
CHURCH AND PEACE

2023 CONFERENCE

THEME : Overcoming racism in the Church

Biblical reference : *And God said: "Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness"* (Genesis 1:26)

NEO-COLONIALISM:

The experience and expertise of a committed African

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INTRODUCTION

In 1960, almost all colonised African countries were proclaimed independent states. But this new situation, which should have been an opportunity for these states to embark on socio-political, economic and cultural development, has led to the realisation, more than sixty years after their independence, that they are still a long way from uprooting themselves from colonisation or achieving decolonisation. The way in which independence was achieved – in real terms, not through official and para-official stories of anti-colonialism – looked more like the metamorphosis of colonialism into what has come to be known as neo-colonialism. The latter, which arose in the international context of post-Second World War Keynesian¹ domination, has been adapted to the neoliberal form of domination imposed on these and other states. In other words, the end of colonialism, in the wake of African independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, led, in many cases at least, to the beginning of neo-colonialism.

What does *NEO-COLONIALISM* mean? Neo-colonialism cannot be understood without first revisiting the phenomenon of colonisation.

I. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH: from colonialism to neo-colonialism

A/ - In the beginning was colonisation or colonialism

With your permission, I would like to use a metaphor to explain the phenomenon of colonisation.

Imagine yourself in your home, living in harmony with the members of your family and following the culture taught to you by your parents and grandparents. Your family is made up of a father, a mother or more and several children.

Suddenly, you see people appear from the neighbouring house armed with guns and take possession of your house and all your belongings. They claim that your culture is too old and that they want to teach you modern manners. Your eldest son, who tried to protest against this invasion, is killed. Your children are taken away from you by force and forced to follow a new education given by the invading neighbours. These same neighbours force you to pay them part of your monthly salary to fix up your house according to their ideas and needs. With the rest of your wages, the neighbours force you to buy products made by their children...

Any protest on your part will be severely punished by your invading neighbours, who will not hesitate to kill your children if necessary. To gain access to and use the property in your home, you have to ask your neighbour. Your neighbours judge your mentality to be too traditional, too archaic, and urge you to lend them money to buy new goods. These goods are always made by their children and are not suitable for your home. In the end, invading neighbours completely change the laws that govern your home. They encourage your wives to

1 Named after the British economist John Maynard Keynes, Keynesianism is an interventionist school of economic thought that advocates a policy of stimulus to revitalise the economy.

change their lifestyle in the name of freedom. They educate your children, who end up seeing you as backward compared to the way of life your neighbours represent. How would you feel in that situation ?

This is the situation of domination in which Africans have lived during the occupation of their lands by foreign powers for more than seventy years of colonial domination and plundering. Through struggle and sacrifice, and after thousands of deaths, they were able to force the colonists to leave their ancestral lands.

However, the departure of the colonists did not lead to sovereignty for Africans over their lands. Instead of granting Africans full sovereignty, the colonising powers decided to maintain their power over their colonies by various means. This colonisation, which continues under the guise of false independence, is known as neo-colonialism.

B/ - Neo-colonialism or maintaining dependence

Let's continue our family history to understand neo-colonialism.

Some members of the family will not agree with the situation. Faced with repeated protests from some of your children, your invading neighbours finally decide to leave your house, but on condition that they choose who will rule there when they leave. They take some of your children under their wings and impose them to run your house. Your children who opposed them and fought to regain your sovereignty are murdered by others who have pledged their allegiance to your neighbours. Your neighbours continue to dominate your home by dictating their laws to your children on their side and arming them to control your home while plundering your land. This is neo-colonialism.

In other words, the independence granted by the former colonial powers was a feint cleverly organised to enable them to continue their domination by other means. The freedom given to Africans to govern themselves has not put an end to the stranglehold on their natural resources. Their resources are still exploited by large companies called Multinationals or Transnationals run by the colonising powers. So for sixty-three (63) years, through corruption of those in power or coups d'état, these companies force African governments to run their countries according to what seems good to the neo-colonising powers. In addition, when necessary for their own profit, multinational or transnational companies may finance armed rebellions against the powers that be.

