„Studia Ełckie" 27(2025), nr 2, s. 247-264
e-ISSN 2353-1274
p-ISSN 1896-6896
DOI: 10.32090/SE.270215

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Scapegoating and the Perpetuation of Harmful Stereotypes: A Theological Reflection Inspired by Selected Texts from AFER

Abstract: The concept of scapegoating has played a significant role in theological discourse, particularly in understanding the atonement of Christ. However, this paper argues that relying on scapegoating as a primary framework for theological reflection on identity is inherently problematic. It argues that relying on this framework perpetuates harmful stereotypes, undermines the agency and dignity of marginalized groups, and ultimately fails to capture the fullness of divine love and justice. It also argued, the often undermine discrepancy in the notion of scapegoating in both the theological and psychological explanation of it. This paper present practically the mistake of applying psychological meaning of scapegoating into theological reflection. By drawing upon insights from various theological and psychological perspectives, including liberation theology and postcolonial transformation, this paper proposes alternative frameworks that offer a more nuanced and liberative understanding of identity in relation to God, self, and others. This will be supported by chosen texts from a journal edited and published by the Catholic University of East Africa supervised by AMECEA.

Keywords: scapegoat, sacrifice, stereotype, liberation theology, Africa, Tanzania, The African Ecclesial Review.

The phenomenon of scapegoating has been a recurring theme throughout human history. It involves the displacement of blame and aggression onto a particular individual or group, often those who are already marginalized and vulnerable. This act of scapegoating serves to maintain social cohesion and deflect attention from the systemic issues that contribute to conflict and injustice.

In theological discourse, the concept of scapegoating has been prominently associated with the atonement of Christ. The traditional understanding of Jesus' death as a sacrifice to appease God's wrath has been interpreted through the lens

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Article ▪ Received: Feb 10, 2025 ▪ Accepted: Apr 23, 2025

of scapegoating. However, this interpretation raises serious ethical and theological concerns. It portrays God as a vengeful deity who demands a blood sacrifice, and it reinforces the notion that violence and suffering are necessary for redemption. In this article we will attempt to analyze this issue from a theological and psychological point of view, however they will be discussed in the area of method in pastoral theology.

This why to understand fully the issue of scapegoating, it seems necessary to analyze it briefly from both theological and psychological perspectives. While we recognize that these two explanations can overlap in certain contexts, examining them separately provides distinct insights.

We will try to support presented ideas with texts quoted from a periodical issued by the Catholic University of Eats Africa (CUEA).

Pastoral theology and its method

In order to analyze the chosen area in intended matter, we will apply the method used in Pastoral Theology (PT) that focuses on religious practice within the Church; Outside the Church; and within a pluralistic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

The PT studies as well the mentioned above religious practice in two levels: First, it examines the existing tension between the current state of religious practice and the desired one, and secondly, by undertaking a research-driven practice, identifies problems and tensions to understand on how it should or could have become. The main goal of this branch of theology is then to ensure a constant renovation and updates of lines of action within the chosen topic.

We should also state here that PT engages the complex interplay of theory and practice in a focal way. This is because theory and practice imply and shape each other constantly. Practice gives rise to theory, while theory often has practical implications. Hence, if we place an effort in understand and explaining both human action and thought, it will require from us a complex theoretical framework, that in turn, arise out of reflection upon actions and practices.

Methods in PT often bear witness to the complexity of the theory-practice relationship, that often make theologians to use a spatial metaphor to describe this complexity.

Method

For the sake of multilayer character of the chosen topic, the Zervas-Klostermann method will be mingled here with the principles of the descriptive method that have been employed into the research in order to present the situation as it exists in the tone of collecting data for this study. Specifically, we will focus on so-called *Ex post facto* research for descriptive studies, where the researcher has no control over the variables, and the findings are reported based on what has happened and what is currently happening.

Context and Background

Because of several factors, such as the etymology of the term and its hermeneutical, cultural and geographical context, there is a need to situate our discourse within a historical and geographical framework. This approach will help us to avoid overly theoretical discussion on one hand, while allowing us to follow the logical flow of the author's intent from the other. Given the extensive African contacts involved, this study will focus specifically on the Tanzanian contexts, due to its long history with the Arab Slave Trade and its unique political position in this part of the African continent.

Definition of Scapegoating

It would be useful to trace the origin of the term *scapegoating* back to ancient religious practices, particularly within the culture and religion of the Israelites, as described in the book of Leviticus[1].

