

SILENCE OF THE LAMB: What are the righteous doing for Kenya's little and poor?

I once saw a UNICEF poster of a child who, when asked what it wanted to be when it grew up, replied "ALIVE!" Life is a basic right that must never be forgotten by activists, including religious leaders. Anything that diminishes or degrades life is an injustice. The purpose of all social economic and political activities of government at all levels is to enhance and protect life. I hold the ancient Greek position that the government has only one purpose: to improve the lives of citizens. The travesty is this - our government through its policies is methodically undermining the foundation upon which such should be achieved. Economic hard times are now upon us. Blogger Ephraim Njenga had [shown](#) that a widespread collapse of the economy is unlikely. Instead, he predicted that it would be a slow and painful death.

The [Psalmist](#) (Psalm 11:3) raises a question Kenyans should ask, given our circumstances: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" "Foundations", here, refers to those things on which society rests, or by which it sustains social order. Things are in a topsy-turvy state here. Much is out of order and off-course, both in Church and State. People despise and disregard laws, which make the foundations of government. They pervert judgment, and justice stands afar off. The doctrines and principles of religion are subverted, so that there is no standing, either in a political or religious sense. Amazingly the political class is setting standards for the religious, and the religious are failing to push the government to protect the lives of Kenyans.

In the conduct of business in today's Kenya, we must question whether our present national economic policies promote or harm the wellbeing of a majority of Kenyans. The global monetary crisis of 2008 was caused by defying the principles of not spending what you don't have and not living beyond one's means. On such principles are sound economies built, yet they are once again being deliberately violated. Our leaders delude themselves that they can violate the rules, and that can build up their own storehouses while exploiting citizens. That appears to be their governing philosophy.

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Our government has demonstrated a reckless extravagance in the administration of the nation's resources. Former mayor of Kansas City, Mr. Mark Funkhouser, [states](#) that the government in a democracy is essentially a conservative institution. It creates and sustains markets, enforces contracts, protects private property, and produces systems of education and infrastructure that allows commerce to function efficiently.

In its wisdom or lack thereof, the Jubilee administration has presided over a massive debt, ballooning annual public spending from KShs 1.2 trillion to over Sh2.5 trillion in six years. This growth in spending rates outstrips the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate. On the other hand, debt obligations shot up this year as semi-concessional and commercial loans contracted over the last five years came due. As it was reported in the [Business Daily](#), "Treasury spent Sh57 out of every Sh100 it collected in July and August to service debt." Debt repayments consumed Sh118.08 billion in the first two months of this fiscal year, more than three times the amount recorded in the same period last year and more than half of total tax collections. Last year, it was less than a fifth. Despite the Kenya Revenue Authority increasing the taxes it collected, funds available for expenditure were far less.

The repayments, which are now a priority, are exerting pressure on the exchequer, and eating into other expenditure, including disbursements to counties. Treasury CS Henry Rotich, in the Statement of Actual Revenues and Net Exchequer Issues as at end of August, admitted that only 15 of the 47 counties had received cash from the Exchequer in the first two months of this financial year. But, in the period, the government spent a whopping Sh133.23 billion on loan repayments, making that the second single largest spend after such recurrent expenditures as salaries, allowances and administrative expenses.

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Kenyans are buckling under the pressure. Essential services are now neglected.

Imposition of Value Added Tax (VAT) on fuel in September, ostensibly to cover the hole in the budget, has had a disastrous effect on Kenyans. The Kenya Association of Manufacturers warned that retailers would be hard hit, with the heaviest burden borne by the poorest demographic. It is now real and will ensnare us for a long time.

Consider how this greed has played in the present maize crisis. Our food security policies reveal a deliberate determination to destroy foundations on which the lives of Kenyans depend. Food security is synonymous with maize supply. Therefore, current and past food policymakers attached great importance to the commodity, which is not only the main staple food but also the most common crop grown by poor, rural households for food.

The government set agents like the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) to address the twin challenges facing the sector. The first challenge is food prices. Policymakers face the dilemma of how to keep farm prices high enough to motivate farmers to keep at production while keeping the maize meal prices low enough for consumers. The second is the production stability, which also involves dealing with food prices, a major hindrance to smallholder productivity growth and food security.

This government hides behind liberalization of maize markets to allow maize cartels to import maize at the expense of ordinary Kenyan farmers. Ariga and Jayne in their survey - [Maize Trade and Marketing Policy Interventions of 2007](#) - noted how prior to the market liberalization of the late 1980s, the NCPB received enough public funds to purchase between five and eight million bags of maize per annum. The purchase constituted more than a half of the domestically traded maize output. The NCPB set its maize purchase prices higher than prevailing market prices in the maize breadbasket areas of Western Kenya. Consequently, the incomes and living standards of many farmers improved, including large-scale farmers, who depended on the NCPB's continuing to offer support prices for maize. Ariga and Jayne infer that by offering above-market support prices, the NCPB used its market power and access to the Treasury to block private sector investment in maize wholesaling and storage.

The failure of the current government to support the role of the NCPB in favor of the private sector (cartels) is what has plunged the sector into the present crisis. This policy shift has handed the market to private traders. A Tegemeo Institute

/Egerton University survey recently revealed how most small farmers in Kenya now sell their maize to private traders who then sell it to the NCPB. The survey shows that the first-order effects of NCPB price-raising operations over the past decade have been to transfer income from (poorer) maize purchasing rural households and urban consumers to larger maize-selling farms.

Elliot Mghenyi, a senior economist at the World Bank, in *Food Pricing Policy, Rural Poverty and the Distribution of Income: Insights from Maize in Kenya*, a [paper](#) presented at the International Agricultural Economics Tri-Annual Meetings in Australia, found that a 20 percent reduction in maize market prices would reduce rural headcount poverty rates and transfer income from a small proportion of maize surplus farmers to most farmers in rural Kenya. Mghenyi's analysis considers these second-order effects by considering both adjustments in production and consumption, and the accompanying responses on the rural wage labor market.

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This government shamelessly robs from its poor citizens to reward the large farmers and maize cartels. Basic questions about political ideologies come down to how we ask, and answer, questions about the production and the distribution of national wealth. Which is why economic judgments are crucial. The greatest potential for pro-poor income growth is likely to involve maize productivity growth.

These foundations are being destroyed not for lack of keen policymakers, but as Gitau Githongo, a Nairobi-based economics commentator, observed, senior public officials are motivated more by personal interests than by public service and even outright nepotism and tribalism, spurious contracting in implementing policy initiatives in the key sectors of health, agriculture, and infrastructure. It is disheartening that public officials are exploiting for personal gain the opportunities provided by an unjust system and not working on principles anymore.

What can the righteous do? What should they do to promote justice? This form of

corruption is a curse on any country; it is a plague on the poor, an enemy of justice, and anathema to all religious beliefs. Is it the responsibility of non-State actors to force such a miracle - or hold responsible those supporting evil deeds? No. It has to be fought. The first responsibility rests with the nationals of the country concerned. If the lukewarm response by parliamentarians or the silence of the Church is something to go by, then ordinary Kenyans are in for a really hard time. Too many politicians have forgotten that government's only purpose is to improve citizens' lives. They believe it's there to improve *their* lives.

While addressing us senior church leaders at the Lutheran International Conference on Ethics and Economy in September 1993, Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere cautioned that we cannot have "a just Africa" if we limit ourselves to one of these rights - civic, social or economic rights alone. In any social unit, they are all interlinked, and the only priority should be to be active on all rights. He emphasized: "Each of us has the responsibility to use his or her own judgment on how we can contribute maximally to building a better world for mankind to live and work in."

