

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

**THE POOR IN PROPHET ISAIAH (Is. 5:8 - 30)**  
**IN RELATION TO THE POOR IN KENYA TODAY**

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**NAIROBI**

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, the material herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All the sources have been cited in full.

Signed.....

*Quibale*

Date.....

*7<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2001*

## **DEDICATION**

To all the religious and priests who are today's prophets to open their eyes wide and preach the gospel to all people, a liberating gospel that is going to encompass all people especially the poor regardless of color, race, language etc. It is my hope and trust that we are all going to cooperate and work for the kingdom of God which is universal to uplift the standard of all those who are oppressed in one way or another by first of all seeing Jesus in them.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Prophecy is not something new in the Old Testament and in our African context e.g. Kenya. In every generation, God raises certain people to convey his message to his people. Even during our age, there are those people whom he has called and chosen for his special mission

In this paper, I am going to put my attention more on the call and the mission of the prophet Isaiah and how he reacted to different situations of his time. I would like to show clearly how he strongly defended the rights of the poor of his time. I would like also to clarify a few things that remain a mystery for most of our Christians, even Catholics, pertaining to who is a prophet and his work. I tend to think that there are so many people who do not know very well what the call to prophecy entails. These and many more are the issues which I would like to address in this essay.

In the first chapter, I would like to dwell more on the prophet Isaiah, his call and mission to the people of his time. In the second chapter I would like to say something on the prophet Isaiah and the poor of his time. In the third chapter I would like to highlight a few things about the poor in Kenya and our attitude towards them as prophets. Then, in the fourth chapter I would like to say something about who is a prophet and his work and the position of the church towards the poor. In the same chapter, I would like to show the active power of the Gospel which we are all called to preach to all people as the today's prophets.

## 1. THE PERSON OF ISAIAH - WHO IS ISAIAH

The Prophet Isaiah was a man of outstanding character who prophesied during the reign of four Kings; Uzziah (785-742), Jotham (742-735), Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-687). He was a man who was out to challenge the status quo. He never spared the perpetrators of poverty and the oppressors of the poor.

“He began his prophetic career in the year of Uzziah's death but the possibility of activity prior to that overwhelming vision of Yahweh enthroned in the temple must be left open”<sup>1</sup>.

He was married and the father of at least two children each of whom bore symbolic names. It is likely that all of Isaiah's prophetic activity was exercised in the city of Jerusalem. Although the prophet moved easily among kings and had ready access to the royal presence, there is no reason to believe that he was a member of the royal household. His concern was more inclined to the poor of the Israelites. He always condemned the oppression of the poor especially by the kings of his time as will be shown in the exegetical part. “His title of nobility rests upon his status as a man and the high office to which God had called him.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick L Moriarty., Isaiah 1-39, In the Jerome Biblical commentary, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 265

<sup>2</sup>Moriarty, F. L., Isaiah, 265

Isaiah's task was to guide Judah through one of the most critical periods of her history. With the death of Uzziah, Judah's time of prosperity and national glory had come to an end. After Uzziah's death, Isaiah witnessed the conquest of Judah by a mighty Assyrian army. Like Amos, he witnessed the threat of physical destruction, greed, hypocrisy and social injustice towards the people of Judah. Judah's king was the descendant of David to whom eternal dynasty had been promised. After the Assyrian army had swept Judah, the Judeans began to doubt the power of Yahweh, something that Isaiah could not expect.

During all these fracas, the most affected people were those who had no one to run or turn to, the poor, widows and orphans. Isaiah mostly directed his message to the poor who were being denied justice. The rulers of Judah neglected the rights of the poor. That is why Jarvis quotes from Isaiah saying that "You rulers have ravaged the vineyard and the spoils of the poor are in your houses, you crush my people and grind the face of the poor (Is. 3: 12-1)"<sup>3</sup>. This message was very fresh and clear in the mind of the prophet Isaiah. He saw and witnessed the injustice done to the weak and the oppressed and that is why he called on the oppressors to stop the practice of oppressing the poor..

Deutero-Isaiah is called by God during the time of exile in Babylon that is why his message is one of hope and consolation to his people Israel. It is different from that of Isaiah of Jerusalem who addresses his people in Jerusalem. At this time, Jerusalem had

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<sup>3</sup>Washington F. Jarvis., Prophets, Poets, Priests, And Kings: The Old Testament Story, (New York: The Seabury Press 1974). 171

been captured and destroyed and its people taken to exile in Babylon at around 587 BC. "He sees young men frustrated by hopeless existence"<sup>4</sup> (42: 6-7). He dwells more on the power of the divine word, that is why he uses the proper term *Bara* but more in the context of God's speaking. Creation is thus a personal act revealing the deepest thought of divine heart. Just as creation is worldwide, so also is Israel's missionary apostolate.<sup>5</sup>

### ***1.1 ISAIAH'S CALL AND MISSION***

The experience which compelled Isaiah to address his people came suddenly and unexpectedly, while he was worshipping God in the great Jerusalem temple. Perhaps the occasion was the annual festival in which the people celebrated Yahweh's enthronement. During this time Isaiah had a vision in which he saw God as eternal king enthroned in transcendent majesty, a God who is present among his people Israel. Isaiah was bitter towards those who were in authority because of the way they treated the poor. He usually told them to cease to do evil and learn to pursue justice (Is. 1: 17, 21, 23). He called them rebels and thieves who love bribes and itch for a gift, who do not give the orphans and the widows their rights. Money-lenders strip my people bare and usurers Lord it over

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<sup>4</sup>Carroll Stuhlmueller Deutero-Isaiah in *The Jerome Biblical commentary*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 367.

<sup>5</sup>Washington Jarvis., Prophets, 171

them."<sup>6</sup> Isaiah sees clearly the fate of the poor but at the same time sees the justice of God which is inevitable to the perpetrators of it.

During this time, the rulers seemed to be so cruel that they had no option for the poor. They looked at the poor as the weeds in society. They were looking for ways and means to eliminate them forgetting that God was always on their side. He tells them shame on you mighty toppers, valiant mixers of drink who for a bribe acquit the guilty and deny justice to those in the right, the innocent (Is. 3:12).

## ***1.2 THE CONTEXT***

Isaiah is a man who has experienced and witnessed a lot of social injustices in the people whom he was sent to. He witnessed the corruption of kings who never cared about the welfare of the others especially those poor, the neglected, the oppressed and the marginalized in the society (Is. 10: 1-4). He looked for justice and behold bloodshed for righteousness. He was to proclaim Yahweh's word to a people whose heart is insensitive, whose ears are dull, and whose eyes are blind. It was not an easy thing to do. He was in a horrible situation where he needed God's help seriously to be able to carry out this noble task which God had given him. Isaiah volunteers only to receive a commission so unbearable that he cries out, asking how long will it go on? But the answer was only to proclaim the word of God to a people who were dull, insensitive and blind. The rich were insensitive to the poor. Whenever he preached Yahweh's message, it landed on deaf ears.

