

RE-INTERPRETING LUKE 4:18-19 IN THE LIGHT OF URBAN RENEWAL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: Achieving the missional mandate of the Church depends largely on the amount of missiological teaching and perspective of various local churches. If the Church relinquishes urban renewal responsibilities to the state government, that would go a step further in constituting inadequate and unacceptable Christological theology of mission. The call for global evangelization is sequential as in arithmetic progression. Jesus first appealed to the social needs of the people prior to dealing with the spiritual. Undermining this progression truncates the missional efforts. This paper examines the theological relevance of Luke 4:18-19 in the context of urban renewal as both a metaphor and a divine philosophy for pragmatic mission enterprise. For Luke Jesus' view of salvation includes deliverance from poverty, social menace and spiritual emptiness. This should be the hallmark of contemporary missions.

KEY WORDS: Reinterpretation, Missional Church, Urban Renewal, Narrative, Pericope, Empowerment, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The narrative in Luke 4:18-19 which could be titled "Jesus' inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth" encapsulates the vision of Jesus earthly ministry and the fundamental principles of holistic ministry. What seemed to be an ordinary reading of Scriptures in the Synagogue at Nazareth, turned out to be the public declaration of Jesus' divine transformational ministry mandate to the world. Nazareth was the same town where Jesus had been brought up. While in the town as a visiting rabbi, Jesus attended service at the synagogue on the Sabbath. As the service went on, "Jesus was invited to read the Scriptures."¹ "The synagogue service usually included recitation of the Shema (Numbers 15:37-41; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21), benediction, a psalm, a priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-26), prayers, a reading from the law (the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy) and then from the Prophets, and then an interpretation of the reading."² It was customary to read the law during the synagogue. However, Jesus' reading of Luke 4:18-19 which was in "the scroll

¹ *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 260.

² *Ibid.*

containing the messages of Isaiah the Prophet” during the synagogue service in Nazareth was a great turning point in the narrative of the Messiah's earthly ministry.³ Isaiah 61:1-2 was the passage that Jesus read from the scrolls, which was later recorded in the New Testament by Saint Luke, in the fourth chapter, verses eighteen and nineteen.

During the time of Christ the New Testament Scriptures were not yet written. Scriptural readings were often taken from the Torah or any of the other Old Testament books. Jesus understood his vision and mission and was prepared to make the first public announcement of his ministerial assignment accompanied with holistic ministry mandate. Jesus unrolled the scroll and then sought for a passage therein which would provide him with the appropriate platform for the announcement of his ministry. F.F. Bruce records, “Expounding the passage, He proclaimed that the Messianic prophecy therein was even now being visibly fulfilled.”⁴

The narrative of Jesus' ministry announcement has been subjected to very many interpretations. First, some interpreters argue that the narrative applies to just spiritual liberation, deliverance and transformation. And that the narrative has nothing to do with the physical condition of humanity. When the narrative speaks of the poor being liberated, Jesus was only addressing the poor in the Spirit in continuation of his message on the Sermon on the Mount.

Second, other interpreters find it difficult to separate the spiritual dimension of Jesus' ministerial goals from its social implication. This group of scholars believes that Christ was anointed not just to liberate his people spiritually, but that he was more concerned about both spiritual and physical needs of the people he came to serve. This view is in harmony with the prophecies of the advent of the Messiah and the activities that will characterize his ministry. It is therefore the aim of this paper to examine the theological relevance of this scriptural passage and extrapolate principles for urban renewal in contemporary Nigeria. The interest of this paper is to interpret the “Jubilarious echoes on the lips of Jesus from Isaiah 61:1-2.”⁵ Understanding this “alleged echoes”, and how it relates to “the interpretation of Luke's concern for the outcast and marginalised” people of his time, is central to this study.⁶

THE THEOLOGICAL IMPORT OF THE NARRATIVE OF LUKE 4:18-19

Attempts towards understanding Luke's theology in this pericope has led to

³ Ibid.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, ed., *The International Bible Commentary: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 1194.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

diverse interpretations of the passage. Viewed in the light of “The concept of Jubilee and Luke” Willoughby in the work titled *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell* argued that the pericope covers Luke 4:18-30.⁷ Literary works focusing on interpreting this pericope is enormous.⁸ Looking at the Luke 4:18,19 narrative, could it be that Luke was more concerned about the jubilee resonance that tended to becloud this narrative as many scholars argue? Or was he simply determined to project the inaugural sermon of Christ irrespective of its social and jubilee implications? Some scholars are of the opinion that Luke’s profession as a physician must have influenced his writing about the Messiah’s concern for the social, physical wellbeing of the people he came to save. For Luke Jesus’ view of salvation includes deliverance from poverty, social menace and spiritual emptiness. Schweizer in *Historical Jesus to the Christ of Word and Sacrament*, argues:

