

Moral Leadership in Church and Society

June 13 2019

EAST AFRICAN CONSULTATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL RESOURCE NETWORK OF THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

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THEOLOGIANS ADDRESS CORRUPTION AT AFRICA CHURCH SUMMIT

Fifteen theologians from DR Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda as part of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion Theological Resource Network at the Africa Bible University, Kampala, Uganda from June 10-13 2019.

Bishops, college principals, and diocesan officials considered the theological challenges posed to developing moral leadership in church and society. They studied the emphasis in the Pastoral Epistles on nurturing character in young leaders.

Free from the constraints of House of Bishops, synod or faculty meetings they worked on how the wrong use of money, sex and power can militate against moral leadership in church and state.

About twenty four new churches averaging 150 people started each day in Uganda in 2018 through population growth and refugee-influx. Residential formal training of clergy will never keep up.

They noted the need for non-formal training of lay people as school chaplains since for hundreds of thousands of young people the school is their church; the importance of godly education in the earliest years both from parents and teachers and how cultural and traditional values of loyalty to tribe and clan can militate against integrity in recruitment. The Gospel calls for transformation so that the common factor is the Gospel of Jesus beyond natural bonds.

They noted how the Western focus on individualism is on individual rights and freedom; in Africa the focus is on ensuring community harmony. Thus on issues of sexuality, African Christians see same-sex relations as harming family and community life while some Western Christians see them as expressing individual human rights, freedom and identity.

They planned to review the biblical, theological and pastoral response to polygamous people when they become Christian with reference to the status and care of all struggling members involved.

Archbishop Eliud Wabukhala, the former Primate of Kenya, the present chairman of the Ethics and anti-Corruption Commission of Kenya with over 1000 employees, spoke of his calling as Christian ministry in the market-place. He led a discussion on “Why with its significant presence in many East African countries has the church failed in addressing the issue of corruption, even in its own ranks?”

He suggested that corruption can be curtailed by legislation or prosecution but not ended. It is a matter of the heart. The concept of sin in Africa is purely relational - undermining community and family relationships. If I can steal from you and you do not know it, there is no problem since I can still be your friend. There is no concept of sin against God.

He proposed that as Jesus is of one blood with us by his incarnation, as his blood brother or sister we should do what he says is the will of God. So our disobedience is to God. Our brother Jesus has exchanged our sin (against God and others) and our shame for his righteousness. There is a need to develop the understanding of salvation and the atonement in relation to African ideas of taboo, shame and guilt.

EFAC Uganda will be launched on July 18 in All Saints Cathedral, Kampala.

The full report follows here

MORAL LEADERSHIP IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

EAST AFRICAN CONSULTATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL RESOURCE NETWORK OF THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

We fifteen theologians from DR Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda as part of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion Theological Resource Network gathered at the Africa Bible University, Kampala, Uganda from June 10-13 2019.

We met to consider the theological issues and challenges in our countries, especially those posed to developing moral leadership in church and society. We studied the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus and their emphasis on nurturing character in young leaders based on the biblical gospel of Jesus.

We considered how the wrong use of money, sex and power can militate against good moral leadership in church and state.

WE NOTED

- The need for non-formal training of lay people as chaplains.
- The importance of godly early years education.
- How cultural and traditional values can militate against integrity.
- The tension between viewing the purpose of marriage and sexuality as to build families and communities, and individualism which emphasizes freedom and identity.

- Addressing the heart of the matter in the human heart by understanding sin as more than disrupting community relationships but primarily against God and addressed through Jesus Christ's atonement.

CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

We have been very concerned at the crisis in training for leadership in our churches. This can be seen in the failure of many students at our theological colleges to understand their call. The high unemployment rate in Kenya for example means that some attend theological schools because when they graduate they can secure a job. Our curricula need to be reviewed to ensure they meet the current needs of the church in addressing population displacement, famine, drought, corruption, and human trafficking. The Church should take the side of the poor and oppressed and speak out on their behalf.

