

## LIBERATION AS A PARADIGM FOR FULL HUMANITY IN AFRICA

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**ABSTRACT.** The study is a response to the call for papers that focuses on African issues and discusses the issue of liberation. This paper seeks to explore the theme of liberation beginning with its definition. It will then proceed by looking at the history of Israel discussing the Egyptian bondage. The identity and role of Moses will also be explored in light of the prominent role that the Hebrew Bible gives him in the exodus motifs. It also highlights the life and role of Jesus of Nazareth in human liberation. In addition it will also highlight the importance of liberation and will pay attention to the fight for freedom and independence in Africa. Finally it looks at the quest for liberation among marginalized women and children in Africa looking at their struggles in the 21st century. The essay will use examples from both theological and secular sources. The Biblical/theological examples will be drawn from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and commentaries. Since Africa is very big although sharing related issues, I will use specific examples from Zimbabwe and also use general information from across the continent.

**KEY WORDS:** Liberation, Moses, Jesus, Africa, Zimbabwe

### **Liberation**

Liberation can best be defined (Oxford Dictionary) as an act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression. It can also be defined (Merriam-Webster) as the act or fact of gaining equal rights or full social or economic opportunities for a particular group. Both of these definitions are in agreement that human beings should gain liberation from oppression. Gustavo Gutiérrez defines (Gutiérrez 2006:12) liberation as a salvation process that enables people to attain complete transformation. In this type of liberation as defined by Gutiérrez, human beings are able to have solid relations with other human beings and with God.

From these definitions one can then posit that there are people who are living in bondage. In this case the focus is on Africa where there are cases of

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ethnic clashes, civil wars, poverty and starvation, gender violence especially against women, the challenge of orphans brought about by HIV/AIDS related deaths, unemployment and the related problems. Religion has the capability of either promoting human liberation or to suppress it.

### **History of Israel**

Herrmann notes that the genealogy list in Genesis 10 does not include Israel and thus suggesting that the nation came into existence later in the history of the Ancient Near Eastern nations (Herrmann 1981:42). The nouns Hebrew(s) and Jew(s) will also be used to refer to Israel. Abraham is mentioned in the genealogies that are listed in Genesis 11:10-32 (Herrmann 1981:20). According to Barton and Bowmen, Israel was a small nation that was consistently attacked by its powerful neighbors though the Israelites themselves wanted to present themselves as a big strong nation (Barton and Bowmen 2004:9). The Hebrew Bible traces the origin of Israel to God the creator of the world as the one who brought them and their ancestors into being. Abraham is the nation's major ancestor (Genesis 12). He is said to have been the first patriarch (Genesis 11:31, 12:1ff). Herrmann notes that Abraham and his extended family were wanderers who were looking for land on which to settle (Herrmann 1997:20). The availability and ownership of land seems to have been an issue in the Ancient Near East (Genesis). This is supported by the text that describes the patriarchs as nomadic (Deuteronomy 26). They seem to have been semi-nomadic and thus without located settlements.

Soggin (2001:10) says there is not much information on Isaac, the son of Abraham as well as the father of Jacob and Esau, beside his marriage (Genesis 24). It should be noted that the name Israel is given to Jacob after his struggle with God (Genesis 32:23-33). Jacob, Abraham's grandson, had a prominent son in Joseph who was sold into Egyptian slavery by his jealous brothers. The descendants multiplied in Egypt creating problems for themselves and for Egyptian leaders (Exodus 1:8). Joseph had played a major role in Egyptian socio political life, and had also helped his extended family to settle there. The new Egyptian leaders disregarded the cordial relation that had existed between the Egyptians and the Israelites and hence started to mistreat them (Deuteronomy 26:6-8).

