

WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY AND CHRISTIANITY FOR AFRICA?

Viewed from its key and fundamental concepts, democracy would be a 'tool' perfectly compatible with the project of universalising the Gospel message that Christianity carries within itself. In the 20th century, after two globalised European wars, with the creation of the UN, democracy was adopted by the countries of the so-called Western bloc as a political system to guarantee the sovereignty of the people and their right to elect and control their rulers.

However, today, this notion of democracy, which has inspired many nations to dream of the perfect model of social coexistence, is now being questioned in many ways throughout the world. In countries with supposedly proven and consolidated democracies, we see forms of expressing the right to democracy that are sometimes violent, even anarchist. Meanwhile, a new world order has been proclaimed: professed by some, suspected and denounced by others. How can we understand democracy when the concept of globalisation is disintegrating while a multipolar structure of the planet is inevitably emerging? What will become of the 'masters' of democracy when their countries with ageing populations have to reinvent themselves with the influx of rebellious young people from countries that have long been subjugated, oppressed and exploited?

First, I will examine the concept of democracy from the perspective of the current reality in Africa.

Secondly, I will demonstrate, always from my African perspective, that the noble project of democratising global coexistence carried within it a factor that made it impossible: colonisation (in the case of Africa).

Thirdly, in an attempt to be lucid, I will point out some conceptual clues that can be considered as the contribution of the African philosophical principle of Ubuntu to the global crisis of the notion of democracy.

I – Westernised democracy, the seed of socio-political instability in Africa.

When, in the 1990s, Europe decreed that African countries had to move from a 'party state' to a multi-party political system, there was euphoria in Africa. National conferences were organised where, in a public debate, everything could be discussed, even the private lives of the supposed mythical dictators who ruled our countries.

Many political parties were founded: some based on the French model (implemented through verbal and discursive demagoguery), others based on the American model (implemented through pragmatism driven by self-interest). No effort was made to create or adapt the model of citizenship management to the socio-anthropological worldview of African peoples. The process of democratisation in Africa was even carried out with obvious principles of contradiction. The prototype of this was the attitude of the then President of France, François Mitterrand. At the same time, he said: "Democracy is a universal principle. But we must not forget the structural differences between civilisations, traditions and customs. It is impossible to offer a ready-made system. France

does not have to dictate a constitutional law that is imposed de facto on all peoples who have their own conscience and their own history and who must know how to move towards the universal principle that is democracy...

France has no intention of intervening in the internal affairs of friendly African states... For us, this subtle form of colonialism, which would consist of constantly lecturing African states and those who lead them, is a form of colonialism as perverse as any other"[1]. François Mitterrand himself was the one who made 'development aid' to French-speaking African countries conditional on their adherence to the multi-party democratic process, formalised by the famous structural adjustment plans that many pan-Africanists have been denouncing[2]. And which, in essence, were a tool for Western financial structures (IMF, World Bank, etc.) to control the economic management of African states[3].

This is how democracy arrived in Africa, like so many other so-called civilisational values, such as Christianity.

But we will now see that these values of the 'perfect civilisation' that I criticise in my book[4] carried within them a 'civilisational poison', a practice that denied all forms of human civilisation, a system that is nothing less than a system of cultural predation and anthropological impoverishment. This system was the colonising instinct.

II - The worm was in the fruit[5]

If one day I had to make a personal profession of faith, it would be something like the following: 'I believe in the Church... but I find it difficult to conceptually separate Christianity and colonialism in Africa, although in practice, the effects can be distinguished.'

The American philosopher Eric Voegelin, quoted by the Capuchin monk Santaner, said: 'When the Gospel becomes doctrine, it ceases to be a source of life and can become a principle of death'[6].

The truth reflected in this statement was perfectly proven in the case of Africa. It is clear that we, black Africans, will never stop questioning the adulterous-incestuous relationship between the Christian Church and the colonial system in our land. How can we understand that an adventure as dehumanising as colonialism has had the 'apostolic blessing' year after year? This relationship, damaged from the outset, has produced results that require us to completely rethink the process of the Christian faith in Africa today[7].

But, deep down, this is not surprising, because it has already been proven that Eurocentric Christianity was unable to prevent the great conflicts, first between nations and then between ideological groups, that devastated Europe and then the world from a supposedly Christian West.

What is most regrettable is that Christianity betrayed itself once again by straying from the intuition of Pope John XXIII when he set the goal of Vatican II to be a pastoral and non-dogmatic council.