With about twenty four new churches averaging 150 people starting in Uganda each day in 2018 through population growth and refugee-influx, traditional residential formal training of clergy will never keep up. Non-formal training (e.g. short seminars on bible knowledge and Christian character formation) of lay leaders for people meeting in small cells with a teaching sermon has been successfully addressing some of this growth. There is also a need to train lay chaplains for the proliferation of schools since the school is the church for hundreds of thousands of young people.

Recruitment to universities is compromised through bribery for entry and mass cheating in exams. So universities get sub-standard students and graduate poorly qualified professionals in medicine, engineering etc. Some university courses have little relevance for employment. They also neglect the pastoral approach in nurturing a holistic lifestyle in students.

The situation is so bad in some areas that government is stepping in to take over or close church institutions, and passing legislation to certificate Christian pastors and teachers in the name of protecting society.

CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION

Christian education starts in the family where parents have the prime responsibility for the education of their children, and not the school system. To offer Christian education to their children parents need to be rooted in the faith of Jesus. So the church is responsible to equip parents spiritually to be able to educate their children in Jesus' way so that they may be equipped for addressing the challenges of later life.

One diocese is implementing formation of women chaplains to enable women to offer Christian education to their children since women in their context are closer to their children than men.

The education system itself has contributed to corruption in the nation and the church through lack of effective discipleship. To enhance discipleship and create a corruption-free society, the church needs to begin modelling to the children from nursery to university.

For example a Church nursery school in existence since 1960 has never been developed. Yet the church has well placed old girls and boys in government and church. Those few confessing Christians are the lucky ones who found Christ in other schools or were mentored by their parents. Other children lose the little Christian formation they acquired at this early age because of the schools their parents take them to after nursery, looking for grades not spiritual formation. Hence knowledge is acquired without character which results in corruption.

Lack of follow up: There is no track record of children when they leave a Christian school to join primary. The church should develop their schools to ensure Christian nurture and practical skills. The debate is whether to hand over the church school to a person able to manage or develop it as a church business arm.

Leadership in Church schools: For example one primary school has been under the leadership of the Muslim deputy head teacher for over 20 years yet the Parish Priest is chairman of the Management Committee. The performance is so bad that the head teacher comes in when she wants and even the priest cannot let his children study there.

Calling and recruitment of clergy: This can show more of a human hand than God's Spirit. They work to maintain offices and please those who gave them work. Power and authority are promoted in the church at the expense of transforming the younger generation.

Lack of well equipped chaplains: There is a need to train school chaplains whose life is consistent with scripture for effective discipleship. Schools give a lot of information but there is little transformation.

Scarcity of mentors/ disciplers: Church leaders can be hypocritical to the extent that their own children and spouses cannot trust them. Yet the family is the first education institution for children. The corruption of parents is passed on to children which shapes their adult behaviour.

Lack of moral authority: In some schools teachers and priests have no moral authority to facilitate discipleship. Christian religious education is taught theoretically by teachers some of whom do not set a good example and often have nothing to offer in terms of morality.

The church needs to balance academic attainment, developing practical skills and spirituality among children from early childhood through university. Other attainments without the fear of God will not avail much to eliminate corruption.

CORRUPTION AND ABUSE OF POWER

Power is the ability to execute tasks and oversee the job being done. Power in the African context goes with economics, wisdom, and where required, correction and punishment. Some church leaders abuse power and succumb to the traps of temptation. Bribery, poverty, corruption, nepotism, syncretism, and love of money and sex weaken church leaders' power and promote the decline of the church's mission and growth. This decays the church in some African countries where top church leaders carry no moral authority with their subordinates.

CORRUPTION

Corruption, a monster in many countries, has crept into the churches so that they lack the moral authority to point out corrupt practices in and beyond their own ranks.

