

**SOAKED IN THEIR OWN BLOOD: A SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY
EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES IN JOHN MBITI'S THEOLOGY
AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE
POOR AND MARGINALISED.**

By

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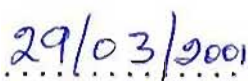
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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this Thesis is my own work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature: 

Date: 

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Preface

The absence of an Evangelical African theology of Development has highly motivated me to embark on this study. Through this study, one hopes that more writings from many evangelicals who are committed to the church's involvement in the process of community empowerment, will come forth.

The study reflects an underlying philosophy which is fundamental to the work of ministry that I have been involved with for more than twenty years. The thesis has focussed on the most effective form of development, the empowerment of people rather than technological advancement and economic growth. The thesis advocates that those who are beneficiaries must be involved in all stages and aspects of their empowerment activity, both as individuals and communities. This enables them to own and contribute greatly to their own community's development.

Too often development programmes have been designed on the basis of planning and management carried out by professionals without the beneficiaries' participation. Here the Thesis is trying to look for empowerment principles in John Mbiti's Theology, which could involve the poor and marginalized in the process of their empowerment.

Finally it also looks at how African theology can empower people within their cultural situation, using their known values as valuable means of empowerment. Therefore, what is reflected in this thesis is an African Theological contribution to the empowerment of the people within their African experience.

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INTRODUCTION

1. PURPOSE

This study critically examines John Mbiti's African theology for the purpose of discovering the principles of community empowerment inherent in the African culture. It seeks to develop these and to apply them in the national attempt to empower the poor and marginalised people of South Africa.

2. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Many years of involvement with the mission crusades of Africa Enterprise have exposed me to the plight of the poor and marginalised communities of South Africa. This involvement with the mission crusades of African Enterprise has helped me understand that the gospel of salvation which Christ came preaching to the world is inseparable from the establishment of justice. The kingdom of God which Christ came to inaugurate is, in fact, the kingdom where justice prevails. The crusade is to drive away all forms of spiritual marginalisation as well as economic and political exploitation.

I have come to understand that any form of mission crusade that does not have a programme for community empowerment and development is contrary to the mission of Jesus Christ who said, "I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Abundant life involves both the temporal and the spiritual life of the community. By his solidarity with them, Christ came to empower and to develop the poor and marginalised. Both concepts of empowerment and development, when understood in the context of poverty and marginalisation, bring about the same results - that of enabling

the people to take charge of their own lives and to bring about a better life in their community, collectively and individually. Linthicum defines empowerment as follows:

It is that process by which the people of an area organize themselves to take charge of their situation and thus develop a sense of being a community together. It is a particularly effective tool for the poor and powerless as they determine for themselves the actions they will take to deal with the essential forces that are destroying their community and consequently causing them to be powerless. (1991:31)

David Korten, who is one of the leading and most respected development practitioners defines development as:

A process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations. ((1990: 67)

This gives more light to my adoption of these two concepts as synonymous and using them interchangeably. In both cases, people take charge of their situation and formulate actions to fight for improvements in the quality of their lives. Both Korten and Linthicum present the enabling power these concepts define, especially when used in relation to the poor and marginalised searching for a better life. Both these concepts have to do with the moving of a community or individuals from a level of life which is not desirable to a level where life is worth living.

Referring to the situation which grinds the poor perpetually in their poverty, John Tooke says:

We cannot endlessly spiritualise the South African issues. More evangelism will not help as the disjunction between church and world, that which makes the church irrelevant, will continue. More prayer will not help unless this is made concrete to our situation. More bible study will not help as we will not be using an appropriate hermeneutic. Our situation can only be affected primarily by changes that are social, political and economic. (1988:126)

These prophetic words of John Tooke must be central to all mission crusades. No crusade must exclude from its mission a deliberate programme to empower and develop the poor and marginalised both politically and economically. Tooke is actually reacting to the attitude of the powerful who, instead of addressing the problem of poverty and marginalisation of black communities, tend to spiritualise it. The issues of poverty and marginalisation are not only spiritual but are fundamentally the result of the sin of injustice and evil which Christ called “the kingdom of Satan.”

3. GENERAL THESIS

General discussion in this thesis will focus on the conditions and experiences of the poor and marginalised communities of South Africa before and after the birth of the “new South Africa” in 1994. President Thabo Mbeki, in his 1998 National Assembly address, painted a clear picture of these communities when he said:

Material conditions divide the country into two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has already access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the most affected being women in the rural

areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled, this nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructures. (Natal Witness, 30 May 1998)

Although there are changes that attempt to bring everybody to an equal footing, the poor and marginalised remain where they were before the democratic elections. The gap between the conditions of poor blacks and wealthy whites has not been narrowed. This divides South Africa into two nations. I recognise that this situation cannot be changed overnight. It requires combined efforts of both the church and the state. It is for that reason that this thesis attempt to contribute a solution to the problem of the imbalance.

Julian May perfectly highlights the inequality between the poor blacks and wealthy whites, in the following way:

Although South Africa has undergone a dramatic economic, social and political transition in the last decade, many of the distortions and dynamics introduced by apartheid continue to reproduce poverty and perpetuate inequality. The correct identification of these and the introduction of remedial policies have been recognised as priorities by both government and civil society. The importance of reducing poverty and inequality has been a consistent theme of the new government (2000:2).

In an attempt to redress the imbalance, the government has introduced a few policies. Most prominent among these is Affirmative Action. Instead of becoming a healing balm, affirmative action has exacerbated the situation. It has been interpreted by some, especially those who have wealthy status, as a way of disempowering them by applying a reversed "Job Reservation".

Arguing from the perspective of Black theology, Simon Maimela defines the situation of the poor and marginalised as follows:

Black theology as a conscious and systematic reflection on the black situation of racial oppression is born out of an historical experience of suffering, of domination and humiliation of the powerless by the powerful racial group, which denies their fellow South Africans the right of becoming creators of their own history. It is born out of the awareness by blacks that they are not poor and oppressed by accident or by divine design. Rather they are made poor, powerless and that they are oppressed by another racial group, the rich and socio-politically powerful whites. (1986: 102)

There are two aspects which are comparable to the understanding of the “divided nation” alluded to by President Mbeki. The **first one** is the racial divide of black and white. Race divides the South African community into a racial caste, in spite of attempts to create a “rainbow nation.”

The **second one** is the socio-economic divide. The racial caste also defines economic status. The black nation is poor and economically powerless whilst the white nation is wealthy and economically powerful. The inequality is caused by the material conditions under which the two nations live. How this can be changed remains a troubling question for all who are concerned. To address the problem, a number of laws such as the Equality Law, the Affirmative Action Law, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and other laws have been introduced. Although these laws are applied with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm, they seem to be failing to create a unified nation. It is for that reason that I have concluded that we can learn from Mbiti, who sees this unity in the light of membership of the African indigenous religions. He argues that, for a unified nation to exist every citizen will not see himself or herself as an outsider or behave as such, if he or she is to be known and accepted as a member of an indigenous group. He says that:

An outsider cannot enter or appreciate fully the religion of another society. Those few Europeans who claim to have been “converted” to African religions (and I know some who make such fantastic claims!), do not know what they are saying. To pour out libation or observe a few rituals like Africans, does not constitute conversion to traditional religions. (1969:4)

For South Africa to be a unified nation, each individual has to be committed to the building up of a united nation that has equal access to the empowering resources the country can provide. Maluleke sees this unity as a total liberation of the poor. He says that:

Africanisation is not merely a change of form, it is a change of content, method, objective and vision, so that theological education and church praxis contribute to and facilitate the total liberation of the poorest of the poor in Africa. (Challenge, 1998:11)

This means that a “unified nation” would demand, from all the people of South Africa, a change of attitude - an attitude that will make them seek genuine reconciliation with each other and where they will see each other as equals.

Maimela says that the poor “are made poor and powerless and oppressed by the rich and socio-politically and economically powerful whites” (1986:102) and speaking from an Africanist point of view, Zephania Mothopeng, former President of the Pan Africanist Congress, says:

It is the Africanist position that the indigenous African people, our principal constituent, are a conquered nation; and a subject nation to a nation or national groups made up of foreign European settlers with their external imperialist supporters. (1990:1)

For Mothopeng and the Pan Africanist Congress, there is no doubt that whites form a privileged nation whilst blacks form an underprivileged and powerless nation and David Cleabaut says that black people are poor and powerless because they are excluded from the key institutions of society. David Korten argues that such people can only be in the same position as the rich and powerful if they are empowered through a participatory development process. Drawing from the African cultural dictum “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am,” John Mbiti says that South Africa can only become a unified nation through depending on each other in the community (1969:108).

4. METHODOLOGY

In this work, I will use a socio-cultural method. This method will allow me to examine the socio-cultural and political situation of the poor and marginalised communities of South Africa and apply to these the principles of community empowerment as enumerated in John Mbiti’s African theology. It will help me enumerate such principles and assess their relevance for the development and empowerment of the poor and marginalised communities of South Africa. A literal survey of Mbiti’s work will be done.

5. HYPOTHESIS

This thesis is based on the assumption that if community empowerment and development must be successful in South Africa, it must be built on the principles of Ubuntu, as founded in the cultural dictum “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.” Although the concept of Ubuntu is inchoate in terms of strict philosophical formulations, certainly it rejects the rugged individualism and capitalism on which development and empowerment policies of government are based. Ubuntu is pro-communalism and,

thus anti-individualism. It is a form of African “humanism” (see Lebamang J. Sebidi, “Toward a Definition of Ubuntu as Humanism,” in Khabela and Mzoneli (eds) 1998, 63). Based on this assumption, this thesis poses and seeks to answer the question, “does the African theology of John Mbiti provide any cultural principles which can contribute to the empowerment of the poor and marginalised people of South Africa?” I have chosen John Mbiti above South African theologians because, beside being a pioneer of African theology, he has had the advantage of wide research covering the whole continent of Africa.

6. DELIMITATION

This thesis will focus on the disadvantage communities of South Africa. Its examination of the African culture will be limited to the theology of John Mbiti.

7. CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

I hope that this thesis will contribute deepened knowledge about the use of cultural principles capable of strengthening development in the black communities.

8. DEFINITION OF TERMS

8.1 *Poor*

This is a state of being without material things. It is also a state of being helpless. The poor are spoken of in two major ways in this thesis. First, as those deprived of physical necessities and, second as those who are socially, politically and economically oppressed.

8.2 *Marginalised*

The Random House College Dictionary defines marginalised as a word that comes from marginal and means “pertaining to a margin, situated on the edge or at the outer or lower limits.” (1980:817) I have adopted the definition that says “situated on the edge or at the outer or lower limits.”

8.3 *SaSa and Zamani*

These two words are used by John Mbiti. “SaSa” is a Swahili word meaning “now period which is elongated,” and “Zamani” means “a past period which starts from the realised period of SaSa to a distant past.” (Mbiti 1969)

8.4 *Impilo*

This is a Nguni word referring to life or well-being. In this work it is used to indicate that development and empowerment that bring life in a situation of death. In Hebrew, Impilo is known as Shalom and it has a much clearer explanation of Impilo. When shalom is translated into English it means peace. This then equates shalom to a SiSotho greeting which is “Khotso”. When “Khotso” is translated into English it also means peace, but greater than just the absence of violence. It also has an understanding of people or an individual’s well-being.

8.5 *Isangoma*

This is a Nguni word referring to a diviner. A sangoma can foretell the future.

8.6 *Inyanga*

Inyanga is a Nguni word referring to a medicine man. Inyanga is different from Sangoma in the sense that inyanga may not be able to foretell the future.

8.7 *Indaba*

This is a Zulu word referring to a community meeting or an issue which is in Afrikaans known as the “bosberaad”

8.8 *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu is an African expression of humane-ness. It is called “botho” in Sotho and “vhuthu” in Venda.

8.9 *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*

A philosophical dictum which defines African communalism. Literally it means that “a person is a person through other persons”

8.10 *Iphupho*

This is a Nguni word meaning, a dream.

8.11 *African Theology*

John Parratt defines African Theology as a “Cultural theology”. He argues his definition from a perspective of South African theologians. He says that:

South African writers usually distinguish between “Black theology,”: meaning the political theology of Black South African, and “African Theology” by which they mean what we have so far called “Cultural Theology”. (Parratt, 1987:6)

Further more, Africa as a continent has many different cultures and therefore one would expect more than one theologies in Africa. John Pobee clearly highlights this point as he argues that:

There is a plethora of African Cultures. Partly as a result of hard geographical and physical

conditions, there is a gulf between Africa North of the Sahara and Africa South of the Sahara, between East Africa and West Africa. (In Parratt, 1987:30)

This therefore, brings into reality a multiple of cultural theologies (African Theologies) in Africa.

9. CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the general introduction of this thesis. Within it a number of terminologies have been defined and are going to be used extensively throughout the study. Many of them give a comprehensive explanation of empowerment within an African worldview.

CHAPTER ONE

IMPILO: A COMMUNITY-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

In African culture, development is understood as a process of group or community empowerment. It is not the empowerment of an individual but of the community, which has taken upon itself the task of making its life better. This improving of community life is multidimensional. This, then, makes development holistic. By this I mean empowerment touches all spheres of life, including health, politics, education, social issues, spiritual issues, economic issues, environmental issues and recreational issues.

In my explanation of what development is, my approach to the subject is not going to be an economic approach but a theological one, because I am not an economist but a student of theology. Development is not only economic. But it is, as I have said, multidimensional. Therefore, non-economic things can also empower people within a given community. In this chapter I am going to use the concept of “*Impilo*”, which means “comprehensive well-being”, as a way of understanding development in the African context.

Perry Yolder in his book “Shalom” discusses a comprehensive understanding of Shalom which relates clearly to an African understanding of *Impilo*, when he says:

We must stress that shalom is a positive idea . It points to the presence of something like well-being or health, rather than having a negative focus like English peace which points to the absence of something: turmoil, distress, or war; rather than the positive presence of things as they

should be. This can result in a notion that peace makers are passive, avoiding conflict and struggle. On the contrary, shalom making is being for something - for a new situation in which people are all right with their material needs being met. In this light, peacemaking as shalom making is striving so that those who do not now enjoy material shalom and physical well-being can do so. (1987:13).

What Yolder is saying in the above quotation is critically important in the experience and the situation of the marginalised and poor people of South Africa. To such people it does not only create motivation for the betterment of their situation but it also builds up a capacity in them to whole heartedly say, "Yes, we can change our situation for the better." They not only critically engage their situation in their minds but it empowers them to creatively act physically to change their environment.

2. WELL-BEING, HEALTH AND HEALING

Impilo, therefore, describes a development that is based on African values. According to Mbiti, *Impilo* refers to "the totality of life" as understood by Africans. Development is, thus, a process of improving the whole life of a community - the community itself having realized its potential and then taken upon itself the responsibility to make such improvements a reality. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can say: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of Life. (Mbiti, 1969:1 09109).

Impilo is important in the process of development because it enables development to take place in an African community. It affects not only the individual but the whole community. No one is "healthy" if others are not healthy in the community. The well-being of a person is intimately connected with the well-being of total creation (Mbiti1978:277). Therefore, *Impilo* cannot be enjoyed in isolation of others.

3. HEALTH AND THE LIVING-DEAD

Those who are the living-dead are believed to be the ones who give the community *Impilo*. This is an African traditional belief which I do not personally subscribe to. Talking about this well-being, Father Martin Mandew argued in a "*Natal Witness*" article that:

Abaphansi ensure *impilo* through the good ordering of the relationships between themselves and the living; they ensure the fertility and well-being of humans, of their crops, their stock, of their healing and medicinal plants, of their environment. (1995, June 24)

Mandew concurs with what I said in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, that development is not accomplished only through economic ways. In an African environment it happens through the "total creation" (Mbiti). That is why Mbiti says that, "The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.'" (1969:109) The individual does not say; "I am, because I have money," or "I am because I can rely on the resources I have." The individual in an African world view understands and interprets what he or she is in the light of what the community is. It is through his or her dependence on the community members that he or she will get a complete *impilo*. There is interdependency. The problem with this is that one is not expected to be different from others. That means there is no room for an individual to be who he or she is, so growth and development in this situation can be very slow.

