

TANGAZA COLLEGE
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A LIBERATING GOD FOR THE POOR IN KENYA

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

**I hereby declare that the material
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Signed . . . Thomas Ochieng' Otanga', ocd
Date .14. February, 1998 . . .

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The yearning for happiness and life necessarily takes the form of pursuit of *Liberation*. Liberation from any kind of misery is the first condition for happiness. This brings me to the three important reasons why I chose to write about a liberating God for the poor in Kenya.

The first is because the gap between the poor and the rich people in Kenya is growing: many people are becoming poorer. The second reason is my belief that the glory of the majority of Kenyans lies in their sufferings. The Kenyan history is full of struggles of ordinary people against the forces of nature and the cruelty of other people. The third reason considers the faith of the Kenyans emerging from the liberating potential contained in the Christian faith and how it can be integrated in the peoples' daily lives.

The liberation of a country and its people takes varied paragon. My starting point is the social experience of poverty. My main aim is to see the country transformed in the interests of the poor. I consider this work to be my active personal involvement in the process of transformation without which my participation in the shared liberating movement becomes abstract and ineffective.

It is essential for me first, to explain the social, political, economic and cultural setting in which I seek to establish the need for *a liberating God for the poor in Kenya*. I will do this in the first chapter. Taking this historical reality with theological seriousness, I will move on to show how the insights emerging from this chapter prove the hypothesis I have formulated and will expound in the succeeding chapters. The hypothesis is that the liberating action of God can achieve its purpose in the national life of the country through its diligent attempts to live an authentic and African Christian life.

In chapter two, I analyse God the liberator in the Kenyan context. It should be borne in mind that considering God as liberator reminds us that one of the signs of the presence of

the Kingdom of God on earth consists in the efforts of the Christians to transform society into a more just sphere of existence. God as liberator thus serves like a call that awakens us from the usual, ordinary ways of looking at reality, reminding us that Christian discipleship means not only individual betterment but also intervention in social reforms as well.

I have highlighted the importance of contextualizing theology so that it can be a more liberating praxis. Since the poor are a privileged hermeneutical locus, I have rejected the version of God or church that does not encourage the liberation of the poor. I see God as a God who saves and does not tolerate oppression or injustice. A contextualized theology will encourage clarity of vision (in the political and religious spheres), commitment to democratic ideals, and pursuit of policies for sustainable development as the hallmarks of good leadership that Kenyans yearn for desperately.

After describing and analysing the past and contemporary history of Kenya, I have used scripture as my fundamental source to be the light and the nourishment of the people of God in the midst of their struggles and hope. This has encouraged me to search for and suggest some prophetic response to the afflictions of the poor in Kenya. In the last chapter therefore, I propose the future pastoral praxis in explicitly primary evangelization in a typical parish setting.

In treating poverty and liberation pointing the injustice, the bad, the evil, in this work is inevitable. The only way to go beyond simplistic condemnation or arrogant triumphalism is to transcend categories of defeat and see the beginning of a new Kenya. The year 2000 calls for *a new creation!* It calls not for breast-beating nor (unrealistic) celebration but for deliverance. It calls for rupture - a cutting away of the umbilical cord from the Western world of civilization to authentic Christian citizens of Kenya.

CHAPTER ONE

A CONCISE SURVEY OF THE IDEAS OF GOD AND OF POVERTY IN KENYA

Preamble

This opening chapter describes historically the people of Kenya's life (of faith) and struggles (of whole classes) that are all part of the past, contemporary and continuing history. In this concise survey, I have attempted to describe the situation of the people as individuals and as a people.

In order to assess their depth and other developments that have taken place (and are still going on in the perception) of the relationship between God and nature, I will start by examining the way the people in Kenya lived in the unsettled times before 19th century, until the 20th century.

1.1 THE CONCEPTS OF GOD

(i) African traditional religion (ATR)

The most minimal and fundamental idea about God found in African societies is the notion of God as the supreme Being. God is the origin and sustenance of all things. This knowledge as John Mbiti has aptly observed "is expressed in proverbs, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and Religious ceremonies."¹ God is no stranger to African people.

African ideas of God are strongly coloured and influenced by the historical, geographical, cultural background or surroundings of each people. It is a product of thinking and experiences of great grandparents of former generations. Mbiti in his attempt to describe the origins of Africans' belief in God writes: "people came to believe in God through reflecting on the universe, realizing their limitations and observing the force of nature."² It is no wonder then, to find similarities in the peoples' ways of expressing their faith in God across the continent.

For African peoples, God is looked upon as one who has absolute power over all. I offer here a few attributes for the sake of clarity. He is described as all-powerful, the all-mighty³. He can avert all calamities, supply rain, provide fertility to people, cattle and fields. God is self-sufficient, self-supporting, and self-containing just as He is self-originating. God is independent, absolutely unchangeable and unchanging. He is one, although there are other divinities and spiritual beings besides him, some of whom are closely associated with Him.

¹John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969) p.29.

²John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed.(Nairobi: East African Educational publishers, 1975) pp. 45-46.

³Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, op. cit., p.34.

The culture-history is complicated by the widely varying environment and the different historical and social contexts of each group of people. Religious developments were influenced by migrations, trade influences, military conquest and other tribal activities. A few examples here are in order: (in central Africa) the pygmies revere water serpents and leopards to show that they are the masters of the other animals; success in the hunt is thought even by farmers to assure fertility for their wives and the village fields; cults restricted to initiates centering on masked forest spirits are found throughout the rain forest Africa.⁴

Force is an important expression of God's power. Placid Temples in his book *Bantu Philosophy* writes that "vital force" is a key idea. He maintains that all beings are said to be endowed with a certain force or power that figures out the position of each being in the hierarchy of forces⁵. At this point, a pyramid of forces may be apt in illustrating the reverence of God. For many cultures, the forces closer to God takes on distinct individuality and separate existence and may be compared to ministers serving a great King.

Generally, Africans refrain from direct worship of God. I cite some justifications. Proper reverence of God in some cultures: the people of Nyoro, Ganda, Soga and Tonga, for example, believe that God has delegated his powers to his spirits and retired from the direct involvement in the petty affairs of the people on Earth. A second justification may be found in the forest kingdoms of the West African coastal regions where it is believed that God is so good and he would never inflict bad luck or illness on anybody. To avoid any misfortune, one must therefore appeal to the undependable or hostile lesser spirits who when honoured in worship will desist from harming people and even aid the devotee. This tendency in its

⁴Keith Crim, ed., *The Perennial Dictionary of the World Religions* (San Francisco: Harper/Row, 1989) p.5.

⁵Placid Temples, *Bantu Philosophy* (London: Longman, 1959) pp. 41-49.

extreme development elevates the intermediary spirits to the status of gods⁶.

A paradoxical widespread theme in African Religions alongside God's distance from the world is his active benevolence by remaining in heaven and permitting everyday life to continue without cruel intervention. If God comes too near, sickness and death are most likely. Those struck by lightning (a divine activity greatly feared), for example, are usually considered chosen and touched by God. Shrines are generally built to the victim's spirit which has henceforth become an intermediary to God.

(ii) The Focus of ATR

(a) Cultural unity

I find the words of Aylward Shorter in his *African Christian Theology* insightful and apt to begin a description of the focus of the African Traditional Religions. He writes: "The assumption is that African Religion must be considered in its pure and pristine form, before it became adulterated and decayed as a result of contact with foreign cultures and modernization."⁷

Religion in Africa is a cultural reality. African Religion is part of African culture. It is an integral expression of the African cultural background. It permeates every aspect of African life and therefore there is no dichotomy between religion and any aspect of real life situation. Such a unitary perception of life in the African context doubtlessly has theological implications. The Pan African Conference of Third World theologians observed: "...we realize that African unity is the unity of spirit and soul; an individual historical unity that may transcend even geographical differences. Our unity contributes to the total community of God

⁶Crim, ed., *The Perennial Dictionary of the World Religions*, op. cit., p.5.

⁷Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977) p.11.

without being blown away in the wind of unspecified universalism. We deplore anything that shakes the solidness of our deep rooted unity, whether economic isolation, power manipulation, or even styles of life."⁸

(b) A peoples' religion

African Religion is concerned with people and is integrated in the different areas of life. A person must necessarily be born in a particular African people in order to participate fully in its religion. The individual member of the community forms a part of large group of people working together so that religion functions on a communal basis. No individual can stand aside and reject his/her people's religion. In fact there are no atheists in traditional life.

(c) Values and morals

Values and morals are of paramount importance to African religions. They contain ideas that directly safeguard or uphold the life of the people in relationship with one another and with the world around them.

