

Convicted to Share; the Need for A Theological Reflection

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Abstract:-Sharing among believers is an expression of adherence and response to the truths shared in the Bible. This article aims to encourage believers to do a soul searching exercise before engaging in the practice of sharing among themselves. A thorough biblical reflection will provide the foundation which Christian giving is based. What believers should understand is that giving is part of the Christian act of mercy and as such it needs to be encouraged among them. Within the Christendom sharing increases unity, love for each other, and meeting of each other's needs and priority focus of what eternity is likely mirrored. Convinced of this truth, this paper is a follow up of what I wrote about, "will Christians ever balance – the urban rich and poor?"

Key terms: Share, Reflection, Theology, hermeneutics, Church Pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

The words of Jesus Christ to the followers that "*the poor you will always have*" (Matt. 26:11)¹, did not negate the need to transform the poor so as to help them enjoy the good of the land. The Bible indicates a preferential treatment to the poor. However, because of the same forces that have seen the gap between the rich and the poor continue to grow, churches have found themselves entangled by the same forces. There is need for both the rich and the poor churches to collaborate in sharing what each has to the benefit of the Kingdom of God. Anglican Churches in Nairobi city must lead by example the call of Jesus Christ to remain one socially, economically and spiritually. Any dichotomy of any kind is highly regretted and seen as a form of dualistic.

Church which is made up of Christians who gather together and who share common creed is called upon to live out kingdom values. The values must be those which are expressed in the Bible yet this aspect poses a paradox when the same kingdom seems divided.

Christian history especially at the first century, indicates a challenge to the present church both rich and the poor to live to the ethos shared by Jesus Christ who at the inauguration of his ministry, citing from Isaiah 61:1-2, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" and stating that this scripture was now being fulfilled. His life and death portray a preference for the poor

in the kingdom that he inaugurated. Each of the Gospels in its own way makes the same point.

II. THE QUESTION OF HERMENEUTICS

The Church should be the hermeneutical community that reads the biblical story as its story and applies this story to the concrete circumstances of its time, place and culture. This is the community within the community from which the word of God is revealed, heard, and lived.² It is the Bible that informs the steps that the Church should take and most importantly, what the Church should be in a society. For a Church that has a place for all in the society is a Church that has a heart for the marginalized, a Church that seeks to visit the periphery and dine with the poor; as the gospel depicts "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The holistic Church stands out like the city on a hill that glorifies God, a beacon of integrity and hope.

The Israelites miraculous experience of liberation marked the start of a new covenant relationship with God. There was a direct connection between God's saving intervention on their behalf and the way they were to treat others, especially the most vulnerable among them. Sider adds that, the Bible insists that we cannot enjoy a right relationship with God without also pursuing right relationships with our neighbors.³ The rich Christians who live side by side with poor must respond to their needs as they always have a better ground to transform the plight of the poor. This truth should always be the drive among the urban rich Church as it seeks to transform its neighbors "poor Church" to a considerable level out of the current economic state.

We cannot be the whole person intended by God unless we enjoy righteous, wholesome relationships with our families and neighbor. Therefore a biblical understanding of persons "should lead the church to seek both spiritual renewal and social renewal, including institutional development, structural reform and creation care."⁴ Both Old and New

²Myers, *Walking with the poor*, 128.

³ Sider Ronald, Philip Olson and Unruh Rolland, *Churches that make a Difference: Reaching your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), 53.

⁴Ibid.,
50 (Jer. 22:13-16; 1 John 3:17)

¹ Jesus reply urges generosity to the poor, who will always be in the land... Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 119

Testament teach that the peace with God is inseparable from doing justice for the poor people and helping those in need.⁵

The prophets in the Old Testament, Jeremiah, Amos, and Micah harshly denounced the Israelites because they thought they could please God with their liturgical worship while they continued oppressing the poor. Every church is called to live out their lives both in theory and practice.

The message of renewal is especially core to the rich Christians of the city since as Myers puts it, the non-poor understand themselves as superior, necessary, and anointed to rule. "They succumb to the temptation to play god in the lives of the poor, using religious systems, mass media, the law, government policies, and people occupying positions of power. These people create the narratives, structures, and systems that justify and rationalize their privileged position. The result is that the poor become captive to the god-complexes of the non-poor."⁶ The church has a mandate to correct the view of the poor among them and through different approaches to teach them that God has created everyone with potential to develop and improve their status. This understanding will make the rich particularly within the churches aware that God has a plan to improve anyone and will use human structures among others to transform them.