I heard over the radio the other day that the Zimbabwean government was going to make tough judgement for rapists. The majority of these rapists are victims of AIDS and, therefore, are raping women in order not to die alone. Others believe that if they rape a child (pre-school age) the disease will be wiped away. This is an example of how *Ubuntu* can work negatively, but it illustrates what I want to communicate about interdependency in an African world view. These women and girls of Zimbabwe

could not have health (*impilo*) because a certain percentage of their community members were not healthy. This resembles the dehumanization that was done by the apartheid regime in South Africa. It destroyed the humanity of people. People could not say, "*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (I am because we are) when they were continually being destroyed.

Therefore, the society could not produce healthy people. If *impilo* is not there, it is sure that the mental capacity of a person will not function properly. As Mzwakhe Mbuli, the singer, says, "If your mind does not function properly your *impilo* collapses." No development can be achieved if the community's *impilo* has collapsed. It is *impilo* that enables empowerment to prosper.

Mbiti concludes by saying:

Health is, therefore, salvation, and sickness is the glaring opposite of it. Health as Salvation covers bodily well-being, its proper and harmonious functioning and spiritual soundness. If this complete well-being is present, there is salvation, where it is absent, the state is evil (1986:151).

So health in the African understanding is not just affecting the individual or one area of a person but the whole community. *Impilo*, or health, is primarily in people-centred development, especially if it is to be sustainable. If we also look from a Western view point, health is primary in the well-being of a community. That is why the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in our country has made health accessible, especially to those who cannot afford to go to any health care clinic. A prosperous nation is a nation that is healthy, creative and productive. Sickly people cannot be creative and productive.

4. HEALTH AND HEALING IN RELIGION

Central to health in African religion are the evil powers. These are the enemies of peoples' well-being. Behind anything that happens to the African community there is a reason. If there is mishap it is accredited to the evil powers. So the African *nyangas* (doctors) or *sangomas* exercise their powers of

protection by fighting with the evil powers. In some cases it is the elders or priests of the community who exercise those powers and bring peace and health to the people. Mbiti explains this in the following way:

For African peoples these powers of evil are concrete realities. Faith has to take on concrete form in order to effectively confront them, combat them and prove victorious over them, thus demonstrating its reality to be stronger than that of the evil forces. This understanding of faith makes it a spiritual reality which one can acquire, cultivate and use as a weapon (if need be) of attack, a weapon of defence, and a weapon of protection in the realm of evil forces. But it functions at a physical level, a level which the public can see, can feel, can touch, can witness most concretely in the case of the sick, the possessed, the person threatened with magic powers, the person who wants, but has been unable, to bear children. The power, the effectiveness, and the reality of this faith are made concrete in individuals and are not just academic postulates. (1986:114-115)

So health has to be experienced through the thick and thin of this evil power. This is the reason why the African independent churches are growing in leaps and bounds because they emphasize the well-being of the people. A religion or faith in Africa, if it is to empower the poor and marginalised, has to demonstrate an ability to cultivate *impilo* in those who are their members, as well as help them overcome those evil powers so that *impilo* may reign continuously in their community. Mbiti says in other African communities they banish the sickness away in order to have health.

He relates that in the following way:

In a cry of command from a man who has God in him, sickness is banished: "Wuu, away the sickness!" To this all the people present cry aloud "Wuu" and move their heads and arms in the direction away from the Dinka people, to the south, in order symbolically to send the illness there.

Now that the illness is symbolically and virtually driven away, the officiant tells God that “I do not want words of such sickness, that a man should be ill.” He solemnly declares in the name of his forefather(s) that he means what he says about not wanting anybody to be ill. (Mbiti, 1975:42)

What Mbiti is illustrating here is the general support that the African people give to each other in the community. This is the kind of support that I believe needs to be given to the poor and the marginalised. If they know that they can drive away illnesses symbolically, that alone will make them mentally creative. This symbolic gesture is an integral part of African culture, especially when Africans communicate with their ancestors (the living-dead). Therefore, the South African poor and marginalised will fully identify with this and use it for their empowerment. Empowerment has to do with hope building in people’s lives. That is why many of our African doctors (*isangoma*) confess publicly that they have the medicine which cures AIDS. The reality is that their patients have been given hope to live by these *sangomas*. Marginalisation and poverty can also be driven away symbolically as a first step, then move to the other practical steps of removing marginalisation and poverty in a community.

Health, as I mentioned previously, is an important part of the African world view. That is why health and healing go together as *impilo* (comprehensive well-being of a person or community). Health in an African context includes everything in one’s household, whether it’s a dog, a donkey, the weather, people, graves or anything that touches one indirectly or directly.

Health and healing are inseparable in an African understanding of *impilo* and they are also interwoven with the spirituality (religion) of the people. Take, for instance, the example of the Annang religion that Mbiti gives us:

In Annang religion, healing is a part of the religious rite. The priest who sacrifices to God can at the same time be the healer, doctor and the psychiatrist. However the strongest forces for healing come from the practices of Jesus and the early church. (1986:150)

Health and healing is part of African traditional culture as this quotation reflects. That is why *impilo* touches every sphere of African life, because health and healing forms the core existence of an African person and his or her social environment. One person becomes involved in four different but related things: priest healer, doctor and psychiatrist. In order that the African community realize a comprehensive well-being (*impilo*/health) one who is able to deal with their psychic phenomena and also their religious belief is critically important. The person is able to understand the people's mind about a certain subject and, therefore, to connect their thinking with the spiritual realm. As soon as these two realities are connected the person's healing is effected and comprehensive well-being is realized. Mbiti says that the comprehensive well-being (*impilo*) in Annang religion is equated with salvation. He starts first by mentioning things which are enemies of people and ultimately bring no salvation to people. He argues that those things are "diseases, ill-health, ailments and sicknesses." (1986:151). Of course, for salvation to come there has to be bad news (that is ill-health, etc.). All this forces us to seek good health which the Annang religion equates with salvation.

Health is, therefore, salvation, and sickness is the glaring opposite of it. Health as salvation covers bodily well-being, its proper and harmonious and spiritual soundness. If this complete well-being is present, there is salvation, where it is absent, the state is evil.(1986:151)

African theology has to take this Annang religious understanding and re-evaluate from a biblical perspective, then be able to say this is in continuity with the Bible or in discontinuity with it. African

theology has to do that because it presents God to the Africans in an African understanding. It should, therefore, sift out things that are not in continuity with the Word of God. As an incipient theology, African theology should have a critical scrutiny of African traditional values as it uses them as crucial means of communicating the Gospel to Africans. Also, as it empowers the poor and marginalised, it should not take any rubbish as an authentic African value and, therefore, use it without interrogating it. Our evaluating yardstick should not be Western values. It should be the local African Christian accepted values that we use as interrogators of the African traditional values that we want to employ as Gospel communicators. These local African values should also be applicable beyond the local community. In fact the African theology of Mbiti should have the capacity to employ internationally accepted values to enhance incipient African values.

Mbiti gives a clear picture of the traditional world from which these African values come so that whoever evaluates them will know the context from where they originate. He argues as follows:

The African Traditional World is one in which people recognize and experience many dangers and threats to life, even if they smile, sing, dance and make merry. As a whole, life is a struggle in the face of these threats which are both physical and spiritual in nature. Human life is a continuity between physical and spiritual entities. As long as one is alive in this body, physical threats have spiritual consequences and spiritual threats have physical consequences. Man is very much aware of spiritual realities which impinge upon the physical realities. Human life is, to a large extent, a struggle to sail through these dangers and threats.(1986:156)

The African theology of Mbiti, which has a clear understanding of this African context, would be able to facilitate empowerment in an African Christian community that is marginalised and experiencing poverty. I don't say that African communities are the same but, as Mbiti has mentioned in his

theological writings, many of these communities share a similar experience to the picture given by the above quotation. Therefore, even our local communities in South Africa would find the above-mentioned experience applicable in their situation. Even there we can't credit any junk as an authentic African value and, therefore, use it as a vehicle to communicate the Gospel. I repeat that it has to be thoroughly scrutinized before that particular value is used so that it does not misrepresent God and change the whole essence of the message of the Gospel into a non-value entity.

5. COMMUNITY-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

According to Mbiti, the success of development in African communities will only happen when continuity is allowed to exist between African culture and modern methods of development. While new ways of development must be introduced, the cultural way of life of the community must be allowed to continue and to form the basis of new ways of life. The continuity that exists between African religion and Christian faith is an example that must be learned. In the paper he presented at the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly on "Christianity and African Religion", he argues:

The points of continuity between biblical faith and culture and African religion have been sufficiently strong for the Gospel to establish a strong footing among African peoples. It is African religion which has produced the religious values, insights, practices and vocabulary on which the Christian faith has been planted and is thriving so well today. (Mbiti in Cassidy and Verlinden, 1978:311)

For Mbiti, the form of development that can thrive in an African community, is the one which involves the community in a meaningful way. Christianity has to take into consideration the local values and the

culture of the people to effect a sustainable development of Christian faith. It takes the people from the known (that is African Religion) to the unknown (that is Christian faith.) According to Mbiti, this is the acknowledgement that has to be given to the local people that they have the capacity to achieve their empowerment without totally depending on outside help. They can be creative with what God has given them for their survival.

Community-centred development is a vehicle through which the local people of a particular community are engaged in the betterment of their lives. Mbiti says this is what has brought growth and longevity in African Christianity. He mentions the figures which indicate this growth:

We are witnessing a tremendous growth of the church in Africa, within an extremely short time. At the end of 1976, there were about 180 million professing Christians in Africa. Their numbers are growing at a rate of 5% per annum. At the beginning of this century there were only 9 million Christians. (Mbiti in Cassidy and Verlinden, 1978:309)

He stresses that Christianity acknowledges and respects local religions it finds in communities it wants to evangelize. He argues it in this way; "The Christian faith comes, therefore, to judge, to save and sanctify, to enrich, to fulfil, to crown and to say 'Yes!' to African religion and not to destroy it." (1978:311)

Authentic development has to listen to the local peoples' theologies as they articulate them. Then it builds on that, together with the people of that community, to produce a long-lasting empowerment which reflects the needs of that community. The former President of Tanzania explains this in his book, *"Freedom and Development"*, in an illuminating way. He says:

Development brings freedom, provided it is development of people. But people cannot be developed, they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for an outsider to build a person's house, an outsider cannot give the person pride and self-confidence in themselves as human beings. Those things people have to create in themselves by their own actions. They develop themselves by making their own decisions, by increasing their own knowledge and ability and by their own full participation as equals in the life of the community they live in. (Nyerere, 1973:58-60)

Applying this to the study in question means the concepts of empowerment found in Mbiti's African theology will enable the poor and marginalised in South Africa to bring to reality the betterment of their community life. This they will do by realizing that these concepts are useful and applicable in their context. The only condition to their development is the realization that they have freedom and that liberation has given them empowerment which is continuously progressing.

Secondly, it has to develop a new synthesis that recognises and protects human rights and a sustained environment. Without this people-centred development, development does not happen. A clear example is well noted in the past history of our now dead apartheid government. The majority of people had to be structurally dehumanised by the top-down kind of approach to the solution of their felt needs. The past South African government made sure that development did not touch the poor and marginalised people. It stopped at improving the structures around the people. They breathed no *Impilo* in the people. Lastly, people-centred development seeks a new human consciousness that empowers people to take care of their lives and their future in their own ways without anybody from outside dictating to them what they should do.

6. THE STORY OF THE OVERGROWN PUMPKIN

A story is told of a developer who went to a remote African village. The developer was highly motivated and fully prepared to solve all the villagers' problems and transform the "primitive" African community. She came to realize, however, that the people lived under immense fear and apathy, and were not prepared to do anything to change their situation. She soon learnt that this fear emanated from a "strange" development in that village. The villagers reported that they had of late noticed a "monster" across the valley which they believed was sent by the evil spirits to punish them. Many people were dying in this village as a result of this evil power, they told her.

They went to show the development worker where the "monster" was. At this stage the villagers were so afraid that they left her to face the "beast" alone. After crossing the valley she discovered that it was nothing but an overgrown pumpkin. Nevertheless, to satisfy the villagers' curiosity she acted "bravely" by drawing out a sword and dramatically cutting it into pieces as the villagers watched in disbelief from a safe distance.

However, to her great dismay, the villagers did not welcome her back despite what she had done for them. Why? They requested her to leave the village in peace fearing that she could be another monster. They wondered how she could overcome the "monster" all alone if she was not another one! A few years later there was another overgrown pumpkin in the same village. Another development worker came to the village and, learning of their fear, she asked them what they had done about the "problem" in the past and they narrated the incident of her predecessor. She asked them to join her with their traditional weapons to face the "monster." They all tiptoed abreast towards the unknown. The development worker identified the object but did not disclose what it was. On reaching it they all set

on the "monster" with their traditional weapons until they shattered it. They proudly walked back to the village, singing and dancing, celebrating their great "victory." The development worker lived in the community for a long time, learning many things from the villagers. Meanwhile she taught them new things, including how to grow and eat pumpkins!

The second developer mobilized for the participation of the people within the community to join her in attacking the "monster". When the community reached the "monster" they knew what to do because they were given an opportunity to exercise their imagination and creativity. At the end of the day they were proud of what they had done. This is development that goes a long way because it is people-centred. It also builds the self-esteem of the people. That is why they were able to achieve such a mammoth task without a dictatorship.

7. MODELS OF ECONOMIC-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

There are two models of development which illustrate how development has been generally understood by the developed countries of the West, and they have been imposed on African communities. These are: Modern Economic growth or Modernization Theory and the Trickle-down Theory.

7.1 MODERN ECONOMIC GROWTH OR MODERNIZATION THEORY

This theory is believed to have started in the early stages of the nineteenth century and it is capitalistic in its nature. It is also believed to have benefited to a great extent the European countries. Out of this “The trickle-down theory was born and was seen as great help to the underdeveloped countries. Anne

Hope defines the approximate time when the Modern Economic Growth theory was started and who benefited most from it:

From the early 1800's to 1950, the process of Modern Economic Growth benefited a small group of mainly European or "European STOCK" Countries. This meant that by the 1950's, these countries more than quadrupled their per capita income. At the same time, there were sizeable increases in the populations of these countries (about 10% a decade). The result was "an enormous increase in total output and income at rates averaging 25% per decade (Hope 1995:9).

There are a few things that transpire from this quotation. The first one is that as an economic development, this growth Theory appears to be excellent. It could help us a lot in our situation if it could be applied contextually. Economic development would be achieved and poverty and unemployment could be decreased. Secondly, it was appropriate for the European context at that time and, therefore, it thrived as best as it could. I wonder how it will do so outside that context at the present time? Thirdly, I believe if it is going to work profitably for underdeveloped countries, like South Africa, it will have to be studied and designed in the context of such countries.

Modern Economic Growth according to Hope, came to be very important from the 1940's onward. She argues that the chief goal of the modernization approach was and continues to be the achievement of Western style of life and culture by all the peoples of the world. Hope believes that; modernization theorists tried to spread the fruits of economic growth and prosperity that the West enjoyed by putting all other parts of the world onto the same path of industrialization and technological growth. She mentions that they were also motivated by a fear that people's experiences of poverty and powerlessness in underdeveloped countries would make communism seem like a good alternative to them. "In moving it to other parts of the world they had a theory of Trickle-down in their minds. So that the needs of the poor and powerless are met," argues Hope.

7.2 THE TRICKLE-DOWN THEORY

The second model of development has been The Trickle-down theory. It came into being as a thought by the developed countries of West that it could help the poor and underdeveloped countries. Anne Hope gives a comprehensive meaning of this theory as she argues that:

The “trickle-down” theory of economics means that if business and production in a country grow, the people outside the circle will find more opportunities to get into the circle. The aim of “trickle-down economics” is to ensure that some of the wealth from the top group is distributed among the poor, so that they become middle class, and their standard of living improves (1995:44).

What I want to highlight in this quotation is the great thinking behind the aim of this theory, which is to involve the poor in the circle of wealth opportunities. “A similar thinking I heard from one of the Muslim faith Leaders, years ago. When I interviewed him about how Muslim faith fights poverty, he told me that those who are poor among them are involved in the businesses some of their members have. They are gradually trained to run the business and eventually are given their own business to run. Those who have managed to get into that “ Circle of Wealth opportunities,” are then encouraged to help other poor people in their midst through this “circle of wealth opportunities” (Hope,1995).