A closer look at the ideas considered here reveals specific topics that are treated: love, justice, truth, beauty, good and evil, right and wrong, respect for people, poverty, decency, the keeping of promises and agreements, praise and blame, crime and punishment, the right and responsibility of both individual and his/her community, character, integrity and so on.

Although these values and morals remain necessary for human life, they change as the people's living conditions change. They help people to live with one another; to maintain the peace and harmony in nature. These show that Africans' genuine reverence for the supreme

⁸Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) p.36.

being is part of everyday life, and that, divinity can be realized in all states and conditions of life. This practice of reverence for God (wholeness/integrity/holiness), is a collective responsibility of the whole community.

1.2 THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN KENYA

(i) The arrival of Christianity

(a) From the 4th Century to the 15th

Christianity arrived in Eastern Africa as early as 1st century (see Acts 8:26-40) but was restricted to the mountains of the neighbouring Ethiopia. The first European to find a sea route to India, Vasco da Gama, erected the famous pillar with a gilded cross in the year 1498 in Malindi, to announce a Christian (and Portuguese) presence in East Africa⁹.

Within the serious limitations involved at the time, evangelization was carried out and Kenyan converts were obtained. Their conversion to the Christian faith was well expressed around the year 1631 when some of these new Christians accepted to die for their faith in Christ in Mombasa.¹⁰ Baur comments thus: "...what is remarkable about these martyrs of Mombasa is the strong Christian conviction of the Africans"¹¹

For the purpose of this work, these Christians are a perfect example of Africans embracing the Christian faith. In 1698, however, the Portuguese lost control of Mombasa and the East African Coast to the Arabs of Oman. This led to Christianity effectively disappearing

⁹John Baur, *The Catholic Church in Kenya*, (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1990) p. 15.

¹⁰A diocesan process (for canonization) was held in Goa and when the documents were sent to Rome, the examining Cardinals "held different opinions" and there followed a complete and inexplicable blackout on the whole process until recently the persistent research of Freeman-Grenville revealed the original documents. See also Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1995) p. 90.

¹¹Baur, *Catholic Church in Kenya*, op. cit., p.18.

from the Kenyan Coast until the modern period.

(b) The 19th century missionaries

Christianity re-appeared in Kenya with the coming of the Anglican Church Missionaries Society (C.M.S.), through the work of Ludwig Krapf and John Rebmann in the year 1884¹². It is worth noting at this stage of developments that Christianity came to Kenya (as well as other parts of Africa) not simply carrying the word of God to *the poor of Kenya*, that is, those who had not heard the message of Jesus Christ.

It came rather as a complex phenomenon made up of western culture, politics, science and technology, schools, and new methods of conquering nature. The coming of the Europeans was the first thing that shook the fundamental concern of the (African) Kenyan religions and life. In other words, the balance proper to the typical Kenyan societies was greatly challenged by the coming of the Europeans.

Generally speaking, the Europeans were welcomed by the Africans in keeping with their tradition of hospitality, and little did they (Africans) know of the scramble and partition which would drastically fragment Africa along the interests of the visitors. As the succeeding events in Kenya unfolded, the Europeans realized their plan of colonisation or conquest. It is in order at this stage to look at the trends of poverty in Kenya at this time, so as to be able to analyse its implications (in the next chapter) in all spheres of life, namely: religious, social, political, economical and geographical.

(ii) The trend of poverty in Kenya

(a) Historical overview

¹²Ibid., p.23.

Kenya's poverty can only be adequately understood within a historical framework, starting from the early attempts to organize the segmentary political system and indigenous farming and livestock keeping into a coherent socio-political, socio-economic systems.¹³

The key factor in stimulating agricultural production relied greatly on the land tenure system. Up to the present time, land holds a very significant position for the Kenyan orientation towards his/her social and economic well-being. Mbithi refers to land as a cultural artifact and says that those without it are regarded as poor.¹⁴

John Ilife's pioneering work on rural poverty is comprehensive and eminently fair to give a historical overview on the trends of poverty in Kenya. He describes how the experiences of slaves and how discrimination against them disempowered them. He shows how colonial rule not only preserved some existing forms of poverty but also created new forms. He offers an example of the Kikuyu (among other peoples of Kenya) being victims of impoverishment through forced labour.¹⁵

Many authors have expressed the fact that the Europeans regarded themselves as superior to the Africans from the outset.¹⁶ Blandier notes that Africans were just cheap labour: tools which the colonizers could use to become rich.¹⁷ It may be of interest to ask: did the gospel that first came to Kenya justify and legitimise colonialism, imperialism and European

¹³Phillip Mbithi, *Rural Sociology and Rural Development: Its application in Kenya* ((Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1974) p.130.

¹⁴Ibid., p.92.

¹⁵John Ilife, *The African Poor* (Wiltshire: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp. 143-163.

¹⁶See Benez Bujo, *African Theology in Social Context* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) pp.32-43; Robert Maxon "The Colonial Roots" in Walter Oyugi, *Politics and Administration in East Africa* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 1994) p.33.

¹⁷G. Blandier, *The Society of Black Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 1970) p.23.

superiority? We leave analysis till the next chapter.¹⁸

(b) Rural and urban poverty: its connection with land tenure systems

Mbithi has observed that substantial urbanization took place in Kenya in expectation of better income stream and higher degree of prestige.¹⁹ This significantly narrowed the rural-urban income gap because there was a decrease in cash crop farming. Farming itself was influenced by land tenure system as we have observed above.

The growth of urban centers encouraged the transformation of rural life. Revolution along these lines of developments stirred the people's hopes and set them to work for progress competitively thereby eliminating to a large extent the spirit of communal living. Rapid urbanization created many problems that on the average, Kenyans were least prepared for. Structures of political, educational, economic and church life favoured these changes. It is important at this point to emphasise these structures for inasmuch as they favoured the conditions for (rapid) change, they remain the structures which keep the rich and the poor in their respective positions.

How exactly did land tenure system affect poverty in the rural and urban areas ? Some sections of the Kenyan Constitution may offer answers. Section 202 sub-section 5 legislates on Trust Lands (that is ownership of lands occupied by the tribes of Kenya, land in special areas, special reserve, temporary reserves special leasehold areas, and special settlement areas). Section 205 refers to State Lands. According to this section, all lands formerly vested on the British Crown (Crown Lands) were vested in the President of Kenya on the behalf of

¹⁸A complete analysis is too big a task for this Essay. I will concentrate only on the aspects of the matter which are relevant to this work.

¹⁹Mbithi, *Rural Sociology and Rural Development: Its implication in Kenya*, op. cit., pp. 70-79.

the government of Kenya.

Such lands included former white settlement, "unoccupied" underutilized regions, game parks, game reserves, temporary reserves and forest lands. All indigenous people could not use all lands in this category. We shall see how this deprivation affects local people in the following chapter.

(iii) The Gospel and liberation

(a) The gospel in the Kenyan cultures

The goal of missions in Kenya was to preach the gospel, to call people to repent, baptize converts (cf. Mt 10:7-8), build churches, and extend the faith in Christ over the people of Kenya and to make Him incarnate/actual among the peoples.

The gospel had to remain pure within the cultures it came into contact with from the outset: it had to be contextualized in such a manner that the truth of it remained unchanged. We will have the occasion in the next chapter, to analyse the problem that this rigidity left in the cultures in Kenya and the relevance for inculturation.

(b) The revolutionary nature of the gospel

The gospel by its very nature was revolutionary as was experienced when it first came to Kenya. Mbiti describes this rightly: "The Missionaries established and pioneered schools everywhere, and these schools became the nurseries for change: they sowed the gospel, they sowed Christianity and perhaps unawares and unintentionally they sowed the new revolution."²⁰ Such revolution was crystallised in a rich complex of legends and myths which were transmitted from an age old generation and from the sacred heritage of the many

²⁰Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed., op. cit., p. 217.

Kenyan tribes.

It is the young men and women who assimilated not only the religion but also science, technology, politics and so on. These young people become detached from their tribal roots and acted like vehicles carrying the gospel and the new changes: the revolution.

The new changes that came along side the gospel were total and affected whole spheres of life. Traditional life was challenged to the effect that tribal identity began to fade away because Christianity and European identities were pushing their ways into the individual and the community life. This meant sudden detachment from the values to which Africans are mystically bound, and thrust into situations where corporate existence has no meaning. The revolution meant, further, that corporate morality, customs and traditional solidarity in the African future would be severed.

Traditional religious concepts and practices could not accommodate themselves fully to the rapidly changing situations. A dichotomy between the religious and secular lives began to appear: something which did not exist in African religious practices as I already described. People began losing sight of the unity of life. Mbiti has pointed out suitably that those who introduced Christianity anew to Africa also brought with it doubt and unbelief.²¹

(c) Money economy

A primarily money economy was introduced to Kenya. People had to grow cash crops such as coffee, cotton, tobacco, tea, or work for money in all sorts of employment. This new economy introduced the concept of spending money with all the difficulties that go with it.