While the Hebrew Bible refers to Moses as a historical figure, Assmann thinks he is a figure of memory and not of history because there are no traces of his existence outside the tradition (Assmann 1997:2). Assmann (1997:2) thinks Moses is a symbolic figure who represents a new distinction that is opposed to the religious and cultural practices of the Egyptian nation. Assmann (1997:2) suggests that Moses was an Egyptian who founded a monotheistic religion after being dissatisfied by polytheism. Moses then led

his followers to Palestine in protest against Egyptian cultural practices that included the representation of gods in zoomorphic images. Monotheism espoused that this God can only be worshiped through virtue and practice of justice. Assmann (1997:2) argues that Jewish monotheism is a good example of a counter-religion born out of dissatisfaction with tradition. There is thus some disagreement between Assmann and the Hebrew Bible about the figure and his role in the origin and development of Jewish monotheism. The Moses in the Hebrew Bible is a historical figure who is born into a family, grows up and possesses feelings (Exodus 2). Polytheism and idolatry belonged to the same group of false religious practices. According to the Mosaic religion, a true God is one who was invisible. Soggin (2001:3) wants to suggest that monotheism was already practiced by the second millennium BC by the patriarchs. Soggin (2001:3) however adds that while there are traces of monotheism among the founding fathers like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is mainly attributed to Moses who received it in revelation. According to Exodus the Jews demanded to be freed from Egyptian bondage because they wanted to go and worship the one true God.

The narrative in Genesis and Exodus suggests that the Jewish people had to leave Egypt because of oppression. This was because a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph came to power. Soggin (2001:3) notes that one of the major challenges in reconstructing the Jewish history in Egypt is that the Pharaohs are not mentioned by name until the time of king Solomon. This complicates the narrative because the Hebrew Bible talks about the Pharaoh in general terms and thus making it difficult to authenticate the historicity of the events. On the other hand, if it is true that there was mistreatment of the Hebrew people, their desire to be free is justified. The Exodus became inevitable in that regard. The Egyptian hosts became oppressors. The 'slavery' cum harder labor episode raises questions about labor laws and working conditions on the Egyptian land. The story also raises questions about the treatment of immigrants and expatriate workers in the Ancient Near East.

The Exodus narrative equates very well with the situation of poverty and deprivation in the developing world. The majority of people in Africa, Asia, and Central America experience poverty that is necessitated by several causes ranging from totalitarian leadership, civil wars, the global economic challenges, government economic policies, diseases, and droughts. Rieger notes that the problem of poverty is not just isolated to the developing world. In the United States of America child poverty and homelessness have been on the increase since the Great Depression (Rieger 2001:5).

On the African continent, South Africa has one of the best economies but the majority of the people live in poverty. Its economic development has also attracted immigrants from other African countries in the process caus-

ing the stretching of its resources. Some of the South Africans developed hatred against immigrants leading to xenophobic attacks in 2008 that left several people dead, thousands displaced, and hundreds others injured (Maduna 2008:1). Khadija Patel notes that South Africans felt that immigrants may worsen the future economic health of the country (Patel 2013). In addition, xenophobia is said to have been caused by historical, social as well economic factors. The attitudes of discrimination learned during apartheid have not completely changed among some of the people. Some still feel that those that are not part of their culture are not welcome in their communities. The rate of socio-economic inequality in South Africa has not changed much since the time of apartheid. It is surprising that the xenophobic attacks are largely carried out by black people among fellow blacks. This behavior raises questions about the concept of African communalism that used to be a strong aspect of African culture.

One of the major activities the church and theologians should do is have a serious and intentional look at the economic situation of the communities they are a part of. Ott thinks that economics is an important aspect of theology because it affects the poor (Ott 2006:206). It is assumed that God is the protector and guarantor of the global economic system. If that concept were to be true God would also make sure that all the poor are given help. The truth of the matter seems to be contrary to that assumption. It seems there are powerful people who are in charge of the global economy, and the poor people are used to further the interests of the few rich people. The xenophobia in South Africa and the rampant corruption in other African countries are reflections of how the world is unfairly tilted in favor of the rich and the powerful.

### **The Exodus**

It is interesting that the Jewish patriarchs in the second millennium and Jesus of Nazareth in the second century found refuge in Egypt, Africa. The contrast is on their reasons for departure from Egypt. According to the Hebrew Bible, the Jews were expelled because of disagreements with their Egyptian hosts (Exodus 5-12) whereas in the gospels Jesus of Nazareth left Egypt because a tyrant, Herod, was dead back home in Palestine (Matthew 2).

Despite some historical challenges connected to the patriarchs, especially to Joseph who is a central figure in the relationship between the Egyptians and the Jews, the discussion will now focus on the role of the divine in the Exodus narratives. Herrmann argues that the patriarchs had personalized experiences with God (Herrmann 1981). He thinks that the tribal group later on 'owned' the experience as a community. In a way the divine encounters by the individual patriarchs were collectivized.