Secondly, if this Trickle-down theory could be a reality in all situations where it is tried, it would be an excellent method of eradicating poverty and unemployment.

8. CRITIQUE OF THESE TWO MODELS.

To start with Modernization Theory or Economic Growth it was and is still not the answer to the poverty of underdeveloped countries. It has to be known that Traditional societies are not the same and so they

cannot all start at the same point. The situation inside and outside underdeveloped countries is not the same as the early stages of the developed countries. So one should not assume that they will move on to similar stages that were experienced by developed countries.

Secondly, modernization theory tends to assume that productivity is synonymous with development and it emphasises large-scale industrial production. This kind of productivity is not the only way for people to develop themselves. In fact it has many bad elements that might restrict human development. Lastly, people whose way of life does not fit the model of modernisation, for example, tribal people, are considered backward and unimportant and their culture and rights are threatened and sidelined by progress.

On the other hand “The Trickle-down theory” is not completely different to Modern Economic Growth. It is also a top down approach of wealth redistribution. Clark and Davies argue that the:

Protagonists of the “Trickle-down” theory believe that generating wealth in a country will eventually lead to the trickle down of that wealth to even the poorest members of society. So everyone benefits. However, experience in the field has produced no evidence to support this Thesis. But there is a clear evidence of the Trickle-down of Poverty(1991:7).

In this quotation’s argument there is no space created for the poor and marginalised to get involved in a meaningful way. It is hoped that they will get the end results of the trickle-down of the rich men’s wealth. The question is, how they will be able to get into that “wealth’s circle” if they don’t fully participate in the creation of that economy. How will they get into that circle of rich people, if the evidence of Trickle-down theory hasn’t been wealth but a trickle-down of poverty (Clark and Davies)? How will wealth trickle-down to them if their culture and their life-style is considered “unimportant and backward?”

This then means that they have to operate and behave in a life-style that is foreign to them. To me this robs them of their opportunity to be creative in their own life-style and also to share that life-style with those who are rich and powerful. In reality the poor and marginalised are disempowered and are stripped of their rights to be themselves. They are forced to operate as someone else. This has the potential to inflict on them an inferiority complex that could be destructive to their lives. On the other side, the rich and powerful deny themselves an opportunity to learn from the experiences of the poor and marginalized.

9. PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

David Korten suggests a People-Centred Development approach as opposed to the “trickle-down” theory and Morden Economic Growth. He argues that it:

Looks to justice, sustainability and inclusiveness as the defining principles of authentic development. It views development as a people's movement more than as a foreign-funded government project. It looks to government to enable people to develop themselves. It seeks a synthesis of the change objectives of the environmental, human rights, consumer protection, women's and peace movements. It seeks a new human consciousness in which the more nurturing, enabling and conserving dimensions of female consciousness gain ascendance over the more aggressive, exploitative and competitive dimensions of male consciousness that have so long dominated the social and economic life of human societies. (1990:5)

This quotation has a main focus on people and it also highlights that people can better their lives if they are empowered to do so. To my understanding, development has to have these components that Korten has outlined above. Firstly, as a peoples’ movement, the people within the community have to be mobilised and brought to a clear understanding of the issues that are affecting the community. Thus, they

are enabled to come up with their own solutions to their own problems, not neglecting solutions that they can borrow from the outside communities.

Western donor countries hoped that if they pumped money into the newly formed African governments, those governments would pass it down to their people. In doing this, Western donors ignored the role of African culture in everyday life and interaction of Africans in their communities. They did not understand that the culture of questioning and making those who are senior accountable does not exist in Africa. As a result, corrupt officials within African governments squandered and misused aid meant for the development of the poor and marginalised in their communities.

The people-centred understanding of development given by Korten and the freedom-bringing empowerment understanding presented by Nyerere are much better than the “trickle-down” theory of development and Modern Economic Growth as these latter theories are disempowering to people. The latter theories are the easy way to monitor and control money from the side of the donors and those who are powerful, as they can see on paper precisely what their money has done and accomplished. Whatever they want can be achieved because of their manipulate power.

10. CONCLUSION

Impilo summarises an African understanding of development. Based on African religion, it represents more than an economic growth approach to development but points to a holistic transformation of a community. This transformation involves the living and the creative people in making their community life better. Community values are treated with respect in the process of development and the culture of the people is taken as the starting point. Finally, one can say that in this chapter *Impilo* has been discussed and presented as a critically important component of development. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the total well-being of being of people, as it is shown in this chapter. As a

result of what was discussed in this chapter, one can conclude by saying well-being is to be created in a community, if empowerment of the poor and marginalized has to be reached. One can speculate that *impilo* is the reason behind the radical involvement of the South African government in the fight against HIV and the Aids epidemic. The Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, has become deeply involved of late in the war against this epidemic because the government sees that the country will have no *Impilo*, if the Aids epidemic is not stopped. Economic growth will be difficult to be achieved, because the work force is being crippled by this epidemic.

CHAPTER TWO

FUTURITY: A CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

1. INTRODUCTION

Mbiti sees time as extremely important to humanity as it plays a significant part in our lives. We do not all perceive time in the same way. Different cultures understand time in different ways. But these ways of understanding time are of significant value to each of them. Therefore, those who are from outside a culture need to understand quite clearly the way time is understood in that particular culture. Many a time people have condemned the way another cultural group understands time because in their culture time is valued in a different way. This, then, makes people think that their way of understanding time is better than the way time is understood in another culture. They then want to superimpose their way of understanding time on others. It is in the development of time that people are able to create a dynamic context for change. Future is the crucial aspect in time for the change that has a sustainable power for human empowerment, because it has a forward mobility. It is in this movement of time that new discoveries are made and people are empowered through these discoveries. Therefore, in this chapter I am going to investigate the presence of future in African cultures and in so doing highlight the understanding of Mbiti about the future in African cultures.

2. DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF TIME

As time changes people development happens also. Time does not only play a significant part in our lives, but it is also a significant part of empowerment, which does not only affect an individual but also affects the whole community of which the individual is part. Time has an economic dimension through

which it empowers communities. For example, there is greater economic growth if production is produced in a short space of time. For this to happen skills development needs to be done with the workers. It is through our effective usage of time that we are able to get empowerment. If we use time creatively we get excellent economic fruits which empower us in numerous ways in life. I am acquainted with four understandings of time. First, the Western understanding which gives us a concept of time that is three dimensional—that is, past, present and future. The second understanding of time is that of Africans, as defined by Mbiti, which has two dimensions, past and present.

The third understanding of time, relates to those African cultures which have a future, but this future is built on things or events that are happening presently or have happened in the past. Take, for instance, the understanding of *Nomkhubulwane*, the goddess of rain and soil fertility among the Zulu people. If a maize field is not given and dedicated to her, it is believed that whatever you plant in your field in the future will not be successful. This misfortune happens because you did not dedicate a special planted maize field to *Nomkhubulwane*. So this touches the future that is not a far distance, just two or three years down the line, but is based on the present and the past.

The fourth understanding of time is the biblical understanding of time, which is more like the Western understanding. It has the past, present and future. This somehow relates to the third African understanding of time which Mbiti does not talk about in his theological debate. Maybe it has been influenced by the Western and the biblical understanding of time or it could be that Mbiti is reacting to these because his own culture is two dimensional in its understanding of time. Therefore, he wants to assume that all African cultures are like his. One would have to do an in-depth study to understand if African understanding of time was influenced by Western or biblical time or if it has been like this from the beginning. Towards the end of this section I am going to look at what some of Mbiti's critics are saying about time, especially in the African context.

In this chapter I am not that interested in the Western understanding of time but my interest is in the African understanding of time, which Mbiti sees as two dimensional, that is *SaSa* and *Zamani*, as defined in the Introduction, and also in the other African cultures that have future.

3. THE EXISTENCE OF FUTURE IN OTHER AFRICAN CULTURES

In the African world view, time is experienced as the occurrences of events which happen progressively. For example, people in our Xhosa culture are woken up by the cock crow, either the first group of cocks, which is around 1 and 2 a.m., or the second group which is a bit later in the morning, round about 3 and 4 a.m. For circumcision they wait for the Big Star that appears between May and June, which is called *Isilimela*. It is at this time that they start counting one's age. One's age is measured by the number of *Isilimela* that one has. Mbiti argues that:

Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the community which goes back many generations before his or her own birth. For one to be able to count one's age, or to tell when was the time that such and such event happened, one has to experience what happened at that event. Or one should have some significant things which happened in order for one to be able to count one's years. Things like the year, the month and the date. (1969:17)

It happens in the same way in Xhosa culture, where one has to know the number of one's Big Stars (*Isilimela*) to understand how old one is. It becomes difficult for one to tell what will happen in the future because the future has not been experienced. However, that does not mean the Xhosa culture has no future in its world view. The cattle killing event among the Xhosa people, led by *Nongqawuse*, tells

us that these people were a futuristic cultural group because she told them about the rich future they would have if they killed their cattle. (Peires 1981) But to them events are important in pointing to a future. That is why Mbiti says:

Since what is in the future has not been experienced, it does not make sense; it cannot, therefore, constitute part of time, and people do not know how to think about it unless, of course, it is something which falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena. (1969:17)

Somehow one finds oneself wanting to agree with Mbiti in the non-existence of the future in the concept of time among Africans. In South Africa's African languages, especially with Zulu and Xhosa, there is no clear word for a distant futuristic concept of time. It is rather a near-by future. This is seen in the proverbs that those cultures share: "*Ingomuso alaziwa*" (future is not known). But this *ngomuso* refers to tomorrow as opposed to a far distant day, which could be ten years from today in western culture. It is also evident in the proverb that conveys an expression of gratitude: "*Nango -muso*" (even tomorrow) that is, "continue to do this". These proverbs do take us into a distant future and, also, into a close future. They give us an understanding that this event will happen the next day, at the same time this particular event can happen anytime after today, or in five or ten years from today. Future does not exist in these South African cultures and it is the crucial component of time which empowers the poor and marginalized.

4. HOW TIME CONTRIBUTES TO THE EMPOWERMENT OF PEOPLE

If time is taken as a progressive phenomenon then it can significantly contribute to the empowerment of people. By this I mean that time is able to move people from a situation of misery to a well developed situation. This will only happen when people conceive of time as a changing phenomenon which brings in new ways of doing things and, therefore, align themselves with the action power of time.

Fortunately, time has the ability to empower people if it is handled creatively because it allows us to look backwards and also to cast our thinking into the future given the present situation. It only can do this when the powerless marginalised people are involved in the process. This progressiveness of time is well stated by Miller in his article “The Development Ethic: Hope for a Culture of Poverty” in the book *“Christian Relief and Mbiti’s Development”* as he warns against a two dimensional understanding of time, which Mbiti advocates, and dismisses it as having no empowerment ability.

In contrast, the development ethic assumes a world in which there is a past, a present and a future with hope. History is going somewhere, and progress can be made in this material world, in relation with others and with God. “If there is no future, how does one proceed with development?” (Miller, 1989:102)

It is clear in this quotation that time must have future which brings hope to the people, and that this future is governed by the history which is progressive and moving somewhere. Now the direction of history needs people who are creative, so that they can direct history towards a creative empowerment of their community. Whatever is new, empowering and developing the community has to be part of it, as a dream (iphupho) of the community. In this way the poor and marginalized in that particular community are able to be empowered as they take an active participation in making their community life much better in terms of living conditions. A dream is something that has not been realized, it is in the future. So through a dream, there are plans and prospects for empowerment and progress. Thus, there is sustainable development in the community, if this dream is implemented.

Therefore, the future is like a dream . This, then, makes a culture that has no future stagnant in terms of progress. Yet, culture is dynamic and it changes. This dynamic nature of culture “gives” power to time so that it can empower people. We are in the modern technology era where we have the whole Global Village in our homes through computer network. This changes the cultures but the change has

got to be monitored and directed in a way that will be beneficial to the people. For example, when Africa was under the rule of colonialists, new and unknown things were introduced in Africa. But the direction of change was not controlled and monitored by Africans and, thus, there was abuse of the mineral resources of Africa by the outsiders. Now Africa is struggling to develop because it has been disempowered. It is, therefore, theologies such as Mbiti's African theology that could empower the poor and marginalised of South Africa, for they have an understanding of time among the Africans. They can help Africans to creatively use time in the present generation when modern times have taken over and distorted some of the cultural values in African worldview. Mbiti argues that:

Africa is caught up in a world revolution which is so dynamic that it has almost got out of human control. It is a revolution of man as a whole, and, therefore, no people or country can remain unaffected by this new rhythm of human history. Nothing can halt this rhythm or slow down its rapid tempo. The people of Africa must get up and dance, for better or for worse, on the arena of world drama. Their self-image and of the universe is disrupted and must make room for the changing "universal" and not simply "tribal" man. This is the general world-wide revolution affecting African societies, but there are immediate causes for the changes now taking place. (1969:216)

In the light of this quotation, Mbiti is trying hard through his theological principles of empowerment to empower the African people by appealing to them to create a space of change and growth in their culture. Culture is not static, it is dynamic. Therefore, it can easily adapt to changes. Even in this "world of revolution which is dynamic", the African worldview will have to change to adapt to the change that it faces constantly. As it yields to this change it will have to be properly guided and monitored.

On the other side, if the African culture does not go according to the changes of time, it will suffer a lack of development. Time changes and as it changes it brings new developments. Therefore whichever culture wishes to be at the critical point of development, it needs to understand what time it is now, then

adjust its world view according to the agenda of the present time. That does not mean it should not hold firm to the traditional values which are crucial and have continuity with the present day. Because of the new developments that are brought forth by the changing nature of time, the poor and the marginalised could be empowered because the present times demand the participation of all in any undertaking that is going to be of benefit to the community. Through this participation the poor and marginalized acquire whatever skill they need for their own empowerment.

5. MBITI'S CRITICS

One of Mbiti's critics gives an argument which is contradictory to what Mbiti's understanding of time is, especially with regard to the future understanding.

The comprehensivity of being includes not only actual but also possible being. Thus, to say at the same time of the same people that their concept of time is necessarily related to that of being and that their concept of time extends only backwards is in itself contradictory. Now portraying the African conception of God as one which includes the temporality of infinitude of God is in itself to suggest that such a conception implies also a conception of infinitude as part of the philosophy - theological conceptualization of reality. In other words, the concept of the infinitude of God must of necessity include a concept of the infinite time within which God executes His acts and plans (Masolo 1994:111).

Masolo has a point in the fact that comprehensivity of being does not only talk about the actual beings and stop there but it also extends to the possible beings who are to come in the distant future. Take, for instance, marriage of the prince in African culture. When a prince takes a wife that woman should be someone who has lived a clean life in terms of sexual relationships and preferably she should come from

a royal family of another clan. The underlying purpose is to bear children of good character who are worthy to be the kings of the nation. That is a future planning which is realized in a distant future. This is a known practise among South African indigenous cultures.

Kwame Gyekye is not very happy with the way John Mbiti understands and presents time in a traditional African world view. He feels that Mbiti restricted his research to the Gikuyu and Kikamba languages. He goes on saying:

Mbiti's analysis of the so-called African concept of time, which was based on a couple of East African languages, is incorrectly attributed to other African languages. Generalizations on such matters that are based on the characteristics of one or two natural languages ought to be made with circumspection. (Gyekye, 1987:185)

This is a major shift from Mbiti's understanding of the African concept of time. And it's a new revelation that Mbiti has based his facts on two languages and disregarded the rest of the African languages in the whole of Africa. Gyekye continues to point out the pitfalls that Mbiti has made in his discussion of an African understanding of time. He argues:

Mbiti admits that "languages are the key to the serious research and understanding of traditional religions and philosophy". Languages, indeed, are vestibules to the conceptual world. But this indicates that a concept inferred from one language cannot necessarily be assumed for a people speaking another language. (Gyekye, 1987:173)

He goes on saying:

I am not denying that it is possible for an analysis of a concept made on the basis of different languages to produce identical or similar conclusions. Rather, I am asserting that the identity or similarity of such conclusions cannot be assumed without having investigated the other languages. (1987:173)

Given this critique one can assume that Mbiti had not travelled Africa then as extensively as he has now. I want to believe that Mbiti would admit that he based his research on Kikuyu and Okamba cultures which do not have a distant future. A culture without future is static, it does not change and develop. Therefore, it is difficult for those people who come from that culture to improve their life situation, the reason being that they can't invest in the future because they have no future. Miller in Allison is surprised by Mbiti's understanding of time which has no future, and Miller says: "Where, in this scheme, is there room for development? Development is, by its nature, an activity of the future, an expression of faith and hope. If there is no future, how does one proceed with development?" (1989:102).

