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## The Prognosis of the Church's Involvement in Development in the Context of Her Mission

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### **Abstract:**

*In this paper my focus is on the philosophy of the church for development. The paper addresses pertinent issues that normally prompt the church to embrace active role in development matters, more specifically the primary mission to cushion her social responsibility status in society. The paper raises fundamental issues such as the environment of operation, the responsibility of the state, the challenges and limitations of this involvement.*

**Key words:** Development, Market forces, mission, paradigms for development, HIV/AIDS, motivating factors

### **1. Introduction**

I feel so much sorry for those who pretend that God listens more to the saints than to the wicked. One day a friend told me of an incident that occurred in their church that led to the desecration of their church building. This particular morning the congregation had refused to allow their priest to conduct mass following numerous accusations against him concerning infidelity and financial impropriety. They also accused the priest of being antidevelopment. Earlier that month they had sent a memorandum to their bishop in which they listed all their grievances concerning their priest. Top on the list was the word antidevelopment; followed by corruption, immorality among others. The congregation wanted a priest who could initiate development in their parish not the one that kept on asking for money every time he stands to speak. The bishop was ready to give them counsel despite the fact that they could not prove the cases of infidelity and financial impropriety. The most preferred case was in the area of development. They argued that the priest had brought the parish to its knee. In fact in their own words the priest had killed the parish. The bishop urged them to be patient as he is taking his time to consult and fellowship with his team over the issue. But to his surprise, the bishop learnt that the church elders led the congregation to deny the priest entry into the church and even went further to beat him up.

Even though the story presents more or less similar circumstances we witness in many churches today, this particular case brings to our attention the plain reality of people's frustration with leadership that fails to deliver. Another issue that comes clear to the picture is people's concept of development.

What is development? What factors inspire the people, the church and society in the quest for development? What paradigms do we use for measuring (1.) development (2.) what is developed, (3)-development person And (4) Tools for development.

The question of development is well understood by the older people who are more amazed than being excited by the latest inventions especially in the field of technology. The old generation could remember the days when they could be sent to relatives living long distances apart to pass the messages of death. They could remember the days when owning a musical gramophone, corrugated iron roofed house, a sofa set or a bicycle were signs of economic well being. They could remember the days when telegram messages had the authority of proof and was the most reliable and authentic means of sending SMS even though the message could reach the recipient after couple of days. It also depended on the good will of the village pillar whose name deserved quoting in cases of emergencies. They often received telegrams on behalf of their village folk. Today what we encounter in terms of Information technology has virtually changed our world view so much so that we now consider ourselves more developed than ever before. We are developed to the extent that we can now pass information much faster and cheaper than ever before. We are also developed to the extent that we can now deal with various diseases, which were considered incurable before. We are also developed to the extent that we can now interact with many people across the globe, sharing more with them their resources, expertise, gains and losses.

### **2. What is Development?**

Let us begin by understanding the meaning or meanings of the word development.

Development is a process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment and their future, in order to realize the full potential of life that God has made possible.<sup>1</sup> There are some indicators for development, which seemingly have gained currency over the years: Physical development, infrastructure, good and quality healthcare and living, good education, high standard of living. Even though these may be visible indications that the people are developed, it would be naïve to limit development only to material prosperity. Development does not simply mean the increase in size or numbers. Quantity is only one measure of development and quality is another. Individuals, churches, organizations, groups and communities develop when their attitudes, beliefs and values improve.<sup>2</sup> It is a contradiction to talk about development as an independent isolated process towards wholeness if we cannot see it in terms of human interactions and struggles in their overall quest for wholeness. The church has a heavy responsibility to intervene in social issues by being at the center of social service.

We cannot limit economic development as the major overriding principle even though this was the case in the 1960s and 70s. The end product in development activity is considered to be reducing, if not eliminating poverty and inequality in society. Inequality at different levels of human living creates enmity leading to wars, fights, and so on, therefore development is taken as nothing less than the upward movement of the entire social system. Michael Todaro considers the essence of development as a change in the whole social system. He points out three core aims of development in any society:

- To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health, and protection
- To raise levels of living including, in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and humanistic values
- To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also the forces of ignorance and human misery.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Motivating factors

The primary responsibility of the church is not really to create opportunities or avenues for development in its literal sense. Radical theological thinkers like Luther strongly believe that this is never and will never be the responsibility of the church as it falls within the mandate of the state. Luther believes that there is no extra credit to our account for either giving alms or helping the poor. Luther could be writing to the extent that our driving force should not be motivated by profit motif in any way. The current trend seemingly has been to commercial our desires, and activities. Do we initiate development as a means to achieve credit from its beneficiaries? Our driving force must supersede commercial interests and personal ego. It is the love of God that compels the church to do something about the plight of the needy. The holistic mission of the Church cuts across social and geographical boundaries. It cannot just be explained in terms of dogmas and ecclesiastical presuppositions.

