bank, 2021). Between 1991/92 and 2017, Ghana's headcount poverty rate dropped from 51.1% to 23.4% marking a significant 27.7 percentage point decline, attributed largely to sustained economic growth (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). However, deeper scrutiny reveals that income-based measures alone may understate poverty's true extent. As Michael Lipton (1977) argues, development strategies often suffer from an "urban bias" that sidelines rural poverty, a key dimension in Ghana's context.

Recent contributions by Banerjee and Duflo (2011) suggest that poverty is shaped not just by monetary factors but also behavioral, institutional, and psychological barriers. Deaton and Ravallion (2010) have also critiqued one-dimensional metrics, advocating for poverty assessments that reflect actual well-being. Simeon Djankov et al. (2002) underscore the significance of institutional quality, regulation, and entry barriers in determining developmental outcomes, reinforcing the need to consider Ghana's regulatory framework in poverty analysis.

Colonial legacies (Fanon, 1961; Rodney, 1972), gender norms and underused data shape poverty in Ghana (Fraser, 2009). Global injustice and institutional inequality (Pogge, 2009) equally shape poverty discourse in Ghana. A nuanced understanding of poverty in Ghana requires looking beyond economic indicators to include sociopolitical dynamics, institutional structures, and individual capabilities. Incorporating global theories, multidimensional assessments, and regional comparisons strengthens both academic insight and policy development.

2.1.1 *Poverty in Strata*

Ghana has made notable progress in reducing poverty over the past three decades, particularly when compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, this national level advancement masks considerable disparities across regions and socioeconomic groups (Teal, 2001; Annim et al., 2012; Coulombe & Wodon, 2007). According to Annim et al. (2012), between 2006 and 2017, five regions, namely: Greater Accra, Western, Central, Eastern, and Ashanti consistently reported poverty headcount rates below the national average. In contrast, the remaining regions recorded rates above the national benchmark. Among them, Greater Accra stood out with the lowest incidence of poverty, while the Upper West region reported the highest. In 2017, the poverty rate in Greater Accra was 2.5%, approximately 21 percentage points below the national average, whereas the Upper West's rate exceeded the national average by about 48 percentage points. Notably, four regions, namely Western, Volta, Northern, and Upper East saw an increase in poverty between 2013 and 2017.

Poverty in Ghana is predominantly a rural phenomenon (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). It tends to be more persistent in rural areas and in the northern regions of the country, in contrast to urban and southern areas. Moreover, the incidence and severity of poverty are closely associated with the socioeconomic characteristics of household heads, particularly those from opportunity-deprived backgrounds. Key determinants include the gender of the household head, their occupation, level of education, and the number of dependents within the household (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). Empirical evidence indicates that the incidence of poverty has consistently been lower among female-headed households compared to their male-headed counterparts (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). This observed pattern is consistent with existing literature on poverty dynamics in Ghana and is plausibly linked to the receipt of remittances from migrant spouses, which female-headed households are more likely to receive (Cooke et al., 2016; Ghana Statistical Service, 2017).

Notably, however, male-headed households recorded a greater overall reduction in poverty over time, a decline of 9.1 percentage points compared to 4.5 percentage points among female-headed households (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). Nevertheless, the probability of escaping poverty remains higher among female-headed households (Gafa et al., 2024). This favorable trend may be attributed to the considerable support extended to women in Ghana in recent years (Donkoh et al., 2014). A range of governmental and non-governmental organizations have implemented targeted assistance and empowerment programs aimed at improving the socioeconomic wellbeing of women, thereby contributing to their increased resilience and capacity to move out of poverty (Adjei et al., 2012). Another area some women in Ghana find support is in marriage and the Interstate Succession Law (PNDC Law 111).

However, these comparative outcomes between female- and male-headed households should be interpreted with caution. In the Ghanaian context, the relatively stronger performance of female-headed households on expenditure-based welfare indicators may obscure underlying disparities in livelihood conditions across household headship types (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). As Kpoor (2019) demonstrates, while female-headed households may exhibit higher levels of consumption expenditure, they tend to possess lower incomes, fewer assets, reduced human capital, and overall poorer livelihood conditions compared to their male-headed counterparts.

In their comprehensive survey, Gafa, Hodey, and Senadza (2024) identified the group with the highest likelihood of experiencing low consumption expenditure due to socioeconomic disadvantage as consisting of individuals whose parents, particularly fathers, have spent most of their working lives in the agricultural sector and whose fathers possess no more than a primary level of education. Conversely, the least-deprived group comprises individuals whose fathers have attained at least secondary education and who have at least one parent engaged in professional, administrative, service, or production-related occupations for the majority of their working life. Gafa, Hodey, and Senadza (2024), observe that the incidence of poverty is approximately 30 times higher in the most disadvantaged group compared to the least-deprived group.

However, Gafa, et al. (2024) concluded that at least 65% of individuals in Ghana, classified as poor in 2006 had exited poverty by 2013, and a similar trend was observed among those in poverty in 2013, with 65% escaping poverty by 2017. Nevertheless, the likelihood of a non-poor individual experiencing poverty entry remains considerable, with a probability of 22.4% between 2006 and 2017, and 21.3% between 2013 and 2017 (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). Regarding deprivation status, the study indicates that the socio-economic background of the household head is a significant factor in poverty mobility (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). Specifically, households in the most-deprived category exhibit a reduced likelihood of escaping poverty, with a significantly higher probability of downward mobility when compared to those in less-deprived categories.

This finding underscores the significant influence of socio-economic background on poverty outcomes in Ghana. It may be attributed, in part, to the limited availability of well-paying employment opportunities outside the informal sector. Individuals from less-deprived backgrounds who are more likely to have higher levels of education tend to access more stable and secure forms of employment. In contrast, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately concentrated in vulnerable, low-paying jobs, which increases their susceptibility to poverty and the persistence of deprivation over time (Baah-Boateng & Ewusi, 2013).