If development or empowerment is an activity of the future, those African cultures which have no future in their world view have got to allow change to take place in their cultures. Otherwise these cultures will soon die because they are not future oriented and, therefore, community life will experience difficulties in changing. This subject is wide and rich, and I cannot exhaust it in this little section. It is a thesis on its own. Those African cultures that have no future have to include it if they are going to survive in the modern and changing Africa.

6. CONCLUSION

What is in the future has not been experienced and, therefore, it cannot make sense to Africans according to Mbiti. In African traditional world view time has to be experienced through events for it to be real. This is the period before Christianity came to Africa with modernization, according to Mbiti. I think we need to understand Mbiti's argument from this historical background. Although Mbiti moves forward into the period of Christian faith, his argument of the African conception of time moves backward into the *Zamani* period. All his theological arguments are based on African traditional world view and at the same time he moves forward when he argues from a Christian point of view. This is the uniqueness and

the richness of his African theology. It is able to understand the behaviour of African Christians because it properly understands the historical background of the African's conception of time. I don't believe that we can say all African cultures are two dimensional when it comes to time, and we do find others with three dimensions of time, as we have discussed above. Mbiti's understanding of time is not the final truth about the African perception as we have seen from some of his critics.

CHAPTER THREE

DENTITY: A CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is a needed commodity in African theology, in Christianity, and in any culture or social life as it is through identity that people are able to know who they are and what has contributed to their being. Therefore, they are able to trace where they come from, which makes them better understand their present situation and, thus, enables them to focus appropriately on the future. A proper Identity can help people focus correctly and wisely for the future and this may bring wealth and prosperity to the community or to the society. If the peoples' identity is confused, their future is confused and their present time can be terribly chaotic. In this chapter I am going to talk about identity as an empowering commodity, especially to the poor and marginalised of South Africa.

Case Study I

I was talking about identity in one school which has young people from different race groups. A black girl came to me and said, "I really don't know my identity. One time I was a Black-American, then I stayed with my aunt in a Coloured township and now I am staying with another aunt of mine in Kwa-Thema township. But my father and my mother are both African-African." This girl, Nomathemba, could not properly identify herself because she found herself not fitting into any of the cultures in which she found herself. Nomathemba expressed a deep seated desire to be more like her parents who properly knew their cultural identity and, therefore, had a positive self-image of who they were. Knowing one's identity is the key to great achievement in one's life.

In the history of humankind there has never been a people as confused as the young people of South Africa today, both black and white. Ever since they were born they were told lies by the status quo machinery of the apartheid regime. Truth was not told to them and now that it is told in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they are beginning to understand they have been told lies. But this makes them not sure about who they are and what to believe and what not to believe. They are not quite sure how their identity should have been shaped. They don't even know how it should be shaped for the future. In reality the lack of identity disempowers people.

The answer to this problem is the challenge that is facing us in South Africa and it is not easy to find. Mbiti's African theology and how he constructively presents the concept of empowerment might help us know our true identity, then be ready for empowerment. That empowerment has to reconstruct the young people's past in such a way that they are able to identify who they are.

It is not only young people who do not understand their true identity but, worse than them, the poor and marginalized. The oppression and dehumanization of the Apartheid regime stripped them of their humanity, in terms of seeing themselves as helpless people. They will come out of this situation through identifying themselves as a marginalized and poverty stricken group, that is able to stand together and take charge of their lives.

The African world view has a powerful way of creating identity which empowers the individual. This powerful way is identifying the individual with the community of those who are alive and also with the community of those who are in the world of the living-dead, the ancestors.

They don't just identify with those who are beyond death but they appeal to them for help through prayer. In a way, that creates a strong bond of identity. Those who are alive feel that they belong to people who

can help them in a time of need. They are even blind to the fact that these people are dead. To them they are alive in the other world of the departed.

2. EMPOWERMENT AND FAMILY IDENTITY

This is a good "sailing board" for African theology to empower people with a sense of identity that has continuity and brings hope to them. Mbiti mentions in his theological writings that the African people are a people who love genealogy, which really identifies who they are.

In our local cultures, Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and others, we like identifying ourselves by going through our family genealogies. In the Zulu culture when a group of three or four men is sent to negotiate for a young man's marriage, they have to identify who they are from outside the boundaries of this young man's future in-laws' homestead. They say where they are from and what has brought them here. Then they can start to identify the bride's family by going through her family genealogy and after that they are allowed to come in and negotiate for marriage on behalf of the young man's family (parents and extended family). For African theology to have an impact among Africans, it has to use extensively these known factors as a vehicle of communicating the gospel relevantly.

Talking about the place of genealogy in African traditional religion, Mbiti argues that:

The genealogy gives a sense of depth, historical belongingness, a feeling of deep rootedness and a sense of sacred obligation to extend the genealogical line. Through genealogies, individuals in the *SaSa* period are firmly linked to those who have entered the *Zamani*. Genealogies are sacred means of orientation towards the *Zamani* where the foundations of different peoples lie. Through genealogies, those who are in the *Zamani* period and those who are in the *SaSa* period become

“contemporaries” in the timeless rhythm of human life. In some societies people trace their genealogies as far back as the mythological “first” man, or other national heroes, giving them a sense of pride and satisfaction. (1969:105)

According to this, genealogy retrieves one's identity in a conspicuous way so that one is able to know one's self in a meaningful way and one is made known to others in a clear way. This does not leave any unanswered questions in the minds of people. According to Mbiti it identifies and establishes the commonness between people who are in the *SaSa* period and the *Zamani* period. This links the living and the living-dead in a creative way. Out of this one is able to identify where one comes from and also to know clearly what one has been influenced by to be what one is.

Therefore, identity can help African theology to empower the marginalised and the poor through making them have a sense of belonging to each other as one big family. This act of perceiving themselves as one family will greatly empower them because they will be able to support each other for their survival. This perception is very critical in the empowerment of a community because it is able to focus the people on one goal.

This kind of identity creates in one's mind a powerful motivation that could lead to excellent self-esteem and tremendous confidence. Both of these qualities are pre-requisites in development: without good self-esteem and self confidence empowerment cannot be achieved. That is why the Congress Of South African Trade Union (COSATU) uses a slogan that says; “An injury to one is an injury to all.” This slogan has galvanised and still continues to galvanise people around a common purpose for a United Action. This has led to an empowerment of the workers. Solidarity such as this is highly needed in the empowerment of the poor and marginalized.

I read the other day in the Natal Witness newspaper a about Mr Gideon Malazi who has returned to our country and who has had difficulty finding what can identify him as an authentic South African. The newspaper article said:

When he tried to apply for a new identity document in December, he was surprised when the department's Pretoria headquarters told him to renounce his South African citizenship (identity) and reapply as a foreigner. "My ancestors would turn in their graves if I did that. I will never renounce my citizenship (identity). This is the land of my birth," he said. (August 21, 1997)

This is a typical example of how identity empowers an individual. Like Mr Gideon Malazi, the identity document was the one that would have given him his freedom to come into the "land of his birth" without a problem. But the officials did not have any document that identified him as someone who was born in South Africa. I am sure it was devastating for him to be denied the right of citizenship in his ancestors' land. That is why he said, "If I denounce my identity and reapply as an outsider my ancestors would turn in their graves."

Identity does not only identify him but it also identifies his past, where he comes from, who his parents were and all that which made him who he is. When he found his old motorbike license with his reference number written on it he said, "I hope that this document will help bring back my past which was destroyed by the apartheid security policemen who wanted to wipe me out while I was in exile." (Natal Witness, August 21, 1997)

3. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Religion is one of the strong shapers of an individual or a community's identity. It is the cherished religious values which clearly declare who the people group is and what their belief is. In an African cultural context, religion is an integral part of the community life, if not the greatest part. Religion is intricately bound up with all the life spheres of African life. It can also be confusing when it comes to the question of Christian commitment, because many Christians who are evangelizing Africans ask them, "Do you believe in God?" They always say, "Yes, I believe in God." This belief of Africans in God is greatly integrated with the African traditional cultural milieu. It is difficult to separate religion from culture in an African set-up. Life in an African world view is holistic, it is not compartmentalized into this and that. However, people are able to identify things that are distinctively religious. It, therefore, needs to be sifted-out by the evaluation that African theology can have on the African holistic life. Harry Sawyer defines inseparableness of the culture and religion among the Africans, as follows:

The African sees himself (sic) as part of a cultic community - a community which is incomplete without the supernatural world. The worship of the ancestors, the attitude to birth and death, sin, sickness, forgiveness and health all converge on the central role of the community(1987:24).

But African theology as a Bible based theology should evaluate this biblically and thoroughly find out what does the message of the Bible say especially in relation to the invoking of the ancestors. It is not only Sawyer who mentions the "worshipping of ancestors" in his theological writings and discussion as a critical part of African Theology but also many other African Theologians, like, Gwinyai Muzorewa (1985) Bénézet Bujo (1992) T. Tshibangu (1987) Manas Buthelezi (1987) and others. In this situation African Theology should be able to evaluate each and every theology that includes the worshipping of ancestors as in the following way:

He who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, but the

memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they no longer have any share in all that is done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:4-6).

The power of African theology is the bridge from African traditional religion to African theological empowerment. Mbiti argues that:

African religion could not produce that which the Gospel offers to African peoples. Yet, it tutored them so that they could find genuine fulfilment in the Gospel. The Christian faith comes therefore, to judge, to save and sanctify, to enrich, to fulfill, to crown, and to say “Yes to African religion”, and not to destroy it. (1978:311)

As the Gospel says "Yes to African religion", African theology needs to have a thorough introspection of the religious things which are more cultural than religious. I don't mean that the Gospel is not able to sift out all that is cultural in African traditional religion. What I mean is that, as we theologise in an African world view, we need to be careful not to overlook things which are in discontinuity with the Gospel. As I mentioned in the first chapter, Mbiti sees things that are in continuity and in discontinuity with the Gospel. Therefore, an African theology of Mbiti that will be able to empower the poor and the marginalised people of South Africa will have to emphasize those things that are in continuity with the Gospel. Richard Niebuhr also agrees with Mbiti in the continuity and discontinuity of the Gospel with Culture, when he says: “Christ is, indeed, a Christ of Culture , but He is also a Christ above culture. He is discontinuous and continuous with social life and its culture” (1951:42).

Any contextual theology has to clearly know the issues that are pertinent to the situation of the people and, therefore, be able to separate the crucial issues from those that are irrelevant. A theology that would properly identify with the poor and marginalized would have to be clear of the religious issues that need to be discarded, and those that need to be embraced in the pursuit of empowerment.

The great influence that the African world view still enjoys on the individuals in the community in spite of the numerous modern changes makes me more emphatic in cutting off things which are not in continuity with the Gospel. Religious identity can be a powerful launching pad for the Gospel. Therefore, African theology can build on that opportunity and proclaim the power of Christ which empowers the poor and the marginalised.

African theology as a reflection of African spirituality needs to fully understand African religiosity so that it may enter the African world view and have an impact. It should not miss the point of communicating Christ as did European theology.

European theology failed to understand the indigenous cultures, religions and traditions of Africa, and to relate to them in a respectful way or to enter into a creative dialogue with them. Such theology was too statement-oriented and speculative. It did not get involved in the real drama of African people's lives or speak in the religious and cultural idioms and expressions of the Africans in a meaningful way. It remained academic, elitist and individualistic. (Pato, 1994:154)

Religious identity is the key to the spirituality of any people group. If any spiritually related thing is going to be communicated to a people group, communicators need to know quite well the spirituality of that group. For the empowerment of the poor and the marginalised, we have to understand their spirituality and communicate with their religious reality. Therefore, Mbiti's African theology has to search and understand properly the religious identity of the poor and marginalised people of South Africa.

In this way it will not fail to facilitate a process of empowerment, as European theology failed to do. It will have to get involved in the real drama of people's lives and scratch them where they are itching. In fact, it will have to ask them in what ways they should be empowered: It should come from them. Mbiti's theology

does not have to dictate what South Africa's poor and marginalised people need to do in order to realise their empowerment. They are people who can relate it to their experiences and their felt needs. It is in this situation that Cochrane suggests:

Theology only becomes real to those who actually suffer poverty, oppression and marginalisation in any society if it also connects with the quite specific material and historical conditions which shape their local contexts of life. It is from this "base" that the living force of any adequate contextual theology will have to come. (1994:34)

As it "connects" with the concrete reality of the people, the Gospel or theology does not lose its true nature as the Gospel but it takes upon itself the identity of the local community or culture. This enables theology to earn the right to speak in that particular situation or community. It has to be owned by the people and, therefore, people theologise from the basis of information that this theology gives, because it is able to identify with the felt needs of the people. In reality it becomes a contextual theology. Talking about the Gospel embracing the felt needs of a community, David Bosch says:

The Gospel must remain good news while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon, while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context. On the one hand, it offers the cultures "the knowledge of the Divine mystery" while on the other hand it helps them "to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought." (1991:454)

4. HOW RELEVANT IS IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA?

I have already discussed the importance of identity in our country. The fact that we have, from 1994, a government of national unity is a sign that we want to create an identity that is common to all of us as South Africans. As I have mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, people have recently been busy trying to define who is the “authentic” African. The President, Mr Thabo Mbeki, has been the main mover of this African identity through pioneering debate on the African Renaissance. The *Zamani* concept of understanding African time empowers us to make a clearer distinction between “Euro-Africans” and “African-Africans” (White Africans and Black Africans). This would help us to identify clearly who is who.

The *Zamani* period of Euro-Africans takes them to Europe where their ancestors are. It has not been clear to me when they explain their Africaness because they never mention their people in the *Zamani* period in their genealogies. Their ancestors are able to identify them in a clear way which will enable them to be properly known to others. Mbiti gives us a clear way of understanding a people group or an individual. This makes one understand “properly” those who are not African Africans and relate to them quite fittingly having been given their historical background, a historical background which illustrates visibly their cultural identity. This could be something that could help fight the racial tension that is in South Africa between the blacks and whites, the poor and marginalised and those who are rich and powerful, and between the former oppressors and the formerly oppressed.

A better understanding could be achieved and, therefore, a genuine reconciliation could be a possibility. I believe that it is absolutely essential for each racial group to know where the other people came from, their real identity. This should not in any way be identified as similar to apartheid. This would encourage an in depth relationship and understanding of one race group by another and, thus, a better closeness to each

other. This would make each understand the other much better and appreciate their cultural values. This would enable us in South Africa to correctly appropriate the knowledge and the skills we have in the building up of our democratic South Africa, a nation free of oppression and racism of any form. Identity produces a dream for us in our country. In South Africa we need a dream similar to that of Martin Luther King, Jr, which will make us work hard on it so that it becomes a reality. Listen to King's multiracial dream for America, which was heavily influenced by his religious background.

I have a dream that one day in the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream that one day in Alabama, with its vicious racists, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. (Martin Luther King, Jr, in John Stott, 1984:194)

King's vision came at a time when the oppressed in America were trying to unearth their true identity, so that they could fight for their freedom as unified black Americans who were oppressed. They needed to have a clear identity of who they were and who their oppressors were, and who they were in terms of the oppressors' identity. After this identity isolation, clarity of identities of these racial groups would have been achieved, realizing this dream of multiracialism. This dream would have come after a good social analysis had been done and people groups had been identified and their socio-political and economic behaviour had been identified. A thorough investigation of the reality of King's dream would have been done. I believe

that King's dream for a multiracial society of America was premature for it to be realized by the oppressed minority of black people. Recent racial attacks and the burning down of black churches in America by white suspects does show that King's dream was too premature to be practical.