Already in the second century the author of the Third Gospel was identified as “Luke, the beloved physician” mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:14... However, beginning in the late twentieth century, scholarship has again begun to see in the Gospel according to Luke a text that exhibits a focused interest on issues of health and healing... there are more than sixty episodic references to healing and health in Luke.⁹

Luke seems to be more interested in the healing works of Christ than other Gospel writers. Judging by the number of references he made to the subject of healing and health, one would conclude that Luke cared more about the Gospel which addressed the people's felt needs and at the same time empowered the people spiritually. For Luke Jesus was careful not to undermine the place of the social needs of the people in respect to his goal of spiritual rebirth and the transformation of the people. This truth does not imply that

⁷ Robert Willoughby, “The Concept of Jubilee and Luke 4:18-30” in Antony Billington ed. et al, *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell*(Carlisle, Paternoster: Paternoster Press, 1995), 41.

⁸ Ibid., Willoughby suggests, “For good surveys see H. Anderson, *Broadening Horizons: The Rejection of the Nazareth Pericope in Light of Recent Critical Trends*, interp 18 (1964), 259-75, and especially the more recent C.J. Schreck, ‘The Nazareth Pericope: Luke 4:16-30 in Recent Study’, in F. Neirynck (ed.), *L’Evangile de Luc* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 399-471.” Willoughby added, “An important recent work which was unfortunately unavailable to me at the time of writing is that of G.K-S. Shin, *Die Ausrufung des Endgultigen Jubeljahres durch Jesus in Nazareth: Eine historisch-kritische Studie zu Lk 4, 16-30* (Bern: Lang, 1989).” These books present scholarly argument on the Nazareth Pericope of Jesus’ inaugural sermon in the synagogue.

⁹ Eduard Schweizer 2008, “Historical Jesus to The Church of Word & Sacrament” from <http://www.amazon.com/challenge-present-theology-Edward->

Jesus was a social transformer or political leader, but he cared for the people and his contributions toward the people's welfare enhanced his evangelistic thrive.

Re-examining Lucan theology and Luke's import, Schweizer argues, "Luke-Acts is often characterized in terms of God's "preferential option for the poor" as epitomized in Jesus' inaugural sermon on Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-19. A quick read-through of Luke-Acts confirms that the narrative is often critical of 'the rich.'"¹⁰ Schweizer further opined, "This engagement with the theme of wealth and poverty begins with the Magnificat (1:51-52) and moves on to include such well-known texts as the woes against the rich in the beatitudes (6:24), the special Lukan parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21), the first/last saying of 13:31..."¹¹

Willoughby expresses, "As far as the Jubilee is concerned, one of the more surprising features of scholarly writing concerning the Nazareth Sermon in Luke 4 is the way in which commentaries have tended to make light of the idea of Jubilee, whilst monographs and articles which champion this hypothesis continue to abound."¹² Robert Sloan observed that, "Though not universally noticed, or, at best, not often pointed out by commentators of bygone years."¹³ Recent studies on the Jubiliary theme in Luke 4:16-30, continue to drive the interest of scholars who make effort to reinterpret this Nazareth pericope

Schweizer/product-reviews/0804206864 (accessed October 3, 2012).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. Schweizer continues to record more evidences why one should consider his argument about Luke's theology of healing which saturates his writing. He added, "...the special Lukan parable of Lazarus and the Rich man.

¹² Willoughby, 42. Willoughby laments: This neglect is, not confined to the commentaries. Many significant articles and monographs have been published which are cautious of emphasizing any jubiliary background. See especially: D. Hill, *The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke iv:16-30)*; *NovT* 13 (1971), 161-80; R.C. Tannehill, 'The Mission of Jesus according to Luke IV:16-30', in W. Eltester (ed.), *Jesus in Nazareth* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 51-75; J.A. Sanders, 'From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults 1* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 75-106; B.D. Chilton, 'Announcement in Nazara: An Analysis of Luke 4:16-21', in R.T. France and D. Wenham (eds.), *Gospel Perspectives II* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 147-72; J. Kodell, 'Luke's Gospel in a Nutshell', *BTB* 13 (1983), 16-18; D.L. Bock, *Proclamation From Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, *JSNTS* 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), esp.105-11; D.J. Bosch, 'Mission in Jesus' Way: A Perspective from Luke's Gospel', *Missionalia* 17 (1989), 3-21; P.G.R. De Villiers, 'The Gospel and the Poor: Let Us Read Luke 4', in P.G.R. De Villiers (ed.), *Liberation Theology and the Bible* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), 45-76.

