

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

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**PROPHECY IN JEREMIAH AND THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF  
MASS MEDIA IN BURKINA FASO: COMPARATIVE STUDY**


Moderator  
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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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## Student's Declaration

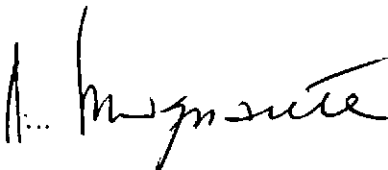
I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the materials used in this long essay are obtained through my personal reading, research and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor

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Rev. Dr Antonio Magnate

Date: ..... *31/01/2005*

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to all the people who suffer for the cause of truth, justice and peace. They are signs of hope in a society governed by selfish interests, the abuses of basic human rights and the love of money. When exploitation and oppression are institutionalized, charity, the first Christian value transforms itself into justice. May they persevere in the fight for a better world.

## **Acknowledgement.**

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Lastly, many thanks to all relations and friends for the support you shod to me in my life. May God bless you all.

## Epigraph

*“Ce qui est pire, ce n’est pas la méchanceté des méchants mais le silence des hommes bien”* [The worse thing is not the wickedness of the wicked but the silence of the good people]

Norbert Zongo

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

For many of us a prophet is a religious figure, an intermediary between God and his people. His message in most cases comes as a warning about impiety and injustice in the society, encouragement in difficult moments, or a piece of information on any topic that God intends to communicate. In a broader sense, the understanding of the prophet has evolved to mean the one who “speaks” for or on the behalf of someone. Seen from that angle, the prophet is both a social and religious protagonist playing a leading role in the society. It is not a recent phenomenon; it is as old as the beginning of human society because in every society some have been naturally endowed or called to defend and promote the rights of the less fortunate. In this reflection we are going to explore the lives and message of two prophets: Jeremiah a biblical prophet in Israel and the journalist Norbert Zongo a secular prophet in Burkina Faso.

Both prophets lived in a context that sparked an intense prophetic revolt against injustice and impiety of their respective communities. Jeremiah struggled against the evil of his community and suffered the consequences of his bold preaching. As a professional journalist, Zongo denied the gross abuses and violations of human dignity and he paid all by his life. We are re-reading the lives of Jeremiah and Norbert Zongo from a Christian perspective. What can we learn from their lives? As Christians, we have always been taught that faith has a charity dimension, and a socio-political thrust toward justice. We are not only moved to compassion but we must also act. We live in a society where exploitation and oppression have been institutionalized; consequently our Christian charity must transform

itself into a fight for justice and peace. Our involvement in social struggle for peace and justice can rekindle the hope of many victims of the structure of oppression and injustice.

In this perspective, we intend to proceed as follows: in the first chapter, we will discover the figure of the prophet Jeremiah, his call, message and struggle to live up his prophetic mission. In the second chapter, we will analyze the sociopolitical situation in Burkina Faso and the main events that prompted the prophetic reaction of Norbert Zongo and his subsequent death. In the third chapter, we will attempt a comparative approach of the two prophets Jeremiah and Zongo, their common characteristics. In the light of their lives, we will draw all the elements which can inspire us today in our struggle for a just and better society.



## Chapter one

# JEREMIAH THE PROPHET AND THE CHALLENGES OF HIS MISSION

## Introduction

The prophet Jeremiah belongs to the prophetic tradition of Israel. Like his counterparts, Jeremiah asserts the dominant features of the Old Testament theology<sup>1</sup>, namely the idea of monotheism, morality and the insistence on future salvation should Israel uphold the clauses of the Covenant. His life, by all standards, reveals the dilemma of a prophetic vocation, namely the inner tension between saying the truth of Yahweh and the threats of his own people to terminate his life. What is at stake in Jeremiah's life is to deliver God's message faithfully and convincingly, a message of intense indignation for Israel. We are at the quest of someone who disturbed kings, critiqued social and political structures and condemned religious leaders. We will journey with a prophet whose legacy remains the classics of the suffering messenger. Given his enormous impact on the Jewish prophetic literature and Christian living, we deem it worthwhile to gain a pristine insight into his prophetic thinking.

This first chapter will delve into the tremendous achievements of Jeremiah, his biographical credentials, the challenges of his ministry, his legacy as a prophet and the

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<sup>1</sup> The New Jerusalem Bible, "*Introduction to the prophets*" p 1163-1164. It summarizes the three important concerns of the prophets: monotheism (the affirmation of the existence of Yahweh as the One God and the denial of other gods), morality (the pure holiness of God and the sinfulness of Israel. Jeremiah takes up this central idea of sin. Sin infects the entire nation, corrupts it as it seems beyond hope: cf Jer 13:23) and future salvation (despite the iniquity of Israel, salvation will be possible for the little "remnant" that will keep the covenant).

prophetic “venom” of his message. In this chapter we shall proceed as follows: a brief presentation of his life, then the political and religious background of his time; from there, we shall analyze the controversies of his preaching and the consequences it engendered. As we round up the chapter, we will look at the figure of Jeremiah, a real profile of courage and his legacy for today’s prophetic endeavour.

## **1. Jeremiah, the man of Anathoth<sup>2</sup>**

The prophet Jeremiah was born of a priestly family residing in a small town of Anathoth, a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. The exact date of his birth is unknown but it must have been about 650 B.C.<sup>3</sup> His origins are traced back to Abiathar and Eli (1Sam 1-3; 14:3; 22:20). Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the 13th year of Josiah (Jer1:2, 4). This was 627 BC.

In his account of the call, Jeremiah emphasises his young age. He is more or less 12 or 13, the approximate age of the boy Samuel when he was serving Eli at Shiloh, and the call to be Yahweh’s prophet came to him (1Sam 2:11, 18, 21, 26; 3:1, 8). Jeremiah’s boyhood experience appears to have its closest similarity to that of Samuel which was lived out at the Shiloh sanctuary not far from Anathoth. The priestly line extending back through Abiathar and Eli picked up added prestige when it was traced all the way to Moses<sup>4</sup>.

From the time of his call, Jeremiah became intimately associated with the stirrings and catastrophic events of his people Israel. Jeremiah remains a special messenger “endowed with

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<sup>2</sup> Anathoth is a Levitical village, three miles north of Jerusalem, situated in the territory of Benjamin (Jos 21:18). Jeremiah grew up there

<sup>3</sup> NEAL. M. F., the Book of Jeremiah, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> ABC CD-Rom, Logos Library System

a mission, with the power of a word not his own that accounts for his greatness ...temperament, concern, character and individuality”<sup>5</sup>.

Though the exact records of his birth are unknown, his life and character are better known than any other prophet of the Bible, thanks to the bibliographical narratives<sup>6</sup> in the third person scattered throughout his book. These are: 19:1-20:6; 26; 36; 45; 28-29; 51:59-64; 34:8-22; 37-44. The “Confessions of Jeremiah”, 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-21, come from the prophet himself.

The call of Jeremiah to be a prophet is rather special. He is called while still very young to live through the tragic years preceding and succeeding the ruin of the kingdom of Judah. As he himself repeats the words of Yahweh “...I have appointed you *prophet* to the nations...you must go to all whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of confronting them for I am with you to rescue you, Yahweh declares.” (Jer 1:5b; 7b-8). Jeremiah was well aware of the difficult task ahead of him and consequently sought to avoid it but Yahweh promised him his support and once more clearly granted him plenipotentiary powers and authority over the nations he sent to. Yahweh said:

“Look, today I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer 1:10).

From then on, Jeremiah understood that he was a “προΦητης, *prophetes* (“prophet”), which means one who speaks on behalf of or to speak for (rather than “before”), is a spokesman more than a foreteller and prognosticator. He is God’s mouthpiece (Jer. 15:19); the one to whom God speaks, and who, in turn, speaks forth for God to the people.”<sup>7</sup> The prophet

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<sup>5</sup> HESCHEL J. A., *The Prophets : An Introduction*, p. X

<sup>6</sup> The content of book of Jeremiah is composed of three different kinds of textual forms:

a) the narratives told in the first person by the prophet himself as he relates his own vocation story and experiences

b) The prophetic sayings or utterances spoken by God or by Jeremiah in God’s name. They are poetic passages conveying teaching, prediction, promise or threat.

c) The narratives at the third person pointing at an author other than Jeremiah himself.

<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia Judaica CD-ROM, *the Origin and Function of Prophecy*

is selected by God and is irresistibly compelled to deliver His message and impart His will, even if he personally disagrees with it. He is consecrated to be set apart from his fellowmen and is destined to bear the responsibility and burden of being chosen. The prophet stands in the presence of God (Jer. 15:1, 19) and His mission is to preach Yahweh's will. By accepting God's message for his people, Jeremiah set out to embrace the prophetic experience which is one of confrontation. The prophet is both a recipient and a participant. Armed solely with the divine word and as conveyor of the divine will, he becomes a radical iconoclast who views the world *sub specie dei*.

## **2. The Historical Setting of Jeremiah's ministry**

### **2.1 Religious Situation**

The religious mentality is especially imbalanced, hypocritical and by all standards pagan oriented. Before the exile the official religion is dominated by the legacy of Josiah for spearheading the Deuteronomic Reform (reform of morals and cult, enhanced position of the Jerusalem Temple, removal of foreign gods etc...), "but the effects of the reform were merely external and short lived"<sup>8</sup> there were chocking religious deviations: human sacrifices to the pagan god Moloch, the cult of Baal and the Queen of heaven"<sup>9</sup>. Sacred prostitution and licentious fertility rites were thriving around the country. They were the bane of social and religious life. Israel prostituted herself in those practices and Jeremiah unceasingly called the House of Judah to return to the Lord but to no avail.

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<sup>8</sup> Neal, M. F., The Book of Jeremiah, p.9

<sup>9</sup> Fertility goddess, worshipped under the name of Ashtar by the Phoenicians or Canaanites and known to the Babylonians and Assyrians as Ishta.