In the old Testament God, through prophet Jeremiah emphasized the essence of a caring community 'seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for its welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:7). The African Bible commentary by Tokunboh Adeyemo says that "The Lord is telling the exiled Judeans in Babylon to change their way of looking at things".⁷

The salvation experienced by Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, their promised land marked the start of a new covenant relationship with God. "God gave the Israelites a system of laws to govern how they should live, covering not only ritual religious requirement but every aspect of life-business family relationship, sexual morality, public health. There was a direct connection between God's saving intervention on their behalf and the way they were to treat others especially the most vulnerable among them."⁸ As they were working to meet personal and family needs, they were also to seek the good of their new home city.⁹ The history of the Israelites has it that, they were not able to live up to the expectation of God. So he reacted when Israelites thought that they were pleasing God with their liturgical worship while they continued oppressing the poor. His angry reply was harsh. 'I hate, I despise your festivals (Amos 5:21), Isa 1:10-

15; 58:3-7, Matt. 25:31ff draws the inevitable conclusion. John in his vision of the new heaven and new earth sees a place without suffering (Rev. 21:4), where all nations are united in peace (Rev. 21:24), economic resources are available to all (Rev.22:2), and everyone lives under the reign of God. Until that time, the scriptures call on "God's people to serve Christ by serving "the least of these," and to do what we can to redress oppression and injustice."¹⁰

III. DEVELOPING AN URBAN CHURCH PEDAGOGY; REFLECTION AND ACTION

According to Paulo Freire who has written on the pedagogy of the poor, from a Latin American Perspective, Pedagogy is the profession or function of a teacher; teaching.¹¹ The teaching method frees people from the control of old ways of thinking and of acting, and enables them to take charge of their own future. The church both in the rich and the poor areas of Nairobi city must recognize that realizing the conditions around them and those that need change is not enough. It is suggested that an action towards rectifying this condition is required. Christians must be moved into action but actions that are directed and informed by reflection.

A church pedagogy in this discourse thus becomes the recognition that when people act, their action then affects the way they think about that action. Linthicum observes that likewise, reflecting in a new way creates receptivity for further and more adventurous action.¹² It thus becomes a spiral upon which the church within a community moves the community... here referring to the Anglican urban church community from one level, that of reflection into action and vice versa.

Viv Grigg who is a long time informal settlement practitioner in Asia and having a long standing experience on the subject of poor in the city, attempts some reflections that any rich church willing to work with their counterparts, the poor churches will benefit and be propelled into actions. First, he points that the rich churches are well placed in terms of human personnel skilled in different disciplines compared to those in the poor churches found in the informal settlements.¹³ The overall objective is creating an environment for the members from the rich church to start seeing opportunities of service in the informal settlement as opposed to the syndrome of just injecting capital in the informal settlements without capacity building of the informal settlement thus rendering the urban poor as managers of the ideas of the rich. It is moving the rich church from working for the poor churches where it makes suggestions without

⁶ Myers, *Walking with the poor*, 73.

⁷ Tokunboh Adeyemo, *African Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 889.

⁸ Sider Ronald, Philip Olson and Unruh Rolland, *Churches that make a Difference: Reaching your Community with Good News and Good Works*, (Michigan 2003), 53.

⁹ Ibid., 53

¹⁰ Homell M Brian & Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Michigan Baker Academic, 2011), 83.

¹¹ Robert C. Linthicum, *Empowering the poor: Innovations in Mission* (Monrovia: Marc Books, 1991), 61.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Viv Grigg, *Cry of the urban poor* (California: MARC, 1992), 283.

involving the poor to working with them which in turn develops to ownership and assured progress.