This search for identity continues among African-Americans. Many of them are found in and out of Africa trying to search for their roots. A friend of mine who is African-American is working in South Africa as a missionary. He has tried very hard, and with great success, to find his African identity. He did intensive research in New Guinea and eventually found out where his great grandparents came from, down to the approximate location where they had lived.

Malcolm X, who was a contemporary of Martin Luther King, Jr, was very much opposed to King's dream and he preached rather for separation from the white people. He was also influenced by his religious background. So religion was central to his struggle in liberating the black American oppressed minority. In his book *"Martin and Malcolm and America"*, James Cone discusses Malcolm X's separation appeal, as he says:

For Malcolm, separation was not a temporary, tactical position but rather an ideological commitment. God demanded separation. The desire to integrate was a sign of self-hatred. Malcolm urged blacks to show love for themselves by separating from "the blue-eyed white man." His vituperative language against whites did not mean that he hated whites or that he was trying to make blacks hate them. Rather his purpose was to wake blacks up to the need to love each other. What some called "hate teaching," Malcolm called "love teaching." "If I did not love you," he told an audience of Harlem blacks, " I wouldn't stick my neck out. This is love talk. We love you, but we don't love him (the white man). We want to unite with you, but we don't want to unite with him. We recognize you as our brother, but we don't recognize that old blue-eyed thing as our brother. Let him go out and be a brother to himself." (1991:108)

King and Malcolm X were both trying to paint a cultural, political and religious identity of African-Americans from a perspective of oppression. Yes, both of them had different interpretations of this cultural, political and religious identity, but both of them earned the right to be listened to by oppressed black Americans. And both of them had the black masses listening to them. Whether they agreed with them or not, they listened. Common to them was their ability to paint a clear picture of identity for those who were oppressed, poor, and marginalised in their community and in their country. However, neither of them were the Africans that Mbiti is addressing. But a lesson can be learnt from their ability to rally people around a felt need. Some of them participated in the call by these two African-American leaders for the liberation of the oppressed and marginalised. This is what Mbiti's African theology will have to do if it is to empower the poor and marginalised people of South Africa. It will have to involve them in a meaningful way so they are subjects of the change not objects. Paulo Freire argues the importance of the victim's participation in their struggle to make their life better and that their contribution should be encouraged:

I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me. Even if the people's thinking is superstitious or naive, it is only as they rethink their superstitions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas - not consuming those of others - must constitute that process (1989:100).

What I want to underline in this quotation is that it is important that the poor and marginalized are so mobilized that they are able to act together through a creative action that will begin to show how powerful they are when they act in a united way. This is not a new thing or action in our South African situation. During the hard times of the oppressive Regime of Apartheid, the poor and oppressed mobilised themselves in a powerful and unified action against their oppressors. Today we have a democratic government which recognises all people as equals, irrespective of their social and economic status. Therefore, it would be absolutely empowering for the poor and marginalized in South Africa to think and act in this way as they seek to empower themselves.

Paulo Freire goes on saying:

It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in their revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation. If they are drawn into the process as ambiguous beings, partly themselves and partly the oppressors housed within them - and if they come to power still embodying that ambiguity imposed on them by the situation of oppression - it is my contention that they will merely imagine they have reached power. Their existential duality may even facilitate the rise of a sectarian climate leading to the installation of bureaucracies which undermine the revolution. If the oppressed do not become aware of this ambiguity during the course of the revolutionary process, they may participate in that process with a spirit more revengeful than revolutionary. They may aspire to revolution as a means of domination, rather than as a road to Liberation. (1989:121-122)

That means the poor and marginalised have to be motivated to be able to think for themselves and not wait for others to think on their behalf. Their role in the betterment of their community has to be a "critical awareness of their role as subjects of their transformation." That would make them always have a continuous critical assessment of their participation in the betterment of their community life. Their critical assessment of their involvement in making their community better must be done communally and continuously. This will enable the poor and marginalised to continuously develop their community life. Through this they will be able to eradicate poverty and marginalisation of the people. This will be possible as a result of involving the poor and marginalised in the key institutions of the society as I said in the first chapter. It is the communal endeavour that will bring empowerment to the poor and powerless. Individualistic efforts have a tendency to remain with those individuals or a very small percentage of the community and they are not sustainable. If things are done communally is there any significant role for the individual? Or does the individual exist at all? This is the question which needs to be asked, especially in the context of an African community. The following case study might clarify this point.

Case Study II

A white minister from a rich and powerful background who had fully understood the identity of an individual in the context of *Ubuntu* moved with his family to minister the Gospel in a poor and marginalised black community. Nico Smith is the minister who had this realization. He felt deeply convicted by the Gospel message, encouraged by the fact that "a person is a person because of the others." He moved from Pretoria Central to Mamelodi, a township outside Pretoria which was poor and marginalised and started to encourage and empower those who were downtrodden. He organized individual families to meet together on a regular basis and have meals together. In this group meeting, "Koinonia" as he called it, people started to see what help they could be to each other, the rich to the poor and the poor to the rich. They realized their empowerment as they related to each other on a regular basis.

5. IDENTITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Given this case study, one can see *that* power of an individual identity which is realized not in isolation of others in the community. An individual identity which is lived in co-operation with others in the community has the power to change the life of the community and bring about the betterment of that community's life. In this case study, Nico Smith realized that nothing of significant value can be realized if the individual identity is pursued in isolation of the rest of the community.

Talking about the change that has been brought by modernity in Africa and which has destroyed the individual identity that has been enjoyed in relation to others in the community, John Mbiti says:

Modern change has brought many individuals in Africa into situations entirely unknown in traditional life or for which that life offers no relevant preparation. Some are forced directly or indirectly to go and work in gold mines, industry, European farms and houses, leaving their land and homes and relatives. This sudden detachment from the land to which Africans are mystically bound, and thrust

into situations where corporate existence has no meaning, has produced dehumanized individuals in the mines, industry and cities. The change means that individuals are severed, cut off, pulled out and separated from corporate morality, customs and traditional solidarity. They have no firm roots any more. They are simply uprooted but not necessarily transplanted. They float in life like a cloud. They live as individuals, but they are dead to the corporate humanity of their forefathers (1969:219).

Let me explain here a little about “modernity”. Dr Anthony Balcomb presents a clear picture of modernity in his writing in the “Journal of African Christian Thought”. He argues:

Modernity is a way of understanding and ordering experienced reality. It is not the only way, but it is the most dominant and powerful way. Indeed, it could be said that modernity is all about power, about learning how to master and control one’s environment. Survival of human communities depends on the extent to which they are able to understand it, adapt to it, and work with it. (Volume 2, No 1, June 1999:3)

Balcomb goes on to say:

Those who do this best are the strongest. Those who do it worst are the weakest. Those who do not do it at all barely survive. Understanding it or misunderstanding it, accepting it or rejecting it, agreeing with it or disagreeing with it, does not alter the fact that it exists, and that it is a rewarder of those who diligently seek its workings. (Volume 2, No 1, June 1999:3)

This is a brilliant explanation of modernity. The South African apartheid government used it as a power to oppress the majority. According to this quotation, they were very able to master and control their environment in such a way that they benefited from the fruits of modernity.

In a much better way than the apartheid regime, we need to “diligently seek its workings” for the empowerment of the poor and marginalised. We will have to use it to correct the wrongs that have been done so that the new political environment is mastered and controlled by it for the betterment of all.

One thing I don’t agree with in the argument that Dr Balcomb presents is that the communities will have to “adapt to it” for their survival. I believe that we should work with it so that it serves us and we have control over it so that it does not overwhelm us. If it is, as Dr Balcomb has said, “a power and a learning of how to master and control one’s environment”, then we should use it for our benefit rather than “adapt” to it.

Modernity has uprooted individuals and some African communities to a great extent. It has also robbed many individuals of their self-identity and they have become slaves of modernity. I believe that modernity did not come into existence to make humanity its slaves but it existed and it continues to exist for the purpose of serving humanity. Our African religiosity should be enhanced and made more rich by modernity. We should make modernity our slave rather than it making slaves of us. This would then make individual identity more significant and held in very high esteem. It will give continuity to an individual identity that seeks to cooperate with others and be shaped by the others in the community.

The modern technology which has been introduced to us by modernity should be so used by us that it empowers the poor and the marginalised with the skills that are necessary for the alleviation of their predicament and the transformation of the community in which they live. In this way we will have used modernity to serve humanity, rather than modernity using people as its slaves.

6. CONCLUSION

Given what has been discussed in this chapter, one could risk concluding that identity is key to the empowerment of the poor and marginalised people. Throughout this chapter it has been shown that people without a common identity cannot be focussed on a future common goal which could bring sustainable development in their community. Poor and marginalised people are most of the time pulled in different directions because of their various responses to their poverty stricken situation. That makes them develop identities that are not true, identities which land them in crisis and in confusion. They end up not knowing who they are and what they want and how they can get what they want.

That is why common and true identity is needed for people, if that community is going to be effective in its development. The discussion in this chapter has shown that most of the time it is the people themselves who re-awaken to the fact that something has to be done about their condition of living if they have to continue living. That re-awakening from one or more individuals has to be sold to the community as a whole, so that the community buys the vision. For the community to buy into the vision, a common understanding of the problem is crucial. The African Renaissance, of which President Thabo Mbeki has become the champion because he coined the phrase, has to stimulate the people to the fact that there is a need for them to come up with a true identity of self. Otherwise they can't move forward in their development if they don't know whether they are Africans or not. That identity of knowing that they are bonafide Africans will make them accomplish their empowerment with fewer obstacles.

Poor and marginalised people need to continue searching for their true self-identity so that they will properly channel the resources of self-empowerment. This kind of search for identity will lead them to sustainable development in their community because they will know who they are, what they need to do, how to get it, and how to implement it. In the following chapter we will be looking at some of these empowerment concepts which emanate from John Mbiti's African theology.

CHAPTER FOUR

PEACE AND SECURITY

1. INTRODUCTION

Peace is the most important commodity, if I may call it that, in any given community. If any community has to prosper and experience sustainable development it will have to experience peaceful community life. It has to be peace that is experienced by the individuals themselves first, then over flow to the community at large. No peace can be experienced by the community if the individuals within that community do not enjoy this experience of peace. Development of a community can never happen if there is a continuous disturbance of peace by the various occurrences of violence or war. In a situation where peace is not experienced, life is always threatened. Therefore, the individuals in such a community need security in their lives. In this chapter I am going to look at possible ways of creating sustainable peace and security in our society.

2. GOD AS A PROVIDER OF PEACE AND SECURITY

The African world view has identified the one who gives security to people as none other than God. This is made clear by what Mbiti says in his book, *“Concepts of God in Africa”*:

In various ways God provides for the things he has made, so that their existence can be maintained and continued. African peoples are aware of God’s providence, and many of them acknowledge it. The Akan consider God to have sanctioned their laws and customs, by means of which their society is protected and prospered. He also provides life, for which reason they call him “the ever- ready shooter”. Thus he “shoots” or “injects” life into the individual so that society does not wither away physically. He opens for man an appetite for life, makes life worth living for him. (1970:56)

For “life to be worth living for” the condition of the community has to project a peaceful atmosphere. In South Africa under the apartheid regime “life was not worth living” for the majority of people. That meant, for the majority, no empowerment could be experienced thus the underdeveloped situation South Africa finds herself in now. I heard the other day over TV, President Thabo Mbeki appealing to the Commonwealth meeting to consider South Africa as an underdeveloped country. A no-peace situation is not only destructive to the lives of people but it also destroys the economy of the nation, and therefore this situation needs to be rectified.

Mbiti discusses this legacy of apartheid in his reflection of post colonial Africa and the disempowerment it has brought to the Africans. In this context he brings in the situation of South Africa. God was disobeyed and, thus, the absence of peace and security. He says:

But there are still areas of resistance, namely in South Africa, where Pharaoh still refuses to let his people go. Here the struggle continues. Here in the early 1970's was born the theology of liberation which, following in the footsteps of the theology of liberation in Latin America, attempted for a while to understand, to interpret and to project Biblical salvation in terms of political, economic, social and educational freedom and justice. However, the South African Pharaoh shut down the channels for this theology of liberation by banning important publications and censoring others; by banning organizations which were trying to give flesh to this movement; and by expelling, imprisoning, detaining and sometimes killing those who led this development. (Mbiti 1986:163)

This was one of the means in seeking for the solution to the absence of peace, but it was clamped down on by the apartheid regime which did not like peace. The peace that was needed was not the peace that could have been created and provided by human beings. It is the peace which the African traditional

view sees as being provided by God himself. Jesus makes a clear distinction between the peace which is given by God and that which comes from human beings. He says : “Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does.” (John 14:27, Good News Bible).

3. CREATING PEACE THROUGH LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

Liberation theology as a contextual theology could have given the people of South Africa a better understanding of God-given peace, because the world did not know how to give peace to people as God gives. That theology was not allowed to be listened to by people. Black theology as well made an attempt to bring peace in the situation of the absence of peace. One of the proponents of black theology defines a theological attempt at finding a peaceful solution to the violent oppression of the black masses of South Africa when he says:

Black theology as a conscious and systematic reflection on the black situation of racial oppression is born out of a historical experience of suffering, of domination and humiliation of the powerless by the powerful racial group, which denies their fellow South Africans the right to become creators of their own history. It is born out of the awareness by blacks that they are not poor and oppressed by accident or by divine design. Rather they are made poor, powerless, and that they are oppressed by another racial group, the rich and socio-politically powerful whites. (Maimela, 1986:102)

This situation, which is well expressed by Maimela in the above quotation, does not give peace and security at all. Instead it promotes violence and dehumanization of lives and thus destroys the chances of empowerment in the community. Maimela was exposing this situation so that people in South Africa should wrestle with it in order to bring about a peaceful solution to the whole situation. I want to believe that it was his challenge to his fellow Christians to engage themselves in the search for peace in this situation and, thus, security and prosperity in our country.

During the 1994 democratic elections for the New South Africa, in KwaZulu Natal the elections collapsed because of the absence of peace. But when the government, non-governmental organizations and various individuals came up with a solution to the absence of peace in the KwaZulu Natal region, “peace” was experienced by people. The elections were done successfully and the people were empowered because relative peace was there. Empowerment cannot happen in a place where violence is the day-facto and where insecurity is very high among people. In Kwa-Dambuza, a poverty stricken area, about five kilometres from my house, the community had a problem embarking on a programme of community empowerment, because of violence and insecurity which was ruling the place. Two political groups were fighting and community development could not be implemented. Our Edendale church leaders forum was called by these political groupings to mediate between them and try to bring about peace in the area. We had to meet with various groups within the community and engage them in the peace implementing process. It took months of meeting with the community but, at last, a peaceful atmosphere was achieved.

It was after the creation of this atmosphere of peace and security that people were empowered to participate in various programmes of community development. This absence of peace and security was not unique to Kwa-Dambuza but it was a microcosm of what South Africa was like before the 1994 democratic elections. The 1994 democratic elections brought a good degree of peace and security in our country, and social and political empowerment to the people.

