

THE REFORMATION AS A RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN
CHRISTIANITY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL MILIEU, THEOPRAXIS
AND RESPONSE

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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	4
1.0 Introduction.....	4
2.0 Theology and Theopraxis of the 16 th Century Latin Church	5
2.1 Selected Issues in the 16 th Century Theological Milieu.....	6
2.1.1 The Powers of the keys	6
2.1.2 Justification	7
2.1.3 The Questions of Authority and Inerrancy.....	7
2.1.4 The relationship of the Two Realms	8
2.1.5 The Sacraments	9
2.1.6 Prayer and Mediation	10
2.1.7 Indulgences and Purgatorial Theology.....	11
2.2 The Ecclesiastical Grip on Society in the 16 th Century	12
3.0 The African Theopraxis of the 20 th and 21 st Centuries	13
3.1 Powers of the keys	13
3.2 Justification	14
3.3 The Question of Authority	15
3.4 The Relationship of the Two Realms.....	17
3.5 The Sacraments	20
3.6 Prayer and Mediation	22
3.7 Krypt-purgatorial Theology	24
4.0 The Reformation as a Responding to Babylonian Captivity in African Theopraxis.....	25
5.0 Conclusion: Reformation Theology as God's Living Voice.....	26

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Abstract

Our point of departure in this paper is that the theological and ecclesiastical issues surrounding the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, as well as the reasons behind them; bear certain similarities with certain aspects of contemporary African Christianity. The similarities are presupposed in both the theology and the theopraxis of the two eras. It is the primary task of this paper to investigate these similarities, with the view of determining whether the answers to the Reformation era issues are still relevant as responses to contemporary African theological innovation and theopraxis. The study employed a qualitative documentary research method in which selected documents of the Reformation (Luther's works and works on Luther) were revisited in the context of theological issues and conditions pertaining to the period. Selected issues in African theopraxis and specifically ecclesiology were thereafter identified and a comparison investigated. This has hopefully enabled a development of argumentations validating the presupposition that the theological positions of the Reformers on issues raised here are relevant to contemporary African Christianity.

1.0 Introduction

The organisers of the Luther 500 colloquium bombarded potential resource persons with a torrent of though provoking and arguably mind-boggling questions like: why should Churches in Africa participate in something that took place 500 years ago while their history is not older than 200 years? Is there any substantial contribution of the Reformation in the transformation of African communities? How are biblical and ecclesial traditions influenced by Reformation inform these Churches and contribute to their theological and pastoral formation? These are all valid questions worth considering in such a colloquium. It is my hope in writing this paper, to be able to address some of these issues.

For reasons of both space and the practical need of allowing room for others to contribute from other perspectives, I will limit my contribution to issues selected arbitrarily on the basis of

taste. This paper therefore seeks to explore the similarities between what I call the theology and theopraxis of the 16th century and that of today, with special emphasis on the character of the ecclesiastical and political milieu of the period. This, I hope, will clear ground for my reflections on the validity or non validity, of the Reformation to the contemporary African Churches.

2.0 Theology and Theopraxis of the 16th Century Latin Church

By Latin Church I mean here the western branch of Christendom after the schism of 1054. Again, by 'theopraxis' I intend to convey the idea of theological ideas in their real practice. The distinction is necessary because, I contend, what worked during the pre-reformation era was not always congruent with what the Church taught and anticipated. While some of the teaching was according to official theology, some of the theopraxis was clearly out of line when compared to official theology, at times bordering on excesses. We may consider one instance of such excesses.

Tetzel, the Pope's 'sales manager' of the indulgences in Luther's Germany, is said to have claimed that as soon as the indulgence purchaser's coin dropped into the money chest, souls of the persons on behalf of whom the indulgences were purchased popped out of purgatory into heaven (Merle D'aubigné, 2014:). Albretch, the archbishop of Magdeburg and Mainz, drew the statement of the indulgences with considerable incentives to the purchasers:

It gave them a ticket or letter, stamped with the Pope's seal, which allowed them to select a confessor, whom they pleased, who would absolve them from all crime and punishment, and would permit them to exchange any vows they had taken upon themselves for some other agreeable good works...it gave a full remission of sins to all departed persons then in purgatory (Lindsay 1997: 49).

It is probable that Rome itself did not extend the powers of the indulgences to the level that Albretch raised them. Tetzl is alleged to have contended further that once one purchased the indulgence certificate, one did not need a confessor anymore. Rome never taught this. Nevertheless, the claims seemed to have had a profound influence on many lay Christians, some of whom may have believed them on their face value, as can be deduced from the frantic business that the sale of indulgences made.

2.1 Selected Issues in the 16th Century Theological Milieu

A few theological ideas of the time are worth considering here. These are: the powers of the keys; justification; authority for interpreting the Word; the sacraments; the relationship of the two realms; prayer and mediation, as well as purgatorial theology. I will first consider each of these on the basis of the theology and the theopraxis of the 16th century.