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This is not the time for the righteous or the just to be silent! The German Evangelical Church made a public declaration of guilt in April 1950, for it did not address the Nazi regime's atrocious policies. It [stated](#): "We confess that we have become guilty before the God of compassion by our omission and silence and thus share the blame for the terrible crimes committed against the Jews by members of our nation". If the German Church judged its complicity as sin against God, it follows that the Kenyan Church that is so cozy with architects of these unjust policies is a sinner of the same degree.

The Church in Kenya will do well to heed Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's directions, who in his seminal work [No Rusty Swords](#), instructed: "There are three possible ways in which the Church can act towards the State. In the first place, as has been said, it can ask the State whether its actions are legitimate and under its character as State, i.e. it can throw the State back on its responsibilities. Second,

it can aid the victims of State action. The Church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering in society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. 'Do good to all men.' In both these courses of action, the Church serves the free State in its freeway, and when laws are changed the Church may in no way withdraw from these two tasks. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but also to put a spoke in the wheel itself. Such action would be direct political action and is only desirable when the Church sees the State fail in its function of creating law and order."

In 1946, United States' president Harry Truman sent General George C. Marshall to China to broker peace between the warring factions of Communists and nationalists. While he failed, what he said upon his return is worth our attention: "We are in the middle of a world revolution and I don't mean Communism. The revolution I am talking about is that of 'the little poor people' all over the world. They are beginning to learn that there is life and to learn what they are missing." Not long after he spoke these words, colonial empires were dismantled first in Asia, then in Africa and Latin America.

The poor will also want to have food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities of life. They will demand to live without fear, and aspire to work for their own living. For them, freedom will be imperative, at least to reject decisions affecting their lives but made without their participation. There is an undeniable correlation between economics and peace. Over the past few days, French citizens wearing yellow vests have been out on the streets of Paris, fighting against unfair government policies, particularly high fuel prices! In India, farmers are mounting a protest in New Delhi because of poor farm prices.

For men to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change, they must be intensely discontented, yet not destitute. They must have the feeling that comes by the possession of some potent doctrine and have access to a source of irresistible power. They must also have an extravagant hope, a conception of the prospects and potentialities of the future. These men and women will defy all odds and be ignorant of the difficulties involved in their vast undertaking. Hope springs eternal for such people across Kenya.

NOT YET UHURU: What Kenya can learn from Cuba's healthcare system

In his famous song [Ayee Africa ee Africa oo Lipanda](#)? (Ah Africa where is your independence?), the young Congolese musician Franklin Boukaka questioned the essence of independence from oppressive colonial rule. Why would the new African leaders indulge in luxuries and power while the masses they led were confined to squalor in his native Congo Brazzaville?

This, of all of Boukaka's songs, was most popular on radio in the 1970s and remains to date. I doubt that the Voice of Kenya (VoK) radio presenters knew that they were playing a song outlawed in the country of its origin. A nimbus of sweetness in the music concealed the song's subversive message. The emphatic climax of the song posed three questions: "I thought the colonisers left? Who then became independent? Ayee Africa where is your independence?"

The singer rebukes the insensitivity of the leaders to the needs of their citizens. One of the most beautiful African voices was, however, extinguished forever. His song earned him silence on February 22, 1972. Boukaka was [executed](#) on the orders of Joachim Opango in the crisis following a coup d'état that failed to topple [Marien Ngouabi](#). However, his voice will continue to haunt our present context in Kenya and Africa as long as the benefits of our freedom are not realised.

Time has revealed the yawning gulf between the independence aspirations our forbearers struggled for and the realities we have experienced. The promissory note of freedom and prosperity has been unhonoured. The majority of Kenyans could not cash it. To paraphrase American civil rights icon Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it has been returned marked "insufficient funds". What was the point of the sacrifice for self-rule if *wananchi* (ordinary Kenyans) would be subjugated to oppressive poverty? Whose independence was this?

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The African leaders of the colonial days were clear about what they demanded. Freedom. While attending the [American Committee of Africa's Freedom Day in 1959](#), Hon. Tom Mboya, the then Secretary General of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) - who had just been elected head of the Pan-African people's Congress in Accra, Ghana - gave a revealing interview to American journalists in a session with the National Broadcasting Corporation's *The Press*. He was articulate, expressing an urgent need for independence. Mboya understood freedom to be achieving the right to self-determination and to have a government elected by the people, not imposed on them and, therefore, one that was responsible for and accountable to the people. That was the reason for the struggle for independence all over Africa.

The colonialist perceived Africans to be too tribal to rule themselves without resorting to chaos. Perhaps this is why the host, [during the interview](#), pejoratively reminded Hon. Mboya that with freedom there goes responsibility for self-government. She expressed her apprehension about the ability and readiness of Africans to self-govern with these questions: "Now, how can you say that people are prepared for such a responsibility when illiteracy is 90 per cent in many parts of Africa? When governmental experience personally for many is tribal and there is major dependence for foreign aid for economic development...?"

Hon. Mboya concurred with her when he recognised the need for literacy and development in form of better roads and schools. He pointed out that "... the motive behind our struggle for independence is our recognition that these things are not possible under colonialism." He refuted her characterisation of Africans, identifying it as a colonial fallacy.

The vision of achieving independence to advance ordinary African people described development in terms of people's welfare, not economic indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Product or economic growth. It concurred with latter-day economists like [Edgar Owens](#) (1987) who suggests that development occurs when there is development of people (human development) and not development of things. According to the [World](#)

[Development Report](#) (WDR 1991), “*The challenge of development, is to improve the quality of life, better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and a richer cultural life.*”

It is this nexus between development and independence that Hon. Mboya had in mind when [he said](#): “It is when people have attained independence that programmes such as more education, more hospitals, better roads, better houses can be implemented by a government concerned for its people.”

The Cuban example

The Cuba experience backs Hon. Mboya’s assertion, although he spoke before the Cuban revolution had taken place. The 1959 Cuban revolution that brought Fidel Castro to leadership transformed the tiny Caribbean Island of [seven million people](#). Castro created a socialist programme that focused on transforming the lives of ordinary Cubans. Consequently, they were provided a completely free education system uniquely adapted to Cuban needs, from nursery to university. Douglas Kellner’s, in *Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara [World Leaders Past and Present](#)*, explains how prior to 1959, the official literacy rate for Cuba was between 60 per cent and 76 per cent. This was occasioned by both lack of education access in rural areas and a shortage of instructors. The Cuban government under Fidel Castro, beginning in 1961, focused on the countryside by constructing schools and training new teachers who taught the predominantly illiterate peasants (*guajiros*). At the end of the campaign, the national literacy rate rose to 96 per cent. By 2009, according to a 2012 Central Intelligence Agency report, literacy levels across the population of Cuba were 99.83 per cent. This became the foundation of the development of the Cuban people. Again, it was the citizens who volunteered to achieve this.

According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), Cuba’s healthcare system is an example for all countries of the world. It is recognised for its excellence and efficiency. Those responsible for its success include family physicians, nurses and other health workers who labour to deliver primary healthcare and preventive services to their cluster of patients. It is a very localised system; the patients and their caregivers live in the same community. There are now about 2,500 patients per physician-headed office at the primary care level. Their healthcare is premised on the preventive health system, which has produced positive results.

As a result, Cuba's vaccination rates are among the highest in the world. The country's life expectancy of 77 years is exceedingly impressive for a developing country. The infant mortality rate in Cuba has fallen from more than 80 per 1,000 live births in the 1950s to less than 5 per 1,000. The improved health outcomes are also be attributed to improvements in nutrition and education, which are key variables that address the social determinants of health. Today, health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum.

Despite its extremely limited resources and the negative impact of the American blockade and economic sanctions for more than half a century, Cuba has managed to guarantee access to healthcare for all segments of the population, which has enabled the country to obtain results similar to those of the most developed nations.