¹³ Robert Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord* (Albilene, TX: Hardin-Simmons University Library, n.d), 19. Sloan also noted several others works which established

focusing on Jesus' ministry to the poor. These scholars agree that connecting the pericope with the Jubilee represents exactly Jesus' intention and plan for the salvation of the poor.

Michael Prior's English translation of the chiasmic structure of the Nazareth pericope is worth noting:

- A And he came to Nazareth ... and went to the *synagogue*
- B He *stood up* to read;
- C *there was given to him* the book of the prophet Isaiah
 - D *He opened the book and found the place ...*
 - E *The Spirit of the Lord* is upon me, because he has anointed me
 - F to *proclaim* good news to the poor.
 - G He has sent me to proclaim *release to the captives*
 - H and recovering of sight to the blind
 - G' to set *at liberty* those who are oppressed.
 - F' to *proclaim*
 - E' the acceptable *year of the Lord*
 - D' He *closed the book*,
- C' and *gave it back* to the attendant,
- B' and *sat down*;
- A' And the eyes of all *in the synagogue* were fixed on him¹⁴

While Prior's chiasmic design climaxed with the (H) in the parenthesis with the release phrase (G-G'), the aspect taken from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 require further explanations. Using the Greek text, Hertig offered a further analysis of the text:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
and on the Sabbath day he went into the *synagogue*,
as was his custom

- A And he *stood up* to read.
- The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was *given to him*.
- Unrolling* it, he found the place where it was written:
"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

some connections between Luke 4:16ff with the Jubilee such works are Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896); George B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963); John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972).

¹⁴ Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995),

because he's anointed me *to preach good news* to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim for the prisoners release

**B and recovery of sight for the blind,
to send away the oppressed into release
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

Then he *rolled up* the scroll,
gave it back to the attendant

A' And sat down

The eyes of everyone in the *synagogue* were fastened on him,
and he began by saying to them . . .¹⁵

Robert Stein opines, "Although Isaiah 61:1-2 develops certain themes from the concept of the Jubilee Year (cf. Lev 25:8-55), Luke did not seem to have been thinking of this here."¹⁶ On the other hand, Howard Marshall agrees that v. 19 of Luke 4, contains the concept of the "Year of Jubilee" but argues that it's now "Made symbolic of his own saving acts."¹⁷ The challenge posed by these arguments is that the various scholars did not provide adequate information that would aid any specific interpretations and conclusions on their exposition of Luke. Contributing to the *World Biblical Commentary* series, John Nolland recognizes, "The Jewish tradition of using the language of Jubilee to image salvation."¹⁸ He however added:

It is not finally an analysis of the language of Isa 61:1-2, but rather the perceived nature of men's bondage in the Lukan frame that must determine the force of the words as used here . . . The Lukan Jesus is no social reformer and does not address himself in any fundamental way to the political structure of his world, but he is deeply concerned with the literal, physical needs of men (Acts 10:38), as with their directly spiritual needs.¹⁹

So the Lukan Jesus is interested in the poor in material things as well as the

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¹⁵ Paul Hertig, "The Mission of the Messiah and the Year of Jubilee: A Comparison of Luke 4 and Isaiah 61" (Th.M. thesis, Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), 72. Another version of Hertig's and Prior's chiasm can be seen in the following work, David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 43.

¹⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 157.

¹⁷ Howard I. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 184.

¹⁸ John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 197.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 197.

rich in material things but poor in the Spirit. Reacting to the Jubilee resonance in the Nazareth pericope in Luke 4, Timothy Johnson in his 1991 commentary writes on the possible Jubilee resonances when he said:

This is possible, but the Gospel does not offer further support for this being Luke's point. Rather than picturing Jesus' work in terms of political or economic reform, Luke portrays his liberating work in terms of personal exorcisms, healings, and the teaching of the people. The radical character of this mission is specified above all by its being offered to and accepted by those who were the outcasts of the people.²⁰

While some scholars joined the debate seeking recognition of their views, others argue from the orientation of the Jubilee perspective of Luke 4, yet without apparent interpretations and conclusions. Various arguments also portray a political Jesus who had socio-political agenda. What seems to be a middle common ground in Luke 4 is the missiological perspective of the author (Luke). Luke's concept of the missiological agenda of Christ rather than the commonly projected socio-political may be clearer and closer to what Jesus actually had in mind. Various interpretations of the Nazareth pericope depend on individual scholar's exegetical abilities. Bultmann observed:

Exegesis without presuppositions is not only possible but demanded. In another sense, however, *no* exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a *tabula rasa*, but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea of the subject matter with which the text is concerned.²¹

REASONS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF JUBILEE

Findings show that the law for the year of jubilee was enacted by the Lord several reasons. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* here are some of the reasons:

1. The jubilee was instituted primarily to keep intact the original allotment of the Holy Land among the tribes, and to discountenance the idea of servitude to men (Leviticus 25:54,55)²²
2. The jubilee year was the year of liberation of servants whose poverty had

²⁰ Timothy L. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 81.

