The Church Will Provide: The Church and Public Education in Kenya

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Introduction

I come into this conversation not as a scholar specializing in education or theology, but as a teacher of the arts. My training is in Francophone African literature, but I stumbled into the fields of education and theology through my struggle to lead an arts department in a Christian university. In that struggle, I confronted arguments against arts education which articulated no Christian conviction or theology. Instead, Christian educators repeated the rationale of the government, the corporate sector and the church, which was that the arts and humanities programs did not need support because they did not fulfill the criteria of morality or “relevance to the market.” When I would express surprise that Christians were not articulating a higher, spiritual calling for education, I would get no response.

This failure to articulate a faith based, non-commercial purpose of education can be traced to the absence of a Kenyan theology that deals with society and public life. As Gifford (2008) observes, Kenyan theology is preoccupied with cultural questions at the expense of social and political ones. As such, efforts towards theological interactions in the public sphere are

dedicated to proving that to be Christian need not mean Europeanization or a contradiction to one's African identity, and to debunking the idea that European cultures are superior to African ones (Gifford 2008). On political and social questions, theology and the church in Kenya remain comfortable within the state paradigm of provision of services, a default setting which the church inherited from colonial missionaries.

As a result, the Church in Kenya has no theology of the public, or of public education, which would inform a response or commentary on issues affecting public education and their implications for society. Once again, I came into this realization through the position of the Church on the arts and arts education in Kenya. In both education and in the public sphere, the Kenyan Church and Christian educational institutions have taken a neoliberal position on the arts, where the concern is not with artistic creativity and performance, but with the application of artistic skills in evangelization and in control of morality and sexual life. As such, the Church remains silent as the state guides gospel artists on their craft (Opera News Kenya 2020), and as the schools use the Christian faith to justify the suppression of the arts through, for example, punishing students for artistic creativity and calling the arts "cultic" and "demonic" (Hudmoon Media 2017; Chebet 2017).

The confusion in the nexus between faith, arts and education, and the Church's contribution to that confusion, fit neatly in the larger neoliberal approach to humanities and arts education. With its focus on what is immediately marketable and profitable, neoliberalism sees no value in arts education and attacks the arts as unnecessary in the education system (Nyaundi 2017), and as a waste of national resources (Kamau 2017). But while it fights against arts education, neoliberalism ironically promotes the applied arts, where artistic knowledge and skill are confined to the pursuit of commercial and political goals. In this pursuit, the private sector

finds common ground with the Church with regards to arts education. The private sector limits arts education to commercial or political pursuits, the Church limits arts education to evangelization, and both detach education from its human and social goals, and limit the purpose of education to the institutional pursuit of power.

In other words, the Church, the state and the corporate sector are not opposed to the arts per se; they are opposed to the arts as a site where thinking and creativity are not within an institution's control, whether that institution is the state, the corporations or the Church. Arts education, as opposed to applied arts education, is where people think about the arts, understand what the arts does and how it creates meaning for humanity, not for specific institutions. Hostility to arts education is, therefore, hostility to human freedom.

This statement implies that the idea of "relevance to the market" is really an alibi for one thing: control. The reason why "the market" will inspire attacks on linguistics and literature but heap praise on communication or public relations, despite all of them using language and storytelling, is because the concern of linguistics and literature is the human being, while the concern of marketing, communication or public relations is meeting corporate targets such as evangelization, profit or political messaging. In fact, when people say that the arts and humanities are not "relevant," "practical" or "applicable to the market," they are, in reality, faulting these subjects for not channeling people or their creativity into a pipeline that culminates with tangible products for sale, political advancement or religious proselytization.

Embedded in this hostility to arts education for humanity is a hostility to the human endeavor called thinking. Thinking is the means by which human beings understand their environment and make meaning. Through thinking, human beings understand and creatively transcend what is within their immediate environment, and deal with the ambiguities in life. In

other words, thinking is engagement in the unpredictable, and therefore an inconvenience for people or institutions seeking convention and the fantasy of a world without doubt and uncertainty (Gordon 2007). Thinking is thus a fundamental threat to the state, the Church and the market, because the power and wealth of such institutions relies on channeling human understanding and meaning into the singular pursuit of profit and power. Institutions cannot make money from exploiting people's work, or make people accept their own exploitation, if people are constantly engaged in the open-ended activities of reflection and creativity.

