

PERCEPTION OF POVERTY IN THE CHURCH: A HOLISTIC REFLECTION FROM THE CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL COMMUNITIES IN YAOUNDE-CAMEROON

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Abstract

The manifestation of poverty in the society directly affects the church and is seen often through delay in human resource development, poor planning and exclusion of stakeholders in planning process, low productivity because of poor health, high family dependency ratio and laziness. The world, as much as Africa and Cameroon experiment the manifestation of poverty at different levels. In Cameroon extreme poverty is still visible at a higher level. The objectives: This study of the Catholic and Protestant Church assort to investigate the perception of poverty in the church in Yaounde. The methods: A total of 631 Catholic (175) and Protestant (456) Christians of the city of Yaounde completed the questionnaire from the congregational studies. The data obtained were processed in the Epi Info software which generated information that was used to assess the poverty level of the Christian church. 69.7% of the study population contributes with their families in the church less than 100 000 FCFA per years. 64.20% of respondents are either or not totally agree, or do not know anything about the fact that their Church encourages the faithful to develop their special gifts. The church which has the capacity to transform the character of the faithful holistically through the virtues of the Word of God is supposed to become more effective in the fight against poverty by building responsible Christians in their relationship with God, in their relationship with themselves, in their relationship with others, in their relationship with social structures (eg church, family, society, etc.) and in their relationship with the environment.

Keywords: Faithful and local church, Church Growth, Spiritual Poverty, Material Poverty, Christian Character.

INTRODUCTION

Africa continues to struggle behind the rest of the world with 560 Million (42%) of people from Sub-Saharan Africa only out of 1334 Million of multidimensional poor in the world (UNDP, 2018). Even with the decrease of the number of people extremely poor shown by the Sub-Saharan Africa's Human developmental index from 74.9% in 1990 to 66.3% in 2015 people living with less than 3.20 USD per day (World Bank Group, 2018), the population is still to feel the fall outs of such a positive turn of development. The World Bank report on Africa pointed to 4.8% growth rate in 2017 but regretted the fact that most economies in Africa were not diversified. The SDGs, 17 in number stipulate how development should be addressed. This still leaves much to be desired given that most strategic development plans for African nature would have to be rewritten since the SDGs came out after its declaration. The first Sustainable Development Goal aims to eradicate all forms of poverty. Statistics available point to the ravaging effects of this phenomenon by 10 Million people in the world living under the poverty line (World Bank, 2015). In their article, they examined five dimensions taken into consideration in the multidimensional cause of poverty, of whom children suffer the most: These are nutrition, accessibility to potable water, health, education, and lodgings. For most households, there is a combination of: accessibility to potable water, hygiene, patrimony, lodging, and the level of education of the head of the household that result in poverty.

The current index for Sub-Saharan Africa is 42% compare to that of Europe (0.3%), America (3%) or Asia (49%) Multiple Components Analysis (MCA) and hierarchical classification methods applied to child and household poverty demonstrate that 73 % of children aged less than five years live with multidimensional poverty line. Of these 25 % were affected by extreme poverty. The situation is not so different in Cameroon where, 61 % of her households are poor but will vary significantly with household size, the milieu of the residence and the level of education of the head of the household. These findings also reveal that the key determinants of child multidimensional poverty are the poverty status of the household, the level of education and the age of the child's mother/caretaker, and the presence of the mother in the household. The church is actively involved in bringing about moral values in social and managerial activities of its parishioners and has a direct responsibility to disciple its adherents to also properly manage money. Rick (2011) presents the church as a Faith-Based Organization that is a must-have development actor. For him, churches are capable, "offering the potential to 'add value' to development in a number of ways. They can: provide efficient development services, reach the poorest at the grassroots; have a long-term, sustainable presence; be legitimate and valued by the poorest; provide an alternative to a secular theory of development, elicit motivated and voluntary service; encourage civil society advocacy" August & Wynyard (2004) alerted to the fact of poverty as a real concern to the church. Today the church seems to be stepping up its fight against this evil. Evangelicals, mainstream Protestants and Roman Catholics are joining the fight and looking at addressing the problem together. It is no

