

## **Reconstructing Mission: The Church in Africa in the Service of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation**

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### **Introduction:**

When I was asked to contribute to the theme of the conference, “Reconstructing Mission”, I was notably delighted and alarmed. Delighted because of the graciousness shown to me by the organizing committee; but nevertheless alarmed because the topic under investigation is novel; and not being involved in direct Christian Ministry, I feared that I may not have adequate insights into the challenges of mission in Africa today or authoritatively make proposals on the necessity or lack of it of reconstructing mission. Perhaps however this gives me a privileged objective position from which to ask the questions, what is mission today? What is the context of mission in Africa and what are its challenges? What does reconstructing mission mean and is there a need for it? What are the markers of a mission theology of reconstruction? How can the Church in Africa be better equipped to carry out its missionary mandate?

This presentation will address these questions bearing in mind that mission implies the calling of the church at every level to participate in the mission of the “Triune God who created the world as an expression of love, power and creativity, who sustains and rules the universe, and who sent Jesus Christ into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit as healing, liberating saviour, and who will bring about final reconciliation and restoration”.<sup>1</sup> This reflection will also be done in the light of the theme of the Second African Synod to be held in Rome in 2009 namely; “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”. The sub-title of the theme is “you are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world”. Other questions to ponder related to the theme are; what does it mean to be the salt of the earth today in an earth full of wealth and potentials, but an earth held captive by poverty, misfortune, disease and wars? What does it mean to be the light of the world in a continent with a mature Christian faith but a world of ethnic animosity, superficial faith and divisions? What missiological issues and approaches are generated by this scenario?

### **Perceptions of Mission:**

The meaning, context and dimensions of mission has been the subject of investigation and debate by missiologists, mission practitioners and theologians and the concept has undergone considerable paradigm shifts over the years. Perceptions of mission have changed and become multifaceted but Jesus’ imperative to proclaim the Gospel to all

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fmc-canada.org/global/resources/theology\\_mission\\_2006.pdf](http://www.fmc-canada.org/global/resources/theology_mission_2006.pdf). *A Theology of Mission for Free Methodist World Mission: 4* Downloaded 26<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

nations and making his disciples of them has not. Mission is not just the Church's activity in another culture local or abroad, but is a frontier of belief, conviction and commitment. The Catholic Church's understanding of mission is well articulated in the Vatican II document *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity)<sup>2</sup>, Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *On Evangelization of Peoples (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*,<sup>3</sup> 1975, and John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, among other Catholic Social Teachings. In these teachings, mission is articulated as the activity of "proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building the local Church and promoting the values of the Kingdom".<sup>4</sup>

The teachings also reiterate that Christian mission is divine and a fundamental obligation of the Church. Mission, which is also referred to as evangelization is primarily understood as an encounter of a people with the Good News of God's love proclaimed by Jesus Christ (Matt. 22:34-40; Jn. 3:16-17; 15:9-17). It entails converting, heralding or worshipping and an involvement in the world. The context of evangelization requires a proper understanding of the notion of salvation which implies liberation from all that oppresses and dehumanizes people; social, cultural, economic, political, spiritual or personal. Mission in this understanding means regeneration of people in a fundamental way through the power of the Gospel. Evangelization should bring about inner transformation in people, thus making them new creatures who witness to God's transforming presence and activity in society. John Pobee perceives mission in an African context as enabling people to do the will of God, working for a community of communities and bringing wholeness and healing.<sup>5</sup>

The Church is called to participate in this integral mission of God from wherever she is located and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is said to be by its very nature missionary; it exists by mission as a fire by burning. Mission creates the Church and bridges the gap between the Church and the Kingdom of God. The Church is called into being by the Father "who so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16) and who sent the Holy Spirit to lead believers into truth.<sup>6</sup> The Church is centered and grounded in the word and is a communion of those who by their encounter with the word stand in a living relationship with God. The Church is defined by its common partaking in the life of God who is Trinity and is the source and focus of all communions. It is both a divine and human institution. Although the Church is made up of human beings who are members of one body of Christ and open to the free activity of the Holy Spirit; in its human condition, it is still subject to the conditions of the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter M. Abbot (ed), *Documents of Vatican II*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1967, pp.580-630.

