

TANGAZA COLLEGE

The Catholic university Of Eastern Africa

Begging: A Challenge To The Church In Kenya.

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This is a long essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies.

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I the undersigned declare that, this essay is my original work and has not been submitted to any institution for academic credit. All sources have been acknowledged in full.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Human life is a gift from God, the sole Creator of all that exists (Genesis 1:27-28). For this reason, it is something precious which has to be handled with great care. Nevertheless, at times this care is so minimal that more often than not, each person is more concerned about his / her own welfare and not of the other. The world is full of Cainine attitude. **The Lord asked Cain, where is your brother Abel? He answered, I don't know. Am I supposed to take care of my brother?** (Genesis, 3: 4-9). Cain knew the injustice he had dealt his brother and was not ready to take responsibility even over his dead body.

In the world today, it is a matter of survival for the fittest. News of war and refugees seeking for a place to settle occupy a considerable space in the daily newspapers. For instance, the Afghans fleeing their country in fear of the United States of America attacks, the killing of Israel tourism minister Reharam Zeevi followed by Israel threats to Palestine that Arafat must hand over the assassins or face harsh retribution.

Kenya, for example, hosts thousands of refugees from various countries such as Rwanda, Burundi and Somali. Situations of war lead people to become destitutes while others, even though not real destitutes still want everyone to know that they have problems hence in need of help. One of the Little Sisters of St. Francis dealing with refugees had this to say, **When people are displaced by war, they become desperate psychologically so much that even those that are able to do some work simply sit to**

be dished with money, food and clothing freely. According to them people should help them and so they keep knocking at the office for assistance¹.

Begging can be an attitude in a person. All in all, whether people beg out of the desire to acquire more, or out of real need for basic provisions, the truth of the matter is that, begging is a reality today particularly in the third world countries. This becomes a big challenge to the Church whose mission is that of Jesus as He described it, **The Spirit of the Lord is in me. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save His people** (Luke 4: 18-19) The Church exists so as to continue the mission of Christ and therefore faces the challenge of finding ways and means of bringing hope to the hopeless, particularly to beggars scattered all over the world.

For quite some time now, this researcher has been pondering on the devastating situation of increasing beggars particularly on the Kenyan streets. Therefore, the desire to come into grips with the situation for the purpose of suggesting ways and means of dealing with it especially for pastoral workers motivated me into the choice of this topic. This indeed is a pastoral problem and there is no way the Church can claim to be in solidarity with the poor without getting fully involved with the people in a more practical manner. In this connection therefore, this paper examines with great concern the issue of begging as experienced in the time of Jesus and in our world today.

Therefore, although this paper more vividly describes the situation in Kenya through the examples given, other parts of the world especially in Africa as a whole are

¹ Ateya Bernadette, Interview, 15 / 10/ 2001.

also mentioned for the purpose of building a more concrete picture of the issue of begging.

This study puts into consideration some very contemporary and real issues which touch on the life situations of many people in our society today. It is therefore the researcher's hope that what has been observed during this study could contribute to the efforts of the agents of evangelization as well as of poverty eradication in their task of uplifting the lives of the poor in their midst. This study therefore;

1. Highlights the meaning of begging from various points of view.
2. Examines some factors that have contributed to the beggars' attraction to their begging practices.
3. Discusses begging as experienced in Africa with a specific reference to the Kenyan situation.
4. Examines begging as experienced in the Jewish community, in the New Testament and in the Church as a whole.
5. Makes necessary recommendations in hope that this could facilitate the development of better democratization, evangelization and poverty eradication policies and approaches. It is hoped that, these recommendations could be necessary for the growth in change of attitude of beggars towards themselves and society, and of society towards them. Recommendations of this study are hoped to become a source of encouragement and hope to beggars and those being begged.
6. This study could also be used as a basis for further investigation on the issue of begging by interested persons such as agents of evangelization, those involved in the

democratization process, Non-Governmental Organizations as well as students in theology and pastoral departments.

This essay is divided into three main chapters. Chapter one is a general view of begging. The main purpose of this chapter is to build a concrete picture of what begging is and how it has been experienced in the course of time by:

1. Discussing its meaning, analyzing various forms of begging such as physical, social and moral begging.
2. Discussing types of beggars such as structural, moira, voluntary philosophical and physically disabled beggars.
3. Examining factors contributing to begging. Basically, twelve factors have been considered one of them being colonial rule. Africa as a whole was for a long period under colonial rule. These introduced to the people very oppressive structures for example, working in European farms for very dehumanizing remuneration. Some Africans were even taken to overseas countries as slaves. All this interfered with the people's initiative.

Other factors discussed in this essay as major causes of begging in Africa are disease and physical disability. For example, here in Kenya most beggars are either blind, deaf and dumb or physically handicapped. In most cases such people are rejected by their family members hence taking refuge in towns and city streets. Other factors discussed are wars, poor governance, poor salaries, ignorance, ineffective education system, constitution and moral decay.

4. Bringing out the African view of begging- Looking at the African traditional society we realize that life was communal and as such the spirit of sharing was very high among

the people. A poor person was seen as a challenge to the community around and any one living near such a person tried the much they could to meet their needs. However, with the coming of colonial rulers and missionaries which led to the introduction of modern lifestyle and civilization, things have never been the same again. Some changes being experienced are ways of relating to each other and manner of dressing. Some people today prefer to live in towns where life is more modern.

Today people have become more individualistic than community minded hence creating room for destitution. By destitution we mean a situation whereby one lacks basic material needs such as clothing, food and shelter among others. It has, however, been discovered that, although many beggars seen in the streets are in need of help, some of them are not genuine. Some of the beggars have some land at their original homes which they found difficult to till, while others actually have homes but are not ready to take up responsibility. Some beggars in the streets are being used by some able people as their source of income. Such beggars are dropped very early in the morning at their strategic corners by those who have hired them. This in itself is a very corrupt practice and misuse of the poor which may discourage people from helping genuinely needy beggars.

5. Pointing out the effects of begging- When people get used to receiving without working for it, there is a risk of becoming lazy. Instead of becoming creative they become helpless lacking in initiative hence becoming a bother to others.

Chapter two is a theological reflection on begging. This chapter is divided into two main parts. Part one is a theological reflection on begging based on the Bible while part two is a theological reflection on begging based on the Church's teaching.

The Bible as a whole views begging in relation to poverty. In the Jewish community the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned were looked upon as needy members of the community. In this case, therefore, it was the responsibility of those who had to share with those who did not have. Although poverty is looked upon with contempt in the Bible, the poor are still viewed as Yahweh's children and therefore those who give to any one who begs is to be blessed by God.

In the New Testament we see that, the poor and the needy were integrated into the Christian community. Like in the traditional African society, the early Christian community valued communal sharing. The spirit of sharing that existed in the early Christian community minimized the number of poor people and street beggars.

The second section of this chapter discusses the Church and the issue of begging with a closer look at the Church in Kenya. The Church's concern for the poor and needy is a reflection of Jesus' concern over his suffering people. According to the Church, beggars and the poor in general reflect into the world the image of Jesus, the poor man of Nazareth. As such, taking care of the poor is one way of serving the poor Jesus indirectly.

In the Church's involvement with the poor, at times instead of curbing the situation she has contributed to its continuation. In this consideration therefore, some possible contributions by the Church in Kenya towards begging have been viewed. Among many other contributions, the Church in Kenya has been blamed for instilling into people's minds an attitude of receiving free things such as medicine, clothing as well as food among others. European missionaries to Kenya used this method to attract people into

Christianity. Today many beggars still flock into some mission compounds asking for help.

Despite the fact that the Church has been part of the ongoing problem of begging, it has however come to her awareness that something has to be done to alleviate the situation. Since the mission of the Church is to bring relief to the suffering, many efforts are being made to settle some of these street people. At present, there are some rehabilitation centers aimed at helping street children, for example, Ukweli rehabilitation center under the Mary knoll priests.

Chapter three which is the final chapter of this essay presents us with a summary of the whole essay, gives some recommendations based on the study and a conclusion. This is followed by a selected bibliography.

Fig. 1: Begging is a reality and not an imagination



This man is a street beggar in Nairobi. He came to the streets after his brothers drove him out of their ancestral land (Photo by Br. Oduor M.)

CHAPTER ONE

A GENERAL VIEW OF BEGGING

1.0 Introduction

This chapter expounds on the meaning of the term 'begging' from different points of view. In a further effort to bring out the meaning of this term and how it is manifested in society, various forms of begging, types of beggars and causes are discussed. From the general meaning of begging this researcher moves down to the African community showing how this phenomenon of begging was experienced in the traditional African society and how it is experienced today. Finally this chapter tries to view the colonial rule in relation to begging as well as bringing about the effects that begging has had on society as a whole.

1.1 Meaning Of Begging

Some words related to begging are:

Mendicant - This is a Latin word for a beggar.

Ptochos – A Greek word used for a beggar during the antiquity period.