4. FAITH MAINTAINS PEACE AND SECURITY

In situations where peace and security are needed, the African world view says that faith has to be practised as a practical tool for bringing peace and protection to people. Mbiti discusses this:

African Christians know only too well the reality of the powers of darkness and principalities, “the wiles of the devil.” So the urge for them is greater to take “the shield of faith”. Realistic also are “the flaming darts” the best known of symbols of hostility, enmity, of attack, of destruction, within their range. The shield is the only effective protection against such enemy darts. The need to take “the shield of faith” becomes vital and pressing. Faith cannot remain inactive, otherwise it would be dead. Faith must take the lead at the front line of Christian warfare and without it there is no victory possible; the battle cannot be fought and so cannot be won. (1986:117)

Taking the practicality of faith further, Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen in their book *“In Word and Deed”* say:

As with justice, so too does peace belong both to the arena of the politics and the centre of our faith. It is at once a personal and political category, a promise of faith and a practise of politics, a significant biblical symbol and powerful political one. As such it too links our two arenas - bridges them in a compelling direction of Liberatory practice. Peace, as with justice, must not separate these two arenas; peace with God must transfigure human politician and cosmic peace, just as human peace must make transparent God’s peace in the world. Our centre is our peace with God, the promise and practice of peace, the cosmic shalom of the prophets. (1991:71-72)

The quotation above confirms the African understanding of peace and also the giver of peace that the world needs, when it emphasises that “Our centre is our peace with God”. God as the Creator creates that “cosmic shalom” within individuals, so that it should overflow from within them and be experienced by the community at large. The peace that comes from God is able to give individuals security. When one has security, one is able to be creative and also make one’s environment peaceful and that attitude is able to empower the community. Then one would be able to enjoy prosperity and wealth.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, it has been learnt that the empowerment of the poor and marginalized cannot be achieved unless peace and security prevails in their community. Secondly, it is through involving the poor and marginalized in the processes of finding peace in their area, that they are empowered. Peace that is created by the affected people is likely to be sustainable. The church, also, has featured in this chapter as an institution that is able to create opportunities for poor and marginalized empowerment, through involving these communities in the peace initiatives.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHOLENESS: SOCIETY AND FAITH

INTRODUCTION

Faith or Religion has been for a long time used as a critical tool for community empowerment. Christian faith in South Africa brought a great deal of human development and economic growth through missionary endeavours. This happened long before the apartheid regime clamped down on the Christian Religion's work of development. The missionaries did not only build churches but they also built clinics for Health Care, Schools for education Training Colleges for skills and many other institutions. Through these institutions people were able to be empowered, although this was not sustainable. It was what David Korten calls, "Generation one of development"(1990). In this kind of development, things are done for people rather than the people themselves taking charge of their community upliftment. This chapter is going to critically analysed Holistic Development.

This missionary work was holistic in its practice. If Mbiti's theology has to be relevant for South Africa, it has to have wholeness in its approach, especially if it has to empower the poor and marginalized. They are not poor because of their spirituality but because of the Socio-Political situation they have been subjected to. Mbiti argues that a theology that is helpful to the spirituality of the people is one that engages the society in the issues that affect the people. He says:

People apply their religion to their social, emotional, economic, intellectual and spiritual life. They believe that religion is relevant in all these areas of their life. In the case of African Religion, which enters all aspects of life, it has been responsible in traditional African life for cultivating the whole person (1991:197).

Manas Buthelezi brings in an additional debate about the issue of the holistic nature of African Religion, which any African theology that can speak in the African experience would have to be composed of, when he argues that: “It has often rightly been said that the African has a sense of the wholeness of life. The traditional African religion was characterized by the motif of wholeness of life. In fact, it is more correct to say that religion and life belonged together” (1987:95).

This sets up a firm foundation for a theology that would be capable of empowering the poor and marginalized people of South Africa because it would grapple with the issues that are affecting them. It would approach life from an angle of wholeness. It would not deal with an individual spiritually only, but it would seek to fight things that socially, economically and politically affect the individual.

2. FAITH FACES SOCIETAL ISSUES

Mbiti's African theology has demonstrated to us that it is holistic in its nature. It is not compartmentalized into sacred and material. One could confidently say that this theology has allowed itself to be shaped by the African traditional world view which knows no segregation of its reality and also how it presents itself. In Africa we've too much of a Western theology which is not rooted in an African traditional world view. This theology has come to us as a theology that compartmentalises life into social and spiritual. It has tended to be more spiritually focussed in its presentation and has regarded social life as evil and wicked. I don't say it has not been good but it has not been good enough at least for Africans because it has blatantly refused to speak to the African situation.

The Ewisa document, “Evangelical Witness in South Africa,” calls this kind of theologising “Dualism”. This come in the process of critiquing their own theology and practice which seem not to help the poor and marginalized to come out of their misery. These Theologians define dualism as:

More of a Greek philosophical concept than a biblical concept. The Greek philosophers believed in a clear demarcation between the spiritual and material. They believed that all material things were evil whilst God was a Spirit somehow committed to save the spirit in the bodies of human beings. On the basis of this Greek philosophical concept of dualism, Western theologians saw the Gospel as concerned only with the spiritual rather than the social (EWISA 1986:9).

This kind of theology does not empower the poor and marginalized: instead it makes them powerless because it does not challenge the injustice that is practised by those who are in societal authorities. It sees all that as evil. This kind of theology has heavily influenced our church in South Africa, to the extent that it needs redemption from this theological practice. Instead, it has focussed on Africans heaven-wards and emphasised the scripture verses like “seek first the kingdom of God and all its righteousness” and “set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth, because our life is hidden with Christ in God”. Western theology has not even come close to the balanced theology which is presented by Luke, Chapter 4 verses 18 to 20:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

I do not say we can create a theology out of these few verses but I am saying they give us an example of what the life situation could demand from us. The Luke, Chapter 4 reference looks not only at our spiritual side of life but also at our life. The Western theological mentality which has deliberately refused to take seriously the social side of our lives has contributed a lot to the nurturing of the apartheid policy in our country, a policy that has dehumanized people. To now humanize the citizens of South

Africa has also proved to be a difficult process, as shown by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which has been set-up by the present government to create reconciliation and unity among the people of South Africa.

3. A THEOLOGY THAT EMBRACES AFRICAN WHOLENESS IN TERMS OF SPIRITUALITY

We, as Africans, need to come up with a theology that will be able to speak to the issues that are prevalent in the African context, an African theology which will be similar to Mbiti's theological writings, a theology that will enable people to have a perception of God which has spirituality and social involvement and does not separate the two. Talking about the Holism of African life, Mbiti argues:

Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wheresoever the African is, there is religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral, and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his or her birth to long after her or his physical death. Through modern changes these traditional religions cannot remain intact, but they are by no means extinct.

In times of crisis they often come to the surface, or people revert to them in secret. (1969:2)

The ability of African religion to speak and be actively involved in all areas of an individual within a community is its power and strength of empowering the poor and the marginalised. Therefore, African theology has to take the same route if it wants to be effective in an African setting. Mbiti says "though modern changes" have come they have not completely ruined the African religious value. The values have dislocated to a degree but, as Mbiti also says, they have not been made "extinct".

4. VALUES THAT HAVE AN ABILITY TO EMPOWER PEOPLE.

An African theology should show an understanding of the “non-intact but not extinct” cultural values of Africans. This would be helpful in the empowering the poor and marginalised people of South Africa because it would be able to raise the deep seated values to the surface rather than wait until there is a “crisis” in a community or an individual. These deep seated values are the ones that fully identify the true identity of a community. Too long we have listened to the great biblical expositions, which had a heavy Western theological reflection. We also need those expositions that have an African theological reflection of our faith in Christ Jesus. Yes, the Western theology reflection gives us a global understanding of our Christian faith. But if it is the only reflection that dominates us, then it has gone beyond its helpfulness. That is why my friend and Christian leader, Phineas Dube, says “Africa is the leading continent in church growth in the world but the quality is very poor.” He says: “The church in Africa is two hundred miles wide and one inch deep”, describing the quality of her spirituality.

This has happened because the theology that is taught and widely accepted in Africa is that which has Western theological reflection. Not only that, Western people are the teachers and professors at the theological institutions which produce African church leaders, but these lecturers do not know that the African values are not extinct and that they keep on coming now and again. African Christians revert to them secretly in times of hardship. I believe that the holistic nature of the African world view, if it can be creatively engaged by a theology that understands the African world, can easily empower the poor and the marginalised. They won't have to revert secretly to their cultural values because that African theology would give them an alternative way of dealing with their crisis. Mbiti says: “Christianity has not come to destroy African religiosity, but it says ‘Yes’ to African religions” and it “provides Africans with what African religion could not provide them.”

So these deep seated values need to be pumped out from this reservoir of Wholeness of an African world view by an African theology which is capable of empowering the poor and the marginalised people of Africa so that the people of Africa can take their places and lead Africa to her potential reality. Africa should stop being led by people who were born in Africa but who do not know and understand the deep-seated cultural values of Africa. Yes, they know that the African traditional values are not intact because of modern changes but they don't know that these values are not extinct. If they knew, in reality, they would not have invested so much in the perpetuation of their Western theological teaching without African people as their counter-parts. Mokgethi Motlabi gives a clear understanding of a theology practised by people who are not Africans for Africans, and who do not understand Africans properly and without the participation of Africans.

Black theology, therefore, reflected most of “white theology’s” interpretation of the Gospel and saw it as mostly self-serving. Through its unfaithfulness to the Gospel it had implicitly declared the death of God just as, in the Exodus story, the children of Israel had apostatised during Moses’ absence and created themselves a golden calf. Black theologians saw as part of their agenda the discovery of the original Christian teaching, the message behind the distorting tendencies of “white theology”, and its recasting in accordance with black people’s understanding and the demands of their experience. In short, they sought “to interpret the Gospel of Christ in the light of the black condition.” (1986: 47)

These black theologians’ contributions have helped a lot in bringing about the recognition of an African political leadership in South Africa. But that contribution needs to go beyond that into the church and the theological institutions in South Africa so that we are able to empower the poor and the marginalised with a theology that helps them to creatively put their faith in context. As black theology rejects “white theology”, which has misrepresented the Gospel message and God Himself in South Africa, African

theology that has a better understanding of an African world view should move in. The power which is in the wholeness of the African world view is able to empower Africans to have a theological reflection which represents God in a rightful way. That wholeness of this world view needs to be tapped into, especially by the theological institutions that train Christian leaders for Africa. This would make the peoples of Africa feel that they have a contribution to make to the changing nature of the African church. More, and above, it would humanize Africans who have been dehumanized and made to feel less important by the Western theological tradition.

In their book *"In Word and Deed"*, Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson present the Basic Christian Communities which are a proper way of doing theology, a theology which recognises the worthiness of those who give the real context to that theology. They argue that:

Here, in these base communities, those who experience themselves as "nothing" in their society discover a new identity as "someone" who is no longer anonymous, who becomes a human subject - an active agent in history who may participate in deciding on and constructing a world to live in. (1991:91)

When people are involved in what is theirs, a whole new world is opened and creative ideas are brought to the surface. I am hoping that this theological empowerment from Mbiti's African theology is going to raise a creativity that is beyond imagination for the poor and marginalised people of South Africa and also affect others who are outside the borders of our country.

5. CONCLUSION

A theology that is practically relevant in the situation of the people would have to be able to engage the authorities and those who are rich and powerful, in the plight of the poor and marginalized. It will have to know how to keep the balance between social issues and spiritual. Hopefully, through Mbiti's theological principles of empowerment we can equip the church in South Africa with empowerment that can empower the poor and marginalized.

CHAPTER SIX

CONTINUITY OF LIFE

1. INTRODUCTION

The continuity of life in the African world view is based on passing on the baton, as it were, to the next runner. That means a father is expecting to pass on that which identifies the father as a man or as the leader of a family or as a clan member to the son, so that the son continues the name of the family. But the father, too, is not going to be completely extinct, because he will join the others who are in the spirit world. As the son continues in this community which is on earth, the father continues the family name in the underworld, a community of the dead-alive people. That is why it is very important in an African culture to have a baby boy among your children because it is believed that the boy child keeps the name of the family alive. He takes the “baton” and runs with it and passes it on to the next generation. Importance of continuity of life is going to be thoroughly investigated in this chapter and how it can be empowering to the poor and marginalised.

2. LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

That is why there is always a problem when an African family has no boy. So the father is encouraged to find another wife. It is believed that in the next wife he will have a baby boy. There is always nothing wrong with the father, it is the mother who does not bear a baby boy, so they believe. If that new wife does not bear him a baby boy, the old women talk to one of the sons and the young wife of the brother. They encourage them to sleep together and most of the time the woman bears a baby boy. That means the problem was with the husband. The intention is not to encourage immorality but it is to facilitate the continuity of family name thus “life continuity”.

Death is not considered as the end of life in the African world view. Death is the start of a new life process whereby the person joins his or her family in the community of the dead-alive. And she or he will continue to be what she or he was before death but new in the world of the dead-alive and eventually in the world of spirit community. Mbiti has given a clear argument about how the African family is structured and how it perpetuates the continuation of life:

African concept of the family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished. The family provides for its continuation, and prepares for the coming of those not yet born. For that reason, African parents are anxious to see that their children find husbands and wives, otherwise failure to do so means in effect death of the unborn and a diminishing of the family as a whole.(Mbiti:1969:107)

So the life before the child is born is absolutely crucial to the African understanding of humanity and life. Life, *impilo*, as discussed, is seen in a comprehensible way, that is unborn people, living people and the living-dead. So when Africans talk about their lives (*impilo*) they mean from the time when they were not born to the period of the departed. The unborn is expected with all the good intentions which are accompanied by high expectations which sometimes cannot be fulfilled by that individual when that individual is born. When that individual is born, that person enters into a level of life which prepares her or him for the world of the departed, which passes through the world of the living. On this the individual has to focus his or her understanding, as this individual is shaped by the community to relate well to the community and at the same time prepares for the world of the departed.

3. LIFE BEFORE DEATH

Once a person is born, the community gets involved in this person's life, right from the onset. The family and everybody in the community owes this individual a contribution to life. The individual is educated by the family and the community on what life is all about. Mbiti argues that:

Just as God made the first man, as God's man, so now people themselves make the individual who becomes the corporate or social man. It is a deeply religious transaction. Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards oneself and towards other people. When the individual suffers, the individual does not suffer alone but with the corporate group. When the individual rejoices, the individual rejoices not alone but with her or his family, neighbours and relatives, whether dead or living. When the individual gets married, she or he is not alone, neither does the wife "belong" to him alone. So also children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's name. (1969:108)

In an African world view there is no day when one can stand alone without the support-base of the others in the community. Support structures are needed and are very crucial in one's life. In the African understanding of life, one has to be supported free of charge by the community so that one is able to cope with life challenges. In a modern African society this concept of life support is disintegrating because of the changes that have come into Africa. And therefore the individual finds herself or himself alone without the support-base and in no time that individual is "squashed" by life into a non-entity.

That means the church, with its African theology, will have to retrieve African values like these if it is to be effective in Africa. Doing this will enable the church in Africa not to be "three kilometres wide

and one centimetre deep.” If that African theology understands the comprehensiveness of life in an African worldview, this will not happen. The church in Africa would have a balanced measure in its width and depth. This state of the church in Africa demonstrates the inability of the theologies that have been in Africa which are not able to speak in the context of Africans. They change Africans to be more European in their life-styles and their behaviour and forget that, although the Africaness in them is shaken by the modern changes, it is by no means extinct. It comes up now and again as Mbiti has pointed out, but he says that happens in times of crisis. John Mbiti concludes this support-giving life by saying:

Apart from localizing the sense of kinship, clan systems provide closer human co-operation, especially in times of need. In case of internal conflicts, clan members joined one another to fight their aggressive neighbours, in former years. If an individual finds oneself in difficulties, it is not unusual for that individual to call for help from that individual’s clan members and other relatives. For example in paying fines caused by an accident; in finding enough goods to exchange for a wife; or today in giving financial support to students studying in institutions of higher education both at home and abroad. (1969:106)

4. LIFE AFTER DEATH

This is the area of life that proceeds from *SaSa* period to *Zamani* period according to Mbiti. This stage of life was prepared by the individual’s parents long before the individual was born. This is the place or life period where many of the poor and marginalised put their hope. They believe that it is in this community of the departed where their plight will be understood and be responded to by those who have just left them. They believe that the living-dead will be able to communicate their situation to God and He will give them the answer, and therefore the living-dead will bring back the answer to the living.

It is this theology of Mbiti that could thoroughly help the poor and marginalised in South Africa because it is able to understand the way Africans view life and it is able to focus them on the life after death. The church needs to be alert to the similarity here or continuity with the Gospel's promise of life after death. African theology can build its empowerment strategies around the idea of life after death or eternity because Africans, whether they are believers or non-believers, know that there is life after death.