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Austine Flannery(ed) *Vatican Council II, More Conciliar Documents*, Leominster Herefords:Fowler Wright Books, 1982, pp.711-761.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Nairobi: Pauline's Publications 1980;33

<sup>5</sup> John S. Pobee, "Lord, Creator-Spirit, Renew and Sustain the Whole Creation," in *International Review of Mission* 29,(April 1990):55

<sup>6</sup> WCC,*The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage in the Way to a Common Statement*. Geneva: WCC, 2005, 11.

In this regard as the World Council of Churches observes, the Church is open to; change which though it leads to positive and negative developments is open to decline and distortion. It is also open to the power of sin; individual, cultural and historical conditioning which can contribute to a richness of insights and expressions of faith, but also to relativising tendencies or to absolutising particular views.<sup>7</sup>

It is therefore crucial that the Church becomes attuned to the signs of the times in order to creatively respond to changed situations with new understandings and attitudes about the mission mandate. As we shall see, questions have been raised about the missionary methods and the attitudes generated by these methods in the minds of the evangelizers and the evangelized despite the fact that the legitimacy of mission has not been questioned, at least in Africa.

### **Defining Reconstruction:**

The term reconstruction gained prominence in theological discourse in Africa in the early 1990s in the context of the All Africa Conference of Churches' theological consultations. It was a notion inspired by Perestroika (reconstruction) which inadvertently led to the demise of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Jesse Mugambi a Kenyan theologian, Charles Villa-Vicencio of South Africa, Andre Karamaga of Rwanda and Ka Mana of Cameroon are some of the foremost proponents of this theology. Their basic premise is that Christian theology is crucial to the social reconstruction of Africa. The emergence of the so called New World Order was perceived by Mugambi as an important historical moment that presented opportunities and challenges to develop a new vision, a new theology and a strategy for action that would deal not only with the legacy of colonialism and post-colonialism, but also implications of its end. He therefore challenged African theologians to critically engage with questions such as; how can Christianity in post colonial Africa help Africans to grow out of the vicious cycles of crises? What can the churches do to promote conditions conducive to national and social harmony? Are Christians and organizations in specific countries and regions agents of reconciliation or promoters of social change?

Mugambi takes issue with the liberation and inculturation paradigm within which African theologies had been undertaken as no longer adequate frameworks for doing African Theology. Both paradigms were designed to respond to the ecclesiastical and colonial bondage which no longer obtain and hence have been ineffective in responding to the multifaceted challenges posed by the post –colonial context. In place of the liberation-inculturation paradigm which was mainly “reactive”, there should be developed a “proactive” theology of reconstruction.<sup>8</sup> Instead of “calling for the ascendancy of liberation over inculturation or vice-versa”, Mugambi calls for an innovative transcendence of both”.<sup>9</sup> The post exilic motif exemplified in Ezra-Nehemiah is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid,30

<sup>8</sup> J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War*. Nairobi:EAPH. 1995,11-13.

<sup>9</sup> Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “African Theology”, in David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologies: An Introduction to Christian Theologies since 1918*. Oxford: Blackwell 2005:496

proposed to embody the new theological challenge and replace the exodus motif which inspired liberation. This proposal is based on Mugambi's conviction of the imperative of Africans' reviewing afresh their reading of the Bible which is replete with illustrations of personal renewal and social reconstruction. Consequently, religious metaphors need to be reinterpreted when they become obsolete and irrelevant. It is also derived from Isaiah 65:17-25. This text reflects the post-exilic period of Jewish History when reconstruction and restoration was very slow and difficult and the poor were exploited. The prophet attempted to restore hope and a renewed pure faith and religious community. The text also envisaging the reconstruction of a "new heaven" and a "new earth" is the motif used for imagining an alternative world by the World Forum for Theology and Liberation, the theological wing of the World Social Forum.

