

## The Implications of the Concept of Koinonia on Poverty Alleviation in a Globalized World

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### Abstract

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Globalisation is making the world more economically, culturally, politically, and spiritually connected. In such an interconnected world with increased knowledge, one would expect the world to be a better place in terms of how people care for the needs of fellow human beings; unfortunately, the world's economic discrepancies show that the opposite is true. Though international corporations and institutions have tried to create economic, political, anthropological, and cultural structures to foster a caring community, they have not delivered much. This paper looks at the theological concept of *koinonia* as a biblical resource that can provide insights into how the globe can move toward a more understanding and caring community. Using the social scientific method, the paper explores the paradox of globalisation, expounds on the theological foundations of *koinonia*, and examines the concept of *koinonia* in the Early Church and how it functioned to address socio-economic needs within the community. The paper provides a review on conceptualising poverty in relational terms rather than material deficit, understanding the impact of globalisation on poverty, and seeking to partner and share all the gifts bestowed upon us by God. Also, acknowledging that what we possess is meant to benefit the world and embracing our multi-ethnicity for the good of all instead of discrimination, favouritism, or dominance would avail much in alleviating poverty in our times.

**Keywords:** Koinonia, Poverty, Globalisation, Community, Church

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## **Introduction**

Though globalisation is making the world more connected and integrated economically, culturally, politically, and spiritually, the gap between the poor and the rich continues to widen. In 2011, the ratio between the rich and the poor increased from 2:1 in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to 80:1 in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rodrik, 2011). In 2014, a Pew Research Center Survey found that the gap between the rich and the poor is a major challenge in the age of globalisation (Dabla-Norris, 2015). Global inequalities are worsening, for little change has been realised since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Comparing the rich and the poor countries in terms of wealth and income, Stanley (2022) notes that the poor own €2,900 (in purchasing power parity) per adult, while the rich own roughly 190 times as much; the rich get 52% of all income, while the poor get 8.5%. Oxfam (2023) shows that in the last ten years, the wealthiest have doubled their wealth; for every \$100 of wealth created, the rich have gained 74 times more wealth than the poor.

These statistics show that despite decades of substantial progress in boosting prosperity and reducing poverty by institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO), the world continues to suffer from substantial inequalities. Unfortunately, these institutions' economic, political, anthropological, and cultural structures have not fostered a caring community. Most people still wallow in poverty, whereas others enjoy globalisation's benefits. For example, in 2013, the World Bank (2016) adopted two goals: to end extreme global poverty and promote shared prosperity in every country in a sustainable way. The Bank aimed at reducing the poverty headcount ratio from 10.7% to 3% percent by 2030 by fostering the growth in the income or consumption expenditure of the poorest 40% of the population in each country. These goals were to be achieved through accelerating economic growth and reducing inequalities, especially among those countries with large concentrations of the poor. Unfortunately, World Bank president David Malpass expressed fears that these goals may not be achieved by 2030, for there is a rise in extreme poverty and a decline in shared prosperity due to inflation, currency depreciations, and broader overlapping crises (World Bank, 2022).

This paper argues that a clear conceptualisation of poverty will affect how the globalised world will narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Poverty, in this case, is conceptualised as both material and spiritual. As Sen (2001) and Myers (2011) articulate, poverty is all about those things and conditions that rob persons of a certain quality of life, dignity and well-being; hence it is material, relational and spiritual. Though often neglected, the relational and spiritual aspects are foundational in creating a caring community. This is



well exemplified in applying the theological concept of koinonia in the Early Church. As lived out in the Early Church, Koinonia provides helpful corrective measures to our tendency toward an individualistic approach to community, moving us toward a more understanding and caring community. The Early Church was a multi-ethnic community, yet it demonstrated that living together and caring for one another is possible.