This would have meant placing human beings at the centre of the Christian cause and, from this perspective, Western civilisation could have realised the horror it was promoting throughout the world with the system of colonisation and made a decisive choice for non-colonisation. And, in fact, would this not be a goal that Christianity itself should set if it wants to regain credibility with so many people of good will for whom Christianity is little more than one ideology among others? In other words, isn't it time for the Christian Church of the 21st century to move from a culturally invasive Christianity, through a decolonising Christianity, to a proposal for a truly decolonised Christianity? [\[8\]](#)

For me, Professor Tamayo's book is a true reference point for the direction Christianity must take today if it does not want to continue suffering as an ideological system in decline. Indeed, Professor Tamayo's decolonial perspective seems to me essential today in order to achieve a way of 'narrating God' that is audible to the people of our times. It is a question of basing a postcolonial and intercultural Christian discourse on an intracultural dialogue with the so-called 'emerging theologies' of the global South [\[9\]](#).

An important point to mention is that the decolonial character of these theologies has not been granted by Eurocentric Christianity, in the manner of the supposed political independence of the colonising countries. No! The global South is already in the process of regaining its self-determination. This process is characterised by a choice to transgress any system of domination such as Eurocentric Christianity. Jean-Marc Ela says: "We must restore the Gospel's credibility and relevance in Africa (...) bring to light the subversive power of the memory of the crucified God (...) We must take the risk of understanding the mystery of God by taking on board the questions posed to the churches of Africa by men and women who wonder how God concerns them in the dramatic conditions in which they live today" [\[10\]](#). Another fact is that, in this dynamic of self-disengagement of new theological statements from theological Eurocentrism, the global South forcefully points out that European Christianity cannot even present itself today as a model of Christianity.

I do not understand the claim that Western Christianity has made to be the uniform way of speaking about the God of Jesus Christ in the world. It is from this claim that Christianity has contributed to building a civilisation that today is denying the values of its own structure and that, in the history of the world, is the only civilisation that, as Pedro Casaldaliga says: 'in the name of a supposedly white and colonising god, whom Christian nations have worshipped as if he were the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, millions of Black people have been subjected, for centuries, to slavery, despair and death. In Brazil, in America and in Mother Africa'.

Of course, Western civilisation, to this day, has been and continues to be incapable of thinking of any other way of relating to Africa than in three ways: appropriating Africa, weakening Africa and terrorising Africa.

- *Appropriating Africa*: this involves the promotion of various mechanisms for plundering African wealth through deception. Pope Francis recently denounced this in the Congo: 'Do not touch Africa. Stop suffocating it, because Africa is not a mine to be exploited or a land to be plundered. Let Africa be the protagonist of its own destiny' [\[11\]](#). We can mention two examples: the contracts for the exploitation of natural resources in Africa by European multinationals and the CFA franc monetary system.

- *Weakening Africa*: several systems of domination have been established in Africa, starting with education (educational systems that promote mediocrity rather than competence); political governance (promotion of corrupt governments); civil society (division and weakening of leaders with utopian ideologies; distraction and disorientation of the population, etc.).

- *Terrorising Africa*: this involves the manipulation of elections and the repeated destabilisation of political regimes to frighten the population. We see all kinds of threats (Western military bases in African countries, armed UN missions, arming and financing terrorist groups).

To all this, the new generation is saying: Enough is enough!

III – From imperialist democracy to Ubuntu democracy

In Africa, we are currently witnessing what we might call an open disaffection of African peoples towards their former colonisers. The country that is feeling the brunt of this disaffection is France. Many opinion leaders^[12], and I agree with them, strongly denounce the nebulous ‘France-Africa’ mafia. In some countries, so-called ‘anti-French resentment’ is openly “preached”. Young Africans allow themselves to loot French embassies with a prescriptive slogan: ‘FRANCE-DEHORS’, ‘France, get out’.

We are witnessing a succession of coups d’état that can be described as military-popular in French-speaking African countries. Something very curious and similar in all scenarios is that a military junta ousts an elected president from power and, instead of seeing popular demonstrations calling for the fallen president, we see the people coming out en masse to embrace the tanks and applaud the soldiers. How has it been possible to reach this situation?

One of the obvious concepts of the management of any political power is that it is understood as a matter for a clan. In Africa, these are natural or anthropological clans, and in the West, they are ideological clans. When the West decided to export and impose democracy on Africa, it did not take into account the worldview, anthropological vision or socio-vision of the African peoples. In general, the traditions and customs of black peoples are characterised by altruism based on hospitality, empathy and sharing.

I think that the crisis facing democratic institutions in the Western world today is because they lack these principles of the Ubuntu philosophy.

It must be recognised that, throughout the 20th century, the West has succeeded in establishing solid institutions operating on democratic principles. However, on the one hand, there is suspicion that these institutions are manipulated by small ideological castes that control their operations and control the world's populations; on the other hand, there is a form of anti-systematisation and violence in some “democratic apparatuses” (the indefinite strikes by the yellow vests in France, the invasion of the Capitol due to Donald Trump's electoral defeat in the US, the invasion of symbols of power after Jair Bolsonaro's defeat in Brazil, and the violent discussions among elected officials in various democratic chambers in the West).

What is happening to the use of democracy in the West?