Hostility to the human being and to thinking necessarily puts the educational institutions, public or Church-based, in an awkward position. These institutions essentially seek education without thinking. Christian universities and educators are so committed to this contradiction, that they are willing to sacrifice theological education along with the other humanities. Thus we see the irony of Christian universities pioneering in fields such as communication for media, marketing for business, creative arts for advertising, public relations for political persuasion, and history and anthropology for conflict resolution, while suppressing programs such as linguistics, literature, music, theater, theology and history.

When one considers that theology is a discipline of the humanities, and that worship is largely an artistic endeavor of speech, music and other art forms, the contradictions of the Christian hostility towards the arts and humanities could not be more glaring. And the contradictions get worse. In church-based universities, theology features among the programs limping on low scholarly output, low student enrolment or little social or intellectual impact (Kaunda 2016). Within the discipline of theology itself, East African theologians are "less concerned with liturgy, art, music and organization" (Gifford 2008, 19), despite the need for these skills in worship. The decline in the arts and humanities education, which affects

theological education, cannot be more alarming than now, because as Kaunda (2016) argues, theological education in Africa is in decline, yet today's generations of Africans, especially the youth, expect from the Church theological depth and insights into the pressing local and social issues of our time.

On the surface, it may seem contradictory that churches and Christian educational institutions are hostile to theology, but it makes sense when one considers that theology is essentially about thinking, because it involves considering faith in specific cultural and historical contexts. But this absurdity is not confined to Christian educational institutions alone. The wider university community also prevents the study of the arts while teaching the application of those very arts for the same reasons of control. In his analysis of the apparent incapacity of scholars to meaningfully contribute to public discourse, Ojwang (2009) traces the silence of intellectuals to the state's suppression of humanities programs in public universities. The state dubbed the humanities "provocative" and demanded that these subjects be housed under departments such as education, religion and governance.

The inability of the Church and theology to identify and address these contradictions exposes weak spot of the Church in Kenya, which is its failure to develop and articulate a theology of education and a theology of the public. The Church has not pronounced itself what education does, on what God requires of education and on what God requires of education for the public. More than that, the concept of the people, or the public, does not feature in Christian theological and prophetic discourses. Instead, the Church (which I use loosely here to refer to both the clergy and theologians) has retained the default role established during colonial times, of supplementing the efforts of the state in providing schools for citizens. The Church in Kenya has accepted the corner assigned to it by the state, where it supplements the state in providing

schools, and negotiates with the state over control of public life, especially through the imposition of religious education in schools. The Church has ceded so much of its identity, that it has settled for the neoliberal and problematic function of “value education,” (National Council of Churches of Kenya 2019) which reduces theological reflection and prophecy to controlling social behavior in schools.

What explains this lethargy of the Church in the face of its own survival? The reality suggests that the Church shares with the state a primary concern for institutional power at the expense of the dignity of the people. What matters to the Church is that the Church builds schools, more than that Kenyans are getting a wholesome education; or that the Church builds hospitals, more than that Kenyans are healthy. This focus on the spectacle of providing services rather than the welfare of the people makes the Church complicit with the state in maintaining the status quo in Kenyan public life and anesthetizing the people to become numb to their own suffering. Indeed, as Gifford (2009) warned, this focus on being a development partner with the state makes the Church complicit in corruption and bad governance. The partnership “helps prevent the political reform that would most help Kenya” because the political elite can “simply continue its depredations, knowing that essentials will be provided by agencies like the churches” (2009, 50–51).

Therefore, it is not surprising that, as I argue in this chapter, the Church was ill-equipped to provide a prophetic response to the issues facing public education during the Covid-19 pandemic. To use the disease as a metaphor, Covid-19 simply amplified already pre-existing conditions that have made the Church vulnerable to lethargy and irrelevance during turbulent times such as the pandemic. If we are to adopt Kaunda’s (2016) exhortation to the Church to develop a theology that provides direction on the complex issues of our age, we need to identify

what those issues are, and to determine why the Church has apparently been unable to pronounce itself on these issues.