Cuba's experience mocks our post-independence achievements. Our literacy levels are most disturbing. The key findings of [Kenya's national adult literacy survey](#) in 2007 indicated that, on average, 38.5 per cent of the Kenyan adult population is illiterate, implying that more than one in three adults cannot read or write. This is despite the fact that they have been major increases in enrolment in educational institutions at all levels, and a plethora of education commissions constituted to rectify the education conundrum Kenya has faced since independence. Shockingly, this was almost where Cuba was in 1959.

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President Uhuru Kenyatta's decision to invite 100 [Cuban doctors](#) to serve Kenyans, therefore, speaks to us with a forked tongue. We are grateful that these specialists are contributing to ease the pressing healthcare needs in our hospitals. However, it should concern us gravely that the government refuses to undertake the arduous task of developing Kenya's healthcare system to Cuban levels. Why import Cuban doctors when adopting their system is within our reach?

The celebrated Universal Healthcare proposal in the Jubilee government's [Big 4 Agenda](#) misses the point of our healthcare needs. It assumes a solution by availing

financial resources. It, therefore, proposes to reduce the cost and ensure universal access to quality and affordable healthcare by 2022. The government plans to ensure that every Kenyan is covered under the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) medical insurance cover. This plan will require: a strong collaboration between the NHIF and private sector insurance providers; reviewing the rules governing private insurers; lowering the cost of coverage; protecting both the government and Kenyans from fraud and abuse; and letting private insurers to invest more in providing medical coverage.

This solution is set up to profit the insurers and other suppliers of medical products rather than ordinary Kenyans. We stumble not for lack of examples to emulate, but for refusal to care. WHO [notes](#) that lack of access to healthcare in most parts of the world springs not from lack of resources, but from a lack of political will on the part of leaders to protect their most vulnerable populations.

With limited resources, the Cuban health care system has solved problems that ours has yet to address. Even though their healthcare system addresses those problems in ways that grew out of Cuba's peculiar political and economic history, the system they have created — with a physician for everyone, an early focus on prevention, and clear attention to community health — may inform progress in other countries as well.

With the [strict economic embargo](#), Cuba has developed its own pharmaceutical industry and now not only manufactures most of the medications in its basic pharmacopeia but also invests in developing biotechnology expertise to become competitive with advanced countries.

On July 14, 2014, [WHO General Director Margaret Chan](#) urged nations to follow the example of Cuba and phase out the curative model, which is ineffective and more expensive. She noted that Cuba's healthcare system is based on preventive medicine and the results achieved are outstanding. "We sincerely hope that all of the world's inhabitants will have access to quality medical services, as they do in Cuba," she said.

Shouldn't we have developed access to health services first? Shouldn't we have provided for effective and relevant personnel and medicine before provision of funding? Shouldn't we be demanding an effective healthcare system that puts the lives of Kenyans above "tenderpreneurs"?

The spectre of revolt looms large

What did our leaders do once in power? What can explain the obscene affluence of a few in the sea of poor Kenyans? A 2014 survey conducted over a span of eight years by New World Wealth, a South African-based research firm exposed a grim picture of wealth distribution in Kenya. It showed that 46 per cent of the country's 43.1 million people live below the poverty line, surviving on less than Sh172 (\$2) a day. The report further stated that: "nearly two-thirds of Kenya's Sh4.3 trillion (\$50 billion) economy is controlled by a tiny clique of 8,300 super-wealthy individuals, highlighting the huge inequality between the rich and the poor".

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Inequality is immoral. Moreover, the proportions we have here kills. Göran Therborn, who has appropriately titled his book [*The Killing Fields of Inequality*](#), highlights several ways in which inequality kills. It violates basic human rights. It excludes "people from possibilities produced by human development." It is divisive; it tears people and families apart, it creates exorbitant squandering, self-indulgent profligacy and, therefore, dehumanises both the poor and the rich.

This appalling situation is a result of political leadership bereft of a moral guiding philosophy. Leadership is viewed in transactional and contractual terms; it is a means to acquire wealth. This may explain why we are confronted on a daily basis with grand scandals of greed, corruption, and looting of public or state resources. Isn't this what [*Jean-Francois Bayart*](#) described as the "politics of the belly"? Do leaders care that they took an oath to serve the people of Kenya?

Prof. Aloo Mojola of St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya, explains our reality as one "peopled with many atomistic leaders and a populace whose one and only preoccupation is personal gain and aggrandisement at whatever cost." He further observes that for the vast majority, the present African situation could simply be characterised as Hobbesian. This description is derived from the words of the

English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who in the mid-17th century wrote in his classic text *Leviathan* (1651): “The condition of man ... is a condition of everyone against everyone...in such a condition there is no place for industry...” Sadly, for these Hobbesians, “the notion of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place...force and fraud are...(the) two cardinal virtues”.

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Unless our leaders adopt a covenantal approach that obliges leadership to better the lives of ordinary citizens, we will be stuck in this quagmire. Our leaders must develop a political philosophy that puts Kenyans at the centre of their agenda. The depth of our problem is explicit, particularly when government policies lean more towards sustaining local and foreign entrepreneurs rather than solving citizens’ problems.

What options remain for citizens when their government fails perpetually to secure their wellbeing? [Thomas Jefferson](#) and his colleagues in the American Declaration for the Independence of 1776 were emphatic that the task of government was securing its citizens’ rights to certain unalienable rights which were: “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” It further provided for redress if the government fails to live up to this call when it stated: “That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

The spectre of revolt looms large over Kenya. The youth have lost faith in law reforms or societal reorganisation. They dismiss the “[building of bridges](#)” - the now famous handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Rt. (Hon.) Raila Odinga - as a political gimmick that is slowing down the country’s transformation. Revolution is what they are working at. I doubt that they have thought through the end-product of their craving.

Tanzania's founding President Dr. Julius Nyerere was disturbed and horrified when he realised that he had become the architect of a government-sponsored system of inequality. He was moved to do something about it. His *Ujamaa* system of African socialism offered a response and attempt to remedy this situation. Aren't our political leaders able to develop a coherent philosophy to shape our nation's development agenda?

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Since political leaders have failed Kenyans in this respect, can religious leaders provide alternative leadership and nudge the country towards the poor who are perpetually left out? The similarities between Kenya and Latin American countries are striking. [David Tombs, in *Latin American Liberation Theology*](#), illustrates how the great Latin American independence movements, which had promised liberation and new hope through independence from the Iberian empire, only benefitted an elite sector of society. Here the Creole class assumed governance replacing the *peninsulares*, yet they did little to alleviate the struggles of the lower classes.

The clergy and theologians in Latin America were on the vanguard of change in addressing the grievances of the poor and transformation of their society. During the [Conference of Latin American Bishops held in 1968 in Medellin, Colombia](#), the bishops agreed that the Church should take "a preferential option for the poor".

One of the architects of this movement was Father Gustavo Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic priest from Peru, who acknowledged to have been inspired by the Cuban revolution of 1959. He laid out clearly the concepts he referenced during this talk in 1968 in his 1971 magnum opus, "A Theology of Liberation". Consequently, liberation theology emerged as a new way of "being human and Christian". In proposing a "preferential option for the poor," the Church was encouraged to extend its work to directly address the struggles of the impoverished and to work specifically to ameliorate "physical and spiritual oppression".

Rather than small ineffective reforms, liberation theology supported work towards

systemic change and even the possibility of revolution as a means of freeing the poor from oppression. While violence was not encouraged, it was justified as a possible last resort or necessity of the revolution.

We must credit liberation theology for changing the role of the Church in Peru and all of Latin America forever. By giving a voice to the impoverished, liberation theology held the Church accountable for the welfare of the lower classes, recognising the essential role of social justice in Christian teachings. The Christians demanded that the Church do more than simple charity and work towards playing a more active role in the promotion of systemic change. This movement realigned the power structures of Latin American society and showed that religion could deliver change in society by forcing the hands of politics.