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<sup>6</sup>Bernard W. Anderson., The Living World Of The Old Testament, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1975P).

Isaiah is called by God to proclaim his message to a people who are self-sufficient and complacent, whose God is silver and gold, horses and chariots, fortified cities and stately ships that sail to far-away places, a people who are so full of themselves that they have no room for the poor. In such a situation, the poor had no one to turn to nor a forum to air their views. Each and every one was trying to be on his or her own. The voiceless were left alone probably for God to intervene for them. Isaiah came in to speak on their behalf saying that, 'there will be a severe doom from which a "stump" will remain and a new life will begin in a remnant of the people. The remnant which Isaiah mentions here refers to those who heeded the word of the Lord, those who kept the covenant promises. This may also refer to the poor of Yahweh who have depended on the Lord up to the end and who will be saved at the end of the day, those who have been deprived of everything for the sake the Lord. That is why he exclaims "your very rulers are rebels, confederate with thieves, every man of them loves a bribe and itch for a gift, they do not give the poor his rights and the widows never come before them".<sup>7</sup>

Isaiah calls the poor his people for when they will cry to God he will answer them. The poor are not weeds as some people would call them but they are God's people whom he delights in but we need to have strong faith in order to see this reality in our midst, for many have eyes but never see this reality in their midst. We may have everything in this world but if we have no option for the poor, everything will be watered

down or will have no meaning. So it is our duty and obligation to see to it in whichever context, that the poor are taken care of and their rights are safeguarded. To be able to see this reality clearly, we need to pray hard for the conversion of the world and its people. It is a reality which needs a careful attention and which many people never dare to venture into, it due to its sensitivity, for it is a very sensitive and a challenge to many people. Therefore, we need the example of the prophet Isaiah to come in the open and address it strongly and try to give strategies and means on how to go about it as today's prophets.

#### ***1.4 ISAIAH'S ADVOCACY***

As with Amos, the day of Yahweh will not be light, but darkness, a day of judgment against all symbols of human pride and self-sufficiency, against silver and gold, horses and chariots, fortified cities and stately ships that sail to faraway places (2:6-21).

Those cultural treasures are not bad in themselves but when they are "lifted up" like the proud cedars of Lebanon people begin to adore them and to place their trust in them and they become objects of idolatry. As Jarvis quotes, Isaiah repeatedly prophesied that, the time will come when people will cast their idols to the moles and the bats and the proud man shall be humbled, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day of the Lord (Is. 2: 17ff).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Washington F. Jarvis., Prophets, 171

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2. PROPHET ISAIAH AND THE POOR**

The prophet Isaiah looks at poverty from two perspectives;

1. materially poor.
2. spiritually poor.

#### **2.1.1 MATERIALLY POOR.**

According to Isaiah, these are people who have been made handicapped by society, by being denied their rights. They are those people who are seen as misfits in the society due to lack of economic stability, those who have nothing to offer or contribute in the society. Like today in Kenyan society, most of these die of hunger, famine, diseases and such like calamities because they have no one to defend them and act for them before the higher authority. They become the objects of exploitation. They are the ones who suffer the most in the times of war especially the orphans and widows. Culture is also an important consideration in relation to poverty in Judah. Those who are poor are put aside as objects of derision. They are regarded as nothing for their economic contribution is minimal.

#### **2.1.2 SPIRITUALLY POOR.**

In this dimension, Isaiah sees the poor as those people who kept the covenant promise faithfully that is why we find one of his children is called "the remnant shall

return" but those who have been faithful up to the end shall be spared and shall endure for ever. To be spiritually poor means to be faithful to Yahweh and to be detached from the goods of this world and to cling to Yahweh alone. This poverty does not mean that one is not materially rich but that one is ready to share what she or he has with others . It is understood as a commitment to Yahweh as demanded by the covenant promises.

## 2.2 EXEGESIS OF (Is. 5: 8-30)

In Is. 5:8-30, we have the *six* "woes" against the corruption of 8th Century, Judah and its decadent aristocracy.<sup>9</sup> Building up large holdings by grabbing the property of others was a fairly common abuse. The concentration of property in the hands of a few (*latifundism*) was contrary to the old Israelite tradition of small holdings.

The Naboth incident (1 Kings 21) was probably still fresh in the mind of the people. The land grabbers will get solitude, but it will be that of the wasteland. It is impossible to give modern equivalents for these weights. For similar charge against drunkards (Is. 28:1,7-8). That God is actively engaged in history and dominates human events is a basic theme in the theology of the prophets. The men of Judah were too full to give a thought to God.

"*Because they do not understand:*" They have no 'knowledge' (*da`at*) of God, i.e. no moral integrity or willingness to practice traditional Hebrew morality as a response to God's gift of the covenant. Hosea mentions this "*knowledge*" of God in 4:1 and 6:6.

These lines may be out of context. It has been suggested that they belong to the oracle in 2:6-22. The “*nether world*” is pictured as a great monster about to devour men. This monster is compared by the exegete to Assyrians who will come to invade Judah if they do not repent and turn to Yahweh. Isaiah declares, “*woe to those who drag iniquity with ewerores and sin with a calf-halter,*”<sup>10</sup> without abiding to God's bidding.

The concentration of property in the hands of the few was a common phenomenon in Judah something which is very common today in our African countries especially in Kenya. An evil which is destroying unity among our countries and our people. The people of Judah used to eat and drink with no regard for the poor, simply because they lacked knowledge of God. They had forgotten the words of Yahweh, that no poor should be among them. They had forgotten what God had said to them in Egypt. God never creates someone miserable. The poor are there because they are made like that by the unjust and corrupt social structures which breed bribery. As we find in Judah at this time, the poor are there because of greedy monsters who are there to grab the wealth of the nation without care and concern for their fellow brothers and sisters who are in need and who want to make ends meet too.

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<sup>9</sup>Frederick L. Moriarty., Isaiah. 269

<sup>10</sup>Frederick L. Moriarty., Isaiah. 269

### 2.3 *THEOLOGY OF ISAIAH*

Prophet Isaiah in his theology, sees Yahweh as the holy one of Israel, a conviction that was brought home to Isaiah with overwhelming force in his inaugural vision. Concomitant with this profound sense of the divine holiness was an intense awareness of his own sinfulness and that of his people. Sin in any form could not be tolerated in his holy presence. "No one in the Old Testament has spoken out more forthrightly than Isaiah in his denunciation of Judah's pride, self-indulgence and callous injustice toward the poor"<sup>11</sup>.

