

## THE CHURCH AS A SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITUTION; AN EVALUATION

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### **Abstract**

*The issue of poverty and its adverse effect in the society is not new of which has called for the attention of the church in its battle. It is on this base that this paper is focused on the church as a social welfare in Nigeria. It looks at the concept of church and social welfare with regards to identifying how the church has helped and will still help in bring a change to the unfavourable conditions of people and also how she has been carrying out charitable works in the society. The paper gives a vivid understanding of the concept of church and social welfare. Social welfare as founded by either the nongovernmental bodies or individuals have in myriad ways made contributions in changing the pitiable conditions of the masses. The church on the other hand in recent times has taking a centre stage in this direction which is seen as part of her social gospel. In this regard therefore, this work will look at some of those areas of concern the church has helped and is still helping in bettering the lives of the masses. Omega power ministry as one of those churches has been outstanding in her role on social welfare which is worthy of note hence this work examines her role in the society. This work is theoretically framed with the Christian theory of human development. This theory was advanced by R.M Thomas (1990) who posits two cardinal goals to human endeavour, which is Christian's pursuit of everlasting life in heaven and the practice of doing good in individual's live by helping the poor, the needy, the depressed and contributing to societal development. Thus these cardinal goals of human development are hung on two principals of charity and justice which are seen in church's work of social services to the societies. This work adopts a phenomenological method in its discussion and therefore recommends that the church of Christ as seen in the societies today should try to make her impact visible in ameliorating and helping in changing the deplorable conditions of the people.*

**Key words:** Church, Social welfare, Christianity, Nigeria

## Introduction

Nigeria has been seen as a complex country of about 140 Million people with many “nations” within it. It has over 250 ethnic groups speaking different languages and dialects and also has the biggest population in Africa with 1 in 6 Africans being Nigerian. With the rise of poverty and inhuman condition prevalent in her, many scholars have researched on the roles played by individual of self-interest and organization in battling with the issue of social problem. This in the words of Berger and Neuhaus (1977) is termed mediating structures on which the structures serve as bridging gaps in mediating and helping to provide the basic things needed by these people in the society. In this regard, this article is set to spotlight and examine the roles Churches have played as a mediator in contributing to alleviating poverty, medical service administration, youth and women empowerments, speaking for justice for the people unjustly treated in the society, contributed in building schools and giving free education to the masses and empowerment of the members of the society.

## Conceptual clarification

**Church:** Many people today understand the church as a building which is not a biblical understanding of the church. The word “church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is defined as “an assembly” or “called-out ones.” The root meaning of *church* is not that of a building, but of people. It is ironic that when you ask people what church they attend; they usually identify a building. In Romans 16; 5 Paul said, “Greet the church that is in their house.” Paul refers to the church in their house not a church building, but a body of believers. The church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head, hence in Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul puts it thus, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” The body of Christ is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) until Christ’s return. Biblically, we may regard the church in two ways, as the universal church or as the local church.

According to Macarthur (2019), the universal church consists of everyone, everywhere, who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This verse says that anyone who believes is part of the body of Christ and has received the Spirit of

Christ as evidence. All those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ comprise the universal church.

Sequely, in Holman Bible Dictionary, the use of the Greek term *ekklesia* for the word church prior to the emergence of the Christian church is important as two streams of meaning flow from the history of its usage into the New Testament understanding of church. First, the Greek term which basically means '*called out*' was commonly used to indicate an assembly of citizens of a Greek city and is so used in Acts 19:32, 39. The citizens who were quite conscious of their privileged status over slaves and noncitizens were called to the assembly by a herald and dealt with matters of common concern. When the early Christians understood themselves as constituting a church, no doubt exists that they perceived themselves as called out by God in Jesus Christ for a special purpose and that their status was a privileged one in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:19).

Secondly, the Greek term was used more than one hundred times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in common use in the time of Jesus. The Hebrew term (*qahal*) meant simply 'assembly' and could be used in a variety of ways, referring for example to an assembling of prophets (1 Sam. 19:20), soldiers (Num. 22:4), or the people of God (Deut. 9:10). The use of the term in the Old Testament in referring to the people of God is important for understanding the term 'church' in the New Testament. The first Christians were [mostly] Jews who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament. For them to use a self-designation that was common in the Old Testament for the people of God reveals their understanding of the continuity that links the Old and New Testaments. The early Christians understood themselves as the people of the God who had revealed Himself in the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1-2), as the true children of Israel (Rom. 2:28-29) with Abraham as their father (Rom. 4:1-25), and as the people of the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament (Heb. 8:1-13). As a consequence of this broad background of meaning in the Greek and Old Testament worlds, the term 'church' is used in the New Testament of a local congregation of *called-out Christians*, such as the 'church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:2), and also of the entire people of God, such as in the affirmation that Christ is 'the head over all things to the church, which is his body' (Eph. 1:22-23)."