Kenya as a nation realized that its prosperity and progress depended on its economic life, and slowly became a victim of economic aid from the richer and industrialized countries.

²¹Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* op. cit., p.23

In the present time it is fashionable to speak of rich countries getting richer and poor countries becoming poorer. The economic life of Kenya is a crucial factor in the search for a liberating God for the poor in Kenya.

1.3 CHRISTIANITY IN INDEPENDENT KENYA

(i) Kenyan Catholicism

(a) Independence and 2nd Vatican Council

Statistically, Kenya is one of the African countries with large number of Christians. In 1962, over 53% of the total population was Christian, and by 1972, the number rose to 66%.²² Independence of Kenya and the renewal of the universal church through the 2nd Vatican Council are the two major events that have marked the history of Kenyan Catholicism in the last 35 years. I consider these two events in the survey of the concepts of God in Kenya since their effects are closely interrelated.

Due to the 2nd Vatican Council, the church in Kenya acquired new features which according to Baur can be summarised as follows:

(1) *Leadership*

In leadership, the National Bishop's Conference, priestly and Parish Councils were formed and these shared the responsibilities in the life of the church.

(2) *Liturgical language*

The use of African languages, local hymns and traditional melodies were adopted.

(3) *Ecumenism*

A new openness to other Christian churches to share both common love of the Bible and

²²David B. Barret, ed., *Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973* (Kisumu: Evangel Press, 1973) p. 144.

Christian responsibility in national life and traditional religion was re-evaluated in a new light of African theology.²³

In 1988 the clergy working in the Nairobi Archdiocese met to discuss the best way to set out and establish the Peace and Justice commission in the Archdiocese, according to the local context. The Second Vatican Council in the document "The Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*) recommends the setting up of Justice and Peace Commissions and stipulates the role they should play as follows:

Taking into considerations the immensity of the hardships which still affect the a large section of humanity, and with new view to fostering everywhere the justice and love of Christ for the poor, the council suggests that it would be opportune to create some organizations of the universal church, whose task it would be to arouse the Catholic community to promote progress and foster the social justice between nations (No 90).

(b) Structures of the church

Kenya has several images of Christianity. Different church structures according to Mbiti "were imported from overseas to make converts better followers of Jesus Christ while they brought denominationalism, one of the worst divisive element in Africa."²⁴ There has been growth of independent or separatist churches from mainline churches and from one another.

These are attempts by African people to *indigenise* Christianity and interpret and apply it in ways that render it both meaningful and practical to them. Zablon Nthumbari has made an exhaustive survey of the indigenous church movement in East Africa.²⁵

²³Baur, *The Catholic Church in Kenya*, op. cit., p. 222.

²⁴Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* op. cit., p.232.

²⁵See Zablon Nthumbari in Zablon Nthumbari ed., *From Mission To Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991) pp. 16 ff.

Some observers have commented that Christianity did not penetrate sufficiently deep into African religiosity. An author summarizing the reactions of Southern Nigerian Christians to Christianity which may serve well to reflect Kenyan Catholicism says "Christianity has impressed many as being largely a social organization capable of worshipping God and money simultaneously, and demanding payments for symbols of membership, the administration of the sacraments. Many conversions have been for material reasons... Thus for many, Christianity is quite superficial and so has no real answers to life's personal difficulties nor any real influence on the people's social life."²⁶

(ii) Church²⁷ and State in search of liberation

(a) Popular leaders' concern

When Kenya attained independence, political liberation was achieved. This created more yearning for more liberation. At that time the Government of Kenya assured that the freedom of religion was guaranteed by the *Constitution of Kenya*. Bishop Henry Okullu maintains that the church has been divinely appointed by God to admonish, exhort, and correct the nation and that the church is the conscience of the nation, which implies that the responsibility is placed upon it to uphold righteousness and justice.²⁸

Bishop Raphael Ndingi has made a modest contribution in the *Kenya Churches Handbook* under the topic: *Church and State in Kenya*. In his analysis he asserts that church and state are two dependent societies which have the common good of the society as the key

²⁶J.B. Schuyller, *Conceptions Of Christianity in the Context of Tropical Africa: Nigerian Reactions To Its Advent* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) p. 220.

²⁷I have used this word to mean specifically the official representatives of the church in collaboration with the ordinary Christians, in this context. I will highlight the prevailing ecclesiology in the next chapter.

²⁸See Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1981) p. 17.

point. He praises the good relationship between the church and State in the same article.²⁹

It may be observed that the church through its preaching and other apostolic activities has supported the Government to keep law and order and to initiate the necessary projects that are vital in the lives of Kenyans. Through the spirit of *Harambee* (this vocabulary was popularized by the first President of Kenya, Mr. Kenyatta, to mobilize people to have a common spirit in building the new nation of Kenya. Translated: *let us pull together*) there has been meaningful closeness between church and State. We may ask whether the leaders' concern has benefited Kenya from these early times just after independence.

Robert Edgerton offers useful and important pointers in his superbly documented book, *Mau Mau*, that Kenyatta's family and close associates became enormously wealthy through the open practice of nepotism, favouritism, and bribery.³⁰ It may be noted that the present governing elites got their way into power through these circumstances. Edgerton makes a further observation which is true even in the present time, that "the Kenya elite live in luxury in the same neighbourhoods that were once reserved only for whites in the colonial times. They drive expensive cars, vacation in Europe, send their children to private schools and have their needs taken care of by servants."³¹

(b) Church leaders' efforts

It may be observed as well, that the Bishops of Kenya failed to raise their prophetic voices adequately against the State on weighty matters such as a minority of people monopolising the good things of the country, unemployment, violation of human rights, and widespread

²⁹Barret, ed., op. cit., pp. 43-48.

³⁰Robert Edgerton, *Mau Mau: An African Crucible* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991) pp. 230-237.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 230.

corruption. In their pastoral letter on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Independence for example, the Bishops in their assessment of the developments that had taken place made statements which only favoured the Government of the time.

A section of one of their letters (which is grounded in the ecclesial reality of collegiality) reads: "The rule of law has been scrupulously upheld... everyone recognises and is truly grateful for the unique role played by His Excellency... Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Without his wise leadership..."³² They expressed similar sentiments after the attempted Coup d'état in 1982. They said: "We want to express our profound gratitude to our dear president Daniel arap Moi, for his dynamic leadership and his support for religion and religious teaching by his own personal example."³³

One may wonder why they engaged in such utterances while the majority of Kenyans even then wallowed in abject poverty. It is only in the year 1988 that they took a no-nonsense approach to state the mission of the church towards Justice and Peace. It is only then that they acknowledged the prevalent evils and emphatically pointed out that injustice was growing.³⁴

The post-Vatican II concern for the "whole person" convinced the leaders in the church that salvation fully involves all aspects of the person. The former president of Tanzania, Mr. Julius Nyerere in his 1970 Maryknoll address said what may conveniently conclude this part. He said "unless the church, its members and its organization express God's love by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present condition of man, it will become identified with injustice and persecution."³⁵

³²Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Kenya, *Independence and Peace*, December 12, 1973, p. 3.

³³*Ibid.*, *In Respect of the Events of August 1982*, p. 2.

³⁴*Ibid.*, *Justice and Peace Commission*, 1988, especially pp. 2-5.

³⁵Baur, *The Catholic Church in Kenya*, op. cit., p. 224.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have found out that the history of Christianity and of poverty in Kenya is closely bound up with its social, political, and economic and cultural history. I have found out as well that Kenya was not devoid of religion before the arrival of Christianity. The missionaries did not consider juxtaposing the new and old religion: the old had to give way to the new one.

The Kenyan church is now called to be a sign of life of the Kingdom within history and to make that life a reality, and so place itself under the scrutiny of the word of God. In view of the poverty in the country, the meaning and demands of the Kingdom confronts the church in a radical way. I will develop this in the next chapter.

GOD THE LIBERATOR IN THE KENYAN CONTEXT

Preamble

In the first chapter, I described the poverty of Kenya and observed as well how people have hoped in the liberating action of God in their religious practices.

In this chapter, I will analyse the liberating potential that is contained in the Christian faith.³⁶ I intend to link this analysis to the sufferings and hopes for liberation of the oppressed in Kenya. A question which this chapter tries to answer is: does Christian faith promise eternal life only or does it work as well for a worthy and just life in this country in the present time?

2.1 THE POOR AS THE PRIORITY OF GOD

(i) Biblical overview

³⁶See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963). He asserts that Christ, the primordial sacrament of God by reason of his dual nature: divine and human, is implicitly present in humanity's search for God. The Church is the sacrament of the risen Christ and is the basis of Christian faith.