Where are the Kenyan theologians who will develop a theology that will focus the Church away from solely eternal salvation to the more pressing necessity of earthly liberation of the poor from oppression and suffering? The genius of the religious figures like Gustavo Gutiérrez was in integrating the liberation of the working class into Biblical interpretation.

Independence in Kenya has proved not to be the low-lying fruit ordinary folks anticipated. Prof. Micere Githae Mugo's (1973) poem "*I Took My Son by the Hand*", in David Rubadiri (ed), (1989), depicts this sorry state in the dialogue between a mother and her son who yearned for the fruits of independence.

"Mother?" he asked, "Do we have *matunda ya uhuru* in our hut?"

Mother: "I laughed foolishly"

Son: "Mother!"

Mother: "Yes son? "

Son: "Do we have some?"

Mother: "Silence..."

Son: May I eat one, when we get there?

Mother: "Move on son darkness is looming fast around us".

There is a possibility to reorient the policies of our nation towards the vulnerable.

It should take all of us to achieve this – the government, civil society, and religious communities. If we do not sincerely address the dire challenges faced by the poor, we must get ready for chaos.

AN ODE TO SILENCE: The Church's abdication of its role in society

The Church in Kenya struggles in silence while endemic corruption ravages the public and private sectors of the country. On this matter, I'd rather lament with [Prophet Jeremiah](#) when he supplicated the appalling backsliding of his people by asking: "Is there no Balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is the wound of my people not healed?", rather than sing in faith, the Negro spiritual affirming: "There is a balm in Gilead to heal a sick, sick soul..."

Wounds inflicted by corruption on this nation will need a more "potent balm", yes, more than an "expert physician", for neither the laws enacted so far nor the commission instituted to deal with the scourge have proven effective.

The law is clear: Corruption, active and passive bribery, abuse of office and bribing a foreign public official are outlawed under the Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act 2003, which is further reinforced with the Bribery Act of 2016 ostensibly to aid in the fight against the supply side of corruption.

Comprehensive enforcement of Kenya's anti-corruption framework, however, remains a challenge because of weak and corrupt public institutions.

But in choosing silence in the face of this obscene level of corruption, perhaps at the counsel of the English poet Thomas Carlyle ("Silence is Gold") or the American rock song by the Tremeloes ("Silence is Golden, but my eyes still see, Silence is Golden, but my eyes still see..."), the Kenyan Church is abdicating its unique and vital role in society. What has become of the once-vibrant voices

within the Church who challenged the draconian Moi rule, risking their lives for a just cause?

Then the Church took a radical and militant approach. It was not afraid to say, like the prophets of old: “Thus says the Lord...” It had clarity on matters of national importance affecting the people, unlike its counterparts today, who are even failing to define their own mandate.

Pope Benedict XVI is emphatic about the role the Church should play in society. He [defines](#) the Church’s role in the political sphere as primarily education (understood not as schooling, no matter how important that is): “The Church must awaken man’s receptivity to the truth, to God, and thus to the power of conscience. It must give men and women the courage to live according to their conscience and so keep open the narrow pass between anarchy and tyranny, which is none other than the narrow way of peace.”

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He also highlights the need for society, both local and global, to recover the divine element in our humanity, which includes moral consensus, without which society flounders and humanity is endangered.

There are some though, who would rather have an aloof Church and one that is measured in contentious matters of public concern. Stephen Carter, the Yale scholar, in his book, [The Culture of Disbelief](#), laments that “our public culture more and more prefers religion as something without political significance, less an independent moral force than a quietly irrelevant moralizer, never heard, rarely seen.”

Could it be that the dearth of the prophetic voice is a sign of a Church struggling to define itself and its societal role in the post-2003 era? Kenya needs to hear what the Church is thinking and saying on corruption. The Church cannot extricate itself from politics because it cannot refrain from the task of reflecting on the implications of its faith within our political context. It has reason to intervene, for we cannot afford the haemorrhaging of this country through

corruption.

A 2016 [survey](#) released by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) indicated that the rate of economic crimes in Kenya is 25 per cent above the global average. It further revealed that every record set against stealing is broken. In the year 2015 alone, economic crimes rose to 61 per cent from 52 per cent in 2014 and maybe worse today. Philip Kinisu, a retired auditor and a former chairman of the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) [told Reuters](#): “Kenya is losing a third of its State budget - the equivalent of about \$6 billion (KShs. 608 billion) - to corruption every year.”

Our plight did not escape the notice of former United States President Barack Obama during his visit in 2015. He rightly criticised Kenya’s corruption, inequality, and tribalism before an audience, which included President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Cabinet, at Kasarani Sports Centre in Nairobi.

Obama [quoted a study](#) showing that every year corruption costs Kenya 250,000 jobs. He said rising prosperity in the economy was leaving out the vast majority of the people, the burden of which is borne by the poor.

This is exactly what Samuel Paul of the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore established in “*Corruption: Who Will Bell the Cat?*” His [study](#) found that in five Indian cities, poor households were much more likely to pay “speed money” for public services than households in general. Consequently, when access to public goods and services requires a bribe, the poor may be excluded. Given their lack of political influence, the poor may even be asked to pay more than people with higher incomes. Furthermore, when corruption results in shoddy public services, the poor lack the resources to pursue “exit” options, such as private schooling, health care or power generation.

We can learn from the struggles of the 1980s, during which Galia Sabar, Professor of African Studies at Tel Aviv University, observed that limited political association paralysed the process of transforming information and ideas into action. As such, she gave credence to the emergence of informal individual activism and the culture of defiance that was growing day by day.

On the frontline of Kenya’s individual Church activism during the Moi era were the Anglican Church’s Bishop Henry Okullu of Maseno South Diocese, Bishop Alexander Muge of the Diocese of Eldoret, Bishop David Gitari, the Anglican

prelate of Mt. Kenya East diocese, and Rev. Timothy Njoya, a moderator in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). These clerics triggered the much-needed change in the country through their political engagements.

Citing the February 1990 edition of *Finance* magazine, Sabar in [*“Politics and Power in the Kenyan Public and Recent Events: the Church of the Province of Kenya*](#), said: “Irrespective of how much we might belittle their social standing, the clerics represent the most cohesively structured, the most firmly organised and the most solidly unified institution in the country.”

Stephen Kapinde, a lecturer at Pwani University’s Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, observes how the vitality of the pulpit as a stable platform for change and the sermons of Bishop Gitari (at a time when the state had censored nearly everyone and proscribed gatherings of more than three people) gave credence to the Church in political discourses. The prelate and his peers developed a culture of resistance through the pulpit.

Prof. Robert Press, in his book, *Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Civil Liberties*, gave more insight into this culture by observing that:

Individual activists can only do so much in their role as ice-breakers in the reform process. Organizational activists build on their advances but need the presence of members of the public at their events to make a serious bid for reforms. The public, in turn, needs the forum for the activists to express their discontent. Together the resistance sends signals to the regime, the public and international officials and agencies that the demands for change have substance and visible public support.

For this reason, the clergy blazed the trail for democratic reforms from their pulpits. Amazingly, such activism was thought by many to defile the pulpit, while in essence, the clerics used the space to liberate the people of Kenya, thereby living up to their calling to be “salt” and “light” in the world.

The contrast is huge today – pulpits are not as sacrosanct and neither are their messages. The frequency with which politicians have graced churches with goodies from corruption, coupled with the silence of clerics, is troubling.