Corruption can be seen when people receive money in exchange for favours; when people practice favouritism in making appointments, for example preferring a relative or member of the same ethnic group out of loyalty before a more competent person at the expense of merit. This is no different from governmental appointments based on tribal affiliation. When incompetent people are appointed many people suffer, for example from unskilled engineers, poorly trained medical staff or sub-standard teachers.

Church officials have been involved in abuse of funds. Christians are called to be transparent in handling money and be good stewards of God's resources, which include money, time and human resources. Pastors have been known to use church money for their own ends. This betrays the trust of their congregations and donors.

Churches have also received money for projects from questionable sources some of which may be corrupt. Such suspicion should be enough to warn against this practice. Rather than receive such funds, the church needs to encourage people to work hard themselves to gain properly earned money. It needs to shun donations whose sources cannot be verified because the motives behind them are uncertain, and take the lead in accountability.

In Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa, lack of adequate discipleship has allowed many people to claim the Christian faith even though they may not live as such. Potential converts are promised jobs, gifts, healing, wealth, visas to go abroad and other things to fix their immediate and felt needs, omitting the real human need to resolve the main human predicament - sin and judgment through forgiveness and new life in Christ. Core cultural values and current felt needs mark the evangelistic effort, without context-sensitivity in explaining the Gospel to new converts.

CORRUPTION THROUGH THE USE OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

Many use positional status to advance themselves. Power is security, status and identity. Positions in power beget possessions. Possessions are power, and power begets more possessions and power.

In the church, titles and placement translate into the power and authority vested in church office. The office is more pronounced than the officer, which often causes the holder to rely on office authority rather than build character or rely on merit.

The power structures of our traditional cultures with tribal or clan boundaries in which authority and influence are exercised for the wellness of posterity and communal expectations need biblical refining.

Biblically, all authority is from God (Rom. 13). Those who exercise it do so as appointed by God to whom they will give account. The use of power and authority in light of the Gospel are grounded in a leader's position as a servant. (Luke 22:24-27; Mark 10:35-45). The Gospel requires this because of the nature of its character requirements (1 Tim. 3:2-7 and Titus 1:7-9), its source (1 Cor. 12:7; Romans 12:6-8), its enablement (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18) its ambition and motivation (2 Cor. 4:5; 13:10).

The use of power and authority outside such other-centeredness is self-centred service, energizes corruption and heightens social disheartenment.

CORRUPTION AND THE PLACE OF TRADITIONAL COMMUNAL BONDS

Factional loyalties founded on tribal alliances reveal how positional power can lead to impunity. Tribes, clans and extended family need a better articulation on how Christians should view nepotism in the face of "helpful" connections for survival and services among their own kinsmen. Kindred connections are tied to provisions and communal success, a value in line with many African traditional values.

Merits for employment, education and other privileges are often based on clans instead of other qualifications, with a desire to assist relatives or kinsmen. With community-being and community-living comes clan or tribe-based obligations. Under these, individual success or achievement is also community success as a shared venture for the common good.

Such loyalties shape political agendas along the lines through which power and authority are dispensed to reward and punish. Positional power can lead to loyalty protecting the corrupt. Political competition includes buying and seeking favour as a survival venture, energizing corruption.

The misuse of power and authority is also tied to religious affiliations or political partisanship. Self-interest friendships (based on self-gain agendas) create selfish solidarities that promote corruption.

A collective anticipation to benefit from one in a high position overrides the concept of "individual corruption" with "community benefit". As long as the pioneer beneficiary continues to share the spoil with the clan, communal solidarity undermines governing principles and integrity. The blessings from communal bonds are numerous and are encouraged by the Scriptures. Societies that cherish community have always held together with an effective church. But such benefits are often formed and upheld by values that serve the self-interest of families and clans. The Gospel calls for transformation so that the common factor is the Gospel of Jesus beyond natural bonds.