²¹ R. Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presupposition Possible?", in *Existence and Faith* (London: Hodder& Stoughton, 1960), 289.

²² Jewish Encyclopedia, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12967->

forced them into employment by others. Similarly all property alienated for a money consideration to relieve poverty, was to be returned to the original owners without restoration of the amount which had been advanced.²³

In the Nazareth pericope Jesus calls on every Christian and the Church to join him in celebrating the ministry of deliverance from slavery, poverty and oppression of the poor. The strategic nature of Jesus' ministry requires every follower of Christ to join in the jubiliary mission to the poor. Transformation of society cannot be achieved if the Church fails to take the lead. Individual Christians must be willing to help the poor urban dwellers overcome their challenges. The rich must be willing to identify with those living on the margins of society and give them hope. Unless this change takes place, the jubiliary mission of the Church may be in jeopardy.

THE NARRATIVE FOR URBAN RENEWAL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

The term renewal may be complex for many to understand in every given context. It could be related to the term transformation which can be interwoven with the term development. Here development can be measured according to the, "Levels of national income, generation of savings, growth rates of industrial output, availability of public utilities, or rates of illiteracy, infant mortality and life expectancy." Thus these indices become 'indicators' by which a country's stage of development" are viewed."²⁴ Defining the term *renewal*, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* offered, "...an act of renewing something ... the process of bringing new jobs, industry, homes etc to the poor areas of large towns."²⁵ Jesus had approached the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4, with the burden he had for the renewal of the poor in that city and throughout the world.²⁶

sabbatical-year-and-jubilee (accessed October 18, 2012).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Tiongo, R., "What has Theology Got to do with Development, Peace and Reconstruction", in *Nsukka Journal of Religious Studies (NJRS)*, Vol. I, (Umuahia, Nigeria: Sylva Printers co., 1996), 17-33.

²⁵ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Harlow, England: Pearson Educational Limited, 2001), 1199.

²⁶ Lucan account shows that Christ was prepared to attack the hostile system he met. He was ready to transform lives of the people, especially those living on the margins of society. He was particular about those people who were absolutely poor without any help. Arguments about the Jubiliary resonance of Luke 4, good as they maybe should climax with a credit to Jesus' boldness, vision and mission to the world.

Viewing the Nazareth pericope in missiological perspectives, one sees Jesus' ministry to the poor as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. Howard Marshall in an attempt to summarize the Lucan view of Jesus' ministry offered the following:

1. He brought the good news of the Kingdom of God and salvation to the people and offered it to all who would receive it, whether economically rich or poor.
2. He befriended the people who were poor and needy in his own society. Within the group of disciples they experienced a new status in society.
3. He cared physically for the sick with mighty works of healing.
4. He fed the hungry.
5. He strongly commanded the giving of alms by the rich.
6. He criticized the rich and violent. He voiced God's future judgment against them. There were those, like Zacchaeus, who heeded his words and who underwent a conversion that altered their way of life.²⁷

The commission to preach good news to the poor, releasing of the captives and setting the people free, was further recorded in Acts 26:17-18, "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."²⁸ Tannehill opined that, "All this material demonstrates the fulfillment of the commission which Jesus announced in Nazareth, the commission to preach good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives and oppressed."²⁹

The target of Jesus which was not only centered on the physical release of the captives should be understood in the light of the original language *'aphesis'* which implies *'release'*, a word that was used to refer to *'forgiveness'*. The deliverance of the people begins with the forgiveness of their sins. This is evidenced when Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven", before addressing the man's predicament. Jesus knew the power of sin in creating obstructions to the blessings, deliverance and the healing of a people. His holistic ministry approach was timely when taken into consideration his context of ministry. For deliverance from poverty and other social challenges to be effectual, salvation of the soul must be given primary attention. The focus on social justice, eradication of poverty, forgiveness and reintegrating into society those living

²⁷ Howard I. Marshall, "The Interpretation of the Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55", in C. Bussmann and W. Radl (eds.), *Der Treue Gottes Trauen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 191.

²⁸ All Scriptural quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the NIV.

²⁹ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1986), 139.

on the margins of society, defines the vision and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus showed through scriptures his love for the poor. It seems he launched his ministry particularly to reach out to the poor. Not just the poor in spirit, but those who are enslaved to the rich and wealthy people of their communities. Those people who have no voice in society; who struggle to feed and attend to their daily social needs. Announcing his mission for the poor, Jesus truncated the status quo of his time. The poor were neglected, often rejected and considered as outcasts, but those were the people Christ identified with.