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For instance, Deputy President William Ruto has been a [darling of Churches](#) during funds drives, notwithstanding the fact that he has been named in a litany of [corruption-related scandals](#). Indeed, former Prime Minister Raila Odinga in 2015 [described](#) him as “the high priest of corruption in Kenya.”

The Anglican Church had an explicit stand on the widespread habit of inviting public figures as guests of honour at fund-raising events. Following the Provincial Board of Christian Community Services consultation on “The Theology and Philosophy of Development” held at St. Julian Centre between 11th and 13th May, 1983, the Church issued protocols to protect the likely erosion of the Church’s prophetic role in society:

Inviting public figures as guests of honour at Church *harambees* or giving them prominence in a church function merely because of the money they bring is not in accordance with our Christian principles. It tends to silence the prophetic voice of our church leaders (A report of the CPK Consultation on Theology and Philosophy of Development, 1989: p. 5, ¶4).

Today, however, several Anglican Churches have overlooked this protocol and indulged the said politicians on their pulpits, thus diluting their prophetic voice. How would they escape the tag of being an accomplice to corruption? They should have heeded Joseph Kamaru’s warning in his song, *J. M. Kariuki*, “*gûtirí múicì na mùcudhìrìria*” (there is no difference between a thief and a mere observer).

The contrast is huge today - pulpits are not as sacrosanct and neither are their messages. The frequency with which politicians have graced churches with goodies from corruption, coupled with the silence of clerics, is troubling.

According to British evangelist and theologian G. Campbell Morgan, “Sacrilege is defined as taking something that belongs to God and using it profanely. But the worst kind of sacrilege is taking something and giving it to God when it means absolutely nothing to you.” If we accept this, then the Church would have committed double sacrilege in this indulgence: Knowingly giving platform to sanitise corrupt money in the name of God, and perpetuating delusion that that is

[investing in heaven.](#)

How do I answer my friend Joe Kobuthi's query: "What does it mean when the Church goes quiet or turns a blind eye to corruption to the extent that a politician like Ruto can claim his contributions to churches to be 'investing in heaven'?"

The Church, by indulging in questionable money being "invested" in its programmes, undermines its own ability to help the poor. Proper "investing in heaven" is investing in Christ. St. John Chrysostom (347-407 AD), one of the greatest Early Church Fathers of the 5th century, warned: "Of what use is it to weigh down Christ's table with golden cups when he himself is dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. Will you have a golden cup made but not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths woven of gold thread and not providing Christ himself with the clothes he needs? What profit is there in that?"

How do I answer my friend Joe Kobuthi's query: "What does it mean when the Church goes quiet or turns a blind eye to corruption to the extent that a politician like Ruto can claim his contributions to churches to be 'investing in heaven'?"

How about using one's position in government to save the annual 250,000 jobs lost to corruption? Wouldn't that give many Kenyans opportunities to feed their hungry, and not to leave them to stare at Church tables embellished with gold? Investing in heaven would mean putting to proper use the US\$6 billion lost to corruption to provide for proper health services and housing for homeless Kenyans.

The Kenyan public is livid at the multi-million-dollar scandals that have failed to result in high-profile convictions. They accuse politicians and top government officials of acting with impunity and encouraging graft by those in lower posts.

Again, Kinisu opines the real drive to stamp out corruption has to come from public pressure for change. Yet in an environment of fear and intimidation by corruption cartels and politicians, it becomes nearly impossible to set up any social movement against corruption.

A curious episode in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* is instructive, as

it well depicts our challenge on corruption:

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us”.

It is not freedom from corruption, but rather the freedom to take a stand against it, that we must all pursue. If the Church is to retain its credibility and relevance, I believe it needs to utilise its eminent position to influence public opinion on matters affecting the nation. I would like to believe that, sooner or later, it will recover its earlier prophetic fervour for the sake of the public good and provide the moral leadership we so desperately need today in the epic fight against corruption.

WADING INTO TROUBLED WATERS: A message to Kenya's youth

**This reflection is dedicated to my spiritual son, Jesse Masai, and several others like him who constantly wrestle with the question of their responsibility to the Republic in this season.*

An old proverb says, “We have not inherited this land from our forebears, we have borrowed it from our children.” Here, we are debtors and owe our children a prosperous future.

The extent to which we develop our democratic institutions, entrench the rule of law and build a prosperous economy shows our obligation towards them. The dream of a land of freedom, where individual rights are guaranteed and where all prosper is fast turning into a frightening nightmare. The once-abhorred Nyayo

era, marked with authoritarianism, state terror, press censorship and violation of human rights is back with a vengeance.

Throughout my writings, I have strenuously been trying to be non-partisan on party politics. This then is the article I thought I would never write: a candid assertion that a certain form of partisanship is now a moral necessity. The Jubilee government, as an institution, has become a danger to the rule of law and to the integrity of our democracy. The problem is not just President Uhuru Kenyatta; it's the larger political apparatus, including Parliament, that made a conscious decision to enable him.

In a multi-party system, non-partisanship works only if all players are consistent democratic actors and subject to independent institutions that safeguard democracy. If one of them is not predictably so, the space for non-partisanship evaporates. I am thus driven to believe that the best hope of defending the country from Uhuru's Jubilee enablers and saving the nation is to stage a public protest as Muthoni Nyanjiru and Nobel Laureate Professor Wangari Maathai did in 1922 and 1992, respectively. Protest against the government and Parliament until they get it right or implode!

The Jubilee government, as an institution, has become a danger to the rule of law and to the integrity of our democracy.

How can a prosperous future for our children be realised under these conditions? This is not how we pay the debt we owe our children. Today's youth must not allow us to squander that future. There is an urgent voice calling for action now: "Wade in the waters, children..." Can't we hear it?

The legendary Harriet Tubman, also known as "Moses" (who once had a US\$40,000 price tag on her head for "slave stealing"), sung this song to alert the runaway slaves she guided to freedom. The song signaled to runaways: "Use the river so the hounds can't trace you. Tonight is the moment for flight; move swiftly; the reaction will be fierce." Harriet speaks to us today: Now is the time: stop this backsliding, "wade into the waters", free our children from slavery. Wade into the waters, children!

This advice does not seem smart at first. Why would one want to jump into waters that God stirred up (described in the Bible as troubled)? For many Kenyans, the

failure of the opposition NASA to guide them to Canaan is troubled waters. Under persistent attacks - many of them seemingly minor - democratic institutions in Kenya have been eroded gradually until they have failed. The undermining of the independence of the electoral commission, the police service and the free press has rendered our democratic process useless. Our waters are troubled in at least two possible ways.

Lately, we have come to regard the government as a danger to the Constitution of Kenya 2010. It has proved unable or unwilling to block assaults on the rule of law. If these assaults are normalised, they will pose an existential threat to Kenya's future.

Secondly, our economy is being shackled with foreign debt. This act makes a mockery of the 2000 Jubilee campaign that pushed Western countries to forgive crippling foreign debts of the world's poorest countries, including Kenya. It is irresponsible to deliberately and unnecessarily enslave our children's future in debt, erasing their future ability to compete in this world.

There is an urgent voice calling for action now: "Wade in the waters, children..." Can't we hear it?

Francis A. Schaeffer, warning in his book *How Should We Then Live?* is instructive to us in Kenya: "If we...do not speak out as authoritarian governments grow from within or come from outside, eventually we or our children will be the enemy of society and the state. No truly authoritarian government can tolerate those who have real absolute by which to judge its arbitrary absolutes and who speak out and act upon that absolute."

A similar situation is playing out in a Kenya that negates the government's claim to construct a prosperous future for our children. Instead of addressing these challenges, the government elects to shut down media channels that expose its incompetency and locks up critics who question its legitimacy. This is a perfect recipe for national rebellion.

