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### **Philosophy of Poverty**

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The philosophy of poverty is a philosophy of desperation and an enemy of hope. It makes people do nothing to resolve or to get out of their situation. In my understanding, after observing how we proceed in Africa, not only in the church but also in society, I conclude that the philosophy of poverty reigns in our minds. From philosophy proceeds theology. From our philosophy of poverty, therefore, we follow after a theology of desperation, blaming God and other people for our condition. This paper is written with the aim of calling African Nazarene theologians to reflect on some problems of pastoral theology in Africa and point out some possible solutions. I gave the title, "Philosophy of Poverty," because I consider it to be the main source of the majority of problems the Church is facing here in Africa.

With philosophy of poverty I mean the passive accommodation to the *status quo* of our present situation whether in the Church or in the society where we live, the willingness to remain always the same, the lack of desire to make any effort to change or to remove the obstacles which hinder progress, the lack of vision and lack of the sense of challenge to accomplish something. Our philosophy of life will influence all decisions we make as well as our behaviour. I do not propound to demonstrate whether Africa is poor or not, neither to show whether the Church of the Nazarene in Africa has or does not have the ability to solve all its own problems; but rather I want to try to show that behind whatever we decide to do in this continent, there is the philosophy of poverty which guides our decision-making process. I am addressing our predisposition and trend to believe that we are unable to do anything to solve the problems that afflict the Church in Africa, problems related to training of youth for the ministry in our excellent institutions, the too low annual enrolment in ministerial programmes to match the needs of the Church in the new century, too low numbers of youth willing to engage in the ministry after graduation

because they will be required to work without adequate salary to face living expenses of today's socio-economic reality, the problems and difficulties of getting pastor's children to engage in the ministry, despite the call to ministry, as a result of fear of suffering what they saw their parents pass through preaching without salary, and so on. These problems are real, and can negatively affect the future of the church. They demand our theological reflection to see what the Bible is saying and what contributions other theologians have made.

On the one hand, Moltmann says, "From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatological, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present." Moreover, Moltmann rightly adds, "Where there is hope, faith is strengthened, and kept always moving forward. Hopelessness and despair cannot uphold faith." (Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*). Moltmann's is the theology of progress. On the other hand, the philosophy of poverty is compatible with hopelessness and despair. The philosophy of poverty gives birth to theology of poverty. John Parratt in his analysis and evaluation of African theology says, "The weakness of African theology is that it does not have eschatological outlook. It is concerned about 'today'" (John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 217). This kind of theology will point to the problems without pointing to the proposed solutions.

### **How Did God Help the People of Israel Solve Their Problems?**

Since the beginning God has demanded man's active participation for the solution of his own problems. In other words, God does not support the philosophy of poverty. The people of Israel had just departed from the land of slavery of Egypt. They had arrived at the shore of the Red Sea, ready to cross the sea to the other side. They had no boats to help so great a multitude of the people cross the sea. To make the situation worse, the Egyptian army was coming behind them to bring them back to the land of slavery. Moses' option was to pray to God so that God might deliver them from the dilemma. God rejects Moses' attitude and calls him to action. God had already done His part, and was expecting Moses to do his part as well: "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground" (Exodus 14:15,16).

Moses' attitude in this story was of powerlessness and inability for the task, which is the philosophy of weakness or dependency. Moses' weakness was only in his mind. He believed that his weakness was real; therefore he advocated his full dependence on God. But, to my amazement, God rejects that philosophy and tells Moses that he could solve the problem with the simple staff he had in his hand. And as Moses used what he had in his hand, he confirmed the existence of such ability he was not ready to acknowledge.

Another classical example is found in the New Testament:

"One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?' 'Sir,' the invalid replied, 'I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk'" (John 5:5-8).

In this example, the invalid had suffered for many years because of the philosophy that the solution of his problems rested with someone else that should pick him up and carry him into the pool. However Jesus challenged this philosophy of inability when he told him to get up, pick up his mat, and walk on his own. The invalid tried and succeeded.

