

An Analysis of Proverbs 6:6-11 as a Case For a Christian Leadership Mindset Characterised by Productivity

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Abstract

Poverty in Africa is an enigma when one considers the natural resources and potential that there is. Worse still, Africa's resources are extracted to develop other parts of the world. For this reason, this article argues that a new leadership paradigm is necessary in order to maximize Africa's own potential for poverty reduction. The book of Proverbs offers a useful reflection on what could constitute such a leadership. Could the church and Christian leaders in particular be missing out on the biblical mandate towards poverty reduction?

1. Introduction

Africa is endowed with many natural resources. The enormity of these resources in global proportions is perhaps best portrayed by Ayittey (1999:5-6) as he cites David Lamb in his compelling read *Africa in Chaos* in which he reveals the following:

Africa is four times the geographical size of the United States ... a continent with immense and untapped mineral wealth. Africa has 40% of the world's potential hydro-electric power supply; the bulk of the world's diamonds and chromium; 30% of the uranium in the non-communist world; 50% of the world's gold; 90% of it cobalt; 50% of it phosphates; 40% of its platinum; 7.5% of its coal; 8% of its known petroleum reserves; 12% of its natural gas; 3% of its iron ore; and millions upon millions of acres of untilled land ... In addition Africa has 64% of the world's manganese, 13% of its copper, and vast bauxite, nickel and lead resources [figures which by now need to be revised upward in view of recent discoveries]. It also accounts for 70% cocoa, 60% coffee, 50% palm oil, and 20% of the total petroleum traded on the world market, excluding the United States and Russia. The tourism potential of Africa is enormous. Unrivalled wildlife, scenic grandeur, and pristine ecology constitute Africa's third natural resource after agriculture and mineral wealth.

Another voice that encapsulates the extent of Africa's wealth, says that "the enormous resources in Africa makes it one of the wealthiest regions in the world ... In most parts of the continent, it is possible to engage in farming all year round. Africa could easily be a paradise on earth" Adadevoh (2006:58). Rukuni (2011:208-9) sheds some light on the significance of the agricultural potential which contributes an estimated 35% of the Gross National Product while employing up to 80% of the total labour and accounting for 40% of the total foreign exchange. He equally posits agriculture, the backbone of the African economy, as seriously

underutilised as the following facts reveal:

- In Africa only 7% of arable is irrigated compared to 14% in Latin America and 38% in East and Southeast Asia and 42% in South Asia
- Fertiliser use in Africa currently amounts to 9kg / ha of arable per year, compared to 120 kg/ha in South Asia
- Africa uses 1.6% of its water resources, compared to 14% in Asia

The paradox in view of these vast resources is that the majority of Africa's people live below the poverty line. This anomaly in our view is primarily a leadership challenge and for that reason there is a need for a new paradigm of leadership in Africa.

In addressing the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW), Roe (2006:5) reveals that "more than 300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than one dollar a day" and "do not have access to clean water". She continues to say that "these conditions are horrible and can leave the population feeling very hopeless". According to the *New York Times* report Sub-Saharan Africa remains the world's poorest region in that it has not changed in nearly 25 years while most of the developing world has managed to reduce poverty Reuters (2008). Sachs (2005:xvi) reveals that 15 000 Africans die a day from preventable diseases for lack of drugs that we take for granted. The combination of destitution and disease has cursed almost half of Africa's population to extreme poverty where households are unable to meet basic needs for survival. For these people, poverty is terminal and will only take outside intervention to alter their misfortune. In Sachs' global call to end poverty in our lifetime, the extreme poor should be our priority as stated below:

The greatest tragedy of our time is that one sixth of humanity is not even on the development ladder. A large number of the extreme poor are caught in a poverty trap, unable on their own to escape from extreme material deprivation. They are trapped by disease, physical isolation, climate stress, environmental degradation, and by extreme poverty itself. Even if solutions exist to increase their chances for survival – whether in the form of new farming techniques, or essential medicines, or bed nets that can limit the transmission of malaria – these families and their governments simply lack the financial means to make these crucial investments.