Using the social scientific method, this paper examines the concept of koinonia in the Early Church and how it functioned to address socio-economic needs within the church community. It explores the theological foundations of koinonia and draws implications of poverty alleviation in the age of globalisation. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part expounds on the paradox of globalisation, whereas the second part explicates the koinonia concept at its historical, philological, and theological background. Part three shows how the concept was applied in the Apostolic Church by identifying and extracting the authentic message that koinonia embodies and can be used to alleviate poverty in the age of globalisation. Finally, part four draws implications that would foster a caring community in the era of individualism, inequality and unequal distribution of resources that has widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

### **The Paradox of Globalisation**

Globalisation is a multifaceted concept including economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual aspects. According to Steger (2013), globalisation is “a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.” Pierre (2004), defines globalisation as “the process through which goods and services, capital, people, information and ideas flow across borders and lead to greater integration of economies and societies.” The World Bank Policy Research Report states that, “globalisation is the growing integration of economies and societies around the world-a complex process that affects many aspects of our lives” (Collier, 2002). Central to these definitions is that globalisation is about people, nations, economies, integration, and interconnectedness; it is economic, political, technological, cultural, social and spiritual.

The term “globalisation” summarises the happenings of the decade of the 1990s and gives us an outlook for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The world is becoming a global village, “a reality which is inescapable and cannot be repealed” (Resolution, 2006). With this reality, one expects “links of understanding and caring among the worldwide human family” (Williams,



2009). Unfortunately, the opposite is true, “though the knowledge that underpins prosperity is potentially available to all, not all parts of the world are rich-indeed, far from it” (Sachs, 2005). Thus, all nations do not enjoy the benefits of globalisation, for some are excelling, whereas others, such as Africa, wallow in poverty (Rodrick, 2011).

This makes globalisation paradoxical; it causes development and underdevelopment at the same time. It transforms national economies, human societies, and individual persons, yet simultaneously creates inequalities and uneven distribution of resources (Rodrick, 2011). According to Hanciles (2008), “Globalisation is celebrated as well as contested; in part, it can mean all things to all people. In part, it is associated with a bewildering array of human actions and experiences . . . it serves as an opportunity to integrate powerful trends and religious phenomenon in a world in which the West seems to dominate.” According to Groody (2007), globalisation creates possibilities for local, regional, and global integration as well as the waves of disintegration; it gives us more and more free market, but it unmasks human and structural “unfreedoms” which widen the gap between the rich and the poor. In some ways, it has made us less able to find the ethical coordinates and the spiritual vision to help us find a place in human solidarity.

Therefore, the defining challenge of globalisation is widening economic, gender, and racial inequalities. In a world of plenty, hunger kills over 2.1 million people each year at a minimum. In every country, the poorest people live shorter lives and face earlier deaths than those who are not poor (Ahmed, N., 2022). Thus, as Groody (2007) articulates, poverty is one of the worst realities of globalisation; it “affects people at all levels of their existence and wastes human potential and weakens the entire community hence endangering humanity.” In his analysis of our times, the late Nelson Mandela observed that: “Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times-times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation. . .” (Passacantilli, 2006).

In 2000, the World Bank report on poverty stated that “the world has deep poverty amid plenty.” Of the world’s 6 billion people, 2.8 billion-almost half-live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion-a fifth-live on less than \$1 a day (World Bank, 2000). At the start of 2014, Oxfam calculated that the richest 85 people on the planet owned as much as the poorest half of humanity. Between March 2013 and March 2014, these 85 people grew \$668m richer each day. In March 2023, the World Bank’s global poverty headcount ratio at the International Poverty Line (\$2.15 per person per day, 2017 PPP) was revised slightly up by 0.1% points to 8.5%, resulting in a revision in the number of poor people from 648 to 659



million. Oxfam (2023) indicates that economic inequality has soared to extreme and dangerous levels; crisis after crisis has driven an ever-greater wedge between the rich and the poor, exposing the consequences of entrenched inequalities which impede our ability to end poverty.

This prompts one to ask: what is the link between globalisation and poverty? Answering this question is difficult, for the “globalisation-poverty relationship is complex and heterogeneous, involving multifaceted channels” (Nber.Org, 2017). Harrison (2006) states that the links between poverty and globalisation are “indirect, complex and ambiguous for they depend on who you are asking: individuals, depending on their theoretical viewpoints, as well as their beliefs about international relations.” However, despite the different perspectives, poverty is a reality in the world today, and this has been attributed to globalisation inequalities, injustices, and individualism.