The Theology of Provision

Before the government declared the shutdown of schools in response to the pandemic (Igadwah and Kiplagat 2020), education in Kenya was already stunningly unequal, with only 3% of those who managed to complete secondary school qualifying for a place in tertiary education. With the lockdown, therefore, children already suffering from chronic disadvantages had additional hurdles to confront. Delivery of content and classroom engagement was transferred online, meaning that learning required the use of radio, TV and the internet. However, less than 10% of Kenyan learners had access to digital gadgets, only 18% had access to the internet, and only 26% of the rural population had access to electricity (Ogejo and Ochieng 2020). There was also a gender dimension to this inequality, with experts warning that with the closure of schools, girls were at a higher risk of sexual exploitation and gender based violence (Parsitau and Jepkemei 2020).

For the larger part, the Church did not provide a theological response to this inequality, which is partly understandable given that the lockdown also affected Church worship services and the revenue earned from congregational offertory. Two months into the pandemic lockdown, a feeble response on education came from the submissions of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) to the Kenya government's Task Force on Covid-19 Management Opening of Schools. In its statement, the NCCK proposed economic interventions to cushion the schools' loss of income due to the pandemic, but made no mention of the underlying inequalities in education (National Council of Churches of Kenya 2020). Moreover, the NCCK confined its

observations on education to management of already established schools, and especially those schools built by churches.

This silence on education inequality echoes the early years of colonial rule, when European missionaries from Catholic and Protestant churches were a major players in an education system that was not only unequal; it was also racially segregated in terms of curricula, examinations and resource provision, with the bulk of resources being invested in schools for Europeans (Mwiria 1991). Before World War I, especially, the colonial government was not interested in educating Africans, and so it allowed the missionaries to assume that function, and subsidized mission schools with government grants (Beck 1966). This arrangement suited the Church because the Church too lacked sufficient resources to establish schools (Joshua 2017). Nevertheless, mission schools still remained starkly under-resourced in terms of facilities, materials and qualified personnel, and Africans consistently made demands to the colonial government to provide public schools, complaining to the colonial authorities that the quality of education in mission schools was inferior, with an inordinate focus on evangelization at the expense of knowledge (Bogonko 1984).

Besides limited resources, another reason why the missionaries accepted this arrangement with the colonial government was the fact that European missionaries shared with the colonial government its opinions about Africans. One is the obviously racist attitude that Africans were intellectually inferior to Europeans and therefore did not need advanced or intellectual education. The missionaries also shared with the colonial government the goal of turning Africans into wage labor for the white settlers (Bogonko 1983). The Church differed with the colonial government only in terms of justification. For the missionaries, African wage labor for the white economy was proof of Christian conversation, while for the settlers, the impetus was their own

economic advancement (Bogonko 1983). Therefore, even though the missionaries did, in some instances, disagree with the colonial government on the treatment of Africans, they were necessarily complicit in the racism and inequality in Kenya's education system (Joshua 2017).

After independence, the racial character of this inequality was obscured, making the ethnic and regional dimensions of inequality rise to the fore. However, the new African-led government was now committed to run education on its own, and so it took over the mission schools while relegating the churches' role to providing morality to manage social behavior. Once again, the material considerations weighed more heavily in the churches' acceptance of this arrangement, for as newly African-led denominations, many churches had even less access to resources compared to their European predecessors (Joshua 2017). Once again, institutional considerations, rather than spiritual or social ones, carried the day in the church's position on education.

The church never considered or repented its role in segregation and inequality in colonial Kenya. If anything, the church benefited from inequality after independence, because its schools became the dominant elite schools, many of which were concentrated in the politically dominant strongholds of the former Central and Nyanza provinces. Thus, even as the state took over these mission schools from the churches after independence, inequality remained entrenched in the school system, except that now it was visibly ethnic rather than racist. Since then, the preoccupation of the churches has been with protecting the delicate balance between the churches' interest in entrenching Christian doctrine in Kenyan life, and not opposing the state at the risk of being reminded of its complicity in the colonial suppression of African cultures and knowledge.

During the tenure of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president, the issue of unequal access was not a major concern, since education was largely seen as a training ground for civil servants (Kithinji 2018). It was only during the tenure of Daniel arap Moi, the second president, that the government was deliberate in including marginalized communities in the mainstream of Kenyan education. The 8.4.4 system, which has now been replaced, was in its design, intended to make it easier for more children to go to school by reducing the number of years and the examination hurdles such as the A level system (Kithinji 2018).