2.1.1 The Powers of the keys

On the powers of the keys, Rome taught emphatically that the powers were vested in Peter. Through what is referred to as apostolic succession (Catholic Answers, 2004; New Advent, 2012), these power were extended to bishop in the see (i.e. seat) of Rome and by extension to universal bishops, so long as they acknowledged the primacy of the bishop of Rome as first among equals. The contrivance to elevate the see of Rome started at the time of Damasus (A.D 304-384) as Pope. Gradually, over the centuries, it gave the see of Rome an elevated position over all other bishoprics (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). Luther however interpreted the powers of the keys as applying to all Christians, a view supported by the at least one text of the Bible where we are encouraged to confess to one another (Jas. 5:16) which has a promise for healing and an implied one for forgiveness. Further, the message of Hebrews remind us that Jesus Christ is the eternal priest, while we are reminded by Saint Peter that we are all a royal priesthood, on the basis of faith in Christ.

2.1.2 Justification

Justification on its part and along the ideas of Thomist, scholastic theology, was officially regarded as being attained by faith and works, the two working together. The greatest insight we get from Luther is his rejection of such theology and his alternative proposition that we are freely justified by grace through faith alone (Luther, 1962:266), since to maintain otherwise would amount to taking something away from the efficacy of grace. The exegetical and hermeneutical contentions and disputations on the issue is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice here to say that in my view the traditional Catholic hermeneutical position on the issue seems rather hollow, as can be attested by the outcome, in the form of a consensus, of the more informed experts on both sides; who constituted the Joint Commission on this and similar issues (JDDJ, 2011).

2.1.3 The Questions of Authority and Inerrancy

The other issue that engaged the theologians of the western Church in Luther's time was that of authority. It was held, through the doctrine of inerrancy, that such a bishop as sits on the throne of Peter could not err when speaking *ex cathedra*, that is, on the seat of Peter (which we may contextually interpret as meaning 'in the official position'). Luther argued that this doctrine ascribed too much on the bishop of Rome than can be warranted for a human being: bishops, just like everyone else, are fallible and Popes could be demonstrated in history as having been fallible. Luther in effect, saw the only infallibles as the whole Church and the Holy Scriptures.

Of course, this high view of the scriptures led to the contention that reformers were now advocating a papacy of scriptures, which Catholics could not accept, on the basis of exegetical and other technical reasons beyond the scope of this paper. Luther and his fellow reformers however, believed that there was no specific promise on inerrancy vested on an individual, but that obviously Jesus promised the Church illumination as well as guidance away from error.

2.1.4 The relationship of the Two Realms

On the basis of a teaching of the two realms as advanced by Rome, secular authorities were regarded as subordinated to the ecclesiastical authorities. This happened progressively from around the 11th Century. The seed seems to have been sown however, around A.D 510 with the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Roman Empire from the attacks of the Vandals, Alans, Suevi and Franks; which gave Pope Gregory an opportunity to fill the power vacuum. This came at no small cost to secular authorities and their subjects, for it essentially put both the princes and subjects under Rome's firm grip by influencing socioeconomic structures of the period centuries before. By the time of the Reformation for instance, it was taken for granted that German bishops had to pay the so called *annates* to Rome, some kind of an annual fees from their estates-which we may roughly equate with a tax or a sharecropper's fee, since all the ecclesiastical lands were regarded as a property of the bishop of Rome.

Then there is the issue of the relationship of the two realms. In the *Appeal*, Luther writes:

In the former times, German emperors and princes permitted the pope to receive *annates* from all the benefices of the German nation...This permission was given, however, so that by means of these large sums the pope might raise funds to fight the Turks...The popes have so far used the splendid and simple devotion of the German people-they have received this money for more than a hundred years and now made it obligatory tax and tribute" (LW Vol. 44: 144).

Luther then contends that Rome had "...taken all authority away from the [German] bishops and chapters. These sit there like ciphers, and have neither office nor authority nor work" (LW Vol. 44, 148). According to Moe-Lobeda (2004: 96), Luther viewed economic activity as "ontologically, an act in relationship to a neighbour... as a practice of love to the neighbour." The Church therefore could not claim to be superior to ruling authorities. This in turn meant

that the Church was not supposed to take over the roles of the state including collecting taxes for a foreign bishopric that had transformed itself into a papal state system. Rather, the Church and the state were God's two arms intended for two different purposes but both serving humanity, which implied a national, and by extension a local character of the state.