## 2.2 Socio-political Background

Jeremiah was born in the periods of profound disaster in Jewish history. At his birth around 650 B.C, the Kingdom of Israel in the north was annihilated by the Assyrians. A significant number of Jews were taken hostages and deported to Assyria. They were replaced by foreign settlers. Though the southern kingdom still existed, its future held onto the unfounded hope of God's intervention in favour of Israel.

With the waning of the Assyrian threat, Israel started believing her chances of freedom. Early come, early gone. Her hopes are suddenly dashed by the rising super power of Babylon. In 598 B.C the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and deported into exile the young king Joachim and the intelligentsia of Judah. A second conquest following the resistance of Israel led to the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. How did all this come about? Jeremiah explains the genesis of the fall in his strenuous relationships with the successive kings who held the throne in Jerusalem. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of the following kings: beginning in the thirteenth year of the reign of *Josiah* (626 BCE), and then *Jehoahaz*, *Jehoiakim*, *Jehoiachin*, *Zedekiah*, and during the brief rule of *Gedaliah ben Ahikam*, whose assassination in ca. 585 BCE marked the final end of the remaining Jewish community in Judah and symbolized the conclusion of the First Temple period. Let us briefly analyze his relationship with some of them.

**Josiah** (Heb. יְאֹשָׁיָהוּ, יְאֹשָׁיָהוּ), (638-609 B.C)

The prophet is very positive about the king Josiah. Jeremiah started his prophetic ministry under his rule and the first chapters (1-6) of his book were written before or right after the religious reform.

Jeremiah is already active during this time and has prophesied against Israel. He blames the infidelity of Israel (Jer 2:1-31) because his people refused to depend upon Yahweh's constant protection; instead they succumbed to the worship of the Canaanite gods<sup>10</sup> as he puts it:

"Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer 3: 12-13)

Israel's *apostasy* has been a type of harlotry for worshipping other gods. She has been unfaithful to the divine spouse, Yahweh. Despite the sin of Israel, Yahweh invites his beloved to return, to remove the idols and practice an internal, spiritual religion of righteousness, described as a circumcision of the heart:

"Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your doings." (Jer 3:22; 4:4)

Despite the virulent tone of the prophecies during his time, Josiah remains one of the great kings of Jewish history because he initiated the reform of cult and morals prompted by the discovery of the Book in the Temple (2 Kings 22). The author of the Book of Kings in evaluating the king says: "Before him there was no king like him... nor did any like him arise after him" (II Kings 23:25; cf. II Kings 18:5 in connection with Hezekiah, the forerunner of Josiah). His tragic death in the battle of Maggedon was a big loss for Israel. Under his rule, no major confrontation was recorded in the book of Jeremiah.

**Jehoahaz** (Heb. יְהוֹאָחָז, יֶזְעַח ; ) reigned only three months in 609)

Immediate successor to Josiah, Jehoahaz was declared *persona non grata* by the Egyptians. His reign didn't have a strong impact on the prophetic preaching of Jeremiah.

**Jehoiakim** (Heb. יְהוֹיָכִים, יְהוֹיָקִים; "YHWH raises up") (609-598)

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<sup>10</sup> Neal, M. F., The Book of Jeremiah, p. 14

The Egyptian Pharaoh Neco made Jehoiakim king of Judah to replace Jehoahaz his brother who had reigned for only three month. Jehoiakim was about 25 when he ascended the throne (according to I Chron. 3:15, he was the second son of Josiah). Jeremiah, chapter 7 to 19 are devoted to the situation under Jehoiakim's rule

He was most likely selected because of his known support for a pro-Egyptian policy. His subservience to Egypt is attested by Pharaoh's changing of his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim (II Kings 23:34; II Chron. 36:4). Jeremiah's prophetic ministry will be exceptionally abundant during this period because of the many exactions of Jehoiakim and many of the virulent prophecies are geared against his regime. As a defence mechanism Jehoiakim violently fought Jeremiah and both of them live in unprecedented open opposition thereafter.

Jeremiah had a relatively quiet career in the last years of Josiah but the perversion of cults and morals under Jehoiakim soon prompted him to resume his prophetic ministry with more determination. He blames the scandalous infidelities, the worship of Baal and "the queen of heaven"<sup>11</sup> of the fiery immolations of sons and daughters to the pagan gods. In his temple sermon, Jeremiah indicts the shallowness of the Jewish spirituality. His focal point is a denunciation of the people for their failure to be obedient to the Torah. He calls Israel to amend his ways:

"For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever." (Jer 7:5-7)

The worship of Israel is valueless because it is separated from true devotion. The primary demand of the covenant was loving obedience but not sacrificial offerings.

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<sup>11</sup> Fertility goddess, worshipped under the name of Ashtar by the Phoenicians or Canaanites and known to the Babylonians and Assyrians as Ishtar.

Yahweh is particularly concerned about the sin of his people and threatens to chastise them if they refused to heed his call:

"Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!' -- only to go on doing all these abominations?"(7:8b-10)

Yahweh is disappointed because Israel's conduct is incomprehensible.

Jeremiah uses a metaphor to compare Israel and the birds of the heavens. They know the time for migration but God's people do not know the ordinance of the Lord:

"Thus says the LORD: When men fall, do they not rise again? If one turns away, does he not return? Why then have this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I have given heed and listened, but they have not spoken aright; no man repents of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Every one turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle. Even the stork in the heavens knows her times; and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming; but my people know not the ordinance of the LORD." (Jer 8:4-7)

In addition to her strange behaviour, Israel is a shameful figure for Yahweh. Israel's lot is irresistibly odious and repugnant. She has become fruitless and barren to the point that Yahweh threatens to punish her. Jeremiah predicts the imminent siege of Jerusalem. Judah will be punished with siege-thirst and with invasion<sup>12</sup>. Jeremiah insists that there is no need for Judah to trust in the Lord's Temple presence or in the king's residence in the city; it is going to be an ineluctable and invertible disaster:

"Lo, I am bringing against you, O House of Israel; a nation from afar declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation... a nation whose language you do not know... Their quivers are like a yawning grave they are all mighty men. They will devour your harvest and food; they will devour your sons and daughters..." (Jer 5:15-17).

And again:

"As for you, do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry of prayer on their behalf, do not plead with me; for I will not listen to you"(7:16)

The reproaches and critics levelled against Josiah fanned the opposition between him and Jeremiah. In his "Temple Sermon" (Jer 7:1-15), Jeremiah suggests that part of

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<sup>12</sup> Neal. M. F., The Book of Jeremiah p. 19



Jehoiakim's policy was an affirmation of the inviolability of the temple. Jehoiakim is depicted as a petty tyrant whose rule was characterized by social injustice. Given the fierce accusation of Jeremiah, King Jehoiakim could never forgive the prophet for threatening him with punishment on account of his unscrupulous mania for building and for his judicial murders as it said of him:

"He shall be buried with the burial of an ass" (Jer 22, 13-19).

When the prophecies of Jeremiah were read before the king, he fell into such a rage that *he threw the roll into the fire and commanded the arrest of the prophet* (Jer 36, 21-26). ). More than once the prophet was in prison (Jer 37:11-38:28) and in chains without the word of the Lord being silenced (Jer 36:5 ff.) but the word of the Almighty was the protection of his life:

"Be not afraid . . . they shall not prevail: for I am with thee, says the Lord, to deliver thee" (Jer 1: 17-19).

In the wake of the Babylonian<sup>13</sup> invasion, King Jehoiakim is killed and replaced by his son Jehoiachin. Three months later, Jerusalem is under siege and the young king is taken hostage among the intelligentsia and objects of booty carried off by Nebuchadnezzar<sup>14</sup> (is into exile (2 Kgs 24: 8-20). He was replaced by Zedekiah

**Zedekiah** ((Heb. זְדַקְיָהוּ, זְדַקְיָה; "YHWH is my righteousness")

This is the third son of Josiah and the last king of Judah (597/6–587/6 B.C.E.). Zedekiah was 21 years old when he ascended to the throne. His name is changed from Mattaniah to Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar who appointed him king. Zedekiah was a weak ruler lacking self-confidence, irresolute, vacillating, and unsuited for the difficult conditions

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<sup>13</sup> BABYLONIA, ancient country in Western Asia between the Tigris and the Euphrates; corresponding approximately to the modern Iraq.

<sup>14</sup> James L. M., *Ed*, Harper's Bible Commentary, p.604

of the time. Disposed to listen to the advice of Jeremiah the prophet and not rebel against Babylonia, nevertheless, fearing the princes, he followed their wishes and renounced his allegiance (Jer. 38:5).

He attempted to throw off the Babylonian yoke and consequently led a rebellion in 598/7 against Nebuchadnezzar despite the furious opposition of Jeremiah. Many false prophets incited Judah to resist and oppose Babylon but Jeremiah refuted the words of the prophets, prophesied sufferings for the people, and uttered a grievous prophecy on Jerusalem and its Temple (7:14–15; 34:21–22). According to Jeremiah, the fate of the nation had already been determined for destruction, in consequence of its moral and religious sin (6:13; 7:17–19, et al.). Because of his warnings and rebukes, Jeremiah, as well as all those who had similar ideas, were persecuted by the princes and the false prophets (Jer. 26).

The reprisals were too harsh for Judah: Jerusalem is reduced to shambles, the Holy Temple is destroyed, Zedekiah blinded and taken to Babylon. The end had just come. Gedalliah is appointed king but killed soon after. For fear of the Babylonians, many escaped to Egypt with the prophet Jeremiah.