Fredrick Douglas warned: "The thing that is worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion." Failure to address the causes of disquiet - and instead opting to use unconstitutional means to silence people - will be the Achilles heel of this government. This may have a tragic ending.

When Laius, the King of Thebes, is told by the Oracle of Delphi that his son will kill him and sleep with his mother Jocasta, the king pierces his baby son's ankles and leaves him on a mountainside to die. This becomes the first of a sequence of events that leads to the Oracle's prophesy being fulfilled. For a shepherd finds the baby and takes him to King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth, who name him Oedipus and raise him as their own.

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Later, Oedipus seeks the help of the Oracle of Delphi to know his parentage. The Oracle tells him that he's destined to kill his father and sleep with his mother. Oedipus tries to run from this fate, but ends up running right into it. He kills Laius in a scuffle at a crossroads, not knowing he's his real father. Later, he wins the throne of Thebes and unknowingly marries his mother, Jocasta, after answering the riddle of the Sphinx. When they figure out the truth, Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus stabs out his own eyes. The Greek story ends in tragedy.

In the spiritual song - *Wade in the Waters* - those who will be blessed are urged to step into the waters first, before the angel of God comes. The song stresses meeting hardships with courage and "steady" faith; gather now and get ready, the healing is promised. Gather now, so that all will be among the first received and delivered by the gifts of grace that spring forth in dark times. While addressing young Germans in Stuttgart on the need to stand for human dignity, former United Nations Secretary-General Dr. Kofi Annan said: "You are not too young to lead, for to lead means to take responsibility and set example." He explained, "When leaders fail to lead, the people can lead and make leaders follow." For this very reason, youth in this country must *wade in the waters* and assume leadership to save their future.

But can we rely on the youth to deliver?

Harris Okongo Arara went to Chianda High School in Uyoma, Siaya County, the same school I attended. He was the best footballer and hockey player that the school ever produced. Upon completing his studies, Arara joined the Kenya Air Force. When he was in his 20s, he became an activist for change and courageously led the fight to end one-party dictatorship in Kenya. What he told a

Nairobi court about to sentence him to jail for sedition on September 24, 1988, expressed the values he stood for and the vision he had for Kenya. He declined to plead for leniency or mercy. With confidence, he dismissed the courts' right to judge him. Arara questioned why he should seek personal mercy while millions of Kenyans lived in misery. He was proud to join the company of those he called apostles, who attempted to rescue justice but found themselves in detention, prison or exile. He said:

The people of this nation are simply demanding their fundamental rights and freedoms. They are simply demanding their rights to a decent living, right to education, right to proper medical care, right to housing. In short, the right to be human beings. If that is sedition, so be it. These are the goals for which I have always fought, and for which I am prepared to die.

Arara was sentenced to a five-year jail term. This was his second stint in jail, having been in detention without trial for six years following the 1982 coup attempt. Arara had only been free for eight months at the time of this sentencing. He was wading into the troubled waters of the Nyayo era.

We learn history because through it we understand the sacrifices that were made before, so that when we make sacrifices we understand we're doing it on behalf of future generations. It is possible to resist oppressive laws enacted by Parliament that undermine the Constitution and degrade human dignity.

In 1922, for instance, 27-years old Harry Thuku, the leader of the East African Association, was arrested for acting and speaking against "forced labour of women on the roads". Officials of the nationalist association rallied African workers in Nairobi to go on strike. On March 15, transport workers, domestic workers and government employees deserted their workplaces and gathered in front of the police station where Thuku was being held. Makhan Singh, in *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, wrote: "As the crowd grew, a deputation of the East African Association, including Jomo Kenyatta, held a meeting with Acting Governor Sir Charles Bowring in his office."

According to Audrey Wipper, who wrote the chapter "*Kikuyu Women and the Harry Thuku Disturbances: Some Uniformities of Female Militancy in the Africa*" in the *Journal of the International African Institute*, Nyanjiru and her stepdaughter, Elizabeth Waruiru, were among the city's female workers who

came out to demonstrate. Nyanjiru was a Kikuyu woman who had moved from the village of Weithaga in the native reserves to Nairobi. Addressing the strikers, Jomo Kenyatta announced the deal the East African Association deputies had reached with the governor: Thuku could not be released, but the governor had promised him a fair trial. He then urged the demonstrators to disperse.

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Nyanjiru stood in the front of the crowd near Kenyatta as the demonstrators began leaving. She threw her dress over her shoulders and exposed her naked body, taunting the cowardice of the men and challenging them to stand up to Kenyatta. (In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, Nyanjiru is presented as a woman who is incensed by men's impotency against colonial oppression. She challenges men to swap their trousers for women's skirts.) Nyanjiru threatened to lead the demand for Harry Thuku's release if the men were too cowardly to do it.

The 300 women present ululated loudly. The strikers were galvanised by Nyanjiru's actions and the women's call to battle. Men who were beginning to disperse returned. A large section of the crowd rushed forward towards the armed guards. Nyanjiru stood only a few feet away from the guards, who had been on duty for 18 continuous hours. The guards kneeled and engaged their rifles at the command of the superintendent of police, Captain Carey.

In the end, 200 Kenyans died. Thuku was exiled, first to Kismayu, then to Marsabit, Witu and Lamu. But as Bryan Ngartia observed in *The Ageless Defiance of Muthoni Nyanjiru*, "the sacrifice wasn't all in futility. The tax was reduced from 16 shillings to 12 shillings and was never again raised for the sole purpose of filling labour needs. African grievances were given serious consideration." This was the seed of struggle that matured in the later independence of Kenya.

Where Are Those Songs? Micere Githae Mugo pleads with our mothers today:

Where are those songs / my mother and yours / always sang / fitting rhythms / to the whole / vast span of life/? [...] Sing Daughter sing [...] sing/simple songs/for the people/for all to hear/and learn/and sing/with you.

In 1992, Prof. Maathai led mothers of political prisoners detained by the Moi

regime to occupy Freedom Corner in Nairobi's Uhuru Park. The government, in now familiar style, dispatched armed police to evict the women, who stripped naked in protest and defiance. Prof. Maathai was beaten unconscious and hospitalised, but the women of Freedom Corner eventually won. Prof. Maathai and her group of women also stopped President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi - at the zenith of his power - from building what would have been Times Tower, a complex associated with the ruling party, at Uhuru Park.

Women must *wade in the waters* and refuse to be silenced; they must fight for their children's future. In her contribution published in *The Inquiry* in 2013, titled "*Silence is a Woman*", Wambui wa Mwangi opposed the exclusionary, false, Gikuyu-centric narrative and ideological erasure of many other ethnic communities in the Kenyan story as told by Gikuyu men. She stresses: "Here, I also want to insist on the strong tradition within Gikuyu women's culture of resisting tyranny, oppression, domination, and hubristic *upumbafuness* by the men." Wambui is right to point us to the fact that authoritarianism has no ethnicity. We all sink under bad leadership.

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In shorthand, the song "*wade in the waters*" admonished the community not to be like the paralysed man, who seemed unable to seize the opportunity and betrayed to the authorities the one who saved him. The song pairs those who made it to safety with the victims who fell trying. For those who made it through: *who that dressed in blue?*

And in the description of baptism, a hinted memory of those lost in the middle passage:

Chilled body but not my soul...

We remember that their sacrifices have given us our freedom, made the rule of law possible and set us on the path of prosperity.

I am suggesting that in today's situation, we all should mount powerful public protest despite our party affiliation or policy position. Our demand should be: The rule of law as a threshold in Kenyan politics. Any party that endangers this value

must disqualify itself. We must insist on unadulterated implementation of Chapter 6 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. Period. Then, perhaps, we too would be *wading in the waters*.