Inequality trends have been more mixed in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs). However, some countries are experiencing declining inequality, while others have pervasive inequities in education and healthcare access. Thus, higher inequality makes a greater proportion of the population vulnerable to poverty (Dabla-Norris, 2015). According to Groody (2007), the roots and drivers of inequality include “money-theism” as opposed to monotheism, consumerism and the system of structures, policies and institutions. Money-theism is practised in the rituals of the stock market and the liturgies of global capitalism, self-worship, and self-dependency, whereas consumerism devours the resources of the earth in an excessive and disordered way as humans seek to have more and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow. These structures greatly diminish the options of the poor, for they end up accumulating high levels of debt to multilateral institutions such as IMF. Schanbacher (2010) explains that the loans offered by multilateral institutions come with conditionalities and are responsible for the huge debt burden that many developing countries have accumulated over time. According to Stiglitz (2012), the rich make money by “taking advantage of their market and political power to favor themselves, to increase their own income, at the expense of the rest.”

These inequalities and structural injustices have widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Greed and avarice translate into poverty which can only be addressed through collective responsibility (Groody, 2007). We cannot remain cold towards poverty. The poor are valuable before God. The widening gap between the rich and the poor is at a tipping point, and it can either take deeper root, jeopardising efforts to reduce poverty, or we can make concrete changes now to reverse it (Oxfam, 2013).



The poor as well as the rich need God for they are all affected by sin. They need to appropriate God's offer for sin, Jesus Christ. Thus, on a deeper level, poverty is integrally related to the disorders of the human heart. Structural disorders, according to Groody (2007), begin with disorders of the human heart, out of these "flow destructive choices that unravel relationships . . ." thus, globalisation presents us with things that dignify, humanise and sustain the delicate bonds that unite us all as a human family and others that diminish ourselves, dehumanise others, and degrade the environment.

## **The Concept of Koinonia Explained**

*Koinonia* is a multifaceted concept whose meaning and theological significance can be better articulated through a word study. In its lexical form, the Greek word *koinoinia* simply means "partnership or participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction, to communicate(-ation), communion, (contri-)distribution, fellowship" (Strong, 2002). According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, *koinonia* is defined as "fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation" (Thayer, 1996).

Etymologically, *koinonia* belongs to the same family with the noun *koinos/koinonos* and the verb *koinoneo*. The noun and verbal forms of *koinonia* refer to something held in common from which all can benefit and share (Gresham, 2012; Allen & Ross, 2012). *Koinonos*, means "partner, sharer, and companion. In short, it is a shared community that involves deep, close-knit participation among its people" (Thayer, 1996). Ramelli (2017) notes that in classical Greek *koinonos* meant companion, a partner or a joint owner; hence *koinonia* implied an association, common effort, or partnership, joint ownership, business, common interest; sharing, intimacy, intercourse; the share one has in anything; a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, alms, etc. *Koinoneo* means "to share with others (objectively or subjectively), to communicate, to distribute, to be a partaker" (Strong, 2002). According to Stott (1982) and Fuchs (2008), the noun form refers to what is shared "in common or communal" that which we possess in common and that which is valuable.

The verbal form of *koinonia* refers to the act of holding something jointly, that is, "to participate," "to give or contribute a share," or "to put together." Fuchs (2008) further highlights that "commonality," "mutuality," "partaking," "reciprocity," "solidarity," "togetherness," and "unity" are renditions of *koinonia*. Sometimes *koinonia* was used to refer to a business partnership (Witherington, 2011), a marital relationship (Horrell, 2004) or other situations where more than one party held a common interest. Neufeld (2012) explains that



whenever *koinonia* has the Greek prefix ‘sun,’ *sun-koinonio*, it means to co-partner or co-participate. In sum, Liddel and Scott (1996) assert that *koinonia* is the spirit of generous sharing as contrasted to selfishness, taking part in something with someone.