In the Old Testament, this concept is vividly illustrated in the ritual of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement[2]. According to Leviticus 16:8-22, two goats were selected: one for sacrifice and the other as the *scapegoat*. The high priest would symbolically transfer the sins of the people onto the scapegoat, which was then sent into the wilderness, carrying away the community's guilt. This ritual highlights the idea of transferring blame and sin onto an innocent victim, a theme that recurs throughout various atonement theories.

Continuing this theological reflection, it seems important to consider René Girard, a leading modern proponent of scapegoating theory. Girard's mimetic theory suggest that human desires are imitative, often leading to rivalry and conflict. According to him, societies alleviate this violence through the scapegoat mechanism, in which a chosen victim is blamed for the communal problems and subsequently expelled or killed[3]. This process temporarily restores social harmony but perpetuates a cycle of violence.

Girard's interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is especially significant. He argues that Jesus' death exposes and subverts the scapegoat mechanism. Unlike previous scapegoats, Jesus is innocent and willingly accepts his fate, thereby revealing the injustice inherent in the system. This revelation, offers a path towards overcoming violence and achieving genuine reconciliation[4].

Another important perspective related to scapegoating is the Christus Victor model of atonement which emerges in early Christianity. This theory views

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1 L.L. Baker, *What Is a Scapegoat in the Bible, and Why Is Jesus Ours?*, https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-a-scapegoat-in-the-bible-and-why-is-jesus-ours.html (access: 19 December 2024).

2 S.D. Morrison, *7 Theories of the Atonement Summarized*, https://www.sdmorrison.org/7-theories-of-the-atonement-summarized/ (access: 19 December 2024).

3 Cf. G. Andrade, *René Girard (1923-2015)*, in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu/girard/ (access: 19 December 2024).

4 L.L. Baker, *What Is a Scapegoat in the Bible, and Why Is Jesus Ours?*, op. cit.

Jesus' death as victory over the powers of evil, including the scapegoat mechanism itself. By willingly becoming the scapegoat, Jesus defeats the forces of sin and death, liberating humanity from their control[5].

Theological Implications

The scapegoating theory carries profound theological implications, especially in understanding the nature of sin, sacrifice, and redemption. It challenges traditional views of divine justice and retribution, by emphasizing themes of mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. By revealing the violence inherent in the scapegoat mechanism, the theory calls for a critical re-evaluation of sacrificial practices and theologies that perpetuate cycles of blame and punishment. Furthermore, the scapegoating theory highlights the role of Jesus as the ultimate scapegoat who, through his death and resurrection, breaks this cycle of violence and offers a new way of relating to God and others. This perspective aligns closely with the moral influence theory of atonement, which focuses on Jesus' life and teachings as a model for ethical living and social transformation[6].

In theology, the scapegoating theory provides a compelling framework for understanding the dynamics of sin, sacrifice, and redemption. By tracing the historical development of scapegoating practices and engaging with the insights of theologians like René Girard, we gain deeper appreciation of the transformative power embodied in Jesus' death and resurrection. Ultimately, this theory challenges us to move beyond cycles of blame and violence, embracing instead the core Christian principles of mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Scapegoating in relation to Jesus' Sacrifice

Over the centuries of Christian theological development, Jesus Christ has been regarded as the ultimate scapegoat and sacrificial lamb. His crucifixion is understood as the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, in which He takes upon Himself the sins of humanity and offers himself as a sacrifice for the atonement of sins.

Among many Catholic sources, special attention should be given to the source of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which teaches that Jesus is "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This signifies that Jesus is the ultimate scapegoat who bears the sins of humanity[7].

Similarly, John Paul II, in Evangelium Vitae strongly emphasized that the mystery of human suffering and sin is fully revealed in the light of Christ's cross[8].

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5 B. Pugh, *Ransom, substitute, scapegoat, God: is there one doctrine of the atonement?*, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/29-march/features/features/is-there-one-doctrine-of-the-atonement-ransom-substitute-scapegoat-god (access: 19 December 2024).

6 L.L. Baker, *What Is a Scapegoat in the Bible, and Why Is Jesus Ours?*, op. cit.

7 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City 1992.

8 Cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, Rome, March 25, 1995, no. 86-87.

Likewise, Pope Francis, in his Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti argued that: "There is at times a tendency to deliberately fabricate enemies: stereotyped figures who represent all the characteristics that society perceives or interprets as threatening. The mechanisms that form these images are the same that allowed the spread of racist ideas in their time"[9].