1. Mission to the Poor in Urban Regions

Across the globe today, the rate of poverty is alarming. Several urban regions are saturated with absolutely poor city dwellers. It's amazing to see how some cities are designed with some parts representing wealthy areas by the type of structures and beautifications evidently in place, while some areas are densely populated with shanty houses without electricity, pipe borne water system and poor roads. The ugly effects of poverty on people living on the margins of societies are not measurable. One of the immediate responses to the question of abject poverty in cities across the globe is urbanization. In his book, *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa*, Wilbur O'Donovan states, "Urbanization not only creates enormous social and physical problems – it also has profound effects on the souls of individuals. City life can lead to major psychological and emotional problems".³⁰ A quick missiological question in response to O'Donovan's concern is 'What would Jesus do in situations such as the one facing many cities of the globe today?'

Poverty stricken communities across the globe are no longer at peace with its torture. Here is the description of a Latin American situation:

It is not only that sixteen-year-old Latin Americans of this land weigh ninety-five pounds and are five feet tall; the point is that at the other side of the avenue he can see other boys the same age who are six feet six and weigh one hundred and twenty-six pounds. It is not just that they will hardly live to see their grandchildren, their life expectancy being way below forty. They know that disease and death can be pushed back and the joys of life can be enjoyed twenty years more. Rapid and luxurious cars, TV sets, new dresses, fun and comfort are displayed everywhere, and even backwoods populations can see them in the news-papers in which their miserable purchases are wrapped. Commercials and political propaganda, Sears Roebuck catalogues and Communist pamphlets produce the same results. The eyes of the

³⁰ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa* (Cambria, CA Paternoster Press, 2000), 52.

poor are transfixed by the picture of this heaven he must obtain at all costs. Life without it is in-tolerable. This is the revolutionary temper, this is the face of the Latin American and of the whole underdeveloped world-a face contorted by hunger, expectation and wrath. This is the face of revolutionary man.³¹

Proffering solutions to the challenges facing the urban poor requires urgent attention. The Church should not be comfortable with the number of causalities in her neighborhood which could have been avoided or reduced if she had opened her doors to the poor who come around knocking and asking for help. It's challenging to note that in some situations, the poor who try to identify with social organizations, religious institutions such as the Church and Mosque, pay dues, give offerings, pay tithes and fulfill most of the conditions for acceptance as full members of their organizations, but unfortunately when such poor people are in need of accommodation, finance to sponsor their children to schools, health care, deaths etc, they are referred to their relatives by their organizations. Some organizations especially, the Church, who claim to have aligned herself with the vision and mission of her Lord, Jesus Christ, are often wrapped in the ugly arts of disowning their followers who happened to be in need. Some churches build schools through financial contributions and sacrifices of both the poor and the rich in their parishes, but at the end, the children of the poor will not be allowed to attend such schools due to high cost of acquiring education in such *church owned schools*. One discovers that the focus of some churches in building schools is clearly seen in the class of children admitted into such schools. Would Jesus have built such schools? Would Jesus have targeted the affluent children and left the poor children at the margin of society?

Urban Christian leaders have great assignment to carry out in the quest for urban renewal. The Church must leave the four walls and get involved in the lives of people on the streets of the cities. The need for missionary attention in the cities seemed to have been neglected. The first impression about missions has often been that of rural regions. While the rural regions require attention, the present situation of the cities calls for more attention that it has ever received. Today the rate of crime in the cities cannot be compared with what is obtainable in the rural areas. It does not mean there are no cases of crime in the rural areas. Cities seemed to have been neglected with the illusion that everyone who comes to the city is comfortable. Acknowledging the devastating effects of such negligence, O'Donovan states:

Urbanization not only creates enormous social and physical problems-it

³¹ Jose MignezBonino, "Christians and the Political Revolution," in *The Development Apocalypse*, a RISK paperback (Geneva: WCC, 1967), 103-104.

also has profound effects on the souls of individuals. City life can lead to major psychological and emotional problems. People moving to the city can lose many of their traditional values and their sense of personal identity. Young people living in the city often lose the all-important African core value of life in community. Sometimes they lose the traditional African value of respect for the elderly which is also an important biblical value...living in the city and being surrounded by godless people with godless values can bring temptation to adopt materialism, secularism, greed, individualism and selfishness instead of the Christian values of generosity, self-sacrifice, humility and support for the community. Working with people whose lives are dominated by hypocrisy, dishonesty, lying and corruption can lead to cynicism and indifference to the needs of others.³²

Contending with the realities of urban life and system, O'Donovan added:

The temptation to conform to the godless and evil values of the city brings an urgent call to the church for culturally relevant ministries of evangelism, discipleship, Bible teaching and counselling. The church must give Christians the tools to overcome the moral and spiritual temptations of modernity. The Bible says, 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Rom. 12:2). Nowhere is this exhortation needed more than in modern urban Africa.³³