In the Hellenistic world, *koinonia* was applied in both religious and social dimensions. According to Rhee (2018), the two dimensions are interwoven and inseparable. Wenstrom (2002) asserts that religiously *koinonia* focused on the unbroken relationship between man and gods as depicted in the lives of the Greek philosophers. He notes that Epictetus acknowledged that religions’ aim is *koinonia* with Zeus. In contrast, Plato saw *koinonia* as the highest and most felicitous form of fellowship, which is the source of salvation, preserving not merely individuals but the whole cosmos, which includes both men and gods.

Socially, *koinonia* focused on a close-knit relationship among men. The Pythagoreans used *koinonia* to refer to “the fellowship of life” or the brotherly bond, for it expressed the sense of brotherhood and a standing expression for how social life was constituted (MacDonald, 2008). According to Plato, *koinonia* emphasised a sense of duty and common ownership within society, including the sharing that was citizenship, for its political ordering was integral for “the preservation of society, and indeed of the cosmos (Kittel & Friedrich, 1965).

From the etymology and the usage of *koinonia* in the Hellenistic world, Williams (2000) concludes that *koinonia* was cognizant of the fact of the divine source of all the world’s goods. It expressed itself through the awareness of the connective worth among the people of the world and functioned under the auspices of “right relations” in its most egalitarian significance. As Williams narrates, *koinonia* was used both religiously and socially in the Hellenistic world to mean “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship”; “generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism”; “sign of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity, gift, contribution”; “participation, sharing in something” as exemplified in the Early Church.

Therefore, *koinonia* centres on the shared community that involves deep close-knit participation among people who share and give for the benefit of everyone. It creates a sharing and caring community that is vertically and horizontally oriented and approaches life holistically. The concept thus provides a holistic outlook on life whereby the common life and common good are at the core of relationships. Thus as the world becomes a global village, we need to acknowledge multi-ethnicity in the global village, which is inescapable and cannot be repealed. Then seek to share the resources bestowed on us (Resolution, 2006).



## **Application of the Concept of Koinonia in the Early Church**

The church was born in a multi-ethnic context; hence her membership was a cross-section of the society comprising the poor and the rich. Brewer (2009) states that most people in the first century were generally economically and religiously poor. Due to this, there was a gap between the religious elite and the “people of the land” living in poverty; the religious elite looked down upon the poor not only on economic terms but on spiritual terms as well.

This context prompted the church to embrace the concept of koinonia in both its religious and social dimensions. By applying the two dimensions of the concept, the church created a caring community whereby the rich shared their resources with the poor to the extent that none was needy in their midst. Thus, despite their social and economic distinctions, in the world around them, believers in the early church had “one heart and mind” (Acts 2:32). According to Williams (2000), the church did not seek for *idione* which characterises the individualism of the age of globalisation, but rather to koinonia which favours sociality which is built of egalitarian principle. The paper focuses on how koinonia was experienced and expressed in the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles.

### **The Concept of Koinonia in the Book of Acts**

The book of Acts opens by articulating the religious aspect of koinonia. The church’s fellowship and sharing or having all things in common are anchored on her relationship with God. Thus, the caring community in this book began immediately after the Pentecost; all those who believed in the resurrected Christ shared a common bond with God. This bond led to their communion with one another; the caring community was an outflow of the church’s restored relationship with God. This relationship made the believers part of God’s blessing and partner with him in his agenda regarding the poor and less fortunate in society. Therefore, as they shared in communion with Christ, they shared in the community of faith with others; koinonia with Christ inevitably involved koinonia with all believers (Williams, 2000).

Acts chapters 2:42-47, 4:32-37, and 5:1-11 show how the believers’ relationship with God was expressed in koinonia with others; the church was sensitive to the needs of one another. Acts 2:42-45 states that, “*All those who had believed were together and had all things in common . . . selling their property and possessions and...sharing them with all, as anyone might have need* (AMP). In this case, the rich sold their possessions to meet the needs of the poor; they selflessly shared their wealth with them; for example, Barnabas sold his property and laid the proceeds at the Apostle’s feet. This voluntary and spontaneous sharing created a new community whereby there was no needy person in the community of believers



(Acts 4:34, cf. Deut 15:4, 11). The rich did not claim ownership of their personal property; for their property benefited the community; they partnered with God in sharing their material blessing with the poor. Constable (2007) observes that the church exhibited a community spirit of being mindful of its members' welfare materially and spiritually. When Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11) embraced a deviant individualistic spirit instead of the community spirit, thus judgment befell them.