Across many parts of Ghana, households are regularly exposed to a range of economic and environmental shocks, particularly those dependent on traditional farming and low-productivity informal sector activities. In rural areas, for instance, agricultural seasonality, irregular precipitation patterns, and climate-related shocks significantly affect household consumption, thereby threatening the livelihoods of both the poor and those living just above the poverty line (Senadza, 2012). These vulnerabilities are compounded by underdeveloped credit and insurance markets, as well as broader market imperfections, which hinder consumption smoothing and constrain investments in human capital and productive assets. Such limitations have adverse implications for long-term income growth among the most vulnerable populations.

The situation has been further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively impacted businesses, the labor market, and household incomes (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020). As a result, many previously non-poor households have become increasingly vulnerable to poverty, while existing poor households face a heightened risk of persistent deprivation. These dynamics underscore the critical importance of understanding welfare trajectories among households and across regions in Ghana, as well as the structural factors driving these outcomes, to inform effective poverty reduction strategies and enhance overall wellbeing (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024).

Equally important in the Ghanaian context is the need to ensure equitable access to development opportunities. As highlighted by Brunori et al. (2015), between 14% and 29% of observed inequalities in Ghana are attributable to disparities in opportunities. When individual outcomes are significantly determined by circumstances such as social origin or gender, it reflects a state of unfairness, wherein access to capabilities, productive resources, employment, and pathways out of poverty are unequally distributed. Such conditions not only perpetuate poverty traps but also contribute to the persistence of inequality over time (World Bank, 2005; Marrero & Rodríguez, 2013).

2.2 Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Ghana

It is instructive that poverty and poverty alleviation are differently understood by different people in Ghana (Amofah & Agyare, 2022). Poverty comes in different shapes and forms. This explains why the definition of poverty remains fluid and context-dependent in both theoretical and empirical literature. What constitutes poverty in one setting may differ significantly from its elements in another (Amofah & Agyare, 2022). Poverty alleviation is the attempt made to reduce the incidence of poverty or to reduce the problem it leaves on people who suffer it. Poverty alleviation theories have evolved over the last six decades (Amofah & Agyare, 2022). Development theories and discussions on poverty and poverty alleviation were intensified in the 1970s and re-launched in the 1990s by international development organizations and academics (Sen, 1976; Streeten & Burki, 1978, 2000; Wong, 2012).

Over the last three decades, organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank have steered the poverty alleviation agenda around the world, especially in developing countries. These discussions have been the reasons behind the promulgation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; United Nations, 2000, 2011; United Nations Publications, 2010) which was targeted to halving extreme poverty in the developing world by 2015. Furthermore, as a sequel to the MDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been implemented to among other things, erase extreme poverty in all countries by 2030 (United Nations, 2017).

Over the years, the Government of Ghana (GoG) has implemented several socio-economic interventions to foster inclusive and sustainable growth. Yet, the increase in income disparities across the population and its persistence over the years suggest that some categories of households or individuals have been unable to take advantage of whatever opportunities growth presents (Gafa, Hodey & Senadzo, 2024). Amofah and Agyare (2022), affirm that Ghana has made efforts to actively reduce the poverty incidence in the country through the GoG initiatives, which include the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme that provided monthly cash remittances to selected vulnerable households with the help of local and international non-governmental agencies and development partners (Addai & Boaheng, 2025). According to Ansah et al. (2020), Ghana was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to meet the MDGs of halving extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015. Yet, the national poverty incidence according to the GLS Survey 7, was a little over 23% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019).

These gains in Ghana need to be sustained and possibly improved. Poverty reduction policy and implementation in Ghana need to be intentional about providing more equal access to productive potential and opportunities for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of education and employment (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024). There must be the provision of economic opportunities and development of human capital to tackle poverty in a more sustainable way (Amartya Sen 1985, 2000; Wong, 2012; Reinert, 2020).

2.2.1 *Education as a Variable for Poverty Alleviation*

Aoun (2004), claims that high poverty rate could be attributed to lower education. Research has proven that education as a variable, has been employed as an effective way to eradicate poverty in many countries (Schultz, 1981). Thus, as people are given basic education, they are able to create wealth based on the value added to their lives through the education (Amofah & Agyare, 2022). Knowledge sharing could be an effective way of reducing poverty. For, when countries, communities or individuals learn from each other, it reduces poverty.

In terms of household head characteristics in Ghana, education is associated with a lower vulnerability to poverty persistence or entry. Specifically, households headed by a person with primary or secondary education (and more) are less likely to remain in or fall into poverty compared with those whose head has no formal education. The effect is greater for higher levels of education. While the occupation of the household head seems to have no significant effect on the likelihood of poverty persistence, it is an important determinant of poverty entry among non-poor households. This finding suggests that having an employed household head, especially one with an occupation other than vulnerable employment in the form of business and farm contributor is a safeguard against poverty entry, as the household tends to be more resilient to income shocks (Gafa, Hodey & Senadza, 2024).

2.3 Financial Education: A Definition

The Organization of Economic Corporation and Development (OECD) conducted a relevant study in 14 countries around the world, concluding that financial illiteracy is widespread in countries, irrespective of their development or under development (Atkinson and Messy, 2012). Financial literacy can be described as an essential skill that allows people to improve their value of life by efficiently understanding, planning, and managing their financial resources (Soekarno & Pranoto, 2020). Financial education has become one of the most widely researched areas in recent times (Agnew et al, 2015: Bhushan et al, 2013). This could partly be as a result of the growing levels of poverty in many parts of the world.