The notion of reconstruction Mugambi admits is also borrowed from the disciplines of engineering and social sciences and implies remodeling or redesigning and reorganization of certain aspects of society in order to make it more responsive. Reconstruction implies change at various levels namely individual, societal, church and nation. Reconstruction as a theological paradigm also finds its justification in the life and ministry of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), is regarded as the most basic reconstructive theological text in the ministry of Jesus. The theme of reconstruction is made attractive by the fact that it highlights the necessity of creating a new inclusive society traversing barriers of geography, culture, historical moments, gender, age, class ethnicity, race etc.

Villa-Vicencio on his part, appeals for a post Cold War theology for Africa to engage in serious dialogue with democracy, human rights, law making, nation building and economics in order to improve quality of human life.<sup>10</sup>

As defined by Ka Mana, a theology of reconstruction aims at the invention of an alternative pattern of human destiny outside the determinism of crisis. He therefore argues that to quit the all pervasive crises in Africa and reconstruct African societies, on a new basis, the major task of theology of reconstruction will consist in re-adapting the ethical stand point offered by the Christian faith as a means to explore new perspectives of creativity, energy and dynamism with regard to the problems of African societies.<sup>11</sup> In such a context, the mission of the church will consist in reconstruction through a triple strategy namely; bringing awareness to Christian communities of the urgent need for self empowerment in every situation against dehumanizing forces; bringing awareness among Christian communities about the necessity to grow in structures that do not allow temptation of tribal or ethnic hegemony and engaging in a mission to teach Christian communities alternative ways by living an active and genuine faith in Christ without falling into types of religiosity that develop feelings of enchantment about the invisible at the expense of public involvement in public affairs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*. Cape Town.:David Phillip Publishers, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Ka Mana cited in Valentin Deji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in Africa in Christian Theology*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003, 120-121.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 122.

Ka Mana's vision of the mission for the Church in Africa today is therefore "the re-evangelization of African societies in order to promote "anti-pharaoh" and "anti-baal" values, to grow seeds of life for the reconstruction of a human sphere where Christians would fully perform their duties as generators of active and creative hope".<sup>13</sup>

The theological vision for the Church in Africa mooted by these theologians is crucial to our understanding of reconstructing mission. It offers alternative biblical metaphors, symbols and narratives and alternate hermeneutical understandings of African realities in order to create new patterns or models of social transformation and community in Africa.

How can the reconstruction paradigm inform mission theology? Is there a need to reconstruct mission and to what purpose? Churches and mission scholars have criticized dominant mission paradigms and in their evaluation and proposals for alternatives utilized terms such as "rethinking mission", "transforming mission", "transfiguring mission" and "new evangelization" etc. Wilbert Shenk poignantly contends that mission is always at the risk of being distorted or misdirected. Whenever the Church has accommodated herself to controls of culture she has lost her sense of being in the stream of God's mission. Such accommodation usually means that a particular worldview such as modernity rather than the Gospel has become dominant for the church in its mission.<sup>14</sup>

Some missiologists have been uncomfortable with how concepts associated with the church's mission have been interpreted and implemented. They point out that some of the feelings and attitudes that have been created and conveyed cannot be in accord with the project of Jesus Christ whose fundamental goal was "life in its fullness" for all humanity. The concept of, "mission to the nations", which was the dominant model since the 15<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by the ideology of Christendom and implicit in it was cultural triumphalism. The missionary movement in the twentieth century and the Christian churches were also plagued by reductionisms that put limits on the scope of the Gospel. It resulted from Christian reactions to the challenges of modernity and especially that expressed through modernism and fundamentalism.<sup>15</sup> It truncated the Gospel into proclamation of the Word and social service. Either extreme is inimical to the integrity of the Gospel for an adequate theology of mission must be faithful to the fullness of the Gospel.