The *koinonia* of the church made it consider the less fortunate in the Christian community. In Acts 6:1-8, widows, usually among the vulnerable in society, received relief from the church. This relief was to benefit all widows regardless of their race or status. When there was a breach of equal distribution of the relief, Hebraic widows were favoured over the Hellenistic ones; the disciples stepped in and appointed deacons to ensure equal distribution. Apart from the relief, Acts 9:36-43 acknowledges how individuals initiated projects to assist the poor, especially widows. Commenting on this attitude, Pilgrim (1981) asserts that in the Early Church, there was neither discrimination nor favouritism of one group over another nor dominance of the rich members over the poor. He further notes that there was no gap between the rich and the poor, for the new community was a caring one that felt obligated to ensure faithful administration of funds. Thus, the church was one body with one life, they experienced a common bond of fellowship, and there was no one in need.

In a nutshell, from the book of Acts, *koinonia* was articulated or rather expressed in real acts of altruism and kindness. According to Gutierrez & Towns (2012), *koinonia* went beyond mere fellowship to how that fellowship was experienced in the community through sharing, generosity, and the pooling of resources. This lived fellowship extended to all churches as Paul collects contributions towards the needy in Jerusalem (Rom 15: 26, 2 Cor 8:4). Therefore, as Heywood (2011) points out, true *koinonia* in Acts and elsewhere, is not merely a conceptual framework used to describe an intangible quality of Christian social relationships, but a practical expression of those relationships.

### **The Concept of *Koinonia* in Pauline Epistles**

In Pauline epistles, *koinonia* still carries its religious and social dimensions; it is both vertical and horizontal, participation with Christ and one another (1 Cor 1: 7-9). Paul uses the terms *koinonos* and *koinoneo* to describe the relationship between the triune God and individual believers as well as the relationship amongst believers (Oregeau, 2017). As displayed in the book of Acts, *Koinonia* is, first and foremost, Christocentric. Christ is the core of our fellowship, sharing, and partnering, which is to be experienced practically in our communal



life. In concrete and compelling ways, Paul articulates the mutuality and reciprocity that accrues from *koinonia* with Christ and each other through his Spirit (Fuchs, 2008). Believers co-exist in a “profoundly connected relationship.” They are drawn together and share in each other’s suffering and joy spiritually and in practical and tangible ways (Augsberger, 2006). Thus, our *koinonia* with Christ breaks down any ethnic and cultural divisions and ends discrimination in the community (Gal 3:28).

The believers’ relationship with Christ in Pauline epistles had concrete economic implications towards the church in Jerusalem, which was poverty-stricken due to natural phenomena. In this case, *koinonia* implied financial sharing or collection; the Gentile churches were to share with the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor 9:11; Rom 15:26). They were to take responsibility for the poor in the Jewish church in Jerusalem. Robinson (1979) observes that the *koinonia* in spiritual things, for which the Jews were to give and the Gentiles receive, led in turn to *koinonia* in material goods, for which the Gentiles were to give and the poor of the saints in Jerusalem receive (Rom 12:13, 15:26, 2 Cor 8:4, 9:13).

According to Rhee (2018), this common bond was to be sustained in the church, and that is why Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:17-34 rebuked the Corinthians for allowing social distinctions to disrupt and distort their participation in the body and blood of Christ. His collection of Jews from Gentiles exemplified that the oneness of the new body of believers entailed dramatic economic sharing across ethnic and geographical lines. Kariatlis (2011) narrates that for Paul, *koinonia* meant “participatory unity,” where reciprocity through sharing met the needs of local communities and the body of Christ as a whole. Paul urged the wealthy to be rich in good deeds and economic sharing toward the poor (1 Tim 6:18, cf. 2 Cor 8:21). In response, the churches (Gal 2:10, 1 Cor 1:26) absorbed the *koinonia* spirit to the extent that Paul warned them against the fraudsters who wanted to take advantage of them. In a nutshell, the Pauline epistles show that communion with Christ translates to communion with the community, it goes beyond geographical locations, and its objective is to foster a caring community.