2.3.1 *Financial Education and Poverty Alleviation among Religious Adherents*

Hakim et al. avow that poverty may be addressed through mental, ethical, and educational transformation (2025). There is an urgent need for people to be educated on the significance of having and applying workable financial planning and management in their daily life (Sapora Sipon et al., 2014). This is crucial because financial knowledge increases the management abilities regarding day to day financial matters and hence reduces the undesirable consequences of bad financial decisions (Delafrooz and Paim, 2011). It is showed that financially illiterate people may end up with low accumulation of wealth. Further, such people are also less likely to utilize the amount after retirement (Lusardi et.al, 2010). The low financial literacy ultimately increases the likelihood of poor decisions regarding financial matters, while the improved financial literacy carries about higher involvement in financial planning (Shafii et. al, 2009). Financial literacy helps in taking sound financial decisions by the consumer. It is the ability of the individual to plan their finances in an effective way.

In their view, Badria et al. (2024) assert that there is a relationship between financial literacy and financial independence among religious faithful, for the former equips young entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge to align their financial decisions with their spiritual values. Financial literacy is a key determinant of financial behavior, influencing how individuals manage their resources and make economic decisions (Goyal et al., 2023; Pandey & Utkarsh, 2023).

Empirical evidence suggests that while both Islamic religiosity and financial literacy influence financial management behavior, financial literacy has a more pronounced effect (Wijaya et al., 2024; Mulyadi et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of integrating Islamic financial education into curricula, particularly for students and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to enhance financial awareness and decision-making (Alharbi et al., 2022). When individuals understand financial concepts such as budgeting, saving, and responsible spending, frugality, asset and liability, they are more likely to make informed choices that support long-term financial stability (Lusardi et al., 2014). People with higher financial literacy tend to be more disciplined in managing their expenses, avoiding unnecessary spending, and using their resources wisely (Goyal et al., 2023; Pandey & Utkarsh, 2023).

Research does not only postulate that financial education helps individuals adopt mindful consumption habits and make smarter financial decisions that align with the principles of frugality (Koe & Yeoh, 2021), but also, it indicates that financial literacy significantly influences entrepreneurial participation and performance. For instance, Koomson et al. (2022) highlight that financial literacy is correlated with increased entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, suggesting that individuals with a stronger understanding of financial principles are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This is further supported by Li and Qian (2019), who assert that micro-entrepreneurs often face challenges due to inadequate financial literacy, which hampers their ability to make sound financial decisions essential for business success.

Additionally, financial education serves as a crucial mediating factor that strengthens the relationship between religiosity and frugal living intention. Financially literate individuals are more likely to translate religious values into practical financial behaviors, ensuring sustainable wealth management. The findings confirm that individuals with higher religiosity exhibit stronger frugal living intentions. However, financial literacy has a more pronounced effect on financial decision-making, suggesting that while religiosity shapes moral perspectives on money, financial literacy provides the practical tools necessary for effective financial management (Badria et al., 2024).

2.4 Religiosity and Poverty

2.4.1 *Religiosity: A Definition*

Religion, revolves around the idea of the Sacred (Hopper, 1986). *Religare*, the Latin word, from which the word, "religion," is derived, denotes "to bind," or "to tie." Its cognate, *religio,* connoting, "reverence," underscores an intricate idea of a person or group of people recognizing the Sacred, and demonstrating a high level of devotion, commitment, and reverence to that entity. Another key element of religion, is belief. Religious beliefs are established over time through the experiences of the people as they engage the Sacred. These religious beliefs and ideas are expressed through cultic practices such as prayer, ceremonies, sacrifice, offerings, initiation, rites, ethical standards, the various proscriptions and allowables, and many more. Thus, a religious person affirms belief in the Sacred/Supreme or Ultimate Reality, as possessing a greater degree of reality than all other forms of perceived existence.

The level of commitment to a religion is defined as religiosity (Bhuian et al., 2018; Mansori et al., 2020; Tariq et al., 2019; Usman et al., 2017; Zakaria et al., 2020). It reflects the extent of one's commitment to religious tenets and intensity of belief and practice associated with one's faith (Mansori et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2020). Johnson et al. (2001) define religiosity as "the extent to which an individual is committed to the religion he or she professes and its teachings, such that the individual's attitudes and behavior reflect this commitment." Religiosity is defined as the notion of individuals' actions that are profoundly influenced by the extent of their religious knowledge and beliefs (Holdcroft, 2006). Hill et al. (2000) presented religiosity as the behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and experiences arising from a desire to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform one's relationship with a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or ultimate truth. Meanwhile, Delener (1990) perceived religiosity as the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideals are held and practiced by an individual.

Religiosity as a term, is often used interchangeably with related terms such as religious appreciation (Norhayati et al., 2020; Ab Rahman et al., 2020), religiosity (Khairuddin et al., 2022; Dana, Wilcox-archuleta, & Barreto, 2017), religious obligation (Ghazali et al., 2022; Han et al., 2018), religious commitment (Abu-Alhaija et al., 2018; Aman et al., 2019), and religious maturity (Indirawati, 2006), all of which broadly describe the same concept, which is the appreciation of religious values in daily life. The internalization of religious values is regarded as a critical aspect of individual well-being within the field of Religious Studies (Newman & Graham, 2018). Such internalization not only fosters moral and spiritual development but also serves as a moderating influence on potentially harmful or deviant behaviors (Aranda, 2008). Moreover, it informs ethical decision-making and contributes to a sense of responsibility and prudence in areas such as financial conduct and overall life choices (Sarofim et al., 2020).

