

DAVID GITARI'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN KENYA (1986-1991)

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Abstract

The article sets out to answer the question, "How effective were Anglican Archbishop David Gitari's methods and approaches in his crusade for multiparty democracy in Kenya between 1986 and 1991?" To address the above concern, I shall first attempt to pinpoint the background to his prophetic ministry and then survey the methods and approaches he employed during those turbulent days. The article will conclude with a critique of Gitari's all-inclusive approach to church ministry (1986-1991). The materials in this presentation have been gathered by means of oral interviews with Gitari and by the use of participant observation by the researcher, who was an eyewitness during the greater part of Gitari's church ministry. An extensive reading of some of the materials under discussion has also been done. The article is intended to caution post-Cold-War Africa against losing the gains of freedom, since neocolonialism is as bad as colonialism itself or even worse.

1 INTRODUCTION

The retired Anglican archbishop David Mukuba Gitari was born on 16 September 1937 to evangelist Samuel Mukuba and Jessie Njuku in Ngiriambu, in the Kirinyaga District of Central Kenya. He enrolled at the University of Nairobi in 1959 and graduated with a BA Honours degree. During this time he was deeply involved in a preaching ministry in schools and universities all over Africa. From 1968 to 1971

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he studied theology at Bristol as an external student of the University of London and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree. Between 1972 and 1975 he served as General Secretary of the Bible Society of Kenya and as Chairman of the Kenya Students Christian Fellowship (KSCF). In 1983 he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity (DD) by the Ashley Seminary, Ohio, USA. He was Bishop of Mt Kenya East from 1975 to 1990. After the division of the big diocese of Mount Kenya East, which was basically half of Kenya, he became Bishop of Kirinyaga from 1990 to 1997. In 1997 he was elected as the third African archbishop of the Anglican Province of Kenya and Bishop of Nairobi, where he served until 2002 when he finally retired. Following the regime change in December 2002, the new president (Mwai Kibaki) gave him, in 2003, one of the highest state honours, the Moran of the Burning Spear (MBS), for his dedicated services to the Republic of Kenya.²

2 BACKGROUND TO GITARI'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY

It is not, perhaps, commonly known that the prophetic ministry of the revered Anglican Primate, the retired archbishop David Mukuba Gitari, was largely inspired by historical figures such as William Wilberforce, who – as a social activist, politician and committed Christian - fought for 45 years in the British parliament for the abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire. Another of his role models was Lord Shaftesbury, who helped to free British children and women from terrible exploitation and inhuman treatment by factory owners who used them as cheap labour. Abraham Lincoln (another good Christian: the US president who helped to free the African slaves in his country in 1865) also contributed to Gitari's view of social justice. Later on Gitari was inspired by the likes of the Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr, who fought for the civil rights of Afro-Americans – a movement that culminated in the repeal of the oppressive Jim Crow laws and the success of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 which allowed African Americans to vote for the first time in American history. As a historian and theologian, Gitari also read about the ministry of biblical prophets such as Jeremiah,

Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, and he became convinced that the end of life is not to avoid risks or pains but to do the will of God.³ He thus chose the “narrow path” and a critical approach to all the structural sins of commission and omission by the State – which almost cost him his life when some people were sent at night to kill him. In this 1989 incident, Gitari narrowly escaped death by calling for help as he ran to the top storey of his house, attracting the attention of friendly neighbours who eventually thwarted the assassins.

In the Kenyan context, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki (Member of Parliament at the time for the then constituency of Nyandarua North) inspired Gitari by his commitment to social justice in the newly independent Kenya. As a matter of fact, Gitari’s known prophetic ministry began early in 1975 after the assassination of this populist and flamboyant Kenyan politician, who was fondly referred to as “JM”.

JM - who was brutally murdered on 2 March 1975 during the Jomo Kenyatta regime (1963-1978) - was known to rub the government the wrong way on matters of social justice. As Gitari says of him, JM “was a hero of the resistance against the colonial government”. He is said to “have been picked up by a party of unidentified men and driven to the Ngong Hills, where a shepherd boy discovered his mutilated body a few days later”.⁴

Blamuel Njururi, editor of the *Kenya Confidential* and 1975 Journalist of the Year award winner, has this to say of him: “JM, as he was popularly known, was not an ordinary member of parliament, but a visionary, who was one of the best socio-politically focused leaders at the time of his death.”⁵ He correctly read the blurred and dangerous future that Kenya was headed for as a greedy bunch of politicians took charge of the country. A clique of the ruling elite was emerging to dominate and determine the destiny of the then ten million Kenyans, to manipulate state resources, control the economy through a pseudo-African socialism and monopolise power.