Herrmann intimates that the narrative in Exodus 1-15 could be historical in that it tallies with some extra biblical material that suggests that there were some *Hapiru* (Hebrew), people who were oppressed while they worked for the Egyptians (Herrmann 1981:60).

Although too much is attributed to Moses in the Exodus narratives, one of his major roles is that of an intermediary (Herrmann 1997:61). Moses and Aaron played important roles in negotiating for the freedom of their people. The negotiations were supposedly accompanied by real threats to the Egyptian people. The narrative posits equal competition between Moses and the Pharaoh. Herrmann notes that the plagues that happened among the Egyptians and the sacrifice that the Hebrews carried out laid the foundation for the Exodus (Herrmann 1997:62). Miriam, Moses' sister, led the victory of the Exodus event through song (Exodus 14). She also played an important role in saving the life of baby Moses earlier in the narrative (Exodus). The author deliberately included her to highlight the importance of women in family and society. Soulen adds that the exodus was inevitable because the Egyptian king wanted to limit the growth of the Hebrew population through hard labor, oppression, and bitter slavery (Soulen 1996:144).

The Old Testament is filled with prominent figures that contribute to the liberation of ordinary people. Priests, prophets, judges, and kings made diverse contributions to and for the survival of the Jewish tribe at various stages of history.

### **Jesus as a Champion for Liberation**

In the New Testament, the Gospel writers introduce Jesus of Nazareth who is conceived by the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:26ff). Although the historicity of the Gospels and their authenticity has some problems they remain credible sources both for tracing the work of Jesus of Nazareth as well for the religious information of their time. Witherington III notes that there have been several efforts to establish the historical Jesus. These include the first quest for the historical Jesus that was done through the work of David Friedrich Strauss who argued that there should be new ways of reading the Gospels (Witherington III 1997:9). The second quest was espoused by James Robison who argued that efforts should be made to glean some history from the Gospels (Witherington III 1997). Before Robinson's work scholars like Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich had concluded that the important thing was to focus on the Jesus of faith (Witherington III 1997). In the 1980s the third quest was influenced by new archaeological and manuscript data, new methodologies and the fact that the historical critical research had not succeeded. The fact that there is still more research work going on means that there is no unanimity among scholars about their findings on the historical Jesus.

Witherington III correctly notes that it is important to focus on the present relevance of the teachings of Jesus as espoused by the third quest (Witherington III 1997:11). More importantly this paper seeks to establish how the Old and New Testament narratives help oppressed groups to realize their freedom. The discussion will now proceed by looking at liberation in general inferring to the writings of Paul of Tarsus then investigate Africa's struggle for liberation, African women and children, then finally the African Church.

Pauline epistles, notably the books of 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philemon, suggest that the Christian faith has brought some form of unity and equality. In the book of Corinthians Paul seems to deal with a myriad of challenges that were affecting the Christian community. Some of the problems were about divisions, spiritual gifts, sexual immorality, idolatry, lawsuits, head covering for women, and the Lord's Supper. The divisions seem to have been connected to power structures within the new community. Paul argues that Apollos, Paul, and Cephas were minor figures compared to Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). It looks like Paul was advocating an egalitarian community where human hierarchies did not matter (1 Corinthians 4:1ff). The spiritual gifts were to be celebrated by all for the benefit of the community. By arguing that no gift was greater than the other, Paul implied that all gifts must be celebrated equally. The questions that Paul poses about the diversity of gifts seems to suggest that the Christian community should focus on love (1 Corinthians 12:29-31). It is also interesting that the spiritual gifts are gender neutral, which means that both male and female can use spiritual gifts. Thiselton notes that love should modify the freedom and rights that individual Christians have in practicing their spiritual gifts (Thiselton 2000:799).

The leadership challenges (1 Corinthians 3) resonate with many religious communities throughout the world. Secular ethnic communities also deal with clashes emanating from existential issues. The quest for survival and appetite for influence lead to unprecedented conflicts.