Before we discuss this matter further, it is important to note that the church is not called to build roads and hospitals for the sick, to construct schools and universities for the needy who are thirsty for these vital services. These services are primarily the preserve of the state. It is the state that has the power and authority to raise funds from the citizenry to finance social services. The primary calling of the church was to proclaim the gospel in its entirety. It was an evangelistic mission that began from the urban setting of Jerusalem through the remote village of Samaria to the rest of the world. The word development is a recent vocabulary in human history. The need for it has forced the church to re-examine her primary mission to the world forcing her to also evaluate her relevance. We must not overemphasize the primary role of the church as purely evangelistic in character. Our entire mission would spell doom if we ignored the plight of a neighbour. The neighbour may not need the word of God in its raw form, but he will easily understand how we care for him at a time of need. He will live to remember that the church played a major role in his life by providing avenues for his employment. The sick will have a reason to think of the church as a place for refuge, a vehicle towards healing and wholeness through her health facilities. Our motivation is not stirred by any desire to lure more people to the church but to help them access the blessings of God through search services.

Another reason why the church must fully get involved in development is based on the understanding that the church is never an exclusive club. She exists not for her own sake but for the sake of others: the afflicted, confused, the segregated etc. The church is there for the rest of the world that yearns for a stake of God's creation. The pain of torture, hunger, diseases, ignorance and other agonizing human conditions is a clear testimony of how vulnerable human society has become. There is no government that has ever succeeded in wiping out the agony of life. The poor are there and will always be there. The church will always be there for the rich and the poor, the wicked and the saints, strong and weak.

The continuous involvement of the church in development is a clear indication that people trust and appreciate the services that she provides. However, the involvement of such a magnitude does not legitimize claims for an alternative power to the state. The state is run by political leadership whose every decision is measured in terms of political returns. The church on the other hand is restrained by the command of the Lord not to let the other hand know what the other has given.

<sup>1</sup> . The definition of development is based on the collections quoted by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden in the *Evangelicals and Developmen: towards a Theology of Social Change* edited by Ronald Sider Exeter The Paternoster Press 1981.

<sup>2</sup> George Lovel et al *The Church and Community Development* Avec Publication 1992 page 31

<sup>3</sup> The article by Pervaiz Sultan and quoted from *Reconciling Mission The Ministry of Healing and Reconciliation in the Church Worldwide* edited by Kirsteen Kim . United College of Ascension, Selly Oak 2006 page 111.

The church is involved in development as a way of showing responsibility. Any responsible person or institution will always strive to address the needs and expectations of those under their jurisdiction. The first element in the theory of responsibility is the idea of response. All action, we now say, including what we rather indeterminately call moral action, is response to action upon us. All actions that go on within the sphere of our bodies, from the heartbeats to knee jerks, are doubtless also reactions, but they do not fall within the domain of self-actions if they are not accompanied and infused, as it were, with interpretation. Whatever else we may need to say about ourselves in defining ourselves, we shall need, apparently, always to say that we are characterized by awareness and that this awareness is more or less that of intelligence which identifies, compares, analyzes, and relates events so that they come to us not as brute actions, but as understood and as having meaning.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. The Scope of Church's Involvement in Development**

From the horizon, we can witness the ever unfolding scenarios requiring our social action at every stage. The prevalence of dreaded diseases, poverty and unending conflicts, will always continue to stir our attention to participate in the search for solution. The needs for our time calls into question the relevance of our mission statements, our sermons, prayers, social activities, teachings, and the level of our participations in community development. Our hearts remain restless until we find peace in thee. St. Augustine was right, there is no way the church can sit and watch when millions are starving in Africa, millions are continued to be displaced by wars, and millions are left orphans as a results of AIDS. As I am working on this paragraph, a daily paper has highlighted a research finding conducted by Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) on the spread of AIDS among the fishermen along Lake Victoria Kisumu County. According to the research findings, the spread of the diseases has been escalated by rampant adultery more so among the wives of the fishermen. The reasons are attributed to several factors: proliferation and glorification of extra marital affairs in modern society attributed to lack of traditional institutions to mentor young men and women on sexuality. The report also revealed that women whose husbands have big penises are more likely to cheat on their husbands a factor attributed to pain during sex. Spouses involved in unprotected extra-marital sex acts as conduits through which HIV enters marriages.<sup>5</sup> The scourging effect of HIV/AIDS pandemic has had on development is immense. In a village of Bwaja in Siaya County, the effect of HIV/AIDS on the education and development of this fishing community is quite devastating. There is less and less economic activities going on in this village. Most young people of between 40-50 years have almost been wiped out. The random tests we carried out with my students, show that almost 99.9% of men who would have been 50 years now have died of HIV/AIDS related complications. Last year (2013) there was none who celebrated 50 years save for this researcher! Giving the impression that there was only one birth in this village in 1963! I had several school mates who were my age mates. We attended the same school in the village, played together and at times fought each other. But now, it is very sad that I stand among strangers, those who are younger than me, and those older than me, thus sharing little of the old sweet memory! Apart from HIV/AIDS there is also domestic violence that is poisoning major threats to family stability and the nation as a whole. In view of these scenarios, the church must honestly feel embarrassed that her message of peace, love and unity is still a toll order. The problem again is that the church has also allowed herself to be part of the agonized, afflicted community. It therefore, becomes difficult to extend a helping hand to the needy. But again, to concretize our moral authority and participation in community development, it becomes imperative for the church to stop thinking of working for the people. Time for working for the people is gone and it is now time to work with them.