There is a noticeable crisis in Western democratic organisation, where decisions about coexistence are supposed to be taken collectively by the people. The notion of the people here is essentially the whole community that needs to be governed. But, ultimately, are it really the citizens who make the decisions that affect the community?

The African worldview questions the imperialist model of democracy in the neoliberal Western world, in the sense that it calls for a reconsideration of human life in its holistic understanding. Indeed, the Ubuntu philosophy would help to promote models of coexistence, not only in terms of coexistence and mutual acceptance between individuals ('I am because you are'), but also in terms of a harmonious relationship with nature and the cosmos. The idea is that, in the expression of democratic coexistence, not only the interests of the community of individuals are valued, but also the community of all created beings (visible and invisible; present and absent, material and spiritual, etc.). In other words, it is a question of considering the three dimensions of the same governed person: the individual, the citizen and the believer.

One of the things that Africa and the global South can contribute to the struggle for democracy today is that the critical voices coming from there are often authentic and not swayed by political correctness. Indeed, the bearers of these voices are people who experience first-hand or are victims of anti-democratic expressions such as racism, fundamentalism, indifference and social exclusion, etc.

In the face of what is happening in Africa, the generalised rejection of the system supposedly understood as democracy, a few years ago, one warned the world with his almost prophetic determination: "Calm down! Don't be afraid, those who are settled and satisfied, communism is not coming back. What is looming over the entire world and has become an unstoppable movement are the protests and mobilisations of the "indignados", the rebels with a cause, who are taking up the torch of the alter-globalising utopia of "Another World is Possible"."[\[13\]](#)

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the world is moving towards a multipolar system, which is undesirable for the hegemonic West but highly desirable for the peoples of the global South. Everything points to Africa playing a very important role in this new world scenario.

There is a gradual but evident and steady awakening of African consciousness, brought about by the rejection of the most subtle form of neocolonialism, which is Westernised, imperialist and neoliberal democracy.

Africa will contribute to the construction of a truly globalising democracy by integrating the dimension of cultural and religious plurality because its worldview is based on the altruistic philosophy of Ubuntu, which, in a way, is one of the foundations of Christianity.

The actors/subjects of this movement no longer want a teacher or planner of Western-made democratic principles. Africans are now ready to take charge of their own destiny. Africa has realised that one of its greatest historical tragedies has been to have encountered France on its path. We Africans now want to regard our association with this distasteful partner as a true nightmare of the past. So much African blood has been shed on our soil in the name of so-called French-style democracy, while the people have become increasingly impoverished.

Therefore, to Africans, African women and all those who love Africa, what should we do and what should we not do so that Africa ‘continues to be enriched by its history, where tradition and modernity confront and permeate each other’ [\[14\]](#) and builds its own system of democracy?

* We must:

- Reduce the “volume of hypocrisy” in narratives about Africa.
- Be loyal to the conviction of building Africa.
- Respect and adopt expressions of ‘grassroots democracy’.
- Integrate traditional African values into the formulation of an Africanised democracy.

* We must not:

- continue to build divisions of all kinds with regard to Africa; for example, see Africa in terms of micro-states, but rather as a whole moving towards a UNITED STATES OF AFRICA.

[\[1\]](#) Speech by François Mitterrand at the 16th Conference of African and French Heads of State in the municipality of La Baule-Escoublac in France on 20 June 1990.

[\[2\]](#) ‘For years (...) so-called structural plans have been imposed on Africa, knowing full well that they are unsuitable plans because they do not address the root of the problems; and the result is that more and more, thousands and thousands of Africans have to flee their land in search of a better life. Deep down, I believe that these plans are scams to take the spoils of the African people.’ Homily delivered on 3 November 2013 during a live Mass broadcast on Spanish channel TVE2 from the chapel of the Comboni Missionaries (Arturo Soria, 101, Madrid) on the occasion of a campaign against modern slavery in Africa, promoted by Fundación Sur.

[\[3\]](#) Cf. J. J. TAMAYO, ‘Prologue,’ C. MELIBI MELIBI, *African Cry for the Right to Exist* (Valencia 2014).

[4] Cf. *Ibid.*, 55-72.

[5] Cf. M.-A. SANTANER, *Le ver était dans le fruit : Un christianisme en dégénérescence...*, (Paris 2008).

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Cf. J.-M. ELA, *Repenser la théologie africaine* (Paris 2003).

[8] Cf. J. J. TAMAYO, *Teologías del Sur. The decolonising shift* (Madrid 2017)

[9] *Ibid.* 11.

[10] J.-M. ELA, *Op. cit.* 11.

[11] FRANCIS, *Address at the meeting with the authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps* (Kinshasa, 31/01/2023).

[12] Cf. Kemi SEBA, Nathalie YAMB and Franklin NYAMSI WA AFRIKA.

[13] J. J. TAMAYO, *Invitation to Utopia. Historical Study for Times of Crisis* (Madrid 2016).

[14] C. MELIBI MELIBI, *Op. Cit.* 194.