**Social welfare:** The term "social welfare" in Hansan (2017) does not have a precise definition. Currently, social welfare is referred to a wide range of activities and services by volunteers, non-profit organizations and governmental agencies providing help to needy persons unable to care for themselves; activities and

resources designed to enhance or promote the well-being of individuals, families and the larger society; and efforts to eliminate or reduce the incidence of social problems.

Furthermore, the history of social welfare is an interdisciplinary study of the evolution of charitable works, organized activities related to social reform movements and non-profit or public social services designed to protect or benefit individuals, families and citizens of the larger society. Charitable efforts in the words of Hansan have often grown out of religious beliefs - beliefs that inspired reformers to deep compassion, firm ethical convictions, and a strong sense of justice. The reformers' faith backgrounds were the foundation of movements such as abolition, temperance, and the establishment of settlement houses. And from the nation's earliest days, religious groups and individuals have provided significant labor and financial support for social reform and humanitarian aid.

Having understood the basic notion of church and the explanation of social welfare institution, we want to have a vivid look at some of the works the Church has done in combating with the challenges of the populace. We intend to examine the Church's roles in terms of poverty alleviation, youth and women empowerment, medical services, school apostolate and social justice.

### **Church and Poverty Alleviation**

Poverty and its alleviation has been a concern to almost all the government that has come to power in Nigeria. In this regard, many programmes were put in place to harness the lingering issue with little or no results. Hence, Odili (2012) opines that the issue of poverty is both disturbing and frightening to the nation. Since the time Nigeria had her independence, both the military and civilian governments have all contributed to abating the menace, like the Better Life Programme (BLP) which was introduced in 1987, the Family Support Programme (FSP) in 1994, the family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1997, the People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) in 1987 but all these aims yielded little or no results. It is on this note that the Church despite the mandate of being spiritual, has conform to her mission of participating in the fight against poverty and fulfilling the mandate of Christ who served both the rich and the poor and gave them hope. (Ayiemba et al, 2015).

Poverty according to UNDP (1996) is a lack of productive resources, income and capacities, which contribute to individual or group isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, economic, political and social discrimination and participation in unsustainable livelihood. In this definition, UNDP perceived the issue of poverty as when one is totally in lack of productive resources that aids in the maintaining and keeping of life. Once these resources are reduced and do not reproduce more but is in a static condition. It is when one has no source of income which has kept him / her isolated from the community. This lack of source of living had also made some people vulnerable, powerless, economically, politically and socially discriminated. Furthering on this, UNDP (1996) posits that poverty manifests in myriad dimensions which includes hunger, ill- health, lack of access to education, medication, employment, safe residence (housing) a malnutrition.

In his work, *“the role of Churches in government eradication programmes in Nigeria”*, Antyo (2012) opines that poverty is seen as a state of deprivation of wellbeing which comprises many dimensions that includes low income and the inability to acquire basic things necessary for a dignified survival. He further opines that poverty involves low level of healthy, lack of education, poor access to clean water, sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice to address issues of the society, and the insufficient capacity to better one’s life. Taylor (2003) saw poverty as predominant in the world today with more than a million people living in it.

In the words of Ayiemba, Theuri, Mungai and kimathi (2015) in their work on *“the mandate of the Christian church in poverty alleviation, the case of the Anglican church of kenya, (ACK) in Maseno and winam division of Kisumu district, Kenya”*, the people of Maseno and Winam are people noted for their abject poverty which includes the absent of everything needed for a comfortable living. In their words, this includes clothing, education, housing, clean water e.t.c. which the Church has helped in providing to the society which has helped in changing their way of life. It is observed by Kodia (2005) that the Church is taking after the ministry of Jesus who went about preaching and doing good. Odili and Eluke (2016) in their unpublished work on, *“the Church and poverty alleviation in Bundu Ama of Rivers state”*, presented a concerted effort made by St Mary’s Catholic Church located at Aggry road in Port Harcourt in poverty alleviation. In their words, the church helped some individual in solving their personal problems, she also has school were members of Bundu Ama are admitted in a reduced cost, some children were given

scholarship by the Church. Members of the area were also employed in the school as teachers, gardeners, drivers, cleaners' e.t.c. which in turn has been helping their families and relations.