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wonder then that much deliberation has gone into addressing the phenomenon of poverty over the past forty years from a variety of perspectives, be they academic, developmental, denominational or confessional (August and Waynard, 2004). Foster (2018) defines the clergy role as follow : "The church had decreed that henceforth I would be spiritual guide, public teacher, and beloved sage to people whose lives and work I couldn't possibly understand. With a stroke of his wand, God-or the bishop-had just made me an expert in troubled marriages, alcoholism, teen sex, and farm subsidies". Clergy is therefore a body of all persons ordained for religious duties. In other words the clergy has religious duties and secular mission from God to take care of the People. Over the years, the church has been marked by the emergence of several Christian communities, among which the Catholic community (Newton, 2003) and the Evangelical Community (ECC, 2016). These communities have in common Christ as the Head of the Church. In Yaounde, a Cameroonian city and area of our study, the Catholic community is divided into three distinct and autonomous denominations: Roman Catholic, Anglican Catholic and Orthodox Catholic. In the same way, the evangelical community is subdivided into two distinct and autonomous denominations: Protestants and Pentecostals. This study of the Catholic and Protestant Church assort to investigate the perception of poverty in the church in Yaounde.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was built, essentially by the method of Hartford Seminary Institute for Religious Research (2015). The questionnaire contained 10 sections meant to investigate Church Participation, Tasks of the Church, Organizational Characteristics, Congregational Identity, Worship, Program Evaluation, Education, Evangelism, Size and Condition of Facilities, Background Information and the Future Church. A pilot study was conducted to test the instruments and train surveyors and adjustments were made. The 6 surveyors were deployed to cover 56 churches in total. A total of 631 Catholic (175) and Protestant (456) Christians of the city of Yaoundé completed the questionnaire. An Exploratory data analysis was performed to find out the main tendencies and centrality of the findings. The data obtained were processed in the Epi Info software which generated information on the poverty level in the church.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indicators of poverty in the Church focused on low financial contribution in the church, delay in human resource development, poor planning and exclusion of stakeholders in planning process, low productivity because of poor health, high family dependency ratio, and laziness.

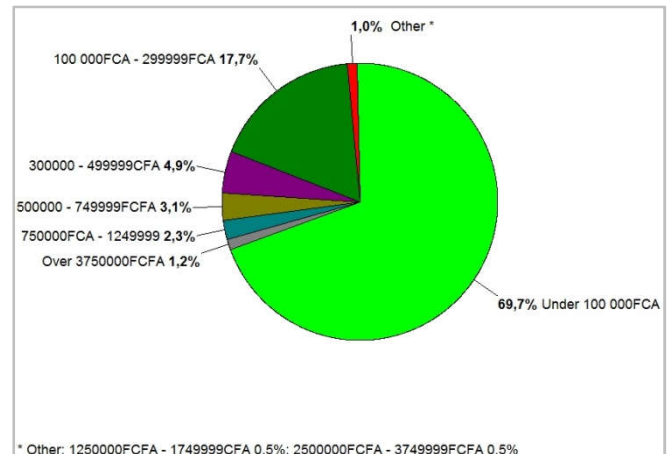
Low financial contribution of faithfuls in the church

69.7% of the study population contribute with their families less than 100 000 FCFA per years. The study population was mostly young, of between 20 and 54 years with singles being over 60% and assumed to have a low income. This may explain the low level of financial contribution in the church (under 100 000 FCFA per year as a family).

Delay in human resource development

Of the 404 Christians (67.20% of respondents) either agree or

strongly agree with the fact that the lay leaders in their church received the training they need to perform their tasks well. In other words 32.80% of respondents think that more is needed to be done to train lay leaders in the church.



Legend: These figures represent annual contributions by individual/families to the church Source: Enow, this study (2019)

Fig. 1. Family household financial contribution to the church per year

The lack of adequate training for group leaders in the church could be a source of inefficiency in the role the church plays in its growth and for its faithful, as well. The church growth principle 18 (Krejcir, 2000) in accordance with the organizational standard makes reference to the training of lay leaders to better perform their tasks (Offutt, 1987) recommends that leaders be trained according to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, as follows: The leader must have a real genuine sense and modeling of being Christ's servant, and the people in their care as His children. This is Servant Leadership Development About 35.80% of respondents strongly agree that their church encourages Christians to discover their special gifts. In other words 64.20% of respondents are either or not totally agree, or do not know anything about the fact that their Church encourages the faithful to develop their special gifts. This would demonstrate a weakness in the development of the church's resources; the most important mission of the church is the discovery and recovery of Christian gifts and talents.

The principle of Healthy church (Searcy, 2002) in accordance with the organizational standard relates to bring the church to encourage its members to discover the specific gifts for ministry and service (Offutt, 1987) recommends: The Ministry System, also known as the Volunteer System, determined how the church mobilizes people for significant ministry. In other words each Christian must be volunteer to serve The Lord. Some 19.40% of respondents are opposed to the fact that their church gives them the opportunity to be creative in their faith. A person with poor character needs for spiritual growth could have negative repercussions on church growth: a frustrate Christian can decide to leave the church and worth of all leave the faith in God. The organizational challenge of the church would be that of supervising each member. The church growth principle 19 (Krejcir, 2000) in accord with the organizational standard pertains to encouraging the faithful to be creative in their walk with God (Offutt, 1987), demonstrates this in the following terms: Leaders of growing churches empower the people in their care. They do not see or use volunteers just as helpers but as the tools and the resources with which to glorify God, and enable the goals of mission and needs to be reached.

They do this by encouragement, training, and organization, all centered to have the people of God growing in and receiving the Spirit in order to reach the full potential that God has for them. If a pastor, coach, or key supervisor gives special recognition and encouragement—even once that leader and/or volunteer will usually remain very faithful and loyal to the church (Krejcir, 2000).