The Galatian baptism formula also adds some interesting dynamics to the freedom that became available in the Christian community. The Galatian writer notes that the new baptism formula places people on the same level (Galatians 3:27, 28). Tarazi notes that Paul was intentional about using the baptismal formula as proof that Jews and Gentiles could be the same (Tarazi 1994:168). Besides trying to address the issue of gender inequality, the baptism formula addresses the Jewish-Gentile problem as well as the issue of slavery. Tarazi argues that slavery was not a problem among the Jews because of the teachings of the law in the Pentateuch (Leviticus 25:35-46; Deuteronomy 15:12-15). Since Paul's focus was on the Gentile community he had to formulate new approaches that would accommodate all peo-

ple. Paul encouraged the new believers to put 'on Christ' as a new identity (Tarazi 1994:168). While Paul was guarding against the prevalence of mystery religions in Asia Minor particularly the worship of the goddess Artemis of Ephesus (Acts 19:27-28, 34), it helped to entrench the Christian religion in the Roman world. Asia Minor and Greece are credited for being the birth place of several religions that included the cult of the Great Mother Cybele, Phrygian god Zabazios who was associated with Zeus and Dionysus, Atargatis, and Osiris (Tarazi 1994:168).

In the process of separating from the local religions, the new Christian community created their own form of initiation or rite of passage through the believer's baptism. The rite of baptism is only found in the New Testament and within the early church community, and thus was a unique practice. The 'putting on of Christ' embodied the redemptive work of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul presented Jesus of Nazareth to the Gentile communities as a liberating savior better than the various deities available in their communities despite the fact that he had died, and later on rose to new life. Baptism into Christ assumes a brand new influence that would direct the new believers. Tarazi notes that to be baptized into Christ was more than just a standard formula as it referred to the power and influence of the person added (Tarazi 1994:178).

The language of liberation and equality that is included in Galatians 3:27, 28 is an inspiration to all oppressed people. The Christian community's attempt to create an egalitarian community should be applauded. The inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles should be used as an example for integrating diverse ethnic groups because it can help in destroying prejudice caused by ethnicity, gender, regionalism, and social status.

### **Liberation in Africa**

The colonization of Africa was made official at the Berlin conference in 1884. The Africans were not represented at the meeting. Those who became colonial masters divided the continent amongst themselves and they were mainly representatives of European countries: France, Great Britain, German, Portugal, and Belgium. They were interested in Africa's minerals, land, and labor. The industrial revolution had exhausted resources in Europe and thus there was need to look elsewhere for land and other basics. Africa became one of the major destinations for European explorers.

Southern Africa's exploitation is connected to the ambitions of Cecil John Rhodes and the findings of David Livingstone. Cecil John Rhodes wanted to expand British influence from Cape to Cairo. On the other end, David Livingstone wanted to spread Christianity, civilization, and commerce. Canaan Banana argues that the main aim of western missionaries was to supplant African indigenous religions with Christianity and to civilize

the pagan natives of the Dark Continent (Banana 1996:19). Some missionaries were just concerned with preaching the gospel without paying attention to the African experience and history. Western Christianity pursued an individualistic agenda that ignored the communal way of life that the Africans lived (Banana 1996:20). In essence, the Africans were being introduced to and forced to adopt a new culture. Moreover, the majority of Christian missionaries did not openly oppose the policies of the colonial governments as they only uncritically applied Romans 13:1ff. For them the governments were ordained by God and thus they were legitimate despite the fact that they were oppressing the local people. Livingstone's three 'C's methods, namely civilization, commerce, and Christian(ity), to some extent benefited the Africans. The Christian teaching of salvation enabled the Africans to think about 'wholeness'. It was not enough to limit salvation to the metaphysics; it had to be applied to the entire being.

Canaan Banana also notes that there were huge disparities between the whites and blacks in all sectors of the society. The system favored the whites and despised the black people. Thus, he argues that the systems classified blacks as less enterprising and thus were supposed to rely on the civilization and teaching of white people (Banana 1996:19).

The church became an outlet for the African through which they expressed their desire for freedom. African clerics became major proponents for freedom and self-actualization. They used the Bible to glean liberation themes. The Israel story of the Exodus helped them to create a rallying point. The Hebrew experience with the Egyptian oppression became their story. The nationalist leaders became their 'Moses' who negotiated with the Pharaohs (the white rulers) so they could be allowed to go to the 'promised land'. For the Africans, the Promised Land was to live in a free country where they can make decisions like adults. They wanted to be granted freedom to participate in the electoral system so they could make meaningful contributions to the governance of their country.

