

Response

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The Philosophy of poverty is a very relevant subject to address in the context of the Africa Region or continent. Poverty is a major factor affecting the effective extension of the Kingdom of God in Africa. This subject is not only a major concern in the Church of Nazarene but also for the governments in Africa and the church of God in Africa as a whole. Having observed the Church of the Nazarene, Africa Nazarene School of Extension, and African Nazarene University for several years, I strongly agree with Mandlate when he says that there is:

- Too low annual enrolment in ministerial programmes to match the needs of the church in the new century;¹³³
- 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; and
- 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.¹³⁴

¹³³ It is regrettable to note that there is no single student studying in ANU who is fully supported financially by his or her local congregations. Many continue to struggle with small needs such as personal effects and a few have been forced to terminate their studies prematurely due to financial challenges. Many in the ANSE programme continue to cry for aid while accusing other people for their lack. On the same note enrolment at ANU in the area of Religion is too low and the future of the department is dim if new strategies of recruiting and financial support are not taken into consideration. The same seems to be the cry of many pastors in the Church of the Nazarene all over Africa and those who seem to have any education continue to grapple for the few paid administrative positions in the church without engaging in real ministry as such. One is left to wonder whether money is the motivating factor.

¹³⁴ However, I disagree with him when he fails to deal with the prevailing situation of poverty, despair, and resignation without bearing in mind the context in which the Church of Nazarene exists. To do so is to be unfair to the Church in Africa and unbalanced, and the

While the above is the true picture of the situation of the Church of the Nazarene in the Africa Region, we are left to wonder what the contributing factors are and what the possible alternatives are to avert this situation. While the African Christians should be addressing themselves as to how they can come out of poverty, the Western Christians should be asking themselves what their ministry or responsibility is to their African brothers.

Speaking to many people in regard to poverty and its effects on the Church of the Nazarene in the Africa Region, the majority echoed the words of J N K Mugambi who states:

“...Africa is faced with deep crises. It is faced with a food deficit; it is the most hungry continent in the world. It is faced with a debt crisis; next to South America it is the most indebted continent. It has the highest level of illiteracy in the world and half of the world’s refugees are Africans.”¹³⁵

To add to the words of Mugambi, Africa today is facing the following challenges: economic crisis, debt crisis, population crisis, technological crisis, knowledge crisis; all these factors have a major effect on the Church of the Nazarene in the Africa Region in regard to the extension of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹³⁶ I strongly feel that any criticism that is to be

chances of getting a solution for the problem are slim for the context or background in Africa has a bearing in the economic performance of the Church. It is not inconsistent with the truth of the Bible for the churches and people endowed with riches to help struggling churches and individuals (see in the Bible where Paul sends relief to struggling churches from other churches). This can be a prime biblical example to us that it is consistent with biblical truth for others in the body of Christ to help the Church in Africa in her struggles.

¹³⁵ J N K Migambi, *The Future of the church and the church of the future in Africa* in *The Church of Africa Toward a Theology of Reconstruction*, by Jose B. Chipenda, Andre Karamaga, J N K Mugambi and C K Omari (eds). (Nairobi: Motif Creative Arts Ltd, 1990), page 29.

¹³⁶ However, few of those I interviewed cited the syndrome of dependency, lack of teaching in the area of stewardship, and mismanagement of funds as major factors contributing to the poor state of affairs in the Church of Nazarene disregarding the context of the church in Africa. In addition to these factors, I see another factor contributing to this: our target audience. The Church of the Nazarene has continued to target the poorest of the poor in the society following the principles of John Wesley. Most of the Nazarene Churches target the slum dwellers and rarely do we target the upper and middle economic/professional people who can support the church (especially the church in East Africa). Finally, the Church of Nazarene is a young movement in some African Zones: most movements that are young begin their rising from the lower economic class. To be specific the church is young in

directed towards the Church of the Nazarene in Africa should be done in the light of this context/background and not in isolation, if we are to be fair.¹³⁷

Rising from such a terrible background, the people of Africa are asking, how can we be expected to support the church locally and internationally? Many would say it is unthinkable and unkind to hold the African Christians (Nazarenes) accountable for the situation of poverty in which the Church finds herself today. Jesus said that the poor will always be with us and at times we may have to ask ourselves what our ministry is to the poor and not why they are poor. I am not saying that we should resign in despair and fail to do something about our situation, but I do suggest that some situations are imposed on us by natural and geographical factors that are beyond our control such as epidemics, drought, floods and the like.