JM was the first post-independence politician to surrender land allocated to him and give it to the landless in his Nyandarua District while at the same time criss-crossing the country donating generously to numerous causes. JM’s political philosophy, his belief that the

Kenyatta Government had hijacked the aspirations of the freedom struggle mounted by the *Mau Mau* (freedom fighters), and his apparent ambition for leadership made him enemies within the ruling clique.⁶

With regard to economic and social justice, JM argued, it is a characteristic of developing nations that the greatest wealth is in the hands of a privileged few while the masses are impoverished. But a stable social order cannot be built on the poverty of millions. Frustrations born of poverty and socio-economic inequalities breed turmoil and violence - hence the priority in any democratic developing country of economic prosperity coupled with the eradication of social and economic disparities.⁷

JM openly and courageously advocated the quest for social justice and equal opportunities for all. He strove for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". With reference to the Kenya of today, he remarked: "A small but powerful group of greedy, self-seeking elite in the form of politicians, civil servants and businessmen has steadily but very surely monopolized the fruits of independence to the exclusion of the majority of the people. We do not want a Kenya of ten millionaires and ten million beggars."⁸

On neocolonialism, JM argued that colonial masters are to be found in government ministries "dressed in a new cloak labelled economic adviser to such and such a ministry or to so-and-so. They advise us in their interests and we follow them like sheep."⁹ Not long before he was assassinated, he highlighted the value of patriotism by saying: "It takes more than a National Anthem, however stirring, a National Coat of Arms, however distinctive, a National Flag, however appropriate, a National Flower, however beautiful, to make a Nation."¹⁰

JM is especially remembered for his perceptive remarks:

... Since Kenya became independent in 1963, we have moved away from the state which we intended to create ...
... Kenya has become like a tree growing very tall, very quickly, but it is going to fall because it does not have deep roots, is not firmly rooted in the people and in society ...

... we do not want a country of ten millionaires and ten million beggars ...¹¹

Following JM's brutal murder, there was a period of nationwide unrest. University students took to the streets, demanding to be told who the killers were. A number of bombs were set off in public places and anonymous pamphlets implicated the government in the killing, worsening the already existing tension. The Revd David Gitari, erst-while General Secretary of the Bible Society of Kenya (a few months before he became the first Bishop of the Diocese of Mt Kenya East), was invited by the National Christian Council of Kenya (hereafter referred to as the NCCK) to preach on the state radio programme "Lift up your hearts". In these talks for the NCCK, which he called "Lift up the nation" and delivered from the Nairobi Baptist Church on 20 April 1975, Gitari lectured the nation on the United Nations General Assembly's proclamation of 10 December 1948 on human rights. Likening JM's killers to Cain who killed Abel, Gitari reminded the nation that the UN declaration on human rights included the right to life, liberty and security, education, equality before the law, freedom of movement and religion, freedom of association, and freedom to marry and have a family.¹²

In this live broadcast on 20 April 1975 Gitari said,

You are created in the image of God and for that reason nobody should deny you the right to exist. The Bible presents physical life as the creation of God who alone is the source of life, and human beings have no independent right to shed blood and take life. A person does not even have the liberty to take his [or her] own life. He [or she] is accountable to God for what he [or she] has done to himself [or herself] or his [or her] fellow human beings. When Cain murdered his brother Abel, God asked him, "Where is Abel your brother"? And Cain answered: "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And God said to Cain, "What have you done, Cain? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground and now you are cursed ..." Today God is asking Kenyans, "Where is your brother JM Kariuki?" And those who assassinated

him or planned his assassination are saying, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”¹³

After giving the fourth series of “Lift up the nation” talks, Gitari received a telephone call from the state corporation Voice of Kenya inviting him to a “dialogue”. It was here that he met seven officials from the Government Ministry of Information and where Mr Kangwana, the Chairman, informed him that his radio talk shows “were very disturbing”.¹⁴ Gitari told those top officials that if his talks were disturbing, then they had served their purpose, “as the gospel is very disturbing to sinners”.¹⁵ A few months later Gitari was elected Bishop of Mount Kenya East, where he continued his prophetic ministry till he was elected Archbishop of Kenya in 1997. As Archbishop of Kenya and Bishop of Nairobi, Gitari continued his ministry up to his retirement in 2002.