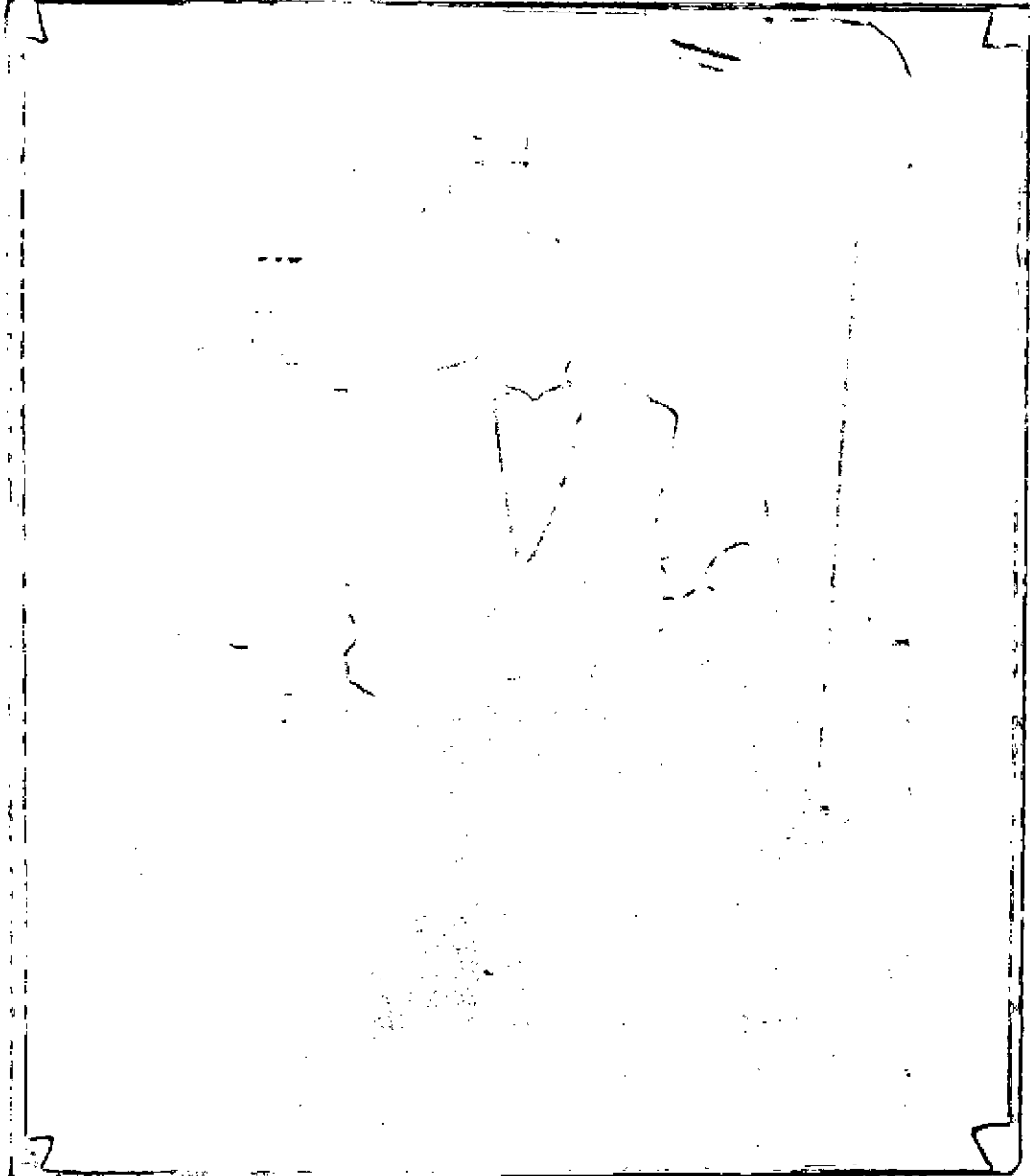
Prosaiteis – Greek word meaning one who asks.

West and Endicott describe the word begging as an act of asking for kindness in terms of money or food. According to them, a beggar is **one who asks to be given money or food without working or paying for it**². Following this line of thought, begging is therefore an act of surviving on other people's kindness not by stealing but

² Michael, W. & James, E. An international Reader's Dictionary. London: Longman Ltd., 1976, P. 24.

through dependency upon their timely generosity. For example, when the blind young man along Mfangano Street in Nairobi city sings the 'Amazing Grace' among other hymns holding a tin on one hand, he expects that people will not only be challenged but will also sympathize with him and drop something in his tin. He makes use of his musical talent to enable him beg for money for survival.

Fig. 2: A Blind beggar along Mfangano street in Nairobi.



This beggar earns his living by singing Christian songs in the streets (Photo by Br. Oduor M.)

Begging is a way of influencing others to share out what they have. It is an act of appealing to public sympathy in order to survive. For instance, in the Kenyan Daily Nation paper, the Somali Aid Coordination body which consists of United Nations agencies and other donor partners made the following appeal in October 2001 **We need to provide assistance to poor families immediately otherwise it will be too late to protect their lives**³. By appealing to the kindness of donor agencies, this team is already expressing a begging attitude on behalf of the needy. By begging, one actually portrays an attitude of inadequacy and of dire need of other people's kindness and understanding. In begging, there is always an emptiness to be filled.

The word begging is a bit complex both in meaning and in practice. When first heard, it could give an impression of one who is desperate. At this juncture, perhaps it would be helpful to point out that, some people beg simply in order to survive. Such people would be described as destitutes. These can be seen everywhere in the streets in towns and cities such as Nairobi, Kisumu and Nakuru. Other people beg not because they are destitutes but simply to meet a particular need that may be temporal. For such people, life still continues with or without the particular assistance. A good example may be refugees in a refugee camp. For the given period that these people are there, they may need great material, moral and spiritual assistance for some time before they can be settled.

³Daily Nation: Kenya, October, 18th, 2001. p.14.

At times begging is a matter of choice. A street boy by the name K.K. encountered by the researcher said, **I chose to be in Nairobi streets because my mother beat me up for refusing to go to school. Her efforts to hand me to police who took me to approved school were fruitless. In life I want to remain a beggar and I am happy to be so**⁴. For such children, life seems okay since they have no responsibility over any one in life except themselves. Some other children are pushed by their parents to go to the streets as family bread winners. Every evening they must make an account of their work and earning. Some mature people as we shall see in the preceding pages are forced by circumstances of disease and dire poverty to become beggars.

Through experiences and the sharing of many people who have been beggars in one way or another, it is clear that, begging can be quite humiliating hence making it a difficult way to survive.

Prosper in adherence to the teaching of St. Augustine agrees that we are all beggars. He writes, **aut legem credendis lex statuatur** meaning that, the law of begging may set down the law of believing not the law of praying but of begging. In one way or another, it is true that we can all become beggars at any time. Even if we are not material beggars we may be another form of beggars. In addition to this, we realize that the human person is quite complicated and constitutes many elements in himself. In this case therefore we shall briefly examine some forms of begging.

⁴ Interview, 19th October, 2001).

1.2. Forms Of Begging

1.2.1. Physical Begging

According to Mailu, **Africa has been associated with poverty**⁵. According to him, in most parts of the continent, this poverty has been due to poor climatic conditions as well as political instability among other causes. In many countries including Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, poor economy has been a major draw back in the path of development. In Kenya, ethnic conflicts such as, the clashes experienced in most parts of the Kenyan Rift Valley in the early 1990s became the origin of a long life of pain and sorrow for some people hence making some of them depend on begging in order to survive.

Physical beggars are those who ask for material help from others such as food, clothing, and money among others. Such beggars are numerous in the streets of each town especially here in Kenya. The blind have rocked the streets of Nairobi especially. At times, these gang up into one group forming a choir. They play their drums, tambourines, shakers and guitars while the container for all expected donations remains in the middle. Others walk round the city led by their children. Other beggars in this category are the lame, the sick, street children and other desperate persons that are encountered especially in different parts of Nairobi.

As mentioned earlier some of these people are forced by circumstances to come out into the streets and to public places to ask for help in order to survive. Others actually choose to beg because they do not want to work and earn a living like everybody else.

⁵David, Mailu. African Indigeneous Political Ideology. Nairobi: Mailu Publishing House, 1997, p. 96.

Their children join them too. As already noted, some beggars are used by some rich people to beg money for them. They drop them into the streets very early in the morning. A good example is a certain shoe maker and a beggar in the streets of Nakuru whose both legs are grounded. He lives with a rich woman who brings him daily to the streets and collects him in the evening. According to an eye witness, those who came to know about the trick could not give him any help and for that reason he turned into shoe making but still living with the rich woman. Physical beggars whether genuine or not are out for basic material needs.

1.2.2 Moral begging

Moral beggars in the context of this paper are those people who knowingly or unknowingly copy other people's behavior. The most vulnerable victims of this situation are the teens and the youths. During the adolescent stage particularly, they experience a lot of tension within themselves. This is a period of self discovery and can be a very trying moment. Pietzak says, **they are often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are and the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier on**⁶.

The youth always tend to pick on anything that seems to interest them from the media. They always have an empty tin in need of filling. By imitating and adopting other people's way of life such as foreign styles of dance or lovers walking with hands tightly glued to each other in open places or kissing each other publicly, the youth are actually

⁶Urszula Pietzak. The Sacrament Of Reconciliation and Youth In Kenya. Unpublished Project, CUEA. Nairobi: June 1996 p. v.

trying to fill in the emptiness within themselves. They become moral beggars by stretching out to other peoples ways of behaviour.

Although the above mentioned problem is more common among the youth, this does not mean that grownups are not prey to it. Actually the issue of morality touches on every human person. What makes the difference is how different people handle their problems. Taking for example the Western world, we find that divorce is becoming more and more normal. Some movies shown over the television expose this behaviour for example, "The Bold and the Beautiful". Due to this exposure through the media, some people have found unfaithfulness and divorce as a way of solving marital conflicts. People who were once rich in good morals end up becoming morally vulnerable picking on immoral attitudes to fill up the gap within them. Due to external influence especially, some people abandon their acceptable way adopting what is foreign to them. A good example here is some Kikuyu youths from Nakuru Kenya who **admitted that they had given up the traditions of their Kikuyu ethnic group in exchange for the fast western life style of Nairobi**⁷. According to Healey and Sybertz, these failed and were depressed and discouraged. Such youth should ponder on the African saying that "a bird that is tired parches on the nearest tree." This can be interpreted to mean for Africans, home culture and traditions is the nearest tree and not foreign ideas or styles.

1.2.3. Social Begging

By social begging, we mean a peoples' way of life that is full of externalization. People tend to live what originally is and was not their own. I do not deny that change or

⁷Joseph Healey and Sybertz Donald Geds. Towards An African Narrative Theology, Kenya: Paulines Publications, Africa, 1996, p. 281..

development among societies is there but change / development does not mean abandoning one's initial cultural values. At times, ethnic groups influence each other to an extent that some of them end-up adopting other people's way of life. Africans especially have borrowed a lot of Western mannerisms, clothing and ways of doing things in general. This is seen in families who tend to borrow the Western social life, such as making children only speak English and not their mother tongue. Some people no longer value their traditional dishes such as Muthokoi (shelled maize) Irio, Matoke, Ugali or blood and milk which is our ancestral food anymore.

