



Dependency, *Harambees* and the Struggle for Christian Stewardship in the Orthodox Churches of Kenya

Dr. Joseph William Black
Deputy Dean, Makarios III Patriarchal Orthodox Seminary,
Nairobi, Kenya, Senior Lecturer, St. Paul's University,
Limuru and Nairobi, Kenya
josephwmblack@gmail.com

Abstract

The Orthodox Churches of Kenya, like many other mission churches globally, have long struggled with the issues of dependency, enabled by years of over-generous foreign financial and material support and exacerbated by a strong cultural inclination to appropriate the levers of various patronage systems a means to get ahead relationally, financially and politically. Dependency and patronage have increasingly become the default posture when it comes to Orthodox individuals and their Churches with respect to how they perceive and handle their financial needs. Churches have also increasingly made use of indigenous ways to raise financial support, known locally as harambee. Harambees are widely seen as culturally appropriate ways to raise money when the need is beyond the means of the organization or even individual. They are often the most successful means that Churches can adopt to push major projects forward such as buying property or constructing the church building. However, while harambees may be culturally appropriate, in the case of Kenyan churches in general, and Orthodox Churches in particular, harambees enable the Churches and their leaders to sidestep the fundamental issue plaguing their parishes, which is a complete absence of New Testament and early Christian principles of stewardship and discipleship. When the previous patron can no longer provide the financial support the Church needs, harambees become the new patron that enable the Church to move ahead. The Church and its members thus never have to address their own lack of stewardship, responsibility and Christian discipleship. The fundraising targets may all be met, but the Churches remain crippled by ongoing attitudes of dependency. This article explores the dynamic of dependency and patronage afflicting Orthodox Churches in Kenya, critiques the preferred financial solution of harambee, and challenges Orthodox Christians to take their calling as stewards and disciples seriously as the only way to escape the slough of dependency that, unless addressed, will ultimately consume them.

Keywords: Dependency, deprivation, harambee, stewardship, Kenya

Introduction

St. Barnabas Orthodox Church is an underprivileged Orthodox parish in a remote corner of Kenya about 45 kilometres from the capital city Nairobi. The parish has a sad history of mismanagement and corruption on the part of an earlier parish priest. The most recent priest has struggled with the legacy left by his predecessor, a legacy seen most clearly by the church members' unwillingness to give to support the church's ministry or to cover the priest's salary. When asked, the members say simply that it's the bishop's church and so it's the bishop's responsibility to pay for whatever the expense might be. As a result, the priest and his family live in poverty in a Nairobi slum and the church building is literally falling apart. There were no serviceable toilets at the church, and the priest decided that, for the sake of the faithful, they needed to construct toilet blocks for people who were otherwise having to walk to a neighbor's outdoor toilet. The priest scheduled a harambee and made use of all of his personal and professional contacts to ensure that many people would come and help raise the money so the church could have toilets. The harambee was



scheduled for after Divine Liturgy on a certain Sunday. And on the day, many people from surrounding Orthodox Churches came, as did many local politicians, and even the Bishop himself. Many made significant contributions. The members of the parish were there as well, but their contribution amounted to little more than a few hundred shillings (a few US dollars). The harambee was very successful. Enough money was raised to build the toilet block and also to make repairs to the fence surrounding the church property. But the parish still believes it's not their responsibility to cover any of the costs for the church. The priest continues to scramble to come up with basic supplies such as prosphora (communion bread) and wine. He pays out of his own meagre resources to buy porridge to feed the children a supplemental meal on Sunday mornings because he noticed that many of the children in the community are hungry. The parish has not lifted a finger to help feed their own children. And the parish continues to say that it's not their responsibility to pay their priest. And he continues to live in a Nairobi slum, somehow making ends meet by working as a gardener.¹

The parishioners of St. Barnabas Church obviously have many issues, but they are right about one thing. There was a time when funding from generous overseas patrons came to the Bishop enabling him to fund many aid projects and to assist the construction of many Church buildings, as well as provide salaries for priests and workers across the country. As one might imagine, this had a depressive impact on the amount of monies Churches were able to raise in their weekly offerings. 'If the Bishop has the money to pay for everything, why do I need to do anything?' was a common and understandable sentiment. Foreign donors were solicited to help 'poor Africans' and to do for them what they were not able to do for themselves, or at least that was how matters were often understood.