Magesa echoing other missiologists suggests that rather than speaking of "mission to the nations" (*missio ad gentes*) we should speak of mission as "God's activity among the nations", (*missio inre gentes*). The "nations" to which God's mission (*mission Dei*) is targeted in this new understanding are not only peoples of "underdeveloped" or "undeveloped" nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, but all people of all races of the world including "us" whoever and wherever "we" are (the evangelizers) may be.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Wilbert Shenk (ed.), *The Transfiguration of Mission: Biblical Theological and Historical Foundations*.  
Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1993, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Shenk, *The Transfiguration of Mission*, 11

The consequences of this understanding of mission and missionary activity are enormous and far reaching. Firstly, it makes redundant previous dualistic notions of the missionary mandate that the responsibility of sending missionaries and receiving them is designated to certain territories. Now all nations are theologically considered mission lands as far as the work of God is concerned. All human beings, all societies are receivers and potential givers of God's grace. All peoples need to be disciplined in the way of Christ regardless of when or how long they have been tutored in the faith. Secondly, this understanding impacts also on the methods of mission. If every person, nation or culture is in need of being evangelized, then evangelization cannot be carried out in a uniform manner. It means that consideration of cultures, group identity, human dignity and respect for religious plurality is an imperative. Dialogue is therefore a crucial component of mission. At this point let us briefly explore the African context in which mission is taking place in the twenty first century.

### **The Necessity of Mission for Africa:**

Africa is a context that tells or depicts two stories that are diametrically opposed. One is a story of frustration and cry of children, women and men who are tired of unending debt, poverty, unlimited exploitation of their natural and human resources and who desperately seek to end the misery caused by civil wars, ethnic conflicts, inept and unaccountable leadership, debilitating disease including HIV and AIDS, and mismanagement of national affairs and resources. The other story is one of a vibrant Christianity, a rich spirituality that engenders hope and sustains her in the midst of this apparent chaos. There is joy in community life and the African values of solidarity, mutual caring, reverence for God, and a dynamic engagement with spiritual forces is experienced and shared. Nevertheless, the Church is so fragmented that there is not much sustained ecumenical cooperation. It is as if night and day exist simultaneously in modern Africa.

It is an acknowledged fact that Christianity is growing tremendously in Africa. To quote some statistics which may not be very reliable yet give crucial indicators; during the twentieth century, the proportion of Africans who were Christians in the world rose from 9% of the whole to almost half. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, "African Christians have mushroomed from 9.9 million (0.6%) of the world's population, to 300 million in AD 2000 (89%). The present net increase on the continent is 8.4 million new Christians a year (23,000 a day) of which 1.5 million are net new converts."<sup>16</sup> Just like in the rest of the two third worlds, what is drawing Africans to Christianity is the power of the Gospel to change the individual and one's personal circumstances, and a search for the key to social transformation of the modern world. The Gospel message of justice and love of God for the poor and marginalized resonates with a context that is characterized by struggles for survival and for justice and peace.

There is tremendous revival in the Church as is evidenced by multiplication of new Pentecostal Christian groups and charismatic renewal within Protestant and Catholic Christianities. These are reminiscent of the Pietistic-Wesleyan movements in the 17<sup>th</sup> and

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<sup>16</sup> David B.Barrett et al. *World Christian Encyclopedia: Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World. Vol. 1*, Second edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 5.

18<sup>th</sup> centuries. As you are well aware, Methodism fostered a new religious climate in England and made people more aware of their fellow citizens and more responsive to their needs. It infused a new philanthropic impulse into English society that made humanitarian concern resulting in societal action, a unifying value for the whole nation. Unfortunately for Africa, numerical growth has not resulted into a transforming spirituality that fosters Christian and national identity. Ethnicity is a demon threatening to tear not only the nation state apart, but also the Church.

In the *Lineamenta* (preparatory document for the Second Special Assembly for Africa), the promotion of the Kingdom of God, which is reconciliation, justice and peace is regarded as crucial to the identity and relevance of the Church in Africa hence the choice of these issues in the theme of the forthcoming assembly. The document identifies social-economic, cultural, socio-political concerns, ecumenism, minorities, migration, inter-religious dialogue, violence, gender injustice and environmental degradation among others as crucial issues for the Church to address if her missionary engagement is to be fruitful.

The first African Synod held in 1994 under the general theme of “Evangelization”, explored topics of inculturation, dialogue, justice, peace and communication. Its theological vision was captured with the descriptive phrase for the Church in Africa as “The Family of God”. Much theological reflection on the theme generating a lot of literature has occurred; but the Church is far from exhibiting realization of these goals. The recent crises in Kenya at the beginning of the year that resulted from a disputed presidential election which was only the precipitating factor of deep ethnic hatred, unaddressed historical injustices dating from the colonial period, social exclusion especially of the youth, unemployment, economic injustice, poverty; and competing political interests, tested the nature and integrity of the Church in Kenya. Her participation in God’s mission has been questioned and this calls for an evaluation and reconstruction of her mission theology and practice.