The Church in this age faces great opportunities to do similar work that Christ did in his time. Announcing the Nazareth pericope in churches today would not only require commitment from the Church, but conscious efforts to ensure that Jesus' vision of liberating the poor, transforming societies is accomplished. Urban pastors must be committed as they champion the course of renewing their communities. Writing on the subheading "Getting the Church into the World", Tony Campolo in his work *Revolution and Renewal: How Churches Are Saving Our Cities* asserts, "The good urban pastor will get the people of the church into the community. Jesus got things going by sending out his disciples door to door and instructing them to minister to any who would receive them. That is a good model for the church today. We don't have to go beyond the Bible for directives. All of this is recorded in an unforgettable passage in the Gospel according to Luke."³⁴ The laborers Christ prayed for in

³² O'Donovan, 52-53.

³³ Ibid., 52.

³⁴ Tony Campolo, *Revolution and Renewal: How Churches Are Saving Our Cities* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 63. Campolo made

Luke 10 were needed for the transformational project he had in the city. The Church must engage the city thoroughly to be true ambassadors of Christ in the urban areas.

2. The Good News to the Poor

The heart of God for the poor is *love*, the sacrificial love often referred to as *agape*. Good news to the poor occupies the centre of Christ's ministry and message throughout the period of his earthly ministry. His teachings on the liberation of the poor begin with his genuine love for humankind. Trying to lay solid biblical foundations for his argument in his paper titled *Social Justice*, Raymond Aitchison navigates through the Old and the New Testaments showing how the Scriptures deals with ministry to the poor. Answering the question 'What are the Biblical guidelines to direct us?' Aitchison said:

A basic one is Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". This was quoted with emphasis by our Lord on one occasion (Matt. 22:39), and on another occasion gave rise to the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was also reinforced by both Paul (Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14) and James (ch. 2:8). Both our Lord and Paul declared

reference to Luke 10:1-17 as follows: After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. (Luke 10:1-17).

that this commandment summed up the Law. It can therefore be taken to sum up the social duty of the Christian. And its Biblical implications are both wide and demanding. The injunctions in both Testaments to be concerned for the *poor* and *needy*, and to be upright, just and merciful in all our dealings with others, are written plain for all to see. Our Lord also summed up social responsibilities on another occasion by saying (Matt. 7:12): "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." And the Christian's social responsibility does not end with his fellow-Christian, though this is his first priority. The example of our Lord Himself, and Paul's remark in Galatians 6:10 make it clear that this responsibility extends to everyone.³⁵

Good news to the poor occupied the heart of the ministry of Christ. Some questions rhetorical questions which may follow the focus of Jesus' ministry are "Could his interest on the poor be accountable for his choice of coming to the world via a relatively poor background?" "Could his poor background be responsible for his extensive engagement in ministry to the poor?" Jesus had real time spent working among the poor. In fact he claimed to have come basically for the poor and the outcast of societies. Schweizer observed that the good news to the poor was the heart of Jesus' ministry. Addressing this biblical message, he said, "The good news to the poor has everything to do with the Son of God becoming someone of lowly status and dying on the accursed cross with utmost shame among the criminals (Luke 4:18; Gal. 3:13; Phil. 2:6-11). He was not born among the rich but the poor."³⁶ Though he was God in his very nature, yet he related with the outcast, the lower class and the rejected people of his society. "By identifying with those with least privileges Jesus brought salvation to humankind and called his disciples to take on the same value system he had."³⁷ His humility drew many people to him. Christ was not partial in his love; he cared for everyone, both the people who encountered him personally during his earthly ministry and the people who now encounter him through the power of the Holy Spirit. He made enough provision to accommodate all.

Obviously salvation is not only for the poor. There were rich Christians in the early church. But the gospel cannot be fully understood unless discipleship is interpreted in terms of one's willingness to identify with the lowly and the weak. What should be noted is that Jesus did not

³⁵ Raymond Aitchison, "Social Justice", <http://www.thebigpicture.homestead.com/socialjustice.html> (accessed October 4, 2012), (Emphasis mine).

³⁶ Schweizer 2008.