Furthering on this, Odili and Eluke (2016) spotlighted the efforts St Barnabas Anglican Church Bundu Ama is also making in giving the poor masses relief from their problems. In their observation, the Church is doing everything within her reach to help the masses. Despite the fact that the Church is a small Church, she oftentimes organizes programme where members learn different skills to better their lives, hence the youths and women are empowered to cater for their families with the skills learnt from the programme. The Church also provides means of transportation to convey Church members from their areas to parish and diocesan programmes thereby reducing the burden of catering for the transport themselves. The Church hosts health care programme on which those with health or medical issues were cared for. Children were also immunized and parents were taught on good and healthy living.

Similarly, Antyo (2012) gives a vivid instance of how Churches have helped in poverty alleviation. In his word, the early Roman Catholic missionaries, the church of Christ in the Sudan, the evangelical Church of the West African in the North, the Catholic Church in Benue state have helped in establishing massive agricultural farm which serves as a benefit to the Church. Also the church used such means to teach the people basic Agricultural practices which helped them out of poverty.

### **Church and Youth/Women Empowerment;**

In the opinion of stormquists in Odili (2015) in his work on *"sustainable development and women education, empowering women through part time theological education programmes in Nigerian higher institution of learning"*. "Empowerment is seen as a process to change, distribution of power both in interpersonal and in institutions throughout the society. In this regard, empowerment, is seen in four dimensions which are

- a) Cognitive empowerment, which is meant for the understanding of subordinate conditions and their causes at macro levels of life. It also aims

at receiving one's experiences in order to notice and identify pattern of behaviour which leads to dependence and reinforces subordination.

- b) Economic empowerment, which aims at the ability to engage oneself in income generating activities that will enable one have access to independent income.
- c) Political empowerment is the ability to analyze issues politically and to effectively make a mobilization for a social charge and
- d) Psychological (spiritual) empowerment which is aimed at ones behaviour that he/she can change his situation himself which calls for competent decision making and effort in improving on such decision.

In his contribution, Kindervatter in Odili (2015) opines that empowerment can be likened to any endeavour which helps people gain control of their living through raising awareness, taking action and working together in order to exercise greater control. There is no gain saying the fact that government has tried in improving members of the society. This according to Aliyu in Antyo (2012) in his work, "*the role of church in government poverty eradication programme in Nigeria*", has been evidenced by the establishment of diverse bodies to see that the masses are empowered. Among which are, Youth empowerment scheme (YES), Rural infrastructural development scheme, (RIDS), social welfare service scheme (SOWES), Capacity acquisition programmes (CAP) and Mandatory Attachment programme (MAP), All these groups have not achieved any positive impact despite the huge amount of money spent on them.

According to the researcher, it is a failed attempt on the government which invariably leaves the responsibility to the Church to perform. It is agreed that the Church has not betrayed this trust on her as the hope of the masses. Consenting to this, Antyo (2012) in his discussion on "*Church and poverty eradication initiatives in Nigeria*" highlights on the works of Roman Catholic Church of the ancient and modern missionaries, and of the Evangelical Church of West Africa etc. who established a massive orchards with the aim of teaching the people basic agricultural practices. He noted that the Roman Catholic Church also set up a famous trade centre in Markurdi where students are taught a variety of trades and the students in turn make their living from those trades learnt from the school. Antyo further posits that Nongo U Kristu U Sudan Ken, Tiv (NKST) since its

establishment has helped in developing local craftsmen among her members. These people learn how to make sweaters, weave baskets, and other crafts and a market was open in the hospital where people come and patronize them. ECWA Church was also known of setting up many rural farms where eggs, chickens and animal feeds are produced. The farm later graduated to centre for improvement and learning of poultry farming which helped to empower the masses.

Oladipo (2000) in tracing the Church record in poverty alleviation and empowerment noted that, many Churches have set up programmes to empower the masses. The European voyage of world discovery as he opined introduced new staple crops and use of animal power for farming. They also brought in skill training and modern health care services on which members were trained. Furthermore, he asserts that Churches are working tirelessly in setting up household income-generating activities for the members of the society. He noted the assistance of the Church to the people in poultry, pig and bee-keeping farming while most of the youths were trained in mason work, carpentry work and other craft works.