The Church’s initiative in welfare provision, emergency relief, pastoral care and general presence among the hurting is commendable. However, Christians expected more bold and prophetic leadership that would show that the Church is really the, *conscience of the nation* and adopting a preferential option for the poor. In the midst of political interests, distortion of history and hate ethnic propaganda proclaimed by competing political parties, generally polarized along ethnic lines, the Christian population sought guidance from their political and religious leaders on how to respond and to vote. The Muslims took a stand, but majority of churches whether evangelical, Catholic, Pentecostal, Protestants or Independent told their adherents to use their conscience. This was bewildering; for people in Africa generally trust and depend on the opinion of their religious leaders. Christians still respect the authority of their leaders and majority are illiterate or semi-literate without the capacity to form informed choices and decisions. Their consciences are not even very well formed.

The consequence of this scenario was unprecedented ethnic violence reminiscent of Rwanda where “born again” Christians hacked their neighbors to death, maimed others

for life, destroyed property and livelihoods, raped women and girls and a displacement of over 350,000 people some of whom are still in camps of displaced people. The Church responded to the humanitarian crises wonderfully but what people wanted to hear is a message of hope, reconciliation, justice and a creative political intervention in the crises. The tragedy of December 2007-February 2008 has shaken the Christian Church to its foundations and has haunted it ever since. Christians and clergy were victims of the violence at the hands of fellow Christians. The church buildings which are hallowed grounds and places where people sought refuge did not escape the violence as some were burnt down and one particular one with people inside, thirty five of whom died. What is shocking is that in the calls for justice, reconciliation and peace at the moment, some politicians have the nerve to call for release of perpetrators of the violence claiming that it is a natural hazard of the quest for democracy.

The crises divided the Church and in worst cases led to splintering of congregations. The church has been accused of complicity and abetting the evil by its silence. On 15<sup>th</sup> February, the National Council of Churches of Kenya apologized to Kenyans for its failure to provide moral leadership, but other churches including the Catholic Church have preferred to proffer guilt and apportion blame to individuals other than the church leadership. A priest in one mainline church recently remarked in this regard, “religious leaders persist in keeping a safe distance from {the} critical effort of reconstruction, choosing instead to criticize politicians as they fumble in their attempts to rebuild our society’s relationships.”<sup>17</sup>

It seems the Church in Africa has failed in some respects to promote an authentic Christian identity and communities that transcend barriers of ethnicity; it has also failed to forge nationhood and to empower communities. A Catholic priest recently attributed the failure of Christians to live up to their calling and Gospel values in the recent political crises in Kenya, to lack of quality formation. He said there is need for a deep rooted evangelization in which African values of life, mutual responsibility, reciprocity and respect of relationships and the earth meet Christian values. He also says that there is need for prophetic, spiritual and sincere leadership for the Church in Kenya to regain its moral authority. Her ecclesiology and mission also needs thorough evaluation for the model of Church determines how Christians understand themselves and their roles in it. Numerical growth of the African church requires to be matched by deep catechesis if it will escape the fate of the North African church which grew numerically but its shallowness could not withstand the onslaught by Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

There are other challenges facing the Church in Africa. Allow me to briefly outline them. The issue of ethnic conflicts and violence pervades much of Africa. Today, nineteen of the 53 African nations are experiencing conflicts and wars. While we may thank God that the Church is growing numerically, vocations to the priesthood and religious life is increasing; the depth of faithful commitment as already mentioned is something to diligently work on. This makes the task of reconciliation, justice and peace a matter of utmost concern and priority. People expect nothing less than the Church to take leadership in this matter. Again to quote Buri, “...politicians are working harder to

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<sup>17</sup> Buri Edward, ‘The Displaced are a Test of our Freedom’, *Sunday Nation*, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2008, 24.



portray a religious front to connect with the people. But regrettably, religious institutions, which already performed poorly in guiding the country during and after the elections are barely contributing. Their presence is hardly felt, and their participation ranks well below that of charitable organizations”.<sup>18</sup>

There should be a focus on ways to promote genuine peace, built on justice and development. The churches’ involvement in peace building, conflict resolution, peace and civic education, anti-gun campaigns and advocacy for human rights and economic justice is remarkable. However more spirited efforts are required centered not on secular approaches but Gospel ones.