### **3. Jeremiah's Message**

In forty years of ministry Jeremiah revealed himself as an intense, articulate and provocative prophet. He slowly grew confident in his ministry and conviction that he had a divine mandate to bring Israel back to God and he did not go the easy way. It is probably because of his aggressiveness that he suffered more than any other prophet of the Old Testament. His message stresses the following themes:

#### **Internalizing Religion**

Internalized, interior or better, personal religion reveals the mind of Jeremiah. The prophet is appalled by the externalism of Jewish practices. With Jeremiah, religion is an

immediate, personal relationship between God and the individual; it means obedience and devotion of the individual to his God:

“Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people: and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well unto you” (Jer.7: 23b).

Conscious of it, Jeremiah struggles and fights for a more honest behaviour in front of God; as would say Roger Vanden Bush “his legacy is : internal religion, reflection and decision making, intelligently, responsibly and prayerfully done”<sup>15</sup>. Laws do not form the spirit but flow from it.

“How can you say, we are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us, when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie?” (Jer.8:8)

Faithfulness and dedication to Yahweh as the sole God of Israel (monotheism) set his prophetic agenda. He worked for a spiritual metamorphosis and a national reformation. The purpose of His whole Life was to bring Israel *to rely on God*.

“The priests did not say, “Where is the LORD?” Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit”(Jer.2:8)

He made use of many symbolic actions<sup>16</sup> to picture Yahweh’s message for Israel, a message of love because it was in love that Yahweh and Israel met<sup>17</sup>. Yahweh has a predilection for Israel, a marital love requiring total commitment. In all Israel didn’t heed the voice of Jeremiah, consequently “he had nothing to offer but the assurance of destruction of destruction and exile”<sup>18</sup>

### **The New Covenant: Spirit of Newness**

An important element in the teaching of Jeremiah is the establishment of a New Covenant.

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<sup>15</sup> Biblical Theological Bulletin, Vol. X, p. 23

<sup>16</sup> Symbolic actions were a natural extension of prophetic preaching. They are as follows: the almond tree and the pot (1:11-14), the waistcloth hidden by the Euphrates (13:1-11), the potter (18:1-12), the jug (18), the figs (24), the yoke (27; 28), the buying of the field (32), Jeremiah’s life and his celibacy as a symbol.

<sup>17</sup> HESCHEL J. A., The Prophets : An Introduction, p. 107

<sup>18</sup> Moriarty, L. F., The Bible Today Reader, p. 198

"The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD."(Jer.31-32)

This prophecy immediately impresses us by the wonderful spirituality of its tone, and by its evangelical character. Dr. Driver laconically states: "By his conception of the New Covenant, Jeremiah surpasses in spirituality and profundity of insight every other prophet of the Old Testament."<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah realized that the covenant made at Mount Sinai had failed to accomplish its purpose. He saw that Israel had become apostate; "they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the stubbornness of their evil heart" (11:8; 31:32). With the New Covenant, principles like truth, justice, purity, love to God and love of man, would be enshrined in the hearts of men. This would lead to an ideal state, in which the sins of the people would be forgiven. The children of the New Covenant would be the sons of God, no longer subject to external laws of the state, but ruled by God.

#### **4. Jeremiah's legacy: A Profile of Courage**

Of all the prophets, Jeremiah is unquestionably the most heroic, outstanding among the prophets as a man of dauntless courage. No other sacred writer has taken us with such intimacy into his life, both public and private. We are aware of the "inner conflict between his desire for inconspicuous retirement and his devotion to truth and civil duty"<sup>20</sup>. For many years he endured persecution in his life without quitting. Being the last prophet of Judah, the southern kingdom, Jeremiah came in at the close of the reign of the last good king of Judah, the boy king Josiah, who led the last revival the nation experienced before it went into captivity.

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<sup>19</sup> S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, New York, p. 275

<sup>20</sup> R. C. Knox. *Knowing the Bible*. NY 1936. p. 99.

Jeremiah's ministry covered about forty years, and during all this time he never once saw any signs of success in his ministry. His life and character are full of surprises which stimulate thought on great moral and religious problems. Jeremiah was above everything a hero of the inner life. His inner experiences can be traced throughout the Book. He was in perpetual pain because of the stubbornness of his people (8:18, 21, 22; 15:18), and their tragedy caused his tears to flow day and night (9:1; 10:19). He loved his people with his whole heart (8:18-22; 14:20, 21). His deep love for his people expressed itself at times in impatience with them, and a desire to escape from them (4:31; 8:21, 22; 9:12). His message was one of denunciation and reform, and the people never obeyed him. He was called to a ministry of failure: to witness to a decayed nation, a nation which was not supportive at all.

His people suspected him of being subversive and threatened him with death. Their reaction against him was quick and stiff because of his sharp and pungent criticisms on the state of the nation. He remains the figure of the unpopular preacher, the reformer whose statements are mocked, his honesty questioned and his ministry fruitless.

Two particular elements retain our attention because they are woven into the fabric of his entire prophecy: the fate of his nation, and the feelings of a prophet. He expounded in great length on the clauses of the covenant, calling Israel to remain faithful for fear of experiencing God's wrath. When he realized the failure of the Sinai covenant he reiterated God's willingness to renew a new covenant with Israel, a covenant written in the hearts. Furthermore he was very instrumental in making known God's will and wishes to his people.

He discharged his prophetic ministry as humanly as possible. Jeremiah is known as the "suffering servant", a precursor of Christ. He met with opposition and discouragement, depression and contradiction, resentment, bitterness and torture but never gave up he turned to God and cried: "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?" (Jer 15:18a). He further accuses God of being a liar and undependable:

“You duped me, O Lord and I let myself be duped...all the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me. The word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day...cursed be the day on which I was born...why did I come from the womb, to see sorrow and pain, to end my days in shame?” (Jer 20:7-8)

“Strong words? Undoubtedly. Honest words? Absolutely”<sup>21</sup> He is pouring out exactly how he feels. He suffers persecution and loneliness: “... know that for your sake I bear reproach.” (Jer 15:15b). In all, Jeremiah didn’t hide his feelings to God. His personality, his mental conflict and his crises of faith are further expounded in the “Confessions”. His portrait depicts him as a very human prophet called from the peace and friendliness<sup>22</sup> of Anathoth to embrace the hectic career of God’s representative.

In a nutshell we can say that, Jeremiah, the prophet and priest, preacher and good citizen, innovator and independent thinker has broken all records for his passion for justice, his thirst for truth, his call for repentance and conversion, the genuineness of his feelings and inner battle, a soul pushed to the very brink, his courage to hold fast despite the uncertainty of a real assurance of a heavenly reward. His vocation, the tragic journey<sup>23</sup> of a young man who by nature was called to gentleness, love and peace, serenity and sense of purpose, marital life and its gratifications, turned out to be a divinely instigated drama where he played out a piece summed up in these terms: to “break down” and “build”, to “pluck up” and “plant”. It is strange and even very strange but that is God’s doing.

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<sup>21</sup> Ray C. S., Series: Adventuring through the Bible, Message No: 24, January 1966

<sup>22</sup> Neal. M. F., The Book of Jeremiah p.10

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.

## Conclusion

We face two tasks as we sum up the chapter on Jeremiah: first to assess how relevant he was to this Jewish contemporaneous society, second to establish the task as to whether God speaks to us now through the story of Jeremiah. By way of answering we wish to locate Jeremiah in his own context. As a matter of fact we can't deny the appropriateness of his message for his people. He was called to minister to his people at the turn of the imminent fall of Jerusalem. His message bears an apocalyptic flavour in the wake of many changes that his society went through. To win his people to God, Jeremiah excelled in various pedagogical stratagems to convey God's message: direct confrontation, usage of symbolic acts, his own life and celibacy. As a consequence he was deemed the subversive opponent *contra mundum*, a serious danger to the country. He was not listened to and we know what transpired from Israel's refusal of the offer of salvation.

As we become acquainted with the words and deeds of Jeremiah, we realize that he has a trait which appeals to many of us<sup>24</sup>; for it suffices to mention his description of social justice, his terrible isolation, the exploration of the problem of God, his bill of complaints against God. Jeremiah is a pioneer in addressing complex social issues, religious and political allegiances. His message is still relevant for us today. We can't forget his jeremiads because it is a daily experience.

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<sup>24</sup> Hollanday. W. Jeremiah : Spokesman out of Time, Philadelphia 1974, p.142

## Chapter Two

# STATE OF MEDIA IN BURKINA FASO: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

### Introduction

Burkina Faso (BF)<sup>25</sup> or “land of the Incorruptible” was formerly called Upper Volta; it is a landlocked country situated in Western Africa, bounded on the north and west by Mali, on the east by Niger, and on the south by Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Côte d’Ivoire.

Given the historical factors and the geographical situation of the country, Burkina Faso went through a tedious birth up to these days. Poor among the poor, Burkina hasn’t attracted much international recognition in terms of capital flow for investments because of the scarcity of its resources and the political situation, let alone being an example according to the criteria of the new world order. In addition to foreign exclusion, the country, I would say the Burkinabe<sup>26</sup> suffered and continue to suffer in the hands of their own leaders. Surprisingly enough, some courageous men and women especially dared to speak up truths and exposed the state of affairs of the political arena. Prophecy and truth, conscience and social responsibility have compelled media practitioners to spearhead the battle against political leaders on issues of good governance and gross abuses of human rights and the outcome at times revealed itself very tragic. This is mainly due to the unstable political context stemming from the authoritarian regimes that dominated the political scene over twenty years.

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<sup>25</sup> from hereafter BF stands for Burkina Faso

<sup>26</sup> “Burkinabe” is a citizen of the Republic of Burkina Faso



My concern in this chapter is to reflect on the different events that marked the socio-political situation of the country and continue to exert an undeniable bearing on its identity and the freedom of expression of its citizens. In addition, I intend to analyze the contributions of the courageous and patriotic sons and daughters of BF who devoted their lives for the cause of truth, justice and peace. We owe them tribute for their *prophetic vision* and we learn from their determination and dreams to achieve human rights<sup>27</sup> for all; we will proceed as follows: at first a brief overview of BF, then an analysis of the socio-political situation and the media coverage of it. To conclude we will assess the consequences of media advocacy in BF.