Western 'civilization' through schools enabled the Africans to be enlightened about their rights. Banana argues that although the education system was discriminatory and largely benefiting the colonizers, the few Africans who were educated became leaders in various sectors of their respective countries (Banana 1996:19). One of the positives of the western missionary enterprise was the establishment of schools and medical facilities in remote places. These institutions brought development to the areas where they were built. Most people who became leaders in liberation struggles were educated in mission schools.

Moses' ability to challenge the Egyptian authorities using divine power from God was an inspiration to many of the oppressed people. The writer of Acts notes that Moses took it upon himself to kill an Egyptian who was



abusing a Jew (Acts 7:23-25). The use of violence to attain freedom raises some complex issues but most Africans took arms to fight against European colonialism. The colonialists themselves were using force and propaganda to pacify the locals.

The African Christians also appealed to priests and prophets from the Old Testament who dealt with social justice issues: Samuel, Elijah, Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos. They reflected on how these religious officials spoke against injustice at various junctures in their communities. Some Africans clerics had no other choice but to either support the liberation movements morally and also to be active participants. In Zimbabwe, there were the likes of bishop Abel Muzorewa, reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, reverend Canaan Banana, and many others. In South Africa, prominent church leaders who spoke against colonialism included archbishop Desmond Tutu, reverend Allan Boesak, reverend Frank Chikane, as well as a long array of other important personalities. Some of them were imprisoned, restricted from travelling or given strong warnings (Banana 1996:19).

Regarding the New Testament, the Africans were inspired by Jesus of Nazareth and his words. In Luke 4:16-20, Jesus of Nazareth declared that the spirit of the Lord was upon so that he could bring good news to the poor, to proclaim the release for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to free the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. For Gutiérrez, the struggle for justice is also the struggle for the kingdom of God (Gutiérrez 2006:97). Gutiérrez further argues that struggle for a just society is part of salvation history (Gutiérrez 2006). In addition, Jesus' clash with the authorities in Galilee and Bethlehem suggests that he was against all forms of injustice. Horsley thinks that Jesus was a Galilean who chose to be a social revolutionary who took the side of the poor and the oppressed opposing the power of the elite (Witherington III 1997). Jesus seems to have been on the side of the poor and the marginalized. While he criticized the authorities of his time, Jesus told his followers to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Marginalized groups in Jesus' time included women, children, the poor, the blind, lepers, foreigners, and tax collectors. The Gospel writers largely present Jesus as one who cared for the marginalized and was always ready to pay attention to their needs.

The 1950s and 1960s saw the majority of African gaining their independence from their colonizers. In Southern Africa, Zimbabwe (1980), Namibia (1990), and South Africa (1994) were the last to be independent. It should be noted that although the majority of Africa is now independent Saharawi Democratic Republic is still fighting for freedom from Morocco. Ethiopia is the only African country that was never colonized.

While some countries were colonized by countries that had a leaning towards Christianity, the majority of the countries in North Africa remained under the influence of Islam and African indigenous religion(s). It should be noted that the role of religion is always important in all the areas of the African's life. African indigenous religions are part of the African's livelihood because it permeates all the entire being. During the liberation struggles, Africans appealed to their departed ancestors for guidance and for success so as to defeat the oppressors.

Africa has generally been independent from colonialism for around fifty years. There have been some positive developments in that in many African nations, people are able to determine their own destiny. Thus, people who could not buy housing in certain communities are now able to do so.

Unfortunately, the majority of the new indigenous rulers are not bringing the much anticipated change, especially in the lives of the ordinary people. There are arguments that the 'the black' elite has taken over from 'the white' elite and the exploitation is now black versus black instead of white versus black like what it was during colonialism. In fact, in some countries one has to be connected to the powerful in order to make any meaningful economic investment. Yamamoto argues that, in Zimbabwe, Strive Masiyiwa was frustrated when he wanted to set up a mobile phone business entity (Yamamoto 2014). Masiyiwa was determined to register his company to the extent that he went to the highest courts in the country, the High Court and the Supreme Court. Yamamoto notes that Masiyiwa used legal advice, determination, and his religious faith to succeed against the government apparatus (Yamamoto 2014). Religious faith can therefore play a part in the emancipation of the downtrodden. Being aware of one's rights and having the resources to pursue them makes all the difference. The challenge is that the majority of the people in the developing world are not aware of their rights and they do not have access to the resources that will help them attain their freedom.