As the impact of the neoliberal economy, accelerated by the Structural Adjustment Programs, began to bite in the 1990s, the quality of public schools deteriorated and the middle classes began to take their children to private schools. Rather than raise its voice about the concern for education for the poor, the church saw that schools were a means to earn revenue, and so they began to privatize some of their schools that had been nationalized, and to build new schools for this market as a way to combine its evangelism endeavor with revenue generation (Joshua 2017). Since 2004, when the revised Basic Education Act tightened government control over Church schools, various churches have resorted to lobbying for control of their schools, or offering their support to government education policy in exchange for asserting their state-assigned role of providing oversight over the moral dimension of education (Oduor 2019).

Another development during the neoliberal era, especially after 2004, was the rise of the narrative which read the underperformance of children in schools as the failure of the school system to meet the needs of the market, rather than as a result of the inequalities in education. By avoiding the questions of access, this narrative essentially divorced inequality in resources from the academic performance of children. This misrepresentation meant that in 2018, during the public debate on the replacement of the 8.4.4 system with the Competency Based Curriculum,

the public was not particularly drawn to concerns that the new system's requirements, such as that of parental involvement in the child's assignments, would aggravate the impact of disparities in income and parents' education on the children's learning. The public regarded inequality to be of minor importance compared to the justification of the new system as what the market and employers wanted. The church largely accepted the new education system on the same grounds, comfortable that its government-assigned role of inculcating values through religious instruction had remained intact (Oduor 2019). This concern was extremely narrow, because it was confined to the church's institutional status, rather than expanded to the humanity of the children who would go through the school system.

This silence on wider education issues raises the question whether, in the opinion of the Church, God is unconcerned about the intellectual and physical development of children or about the society which the education system is preparing us for. The silence reveals that like its missionary predecessors, the Church is preoccupied with institutional power, revenue generation and the Church's relationship with the state, rather than with the wellbeing of Kenyans themselves. To any question about what God says about education, the Kenyan church seems to have the singular reply: "the Church [not the Lord] will provide."

It would therefore be ambitious to expect that the Church would be sensitive to, let alone have a position on, the inequalities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. But why does inequality matter, and why should the Church address it?

Sabbath for people, not people for Sabbath

Currently, education in the school system is linked to power and resources, because acquisition of knowledge and certification imply access to other opportunities in terms of training, income

and political engagement. When an education system alienates more than half its population, it means that the same half is also alienated from professions, forms of income, and most of all, informed political and democratic participation. As such, inequality in education is necessarily a form of discrimination and disempowerment, and a guarantee of poverty. Inevitably, inequality leads to social and political conflict, as has been captured in the Kenyan dictum cited during the social unrest tied to election cycles, which is that there are two tribes in Kenya: the rich and the poor. Inequality is, therefore, injustice.

When the church fails to address injustice, it invites the wrath of God. In the days of the Old Testament, God harshly reprimanded Israel for the injustice suffered by the most vulnerable social groups, such as “the orphan, the widow and the alien.” One of the famous moments in which Jesus lost his temper was when he arrived at the temple and found that the entrance had been blocked by traders, preventing the poor from gaining access to the house of worship.

God consistently demonstrates fairness towards the most vulnerable people in society. Moreover, in the face of inequality, God’s primary interest is in the restoration of relationships, more than simply in the provision of services. This dynamic is demonstrated, for instance, in the account of the woman with the alabaster jar, a story which appears in all the four gospels which I will examine further here.

The common features of the story are a broken woman pouring expensive perfume on Jesus as a mark of great honor; skepticism from observers who thought that the perfume could have been put to better use through programs for the poor; and Jesus’s rebuke of that logic and his affirmation of the woman. My reading of this story is that Jesus was demonstrating that dignity should not be sacrificed for material provision. Even though the woman was poor, or sinful by one account, her dignity was affirmed by bestowing a great honor on Jesus, who

himself was about to suffer a humiliating trial and execution. Technically, it was true that the money earned from selling that perfume would have fed others, but Jesus was saying that at that moment, the woman's dignity being affirmed through an act of worship was more important than meeting the material needs of the unnamed poor. In other words, Jesus demonstrated that meeting the material needs of the poor is not an end in itself; the purpose is to affirm the dignity of human beings, which may or may not require meeting material needs.