In recent years, overseas funding has all but dried up, and the Orthodox Church has experienced an unprecedented crisis in funding the various programs and maintaining the various salaries and ministries. Increasingly local parishes have been forced to step up and take on responsibility for things like salaries and for funding their own programs and projects. This, of course, has not been a bad thing. What is telling, however, are the ways local parishes have adopted to respond to their new financial realities.²

Kenyan Orthodox Christians and parishes have been nothing if not resourceful in finding ways to fund salaries, ministries, buildings and projects. Although some Orthodox parishes are relatively wealthy and some individual Christians have been successful and are prosperous, the vast majority of Orthodox Churches and the people who attend are resource-challenged. Orthodox Christians and their leaders tend to follow their Protestant neighbors in viewing success in terms of both numbers of attendees as well as relative material prosperity.³ Almost every Orthodox leader has in mind what a successful and prosperous parish will look like, in terms of physical plant, in terms of provision for the priest, in terms of ministries sponsored by the parish. As is the case with many other Christian traditions, there are not a few Orthodox Churches in Kenya that have begun with services under a tree. As soon as is possible, a small building with tin or mud wall sides, and a tin roof might be constructed (in the 20th century such buildings might have been made of mud and sticks with a thatched roof). The ultimate goal for the congregation would be the construction of a permanent structure made of stone with a concrete floor and tin or even a tile roof. Each step

¹ The story related actually happened. The names and location have been changed.

² For an early treatment of many of the issues surrounding stewardship in African contexts, see John R. Crawford, 'Stewardship in Younger Churches: Observations and Caveats From an African Perspective' in *Missiology: An International Review* IX:3 (1981), 299-310.

³ See for example, Peninah Jepkogei Tanui, Dominic Omare and Jared Bogonko Bitange, 'Internal Control System for Financial Management in the Church: A Case of Protestant Churches in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya' in *European Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Finance Research*, 4:6 (2016), 29-46, especially the description of the context, 29-33.



along this path seems prohibitively expensive for any congregation, but especially for those who live in the rural areas.

Although the Orthodox claim to be the original Church and to have best preserved the Traditions of earliest Christianity, with respect to their posture towards money and church offerings, they are not much different from any of their non-Orthodox friends. Whether rural or urban, whether former mission church or new style Pentecostal, Roman Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox, the process of acquiring funds is remarkably similar across the country. Because many of these projects are perceived to be beyond the reach of the local membership, the crucial part of any fundraising effort in Kenya is to find outside donors with the means to help. These outside donors might be wealthy individuals in the local community. They might be denominational leaders such as bishops or mega-church pastors, they might be politicians who are prominent on the local, regional or even national stage. The goal is to create an event that brings the people who have resources together with the people who have the need. And Kenya has developed the perfect, culturally appropriate way of doing just this. It is called *Harambee*.

Harambees and Kenyan fundraising

Kenyan author MacMillan Kiiru defines harambee as 'a collective effort which means pull together. It is a strategy for pooling resources of a community together in order to carry out a community project that meets the needs of all community members.'⁴ Kiiru sees harambee as 'a built-in provision for self-reliance for the individual and the society' embodying community ideals of 'mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social responsibility' and community independence.⁵ Kiiru's enthusiasm for harambee, given that he is writing a book for Christian leaders on fund-raising, is an indication of how thoroughly the philosophy of harambee has permeated Kenyan Christianity. Alternatively, Mbithi and Rasmussen view harambee as an attempt at 'bottom-up' development to meet local needs which improved self-reliance by making use of indigenous resources and by enlisting popular participation.⁶