Going forward, it is likely that public protest will be dealt with ruthlessly and may even be fatal for some, but there is gain for all that we strive for. In the face of brutality against dreams, let us consider the story of Joseph in the Bible. The brothers said, "Come, let us kill him and throw him into one of these wells...Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." (Gen. 37:20) Here the irony could not be more explicit. The very act intended to frustrate dreams by killing the dreamer becomes the beginning of a sequence of events that make the dreams come true. Joseph went on a winding journey from slavery, to Potiphar's house, to prison and finally to leadership in Egypt.

Let us demand the dreams of our children.

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THE APOCALYPSE NOW: Pathways to building a nation called Kenya

Kenya is on the brink of plummeting into the abyss of political catastrophe. The government and the opposition are locked in an existential contest for Kenya's leadership. Either the government will cement its hold on power by employing all means possible (illicit not excluded) or the opposition National Super Alliance (NASA) will wrench power in a way not yet anticipated (but adjudged illegal). Such is the fix that my people would say, "*Thuol odonjo e ko*" (The snake has entered the guard, would we salvage the milk or the gourd?)

Could it be that Kenya is headed for apocalyptic politics?

Critics of this government accuse it of wantonly undermining Kenya's democratic principles by infringing on democratic accountability, individual rights and the rule of law. This has been manifested in its preference for tyranny rather than dialogue as a response to pressure from the opposition and other critics. Toiling to deter and deal with dissidents, the State has turned to its vast repressive apparatus on Kenyans perceived as a threat.

The repeat election on 26 October exposed what has been a closely-kept secret: a government appearing strong on the outside but whose power remains brittle at its core.

The first victims of the State's assault have been democratic institutions. The opposition politicians are harassed and picked up by police on flimsy charges. Basic freedoms of expression and assembly have been restricted in practice, though not in law. Elections have become choreographed performances that are neither free nor fair. At its core, this assault has been motivated by the regime's desire to protect power and accumulate wealth. The government purports to run the country according to the tenets of Western democracy. What we have, however, is a democratic facade, paying lip service to those tenets even as they are subverted.

The repeat election on 26 October exposed what has been a closely-kept secret: a government appearing strong on the outside but whose power remains brittle at

its core. It is apparent that the regime projects a nimbus of invincibility that masks the shallow roots of its public support. What else would necessitate the massaging of votes, the muzzling of civil society organisations, the swamping of social media with propaganda and the hyping of approval ratings and other forms of manufactured consent?

NASA's hopes of assuming power have been reliant on the independence of the country's institutions. The opposition demands that the principles of democracy be applied in toto. When the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) failed to conduct a free and fair election on 8 August 2017, they said that these principles had been manipulated or distorted. The opposition threatened to unleash its final bullet, "*wacha kiumane*" (let hell break loose). This meant that it would arbitrate its case on the streets, thus confronting a government ready to crush protests even if lives were lost.

The opposition has a large and increasingly radicalised and aggrieved following. These people are determined to change their situation no matter the consequences - anarchy or death don't matter.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his book Not in God's Name, explained that: "Apocalyptic politics is the strange phenomenon of a revolutionary movement whose gaze is firmly fixed on the past. It arises at times of destabilising change and speaks to those who feel unjustly left behind."

In messianic politics, people believe that the destination is close and God is beckoning. "Hence the readiness of messianic militants to welcome even to initiate the terrors that proceed the last days", writes Michael Walzer. "Hence the strange politics of the worse the better and hence the will to sin, to risk any crime for the sake of the end."

The opposition's followers had high hopes of reaching "Canaan" this time around. The manipulation and illegality of the election stole this hope, and with it went the aspiration for change. They were stranded

*"wondering between two worlds,
one dead the other powerless to be born."*

(Matthew Arnold, Stanzas from the Grande

Chartreuse [c1850)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his book *Not in God's Name*, explained that: "Apocalyptic politics is the strange phenomenon of a revolutionary movement whose gaze is firmly fixed on the past. It arises at times of destabilising change and speaks to those who feel unjustly left behind." It is the longing for the end of time in the midst of time, the search for redemption now. That is why this political position suspends the normal rules that restrain people from murdering the innocent.

It is like Samson in the Temple of the Philistines, bringing down the building on his enemies but destroying himself in the process.

If the event of Raila's return from his USA trip is indicative of the future, then I am certain we are on the cusp of revolt and Armageddon. The disenfranchisement in the country must be addressed, and all should have an opportunity to prosper. With increasingly dim prospects for a livelihood, health care and a future to latch on to, the protesting opposition followers cannot be deader than they are already. It's already tragic.

Nowhere is this condition as explicit as in the myth of Sisyphus. Condemned by the gods to roll a rock to the top of a mountain, whereupon its own weight makes it fall back down again, Sisyphus was trapped in this perpetually futile labour. He was condemned to everlasting torment and the accompanying despair of knowing that his efforts were pointless. Efforts to bring about change in Kenya have also been futile. Hopes hinged on the Constitution of Kenya 2010 did not materialise.

Intriguingly, Albert Camus, the French philosopher, noticed defiance in Sisyphus at the moment he goes back down the mountain. The consciousness of his fate is the tragedy, yet consciousness also allows Sisyphus to scorn the gods, providing a small measure of satisfaction. There is a mingling of satisfaction and tragedy, which is reflected in the opposition followers' loaded scorn in the face of police brutality: "I would rather die standing than kneeling."

Yet we delude ourselves when we claim that the problems facing Kenya are due to individual politicians. Ignoring these seismic shifts that undermine the foundations of the country's democracy and fault Raila and his followers' street protests is also cheeky dishonesty.

The opposition's unexpected decision to go to the Supreme Court shifted the direction of events and possibly averted a grave bloody encounter. The Supreme Court judges, acting according to their conscience, kept Kenya on the narrow pass between anarchy and tyranny, on the narrow way of peace. In asserting their independence, they ruled to nullify the election and called for repeat polls. This salvaged the country by redirecting energies towards reforms. The opposition recognised that pursuing the reform of independent bodies would build lasting peace for the country, and therefore demanded changes and openness within the vilified IEBC.

The opposition also sought reforms of the laws that the Supreme Court applied to nullify the polls. They opted to regularise the "irregularities" and make illegalities "legal", so to speak. Parliament, without opposition members, made changes in law apparently to make it easy for Jubilee to win in the repeat polls. This was a significant and definitive decision that, as we shall learn, took the country away from the path of peace back to the sinking sands of uncertainty. The resulting confusion at the IEBC, working under duress and alleged pressure from the State, forced a key member of the commission to quit. The president is believed to have tacitly supported the confusion; he had to win in the repeat election and so made these decisions willfully.

Yet we delude ourselves when we claim that the problems facing Kenya are due to individual politicians. Ignoring these seismic shifts that undermine the foundations of the country's democracy and fault Raila and his followers' street protests is also cheeky dishonesty. Why could we not see the obvious in the president's decisions? That he first repudiated the faith on which the nation was founded - the rule of law and therefore the Judiciary and the Constitution. Then the precepts that governed the country, the independent institutions of the nation: the police force, IEBC, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, all which were so systematically strangled that they effectively operate under instruction "from anonymous sources" (guessing who these sources are is not difficult). The stifling of public freedoms and the vigour with which civil society organisations were hunted threatened the moral framework that gave us the impetus for a free society under the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

These are the terrifying decisions he made. They are the kind of decisions we are making all over the world at this time. The entire global monetary crisis of 2008 was based upon a framework that defies the moral law of God. This framework

allows you to violate the rules, to cheat in elections and to build your own storehouses while exploiting others and eliminating anyone who stands in your way. The truth has been simplified to the most elemental choice: agree or die. We have desecrated the very essence of human life, which is why the normal rules that restrain people from murdering the innocent are suspended. Very seldom do we talk about the right to be human. And we think we can do all of this with impunity? These are the issues that are strangling Kenya.