He was convinced that Yahweh was about to strike down the nation in judgment. In fact this destruction was already close at hand in the form of the Assyrian armies. The cosmic character of the judgment should not be overlooked. Not only would the land of Palestine be laid waste but all nature would be involved; the sin of man affected the whole universe which would therefore experience the wrath of divine judgment, yet Judah was still his people and Jerusalem was the holy city whose foundation was sure. Again and again Isaiah returns to the idea that Zion has been chosen by Yahweh the living God, as the place where he dwells and reveals himself. For this reason Isaiah never believed that the nation would be utterly destroyed and the divine promises canceled out. He stresses that there would be a remnant cleansed in the fire of judgment, inheritors of the promises made to David. Isaiah's doctrine of the remnant gives an optimism to his work without

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<sup>11</sup>Frederick L. Moriarty., *Isaiah*, 266

clouding his vision of the inevitable judgment against wickedness and corruption of that time. Safeguarding the doctrine of the remnant was Isaiah's faith in the divine control of history. Even in her greatest hour of trial with Sennacherib encamped under her walls, Jerusalem was promised deliverance if only she would place her trust in God. Such an attitude could later be perverted into a crass orthodoxy of Jerusalem's absolute inviolability but this was only a distortion of Isaiah's faith that coupled salvation with repentance and conversion to Yahweh. He knew that Yahweh would at one time raise up a king from David's line who would come to liberate the poor from all sorts of oppressions, whose rule of peace and justice would replace the faithless and vacillating service of the kings who had ruled from David's throne. "In this royal messianic figure, Israel's hope took on a permanent form that our faith tells us was fulfilled many centuries later when God sent his only son to establish his reign of peace and justice over the entire world."<sup>12</sup> Prophet Isaiah wants to give hope to the people of his time which is a challenge to us today as prophets. It is good to give hope and consolation to the poor and the oppressed where possible.

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<sup>12</sup>Frederick L. Moriarty., Isaiah, 266

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. THE POOR IN KENYA

In this third chapter, I would like to dwell more on the materially poor and our mission as prophets towards them. First of all before I identify who are the poor in Kenya, I would like to clarify what is meant by the term poverty in this third chapter because here it might sound as a foreign word .

In the secular world, the term poverty denotes a state of deprivation or lack of adequate basic necessities for example “hunger, powerlessness, violation of dignity, social isolation, resilience resourcefulness, solidarity, state corruption, rudeness of service providers and gender inequity.”<sup>13</sup> The worst of these is to deprive somebody of his/her basic needs e.g. food, shelter, medical care, and clothing. Poverty is not something to be admired by anybody or wished on others . One of the worst thing a Kenyan will not admire in his or her life is to be poor, for those who have experienced poverty, say that it is better to die than to be poor.

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<sup>13</sup>Deepa Narayan., Voices of the poor: can anyone hear us?, (New York: Oxford University Press. 2000). 3.

The poor people suffer physical pain that comes with too little food and long hours of work an emotional pain stemming from the daily humiliation of dependency and lack of power. The poor also suffer from moral pain being forced to make choices such as whether to use limited funds to save the life of an ill family member or to use those same funds to feed their children. One thing we should put into consideration is that, “the poor are not lazy stupid or corrupt.”<sup>14</sup> It is due to social structures which fail to provide for the large number of people in the country. „This may be also as a result of poor management of the economy and poor leadership with no transparency in the economy dealings.

### **3.1 WHO ARE THE POOR IN KENYA TODAY?**

In Kenya today we have different kinds of poor people, “the dependent poor the resourceless poor, the temporary poor, the working and God’s poor, each of whom have different priorities; but the poor in this case emerge from poor people’s experience in many different places in the country.”<sup>15</sup> These are the people who have been marginalized by society. They are materially poor. They live in unstable houses (huts) often made with mud. They have no television or radio to get to know what is happening locally and internationally. One day I visited a poor elderly woman, living in Kibera slum, just to know their means of survival there but I was really surprised at how she lived. She told me, *“Brother even sometimes we go several nights without food; Life here is very hard;*

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<sup>14</sup>Deepa Narayan., Voices of The Poor, 14

*We are not able to save money for future schooling of our children for we live from hand to mouth; Sometimes we go hungry without food*<sup>16</sup>. These people are really miserable and they include slum dwellers, street children, victims of ethnic clashes, those retrenched from civil service, the widows, landless and many more who are in the same pathetic situation.

In fact “a large population live in slum conditions unfit for human habitation”.<sup>17</sup> It is an alarming fact that half of Kenyans live below the poverty line. The government is failing to sustain its people. Indeed Kenyans are literally hungry as the economy has failed, especially in the last few years, to meet the basic needs of a large proportion of Kenyans. “Over 20% of the 11 million labor force is openly unemployed. While 500,000 people join the labor market every year, the economy is only able to create about 100,000 new jobs”.<sup>18</sup> All of these conditions make people’s lives miserable. “Poverty from this perspective would mean oppression and dependence in social terms and injustice and social sin in ethical terms. Within the Kenyan context the poor are classified as landless and the displaced, the handicapped, female-headed houses, unskilled and semi skilled casual laborers, street families and children, beggars, the rural peasants, slum dwellers both in rural and urban settings.

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<sup>15</sup>Deepa Narayan., Voices of The Poor, 3

<sup>16</sup>Lucy Mwikali., (60) who resides at Kibera slum interviewed by Gabriel Mbale.

<sup>17</sup>A speech on lenten campaign on the present economic situation in kenya, march, 2000, by Dr. Gerishon K. Ikiara. a lecturer in Nairobi University.

<sup>18</sup>A speech on Lenten campaign on the present economic situation in Kenya by Dr. Ikiara a lectuer in Nairobi University.

Most of the people living in Kenya are poor and destitute. They live in very poor conditions. The poor have been marginalized and pushed aside to where they cannot participate in national programs. The gap between the poor and the rich is deeply pronounced here in Kenya. The government has tried in different ways to inflict the poor with all sorts of pain e.g. prices of items have gone very high, it is not easy to obtain a piece of land, education and health facilities are not easy to get to.