### **Implications of *Koinonia* in Poverty Alleviation in a Globalized World**

What relevance does the concept of *koinonia*, as applied in the Early Church, have for the globalised world where the gap between the poor and the rich is widening? Since we cannot oppose the changes of globalisation or uncritically embrace them, there is a need to tame the individualism and uncaring attitude which is widening this gap by creating a caring



community. Though the globalised world is different from the first century politically, socially and economically, the concept of *koinonia* still provides essential inferences that can help reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in an interconnected and integrated world.

First, we must conceptualise poverty in terms of relationships rather than material deficits to alleviate poverty in this age. Just as the Early Church's caring community was founded on their relationship with God, so should the present society. This relationship should be the framework for interpreting poverty's reality in a globalised world. We need to remember that God does not separate being from doing; the two are in him; he is a relational God who created man to uphold the right relationships. As Myers puts it, our identity is expressed through our relationships; with God, self, fellowmen, and the environment (Myers, 2011). Unfortunately, these relationships are marred by sin, and only conversion can mend them. God puts us right with Himself through Christ, and a good relationship with him should lead to a caring relationship with fellow men. Groody (2007) states that it is only conversion that can turn us away from globalisation gods, which leads to a self-seeking autonomy that sees the self as the source of life rather than a receptive, creative agent of God's divine power and reduces man's value and worth to a 'market fundamentalism.' As he observes, the conversion will generate a community transformed by the love of God and others. It will also deepen understanding of communion as a right relationship among all people and carry out the theological imperative for Christian reflection.

Understanding God, humanity, and the environment is paramount if we will tame the individualism and inequalities of globalisation. Since the ills of globalisation are in the "terrain of the human heart" (Groody, 2007), which determines how we live, what we value most and what Jesus values most. The foundational things in this terrain are conversion from "money-theism" to monotheism, making God and not Mammon the only true God. God opposes the oppressive works of the empire and stands with the poor not because they deserve it but because of God's love for the vulnerable. We must deal away with individualism, for it is self-seeking and leads to the negligence of the poor (Groody, 2007). This means that the starting point towards alleviating poverty is a clear understanding of the Creator and creation, for this will dispel the gods of globalisation, namely, self-reliance and self-worship, which lead to anarchy in society. An understanding of the Creator and self makes us take up our moral responsibility to care for the environment and intelligently use resources to meet needs while at the same time conserving these resources and safeguarding them for future generations"(Groody, 2007).



Second, just as the Early Church understood her context and addressed poverty caused by natural phenomena, there is a need to understand the impact of globalisation on poverty. We need to be alert of what is happening to people and communities as they get “integrated” into the globe, for the whole world is the arena of God’s glory and human accountability (Resolution, 2006). As Myers (2011) articulates, there is a need to know who we are, where we are, what is wrong, and what time it is. As human beings created in God’s image to partner with him, we live in an age characterised by individualism, inequality, and unequal distribution of resources leading to the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Though *koinonia* was practised within the church context in the first century, the concept can still be contextualised in this century, where the globe is interconnected; yet inequalities derail the efforts of alleviating poverty. Just as the church embraced the overriding human responsibility of transmitting God’s gifts to successive generations (Resolution, 2006), we can embrace the *koinonia* spirit, which seeks to partner and share all the gifts bestowed upon us by God. As ethicist George Thomas (1955) puts it: “Christians must supplement the individualistic ideal of equality of opportunity with the more humane ideal of equality of consideration. This is the principle that everyone should be genuinely considered in the distribution of social benefit. . .”