Consequently, the opposition lost patience. Essentially, it wanted a revolution without the slow process of transformation. Its decision to withdraw from the rescheduled election of 26 October 2017 - informed by the failure of the IEBC to act independently and to reform - reflects this frustration. In the determination to act for change, the opposition resorted to the setting up of People's Assemblies at the county levels across the nation, as it were, invoking the sovereignty of the people as enshrined in the Constitution. It won't accept Uhuru as president, instead demanding to swear in Odinga as the people's president (initially scheduled for the 12 December 2017 but which took place on 30 January 2018). The details of this and how it will sit in law is still opaque. Here are an ominous sign of imminent legal confrontations and conflicts.

These political protagonists look to use power in the place of persuasion, to use daggers instead of debate. There are no listening ears among them or their followers. The government resorts to tyranny and brutal force, while the opposition urges the masses to revolt and spread anarchy.

What Prof. Ogude observed of the post-Kenyatta State can be said of this regime - an increase in what may be called "an ethnocratic state" whose basic political rhetoric is nation-building, while in practice it undermines any real desire for nationhood.

What ails Kenya's politics is not ethnicity *per se*. The seismic events of 2002 - when the organised opposition seized power - proved that Kenyans can come round. Such coming together, however, has the potential to inflame violence, as we would witness five years later.

Prof. James Ogude, a Senior Research Fellow and Director at the Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship, University of Pretoria, exposed the popular use of "ethnicity as a means to establishing difference or exclusivity for political

expediency". Holders of power are bent on wantonly wrenching the thin web that binds Kenya. They dutifully ape the nation's founding fathers, who established the country on the ethnic exclusion of certain communities perceived to be a threat to the State. What Prof. Ogude observed of the post-Kenyatta State can be said of this regime - an increase in what may be called "an ethnocratic state" whose basic political rhetoric is nation-building, while in practice it undermines any real desire for nationhood. It is unfortunate that political leaders goad ethnic hostilities like the bullfighters in Khayeka, Kakamega County. They have weaponised ethnicity.

The real shame has been the failure to transition from ethnic-based to ideologically-based politics. Aggravating this situation is the absence of concrete class markings, which allows this void to be filled with tribalism. We are ruined when in the absence of proper political ideology, tribalism has filled the vacuum. Prof. Colin Leys, writing in the Institute of Development Studies Bulletin 7(3): *Underdevelopment in Kenya, The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* affirmed this when he said, "Tribalism is in the first instance an ideological phenomenon. Essentially, it consists in the fact that people identify other exploited people as the source of their insecurity and frustrations, rather than their common exploiters."

Of course, this does not happen "spontaneously". Kenyans are victims of political leaders who create this situation. The challenge, therefore, goes beyond individual politicians and tribalism, and to our refusal to agitate for the establishment of effective democratic institutions to serve all Kenyans.

Tribalism serves our politicians by retarding the development of mass class-consciousness, which in turn is achieved by deliberate recasting of such issues into tribal terms. Colins Legum, in his book *Africa Since Independence*, observes how "politicians seek to secure their class position by constructing inter-tribal patron-client hierarchies, defining social conflicts in terms of ethnic relationships..." What this argument reveals also is that, although ethnic categories have intrinsic reasons for existence, it is not a given that ethnic groups must develop on the basis of mutual hostility and competition.

The book of Genesis in the Bible is about the willingness to accord dignity to the other rather than see them as a threat. The classification of "others" as threats has enabled pathological dualism that, according to Sacks, "divides humanity into

children of darkness and of light, all good among us but all evil in the others”.

The book of Genesis in the Bible is about the willingness to accord dignity to the other rather than see them as a threat. The classification of “others” as threats has enabled pathological dualism that, according to Sacks, “divides humanity into children of darkness and of light, all good among us but all evil in the others”.

When a section of Kenyans would commit evil just to prevent Odinga from being president, we see an outright refusal to accept the partially good intentions of others with whom, according to Thomas Melton, “we are unconsciously proclaiming our own malice, our own intolerance, our own lack of realism, our own ethical and political quackery.” This kind of dualism must be defeated if Kenya is to become a nation.

One way out of this is role reversal. Rabbi Sacks suggests: “The way we learn not to commit evil is to experience an event from the perspective of the victim. That is what (Biblical) Joseph is forcing his brothers to do. He educates them in otherness through role reversal.”

Joseph forces his brothers to recognise that just as a brother can be a stranger (when kept at a distance), so a stranger can turn out to be a brother. Cain is able to commit murder because he asks, “Am I my brothers’ keeper?” He refuses to feel the pain of Abel but cares only about his rejected offering. On the contrary, in showing that he is his brother’s keeper, Judah’s repentance redeems not only his own earlier sin but also Cain’s. No wonder then that the nation of Israel began in Egypt with slaves so that they could know from the inside what it feels like to be on the other side.

Going forward, let truth be the foundation upon which Kenya is built. History is replete with evidence that truth can be betrayed and systems can be manipulated in the service of oppression and injustice. This has been the story of Kenya.

But aren’t these the challenges also confronting the human family now, calling us to look beyond those dangers? The opposition needs to remain committed to good governance and resist half-measure application of democratic principles, individual rights and the rule of law. The government that calls on all to respect the Constitution must also be exemplary in adhering to the tenets of the

Constitution. This is dealing with each other truthfully.

Addressing civil and political leaders and members of the diplomatic corps in the Presidential Palace in Prague on 26 September 2009, Pope Benedict XVI could have as well been addressing Kenya's stalemate today when he said: "The thirst for truth, beauty, and goodness, implanted in all men and women by the Creator, is meant to draw people together in the quest for justice, freedom, and peace." He questions what is more inhuman and destructive than the cynicism which would deny the grandeur of our human quest for truth, and the relativism that corrodes the very values which inspire the building of a united and fraternal world. It is imperative, therefore, to place confidence in our innate capacity to crave for and grasp the truth and allow this confidence to point us to work for the Kenya we want.

Our priority must be to pursue principle above pragmatism. To get there, we must admit that while pragmatism determines the greater part of politics, it must never be at the expense of moral principles.

Now, however, we need to also embrace the truth with all its ramifications. Kenyans have a capacity for doing right and upholding the principles of democracy, as demonstrated in the 2002 election and the referendum that yielded the 2010 Constitution. This will ensure an end to election theft. I doubt there is need for more laws. I also do not imagine that changing people at the helm of failing institutions like the IEBC, without a shift in attitude, will change the situation.

Our priority must be to pursue principle above pragmatism. To get there, we must admit that while pragmatism determines the greater part of politics, it must never be at the expense of moral principles. For the professional politician, judge, administrator of justice or manager of the country's crucial institutions, this means the priority of conscience above mere expediency. This will not be without a cost. Cardinal Ratzinger warns: "To live by the priority of moral principle over pragmatism requires moral courage. To adhere to your (genuinely moral) principles, must bring you into conflict with the powers and principalities of this world." And for politics to recover its sense of direction, argues Ratzinger, what is needed is the recovery and public recognition of those moral norms that are universally valid.

In the end, we need to pursue truth to its logical conclusion. Attempts to bridge the divide and solve the present crisis have focused on reconciliation. Needless to say, these have so far been futile, for want of honest mediators. The depth of the crisis transcends a simple reconciliation between President Kenyatta and Mr. Odinga. Reconciliation must be grounded in repentance, which means a complete change in attitude and behaviour. A role reversal would be the best way of entering the world of those with “no stake in the economy” and whose rights have been trampled again and again.

We must urgently move away from the path of apocalyptic politics and affirm, through reforms, the national institutions that accommodate us all. The day these conflicts are transformed into conciliation will be the beginning of our journey to becoming members of one family called Kenya.