## **1. Burkina Faso: Brief Overview**

The history of the peopling of Burkina Faso (BF) can be traced back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>28</sup>. The first indigenous peoples known and recorded are the Lobi and the Bobo, and then followed by many other groups. And since then the country has tremendously grown to house more than 60 ethnic groups like Mossi, Fulani, Senufo, Gourounsi, Bissa, and Gourmantche.

In 1896 the French set up a protectorate<sup>29</sup> over the kingdom of Ouagadougou, and in 1904 the area became part of the colony of Haut-Senegal-Niger. In 1919 it was made into a separate constituent territory of French West Africa, only to be divided up in 1932 between the French Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire. It was reconstituted as the separate territory of Upper Volta in 1947.

In 1958 Upper Volta became a self-governing republic and a member of the new French community. The first government is formed and headed by Maurice Yaméogo. In

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<sup>27</sup> Human Rights could be defined as those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as humans. They are inalienable, inviolable and allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience to satisfy our spiritual and other needs.

<sup>28</sup> The World Guide 2003/2004, p.156

<sup>29</sup> Encarta 2004

1959 Upper Volta joined the council of the Entente, composed of Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Dahomey (now Benin), and Togo. The independence of Upper Volta was promulgated on August 5, 1960.

After attaining the independence on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1960, Burkina Faso experienced a continuous political infighting which led to unprecedented consequences for its peoples. To date five different presidents succeeded one another on the throne mostly by means of military coups.

The first president *Maurice Yaméogo* was elected in 1960 and reelected in 1965; he was the sole candidate. He became unpopular because of his austerity measures. As a result General *Sangoulé Lamizana*, then army chief of staff, assumed power on January 3, 1966, and suspended the constitution. Lamizana ruled as a dictator until the reintroduction of parliamentary government in 1978, when he won the presidency in a democratic election. Two years later he was ousted in a bloodless military coup by *Saye Zerbo*; another coup followed during the next 33 months by *Jean Baptiste Ouedraogo*.

On August 3, 1984, the first anniversary of the coup that brought Captain *Thomas Sankara* to power as head of the National Revolutionary Council, the official name of the country was changed to Burkina Faso, and a new national flag and anthem were decreed. In October 1987, Sankara was ousted and executed in a coup led by his chief adviser, Captain *Blaise Compaoré*, who ruled as head of the Popular Front. Compaoré, who survived two coup attempts in 1989, introduced limited democratic reforms<sup>30</sup> during 1990, and a new constitution was promulgated the following year. He is at his second mandate. Up to date, Blaise is still the president with overwhelming powers with no one to check and cross-check his administration of public affairs.

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<sup>30</sup> The Summit France-Africa held in Baule (France) in 1990, compelled all the countries colonised by France to embrace a democratic system of governance. It made clear to African countries that financial will be conditioned by the institution of democracy.

As a consequence of the political instability, the socio-economic development suffered a serious blow. For instance the macroeconomic profile<sup>31</sup> (self-reliance, growth rate, income distribution, inflation, import-export and health services) displays the actual situation of the country. The geographical situation (landlocked, recurrence of droughts) coupled with the scarcity of natural resources further complicate the developmental process. The exploitation of the land and its resources remain a challenge for the local government.

## 2. The Socio-political Situation in Burkina Faso

It is common knowledge that the different governments that succeeded themselves in the state house didn't foster or sustain a national consciousness and sense of belonging except in a certain degree the regime of Sankara whom many a Burkinabe still remember with nostalgia. The reasons that motivated the anarchic and political transitions were tremendously detrimental to the cohesion of the social fabric. The country lost many valuable sons and daughters to violent coups. Up to date, tensions and grudges are still restive and entrenched in the memories of victimized families. Forty years of independence in BF have been equated

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<sup>31</sup> GDP: \$14.55 billion (2003). The Gross National Product is the value of all final goods and services produced within a nation in a given year, plus income earned by its citizens abroad, minus income earned by foreigners from domestic production

Inflation rate (consumer prices): 1.9% (2003 )

Industrial production growth rate: 14% (2001)

GDP - real growth rate: 5.2% (2003)

GDP - composition by sector: *agriculture*: 39.8%

*industry*: 19.6%

*services*: 40.5% (2003)

Investment (gross fixed): 29% of GDP (2003)

Population: 12 millions

Population below poverty line: 45% (2003)

Literacy: *male*: 36.9%

*female*: 16.6% (2003)

Labor force: 5 million

Reserves of foreign exchange & gold: \$379 million (2003)

Life expectancy: *male* 47 years

*Female* 49 years

with a slow sinking into chaos, a sad story for a poor country that struggles towards achieving better conditions of life for its citizens.

Thanks to God, all hopes were not dashed by the prevailing situation and the poor management of the social and political affairs by the different governments. A great deal of patriotic work was undertaken by informed consciences<sup>32</sup> for the good of their fellow citizens. Among them we name the media<sup>33</sup> whose contribution remains by far impressive and crucial in the pursuit of democracy. They stressed the basic and fundamental constitutional rights<sup>34</sup> of the public to be informed on all matters that impact on their lives so as to fully participate in the socio-economic activities of the country. In all, the dictatorial regimes didn't approve of such intrusion in the daily running of the political affairs. As a matter of expediency they resorted to violence to silence or muzzle up the media.

### 3. Media Coverage: Past and Present

By definition, media<sup>35</sup> stands for primary means by which information and entertainment are quickly and efficiently delivered to the public in virtually every nation around the world. It is composed of broadcasting (audio signals or radio), audiovisual signals (television), print media (newspapers to report news, commentary on politics, economics, and arts and culture etc) and in recent days the internet... All of them provide the public with news

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<sup>32</sup> Political pressure groups: Burkinabe General Confederation of Labour or CGTB; Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights or MBDHP; Group of 14 February; National Confederation of Burkinabe Workers or CNTB; National Organization of Free Unions or ONSL; watchdog/political action groups throughout the country in both organizations and communities

<sup>33</sup> By media, I mean print (newspapers, magazines) and electronic (radio, television, motion pictures). Their gigantic contribution in furthering the importance of human rights in the society empowered the masses to take their own destiny in their hands.

<sup>34</sup> Mitch Odero, – Esther Kamweru (Ed.) *Media Culture and Performance in Kenya*, article by Rosemary Okello, p.159

<sup>35</sup> Encarta 2004, article by Marc David senior Communications Manager and adjunct Professor in Syracuse University

that is “a timely, factual report of events, ideas and situations that interest the public”<sup>36</sup>. The collecting, writing, editing and dissemination of news material is called *journalism* and from this perspective we can acknowledge the gigantic work done by many journalists in Burkina. The accuracy, objectivity (mature judgment in the public interest) and integrity of news coverage provided an important and relevant forum for open debate on social and political.

The history of media in BF can be traced back to the colonial times. Despite the fact that the country was introduced to media communication in the wake of the independence, it is unfortunate to note that its development met with many obstacles. The recent mushrooming is the outcome of the wind of democracy that swept over all Africa. Many factors encouraged the liberalization of the media: the instauration of democracy with its corollaries (freedom under all its aspects), the media Act<sup>37</sup> of June 1991 and the pressure of western countries promoting good governance. Soon after, a Code of Information and a Media Council (“Conseil supérieur de l’Information”) were established to regulate the flow and the treatment of the information.

An audit of the media scene in BF shows the existence of a plurality of media. To date, the country counts more than fifty private FM radios (confessional, commercial, socio-educational), four TV stations (TVZ, Multimedia, Channel Wiim Koeega and TNB) and more than three hundred different newspapers<sup>38</sup> both private and public in French or vernacular languages. In this plurality of media, two main trends were clearly marked in course of history: the mainline or mainstream media ( Sidwaya, the National Radio, the National TV and other media pro-governmental) and the alternative media generally private ( Le Pays, l’Indépendant, le Journal du Soir, le Bulletin Quotidien de 24 heures, , l’Express du Faso, le Journal du Jeudi) were in the forefront of the battle for human rights. Their legacy in the

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<sup>36</sup> Esther Kamweru, *course on Newsgathering for Print*

<sup>37</sup> the media Act stemmed from the adoption by referendum of the new constitution on 2 June 1991

<sup>38</sup> the important dailies are Sidwaya, l’Observateur Paalga, le Pays, le Journal du Soir, le Bulletin Quotidien de 24 heures, l’AIB, l’Express du Faso. The weeklies are l’Indépendant, le Journal du Jeudi.

public opinion grew steadily in the wake of the democratization of Burkina Faso. At this point of our analysis of the media scene, let's have a closer look at the reasons which consecrated the success of media in BF.

