

THE ATTITUDE OF THE HISTORICAL CHURCHES TO POVERTY AND WEALTH: A CHALLENGE FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

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INTRODUCTION

Money is a symbol of God's created world. It is the medium of exchange. Having it or lacking it separates people and creates a barrier between them as persons. As a consequence, they trade part of their time when they find themselves in need of it to balance their expenditure in the areas of quality education, medical services, decent houses and adequate clothing that match their tastes. As a Christian Church historian, I am not overstressing that money is what is important in life. Nevertheless, without it life is miserable.

When the *faithful Christians* read the Bible within the lenses of such background, the rescue they often seek from God is in terms of the right amount of money at the right time and in the right place. It is certainly true that a big fraction of the well to do Christians who are considered "good" hardly help the poor. They comfort themselves likening the "poor" to *the body of Humpty-Dumpty* who sat on a wall, fell down and broke into pieces. Instead of trying to put together the body of Humpty-Dumpty, they comfort themselves "myopically" saying; *the materially poor are poor because they are lazy or unfortunate or both.* Others who meagerly help the

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poor in order to enhance the economic system, which put them *at a 'thank you Mama-Papa' end*. The poor know that such people are rich because of their covetousness and greed. And such wealth gives them power to marginalize, aggrandize, deprive, abuse and subjugate them to such subhuman conditions as if they are second-class *Homo sapiens*.

Can the church admit the existence of a sharp antithesis between personal morality and other unhealthy practices which are rampant in some of the businesses? What is the position of the Church on the issues that confront the *poorest of the poor*? Why do the poor find it difficult to get justice? Some of these questions will be addressed indirectly in the body of this paper. However, Solomon's position is clear:

Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man (person) is deserted even by his (her) friends (Proverb 19:4).

We are ashamed of the above quotation but it is a common practice. A frank recognition of it is necessary if we are to be guided by Christian ethics in helping the materially poor. In Africa, there are proverbs and sayings that describe the fortunes of the *rich and the poor*. One example will suffice. A *Kiganda* proverb stresses that God showers his blessings *like air* upon the rich (*omukisa mpewo, nobwogalawo guyinira* - even though doors are closed, still more blessings enter to bless the rich).

But, should some *Christians* be poor? The writer is not using the subject of the poor as a retagged-subplot to bash the rich. Nevertheless, he smells a historical or religious rat and rightly so. The rich promote the Jesuit philosophy; the *end justifies the means*. Invariably, poverty affects both men and women, young and old, educated and non-educated and it eventually creates a vicious cycle. The picture portrayed by poverty is multidimensional in nature. Without doubt, it is real. All these seem to lead to the widespread political slogan that poverty must be eliminated. Too painful to remember and too painful to admit, a big fraction of the "faithful Christians" in our Churches *are, very, very, very poor*.

DEFINITIONS

The writer may be excused for the sake of clarity if he could first give definitions of some terms that are used in this presentation. He will first

define *faithful Christians*, and then give a résumé relating to poverty, *wealth and Church* before he objectively enhances the biblical and historical observations. He will conclude by looking at the attitude of the mainline Churches to the *trio thorny and naïve contemporary issues*. To begin with, in this new century, a clear definition of the word “*Christian*” is required to face the daunting religious agenda, including increased poverty, ethnic and territorial conflicts, wars, ignorance, ecological destruction, environmental degradation, disease and (HIV/AIDS) pandemic. Nevertheless, by *Christian*, we understand all baptized people who believe in Jesus Christ. They may be young or old, committed or non-committed, virtuous or scandalous. They live in all parts of our nations: cities, towns and villages. They engage in all sorts of professions. Some receive monthly salaries and others do not. Some are either self-employed or have no employment at all.