2.1.5 The Sacraments

One other issue that became the bone of contention in Luther's time was that of the sacraments and their efficacy. Luther wrote at length on these issues, first denying the seven sacraments and accepting only two, namely baptism and Holy Communion. His arguments were on two simple bases for an understanding of a sacrament: (1) It has to be backed by a commandment of the Lord and (2) It has to have an outward sign or signs (the elements). This of course tempts us to somehow validate the anointing of the sick as a sacrament, but one could object rightly, at least on the basis of Lutheran understanding; that the Lord never expressly commanded it. Penance too is excluded, on the basis of lack of an external sign, although Luther himself seems somehow undecided on it.

Again, this brings up a debate of penance as a sacrament. On the basis of readings of Luther, I am inclined to argue that the Luther who sees penance as a sacrament is an early Luther, one whom we see still addressing the Pope as the Holy Father and genuine bishop of the Church of God. The later Luther, after numerous failed efforts at reconciliation and the after the ensuing schism, seems to have made a complete break such that even certain contents of the catechism and in his other writings on penance, in which he ties absolution by God to reverent subjection of the penitent to a priest, would in my view, somehow make him cringe. I will not treat this aspect beyond these few comments, since it deserves its own adequate reflective space elsewhere. Something in addition has to be said about baptism, however. Catholic view stated that:

In the Sacrament of Baptism not only is the guilt of sin remitted, but also all the penalties attached to sin. In the Sacrament of Penance the guilt of sin is removed, and with it the eternal punishment due to mortal sin; but there still remains the temporal punishment required by Divine justice, and this requirement must be fulfilled either in the present life or in the world to come, i.e., in Purgatory. (New Advent, 2012).

Luther would not contend with the original sin so much, although he seems to me to lean more towards reconciliation and adoption than to obliteration of sin that leaves a chance for future adulterations of the same soul, hence the indulgences. To him, the central point is an establishment of a relationship on the basis of promises and one's acknowledging them. One became a member of the house of God immediately and all else became newness of life through repentance and sanctification through the Word and Holy Communion.

2.1.6 Prayer and Mediation

As regards prayer, Roman theology and theopraxis posited, in essence, that it was essentially through a mediator that one became acceptable before God. This accords with biblical theology so long as that mediator is Christ (1Tim. 2:5, Heb 4:14-16). According to Roman theology however, the mediator came to be an ordained man of the Roman Catholic Church, whom was regarded as an *alter Christi*, that is another Christ, a representative of Christ through the sacrament of the ordination. This became a serious problem to Reformation theology, which saw this as not only unnecessary, but as standing in the way to a personal relationship of a repentant sinner and his God, not to mention the negation of both the efficacy of grace through faith and the redemptive death on the cross.

In the 20th century a similar problematic to ecumenism was posed by the Franciscan order, when the order campaigned for declaration of Mary as *co-redemptrix* with Jesus, which is a cognate with *co-mediatrix*. The *co-redemptrix* move somehow died. The Dominicans (who

through John Eck were Luther's archrivals in the 16th century), this time worked with the Jesuits to oppose such over-assuming theology. Stubborn Luther's spirit is still incandescent even inside the Vatican.

2.1.7 Indulgences and Purgatorial Theology

The official theology of the indulgences taught that when one confessed and was absolved, the guilt of the sin was fully 'remitted', that is removed or obliterated. The penalty of the sin however, remained. This penalty had to be removed satisfied (technically, remitted) on earth by doing good deeds or saying some prayers prescribed by the confessor. A device was then created on the basis of this theology, to help those who could not meet heavy satisfaction. They got a safety valve in the indulgences:

An indulgence is the extra-sacramental remission of the temporal punishment due, in God's justice, to sin that has been forgiven...In the Sacrament of Penance the guilt of sin is removed, and with it the eternal punishment due to mortal sin; but there still remains the temporal punishment required by Divine justice, and this requirement must be fulfilled either in the present life or in the world to come, i.e., in Purgatory. An indulgence offers the penitent sinner the means of discharging this debt during his life on earth (New Advent, 2012).

The argument was that God forgives the sinner but still requires him or her to pay the penalty for the sin. However, if the fulfilling of such requirement became too strenuous and one was not sure they had actually fulfilled the requirements. This treasure was given in the hands of the Pope to dispense for the benefit of the Church. However, it is not like all believers approved of the sale of indulgences; as the narration about a shoemaker whose wife had purchased the certificate against her husband's will and died shortly later inform us:

The shoemaker put his wife's indulgence in his pocket, and went to answer the accusation. "Is your wife dead?" asked the magistrate. "Yes," replied he. "What have you done for her?" "I have buried her body, and commended her soul to God." "But have you had a mass said for the repose of her soul?" - "I have not: it was of no use; she entered heaven at the moment of her death." "How do you know that?" "Here is the proof." As he said these words, he drew the indulgence from his pocket... "If the reverend gentleman maintains that a mass is still necessary," added the widower, "my wife has been deceived by our most holy father the pope; if she has not been, it is the priest who deceives me." There was no reply to this, and the shoemaker was acquitted. Thus did the plain sense of the people condemn these pious frauds (D'Aubigne 1846:151)

Indulgences could be purchased on behalf of the dead. Luther rejected the indulgence theology, arguing that both the guilt and penalty are obliterated once one confesses one's sin. So radical was his position that to him, one is forgiven even one approached the offer for repentance and the promise of forgiveness with fear, with a bad conscience or half-heatedly, since fallen humanity is incapable of coming to God wholeheartedly unless we drawn by grace. To Luther it is grace from the beginning to the end.