### **3.2 THE CAUSES OF POVERTY IN KENYA**

#### **3.2.1 CORRUPTION AND POOR GOVERNANCE**

In Kenya, corruption and poor governance is identified by many as the root cause of poverty and the continual widening gap between the rich and the poor. "The study carried out by the Institute of economic Affairs show the famous Goldenberg scam that cost Kenya tax-payers more than US\$ 200 million" <sup>19</sup>

A study carried out by a Berlin based international anti-corruption lobby called *Transparency International* stated that Kenya is ranked as the third most corrupt country after Pakistan and Nigeria. Corruption can be defined as "actions that foster, aid or abet the improper use of or selfish exercise of power and influence attached to public or any

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<sup>19</sup>R. Shaw & G.Wamuyu, (eds.) Our problems, our solutions: An economic affair, (Nairobi: Orbis Books 1998), 47

other office for the acquisition of various rights and interests to the detriment of other potential beneficiaries".<sup>20</sup>

These three forms of corruption can be identified in Kenya namely, "*petty, grant and looting corruption*."<sup>21</sup> By *petty corruption*, I mean the payment of small amount of money or other gifts commonly known as T.K.K. or *Toa kitu kidogo*, so as to speed up any service to be rendered to you. In Kenya this kind of corruption is very common especially in every office you enter such that many consider it as normal and perpetuate it. *Grant corruption*. This one is common among the top government officials or senior personnel in the business and private sectors. It involves bribing someone with a huge amount of money to facilitate a favorable review of a tender application or for a supply contract or any other public services e.g. bribing custom officials with US\$ 90,000 to evade paying tax on imported goods. *Looting corruption* is the third and the most dangerous form of corruption as it destroys the economy of the country. It has a very serious micro-economic implication as the government pays for goods that are never delivered causing inflation. It is a unique and complex form of corruption, in that it takes place only with the knowledge and the approval of the Head of State. Its culprits always invest the money stolen in foreign banks, e.g. Swiss banks to guarantee security and this security in case of any national fracas. These culprits may escape with the money without much difficulty.

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<sup>20</sup>R. Shaw & G. Wamuyu, (eds.) Our Problems, Our Solutions, 47

<sup>21</sup>R. Shaw & G. Wamuyu.. (eds.) Our Problems, Our Solutions, 23

### 3.2.2 POOR GOVERNANCE

In fact Kenyans are literally hungry today as the economy has failed especially in the last few years to meet the basic needs of our people. The government on the economic review process seems to be reluctant and as a result of this, the poor continue to suffer more and more. The poor continue to be poorer and rich continue to be richer. In Kenya, we need a sound macro-economic management which is an essential prerequisite to growth of the human person. It needs to be done in conjunction with governance which upholds the rule of law and justice that checks corruption and makes infrastructure and productive sectors more efficient. This is where the budget and its proposals face severe limitations.

"To re-stabilize the economy of this country, the government needs to consider so many sectors which are deteriorating,"<sup>22</sup>smallholder farmers especially the agricultural sector which holds a half of national economic activity. If all this is done, poverty in Kenya will be highly reduced. The economy we have in Kenya has no concern for the poor. It has no clear focus on anti-poverty programs. The jua kali sector is so much paralyzed. We depend so much on foreign resources 80-90% of development projects funded by donors. 16% of the budgeted resources go now to service internal and external debts.

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<sup>22</sup>Robert Shaw., "Do not expect much too soon," Daily Nation, (Nairobi: 18th, June 2000), 5

Education plays a cardinal role in the life of an individual. According to the National Poverty Eradication Plan in Kenya, it is clearly articulated that, “a critical social service in the development of the skills and human capital of low income group is through education.”<sup>23</sup> It is sad to realize that the burden of cost sharing is denying a number of poor children their inalienable right to education. Most of the poor parents are withdrawing their children from school when faced with increased financial strains on the income and expenditure of households, while a number of other children withdraw from school so as help their parents in order to cater for their young brothers and sisters through casual labor. In this relation, facts reveal that completion rate for primary school, has always remained less than 50% despite the rising rate of enrollment; for instance 43.2% of girls and 65.1% of boys enrolled in standard one in 1989 completed standard eight in 1996.

The two major setbacks facing education system in Kenya are the cost and relevance of education to the day-to-day life of the common Kenyan. As clarified above, cost sharing is a burden for the low income and marginalized groups. With lack of good governance, planners and investors in the education sector are disoriented and lack vision to plan ahead. According to the National Development Plan, the national objective is to achieve industrialization by the year 2020 but the problem is, how would this objective be reached if the education system lacks this vision of National target in the education

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<sup>23</sup>Government of Kenya, Poverty Eradication Plan, 39

system?. The government should know that one of the contributing factors to national development and betterment of all Kenyans is access to education. The government should see to it that all get access to education, both rich and poor alike for the well being and the peace of the whole nation. There should be no inequality when it comes to education. All should get access to it if possible.

### **3.2.3 GLOBALIZATION**

Today due to accessibility of media such as computer, television and radio, the world has become a small village. All people are living together in a sort of a network. But in this kind of a network, there are some countries which want to exercise their superiority or power over others by manipulating or taking an advantage over their poverty. This kind of practice or tendency, is associated with some developed countries like U.S.A, Russia who want to take the advantage of poor socio-economic political situations of developing countries like Kenya, Uganda etc. so as to make them more and more poor. What these countries do is that when a country like Kenya has a national crisis like famine or poor infrastructure, they borrow money through international banks like World Bank or IMF. To pay it back, it costs a country great deal because they may pay double the amount given and as a result the country ends up being poorer. This is one of the main reason why the economies of the developing countries like Kenya are always depreciating.

The problem with this money is that once it is given, most of it goes to the pockets of a few top individuals. Therefore it does not achieve its intended goal. Those who

suffer mostly are the poor because to pay for it, the government may decide that the prices of items should go up. The poor man in the village, cannot afford these items e.g. one kilo of sugar costing 50/=. How will the poor people be able to afford this and yet he/she is not working?. "In this case the poor have been exposed to severe socio-economic risk including worsening poverty"<sup>24</sup>.

### 3.2.4 LACK OF SELF-HELP PROJECTS

In Kenya, because the government does not seem to care about its people, as leaders of the Church, we need to invite NGOs and donor agencies to come to the aid of these people and see what they can do to try and initiate projects to eradicate poverty from its grass roots." From a research I have done in Matuu location, I found that the place is very fertile with plenty of rivers and valleys which can be used to irrigate the whole area and eradicate its poverty once and for all"<sup>25</sup>. The place needs someone with a vision to come and conscientise people on how to eradicate this poverty by calling seminars and request for NGOs, benefactor and donor agencies to come and assist them, because most of the leaders elected by the people are out to manipulate them and get away with the money they contribute for the projects. That is why we need leaders who have vision and educated people to run these projects once started, who are transparent and God fearing people. By so doing we shall be fighting poverty from its grass root level, and I am sure

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<sup>24</sup>(*Government of Kenya, National Development Plan 1997-2001*, (Nairobi: Government Press, 1996), p. 153

<sup>25</sup>Matuu is a location in Machakos district where I met a group of women who want to form an association to alleviate poverty to some degree by starting a small chicken project.

within a short time there will be a big change of development within the area and whole country at large.