3 GITARI’S CRUSADE FOR A MULTIPARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM (1986-1991)

Following his election as Bishop of Mount Kenya East, Gitari did not immediately appear too vocal on matters of state. He concentrated most of his energies on developing his young diocese, which had less than twenty parishes and clergy.¹⁶ Following the death of President Jomo Kenyatta on 22 August 1978, the new President Daniel Arap Moi appeared to have started well, encouraging the nation to preserve their environment by planting trees, telling citizens to do family planning and to respect and care for the elderly, children, the disabled and other marginal members of society. He even introduced a new philosophy – the Nyayo philosophy of peace, love and unity – which Gitari and other church leaders of the time found compatible with the Christian Testament.

However, things took a turn for the worse when a fresh awareness of government matters began to emerge after the constitutional amendment of 1982 that made Kenya *a de jure* one-party state. Not long afterwards there was an attempted coup (on 1 August 1982), and with that Kenyan politics began to take a nosedive. Subsequent constitutional amendments consolidating the power of the Executive did not make matters any better, as the state became very intolerant

of dissenting voices. As a result, some were abducted and killed; others were jailed or detained without trial. This infuriated the church leaders and in particular the National Council of Churches of Kenya, of which Gitari was the Chairman (1978-1980 and 1982-1985). By 1985, the State had begun to oust popular parliamentary and party candidates who were considered to be critical of the governance of the country.

As a consequence of all this, the National Council of Churches (formerly the National Christian Council of Kenya) organised a National Pastors' Conference in 1986 at Kenyatta University. At this conference Gitari and other members of the Council took their radical stand against the queue voting system, where rigging was rampant. In 1988 the NCCCK used its publication, *Beyond*, to document evidence of massive rigging and many other electoral malpractices during the general elections of that year. Amid intense criticism, this activism culminated in the banning of *Beyond* magazine. As a result, two of NCCCK's journalists (David Makali and Bedan Mbugua) were jailed in Manyani Prison. This did little to improve relations between Protestant church leaders and the Government. Indeed, this general uneasiness and mistrust was to define their relationship for years to come.

Gitari's emergence as a crusader for a multiparty political system in Kenya is clearly to be seen in 1986 after two events that took place at the time.

First, the then ruling party (and the only registered one), Kenya African National Union (KANU), made a very anti-people and anti-Christian recommendation for the governance of the country. In a record time of ten minutes, they passed twelve resolutions. In other words, their 3 600 delegates debated nothing, since political debate (in the sense of criticism) was unofficially "prohibited" in those dark days.¹⁷ Thus, like the proverbial frogs, the delegates just said "yes" to every resolution that was read to them, however unfair to the populace. This infuriated Gitari. He explains, "I spoke publicly to say that it was a terrible waste of people's time to make them just a rubber stamp, and this hit the [daily newspapers'] headlines."¹⁸ To the surprise of Gitari and the vast majority of Kenyans, the Kenyan

parliament, rather than addressing the concerns he had raised, suspended its ordinary activities to “discuss” him as “unpatriotic” and as “serving his foreign masters.” In short, they spent almost three hours hurling insults at him.

Secondly, adding insult to an injury, another KANU assembly passed a resolution that “the future elections will take the form of queuing behind the candidates” and not the old and acceptable secret ballot. In other words, “if you have three candidates, you tell the voters to line up behind the one you like most”.¹⁹ And since this is done during the daytime, everyone is expected to see clearly who wins or who loses. This was a divisive method: church leaders who wanted to vote would fear to vote by queuing, as that would have divided the members of their congregations. Gitari, who went simply to observe the elections, was horrified. There was open rigging: the state radio was quite likely to declare the leader of the shorter queue to be the winner, provided only that he or she was a “government candidate”. This led Bishop Henry Okullu of the Anglican Diocese of Maseno to team up with Gitari and other like-minded church leaders (such as the Revd Dr Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Africa, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches from 1988 to 1993; the Revd Dr Julius Kobia; Bishop Prof. Zablon Nthamburi of the Methodist Church; Archbishop Raphael Mwana’a Nzeki of the Catholic Church; Archbishop Manases Kuria of the Anglican Church of Kenya (1980-2002); Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth of the Kisumu Diocese of the Catholic Church; Archbishop John Njue of the Catholic Church, and Bishop Alexander Muge of the Eldoret Anglican Diocese),²⁰ in saying that seventy percent of the sixth Kenyan parliament was selected and not elected.²¹