2.2 The Ecclesiastical Grip on Society in the 16th Century

We may conclude therefore, that both the theology and theopraxis in the 16th century sought to tie the faithful firmly to the Roman Church, even when it did not necessarily tie him or her firmly to God. At the centre of all this was power and money. The official Church exploited the believer's commitment for its own political and economic gains. Effectively, The Church ceased to be a source of consolation and refuge and instead became a stumbling block for genuine seekers of faith to contend with.

3.0 The African Theopraxis of the 20th and 21st Centuries

We may now turn to contemporary African theopraxis. We will begin with the issue of theological milieu of the 20th and 21st century African Church. The second half of the last century was marked by two major trends that have straddled the first two decades of the twenty first century. One was the emergence of African independent Churches. The other development of the second half of the period was the Africa Awakening, which in East Africa is commonly known as the East African Revival Movement. We may consider the situation in context, again on the basis of the 16th century milieu: the powers of the keys; justification; authority for interpreting the Word; the sacraments; the relationship of the two realms; prayer and mediation, as well as purgatorial theology.

3.1 Powers of the keys

Let us first consider the powers of the keys. The mantra in the five or six centuries up to the Protestant Reformation was ‘there is no salvation outside the Church.’ What was meant by ‘Church’ was the Catholic Church. Today, we see a repeat of the same formula with differing emphases, among revivalist groups. The Lutheran understanding of the Church as both the unseen boy of Christ and the physically seen members is ignored. In other words, it does not matter if one is committed to Christ, has been baptised and belongs to a Church or a free non-denominational congregation. One has to belong to ‘our Church’ or else one is counted out. This is closet Romanism, with its divisive and destructive poisons.

In other words there is a clear failure to emphasize on grace from beginning to end. Instead, it is now fashionable to talk or preach about ‘grace with works’, ‘grace with fasting’, ‘grace with giving’, ‘grace with proper tithing’, ‘grace with good behaviour’, etc. In a sermon I once attended, a lay preacher contended that it was likely for those who were not giving their tithes appropriately to have failing children or ones with very low grades in secondary school

national examinations. The idea of common grace is completely excluded and any good thing among non-believers is demonic or else hypocritical.

3.2 Justification

On justification, the theology seems to have come full circle. Preachers are not unheard of who constantly remind especially believers from other congregations: ‘you are born again but not redeemed’ (*umeokoka lakini hujakombolewa*). In order to be redeemed, something has to be done. This may mean accepting to move Church in order to be an ‘Apollos now taught more precisely in the way of the Lord’ (Acts 18:24). However, most often the ‘something’ is a payment in cash or in kind (an animal or some other valuable property) made to the pastor or the itinerant preacher. Texts like Ex. 13:2, 13-15 are appealed to as calling upon people to redeem their children in accordance with the commandment of the LORD. Preachers are not unknown who rely on parsing the message of certain selected texts to suit their vile passions for money and amassing of followings.

The practice goes like this: A mother (usually) or both parents are convinced by the pastor or preacher that they need to keep their first-born male child at Church-and effectively, at the pastor’s home. The child will be taken back only once they bring redemption, which is usually a goat, lamb or even a heifer or young bull. It needs to be investigated further of course, if the pastors’ first born males are similarly taken to the bishops’ homes to be redeemed later. My discussions with a few members of the ELCT indicate that some believe this practice to be appropriate, while the others are in doubt. Even with Luther aside, one wonders however, what is the value of these redemptions in the light of texts like 2Cor. 5:17 (those in Christ are a new creation); Gal. 3:13 (Christ redeemed us from the curse and was made a curse himself on our behalf).

Let me add here that I am not oblivious of the fact that African Christianity, like the rest of its ontology, is populated with curses, demons, evil spirits and the like. Yet, freedom from all these enemies lies in unreserved accepting of the message of the gospel. This means that the message has to be taught relentlessly; accompanied with prayer without ceasing and leading by example. All other ways are either shortcuts, which as the English saying goes, are wrong cuts. Not only that, they are manipulative tactics with long time serious repercussions including relapse of the clergy themselves into idolatry and witchcraft. They further lead to an emergence of theologies they cannot defend on the basis of scripture or even that of historical, orthodox practices.