Developmental theories have suggested over some time now that people in need of assistance should be allowed to manage their projects and social life adequately. Alvarez, Avarientos and McAlpine working with the poor¹⁴ in reflection of Isaiah 61, suggest that the process of capacity building was not simply skill-focused but aimed at building self-confidence and the inherent capacity to dream and to mobilize collective efforts to build a better quality of life. At the core of empowerment process is the need for the poor to have a growing awareness of their disempowerment and the web of realities that conspire to relegate them to poverty. The spirit of empowerment occurs when the poor recognize that God is supreme over all powers vying for the poor's allegiance and discipleship. God is the power that fuels a community's efforts to unshackle itself from the chains of poverty, oppression and injustice. This experience of freedom is empowerment, a blessing. The process becomes even more dynamic when the empowered (the blessed) desire, seek and work so that others will likewise be empowered (be blessed). Empowerment becomes the mustard seed that grows to be a big tree giving shade and rest; it can scale up and gain momentum to become a strong people movement.¹⁵

Second; the rich churches should put programs in place to build capacity of the church leadership in the informal settlements in order for them to remain relevant and focused.¹⁶ The people from the informal settlements understand their context quite well. What they lack is the knowledge on how to go about solving enormous challenges that confront them everyday. The capacity building helps the rich to relate well with the poor in a more reasonable way rather than perceive the poor as objects of material support. The rich and the external well wishers must stop viewing the poor as dependants who are there to be given and receive. Rather they should "challenge them to define their own vision, and manage and own development process as planners, implementers, evaluators and change agents themselves".¹⁷

Poverty in the informal settlements needs to be analyzed in the light of circumstances that individuals are going through. Experience has proved that there are very experienced, educated, and very bright people in the informal settlement who only need to be given an opportunity or shown the way.

Third, is the support of the poor which directly requires the rich to strategically give support to those areas that improve lives. Myers adds that the "rich churches should put plans in place to offer bursaries to the poor children from the informal settlements that seem to have a bright future but

without adequate financial support."¹⁸ It is without doubt that informal settlements are home to a lot of bright children who are wasted since they lack what their counterparts in the rich part of the city access. Many parents earn little money so that they cannot support their children in their educational needs. Grigg observes that, where formal education especially in Kenya has been given a high prominence, so that one is gauged according to academic achievement and this is through the grades that one attains. So that, the rich are able to take their sons and daughters to an expensive school with all the facilities that are required while the poor parents only afford to take their son and daughters to government sponsored schools that have no enough facilities and children are clustered together in numbers that cannot be adequately served by the teacher. Thus when the whole process is analyzed, the poor remain disadvantaged in the job market. They find it difficult to compete adequately in the Job market and thus left to serve the children of the rich and using the words of Jayakumar, "creating the future poor."¹⁹ The CUM,²⁰ in response to this challenge have partnered with St Jerome Church²¹ where they open their church hall to pupils in the upper primary level to access space to do their homework and some tuition especially in the evenings. In this, the children are able to receive light²² which is not assured in their parents houses and an environment that is generally favorable to their learning needs. This is a gesture that if enhanced and supported by the rich churches through collaborative partnership with the informal churches, can help in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor who also divide the society in terms of the elites and non-elites.

Grigg adds that in order to eradicate a dependant syndrome, the rich must be willing to develop strategic development plan that engages the informal settlement people in realizing their talents and gifts in their context. He suggests that since the poor are intimidated by contextual circumstances, it is in order that the rich take initiatives to remove the barriers and create opportunities for the poor. He talks of three points that lead to economical, as well as social and spiritual dependence (liberation). First is the provision of financial credit which implies that instead of free hand out, the rich churches would encourage micro finance units in the informal settlements to boost the economic status of the poor. Afterwards, when their small businesses grow, they will learn to deal with their own issues rather than every time depending on good Samaritans. Second; is identifying needy cases such as youth who have dropped out of school and support them

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 7.

²⁰ Centre for Urban Mission is a branch of Theology within Carlife School of Theology. The campus is situated in the heart of Kibera slums, which is the largest slum in Africa.

²¹ St Jerome, is an Anglican parish within the All Saint Diocese that is situated in the heart of Kibera slums.

²² All slums have no adequate electricity connections and many homes are not lighted at night.

¹⁴ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 68.

¹⁵ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 69.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 57

through vocational trainings in order to be independent of economic pressure and the enslavement of peer groups.

The third point that Grigg proposes is the transfer of tools and equipments and also of technical knowledge. The rich, who also forms the elite category of the society, need to see the informal settlement and slums as places of ministry where rich church leadership needs to talk about informal settlement context in their pulpits often and call on those with various skills, knowledge and equipment to support the poor.²³ The emphasis here is on the need to form a ramification that would act as a conscious tool towards the role of the urban rich church to their counterparts.