(a) God's revelation and proclamation in history

The Bible does not present the Good News of God's liberation in a systematic form. It has been pointed out that it is not a text book of theology. It is a collection of different books of different kinds. The greatest part of it deals with a history of a people. In it we encounter factual accounts, interpretation of events and meditations on them. Biographical sketches of outstanding personalities are juxtaposed alongside the preaching of the prophets and of Jesus, and their theological analyses.

Reading the Bible and hearing it explained allows us to rediscover the deep meaning of our life and commitments. We are then able to see the most common thing in all the different kinds of books that make up the Bible. All the books tell of the Jewish people's faith. Their faith is based on Supreme Being, God.

The basic historical fact, that is liberation from Egypt leads to successive events which culminates in God himself becoming "man" and living among us (Jn 1:14). With the coming of Jesus in history, God establishes a new regime whose chief citizens are the poor and the lowly.

Later on after the direct proclamation of Jesus, his disciples met with adverse political and cultural structures in the earliest New testament times. They followed Jesus' spirit and protested against them as exemplified especially in the Acts of the Apostles (4:1-22; 5:27-33; 15:22-29).

(b) Israel's open-ended history

The history of the Israelites from which biblical faith springs is not limited to the experiences that happened at the time only. Liberation from Egypt is an event which was read by the Israelites long after it happened. It can be read by any group of people in their own

circumstances to shed light on other historical interventions of Yahweh. Gutierrez has pointed out rightly that faith is transmitted not by remembering a past event, but by rereading it in the light of the present.³⁷

The meaning of God's intervention Israel's history is referred to as liberation. One may find God's intervention a wonderful story within a historical framework. One must keep in mind that God's intervention is not to show his might or what he is able to accomplish, but the reasons of his actions. His might is at the service of justice.

The book of Psalms depicts this with clarity, that his power is expressed in the defence of the rights of the poor (Ps 146:6-9). God takes side with the poor and liberates them from oppression and slavery. St. Luke in his gospel portrays the poor as having a privileged place before God: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk 6:24-25).

(c) The mission of Jesus Christ

The mission of Jesus is situated within the process of God's revelation in history, but with a new beginning. Having faith in God means also that believing in the Jesus of our own history.

He proclaimed the gospel to the poor and liberation to those in captivity. Jesus confronted the great ones of his people who occupied power in order to do justice to those who were considered weak and poor. He chose to live with the poor. He was born in a social surroundings which was very much characterized by poverty.

Jesus' proclaimed the Kingdom in favour of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized as Matthew (Mt 3:23) and Mark (Mk 1:15) have described at the beginning of

³⁷Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983) p. 6.

their gospels. "Kingdom" signifies globalization.³⁸ This implies that all nations on earth are included and nothing escapes it. In Jesus God becomes the Father of all people. Through Jesus God the Father has made a new Covenant with all peoples. St. Paul says "and for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation is gone and now the new one is here" (2 Cor 5:16-17).

The universality of the New Covenant comes about by way of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ himself is the truth that liberates and this is the starting point of Christianity.³⁹

(ii) Theology of liberation and the option for the poor

(a) A clarification

A clarification of the term *Theology* is in order before any analysis is made. Richard McBrien has defined it rightly as the ordered effort to bring our experience of God to the level of intelligent expression.⁴⁰ Every true theology springs from a spirituality. A true theology is a reflection of true encounter with God in history.

This clarification may be incomplete if I do not add that all Christians in Kenya, without exception, are to be *theologians* in order that they may exercise the liberating theological powers within them. This may be referred to as *theology in a general sense*. It does not take away *theology in a technical sense* whereby a theologian's authority springs from his/her competence, training, and specialization.⁴¹

³⁸Gutierrez, op. cit. p. 15.

³⁹Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, op. cit. p. 97.

⁴⁰Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981) p. 1258.

⁴¹Professionalism is an added quality to the theologian: an enriching complement to one's Christian life and vocation which may help him/her to perform his/her role in the world more effectively.

(b) Liberation theology

Liberation theology conjures up the names of its best known exponents such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, and Pablo Richard.⁴² At the present time, liberation theology is not restricted to a few professional theologians. It is a cultural and ecclesial phenomenon. It is a way of thinking which embraces most of the membership of the church, especially in the so-called Third World countries of which Kenya is an example.

We should highlight an important characteristic of this kind of theology: it does not end with the production of theological works in centers such as Tangaza College. It leads the theologian to take seriously the option of solidarity with the poor (I will elaborate this point in the next chapter).

Sobrino in *Christology at the Crossroads* develops the Christological basis of the option for the poor. He builds on what other theologians like Boff, Gutierrez, Metz, and Segundo, have said about Jesus' option for the oppressed. This option for the poor has been given theological depth. By "poor" it is not meant for example, (only) the poor individual who is begging in the streets of Nairobi. It is meant a collective poor which is a much wider category. Concrete examples of the masses of socially and historically oppressed which makes up the poor as a phenomenon will be analysed in this chapter.

(c) The challenge for Kenyan theologians

In view of the foregoing discussion on the task involved in theology, it follows that if theology is to be done in Kenya, it must be an interpretation of a theologian's faith. Patrick Ryan, a specialist in Third World theologies, has pointed out in a journal of Religious and

⁴²Leonardo Boff & Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) p. 11.

Social concern: *Wajibu*, that all theologies should be explicitly contextual. He stresses that a theology which is aware of its contextual character will see itself relevant chiefly for its own context: down-to-earth and usable.⁴³

Liberation theologians must paint an image of God that empowers the poor people to struggle for a better life. Ryan's criticism for "theologies thought out in the insulated context of monastery, seminary, and university, in the context of complacency and comfort" is valid. He contends that theologies from such backgrounds fail deliberately or by neglect to confront the urgent problem of poverty of the masses.⁴⁴ Ryan does not commit himself to state categorically the best contexts for theologians, but we may turn our attention to the western theologians for contrast.

The western theologians produced traditional theologies with no awareness of the present situation in Kenya. More over their theology was not eternally true and valid for everybody. Mugambi observes that "any brand of Christian Theology is tied to the culture in which it is originally articulated. St. Thomas Aquinas for example, was specifically responding to skepticism which had been nurtured by Islamic learning. Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and other contemporary European theologians are all responding to issues relevant in their own cultural contexts. Unfortunately it has tended to be assumed that the issues are also relevant in other parts of the world."⁴⁵

Kenyan liberation theologians must necessarily draw from their own contemporary thought-forms and culture to express, explain and even defend the faith: from the ruling elites, from the western (or non-Kenyan) influence that constitute individual's or community's

⁴³Patrick Ryan, "Liberation Theology and Africa's Poor", *Wajibu*, 12(2) 1997, p. 10.

⁴⁴Ibid., "The Search for a Liberating God", *African Christian Studies*, 10(3) 1994, pp. 1-19.

⁴⁵J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 1995) p. 23.

enslavements and from all other factors that enslave Kenyans.

Although the perennial themes in Christianity may not be avoided by any theologian in any context, the urgent problems of poverty in Kenya should serve as solid groundwork and should be given the attention they deserve. The theme of liberation is crucial and must be introduced and highlighted into the contemporary theological discourse so that all other theologies with less applicability to our experiences will be placed aside to wait until a more developed situation of the church in Kenya may accommodate them.

What is most needed presently is a theology that will take into account peasant people's struggle for self-determination and a search for new political, social, religious and economic models. This is the theology that will increase human power to change oppressive situations and bring about conditions for realization of liberation. It is one that demands *metanoia* (change of heart).

(iii) Who are "the poor in Kenya" ?

(a) General observation

I have painstakingly described Kenya's overall social, political, economic and religious structures by uncovering the underlying causes in the first chapter of this work. This part of the essay being very important, I will now analyse the poverty to be found in Kenya in a more concrete way. The core of the argument is the presence of structures creating a growing minority of poor and marginalised people who have little chances of sharing the fruits of development.

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) figures, 33.8% of Kenya's population in 1996 lived in poverty, that is at least 10 million people. This seems to me a glib generalisation. For the sake of accuracy and precision then, I will identify six

groups of the poor under *two* distinctions: between those who are poor socio-economically, and those poor spiritually (Matt 5:3).

(b) The socio-economically poor⁴⁶

1. Poverty through accidents:

These people lack the necessary means of subsistence: food, shelter, basic health-care, elementary education, and because of reasons which cannot be laid in their doorsteps. The cause of this kind of poverty is circumstances beyond control of the people such as natural disasters (droughts, floods or locust invasion) or lack of education.