### 3.1 Media, Freedom and Democracy in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso<sup>39</sup> is a democratic country and as such shares the principles and values of democracy (freedom of speech, association, religion). Despite adhering to those principles<sup>40</sup>, the political leadership, we mean the present government headed by Blaise Compaore has scored a poor record of excellence and good governance. The rule of law and the respect of human rights have been a constant struggle. The media whose primary role is to foster public interest by providing news on the state of the nation adopted different strategies. In a context of financial constraints, some adopted a sycophantic and subservient leaning towards government interests. By toning down their critics and anti-government reports they lost their credibility and social responsibility vis-à-vis the Burkinabe. Others (mainly the alternative media), in the contrary, stood their grounds and reported undemocratic and illegal activities of the government<sup>41</sup>. Such a *litmus test* created unprecedented consequences because from that time on the government remained in loggerheads with the alternative media. For instance many FM stations were suspended *sine die* because they represent a threat to the security of the country. Above all a clear example of such a confrontation illustrates itself in the case of *Norbert Zongo*<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Burkina Faso renewed with democracy in 1992 under the current president Blaise Compaore who, previously came into power by a coup d'Etat in October 1987

<sup>40</sup> BF is a member of many international organisations: ACCT, ACP, AfDB, AU, ECOWAS, Entente, FAO, FZ, G-77, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC, ICt (signatory), ICFTU, ICRM, IDA, IDB, IFAD, IFC, IFRCs, ILO, IMF, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ITU, MONUC, NAM, OIC, OPCW, PCA, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WADB (regional), WAEMU, WCL, WCO, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WToO, WTrO

<sup>41</sup> I mean here, the government in its triple functions : legislative ( making laws), judiciary (interpreting and applying the laws) and the executive (enforces the laws)

<sup>42</sup> Norbert Zongo, one of Burkina Faso's best known journalists, was editor-in-chief of an independent weekly newspaper, *L'Indépendant* and a founding member in 1989 of the *Mouvement Burkinabé des droits de l'homme et des peuples* (MBDHP) [Burkinabé Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights]. The organization became a

The battle for a democratic society was spearheaded by the print media that carried out thorough investigations on issues of gross violations of human rights. They were accused of inciting the population to disobedience. The media especially the print was viewed as being disruptive by the government vis-à-vis the social order and peace in the country. The media, on their part, reproach the government the failure to uphold its obligations towards the Burkinabe (protection of the constitution, freedom, human rights, and respect for the rule of law). It failed its role as purveyor and guarantor of public welfare. Peace and justice remain under the purview of the government but it failed to fulfill its promises. Corruption and political patronage, nepotism and bureaucracy, cronyism and partisanship are rampant in the public affairs. In a nutshell, the media are asking for responsiveness and a greater accountability from the government in the management of public affairs and resources.

This concern is further confirmed by the U.S Department of State in its 2004 report:

“The Government's human rights record remained poor... The continued dominance of President Compaore and his ruling party limited citizens' right to change their government. Security forces were responsible for numerous killings of criminal suspects...Prison conditions remained harsh. Arbitrary arrest and detention were problems, and authorities on occasion did not provide detainees with due process. Impunity remained a problem. At times authorities restricted media activity, and the media practiced some self-censorship”<sup>43</sup>

The report highlights a long list of abuses: arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life (political killings by the security forces), disappearance, torture and other cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment of detainees, arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile. The description continues on the same note: arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, denial of civil liberties (freedom of speech and Press, freedom of peaceful assembly and association) just to mention a few because the list is not exhaustive.

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powerful voice for justice and freedom as Burkina Faso embarked on an uncertain, flawed democratic transition. On 13 December 1998, he became a victim of the climate of impunity he had fought so hard to dispel.

<sup>43</sup> The annual report by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (U.S Department of State) February 25, 2004

All these irregularities denote the difficulties truth seekers meet with in carrying out their daily activities. The situation is more than alarming. When citizens can't enjoy their basic rights and be happy to participate in the development of their country, when political powers manipulate public opinion to achieve their selfish interests, then the situation itself calls for a social and political change. In the case of BF, all couldn't keep quiet; some had to speak up; as Norbert Zongo would say: "what is worse (in such a situation) is not the wickedness of the wicked but the silence of the good people" and indeed he did speak up. What did he say?

### **3.2 Investigative Journalism with the Journalist Norbert Zongo**

Norbert Zongo was editor-in-chief of *L'Indépendant* an independent weekly newspaper. He won his legacy in and outside the borders of country by the virulence of his pen. His seriousness and determination in unearthing hidden political agendas made of him the new fad of investigative journalism which was his domain of predilection. He valued truth more than his own life. His *credo* runs as follows: human rights. As a founding member of the *Mouvement Burkinabé des droits de l'homme et des peuples* (MBDHP) [Burkinabé Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights], Norbert Zongo turned the organization to become a powerful voice for justice, peace and freedom in Burkina Faso which had embarked on an uncertain, flawed democratic transition. By 1998, this independent human rights organization had representatives in all 45 provinces across BF.

Norbert Zongo strongly believed that violators of human rights should be brought to justice. He fought with all his strength and intelligence the culture of impunity. To obey his conscience, Norbert refused to subscribe to the spiral of silence<sup>44</sup> but engaged in a campaign against the impunity by using his newspaper as an avenue to reveal the undemocratic practices of the government. The root causes of the violation of human rights were disclosed

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<sup>44</sup> In media studies, theory of public opinion that postulates that people feel uneasy when they are isolated by their opinions and consequently capitulate. It is exposed in an exposé "*the model of public opinion*" by Noelle-Newmann



to the public: for instance, the killing of the pupils of Garango by the army, the gunning down of a cyclist in Réo, the killing of Dabo Bukary (prefect of the students' union at University of Ouagadougou), the case of the widow of Somé, the extrajudicial killing of many opponents to the government, the corruption of the mining company and finally the case of David Ouedraogo<sup>45</sup> that cost him his life. The case of the latter staked the popularity of the government on the national and international scene. What is the case about?

In December 1997, David Ouedraogo, (the chauffeur of President Compaore's brother Francois), along with two other domestic employees, after being accused of stealing money from the home of the President's brother, were taken to the Presidential Guard barracks. There, they were killed without any court rule. Francois Compaore's refusal to cooperate with judicial authorities impeded the official investigation, and *he was never arrested*. In March 1999, the civil court handling the case declared itself incompetent to rule on the matter since Ouedraogo died in the hands of the Presidential Guards within their barracks. As a result, the case was sent to a military tribunal.

The protest got out of proportion under the influence of Zongo who thoroughly investigated the case and made public the underlying issues. Groups across the country (especially university students) went in the streets and demanded that justice be done. All that led to a political standstill. The civil society and pressure groups took over from the press and further complicated the unrest. The country was on the brink of collapsing. As an immediate expedience, Zongo was brutally murdered on 13 December 1998, along with three companions and became a victim of the climate of impunity he had fought so hard to dispel. His brutal death is also an evidence of the censure of press freedom in Burkina Faso. Norbert Zongo's murder caused an unprecedented public outcry, an enormous outburst of public

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<sup>45</sup> The annual report by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (U.S Department of State) February 25, 2004

indignation and protest in Burkina Faso. Following the unfortunate death of Zongo, the trust between the government and the civil society suffered a severe blow.

A commission of inquiry in his death was set up, composed of a governmental party, civil society bodies (pressure groups) and an international representative (*Reporters sans Frontières*). The findings established a link between his killing and his political position. He was shot dead and burnt by the body guards of the President. The commission concluded this:

“He defended a democratic ideal and took up the commitment, with his newspaper, to fight for the respect of human rights and justice and against public mismanagement and impunity”.<sup>46</sup>

The civil society, the *Collectif* (Collective of grassroots democratic organizations and opposition parties), the *Collège des sages*, (college of elders) called for the arrest of those responsible for the death of R. David Ouédraogo and Norbert Zongo but to date, no judicial proceedings have taken against culprits and this remains a quite remarkable epic in the justice of BF. In this situation of impunity, the media strived to differ with the *status quo*. They stood their grounds to defend the defenseless, educate the poor and empower them to speak for themselves. The media imposed themselves as credible interlocutors and sources of authentic reporting for the public. This state of affairs tremendously encouraged the fight against the abuses of human rights in the country.

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46 ARTICLE 19, International Centre Against Censorship, Lancaster House, 33 Islington

## 4. Advocacy Journalism

### 4.1 Telling the Truth

By advocacy we mean the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something or someone; it is actively and earnestly supporting a cause, an idea, interest or policy. For the case of BF, advocacy journalism or “justice journalism” has been an important promoter of social justice and an alternative voice in the media. Advocacy journalism is best known for its zeal and courage in protecting the rights and privileges guaranteed by law to all Burkinabe, serving as constructive critic of government at all levels. By and large, media revealed itself *prophetic* in siding with the voiceless. It is a tremendous legacy which gives credit to men and women who value equality and same treatment of the citizens in front of the law.

The battle between the government and the media was not of equal footing but rather a David-Goliath like fight. Until recently, the government was very repressive for any form of opposition in order to muzzle the voices of justice and truth. All along the fight, a serious debate arose in the columns of the newspapers by the elite of the country: who is the basis of authority<sup>47</sup>? The people or the government? When can a leader legitimately impose his way of governing on a State? The debate reached a deadlock and the unraveling was almost impossible. It led Zongo to make the following statement:

‘What will the President do to impose himself on intellectuals who are wise to the extent of his dictatorship and its tragic implications for our people? ... There is only one thing he can do: put them in prison, kill them, make them disappear.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> According of to *the Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, “authority” carries many meanings: the power or right to enforce obedience, a doctrine of moral or legal supremacy, the right to command or to give the ultimate decision. It can also refer to delegated or derived power given to the bearer from above. Here the word takes on the meaning of “those in authority,” that is, those vested with the legitimate or traditional power to command or to influence the actions of others. Authority, however, is not limited to behavior or action, but extends to the inward, subjective dimensions of human life, as in “power over the opinions of others” or the inwardly felt power of conscience in relation to social authority. Here, subtle but far-reaching forms of intellectual, legal, and moral authority are exercised through authoritative opinion or quotation from authoritative sources.

<sup>48</sup> Norbert Zongo, editor-in-chief of an independent weekly newspaper, *L'Indépendant*

Though a solution to the debate was not found, we may propose an answer knowing that BF is a member of the United Nations. The solution is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads as follows:

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government. This will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”<sup>49</sup>

This mandate to preside over the destiny of the Burkinabe was abused to the detriment of the same people without any structure for checks and balances. The negation of people's rights to free expression of opinion and association seriously undermined the democratic debate in the country. The only institution that could conveniently challenge the status quo found itself in loggerheads with a powerful machine that crushes everything on its way.

