

## Editorial

### Good News for the Poor of Africa and the World

Africa is bad news in all imaginable forms! It is so bad that a descendant of African slaves in America thanked God for the singular favour God bestowed on his parents and on himself by having counted his parents worthy to be slaves in America. One recalls with shame and confusion the barbaric massacres in Rwanda and the ongoing war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo deeply connected with the crisis in the Great Lakes region. One sheds tears at the havoc and mayhem unleashed against citizens of Sierra Leone, especially the children, some not more than 3-year old, who have to live the rest of their lives as amputees, victims of quarrels they may never understand. One loses hope in view of boy-soldiers trained and drugged to kill and destroy without having an opportunity in their life to learn to embark on alternative and other life-generating tasks. The barons of corruption inside and outside Africa, the barons of the diamond trade inside and outside Africa, the barons of the arms trade inside and outside Africa, regale themselves at the profit they make from sheer blood money. Men, women and children are uprooted from their homes – some lost forever in the equatorial forests, others perish through hunger and/or disease. The spectre of refugees and internally displaced persons haunt the continent into the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. African governments and the international community appear helpless.

Nevertheless we propose this millennium edition of the *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* as an edition of hope because the Good News of Jesus Christ is brought to the Poor – especially the poorest of the poor in Africa. This good news must be proclaimed, “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” [Lk 7:22]. The new millennium is good news insofar as the poor of Africa and the world become healed to rediscover their agency and proceed to change their life by drawing from the wells of their God-given treasures instead of perpetuating the poverty and distress that have become their lot. Rediscovering their agency no matter how

amputated or disabled throws a challenge to the poor (materially poor) and those who opt for evangelical poverty to reinvent or reincarnate joy into the hopeless situations of Africa and the world; for there is hardly any creativity without internal peace and joy. Consequently, the choice to live in solidarity with the poor transforms into a creative way of joy and provides the necessary psychological distance from the mental stress caused by oppression. The poor and oppressed are given the last word by God's Spirit instead of the fabricators of the industry of poverty. The power of the poor does not lie simply in being potential forces to be mobilised to fight for their rights, but rather in realising that they are privileged centres for the manifestation of God's Spirit. "In seeking to promote human dignity, the Church shows preferential love for the poor and the voiceless, because the Lord has identified himself with them in a special way (cf. Mt. 25:40)" [Ecclesia in Asia, no. 34]. Solidarity with the poor and the marginalized is the best antidote to poverty because it is joining in the struggle of God against poverty and oppression and living in the joy of the Spirit of God.

Essays in this edition focus on various aspects of poverty, deprivation, and oppression that we live especially in Africa. They indicate also the way forward or provide answers to this thorny issue. Nnamani gives us a wide definition of the variations of experience, meaning and theology of poverty in Africa and in the Bible. Omenka focuses on the disabled persons of Nigeria and their inalienable rights. Massey presents the point of view of the Dalit, mistakenly called untouchables, in India, and discusses issues of Dalit theology of liberation. And Onaiyekan draws the attention of Moslems and Christians to the Sharia and on how to eliminate intolerance in Nigeria to put an end to violence and oppression. The concluding theological methodological paper by Maluleke focuses on the agency of Africans and the emerging paradigms of African theology in the post-cold war and post-apartheid South Africa. Finally Ekechukwu, in the section on Features, draws a lesson or two from the seminal novel *Things Fall Apart* of Chinua Achebe who will be seventy year old this year.

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