What follows is a brief theological comparison between of the mechanism of scapegoating and Christ's sacrifice, aimed to helping us better understand their fundamental similarities and differences.

Short Comparison of Scapegoating and the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

There are some similarities that in short could be presented in these few points:

1. Transfer of Guilt: Both the scapegoat ritual and the sacrifice of Jesus involve the transfer of guilt and sin from the people to a sacrificial victim10;

2. Atonement: Both practices aim at atonement and reconciliation with God11;

3. Symbolism of Purification: The scapegoat ritual and the crucifixion of Jesus symbolize the purification and cleansing of sin12.

There are also some differences of which we will list just few:

1. Divine Ordination: The scapegoat ritual was a divinely ordained practice in the Old Testament, while the sacrifice of Jesus is seen as a voluntary act of love and obedience to God's will.

2. Eternal Redemption: The scapegoat ritual provided temporary atonement13, whereas the sacrifice of Jesus is believed to offer eternal redemption and reconciliation with God.

3. Personal Relationship: The scapegoat ritual was a communal practice, while the sacrifice of Jesus14 emphasizes a personal relationship with God and individual salvation.

From this brief comparison we gain a deeper understanding of the concept of scapegoating in theology and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which are indeed profoundly intertwined. While the scapegoat ritual in the Old Testament provided a means of atonement and purification, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is regarded as the ultimate and final atonement for the sins of humanity. This

[9] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, Assisi, October 3, 2020, no. 266.

[10] Cf. *Understanding the Spiritual Meaning of the Scapegoat*, https://spiritualityshepherd.com/spiritual-meaning-of-the-scapegoat/ (access: 17 November 2024).

[11] Cf. T. Staples, *Why a Sacrifice?*, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/why-a-sacrifice (access: 17 November 2024).

[12] Cf. K. Adana, *What Does The Word Scapegoat Mean In Relation To The Day Of Atonement*, https://christian.net/theology-and-spirituality/what-does-the-word-scapegoat-mean-in-relation-to-the-day-of-atonement/ (access: 17 November 2024).

[13] Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, December 7, 1965, no. 11.

[14] Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, November 21, 1964, no. 2.

comparison underscores the continuity and fulfillment of God's plan for redemption through Jesus Christ.

In the following section, we will explore the psychological implications if the concept of scapegoating.

Psychological Perspective on Scapegoating

Here we would like to offer a brief overview of scapegoating from a psychological perspective, in order to explore the different approaches developed and defined within this branch of science.

The theory of scapegoating is rooted in several psychological concepts, including displacement, projection, and social identity theory[15]. One could also argue that, in psychology, scapegoating is viewed as *a defense mechanism* whereby a person or group is unjustly blamed for problems or misfortunes. This phenomenon can occur in various contexts, including families, workplaces, and societies, often involving the projection of one's own negative traits or feelings onto others.

Here we present two fundamental sources to provide readers with a starting point for further research in this area:

1. It seem wise to begin with the quote attributed to the Carl G. Jung which highlights a psychological principle: Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate16. This underscore how unresolved inner conflicts can manifest externally.

2. A related insights comes from Gordon W. Allport, who defined prejudices as an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may too be directed toward a group or an individual of that group17.

These two quotes, attributed to the pillars of modern psychology, illustrate a different notion of scapegoating compared to the theological perspectives discussed earlier. This foundation allows as to briefly describe the psychological mechanism of scapegoating:

1. Displacement: Individuals may redirect their frustrations and aggression towards a scapegoat perceived as less threatening.

2. Projection: People project their own negative qualities onto the scapegoat, externalizing internal conflicts18.

3. Social Identity: Scapegoating can strengthen in-group cohesion by creating a common enemy and enhancing group identity.

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15 Cf. H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner, *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*, in: *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. W.G. Austin, S. Worchel, Brooks 1979, pp. 33-47.

16 Cf. C.G. Jung, *Aion: Research into the phenomenology of the Self*, (Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 9, Part 2), Princeton 1959.

17 Cf. G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge 1954.

18 More information on this section might be found in the following publications: H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner, *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*…, op. cit.

In social and organizational contexts, scapegoating often appears in workplaces, where employees may blame a colleague for a project's failure to avoid accountability. More broadly, minority groups are frequently scapegoated during times of economic or political instability – a subject extensively explored by G.W. Allport[19].