In making this call Sachs is adamant that if all is done that could be done with the available resources, this seemingly colossal task to eradicate extreme poverty can be achieved. For the remainder of Africa's underprivileged, poverty can be described as a disposition particularly in view of the resources at their disposal. If almost anywhere else in the world regions there has been economic progress, this fact suggests that Africa cannot be an exception. Adadevoh (2006:50) says that "situations hardly change for the better by themselves; they are changed through the determined efforts of change agents". The leading objective for the

United Nations Millennium Goals for Africa is to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day. The second ambition aims to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people (see <http://www.mdgmonitor.org/goal1.cfm>). The prioritising of these aspects testifies to unfavourable conditions which the average African has to put up. In view of Africa's resources, these conditions with are unacceptable. More compelling, is Kinoti's sentiment in his book *Hope for Africa and what Christians can do*, in which he says that the "wretchedness of the African people dishonours their Creator. Therefore, every Christian has a moral responsibility to do his or her very best to correct the situation" (1994:1). His book intimates Christian responsibility and action.

The question we must ask at this juncture is why is Africa under such extreme levels of poverty and hunger when she is endowed with inexhaustible resources? Ayittey (2009:37) blames the political scenario and the aid vehicles by stating that:

Africa is not poor because of anything inherently the matter with African societies – quite the contrary. Africa is not poor because of the residue of colonialism or the machinations of large global corporations. Africa is not poor because of poor resource endowments or climate. Africa is poor because its dysfunctional, kleptocratic politics have disorganised its societies, and Western countries and their aid vehicles have unwittingly been complicit in this. Africa is rich; only its politics are poor.

Ayittey substantiates his reasoning by showing that even though there are a few political-economic success stories in the post-independent era in Africa, these are overshadowed by the tragedies in the majority of current situations (2009:37-38). For example, he says that only 16 out of 54 countries in Africa can be described as democratic, and only eight have reasonably free and independent media and only two countries have consistent levels of economic growth sufficient to keep up with population growth (2009:43). By the same token, despite the aid amounting to a staggering \$460 billion that Africa has received since 1960 the donors have not bothered to be introspective about the outcome of their efforts (2009:37). Ayittey is right in pointing out these anomalies. He goes on to prescribe possible solutions when he surmises that "the African people, through African society groups, need to be empowered to monitor how aid money is spent and to instigate reform from within" (2009:45). He goes on to qualify how this action could be done when he specifies that "empowerment requires arming the African people with the information, the freedom and the institutional means to unchain themselves from the vicious grip of poverty and oppression" (2009:45). From reading his book, *The End of Poverty: How to Make it Happen in Our Lifetime* (2005), Sachs would undoubtedly endorse these initiatives, and so would other proponents for the eradication of extreme poverty such as Julian May (2000),

Wisner et al (2005).

In this paper, however, we would like to particularise the individual African to whom poverty is somewhat a disposition. According to Sachs (2005:20), poverty describes households in which basic needs are met but just barely. In some situations poverty is a result of a dependency syndrome that plagues people who no longer take responsible action for their situation. In Adadevoh's sentiments, what one seems to lack in most of these scenarios is self-initiated action and leadership towards reversing one's dire circumstances (2006:52).

Ayittey (2002:5), himself, admits that wealth anywhere in the world is created by individuals or the private sector, and not by the government who merely distributes it. This truth is evident in Africa where the vast majority who produce wealth based on the natural resources are in rural or informal sectors, economic activities they engage in on their own initiative Ayittey (2009:39-40). In line with Adadevoh's (2006:53) apt call that God expects African Christians to do their part in producing what they want to consume, to invest in what they earn and sow where they want to reap, we would like to attempt to forward some thoughts based on Proverbs 6:6-11 on ideas that stimulate the individual towards taking responsibility for reduction if not the eradication of poverty at that micro level.