2. Poverty through deprivation:

Many Kenyans are deprived. I offer some insights on this because of its magnitude. In 1993, the Bishops of Kenya in their Pastoral Letter observed that "many people go hungry: lack basic needs while the Government spends billions in luxury projects. Education, health, and social services are a scandal to the tax-payers."⁴⁷ In the same document the Bishops emphasized that the misery of the people increases, unspeakable values of the society are destroyed while politicians struggle for power and cheap publicity. All the poor *wananchi*⁴⁸ may be placed here as an epitomizing example.

Kenya has achieved remarkable political stability and economic growth since independence but its prosperity has not been shared equally between the rulers and the *wananchi*. This socio-economic poverty of the masses is unjust because it is produced by along historical

⁴⁶See Boff/Boff, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-49.

⁴⁷Pastoral Letter of Kenya Catholic Bishops, *To Serve Peace, Reach out to the poor*, September 17, 1993.

⁴⁸Swahili for 'sons of the country'. I have used it to embrace all those in Kenya who abide by the laws, pay tax, the ordinary people: the non-ruling class.

process of exploitation.

3. *Culturally oppressed (people):*

Contemporary struggles for Kenyans is basically on ethnic groupings. Ethnicity either enriches or kills national growth. Examples may show those in this group: the Luos, Kikuyus, Luhyas (etc.) who are considered as minority or whose values and morals have been suppressed. Some of these peoples have been marginalised by the leaders.

4. *The materially poor:*

There are many desperately poor people in the country. The major towns of Kenya especially in Nairobi are perfect examples. Plastic and cardboard shelters are defining the architectural styles of the slums in these towns. Many more people in the rural areas live in abject poverty and remain landless. There are masses who are unemployed, homeless, hungry (etc.) who have been subdued by a few elite. These may show the extent poverty in the country.

(c) The spiritually poor

1. *The evangelically poor:*

These are the people who have placed themselves and their strength at the service of God in their sisters and brothers. We are faced with a consumerist society: we live in a predatory society profiting from accumulating possessions, power, and glory. In other popular gospel words, they are the poor in spirit. They open themselves in faith and gratitude to protest against this trend of consumerism without being neither rigid ascetics or spendthrifts. These people understand God's project in Kenya. They make themselves available in realizing God's gifts to his people thereby becoming instruments (signs) of God's Kingdom.

The perfect examples of the poor in this distinction are those who have accepted the

radical demands of the gospel and now live in the church as lay people, different kinds of consecrated lives, and priests. A sure sign of these people's commitment to their service is that they establish solidarity with the wananchi and identify with them to follow the example of Jesus.

2. *The morally poor:*

These people are poor through direct consequences of their moral and social behaviours. Alcoholics, prostitutes, notorious thieves may be named as examples in this category.

(d) The poverty trap

Robert Chambers' challenging book on rural development offers insights into the vicious cycle of poverty. He analyses that five clusters, namely: powerlessness, vulnerability, physical weakness, poverty, and isolation which in their negative forms interlock like a web to trap people in their deprivation.⁴⁹

In the Kenyan context, poverty contributes to the physical weakness which accentuates vulnerability by limiting one's power to protest against one's oppressive situation. This leads to isolation and powerlessness to attract government aid, schools, health facilities and other resources.

2.2 IS THE CHURCH IN KENYA COMMITTED TO THE PLIGHT OF ITS POOR PEOPLE ?

(i) The liberating mission of the church in Kenya

⁴⁹Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting The Last First* (London: Longman, 1983) pp. 111-114.

(a) An ecclesiastical framework

It should be noted that the mission of the church as a community of Jesus' disciples is to convey and bear witness to the total liberation of the human person. The saving work of Christ should be extended to all spheres of life and at the end, nothing should be left untouched.

Although the institutional profile and the spiritual reality of the church in Kenya is more popular, we should keep in mind that the church as a communion presents the reality of Christians as forming the body of Christ united with him and all the members by the bond of natural love and by sharing the same spirit⁵⁰. In this analysis I have adopted John O'Brien's reflections on the church and included the church's socio-cultural shape, evangelical mission, organisational influence and its mystical permanence.⁵¹

Juan Segundo has lucidly expressed what is true in this analysis, that the church is a sacramental community with a mission among all people and not a closed circle in which the Christian lives out his/her faith and ensures personal salvation.⁵² This may be individualistic, not relating relevantly enough to the world beyond the white, middle class, western culture.

Considering the historical involvement of the western missionaries, the church in Kenya appears to be a hierarchical or a dominion rather than one of service. It presents itself as a maternalistic society (sometimes) committed to outdated systems of thoughts (based on medieval philosophical schools), rather than a fraternal (or communal) friendly entity transcending specific civilizations.

⁵⁰Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church, (*Lumen Gentium*) nn. 2,4,13,15 & 18.

⁵¹John O'Brien, *Seeds of a New Church* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1994) p. 13.

⁵²Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community Called Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980) pp. 90-92.

(b) Christian praxis in Kenya

Perhaps the best insight which can forcefully express the poor beginning of evangelisation in Kenya has been echoed meaningfully by George Carpenter when he says: "'The missionary came first' says the African. Then followed the trader. Last came the soldiers to kill, conquer, divide and rule... Missionaries were the means by which the white people lulled Africans to sleep while they took away their land and freedom."⁵³

Christians now have a task to correct the past, and to engage in an enlightened praxis. The deepest meaning of "praxis" may be summed up as love and justice.⁵⁴ *Libertatis Conscientia* speaks of praxis as:

"The putting into practice of the great commandment of love. This is the supreme principle of Catholic social morality, founded upon the gospel and the whole of tradition since apostolic times and the age of the Fathers of the church up to and including the recent statement of the Magisterium" (No. 71).

This teaching now leads us to understand the direct mission of the church in Kenya.

From what we observed in the first chapter, the words of Gutierrez may lucidly explicate the relevance of our findings so far: "The God whom the missionaries preached was a God who blessed the powerful, the conquerors, the colonisers. This God demanded resignation in the face of opposition and condemned rebelliousness and insubordination. All that was offered to us by this God was an interior and other-worldly liberation. It was a God who dwelt in heaven and in the temple, but not in the world."⁵⁵

If the church acknowledges its past failures and makes efforts to paint the picture of

⁵³George Carpenter, *The Way in Africa* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1960) p. 47.

⁵⁴See Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, op., cit.

⁵⁵Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, op. cit., p.7.

God who lives with the people to liberate them, it is only then that church's commitment to the plight of its poor ones may be articulated well in the light of the present challenges it is facing.

(c) Occasions for the church to exercise its public responsibility

A profound passage in the Magisterium *Libertatis Conscientia* states that

"The essential mission of the church following that of Christ is of mission and of evangelization. It draws its zeal from divine love. Evangelization is the proclamation of salvation, which is the gift of God (No. 63).

This passage may serve as a criteria by which we may scrutinize the occasions which the church had to exercise its role. Pope John Paul (II) talking about the church being the voice of the voiceless says that evangelisation must promote initiatives which contribute to the development and ennoblement of individuals in their spiritual and material existence.⁵⁶

After a long and complex political process towards independence, the religious atmosphere in Kenya improved tremendously.⁵⁷ The Bishops of Kenya have published their most unanimous concerns in the forms of messages and statements from 1960 to the present time. These documents without claiming doctrinal infallibility have special value and may serve to point to us these occasions.⁵⁸

The Pope's words to them offers useful and interesting pointers. Pope John Paul II applauded the Kenyan Bishops at their *ad limina* visit to Rome in 1994 for their work. Part

⁵⁶Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995, n. 70.

⁵⁷Baur has described the major difficulties which had to be subdued, namely the Labour question, the Indian Question, Nationalist Movement, and Mau Mau Rising in Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, op., cit. pp. 474-484.

⁵⁸See Rodrigo Mejia, *Conscience of the Society: The Pastoral Letters of the Kenyan Bishops from 1960 to 1995* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1996).

of his message reads:

"Your protests against violence, your defence for human rights, your reproof of those who seek personal advantage by exploiting their neighbours, your calls to the civil authority to renew their dedication to ensuring the common good and your summons to national reconciliation - all these are signs of your fidelity to the demands of your apostolic ministry."⁵⁹

One is tempted to ask in view of such uncritical, almost naive praises: did the pastors always speak prophetically on the evils and social injustice of contemporary society or, was the pontiff misinformed of the developments in Kenya since independence ?

(ii) Agents of Liberation

(a) The task of liberation

The liberation of any oppressed social groups is the task primarily of that group itself. To consider them as agents of liberation implies both to correct the mistakes of the past and to give them a privileged position in the building of the nation.

(b) The church

The promotion of justice at national level calls for the participation of all Christians in the church in the running of public affairs. The Catholic Bishops of Kenya in their Pastoral Letter of 1988 formulated the main objectives of National Commission for Justice and Peace, a laudable move that can be summed up as *proclamation* and *action*.⁶⁰ The church then may be considered to be an agent of liberation.