Harambee has its origins from Kenya's coastal Swahili-speaking people, who used the word 'harambee' to mean 'Let us all pull together.'⁷ It expresses ideas of 'mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social responsibility, community self-reliance'.⁸ Harambee was used as a rallying cry by the first president of Kenya Jomo Kenyatta to unite Kenyans for the hard work of forging an independent nation after the long and bloody struggle against the British colonial regime. Most ethnic groups in Kenya have their own version of harambee. The basic idea is that of coming together as a community to assist a neighbor with work on their *shamba* or in building a home or in some other special project. Harambee was also used in funding or providing labor for building special projects such as schools, clinics or churches. In rural parts of Kenya, harambees can still be used in these ways. But in the cities and towns, harambees have increasingly become fundraising events, enabling the community to come up with the money, or at least the next instalment, that enables them to progress on a particular project.

⁴ MacMillan Kiiru, *How to Develop Resources for Christian Ministries* (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 2004), 49.

⁵ Kiiru, *How to Develop Resources for Christian Ministries*, 49.

⁶ Philip M. Mbithi and Rasmus Rasmussen, *Self Reliance in Kenya: The Case of Harambee* (Uppsala, SW: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977), 9. See also 146-163.

⁷ Kefa Chesire Chepkwony, 'The Role of Harambee in Socio-Economic Development in Kenya: A Case for the Education Sector' (unpublished paper, 2008), 4. <http://www.phasi.org/public/harambee.pdf>

⁸ Mbithi and Rasmussen, *Self Reliance in Kenya*, 13.



Harambees have proven to be an effective tool for local community development.⁹ Individuals who themselves would be considered poor use the opportunity of a harambee to pool their resources to accomplish a goal that might otherwise seem impossible. Harambees also bring together disparate portions of the same community, sometimes even of different ethnic groups, and unite them for a larger purpose than their own community's interest. Participation of individuals, as Mbithi and Rasmussen note, 'is guided by the principle of the collective good rather than individual gain', described as 'enlightened community and collective self-interest'.¹⁰ Kenyans are rightly proud of how this indigenous method of pulling together and pooling resources has been put to use to further development in the wider community and in the nation itself.

Unsurprisingly, Christian churches have made use of the fundraising power of harambee to fund their own building projects and ministry programs. Church buildings whose construction was funded by one or a series of harambees are everywhere. And on any given Sunday even today, harambees will be taking place in multiple churches across any given area. And given that a harambee has proven to be a good opportunity for a politician or for a candidate to be seen, as well as to be seen as being generous, a local harambee, even one sponsored by a church, will often have invited politicians or other local leaders in attendance whose presence and contribution make a splash that's noted by all in attendance and goes far towards ensuring that the organizers will meet their goals.

Harambees are simply a fact of Kenyan fundraising, and they are often the main strategy that is used by many Kenyan churches to fund projects. The purpose of what follows is not to criticize harambee as a fundraising tool and a means of empowering a local community to accomplish more together than they could have ever done as individuals. Instead in the rest of this article I wish to discuss implications of both the patronage and dependency culture and the pervasive practice of harambee in in so many of Kenya's Orthodox Churches, in view of the Christian calling to be stewards, both as individuals and parishes.

Churches in Kenya

By whatever measurement one chooses to use, the vast majority of Kenyan churches across the denominational divide are poor. There are some churches, usually in the major cities or towns, that have achieved a degree of self-dependence. There are, in addition, other immense congregations that have succeeded in tapping into income streams that enable them to mimic the success of Western mega-churches in terms of buildings and programs. But many churches don't have enough money to pay their pastor or priest a living wage. Nor do they have enough money to buy Christian education supplies for the children and youth. Nor is there enough money to purchase Bibles or songbooks or service books. There is not enough money to afford indoor plumbing, or to have a church building bigger than just a one-room mud or tin-walled sanctuary, or to purchase pews or plastic chairs. There isn't enough money to build space for Sunday School, or a room with a table and chairs for committees to meet. Someone may have come up with the money to afford a sound system, but when the speakers are blown out because the volume has been turned up too loud, there is no money for repairs or replacement with the result that the music is not just loud but awful as well. There is simply no funding available to pay someone to clean the church or cut the grass outside. Nor is there money to repair the holes in the roof that leak on the congregation when it rains. The current tin structure where the congregation has been meeting for the past ten years was probably built with money raised at a harambee. But on any given week, when the offering is taken after the Liturgy (as it always is), everyone may walk up front to put their contribution in the basket, but most contributions amount to a few coins or small bills at most. On a 'good'