Social begging indicates a behaviour whereby some people silently and with time replace their own social-cultural values with what is foreign to them. This is because, either they are not satisfied with their own or it is out of sheer influence. Whatever the case may be, for the purpose of this research we still term them as beggars, not of money or food but of socio-cultural values.

1.3 Types Of Beggars

Speckman discusses four main types of beggars namely:

(a) Structural Beggars

Reissmann, says, **All human societies, primitive and modern, capitalist or socialist are stratified in one way or another**⁸ Social stratification implies inequality of some kind. There are those who are at the very top, who dominate and control the tools of power while those at the bottom are kept off.

⁸ Reissmann. L. Social Stratification In: Smelser NJ. Sociology an Introduction. New York: Wiley, 1967, P. 206.

They have no access to economic power. At the bottom of this social ladder are the prostitutes, antinomies and beggars.

(b) Moira Type of Beggars

According to Speckman the term moira first appeared in Homer's writings in the eighth century BCE which he used to mean fate. **Fate is the destiny of some in accordance with divine plan**⁹. In this understanding, some people are destined to suffer in life while others are destined for a happy and successful life. The stoics hold the same view point that fate is divinely ordained. Moira type of beggars are therefore to be found everywhere amidst the blessed of Yahweh who seem to enjoy a blissful life.

(c) Physically Disabled Beggars

In the New Testament particularly, the physically disabled are the common beggars. For example, the healing of the blind beggar by Jesus (Luke 18:35:43, Mt. 20:29 –34, Mark 10: 46-52) and a man born blind who used to sit and beg at the Temple gate (John 9:1-42). The New Testament beggars have one physical disability or another which makes it impossible for them to make ends meet without the help of others.

(b) Voluntary Philosophical Beggars

Begging for this type of beggars is a matter of choice. Speckman says, **in fact, we refer to them by this name because they have opted, on philosophical grounds, for “self-imposed” poverty by giving up all the material possession they have had, in exchange of beggar's life**¹⁰. Among these people are the Cynics who for them poverty is

9 Speckman, M. The Bible & Human Development. Kenya: Acton Publishers. 2001, P. 111.

10 Ibid. P. 114.

a virtue. For these people, material wealth is temporal and so there is no need for clinging to it.

1.4 Factors Contribution To Begging

1. Slavery

Arab traders came into Africa not only for the purpose of ivory trade but also for slave trade. It is actually impossible for one to be a slave and industrious at the same time. Those who became slaves even after they were set free still remained incapable of rebuilding either themselves or the nation. Slavery was not only experienced in terms of slave trade but further still, when young men and women became cooks, house helps, compound workers and farm managers, those lived a slave kind of a life, a life of total obedience to the white person.

Such people worked twenty four hours in *muzungu* land or compound with no time to develop themselves. Despite a whole days' work of hard labour, these received very low wages not even enough for their feeding let alone other expenses.

2. Colonial Rule:

The colonial government and missionaries in Kenya did not take into account that which Kenyans treasured such as their traditional beliefs and practices in various aspects of life. The colonists introduced their lifestyle to the people making them adapt their way of thinking and doing things such as in the agricultural sector. The colonial rule led to oppressive structures and situations hence retarding the people's initiative and ability to stand by themselves.

3. International Lending Policies and Practices

When the government borrows, people have to work hard to have the debt cleared. People work so hard expecting that their hard labor will be rewarded. According to Speckman, **When they notice that is not the case, due to a number of deductions, including heavy taxation, they then decided to spend some of it on liquor, the aim being to 'taste' the fruit of their labour before it all pays debts¹¹**. Such behaviour may lead to the lose of one's job and consequently to heavy drinking and finally becoming a beggar. Actually some begin in this manner while others simply choose to beg in order to make ends meet.

4. Poor Governance.

For any country to build up a strong social policy, participation of all members is necessary. In Africa, Wilson and Einer decry a situation whereby **the poor are deprived of the opportunity to contribute ideas on the running of their matters. This in turn continues to make them feel helpless and useless hence the attitude of dependence¹²**. We can also say that, poor governance allowed for the mushrooming of **kiosks** which are quite necessary in their own way. Due to poor governance, economy goes down and social organization becomes poor giving room to the rich to remain richer and the poor to become weaker and voiceless. It is a matter of survival for the fittest. For example, those who hold the tools of power have an opportunity to exploit the weak if they wish. A good

¹¹ Ibid P. 33.

¹² Wilson Francis etal (eds) Poverty Reduction New York: Red Books, 2001, p.11.

example is the recent demolition of *kiosks* (small shops) in Mombasa under the order of a Kenyan minister Mr. Nassir. Surprising enough, other members of parliament from the Coast province supported this move. The reporter says **The MPs said they fully supported Nassir's move saying this was aimed at making the town clean**¹³. Such a move only makes people more desperate and poorer.

5. Wars

War is a symbol of destruction. Africa as a whole has been rocked by reports of war and intertribal conflicts (see some examples of war victims ahead). Here in Kenya, the situation is not exceptional. There are a lot of intertribal clashes among different ethnic groups for example between the Masaai and Kisii, among the Orma, Pokomo and Wardei of Transmara district, and Kisii and Luo. According to Murray, this situation prevailed during the pre-colonial era and still after though but for different reasons. Wars leave people desperate as happened here in Kenya during the ethnic conflicts in areas of Rift Valley. A Daily Nation reporter says, **Prior to the 1991 / 92 so called ethnic clashes, Kenyan communities were largely co-existing peacefully...as a result of these skirmishes, many lives and livestock have been lost and property destroyed**¹⁴. Today many of the displaced people are in towns or in camps such as Maela. Such people have to look upon others for survival.

¹³ Daily Nation, 31/ 12/ 2001. P. 1.

¹⁴ Daily Nation, 27 /6 / 2001. P. 44.

6. Poor Salaries and unemployment

Kenya experiences the problem of poor and dehumanizing salaries for most working class people. Any salary that cannot enable people to cater for their needs as well as of those who depend on them comfortably, we can describe it as an unjust salary. Warren not only sees the suffering of the common person but also the clergy. He says, **standards of living and salary scales for all engaged in Government services and business have left the remuneration of the Catholic clergy far behind**¹⁵. According to these, most clergy depend much on subventions from abroad reducing them to silent beggars. This researcher agrees fully with Warren. Most priests depend on donations either from abroad or from the Christians to run the parish as well as meeting personal needs.

At the same time, today there are so many people without jobs. This affects them greatly. It is a situation that makes people miserable making some children and even parents run away from their homes in search of better pastures hence the problem of begging.

7. The Constitution

In every country in the world, the Constitution plays a key role in the running of the country's affairs. It is in this very important document that guidelines necessary for proper social, political, religious and moral organization of a country are stated. In most cases, those involved in the construction of this document are at least people of reasonable standard and not the very poor. In this case, there is the danger of living out

¹⁵ Warren Max. Problems and Promises in Africa Today. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963, p.61.

the needs of the very poor who may not even know whether such a document exists. For example, if the constitution does not articulate how the needy are to be treated, it becomes difficult for any one to defend them, not even political leaders. Basically poverty is what pushes many people to become beggars.

8. Ignorance

Ignorance is a big draw back in any society. For example, here in Kenya there are still some people who do not value education. There is still a large number of youngsters that have not been in school. Both these and their parents do not see the need of education yet the trend of life calls for knowledge, modern skills and self reliance. Lack of education leads to loss in beneficial skills such as reading and writing. This in turn makes it difficult for them to get employment. Many of these ignorant people end up becoming dependant upon able members of the family or society.

9. Ineffective education System

Education is the key to life. This is an expression one finds on most school and college sign posts. The type of education we give to our people is supposed to help them have good life. It should also promote job opportunities and self reliance.

The change of education from one system to another in most countries has helped promote begging instead. Some education systems help prepare learners better than others. Here in Kenya, for example, the former education system of 7-4-2-3 provided an opportunity for maturity before entry into university than the 8-4-4 system. With this system, after standard eight, pupils are expected to be self reliant which is not practical at all. The system does not help learners to focus attention on a particular area of

specialization. They are piled with too many subjects with no particular focus. The number of school dropouts is so enormous that job opportunities have become so scarce partly because the school expenses are too high for many parents.

10. Moral Decay

Kenya especially is experiencing a big draw back due to the moral status of some people. In towns and in the city of Nairobi, evening hours are a real disaster. There are so many prostitutes on every street. In Nairobi, the situation is almost running out of hand. A certain young Kenyan girl aged fifteen in one of the rehabilitation centers who declined to be named shared with me her ordeal. She says that at the age of twelve her drunkard mother used to lock her out of the house in the evenings saying to her, **You have your own thighs, why continue to depend on mine?**¹⁶. According to her, it was her mother's bad behaviour that pushed her to the streets where she became a prostitute. The obvious outcome of immorality is high risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases, an increase in single mothers and bastards hence an increase in street children and beggars.

11. Disease

Africa is particularly hit by a variety of devastating diseases such as human Immune Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) among others. Many victim families today cannot afford medical care for their affected family members. Such victims are commonly seen in places like Mathare, Majengo, Kibera among other slum areas. Due to the problem of disease and high medical bills, here in Kenya some people have lost their property through auction or voluntary sale. This is

¹⁶ Interview, 3 / 1 / 2002.

done in order to clear a high medical bill of a family member. This leads to poverty which in turn leads to begging. Gitame says, **When parents are infected most of the family savings are directed to their care and purchasing of drugs**¹⁷.

12. Physical Illness

Physical illness is one of the major causes of begging. When one is physically handicapped it becomes difficult for them to survive without the support of others. Actually, looking at most of the beggars in our streets, we realize that most of them are blind, crippled or with chronic wounds and other deformities.

Fig. 3: A crippled woman who survives through begging outside St. Peter's Church Nairobi.



She says her main aim of begging is in order to purchase a wheel chair (Photo by Br. Oduor M.)