Poor planning and exclusion of stakeholders in planning process

About 15.80% of respondents did not know if their needs are taken into account by their local church. This shows a lack of interest in the faithful and what their church offers or a lack of church communication on this point. The church growth principle 27 (Krejcir, 2000) in accordance with the organizational standard relates to church planning based on the needs of the congregation and the community (Offutt, 1987), recommends church leaders to listen to their faithful in the following terms: Listening, without arguing or defending one's self. This requires prayer and self-discipline. Where a leader is incapable of doing this, he or she could have someone do it. The task is not to persuade people to accept a particular view, but to communicate Biblical precepts and get them to understand them. They need to be made to feel heard. When they feel they are listened to, then their defenses will come down and relationships can be built. Then it will be a pleasure to lead them. They will respect and love the leader more, and will be more likely to be led by established goals. This makes it 28.40% of respondents (172 Christians) who disagree with the fact that in their church important decisions about the life of the church are rarely made without open discussion by church leaders and members.

Low productivity because of poor health

There is a strong link between human beings productivity and their health as this results showed that 9.40% of respondents declared that better health is one of their major reasons for the increment of their church participation. On the other hand 2.50% of respondents (16 Christians) recognize that their involvement with the church has dropped due to health problems. "We sought to provide evidence for the relationship between health risks and self-reported productivity, including health-related absence and impaired performance on the job. Higher risks are strongly associated with greater productivity loss, and different risks are associated with absenteeism than with being present" (Boles *et al.*, 2004).

High family dependency ratio

Most of the respondents live in households with large families. Among the respondents, 3 Christians (2.68% of the studied population) with at least one child have 10 children over 19 years in the home. 32.39% of the studied population (184 Christians) live in a house with several adults and at least one child. "Causes of poverty: "large families with small incomes, families managed by female heads of households controlling fewer resources (including economic, political and social power), and families headed by individuals living on the fringe support are bound to be poor. Persons that are unemployed, people with little education, and those living in rural areas where income generating activities are difficult to come by, or persons with no fixed nor regular income will also be trapped in poverty." (Ajaga-Nji, 2004)

Laziness

About 28.50% of respondents do not belong to any group or church committee. Belonging to a group or a church board allows participation in the advancement of God's work instead of just being a spectator. The principles of holistic development recommend that human beings must be responsible towards others in services, in their relationships with others. Brink (2012) and the theory on healthy church says that God created His people to serve; so to be active in groups and committees of the church is part of the average growth as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ (Searcy, Hatley, & Henson, 2011). The manifestation of poverty in this case is presented on two levels: spiritually poor, which is inactive in groups and committees of the church and another dimension is that the church does not encourage Christians to bring and use their potential in the groups and committees of the church. Some 26.60% of the studied population (162 Christians) in a year has not invited anyone to come into his church during the past year. The study notes the case of regular attendance at church programs reflecting the spiritual poverty of these Christians express not ignorance on the importance of being present at the various church services or the manifestation of laziness on their part.

Conclusion

The church which has the capacity to transform the character of the faithful holistically through the virtues of the Word of God is supposed to become more effective in the fight against poverty. A total of 631 Catholic (175) and Protestant (456) Christians of the city of Yaounde completed the questionnaire from the congregational studies. The data obtained were processed in the Epi Info software which generated information that was used to assess the poverty level of the Christian church. The study presents the case of irregular attendance at church programs. The study presents the case of inactive Christians in the church; they belong to no group or church committee who exposes the spiritual poverty of those, resulting in negligence in being helpful or lack of education on the importance of belonging to a group or a committee in the church. The studied population is not strong givers. Several explanations can be made: the mismanagement of finances by Christians, a Christian refusal to be generous as recommended in the Bible, the lack of teaching of the Church to the Christians on resource management. All these reasons are factors of spiritual poverty that have direct repercussions on the increase in material poverty. A need to train more lay leaders to better perform their duties in the church was raised. The incompetent lay leaders could bring confusion in the church and this could have consequences on the weakening of the faith of some Christians or bad Christians framing. The study appears difficult for the church to train its members adequately by allowing them to be Creative. The decision making in the church sometimes face the difficulty of explaining her involvement in the Bible. This point could be the source of poverty in the church that the remoteness of the church's Biblical values could lead to straying Christians in their faith. The discussion of these results has shown clearly that the reflection of the poverty level in the nation is the same in the church. Some people in Cameroon are working poor (low income, less than 1000 FCFA per day), the reflection of this fact in the church can be a low financial giving. The manifestation of poverty in the society affect directly the church: Delay in human resource development, poor planning

and exclusion of stakeholders in planning process, low productivity because of poor health, High family dependency ratio and Laziness. This paper is a call for the nation and the church to join their forces to fight against poverty. The church should adopt a holistic approach in the image of God which would enable it to simultaneously transform; positively and progressively, all its Christians into firm leaders and thus influence the development of society. Starting from the observation that development must be driven by human beings and for human beings, society therefore needs responsible human beings.

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