⁹ See Washington Chege Kamau's study of harambee as an indigenous means of development in Kenya over and against the development assumptions of the colonial authorities: *Harambee: Evaluation of Its Historical and Theological Contribution to Development in Kenya* (Saarbrücken, DE: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

¹⁰ Mbithi and Rasmussen, *Self Reliance in Kenya*, 14.



Sunday, the total collected might amount to 500 Kenya shillings, or \$5 USD. That might pay for chai after the service. 'We are poor,' members of one Church told me. 'We have nothing to give.'

Another parish has a beautiful stone building that was paid for by generous contributions from overseas donors funnelled through the denominational office. Moreover, the parish priest receives a stipend from the same denominational office. It may not be enough to live on, but it helps. Even so, despite the significant help from foreign patrons, the week by week picture for this church remains the same as the congregation with the tin church. The offerings collected each Sunday are minimal. Even at the recent harambee sponsored by the Church to build a new school, the amount contributed by the members was disappointing. But the harambee was nevertheless 'successful' because the representative from the denominational office made a huge donation that enabled the project to move ahead.

I mention both of these examples because they represent different versions of the same patronage mentality that characterizes the members and leadership of many Christian churches in Kenya, and many local Orthodox parishes as well when it comes to money and funding church needs. Just as with the old mission churches, many contemporary churches have adopted a posture of dependence upon a patron or patrons.¹¹ Bluntly put, I don't have to contribute my money to this church or program or building project because somebody wealthy will do it for me. That 'somebody' might be a politician who has his/her own agenda for giving at the harambee. It might be a foreign donor (an individual or Church or a mission organization or an NGO) who has developed a 'relationship' with the pastor/priest/leadership and who gives what for the local economy is a mind-boggling amount of 'support' which may or may not be spent with integrity. It might be a denominational office or a bishop who steps in with largesse that rescues the church from its current crisis or helps the pastor pay school fees for his children that were due last week. And so the church survives another week, until the next crisis finds it with hand extended begging the circle of patrons to save them yet again.

These are all pictures of dependency, and their number could be multiplied. Rarely if ever do the patrons of such churches and ministries suspect that they are simply fueling a cycle that is destroying viable Christianity. They think they are doing a good thing by helping these churches and Christian leaders meet needs and accomplish goals. They often feel that they are using their resources to help poor people in their poverty. They often feel that this is what 'mission-minded' people do. But in fact, these many patrons are helping poor people and poor Churches *remain* in their poverty.¹² This is because their intervention removes any incentive to think differently about how we as Christians manage the resources entrusted to us by God. In an article on short term missions and dependency, Robert Reese defines dependency as 'the unhealthy reliance on foreign resources, personnel and ideas, which stifles local initiative. It is expecting someone else to do for you what you could do for yourself.'¹³ Poor Churches and poor Christians who depend on patrons to rescue them have had the luxury of not thinking Christianly about their money and how it is being used. There is, of course, a communal aspect towards financial responsibility in Kenyan societies, where family members with resources are obligated by ties of kinship to aid those family members who have needs. But the financial poverty of Churches has nothing to do with these kin-

¹¹ This fits into a broader narrative of colonialism and Christian mission strategy identified by authors such as Etim Okon, 'Christian Mission and Colonial Rule in Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis' in *European Scientific Journal* 10:17 (2014), 204-207.