¹⁷ Gitame, in Poverty Reduction. New York: Red Books, 2001 p.33.

1.5 Begging From The African Point Of View

In the traditional African community, there was no dichotomy between religion and cultural heritage. Mbiti says, **Religion is found in all areas of human life**¹⁸. In the traditional African Society, religion shaped people's culture, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities. Mbiti actually say, **Africans are notoriously religious**¹⁹

The African traditional religious beliefs and practices guided people's lives to such an extent that, lack of charity towards others was seen as lack of charity to God. **The value of African hospitality, is closely linked to the person centered values and personal community relationship values**²⁰. Healey and Sybertz give a story among the Sukuma people of Tanzania whereby the area chief welcomed a poor man who was a stranger making him part of the royal family. According to these writers, traditionally the Sukuma chief welcomed everyone without discrimination or favoritism.

The African people motivated by their religious and cultural values lived integrated lives whereby everyone felt at home. Those in need among them were catered for by their neighbours. In other words, in the traditional African society, it was rare to find someone of a given community go hungry. Neighbours and relatives always saved the situation in time. The spirit of sharing was quite strong and well practiced. For instance, among the Bafofoyo of the Marachi ethnic group of Kenya there was **Kusuma** which implies freedom to move to others and get what you need if you did not have it in

¹⁸John S. Mbiti. Introduction To African Religion. Second Edition. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd. 1992, p. 10.

¹⁹John S. Mbiti. African Religion And Philosophy. Nairobi: East Africa Publishing Co. LTD. 1995, p.1.

²⁰ Joseph Healey and Sybertz Donald. p. 96. P.179.

terms of food. Problems of an individual mother became problems of the community. A similar practice would be traced among the Akamba of Kenya whereby children would eat in whichever home they found food or were offered food.

To a given extent, the situation that hailed in the traditional African community created no room for beggars as we have it today. All people enjoyed their human dignity and respect with not many destitute cases among them. The situation has however changed due to many factors. With the onset of civilization and Western cultural influence which paved its way into Africa through the colonialists and Christian Missionaries, things have not been the same any more.

These brought about civilization especially through the introduction of modern education and the modern way of life. This paved way for individualism in a way. The African cultural values of sharing and hospitality in general, have been eroded away due to the desire to uplift one's living standards. The traditional African extended family which provided shelter and security to the numerous family members has been changed into nuclear families which take into account father, mother and children. Unlike what it was in the traditional African society, today in some families there is a strong fence with an inscription written on the gate *mbwa kali* meaning 'fierce dog'. This means that you cannot just walk into such a home even if you are in need of charity.

A new society prevails today of haves and have nots hence replacing the communitarian life that existed there before among the Africans. Selfishness and greed have gripped people. A good example is a Kenyan case which involved a prominent member of Parliament for Keiyo South Mr. Nicholas Biwott. The problem started over

1000 acres of land, the minister hived off Kaptagat forest to build a public complex in honor of his mother, Mama Maria Soti, Father Rop Michael a Catholic Priest of Eldoret diocese challenged this move out of concern for the many landless Kenyans. According to him, this land should have been given to the landless or used for the common good. Such incidents of selfishness are to be found in many other countries and not only in Kenya.

The societies have become what we call, man eat man societies. Land is taken away from the poor in the name of development, but one may ask, what kind of development, is this that drives the majority to the streets to beg from what is their own? This is what we mean by man eat man society, and this is what has destroyed the African communitarian life. Before the 1994 African Synod, the Pope decried the situation in Africa with the following words, **The African continent is burning and bleeding in many places. The cries of people of Rwanda, Sudan, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and other parts of Central Africa rend our hearts**²¹. The problems experienced in Africa both in the 20th and the 21st centuries have changed the lives of many making them to survive in the hard way.

With the above picture in mind, we realize why there are so many beggars in our streets. Slums such as Mathare, Kibera and Korogocho in Nairobi are becoming more normal, more acceptable and more part of life. It has been discovered that some well to do people tend to associate themselves with the poor, not to uplift them but with the intention of protecting what they have.

²¹ AMECEA and IMBISA Bishops. The African Synod. Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa. 1994. p. 24.

It is true that many beggars in the streets during the day turn into thieves in the night. A certain religious nun (name withheld) shared with this researcher that she has particular street boys who look after her car whenever she is in town. When these street boys are around her car, no one can break into it. By befriending these boys who at times are thieves themselves, this nun is more concerned about the safety of her car but not the welfare of the boys as such.

Other beggars such as the religious writing abroad for monetary help or going there in person for mission appeal do not do so because they are actually desperate but simply to meet a certain temporal need.

All in all, begging in its various forms has fully taken root in Africa. This poses a challenge to all humanitarian groups including the Church to double their efforts in trying to curb down the situation before it runs out of hand. By nature, Africans are hardworking people and therefore efforts should be made to help especially the idlers, direct their energies towards some beneficial activities.

1.6 Begging in the Colonial / Missionary Era

In the history of humanity we find that, Africa from the beginning had its way of life and rule. For instance, among the Baganda of Uganda, kingship rule was practiced among them. In each country, each ethnic group had its own way of organizing itself socially, politically, morally and religiously. To most ethnic groups this lasted only until the beginning of colonial rule.

The colonial rulers came in from different parts of the world to Africa with the initial intention as to explore, to conquer and rule the Africans who were thought to be

atheists and uncivilized. Missionaries on the other hand came in to preach the Good News. In order to accomplish this task they had to cooperate with the colonial rulers. The colonialists acted as a tool of division so much that, people who once lived together in harmony were now divided among themselves politically into administrative regions. The bond of community was highly affected and to some extent broken. For example, in the African traditional setting particularly here in Kenya, different clans occupied a common area. This enabled them to know the needs of each other and to help one another. With the idea of having individual land, this in turn has affected the peoples' relationship with each cultivating within them an attitude of individualism. The idea of boundaries between one country and another is a clear indication of this division on a wider scale.

Colonialists, among them Arabs entered the East African Coast with hidden motives under the cover of trade. Murray remarks, **Arabs were reaching further into the interior in their search for ivory and slaves at the East African coast**²². Making people slaves meant turning them into helpless creatures with nothing of their own, not even the use of their free will. A slave is a destitute within himself / herself and even before his/her master/mistress. A slave is actually a beggar.

Kenya became a British colony as early as 1920 (New People, No. 76, 2002, P. 23). Colonial rule activated the onset of poverty in Kenya and in Africa as a whole. Taking the Kenyan situation as an example we find that, many Kenyans were employed as casual labourers in big farms owned by the white man such as the famous Lord Delamere farm in the Rift Valley. These lived as squatters in these farms earning not more than the cost

²² Jeremy, Murray. Kenyatta. London: George Allen and UNWIN LTD. 1972, p.22.

of a loaf of bread. Individuals and families who became squatters in European farms were either given a small piece of land at the end or sent away empty-handed. Many of those sent away with nothing became helpless. Some of them still looked upon the white man as their saviour. By taking advantage of the people and using them for cheap labour, the colonial rulers bound the people's sense of initiative to a given extent. The whole system took on a new meaning. The colonialists introduced what we call *Kibaha* meaning the measure of food one was to get per day. Their land was taken and they were put in camps meaning that they could not plant their food in their own land but for their masters whom they called *Bwana* meaning Sir.

On the question of education, this sector met with a lot of resistance from the local people. Strayer says, **the chiefs never sent their own sons but children of distant relatives to school**²³. These same children provided cheap labour in mission compounds. Many of those who denied their children modern education did so to avoid having their children being polluted with European attitudes and lifestyle hence abandoning their cultural values. Before the coming of the missionaries or the white man, Africans lived as one with high regard for community life. However, with the onset of Christianity and missionary Crouch says, **on the one hand the missionary educational institutions were centers of cultural alienation; and on the other the imperial subjugation ensured political and economic dominance**²⁴.

²³ Strayer Robert. The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa . New York: Heinemann State University, 1978, P. 59.

²⁴ Margaret, Crouch. A Vision of Christian Mission. Nairobi: National Churches of Kenya. 1993 p. 170.

1.7 Abuse of Begging in the Contemporary Society

Just as we have seen in the preceding discussions, in the traditional African society, people were bound together in a spirit of hospitality, generosity and sharing. In this case therefore, those among them, who were in need of material help were made welcome by their neighbours or members of the extended family. With the coming of colonists and missionaries, the African person has undergone a lot of changes and the whole life style changed.

As we have already mentioned, some beggars that we find in our streets are genuine while others are not. For example, in the streets of Nairobi and many other towns in Kenya, there are real destitutes such as Kariuki's case. In an interview with a relative of Kariuki, it was revealed that, Kariuki was a well to do man with a wife and children. He owned a big farm with a permanent house. He also had an inherited piece of land. At one go he just decided with his wife that they should sell their property and hire a house in town. This they did but after a short time, all the money was gone, the wife and children. Kariuki remained alone with nothing to hang on. Chased out of his flat, he moved to the streets where he is to date. A week a go **I put thirty shillings in his tin**²⁵. If Kariuki had some one to advise him, he would not have taken such a foolish decision. Today he is in the streets due to love of leisure.

Some cases encountered today are not genuine. For instance, the case of parking boys and girls in the streets and slum areas. Many of these are at work as commissioned by their parents. Perhaps their parents are lazy or even poor but then they make use of

²⁵ Njoroge, an interview schedule, 23rd October.2001.

innocent children who would be going to school to make ends meet. A very striking experience was shared by one of the research assistants, Sr. Rosina Ngundo had three very poor children whom she picked from Bondeni streets in Bahati. These children longed to have education but their mother was against it. So everyday they went to school they were beaten and one was once burned on the hands so as not to write. In the end, their mother succeeded in pushing two of them to the streets of Nakuru and one to Nairobi. For this mother, one does not become a beggar because they are desperate but as a way of earning a living. This is pure misuse of the children and giving a different meaning to begging.

