

Democratisation of Africa from the Interreligious Perspective

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Introduction

Africa went through three traumatic experiences. It was enslaved by the Arabs and later by the West and colonised by the West. Slavery was abolished and decolonisation began in the late 1950's with Ghana having celebrated its 50 years of independence in 2007. South Africa was the last country to be freed from white rule in 1994. Postcolonial Africa was faced with a mammoth task to democratise itself (Arnold 2005:xiii). In my broadened definition of democracy I would place elements such as multiparty/parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, accountability, good governance, transparency and constitutionalism, development, reconstruction and socio-economic justice.

Formation of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and African Union (AU)

When more and more African states were born as a result of decolonisation, they constituted themselves into the OAU. Thirty independent African states met in Addis Ababa in 1963 for this purpose (Arnold 2005:xiv). With fifty-three independent African states by 2000, the OAU was replaced by the African Union. The AU has more power to an extent that it may intervene directly in independent states without the excuse by those affected states appealing to their sovereignty as it was the case under the mandate given to the OAU (Arnold, 2005:xix). The AU just like the OAU before it, has to address issues related to the legacies of slavery, post-colonialism as well as apartheid in South Africa. Neo-colonialism and globalisation through the Western institutions and governments, financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation have been identified as culprits. And yet other problems are continent-grown such as corruption and despots (Mafeje 2002:72-80; Mkandawire 2002:112-114). To this list I would add the cold war between the former Soviet Union and the United States of America that started to thaw with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. What is of great importance is that in the AU and its organs and commissions, unlike in the OAU women representation is not left to chance. For example, the African Parliament's first president is a Tanzanian woman by the name of Angela Mongella. The African



Peer Review Mechanism consists of some of the best women Africa has ever produced. Women should continue to claim more space in public life and use those teeth to bite. Time for token representivity is over!

The African Renaissance

Analogous to the European renaissance, the African renaissance was born out of the social and spiritual history of slavery and colonialism (Mamdani 1999:125; Magubane 1999:11). Magubane (1999:10-13) believes that it was Nelson Mandela on 13 June 1994 who gave impetus to the project and this project was firmly put in Thabo Mbeki's hands to run with. It is important to mention that this renaissance included also the Africans in the diaspora. Indeed great leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Kenneth Kaunda and Leopold Sengho were forerunners of the project. As Malaka (2004:4) says, "Pan-Africanism rested on four pillars. (a) a sense of common historical experience (b) a sense of common descent and destiny; (c) opposition to racial discrimination and colonialism; and (d) a determination to create a new Africa. In the main, as was evident with the formation of the OAU and particularly the AU, this renaissance aimed at instilling a sense of pride and dignity in Africa. Across the continent many organisations delved into Africa's past history to prove that African religion, philosophy and culture in general were far superior to any civilization in the world. Science and mathematics, education, governance, technology, etc were shown to have been started by Africans (Makgoba 1999). In South Africa, the Centre for African Renaissance Studies at Unisa, Kara Heritage Institute and Centre for Advance Studies in African Society at the University of Cape Town, have done a considerable amount of research into Africology and Egyptology. There are of course, other such institutes in the country that are steeped in the revival of African religion and culture such as Icamagu founded by Unisa academic Nokuzola Mndende. The South African Chapter of Renaissance would be more relevant to our unique situation in the country and stronger if our intellectuals were to factor in deliberately and consciously the contributions by the advocates of Black Consciousness . That, I contend, would be a particular contribution by South Africans to the African Renaissance discourse.

New Partnership for Africa`s Development



Inextricably linked to democratisation was what one might call the economic arm for Africa's recovery, the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The creation of NEPAD was to address challenges that the AU had identified, the most pressing and immediate ones being the eradication of poverty, ignorance and disease (Nyong`o 2002:3). The principles of NEPAD are as follows:

Good governance as a basic requirement for peace, security and sustainable development; African ownership and leadership . Anchoring the development of Africa on its resources and resourcefulness of its people, ... acceleration of regional and continental integration; building the competitiveness of African countries and the continent; forging a new international partnership that changes the unequal relationship between Africa and the developed world ... (<http://www.nepad.org/2005/files/inbrief.php>, downloaded 2008/07/03).