Likewise, the Kenyan church needs to prophesy and develop a response to inequality in education beyond providing schools, because the goal should be to affirm the dignity of the Kenyans who do not have access to decent schools with adequate resources, and to hold accountable those whose theft of public resources denies Kenyans entrance into democratic participation through education.

In any case, the church's attempt to supplement the state in service provision is technically futile. The church, which gathers its income from voluntary offerings, can never adequately provide services which the state has adequate resources to, but fails to provide due to corruption and bad governance. Moreover, the position of the church as provider opens up the Church to disappointment and ridicule from the public.

The Church as Caesar, or as Sponsor?

As Gifford (2009) cautions, the focus on providing social services negates the spiritual calling of the church, because it secularizes the church and makes it resemble an ordinary non-governmental organization (NGO). In the twenty-first century, this role has evolved into educational entrepreneurship similar to that of commercial enterprises. Joshua (2017) notes that building schools has now become a means for churches to achieve "short-lived gains such as

financial benefits in order to fund church-related activities." Moreover, some churches are members of the Kenya Private Schools Association, where they join with owners of schools for profit in lobbying the state on education. The church, essentially, has no prophetic contribution to make to education.

Ironically though, providing schools does not lie at the top of the Kenyan public's expectations of the church. The Kenyan public is more interested in the church's position on social justice, and often expresses disappointment that the church has been silent on, if not complicit in, the post-independence state's dysfunction and oppression (Omondi 2018). But rather than carry out some introspection with regard to these expectations, the church doubles down its involvement in social service provision. This gesture only exacerbates conflict between the church and the Kenyan public, because building schools means acquiring land and raising funds. Church members have expressed fatigue with the pressure to raise money for church development projects when the depressed economy means that members can hardly make ends meet. The church has been named as a major actor in land injustice (Government of Kenya 2004) and it has sometimes found itself in conflict with communities over land for schools (Ondieki 2020) . This conflict often comes under the patronage of political leaders, for the example of the African Inland Church which acquired public land during the reign of the second president Daniel arap Moi (Wasonga 2017).

Moreover, building schools puts the church in an impossible bind, because it often means churches accepting donations from politicians associated with theft of the very public resources which are supposed to provide the social services which the churches are seeking to supplement. As public funds are looted and social services deteriorate, Kenyans resent seeing huge offerings being made by politicians at Sunday services. They accuse the church of participating in money

laundering (Ajiambo 2019), and they remain unconvinced by the churches' pleas that the donations are for financing development projects (Mbaka 2019).

The cost of paying attention to material needs, rather than to the greater aspiration for human dignity, can be illustrated with the dubious term "sponsor," which has been used by the Basic Education Act to describe the church's role in education in Kenya. As far as the government is concerned, the church's function as a "sponsor" is to provide economic and material support to schools, even to the exclusion of the church having a say in the governance of its own schools (Joshua 2017). As if that is not bad enough, the term "sponsor" in the Kenyan popular imagination carries derogatory connotations. As Pala (2018) explains, "sponsor" in Kenyan parlance captures the normalization of inter-generational transactions in which older people provide financial and material incentives to young people in exchange for sex and intimacy.

The connection between the two meanings of the word "sponsor" is not far-fetched, especially when one considers the gospel song "Yesu ndiye sponsor" which was sung by Jimmy Gait and which caused a public uproar. The song equated Jesus to a sponsor, promising that a relationship with Jesus would give one a car, a house and other consumer items. The song provoked a heated public debate, with reactions ranging from disgust to caution to amusement. In the media, tongue-in-cheek reactions included the argument that "Christ is the ultimate sponsor" since Christ fulfills the needs that are supposed to be met by sponsors (Thurube 2016). Sober takes on the song came from legendary gospel songwriter Reuben Kigame as well as Jimmy Gait himself. Kigame said that because the term sponsor is associated with cheating, stealing and sugar daddies, songwriters need to be "mature" in their choice of words, which may

carry unsavory meanings, while Gait himself impressively, but not convincingly, pleaded that he was simply using a metaphor from the real life experiences of young people (NTV Kenya 2016).