Though we are still waiting to see significant improvement in the running of the public affairs, we can already praise the arduous work and the charismatic role of the media that help to raise the alarm on the gross abuses of human rights. The battle is far from being over because in the African countries experience has shown that human rights are not given but fought for.

## **4.2 Media and Prophecy in Burkina Faso**

An important aspect of a prophet is his differential decoding of reality. He refuses to see things the way the majority of people would usually do. His search for truth and his outstanding perspicacity make of him a man for the people. He has a purpose in his fight and a message for both the oppressed and the oppressors.<sup>50</sup> The prophet not only empowers the oppressed to fight for their rights but also he justly blames the oppressors. He is moved by human suffering and injustice. He would ideally wish a society of justice where all will equally enjoy the same rights and duties in front of the laws; equally share the resources of the

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<sup>49</sup> UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21, n°3

<sup>50</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

country. If such is the prophetic agenda, then we can without reserve qualify the media in BF with the epithet “prophetic”.

The prophetic role of media in BF revealed itself in the continuous fight for human rights, the democratization of the public affairs and good governance. They reported on politically motivated disappearances of opponents, arbitrary arrest, detention, exile, torture, inhuman treatment of detainees and denial of fair public trial. They have been adamant on issues of life and the welfare of each and every citizen in the country. They promoted the respect for civil liberties including the freedom of Speech and Press, the freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, the freedom of Cult and movement across the country. Moreover they questioned the government’s manipulation of the masses to change the constitution so as to favour a lifelong presidency. Here they underlined the respect for political rights: the right of the citizens to change their government<sup>51</sup>.

Another battle spearheaded by the media bears on the economical development of the country. BF is classified among the last underdeveloped countries in the world. The political instability in the transition governments (four coups d’Etat at least) negatively impacted on the socio-economic development. The scarcity of resources further aggravated the situation. Diagnosing the different problems that the country faces, the media called on the government to deliver on its campaign promises and liberalize the means of transformation so as to accelerate the development. The laxity and inefficiency of the administrative system were greatly exposed to the public which reacted in anti-corruption rallies to put pressure on the government to improve its services and be accountable for the resources of the country.

The media as whole fought a significant battle which benefits are slowly made visible today as time goes by. Justice and peace, responsibility and accountability, leadership and

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<sup>51</sup> The annual report by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (U.S Department of State) February 25, 2004

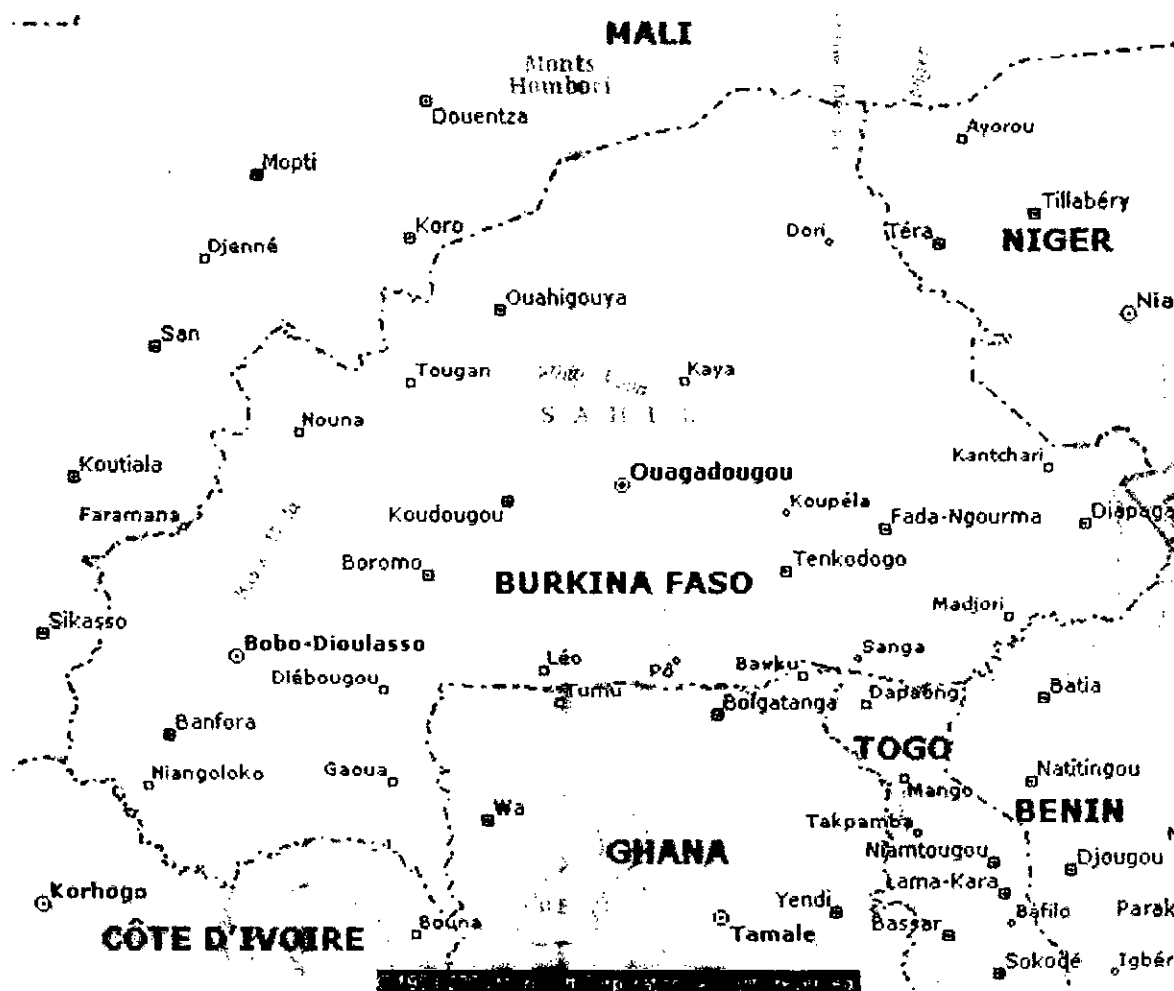
good governance, democracy and human rights, solidarity and concern for others have all the way been the focus of the fight the media waged against the successive governments that privileged their selfish interests to the detriment of the majority of the Burkinabe. After an overview on the political situation of the BF, we can imagine the compelling and almost impossible role the media played as watchdog of the political scene and conscience of the nation. Their prophetic role was commanded by the situation and forced by the nature of their conscientious commitment.

## Conclusion

In our analysis of the socio-political situation of Bf, we focused on the challenges the country faced in the passed decades. It has been a chaotic journey made of numerous putsches and a somber record of gross abuses: extrajudicial killings, negation of human rights, corruption and the like. Many citizens across Africa and particularly in BF have realized that our leaders do not foster an integral development of our countries be it by their attitudes or their management of public affairs. Axel Kabou in her book *“Et si l’Afrique refusait le Développement”* makes a sad analysis of such a situation displayed in the lack of political will to improve the living conditions of citizens across Africa.

BF does not make an exception to the rule. This chapter studied some of the challenging areas that need serious attention. Though the picture is not encouraging we can still hope that our future is not uncertain because some like the media practioners still dare to challenge unconstitutional and undemocratic rules for the triumph of truth and justice for all. Zongo and his companions spoke with a prophetic voice in a prophetic way for the rule of law and the respect of the dignity of each and every citizen. Zongo believed in the freedom of speech and the role of informed consciences to educate others as he brightly stated: “what is worse is not the wickedness of the wicked but the silence of good people”. He fell victim because of his convictions but the battle does not stop. To fight for human wholeness and to believe in it depict the prophetic mandate of mass media. It is tough but it is rewarding. It requires persistence, conviction and a true love for truth.

## The map of Burkina Faso





## Chapter Three

# PRACTICING FAITH AND LIBERATING THE HUMAN PERSON: A TASK FOR THE PROPHETIC CHRISTIAN

### Introduction

In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Smerdyakov claims "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." This quotation has often been taken to imply Dostoevsky's belief that morality is essentially dependent upon God; hence if there is no God, then there is no right or wrong and everyone may do whatever one pleases.

Though his thought is amply debatable, we choose to approach it from a Christian perspective: God does exist and we consequently deduce from that premise that a moral judgement of human activity is possible and all that takes place in a community of life may be overhauled according to moral principles. We live in a society. This reality is not optional; it is a longstanding patrimony of humanity; it means that we grow in society, are involved in a complex process of socialization or in other words we are self-making beings in the society. Moreover,

"when creating human beings, God wrote in their minds and hearts the rules of life as persons and as social beings"<sup>52</sup>;

He wished a community of humans built on the values of justice, truth and love where the available resources of the planet will be shared in a more just way so that every inhabitant in this world may enjoy a decent existence.

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<sup>52</sup> Tarcisio Agostoni, *Every Citizen's Handbook, building a peaceful Society*, p. 15

Experience, on the contrary has shown that the human heart is selfish and worse than that, it is wicked. Those who preside over the destiny of people, be it at the time of the prophet Jeremiah in Israel or the time of Norbert Zongo in Burkina Faso, have developed agendas that disrupted the original plan of God. Injustice under its various forms of economic, social, political and religious degeneration undermined the social fabric and the inalienable rights to life. As a result, structures of governance became counter productive and constituted a serious hindrance in the fight for justice. They used their social status to the detriment of their own citizens, a state of affairs Koffi Annan objected to by saying:

“instead of might making right, right should make might”<sup>53</sup>.

Two people have shown us the way forward in the fight for human dignity and wholeness. Jeremiah and Zongo, both prophets in and for their respective societies have an inspiring message for us today. In this reflection, we want to identify the ground and vision of their fight and their common characteristics. As we proceed, we'll underline the importance of social justice that is basically a Christian value through and through. From there, we will look at the challenges of prophetic living today in our context and define alternative solutions for more efficiency and commitment.