The term "**NEO-COLONIALISM**" therefore refers to a situation of real dependence of one state on another without being associated with a formal, legal and political dependence, the same as that which characterises colonialism: the maintenance of dependence between the former metropolises and their former colonies. The expression is particularly used in a pejorative sense to denounce an asymmetrical relationship between the countries of the North (dominant) and the countries of the South (dominated). In other words, neo-colonialism allows "*... the postulate of the old spirit of domination and exploitation to be preserved in new, more modern, more realistic, less shocking and less conspicuous forms*".

For Kwame Nkrumah, "... *the neo-colonial phenomenon gives a fictitious independence that transforms the new state into a client state controlled by the colonising power*", whose dependence can take several forms: political, economic, security and cultural. It is also scientific and technical, with asymmetry in knowledge and patents.

II. CAUSES AND MANIFESTATIONS OF NEO-COLONIALISM

A/- Causes of neo-colonialism

Historically, a twofold factor has led to the need to change the system of domination that is colonialism.

The first was the growing monopolisation of economies, which required a broadening of the places of supply of raw materials and labour and access to a wider market. This expansion contradicts the old colonial pact reserving the raw materials and markets of a territory for the occupying powers.

The second is quite simply the revolt of the colonised which, although it never ceased, nevertheless found a context more favourable to its massification and radicalisation in the changes in the balance of power following the Second World War. Independence was the result.

The 1950s saw a radicalisation of the struggle for independence in Africa. The wars of armed liberation that broke out in certain colonies led to fears that they would spread to all the colonies and that plans to break with colonialism would become more radical. Colonialism adapted by mutating into indirect colonialism or neo-colonialism. Independence was corseted by two mechanisms. The first was the unequal nature of the world market, which forced African economies to focus on export-oriented monopolies. The second was a whole series of agreements (economic, monetary, political, cultural, military, etc.) that reproduced the way the colonial economies functioned.

B/- *Methods and manifestations*

The relationship of dependence can take several forms, including the following:

- **Political:** African leaders in the colonies are chosen by the former colonial power or with its blessing. They must protect its interests or be killed.
- **Economic:** through companies and capital flows, imposing an economic system that Africa is incapable of following (market economy) ;
- **Monetary:** imposing a monetary system that has become an instrument of monetary servitude that annihilates the development of the colonised country (example of the CFA Franc) ;
- **Commercial exchange:** imposition of a commercial system based on unequal competition that undermines the terms of trade ;
- **Ideological and cultural:** Ideological and cultural hegemony is a formidable weapon used by colonisers throughout history. It consists of dominating the minds and even

the souls of the colonised. This form of domination is achieved through education, with curricula modelled on the models of the former colonial powers, university scholarships to train their elites, the media to control the information that reaches them and religions to make them hope for paradise by forgetting their earthly suffering (American neo-Charismatic churches, Wahabi or Shiite mosques, etc.)². The aim of this hegemony is to perpetuate in people's minds the omnipotence of religion and the ideologies defended by the colonial powers. This makes the colonised believe that outside the framework created by the coloniser there will be no salvation for them either on earth or after their death. The colonised are thus completely alienated and under the total control of the colonizer ;

- **Linguistics** : Language is an important means for the colonial power to reinforce its impact on the formerly colonised territory. The aim of this hegemony is to perpetuate in people's minds the omnipotence of the colonial power's language.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF NEOCOLONIALISM IN AFRICA

From the outset, I must confess – moral and intellectual honesty dictates – that even if the African continent's encounter with the West has done a great deal of harm to Africans, there is no denying the benefits that Africa has derived from it. These benefits, even the lesser ones, are visible in the fields of education, health and infrastructure, to name but a few.

Returning to the disastrous consequences, it will be necessary to note the situation of alienated and conditioned people that Africans have become, and to add the persistence of various crises on the continent.

A/- Self-colonisation

Kwame Nkrumah emphasised that the phenomenon operated not only in the economic sphere, but also in the political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres. The colonial powers had ensured that there was an influential section among the subjugated indigenous population of their colonies so that they would become clones of their own masters, so that they resembled them in almost every respect except physical characteristics. These groups of people are in most cases the elites and ruling classes in most former colonies and willingly represent the proxy efforts of their neo-colonialist masters in the exploitation of their own nations.