⁵⁹L'Ossavatore Romano (English Ed.), May 4, 1994.

⁶⁰Kenya Episcopal Conference, *op. cit.*, nn. 10 & 11.

Mugambi writing about Africa points at something true about Kenya: "African churches have not been reputed for taking an interest in overt political activities. Why should they become suddenly active after 1990 ? Did they discover that Africans needed 'democracy' only after the collapse of Communism ?"⁶¹ Participation in political activities for the common good of all is a responsibility of all Kenyans and not just a prerogative of a few professional politicians.

Apparently the contemporary political atmosphere in Kenya is dominated by seemingly a few power-hungry individuals. But this situation should not eliminate the peasant Christians' potentiality and courage to affect change.

(c) The youth

There is a need, I seem to see, to consider the youth both within the church and independently because until now, their involvement in the process of liberation has been poorly grasped. They constitute a considerable percentage of Kenya's total population. Dialogue proves to be difficult between the youth and the adult generation. There are serious conflicts within families, disorders in learning institutions and in handing on of beliefs and values.

In the youth lies a real power for the church for today and tomorrow, yet they have not been the priority of pastoral concerns. In the political life of the country they have been ridiculed in the past. In 1992 for example, when Youth for KANU was formed, the important members were adult professional politicians. Was there any youth for... (any party) in 1993 or in the later years, or was it simply a youth for the sole purpose of winning the 1992

⁶¹Mugambi, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997) p. 28.

general elections? This shows the mockery and lack of recognition that the young energetic Kenyans have experienced.

A great deal of the societies' poverty (especially the ones I analysed above) is reflected on the youth. It should be borne in minds that a civilization cannot maintain its consistent continuity if the young members of the society are maltreated or not given enough chances to develop their full potentialities.

(d) The women

Women's participation in the cultural, political, religious and social life is by all reckoning significant. They are however, the victims of injustice in all these spheres of life. It may be observed that there is little recognition of the legitimate rights that enable women to participate in the national development (the first and only woman cabinet minister for example, was appointed in 1995) and to fulfill their mission in the church.

The revealed word tells us that "man and woman he created them" (Gen 1:27). The baptised are equal in dignity and have common mission. It is a wonder how celibate males have made rigid rules for women: the cloistered nuns, or the rules for the birth control (*Humanae Vitae*, 1968) for examples. If "we" are sons of God (our Father) seeking brotherhood in the sonship of Jesus his son, where is the place the women in "our" liturgical language ? Is it not apt to free the church from unjust customs and exploitation ?

(e) African traditional religion

In the previous chapter we have underscored the ambiguities and contradictions characterizing African Christian expressions. We may add at this juncture that superficial Christianity practiced in this country contributes to its poverty. ATR is the religious context from which

most Christians in Africa comes, and in which many of them still lives to a great extent.

Many members of the church surreptitiously seek the help of traditional healers and diviners when seriously sick or feel that their lives are seriously threatened by mystical powers. In view of the recognition that ATR gives of holistic approach to a person, as a complete entity and not a fragmentation, may the Kenyan Christian use herbal (or other traditional) medicine ? If a Christian consults a traditional healer (otherwise known in other derogatory, disparaging and negative terminologies such as witchdoctor) does it destroy his/her faith in God ?

If ATR is not considered as an agent of liberation, there will still be lack of unity in the religious practices, for example there will be sins confessed to the traditional healer, and never confessed to a Catholic priest. Inculturation⁶² or contextualization, may be appropriate exercises to be considered for concrete suggestions, but I will bring them up in the next chapter.

(f) The Kenyan Government

F.M. Mwega and J. Kabubo's analysis of the effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on the economy is an exquisite and meaningful pointer. In it they have highlighted inflationary pressures, marginalization of the poor, and reduction in employment as the consequences.⁶³

The most important objective of structural adjustment policies is to reduce the budget deficit. In practice the country incurs large external debt burden when the total government

⁶²A detailed treatment of *inculturation* is beyond the scope of this work. I refer to it in so far as it concerns the ultimate transformation of cultural values and their integration into Christianity and consequently the insertion of Christianity into the various cultures of Kenya.

⁶³F.M. Mwega & J. W. Kabubo, "Kenya" in Aderanti Adepoju (Ed), *The Impact of Structural Adjustment on the Population of Africa*, (London: Villiers Publications, 1993) pp. 25-39.

spending rises. The government is then forced to seek high conditionality loans from the International Monetary Funds (IMF) and World Bank. Eventually it is the common *mwananchi* who has to absorb the impact of the SAPs.

The recurring and seemingly endless cries among others, are the devaluation of the Kenya Shilling, high taxation on mass consumption goods, removal of subsidies which reduces access to food and escalating malnutrition and poor housing. This situation is further aggravated by the irresponsible behaviours of some elite who personalize public funds. (Many observers have complained about corruption in Kenya.)

Can we trust the government to be an agent of liberation and allow it to review its own management procedures in order to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, production and productivity ?

2.3 Irruption of the poor is a challenge to Kenyan Christianity

(i) A theoretical framework

Gutierrez has described the irruption of the poor to mean that those who were absent in history as poor are gradually becoming present.⁶⁴ The presence of the poor in Kenya which can be traced in its short history is making itself felt forcefully. We may refer to this phenomenon as "irruption" and which in this section I point out as a problem beginning to assume massive proportions; a challenge to Christian orthopraxis.

The alarming number of the poor and the oppressed peoples of the world is a concern of the all believers. Pope John XXIII expressed this in *Mater et Magistra* (1961) noting that the church in Latin America (and now Kenya in this analysis) was far too closely linked with oppressive political economies. He further elaborated this theme in *Pacem in Terris* (1963)

⁶⁴Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, op. it., pp. 8-9.

wherein he claimed that peace, poverty and human rights are the central concerns of committed Christians everywhere.

Christian life is above all else a following of Christ. This may situate well the concept of praxis on which contemporary Liberation Theology appeals and which Gutierrez rightly says involves a transformative activity that is influenced and illumined by Christian love.⁶⁵

(ii) Inadequate identification with the poor

One may wonder if all Christians have sufficient understanding of the need to identify with the poor. It is fairly simple for pastoral agents (or church people) in Kenya to quickly assume that they have made an option for the poor in Kenya. One may ask if actually they have identified with the poor by supporting their struggles for their liberation: for their own self-determination, or if they simply respond to the symptoms of poverty.

It may be noted that the approach of the majority of the pastoral agents springs from a model of mission that sees some people as religiously and materially wealthy, and some as poor both materially and spiritually. This approach does not work for the empowerment of the poor because it designates a group of people as *receivers* and another as *givers*.

In practice many pastoral workers have hijacked the ministry of Justice and Peace. They have turned it to opportunities of interpersonal charity rather than getting into the basic nub of the causes of poverty. This approach may be decried in principle but may only be eradicated if acknowledged and dealt with.

Another reality which has encouraged inadequate identification with the poor is the tendency of the bishops, priests, and other religious people to give priority to the religious realm. A defective expression, one that encourages detachment and adopts a spiritualistic

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 99.

interpretation of the beatitude: "blessed are you poor" (Lk 6:20).

(iii) Protest against injustice

It is fortunate that some praxis is going on in Kenyan Christianity but as I have suggested above, it is not enough. It may be noted that the bishops have acted jointly to be in solidarity with the poor. They have shown optimism in their unanimous concerns for social justice especially in the last few years. Is it not true that they actually did too little, too late? They ensured the survival of the church by remaining silent over matters of paramount gravity.

It may be noted as well that it is a good time for the church in the country whereby consecrated life is growing rapidly and religious congregations are thriving. But it is a case of too much of a good thing. The picture of God that they might paint (if they do not bring down their charisms to the level of the people) is one that may not empower the poor people to live, an authentic African Christian life in the contemporary times.

In their protest against the injustice done to the poor, the pastoral agents, especially the missionaries from Europe and America must recognize where their responsibility lies. As we have identified several facets of poverty, it is vital that in each circumstance the forces that enslave people be identified.

Failure of "democracy" in post-colonial Kenya may be seen as a direct consequence of placing ideological interests of power blocs above the interests of ordinary individuals in Kenya. One important responsibility would be to protest against neo-colonialism, because many policies of western governments and multinationals are guilty of perpetuating poverty and lack of meaningful independence.

Conclusion

I have analysed the presence of God in the Kenyan context, in this chapter. The image of God that I seek to paint for the poor in Kenya in this essay, namely, a liberating God, finds full expression by the discovery that the poor are the priority of God. Since God is present to Kenya in the church, I looked at the commitment of the church to the poor and found also that the irruption of those who are poor is a challenge to Christianity in the country.

