

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Africa in the Debt Yoke: The Mission of the Church* by

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The small size of the book deserves comment. At only 136 small-format pages (including the subject/names index), this is a very brief volume. I am surprised that the editor chose to publish it as a hardbound edition, because that binding undoubtedly contributed to the book's high cost (\$49). The book did not state how many of the 42 participants read papers at the conference; only eleven individuals authored or co-authored the papers included here. Possibly others presented papers but missed the deadline to be included here, but this is my speculation.

I am ambivalent about recommending this book. Despite the high quality of its scholarship, the book is both undersized and overpriced, placing it beyond the reach of most readers and even of financially strapped libraries. The papers are, by now, somewhat dated. More papers should have been invited to be included in it. Still, readers with highly focused military or aid interests may want this book regardless of its expense.

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National Council of Churches of Kenya, *Africa in the Debt Yoke: The Mission of the Church*. Kenya: Development Horizons Trust, 1991. 207 pp.

This book, the very first of its kind to be published in Kenya, is the church's response to the debt crisis in Africa. It is partly a result of the inspiration of three conferences organized by the church in Africa. These are the Maseru Declaration of September 1990, a conference on external debt held in Jos, Nigeria, in November 1990 and the March 1991 meeting in Nairobi (Kenya).

The book proceeds from the position that long gone is the time for anyone to insist that the church must only concern

itself with spiritual and ecclesiastical matters. The book argues that what the poor of the world are experiencing violates the integrity of the human community and is therefore against God's plan for man on earth. The church's mission is thus to redefine the debt crisis from purely financial orientations of the present times to the realistic human and social terms.

The problem of external debt is not only real in Africa. It is so serious a problem that it threatens the future survival of African countries. Already in the most extreme cases it has abused Africa's socio-political integrity. The cumulative damage Africa has borne in the last decade from debt is frightening. And for anybody who cares about Africa's future, the debt crisis is a matter of both serious concern and worry.

Statistics best demonstrate the above desperation: In 1986/86 sub-saharan Africa paid the IMF 500 US dollars more than she received in new aid. In 1988 the continent paid 250 million more. It is estimated that the continent's external debt will reach 606 billion U.S. dollars in 1995 and a staggering 1,496.8 billion in the year 2000. At the same time, most African countries spent 41% of their total export earnings on servicing debts. This is of course against the common rule that a country's debt servicing obligation should not exceed 25% of her export earnings if that country hopes to survive and adequately plan for her development.

In the book under review the church, acting as a partner both in experiencing the pains of the debt crisis and in formulating viable solutions to this problem, seeks to do four things. These are: (a) Establish the origins and extent of the debt crisis in Africa; (b) Assess its impact especially among the vulnerable groups in society, namely women and children (c) Explore alternatives available for socio-economic patterns of development to bring about reduction of foreign indebtedness; and (d) Analyze the implications of debt and increasing poverty on the mission of the church.

Like earlier publications on the topic of debt, *Africa in the Debt Yoke* discusses four major causes of indebtedness.

First is the capitalist economic system that was forcefully implemented in Africa during colonialism. Second, is the mismanagement of national economics by African leaders, some of whom are autocratic and extremely corrupt. Third, is the 1973-74 oil crisis and the resultant price increments in industrial and related sectors. Fourth are the constraining and unjust neo-colonial eco-political structures. Regarding this subject, the book particularly discusses in relative detail the role of the IMF and the World Bank in perpetrating Third World poverty.

The church's position about IMF initiatives such as SAPS is that they offer irrelevant solutions to the debt problem. For one the church observes, SAPS "leave too little or no room at all for governments to direct the economic activity for the good of their citizens"(p. 27). It is the argument of the church that devaluation, reduced government budgetary allocation, divestiture, price control and other ingredients of SAPS in practice lead to a decline in foreign exchange earnings, a falling apart of productive infrastructure and capital flight.

Some analysts, especially those who blame the current debt malaise on colonial plundering of African resources, advocate outright refusal to repay all outstanding debts. Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, and Tanzanian former head of state, Julius Nyerere have, for instance, argued that debtor countries' have a strong and binding historical and moral justification not to pay back. Other analysts prefer moderate measures such as debt waivers and debt rescheduling.

The church, in the book under discussion, dismisses refusal as unrealistic and counterproductive because the poor countries carry "no doubt against the powerful Northern creditor countries" (p. 80). With the caution of a peace-maker the church proposes that "the best recourse lies in reasoning, and persuasions, in negotiations to find mutually suitable solutions rather than in confrontation" (p. 87).

*Africa in the Debt Yoke* is for all purposes a solemn blueprint to solving one of the worst things to happen to Africa. While outlining its response, the church is quick to emphasize the need for concentrated efforts in other sectors of

the society. Top among the five recommendations by the church is a call for a international ethics on loans that will ensure public accountability, the funding of only feasible and beneficial projects, and the linkage of loan provision to the reparation of wealth stashed in foreign accounts where applicable. Probably this recommendation holds alot of hope for a host of ravaged African economics. It needs to be pointed out, however, that this is a venture that demands substantial amounts of determination and global political goodwill.

In *Africa in the Debt Yoke* the church lends its voice to Africa's worst modern-day epidemic. From the arguments advanced, it is quite apparent that the church historic mission and social function is now more than just pricking the conscience of creditor and debtor countries.

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Dolphyne, Florence Abena, *The Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective*. Accra, Ghana: Ghana University Press, 1991. 107 pp.

It is a truism that one cannot fairly judge the quality of a book by merely looking at its cover and, sometimes, its volume. Indeed, that is the situation with Professor Florence Abena Dolphyne's slim but excellent and very readable book, *The Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective*, published in 1991 by the Ghana University Press.

The 107-page unpretentious book — which also has 15 additional pages, including the useful seven-page preface (i-xv) — makes “an attempt, by someone closely associated with activities for women in Ghana during the Decade, to explain what she believes women's emancipation means to African women,” (p. xiv). Essentially, the book is based on Dr. Dolphyne's field experiences in Ghana as well as in a number of