On the other side of the spectrum, *poverty* means unsatisfied want or not having sufficient access to resources or lack of necessary materials to meet the basic needs in life. Morally and culturally, the poor can be perceived as powerless, hopeless, lacking participation in decision-making at the grassroots level - all of which lead to betrayal and defeatism. Socially and economically, when contrasted with the *ghettoes* of Johannesburg, *shanty areas* of Nairobi and *slums* of Harare, poverty becomes inexcusable. Biblically and spiritually, the poor (Greek *ptokhois*, Hebrew *hanavim*) include the poor in spirit who may be *rich* in material things.

Thirdly, by *wealth*, we mean to own a lot of assets (money), or having more than others. The Bible does not condemn it. Although our Lord Jesus Christ criticised the Pharisees for not relating their religious piety with acts of mercy, he hardly expects the faithful Christians to give up everything in order to follow him (Matthew 6:19-33; Luke 12:15-33). Joseph of Arimathea is described as *a rich person* and as ‘a disciple of Jesus’. Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax-collector, promised to pay back to the people he had cheated four times what he had taken, and to give half of his possessions to the poor, which presumably means that he kept the other half, apart from what he paid back to his victims. Yet Jesus said that salvation had been given to him (Matthew 27:57; Luke 19:8-10). In the book of Acts, the tragedy which befall Ananias and his wife Saphira was not that they were selfish to withhold some of their property, but that they

were deceitful to pretend they had given it all. Peter said to Ananias: 'didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?' (Acts, 5:1-10) Christians in the early church practiced communalism. We too can in our own way, champion the move and plough the little land in order to help the poor.

Lastly, by the word *Church* (which is derived from the Greek, word *ekklesia*), we mean, an assembly of citizens duly summoned or a local congregation of Christians (Acts 9:31; 1 Corinthians, 1:2; Galatians, 1:22); or a Christian place of worship. In Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Epistles, Petrine Texts, the Epistle of James, Johannine Letters, and the book of Revelation, the word Church is referred to as a particular local congregation of the people of God, the powerful as well as the marginalized. As time progressed, a team of elders governed the Church (Greek, *presbuteros*), and one became the chief elder. With the passage of time, the office of chief elder evolved into that of *episcopos* (*overseer or bishop*). Within this perspective, the tempo of the ministry of bishops began to grow as they exercised authority over other churches. A line hardly pursued historically and which should be enhanced by the faithful is that in God's purpose, there is only one Church, gathering under the leadership of Jesus Christ. But on earth, the Church is seen wherever two or three are gathered in His name (*Matthew 18:20*). There is no need to explain the relationship between the one and the many; this will perhaps take us beyond the parameters of this research paper because beyond the biblical image of the Church are many denominations. Their existence raises the awkward question, "which church?" One Church? *Una sancta*? It cannot be so when the ecclesiastical map is like the shell of a tortoise!

BIBLICAL TEACHING AND HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS

In the New Testament, Paul states that the *love of money is the root of all evils* (1 Timothy 6:10). African Church historians and missiologists are challenged not to misquote him. Paul did not say that money is evil. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the writer challenges the *faithful Christians* to keep their lives free from money (Hebrews 13:5). Nevertheless, money in the hands of unscrupulous persons creates social, economic and religious problems culminating into *income poverty, food poverty, infrastructure poverty and spiritual poverty*. Although Solomon's view (Proverbs 14:20) is a good take off point and a critique of a number of societal structures,

institutions and patterns of life that affect the poor,[†] there are still unsolved economic and Christian ethical issues, which leave the *faithful Christians* with a moral problem. The problem is how to attain adequate spiritual maturity and self-understanding as well as to justify the desire for more money and wealth on the basis of need rather than of love for it. This is a bold thesis.