At this step in our examination, we have highlighted not only the negative aspect of scapegoating within psychology, but also the severe psychological and social consequences it can have for targeted individuals or groups. These consequences include increased stress, anxiety, and social isolation for the scapegoat, as well as perpetuating cycles of blame and conflict within organizations and societies.

Scapegoating is undoubtedly a complex psychological phenomenon that affect with individuals and groups. However, understanding its mechanisms and consequences will help in developing strategies to mitigate its harmful effects and promote healthier social and organizational dynamics.

We will now present selected texts showing how scapegoating leads to harmful stereotypes.

The African Ecclesial Review

The African Ecclesial Review (AFER) is an academic journal dedicated to the study of Catholic Church practices within African context. It places special emphasis on African Christianity from an indigenous perspective, contributing to academic discourse by making Christ's message relevant through reflection, discussion, informed views, documentation and pastoral ministry experience. AFER is published by the Catholic University of East Africa (CUEA), which is owned by the Associations of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA)[20].

The selected texts from AFER help illustrate both, the psychological dimension of scapegoating within a theological discourse and its harmful effects. It is evident that various authors in AFER publications have often identified the Western – and, by association, Western missionaries – as a common adversary, making them frequent targets of scapegoating. As a result, Western missionaries have frequently been unjustly criticized in African theological literature as agents of colonial oppression, and this critique has often manifested as a form of collective scapegoating.

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19 Cf. G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, op. cit.

20 The Association of Member Episcopal Conference s in East Africa was established in 1961 by Cardinal Archbishop of Lusaka (Zambia) Adam Kozłowiecki SJ its founding president. Members of AMECEA are episcopal conferences of the following countries: Ethiopia, Eritra, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Sudan, Uganda, Somalia and Djibuti, Amecea, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_of_Member_Episcopal_Conferences_in_Eastern_Africa (access: 11 October 2024).

1. "While globalization means progress to some, it is underdevelopment and misery for others. In the process of globalization there are beneficiaries and victims, winners and losers. Whatever the case, globalization has come to stay. (…) Free market and economy are the pillars of globalization. The rapid invasion of the Western culture of consumerism is threatening the traditional values of Africa"[21].

2. "There are many traditional cultural practices and believes that keep Africa underdeveloped. These include superstitions, illiteracy, magical practices witchcraft, wife inheritance, polygamy, discrimination against a girl child and woman, tribalism, ethnic conflicts, cattle rustling, female genital mutilation, etc. However, the real conflict is between the basic value that people must be allowed to decide freely what traditions they wish or not wish to follow and the insistence that established traditions be followed no matter what, or alternatively, people must obey the decisions by religious or secular authorities who enforce real or imagined traditions"[22].

3. "Christianity contributed immensely to the education, health and economic development of the continent. To some Africans, Christianity was presented as the embodiment of Western culture in cloak of religion. Christianity has been a major aspect of socio-political development. The greatest and most effective weapon used by the Christians to disrupt traditional believes of the people was Western education. In addition to this, medicine and technology came, which improved the people's health"[23].

4. "(…) the past missionary evangelization of the continent was superficial because it undermined both the African culture and the African person. It made the African an object of charity rather that a subject of love and self-reliant. Consequently, the Person of Jesus has remained foreign to many in Africa. (…) There is need for an African Paradigm of Evangelization which will empower and enable Africans to become free individual persons who must remain unfettered to act, speak, work, associate and accumulate wealth motivated by faith in Risen Lord for the good of humanity (…)"[24].

5. "Both the western Christian missionaries and the colonizers shared the same myth of cultural superiority and viewed the African culture as inferior and inadequate. To the missionaries then, the African cultural environment was not conductive for the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ. This explains why much effort was directed towards the elimination of traditional custom and practices which were viewed as unchristian by the western Christian missionaries"[25].

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[21] B. Iñarra, *Religious formation in the light of justice peace and integrity of creation*, AFER 45(2003), no. 1, p.74.

[22] J. Kahiga, *Poverty and unemployment: deprivations of capabilities*, AFER 46(2004), no. 3, p. 221.

[23] D.T. Abiola, *Secularization, christianity and the african religion in Yorubaland*, AFER 48(2006), no. 3, p. 146.

[24] D.R.K. Nkurunziza, *Towards a new African paradigm of evangelization*, AFER 50(2008), no. 1-2, p. 60.

[25] N.W. Ndungu, *Cultural challenges and the Church in Africa*, AFER 50(2008), no. 1-2, p. 74.