Many people who beg in our streets are thieves. When they ask for a shilling, it is not because they need that shilling but instead, they want to see how much is left and where you have kept it so that they come round you. Others become beggars so that they can move freely in any place and face anybody not knowing that they are spies of some prominent people. .

It is also something striking to realize that, the number of street blind people is on the increase. The question one would ask is, why this influx? Have the blind reported to one another that people are dishing money to the blind? Or does it really mean that once one is blind they are thrown out of their families? Or rather that once blind you automatically become a beggar. Here one actually sees some foul play. Some of them are not actually blind. They may have eye problems but not completely blind. One day, as this researcher queued to board a matatu in Nairobi, a certain blind woman was able to

identify him as *kaka* (brother). How did she know he was a man yet he had silently remained in the queue?

It has also been discovered that many of those along the streets begging are brought by some well to do people. It has become a kind of business. The rich employ, the blind, whom they pay some amount of money or supply some food at the end of the day. Some babies are hired from their mothers, to whom the hirer pays something at the end of the day. This kind of practice has brought confusion and dishonesty. Nobody trusts those begging whether genuine or not, for it is not easy to distinguish between a genuine beggar and those hired.

There is a general understanding and belief that the slum dwellers are the poor people within any locality. However, nowadays some able people hide themselves among the poor, so that the little the poor slum dwellers are given they too may have a share. These same rich people whenever land is to be given to the landless or the poor they are among first ones to enroll. This is the highest expressive form of corruption and a blunder as well. A good example is the Agricultural Development Cooperation farms in Transzoia District. Land was sub-divided to give to poor squatters but when you go there you find that the intended people were given half an acre of land or so while the rich took forty and others fifty acres of land.

This situation makes it difficult to know who is a genuine beggar and who is not due to the increase of cheating and corruption in general.

1.8 Effects Of Begging

Begging has affected the society in various ways. Looking at it from the economic point of view, we realize that, the economy has gone down for some people have abandoned working resorting to begging thinking that this is a short cut to acquiring money.

The places mostly affected are tourist centers such as Mombasa. The situation at the Coast beaches is that, the young boys and girls drop out of school, because they want to become tour guides to the tourists, who give them money in turn. There is what we call cheap business people who want to get money without applying much effort in life.

The number of street children / street families has increased. Many poor, lazy and people with ill motives no longer want to stay in the village. Instead they want to stay in towns and cities where they can beg for money from the large masses of people. Many of these people are thieves hence making life difficult for those straining to earn their living justly. On the other hand, as they continue being in streets they become lazy and irresponsible members of society. Frustrations may also make them bitter people leading them to criminal acts such as killing.

From the political point of view, begging has had a negative impact too. When a country borrows money from the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund, it is viable to pay it back. This leads to suffering of the common person because the country in the first place has very few resources. When the little that she has is taken to meet debts, then this is a great pinch to the people. Here the major problem is that, although when the money is borrowed it is targeted at a given national need, very little is utilised

for the common good. Much of it goes to some greedy pockets and in the end it is the common person to suffer the consequences.

Borrowing is a term used by third world countries in asking for monetary assistance from overseas countries. For the purpose of this research, this kind of borrowing will be put under the same scale with begging. It is actually an indirect way of begging since most countries including Kenya have never been able to clear their debts from the international community. On borrowing Ndumbu (1991, p. 12) observes that It is part and parcel of economic development. To the third world countries it is a trap for perpetual enslavement of the poor nations by the Western countries. This is how African states are being torn to pieces.

Still within this same context, we would point out that the colonial legacy contributed a lot towards the food crisis among the indigenous people. Just as the missionaries, looked down upon African religious heritage so did the colonists look down upon African agricultural systems as backward and primitive. As a result Getui says, **The colonial masters imposed their own agricultural patterns, some of which were hostile and destructive to the African environment**²⁶. This resulted into low production of food for consumption leading to food crisis which is experienced to date.

Generally speaking, when people accept themselves as beggars this in turn imprints within them a feeling of helplessness. They feel they cannot survive unless people help them. At times they even think it is their right to be given assistance and so they demand for it and if they are not given, they halt abuses. Due to the growing

²⁶ Mary, Getui & Emmanuel, Abeng (eds.). Theology of Reconstruction. Nairobi: acton Publishers, 1999, p. 22.

number of beggars especially in the Kenyan streets, it seems a new generation is coming up, a generation of dependants and hooligans. Such people cannot build the nation as expected. It is the fear of this researcher that in the future people will be snatched their belongings in broad day light. It is already happening in some street corners of Nairobi but time is still coming for the worst to be experienced unless something is done early enough.

In conclusion we can say that, begging is a real issue that is both a threat and a challenge to the society. The problems that lead to such a destitute state can come upon any one, rich and poor alike. Although different kinds of beggars have been mentioned in this essay, it is in the view of this research that material beggars are on the increase. By asking for money, food and so on one already becomes a beggar. However, begging can be very humiliating but to those used to it, they grow to be dependant upon others which is at times a bother.

Fig. 4: War victims who survive through the help of others.



Rwandan mother and child near the village of Biaro in Eastern Zaire, 1997. (Photograph by Sebastiao Salgado)

Source: Universal declaration of human rights, 1948- 1998.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON BEGGING

2.0 Introduction

Beggars were there before, during and after the time of Jesus. Among the Jewish people, there existed a whole host of beggars. Both in the old and New Testament beggars stood out in the community and they depended largely on the kindness of others. Whether they chose to be in the streets or not the fact remains that such a group of people existed. This chapter examines, closely how the Bible views such people, both in the Old and in the New Testament. On the other hand this chapter draws us to reflect on the Church's view on begging. This reflection enables us come into grips with the problem of begging as experienced in the Church, perpetuated by the same Church and as a challenge to the same Church in her effort to bring the Good News to all strata of the world.

2.1 Biblical View

2.1.1 Begging in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, understanding of begging varies. Begging as such is scarcely mentioned in the Old Testament. However, several references, are made to the poor, the stranger, the widow and the orphan as will be discussed in the next page. At the same time, the generous are commended for their kindly assistance to them. All this is an indication that in the Jewish community, there were many people who had to support themselves by begging. In the history of the Israelites, God was right in their midst since

they were a theocratic community, a people whose Father and ruler was Yahweh. The people themselves said **We will obey the Lord and do everything that He has commanded** (Exodus, 24: 7). God chose them and they freely gave in to the choice. By so doing they surrendered their lives to God hence, living directly under his command though at times they disobeyed and went against His will. Despite their rebellious attitude at times, God still remained close to them and provided for them as a Father.

While in the wilderness for example, when they ran short of food and drink, God provided them with manna. When they complained to Moses he retorted, **It is the Lord who will give you meat to eat and as much bread as you want in the morning, because he has heard how much you have complained against him** (Exodus, 16: 8). As a matter of fact, God made the Israelites go through such experiences, so as to teach them about his mercy and love and at the same time to test their faithfulness to him. They therefore did not choose poverty as a community but when they experienced it, it was for a purpose. In the Israelite community, there existed real poor people. Isaiah says, **He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor, to heal the broken hearted and announce release to captives**(Isaiah, 61: 1). Here Isaiah makes reference to a group of needy people, the poor, the broken hearted and captives. Whether by referring to the poor he meant the spiritually or materially poor, what is important for this research is that there is an aspect of poverty which leads to begging.

The book of Leviticus makes it even more explicit when it says, **If a fellow Israelite living near you becomes poor and cannot support himself, you must provide for him as you would a hired man**(Leviticus, 25:35). Just as Yahweh looked

after His poor so should they look after one another. According to Leviticus, since the poor among them are part of God's family, the rest of the family members have a responsibility over them. In the book of Sirach, the one who gives to the poor receives abundant graces. According to Sirach **giving to the poor can make up for sin, just as water can put out a blazing fire** (Sirach, 3: 30).

In this case, generosity towards the poor is an opportunity for the giver to experience the mercy of God. The poor are to be looked upon with great love. Sirach says, **son, don't prevent the poor from making a living, or keep them waiting in their need... do not refuse to help a beggar who is in need** (Sirach, 4: 31). Helping the poor is a duty and a command as Sirach says, **The Lord has commanded us to help the poor, do not refuse them the help they need** (Sirach, 29: 9).

Amos brushes off the rich for their crimes against the poor. **They sell into slavery honest men who cannot pay their debts, poor people who cannot even repay the price of a pair of sandals ... At every place of worship men sleep on clothing that they have taken from the poor** (Amos, 2: 6-8). For mistreating the poor, the Israelites have put themselves into trouble with God who according to Isaiah is the defender of the weak and oppressed. Isaiah says, **He will judge the poor fairly and defend the rights of the helpless** (Isaiah, 11: 4).

Commenting on the psalmists' attitude to begging Downey says **The poor appear as the beloved of Yahweh. Yahweh hears their cry and delivers them**²⁷. Some of these Psalms are Psalm 4 and 91.

²⁷ Michael. Downey. The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality. Minnesota: The order of St. Benedict, 1993, P. 711.

Among the Israelites a poor person is a sinner while a rich person is blessed by God. However, with time and as the Old Testament literature develops, the prophets and the post exilic writers such as Isaiah see the increase of wealth and the spread of poverty as an indicator of hardening of hearts and no longer a blessing. The rich get rich by trampling down upon the poor and through deeds of injustice.

The book of Proverbs says, **Give to the poor and you will never be in need. If you close your eyes to the poor many people will curse you** (Proverbs, 28: 27). This may sound like a contradiction whereby we get a negative attitude to begging in the same Old Testament. It is however important to understand that, although there were many poor people and beggars in Israel, this was not an encouraged attitude. Those who became beggars were so, not because they chose to be but were forced by circumstances for example diseases such as leprosy.

Beggars lived very humiliating and uncomfortable lives and for this reason, Sirach advises his son with the following words, **Son, do not live the life of a beggar; it is better to die than to beg. If you have to depend on someone else for your food, you are not really living your life. You pollute yourself by accepting food from another. Begging is a torture to the sons of any sensitive person. A shameless person makes begging sound sweet, but something inside him burns** (Sirach, 40: 28-30). This negative attitude towards begging is an indication that not every one welcomed the idea of begging among the Jews. Whatever the case may be, what is important for us here is that begging existed in the Old Testament and that every person was obliged to render a

helping hand both as a command from God and as a way of ensuring blessings upon themselves and their families.