Those who know their rights should not despair because they can also rely on their faith, hope, and determination for a change of their situation. Musa Dube notes that when professionals go to work with the poor and the disposed, they should not go as experts but as learners. They should go with open minds willing to learn how the poor have managed to survive under the difficult conditions and the unfair societal structures.

### **Liberation for Women and Children**

This section looks at the theme of liberation among women and children. It begins by discussing issues that affect women then move on to explore the issues that affect children. Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament was mainly written by men because of the Jewish and Roman cultural influ-

ences at the time. These cultures were largely patriarchal. They were patriarchal to an extent that the voices of women were never heard, as they were drowned or ignored altogether. Consequently, the place and role of women is heavily undermined if the texts are literally read. The quest to read and interpret differently should help in bringing about emancipation to both the readers and the marginalized groups.

Just like the Christian Bible, most African cultures are patriarchal. Being patriarchal is not necessarily bad but when there is oppression and marginalization it is wrong. It is even worse when religion is used to further the abuse of God's creation. The abuses covered decision making, economic opportunities, education, and health related issues. Dube thinks there is need to decolonize inherited colonial education systems, languages, literary canon, reading methods, Christian religion so as to control negative ideologies (Pui-Ian 2005:77). This suggests that aspects of colonialism have been carried over into independent nations, and thus there is need to review the system paying attention to issues that continue to undermine the status of women.

Some aspects of the language have been adopted to describe women who are perceived to be of loose morals. In Shona, words like *pfambi* and *hure* or prostitute and bitch in English are used to describe women. The same is not necessarily used to label men who commit acts of prostitution. The Hebrew Bible has examples of women who were either prostitutes or unfaithful to their marriage partners. Rahab is described as a prostitute in the book of Joshua. The story portrays her as a faithful Canaanite prostitute (Joshua 2) who went off her way to hide the Jewish spies. As a reward to her actions she and her family members are spared from the Hebrew vengeance. Pui-Ian thinks that Rahab's case and that of Ruth are narratives that deal with gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality in cultural contacts and border crossings (Pui-Ian 2005). In developing countries, prostitution is prevalent, in border towns and big cities, but also in the farming and shopping centers of rural communities. The fact that there is some value placed on religiosity raises some interest. As for Rahab, there is certainly some inter-religious interaction between the Canaanite lady and the Jewish males.

Jesus of Nazareth had dealt with a case of a woman who was caught in adultery (John 8:3). Her accusers did not bring the man who was part of the scandal. The accusers wanted Jesus to punish the woman. While Jesus did not approve of the woman's actions he did not condemn her to die but instead challenged the men who had brought her to prove their innocence in relation to sin. The narrative says Jesus asked the men to stone the woman if they had never sinned (John 8). The fact that none of them heeded Jesus' challenge shows that they had their own personal issues. Jesus re-

leased the woman and warned her to change her life style. He neither condoned her actions nor condemned her.

A Zimbabwean church leader was sent to jail for forty years after he was convicted for raping several women in his church. In his defense he argued that all women in his church belonged to him and thus he had a right to have sexual relations with them. The church leader added that even the married women would be on 'loan' to their husbands. He also told the court that he wanted to have one hundred children with one hundred different women (*Newsday* 2013). In addition, he told women that polygamy was upheld in the Bible (*Newsday* 2013). Women who turned him down were threatened with curses. They were not supposed to turn down the 'man of God'. The church leader argues that he only pays the dowry price after a wife conceives. For him the value of a woman is connected to her fertility. She should show her worthiness by giving birth. This has some similarities to the New Testament text that says women would be saved through child birth (1 Timothy 2:15). In the Hebrew Bible women were going to experience pain in child bearing as punishment for their sin (Genesis 3:16). These texts and others like them have been used to force women to bear children against their wishes. It has also been used to keep women at 'home' despite the fact that they would be having professional qualifications that could allow them to work outside the home. Dube argues that women are able to turn the Bible into a site of contestation and resistance for their own emancipation (Dube 2005:78). Dube's suggestion is justified considering that some African cultures want to perpetuate both evil African practices as well as western systems that did not value the status and role of women.

The Zimbabwean preacher's case exhibits how some religious leaders abuse power and authority. They take advantage of the naivety of their followers. In some cases they use the sacred scriptures to justify their evil actions. Some leaders use money and material resources to abuse the vulnerable members of society. A Zimbabwean bishop raped his maid for four years, from 2005 to 2009 (*News dzeZimbabwe* 2014).