2.4.2 *Religiosity and Poverty Alleviation*

Religion is very fundamental (Trueblood, 1944) in all human societies. It shapes the underlying framework through which individuals interpret the world; and guides their behavior in accordance with their beliefs. Measuring religiosity presents a considerable challenge due to its multifaceted nature. It is commonly understood to comprise two primary dimensions: internal and external religiosity (Augenblick et al., 2016). Internal religiosity reflects genuine adherence to religious principles and a sincere desire to serve one's faith. In contrast, external religiosity is characterized by the instrumental use of religious practices for personal gain or social acceptance (Le & Kieu, 2019; Tariq et al., 2019). Religiosity is closely linked to individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviors, influencing various aspects of personal and social life (Al Balushi et al., 2018; Bhuian et al., 2018; Usman et al., 2017). In this context, just as values, attitudes, and behaviors influence an individual's commitment to religion, religious adherence also reciprocally shapes one's values, attitudes, and behaviors. Consequently, individuals who profess the same religious faith may exhibit differing patterns of behavior, reflecting the complex interplay between personal disposition and religious commitment (Al Balushi et al., 2018; Bhuian et al., 2018; Mansori et al., 2020; Usman et al., 2017).

Klein et al. (2017) argue that religiosity should be considered a relevant factor in the analysis of financial behavior. Similarly, Al Mahi et al. (2017) contend that emphasizing religiosity, rather than religion per se, offers a more accurate framework for understanding individual behavior. This distinction is grounded in the notion that religiosity pertains to personal belief and individual responses to religion, whereas religion is often understood as a broader cultural construct. The theoretical foundation supporting the significance of religiosity lies in the idea that although individuals may be socialized into specific religious values and beliefs, it is the internalization and active pursuit of these principles that ultimately shape behavioral outcomes (Mokhlis, 2009).

Religiosity, which refers to the internalization of religious values in daily life, is reflected in speech, actions, and decision-making (Muzakkiyah & Suharnan, 2016). It is closely tied to an individual's spiritual connection with God, forming the foundation of faith and belief systems (Asih et al., 2020). More than just abstract principles, religiosity is actively practiced through behavior and can be understood through three dimensions: the cognitive dimension, which relates to religious knowledge and beliefs; the affective dimension, which involves emotional and spiritual experiences; and the behavioral dimension, which reflects how religious teachings are applied in everyday actions (Asih et al., 2020; Westacott, 2016). In addition to shaping personal values, religiosity also influences professional and entrepreneurial behavior. Mustikowati & Wilujeng (2020) emphasize that religious principles such as honesty, ethics, morals, and mutual respect contribute to improving an individual's performance, reinforcing the idea that strong religious adherence can positively impact both personal and professional success. Religiosity is deeply connected to religion, as it involves applying religious values to different aspects of daily life, including economic, cultural, financial, and managerial activities (Badra et al., 2024).

According to the religion market model (McCleary, 2003), economic development tends to diminish religious participation and belief. This perspective posits that as societies become more economically advanced, individuals exhibit lower levels of religiosity, particularly in terms of adherence to specific religious beliefs. However, religiosity plays a significant role in moderating personal financial behavior. For example, individuals who adhere to strong religious social norms are generally expected to exhibit greater financial discipline and, consequently, lower levels of personal debt (Sipon et al., 2014). Keister (2008) affirms that religious belief can influence wealth ownership via behaviors.

Empirical research on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and mental health further supports this view, indicating a positive association between religious commitment and a reduced propensity for risk-related behaviors, including excessive borrowing, delinquency, and criminal activity (Larson & Larson, 1994). A study by Sipon et al. (2014), highlights the significant role of religiosity in curbing overspending, suggesting that individuals with strong religious values are more likely to exercise financial restraint. Similarly, Jerusalem (1993), found that individuals who identify as religious, report lower levels of depression compared to their less religious counterparts. Bee-Horng Luea, Liang-Ju Chenb, and Shwu-Chong Wu (2010) argue that religious affiliation contributes to a stronger sense of personal identity, which in turn reduces anxiety and enhances resilience in the face of stress. Furthermore, they suggest that religion offers a framework of meaning and purpose, enabling individuals to interpret life's challenges more rationally. Through beliefs and rituals, religion fosters positive emotions such as hope, faith, optimism, and emotional release, often facilitated by practices like forgiveness and the pursuit of healing and redemption.

2.4.3 *Religiosity and Debt Eradication*

Debt remains one of the principal drivers of poverty, significantly impeding the economic development of indebted nations and constraining their capacity to invest in critical public services such as healthcare building of roads and education (Kamil, 2007). In many poor communities, one could observe that indebtedness and poverty are common bedfellows in the life of the individual members. That is to say, poor people are likely to be in debt more than any other group. Likewise, people with huge debt responsibilities constitute the majority among those in the web of poverty. Debt is never merely an "economic issue" but a deeply moral and ineradicably social one as well (Mladin & Ridpath, 2019). Lending and borrowing usually occur among closely related individuals and groups. This social capital does not only increase the rate of lending-borrowing in many communities, but also debt occurrences. This is because in such contexts, debtors are rarely under pressure to settle their debts, making debt eradication untenable.

Some scholars avow that, people with higher religious social norms are likely to have lower financial debt and people with lower financial debts experience lower debt stress (Sipon et al., 2014). Khan and Mould (2008) assert that Islam, for example, strongly discourages the accumulation of excessive debt, as it is believed to have serious and potentially detrimental implications for a Muslim's faith and conviction. Debt is viewed as a condition that may lead to harmful consequences, both spiritually and socially. In particular, incurring debt to finance luxury or extravagant consumption stands in direct opposition to fundamental Islamic principles, which emphasize moderation and explicitly condemn excess and wastefulness. From an Islamic perspective, the relationship between religiosity and financial debt is rooted in the Qur'anic emphasis on prudence and responsible financial conduct. Islam permits debt within manageable limits and strongly encourages prompt and full repayment. Several hadiths underscore the virtue of repaying debts and warn against delaying repayment or incurring debt with no intention or means to repay. Muslims believe that one's debt could be a hindrance for entry into Heaven at death.