¹² Glenn Schwartz identifies the issue and traces the consequences and provides some helpful solutions for the issue of dependency. His work is geared to provide mission administrators and missionaries with practical strategies to deal with the realities and consequences of dependency in local churches, institutions and individuals. See Glenn J. Schwartz, *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement: a Compendium* (Author House, 2007).

¹³ Robert Reese, 'Short-Term Missions and Dependency' in *World Mission Associates* (2007), 1, <http://www.wmausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Short-term-Missions-and-Dependency.pdf>



ship and communal obligations to help. Something more fundamental is going on in the Churches, and that has to do with the foundational Christian discipleship issue of bringing every aspect of one's life under the Lordship of Christ, *especially one's finances*. Again, this foundational aspect of being a Christian is called 'stewardship'.

The route to Salvation

The truncated version of the New Testament gospel that is preached and believed in many churches in many Kenyan denominations is heavy on the issue of being 'saved' from our sins, but the corresponding notions of repentance and discipleship, while perhaps mentioned, receive none of the emphasis one finds in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. The results too often are churches full of men and women and young people who may have 'a testimony' of when, where and how they got 'saved'. But one quickly realizes that this notion of 'salvation' merely gives the believer the assurance that they are 'going to heaven when they die'. Even in Orthodox Churches, where salvation is construed differently from the Western model on offer,¹⁴ the implications of Orthodox theology, however sound, have often not permeated the hearts and the minds of the faithful so that, in practice, they are little different from their Protestant neighbors in terms of their day to day practice of their faith. There is a rhetoric of piety that is mastered by most. But there is no corresponding sense that the gospel has any meaning or application for today, except to attend church and avoid committing sins that might cause public scandal (or avoid getting caught!).

This incomplete understanding on the part of otherwise sincere Christians means that, for the most part, their 'Christianity' is merely a veneer painted over the way of life they have always known. 'Church is what we do on Sundays,' a businessman told me once. But in the meantime, life goes on as it always has before, with the Gospel making almost no difference in how people actually live or treat each other or manage their affairs. So on Monday through Saturday, this customer is cheated, that policeman is paid off, the books are fudged so that taxes can be avoided, a bribe is received to influence the awarding of a contract, and the wife subjected to physical abuse. And then back to what we do on Sunday.

For Orthodox Christians, this incomplete understanding of the gospel has direct implications for how individual Christians understand and use resources and for how Churches view their finances. One gets the impression that, aside from the postures of piety, Christianity makes no real difference in people's priorities and no material difference in how they make use of their resources. Church members are not 'disciples' (intentional followers of Jesus) because none of their leaders are 'disciples', because no one in the Church has ever raised the issue with them, much less taught and shown them how to be a disciple. Christianity is merely a culturally-appropriate religious add-on to their lives instead of a relationship with Christ that increasingly defines their lives. In this sense, many Orthodox Christians are no different than their Protestant and Roman Catholic neighbors - Christian by profession, but not much else.

The importance of Stewardship

New Testament Christianity is not just a matter of hearing the good news of what God has done for us in Christ, it is also a matter of our response. We respond by repenting – that is, by turning from our destructive ways of living for ourselves, of the way we treated our neighbors and of the ways we ignored God's claim and call on our lives. Our faith leads us to begin a process of bringing our lives into conformity with what it means to be like Jesus: in our character, in our relationships with others, in our relationship with creation around us, and in our relationship with God. And one of the ways we do this is by understanding ourselves as called by God to be *stewards*.

¹⁴ See for example Kallistos Ware's *How Are We Saved? The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publications, 1996). Ware provides an easy to read explanation of Orthodox emphases when it comes to the gospel and the implications of salvation on the lives of believers.