Also in his contribution, Odili (2016) unpublished work on *“The Church and Poverty Alleviation in Bundu Ama, Rivers State”*, spotlighted the effort of St. Mary’s Catholic Church, which has a school in a nearby area and has members of Bundu Ama as her workers which is aimed at empowering them to take care of their families. The Church also gives free education which serves as an encouragement and morale to the children. St. Barnabas Anglican Church on her own has also embarked on many programmes on skill acquisition and empowerment to both women and youth which has made them to learn skills that have been helping them in meeting with their personal and family demands. Most of these skills include bead making, baking, phone repair, interior decoration and more.

### **Church and Medical Services**

One *other* area the Church’s social welfare is evident is in the field of medical services. The researcher observed that Churches of today are contributing immensely in helping the sick ones through hosting of programmes aimed at having a free medical treatment and checkup. In line with this assertion, Olayinka (2016) in his work *“RCCG offers free medical service”* opines that Churches have

really been making impact in the society, noting the work of Redeemed Christian Church of God who organized a free medical programme in Orisumbare in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State of which over two hundred persons were attended to. The services among others include free diagnostic tests to ascertain their blood sugar level, blood pressure, and other blood related examinations like widal test, typhoid test and others. The beneficiaries were offered drugs as their health examination demanded. In their appreciation, Mr Adeoye Balogun who was a beneficiary and a Muslim thanked the Church for such gesture which he noted that took the Church a huge money and further remarked that many persons that were treated were people that could not have attended for their hospital bills and would have died in their sickness, which was also emphasized by Mrs Suraju Sulaiman in her word of thanks.

McCaughan (2011) in his work, *“Need a Doctor, free church medical clinics offer hope”*, spotlighted St Timothy’s Episcopal Church in Brookings who takes care of the poor by annually organizing a free medical service on which dozens of people are recorded. The people are fed from the free medical soup kitchen and thereafter the medical checking. The Church also offers help to the poor, empowers those that need empowerment and administers medications on the masses. St. Peter’s Church is also known for their medical services; the Church is a small Church but has been known of her medical treatment every Tuesday on which people are attended to. The Church’s clinic has been hope to people that would have died of their sickness because they are ever ready to attend to the need of the people. Narrating the importance of this service by the Church, a mother who had diabetes thanked the Church for their checkup on the community and administration of drugs on the people with remark that she got the supply she needed which were a meter and test strips to monitor her blood sugar level, noting that the service by the Church has helped them. The services of St. James Church which opens every Wednesday between 6am and 9pm and offer eye medical, dental service and preventive care services was also noted. The church maintains that their service is not only to the soul but also to the body which is their propelling force in carrying out these social responsibilities in the Society.

### **Church and School Apostolate.**

The church has played a very prominent role in the field of education. This is traceable to the early missionary days when schools were managed by the Church. It is in line of this that Odili (2016) opines that among Christian missions, education and evangelism were inseparable, which was the way the missionaries used in converting the heathen to Christianity. He noted that even though various missions adopted different approaches of the implementation, they all regarded education as an indispensable tool in evangelical endeavour. Recommending the effort of the mission in establishing education, Odili opines that while the Methodists should be applauded for establishing school in Ukwuaniland, it was the Church Missionary Society that made the most contributions to education in the early period, He went further to observe that the various missions established myriad of primary schools for boys and girls all over western Nigeria.

In a similar way, Ademola in Odili (2010) in his work *“Christian mission and evolution of the culture of mass education in western Nigeria”*, opines that the beginning of western education in western Nigeria is traceable to the era of church missionaries who established contact with this part of the country in 15th century which began with the Portuguese who entered into the coastal areas in about 1472. Fafunwa in Odili (2010) is in agreement with Ademola, who also opines that missionaries without exception used the school as means of conversion and the government was not interested in educational endeavour which made education to be in the hand of the missions. Although, schools are now under the government but the Church is still actively participating in the maintenance of the standard of education. The Church has also in diverse way contributed in making sure that the masses have their share in educational product. It is in line of this that Oladipo (2000) opines that many of our leaders were trained and educated in Christian schools. He further observed that in the western, schools were taken away from the Church which affected the levels of education in the country. This agrees with Adomah and Aluede of which the mission or Church did not sleep but opened up vocational training school where the youths were skillfully trained. It was the vocational schools that gave rise to the government establishment of polytechnic for skill training.