CORRUPTION, SHAME AND GUILT

Shame and guilt are increasingly disarmed of their traditional role on the conscience. Cultural values that encourage corruption include the unnecessary shunning of guilt and shame. Africans understand the conscience as the soul's automatic warning system about the presence of transgression. Shame and guilt have a positive role as necessary socio-spiritual mechanisms to bring people back in line with their communities, through their excruciating discomfort.

The conscience holds us back as a restraint. A numbed conscience will not respond to shame and guilt. Denying wrongdoing at all times gradually silences the conscience through deteriorating common sense, corrupted religion, uncontrolled lust, and perversion. Society now insists that no one is supposed to feel guilty because guilt is not conducive to dignity or self-esteem.

Benevolence and philanthropy endear the corrupt rich to their clients. Corrupt leaders may 'silence' the church with donations, thus muting her prophetic voice of God's standards. Some beneficiaries from corrupt gains are indebted for what they have received, and expected to make favourable returns. This erases the scruples that would point out the wrong. Values that should shape a populace vanish in the face of attempts to civilize "wrong-doing". Corruption then embeds itself deeper with a perception of "human advancement" in material terms to undermine ethical integrity and relational credibility.

Moral decline highlights the need for character reform in re-sensitizing the conscience. Guilt and shame prompt the cry for forgiveness and restoration, and fear of their consequences keeps people away from conduct that would overwhelm them with such pain. A shame-free and guilt-free society heightens corruption and accounts for a toothless Christian presence.

CORRUPTION IN CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS

Church and state are separate but work together for the interest of people. The body of Christ should be a benchmark and advisor of the state. However in recent years church-state relations in some countries have gone sour which affects church growth and freedom of worship. Some states determine the standard of infrastructures and church workers. They impose taxes on church properties and control church finances.

Though some regulations are for the good of people, a joint consensus is needed between the church and state on a general understanding, enough time frame for execution, and sensitivity to the requirements of people's living conditions and capacity.

Democracy is still foreign to much of Africa where chiefs and kings are portraits of power and authority. Societies where tribes and clans deeply mark human identity continue to struggle to see them give way to nationwide and universal ideals. Democratization cannot yet guarantee a systemic uprooting of corruption, since the latter flourishes with "undemocratic" ideals approved by tradition and culture.

Corruption flourishes because the church and the state both understand power and authority in the same way and tend to tap influence from each other in compromising ways. Politicians need votes and see the church as a constituency to serve this purpose. The church needs recognition and social influence, and seeks government approval and resources. The church's prophetic voice is "bribed" into silence while the state's civic responsibility is abdicated.

A biblical understanding of the church and the state is an issue of kingdoms. A biblical description of kingdoms in conflict and a grasp on the Kingdom of God should reveal the source of divine power and the use of human authority for a Gospel-centred transformation in society. Western democracy as practiced in Africa ought to be revisited with a biblical understanding of how societies ought to manage themselves.

CONFUSION BETWEEN FEAR AND RESPECT

Traditionally, lack of a clear distinction between fear and respect hampers appropriate principles of accountability, and undermines openness and transparency. The power structures of our traditional tribal and clan cultures in which authority and influence are exercised for the wellness of posterity and communal expectations need a biblical refining.

The association of respect and fear hampers accountability. If by challenging highly-placed officials, one is seen to be disrespectful of those above him, or labelled antagonistic and rebellious, society will not find it conducive to challenge the powers that be – first, in order to maintain harmony and second, to avoid being labelled "anti-social". But fear is also expected among all who would not disrupt communal harmony. This confusion of fear and respect undermines openness, transparency and accountability and stifles principled stands against corruption.

A theological redefinition is needed of self-identity, personal status, and personal security in giving and receiving honour, loyalty, showing respect, reward, status, service, prestige, security, patriotism and others. Success will not be measured by what anyone is aiming for, but by what they are leaving behind.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON GOD'S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY

Our human sexuality – maleness and femaleness – comprises the physical, emotional, and spiritual intricacies which are God's design to lead us into understanding intimacy with God in greater ways. Human sexuality is meant to enrich and fulfil our person-hood.