Behind the above scenario however, is the interpretation of the two terms in question "*poor and wealth*". In the New Testament, there are some biblical passages in which the word poor is used in the company of other words to clarify its meaning. The gospel of Matthew 11:4-5 lists the blind, lame, deaf with the poor. In Luke 6:20-21, the poor ranks with those who hunger, thirst and mourn. James 2:3-6 points out that the shabbily dressed people are powerless. And Revelation 3:17-18, considers the poor wretched while the rich prosper. The writer is not exaggerating, we have poverty in all the nine aspects of life: religious, economic, spiritual, moral, mental, social, cultural, physical and political. Admittedly, poverty is dangerous, dehumanizing, pervasive and acute.

As far as wealth is concerned, there are passages in which the equivalent word *for rich* is used in the New Testament: treasure, mammon, property and money (wealth). The writer of the Gospel of Matthew calls such "Wealthy" people (I venture to stress with capital "W"), the *the mighty proud* (Matt. 6:19-21). In the Gospel of Mark, they control abundant resources from which they do not give heartedly to the poor (Mark 10:23-24 see also Luke 6:24-25). Perhaps, the fullest descriptions of the moral quality of being rich is in James 5:1-7 where the writer stresses that the *rich* trust in their perishable possessions – garments, gold, silver, fields and amassed goods.

With that in mind, the *faithful Christians* are aware that the historical Churches are full of incidents where the Church gave her heart away to

[†] Matthew Theuri, "Poverty in Africa", in Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction*, (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1999), 230-242.

prosperity and wealth, which have the grimmest and unrealistic witness[‡]. The practice of simony (during the Dark Ages), selling indulgences (prior to and during the reformation period), modern lotteries, fundraising in Church premises and many additional practices are eloquent examples of unprecedented and imaginable proportion for the acquisition of wealth.[§] Today, a pastoral survey confirms that some churches own a lot of resources and property: Institutions of Higher Learning (Universities), Schools, hospitals, hotels (hostels), banks, buses and buildings for renting. Shocking to the *faithful Christians*, the historical churches have become overwhelmingly the Churches of the rich. Going by this observation, several centuries ago, a Roman Catholic Pope is reported to have surveyed the vast riches he had amassed, and to have gloated; “no longer can the Church of Jesus Christ now say; *silver and gold have I none. True, Sire, a subordinate replied, “but then neither can the Church now say, ‘Rise up and go. At worst, “material wealth has always carried the Church (faithful Christians included) into spiritual bankruptcy.”** Thus, increased wealth does not lead to increased righteousness; instead, it leads to spiritual and moral poverty.*

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH TO POVERTY AND WEALTH IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

While more critics have pushed the Church from left, right and to the centre, the fact remains she has a noble cause to address. She must set up her determination to teach her followers the vocation of their Christian services (1Timothy 5:18) and be transformed by the Gospel in order that they may carry the indelible marks of the Gospel (Matthew 7:18-20). She must encourage them to learn new skills, which will under-gird their daily

[‡] M.A. Gitui, *Moral things in Contemporary African Society*, in J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike (eds.), *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity*, (Nairobi: Initiative Publishers, 1992), 60-72.

[§] It is significant to note that one can be materially rich and spiritually poor or materially poor and spiritually rich. See how, Laurenti Magesa deplored the unwanted stand of the church in his article entitled “Some Critical Theological Pastoral Issues Facing the Church in East Africa,” *African Christian Studies*, (1988), 43-60; A.E. Harvey, *Strenuous commands – The Ethics of Jesus*, (London: SCM Press, 1990), 117-125.

⁴ Samuel Kunhiyop, “Powers, Good News for Africa”, *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (2000), .3-39.

programmes. If the Church will do this, no doubt, many people who now seem lost will recover and our nations will receive new life. Intensive farming will start (*our land is our prosperity – as stressed in Zimbabwe*), strong philosophy of self-reliance will be promoted, and individuals will acquire new skills in planning and management. Instead of losing heart, folding hands around their bodies, walking in self-pity, weeping over spilt milk; they will be encouraged to improve their situation guided by Christian work ethics.