Associated with these are other theologies of the blessings of the first born, the gates (*malango*) theology (implying the gateways for God's blessings, which can move from the natural first born to a Jacob). What God offers freely by grace is made to appear as subject to certain secret formulae known only to the preachers who are capable of divulging them, second century Gnosticism style. However, the 'revelations' and 'theological advances' generally tend to stand on very shaky interpretation of scriptures that do not take into account the original languages and the context.

3.3 The Question of Authority

Another area that is victim of the predatory theopraxis is on the authority for interpretation of scripture. I have, and several other clergies and Christians may have; heard sermons and teachings aired on Tanzania's numerous FM stations; projecting a certain preacher as the one true servant of God, who teaches *injili isiyoghoshiwa*, an allusion to 'the pure milk' of 2Pet. 2:2 and hence implying the pure gospel. The same preachers discourage listeners and viewers from being close to the local pastors who are alleged to teach 'mere religion.' Instead, they invite people, Coca Cola style, to 'send a gift for a sure answer to prayer', to 'come and see the true messenger of God with special anointing' 'come to receive (or re-receive) the Holy

Spirit', 'to get deliverance from familial curses or bewitchment', among several products. In other words, the particular ministers of God set themselves apart as 'the ministers', with all others being dismissed as counterfeits and impostors.

Behaviour demonstrated by these *neo-gnostic* preachers expose their hearers to manipulation, control and exploitation. Not a few pastors and evangelists in the ELCT have of late taken to emulate them. The conventional wisdom seems to be: 'If you cannot beat them you join them'. However genuine Christianity cannot base on such temporal aphorisms. Most of the interpretations by these 'authorities' employ the allegorical method, with all its dangers of spiritualizing even clearly parable texts. This of course has the serious danger of directing away the followers from Christ and his cross, and instead to the preacher and his usually syncretistic interpretations. One thing is glaring though: these *neo-gnostics* have become filthy rich by exploiting their followers (Adeleye, 2012). It is a 'gospel according to commerce'.

For those who still wish to keep on guard, the warning is that we are almost in a situation where the wealth of a preacher or Pastor in Tanzania at least, is a sure sign of his or her deceptions and manipulations of the Church of God. To the deceivers themselves however, many of whom feature prominently on gospel TV, these achievements are demonstrations of God's working with the preacher. As mentioned above, the various claim to special knowledge and powers hidden to others expose these preachers to charges of what one may term *neo-gnosticism*. In this *neo-gnosticism*, like in the gnosticism of the second and subsequent centuries, the preacher or expositor claims to have a certain *gnosis*, that is special knowledge not available to the other believers. *Imitatio Christ* through simple living, hard work, prayer and contentment with basic necessities of life, is to these *neo-gnostics* a weakness, if not demonic and a demonstration of lack of the Spirit.

3.4 The Relationship of the Two Realms

The other 16th century problem was the contention that in addition to being above all other bishops, the Pope was above secular rulers. The African theopraxis bearing parallels to this issue, in my opinion, rests on three hinges. One is where the bishop is seen more in ethnic lenses, as a result of nostalgia for chieftainships (Omari 1987:7-9). The bishop aspirants would definitely play an ethnic card if an ‘outsider’ attempted to contest in their area. On ascending to the ‘throne’, at times through scheming and shameful practices, the bishop often tends to exercise autocracy and authoritarianism (Fihavango 2007: 234). At the centre is the same problem of power and the compromises that have to be arrived at in mediating it.

The second hinge lies in the self-projection of the clergy as superior to secular authorities, while the third hinge is on the habit of congregants themselves projecting a larger than life size of the nature of clerical office. The cleric is a *mpakwa mafuta* not to be criticised, not even gently and in Christian love. To do that is to endanger one’s standing with God and risk losing *mbingu*, the heavens. This adds to clergy’s self importance and puffed attitude that borders on the feeling of rights to everything, including otherwise private territories of fellow believers, who are routinely referred to as ‘*kondoo wangu*’, ‘*washarika wangu*’ ‘my flock’, ‘my parishioners’. I once heard a story from my fellow theology students, of a pastor who faced the music after suggesting that the bishop’s expensive Toyota VX be sold, a smaller car bought for him and the balance of the money be used to purchase motorcycles for pastors and bicycles for evangelists. Most of the pastors in the meeting, would have benefitted from the suggestion. However, most accused their colleague of *kumtamani mke wa baba yake*, desiring his father’s wife, a really serious offence in Africa, which can only be answered with a father’s curse that is a dread of any typical African, including myself. He was forced to apologise for his stupidity.

Arguably and at another level, the social structure in Tanzanian society is one where the pastor and above him the bishop are regarded as more trustworthy than their political parallels. This unfortunately tempts pastors and bishops to be power brokers at various levels, at huge costs to the state-church relationship and to the spiritual health of the Churches. As a result, the relationship with the state tends to be either strained or amiable, depending on 'who what Church supported' during elections.