6. "The reality is that Africa's political instability, civil strife, economic crunch and regression, corruption and poverty are deeply rooted in the dynamic Western imperialist colonialist and the Cold War power rivalries between the bipolar East and West block, which shaped the colonial rule. Precisely, the Western imperialistic colonial nations put a sword at the heart of what held Africa together as a people in devaluing and assaulting their culture and identity, worth and dignity. Africans were regarded as commodities and property of the Western imperialists through the dehumanizing slave trade. Imperialists valued material resources which they siphoned from Africa more than Africans themselves"[26].

7. "Europe exported not only faith in Christ, but also all of the vices of the Old Continent. It exported the sense of corruption; it exported the violence that is currently devastating Africa. And we must acknowledge our responsibility so that the exportation of faith (…) is stronger than the exportation of vices of Europe (…) We Christians must do much more in these regards so that faith is made present, and with faith, the strength to resist these vices and to rebuild a Christian Africa, destined to be a happy Africa, a great Continent of new humanism"[27].

8. "Some theologians assert that the missionary era is over, and that the Church in Africa is capable of running her own affairs of evangelization without expatriate missionaries. They argue that the local Church should be left alone to inculturate gospel values in an African context and liberate it from the European trappings that missionaries imposed on Africans. After Vatican II, some missionaries felt that they were no longer needed and that their role in evangelization of Africa was over. The desire of the local hierarchy to give shape to their own local church, and to manage everything by themselves, gives the impression that expatriate missionaries are merely tolerated, rather that wanted"[28].

Short Analysis

At this phase of our analysis of our study, we aimed to clarify the rationale for quoting selected texts from AFER in the context of our research topic.

Principles of theological reflection

Theological reflection, regardless of its specific field, whether biblical, patristic, dogmatic or otherwise, helps believers deepen their understanding of faith and connect theological teachings with everyday life. It also emphasizes personal spiritual growth and supports others in this journey. This aspect is particularly significant given AFER's Catholic background.

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[26] K. Obiekwe, *The 2009 Synod of Bishops: Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace*, AFER 51(2009), no. 1-2, p. 105.

[27] Ibidem, p. 107.

[28] P. Saa-Dade Ennin, *The role of missionary institutes in reconciling Africa*, AFER 52(2010), no. 1, p. 509.

It would be honest to note that the disclaimer on the AFER clarifies that the views expressed in any article published by AFER do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board.

Typically, AFER does not represent the official voice of AMECEA, unless explicitly stated. The editorial board, which includes both lay members and priests, was led by Sr. Justin C. Nabushawo (SMK). The journal is published at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, owned by AMECEA.

In the following section, we will attempt to align the tone of selected texts with that commonly associated with Liberation Theology. A careful reader of texts AFER's publications may identify certain conceptual elements related to this theological field.

Elements of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is a synthesis of Christian theology and Marxist socio-economic analyses that emphasizes social concern for the poor and the political liberation for oppressed people[29].

Originating in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, it is rooted in the belief that Christian theology should address the social justice and liberation from unjust social, economic and political conditions. Its primary goal is to achieve social justice and liberation from unjust social, economic, and political conditions. This theology calls for the Church to take an active role in advocating for the marginalized, drawing inspiration from both the Bible and the Catholic teachings.

The roots of liberation theology traces back to the early Christian community and the teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized love, compassion, and justice. The Gospels depict Jesus' siding with the poor and marginalized, such exemplified in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Liberation theologians argue that the Church must follow Christ's example by actively working to transform society and alleviate the suffering of the oppressed.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was pivotal in shaping liberation theology. Its documents emphasized the Church's commitment to social justice and the preferential option for the poor. In Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the Council stated: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ"[30]. This call for solidarity with the suffering became a cornerstone of liberation theology.

One of the key figures in the development of liberation theology was Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest. In his seminal work *A Theology of Liberation* Gutiérrez argued that theology must be rooted in the lived

[29] Cf. G. Gutierez, *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation*, New York 2021.
[30] Second Vacitan Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1.

experiences of the poor and must seek to transform unjust social structures. He introduced the concept of the "preferential option for the poor", which calls for the Church to prioritize the needs of the poor and oppressed in its mission.

Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens also addressed the Church's responsibility to promote social justice, stating: "it is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation, which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and for action from the social teaching of the Church"[31]. This directive encouraged local churches to engage in social analysis and action to address the root causes of poverty and injustice.

For instance, Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, has shown a deep commitment to the principles of liberation theology. In his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, he writes: "the poor person, when loved, is esteemed as of great value", which forms the foundation of the "preferential option for the poor"[32]. His emphasis on mercy, compassion, and social justice echoes the core tenets of liberation theology and highlights the ongoing relevance in the Church today.