The above two events convinced Gitari that Kenya needed radical change (read: a multiparty political system) so that those who were dissatisfied with the only party, KANU, could join other parties of their choice. From 1986 onwards, Gitari lost no time in condemning the queuing system and the whole philosophy behind single-party political dictatorship until, in December 1991, President Daniel Arap Moi yielded to pressure and accepted the repeal of Section 2A of the Kenyan Constitution which prohibited the formation of political parties other than the ruling KANU.

This raises the question: what methods and approaches did the then Bishop David Gitari (of Kirinyaga Diocese) of the Anglican Church of Kenya employ in his crusade for multiparty democracy in Kenya (1986-1991)?

4 METHODS AND APPROACHES IN GITARI'S CHURCH MINISTRY (1986-1991)

First and foremost, Gitari respected the *Bible* (translated into the local language, Gikuyu, also referred to as Kikuyu) *as authority*. Knowing his context, which is a deeply religious one, was a big plus for Gitari: he spoke his political mind through expository sermons which faithfully interpreted the biblical texts. For example, when decrying the grabbing of Kamuruana Hill, a public property, by two local politicians in the Kirinyaga County Council who called themselves JIMKA and JAKEN, Gitari went to the nearby Mutuma Trinity Church in 1991, picked 1 Kings 21:1-29 as a relevant text and asked his congregation, as his sermon theme, "Was there no Naboth to say no?"²² As a characteristic method, such an approach would always stir his audience to think and see the grabber as King Ahab and strengthen their resolve to pursue the big fishes.

Another example is his opposition to the government crackdown on *Mwakenya* political dissidents – a group of people who were said to be releasing pamphlets that were critical of state excesses. Gitari noted that most of the suspects taken to court at odd hours were innocent Kenyans who were tortured and forced to confess to involvement in clandestine activities, sentenced by compromised judges and finally jailed on trumped-up charges. In such situations, Gitari in his sermons would urge the nation not to conform to the patterns of this world, no matter what persecutions they faced (cf. Romans 12:1-2).²³

This reliance on the Bible confirms its centrality to African Christianity – a fact that is evident in its widespread translation, being "the most widely read book in tropical Africa".²⁴ As Mugambi puts it:

The Bible is the most widely available book in both rural and urban areas. It can be regarded as the most influential book in Africa. The Bible is read at primary and secondary schools, in colleges and Universities, in Seminaries, during Worship Services, in fellowship meetings and in private devotion and meditation.²⁵

Indeed, “most Christians carry copies of the Bible, or parts of it, everywhere they go, and read it when they have a little time to spare. Even when they do not have the Bible in their hands, they will refer to it as they talk and pray.”²⁶ As John Karanja observes:

Kikuyu Christians showed considerable latitude in interpreting and applying the Bible from the time the scripture was available in their vernacular. Although the text of the Bible was fixed, its interpretation was not. The *athomi* (readers) used the Bible creatively to serve their pastoral, political and cultural needs. Pastors used it to promote morality and giving in the church. Politicians used it to create tribal consciousness; apologists for Kikuyu culture used it to affirm their own religion and culture. Indeed, Kikuyu creative use of the scripture demonstrates their ability to adopt and exploit western innovations.²⁷

Second, Gitari was fond of *appealing to history*. For example, he liked to compare bad leaders to Adolf Hitler, the man who ruled Germany in the 1930s. Hitler is seen as the man who toppled the world into a Second World War (1939-1945).²⁸ By drawing on his vast knowledge of world history, Gitari was, first and foremost, calling upon his audience to think deeply and place themselves historically on the map of the world. As an end result, Gitari may well have hoped, Kenyans would discover that they are not an Island unto themselves but part of world civilisation and hence deserving of respect. This appeal to history was highly enlightening. Gitari moreover wanted to tell the oppressive regime of the time to take him seriously; as a scholar bishop he was speaking from an informed position. How then could they afford to ignore the prophet and moral leader of his time?