One of the stated primary objectives of NEPAD is to accelerate the empowerment of vulnerable groups such as women and children(<http://www.nepad.org/2005>) and in the process poverty has been given a feminine face. And consequently Miss Rukato was appointed as the deputy chief executive of NEPAD. NEPAD has singled out agriculture as key to addressing poverty in the continent (Nyong`o 2002:17). This form of development will contribute greatly to the aims and objectives of the Kyoto Protocol that advocated responsible use of natural resources and the protection of the environment in the interest of creating sustainable development. The agrarian form of development is therefore more sustainable than others, which deplete non-renewable sources of energy and other finite natural resources. One of the critical instruments devised was the creation of the African Peer Review Mechanism with prominent women serving on the committee. A number of countries have already been audited including Ghana, Botswana, Kenya and South Africa. As to the successes and failures of NEPAD, you are referred to the Codesria Conference papers published in 2006 and edited by Adesina, Graham and Olukoshi. One big success that can be mentioned is that Africa under the AU has awakened out of its slumber and is prepared to take its place in the world particularly at the United Nations. One important challenge that Africa is facing is the financing of NEPAD. The other partners are still the West and Brettenwood institutions that have failed Africa in the past sixty years by rendering our countries stateless.



Inter-religious Ethics

Africa has over the centuries, in addition to the African Religion, become home to many religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism. Africans are deeply religious with over 98% of the continent classified as religious. All these religions, in spite of their doctrines, work for an alternative society that is qualitatively different from the present one. That world is called by different names by various religions that populate the continent. These names include heaven, nirvana, paradise, new heaven and new earth, God's reign, reincarnation etc. Fighting poverty and human rights abuses and working for justice in general, are values and principles embedded in all religions. Kung&Moltmann(1990:vii) are optimistically wondering when they say,

it would be of utmost importance for humanity if the great world religions could agree upon a basic ethic and...upon basic rights of human beings.

Religions should therefore work together and not only side by side, to assist the African Union and NEPAD to achieve their aims and objectives. It is not a question of religions tolerating one another but of appreciating and celebrating one another's contribution to fighting poverty, ignorance and disease, and to working for justice and peace. It would be beneficial for religions to also theologise on the work done by secular organisations such as the World Social Forum as a platform for common witness and action. As Karl Barh(1963:297) aptly puts it,

we do not need to delete or retract anything from the admission that in His(sic) revelation God is present in the world of human religion

God's rule was inaugurated when Jesus was born and the Church that was born on Pentecost has been mandated to extend this reign to the uttermost parts of the globe(Matt 28:18-20).Through his teachings and life Jesus stood in the long line of great prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hezekiel and Amos who were champions of the poor and the marginalised(Cone 2003:57-76).Jesus stood against the Roman empire and Judaism when the State and Sanhedrin connived against the poor (Gutierrez 1973: 226-227). His love for humanity was demonstrated by his compassion and solidarity with the victims of evil attitudes and structures (Isasi-Diaz



1996:88-92, Boff&Boff 2005:1-9). I regard the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) as Jesus' epitome on social ethics.

Biblical salvation/liberation history tells us that the first human pair God created was perfect in all respects and similar myths are found in other religions. Sin separated us from God but God never abandoned us. God's project of redemption and liberation from sin and its consequences reached its climax in Jesus the Christ. God's reign will be consummated with the return of Christ when everything will be transformed. John the Apostle was shown in a vision, a new earth and a new heaven (Rev 21:1-4; cf. also 2 Pet 3:13), a new order that prophets had spoken about (Is 65:17, Jer 31:33). There would be a new covenant, a new morality and a new conscience. This new order according to Boff(1978:49-62) is neither a territory nor is it merely a spiritual one. Jesus has identified himself with humanity's deepest longings by becoming human.

Conclusion

World's problems are here to stay, whether caused by nature or by humans or both. As co-creators with God, all humans regardless of religion, ideology, philosophy and gender have a responsibility to make planet earth a better, if not a perfect, planet to live on.

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