This theological movement integrates faith and action, calling for the Church to be a voice for the voiceless and an advocate for the oppressed. By drawing on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic doctrine, it challenges Christians to work towards a more just and equitable world.

However, it has faced controversy. Critics within the Catholic Church argue that it sometimes aligns too closely with Marxist ideology and political movements, focusing more on social and economic issues than on spiritual matters.

For example, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 1984 document, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation, acknowledged that while the Gospel is a message of freedom and liberation[33], some forms of liberation theology uncritically adopt Marxist concepts, leading to ideological deviations that betray the cause of the poor[34].

Pope John Paul II, while supporting the preferential option for the poor, proffered the term *love of preference for the poor*, signaling a more cautious stance towards liberation theology. In his encyclical Sollicitudo rei socialis, he emphasized balancing social justice with spiritual liberation, warning against reducing the Gospel to purely socio-political message. He highlighted solidarity as a moral response to injustice and stress the Church's mission to promote authentic human development[35].

Similar critics appear in his encyclicals Redemptoris Missio, Centesimus Annus, and Laborem Exercens, where he underscored thew Church's role in

31 Paul VI, *Octogesima advaniens*, May 14, 1971, no. 4.
32 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, Rome, November 24, 2013, no. 199.
33 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"*, Rome, August 6, 1984.
34 Cf. ibidem.
35 Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicituido rei socials*, Rome, December 30, 1987, n. 46.

condemning injustice while maintaining that salvation and transformation come primarily through faith in Christ[36]. Liberation from personal sin is what eliminates the secondary effects of oppression[37].

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, (later Pope Benedict XVI) as a prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith reiterated the need to balance social justice and spiritual liberation cautioning against reducing the Gospel to socio-political ideology[38].

Pope Francis having grown up the Latin America, acknowledges that the movement is being purified over time through experience and reflection from its ideological concept. He emphasizes the importance of focusing on the Gospel's message of social justice rather than ideological distortions[39].

These quotations and reflections highlight the Church's concerns about the potential ideological deviations within liberation theology and emphasize the need to maintain a balance between social justice and spiritual liberation.

This overview of liberation theology helps us understand the AFER texts in this study and see how the authors' intentions may have differed from Gospel-based theological discourse.

The following is a brief study of the political atmosphere in Africa on the eve of independence and the emergence of new countries.

An African context

The revolutionary sentiments described earlier are clearly reflected in the context of newly emerging countries on the African continent. This division was evident in the general perspectives on African affairs, particularly through the emergence of two prominent groups: the Monrovia and Casablanca.

The *Casablanca Conference*, known for its more radical stance, represented those leaders who, from the outset of independence, sought to define African liberation along Marxist lines. In contrast, the *Monrovia Conference* aimed to achieve similar goals but favored legal and diplomatic means. The *Casablanca Conference* originated from a meeting convened by King Muhammad V of Morocco, held in Casablanca from January 3 to 7 of 1961[40]. Attended

[36] Texts of presented encyclicals might be found online, especially on the Vatican website: www.vatican.va (access: 17 November 2024).

[37] Cf. Ch. Grondin, *Liberation Theology*, https://www.catholic.com/qa/liberation-theology (access: 17 November 2024).

[38] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation", op. cit.

[39] Cf. C. Wooden, *Pope reflects on changed attitudes towards liberation theology*, https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/02/pope-reflects-on-changed-attitudes-toward-liberation-theology (access: 17 November 2024).

[40] The origin of the Casablanca group should be traced back to 1955, when the Egyptian leader, Nasser pretended to play the principle role as a leader of Africa and invited all liberation movements of the continent to spread around his desire by using their offices and public media. Nasser attempted to interfere in the internal evolution of the other African countries. Already

by heads of state of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco and the United Arab Republic (UAR), along with representatives of the Algerian Provisional Government, Libya and Ceylon, the conference primarily debated the Congo crisis. The resolutions adopted reflected a distinctly anti-Western foreign policies stance, marked by a revolutionary character by the UAR's leadership during the meeting.

At the same time, other African states promoted a pro-Western political approach. The Casablanca Conference's pro-Communist orientation underscored the political divisions of the African continent and led to the formation of the Monrovian Group. Organized by President William Tubman of Liberia, the Monrovia Conference took place from May 8 to 13, 1961, bringing together nineteen countries, including Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo and twelve members of the *Brazzaville Group* (established in December 1960. This group condemned the Casablanca's radicalism, emphasizing realism and moderation in their approach[41].