It is common knowledge for instance, that certain pastors and their bishops in several Churches across all denominational divide have in the last two three general elections publicly uttered their special revelations 'from the Lord' on who is God's choice for the next president. Some have received huge contributions from aspiring contestants, whose timings seemed questionable even to a casual eye. To the best of my knowledge and to their credit, if my observation here be true, the Adventists may be the only Christian group that has stayed clean of the political game, and hence the only ones not culpable of the guilt of politicization of ecclesiastical functions.

Unfortunately for the prophets of Tanzania's election politics, and since they do not own the necessary machinery and networks comparable to the state, the predictions of these self-serving prophets have routinely failed the test of the times. Yet, the cost of such self-serving prediction on Church-state relations, are too huge to ignore. As to ill timed, politically motivated 'givings', the defence by the clergy is always that 'we cannot prevent people from deciding what they give and when'. This may be true, but we can set a moratorium on such giving when it seems politically sensitive. Otherwise the offering tends to be interpreted as a purchase of both airtime and allegiance by political aspirants.

My point here is that while the post-Westphalia frame prevents the Church from being above the state, the thinking in the African Church is still decidedly that the Church is above the state. This thinking is decidedly not Lutheran. Any good Lutheran pastor and bishop should

understand the issue in that way, sociological and psychological pressures from the community or from superiors and relatives notwithstanding. They should teach this to the congregations and prayerfully call for peaceful elections that are free, just and fair at all levels, not only at the level voting and vote counting. They should raise objecting voices to injustice, as lambs ready to be smitten, while at the same time pointing it out that they are not intent at meddling into the affairs of the state, that they know their limit. When this fails, God will not fail, for he is the God of all flesh.

At the congregational, personal and pastoral levels, the trust of congregants in their pastors and bishops is arguably abused in form of excesses that border on 'devouring flocks' by ruining marriages through ambiguous intrusions, some of them very sensitive, by exerting undue influence on family members and on occasions subtly coaxing unwarranted favours particularly from well-to do congregants. Not only that. In the ECD as a typical example of the ELCT, as well as in many other Churches, especially among Pentecostals, trends in certain congregations exhibit acts that could expose the Church to tortuous or even criminal liabilities in future. This may occur for instance, since pastors allow or even invite this or that person to trade their wares in alternative medicine and so called 'sophisticated family use products.'

An example is a bishop (not ELCT) who has a radio station which airs an advert stating that the Church (the bishop?) or persons they sanction employ computers that can diagnose all diseases in a human body in a matter of a few minutes, and that at the instance of scanning one's five fingers, the way one is scanned for biometric data! Europe and America, may as well consult Africa on this breakthrough in medical technology, were it not a hoax and a work of conmen preying on ignoramuses!

Such products and services include ayurvedic medicine, which bears connection with an eastern mysticism that most pastors do not understand anything about and cannot therefore explain or try to support or critique. There have been several occasions in which pastors, have

invited or allowed conmen to speak on their products and services without being aware of the dangers, which dangers they could establish through simple techniques of the questioning method; so as to satisfy themselves of the speakers' honesty and product reliability. And this has sadly occurred on Sunday services when the flock is supposed to be tended and fed. This is partly a result of pastors regarding themselves as capable of fulfilling functions that are rightly reserved for the state, like deciding what is safe for public consumption and for commercial activity. It further has something to do with inadequate training of pastors themselves, an issue I hope some resourceful persons in this forum will address in details and taking account the political, cultural and economic dimensions of globalization, which can easily render a preacher into a laughing stock, if he or she is seen clearly unaware of the political, economic and cultural ramifications of globalization.

We may sum up with yet another illustration. Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) technology is already a globally divisive issue and may easily split any congregation that happens to have members from the scientific community or informed congregants holding different positions on the issue. This is a scientific and ethical issue. Yet, it will not come as a surprise, to me at least, if in the near future traders in genetically Modified Organism (GMO) agricultural seed will discover easy targets that out there in Christian congregations of the ELCT. This may easily occur if a pastor allows such peddling upon simple request, even before checking with the ministry of Agriculture, with some knowledgeable in the field or related fields; or at least with the District Pastor or Secretary General.

3.5 The Sacraments

We may now move on to the understanding of the sacraments. For Luther, the overarching theme in respect of sacraments was the promises that come with them: 'take and eat', 'baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.' It is the believers' response to these promises that makes them a reality to them personally, just like a man and woman

become a married couple after the exchange of promises, not after they exchange many gifts or speak very nicely to one another for a long time or, in African context, when they hold their baby in their hands.