While Africa has a huge presence of the Christian religion distributed through various denominations, there is also a reasonable number of Muslims especially in North and West Africa. Currently the country of Nigeria is dealing with an extremist Muslim organization called Boko Haram, which is also very active beyond the borders of Nigeria. The group claims to be against and also fight against Western education. As a way of fighting Western influence they force people to become Muslims through abductions, killings, and coercions. Jacques notes that families whose loved ones are abducted by police or military groups almost always come up against a wall of silence or lies from the authorities (Jacques 2000:19).

**The Role of the Church**

Christianity is a growing religion in sub-Saharan Africa. It has played a major role in human development and can continue to do so by adding her voice to current issues that are affecting the poor. Other than preaching about heaven and afterlife, the church should also respond to the voices of the oppressed. Gustavo Gutiérrez thinks that the church should proclaim that the poor have a right to life like everybody else (Gutiérrez 1990:153). The church's participation in human emancipation should be motivated by the love that comes from God. Gutiérrez also argues that anything that the church does should be part of the big picture (Gutiérrez 1990). In other words, the message that the church proclaims should not be compartmentalized. In any case, justice and freedom are major requirements for the functioning of human society.

The Latin American Catholic community has responded to the needs of the poor by adopting the theme of 'preferential option for the poor'. This position is drawn from the official documents of the Second Vatican Council. Gutiérrez argues that the church's position is part of the scriptural teaching (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20). In the beatitudes, Jesus of Nazareth is quoted as saying the poor are blessed. Instead of leaving them in the state of poverty and deprivation, Jesus chose to be poor so he could be part of them. It should be part of the mission of the church to be on the side of the poor.

**Suggestions for the Present and the Future**

It is important to note that the struggle for freedom is as old as the history of humanity. The above discussion has shown that both the religious and secular world has and continues to deal with issues of marginalization at different levels in communities. The current events indicate that oppression may be around for a long time. It is therefore imperative to seek for ways of eradicating or reducing the rates and empower the majority. This can be through awareness of oppression, need for change, visionary leadership, sacrifice, persistence, building partnerships, and modelling new paradigms. Awareness can be attained through the sharing of available information. Oppressed women, children, displaced people, and those who are abused by people in authority should have access to information that could enable them to know their God given rights. Information can be made available through Bible study programs, seminars, social media, radio or television. Phiri notes that when truth was told about the crimes that were committed during the apartheid era in South Africa, people were able to make informed decisions about forgiveness (Phiri 2006:114). Space should be created for the marginalized to reflect on their experiences so that they could find ways of dealing the situations. The writer of the fourth gospel notes

that knowledge of the truth gives freedom (John 8:32). The writer of Hosea intimates that people perish because of ignorance (Hosea 4:6).

Furthermore, some long held practices need to change. Some reading and hermeneutical methods may perpetuate oppression and deprivation of others. Reuther thinks that the deliverance of Israel from bondage became the story of redemption for all people (Reuther 1998:15). It also became applicable to deliverance from sin, disease and demonic possession (Reuther 1998:15). Some conditions and situations need to change so that people can be free to exercise their feelings. It should not be change just for the sake of it but one that is beneficial. It should however be noted that bringing change is not always easy.

Again there is need for visionary leadership if any changes are to be implemented in any given circumstance. The examples in the Hebrew Bible show that with good leadership positive changes can be realized. The story of Moses is one that stands out as he is shown to be in front leading the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land. He had to deal with the opposition of the pharaohs and sometimes that of his own people (Acts 7:35-36). He exhibited courage, love, patience, and endurance. Joseph also epitomized visionary leadership when he was appointed a high ranking official in Pharaoh's palace. Moreover, the Scripture informs the readers that he became an important adviser. Oduyoye contends that there is not always unanimity among followers and leaders on the issues that should be addressed during a struggle (Oduyoye 2006:25).

The Lucan writer also deliberately included the story of the persistence widow in his narrative (Luke 18). The woman was dealing with an issue of injustice and was forced by the situation to approach an unjust judge. For some reason, the system allowed an unjust official to preside over the issues of justice. As the story goes, the woman continued to approach the corrupt court system for protection. She was eventually granted her wishes because of her persistence.