The above can imply that the rich Church, with all its resources and human expertise, has a missionary mandate to reflect God's image in the lives of the marginalized communities of the world. Bob Moffit perceives the church as the agent of God working hard to reclaim and restore harmony that was lost in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned.²⁴ In the face of human suffering, the church governed by the Christian values becomes the only instrument of hope to the hopeless. It cannot be compared to the governments which in many ways are driven by policies and other factors that may not necessary be helpful to the poor.

Kinoti, suggests five points that the church needs to engage with in the process of promoting a social- economic collaborative spirit among the poor and the rich churches. In his first point, he argues that since God wills peace and prosperity for the African people, the African church must respond to that call. The church and especially the Anglican Church in Kenya must develop mechanism that would promote social-economic collaborative measures. The Old Testament, from the Pentateuch to the prophets, reveals God as a father who was equally concerned about the spiritual, moral, economic and social welfare of the people of Israel. They were to live in harmony with one another and their neighbors. The New Testament encourages the same notion. The story of the rich man and Lazarus and the strong teaching of James on how the believes are to treat each other materially, elaborates more on social life between the rich and the poor. James emphasis of the true religion as that which takes care of the orphans, the widows, and keeping one away from being engulfed by the world, clarifies that the role of the church is that of demonstrating God's own love among all and especially the poor. The story of the rich man and Lazarus²⁵ in particular shows that wealth is good but needs to be handled in the interest of God's own mission, but not selfish interests.²⁶

Second, Christians are an integral part of society. The call here is for the Christians to start seeing themselves as agents of transformation aiming at creating a habitable

environment. The transformed Church should appreciate the role of speaking on behalf of the voiceless by formulating a plan and a vision, thus creating a society that seeks shalom of all its inhabitants. The term Shalom used by Kinoti is not just the mere peace, but that which demands more than reflecting but action oriented.

This shalom, Mugambi quoting Richard Harries adds that,

There can be no peace without justice, because any denial of justice will inevitably create the yearning amongst those who suffer injustice for the restoration of their rights, and integrity. Since *shalom* is an ideal, which is achievable in perfection, there is always a longing, a hope, that perfect peace – shalom-will eventually be realized. *Justice* is so integral to shalom that it is futile to proclaim peace in a society where injustice prevails.²⁷

Myers points that, “any vision of a better human future that is Christian must include a vibrant, growing, living Christian community that is eagerly and joyfully serving God and the community. It is impossible to imagine a transforming community without a transforming church in its midst.”²⁸

The urban church needs to put on the aerial or bird's eye view and start possessing the city in ways that can show what it is in a society. It should respond, politically, socially, and economically. One of the great responsibilities that God holds the church accountable is in the area of stewardship and equitability of resources.

Third “the human dignity of Africans is important. The fundamental Christian doctrine teaches that all humanity is created in the image of God and shares with their creator unique dignity and worth. The church should be working towards the sanctity of Human life. Certain conditions such as abject poverty, diseases, gross social injustice and dehumanization damage human personality and are an affront to human dignity.”²⁹

Fifth, obedience and compassion, it is the Christian duty to respond by supporting the needy. Thus compassion becomes an important motive for seeking to alleviate the suffering of the poor people in the city.³⁰ As this is implemented, the urban Church thus finds itself alienating the disintegration that exists between the poor churches and the rich Churches.

²³Grigg, *Cry of the urban poor*, 286.

²⁴Bob Moffit, *If Jesus Was The Mayor* (Harvest India, 2004), 94.

²⁵John 11:1-16.

²⁶Kinoti 2003:5-14.

²⁷Mary, Getui and Peter Kanyandago. Eds., *From Violence to peace: a challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999), 76.

²⁸Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 115.

²⁹Ibid

³⁰Ibid

IV. CONCLUSION

Churches' sharing of resources among herself is an expression of adherence and response to the truths shared in the Bible. It is of great importance that Christians learn to share what they have as living testimony to people outside of the kingdom. It helps reduce the disparity between and among the Christendom. It is important to have a Church that share for the balance of her members in all fronts of life.

AUTHOR

Rev. Dr. Manya Stephen is an experienced lecturer of religion. He has lectured in a number of universities and colleges including; Alupe University college (Where he is currently based), Kenyatta University, Daystar University, Scott Christian University, Mt. Kenya University, Africa International University, Riara University, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology and Church Army Carlile College. In this paper Dr. Manya Stephen provides a critical theological reflection on the conviction of Christian act of resource sharing.

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