I now move on to the final chapter to look into the concrete ways of praxis that may bring the image of God that is most relevant to the people of Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE

FUTURE PASTORAL PRAXIS

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have described the situations of poverty in Kenya and analysed them in the light of the presence of God the liberator. Hitherto I have established that the poor are the priority of God and showed how the church in Kenya is committed to the plight of its poor people. I have ended so far by concluding that the irruption of the poor is a challenge to the Christians.

In this final chapter I seek to suggest some pragmatic pastoral contribution which the Christians may make in order to respond to this challenge. I will do this by outlining some ways of future pastoral praxis.

3.1 THE CHURCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

(i) The church and politics

(a) The need to integrate politics into ministry

Perhaps an apt quotation of Kee is appropriate to help us focus our attention on this need: "If Christianity is about incarnation, the question is not whether political theology is still

theology, but whether anything that is without political significance deserves the name theology."⁶⁶

In view of the foregoing discussion on Kenyan Christianity, the church in Kenya must face the challenge to consider socio-political analysis as an integral part of its ministry. Through analysis people should be mobilised to bring about substantial improvements at the parish level, and not simply point accusing fingers at the politicians. Small details of community life such as filling a few pot-holes on a road in the neighbourhood, providing playing ground for children within the community, or identifying and working on some causes of preventable diseases (like cholera or AIDS) may only require a strong sense of "community" to accomplish.

The country closes the 20th century in a lamentable situation in which the church has grown evangelically without corresponding theological, liturgical and economic maturity. Following the warning of Roland Oliver in his study, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*,⁶⁷ the church should establish solid theological and sociological foundations for growth, otherwise there is a danger that under the stress of political and social change, organised Christianity may start to disintegrate at the centre while it is still expanding at the circumference.

These foundations for growth should exterminate the model of exploitative development which causes impoverishment and oppression. The Justice and Peace Commission⁶⁸ should lead all those involved in the promotion of justice following the directives of the Magisterium in *Octogesima Adveniens* (nn. 24-25) to foster a balanced

⁶⁶A. Kee, *A Reader In Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974) p. 9

⁶⁷Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longman, 1970) p. 11.

⁶⁸See page 14 above.

participation.

(b) Monitoring

Ethnic wars/clashes may easily be instigated by the government. General elections may as well be manipulated by the government. At the same time the government has the machinery to invoke national security to protect the people and to encourage them to participate effectively in the making of the decisions which affect their lives.

The church in Kenya should be a "watchdog" for the implementation for the constitution, protection under the constitution and infringement of constitutional rights. It should also monitor the government's use of power which is crucial to ensure operations with objectives and eliminate strategies without logistics.

It should criticize the haphazard manner in which the government starts new projects before completing the old ones thereby causing poverty in the country. Prioritization is essential in the planning process so then the church should consider it essential to advise and discern viable alternatives, scan environments, debate past failures, and identify the best options for the country.

This task may be incomplete if the church is not conversant with governance issues. I suggest then, that the church and the government should establish a co-operation between them and appreciate one another. Workshops, seminars, and encounter groups should be conducted to facilitate good working atmosphere. Programmes to address poverty and strategies to eradicate poverty will then be undertaken without biasness to party affiliations or ethnic regions.

(ii) New orientations for the future

(a) Conversion

Konrad Raiser has quoted Hans Kung who drafted the "Declaration Towards a Global Ethic" as having used the 10 commandments as the basis for formulating four irrevocable directives/commitments at the core of global ethic. This is worth mentioning for future praxis because it will bring about a new culture of:

- (1) non-violence and respect for life
- (2) solidarity and a just economic order,
- (3) tolerance and life of truthfulness, and
- (4) equal rights to and partnership between men and women.⁶⁹

The whole of the Declaration will imply a conversion of heart (*metanoia*), which I already introduced in the previous chapter.

Conversion means transformation of consciousness and turning to God. It will recall to the individuals (who will then be incorporated into a new community) that God has first turned to Kenya in love and has become present in Jesus for all.⁷⁰ This is the basic liberation which all must seek to experience in their sentiments, thoughts and behaviour, and in the structures and operations of the whole country. Corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, divisions and separations, discrimination and pitiless exploitation are some examples of vices which may only be counteracted by a genuine conversion.

(b) Economic development

I analysed the gigantic strides taken by Christians in their participation in the economic

⁶⁹Konrad Raiser, *To Be The Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997) pp. 38-41.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 58.

development. It is vitally important that the church should encourage economic development beyond the increase in gross national product (GNP). The quantity of goods produced (national wealth accumulated) should matter less than the quality of life that the wananchi live.⁷¹

It is worth asking: How will the country participate in the international markets as seller and buyer of agricultural commodities ? Kenya being basically an agricultural country it must contribute to Rural-Urban development strategy, which is consistent with agricultural activities.⁷² The church should encourage farming activities so that there may be no agricultural commodities imported and domestic industry may grow.

Tarcisio Agostini has emphasized the necessity of economic development and highlighted the fact that concerns and resources of a country are generally administered through the monetary system.⁷³ Along this fact, the church must promote the struggle against destitution and lead in building a nation where every person can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed by other people or by natural forces over which he/she has not sufficient control.⁷⁴

3.2 VOLUNTARY SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

(i) Evangelical solidarity

(a) "They who choose to be poor"

Gutierrez has offered that the verse in Matthew has at times been translated as "blessed are

⁷¹See also Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974) pp. 21-23.

⁷²See also Kenya Government, *National Development Plan 1989-1993*, pp. 112-113.

⁷³Tarcisio Agostini, *Every Citizen's Handbook* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1997) pp. 96-97.

⁷⁴See also Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, nn. 34-47.

they who choose to be poor".⁷⁵ We may add in this context that spiritual poverty implies spiritual childhood, which is the essence of Christian message. This is the key idea in the gospels. Those who do not choose to be poor may not have the personal engagement of a Christian in acquiring the perspective of the poor.

A Christian wishing to live the faith authentically must necessarily be poor (not in the sense of absolute misery for this would lead to total ineffectiveness) but in the sense of detachment from unnecessary wealth and privileges so as to depend on God for everything. We found out in the previous chapter that a spirit of consumerism and accumulation of possessions, power, and glory is growing. Living with certain comforts (in practice) reduces the Christian's absolute dependance on God.

(b) Prophetic praxis

The prevailing ethos of selfishness and individualism needs men and women who will respond to the radical demands of the gospels. The theologian who willingly accepts being in solidarity with the poor is a countersign and thus a prophet.

The Old Testament shows us how the prophets rallied to the side of the poor and denounced extravagance, injustice, inequality and greed. This should lead the theologian to understand the relationships between power, wealth and pleasures and transcend the achievement orientation of the western cultures which many Kenyans seem to desire as the best kind of civilization.

This will provide the conditions for rediscovery of the gospels in order to see money, time, and talents as the possibility of creative service to the poor and solidarity with them. The theologian who has adopted this prophetic orientation necessarily holds for a future of

⁷⁵Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, op. cit.

natural equality between people. This future demands a simplicity of lifestyle. It should be a lifestyle that does not draw the theologian to accumulate ever greater wealth, ever greater powers and ever more intense pleasures.

(ii) Existential solidarity

(a) Relationship with the poor

It is reasonable to state that the suitable praxis in the context of those who are poor socio-economically as I have underscored in the previous chapter, is relationship with them. John O'Brien has rightly pointed out that the theologian is present to the poor first as a learner who needs to understand their experiences and so needs to be in solidarity with them.⁷⁶

Theologians seeking to articulate their faith in a systematic way to all Christians and in a special way to the poor, are seeking to a living *koinonia* in the faith with the people who are poor and oppressed. *Koinonia* with those who lack the necessary means of subsistence, those who are deprived of the basic necessities of life, those considered culturally little and insignificant will be an apt response for future praxis.

This task is a difficult one because it demands a level of spiritual solidarity and intentionality for creative change to be affected. It further requires that through living intensely and loyally with a particular few people, the theologian will identify himself/herself through this relationality.

(b) Complementarity

I identified a group of people in chapter two above as "spiritually poor". The poor (in this group, for example) make a big difference to the non-poor by virtue of their poverty. Through

⁷⁶O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 81-82.

existential solidarity the two groups of people will complement one another because there will exist a mutual carrying of one another in faith.

They are then, as Sobrino states, able "to ask the fundamental questions of faith" and activate the entire community in the process of "learning to learn" what Jesus Christ is.⁷⁷ The simple life of the disciples of Jesus is an enriching example for this vision which as Schottroff and Stegemann have expressed (according to the gospel of Luke) is a "literary ideal."⁷⁸ The two have however, warned that great caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions of the way of life of the disciples in the historical situations of the Palestinian followers of Jesus.⁷⁹

Such a warning is apt in the Kenyan context because the economic and spiritual situation of some of the disciples may lead them to become radical vagabonds and wandering charismatics. The idea of complementarity may then be abused.