Also Antyo (2012) in his work on *“the role of churches in government poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria”*, posits that with the bead of contributing in poverty alleviation, the Church is fully involved in the field of education. Knowing full well that with education, poverty is alleviated, hence he said, education is generally aimed at addressing poverty which has a tremendous influence is fighting poverty. He noted that Nongo U Kristus U Sudan, (NKST) the Church of Christ, and the evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), have all established, primary, secondary and tertiary schools which admit students in low fees and also give scholarships to children of the less privileges in ensuring that they are not deprived of education. These schools he noted also train the students in skillful acts so that they will not only hope for white collar jobs but can also be entrepreneurial on their own after school years.

He further noted that the Pentecostal group of Churches is not left out in establishing schools and helping in educational endeavour with scholarship awards given to children by most of these Churches as ways of making impact in the society. Also in his work on *“the role of the church in poverty alleviation in Africa”*, Oladipo (2000) opines that one of the strategic advantages of the Church in poverty alleviation is her educational impact in the society. This he observed is evident in urban and rural areas and even been carried out by Church that may not be capable of such but because they understood the expectations on her as the hope of the hopeless, she has to shoulder such responsibility, knowing full well that once one is educated, he is liberated from the clutches of poverty and ignorance which aids him to be a reasonable and impacting member of the society.

Uchegbue (2013) in his work *“The place of the church in the socio-political and economic liberation of Nigeria”*, remarked on the impact the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCCK) is making in the educational endeavour in the lives of the youth. He observed that when there was an increase in the number of school leavers, the National Christian Council and the Christian Churches Educational Association began to innovate ways forward for the educational system and the village polytechnic in Kenya was a child of this thought which helped to admit and train the youth and equip them to overcome the challenges of life. It will not be an irony to posit that, Churches have helped in the missionary age in establishing schools and have gone beyond in sponsoring and carrying responsibility for the people’s

education endeavour with the view to making sure that her impact is positively felt in the Society.

### **Church and Social Justice.**

Poverty which has been a cankerworm that is ravaging many communities in Nigeria today has been on the increase despite all the efforts made by the government and the church in arresting it. Gnanakarn (2004) opines that, poverty has been on the increase because of injustice made on the poor masses by the rich ones which has brought about inhuman living conditions and its accompanied disease and malnutrition. In his view, the struggle against this inhuman practice of injustice is one that the Church must fight and make her impact in the liberation of the masses. According to Boff (1994) the rich through injustice has related to inequality and inequitable practice in discharging of justice which has contributing to the perpetuation of poverty in the nation and the church should not be isolated in the fight of this but should address it because it is among her collective responsibility. In line with this, Okwoeze (2005) in his book, *"Africa the agony of a continent: can liberation theology offer any solution"*, reacting to the role of the Church in the fight against injustice opines that in this fight, the Church is thus confronted with two costly options, the less, costly would be for it to be quiet and live. But the problem is that if it keeps quiet, the people who fill up the pews every Sunday would begin to see it as having aligned itself with the powerful oppressors and then desert it which will be the real death. On the other hand, if the Church takes the courage to follow the more costly option by speaking out in favour of the exploited. For a time, she may be crucified but eventually, it will resurrect because the people on account of whom it is crucified will fill up its pews and make it reverberate with life to the utter consternation of its oppressors.

In his work, *"the place of the church in the socio- political and economic liberation of Nigeria"*, Uchegbue (2013) opines that the Church has a significant role to play in Nigeria politics by acting as a moral watchdog of the society. He noted that the level of injustice prevalence in the nation now is alarming such as Niger Delta military, indigenous people of Biafra, the Boko Haram episode etc. Injustice in Nigeria today according to him has a global foundation and international connection of which experiences will leave one with the conclusion that the society is solely unjust and has a need of social justice. According to Rodney in Adegbola

(1984) the issue of injustice in Nigeria demands cooperate efforts of the government and the Church to fight. This according to him is so because, during European colony, all that Africa had was taken from her and still impoverished her, but today it is known that colony did not end with the flagging of independence but after the colonial Masters left, neo-colonialism began which puts the masses under a local colonialism by some rich few, which demands the voice of the Church for Justice. Speaking on the need for the voice of the Church in the economic direction of the nation, Adegbola (1984) opines that the elite today have constituted themselves into a circle to squander the rich resources of the nation without equitable distribution to the lesser individuals. This he likened to the practice of Europeans and Americans who constituted themselves into a circle to ensure that the resources of the third world are transferred to the developed world. The consequence of this action was that it created ways for imperialism within the nation of which injustice is perpetrated.