Having observed the Church of the Nazarene in some parts of Africa for several years, I do realize that the challenges facing the Church of the Nazarene are not unique to Nazarenes only, but are characteristic of the whole church of God in Africa. But, as it has been affirmed by Mandlate and numerous other scholars, in Africa today we are in great need of the theology of hope. Despite all the very demoralizing and frustrating propaganda which we are faced with, tomorrow need not be like yesterday. Today, in faith we can commit ourselves to work for a better tomorrow, knowing that with God nothing is impossible. We dare affirm that since the God we worship is the creator and the director of all human history, tomorrow need not be like yesterday. In God's plan, there is nothing special about being powerful or being powerless. The most powerful can lose their power, and the powerless can be empowered by God's will. But this is possible only if love and hope are continually cemented by faith.

As a matter of fact, the churches in Africa are challenged by the scriptures to continually act as God's witness on earth in the name of Jesus of

terms of leadership and in other areas in terms of time.

¹³⁷ As we criticize the Church of Nazarene in Africa, we should bear in mind that Africa South of Sahara, with its population of 450 million, enjoys a gross domestic product of a meager 135 billion dollars, equal to that of Belgium with its 10 million inhabitants. I draw this example because the Church of Nazarene Africa Region is found within this context (Africa). One is left to wonder whether these are some of the factors leading chronic dependency and bankruptcy in the Church of Nazarene and others in Africa.

Nazareth, whom we affirm to be Christ. Each Christian is challenged to act upon this challenge and endeavour to make it a reality. Do we witness with despair, or with hope? There is no use of witnessing without hope. In fact, if we witness with despair, we shall do greater damage because we may demoralize even those who had a little hope. So we must witness with hope for where there is no hope in the future, there is no power in the present. Hope is a psychological necessity for the healthy maintenance of the human community and the individual, and thus we must continue to minister with hope. Without hope life cannot be sustained. Hope rises above hard economic times. If you hope, you will inspire another to hope, and then others will follow. One good characteristic of hope is that it is forward looking and forward moving and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. I agree with Moltmann when he says: "Hope finds in Christ not only consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering. Hope is not content with things as they are in the present but strives to transform the reality and keep it in a state of change". In the light of this I strongly believe that things can be different and that ways and strategies need to be designed to change the present reality of poverty into what things can be in the future.

I hope that this discussion will stimulate further research, reflection, and discussion that will help bring about a solution to one of the church's most pressing problems: poverty. As Mandlate has echoed the words of John Parratt, "The weakness of African theology is that it does not have an eschatological outlook... This kind of theology will point to the problems without pointing to the proposed solutions." I thus propose that a team begin to work on possible solutions to avert the prevailing problem of poverty and dependency syndrome lest we continue to propagate the same kind of theology that we are seeking to do away with.

As a way forward I offer the following suggestions as part of the solution to the problem:

1) Management

The churches will need to review their management procedures in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness and productivity. The resources to be managed include personnel, finances, assets, time, donations, and grants in money and in kind.

2) Teaching on Stewardship

Most pastors, church staff, and lay leaders are both inadequately trained and emotionally unprepared for communicating about and actually raising the kind of money required to lead a church toward the fulfilment of its vision. There is a great need on the continent of Africa to teach Christians to be financially generous with God and their church. The local churches should organize workshops, symposia, seminars, and development education programmes on stewardship and tithing which should also be taught and preached as a biblical principle of giving. The heart of stewardship, which is total commitment, should be taught.

3) Establishment of Income Generating Projects

The church also needs to establish some income generating-projects such as schools, guesthouses, and rental houses and to open some businesses such as bookshops and commercial printing presses to help with support.