### 3.2.5 LOW INCOME

As pastors of the Church, we cannot just sit and watch when corruption and many other bad things happen to our country and our people. We are the conscience of people. That is why we are privileged to have education so as to help people see the reality of life. People need to be educated to know their rights and duties in the society. People of Kenya, especially the poor, need to be educated to come to know what is happening in their country. Kenya is classified as the third most corrupt country in Africa. In Kenya most of the workers get very low salaries. The most affected people are the poor who have very little purchasing power and therefore they are peripheral to the structured market economy with which so much development thinking and activity is concerned.

Money alone cannot be used to demonstrate demand. “The proper understanding of the demand of the poor requires a sound assessment of institutional forces lying outside the formal market place”<sup>26</sup>e.g. parental attitude regarding schooling. The number of children parents want and their predisposition to planning for this number, the importance of rural water sanitation and the commitment to apply communal self-help to them. These are all illustrative of demand related instructional issues.

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<sup>26</sup>Lawrence Submen., Institutional Dimension of Poverty Reduction PRE-redissemination Centre, (New York: World Bank, 1990), p. 8

### 3.2.6 LEARNING PROCESS

In 1990, a combined team of professionals from both Kenya and Tanzania spent one month living in villages in four regions representing differing degrees of primary school attendance which averaged 15% for rural areas of the country.

This assessment found that the demand for education among rural parents was so low because they felt the costs of their children attending school outweighed the benefits obtained from studying in schools and so "the school is not seen as gateway to employment in the public sector"<sup>27</sup> but something like wastage of parents' money.

### 3.2.7 POOR CONDITIONS OF ROADS

In a research which I carried in Matuu division, Machakos district, I found that there are conditions which prevent many people from getting their produce to market. "Most of these people sell their produce to middlemen who can afford vehicles and who pocket a half of the profit"<sup>28</sup>. Therefore in this case transportation is the most important thing to these poor farmers who lose a lot of money through merciless middlemen who are out there to exploit them after their hard labor of farming.

Due to the "problem of industrialization, technological advancement, poverty becomes quite relative in proportional relation to the standard of living which is variable

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<sup>27</sup>Gerry Rodgers., Poverty and Population Approaches and Evidence, (Geneva ILO: inter national labour organisation, 1994), p. 11

<sup>28</sup>Joseph Mutua, (70) Matuu location interviewed by Gabriel Mbale.

from one nation to another.<sup>29</sup> Hence, someone who is considered poor in a given country like Kenya, might be considered of average standards if judged by the living standards of another country. Therefore, to define poverty, all socio-economic determinants must be taken into consideration. Poverty may be understood by many as complete lack of the most basic needs such as water, food, shelter, clothing, education and lack of adequate ways and means to fulfill these basic needs.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional, variable concept. It is not only determined by earnings such as one's salary scale but it also includes the access to health, education opportunities, cultural identity, active participation in social set-ups such as governance of society as well as feeling of respect and dignity as a human being. Poverty is currently seen by many as social structural and massive problem of our world as witnessed by the fact that a majority of the world population are poor.

#### **4. THE ROLE OF THE PROPHET IN OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY.**

In this chapter, I would like to identify who is a prophet and whom can we term as prophets today in Kenya . I would like also to identify the work/mission of prophets and the challenges faced by the prophets today as they defend the rights of the poor. Lastly I

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<sup>29</sup>Lawrence Submen., Institutional Dimension of Poverty., 8

would like to offer some solutions on how to eradicate poverty followed by a general conclusion.

#### **4.1 WHO ARE THE PROPHETS.**

I tend to think that many prophets today do not know their work as prophets. That is why in this fourth chapter I would like to show clearly who a prophet is. To be a prophet is not a sweet job whereby one has to sit down and enjoy his or her *Nyama* (*Choma*, it is a job that goes with a lot of sacrifice. A prophet is a messenger, one who is sent by God for a particular/special mission. This kind of prophecy is not confined only to the Old and New Testaments but something found in all religions everywhere in different cultures. A prophet does not tell about the future as some people may think but is someone who challenges the situation here and now for a new change or re-creation. A prophet is the one who tells about not his will but the will of the one who sent him. The prophets are not apocalyptic but people who after they have looked at, and analyzed the situation and now look for ways and means to improve it. They are the defenders and conscience of people. Their message is to save those who, after hearing it, respond to it faithfully. A prophet will proclaim God's message fearlessly and publicly for all to receive it or reject it. Whenever the status quo is not in favor of the common interest of all the people and especially the poor, he challenges it. A prophet is the carrier of God's word and passes this word faithfully to other people. A prophet's life belongs entirely to God. He is prayerful, devotional and dedicated to God's service for all his life. Having been consumed by the word of God like the prophet Isaiah, he goes out to proclaim the year of favor to all God's people.

Having seen who is a prophet, I would like to identify who are the prophets in Kenya and what is their mission as pertains to the people of Kenya especially the poor, refugees, marginalized, the homeless, the retrenched, the hungry, orphans, widows etc. For the word of God to be able to sink into ears, hearts and lives of people, we must not reject or neglect these people. The real prophet after having been consumed by the fire of the word of God, and having experienced the presence of God in it, should walk hand in hand with these people.

#### ***4.2 WHO ARE THE PROPHETS IN KENYA TODAY?***

Today as in the times of the prophet Isaiah, we have people whom we can call prophets. These include those people who are consecrated and set apart for God's special mission in the Church of Christ. They are people who have felt and experienced God's consuming power calling them to go and liberate his people from different yokes of slavery just like Moses and the rest of the prophets of the Old Testament. They are to do God's work wherever they are called to and to preach the good news to all people for the salvation of all. They are called to be the conscience of people in all aspects discriminating against no one in their ministry. They are to prove to the world that they are called for God's service by their way of living and by trying to be the light of the world leading all people in the right direction in truth and love.

#### ***4.3 THEIR MISSION/WORK IN KENYA***

These people are called to be at the center of the people especially the poor to be identified with the poor so as to be able to change their pathetic situation of

marginalization and oppressive structures. God has chosen them to evangelize the world and contextualize their theology to fit in the shoes of the people especially the poor who have no one to listen or attend to. Theology should not be something abstract but something down to earth, which is going to change the lives of people for better.<sup>30</sup> To be able to come to a new and full understanding of the gospel values, we need to have that spirit of sharing our goods with others especially the poor and the marginalized in the society. Not until then, shall we shall be able to say that we have grasped the message of our Lord Jesus. As prophets and missionaries our response in must be that one of preferential option for the poor. As Christians, the clergy and the religious, we should live to appreciate the poor, learn from them and try to look for ways and means to improve their style of life. Without doing this, the gospel will remain abstract and meaningless to them with no effect on their lives.

#### **4.4 CHURCH IN KENYA**

Christianity must be understood as holistic religion. Christianity is not only what one does on Sunday or what he/she does in his/her own private devotional life. Our Christianity must permeate every part of our lives and must penetrate every part of society. One of the greatest challenges to the Kenya Church in the twenty first-century is to recognize and implement this truth. The following are some of the most important principles that must be developed and inculcated into the society.