#### **5. The how of the Church's Involvement**

George Lovell draws a very important attention to this subject. He says that much has been written about 'the servant Church'. In practice many have interpreted this as the church working for the world, that is church being the humble, uncomplaining and unpaid servant of the world which presents itself as customer, client or boss. The servant ministry of Jesus was otherwise. He was servant to all but none were his bosses or his customers. He came to work with us. He is Emanuel which means God with us. Working with people generates a sense of community. It helps them feel that they belong and that they are equal partners; they begin to talk in terms of 'we' instead of 'them and us'. It is our project instead of their project, our centre instead of their centre, and our idea instead of their idea.<sup>6</sup>

There is always a wrong notion that development is meant for only a certain category of social class. Most NGOS operations are meant to empower a certain class of people commonly referred to as the people, the poor, or simply the common person. This notion negates the principle aim of our motivation. Development cannot be limited to such a reference. It is the holistic involvement of the people irrespective of their social classes or political inclinations. The Church may not have the capital to initiate mega institutions or projects that would create more jobs to the entire population. Even though the Church may have a big following, the contributions of members may not be enough to address such fundamental enterprises. However, the church has a voice that must speak aloud to be heard. It can embark on community sensitization, behind the scene lobbying, and to some extent join hands with other pressure groups to force the government to meet its obligations.

<sup>4</sup> ( Niebuhr H Richard *The Responsible Self* Harper and Row, Publishers 1963-page 61)

<sup>5</sup> Daily Nation Nairobi Friday , April 25,2014 page1-2

<sup>6</sup> George Lovell as above page 5

The role of churches in development requires them to be fully involved in socio-economic life of the people at every level. At the grass root level, it must participate in planning and prioritization processes. The church must claim its role as the voice of the voiceless, the focus of unity, the epicentre of hope, and a springboard for action. But again how can the church do this without losing focus of her mission? The church would be required to work together with the people to identify what has gone wrong. Something definitely has gone wrong somewhere. As Michael Nazir-Ali would say, there are things that have gone wrong with people's values, with worldview, with beliefs, and so the church is called, in the light of the gospel, to judge what has gone wrong.<sup>7</sup> Something has also gone wrong with the church that has to play the role of a judge. The judge has become the accused. He is no longer the perfect guy with the power to determine the fate of convicts. He is himself convicted. More often than not, church leaders have been accused of malpractices ranging from financial impropriety to other vices. The secular authority has exploited the weaknesses of the church and taken her leaders hostage by awarding them favours in order to silence their voices. This is this scenario that all Christians must deal with. There is hope for a broader and better participation of the church in development. History reminds us that the church has survived crisis after crisis, and the mantle of hope is always with the ordinary Christian folk, the ones that have been infected by the gospel and are determined to carry the burden of faith at all cost.

## 6. The challenges

New approaches are necessary if we were to remain relevant as a church. The church needs to prepare to either confront or accommodate the emerging concepts of our time. Here, we are bound to address the course and trend of secularization Vis-a- VI the calling of the church. The term 'secularization' was first used in Europe as a term to describe the legal procedures whereby ecclesiastically owed property was transferred to 'worldly' ownership or use. It has gradually evolved into a description of a process whereby 'religious' beliefs cease to be widely accepted and 'religious institutions' cease to have social, economic or political influence. This process seems to be irreversible. It has also been held to be a necessary accompaniment of modernity. The more secular a society, the more irreligious it is.<sup>8</sup>

The church through her educational policies must come up forcefully not to fight secularism, but to assert herself as the sound of reason, hope, and faith of the people in their own initiatives. Secularism may be classified as part of the principalities and powers of our time. The church must therefore not attempt to isolate her from non religious activities, but should always seek to interpret her functions in light of biblical jurisprudence. The interpretive approach to the bible will allay the fear of losing Christian values and beliefs to secularism.