Rev Titos Nzucule told a story of an African hunter who was guiding himself with the philosophy of inability. One day, a Portuguese merchant came to the kraal of the African hunter and asked him to go hunting with him. The merchant had a gun, bullets, truck, and a lamp because the hunting took place during the night. The African hunter went with the merchant. The lights of the vehicle caught the eyes of an animal. It was a gazelle. The hunter took the merchant's gun and killed the animal ...the story continued until the dawn of the day, and the truck was full of big and small animals. They decided to return home. The Portuguese merchant passed by the kraal of the hunter and dropped him and gave him a rabbit while the truck was full of all kinds and sizes of animals. The hunter felt that the merchant had been unfair to him... but the hunter had offered nothing but expertise in this campaign. This is how the philosophy of poverty/dependency works. The hunter had no gun, no ammunition, no lamp despite his capacity to buy all these things since he had herds of many

cows and goats. He had the ability of hunting well but he wanted someone else to make him do it.

All progress we see around the world today has come into existence from the minds of people like us. They started from nothing and ended up with ability to build towers, cities, big sea vessels, big airplanes, et cetera. Until when will the African Church be dependent for its survival? When will the African church begin to think on its own and solve its problems on its own? The Church of the Nazarene in Africa started its existence almost the same time it started in the West. The Church of the Nazarene in Africa celebrates now 95 years of its existence in this continent. If it is unable to stand on its own, then it is abnormal; it is a dwarf.

### **How Can the Church Solve So Many Problems?**

One of the laypersons from one of the new areas in Mozambique said that the most needy person in the Church could give 30,000.00 Meticaís (R10) a year toward the scholarship endowment for the training of pastors for the future. According to Mozambican statistics in the present moment such an amount can produce about 1,950,000,000.00 Meticaís, which is far above the total annual budget of the College in that country. And if such an amount were repeated five times (in the space of five years), the financial problems of the students who are preparing for the ministry in the College might be solved forever. If we had made the same calculations for all our institutions in all of the geographical areas served by our institutions, we would reach the same conclusion that Africa has the ability to solve the problems of training our pastors and leaders for the new century.

Secondly, the family members of the student preparing for the ministry do not help the student to pay his school fees because the family expects no revenue from him after his graduation. Moreover, the graduate will be dependent on his family even after starting to serve the Church because he will be expected to serve the Church free. This is incredible because even in the secular world no soldier is expected to prepare himself militarily and defend the country after training without support. This practice is unbiblical and deserves our theological reflection.

Thirdly, when God chose the Levites to serve the people in the tabernacle and when He told Moses to tell the people that the Levites would not be given heritage in the land because their portion would be the offerings that

the people brought into the tabernacle for the worship of the Lord, the people of Israel, despite their rebellious attitude shown in the desert, and despite the extreme poverty in which they were living, accepted the challenge of supporting the priests and Levites (Leviticus 7:28-38; 10:8-20; Numbers 1:47-54; 3:13; 4:1-49; 8:5-26; 16:41-17:13; 18:1-20; 35:1-8; Deuteronomy 18:1-8).

In the New Testament, Jesus and his disciples had a bag of money from the offerings of the people. This money was enough to support them during their tours back and forth to Jerusalem and Galilee in their ministry. In the New Testament literature, passages abound which teach that the worker is worthy of his salary. From these passages we can conclude assuredly that it is the will of God that all those whom God calls to the ministry should have adequate salary to live with. We do not need to make research in order to see that there is a flagrant difference between what the Word of God teaches and what is practiced in the Church of the Nazarene in the African continent as it relates to the salary of the preacher of the gospel. The concept of tithing should be taught right from the time the church begins to exist, rather than to postpone that for a later time. The local church should be taught to start paying salary to the lay pastor who starts a new church, rather than to wait until the time the church receives a new well-trained pastor.

I hope to have given some proposed solutions, which requires that our philosophy shift from that of poverty towards a philosophy of progress. My hope is that other Nazarene theologians will think with us of practical solutions for pastoral theology so that we can move from desperation to a theology and a practice of progress!