If the historical Churches promote Solomon's teaching that the rich and the poor rub shoulders and the Lord is their maker (Proverbs, 22:2), then, a new Christian ethics in the African context, governed by a new economic, political and Christian teaching has to be advanced whereby the rich must live more simply and the poor may also simply live^{††}. All this makes it clear that the historical Churches would open a whole range of opportunities, which will enhance strong campaigns aimed at producing job-creators but not job seekers. In this way, Christian Universities, Tertiary Institutions and Institutions of Higher Learning will be encouraged to promote this new school of thought in their curricula. Christianity is a religion of new life and hope. The hope is that the faithful Christians will overcome some day.

In the twentieth century, particularly in East Africa, this hope was stressed as a preparation to go to heaven. This implies (a) transcending the limitations of human powers and knowledge in the presence of the Almighty God, (b) attaining everlasting life through Jesus Christ, and (c) final victory over sin and a reward for those who were saved, are being saved as well as to be saved and constantly empowered the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther King called this new hope - a '*dream*.'

It is therefore in this context above all, that we mention some of the issues that hamper the spiritual growth and eschatological hope, which the historical churches have to address. Such issues include: terrorism, homosexuality, lesbians, prostitution, abortion, child-abuse, witchcraft, sorcery, wife/men beating, drug abuse, devil worship, alcoholism, embezzlement, just to mention a few. More than ever before, all Churches

^{††} Gwamna Je 'Adayibe' 'Where your treasure is: A consideration of Jesus' Teaching on Possessions', *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, (2000), 29-45.

have to address different ideologies that cause eye-brows to raise either out of curiosity or condemnation because they trash the existence of God and family values: the media, videotapes, blue movies, nude theaters, cable TV, Internet and pornography. All these are maliciously damaging the authentic fabric of our cultural heritage and religious values in Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, Australia, North and South America. In fact, our economic, cultural and Christian values have been shaken^{††}.

What has been done: Far too often, the Church has allowed herself to be backed away from her responsibility to a little corner of her “*spiritual*” province. And strangely enough, even some of the blazing prophets within the Pentecostals, Charismatic and Renewal Churches who argue with relevance about the place of their Churches on the contemporary scene, are strangely silent when the subject relating to “the attitude of the Churches to poverty^{§§}, wealth^{***} and prosperity” in *our nations, leave alone in African Christianity*^{†††}, is top on the agenda for discussion. This being so, all Churches as well as spiritual movements must be reminded that they are the salt of the earth as well as the light of the world and the *faithful Christians* constantly turn to them when they feel the pressure of darkness at all levels (Matthew 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-28).

^{††} Keith Eitel, *Transforming Culture, Developing a Biblical Ethic in an Africa Context*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1986), 94-105. Amplifying this subject, Eitel brilliantly stressed that materialism and wealth within the parameters of the Biblical teaching will be the major threats to the lives of the faithful Christians before God. The trio must be dealt with and the faithful Christians must be put in their proper place or else, the Lordship of Jesus Christ will be compromised (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:33).

^{§§} Narcisio Bagumisiriza, “Poverty and Hunger in Uganda Today” in Douglas Wanjohi Waruta (ed.), *Caring and sharing: Pastoral Counseling in African Perspective*, (Nairobi: Act Print, 1995), 177-196.

^{***} John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1990), 273-281; Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a non – Western Religion*, (New York: Mary knoll Orbis, 1995), 126-155; Matthew Theuri, “Poverty in Africa”, in Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction*, (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1999), .230-242.

^{†††} Peter Kanyandago, “The disfigured body of Jesus Christ and African ecclesiology”, in J.N.K Mũgambi and Laurenti Magesa (eds.), *The church in African Christianity*, (Nairobi: Initiative Press, 1990), pp. 180-192.