Stewardship is part of humanity's original call.¹⁵ Part of being made in the Image and Likeness of God is to be a steward over God's creation (Genesis 1:27-28). Men and women were called to manage the beauty and diversity and plenitude of the created world in which God in his goodness had placed them. One of the first tasks undertaken by the first man was to name the animals. But when humanity fell into rebellion against God and into selfishness, our call to be good stewards of God's creation was largely forgotten. Instead, humanity began the increasingly destructive practice of exploiting creation for our own use. And while we human beings have never entirely forgotten what our original call in this regard was, and have been capable of dramatic feats of conservation and astonishing advances in science and technology, it doesn't take a very long walk through our cities and in the rural areas to observe that something has gone terribly wrong, and that we have no one to blame but ourselves. There is garbage piled everywhere, creeks and rivers are choked with refuse and would likely poison anyone who risked a drink from them, erosion from ignorant farming practices has destroyed thousands of hectares of rich farmland, and the treasures of this land – its wildlife and its forests – have been squeezed into ever marginal lands for no reason other than heedless human self-centeredness. And if that were not enough, the crown jewels of our African eco-system, our elephants and rhinos and other wildlife are being slaughtered to extinction just to satisfy the utterly selfish greed of a very few. All of these and more are problems created by the self-centered, thoughtless choices of human beings, the very people whom God has called to protect and manage his creation. None of us are innocent bystanders in this. All of us have become complicit. Our choice to keep quiet gives the rest permission to continue with impunity. They couldn't continue their destructive rampages without the rest of us choosing to look the other way or absolve ourselves by blaming another.

Stewardship in this creational sense is simply what it means to be human, and our refusal to be good stewards in this regard is a measure of the destruction that sin is bringing on our lives and our society.¹⁶ The degradation of the creation around us and of our own lives is what death does. It destroys that which is beautiful, and will ultimately rob us of that which is most precious to us, our own lives and those of our loved ones. But the rot has already set in, and we have blighted all that God said in the beginning was good and we are turning this creation that was entrusted to us into our own coffin. It is for this reason we desperately need a savior. And this is one of the reasons that 'salvation' will mean much more than avoiding hell and 'going to heaven'. Repentance means owning what we have done and turning from all the behavior and the choices that brought us there, and instead choosing to behave in a way that both begins to undo the damage that we have done and does instead the good and right things that Christ our Savior is calling is to do and be.

Part of the change that salvation brings to our lives is a new understanding of who we are in our own context, and this means reclaiming stewardship as God's call on our lives. Just as being a disciple is part of everybody's call when one becomes a Christian, so stewardship is part of the new life we are brought into by the Holy Spirit as part of the normal Christian life. It matters not

¹⁵ See Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 15-17.

¹⁶ His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew writes, 'We envision a new awareness that is not mere philosophical posturing, but a tangible experience of a mystical nature. We believe that our first task is to raise the consciousness of adults who most use the resources and gifts of the planet. Ultimately, it is for our children that we must perceive our every action in the world as having a direct effect upon the future of the environment. At the heart of the relationship between man and environment is the relationship between human beings. As individuals, we live not only in vertical relationships to God, and horizontal relationships to one another, but also in a complex web of relationships that extend throughout our lives, our cultures and the material world. Human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence; a complex fabric that we believe is fashioned by God.' His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 'Orthodox Churches Statement on the Environment', <https://acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/orthodox-churches-statement-environment>. See also, Crina Gschwandtner, 'Orthodox ecological theology: Bartholomew I and Orthodox Contributions to the ecological debate' in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10:2-3 (2010), 130-143.



how poor one is, or how wealthy one is – everyone is called to stewardship. In fact, the biggest adjustment in thinking must occur on the part of those who are wealthy. Wealthy people are often used to thinking that a contribution here and a contribution there satisfies any requirement for generosity that God might have. But this self-justification misses completely the attitude towards possessions that Christ calls each Christian to own:

A ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother."' He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.' (Luke 18:18-27)

Or as the Apostle Paul puts it in his first letter to the church in Corinth: '*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?*' (1 Corinthians 4:7)

The wealthy young ruler walked away from Jesus sad not because he was wealthy, but because he, like all of us, thinks that what we have is *ours*. This is the perspective of the world, and tellingly, it is also the perspective of almost everyone in the churches. It is precisely because of this that churches in Kenya and elsewhere are impoverished. It is this attitude that is the beginning of the disaster that characterizes our relationship with God, with the people around us, and with creation itself.