The creation of partnerships may help in brokering sustainable solutions to issues that affect the poor and the underprivileged. The Msasa Project, a non-profit organization, helps with the needs of abused women. Thus, the Msasa Project castigated the Apostolic Sect group of bishop T for violence against women and girls. Partnerships are not only common in African contexts; they are naturally part of the African way of life. In this respect, Donders notes that pain and suffering are generally shared within the community (Donders 1985:144). He also adds that in some African communities it is even difficult to talk about a person's disease because of the interconnectedness of village life and the reality that people know each other rather intimately (Donders 1985:144).

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the concept of liberation from the Hebrew Bible by focusing on the Exodus narrative. It discovered that although it is difficult to identify the Jewish people as a historical group from extra Biblical sources, the Hebrew Bible can be a credible source in tracing the socio-religious character of the groups in the Ancient Near East. The people's livelihood was closely inter-twined with their religious connections. The various groups had their deities that were intrinsically part and parcel of their lives. Religion permeated all aspects of their lives. There are close similarities between the Hebrew Bible and the African cultural practices. Any issue one can endeavor to explore is almost always connected to the religious-cultural behaviors of the African people. Although the New Testament has different characters from those of the Hebrew Bible, one can also find some common themes. The Old Testament prophets seem to have been important players in proffering human liberation through their prophecies concerning social justice and religious fidelity. In the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and his followers (disciples) are for the most part presented as champions of liberation. They are portrayed as representatives of peace, love, justice, and equality.

Through colonialism, the Africans were victims of structured injustice. They are certainly justified for demanding liberation from the colonial masters who had appropriated both their natural and exotic resources. Their land and everything in it was taken. Some had their personal property expropriated. The colonial system created untold suffering among the indigenous people. Families were displaced and the cultural networks were disrupted. While culture is dynamic there are some cultural practices that were prematurely changed by the colonial system. People will continue to be nostalgic about the past although they cannot do much to re-enact the old culture.

The paper also discussed about the new challenges in Africa that mainly affect the powerless, the poor. In this paper, the most vulnerable people are represented by women and children. The unfortunate thing in the developing world is that those who took leadership positions to be liberators of the oppressed have largely become the 'new oppressors'. They enact laws that enable them to stay in power for a long time without allowing any meaningful opposition parties to survive. Democracy has struggled to materialize in most parts of the developing world.

The struggle for liberation has thus continued in several parts of Africa. The only major difference is that the oppressors are of the same skin color and familiar language with the oppressed. Theology should thus reflect the challenges that people face on daily basis. It should avoid the pitfall of either siding with the powerful at the expense of the weak and powerless or

the temptation of completely ignoring to confront the challenges today. Ott argues that some Evangelical groups in the United States of America choose to be on the side of the monetary and ideological New Religious Right that supports capitalistic values (Ott 2006:207). In addition, others are too otherworldly in their theology to the extent that they neglect the pressing problems of society (Ott 2006:208).

If church leaders and theologians are not willing to work with the poor in their time of need, the poor people themselves should endeavor to be their own liberators. In this essay it has been discovered that both Judaism and Christianity had to separate themselves from other religious sects in order for them to have their own distinctive identity. At some point there had to be a separation. During the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe some African church leaders had to leave the missionary-oriented churches. Some missionary led churches did not criticize the colonial governments' treatment of the black people. The missionaries were telling the African believers to pay attention to texts like Romans 13 that encourage people to obey political leaders and their governments. They did not cite examples where political leaders were challenged by prophets and preachers for their abuse of power and authority. Some expatriate missions were certainly beneficiaries of the colonial system in that they like the other whites were entitled to house workers and several other benefits. They were thus happy with the status quo. They were ready to 'pray' for the colonial governments to stay in power. The African freedom fighters were labelled as rebels, terrorists, and guerillas. Today some religious will never speak against the evil practices of political leaders because they are either afraid for their own safety or they are benefiting from the system. It should be noted that some religious leaders stand with the poor and the weak. They are pro-active about empowerment and emancipation.

It should also be noted that collective efforts by those in positions of influence and the oppressed can be one of the best way forward in promoting liberation and the attainment of full humanity. More practical ways can continue to be explored in dealing with the subject because when many people are free and have access to resources that can improve their lives a new world can be created. Although some gains have been made I submit that the subject of liberation should continue to be discussed as some groups in the world are still a long way from realizing complete freedom.

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