In this respect, they are called upon to pay critical attention to causes and symptoms of moral degeneration. And for this to happen, they must face the real issues of poverty, greed, corruption, inadequate housing, hunger, ignorance, disease, leave alone HIV/AIDS scourge and famine. They must restore the image of the Garden of Eden, which is taken to mean *a place to feel at home* (including rivers, agricultural land, plants and animals that grace this planet)⁺⁺⁺. Only when the Churches understand this broad principle, can they rise up with boldness and begin to see that they have a tremendous role to play and a *word to speak about the restoration of the image of the Garden of Eden*.

From the writer's historical, missiological and practical studies, he has observed that some of their followers are now shifting gears:

- Some have decided to enter the *trade industry* with all the risks involved and the moral code that govern their activities.
- Others have taken on extra-employment in order to make both ends meet.
- Some qualified teachers and government employees have opted to become self-employed on the ground that a daily income is far better than a monthly salary.
- Some have decided to move from towns or cities to the villages in order to acquire plots of land and built small houses which are at least their own and where they are assured of food security without paying for it.
- Lastly, others have drastically reduced their expenditure in order to observe the Christian moral and spiritual codes, which they have learnt from childhood that enhance the inner joy and satisfaction even amidst physical and economic hardships or sufferings. They recall the biblical teaching, which directs people to obedience, sacrifice, acceptance of suffering and a good life hereafter (James 1:5-8). They continue to look to God for the solution (1Peter 5:7).

⁺⁺⁺ Going to Church has yielded indigenous Christians who have reduced religion to a kind of uniform, something put one day and discarded the rest of the week. Ardent confessed Christians go to *pray* on Sunday, only to return home to *prey* on each other! One should not be shocked to see respected Christians desiring material possessions and using wrong channels to acquire them at the expense of forgetting the internal possessions, which are found in religion and God.

It is in this context that some biblical claims and Christian ethical principles are significant. Admittedly, that is what every missionary did since Paul, every preacher since Peter and every biblical student, perhaps since Apollos and Timothy have believed. Anyone who has tried to understand the relevance of the message of the Bible in relationship to contemporary issues has done the same. Today, we call this process "conceptualization".^{§§§}

Functionally, if conceptualization is joyfully shared, it will make the biblical message expressed, felt and lived in the cultural context of the people of Africa. That said, however, it is good to note that when the *faithful Christians*, face such harsh realities in life, they are comforted to know that they are following Jesus Christ who did not carry money or own any. He had no time to acquire wealth and property. He had no silver, no gold, no cash income, no property, no current account, no savings account, and no financial reserves. It is readily understandable that he lived by what he taught and his impact on the world was and is still enormous. He had nowhere to lay his head. He was less well off than the foxes and birds of the air. Renouncing the heavenly wealth, He was born in a borrowed stable and died naked on a rugged cross. Positively He did not come from the day-to-day - laborers and landless tenants, but was from a middle class of skilled people of the Province of Galilee.

For the above reasons, like his father, he was (*a tekton*, - a Greek word, which means mason or) a carpenter and a joiner all rolled into one: an

^{§§§} Max L. Stackhouse, "Contextualization and Theological Education", *Theological Education*, (1986), 67-84; by definition contextualization is "that dynamic process that attempts to interpret the significance of a religion or culture norm for a group with a different (or developed) cultural heritage" and its purpose is to move from "what it meant" to "what it means." As such it comprises what homilicians call "application" and is exemplified in the Bible itself. See also O. Imasogie, "Contextualization: constrictive interaction between culture, people, church, and the theological programme, *African East Journal of Evangelical Theology* (1993), 19-23; Tite Tienou, "Issue in the Theological Task in Africa Today," *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (1982), 3-10; Bruce Framing *Contextualization of Theology: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980), pp. 67-68; Fabian Maganda, "Contextualising Jesus 'the only mediator' for the Sukuma people of Tanzania", *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, (2002), 147-164.

artisan. Granted, he founded what was largely the original Church of the poor, a fellowship of the oppressed, the exploited, the powerless, the deprived, and the dispossessed. And he commanded his *first followers* not to carry gold, silver and money in their pockets. This trend of thought leads us to the last important point.