The Qur'an also advocates for compassion toward debtors in distress, allowing for repayment deferrals. Prophet Muhammad regularly sought refuge from heavy debt, recognizing its potential to lead individuals into dishonesty and broken promises. Collectively, these teachings highlight Islam's promotion of financial responsibility and caution against the burdens of excessive indebtedness. It also has the propensity to protect and preserve relationship between Muslims because debt can indeed be a disease and a source of rancor in a community if not managed properly.

Christians on the other hand, are taught from Scriptures about debt and debt-management. The Bible is replete with the idea of one receiving freedom from the oppression of debt (Mk. 10:45; Rom. 6:21-23; Col. 3:5-6). From a Christian perspective, Mladin and Ridpath (2019) affirm that debt expresses the very nature of human beings as creatures defined and made for relationships, with personal and communal obligations. That notwithstanding, relationships can be marred when it becomes parasitic and exploitative regarding lending and debt repayment. This is affirmed by Jeremy Bentham (1992) that a Christian is considered moral and righteous if they become responsible and pay back what they owe the neighbors.

Christian doctrines encourage lending to one another but frown on lending at interest. In the 4th Century, Basil the Great (n.d), the bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, is reported to have asserted that "a loan given on interest is a poison that slowly destroys the life of the borrower." The Christian principle of love for a neighbor as oneself is to be upheld in financial interactions. Borrowers usually fall into huge debts due to high interest rates on loans. It can be observed that rich-lenders usually get more from the poor instead of the other way round. Christians see such a situation as an act of injustice.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design informed by an interpretivist epistemology, recognizing that knowledge is socially and contextually constructed, particularly when dealing with religious and cultural narratives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A descriptive analytical approach is adopted, suitable for systematically interpreting conceptual, textual, and doctrinal materials without statistical generalization. The purpose is to uncover embedded theological and financial meanings within religious discourses and evaluate their relevance for poverty alleviation in Ghana.

This research relies on library-based data collection involving both primary and secondary sources. Primary data include sacred religious texts such as the Bible and the Qur'an, which provide theological foundations for religious perceptions of poverty and economic ethics in Ghana. These texts are treated not merely as fixed dogmas but as interpretive frameworks that evolve through context and praxis (Gadamer, 1975; Tracy, 2010). Secondary data comprise peer-reviewed academic literature, books, policy papers, governmental and non-governmental reports, and scholarly theological commentaries on religion, poverty, and financial behavior. These were selected based on their theoretical relevance, methodological rigor, and representativeness of diverse religious perspectives.

Thematic analysis was employed to examine recurring ideas and concepts, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This method, though originally designed for empirical qualitative data, was adapted for textual analysis with reference to Clarke and Braun (2013), who advocate for its flexible application across a variety of qualitative materials. The analysis was further guided by hermeneutic interpretation, especially suited for theological exegesis and ethical critique of religious doctrine (Gadamer, 1975). The approach emphasized how poverty is portrayed not just as economic deprivation but as a manifestation of social injustice and moral concern requiring theological and structural transformation (Gutiérrez, 1973; Sen, 1999). Religious praxis such as biblical teachings, *zakat*, and prosperity theology was examined for its role in shaping public perceptions and behaviors around wealth, charity, and responsibility.

Reflexivity was also embedded into the research process. The researchers maintained awareness of their theological and academic positioning, recognizing how personal beliefs and interpretive lenses could influence data selection and interpretation (Finlay, 2002). Ethical considerations were observed in the interpretation of religious texts and in the respectful engagement with culturally embedded belief systems (Christian, 2000). Source credibility was ensured by selecting texts and scholarship based on peer-review status, relevance to the Ghanaian religious context, and inclusion of diverse denominational viewpoints.

To enhance the trustworthiness of findings, methodological triangulation was used by consulting a diversity of textual sources and cross-validating themes across Christian, Islamic, and traditional religious worldviews (Patton, 1999). This allowed for a more comprehensive and culturally grounded understanding of how faith-based financial education can be mobilized to address poverty in Ghana. This methodological framework enables a rigorous, ethically anchored, and interdisciplinary inquiry into the convergence of religiosity and financial literacy, thereby providing a theoretically robust and contextually grounded basis for examining their integrative potential in advancing sustainable poverty alleviation.

4.0 CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION

4.1 The Bible and Poverty

In a 2019 UN report, it was highlighted that the church wields significant influence in shaping awareness and social action in addressing poverty and economic inequality (World Economic Forum, 2021). Several examples of positive contributions by the church in addressing poverty and economic inequality have occurred in various countries. In Ghana, several church organizations have assisted in providing social aid to impoverished communities, such as distributing basic necessities and healthcare assistance. Moreover, they have also played a role in providing education and skills training to children and individuals in need.

Biblical teachings and values provide a strong foundation for these actions, guiding the church in its mission to alleviate poverty and promote economic equality. In the New Testament (NT), Greek words such as *ptochos*, *penes*, *endees* and *penichros* are used to describe poverty in different forms. The commonest of all the terms used for the idea of poverty, is *ptochos*. In the days of Jesus, it refers to poverty in its literal sense. It describes those who are extremely poor and destitute to the point of begging. In fact, it shows that such a person lives in this situation continuously (Louw & Nida, 1988).

Examples can be found in various NT texts (2 Cor. 8:1-3; Mat. 11:5, 19:21, 25:31-46; Lk. 16:20-22; Jas. 2:2).