The Monrovia[42] resolutions stressed the sovereignty of states, their right to independence and union, respect for territorial integrity and non-intervention in internal affairs. The existence of these highlighted the fragility of post-colonial Africa and revealed that many leaders of the newly independent nations lacked the strength to govern their country unilaterally. The Casablanca and Monrovia Groups not only divided the African continent politically but also reflected divisions among Africans themselves.

Importantly, these divisions existed even before many African countries had secured independence. However, they helped pave the way for compromises, culminating in the Addis Ababa meeting of May 1963, during which the *Organization of African Unity* (*OAU*) was established[43]. Members of the Monrovia group believed that by accommodating their moderate views, the extremist positions of the Casablanca Group could be overcome. Unfortunately, the dishonesty and political maneuvers of the pro-Communists faction led to the reorgani-

one year later, in Congo there was active an *Association Nasser* which through its agents worked for an Islamic solution in that state. He as well promoted anti-Western policy based on the Suez crisis. The Casablanca group adopted the Nasser's methodology in spreading inside of the other states pro-Communist view of independence and liberation movements. Cf. *Communism in Tanzania?*, *(Communism in Tanzania, 1964-1965)*, p. 1, AWFR, Fonds Schildknecht, vol. Z 9, no. 5.

41 Cf. A. Adedeji, *Comparative strategies of economic decolonization in Africa*, in: *Africa since 1935*, vol. 8, ed. A.A. Mazuri, Paris 1990, pp. 407-417.

42 The Monrovia Group had its origin in a group of twelve French-speaking countries that signed an agreement to form the Union Africaine et Malgache (UAM), which later became the Organization commune Africaine et mauricienne (OCAM). The later meeting of the nineteenth in Monrovia let them be known as Monrovia Group. In 1962 the members accepted a draft charter for an Organization of Inter-African and Malagasy States. Cf. D. Seddon, D. Seddon-Daines, *A political and economic dictionary of Africa*, London 2005, p. 405.

43 Cf. S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-Africanism and regional integration*, in: *Africa since 1935*, op. cit., pp. 725-733.

zation of the previously existing *Organization Commune Africaine et Mauricienne* (*OCAM*), undermining these efforts[44].

The Tanzanian context

To better understand Tanzania's political situation, we should consider a historical example from the region. On December 9, 1961 Tanganyika, formerly part of German East Africa and later a British protectorate, secured its independence. Zanzibar followed suit on January 12, 1963. Subsequently, on April10, 1964 the two entities united to form the Republic of Tanzania. A key figure in the process was Julius Kambarage Nyerere. Historically speaking, Nyerere played a prophetical role. He was fully aware of Africa's vulnerabilities and mindful that the continent could once again become an ideological and economic battlefield between the powers of the East and West. As early as 1958, he predicted the coming of a

> "second scramble for Africa and warned his fellow Africans that in this second scramble, it will not be the Europeans doing the actual fighting and shedding of blood, but brother Africans fighting each other through the machinations and manipulations of the non-African powers, if the Africans permit it"[45].

Nyerere chose to lead Tanzania toward unity without aligning explicitly with either the Eastern or Western blocs. Similarly, he neither joined the Casablanca, nor Monrovia group, believing instead that there might be another path: the *South*[46]. He grounded the vision in African personality, tradition and ways of life which differed fundamentally from the political and economic ideologies of the existing blocs. Nyerere was open to adopting the positive aspects of both Communism and Capitalism, while simultaneously rejecting anything that conflicted with basic African values, beliefs and ideology.

Liberation Theology in Tanzania

Nevertheless, there has always been a tendency for revolutionary ideas to emerge, especially as a reaction against previous oppressors, and our previous analysis revealed similar patterns of revolutionary response.

Nyerere as a professional teacher and politician, was well-versed in the history of East Africa. He did not shy away from acknowledging the centuries-long Arab slave trade arguing that:

> "Now I should try to explain what our Party's guideline are but I should like first to refer you to previous events. These guidelines begin with the repetition of the

[44] Cf. *The African political scenes*, (*Communism in Tanzania, 1961-1964*), p. 2, AWFR, Fonds Schildknecht, vol. Z 9, no. 5.
[45] Ibidem.
[46] Cf. ibidem.