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<sup>30</sup>Fr. Patrick Ryan., Megatrends affecting the Church and its mission, 7

#### 4.4.1 EMPHASIS ON JUSTICE

One of the fundamental concepts of both Christianity and Judaism is the justice of God. also the psalmist declared that, the Lord works for righteousness and justice for all the oppressed (Ps. 103: 6). The apostle Paul declared, "now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. Any society can not be healthy without justice. a society will not be just unless justice is embedded in its core values."<sup>31</sup>

The only way that truth can become a core part of the society is through its religion. So the Church in Kenya must rise to the challenge of preaching, teaching and practicing justice, so that the poor may be liberated from the yoke of socio- economic, political oppression. So the church is called to resist all forms of injustices<sup>32</sup> in society including giving or receiving bribes of money; positions, material possessions, sexual favors or intangible assets.

#### 4.4.2 RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Every human being deserves respect because if we read from Genesis 1:26 we learn that God said, "let us make humankind in our own image" which implies that man is made in the likeness of God and hence man is entitled to certain rights often called human

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<sup>31</sup>Danny McCain, "The Church in Africa in the twenty first century: Characteristics, challenges and opporunities, World vision International". AJET, Vol 19 (Nairobi: Kenya ,2000), 125

<sup>32</sup>Danny McCain., The Church in Africa. 125

rights. One of the clearest teachings and examples of Jesus was related to compassion for the poor. It must be viewed as a fundamental responsibility of every culture to take care of its weak and needy members. This aspect must be taught and inculcated to the minds of young people to come to know that it is wrong to deprive of others of their property. The church should provide some assistance to those who are most needy in society. Christians should be involved in identifying the causes of poverty and address them openly, without fear to all people. "God has not called all Christians to be rich. However he has called us to help meet the needs of the poor."<sup>33</sup> Helping the needy to acquire adequate housing not just a governmental responsibility but a responsibility of the church. Providing good water for a community is another important application of taking care of the poor and needy. Providing job training and encouraging Christian businessmen so that they can provide honorable jobs for people is a part of our Christian responsibility.

The church is continuously present in the history of the Church as a sign of the community of believers striving everyday to attain the kingdom." The church is subordinate to the kingdom and so it is eccentric, directing it's mission outside and beyond herself to the kingdom and to the world." It is a sign of hope to the people especially the poor, rejected, marginalized and oppressed to find meaning in life through the church. Juan Segundo has lucidly expressed what is true in this analysis, That the Church is a sacramental community with a mission among all people and not a closed

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<sup>33</sup>Danny McCain., The Church in Africa. 127

circle in which the Christian lives out his/her faith and ensures personal salvation.<sup>34</sup> It has also the right to instruct the world about the kingdom reflecting on the existing situations of the poor, oppressed and marginalized.

This is why Dussel remarks that "if there were no poor, then either we would be already in the kingdom, not yet or we would be in salvation kingdom of this world."<sup>35</sup> The poor of this world are the pillar of the kingdom of God and this is the central point in Christ's proclamation which should also be the proclamation of the Church. The Church would lose its transcendental ability if it is not critical of the present situations and challenges and its interest will be an earthly thing.

#### **4.4.3 THE CHURCH AND THE POOR**

The Church as the instrument of Gods kingdom in the world is to be seen as the gift revealed from Christ to proclaim the kingdom of God to the poor and oppressed and as the Kingdom of God which has already begun in history.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Juan Luis Segundo., The Community Called The Church, (New York:Orbis Books, 1990), 90-92

<sup>35</sup>Dussel., International Review of Missions, Vol. LXVIII, No. 270, April 1979, 115

<sup>36</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation: History of Liberation Political and Salvation. (New york: Orbis Books, 1973), 11

This kingdom urges the church to move forward constantly, for it has already begun to become a reality but has not clearly attained its full form. "The existing gap between the rich and the poor needs everybody's attention."<sup>37</sup> The Church has to stand strongly in this point.

The church proclaims the kingdom to the poor and to the world and therefore the church, as the sacrament of the kingdom, enables us to think within the horizon of the salvific world of Jesus which encompasses all the people. The world essentially depends on the church to receive the Good News. The church explicitly conscious of the kingdom and functioning as the sign, proclaims the kingdom of God to the world.

The church reveres the world from the anonymity enabling it to know the ultimate meaning of the historical future. The Christian church should not depend on generous foundations to help the poor for it has the mandate from Christ himself to share its goods with the poor "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20.55). This quotation from Acts relates very well to the sharing of the material goods with the needy (poor). The Apostle Paul does not seem to use the means that are commonly used today to motivate the Ephesians elders to share their material wealth with those in need. The church is called to be in the forefront in advocating and serving the poor and those

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<sup>37</sup>A pastoral Letter of Catholic Bishops of Kenya on "The Present Situation of Our Country" (Nairobi, 5th July, June 1990), 9

less privileged; the church ought to share the material goods with those in need " (Act 2: 44, 4: 32).

The church as a community of believers with Christ as its head, has this mandate to share its goods with the poor as we find in the first believers of the first century. The church should also work hand in hand with the poor and always supporting them where it is necessary (Lk. 6: 38) by sharing possessions with those in need of such help. This echoes the spirit of sharing where possessions and goods were sold freely to assume here for that ,for the Jerusalem church to continue sharing ,someone must be ready to work to keep this flow, so we can deduce that from the beginning the church has been supporting the poor in their needs. So the same must be echoed by our churches today. The church must see to it that the poor are not marginalized or rejected by society. It should look for good strategies on how to help them. So the church as the conscience of people has this right to see to it that the poor are taken care of like any other human beings, for they belong to the community of Christ per se. The parable of the rich host (Lk. 14: 12) teaches that he never shared his wealth among all including the poor of the community (Lk. 14: 13). This is the danger of not sharing one's wealth with the poor of the community, a practice which was very common in the Near East tradition and in the Early Church. In the parable of the rich man and the poor man Lazarus, Abraham gives the reason of the rich man being in the torment because of having received plenty while on earth. The rich find it very hard to share with the those in need, (Lk. 18: 23) and Jesus tells them that it is hard for them to enter the kingdom of heaven perhaps due to the false security of wealth they have acquired through their wicked ways. There are other few examples of the rich

people who like Zacchaeus generously and willingly managed to share their riches with the poor (Lk.19: 2ff).