In the socio psychological direction of injustice in Nigeria Adegbola (1984) further observed that it is reflected in the employment of racism in Nigeria. It is a situation whereby a set of people see themselves as born to rule, while other races are on the ruled side. This demonstrates to the obvious manifest of tribalism, ethnicism, nepotism and classism. This is in agreement with Olukoju (1997) who noted that Nigerian politics has been filled with racism which made the Hausa's to see themselves as the only people to be producing the president. This is injustice manifested, which must be addressed if the nation will progress.

Okwoeze (2004) in his book *"the paradox of a nation"*, lamented for this unjust practice in the democratic rule of this nation and queries if Nigeria is really practicing Democracy or Demofacism. Thus the practice as in Nigeria today is a rape on democracy, which has laid down Justice and rule of law and needs combine effort to speak for justice. Also in his book *"Democracy and the ripples of executive rascality "*, Okwoeze (2005) opines that the level of lawlessness in the nation which is evident in the executive class has brought about an increase in corruption and injustice, which the Church will not be silent and the pews are been use as mess in fulfilling selfish political ambition. On this note, he calls on the Church to rise and let her voice be heard against injustice. The situation of the injustice in Nigeria can be described in what Hasting (1976) termed a country with few rich and very many poor people with the majority of the masses seen as

marginalized citizens who have learnt to live and be accommodated in the culture of penury and poverty. A country where many graduates are moving around the street without jobs and the unborn children of the rich have places already kept for them in places of work. In view of the ongoing, Abati (2009) posits that it is clear that injustice is an issue that has lingered which demands for deliverance and liberation of which the voice of the Church must be loud for she is a religious organization and viable social institution which must take a positive stand in the fight of injustice wherever it appears.

It has been observed that Christians and Churches have not relented in speaking against injustice in Nigeria no matter who does it. Okwoeze (2004) in his book "*C.A.N my foot, the reckless utterances of a willful president*" posits that during the Kano riot in 2004, in which most Christians were brutally killed by the Muslims of which the number were about 3000 people, and 30 Churches burnt down. The C.A.N branch of Kano state categorically spoke against that thus "it is inhuman, barbaric and an act of vandalism for Kano state government to throw into Challawa River dead bodies of these Christians. We condemn in strong term the mass burial. The blood of these Christians will rise in judgment before God against them".

Similarly, with the rise of killing of the Igbo's in the North, and the incessant killing of Christians on which the government will just make a perfunctory condemnation of the killing, threaten fire and brimstone on the killer, set a commission of inquiry to investigate both the remote and immediate causes of the killing, get the report from the commission, hide the report somewhere so that nobody will hear of it or see it again, and then wait for another round of killing to start all over again. The killers are not punished, often, they are even rewarded. The victims and their relatives are not compensated instead, the dead bodies of the latest killing in Kano were insulted by being thrown into the river (Okwoeze, 2004). He further observed that when the outcry against the cruel neglect and the calculated attempt to destroy the Igbo's were discovered to have reached its peak, the Bishop Catholic of Onitsha in his pastoral statement spoke against such treatment on the Igbo's and asked the government to rise and give Justice a place in her administration so that everybody and tribes will have equal share in the government of the day.

Also in his book *“Martin Luther King Jr; his life and message”*, Okwoeze (1995) discussing on the Church and social justice made it clear that the Church has ever been in the fight for injustice which was what Martin Luther King Jr, was known for. He further related it to Nigeria context on which he stood on the ground that without the voices of the Church in Nigerian’s administration, she would have been worse than what she is. It is clear that the Church has not been quit in the face of injustice, especially when Mrs. Magret was murdered by the Muslims; the Church did not keep silent but made her voice heard through writing and preaching.

### **Omega Power Ministry and social welfare; an overview**

According to George (2016) in his book *“Apostle Dr. Chibuzor Chinyere, making a difference”*, the Omega Power Ministry (OPM) under the leadership of Apostle Dr. Chibuzor Chinyere has made extensive monetary contributions into so many projects like skill acquisition, borehole, renovation of schools, building of houses for widows, poverty alleviation etc where thousands of people have benefited from. It is pointed by George that the church does not only give God’s people spiritual food, but also gives them cloths, free education, accommodation etc. This is in line with its ground of formation on humanitarian works with the aim of reaching out to the helpless and the downtrodden with the gospel and the love of God. The foundation has been noted for the rehabilitation of thousands of boys, girls, men and women alike, empowering them to achieve their goals in life, training them in various volitions and also giving them financial empowerment.