Truth be told, we own nothing. As Paul says, everything we think is 'ours' has come to us as a gift. We come to this world with nothing in our hands, and death strips us of whatever we thought might have belonged to us at the other end. And in between, *everything* that has come to us comes as a gift which we receive. This is actually the starting point of both Christian discipleship and Christian stewardship, because it enables us to view ourselves and everything that we have as belonging to the Lord. We and all we are and all we have are now the Lord's, for him to use as he sees fit.

Although this is the starting point of the New Testament gospel, it very rarely gets communicated when the 'gospel' is preached and when people are invited to become Christians in most of today's churches. Perhaps we are more concerned to inflate our numbers with easy converts than we are to be faithful to Christ. Maybe we are afraid that no one will respond if we allow Jesus himself to speak in our churches. And so we serve up heaping *sufurias* (huge cooking pots) of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor, theologian and martyr, calls 'cheap grace'. Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) writes:

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheap-jacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices.... Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for



its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin.... Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. 'All for sin could not atone.' Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world. Let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.¹⁷

By means of contrast, Bonhoeffer says,

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all of his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.¹⁸

It turns out, not surprisingly, that Orthodox Christians are just as susceptible to cheap grace as German Lutherans. Our challenges with stewardship in our churches and in our own lives turn out to be mere symptoms of the real issue confronting Christianity in Kenya – we are a land of churches full of converts, full of the baptized, full of the 'saved', but there is hardly a *disciple - a Christian* - to be found in any town, in any community, in any church. There are certainly a lot of worship services. There are prayer meetings in abundance. A lot of people singing 'praise and worship' songs, a lot of people speaking in tongues. But where are the disciples? There are more preachers and preaching per capita the population in Kenya than just about anyplace else in the world. But so little Christ, and so little of his transforming call upon our lives.

When God's grace does breakthrough in African lives and in African contexts, it does so powerfully and with an unexpected voice. Mary Aluel Garang writes of being a Christian and of suffering in Sudan, with the harrowing line: 'Death has come to reveal the faith.' She continues:

God has come among us slowly,
And we didn't realize it.
He stands nearby, behind our hearts,
Shining his pure light upon us.
We ask you, our Father,
Great Lord of peace in heaven,
Who is calling us with a whisper.
Our Father knows the depths of the heart of humankind.
Our faith is weak; make us strong,
That we may stand firm with courage,
Until you reach us undeterred...

Send us your power, O Lord,
The guiding Spirit of truth
To teach us the law which has been written.
We receive salvation slowly, slowly,

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1959), 45-47.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 48-49.



All of us together, with no one left behind.¹⁹

We began this article discussing the role of harambee in Kenyan fundraising in general, with a view towards its widespread use among Kenyan Orthodox Churches in particular. The strategy by Churches that have used harambee as the cornerstone for their efforts to raise money has met with enough success as to be used repeatedly by Churches in every corner of the land. But Orthodox Churches that make use of harambees to meet their financial need discover that harambees do nothing to change the fundamental poverty of their congregation or their giving. Harambees may raise a significant amount of money enabling a local project to move forward, but harambees are also a symptom indicating issues with the overall health of the congregation in terms of discipleship and stewardship. Moreover, the public presenting of gifts and the public announcement of how much a person is giving may spur even more giving by means of competition, but it flies in the face of the anonymity demanded by Jesus of his disciples when they are presenting their gifts. Christians are to give generously, but they are giving to God, and not for the approbation of the audience:

So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:2-4).