## **1. Similarities between the Prophet Jeremiah and Norbert Zongo**

As we attempt a comparison between the two prophets, let us define a few working principles that could help delineate our reflection. By a way of starting, let us ask ourselves the following questions: what is the content of the prophetic experience, what is the prophet's consciousness, the facts that stir him so deeply that he can't help but speaking it out? Is it a sense of anxiety about the fate of his nation and people? Is it an impulse of patriotism or an

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<sup>53</sup> Koffi Annan, General secretary of United Nations, excerpt from his ground-breaking speech at the opening of the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly on the 21 September 2004 in New York

inner call to safeguard human values, moral laws and standards? All these questions help us to define some similar characteristics among the two prophets: Jeremiah and Zongo.

One of the striking features of the prophet is *his sensitivity to evil*. Evil revolts his heart and gives him sleepless nights. Deep down in his heart, he loathes whatever diminishes human dignity and wholeness. As would say Cardinal Charles Lavigerie:

“I am a man and the injustice of the other rouses my heart to rebellion. I am a man and cruelty to other men fills me with horror, I am a man and what I should like to have done on my behalf to restore my liberty, honour and the sacred ties of the family, I wish to do for the sons of that unfortunate race to restore to them family, honour and freedom”<sup>54</sup>

Evil triggers in the prophetic heart feelings of rebellion and that has been the lot of both Jeremiah and Zongo. They revolted against the evils of their nations and called them, especially the leaders to enforce the law they were elected or chosen to apply. Both Jeremiah and Zongo understood their mission as messengers of truth and solidarity for the less fortunate and the victims of social injustice. To be prophetic is to wake up and to awaken others. As would say Paulette Shkiba:

“To be prophetic is to be moved by compassion, to stand with those who suffer, to envision a world where all life flourishes, and to passionately and courageously witness to God’s deep concerns.”<sup>55</sup>

The Jewish scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>56</sup> described prophets as sharing in the intense feelings of God’s heart, a God who wishes good for his people. This means that to be prophetic is to be God among his people. The prophet’s special concern is with those whom the world cares least about and who are, therefore, most dear to God’s heart. Prophets, therefore, draw our attention to what we would rather not see. In Herschel’s words, “they take us to the slums.” Whether we call it advocacy journalism or religious prophecy it does not matter. Whatever or whoever promotes human dignity and the right to decent standards of

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<sup>54</sup> Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, doctor in theology and Church History is the founder of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) in the book “The Cardinal of Africa”p:172. He took an active part in the fight for the abolition of the slave trade

<sup>55</sup> Paulette Shkiba in an article on the web: [www.ucg.org/](http://www.ucg.org/)

<sup>56</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel in an article on the web: [www.thekingcenter.org/ecommerce/shop.asp](http://www.thekingcenter.org/ecommerce/shop.asp)

life is deeply divine. The lesson we learn from the two prophets questions our conscience on the reality of evil and our duty to combat it, for, if we do not feel, we do not care.

Another distinctive quality of the prophet is his *concern for the highest good of the nation*. The usual tendency of the prophet to criticise the evil structures of the governments and established authorities makes of him a *persona non grata*. He is normally presented as the one who undermines the unity and cohesion of the nation. The prophet's life balances between austerity and compassion<sup>57</sup>. His words are stern, sour and stinging but behind his austerity, there is love and compassion for his nation. This is the common denominator of our two prophets.

Jeremiah stood in a long tradition of prophets who spoke God's word of judgment and condemnation against the nation of Israel. He criticized their unfaithfulness and pursuit of other Gods; he spoke out against a variety of social injustices which primarily centred on the oppression of the poor and vulnerable members of the society as he says:

"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal and go after other gods that you have not known and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name " Jer 7:9

Jeremiah called on Israel the fury of God and yet he had a deep love for Israel his beloved country. He wished they could change at hearing his virulent message. Unfortunately they didn't heed his warnings.

In the same way Zongo declared a total war against the culture of impunity and lawlessness in BF. He spearheaded the campaign for the right to justice and equality in front of the law. His agenda was: human rights. As a prophetic voice, Zongo echoed the essence of the Catholic social teaching that stipulates:

"Life, especially human life, belongs to God; whoever attacks human life attacks God's very self."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, an Introduction, p. 12

<sup>58</sup> Papal encyclical "The Gospel of Life", Donders translation n°9

The prophet cannot remain insensitive to whatever serves a person's true welfare, and more than that he can't remain indifferent to what threatens it. The prophet does comply with general feelings when things go wrong. The highest good of the nation is his preoccupation day and night.

The final but not least quality of a prophet is *his courage and sense of purpose*. His courage is surprisingly extraordinary. He does not shy away from any intimidation or threats of death. His conviction coupled with the urgency of the message to deliver and the exigencies of the social context move him to heroic commitment. Zongo and Jeremiah have displayed important examples of courageous deeds<sup>59</sup> for the benefit of their nations and fellows countrymen. Their pursuit of truth remains a good example for us today

## **2. Christian Prophetic Call, a socio-political and religious responsibility**

Jesus announces the coming of the Kingdom of God as the Good News of salvation which frees the poor. In the presentation of his program in the synagogue of Nazareth (cf. Lk.4: 16 ff.) Jesus applies to himself the prophecy of Isaiah 61,1-2:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
For he has anointed me  
To bring the good news to the afflicted  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives,  
Sight to the blind,  
To let the oppressed go free,  
To proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.”

This is the comprehensive socio-political agenda of Jesus. As Christians and followers of Jesus we share in his vision of a kingdom society where Christian values (justice, peace and freedom) permeate the society and transform our lives. In today's world of injustice and domination, the Church and her members at large have become a prophetic sign of hope.

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<sup>59</sup> for instance the symbolic actions: the almond tree (Jer 1:11-14), the waistcloth hidden by the Euphrates (Jer 13:1-11), the potter (Jer 18:1-12), the jug (Jer 19), the figs (Jer 24), the yoke (Jer 27-28), the buying of the field (Jer 32) and his own life as a symbol

This commitment to improve human relationships among the people by uncovering evil dealings in the society remains a prophetic endeavour.

In the forefront of the battle for human dignity, the church has developed her social teaching enshrined in the official documents. The hallmark of our Christian prophetic call is the following: a faith that does justice, promotes human rights and solidarity among peoples and nations. The first task that is incumbent to the Christians is the call for social analysis

“It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the gospel’s unalterable words, and to draw principles or reflections, norms of judgment, and directives of action from the social teaching of the church”<sup>60</sup>

The social doctrine of the Church proposes various principles<sup>61</sup> for reflection, criteria for judgement and directives for action which are starting point for the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism. So, in the process of the analysis, we ask ourselves basic questions like: who makes the decisions? Who benefits from the decisions? Who bares the cost of the decisions? In a nutshell: what is happening to people? The answers to such issues will vary according to particular levels: economic, social, political or religious.

A list of major lessons is drawn as we conclude the analysis of the socio-political situation of Burkina Faso and by extension all the African countries. The situation is not encouraging. We must swiftly act so as to curtail a further deterioration of the economy, culture and the stewardship of public affairs. As Christians we are citizens of our countries and it is our role to fully participate and take an active part in public life. It is our duty to voluntarily and generously engage in the social interchange. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. We must blend faith and the social dimensions of life as suggested by the encyclical of Paul VI:

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<sup>60</sup> Pope Paul VI in *A Call to Action* ( Octogesima adveniens ) 1971 N.4

<sup>61</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, p.3

“The social and the human construction of the world is not secular in the sense of being outside of God’s plan, but it is intimately involved with the dynamic of the Reign of God. Therefore faith and justice are linked together”<sup>62</sup>

Political participation in the structures of the society, in decision making is “the best way to respect the dignity and liberty of people”<sup>63</sup> because the government is an instrument by which people cooperate to achieve the common good. Our call is to free our society and give it a new look and hope because the right to freedom is essential and unavoidable. By definition

“Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness...”<sup>64</sup>

The fight for human rights and justice in general has one focus: the freedom of the whole person; it has a gospel value and blessed are those who heed Christ’s calling when he says:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”(Mt 5: 6)

The call of Christ moves us to revolt ourselves against:

“Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury”<sup>65</sup>

because human dignity stands above all things and his rights are inalienable and inviolable. Established authorities and the society in general must recognize the intangibility of the inalienable rights of every citizen and safeguard them. Respect for the human person

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<sup>62</sup> Encyclical: *Centesimus Annus*, May 1991

<sup>63</sup> Peter J. Henriot– Edwards P. Deberri., Michael J. Schultheis, Catholic social Teaching, our best kept Secret; p. 23

<sup>64</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church: freedom and responsibility n°1731

<sup>65</sup> Vatican II, the Church in the Modern World, N°27.

entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. The church's position on human issues is very adamant and she speaks "in the name of the human person"<sup>66</sup>

"These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role to remind men of good will of these rights, and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims."<sup>67</sup>

The strong emphasis of the Church social teaching bears on the communitarian character of our mutual responsibility. It stipulates that human rights can be recognized and protected only in the community<sup>68</sup>. Those rights are political-legal (voting, free speech, migration) and socio-economic (food, shelter, work, education).

The promotion of peace and justice in society and across the world is another urgent social responsibility, especially at these last times that African nations go through important social upheavals. Our Christian prophetic role calls us to intervene and offer our good offices as our Master commanded us:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Mt 6:9)

This theme is further taken up by the church which made of it an integral part of her mission because it is the will of God that we live happy in this world as we read in the synod of bishops:

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."<sup>69</sup>

As we live these ideals of peace and brotherhood, we encourage the world to follow in the footsteps of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (cf Jn 14:6).