In 2010, the Omega Power Ministry Foundation commissioned a free computer training centre at Elele prison in Rivers State of which many prisoners are graduates of the scheme. This program equipped so many youths who later got employments into private and government section in the state and beyond (George, 2016). In 2012, the Omega Power Ministry Foundation commissioned a free tailoring and computer training Centre in Rumuji town in which both non indigenes and indigenes have benefited from. The foundation provided and commissioned a water borehole in Rumuji and Ohaji of which many persons are benefiting from. (Amadi, 2017, Oral Interview). In 2014, according to Cletus in an oral interview, the foundation was responsible for the opening and running of the Omega power Ministry free Restaurant to caters for the needs of the hungry in our society; this has

been going on now. He further remarked that the foundation has also floated the Omega Power Ministry free education in Ohanku, Abia State, where the children of the less privileged can get basic and quality education. The foundation is also running the same school in Port Harcourt where children are given four sets of uniforms, free sandals, free lunch, free computer training, free text and exercise books, fully air conditioned classroom and an equipped laboratory (Cletus, 2017, Oral Interview).

In the words of Gogo (2017) in an oral Interview, the Omega Power Ministry foundation dug a water borehole for people of Mkpukpuwa community in Abia State. The foundation built housing estate in Rumokuruishi, Rumuigbo and Aluu communities among others for the masses. This foundation also built two bedroom flats for widows. Omega Power Ministry has established a multi skill acquisition Centre in the areas of oil and gas, carpentry, tailoring, rig welding, scaffolding, free training school, batch building etc which was commissioned in Port Harcourt at 62 circular road by Apostle Dr. Chibozor Chinyere and a record of 6000 beneficiaries and more have benefited. Gogo further noted that Omega Power Ministry in her work in the Society did not leave the educational section. This is shown in her reconstructing of the Ikuorie comprehensive secondary school that was in a sorry state for over 10 years in Ohanku Ukwa east Local Government Area of Abia State. The School was equipped with computers, and a power generator, copper's lodge was built for serving corps members. In fact, the effort of Omega Power Ministry in contributing to societal development is great.

In his contribution to poverty alleviation, according to Gogo (2013), a scene reminiscent to that of the holy pilgrimage was witnessed at the Omega Power Ministry headquarters in Port Harcourt on Wednesday February 6, 2013, as Nigerians gather in the area to be partakers of the Ministries free kerosene donation given to them through the church by chairman managing Director of capital oil and Gas limited. Mr. Ebubechukwu Aso Ifeanyi Uba, who gave the donation through the General Overseer as a sign of appreciation to God for all he has done for him. Omega Power Ministry Donates motor-Bikes, Hair Dryers, other items to Buru Tai indigenes in Tai local government Area of Rivers state on Saturday, May 4, 2013. The General Overseer on the said day gave out about ten (10) motor bikes, twelve (12) hair dryers', seventeen (17) sewing machines and many farm implements to the

members of the community. (Port Harcourt telegraph. Vol v. No 22 of October 2-8, 2010)

Omega Power Ministry has also extended hand of charity on skill acquisition to Accra Ghana. A different scenario plays out in that area as the General Overseer Apostle (Dr) Chibuzor Chinyere stormed that country to propagate the word of God and to explore avenues of opening more branches. The Apostle used the Occasion to commission three free skill acquisition Centres at Edytech refrigerator and air condition service training Centre, Osu, Accra, Ghana which is to train both members and Non members of the church.

It is not hidden that so many Individuals are looming the street in search of where to rest their heads as their apartment. This is another Area Omega Power Ministry has ventured into with the view of reducing the population of homeless people. According to George (2016), the church built many houses for members of the society who have no affiliation with the General Overseers of the church. Speaking further, he posits that Omega Power Ministry has built housing estates in Rumuokwurushi, Rumigbo and Aluu communities among others for Nigerians to occupy free of charge. The foundation still built two bedroom flats for widows in the society. A beneficiary Mrs. Precious a native of Elebrada in Emohua thanked the General Overseer, who gave the gift of 2-bedroom flat and I bedroom flat to her daughter for graduating as the best student of Port Harcourt free school. The woman further admitted having a problem of accommodation since the husband died but by the charitable work of Omega Power Ministry, she and her children have become owners of houses. (National Network vol. 9, No 43, Page 10 of October 3-9, 2012).