Conclusion

The whole purpose of a harambee is to sound a trumpet about one's giving and this has worked well in community settings. And while there are salutary cultural qualities of mutual interdependence and community responsibility represented by harambees at their best, the Christian discipleship and stewardship reflected in the New Testament represents an even better, more effective model of mutual interdependence and community responsibility for the simple reason that rather than being episodic as are harambees, the Christian calling to discipleship and stewardship is relational and day by day. The implications of this call to discipleship and stewardship for the Kenyan Orthodox Churches and for Orthodox faithful are profound. They will require the intentional detachment of both faithful and parishes and their leaders from postures of dependency and from ways of acquiring funds that play on human greed and pride rather than our Christian callings as disciples and stewards. As such, these implications will require us to live as Christians. These will not be the only solutions to the challenges facing Orthodox Christians in Kenya, but they are the necessary ones.

References

Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch. (1997). Orthodox Churches Statement on the Environment. [online] Acton.org. Available at: <https://acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/orthodox-churches-statement-environment> [accessed 26 March 2017].

Bonhoeffer, D. (1959). *The Cost of Discipleship*, London, UK: SCM Press, 45-47.

¹⁹ Marc R. Nikkel, *Dinka Christianity: The Origin and Development of Christianity among the Dinka of Sudan with Special Reference to the Songs of Dinka Christians* (Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 2001). Quoted in Andrew Walls, 'The Cost of Discipleship: The Witness of the African Church' in *Word & World*, 25:4 (2005), 442-443.



- Chepkwony, K.C. (2008). 'The Role of Harambee in Socio-Economic Development in Kenya: A Case for the Education Sector' (unpublished paper, 2008), 4. Accessible at <http://www.phasi.org/public/harambee.pdf> [Accessed on 15/2/2017].
- Crawford, J.R. (1981). Stewardship in Younger Churches: Observations and Caveats from an African Perspective, *Missiology: An International Review* IX:3, 299-310.
- Gschwandtner, C. (2010). 'Orthodox ecological theology: Bartholomew I and Orthodox Contributions to the ecological debate', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10:2-3, 130-143.
- Hall, D. J. (1990). *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 15-17.
- Kamau's, W.C. (2011). *Harambee: Evaluation of Its Historical and Theological Contribution to Development in Kenya*, Saarbrücken, DE: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011.
- Kiiru, M. (2004). *How to Develop Resources for Christian Ministries*, Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 49.
- Mbithi, P.M. & Rasmusson, R. (1977). Self-Reliance in Kenya: The Case of Harambee, Uppsala, *SW: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies*, 9, 146-163.
- Nikkel, M.R. (2001). *Dinka Christianity: The Origin and Development of Christianity among the Dinka of Sudan with Special Reference to the Songs of Dinka Christians*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications.
- Okon, E. (2014). Christian Mission and Colonial Rule in Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis, *European Scientific Journal*, 10:17, 204-207.
- Reese, R. (2007). 'Short-Term Missions and Dependency' in *World Mission Associates*, 1, Accessible at <http://www.wmausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Short-term-Missions-and-Dependency.pdf> [Accessed on 17/2/2017].
- Schwartz, G. J. (2007). *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement: a Compendium*, Author House, 2007.
- Tanui, J.P., Omare, D. & Bogonko Bitange, J. (2016). Internal Control System for Financial Management in the Church: A Case of Protestant Churches in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya, *European Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Finance Research*, 4:6, 29-46.
- Thiani, E. (2016). *A Recipe for Dependency: A Kenyan Story. Slaying the Dependency Dragon* [online]. Available at: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/a-recipe-for-dependency> [Accessed 30 March 2017].
- Waiguru, A. (2016). Corruption and Patronage Politics: The Case of 'Harambee' in Kenya. In A. Shacklock and F. Galtung, eds., *Measuring Corruption*, London: Routledge, 251-263.
- Walls, A. (2005). 'The Cost of Discipleship: The Witness of the African Church', *Word & World*, 25:4, 442-443.
- Ware, K. (1996). *How Are We Saved? The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition*, Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publications.