To compliment these thoughts, Adadevoh's "production mindset" as well as his "new mindset" ideologies are presented here as critical for reducing levels of poverty in Africa. He writes that in the "African situation this means taking responsibility even when the global leadership and donor agencies have not required such action. It also means citizens organising themselves and taking necessary action even when the central government has not requested and/or donated resources towards it. The wisdom to know the seasons and the appropriate action is the first step" (2006:55). Surely, responsible action will begin with a paradigm shift in our thinking, first of all, at an individual level as Adadevoh (2006:95-96) argues:

Mindset transformation requires that individuals and groups first recognise the need for change. This begins with an awareness of current mindsets. People need to be helped with awareness of the way they think, their perspectives on particular issues, and how those thinking patterns came to be. However, it is the effects of the thinking patterns that provide motive for change ... the desire for change is not only based on dissatisfaction with the status quo, but it is also influenced by the conviction that the new mindset and its positive effects are possible.

Similarly, Bowers and August (2005:20) in their missiological article on social transformation, cite the ANC Statement on Moral Renewal of the Nation in which the former South African President says that "in striving for political and economic development, the ANC recognises that social transformation cannot be separated from spiritual transformation". Social transformation in Bowers and

August's mind is best represented by Groenewald who defines it as "change in human conditions of people ... the process of change in conditions of the lifestyles of people and the qualitative change in the nature and character of human societies" (2005:24). Notably, emphasis is not on infrastructural improvements but on human beings.

Combining the spiritual transformation ideology with the production mindset, we would like to consider Proverbs 6:6-11 as the basis for the development of a production mindset among Christian Leaders, because we believe a production mindset must characterise Christian Leadership in Africa if we are to see a real reduction in poverty in Africa. As we will see below, the concept "sluggard" used in the wisdom poem intrinsically hints at an unacceptable situation. The tone of the address commands attention. The intended outcome is unmistakably towards a reversal of circumstances. We now turn our attention to that.

2. Wise Advice for the "Sluggard" 6:6-11

We come to this wisdom poem in which the important feature of communal survival is idealised. Our interest in this poem also lies in the fact that the addressee is young. Correspondingly, more than 60% of Africa's population is under the age of 21. O' Donavan (2000:205) and his concept of youth as the leadership resource for the next generation is an important concept. According to the Population Reference Bureau, in mid-2008, Africa's population was estimated at 967 million, with about 400 million (42 percent) below age 15. This youthful population age structure provides momentum for continued growth (<http://www.prb.org/pdf08/africadatasheet2008.pdf>).

It is our belief that Africa's rise from poverty to affluence, among other things, rests with her youth. Ayittey (2005:xx) calls this new generation the "cheetahs as opposed to the older, the hippos, who are intellectually astigmatized and stuck in their colonial pedagogical patch". As such this wisdom poem is critical in influencing this generation towards a productive mindset that takes advantage of the resources at their disposal towards a better future.

To come to the details of the wisdom poem: Firstly, we notice that the context is summer or harvest time, when hard work was directed towards the acquiring of food cf. Gerstenberger (2002:20). The family could not afford to have a member who was lazy, and in being that way, contributed nothing to the communal productive efforts. In fact, a lazy person could not afford his lifestyle since it would not be the riches he missed out on, as Waltke (2004:339) points out, but rather "it is food, the necessity of life". Clifford (1999:76) picks up on this theme when he observes that the tone of this address is "sharper than usual, perhaps because the context is harvest, which is so crucial for the community's welfare". Having a lazy person is detrimental to the survival of all. Simply put, "laziness is another way to become poor" Harlow (1984:26).

Clearly, this subject is of extreme importance to bring up among many other lessons that are featured in these exchanges.

Secondly, this instance is the only time within the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs that the subject on productivity is brought up. Here, it is featured within the generic scope of parental instructions, although that claim is not directly made. This fact brings to the fore Gerstenberger's (2002:25) sociological orientation on the Israelite family circle and in particular the productive role expected of each member for the sake of the welfare of all. This suggests that at the earliest possible opportunity a child was exposed to this productive mindset as part of his/her essential being.