However, Jesus introduced a surprising kind of poverty where he regarded people who lacked the revelation of God as *ptochos*, “poor” (Mat. 5:3, 11:5). The implication here is that once a person receives the revelation of God, poverty cycle should be broken in his or her life. *Penichros,* which occurs only once in the NT and it is a *hapex legomenon* (Lk. 21:2), has the same meaning as *ptochos*. Another term for poverty in the NT, *penes,* is used to describe a person who can merely survive on their income and therefore expected to live moderately or sparingly. Such a person does not suffer from extreme poverty but perhaps a moderate one (2 Cor. 9:9). The fourth Greek word describing poverty is *endees*. It denotes a person having a serious lack of resources at a particular point rather than on continuous state of poverty. Thus, such a person may need an urgent help or quick fixes. It was for this reason that in the Early Church, it was reported that “no one was in need” (Ac. 4:34). All of this is to say that the Bible addresses poverty in many ways.

4.1.1 *The Prosperity Theology*

In maneuvering the complex terrain of poverty alleviation in Africa, a range of theological and hermeneutical perspectives has emerged, each purporting to reveal the divine will regarding financial independence. Among these, the prosperity theology, otherwise termed, “Prosperity Gospel,” stands out as a prominent strand (Boaheng, 2024). This theological or hermeneutical position asserts that God desires material wealth for his followers, framing financial affluence as part of a divine-human covenant. Proponents of this hermeneutics, often referred to as “prosperity preachers,” maintain that it is the will of God for every Christian believer to become financially affluent. Consequently, they attribute poverty in a Christian’s life to a lack of faith and the sin of miserliness towards giving of offerings and tithes (Kwarteng-Yeboah, 2016; Oluoch, 2012). These preachers frequently urge their congregants to contribute substantial sums of money either directly to them or to support what they define as “God’s work,” promising financial breakthroughs in return (Kwarteng-Yeboah, 2016).

Prosperity hermeneutics comes across as a theological view that prioritizes material gains over spiritual and altruistic ideals, promoting the pursuit of personal wealth rather than the equitable distribution of resources within the ecosystem. The materialistic orientation of prosperity hermeneutics often leads its adherents to become obsessed with money and wealth, reducing life to a relentless pursuit of financial accumulation (Goliama, 2013). While this hermeneutic permeates various strands of Christianity across Africa, it is particularly prevalent among the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Neo-prophetic movements (Boaheng, 2024).

Indeed, the Christian Scriptures is replete with God’s promises of “prosperity,” which includes material wealth for believers (Deut. 8:18; Prov. 10:22; 2 Cor. 9:8; Php. 4:19; Lk. 6:38). Yet, these promises do not seem to be absolute. A careful reading of many of the texts the prosperity preachers cite, reveals that those texts have either context to be considered or conditions attached to them but unfortunately, many of them focus on portions, and use them as proof-texts for their fund-raising activities. For instance, the context of Deuteronomy 8:18 shows that God was rather admonishing the people not to become proud when they acquire wealth. 2 Corinthians 9:8 came about as a result of the church, though in difficult times, were willing to share the little they had with others in Jerusalem. Paul, moved by such generosity, declared to them that since they were willing to share their resources with others, he believed that God, who is capable of giving them more, would help them get more so that they could keep being generous. Surprisingly, Paul’s use of the Greek words: *pasan,* “every” or “all,” *chreian,* “need,” and *ploutos*, “riches,” in Philippians 4: 19 is not limited to material wealth but rather, the totality of the provision, which includes material, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual abundance, that reflects the inexhaustible nature of God’s resources. Clearly, “Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Lk. 6:38), ascribed to Jesus, underscores the reciprocal and communal element in resource sharing. Nevertheless, on many occasions, God is petitioned to honor his (this) promise.

Gordon D. Fee (1984) critiques the hermeneutical misuse found in prosperity theology, warning against the tendency to project the contemporary cultural contexts onto the biblical text –a practice that ultimately distorts the original intent of the biblical authors. Similarly, Judith L. Hill (2009) contends that advocates of prosperity theology often demonstrate either a disregard for sound interpretive principles or a lack of proficiency in the Greek and Hebrew languages, particularly in matters of syntax. No doubt, a hermeneutical flaw always leads to a theological flaw and a theological flaw equally results in a hermeneutical flaw.

4.1.2 *Jesus against Poverty*

Jesus lived a life and taught lessons that can be harnessed to deal with poverty. As a revered figure in the Christian faith, Jesus is known for his profound compassion towards the poor and vulnerable, actively addressing issues of poverty and economic inequality. Some of his actions in tackling these issues include providing social assistance to those in need, such as feeding the hungry (Mat. 14:13-21) and healing the poor and sick (Mk. 1:29-34). In addition to providing direct assistance, Jesus also encouraged his followers to do the same. He taught that Christians should help those in need and emphasized that material wealth is not the primary focus of life. In one of his teachings, Jesus stated, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mat. 6:19-20). Here, Jesus emphasizes that wealth is meant to serve the whole community. The Christian approach values generosity over selfish hoarding or accumulation of riches solely for personal aggrandizement (Boaheng, 2020). This does not imply that saving money is wrong. Rather, the ethics of God's kingdom encourage responsible earning and savings, without harming others, and using those resources generously to uplift and support those in need (Tryon, 2006).

Jesus' actions in addressing poverty and economic inequality not only had an impact during his lifetime but also resonate in the present. His teachings on love, social justice, and selfless service have inspired many individuals to engage in social initiatives and address issues of poverty and economic disparities. The Early Church was noted to have practiced resource-sharing to the point where there was no one in need among them (Ac. 4:34). Communalism and sharing of material resources have characterized the church up to today.