3.3 EMPOWERMENT OF THE AGENTS OF LIBERATION

(i) Empowering peoples

(a) The general public

We have identified some examples of the agents of liberation in the previous chapter. In this part of the essay I suggest that those agents should be empowered, that is, they should be enabled by being given lawful power and authority, in order not to dominate, but to affect change. Donal Dorr has rightly warned that if theology is not deliberately used to give power

⁷⁷Sobrino, *Jesus The Liberator* (New York: Orbis, 1993) p. 30.

⁷⁸Louise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann eds., *Jesus And The Hope of the Poor* (New York: Orbis, 1986) pp. 80-82.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 82.

to people then it will almost certainly be used to dominate them; there is no middle ground.⁸⁰

The power that the general public need to have should first come from within them. Mahatma Gandhi expressed this powerfully when he said that "The greatest hurdle to overcome in a national development policy is the people's psychological and ideological dependance on western materialistic models and thus compromising their national dignity."⁸¹

They should be cautious not to be preoccupied with condemning the past colonial activity to the extent of overlooking the oppressive and violent phenomena that are from within.⁸² It is then that they can be able to raise audible voices calling all religious and political leaders to their role of leading all people to justice and peace.

(b) The local Church

At the heart of Christian praxis is worship. It is the encounter with God which illumines, signifies and sustains the whole of Christian praxis. Now the praxis of loving God necessarily encompasses loving one's fellows and being concerned for their lives. As we noted the Bishops failures in the past above, a concrete suggestion in the words of *Ecclesia in Africa* is in order:

"The condemnation of evils is also part of that ministry of evangelisation in the social field which is an aspect of the church's prophetic role" (n.70).

We have pointed out the superficiality in the worship of the Kenyan Christians in the previous chapters. It is appropriate at this point to suggest that the local church should participate in the worship of God in line with their cultural and religious history.

⁸⁰Donal Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda* (New York: Orbis, 1991) p. 144.

⁸¹C.B. Peter, "Beyond A Theology Of Development" in *AFER* 35 (1), February 1993.

⁸²Simon Magandazi Baluleete, "Liberation in Africa", *AFER*, 25(2), April 1983, pp.90-96.

Mugambi has said that the Gospel becomes rooted when the converts live it in their own lives with their full appreciation of their cultural and religious heritage, not when they theorize it.⁸³ The optimism of the present time emerging from the just concluded *African Synod* will die prematurely if there is no radical change in the ways of expression of faith. Our liturgies, for example, tend to be rather static, verbal and rubric-oriented.⁸⁴ The local church will not always resonate with these characteristics.

The local church should not remain on the receiving end from the donor churches. It should rather strive to free itself from undue dependence on the Western missionary enterprises. A practical way to do this is to encourage local theologians. Another way is to stop importing western ways of worship and instead mobilise the members of the Small Christian Communities to research on inculturation⁸⁵ and liturgical adaptation.

Although there has been tremendous efforts in the areas of self-support in the actual building of churches in the recent past, there is need, I suggest, to put up simple structures which the local people are familiar with and can easily maintain. It will be unreasonable to import and put up western architecture.

Besides the external structures, we need more dramatic ritual expressions of praise and thanksgiving and richer use of symbolic actions. Original traditional African prayers were danced out in most cases and not merely recited in sometimes seemingly cold and uninteresting fashions prevailing in the local churches.

⁸³Mugambi, *From Liberation To Reconstruction*, op. cit., p.67.

⁸⁴Aylward Shorter, "Liturgical Creativity in East Africa", *AFER*, 5, October, 1977.

⁸⁵Inculturation was considered an urgent priority in the life of the particular churches during the *African Synod*. See John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, op. cit, no. 59.

(ii) Empowerment for reconstruction and salvation

Reconstruction may seem to be an engineering vocabulary, but I use it here to highlight the necessity of creating a new society. Mugambi has suggested that the theme of *reconstruction* needs further development as a paradigm of Christian reflection in Africa.⁸⁶

Israel was anxious with the messianic hope that some deliverer would come to liberate the people from the yoke of Roman imperialism. When Jesus entered history, his critics accused him of destroying Judaism and its institutions. Jesus' response to them is particularly apt to bring this work to a safe conclusion. He replied that his mission was reconstructive rather than destructive (cf. Mt 5:17-19).

This mission of Jesus is precisely the appropriate praxis that the church in Kenya should engage in. The church is the most influential and the sustainable social institution, because political parties and other organisations within the country have no similar permanence.

The poor in Kenya are liberated in order to participate in the mission of Jesus: of reconstruction. They are liberated *from* the oppressive structures (that we identified so far), *for* the reconstruction of a new society. The Good News that Jesus proclaims must restore hope and dignity of the poor.

Reconstruction is directly connected with God's activity in history. Salvation from Egyptian slavery is referred to as *bara* (Is 51:9-10). Deutero Isaiah clearly goes beyond Jeremiah by applying the same category to the promised new Exodus from Babylonian exile (Is 41:20;48:7). We can conclude from the foregoing that *bara's* basic meaning is drawing out of chaos by saving, liberating: bringing order out of disorder.

The future of Kenya that I envisage through this work joins creation not only with

⁸⁶Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, op. cit., p.15.

Exodus and Covenant, but also with eschatological salvation. I therefore describe the final condition of the poor in Kenya and indeed all Kenyans as new creation, for they have entered into the redeeming light of salvation which Israel has experienced and which is accomplished in, through, and for Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6).

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I discussed the role of the church in the transformation of the social, economic, religious, and political environments. I stated some pragmatic pastoral contribution which the Christians may make to the need for the liberation of the poor people. In spite of the reluctance of the official church to narrow the credibility gap between the theory and practice of development, I saw and described some signs of hope.

Looking at the need for development, I suggested that the church needs to take some definite responsibility in politics and adopt new orientations for the future. I made a further suggestion that the Christian should make an option in freedom and faith to be in solidarity with the poor, both evangelically and existentially. This is a commitment that calls for a profound intimacy with the poor people.

In the last part of this chapter, I suggested ways by which the agents of liberation may be empowered and enabled in order to participate fully in the task of reconstruction of a new society where the values of the Kingdom of God are lived and shared from a new plane. The reason for this is because the real initiators of liberation theology are the poor themselves, the agents of liberation. Their final condition is *new creation* which may never be reversed.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The task of this essay, as noted in the general introduction, has been to respond to the situation of the poor people in Kenya who have placed their hope in a liberating God.

I have observed that in Kenya the economically exploited and the politically oppressed people are the absolute majority from the historical past. Theologically speaking, they are Jesus' lost ninety nine (c.f. Lk 15:4-7) who ought to be aggressively sought, first by the shepherds of the flock (the Bishops and priests) and then the laity and the agents of liberation.

Jesus' command "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mk 28:19) provided me with the chance to evaluate the Christian' performance since the advent of Christianity in Kenya up until the present time. In this connection I discussed the church's cross-cultural ministry and emphasized the need to make Christianity relevant to the local people. Christians in general and professional theologians in particular must contextualize theology in order to understand the Christian faith in terms of the particular context of Kenya.

Contextual theologies in Kenya will necessarily grapple with particular problems of poverty, sexism, corruption, neo-colonialism, tribalism, injustice, among other problems. This is the challenge which all Christians must meet head-on. If this is done carefully, there will be a continuity in the truths of Christian faith with a flavour of cultural reality as is noted in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*.

The challenge in Kenya is a rather urgent one because it is a challenge in which bare survival of the poor masses is the issue at a time that some rich Kenyans are becoming richer and scientific and technological progress is making life easier and better in many parts of the world.

The liberation of the poor people in God and in the society includes both the conversion of the inner person (*metanoia*) and all conditions to be fully human. All Christians

need to create conditions for rediscovery of the gospels so that orthodoxy and orthopraxis will lead them in the search for a liberating God.

We must avoid fostering hope in people, of a total freeing from all human limitation and social injustice. Total liberation (salvation) is worked in us by Christ in phases: on earth, through grace; in heaven, in a fuller way; at the end of time, totally, when all creation will be transformed in glory and God will be all in all. Thus liberation in all dimensions does not occur all at once and much less so during one's earthly existence. It occurs first in the intimate dimension of liberation from sin and vice and gradually pervades all our existence.

The church in Kenya needs a new way of experiencing and responding to the reality of poverty, otherwise Christian formation will forever remain superficial and nominal. Within the limited scope of this work, I do not see this work as a pioneering literature in liberation theology in Kenya, but at least I hope I have opened up creative possibilities in the experiential dimension of theological studies.

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