The concept of neo-colonialism is not sufficient to understand the mechanism of domination in detail. It restricts the analysis insofar as it emphasises the pressure exerted by the foreign power and stresses the conscious structuring of economic and political relations with a view to establishing a relationship of dependence. The limited nature of this concept can be seen if we relate it to that of self-colonisation. By this we mean that the submissive or dependent

2 For many Africans, the Christianisation of Africa is part of European domination strategies to get their hands on Africa's wealth. This is in line with what the first Kenyan president, Jomo Kenyatta (father of the former Kenyan president, Huru Kenyatta), said: "the whites taught us to pray with our eyes closed and when we opened our eyes, they had our land and we had the Bible".

partner voluntarily accepts external value systems, forms of behaviour and thought patterns, thereby rendering superfluous the exercise of coercion by the dominant partner. It is perhaps an exaggeration to speak of voluntary acceptance. Africans have been indoctrinated for centuries; they have been led to regard their culture as outdated and, at the same time, to imitate European models. For decades, Western industrial society had a monopoly on setting an example as an "advanced" form of society. As a result, many Africans have had no choice but to internalise European models and ways of thinking, only to present them as their own.

It is clear today that this policy is a failure for the African elites, as assimilated Africans also end up coming up against racism of the neo-colon. Racism, the behaviour that crystallises relations between Africans and neo-colonialists – incidentally - is a consequence of colonialist practice. Colonial and neo-colonial discourse obeys an ideology skilfully put together by well-informed ideologists and is purely racist and discriminatory. Take, for example,

- *"We have already said that great heat weakens the strength and courage of men, and that in cold climates there was a certain strength of body and spirit that made men capable of long, arduous and daring actions... It should therefore come as no surprise that the cowardice of people in hot climates has always almost made them slaves, and that the courage of people in cold climates has kept them free."*³

Closer to home, we might mention:

- *"It must be said openly that the superior races have a right in relation to the inferior races. I repeat that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have a duty to civilise the inferior races."*⁴

This is creating a vicious circle today, because it is not only the neo-colonised who suffer racial discrimination, but the neo-colon is also suffering discrimination today. The proof is in the acts of violence against Westerners, and even more so in the protest movements against Europeans and their symbols of neo-colonial domination in the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, etc.). While these anti-European attitudes must be vigorously condemned, we must also recognise that racism against Westerners in Africa and elsewhere is part of an ideology designed to relativise the systemic, social and cultural racism suffered by Blacks and Arabs. Its rise to prominence in the public debate bears witness to the blindness of the neo-colonising powers to the colonial question, to its long duration and its persistent topicality. To add insult to injury, racism, sown by the colonisers, has sprouted and permeated all structures and institutions, even the Church. The Church is following suit and is caught up in the vicious circle of racism. In other words, racism lives and perpetuates itself within the Church.

However, it seems that the ruling elite is still very attached to the idea of equality between blacks and whites within the zone of colonial influence. In this meeting, however, the European is the conductors of the Euro-African symphony orchestra, and the African is the

3 (own translation from French into English): Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Livre 17, Chapitre 2. Un déterminisme géographique rigide qui dans le sens de l'idéologie coloniale et raciste.

4 (own translation from French into English): Speech given by Jules Ferry, spokesman for the French Republican Left, to the Members of Parliament on 28 July 1885, the year in which Africa was divided up between Europeans, heralding the start of colonisation.

percussionist. All this would be fine and dandy if, in the scale of values behind such ideas, the proportion were not placed higher than emotion or if the conductor were not more important than the percussionist.

Two aspects are particularly characteristic of the self-colonisation of the African elite: the tendency towards centralisation and formalism as fundamental principles of a certain style of government, and the maintenance of models of colonial power in the education sector.

The former is an attitude that prioritises the development of the administrative apparatus over the improvement of the population's living conditions. In other words: administration and order first, development second.

But the attitude of African education authorities often reflects their belief that only educational models developed by Europeans should be taken seriously. African schoolchildren learn more about the Crusades and European "discoveries" than about their own history. They read Voltaire and Maupassant and receive only an incomplete picture of artistic creation in their own cultures. It is true that today there are reform movements seeking to overhaul school materials and promote in African learners, especially at primary and secondary level, a relationship with their natural environment.