Third, Gitari used *an all-inclusive approach* in his ministry (1986-1991). This means that he not only recognised the ecumenical movement in Africa (read NCKK, AACC, etc.) as a vital institution, indispensable because of the problems created by denominationalism;²⁹ more importantly, he worked with non-Christians and the emerging opposition politicians. Gitari also linked up with the so-called political dissidents, most of whom got into the government when KANU finally lost the 2002 general elections. They included the fiery Hon. Paul Muite (an Anglican Christian), the Hon. Waruru Kanja (a Muslim), the Hon. Professor Wangari Maathai (who, in 2004, was the first African woman to become a Nobel Laureate), and the Hon. James Orengo, a prominent lawyer and fervent politician. One day in early 1991 he invited everyone who was interested in praying for a return to a multiparty political system to assemble at St Thomas Kerugoya Anglican Cathedral for prayers. As I observed for myself, the “prayer session” included everyone who was anyone in the opposition politics of the time. I remember how in 1987, as my bishop, he invited the Hon. Nahashon Njuno (then MP for Kirinyaga East, now Gichugu constituency), to speak in my local Emmanuel Church, Mutira, to greet the congregation even though the Government through the local KANU branch had barred him from speaking in public. By “breaking the law,” Gitari was trying to tell the Kenyan people that “no one has a right to deny you the right to freedom of speech and association”. In addition, Gitari was trying to guard against any form of societal fragmentation: being united is far better than being divided when we have a common cause.

It is crucial to acknowledge that an all-inclusive approach to church ministry requires practitioners of the Christian faith to place more emphasis on developmental issues that concern the society of faith where it is being articulated. In such circumstances, the Christian faith is forced to place more emphasis on environmental degradation, reconciliation, domestic violence, gender disparities, the power of love and a sustainable society. By his all-inclusive approach, Gitari had the last laugh when the high-handed KANU yielded to the demands of the vast majority of Kenyans - who had Gitari and a few other church leaders to speak for them - as the real voice of the people.

Fourth, Gitari's methodology included the *use of ancestral resources* to communicate his message of liberation and reconstruction of our society, which was in dire need of political reform among other things. By the use of ancestral resources I mean that Gitari would encourage the communication of the Christian message by means of folk dances - but with some revisions, so that the contents would address the worship of the God of Christendom as opposed to the God of African traditional religion. To demonstrate this, Gitari saw to the production of a Christian hymn book, *Nyimbo cia Gucanjamura Ngoro* (literally, "Songs to warm the heart") with ancestral melodies that clearly reflected the local context. In so doing, he led the Christians in owning the gospel as the word that was delivered to them from time immemorial when their ancestors used to sing the same tunes. This method of communicating the Christian faith is also seen in the conviction of Anglophone theologian Jesse Mugambi that ancestral resources can be creatively exploited in African Christianity.³⁰ On the other hand, Kā Mana, a Francophone theologian, presents past African cultural values and traditions as a "decaying" or "disintegrating reality", and cautions that any attempt to avoid Africa's present problems by going back to its ancient history is a new type of estrangement - which, to him, is equivalent to surrendering ourselves to "the dictatorship of the past".³¹ In particular, Kā Mana presents his analysis of the ethical dimensions of the human crisis in Africa in an alarming way. He paints an alienating and despairing picture of African societies and goes on to propose that only a radical reconstruction of the African approach to religious and socio-political realities would heal them of their major shortcomings.³²

While not discarding either of the two viewpoints, a theology of reconstruction must acknowledge the huge contribution of anthropological resources in Africa; they can indeed be positively exploited in a psychosocial reconstruction of Africa. This compares with Wole Soyinka's proposal concerning reconciliation in Africa, where one of his resources is that of religious myth. More specifically Soyinka turns to his ancestral Yoruba pantheon and to their rituals and mythology. In this version, the gods come down to mortals to oversee the atonement festival, reminding them of the necessity for atonement and forgiveness.³³ As he phrases it:

Most African traditional societies have established modalities that guarantee the restoration of harmony after serious infractions - see, for instance, the banishment of Okonkwo after involuntary homicide in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.³⁴ And, if we may be somewhat whimsical, Emperor Bokassa's bizarre return to Central African Republic, in full knowledge of what fate awaited him, argues strongly for some kind of supernatural intervention - the vengeful souls of the violated children dragging him back from the security of his French asylum? Certainly, a singularly atrocious act appeared to be denied closure until the perpetrator returned to expiate on the scene of the crime. Maybe, in the sphere of abominations, (African) nature does abhor a vacuum. Are we then perhaps moving too far ahead of our violators in adopting a structure of response that tasks us with a collective generosity of spirit, especially in the face of *ongoing* violations of body and spirit?³⁵

Even though Gitari did not share the extremism of Wole Soyinka, he nevertheless rejected the assumption that African ancestral resources had nothing to offer towards enriching the gospel in Africa. Thus, in building the case for appealing to the use of ancestral resources in Gitari's ministry (1986-1991), it is critical to appreciate that some ancestral resources, such as African philosophies, proverbs, sayings, morality, hospitality and religiosity among others, gave Gitari a chance to make the gospel authentically African.

Fifth, Gitari's methodology included the *use of slogans and repetitive phrases*. To drive his point home, he had a unique way of keeping the crowd together. For example, whenever he made a "sensitive" comment, he would ask the crowd, *Muguki - igua? Mukuiguai?* (Literally, "Did you hear? Did you see?" meaning: "Have you heard and seen?" or "Are you with me?"). And the ever-enthusiastic audience would automatically note the seriousness of the matter under discussion and respond in unison: *Tuguki-iguai, Tuguki-onai* (literally: "We have heard, we have seen").

When the Pentecostal wave on the one hand threatened Gitari's ministry by working hard to fish from his pond, and suspected Government agents on the other hand were releasing leaflets to discredit him and the church in general, he responded by coining a sloganeering song that was sung thus:

Ona ni kure mbura – Even if it rains
Ona ya kiboboto – Even if there is heavy flooding
Kana ya micumari – Even if it rains nails
Kanitha ndikoima – I will never abandon the church

Kanitha nii ndikoimai – I vow never to abandon my church
Kanitha ndikoma – I will stick to my church

Ona ni kure mbura – Even if it rains
Ona ya kiboboto – Even if it is heavy flooding
Kana ya micumari – Even if it rains nails
Kanitha ndikoima – I will never abandon the church

By the word “church” Gitari, though an ecumenist, was referring to his own Anglican Church of Kenya in Kirinyaga Diocese (1986-1991). “Raining nails” referred to the state persecution that the church was suffering as a result of his uncompromising stand on matters of social justice at the local and national levels. Like John in his book of Revelation (1-4), Gitari was simply telling his audience: *Vumilia mateso ya sasa. Ni ya muda tu! Tuzo la baadaye ni kubwa*. That is, “Endure the persecution you are encountering now. It is only for a while. You will be crowned with abounding victory later. So stand firm.”

By cautioning his audience not to abandon the church, Gitari was telling his local Kirinyaga Diocese first and the nation as a whole later that they should not allow themselves to be carried away by emerging waves, whether religious or political. So even if Pentecostal churches are making big waves with their “new gospel”, this should not make Christians lose their focus. And as some of these churches were supporting the Government and arguing that Gitari was doing politics rather than “preaching the Word of God”, they were able to

increase their membership - since some people were convinced that there could never be any juxtaposition between church and politics. In his retirement (since 2002) Gitari has watched leaders of these Pentecostal churches declaring their intention of vying for elective posts in government - years after some had opposed his crusade for a *laissez faire* society for all. One cannot help thinking of the African proverb that says, "He who tills the land is not necessarily the one who eats the produce of the farm."