The point here is not the similarity, or lack thereof, in the different uses of the metaphor "sponsor." Rather, it is that the very composition of the song, and the furor which greeted the song, both indicate that the Kenyan public expects the Christian faith to know that meeting people's physical needs must not come at the expense of the people's dignity. Therefore, in this era of exploitation, increasing levels of poverty and inequality, the Church is expected to offer a theology of governance, political justice and human dignity, not just mere services. However, the Church in Kenya seems is unable to see this truth because it has not accepted that is impossible to ever match or surpass the resources which the government, or Caesar, is supposed to provide its citizens. Caesar earns more worldly wealth, which the moth and rust can eat away, but the Christian faith seeks wealth that is not of this world. The message of God, which the church is committed to announce, brings good news to the poor, comforts the broken hearted, feeds the hungry and sets the captives free. To give up these riches of dignity of God's children, for worldly resources such as buildings and materials, contradicts Jesus's rebuke to those who thought that the woman with the alabaster jar had wasted money by ministering to Jesus.

Mourning and Maturity

So far, this essay seems to suggest that the problems discussed here are unique to the Church. However, the challenges I faced with arts education point to the fact that the problem affects all sectors in Kenya, not just the Church.

For instance, before the pandemic, public discussion of inequality, especially in education, was literally an anomaly, unless it was confined to pictures of poor children sitting

under trees or in mud-walled classrooms. Concerns about the intersection between inequality and the new Competency Based Curriculum did not attract the attention Kenyan middle class which could afford textbooks and fees of private schools with better facilities. The middle class was therefore complacent with the media narrative that limited the new education system to the release of the new textbooks, presumably because members of this class hoped to buy the books and give their children a head start in the educational race to the top.

After the declaration of the pandemic lockdown, this complacency diminished, only because this time, the middle class were more personally implicated. With the lockdown, the inequality was not going to be mitigated by the school, but was going to be directly shouldered by the individual parents who had to provide internet and the necessary gadgets, and who needed to help their children with the covering the syllabus. Moreover, as the social group most invested in their children surviving the country's cut throat system of social selection that is examinations, middle class parents were anxious about their ability to prepare their children for the final examinations from home. With the government having initially adopted a hardline stance that examinations would take place as scheduled (Oduor 2020), the reality of disparities in parents' ability to support their children's competitiveness hit home.

Another probable reason for the peak in interest of the media and middle class in the lockdown is the fact that the problem was now visibly technological, as opposed to the predominantly social. Social inequality makes uncomfortable conversation because it elicits questions about political decisions and power; by contrast, disparities in access to technology can be limited to lack of access to "modernity" in the form of electricity and gadgets. The solution to access, therefore, becomes simply one of provision, rather than of equity in social conditions.

The theme of provision also lessens the pressure of citizens on their government, because provision can come from agencies other than the government which is obligated to provide them. Provision comfortably fits in the paradigm of foreign-led development, a dominant theme of Kenyan government, media and public discourse. Provision can also be outsourced to individual purchase from commercial entities, and those who are unable to access the technologies are pitied for being poor. Access to technology does not imply collective political responsibility with the same compulsion that social disparity does. Access to technology is also racialized, because it affirms the narrative of "progress," where progress is measured by access to technical gadgets, and in which Africans are generally expected to lag behind. Even when they do obtain those gadgets, the social issues that allow poverty in the first place, are left unaddressed.

This common ground between the Kenyan middle class and the Church as an institution suggests a fundamental social problem that haunts Kenya today: the avoidance of humanistic goals in social endeavors. The middle class prefers to engage education from a technological perspective rather than a social one, while the Church never asks humanistic questions about the flourishing of human beings and is instead concerned with asserting its institutional role in directing behavior, providing schools and earning revenue. Both the middle class and the Church avoid dealing with questions of the human being.

And this argument brings us back to the observation at the beginning of this chapter, which is the paradoxical onslaught by the Church and Christian educators against the arts and humanities, when the arts and humanities are core disciplines for life and for faith. The common thread running through the church's hostility to arts education and its complicity in inequality in education is the churches' preference for institutional status at the expense of society and the human being, a hostility it shares with the state and the media as institutions controlled by the

elite and run by the middle class. How is such a dehumanizing dynamic possible within an institution like the Church which, as Gifford (2008) suggests, is inordinately preoccupied with responding to the European dehumanization of Africans?