Mbiti gives a clear understanding of who are the living-dead and how they communicate with the living to an extent that the living create in them a hope for the life after death. He describes them in this way:

The departed of up to five generations are in a different category from that of ordinary spirits. They are still within the *SaSa* period, they are in the state of personal immortality, and their process of dying is not yet complete. We have called them the living-dead. They are the closest links that people have with the spirit world. Some of the things said about the spirits apply also to the living-dead. But the living-dead are bilingual: they speak the language of people with whom they lived until "recently"; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically. (1969:83)

So the living-dead are still fresh in the memories of people and, therefore, people communicate with them in a spiritual way, visualizing them as people who are not in the actual body form. Mbiti gives us their function which, to me, enables the poor and the marginalised to see their liberation as not very far. He argues that:

The living-dead are still "people", and have not yet become "things" "spirits" or "its". They return to their human families from time to time and share meals with them, however symbolically. They know and have interest in what is going on in the family. When they appear, which is

generally to the oldest members of the household, they are recognized by names as “so and so”; they enquire about family affairs and may even warn of impending danger or rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instruction. They are the intermediaries between people and God: they know the needs of people, they have “recently” been here with people, and at the same time they have full access to the channels of communicating with God. (1969:83)

The church in South Africa needs to understand this life stage which is able to give a tremendous hope to those who are hopeless, poor and marginalised, so that it can grab hold of the hope-giving method of the African world view. The church could creatively contribute to the process of empowerment of the poor and marginalised if it grabs hold of this understanding. Graham Philpott in his book *“Jesus is Tricky and God is Undemocratic”* discusses a similar situation where the church did not let this opportunity go in communicating the Gospel in one local community. He discusses the march which was done by the Amawoti community during Easter and how the church used the understanding of Easter to present Jesus in that community.

The understanding of Easter, and the Jesus of Easter, developed in response to the crises of the community. The places at which the march halted were seen as places which particularly expressed the presence of God or the absence of God. This is discerning God in their own exceptional history. This discerning of God happened from within the position of the poor and oppressed, as the members of that community reflected together on the nature of this God. (Philpott, 1993:111)

So the Amawoti community went into the *Zamani* period of the Christian community. They first understood for themselves what was happening during Easter and, then, identified themselves with the Jesus of Easter. Jesus’ suffering and his victory was seen by the Amawoti community as an act of

defeating the oppression of apartheid. Therefore, it empowered them to be able to fight for their liberation and also create peace within the community through the hope that was aroused in them by the Jesus of Easter.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it has been discovered in this chapter that in an African Context life is ushered into this world of the Living, it is prepared for. When life is in the Midst of the living, it is taken through life stages in a very serious and respectful manner. This is one of the ways that can create a good self-image in one's life. In this chapter it has been shown that, it could be a very crucial tool for the empowerment of the poor and marginalised.

If the same method of caring for life before birth, before death and after death could be practised in the process of empowering the poor and marginalized, poverty and marginalisation could be eradicated. This kind of caring method does not only empower the poor and marginalized but it also builds up a healthy community, which is able to create a sustainable development within the community. In the next chapter health and healing is going to be dealt with in an extensive way.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WEALTH AND PROSPERITY

INTRODUCTION

In an African world view one's wealth and prosperity is, to a greater extent, determined by the good relationships one has with the others in the community. One's good repute is the thing that brings to an individual the possibilities of becoming prosperous in whatever one is doing. If one wants to be wealthy and prosperous in an African setting, one has to understand that one's business ethics will have to be based mainly on people relations. This is encouraged by the *Ubuntu* concept - it does not allow people to be rich and prosperous in the midst of poverty. The culture of *Ubuntu* has taught people to share with each other from the time they were little kids. This, therefore, cultivates and inculcates in one's nature the ability to share with others that which one has that the others don't and which they need for their life continuity. This is highlighted by the proverb we have in Xhosa which says: “ *Inkomo yeqoma yintsengwa ibhekwa*”. This literally means: “If one is milking a borrowed cow one has to be looking now and again for the coming of the owner.” When the owner comes to take the cow, the calf becomes the debtor's calf. The calf grows and starts producing as well, then the debtor becomes rich as well, just like all the others in the community. This chapter will be talking about how wealth and prosperity can empower the poor and marginalised to rise above poverty and hopelessness.

2. CHANGES THAT HAVE AFFECTED THE AFRICAN COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO WEALTH AND PROSPERITY.

Twentieth century Africa, which has been influenced by the modern changes that have been brought by the Western cultures, has changed *Ubuntu* culture of interdependency to a large extent. It has also changed the knowledge that one cannot be rich and prosperous in isolation from others in the community.

Today it is not difficult to find a person who is wealthy and prosperous ignoring the object poverty happening around him or her. Many African cultures have learnt the tricks of capitalism where an individual's prosperity is encouraged and the survival of the fittest is the way to success. But that capitalistic spirit of competition has not been fully grasped by many African peoples because of the African culture of *Ubuntu* which still exists in a small way in the life-style of an African.

Mbiti says this is clearly evident in the prayers that the African people say which highlights their understanding that one alone cannot withstand the pressures of life. In his book "*The Prayers of African Religion*", Mbiti says:

Prayer 61 for prosperity is offered by the Mugwe, the ritual leader of Meru people. It addresses God as the "owner of all things", and the Mugwe informs him that everyone is suffering in Meru country. So he begs for life, riches, health, children, fertility of women, cattle and food. The Mugwe is very sensitive to the needs of his people, being especially concerned about the "women who suffer because they are barren" and for whom he asks for universal prosperity as he prays that God will remove "also the trouble of the other lands I do not know". They also ask for prosperity from the departed grandfathers "who completed so many noble undertakings". It opens with a note of diplomatic praise for the departed, in keeping with common practice of "praising" those in authority before one asks favour of them. The man has sacrificed a bull to the living-dead, it is now theirs; so he is entitled to ask them for "every kind of prosperity". (Mbiti 1975:55)

In this quotation it is clear that in the African world view prosperity is not something which is worked in isolation from others in the community or something that the individual does at the expense of the others. But prosperity and wealth is created through having relationship with the others and having interdependence within the community. For their wealth the Mugwe leader appeals to God and the living-dead to supply his community with the wealth they need, so that their community might prosper.

3. WEALTH AND PROSPERITY vs RELIGION

So African theology as a biblical theology has to look at these values and see if they are in continuity with the Gospel. If they are not, find an alternative that would help people to correctly appropriate their faith as they relate to God. More particularly, Mbiti's African theology, as it seeks to empower the poor and marginalised people of South Africa, would have to say to them: "You don't have to go to the living-dead because they are dead but to God and those of the Christian community who are alive, walk and live with us." For the Bible says:

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun. (Ecclesiastes. 9:5-6).

I have quoted Mbiti as saying that Christianity has not come to destroy African religion but has come to say "yes" to it and to give people what African religion could not give as a tutor which was guiding people to the Christian faith. Now that it has come, the African theology of Mbiti has to show people how they can be prosperous in their various communities. Looking at John Wesley's evangelical economics in his book *"Good News to the Poor"*, Jennings discusses how John Wesley integrated his theology with economics in empowering the poor and marginalised and how his eyes were not closed to the plight of the poor. He says:

It is not likely that we will even be aware of these needs so long as we wrap ourselves in the protective cocoon of studied ignorance of the plight of the poor. But the existence of the marginalised, whether as hungry, sick or imprisoned, provides us with the concrete norm of our action. Thus Wesley understands the saying "the poor you have with you always" in its true, evangelical sense. The norm of our fidelity to Christ is the attitude and action we take toward the poor. (Jennings 1990:104)

Therefore Christian theology, whether African, black, white or the theology of apartheid, has to take the poor and marginalised as its primary concern. This is made more significant than it could ever have been by the recognition in the above quotation, that the poor we will always have with us, and that we need to have an attitude which is committed to the upliftment of their poverty and marginalisation.

4. HOW UBUNTU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO WEALTH AND PROSPERITY

African theology can effectively use the *Ubuntu* concept to empower the poor and marginalised to the extent that they also are economically strong. That means they would be so empowered that they would be able to get enough of what they want to meet their needs so that they are strong enough to resist the exploitation of the rich and the powerful. Maybe it would be wise to refer to the second chapter of this dissertation where I introduced the African Ethos of Development. In this chapter I mentioned David Claerbaut who said that the poor are poor because they have been denied the opportunity to be participants in the key institutions which make decisions in a society.

Ubuntu involves the poor as important participants in that which will enrich them. At the end of the day the poor are as rich as the one who is helping them. Sometimes this *Ubuntu* way of empowerment makes the poor and marginalised more enriched than those who are helping them. The way this happens is through the involvement of the poor and marginalised in the key decision-making institutions of the society. This highlights that richness and prosperity is not only in money but is also found in the things that the individual knows, whether poor or rich. So *Ubuntu* unearths the wisdom and the knowledge that the poor and marginalised have which has been suppressed.

For Mbiti's African theology to be useful in the context of the poor and marginalised it has to empower people in such a way. Such a contribution of African theology would boost the self-image of the poor and marginalised, and that would enable them to participate constructively in the process of their self-

empowerment. African theology has to create this awareness in the people's minds that they are what they are because of the others in the community, whether they are poor or rich. Their richness or their poverty has been to a certain degree created by others in their community.

That is why some African political leaders felt that working together would bring to their African countries sustainable development. They understood that their countries could prosper if they worked together in recognition of "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*". Therefore their countries can be viable countries in terms of economic growth. Mbiti brings out some of these leaders' views in this way:

In his days Kwame Nkrumah was the most outspoken champion of African unity, putting all his weight to see it realized "here and now". He not only preached it but also symbolized the search for African unity. His advocacy of African unity reached its climax at the creation of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1963. Nyerere, another advocate of African Unity, is similarly realistic when he says that it "has to come by agreement, agreement between equals". But perhaps not so realistic is the notion that such unity is the key to solving African problems: "Unity is therefore essential for the safety, the integrity and the development of Africa. Its form must secure these things; otherwise it is pointless" if it does not prevent political exploitation, police itself, and defend itself. (1969:270)

So for African theology to make a significant empowerment contribution to the poor and marginalised of South Africa, or even in Africa as a whole, it has to create a sense of sisterhood and brotherhood among the poor and also in their relationship with the rich. In this way African theology would then seek to enrich both poor and rich to work side by side and see the contribution of each other to one another. Jennings sees a problem if these two cannot work side by side in each other's empowerment. As I said, the rich need the poor and the poor need the rich in their *impilo* (well being). He argues that:

Whenever wealth and power are uncritically celebrated as a gift of God, and so as the sign of the divine favour, then the presence of poverty and powerlessness is all too naturally seen as an indication of divine disapproval, as punishment for sins of sloth or unbelief. The remedy suggested by the proponents of the Gospel of wealth and success is conversion; this will then lead to those material blessings that, it is presumed, follow from a life of faith. Such a position makes it possible to hold the poor in contempt and makes the wealthy and powerful the role models of faith. (Jennings 1990:47)

This theological understanding of wealth would destroy any Christian attempt to contribute to the empowerment of the poor and marginalised. This understanding does not surprise Gustavo Gutierrez as it does Jennings. Gutierrez brings our attention to the fact that:

The Gospel has been communicated from the view-point of the dominating sectors and classes, abetted by a good part of exegesis that is thought of as “scientific”. In this way what is “Christian” has been forced to play a role, within the dominating ideology, that affirms and consolidates a society divided in classes. (1983:18)

African theology has to say “no” to an interpretation and communication of the Gospel which gives rise to a society that is divided into classes. It has to promote unity among those who believe and who are from a rich or poor background. Jon Sobrino’s suggestion would be that African theology should theologise in an understanding of the experience of the poor and marginalised. He argues that:

A true church of the poor must look at poverty from the perspective of the beatitudes. They propose in effect a Salvific Kenosis, which in order to be Salvific must be Kenosis. “Become poor as long as there is poverty in the world; identify yourselves with the poor. The spiritual basis of

the church of the poor must include a voluntary acceptance of poverty, the adoption of an attitude of effective solidarity with the poor and an acceptance of the persecution that results from the just nature of this solidarity. The church must accept real poverty and must actively defend the causes of the poor. (Sobrino 1985:137)

5. CONCLUSION

It has been discovered in this chapter that wealth and prosperity cannot be sustained continuously if it is created and enjoyed in isolation of others in community. There has to be an understanding which creates in one's mind an ability and practice of sharing the resources with others. It was made clear that one is dependant on others for one's progress. Interdependency has also been highlighted in this chapter although it was not critically discussed. It will be dealt with in a deeper way in the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A WAY FORWARD

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I am hoping to identify and highlight clearly the challenges that are posed by John Mbiti's theology to the South African church and all South Africans. I will be looking especially at the message the empowerment principles of his theology has for the church's theology in South Africa in relation to its mission of empowerment of the poor and marginalised communities in our country.

I will also look at what critical questions challenge our government in terms of developing and empowering the poor and marginalised communities. Hopefully this quest will also look at how Mbiti's theology brings back the respect and dignity of the dehumanized people of South Africa, which was taken away by the former governments of colonialism and apartheid.

I will go further and suggest an appropriate action that could be implemented as a result of this challenge. Therefore, I invite you to come with me and thoroughly search these challenges not only for the South African church but also for the government, as they work to empower the poor and the marginalised people.

2. CHALLENGES THAT ARE BROUGHT TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH BY JOHN MBITI'S THEOLOGY

The main challenges that I picked up and discussed in the previous chapters are set forth by the theological principles of empowerment in Mbiti's theology. The challenge of these principles is to be understood in the context of the ministry of the church to the poor and marginalised. The following argument by John De Gruchy would be able to set a proper context for the challenges that are brought by the theology of Mbiti to the church of South Africa and her theologians:

South African churches and theologians have issued many statements criticising apartheid since its increasingly rigid enforcement in 1948. These statements have reflected a liberal concern for racial justice, and have been critical of the state ideology with its Christian pretensions. They have understood themselves as representing the biblical prophetic tradition and witnessing to the Kingdom of God. In the name of prophetic theology, however, the “Kairos theologians” not only rejected what they called “state theology” (“the theological justification by the state of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism”) but were also critical of “church theology”. This theology, they argued, is reflected in the statement of church leaders whose criticism of apartheid “is superficial and counter-productive”. (De Gruchy, 1987:61)

We need to read and understand these challenges of John Mbiti’s theology in the light of this rather long quotation from De Gruchy. The first thing that one picks up in De Gruchy is that the church in South Africa spoke against the injustice that was practised by the apartheid regime against the poor and marginalised. These, unfortunately, were the theologians who were identifying with the oppressed. It was not the whole church. These Kairos theologians also rejected the church theology which was adhered to by the “church leaders whose criticism of apartheid was seen by these theologians as ‘superficial and counter-productive’.”

Mbiti would have agreed with these Kairos theologians in rejecting the justification of a status quo that was racist and oppressive to the powerless and poor, especially if one understands Mbiti from the Interdependent principle point of view. Mbiti would never have supported anything like a racist and oppressive regime. Through his theological principles, Mbiti would have declared clearly to the church and the state that the governance of South Africa was an abomination and sin in the eyes of God. Therefore, it would have been difficult to find a church, whether rich or poor, participating in the oppressive and unjust system as some of the churches did during the apartheid regime.

Simon Maimela, critiquing a theory of man in white theology that was justifying the apartheid government, agrees with Mbiti that people are shaped by others for their better.

A week never passes by without one reading about disputes and debates as to whether blacks and whites should attend the same church. Congregants revolt against policies that promote Christian mutual acceptance between the supposedly 'new creatures' in Christ. (1983:49)

This division is greatly challenged by Mbiti's theology as something that should not exist in the church and should not be found in any Christian theology. Unfortunately, this division still exists in the nation of South Africa, which President Thabo Mbeki alluded to when he was still in the office of Deputy President as "two divided nations". This is not only found in the nation but also in the church. White Christians are in their corner and the black church has moved into her corner for some soul searching. When will they ever be in one place reconciled and united in a real sense?

African Enterprise, an evangelistic organisation based in Pietermaritzburg, has tried to bring together the black and white church leaders in an attempt to forge reconciliation between the two, resulting in both successes and failures. In 1998, African Enterprise had a conference in Port Elizabeth with the church leaders of different race groups in an attempt to find each other. The conference helped in introducing these leaders to each other and dealt with the things that were dividing them. The conference proved to be effective and again, in September 1999, another conference was held in which the leaders who could not make it before were included. This does not only affect Port Elizabeth but the whole church in South Africa. It worked in Port Elizabeth to kick start a working relationship between church leaders. It can also work in other parts of South Africa.