Jesus' teachings and lifestyle provide useful lessons for poverty alleviation. Jesus encourages his followers to pursue philanthropic and charitable activities. According to Luke 6:38, Jesus relates: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will men give to you." The goal of Jesus is to intimate the need for giving and generosity in human interrelationships (v. 33). To Jesus, giving has a way of reciprocity. Resource exchange is a key factor for human survival. The whole world runs and is sustained through resource exchange. The Akan express this idea in a wise-saying, *nsa kɔ na nsa aba*, "hand goes and hand comes," highlighting the need to share and or exchange our resources with one another for life's sustainability.

Also, Jesus' comment on the "widow's mite" (Mk. 12:41-44), is to emphasize the need for everyone to give willingly whenever the need arises. The offerings that were being put in the treasury was originally meant to be shared to the poor, yet, even the poor were expected to give as a way of motivation to the rich to give more. Probably, to Jesus, poverty is a mind-set and that everybody has something to give. From a Christian perspective, giving is a way of life. It was a culture commonly practiced by the Early Church to eradicate poverty among the faithful (Ac. 2:44-45). On one occasion, Jesus, having given two parables (the ten virgins and the talents) to illustrate the kingdom of Heaven, painted a picture of himself on a judgement seat; delivering his verdict to the world. In that imaginary court setting, one notices that providing food to those who are hungry and water to the thirsty, providing shelter for the displaced and clothing for those who need it, were the needed substantial evidence and better particulars to win the heart of the judge (Mat. 25:31-40). Christian theology underscores that being indifferent to the plight of individuals living in poverty is sinful in the sight of God (Boaheng, 2024). All of this is to underscore the need for Christians to become the help that other fellow believers need. Sustainability of such approaches is however crucial and calls for re-evaluation.

4.1.2 The Teach-a-Man-to-Fish Paradigm

Society's usual approach towards the poor has been to give a little, normally, enough for a day's sustenance. This approach has no significant place in poverty eradication because the effects of such interventions are not sustainable. Rather, it encourages overdependence and slothfulness. This is affirmed by Addai and Boaheng (2025) that even though provision of temporary reliefs may be advantageous to the poor, it could also diminish and undermine their overall self-worth. Christian teachings strongly advocate for poverty eradication, emphasizing compassion, justice and actively helping the poor to exit the poverty web. Christians are encouraged to actively support the poor through giving, volunteering and advocating for policies that address poverty in a sustainable way. While advocating for immediate relief, Christians are also encouraged to address the underlying causes of poverty, such as financial illiteracy, lack of opportunities and systemic inequalities.

The church has a lot to glean from Jesus in addressing poverty in Ghana. For instance, the Gospels relate that at one time when Jesus and his disciples needed to pay their taxes, he instructed the fishermen among them to go and fish (Mat. 17:24-27). Jesus could have conjured money for that purpose, yet, on that occasion, the disciples had to work before they could get money to settle their debt. Sometimes, people get locked up in the poverty web because of what one may call "the beggars' economy." This describes a situation where some people find begging for alms a lucrative venture. In recent years, the phenomenon of "healthy-professional-beggars" has become a daily spectacle in the major cities of Ghana. Their trade is to make a living from hardworking people through aggressive begging, stealing and scamming (Addai & Boaheng, 2025). Some of them also think that prosperity is dependent on luck and chances.

Biblical interpretations could be one of the causes for such mind-sets. The story of catching fish in order to pay their taxes has been understood and taught by many interpreters from the angle of a miracle. Willmington Harold (2018), for instance, illustrates the story in the context of a miracle by Jesus which confirms his deity. He further links it to the creation narrative when human was told to "subdue" the earth (Gen. 1:28), highlighting the divine authority of human to communicate and exercise control over all creatures which includes "a fish swimming in the waters of Galilee" (Harold, 2018). This is affirmed by Albert Barnes (1834) who interprets the fish miracle as evidence of divine omniscience or power either foreknowing or placing the coin in the fish, which underscores Christ's divinity.

What if one viewed the story from a didactic angle? What if Jesus' words to the fishermen were figurative? It should awaken a critical mind to ponder on why Peter and the fisher-folks did not raise any queries regarding the likelihood for them to find money in a fish's mouth if they went to the sea. It is equally curious to note that the Matthean writer leaves readers with no evidence of the disciples' experience when they followed the instructions of the Christ. This raises an important question on the validity of situating the story solely in the context of miracle, when the text clearly omits any of such elements. Neil J. McEleney (1976) affirms that "telling a miracle here is not uppermost in Matthew's mind." The argument here is not an attempt to discredit the ability of Christ to perform miracles but to draw Christians' attention to the more probable lesson the story seeks to teach. Probably, the lesson is on working for financial independence. The narrative highlights a foundational principle of poverty alleviation, herein referred to as the "teach-a-man-to-fish paradigm."

The "teach-a-man-to-fish paradigm," as conceptualized in this study, underscores a developmental approach to poverty alleviation that prioritizes capacity building over temporary relief. This paradigm advocates for empowering individuals and communities through skills development, education, and the provision of sustainable livelihood opportunities. Rather than offering short-term aid or charitable handouts, this model emphasizes the importance of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and resources necessary to achieve economic self-sufficiency. In doing so, it seeks to address the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate poverty by fostering resilience, agency, and sustainable socio-economic mobility.

This paradigm aligns with human capital theory and participatory development frameworks, which argue that meaningful and sustainable poverty reduction requires active engagement and investment in human potential. It also resonates with contemporary discourse in development studies that critiques dependency-creating interventions and calls for strategies that enable the poor to become agents of their own development. This aligns with the third role of religion in poverty alleviation identified by Ali and Hassan (2019), which highlights religion's developmental and motivational influence, encouraging the poor to actively strive toward improving their economic circumstances.