Thirdly, for the first time in the book of Proverbs, there is the use of observation as an instructional aid. Unlike the previous cases where hypothetical scenarios are imagined (1:8-19), and typical events recreated (6:1-5), in this instance the learner is commanded to go and learn by observing natural phenomena. Longman III (2006:171) says that "with the call to go and observe the activity of the industrious ant, we see here an explicit example of the importance of observation in the development and support of wisdom principles". Longman III's views are echoed by Gittay (2001:46) who suggests that the observation of a set of fixed cosmological rules projecting order and stability is a highly persuasive and beneficial wisdom principle. The importance of observation is uniformly recalled in Proverbs 24:32 as a fruitful exercise.

Fourthly, we have embedded within the African culture a similar instructional exchange. In the Shona traditional culture, for example, we have similar admonitions towards hard work see Hamutyinei (1992:48). At the same time, it reflects strong parental authority emblematic of a Shona (African) father whose tone of address changes when he brings up unpleasant matters. As in all the previous cases, the son cannot talk back, as a sign of respect. Thus, the way the subject is handled in biblical and Shona contexts reflects an individual focus which has some affinity with a domestic setting. With these preliminary thoughts in mind, we will now consider the text more closely using Robbins' Socio-Rhetorical approach (1996).

2.1 Text and Exegetical Framework 6:6-11

The framework reflected here follows the natural division of the poem where the first half, 6:6-8, describes the industry of the ant as an object lesson. The second half, 6:9-11 focuses on the sluggard to whom the object lesson applies. Verse 11 provides some form of closure. These divisions can be represented as Instruction 6:6-8, Admonition 6:9-10, and Consequence 6:11, as shown below:

Instruction	{	⁶ Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, ⁷ Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, ⁸ Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest.
Admonition	{	⁹ How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep
Consequence	{	¹¹ So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.

2.2 Inner Texture in Proverbs 6:6-11

The *inner texture*, first, draws our attention to the opening verb “go” which is in the imperative construct creatively set at the beginning of the unit to introduce the lesson on diligence. The command seems to have a rousing effect on the part of the “sluggard” or “lazybones” see Waltke (2004:336), whom, as we will see, is preoccupied with sleep (6:9-10). The command also puts into perspective the *opening-middle-closing texture* where the *beginning* is raised in 6:6-8 as the lowly ant, van Leeuwen (1997:74) says, serves as a moral example. The *middle* in 6:9-10, presents the condemnation of the sluggard by a rhetorical question which literally reads “after how long?” with the interrogative *repeated* in the same verse designed to apply the apparent lesson from the ant by rousing the sleeper. The passage then *closes* in 6:11 typically with a consequence clause that reveals that too much sleep or lack of industry will lead to yet another self induced trap, (cf. 6:1-5), in this case poverty.

Second, we note that in typical Instruction fashion we have a predominant use of the imperative in the opening statement, some four times in total. The addressee usually indicated by the vocative “my son” (cf. 5:1, 7; 6:1, 20; 7:1), however, is replaced with the double vocative, “sluggard” in 6:6 and 9, perhaps because of the repulsiveness of the subject. There is some sarcasm in the request for the “sluggard” to learn from the “ant” a feminine singular noun in this case. Hubbard (1989:99) picks up on the sarcasm by projecting a 5ft plus and some 130 pound in weight sluggard being told to let an ant, less than a quarter of an inch long and weighing a slight fraction of an ounce, be the teacher. He continues that “a person with gifts of speech, with a brain the size of a whole anthill is told to bend over and peer down, and learn from the lowly ant. The irony is powerful” (1989:99) cf. Ross (1991:932).