B/- Development of crises in Africa

Decades after independence, it is clear that Africa has not yet shown itself to be responsible enough to assume a glorious destiny. The paths that Africa has taken have led us to a single destination: *underdevelopment*. It is true that underdevelopment in itself is not inevitable; all great nations, all continents and all individuals have gone through it. What's bad is staying there. We must transcend this underdevelopment in order to become part of universal history. But it seems that in Africa, this awareness is latent. While it is clear that Africa is not yet capable of taking full responsibility for itself, it is equally clear that there are crises that are being teleguided by the international community.

Since gaining independence, almost all, if not all, African countries have invested in raw materials. As a result, none of them is an industrial power today. Yet the wars being waged in Africa are exceptionally well armed, and worthy of a Hollywood film. It is the colonial powers, the industrial powers, that manufacture these weapons of war to sell them to the Africans. Having created certain wars for others, they are very often the only ones who know and can calm them down by posing as a buffer force on behalf of the State in crisis or the States in conflict. This fire-fighter attitude gives them the opportunity to create the illusion that they are investing in the pacification of places on fire, when in reality they are using it to consolidate their domination over Africa. This observation leads us to ask the following central question: Doesn't the development of the war industry and the abusive use of its products in Africa enable the colonial powers to perpetuate their domination over Africa? The answer to this crucial question can only be in the affirmative.

Faced with all the strategies designed to keep the body, mind and soul of Africans under the sway of the economic and colonial powers, it is the duty of the new generations to take up the fight for their sovereignty.

Jamaican artist Bob Marley appealed for this in his song **Redemption Song** : “*Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery (Affranchissez-vous de l’esclavage mental). None but ourselves can free our minds.*”

Of course, there has been no shortage of attempts to break out of this straitjacket. African countries denounced neo-colonialism in the 1960s and tried to free themselves from it through policies of refocusing on the national market, agrarian reform, industrialisation, etc. They all tried different but converging experiments to break away from the extroverted economy, but these efforts were subject to destabilisation of all kinds.

VI. WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS FOR GETTING AFRICA OUT OF THIS STRAITJACKET ?

Most of the colonial powers, known as the Great Powers, owe their salvation to Africa. Under these conditions, it would seem wise for Africa, if it wants to develop, to unite to speak with one voice and also to choose responsible leaders.

A/- The need to build a united Africa

Africans generally feel great disappointment and bitterness when they look at the level of integration of states at continental and regional level. This is because there is a gap between the number of continental, regional and sub-regional organisations in charge of integration and the results achieved. The results obtained compared with other integrated areas (European Union, NAFTA), are well below expectations.

And yet, both before and after independence, it was clearly recognised that if Africa was to emerge from underdevelopment, it had to unite, for a single, indivisible Africa, without borders and led by a single leader. It goes without saying that the balkanisation of the continent is one of the main causes of its economic problems and its political, social and cultural weakness. The creation of a federation grouping together all the countries and pooling human and natural resources would enable Africans to make their voice heard on the world stage. This idea is not without relevance; it is a response to the desire for natural fraternity that drives peoples who have been through the same ordeals such as the slave trade, colonisation, neo-colonialism and other foreign domination.

If we want to remain free, if we want to benefit fully from Africa's abundant resources, we must unite to organise our perfect defence and the systematic exploitation of our material and human potential, in the interests of all our peoples. The continent cannot speak of independence if African states do not enjoy complete autonomy to manage their own affairs.

This choice is only possible with responsible leaders.

B/- Responsible leaders for Africa

It must be recognised that intellectuals play a key role in the development of any country. As such, African intellectuals must play a major role in the development of Africa. However, all these intellectuals, trained in the West or according to the Western model of education, are unable to play a serious part in the continent's development because they have been trained in Western realities while forgetting those of Africa.

Once in power, these people set to work, let their masters plunder the country's wealth in return for kickbacks for a job well done. These men and women become untouchable and rich while the people die of hunger and disease, and poverty in general; they achieved the feat of forgetting themselves as Africans in order to be more of a colonist than the colonist himself.

Africa must give itself leaders capable of learning to write the history of Africa according to African realities. African society must be seen to enjoy its own integrity. Its history must be a reflection of itself and contacts with others must be narrated and judged from the point of view of the principles that animate African society, from the point of view of the harmony and progress of that society.

African politicians must take account of African realities in their thinking about African development. By consolidating independence and neutralising neo-colonialism, which is the last stage of imperialism, Africa will be able to advance serenely along the road to development, an ideal for which people are fighting and will continue to fight.