For many decades, the church has been interested in poverty issues, seeing them as grounded in biblical principles of compassion, almsgiving and support for the needy in society. During the early stages of Christian development, the people demonstrated love and charity by providing communal care support, ensuring that no Christian went without a basic need (Nye-Knutson, 2008). However, the efforts of the church in particular and religious groups in general in Ghana, could be described as quick-fixes, which are only reactionary and unsustainable. This paper presses for more sustainable interventions to help people exit the poverty web in Ghana.

4.1.3 *Poverty Exit Paradigm*

Christians in the poverty web are expected to take calculated steps to exit. Falling into extreme poverty levels and remaining so continuously (ptochos), may not be biblically encouraged. However, from a biblical point of view, taking careful and well-planned steps to improve one's socio-economic status seems ideal. Thus, in the parable of the talent (Mat. 25:14-30), profit-making, fruitfulness, and prudent resource management are key economic concepts highlighted by Jesus. The parable reveals an essential poverty alleviation paradigm. That is, from Christian understanding, resources that are distributed to the poor are to be carefully managed so that their socio-economic life would be gradually improved. Thus, reliefs are meant to cushion the poor and provide opportunity for them to take steps to check out of the poverty cycle. That was the reason why the two servants who received five and two talents and made profits of five and two more respectively, were commended, whereas the fellow that made no profit because he made no effort, was condemned in that parable.

The OT contains numerous passages urging compassion for the poor:

> Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Prov. 14:31), Poor persons will never disappear from the earth. That's why I am giving you this command: you must open your hand generously to your neighbours (Deut. 15:11), Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses (Prov. 28:27). If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom become like a noonday (Isa. 58:10).

This concept of poverty alleviation can be traced way back in Ancient Israel. In the Old Testament (OT), one comes across poverty alleviation systems, established by YHWH (The LORD) to mitigate poverty levels among the people of God (Israel). As a result, there were special offerings, tithes, farm gleanings during harvests, debt cancellations on the Sabbath Year and reversal of land holdings during the Jubilees (Addai & Boaheng, 2025) etc., as part of Israel's socio-economic and national organization. Theologically, "the Sabbatical Year was not only instituted as a test of faith, but also as a test of love" (Boaheng, 2020) for one's neighbor. All these were meant to resource the poor so that they could exit the web of poverty in the foreseeable years.

Avoidance of waste and living within one's means are also useful ideas Christians can learn from Jesus in order to exit the poverty web. In John 6:1-13, the narrator relates how Jesus, having realized that his congregation were hungry, made use of the available loaves of bread and fishes to feed them. Beyond the miracle of multiplication, a key financial lesson that can be gleaned is resource mobilization and management. Clearly, the text highlights the need to avoid wastage of food and resources. The twelve baskets of leftovers could be used another time or be used to feed some other people. This is a critical lesson for poverty alleviation.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, the paper makes some recommendations for poverty alleviation agents in Ghana. First, Religious leaders must incorporate the theme of poverty into the core of their ministries. Textual themes and passages in their sacred books that underscore resource–sharing and communityship must be highlighted and properly interpreted to firm up positive religiosity among their members. Religious education that discourages slothfulness, indebtedness and dependence-mentality ought to be vigorously pursued by religious leaders during their meetings. Periodic financial literacy programs should be organized for religious congregants to acquire entrepreneurial, management, and financial independence skills. Religious people should avoid lending or borrowing at interest in order not to fall or cause others to fall into huge debts. Through proper textual interpretation, religious leaders should harness religio-financial resources and incorporate financial education in their religious pedagogies for all the different groups of people in the lead.

In addition, all poverty alleviation agencies (i.e. governmental and non-governmental) should adopt the “teach-a-man-to-fish paradigm” and move away from focusing on providing temporary reliefs in their poverty eradication programs in Ghana. The employment models and skills development programs championed by the Youth Employment Agency (YEA) and those spearheaded by religious groups need to go beyond the presentation of certificates to the participants but rather, it should include financial capital and other useful logistics such as tools and equipment, and space to really set them up for business. This will help the poor to gradually exit the web of poverty.

Further, apart from engaging in social services such as contributing material resources for poverty alleviation, it is the role of religious organizations to participate in social action in the form of advocacy. Particularly, the Church in the Christian context, must walk alongside the poor and the marginalized, resisting all forms of religious and social structures that seek to legitimize or perpetuate poverty. The church is therefore expected to speak to contextual social problems such as injustice, bribery, corruption, and smuggling and hoarding of goods, among other ills that prevail in our societies and impoverish people. The Church, priding herself as the conscience of society, must be seen to be engaging in rhetoric in the area of nation-building and national development, by speaking for the voiceless and advocating for equitable distribution of national resources and social amenities.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Ghana, a highly religious environment, remains one of the countries in SSA grappling with the issue of poverty. The curious enquiry into whether poverty is a function of religion or religion is a function of poverty in Ghana is not out of place due to this ubiquitous nature of religion. However, this paper has affirmed that neither religion causes one to become poor nor does poverty necessarily make one more religious. The analysis has posited that religion exudes vital financial education paradigms that can be harnessed for poverty alleviation in Ghana. Proper contextual interpretation of religious texts and the internalization of sound and ethical religiosity by religious adherents in Ghana is critical for poverty eradication. This paper has highlighted the teach-a-man-to-fish paradigm to be employed by religious groups, government and non-governmental agencies involved in poverty alleviation programs in Ghana. Embedded in this paradigm are specific ideas postulated by this study for people to escape or exit the poverty trap.

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