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<sup>66</sup> Jean Marc Ela African Cry, p.79

<sup>67</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, n°, 1930

<sup>68</sup> Peter J. Henriot- Edwards P. Deberri., – Michael J. Schultheis, Catholic social Teaching, our best kept Secret; p. 22

<sup>69</sup> Justice in the Word : Statement of the Synod of Bishops in 1971, N° 6



Another domain where our Christian contribution requires a substantial and active involvement is the preservation of common good. The definition of common good by the Catechism of the Catholic Church runs as follows:

"The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority. It consists of three essential elements: respect for the person, the social well-being and development of the person and finally peace" (1906)

This sense of responsibility for God's creation is purpose oriented. Active human solidarity could help in building and sustaining a responsible and caring society. The values, historical patrimony and customs of the society are the cultural heritage of humanity and we must protect for the future generations so that they may identify themselves a certain tradition.

Another lesson which stems from our analysis is the precarious situation of the poor. They need a special attention. Our call is preferentially geared towards them because they are the less privileged stratum of the society. Most of them are the victims of injustice and the less protected by the law. Jesus in his ministry had a special attention for them. He invites us to live the Beatitudes (Mt 5: 1-12) because the Beatitudes are at the heart of his preaching. They express the vocation of the faithful. They shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life. In the footsteps of Jesus, we are called to dedicate our time and energy to defend the rights of the poor. As Christians, we cannot have peace of mine when our fellow citizens are victimized by unjust political systems because the gospel empowers us to liberate ourselves and others as would say Paul VI:

"In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society..."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Octogesima Adveniens (A Call to Action), Apostolic Letter of the Pope Paul VI, 1971 n°23

### 3. Challenges of the Prophetic Living Today

In a society governed by selfish interests, the abuses of basic human rights and the love of money, we cannot deny the necessity of an active faith. Many Christians in my country Burkina Faso have discovered that exploitation and oppression have been institutionalized. In this case, charity, the first Christian value transforms itself into justice. Faith here has a charity dimension which goes beyond the religious sphere. Any profession of faith is a profession of God who frees people from the forces of alienation in the here and now. He is the God of exodus<sup>71</sup> moved by love for those in oppression. In consequence we can say that an authentic biblical faith always finds a social expression. As people of faith in context, we act according to the context because Christian salvation means we have to know the evil that threatens us and from which we are to be redeemed so as to call on the power of Jesus Christ that is concrete: it is exercised in history. From this perspective the Christian faith experience has a socio-political thrust<sup>72</sup>.

Loving the neighbour in such situations means standing up against domination and discrimination for a better and just society. Transforming social realities with the power of the Gospel is our major challenge because it means a proclamation of Jesus Christ as good news, love, justice and peace. That is the biggest challenge of the Christian vocation. For us Christians, faith in Jesus Christ has a justice dimension; faith and justice are inextricably intertwined because the encounter with the living God in Jesus Christ initiates us into a new perception of society and creates in us solidarity with the poor. Furthermore we know in the Bible that God is on the side of the marginalized and exploited presently struggling for greater justice. The question that crops up at this point poses a serious challenge: are we true and

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<sup>71</sup> Jean Marc Ela *African Cry*, p.90

<sup>72</sup> Gregory Baum, professor of theology and religious studies at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto; talk on "The Church Since Vatican II: Prophetic Sign of Hope"

committed Christians if we ignore the social dimension of our faith? Certainly not. A fully formed faith calls us to commit ourselves to justice, an important dimension of the Gospel, to reveal Jesus Christ as the protector of the poor and the oppressed, to make social justice the centre of our fight in solidarity with the oppressed people.

The Christian social responsibility is so permeated by the social realities that we can't even imagine a prayer that ignores the social context of our lives; my personal consciousness expands into a global dimension, through which other people, especially the poor, become part of my morning petitions and my evening praises. As would say George Baum: today,

"It becomes impossible to have a spiritual experience that excludes the others. Every prayer, every ecstasy, every surrender to the gracious God has here a social dimension. Contemplation is part of praxis."<sup>73</sup>

The value of Christian living finds its expression in our dedication to social issues that uplift the human being and restore him to human wholeness. To achieve a social transformation, our Christian agenda for social justice should put an emphasis on the following points:

Human rights (Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Press, Freedom of Speech) must take precedence over any social, commercial or political interests according to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Give priority to eradicating poverty (lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services)

Uphold the right to education for all citizens so that all may share in the benefits of our modern culture.

The exercise of the preferential option in favour of the poor, the weak, the helpless and the oppressed.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Looking at the demands of Christian faith, we clearly realise that it is an enterprise to be pursued throughout history, in the knowledge that we are working with God,

“for in the combat for human liberation, nothing less than the divine is at stake”<sup>74</sup>

What concerns humanity first concerns God because there is a love story between God and his creation.

## Conclusion

In our reflection, we have seen the basic characteristics of the prophet: his sensitivity to evil, his courage and sense of purpose, his concern for the highest good of the nation and his preferential love for the less fortunate. He is someone who speaks for his fellow citizens against the evil structures of his society. The prophet Jeremiah and the journalist Zongo lived these ideals as an inner conviction and their lives remain for us a vibrant sign of Christian witness of solidarity, love and respect. They dedicated their lives to the service of the full truth about man in the society.

In their footsteps and by our Christian vocation, we are called to embrace a prophetic living that radiates the Gospel message: the love of the neighbour. The major challenge of Christians today is to foster a civilization of love, understanding and justice among the peoples and this comes about through the respect of basic moral principles and values designed and protected by the law so as to build a society worthy of the human person. Our faith in God sheds light on the moral principles that are:

“the sole and irreplaceable foundations of that stability and tranquility of that internal and external order, private and public, that alone, can generate and safeguard the prosperity of the States”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Jean Marc Ela African Cry, p.99

<sup>75</sup> Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Summi Pontificatus* : AAS 31 (1939), 425.

In a context of serious forms of exploitation and social injustices, there is an ever more widespread and acute sense of the need for a radical personal and social renewal capable of ensuring justice, solidarity, honesty and openness<sup>76</sup>. The Christian social commitment is obvious but it is also demanding; that is why it requires a solid hope despite the sin that deeply marked human history. In all the challenge remains ours and Christ is in our midst to see us through.

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<sup>76</sup> Jean Paul II, Encyclical letter *Veritas Splendor*, 98 : AAS 85 (1993), 1210

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The task of a prophet is hardly rewarding and worse it is even an ordeal, “my incurable wound” using the words of Jeremiah (Jer 15:18a). The overall drive of a prophetic message finds its origin in a context of gross violations of human dignity but the challenge remains the difficulty to break the structures that breed evil and its corollaries. The prophet, in all that makes a different decoding of the social life and calls for justice and conversion, a message of bad press because it reveals the truth for all to see. In the analysis of the socio-political situation of Jeremiah’s time and Norbert Zongo in Burkina Faso, we have pointed out many incidences of violations of the dignity of the human person. The situation was so bad that it called for a leap of prophetic courage to face the powerful leaders and tell them the wrongs of their stewardship of the public affairs. And we all know what befell them. It is and it has always been a challenge throughout history to remain both a faithful and patriotic citizen and at the same time faithful to one’s own conscience and the demands of Christian faith. The Christian social responsibility is undeniably a gospel mandate. It requires full commitment.

It simply means that the interests are different and the means to achieve the goals are even greatly diverse. Somewhere, around the corner, there are clashes of interests and the Christian is left to decide on the basis of his conscience. The truth calls us to hear the Word of God as judgment on a sinful world and as promise for a new and emancipated life. The God of Jesus Christ is not partial, he is for all but he is by preference in solidarity with the victims of society, and he is on the side of the marginalized and exploited presently struggling for greater justice. In the footsteps of our master, we are the salt and the light within our society, to call leaders to respect and value the human person and all pertains to his dignity and subsistence. We are agents of change and social transformation. We must be ready to face the

consequences of our stand point, be able to say like Thomas More<sup>77</sup>: “I die faithful to the king but to God first” meaning that we remain staunch good citizens but prioritizing our Christian faith because when we are faithful to God, we are always in the truth

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<sup>77</sup> More, Sir Thomas (1478-1535) English statesman and writer, known for his religious stance against King Henry VIII that cost him his life. Entered Parliament in 1504 ; Appointed undersherif London in 1510 Became a member of the Privy Council in 1518. Knighted in 1521. Made Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523. Made Lord Chancellor of England in 1529. Imprisoned in the Tower of London on charges of treason in 1534. Executed 6 July 1535 at Tower Hill, the Tower of London. Canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church in 1935

## **List of Abbreviations**

**ACP:** Africa Caraibes Pacific

**AU:** African Union

**FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - Rome, Italy

**IAEA:** International Atomic Energy Agency - Vienna, Austria

**ICAO:** International Civil Aviation Organization - Montreal, Canada

**ICC:** Inuit Circumpolar Conference

**ICJ:** International Court of Justice - The Hague, The Netherlands

**IFAD:** International Fund for Agricultural Development - Rome, Italy

**ILO:** International Labour Organization - Geneva, Switzerland

**IMF:** International Monetary Fund - Washington, USA

**ITU:** International Telecommunication Union - Geneva, Switzerland

**ITU:** International Telecommunication Union - Geneva, Switzerland

**NAM:** None aligned Movement.

**UN:** United Nations

**UNCTAD:** United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

**UNEP:** United Nations Environment Programme

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNHCHR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund - New York, USA

**UNIDO:** United Nations Industrial Development Organization

**UPU:** Universal Postal Union - Berne, Switzerland

**WHO:** World Health Organization - Geneva, Switzerland

**WIPO:** World Intellectual Property Organization - Geneva, Switzerland



**WMO:** World Meteorological Organization - Geneva, Switzerland

**WTO** World Tourism Organization - Madrid, Spain

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