Third, we must acknowledge that what we possess is meant to benefit the world. Material poverty is addressed through sharing of resources (Gal 6:2, 10). The wealthy in the Early Church never considered personal property private; they sold it and laid the proceeds at the Apostles’ feet so that no one in their midst would be needy. They acknowledged God as the giver of wealth to benefit others; this led to sharing equitably without some enjoying living in abundance, whereas others lacked (Augsberger, 2006). In this individualistic age, we need to acknowledge that true wealth consists not in the accumulation of goods but in their distribution to others, not in cultivating into one’s bank account but in cultivating one’s heart, not in having more but in being more (Groody, 2007). Boerma (1980) explicates that one’s prosperity is closely connected with that of others. One cannot be rich by himself; hence the wealth of the rich is purged and transformed in the same way; this is why Paul urged the Corinthians (2 Cor 8–9) to complete their collection for the needy in Jerusalem. In doing this, Paul noted that they would discover the joy of corporate living, which also brings spiritual blessings. All these must be intentional, just as was the case in Acts and Pauline’s epistles. The church did not just acknowledge the poor in their midst but acted on their behalf; they provided for them.



Fourth, we need to acknowledge multi-ethnicity in the global village. As discussed earlier, the Early Church comprised members from the community's cross-section. It did not discriminate against or show favouritism of one group over another or dominance of the rich members over the poor (Pilgrim, 1981). By being non-discriminatory, we will be mindful of the welfare of every community member regardless of their geographical location, social status, race, and gender. The community will feel obligated to care for one another's needs, bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. This is a crucial steppingstone towards the alleviation of poverty, for as Williams (2000) asserts, it serves as a reminder that God owns the globe, it is his household which comprises many kinds of cultural systems, and with God at the centre, all cultures, races and genders should relate to each other.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening regardless of globalisation's economic, social, political and spiritual connectedness and integration. Statistics have shown that despite decades of substantial progress in boosting prosperity and reducing poverty by multilateral institutions, these institutions' economic, political, anthropological, and cultural structures have not fostered a caring community. The paper argued that if the church and the world will address poverty meaningfully, it is necessary to conceptualise it as material, relational and spiritual, for these aspects are foundational in creating a caring community as was the case in the Early Church.

Though globalisation is multifaceted and means different things to different people, the paper highlighted that globalisation is about people, nations, economies, integration, and interconnectedness; it is economical, political, technological, cultural, social and spiritual. Unfortunately, though the world is becoming a global village, it has not fostered a caring community among the worldwide human family. This makes globalisation paradoxical. It causes development and underdevelopment while making poverty a terrible scourge in our times. "Money-theism," consumerism and the system of structures, policies and institutions were identified as the roots and drivers of inequality in this age. However, the paper noted that on a deeper level, poverty is integrally related to the disorders of the human heart, for structural disorders begin with disorders of the human heart.

The concept of *koinonia* was discussed in relation to its theological, historical, and philological meaning. As explicated, *koinonia* centres on the shared community that involves deep close-knit participation among people who share and give for the benefit of everyone. It



creates a sharing and caring community that is vertically and horizontally oriented and approaches life holistically. The concept thus provides a holistic outlook on life whereby the common life and common good are at the core of relationships, as it was exemplified in the book of Acts and Pauline epistles, where the church's relationship with God made her not look down upon the poor as was the case in the first century, but instead shared their resources for the common good.

The following inferences were drawn from the theological, historical, philological and biblical concept of koinonia. First, the conceptualisation of poverty in terms of relationships rather than material deficit will deepen our understanding of communion as a right relationship among all people and carry out the theological imperative of partnering with God in reaching out to the poor. Second, there is a need to understand the impact of globalisation on poverty and seek to partner and share all the gifts bestowed upon us by God. Third, we should acknowledge that what we possess is meant to benefit the world. God has given us wealth for the benefit of all; we should share equitably without some enjoying living in abundance, whereas others lack. Finally, our multi-ethnicity should not bring discrimination, favouritism, or dominance over the poor. Instead, we should embrace each other regardless of geographical location, social status, race, and gender. We should know that God owns the globe; his household comprises many kinds of cultural systems, and with God at the centre, all cultures, races and genders should relate to each other.

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