Another issue related to promotion of human dignity is that of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and gender justice. The HIV and AIDS pandemic requires a more holistic approach not just as a medical and moral issue, but one of social justice considering that it is aggravated by poverty which is a result of bad governance and other macro factors. The Church generally has not addressed gender questions which are not just about ordination of women. The critical concern is involving women in decision making at all levels, promotion of the rights of the girl child (the boy child as well), addressing gender based violence as a moral, theological and social issue and full teaching of the equal dignity of women in sermons, catechetical training and small Christian communities discussions. To continually be relevant, the church needs to continue her advocacy for social justice, equitable distribution of resources and the promotion of the dignity of the person in teaching and practice. Economic growth in some countries like Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda in the last five years has not translated to marked improvement in the livelihoods of people. It has widened the gap between the rich and poor classes and the frustration of the people has been expressed through ethnic and xenophobic violence as witnessed in Kenya and South Africa in the last five months.

The Church should create a balance between service provision, proclamation of the Gospel and being prophetic; otherwise there will be no difference between it and secular Non-Governmental Organizations. Her commitment to issues of justice, peace and reconciliation should go beyond writing pastoral letters denouncing conflicts, corruption, foreign debt etc. There should be deeper pastoral involvement that will foster a faith life, catechesis of children and adults, prayerful liturgies, spiritual depth of families and consequent evolvment of a genuinely and authentically African Church. The Church especially former mission churches require to be more self reliant in theology, mission practice and otherwise. This calls for a creative and dynamic view of mission and accountability even in church affairs. Peter Henriot writing about the Catholic Church in Zambia observes, “...we still have a long way to go before we can say that mechanisms of participation, guarantee of human rights and openness of decision making are fully adopted in the Church.”<sup>19</sup> What does reconstructing mission mean in this context in Africa? What is the future of mission in Africa? It is to this that we shall now turn.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Henriot, “AMECEA and the Second African Synod”, *New People*, No. 114 May – June 2008, 20.

## **Towards a Holistic Mission:**

Although the future of mission is ultimately in God's hands, it is the privilege of human beings to shape it based on the understanding of the past and present. The Church as we have mentioned earlier is the whole people of God, individuals and groups responding to the law of Christ which eternal element is invitation to express love to others. The Church continues to renew itself and its mission too. For any individual or group to live fully, it involves correcting mistakes of the past and charting a better vision of the future. This is even more imperative for Christians in the spirit of repentance or *metanoia*. What does this mean in practical terms? In the face of seemingly hopeless and precarious situations, how can the Church live and engage in its mission in such a manner as to be a sign and instrument of change and hope that is rooted in the Paschal mystery?

### *Promoting Peace-building, Justice and Reconciliation.*

The deep hurts and painful experiences that the African continent has experienced invite the Church to mediate peace, reconciliation and healing. It calls for an ecumenical mission and vision that entails partnering in suffering by accompanying our members who are suffering whether it is ill health through HIV and AIDS, ethnic conflicts, gender violence, child abuse or any other form of suffering. We should not as people of God fail in our moral duty to stand up for justice and speak out where it is violated. Ethnic hatred and Xenophobia are a great hindrance to the Church's mission to live the life and love of Christ in Africa. Its major source is the problem of "otherness", which regards those unlike "us" as less human or unworthy. This "othering" extends to differences such as gender, class, race and even religion/faith. Difference should not be divisive but should be celebrated. The Church should reflect on this concept of otherness and foster what Miroslav Volf calls a "theology of embrace". He observes, "The future of the whole world depends on how we deal with ethnic, religious and gender otherness".<sup>20</sup> Volf considers the inability to relate the core theological beliefs about reconciliation to the shape of the Church's social responsibility.