The provision of free medical services is another way Omega Power Ministry has been contributing to the society. According to Gogo in Omega Power Ministry goodness magazine vol. 2, No 10, Nov. 1-30, 2013, Omega Power Ministry built and commissioned free medical Centre at Ohanku Ndoki in Ukwa East Local Government Area of Abia State. Speaking at the ceremony, the General Overseer, Apostle (Dr) Chibuzor Gift Chinyere noted that the idea of providning the free medical care services was borne out of passion for the people who could not afford the high cost of medical treatment. Speaking with Mr. Amadi Cletus in an oral

interview, it was also recorded that during the flood time in 2012, Omega Power Ministry commissioned rehabilitation Centres where people were medically treated for free and were also given relief materials. The church often times organizes a free medical program of which people normally participate (Cletus, 2012). The Omega Power Ministry foundation has also showed her commitment in education thus in 2016 she registered the West African Examination Council (WAEC) for all the 45 Senior Secondary Three Student of Ikwuorie Comprehensive Secondary School, Ohanku in Ndoki Ukwu East Local Government Area of Abia State. (verite newspaper vol. 7, No 44 of Nov 1-7, 2016).

In an oral interview granted to Mr. Talbot Uzu, on Sunday 12/03/17, it was gather that Omega Power Ministry has not only provided material benefits to the society but has also brought sources of joy and happiness to the people. In his words space cannot enter thousands of testimonies recorded every Sunday by members on what God has been doing in their lives. Also In an oral interview granted to Sis. Loveth Okerie who is from Umuezala Nsu of Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State but living at No. 1 Nwele Street Rumodara, Port Harcourt recorded that she has been in the problem of getting and loosing but was in 2009, delivered from the spirit. Another Sis. Nkechi Godwin from Ndokwa West Local Government Area of Delta State but living in Rumukurushi, Port Harcourt told the researcher in an oral interview that she was healed of 24 years of bedwetting. Sis Beinnonyo Yusuo also living at No 17 Okereh Street, Mile 2 Diobu Port Harcourt, testified on how God restored her menses which was not seen for over 5 years, but God through the General Overseer restored it.

According to Omega Power Ministry Good news of February 2017, Mr. Chiks, Gombs Nte living at No 3 Njuru Street Agbonchia Eleme was healed of 11 years of wound. Mr. Sampson Ejike Alezander living at No 7 faith close Ogbatai, Woji was delivered from 10 years of masturbation. Sis Chibuzor Oguzie living in Etche within the premise of Omega Power Ministry but hails from Umuezom Umuekwune in Ngo-Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State, testified of having been healed of a problem that started immediately she got married in December 31<sup>st</sup> 2009. Mrs Ngozi Okeke a resident of Rumuodumaya in Port Harcourt who hails from Osumenyi in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra State was healed of HIV disease. Another Mrs. Ruth Demian in an interview testified how God saved her three (3) years and two (2) months son from crawling. The researcher also in one of the Sunday service in Omega Power Ministry noted Mr. Simeon Karshima

who was suffering from Ulcer for the past five years, testified about his healing. There are millions of miracles recorded everyday in Omega Power Ministry which space will be a constraint in putting them down.

### **Conclusion**

Man has always been surrounded with unpleasant situations which have called for the intervention of non governmental bodies and individuals. In this regard, so many non governmental bodies and individuals have contributed their quota in abating these conditions. It is germane to postulate that the contribution of the Church is of utmost important as the conscience of the society. This work has been a concerted effort in examining the roles of the Church in contributing to changing the deplorable conditions of the people of which the writer has explored her efforts in poverty alleviation, youth and women empowerment, medical services, school apostolate and social justice. In this regard and more, the voice of the Church has been loud and her actions felt which has contributed to a better society. The roles of Omega power ministry in this regard has also been noted which is laudable in the society.

### **Recommendations**

The paper recommends that churches should make judicious use of their incomes in changing the lives of their members who are members of the society because those incomes are generated by the people and should not be used in exotic and flamboyant living.

It also recommends that pastors should be up to the responsibilities of taking care of the social wellbeing of their members with the view that it contributes more to their spiritual stability. This is so because when an individual has a depressed and disturbing issue, his or her spiritual life will be affected but when those disturbing issues are arrested, it helps for a stability in the spiritual being.

The paper goes further to recommend that churches should also try to work in synergy with the government to bring about a conducive and better society. This is so because the church as the conscience of the society cannot but be alive in her speaking to the government to make sure that the resources available are used for the betterment of the masses.

Any religious leader who knows that he is not called but has an ulterior motive for the ministry should close and look for other ways to make ends meet to avoid bringing shame and evil label to the proliferated churches (New Religious Movements).

Government should be active in her regulation of places of worship and if possible close some proliferated churches that have no impact in the society but are interested in enriching themselves and their family members.

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