Generally speaking, in the Jewish community, poverty and begging went hand in hand. Under normal circumstances, those with enough of what they need do not have to bother people begging for this and that. In the Jewish community, the sick, the crippled, the orphaned and the widowed were counted among the poor. Most likely, these people became beggars to make ends meet. God continued to challenge the people on their attitude towards the poor and the needy showing them how much they needed their love and care.

2.1.2 Begging in the New Testament

The New Testament has a lot to say about begging and beggars. Generally, a beggar is a poor person who stands in need of other people's help. Downey says, **Jesus himself is the poor man of Bethlehem, and Nazareth**²⁸. This statement should not lead us to think of Jesus as having been a destitute. The letter to the Philippians explains it all when the writer says, **of his own free will he gave up all he had and took the nature of a servant** (Philippians, 2: 7). It was out of His free will that Jesus became poor even with no where to lay his head (Luke 9: 58). Right from the beginning of salvific history, God himself begged Mary through the angel Gabriel to be the mother of his son (Luke 1: 28-35). By her humble reception of the Son of God into her life, she was to become the provider of all human needs of a child to the mother. Joseph came in too, to provide the

²⁸ Ibid. P. 743.

fatherly needs of a child. At the time of his birth the parents of Jesus had to beg for a place for him to be born (Luke 2: 7).

When Jesus was to be born, there was no room for them in the inn and so he had to be born under the poorest human conditions, in a cowshed. Owing to this great experience of poverty in the initial life of Jesus the founder of Christianity, we can describe him as the first Christian beggar whose coming into the world was made possible by Mary's humble submission to God's will (Luke 1: 38).

At the onset of his ministry, Jesus identifies his mission as directed primarily to the poor. He told the messengers of John, **Go back and tell John what you have heard and seen, the blind can see, the lame can walk, those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases are made clean... and the good news is preached to the poor** (Luke, 7: 21-22). Jesus took it up as His daily mission to bring hope and life to those helpless people living in various corners of Palestine. He never condemned the poor but instead saw them as the heirs of the kingdom of God. The beatitudes are quite plain on this, **Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours** (Luke, 6: 20). During his ministry Jesus challenged the rich who held so tightly to their wealth while the poor had nothing to eat. Jesus was not against their wealth but condemned their selfish attitude towards the needy. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man on his death goes to hell while Lazarus joins his father Abraham in the bliss of heaven. The rich man who lived luxuriously refused to share his wealthy meals with the poor beggar hence the reason for his condemnation (Luke 16:19-31). For this reason, Jesus warns His disciples about the dangers of wealth saying, **do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth where**

moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal (Matthew, 6: 19). Jesus sees among His people the dangers of turning full attention to one's possessions. Such a turn could blind fold one making it impossible to realize their own need of God and at the same time the needs of those around them. This is quite disastrous to one's faith.

In His ministry, Jesus encountered many beggars some of whom needed not money from Him but His compassion. A man suffering from a dreaded skin disease **Knelt down before Him and said, Sir if you want to you can make me clean"**. Jesus **reached out and touched him** (Matthew, 8: 2-3). To Bartimaeus the blind man, He showed mercy by stopping to listen to him. The crowd scolded him for begging Jesus to have mercy on him but Jesus was firm in His love for the poor and needy (Mark 10:46-48). What He was able to offer He did so but at the same time expressed in all honesty what He could not offer as He did to the mother of James and John. She requested that her sons sit one at the right and the other at the left side of Jesus' kingdom. To this Jesus was honest enough to say that this was not His area of jurisdiction but of His Father.

Jesus in His lifetime experienced what it meant to be needy. As we have already seen, Jesus had no permanent place to live in nor to welcome His visitors. For this reason during His last supper He had to beg for a place to hold His feast with His disciples. He said to His disciples, **Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters and say to the owner of the house: The teacher says, where is the room which my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?** (Mark, 14: 13-14). If He had His own room, He would not have had to look for one. During his judgment, unknowingly, His torturers crowned Him with a royal garment as

king of the people of God. This garment was not His (Mark 15:17). Although they meant to mock Him they actually did the right thing since He is by right the king of heaven and earth. Finally after His death His mourners had even to beg for His body (Mark 15: 43) and buried Him in a tomb that incidentally had not been prepared for Him. Jesus, out of choice came into this world as a beggar, lived as a beggar depending on the good will of generous people and died a beggar owning nothing. His choice of poverty was in order to teach us the lessons of detachment and the need to share what we have with the less privileged members of society. One does not enter the kingdom of God because he/she is rich or poor but by doing the will of God.

In the early Christian community, an effort was made to curb down the problems of begging by cultivating the spirit of sharing among themselves. Everything was held in common and shared according to each one's needs (Acts 4:32). However, despite this commendable spirit of sharing, some beggars still existed among them for instance the lame man at the temple gate. **When he saw Peter and John going in, he begged them to give him something** (Acts, 3: 1-3). Since they had no money, they prayed for his healing instead so that he would once more lead a normal life.

The attitude to the beggars and the poor in general portrayed in the Bible as a whole poses a big challenge to the Church today. The Church today continues to witness to the Gospel of Christ by showing love and concern to Him through His needy people.

2.2 The Church And The Concept Of Begging

As already mentioned, in the first centuries of Christianity the needs of the poor were taken care of. According to Gregory Nyssa, **To feed and cloth the poor is to feed and**

cloth Christ²⁹. According to him, Christ comes to us through the needy beggars of our time. In this case therefore, it is the duty of all Christians to reach out to the poor. Earthly goods are for all and not for the few. When people are blessed with wealth, it is not just for themselves alone but also for the good of those around them who are needy. St. Gregory encouraged all bishops to be fathers of the poor who are the most beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Jerome formulated the famous phrase, **Follow naked the naked Christ (Nudus nudum Christum sequi)**. According to Jerome, in the nakedness of the poor, one finds the way to follow and recognize Christ. In this image, the poor are a reflection of the poor Jesus of Nazareth and Bethlehem. These great men of the Church therefore view giving to the needy as one way of giving back to God the gifts he has shared with you. It is a blessing to give but the receiver must give thanks to God.

St. Francis of Assisi who lived between 12th and 13th centuries saw Christ as the poor man despised and rejected. For him, the poor were no longer the means by which the wealthy were saved, but rather the poor were the bearers of salvation. For Francis imitation of Christ meant joining the ranks of the poor. For Francis and his followers there is great rejoicing when they live among the people of little worth who are looked down upon, among the powerless, the sick, lepers and beggars by the way side. According to him, there is more joy in giving than receiving. Marion tells us that Francis gave his trousers to the poor.(Marion, 1991, P. 436). At one occasion he gave his mantle to a sick woman (Marion, 1991, P. 438). These same sources tell us that, **For love of poverty, Francis much preferred to use alms which had been begged from door to**

²⁹ Ibid. 743.

door, rather than those given spontaneously³⁰. To lead a poor life, owning nothing was a matter of choice for many religious men and women of the time and even today. Their inner motivation was to experience the sufferings of Jesus and share in his humiliation so as to experience that inner consolation from God which can only be experienced by those who fully surrender themselves to him. Such people made a choice to live by begging just like the Buddhist Monk shown in the picture below.

Fig. 5: A Monk who survives through the kindness of those he serves (Daily Nation, 26/2001, p. 44)

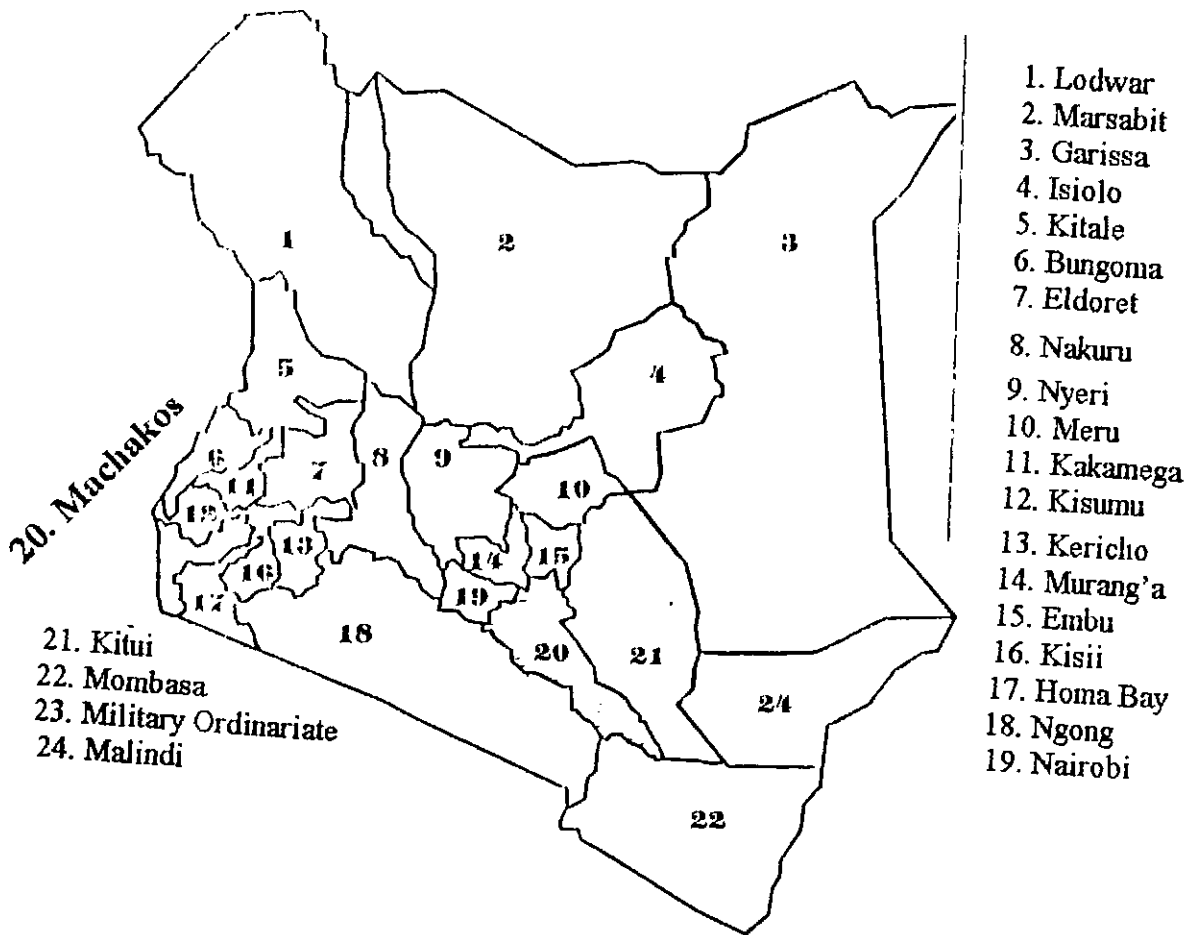


³⁰ Marion, A. Omnibus of the Sources. 4th edition. U.S.A: Franciscan Press, 1991, P. 684.