Furthermore, individualized pietistic and evangelical Christianity (prevalent in Europe) has placed little focus on social reconciliation. Faith is a matter of the soul's relationship with God and lacks a social dimension. An exclusive emphasis on private morality based on an individual's reconciliation with God leads to an aversion towards the world and the other. Could this be the problem at the root of ethnic animosity among Christians? The social dimension of reconciliation was central to human and communal relationships in Africa. This is a resource the Church can tap into as it evolves new dynamic ways of being Church and as it addresses injustice, social and political strife.

The Church in Africa should see her mission as bringing wholeness to people as Jesus did. Jesus' ministry was grounded in *Shalom*, an Old Testament concept of peace that is inclusive of harmony and wellbeing. *Shalom* entails justice, healed relations between individuals in the society, between God and humanity and between humanity and the rest

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<sup>20</sup> Miroslav Volf cited in Anne-Marie Kool, "The Church in Hungary, Central and Eastern "Trends and Challenges", in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. XXVIII no. 2, 2007,149.

of creation. The greatest challenge is post war/conflict reconstruction. This is where confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing are necessary. This reconciliation should not be a hasty process but one that respects and restores human dignity. It should be seen as a process that leads victims to discover the mercy of God welling up their lives. It is discovering God's reconciliation through Christ. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to bring forgiveness and reconciliation among people who are hurting, both victims and perpetrators. As Esther Mombo asserts, "for reconciliation to be there, the victim must forgive, the perpetrators cannot forgive themselves. That forgiveness must carry something of the unboundedness of grace that God gives. We must not count trespasses more than God does."<sup>21</sup>

### *Discipling the Nations:*

Commenting on the apparent superficiality and nominality of African Christianity Madu says that as long as Africa's cherished ideals and values are not met by the Gospel, then its cogency for the African becomes questionable and Africans will continue to ask, "is this the Christ or shall we look for another?"<sup>22</sup> This is a challenge to an inculturated evangelization. The future of mission and the Church in Africa depends on the sound, committed and honest theological reflection and not mere numerical strength. There is need for comprehensive, integrated and systematic ongoing formation catechesis. The emphasis on that catechesis should not be on intellectual learning of the faith but on living it; a catechesis that facilitates a living personal and communal encounter with the Risen Lord. This will promote moral behavior and mutual concern and responsibility.

The Good News is about transforming cultures as well. When people have the Good News and turn to God in Jesus Christ they express their response creatively in a new way of community, structures, rituals and celebrations, reflection and spirituality. Doing mission in a holistic and transformational manner implies surrendering ourselves to Christ to be purified, sanctified and renewed. It entails Christ confronting and transforming our lives and institutions to be like him. Until the Gospel effects this transformation through being inculturated in the African context; we shall continue lamenting about an "uncompleted mission", "superficial gospel" and a "schizophrenic Christianity". A sustained theological engagement and formation is the a major challenge to Christian mission in Africa.

### *Prophetic Leadership*

For effective mission, there is need for a courageous, empowered and committed leadership. Our Church leaders should have pastoral integrity. A leader should have a

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<sup>21</sup> Esthe Mombo, "Building a Culture of Peace Through Reconciliation from a Christian Religious perspective", Mary N. Getui and W. Musyoni (eds.), *Overcoming Violence: A Faith Based Response*, Nairobi: NCCK. 2004, 144.

<sup>22</sup> Madu Emeka, "The Place of African Culture on Christian Practice: Food for thought for Nigeria's Major Seminaries" *African Christian Studies* Vol. 19, No. 3, 2003, 34.

stand, be dependable, uphold justice, and have convictions and courage. Church leaders should embody in their leadership just like Jesus, integrity, dignity and humility. We mentioned earlier that the Kenyan Church failed to provide moral leadership by taking sides in the political crises that engulfed the nation late last year and early this year. They failed to play the prophetic role of being the conscience of the nation. Theological education/formation is crucial to developing this type of leadership. A visionary leadership is required that is able to engage in a dynamic and informed way with the myriad of issues confronting the African continent.