Third, and closely related to the above, is the significance of the feminine con-

struct in the noun “ant” which most commentators do not highlight. Van Leeuwen (1997:75) regards this as yet another occasion for female symbolism exposed in the text, after the personification of Wisdom (1:20-33; 9:1-18). The singular construct is also significant in that it delineates individual responsibility and ignores the collaborative behaviour of ants, noteworthy as that might be.

Fourth, as predictable of Hebrew poetry, we have the use of *parallelism*. In 6:8 the industrious nature of the ant is depicted on the one hand as storing its provision in summer which is *synonymously paralleled* to her gathering food at harvest on the other hand. The particularization of summer and the harvest is unmistakable, a peak period of work. Similarly, the rhetorical question raised in 6:9, “how long will you lie there” is synonymously paralleled to “when will you rise from your sleep”. Even here, the focus on the sluggard’s slumber is highlighted twice and taken up further in 6:10. In the consequential clause, we have the use of two similes, “like a robber” and “like an armed warrior”, to describe the effect of a lazy lifestyle which is “poverty” and “want”. Longman III (2006:172) alleges that the imagery here suggests that poverty will sneak up on the person and arrive suddenly, which serves as a warning with the hope that the “people who have a propensity to be lazy will stir themselves into activity”.

2.3 Intertexture in Proverbs 6:6-11

First, we need to point out that the “sluggard” is a prominent subject in the book of Proverbs (10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16). What is particular to a majority of these texts is they emphasise the individual. As much as the Israelites enjoyed a communal ideal, they could not escape from the fact that individuals made up the solidarity they took pleasure in. Therefore, the stance taken here of singling out the offender was crucial in a communal setting.

Second, the examples from nature in terms of industriousness and other aspects also feature quite a lot in the OT (Job 12:7; Is. 1:3; Jer. 8:7). More specifically, is the reiteration of the “ant” as an example (Pr. 30:25-26) and the comparison to locusts and lizards (Pr. 30:27-28). The main idea here is that lessons from nature are available to all and as such, are indisputable. In our instance the lesson is threefold; that of foresight, industry and preparedness. Perdue (2000:125) comments that “unstated but assumed is that the ant recognises that the preparation will enable it to survive sustained periods of drought and bitter cold. This illustration from nature becomes for the wise person a compelling example of the necessity of hard work and the requisite preparation for future survival”.

Third, there is the general association of the harvest with hard work as a divine institution (Gn 8:22). As a result a number of scriptures reflect that common notion of summer time and hard work, (Ex 23:10,16; Pr 10:5; 14:4; 18:20; 20:4; Is 62:9; Jl 3:13; Mt 9:37-38). The point to be made from this is that the ant demonstrates being in tune with cosmic reality as Clifford (1999:76) says that she “instinctively springs into action at any opportunity of gathering food”. Hubbard (1989:99)

endorses the same idea by stating that the fact that the ant plans ahead demonstrates her understanding of the seasons and invariably the cycles of life, unlike the sluggard who would rather sleep a little. Such is the disdain of the sluggard's laziness and love of sleep that the sentiments of 6:10-11 are repeated verbatim in Proverbs 24:33-34.

2.5 Social and Cultural Texture in Proverbs 6:6-11

The subject in 6:6-11 assumes a *Gnostic manipulationist argumentation* by virtue of the command to "go to the ant ... consider its ways and be wise". The distinctive knowledge to be gained from this observation, we note, is what would make one "wise", an imperative attainment in this account. There are some aspects of *common social and cultural topics* implied in the fact that the subject of observation, the ant, has no chief, officer or ruler in 6:7. This presupposes some form of governance or administrative institutions that existed within the cultural setting through which labour was organised. Hubbard (1989:99) suggests that the particularisation of these officials implies the Solomonic bureaucracy of which the ant is not a part. Even hierarchical structures within an ant colony are not in view here as Longman III (2006:172) comments:

The fact that modern scientific study has uncovered hierarchy in an ant colony is beside the point. This information was not available to the ancient Near Eastern observer, so the sage is speaking from the point of view of naïve observation. And without obvious social structure, these creatures cope quite well.