As a whole, the Church does not encourage people to become destitutes. If anything, it is the wish of the Church that all people enjoy the dignity expected of them as God's children. Actually, being in the streets is quite dehumanizing and that is why the Church makes an effort to rehabilitate such people where possible. As for people like Francis, he was allowed to lead a life of poverty as a matter of choice and for a higher goal, for the sake of the kingdom.

2.3 The Church In Kenya And Begging

Map 1: Showing the Catholic dioceses of Kenya (Source: Kenya Catholic Secretariat)



2.3.1 Possible contributions by the Church in Kenya towards begging attitudes.

Since time immemorial, Africans had their own indigenous religion. According to Baur, **Christianity arrived in Eastern Africa as early as the fourth Century**³¹. Christianity was never known in Africa until when the missionaries paved their way in. In Kenya missionaries appeared on the Kenyan coast in 1844. The first of these were Ludwig Krapf and Rebman. Earlier attempts were made by many other groups but due to unfavourable conditions such as hostility from the local people, only a few survived. Among these were some Augustinian monks who appeared on the Kenya Coast but due to hostility of the Galla people of Ethiopia this did not succeed. As early as the beginning of 1900, many missionary groups came up such as: the Holy Ghost Fathers, the Consolata fathers, Cotelengo Missionaries, and Kiltigan fathers. Among the Protestant missionaries were the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Africa Inland Missions (A.I.M).

Where as the missionaries did a commendable job in bringing the Good News on the one hand, this came with its own effects. Strayer says, **The nationalists perspective has emphasized the extent to which missionaries activity has transformed traditional patterns of African life by undermining the cultural self confidence of their converts**³². The leaders at the time failed to reaffirm the validity of traditional religious systems against European presumptions of the supervision of Christianity. Actually the missionaries saw the African traditional beliefs and practices as pagan and evil and therefore condemned them wholesome. With the onset of Christianity, there

³¹ John Baur. The Catholic Church in Kenya. Kenya: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1990, p.15.

³²Strayer, R. The making of Mission Communities in E. Africa. NewYork: Heinemann, 1998. P. 20.

came a division between religion and culture hence indirectly affecting some long practiced values among the Africans such as family rituals performed during various rites of passage. Such rituals brought people together reminding them of their responsibilities in the society. By condemning these practices as evil, the missionaries separated the Africans from that which strengthened the ties among them. This also affected the great concern for one another that existed before. Those among them who could not make ends meet, with time singled themselves out as the societal poor.

In one way or another missionaries helped create in the Africans an attitude of dependency. This was effected through the means they utilised in evangelizing the people. As a matter of fact, missionaries made use of incentives in order to attract people to the faith. For instance, schools were build in which free education was offered, hospitals in which free medicine was initially given as well as other social amenities. To the Church attendants free clothing and food was distributed in most Churches to those in need. An example of such places where medicine was offered freely was Kanzalu Parish in Machakos. As early as 1930's, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa from Ireland worked in Kanzalu Parish. Here the Sisters were well known for their generosity. They dished food, medicine and clothing freely to the people. Since they left the place in 1970's, the Little Sisters of St. Francis took over. However, it is pathetic that to date, The people of Kanzalu have never accepted them fully because they began charging for medicine and gave neither food nor clothing to them. According to the African Sisters currently working there, everyone in that place talks of Sr. Kaka, a generous woman who gave them free things.

In the building of Churches, people were not expected to give any contribution. In a way, the idea of giving free things to the people spoilt them making them see themselves as helpless and needy. They also realized that the white man had a lot money and so longed to have a share. This practice contributed greatly to the acquisition of begging attitudes among the Africans.

Today a few missionaries still continue with the distribution of food and clothing as well as catering for other social and health needs of some individuals held to be poor. At least one missionary priest from the Maryknoll Society (name withheld) is involved with meeting physical, health and other social needs of poor people living in Mukuru and Lunga Lunga slums among others. According to him, at times he suspects that wrong people are given medical assistance who would otherwise meet their own medical bills. A few other communities in Langata do the same and because of this, people who claim to be hungry move from one community to another begging for food or money. In one way or another, the Church is to blame for perpetuating this attitude to begging by continued giving instead of educating people

Further still, this researcher sees the Church in Kenya as contributing to continued begging by her silence about the situation. It is true that the Church is aware of the poor among them, but it is rare to hear the Church leaders challenge the government about street beggars. Only a few faint voices are heard. Silence implies consent and compromise.

Another way in which the Church has possibly contributed to begging attitudes even among those who should not be begging is by being a beggar herself. The Church

in Africa and hence Kenya for that matter has for a long time been dependent upon Rome, charitable organizations and generous individuals ready to help the Church. Today the flow of money that made the life of clergy comfortable and attractive to fellow young men is no more. Each parish, in all the dioceses in Kenya has to find ways and means of generating money. This has in turn made the Church into a real beggar. Everyone is writing abroad appealing for assistance to develop various projects even to put-up Churches. Many projects are turned down. The same problem is being experienced by religious brothers and sisters. In order to put up any building, one has to beg either locally or from donor agencies which is becoming a real problem. Due to lack of foreign assistance in our parishes, the Church in Kenya is working towards self reliance. This means that the Christians themselves have to be the bread winners especially for diocesan priests. Due to this, every one in the Church is realizing that they have to depend on one another

2.3. 2 What The Church Has Done In An Effort To Eradicate Begging.

Despite what has been said above, much has been done by the Church in an effort to try and eradicate the situation of poverty as a whole. To begin with, it was Pope Leo XIII who wrote the first encyclical addressing the problem of poverty which pushes people to begin begging. The document ‘Rerum Noverum(Condition of labour) was written in 1891. In this letter, he articulates the role of the Church as taking care of the poor and the needy of our time. He writes **The Church has the right to speak out on matters concerning the poor...do not treat workers as slaves, uphold the dignity of workers, let workers attend to their religious and family obligations, do not impose**

more work than a person's strength can endure, pay a just wage, do not tamper with workers' savings to give to the poor after their needs have been met³³. The Church has tried to speak and write on global basis on the situation of the poor.

Since then, many other documents have been released by the Vatican concerning the treatment of God's people for instance, "Popularum progressio" 1967 (The development of peoples) and "Sollicitudo socialialis" 1988, (Social concerns of the Church). Another regular paper by the Catholic bishops in Africa is the **New People** magazine. These documents among others challenge the Church from within and without to act according to the Gospel of Christ for the good of the people.

Here in Kenya the Church has not been silent either. The **New People** magazine says, **All along the past forty Years, the Kenya's Catholic Church has not been silent particularly since 1988. The Catholic bishops repeatedly came out with pastoral letters and press statements to give a sense of direction in various preoccupying situations**³⁴.

It is true that the Church in Kenya has done her best to educate people on their rights as citizens through civic education. Through this education, the citizens become informed of what they should do in order to contribute towards a just regime and system of leadership. This education which is carried out through the Justice and Peace commission is quite important despite the fact that only a few people receive it due to government interference. Through this education, people get to learn ways and means of avoiding opportunities that lead the to desperate situations and poverty as a whole. For example,

³³ Peter, Henriot et s/s (Eds.). Catholic Social Teaching. New York: Orbis Books, 1992, P.35.

³⁴ New People, January- February, 2002, No. 76, P. 23.

instead of someone being thrown out of their land and remaining silent, they come to know that the law of Kenya is there for them.

The Church has also tried in various ways to put up homes for the aged such as a home found in Kasarani manned by the Little Sisters of the Poor. Old people, the sick who have no one to care for them and so on find joy and consolation in such homes. In Kanzalu Machakos, though the aged are not made to live together, the Sister running the program visits them in their homes and only brings them together from time to time.

Homes for orphans are also to be found in various dioceses such as, Nyumbani Children's Home in Nairobi and Amukura Orphanage in Bungoma diocese among others. Rehabilitation centers for street boys and girls are also to be found in various places such as Ukweli Rehabilitation center here in Nairobi under the Maryknoll Fathers but run by the Little Sisters of St. Francis (see some examples of these homes ahead). In Kitui diocese, the Charity Sisters run a center for counseling prostitutes who would otherwise be in streets. Some religious institutes have now taken upon themselves the care of AIDS victims for example the Little Sisters of St. Francis and the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa. In Nakuru and Kericho dioceses, there are about fifteen small homes for the rehabilitation of the physically disabled many of whom are rejects from their families. In the case of hospitals situated near a given parish, a priest is always assigned to act as spiritual guide to the patients or a chaplain for that matter.

To sum up this chapter we can confidently say that, all people belong to God and as such, all need to experience His loving care. This care will come from us all. Although begging is not to be encouraged, it is still a Christian duty to meet the needs of the less

fortunate people of God. By performing acts of charity, the Church serves in her divine vocation among the needy people of God. Concern for the poor has been characteristic of the Church's apostolic activities through out the centuries and will still continue to be. By doing so, She cares for Christ Himself among His suffering brothers and sisters.