This is the idea of communication of properties (*Latin: communicatio idiomatum*) taking place once the promises are believed. We may argue here therefore, that, baptism by the Holy Spirit is received only by faith in the Lord's promise at the instant of physically visible baptism or in a miraculous conversion even before baptism, presence or absence of outward symptoms notwithstanding. An emphasis on the Reformers' simple teaching on sacraments, that their efficacy does not depend on the performer or the sinful doubts of the recipients could help dispel such misguided theologies.

Yet I once attended a Lutheran worship service in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the ELCT, in which I had to preside over Holy Communion. The preacher of the day was a Lutheran evangelist from another Diocese, invited by the parish pastor. In his fire and brimstone homily, this preacher contended that what pastors promise baptizants during Lutheran baptisms on being received in the Church, which included the promise that they are united to Christ and the invocation for the power of the Holy Spirit; were 'mere dramatization' (*Swahili: hayo ni maigizo tu*). So the preacher invited his listeners to the 'real thing' the following Sunday, which fell on Pentecost. His idea was to make them 'receive the Holy Spirit' in the 'real way' or the 'genuine one' the following Sunday, his last day of the eight days' preaching campaign. Instead of being taken aback, congregants were applauding and ululating. Top on my mind was the value of the holy communion that day after the scathing attacks on baptism, for in Lutheran theology, both baptism and holy communion depend on the words of promises and one's willingness (and I suppose, Luther would argue, not even on one's clear understanding).

Now, there is an accusation generally levelled by the so called *kiroho* or ‘spirit-filled’ believers; on anyone who argues for order and attempts at correction of such unwholesome theologies and syncretism. They are all branded as *pepo* (demonic). I must confess that in my *pepo* theological mind, I avoided the ‘real thing’ promised on the following Sunday by conveniently attending Sunday service elsewhere. But how can we systematically rebuff such controversial and defective theologies? My answer here is that only Reformation theology, working with untainted trust in the message of scripture can be an antidote. These are the only other viable tools for guarding against such serious theological errors.

Let us revisit the simple example of marriage. A friend at the college I work once shared with me that on the second day of their marriage, he was having a lovely conversation with his new wife. Then as time went on, the young lady said: You know Mark (not the real name), it is getting late, so I guess I must go home now. The husband retorted: Unfortunately from yesterday there is no going home late evening any more. The woman replied: ‘Oh, I forgot that we are now married.’ The same applies to the word of promise and its effects. We may not understand it fully, everything may seem hazy, foggy and even unreal: ‘your sins are forgiven’ ‘take eat, this is my body’, you are delivered from the powers of darkness’, ‘you are above powers and principalities’, but it is efficaciously accomplished outside our feeble frames of reference. I have on numerous occasions remarked, in discussions with same-minded and my theological detractors alike in the ELCT-ECD, that most of these new theologies bear the unseen label that every serious Christian ought to read carefully despite its being unseen: ‘Shake well before use, keep out of reach of children. In case of complications or any dangerous symptoms, consult the local pastor.’

3.6 Prayer and Mediation

We may now turn to prayer. In the contemporary theopraxis in many Churches, prayer is ‘not easily heard’, and therefore something extra has to be done. Total unreserved reliance on the

Holy Spirit and on God's simple promises in the scriptures are of little value to these preachers. Consequently success (whatever that means) and blessings are tied to certain capabilities to appease God: 'you are blessed in proportion to your extent of giving', their teachings go. 'England is blessed because her ancestors gave much to the cause of Christ and missionary activity' (and not because they were colonialists, enslavers, robbers, pirates and warmongers); 'America is blessed because she has a lot of Christians and they give a lot' (not because of the hegemonic tendencies of her successive governments and her chief political export product, war); 'the poor are so because they are mean of giving' (not because oppressive governments and the world unjust economic system deny them an opportunity for meaningful economic activity), 'the rich know how to sow in the Lord' (not because they *may* simply be modern day Pharisee exhibiting pomp). However when questioned about Japan and China, they tend to say something roughly like 'you have not figured it out the right way'.

The most notorious variant of these teachings and preaching techniques has been on giving as a way of getting blessings. Grey Christian literature in Tanzania is replete with these teachings that emphasize on giving rather than on commitment to and trust in the promises of God. The texts most appealed to include 2 Cor. 9:6ff, which is expounded along shaky lines that what you give in offerings is a 'seed', akin to capital, from which you reap in proportion to your giving. The expositors however conveniently skip verse 9, which is pointedly on giving to the poor. Instead they subtly lead their followers to sow generously in the private pockets of the preacher.