Even if this information was available, it does not take away from the point being made in this poem. Waltke (2004:336) concurs with this explanation when he adds that even though there is a perfect social organisation among ants, as entomologists have discovered, this does not imply a hierarchy of command. The concept "chief" describes one who holds others accountable in upholding the law, as is true in the Israelite paterfamilias in which the head of a household exercises such authority; (see Jos 19:13; Job 29:35; Pr 25:13; Is 3:6-7; Dn 11:18 for the use of the same concept and perhaps its implication in these contexts). The idea of a chieftainship was not formally instituted in Israel. The closest to that ideal is probably the period of the judges, otherwise "chiefs" were known among Israel's neighbours (Nm. 25:15). The "officer" was someone who exercised military, judicial or civil administrative duties. The "ruler" describes someone who governed or had dominion. None of these leaders are in view when it comes to the ant's work ethic put forward here. On the contrary, the sluggard would have such structures to his aid, and yet astonishingly fails to deliver.

Related to the above is the fact that the ant's foresight, is in line with seasonal cycles. Van Leeuwen (1997:75) tells us that Palestine has two main seasons, the cool, rainy season which runs from October to May and the warm, dry season

which runs from June to September, with three to four months of no rain at all. April is when most of the harvesting took place, where the early period of that month would be barley and the latter wheat (see Waltke 2004:338). The gathering of the food by the ant, however, was not limited to the two main crops but many other potential sources. In 1 Chronicles 12:40, we note a variety of food sources consumed in Israel which would have been accessible to the ant in her gathering of her much needed supplies. There are over a 100 known species of ants to whom this scenario could apply, but as Waltke (2004:336) advocates it probably was the harvester ant (*Messor semirufus*), found everywhere in Palestine, that the speaker had in mind.

To add to the above, we draw our attention to the rhetorical questions raised in 6:9. The questions presume that the harvest is actually happening, hence the implicit admonishment to reverse the futile laziness. According to van Leeuwen (1997:75), these questions throw responsibility where it belongs, but gives the sluggard the freedom to make up his own mind. In other words there is still room to redeem the situation. This admonition is followed by the mimicking of the sluggard's own excuse for wanting to take a "little sleep" which is the use of effective irony to rebuke the sluggard Ross (1991:932). Here is an attempt to belittle the quantity of sleep. Waltke (2004:339) points out that "sleep is the defining characteristic of the sluggard the love of sleep is pure escapism – a refusal to face the world".

The poem closes by pinpointing rather regrettably that "hunger" will be the outcome of a lazy lifestyle. The use here of the similes of a "robber" and "armed man" is interesting. The former represents someone who takes another's possessions by force and the latter one who is intended to protect but turns out to be the offender. In either scenario, the victim is defenceless. The state of poverty is here epitomised by the use of a concept not normally used, of the poor and the oppressed, as Waltke (2004:339) observes, who are a special concern for the Lord. These poor and defenceless usually become destitute through circumstances beyond their control, such as widows and orphans who lose their access to income when the breadwinner passes on. Interestingly, the people in extreme poverty in Africa can be classified under this notion as they are unable on their own to reverse their circumstances. Sachs (2005:18) approximates around one sixth of the world, a billion people, who are too ill, hungry, or destitute to even get their first hand out of the pit of poverty. By contrast, the sluggard, described in 6:10 as wanting to rest his hands, is here reflecting his reluctance to work and that is the cause of his poverty. Koptak (2003:188) makes the following comment:

The teaching also shows that laziness, at its root, is a failure of love. While others work to provide for self and family, caring for others, the loafer wants to be carried. In sum, the theme common to the first and second teachings may well be that of laziness, a wilful negligence that looks to bear the burdens that should be one's own. Just

as it is wrong to take what is not one's own, so it is wrong to shirk responsibility for what is.