Fig. 6: Examples of some rehabilitation homes (Source: The Seed, Vol. 10, No. 12, 1998).



Nyumbani, is the Institute that realizes the vision of Fr. Angelo D'Agostino to care for HIV positive and abandoned orphan infants.



Shangilia Jambo is a small home

Street children are catered for in both education and basic needs. It has around one hundred and fifty children. They range from very little children up to standard six children. The children of Shangilia are innocent that they don't even understand why they are in such a situation.



Nairobi Juvenile Remand Home is a government sponsored rehabilitation center for street children. The situation there seems to be not up to date. Children really need love from the entire society. Children there feel very much neglected.

CHAPTER THREE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

3.0 Summary

The main purpose of this essay was to bring out the meaning of begging and its practice in society with specific reference to the Kenyan situation. It was also aimed at showing why begging should be one of the areas of interest. Although the term begging is a complex one, we have tried to focus our attention on the meaning that describes begging as an appeal for help from others or an appeal to public sympathy.

Chapter one was a general view of begging which dealt with the meaning of begging, forms of begging, types of beggars, factors contributing to begging, begging from the African point of view, begging in the colonial and missionary era and abuse of begging in society. During this study, it was observed that there are many beggars ranging from children to adults, men and women.

A lot of factors can be attributed to this as we have already discussed. Over and above all, the government stands to blame for much of the problem of begging. This in turn lays a big challenge to the Church whose mission is Jesus' mission of bringing hope to the hopeless and to bring the Good News of salvation to the poor. This calls for double efforts by the Church in her service to the poor of Yahweh through the pastoral workers, health workers and social workers.

Colonial rule as we have seen created a lot of loopholes by the creation of oppressive structures and conditions that only favored the white person. Africans that

worked for the white man concentrated on developing his land and no time to develop their own. They depended on the little money received from their masters. Many of these people are suffering today.

Looking at the African situation and particularly that of Kenya, we realize that, with the coming of European Colonists and white missionaries things are no longer the same. Their teaching, lifestyle and attitude towards African changed everything leading to a breakdown in social cultural values hence the beginning of individualism and struggle for personal survival.

In chapter two we came to realize that begging was a reality both in Judaism and in the time of Jesus. Seemingly, when Jesus preached and converted the first people to Christianity, these took the idea of Christian love and charity very seriously. For this reason, in the early Christian community we do not hear much of beggars because of the strong life of common sharing. Although the Church today faces the challenge of the growing number of street beggars especially, a lot of efforts to rehabilitate these have been made.

3.1 Recommendations

While it is true that the Church has done quite a lot in the past in an endeavor to eradicate begging, still much more needs to be done. Perhaps what has been done has not been done every where and so it needs to be spread out .

Brecht says about the needy **Every one should have access to food, clothing and shelter, and acquire the foundations for self determination. Bread first and then**

morals³⁵. If this is to succeed, it is the duty of the Church to ensure through words and deeds that the needy members of the society experience the consolation that each being desires. In this regard, the Church has to take extra measures in her endeavor to alleviate suffering among the poor.

Although different homes cater for the needs of different needy cases such as orphans the physically and mentally handicapped, AIDS patients and homes for the aged have been established, such programs should reach all parts of the country. Most of these facilities are to be found within towns and cities. The Church should therefore extend her mission to the poor in the rural areas too as well as increasing these same centers in towns to cope with the growing numbers.

Rehabilitation centers particularly for street Children and drug addicts need to be taken up seriously. It is the high time that the Church seriously took into account the many young people involved both in small and big crimes. Perhaps such young people dropped out of school and are now hopeless and helpless. The Church's mission to bring hope to the hopeless is of paramount importance in society.

Other hopeless cases at times are the widows and widowers and single mothers. The early Church took great care of the people especially widows in their daily needs (Acts 6 1-7). This same Church, build on this same Peter has to be a sign of Christ's hope to the people. Mathew says, **As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless like sheep without a shepherd** (Matthew, 9: 36). However, whenever help is given to the needy it should be given in a spirit of love and commitment as Speckman puts it. **Where relief is to be given at all, it**

³⁵ Wilson Francis etal (eds). Poverty Reduction. NewYork : Red Books. 2001 p.33.

is to be done communally for the membership and with discretion. The idea is to share rather than to give a 'hand out', to transform rather to provide a pair of crutches³⁶.

Priests and other agents of evangelization have a big challenge to penetrate these broken souls and to implant in them the message of the Gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit. However, in order for the Church to be more effective in her service to the people of God, she has to realize the need to co-operate with the Government since these same people also belong to the same social and political order. Warren says, of the Church **One of its principle avenues for influencing the community, one of the sources of its pride and joy, is in fact no longer under its direction, but has to look to the state for its guidance and support**³⁷. While what Warren says is very important, the Church must not forget that as much as she cooperates with the Government and listens to its advice, the Holy Spirit is still the chief voice for all actions. Discernment here is very crucial.

The Church, acting on the famous Vatican II slogan **Preferential Option for the Poor**, should ensure that the old practice of giving or dishing out food and clothing to the poor is scrutinized. The reason for this is to help people realize that, hard work is what counts for a just remuneration. When people are given things freely, they become lazy, demanding and at times sarcastic. Actually, due to the missionary practice, many old people still feel they have a right to receive money, clothing or food from a priest, brother or sister. As already said, If a parish that used to be under a European is now under an African, some people think and say that the priest is the one eating their money and so he

³⁶ Speckman.2001 P. 145.

³⁷ Warren. Max. Problem and Promise in Africa Today. London: Hodder and Stoughton. 1967 p.61.

should vacate the place. In this case, it is the duty of the Church to educate people on self reliance. At the same time, the Church is challenged to try and integrate the beggars and those living in poor conditions into the Church community, not through the use of force but by the word and deed.

The Church is the mouth piece of God and a spokesman for the people. In this regard, She has to urge governments to settle the landless and to legislate for fair and just wages. On this point, the Church is challenged to be more outspoken on issues of justice and to ensure that the poor are not oppressed. Leaders should therefore act and speak without fear although some have done so and paid for it with their dear lives. For example, the killing of Br. Larry Timmons, a Franciscan friar by administration police in Nakuru for challenging them on the issue of identity cards. Fr. Kaiser is yet another martyr of our time. On many occasions he challenged the government. Before his mysterious death on September 2000, he was following a case in which a cabinet minister allegedly raped two girls (The Voice, September, 2000, P. 6). However, this should not discourage any one, for Christ himself experienced the same. The Vatican II document says, **Since this mission continues and in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor, then the Church urged by the Spirit of Christ much walk the road Christ himself walked**³⁸.

We have already seen that, the Church is a victim of begging herself. In this regard, we recommend the raising of the standard of theological education, by making it more practical as well as trying to increase the standard of the Church's own self reliance.

³⁸ Austin. Flannery. Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Conciliar Documents. U.S.A. Costello Publishing Company. 1975 p.719.

The training of those candidates for priesthood should be done in such a way that, they are formed to acquire apostolic attitudes of tireless service to the people of God. Self denial and self sacrifice must be stressed. Some evangelizers are not apostolic minded and only concentrate on saying Mass. Those who are fully involved with the Christians get a lot of assistance from them since a labourer eats where he works. On this same point, the Vatican II document says, **completely devoted as they are to the service of God in the fulfillment of the office entrusted to them, priests are entitled to receive a just remuneration. For the labourer deserves his wages (Luke 10:7) and the Lord commanded that, “they who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel (I Corinthians 9:14)³⁹**. With this, the question of priests begging money for personal needs should not arise. In order to cater for further needs of the religious and diocesan priests, a common fund system should be established so that each is given something according to their needs. This will be in line with the example set by the early Christian community described in Acts 4: 32.

In this essay we have also mentioned that, many young people tend to copy other people’s behaviour. Some of these behaviours such as lovers walking with hands gripped together are Western by origin. These are learned through the media especially. We therefore recommend that, the media be scrutinized in all that it offers to the public. Parents should also do their best in educating their children on acceptable morals. In schools, social education and ethics should be taught to all students. The children born in towns should also be exposed to rural life whereby people are more in touch with their cultural values.

³⁹ Ibid P. 750.

3.2 General Conclusion

Through out this paper, we have discussed fundamental issues concerning begging. Our center of focus has been seeing how it has been viewed and experienced by various communities down to Kenya. In Chapter one, we discussed the meaning and various forms of begging experienced in our society. In our view of begging from the African perspective, we came to realize that, in the traditional African society, begging as we know it did not really bloom due to the outstanding virtue of hospitality backed by charity.

The fact is, times have changed and with this the old lifestyle experienced in Africa has been replaced by a modern one. With these changes, life has become more demanding and individualistic. Every one cares about their own problems meaning that those who have no ways of earning a living have to survive by the kindness of the others. This kind of a situation has driven many of our people to the streets to beg for their daily needs.

Begging should be an area of interest for it is a reality that touches the human person. For sure if it were my wish no beggar would be on the streets but this is beyond my power. It is however important that these be rehabilitated for the good of society. In this case therefore, it is the duty of every member of society to take interest on the poor with the main aim as to free them out of this devastating and dehumanizing situation. The role of the Church in her continuation of Jesus' mission among the poor is therefore to do the will of God as Jesus did and to bring hope to the hopeless (see pictures of some messengers of hope ahead).

Fig. 7: Some Messengers of Hope to the Hopeless.



Bishop John Njue, Chairman of Kenya Episcopal Conference.



Fr. Kaiser, his sister Mrs Carolita Mahoney, who vowed to fight on until justice is done about his brother's death



Messengers of hope back: Sudanese Sister Francis Nakigozi, MM; Maryknoll Sisters Joan Sauvigne, Mariyn Norris, Kiltegan Father Jim Galvin, Maryknoll Lay Missioner Susan Nagele, front: Marty Roers, Kiltegan Father Sean Cremins.



Mother Teresa

Source: Maryknoll, March, 2001.

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