The traditional and evangelical understanding of giving entails its understanding as: (1) an expression of gratitude to God in his mercy (2) an ethical response to a loving God-hence one doing or participating in diaconical works (3) a means of being co-workers with Christ, by supporting those who do the preaching and pasturing. Of late however, such emphases have been less and less emphasized upon, even in the Lutheran Church. Instead, certain *neo-*

pharisaism has crept in that relate success and healing to giving (instead of hard work, prayer and child-like dependence on God). Not only that, emphasis on diligent work and ethical conduct in business and in social relations, which were among the cornerstones of both Lutheran and Calvinist work ethics, is not emphasized. In fact, it is de-emphasized so as not to antagonize the ‘major givers’, who tend to be the well-to-do in the congregation who also *may* double as the drug peddlers and suspected bribe takers.

As part of this health and wealth theopraxis, the well-to-do progressively become so important that special seats and even attire are designated to enable them being identified and given executive treatment on Sunday services. The Church becomes a hotel or a passenger aircraft with class seating. Justice theology and God’s special preference for the poor in both senses (i.e. the poor in spirit and those materially deprived due to economic injustices); so crucial to proper understanding of the reaching of God to the world; are excluded. Instead emphasis of the message becomes: “Our God wants us to be rich and begin enjoying the fruits of eternity henceforth”.

Further, according to these theologies, suffering is satanic and is only for those not yet truly delivered. In short, theology and theopraxis becomes a soft pillow and cushioned pews theology, in which Christianity entails enjoying the good of the land. These preachers actually brag it all on TV on the quality of their clothes and cars; the beauty of their spouses; the intelligence of their children; their travels abroad and other irrelevancies; while, castigating those who have not ‘made it’ in their ministry as either counterfeits or persons who need to examine themselves as to what is wrong with them.

3.7 Krypt-purgatorial Theology

The natural offshoot of giving theology is a krypt-purgatorial theology. In recent years even the so-called evangelicals have been caught in this trap. In the ELCT, especially in the Eastern

and Coastal Diocese, roughly three out of four sermons I attend in a quarter of a year will not end without talking about the benefits of giving-to the Church, not to the poor. Unabashedly, a subtle emphasis is given to giving to the pastor directly: *fungu la kumi la mtumishi*, which I regard as a sophisticated form of stealing. In this theology, giving is the central theme: it is what opens doors for your children academic and educational progress, for your prayer for healing being heard, for your business flourishing, for a promotion at work, for getting a fiancé or fiancée, for restoring soured relationship with a spouse or workplace superior etc. etc. One prominent preacher much known and very welcome in ELCT circles routinely contends that ‘it is your offering that bears your prayers’ (like a pedestal or an elevator). Now one wonders what the role of faith in God and reliance on the Holy Spirit becomes if my prayers are borne on an improvised ‘prayercraft’ of giving. Further, one wonders what remains of the value of faith in the promises of God, a concept that Luther emphasized so much in his sermons, using the example of promises in baptism, in Holy Communion and even in a very human example: marriage.

4.0 The Reformation as a Response to Babylonian Captivity in African Theopraxis

We may now make some summary of the impact of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Our issues are still the same: powers of the keys; justification; authority for interpreting the Word; the sacraments; the relationship of the two realms; prayer and mediation, as well as purgatorial theology.

One of the outcomes of the Protestant Reformation was that it demanded a complete reorientation of faith and allegiance. No more were the faithful required to rely on masses and purchase of indulgences for their right relationship with God. No more were they to depend on the Church or its special dispensations and edicts for their justification; for they were assured that they are justified freely by grace. No more were they to depend on Rome’s self-serving interpretations of the scriptures, family and the local Church could enjoy reading the Bible

while being illuminated by the Holy Spirit. No more did they need to fulfil works prescribed by the confessor, all they needed was an honest confession to one another, to an evangelical confessor or in communal worship service. It became a simple faith of prayer and study of the scriptures.

The believers did not need any more to doubt the efficacy of their baptisms on the theological argument that they could lose their salvation. They only needed to be reminded that their oneness in Christ was a mystery too profound to demystify, but became a reality once received by faith, by acknowledging the *communicatio idiomatum*. Nor did they have to impel any special position of the Church elevated against the state, for bishop and emperor were both servants of God. This was uncalled for. Neglect of such an approach and the all too strong pull to the ways of those around us, especially the quest for the easy life may be part of the reason. It is my contention here that these positions of Luther and the other reformers are still a sure antidote for the erroneous theopraxis that has infected the African Churches.

5.0 Conclusion: Reformation Theology as God's Living Voice

The Reformation may be an event from which we are separated by 500 years. Yet the people then are not really separated from us in terms of the essential standing before God: We are all fallen and coming short of the glory of God. The theological expedition begun by the reformers 500 years ago is still on, with new captains and voyagers in the same rough seas. We can employ the experiences and solutions of the reformers in our own context to guard from error, syncretism and the general tendencies to dominate and manipulate others that always tends to assault the Church. The Reformation is a living voice with an enduring message on issues of appropriate theology and theopraxis in this enduring voyage.

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