In the forthcoming December 2007 elections, for example, Bishop Pius Muiro of the huge Pentecostal church Maximum Miracle Centre has declared his candidacy for the presidency, to replace the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki. He is contesting it under the banner of the Kenya People's Party. Similarly, Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, of another Pentecostal-leaning church - Jesus Is Alive Ministries - has declared her intention of contesting the populous Nairobi constituency of Starehe, currently represented by the Hon. Maina Kamanda, Minister of Sport, Culture, Gender and Social Services. Of great interest is the fact that while the Hon. Kamanda is in the Government-leaning NARC-Kenya Party, Bishop Margaret Wanjiru is in the anti-Government opposition party, Orange Democratic Movement (ODM-Kenya). In the Moi era (1978-2002), Pentecostal churches in Kenya were seen as supportive of the Government - as "all governments are ordained by God" (Romans 13). They only participated in politics when "praying" for the Government. Indeed, there were reports of leaders of Pentecostal churches being hosted by government functionaries, given cars and other favours for their "prayers". Since 2002, when the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) defeated the erstwhile governing party KANU which had ruled since 1963, this trend has changed.

When Bishop Pius Muiro of the Maximum Miracle Centre announced in Nairobi on Wednesday 17 January 2007 that he wants to be not only the MP for Kamukunji - thereby replacing the Hon. Norman Nyagah, the Government chief whip - but, more importantly, the President of Kenya, thereby replacing the Hon. Mwai Kibaki, Kenya appeared reborn. Muiro's parading of his parliamentary candidates all over Kenya on his Republican Alliance Party of Kenya (RAP-Kenya) ticket in the 2007 elections has caused great excitement, concern

and queries. Why? It is a radical shift in the religiosity of Pentecostalism in Kenya; it has not been characteristic of them heretofore to indulge in elective and partisan politics. Muiru has since then moved from the RAP to the new Kenya People's Party (KPP).³⁶

In explaining that he had abandoned the Republican Alliance Party of Kenya (RAP-Kenya) - having been almost derailed by "the work of the devil" - to move to the KPP on 25 February 2006, Bishop Muiru remarked: "When I declared my candidature, some people said that a man of the cloth should not mix religion with politics." He went on to remind his critics that some distinguished religious leaders such as Martin Luther King had made significant contributions to the politics of their day. He said: "Had Luther King, a Baptist preacher, not involved himself in politics and ultimately paid with his life, the Afro-Americans would still not be free." At this inaugural meeting, Stephen Sitati Baraza was introduced as Muiru's running mate in the coming elections.³⁷

Thus, after multiparty democracy was introduced in Kenya in 1991, political evolution has continued - as evidenced by the above developments. Could this be the new turning point for Kenya? Does it mean that Gitari and other church leaders from the mainline churches (Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians) hatched the egg only for the Pentecostal leadership to consume it? Or is it a case of God assigning to each their own task in their respective domains? A good example would be the occasion when St. Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:6): "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." Seen from this perspective, the Pentecostals who were "quiet" while Gitari and other church leaders risked their lives by their vocal stances may be compared to Apollos, whereas Gitari and others from the mainline churches (Okullu, Okoth, Nthamburi, Njoya, Kuria, Muge, Njue, Kobia, Njue and Kuria) may be likened to St Paul, who planted the church of Corinth. In view of this, Gitari (or any of the other leaders mentioned above) can now say with St Paul:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos

watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

Still using the words of St Paul, Gitari could go on to say,

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through flames (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Sixth, Gitari employed *story-telling* as a method in his ministry (1986-1991). He would tell stories of personified animals, and the audience would understand his figurative language. As a matter of fact, story-telling as an art is one major form of communication in African indigenous society. In traditional society it happened around a camp fire; Gitari told stories – which were always relevant and compatible with his chosen biblical text – in the pulpit. In general, story-telling is a means of communication that links the history of a people from their origins right up to the present. It is one of the major forms of informal education in Africa and is also indispensable as a means of illustrating an important message in the African context. Story-telling as a traditional art creates, above all, a deep sense of friendship and community. This finds a parallel in the Bible, which is a collection of stories told about a people, namely the Israelites and the disciples of Jesus.