In this situation Mbiti's theological principle of empowerment, especially the Interdependence principle,

is another challenge to the church in South Africa and is very relevant for our new and vibrant democratic country. Its relevancy is that, it encourages the working together of people irrespective of their race or colour. It cherishes the notion of a rainbow nation where people of all race groups work together and are all treated equally. It is also very healthy for our church's witness in South Africa. John De Gruchy underscores this by saying:

To confess Jesus Christ as Lord implies obedience and discipleship; it is invariably costly, for it is the way of the cross. But it is also a sign of hope. It means that the church is not prepared to accept things as they are, nor is it cynically resigned to consign the future to fate, but it believes in and therefore works for a better future in which God's justice and peace reign. (1984:9)

For this to happen in the South African church across the board, both black and white, we would have to employ creatively Mbiti's theological principle of empowerment. This challenge does not need to be debated in the Christian family because it is one of the Christian values Jesus taught to his disciples. That is:

There is no one who has left house or wife or brother or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life. (Luke 18:29-30)

That means that when we become Christians we find ourselves part of one big and united family where we all belong to each other as children of the same family. This empowerment principle of Mbiti challenges us to do this as a church in South Africa. This would, then, empower the church to help the poor and marginalised as they struggle together with the church for their empowerment and total eradication of their poverty and marginalisation, even in the present democratic situation.

It is imperative for the church in South Africa to practise these empowerment principles as it is the church in an African country. Secondly, if it is to be effective and practically relevant in the African context, it will somehow reflect in its theology the practice of the interdependence principle of empowerment. This principle demonstrates part of *Ubuntu*. It is not *Ubuntu* by itself, as it has to be realized in the context of the African traditional world view which embraces *Ubuntu*. It has to be understood in the context of African culture and would lose its meaning if used without reference to the African culture.

Therefore, if the church in South Africa is to be critically relevant in its presentation of the Gospel that transforms people and communities, it has to make use of the incipient theologies that it finds within the African context. Mbiti supports this idea by saying that the Gospel has not come to destroy the work of the African traditional religions but to enhance and use them as a vehicle to communicate the Good News.

In her ministry, the church in South Africa reflects the political culture of her context, that is, good theologising. But it does not stop there. It should encourage any situation that promotes the dignity of the citizens of its country. It should also challenge any situation which is dehumanizing and oppressive to the people.

Therefore, according to Mbiti's theology, the church in South Africa should have rejected the oppressive and unjust governance of apartheid, which has become a continuing problem even in the present age of democracy. Mbiti would have demanded equality at least within the church, then rejected and challenged the policy of apartheid which was encouraging inequality and was also practised by the church in our country. We now have a big struggle trying to organize conferences for reconciliation. The church is now trying to remedy the situation which a section of the church accepted as a legitimate principle of governing, although it was against Christian principles.

David Bosch writes in support of Mbiti's empowerment principle of depending on each other in his chapter entitled "Nothing but a Heresy" as he contributes to the book called "*Apartheid is a Heresy*".

He argues:

The acceptable Christian way, so it appears to me, is rather to bear with one another even to the point of suffering, to forfeit some of our efficiency for the sake of our unity. But this is perhaps a rather negative reason! There is also a far more positive one: to regard our cultural differences as mutual enrichment, as aids to a broadening of our horizons, as object lessons on the richness of the unfolding of God's works among people. (1983:34)

This means that those who were Christians and were from the rich and powerful section of the church should have suffered and forfeited some of their rights and privileges which were denied their black brothers and sisters. They would have escaped the challenge which says "I am because we are" and which is brought about by Mbiti's theological beliefs and writings to the church. They would also have helped the church as a whole in South Africa not to have participated in such a discriminatory system of government.

Simon Maimela agrees with Mbiti's rejection of any situation that dehumanizes in any way. He, therefore, argues his support of Mbiti from a black theological point of view that:

In Black theology, the fact that God has taken sides with the poor is very important, for it implies that God is not prepared to put up with social situations in which the black majority are oppressed and humiliated. Consequently, Black theologians argue, just as God liberated Israel not only from spiritual sin and guilt but also from oppressive political and economic deprivation, God will again liberate all oppressed people not only from spiritual sins and guilt but also from the historical structures that are evil, exploitative and alienating. (1986:106)

Both Mbiti and Maimela did not accept the church policy that accepted the policy of discrimination and oppression of the poor and powerless and also practised it within the church. If Mbiti had lived in South Africa at the time of apartheid, he would have been jailed like all other people who rejected apartheid. Today Mbiti would be challenging the divided church to confess the sin it committed by not challenging and rejecting the injustice and oppression publicly and vigorously.

Mbiti would also point to the harm it has done to black and white Christians in terms of relating to each other as brothers and sisters. As they try to do that, their relationship is entangled by the sin of the past which was not confessed to God and to each other. The church in South Africa must find a time whereby both the church from the black community and from the white community can meet together and repent before God and confess their sin. Then they can start to walk together as brothers and sisters who have been united by their confession of Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

This availability of each other for the empowerment of each other would not only help the poor and marginalised to rise above their life situations but would also help the church in South Africa to walk together as a united black and white church which is sensitive to each other's cultural backgrounds but not at the expense of the Gospel, as apartheid supporting churches and Christians were doing. This would also help the nation not to be two divided nations. The church has the power to influence the nation towards ethically and spiritually right ways of living, if the church lives according to the transforming principles of the Gospel as it is explained in Luke, chapter 4:18-20 and in other scriptures.

The church in South Africa needs to critically look at how seriously Mbiti takes the African cultural context as he presents his theological writings. He looks at the African understanding of time, life after death, holism in African world-view, health and healing, and he highlights these values as critically important in doing theology in an African context. We have already debated these issues and I don't

intend to revisit them as a lot has been said about them in the previous chapters. But it is worthwhile for the church in South Africa to look at them as it seeks to recreate the position of the poor and the marginalised in our communities.

I would propose that the church in our country take this as critically important in its ministry as it would communicate to the poor and the marginalised that it understands something about the African cultural background. Therefore, this could create an expectancy and hope from the downtrodden that the church could be the answer to their problems and questions.

3. WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE BE TO THESE CHALLENGES?

The empowerment contribution these principles can have for the poor and marginalised is the creation of a sense of unity among them. Through the principles of Identity and Interdependence a people group is created that is able to voice their aspirations. They are also able to embark on a programme of self-empowerment, given the tools to do so. Through these two principles the poor and marginalised are able to build their self-esteem to a greater degree, a self-esteem which was destroyed by the unjust policies of apartheid. This also empowers them to have a way forward in their programme of action and not be caught up in the legacy of the past, so they are able to be independent thinkers and caretakers of their present and future situations.

I also believe that if our church in South Africa can employ these principles in ministry, the poor and marginalised will be greatly helped to create a better life for themselves. It would also help the government of the day look better in its governance because poverty would have been defeated. This is a challenge not only to the church in South Africa but also the government.

Another contribution is the resulting chemistry among the poor and marginalised people as they become one united group during the process of unity. The act of finding one another in the midst of poverty and marginalisation is wonderfully awesome and creative. The dehumanized people have found each other and their finding of each other has caused them to form a strong united action. This action of theirs is a good recipe for reconciliation, which is highly needed in our country between blacks and whites and rich or poor, whether they are Christians or not.

These two principles could also have a tremendous contribution in the economic upliftment of the poor and marginalised if they can work together as a co-operative and start together a money making, job creation programme which is sustainable. Programmes like the Sewing Programme and financial assistance (EDECFA) programme are examples. The Sewing Programme referred to here is a small business project started by our church women's group. Women came together and trained other women in sewing. They made dresses and school uniforms and sold these to make a living. This has economically empowered those who were poor and marginalised. Many of them are now economically much better off than before.

The EDECFA, which stands for Edendale Evangelical Church Financial Assistance, is a project which was started by our local church in order to help members pay off their home loans more quickly and cheaply than bank loans. Members of the church put money together, a "Stok Vel" kind of project, and the EDECFA pays off the home loans of church members. The members then pay the EDECFA at no interest. In this way the members are freed from the economic oppression of the home loan. This empowers the people to stand together and economically liberate themselves.

Such programmes as these would make the poor and marginalised participate in the improvement of the economic status of the country as well as bring a very high degree of contentment to the downtrodden.

Case Study I

The practical example of this is a friend of mine—I will call him Sunshine—who was a street kid who hailed from Johannesburg. He had no skill to make a living for himself or even an identity document to get employment in the unskilled labour market. A group of friends from a church in Pietermaritzburg who were also acquainted with him sat down and talked with him about what he could do to make a living.

They discovered that he had an ability and interest to start and run a business. They then asked him to look for a business training programme that he could participate in. Finally he found it and got his training. Then the group gave him money to start his small business and he was provided with a caravan in which he operated his small tuck shop, which he also used as a home. They also provided a car to pull this mobile tuck shop of his twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. In Boom Street where his mobile tuck shop was, Sunshine was well known. He became one of the successful small business people in the city and eventually moved his tuck shop from the caravan to a building.

Programmes similar to this case study can be multiplied in various communities of the poor and marginalised of our country. Mbiti's theological principles of empowerment have opened our eyes to this. If the church or the government or the “haves” (rich people) can help the poor and marginalised with the means to reach this stage that has been reached by Sunshine, then poverty in our country will be eradicated. We would have less crime, and peace and prosperity would be the talk of the day.

Where there is peace and prosperity, crime and violence is discouraged and decreased. Therefore development and empowerment of the downtrodden can be reached with less difficulty. It can only be realized through a process of encouragement and enablement.

The principle of Peace and Prosperity can empower the poor through the programmes of peace initiatives like community police forums. This is another programme that can create jobs for poor and marginalised communities. The government or the church can mobilize the very poor who are affected by violence and crime to create community police forums which are income generating, just like security guard firms.

Case Study II

A trainee in our development training programme, whom, I will call Joe, started a community programme on police forum within his community. He did this as a result of the foundational requirements of the programme, as every student has to have a community programme which can be evaluated if the student qualifies to be awarded a diploma from the course. The programme started with five volunteers, including him. After three months, when the community saw that there was a good degree of peace, they asked the local Inkosi to plead with the community to contribute financially towards the payment of these young men. That succeeded and they became full time in this community police forum. After a year they were asked by the two neighbouring communities to come and train people in their areas for policing. This became an employment creation programme. Many people in these three communities are employed in this growing peace making industry. So as it creates peace in the community, it makes prosperity for a few others. The government has also joined in this programme through the local police service which is in that neighbourhood.

This Community Police Forum is a well known programme which was introduced by some of our politicians and was—and in some areas is still-being done by the South African Police Services (SAPS). For this community police forum to be successful, like this situation of Joe, it needs people who understand that sustainable development needs training and management skills.

5. HOPE AS A KEY ASPECT OF THE WAY FORWARD.

In actual fact, the all encompassing power of these empowerment principles is HOPE. Almost all these principles have been found to create a great sense of hope in a people who have been hopeless for a long time. Words of thanks should be given to John Mbiti for such a treasure of life in his theological writings, and especially for the empowerment of the poor and marginalised in South Africa.

Without hope no one can ever do any constructive thing for himself or herself or the community he or she lives in. These principles create a hope so great that the individual is able to be creative, confident and competent. Hope is a phenomenon that brings a better self-image to an individual. When an individual experiences that, he or she rises above in the very high clouds, so to speak, as if that individual has had his or her locked wings unlocked.

Talking about how Christian spirituality rejuvenates hope in the lives of people, Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen in their book *"In Word and Deed"* say:

The extent to which Christians have been empowered to struggle for justice has also evoked hope and kept it alive in those who have despaired of social transformation. Christian spirituality is about keeping such hope alive even in situations which are, humanly speaking, hopeless. Hope is, in fact, attempting to live and witness here and now in anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promise of a "new earth and new heaven". Hope is another way of saying that we believe in the God of justice and righteousness. To lose hope is to lose faith in God. To lose hope is no longer to live in anticipation of the new heaven and new earth to which the Gospel points us. (1991:82)

According to Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen, to have hope is to "live in anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promise of a new earth and new heaven." That means for our poor and marginalised people that they have to "live in anticipation" of a better life here on earth not only when they die. People who have

an anticipation of great things to happen in their lives don't sit and fold their arms. They interact with their anticipation and plan for the coming of that promise which they had hoped for all those years.

Therefore, this Christian spirituality which is able to “evoke hope and keep it alive in those who despaired,” has to make hope to create diligence in the poor and marginalised that they act creatively as they anticipate the fulfilment of the promise. That creative action has to be a critical engagement with their situation. This means that they would have to come up with a critical analysis of their context and a strategic plan to implement their action plan.

Through this alive hope in the hearts and minds of the poor and marginalised, they could skilfully strategise and implement their action plan in a practical way similar to the Future Search workshop I attended. In three days we were able to have an action plan that would change our ministries or businesses for those who were in the business sector.

In these three days we were able to, *first*, scan our environment or situation around us. We did this by putting to ourselves questions like, “What has made us be where we are? Where do we come from? How have we participated in the shaping up of ourselves?” The *second* stage was to look at some of our things that we need to keep, drop and create because these are the things that contributed to what we are and have been. Then, the *third* stage, was to combine what we want to keep and that which we create. The *fourth* and last stage was to implement this combination for the betterment of our situation. For sustainability of a better life in one situation, this “search” has to be done constantly.

If one knows how terrible the situation is one comes from, one would not stop being creative in evaluating one's situation. Lebamang Sebidi reminds us of the origins of the poor and marginalised people in South Africa and what has caused them to be where they are now:

South African blacks are oppressed not primarily because they show a different skin colour, but because, basically, their economic interests are antithetical to those who are the economically dominant class. So whilst the conflict manifests itself in forms that are racial, its origin is decidedly non-racial. Its origin is a collective attempt to protect group interests: the land, water, pasture, and later the mines, manufacturing industry and commerce. It is, therefore, not race-relations that one should study and focus on, but class-relations. In short, the “face” of the problem is racial, but its essence is non-racial. (1986:18)

According to Sebidi, the problem of the poor and marginalised communities of South Africa is not racial but “class relations”. This originated from an “attempt to protect group interests” such as “land, water, pasture, and later the mines, manufacturing industry and commerce.” This is still a bone of contention between the poor and rich even today in the present democratic government. The President of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki, alluded to this as I quoted him in the early chapters of this study. He said that we are, “a nation divided in two parts: one rich, powerful, white, and in the minority; the other poor, powerless, black and in the majority.”

So this is the context that this hope has to be engaged in and through this context an anticipation of a better life has to be lived by those who are poor and marginalised. Yes, the poor are still fighting for survival in their native country and the few rich people are still controlling the economic power of South Africa.

6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, practical suggestions for possible solutions to resolve the plight of the poor and marginalised in South Africa have been given. These possible solutions come out of the challenge of Mbiti’s African theology. In actual fact, they are not solutions that are cut and dry, but case studies that

have been practically used in other situations with success. It is not suggested that they will solve the problems of poverty and marginalisation, but they can be employed as some of the ways to solve the problem.

It is in this chapter also that we have discovered that hope is found in most of these empowerment principles of John Mbiti's African theology. And we have discovered that hope plays a very significant role in empowerment. Lastly it has been discovered that John Mbiti's theological principles of empowerment are very relevant for the situation of the poor and marginalised in South Africa.

There is no straight forward answer or simple response to this question. I believe that the poor and marginalised would have to look at a multi-pronged strategy to get this problem off their shoulders. They also have to look at the case studies presented in this study.

The church and the government should also work with them in their empowerment and struggle together in finding a solution to this problem, a problem which Sebidi calls "class-relations caused by an attempt to protect group interests such as land, economy and commerce". For that to happen we don't need one strategy but multiple strategies.

It is my hope and belief that this problem of poverty and marginalisation would be radically decreased by the poor and marginalized themselves in collaboration with the present democratic government, as long as it seeks ways and means of making people's lives better and equal irrespective of race and status of the individuals. So the way forward for me would be this: let us work together as one, united nation to find solutions to the problem of poverty and marginalisation in our country.

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