As a result the fall, the complementary nature of human sexuality has been distorted through polygamy / bigamy, same sex relations, transgender, prostitution, divorce and other ways.

Same sex relations have become more acceptable to society, but are a serious offense in the sight of God. The Bible consistently tells us that homosexual activity is a sin (Gen. 19:1-13; Lev. 18:22; 20:13 1 Cor. 6:9); that people become homosexuals because of sin (Rom. 1:24-27) and ultimately because of their own choice. A person may be born with a greater susceptibility to homosexuality, just as some are born with a tendency to violence and other sins.

That does not excuse the person's choosing give in to sinful desires. If a person is born with a greater susceptibility to anger/rage, that would not make it right to give in to them. Homosexuality is not genetic. If it were, it could not be altered by choice. The apostle Paul writes, "... but such were (past tense) some of you..." (1 Cor 6:11).

Bible believing Christians should display compassion to homosexual people in accordance with God's gracious stance towards humanity - firmly to call sin, sin, and display compassion.

The Western focus on individualism is on individual rights and freedom; in Africa the focus is on ensuring community harmony. Thus on issues of sexuality, African Christians see same-sex relations as harming family and community life while some Western Christians see them as an expression of individual human rights, freedom and identity.

Changing God's definition of marriage to include homosexual behaviour is sinful, harmful, and contrary to the Bible (Gen. 2:23-24). Like all other temptations, homosexual temptations are invitations to sin and, therefore, must be resisted or fled from (Rom 13:14). Sexual lust – whether directed at one's own or the opposite gender – or at anything else – is sin. Therefore, one who is tempted by homosexual desire must be committed to purity of thought, not just of behaviour (Mat. 5:27-28; 2 Cor. 10:5). If we linger over these desires or gratify them, we are sinning (James 1:13-15). Chastity is not repressive but frees us from using others for selfish gratification and enables us to love others as Christ loves us.

Marriage between a man and a woman is a model of Christ and the church, fulfilling God's design and purpose for sexuality. God's description of the work of His Son Jesus Christ as the sacrifice of a husband for his bride tells us that He made us male and female to display more fully the glory of His Son in relationship to His bride. So the foundation for marriage displays the covenant love of God sealed with solemn vows.

We need to explore further the biblical, theological and pastoral response to polygamous people when they become Christian with reference to the status and care of all struggling members involved.

ADDRESSING THE HEART

Archbishop Eliud Wabukhala, the former Primate of Kenya, the present chairman of the Ethics and anti-Corruption Commission of Kenya with over 1000 employees, spoke of his calling in this post as Christian ministry in the market-place. He led a discussion on the issue "Why with its significant presence in many East African countries has the church failed in addressing the issue of corruption, even in its own ranks?"

He suggested that corruption can be curtailed by legislation or prosecution but not ended. It is a matter of the heart. The concept of sin in Africa is purely relational - undermining community and family relationships. If I can steal from you and you do not know it, there is no problem since I can still be your friend. There is no concept of sin against God.

So when a revival brother or sister says they are saved, what are they saved from? In African culture the issues are shame, guilt and pain, not sin against God. And how are they showing they are being saved through transformation of their behaviour?

How does the death of Jesus relate to these? An answer is that Jesus is of one blood with us by his incarnation (Hebrews 2:14 "Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.") As his blood brother or sister we should do what he says is the will of God. So our disobedience is to God. Our brother Jesus has exchanged our sin (against God and others) and our shame for his righteousness. There is a need to develop our understanding of salvation and the atonement in relation to African ideas of taboo, shame and guilt.

He encouraged the development of Integrity clubs in schools. He emphasized the need to train young children in integrity as they will occupy influential positions in later years.

We will continue our work on these and other theological issues for our churches in our own provinces.

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