C/- Adopting an approach that is much more constructive than accusatory

The actions of neo-colonising forces on the continent, as denounced above, continue to cause considerable upheaval and harm to African countries, rather than contributing to their development and growth. Africans need to be wary and vigilant, because there is an African adage that says "a person bitten once by a snake will end up fearing even the sight of earthworms". All the more so as the stereotype of arrivals/operators in Africa as colonists ready to exploit its natural resources to the detriment of all ethics and morals is still very much alive.

But they must be careful and do their homework, and not always approach the issue from the sole angle of a global conspiracy, with the main expected outcome being the resurgence of the colonial fact and renewed control of Africa, as attempts are being made to do, is a serious mistake. This prism of recolonisation entangles us Africans in a submissive, impotent, inept and inert dynamic, and significantly diminishes the continent's capacity to influence its own destiny and that of the world.

Moreover, this threat from imperialist forces and the call to fight against them are inoperative in a context where, in many cases, the problem is endogenous. When wrongly mobilised in poor countries, as is often the case, the abusive or erroneous reference to neo-colonialist intentions can go beyond its objective of strengthening national unity and serve as an easy

outlet, thus avoiding the search for other causes of failure and delaying the solution to the problems of building national society.

In fact, it's an established fact, and we have to be honest in acknowledging it, that the excesses and abuses observed, the unfavourable clauses in contracts with foreign players or investors, are very often the result of the ineptitude, the failure to observe the principles of governance and a lack of political will on the part of African leaders. These factors are at least as important as the harmful actions of foreign players. As a result, the energy and resources devoted to monitoring the resurgence of neo-colonialism, everywhere and at all times, should instead be devoted to finding and implementing effective solutions that serve Africa's interests; because tackling the legacies of colonialism can help overcome inequalities within and between states and meet the challenges of sustainable development.

With the new rush of today's economic powers on its resources and potential, Africa has a duty to put in place the strategic measures that will enable it to regain its real sovereignty, promote its true integration into global flows and its legitimate aspiration to finally be part of the next generation of world powers. It is suicidal for Africa to confine itself to populist and hypocritical pan-Africanism, as we see here and there. The Mossi, an ethnic group in Burkina Faso, say that "if you close your eyes to avoid seeing evil, you run the risk of not seeing the good that has passed". Africa has a duty to develop with others.

CONCLUSION

African independence, the fruit of many years of struggle, has been a real failure if we take a critical look at the reality of the continent. Since independence, Africa and its people have been prey to all the scourges of the world (socio-political, economic, security, etc.). Poverty and misery are now the daily lot of Africans, and all sorts of strategies are being put in place by the great powers to perpetuate neo-colonialism. These cleverly thought-out strategies are being put into effect by the goodwill of certain Africans who are greedy for power and money.

If the situation is to change, Africans must become more aware of the situation, and be prepared to dream, because for Africa, it is first necessary to dream before engaging in the ultimate fight for its rebirth. We are confident that a glorious time for Africa is approaching, even if we may be called dreamers.

These days, we are witnessing the growing and permanent presence of other non-Western players on the African continent – China, Russia and Turkey. It should be pointed out that relations between Africa and these players do not date back to the end of the Cold War; rather, they are increasingly being reinvested.

The renewed emergence of these powers is motivated by the globalisation of trade and production. It has been encouraged by Western deficits and the financialisation of capitalism.

Africa is seeking a new configuration of economic and political relations with its partners. But how do the partnership models they propose for Africa compare with those of their Western partners, who make their partnerships conditional on the rigorous application of the

fundamental principles of democracy, notably the protection of human rights, good governance and transparency? These new powers, on the other hand, take no account of democratic principles when entering into any kind of partnership with African countries, and seem to have no interest in the internal affairs of states. For these new global economic powers, business and agreements are essential, while respecting the sovereignty of African states, whether democratic or not.

Faced with these diametrically opposed models, how can Africa make the most of them for its economy? Given the challenges of climate, security, economics and governance, what kind of partnership should Africa forge from now on?

I have deliberately chosen to open my communication with these pertinent and constructive questions about the future of Africa.

While humbly submitting the rest to your cogitation, I would like to thank you for your kind attention.

TO GOD BE GLORY AND HONOUR