## 7. Market Forces

Any idea of development that does not take into account the economic needs of the people is bound not only to fail but also to thwart the people's confidence in church's ability to participate in social services. Market forces always dictate the trend of development to a certain level that can jeopardize the entire operation if extra caution is not put in place. Gustav Ranis says that it is not very controversial to observe the empirical, stylized fact that developing countries, in navigating their respective paths to modern economic growth, seem to pass through certain sub phases, i.e., a seemingly metamorphic process characterized by changing rules of the game, occurring in a more or less well-defined, if not monolithic sequence.<sup>9</sup> Ranis went on to examine trends in developing countries especially those that had emerged from colonial powers. Each of these countries are forced to create an economy out of a mixture of disparate economic agents spread across a sometimes ill-defined set of boundaries, with mercantilist natural resource, transport, and trade patterns having to be cut and reliance on the market, associated with that colonial regime, having to be abandoned.<sup>10</sup> The epoch of modern economic growth has been associated with an attitude that emphasizes the use of science and technology as a routinized way of generating substantial changes in the per capita product.<sup>11</sup>

The market is saturated with competitive forces and the church must desist from venturing into a field where she lacks the expertise and resources. Even though the role of the church must be limited to facilitating and influencing, she has to be very careful not to outdate herself. There are major players in the field of development from corporate world, the NGOs, private sectors, and the government. But since the church is not an exclusively independent entity, she draws her members from the very agencies that provide alternative approach. It is my belief that that church has not adequately exploited this rich resource to its fullest. Right from the local church to the national and international level, there are men and women of good standing and will that can make a nucleus of think tank and financial provider for the church as an institution. The role of these organic groups will be to work with the church towards achieving the desired objectives. It is sad that ecumenical organizations have not tricked down their influence at the local level. In most cases, they are more or less becoming political activists prone to compromises.

<sup>7</sup> Nazir-Ali Michael *Mission and Dialogue proclaiming the gospel afresh in every age* SPCK 1995

<sup>8</sup> Vinophth Ramachandra *Faith in Conflict ? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World* Intervarsity Press page 141

<sup>9</sup> Gustav Ranis et al *State and Market in Development* Lynne Rienner Publishers 1992 page 86.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid page 90

## 8. Conclusion

The primary goal of any development is to lead people towards a sustainable future. If this ideal concept is compromised or relegated to the periphery of our agenda, then the whole undertakings will be an exercise in futility. Any development project must be motivated by the desire to seek liberation from dependency. By independence we mean a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade, assumes the form dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and can be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which can have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate development.<sup>12</sup>

When we look at the major investments in our national economies, we see the influence of Wall Street, or Capitol Hill. It is not wrong to seek foreign investments to stimulate the economies of the developing countries, however, we have to mobilize our own resources and encourage local input. The church needs to play a major role in this exercise. Tough trade laws discourage local entrepreneurship and they have to be identified and done away with. As it stands now, African countries will still depend on the developed western countries for their economic survival so long as they still remain conservative in their handling of economy. Do Santos highlights historical forms of dependence conditioned by – (1) the basic forms of this world economy which has its own laws of development; (2) the type of economic relations dominant in the capitalist centers and the ways in which the latter expand outward; and (3) the types of economic relations existing inside the peripheral countries which are incorporated into the situation of dependence within the network of international economic relations generated by capitalist expansion.<sup>13</sup>

For the sustainable future to take effect, the church must emerge from the life of activism, and concretize her objectives in development. The economy of Africa is ruined by among other things prevalent corruption, ineptitude, tribalism, inefficiency and wrong priorities. The church has the opportunity to work with the people in realizing their own dreams, using their own resources-human and material. She needs to use the expertise of professionals within her membership to inject a new inspiration, and dynamism to move forward. The ecumenical organizations and institutions must be strengthened and given new lease of existence and function. There must be a balance between the functions of the church as an evangelical reality and her role in community development. As an evangelical reality, the church must preach and teach everything that the Lord had commanded. As a community partner, the church must be prepared to share the burden of failures and success of economic policies.

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<sup>12</sup> Theotonio Dos Santos et al *Development and Under-development The Political Economy of inequality* by Mitchell A Seligson and John T Passe-Smith lynne rienner publishers 1993 page194

<sup>13</sup> Ibid page 195