What then ought we to do? To respond more appropriately to the current state of affair in our nations where some *Christians* are deeply involved in squandering national and Church resources, where some people in positions of responsibility do not know how to manage government and Church funds; where

some people in charge of church projects use institutional property to promote their own projects instead of using it for the purpose it was meant for, where others in high positions were appointed to such high offices because they are either friends or relatives but not because they were competent; there cannot be a better time to address this topic than now. These few examples give a dawning and gloomy picture of some people in our Churches, who are culturally undisciplined, morally perverted, religiously blind and spiritually bankrupt.

It must be re-asserted that the historical, Pentecostal, Charismatic and African Initiated Churches are challenged to accept the above reality in order to address the matters squarely relating to prophetic, spiritual and pastoral issues. Failure to do that, these thorny issues would spill over from the sanctuary into the public arena, especially in some nations with a strong Christian heritage. Thus, to fulfill this noble task, all Churches have to strengthen their biblical and spiritual campaign in order to safeguard moral and spiritual ethics in our nations****. Based on these observations, they have to teach their followers to protect the environments: forests, swamps, minerals and other energy and natural resources. They have to challenge the governments to promote human rights, establish new economic policies, promote fair distribution of the national cake (revenues), create employment, eliminate personal greed, and rehabilitate industries, agricultural enterprises and trade.

**** George Kinoti and Peter Kimunyu (eds.), *Vision for Bright Africa, facing challenges of development*, (Nairobi IFES Anglophone Africa, 1997), 194-196.

All the faithful Christians in every corner of our nations should be shown how to fight against poverty. At all costs, they should never ever lower their spiritual morality and Christian ethics in order to survive economically. Behind such observation is the concern to come to the rescue of the poor, the needy and give them a chance to live a decent life. But sympathy does not mean sentimentality. The poor have to master the art of money acquisition. Based on historical research, devotional studies and lessons learnt in life, without money there is no economic security. Church sponsored agencies; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) should enhance programmes and projects to help these targeted groups. At a practical level, the material poor^{††††} should be encouraged to acquire loans from the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF)-Geneva and Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society (EDCS)-Netherlands. All they need is the will to do it. Thus, the historical Churches are challenged to jump on the (Christian) economic wagon and ride holding boldly the ECLOF and EDCS banners.

Unless, instead of a desire for easy money is replaced by determination for hard work and sweat, we do not see light through the tunnel; hence, we *shall be doomed*. *A good case in point, we have at our disposal the manpower, the brainpower, the spiritual power and the technological know-how*. It is within this framework that the rich are challenged to rededicate their lives to the sufficiency of God's word in all matters relating to materialism and to care sacrificially for the wretchedly poor.^{††††} *Accordingly, God's chosen, the poor, the rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom should not be overlooked.*

CONCLUSION

^{††††} Materialism' is not the mere possession of material things, but an unhealthy obsession with them. It is but a short step from wealth to materialism, from having riches to putting our trust in them, and many take it. But it is foolish. There is no security in wealth. It is not for nothing that Paul writes of 'uncertain riches.' Burglars, pests, rust and inflation all take their toll.

^{††††} F.F Bruce, *The Hard Saying of Jesus*, (Downs -Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp. 184; M.A. Gitui, *Moral things in Contemporary African Society*", in J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike (eds.), *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity*, (Nairobi: Initiative Publishers, 1992), pp. 60-72.