3. Reflecting on Proverbs 6:6-11

First, the *Instruction* in 6:6-8 points to the ant's foresight. She is described in Proverbs 30:25 as a creature with little strength and yet has the ability to store up food in summer. That is the crux of the matter which this lesson from nature brings out. If an ant in her limited state has the foresight to provide for her needs, what excuse can a sluggard, one who is reluctant to work, forward to justify his position? This picture serves as an apt warning to a sluggard who, by his actions, invariably subordinates himself to such a lowly creature. For that reason, we have the command to "go" and learn from her, to depict the degradation implicit in this scenario. Productivity was important for the sustenance of the community which could not afford the idleness of even one of its members. The point is driven home beyond question through the approach taken in the treatise found in Proverbs 6:6-11. Habtu (2006:756) adds that "where the student has previously been addressed repeatedly as 'my son' (6:1, 3), in this passage he is repeatedly addressed as 'you sluggard' (6:6, 9). This is not only humiliation that the teacher uses to make his point about diligence and indolence. The sluggard is sarcastically advised to go and learn from ants".

It seems at the time of speaking, the addressee is not yet in poverty but merely being warned pertaining to the dangers his actions are likely to attract. This perspective is a role we can begin to play of warning the younger generation what the distasteful fruits of laziness will inflict upon Africa and her people. In our view, we need not go out of our way to register this concern as our continent has invited extensive Afropessimistic labels.

Second, the *Admonition* in 6:9-10 forewarns the addressee against procrastination and docility. Here we refer to Gerstenberger's (2002:20) concept of a family as a close community focused on acquiring food together and as a group that indubitably shared all that it found and acquired. It is at this familial level that the key towards poverty reduction in Africa also lies. Since, as noted earlier, the call demands a multi-disciplinary approach, the spiritual insights offered in Proverbs 6:6-11 in this quest for poverty reduction are valid. Adadevoh (2006:24) describes this reality as an ongoing and necessary ecclesiastical involvement when he writes:

It is necessary to note that ecclesiastical involvement in social upliftment is no new phenomenon. Social action has always accompanied Christian Mission, either as an explicit part of it or as the intended by-product of mission.

As a result, we have a clearly developed theological position that governed that

co-existence and understandably communicated within the family setting.

Third, the Consequence in 6:11 highlights the regrettable effects of irresponsible behaviour. The forceful images of a robber and an armed warrior are effectively used as vivid reminders of the almost inescapable result of a prolonged unproductive disposition. Not only does laziness have devastating results for the individual, it ripples into the community at large who not only miss out on the possible productive contribution but have to assume responsibility for the victim.

Lastly, we would like to bring to the fore the biblical notion of Shalom which “not only means peace in the sense of the absence of strife, but also health, wholeness, prosperity, justice, harmony and general wellbeing” Adadevoh (2006:30). Moreover, the command to epitomise the principle of the Mosaic Law, to love your neighbour as yourself (Lv 19:18 cf. Lk 10:27; Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-31), implies that we cannot claim to be neighbourly in the biblical sense if our neighbour is hungry, poor or needy. Loving the neighbour, according to Proverbs 6:6-11, also implies helping with ideas towards productivity. Imagine if we all were persuaded to this kind of thinking, where would Africa be by 2050? Shouldn’t Christians and the church leadership in Africa be at the forefront of such ideas rather than be outmanoeuvred by other non-governmental organisations?

4. Conclusion

The pertinence of a Christian Leadership that has a productive mindset emanates from the observation that the need is equally true in the secular context. In his editorial to the book *Advocates for Change: How to Overcome Africa’s Challenges*, Moeletsi Mbeki (2011:1) intimates that “there is a generally expressed consensus that Africa lacks a dynamic and innovative political and economic leadership”. His statement is particularly pertinent in view of the fact that the Church has been regarded as the conscience of the nation see Homrighausen (1960:223-34) and Nassif (1996). For this reason, the church has a moral obligation to be at the forefront of advocating for Africa’s transformation particularly in view of the texts like Proverbs 6:6-11 which when properly analysed offer insightful and actionable principles towards poverty reduction.

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