#### *Dialogue as a way of Mission*

Africa is a continent of diverse nations, cultures and religions. Expressing integrity in mission entails an awareness of this pluralistic context and recognizing that Christians can only fulfill their mission mandate in collaboration. Dialogue has not been a common practice in the Church due to fundamentalist currents, and misuse of the power of religion by economic and political vested interests. We however need to listen to one another in order to effectively proclaim the Good News. In the process of mutual listening, there is mutual learning and our common experience of God is deepened. This also facilitates common living, while respecting the dignity and differences of others.

#### *Witness to the Marginalized*

For the Church's mission in Africa to be relevant, it must be inclusive and bring Shalom to the marginalized. To be Church in Africa is to have "good news" for the crowd of humanity that seeks fullness of life without ever achieving it, the poor, and the deprived rural and urban poor. These are the victims of economic and political injustices women, men and children. Women and the girl child are especially oppressed by patriarchy both in Church and society. Reconstructing mission calls for dismantling of patriarchal notions and power structures that prevents people from experiencing the liberative power of God. This would also lead to attentiveness of what women bring and can bring to the Church. In an insightful article on the Church and AIDS, Orobator observes that "in the context of AIDS, the face of the Church as a multi-sectoral, ministering and healing community has a distinctively feminine profile. This profile or face embodies an important aspect of the church's identity and mission namely Church as mother".<sup>23</sup>

This dimension is visible in the many ways that women provide care to the infected and affected. The spiritual and social accompaniment, compassion and commitment provided by these women in responding to AIDS are integral to the identity and mission of the Church. The same can be said of women as healers and peace makers in conflict situations. A renewed or reconstructed mission should value the contribution of women in all situations and accord them greater freedom in representing the profound reality of Church as mother to the rest of society. A renewed Church should deconstruct the structures of gender based discrimination in Church and society. The image of the Church as a caring community is tarnished by its abetting whether knowingly or inadvertently the oppression and discrimination of women.

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<sup>23</sup> Orobator A. E. "When AIDS Comes to the Church" Benzet Buju and M. Czerny, *AIDS in Africa: Theological Reflections*. Nairobi:Paulines, 2007,124

The youth is another forgotten category by the Church and society. They are acclaimed as leaders of tomorrow but they wait forever to take the mantle from their parents. They are a resource that the Church is not adequately utilizing. The modern missionary movement owes its success to the committed and untiring efforts of youth world wide through organizations like the Young Men Christian Association, Young Women Christian Association, World Student Christian Federation, Student Christian Movement etc. I understand that the youth department is the most under funded and undervalued department in many churches. This needs to change. It is not surprising that young people are moving to Charismatic churches which have relatively younger membership and provide more fulfilling opportunities for participation and leadership. Unfortunately, there are also youth who drop out of the Church and do not join another one. Some have also never been evangelized. These are the ones who become fodder for politicians in urban and rural areas. This is a frontier of mission, especially in urban slums that needs serious attention. It has been observed that many mainline churches are reluctant to engage in “slum ministry” and the church in the slums does not perceive itself as part of the local church. Most of the clergy serving in urban slums are foreign missionaries. The local church is therefore challenged to be inclusive .

### **Conclusion:**

The Church in Africa is growing as evidenced by the number on Christians in the continent, the increase in vocations, the number of local clergy, educational, health and pastoral institutions and developments of projects and programmes aimed at uplifting the lives of the people. Mission in terms of proclamation and witness has therefore succeeded. However, it is lamented that this numerical growth is not matched by moral transformation of people which is visible in the frequent and persisting ethnic conflicts, corruption, impunity and disregarded for healthy relationships among fellow human beings. Mission is not a state, it is a process, an ongoing task. We too are not Christians but continually become Christians. Therefore discipling is an ongoing task if Christians have to love and live the life Christ calls us to. To the question “Africa, where are you going?,” I agree with the Lineamenta that there is need for a renewed vision for mission in Africa. It is one that must change Africa’s destiny so that reconciliation will come in the midst of much hatred and divisions, and peace and justice will finally reign. It is a vision that calls for imagining another possible world centered on Christ who is the fullness of life, our Reconciler, our Peace, our Justice and our hope.