#### **4.5 JESUS' TEACHING ON PROPERTY AND THE POOR**

Jesus teaching on property and poor must have had great influence on the primitive church if we consider the way they were behaving towards the poor. In Luke's gospel the birth of Jesus was introduced by a strong note of liberation of the poor and chastising of the rich (the song of Mary) introduces the liberation for the poor, thus his ministry was inaugurated by a declaration of the release of the oppressed and the blind. Jesus reads passage from Isaiah which read, "the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim liberty and the release of the captives and to proclaim the favorable year for the Lord," (Lk. 4:18).

We find the interest in the poor continued in the preaching of the Jesus, where the poor are praised and the rich are rebuked so, Jesus attitude seems to have been ambivalent towards the rich and praise worthy towards the poor. In one occasion Jesus was confronted by the need of a large crowd of five thousand. This event must have been very significant to have appeared in all the four Gospels, despite some slight differences of presentation of the event they all agree on the main part of the story. Luke puts it very clearly in (Lk. 9:10,17), it was a large crowd so overwhelming that the disciples were short of words when their Lord suggested they feed it. The crowd was in a desolate place, meaning there were no shops to buy food. But Jesus commanded his disciples to give

the crowd something to eat. There were only five loaves and two fish meaning very little food for such a crowd. But when it came to feeding them, there was organization, all ate and were satisfied. There were twelve baskets of what remained.

From this Lucan text we can find that Jesus had compassion for all the people. This was a very good gesture of godly community which Jesus performed. A gesture of community or social sharing whereby everyone in the gathering will feel at home as part and parcel of the community. It is a practice which should trigger our minds to reverse our way of thinking and consider all the people as equal in the eyes of God. In the same text the disciples had suggested for Jesus to send the crowd away to buy food in the nearby villages. But instead Jesus challenged them to provide something for the crowd. Jesus out of his loving mercy and kindness took the little food (two fish and five loaves) blessed and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the crowd. Jesus demands unconditional love from us when it comes to giving or distributing anything for the good of the community may it be clothes food or any other alms. We should give generously and wholeheartedly for all to be satisfied. This is not only work for clergy alone but a work for all Christians who are looking for eschatological union with God here and hereafter. All are called to give whether rich or poor. What is important is the attitude of the giver as it is portrayed by the rich and the poor widow (Lk. 21: 1ff)

As Christians we should try not to exploit the poor but instead try to relieve their pain by trying to improve their ways of living and showing concern for them through education and projects. By so doing they will not feel rejected people, but people who are part of the society. In fact our God is so good, he does not tell us to give what we do

not have (2 Cor. 8:12). The Christians in Antioch gave only what they could afford for the relief of the poor believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29). This is a big challenge to the church in Kenya today and in Africa. We need to realize our Christian value as well as our Christian way of life, and try to reverse our way of thinking. We should, ask ourselves, are we really Christians? What do we do as a Christian for the well being of our brothers and sisters in need? What am I called to do and where am I heading to? What is my ultimate goal after this life here on earth? Is it to achieve all wealth of this world and lose the kingdom of God or use whatever God has given well for all the people. My dear people let us re-think and share commonly whatever wealth God has bestowed on us for the well-being of the others.

#### **4.6 THE GOSPEL IN THE KENYAN CULTURES**

The goal of missions in Kenya was to preach the gospel, to call people to repent, baptize converts ( cf. 10: 7-8 ), build churches, and extend the faith in Christ over the people of Kenya and to make him incarnated actually among the Kenyan people. So that people can see and experience in their own lives the Christ of love but not a Christ of division and enmity as we find in most cases. The gospel has to remain pure within the cultures it came into contact with from the outset: It has to be contextualized in a way that the truth of it remains unchanged. The gospel has to be inculturated in every corner of the country so that each and everyone can feel the warmth and the love of Christ.

#### **4.7 THE REVOLUTIONARY NATURE OF THE GOSPEL**

The gospel by its very nature is revolutionary as was experienced when it first came to Kenya . Mbiti describes this rightly: "The Missionaries established and pioneered schools everywhere, and these schools became the nurseries for change: they sowed the gospel, they sowed Christianity and perhaps unaware and unintentionally they sowed the new revolution"<sup>38</sup> Such revolution was crystallized in a rich complex of legend and myths which were transmitted from the old generation and from the sacred heritage of the many Kenyan tribes. It is the young men and women who assimilated not only the religion but also science, technology, politics and so on. These young people became detached from their tribal roots and acted like vehicles carrying the gospel and the new changes.

The new changes that came alongside the gospel were total and affected the whole spheres of life. Traditional life was challenged to the extent effect that tribal identity began to fade away because Christianity and European identities were pushing their ways into the individual and the community life. This meant sudden detachment from the values to which Africans were mystically bound, and thrust them into situations where real existence has no meaning as such. The revolution meant, further, that the so-called morality, customs and traditional solidarity in the African future would lose some of their values.

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<sup>38</sup>John S. Mbiti., Introduction to African religion, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1975) 45-46.

Traditional religious concepts and practices could not accommodate themselves fully to the rapidly changing situations. A dichotomy between the religious and secular lives began to appear, something which did not exist in African religious practices we described.

#### **4.8 THE CHURCH AND THE STATE**

When Kenya attained independence, political liberation was achieved . This created more yearning for more liberation . At that time the Government of Kenya assured that freedom of religion was guaranteed by the constitution of Kenya. Bishop Henry Okullu maintains that the church has been divinely appointed by God to admonish, exhort, and correct the nation and that the church is the conscience of the nation, which implies that the responsibility is placed upon it to uphold righteousness and justice.<sup>39</sup>

Bishop Raphael Ndingi has made a modest contribution in the Kenya churches. In his analysis he asserts that, church and state are two dependent societies which have the common good of the society as the key point. He praises the good relationship between the church and state in the same article. It may be observed that the church through its preaching and other apostolic activities has supported the government to keep law and order and to initiate the necessary projects that are vital in the lives of Kenyans, through the spirit of Harambee ( A swahili term coined by the Kenya former President to mobilize, to unite together to build the nation of Kenya). Since then, there has been a close

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<sup>39</sup> Henry Okullu., Church and Politics in East Africa (Nairobi: Uzima press, 1981) 17

interaction between the state and the church. We can ask whether the leaders' concern has benefited Kenyans from these early times just after independence

"Robert Edgerton offers useful and important pointers in his superbly documented book, *Mau Mau*, that Kenyatta's family and close associates became enormously wealthy through the open practice of nepotism favoritism and bribery. "<sup>40</sup> It may be noted that the present governing elite got their way into power through these circumstances (bribery). Edgerton makes a further observation which is true even in the present time, that "the Kenya elite live in luxury in the same neighborhoods that were once reserved only for whites in the colonial times. They drive expensive cars, spend their vacations in Europe, send their children to private schools and have their needs taken care of by servants"<sup>41</sup>

#### **4.9 THE CHURCH AND ITS LEADERS**

It may be observed that the Bishops failed to raise their prophetic voices adequately against the state on serious matters such as the rich (elite) monopolizing the good things of the country, unemployment, violation of human rights and the widespread problem of the deadly disease AIDS. As the church leaders it is their right and duty to see to it that no one tampers with the human rights of anyone in the country. They are also

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<sup>40</sup>Robert Egerton., *Mau Mau: An African Crucible* (New york: Ballatine Books, 1991) 230-237

<sup>41</sup>Robert Edgerton, *Mau Mau*, 230

called to raise their voice against the voiceless and to do everything possible to help them and raise their standards of living so that they can cope with the socio-economic situation of the country.