Why did Gitari use story-telling as a methodology for communicating “sensitive” messages? First and foremost, it was a way of educating the masses without necessarily causing a lot of legal conflict with the local government, who were always trailing him for the wrong reasons. And then, as a scholar, he wanted to come out of the academic ivory tower and be with his audience. As Anthony Balcomb³⁸ puts it,

So stories are not just the domain of skilled or professional storytellers who brighten our lives with their gift of story-telling. Stories are the domain of all human beings who want not only to make sense of life but [also] to open up all sorts of possibilities in life. This is because we do not only tell stories about what does happen but also about what could happen. We challenge ourselves to greater possibilities, unknown in practice but known in the imagination by asking ourselves the question “What if”? What if we could all live together in peace? What if everyone could have a say in government? What if we could find a cure for AIDS? What if we could solve the crime question? Without narrative we could not only not do history but we could not do law, we could not do science, we could not do politics and we could not do theology.³⁹

5 A CRITIQUE OF GITARI’S “ALL-INCLUSIVE” APPROACH TO CHURCH MINISTRY

By inviting everyone regardless of race, creed, religion, gender, faith or colour to work with him during those turbulent days, Gitari risked making Christianity look like mission without borders. In other words, was it church ministry that he was doing? Or was it a matter of inviting both Jews and Gentiles to build the wall (cf. Nehemiah 2)? Didn’t the heavy presence of opposition politicians in his “political ministry” (1986-1991) imply that the gospel favours the opposition but not the Government? And wouldn’t that have given the wrong impression - that Gitari was taking sides between two warring factions rather than reconciling them as a bishop should?

Clearly, then, the “all-inclusive” approach in Gitari’s ministry can attract mixed reactions from various practitioners of the Christian faith. For if the Christian ministry is undertaken without caution, one may wonder: are we going to include even “Satan” in our socio-theological schema? What is our moral-ethical consideration in “including everyone”? Are we going to include tares even when we know they are not wheat?

6 CONCLUSION

In concluding this section, it is critical to acknowledge that Gitari’s prophetic ministry is not an isolated event; history is replete with stories of church leaders’ involvement in matters of governance in their respective countries. In Nicaragua, pressure from the Catholic Church led to the collapse of the Sandinista regime. The church was so strong that Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo, Archbishop of Managua, was named a signatory to several peace accords during the 1990 transition. He also influenced the new education system which replaced that of the Sandinistas. The Catholics kept the new regime under surveillance. Several times, church leaders complained that the new government tolerated corruption and usurped the cause of justice.

In the Philippines, the Catholic Church hastened the departure of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1987. Interestingly, it was two of Marcos’s generals who asked Cardinal Jaime Sin to help topple their iron-fisted ruler, forever changing the dictatorship’s status as one of the most powerful in the world. Amid rising opposition both from without and within, the national assembly ruled that Marcos had won the 1986 elections. Two of his top generals led a campaign to unseat the Government. On the very night when they learned that the Government’s security services were after them, they called Cardinal Sin, who immediately asked all parishes to support the rebel soldiers. Counting on US support, Marcos staged his own installation ceremony as president. But he got it wrong. The message to the Catholics had sunk in and the protest had become massive and defiant. He had to leave the country, and so yet another repressive regime succumbed to a faith-inspired movement. But Cardinal Sin would not take credit for the regime’s collapse. He said simply: “The

people cried, and their voice was heard in high heaven.”⁴⁰ A similar thing happened in January 2001 when a popular uprising removed President Joseph Estrada, allegedly for corruption. As in the previous case, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, organised the protests as he had done in 1986.

On the whole, Gitari’s approach to church ministry (1986-1991) was contextual. Why? He was theologising from his Kirinyagan and Kenyan context. For that reason his ministry addressed the challenging issues of the time - though it made him enemies within the state machinery. In some cases he would challenge corruption in high places as well as at the local level. This is contextual theologising - a phenomenon where theology is done on the premise that the social, ecclesiastical, historical or geographical context or the consciously or unconsciously influences theological articulation. His motive in emphasising the context was “the fundamental understanding that there is no neutral or absolute meaning of a text or, for that matter, of any human communication”.⁴¹ In so doing, Gitari utilised the hermeneutical keys of doing theology by sticking to what Kwame Bediako calls “the hermeneutic of identity”.⁴² As we take on the new challenges of the twenty-first century, we need to reflect on Gitari’s ministry - as one way of understanding the reality of Christian leadership in Africa today.

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ENDNOTES

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- 2 See David M Gitari 2005, *Responsible church leadership*. Nairobi: Acton,
3 I remember hearing Gitari make this confession when he was my bishop (1975-1997).
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- 5 Blamuel Njururi, *Kenya Confidential*, volume 4 No. 10, 2000.
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