³⁷ Ibid.

demand Zaachaeus to sell all his possessions – something that Luke emphasises in his gospel (14:33; 18:22). Zaachaeus probably remained relatively well off. But for Jesus, wealth is not to be measured in monetary terms. In this story Luke has shown us how the poor outcast) has been restored, and how he now, by the use of his possession, has included the poor in his circle of kin.³⁸

Provisions are made by Christ for young and old, poor and rich to hear the message of salvation with the opportunity to make decision either to follow him or to remain in sin. Nothing else apart from thorough ministry to the poor drives the mind of Christ. In the *Christian Mission and Social Justice* Samuel Escobar and John Driver observed, “The expression “the gospel to the poor” is an expression that Jesus used precisely in relation to the definition of His own mission (Luke 4:18; 7:22).³⁹ Answering the questions, 'How did He accomplish this mission of preaching the gospel to the poor?' 'What was the nature of Jesus' presence among the poor?' Escobar and Driver said, “The first fact of Jesus' presence among the poor is that it was *the presence of a poor Man among the poor*. Writing to the Corinthians Paul says, 'For you know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, NEB).’⁴⁰

Successful ministry of the good news to the poor must be wrapped with compassion. Jesus was not a selfish minister; he did not approach the poor with some ulterior motive. He was genuine in his love, very honest with all simplicity. He spoke from a heart full of love and pains for the plight of the poor. When he said, “You have the poor among you always” (Matthew 26:11, NEB), Escobar and Driver observed:

...these words were pronounced by a poor Man who lived among the poor and spent His life in service which sprang out of compassion for the poor, we can better understand at least what those words do not mean. The fact is that usually when used by people who are not poor, the words have a different meaning. They really come to mean, “The rich you will always have with you,” because they are used to defend a position that refuses to change things, to be bothered by inequalities and injustices.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Samuel Escobar and John Driver, *Christian Mission and Social Justice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 47.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 47-48.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

Jesus was careful to destroy the system of inequality and injustices. He did not waste time to condemn the act and pronounced condemnation on anyone who perpetrates the act. Renewing urban regions in contemporary Nigeria requires proper implementation of Jesus' principles of ministry found in the Nazareth pericope as recorded by Saint Luke. Since this renewal is vital the question then is 'Who will be responsible for renewing urban areas just the same way Jesus would have done?' 'Who will be at the fore front of its implementation, the rich who are interested in maintaining status quo or some other people?' In addition to Jesus' principles, the seven main points of Robert Lewis' book titled *The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community* are worth noting:

1. Reconnecting Church and Culture
2. The Big Idea of Jesus
3. Building the Best Structure
4. Moving from Pew to Participation
5. True Stories of Faithful Bridge Builders
6. Three Keys to Multiplying Influence
7. Where Do We Go from Here?⁴²

How is the Church working towards realizing Robert Lewis' vision that will give birth to the Church of irresistible influence? If the Church fails to meet the demands of people in her neighborhood who glamour for protection, shelter and other aspects of care from the Church, then Jesus' vision in sending the Church into the world would have been hampered. Addressing the importance of reconnecting Church and Culture Lewis and Wilkins recorded an ugly response from a survey, "In an informal survey taken at a large suburban mall, people were asked if the Church was making any impact on the community. One teenager answered with directness, "The Church is crap." That hurts. But are there elements of truth in his response?"⁴³ Jesus was a bridge builder who concentrated on building bridges connecting the Church and the people in the communities around the Church. Lewis and Wilkins suggested:

⁴² Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, "The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge-Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003)," in Ken Kelly Christian Book Summaries vol. 3, Issue 12, <http://www.christianbooksummaries.com/library/v3/cbs0312.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2012).

⁴³ Ibid. The word "crap" is an offensive term for saying that something is 'nonsense, worthless, useless and annoying (Microsoft Encarta 2012).

Study the life of Christ and you will discover one who imagined a dangerous dream of building bridges spanning the chasms of indifference, hostility, and skepticism. He dreamed of a bridge that would connect His people, the Church to an unbelieving, apathetic world. He urged people to follow Him, and He would teach them how to fish for the souls of men. He exhorted people to let their lights shine in the world of darkness. He told His followers they were salt and, therefore, they should add a tasteful flavor to their culture.⁴⁴

The concept of *bridge building* used by Lewis and Wilkins has to do with the idea of holistic, transformational ministry first mentioned and practiced by Jesus Christ as seen in Luke 4. Building the bridges helps the Church to penetrate their community. "Imagine New York City with no Brooklyn Bridge, London minus London Bridge, or San Francisco without the Golden Gate" or Lagos, Nigeria without the third Mainland Bridge. "*Bridges give life through two-way movement!*"⁴⁵ "Without its own bridges to the world, Church life-in-time-fades into isolation, self-congratulation, and finally, irrelevance."⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the above is the description of most of the churches across the cities of the globe.