In summary, my presentation stresses that *economic growth* does not eliminate poverty. Inequality between *rich* and *poor* will continue to grow. Biblical and historical and missiological observation have shown that wealth in itself is not evil. Nevertheless, *righteousness not money* will exalt the *faithful Christians* in our historical Churches. In this vein, the historical Churches must take seriously the holistic mandate of teaching the *faithful Christians* to understand the central biblical teaching in respect to *poverty, prosperity and wealth*. Thus, what is paramount is *wealthy theology, poverty theology and conceptualized theology*, which will enhance the idea that money should be devoted to the programmes that are in the mind of God; not only some of it but all of it. The second point is not a side issue. Visionary Church leaders are needed who have the capacity and will to lead *their followers* away from *egocentricity* towards *Christ-centered interests*, geared to spiritual maturity. The lack of clear vision means that church leaders will not lead their followers diligently. Another point high on the agenda is to crystallize and sensitize unreservedly the *faithful Christians* who are *materially* poor to secure loans from the ECLOF and to tap the economic and religious potential offered by the EDCS.

It is clear from the above facts that there is a call for the leaders of the old Churches not only to teach the *faithful Christians* who sit in the pews every Sunday but also to visit them at their places of work (where their wealth lies) and help them to know the significance of their assets (banks and property) and how to use them profitably; not the *ten per cent only* but the total of it. Unless these resources are utilized for the right purposes, in the end, the historical Churches and other Churches will ultimately prove to have had minimal spiritual impact upon their neophytes, leave alone their respective nations. Wealth acquisition, which does not take care of the needy, the marginalized and the poorest of the poor, is brutal and inhumane.

In order to fulfill their goals, the historical Church leaders must teach their followers the holistic culture of prayers, which will under-gird their programmes. In fact, behind every extraordinary supernatural move of God are people who have dedicated themselves to earnest prayers. Prayers prepare the hearts of God's people for His blessings. Without prayers the Churches cannot successfully fulfill the God-given mission of articulating the Christian gospel (*euangelion*), which is vital in African Christianity. Of

course, this opens up some interesting ecumenical possibilities, for if Churches are seriously engaged in seeking to express their unity, then the role of the ecumenical prayer pattern could be a powerful means to that end. All this makes clear that the *faithful Christians* are apostles of hope rather than despair and pessimism. They are also challenged to turn from greed for money and repent. Genuine repentance is always characterized by resolute to turn from ungodly acts to godly ways. This kind of repentance brings radical change (revival). It does not compromise with worldly attitudes and actions. It requires covenanting with God about things one would no longer return to and things one would now dedicate one's life for. At best, the Churches "*raison detre*" is to bring salvation to the *faithful Christians* ^{§§§§}. By and large, the *Christian life is not Jesus Christ plus, but Jesus Christ period*. This is the crux of the New Testament teaching.

In a nutshell, as the *faithful Christians face the twenty-first century, they are challenged to reevaluate their values and set their priorities towards spiritual maturity*. They need to be reminded of Jesus' teaching in respect to wealth acquisition and not be consumed into *the crazy chase for possessions or following economic winds of change*, which has led many astray recently into all kinds of evils. This is an appropriate example of some people who behave as followers of Jesus Christ and then become backsliders or drop into oblivion after their obedience to him goes down completely because of money and its use. Failure to do this, mammon will win, the poor will suffer and the rich will not be brought to conviction. Increased wealth does not lead to increased righteousness. On the contrary, it leads to spiritual poverty. This additional point is evocative, but it may also be a problem because it may lead to generalize spirituality; I welcome dialogue on this subject.

Some Suggestions

Having studied the situation in which the *faithful Christians* live in our respective nations, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Along with fund raising programmes for schools (which are beneficial to the youth who attend schools); should fundraising programmes be promoted during Church services with intent to

^{§§§§} Maniama Manjorie Williams, "Poverty and economic issues" in *We Are Witnesses: The Lutheran Word Federation Documentation on Women in Church and Society*, Geneva (1995), 28-31

open some practical projects in the rural areas at community level for the poorest of the poor?

- What mechanism can be employed by our Churches to enable them not to rely heavily on foreign aid?
- How can our Churches promote projects which will alleviate the plight of many jobless people, including the faithful Christians in our nations?
- Can our Governments make concrete plans for her graduates so as to cut down the number of job seekers?

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