I propose that as a collective, Kenya exhibits the failure of a generation to graduate from the struggles of anti-colonialism to those of de-colonization. Although the generation that came into independence as youth successfully fought to remove Europeans from overt state governance, the work of replacing the anti-human logic entrenched by colonial institutions – from the government to the schools to the Church – is yet to be carried out. The dominant theme in Kenyan theology of reacting to European disdain for Africans, which Gifford (2008) erroneously attributes to the failure to appreciate the benefits of modernity, reflects a generation which is still behaving as if British colonial officers are still running the country and is therefore preoccupied with reacting to colonialism. The focus on colonialism helps the church avoid addressing current socio-political realities in which fellow Africans are major actors.

The work of freeing Kenyan social life from the colonial legacy can only be done when each generation, as Fanon (2004) famously said, discovers its mission and fulfils it. But such a discovery can only take place when that generation appreciates the accomplishment of the previous one, and understands that the elders "fought the best they could with the weapons they possessed at the time" (Fanon 2004, 145). Such a task will require lamentation and mourning, an acknowledgement that colonialism abused us, and a reckoning with the injuries colonialism caused us. Kenyan theologians need to reconsider John Mbiti's (1974) dismissal of liberation as a theological concern, and the accompanying argument that Africans were concerned only with the "joy of our experience of the Christian faith" (1974, 43). Similarly, questions emerge from the call to replace a theology of theology of reconstruction independent of the reality of the

neocolonialism and neoliberalism (Tarus and Lowery 2017). These theologies sound like the popularly sanction defeatism and resignation inherent in the Kenyan phrase "accept and move on." They dismiss the importance of mourning the injuries of the past, and perpetuate a Kenyan theology of trauma that is preoccupied with reacting to European theologies of dehumanization (Gifford 2008). As such, the church remains stuck in the dynamic which Fanon warned against, where scholars and clergy "[delve] into the people's past to find concrete examples to counter colonialism's endeavors to distort and depreciate" (2004, 168), and are unable to craft a theology that is connected to the struggles which ordinary Africans continue to confront.

This different approach necessarily implies that the church must respect the public as a sacred space, where human beings, of the Christian faith or not, come together to critically consider reality and imagine new possibilities. The Church must approach this public space not with the colonial missionary posture of appropriation through evangelization, in competition with the state for institutional power, but with the humble recognition that the Church is but one participant in the public sphere (Tenai 2016). Likewise, the Church should recognize that public education is the tool for cultivating the public sphere, because it is in public education that all people come together to critically examine reality and imagine new possibilities, and "where public values, justice, and democracy come together to provide the foundation for critical agents and engaged citizens" (Giroux 2010, 350). The Church should therefore become the voice which prophetically calls for a public schooling system that encompasses the diversity of Kenyans, that makes special accommodation for the differently abled, the poor and the disenfranchised, and that builds a culture of democracy through both its overt and hidden curriculum. Public education must be the space of justice, democracy and creativity, where humanity thrives and therefore where God inhabits. The Church needs to respect public education, and the public in

general, and not equate God’s inhabitation in the public space with institutional control of the public sphere by the Church. Failure to do so will perpetuate the public’s perception, and understandably so, of the Church as entangled with the neoliberal corporations and the state in the vices of inequality, corruption, racism and the war on democracy and humanity.

By the same token, the Church needs to develop theologies which see thinking and creativity as gifts of God to humanity, rather than the demand control of or exclusion of the arts and humanities from education. As already noted, the Church is shooting itself in the foot by remaining hostile to the arts and humanities in its places of worship and educational institutions. Like Jesus in the story of the woman with the alabaster, the concern of the Church should not be whether the arts and humanities are practiced in conformity with the institutional preoccupations, but whether the arts are practiced in a way that affirms the dignity of human beings and the worship of God.

May we heed Fanon’s call to “work and struggle in step with the people so as to shape the future and prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already sprouting” (Fanon 2004, 168). As Kaunda (2016) states, “the new generation of young Africans is searching for new ways of living, life-giving identities, and alternative ways of expressing these identities. This generation is searching for new African communities that celebrate diversity, complexity, richness, ambiguity, emergency identities, and new socio-cultural life” (2016, 114). A “new socio-cultural life” requires slaying the dragon of social inequality that alienates so many Africans from flourishing. The path to achieving that goal requires not only a new theology, but a fresh approach to education that meets this need. We therefore need to mature from simply asking how many people are going to school and what jobs they will get, to reflecting on what education is for, and most of all, on what God considers education to be for.

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