The intention of Christ in establishing the Church is that the Church would continue with the vision of Christ which is to set the captives free (spiritual and physical captives), feed the poor, care for them and give the poor hope once again. Instead of accomplishing the Master's vision and goal of ministry, there seems to be more issues in the Church that occupy the attention of the leaders than evangelism, discipleship and holistic ministry to the poor. Such accounts for the failure of the Church in an age that needs more spiritual vigor to overcome the evil one. "So let us confess that our comfort, our moral compromises, and our misguided pursuits and priorities have rendered us increasingly important before the watching world."⁴⁶ To lead the Church to accomplish the task of transforming the nations, cities and communities, there must be transformed leaders who are truly agents of transformation in different capacities. "Turning the face of the church outward, giving its resources away, blessing the community, unleashing the gifts of laypeople to serve-this is what our living God desires for his church."⁴⁷ The challenge of lack of transformed leadership is the tyrant facing the Church today.

Lewis and Wilkins' three keys to multiplying influence is worth noting:

1. Partnering with other churches, "Whereas prayer became the catalyst for a new unity between our churches, good works have become a catalyst for

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

- building a new credibility with our community.”⁴⁸
2. Equipping leaders for ministry, “Without progressive leaders, bridges can never be built with lasting success. These leaders must possess a vision that extends far beyond the growth and success of his own congregation.” “Everywhere the church is suffering from a dearth of competent leaders, especially the kind of leader needed to turn the church outward.”⁴⁹
 3. Creating a community Strategy, “...first the perception that our geographical area is highly churchd is erroneous. Second, two dominant issues are still race and education. Third, there is a wide gap between community needs and church ministries that are addressing those needs. Fourth, churches are investing very little money in local ministries. Fifth, the community welcomes any efforts that churches can provide.”⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

To renew the urban regions in contemporary Nigeria, every Christian should be willing to pay some prices. Just like Jesus did in his time, Christians should endeavor to address critical social issues such as:

1. providing housing for the urban poor dwellers
2. giving scholarships to the children of the poor in the cities
3. empowering the people by creating jobs and employing the below average citizens who are also in the churches

God did not call the Church just to focus on building of Cathedrals and mansions for earthly purposes. He has something in mind far above that. His mission is the total transformation of humanity, spirit, soul and body. He cares for every individual person on the planet. His desire is to see everyone blessed and overcome the challenges of life. The church that does not live with (*incarnational church*) is a Christ-less church. The Church should be like Christ in all ramifications of his existence including his ministry visions and achievements.

In every city, there must be city changers who will intentionally identify with the poor as incarnational, selfless leaders who work hard to transform the city. Sunday Adelaja in his book *Church Shift* relates the teaching of Matthew 5:13 to the divine call on the Church as city changers and city sustainers. Matthew identified the Church as the salt of the earth, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” Salt has a definite characteristic which was of particular interest to Christ. It is used for flavoring and preserving. Why would Christ liken his disciples to salt? Could it be that he wanted them to provide seasoning to the earth? It is important that believers realize their unique position in relation to their services to humanity. “There is absolutely no use in having a big church without changing culture, speaking to society, and curing social ills.”⁵¹ The church and all her agencies have been commissioned by Christ to provide saltiness to the earth. Dealing with societal challenges becomes one of the primary ministries of the church.

Adelaja added that, “When a church loses focus, people get busy fighting among themselves. When our focus is not on finding our promised land and changing our society from right where we are, we start using kingdom resources to build our own kingdom.”⁵² Can your own church really raise her hands in innocence from Sunday Adelaja's comments? The chief occupation of the Church is to build societies, give succor to societies around her walls and by so doing provide that saltiness to the earth which Christ expects of her. Drifting from this divine mandate truncates God's design for the deliverance of communities around the Church. The Church becomes city changers and city sustainers by intentionally providing saltiness to the city in which she is located. The idea here is to start from the Church's immediate ‘Jerusalem’ (environment). Challenging the weaknesses of the Church in remaining within the ‘four walls’ of the building, Sunday pointed out that, “When Christians make church the focal point of their lives and ministry, they burn each other like an over-salted dish and blind each other like a room full of spotlights.”⁵³ The ministry of the Church is best located outside the walls of the building. The Great Commission specifically pointed the Church towards a direction of ministry, “...go and make disciples of all nations...” The instruction does not say remain within the building whereby you have fellowship. The instruction does not say engage in house battle and serving of tables. But Jesus identifying the needs in the nations directed believers to those nations, cities and societies around the Church where the poor and afflicted can be seen and touched for the glory of God. In doing this therefore the Church also recognizes the fact that there are needy people in her midst who equally deserve the peace of God. The scope of the Great Commission is wide and all encompassing but it begins just from one's immediate environment. Jesus had this Great Commission in mind when he entered the synagogue in Nazareth. The Lucan narrative in 4:16-30 shows the urgency of Jesus' vision for holistic transformation of humanity. So the Church should take a cue from

⁵¹ Sunday Adelaja, *ChurchShift* (Florida: Charisma House, 2008), 69.

⁵² Ibid, 69.

⁵³ Ibid, 69.

this ministry vision of Jesus Christ.

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