#### **4.10 GOD'S REVELATION AND PROCLAMATION IN HISTORY**

Reading the bible and hearing it explained, allows us to discover the deep meaning of our lives and commitments. We are then able to see the most common thing in all the different kinds of books that make up the bible. All the books tell of the Jewish people's faith. Their faith is based on supreme being, God. The basic historical fact, that is liberation from Egypt, leads to successive events which culminate in God himself becoming man and living among us (Jn. 1:14). With the coming of Jesus in History, God establishes a new regime and a new covenant whose chief citizens are the poor and the lowly. In his preaching, Jesus meets and confronts the tyrannical leaders e.g. the Pharisees, Tax-collectors of the day. He fearlessly challenges them openly to remove all empty cults and lip-service and offer the best sacrifice to God pure and contrite hearts. Later on after the direct proclamation of Jesus, his disciples met with adverse political and cultural structures in the earliest New Testament times. They followed Jesus' spirit and protested against them as exemplified especially in the Act of the Apostles ( 4: 1-22; 5:27-33; 15:22-29).

#### **4.11 GOD AND ISRAEL ( POOR)**

The history of the Israelites from which biblical faith springs is not limited to the experience that happened at that time only. Liberation from Egypt is an event which was

read by the Israelites long after it happened. It can be read by any group of people in their own circumstances to shed light on other historical intervention of Yahweh. Gutierrez has pointed out rightly that faith is transmitted not by remembering a past event, but by rereading it in the light of the present".<sup>42</sup> The meaning of God's intervention in Israel's history is referred to as liberation. One may find God's intervention a wonderful story within a historical framework. One must keep in mind that God's Intervention is not to show his might or what he is able to accomplish, but the reasons of his actions. His might is at the service of justice. The book of Psalms depicts this with clarity, that his power is expressed in the defense of the rights of the poor ( Ps 146: 6-9). God takes side with the poor and liberates them from oppression and slavery. St. Luke in his gospel portrays the poor as having a privileged place before God: " He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk 6:24-25).

#### **4.12 THE MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST**

The mission of Jesus is situated within the process of God's revelation in history, but with a new beginning. Having faith in God means also believing in the Jesus of our own history. He proclaimed the gospel to the poor and liberation to those in captivity. Jesus confronted the great ones of his people who occupied power in order to do justice

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<sup>42</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez., The Power of the Poor in History. (New York: Orbis Books, 1983).

to those who were considered weak and poor. He chose to live with and in the poor. He was born in social surroundings which were very much characterized by poverty. Jesus' proclaimed the Kingdom in favor of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized as Matthew (Mt. 3:23) and Mark (Mk. 1:15) have described at the beginning of their gospels. This implies that all nations on earth are included in this kingdom and nothing escapes it. In Jesus God becomes the Father of all people. Through Jesus God the Father has made a new covenant with all peoples. St. Paul says that for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old is gone and now the new one is here (2 Cor. 5:16-17). The universality of this new covenant comes about by way of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ himself is the truth that liberates and this is the starting point of Christianity to all those who come to him with contrite hearts.

#### **4.13 THEOLOGY AND THE POOR**

Richard McBrien has defined theology as, "the ordered effort to bring our experience of God to the level of intelligence expression."<sup>43</sup> Every true theology springs from experience. A true theology is a reflection of true encounter with God in History. This clarification may be incomplete if I do not add that all Christians in Kenya, without exception are to be theologians in order that they may exercise the liberating theological powers within them. This may be referred to as theology in a general sense. it does not

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<sup>43</sup>Richard P McBrien, *Catholicism*, (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1991), 1258

take away theology in a technical sense whereby a theologian's authority springs from his/her competence, training and specialization.

#### **4.14 POVERTY AS A CHALLENGE FOR KENYAN THEOLOGIANS**

As Kenyan theologians, we should revisit our theology to fit the cultures and the environments that we live in. Our theology must be contextualized so as to fit in the culture and the lives of our people whom we live with. The theology which we study in our colleges may not be enough if it is not going to touch the lives of people concretely and practically. Our theology should move from pulpit preaching to action orientation, such that the people may see or discover the dichotomy between the orthodoxy and the ortho-praxis but both as one thing. Poverty in Kenya is a sensitive issue which should be given serious attention. The church in solidarity with the state should work hand in hand in every way possible to eradicate it. Poverty in Kenya is an issue which should not be overlooked under any circumstances and given the first priority. As theologians, we should look at the immediate problems and try to see how we can solve them. The aim of our theology as we have seen with the gospel, should be both liberating and revolutionary to our people especially the poor. This is the only theology which will increase human power to change oppressive structures and bring about conditions for realization of the gospel values in the lives of people. This is the only theology which will bring *metanoia* (change of heart) to our Kenyan people. This is what I shall request our today's Prophets who are actually theologians to operate in their pastoral ministries.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The aim of writing this essay as I have pointed out in the introduction is to conscientize especially the prophets of today (the religious and the priests) to come out in the open and preach the gospel of our Lord without fear to all people. God never created anyone poor neither a poor world. If we read Genesis I: 26-28, we hear that, God created and gave him everything good and told him to subdue it. Also if we read Ephesians 1: 1ff Colossians 1: 14ff we get a clear picture of who we are in God. Out of his loving mercy, he has sent his only son to come to rescue us from the ruling force of darkness by his passion, death and resurrection. So now we can be able to share the lot of God's holy people. Now the question comes in if God loved us this much, Why is there a lot of injustices in our society? why people who are corrupt, grabbers and greedy, who have no sense of love for one another?. These and many more questions are the ones we need as prophets to address to our people so that they can come back to their senses and know the right thing to do. We need as today's prophets to conscientize both rich and the poor to know their rights and duties. It is the high time to make people aware that each one of us has got inalienable rights and something unique to offer in the society whether rich or poor. God has called us like the prophet Isaiah to be "his eye" and try to correct the status quo wherever things are not going well. God called us for a purpose and his call is not for intimidation but a call of liberation. Our call should be to go and liberate all those oppressed in one way or another and to see Christ in them first regardless of tribe or color. So, I call upon all the religious and priests to open their eyes wide and cooperate in preaching the kingdom of God to be realized here on earth.

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