> words contained in the Arusha Declaration. These are very important words and perhaps more important than any words in the Arusha Declaration. I repeat these words: "We have been oppressed a great deal. We have been exploited a great deal. It is our weakness that has caused us to be oppressed, exploited and humiliated. And now we want Revolution – Revolution to do away with our weakness so that we should no longer be oppressed, exploited and humiliated. (…) I said that I would like to go back to the past events. Our continent has gone through, and is still going through, the various stages of exploitation, oppression and humiliation. We reached a stage when we used to be caught and sold like goats – the stage of slavery. It was not a short period. It went on for whole centuries and over when Africans were hunted and caught and sold as you sell charcoal, clothes and beds. There were sold by Arabs. (…). What followed next was the second phase of slavery, namely, the Colonization"[47].

Although Tanzania did not join either the Monrovia, or Casablanca groups, the revolutionary spirit was clearly present. In fact, Nyerere went even further by committing himself to implementing the principles of Arusha Declaration and establishing the Ujamaa system in the newly independent country.

It appears that there was a potential misalignment between the universal nature of the Catholic Church and Nyerere's vision of *Ujamaa*, as he anticipated that Catholic bishops and leaders would actively support political initiatives and reside among the people in villages. In one of his speeches the urged: "(…) Learn from the Muslims. (…) They have the teachers, the *sheiks*, those who teach the Islam religion, but they live with the people"[48].

The first president of Tanzania expressed also a desire to recruit priests from Latin America, hoping that *they* would better understand and appreciate the ideals of Ujamaa, which resembled their own struggles against social injustice in their home countries[49]. As a result, Catholic leaders in Tanzania often found themselves caught between two competing currents: *liberation theology* or *state theology*[50].

Conclusion

Revolutionary sentiments had spread among many native members of the Catholic Church, influencing emerging leaders of local churches across the continent.

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47 *Nyerere's speech at TANU Headquarter*, February 21, 1971, 1-2, in: J. Gorka, *A Tanzanian Culture: Catalyst or Inhibitor of Social Development? A Short Comparison of the Cases of Dr. J.K. Nyerere and Dr. J.P. Magufuli*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 69(2022), no. 9, p. 201.

48 J.P. van Bergen, *Development and religion in Tanzania. Sociological Soundings on Christian Participation in Rural Transformation*, 1981, p. 329.

49 *Arusha Declaration: President Nyerere and the role of the Priests in Tanzania*, 3 August, 1970, p. 1, in: J.A. Gorka, *Youth ministry in the face of unemployment: Historical-critical study of the development of the Church and its concern for youth formation and employment in Mwanza (Tanzania)*, Morogoro 2017, p. 292-294.

50 Cf. F. Ludwig, *Church and State in Tanzania: Aspects of a changing relationship, 1961-1994*, "Studies of Religion in Africa" 21(1999), pp. 111-123.

Examining the situations in African countries prior to their independence movements revealed three key events that shaped the development of liberation theology in Africa: first, independence itself; second the Second Vatican Council; and third, the transition from missionary Bishops to indigenous leadership.

These three events contributed to the anti-colonial narrative, which gradually evolved into a critical perspective within the field of theology as well. While it is important to acknowledge the negative aspects of colonization, it can be limiting if the Scramble for Africa era becomes the sole reference point for all related discussions.

This narrative often overlooked earlier historical realities, such as the Arab expansion and exploration in East Africa through Kilwa Island, dating back to the 9th century, and the Arab-Muslim slave trade initiated in the 16th century when the Oman Sultanate controlled Zanzibar and claimed inland territory of eastern Africa. This is the reason why, early Anglican and Catholic missionaries, before evangelizing the mainland via Bagamoyo harbor, had to first obtain permission from the Sultan of Zanzibar to proceed.

The scapegoating narrative also obscured the broader global tragedy of colonization. According to some sources, only about ten countries in the world have never been colonized, a figure that depends on distinguishing colonization from military occupation – as in the case of Ethiopia, which was never colonized but was invaded and oppressed by the Italian army.

While scapegoating highlights genuine grievances and historical injustices, it risks perpetuating cycles of blame that hinder constructive dialog between African and Western Christian communities. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for fostering mutual understanding and healing within the global Church.

It is important to note that colonization should not be reduced solely to a generate a scapegoat narrative. In some contexts, particularly in countries on other continents, the same colonization become a fuel for self-motivation and development. Therefore, presentation of historical facts in our study aimed to explain how scapegoating become a dominant narrative, not to minimize the suffering of oppressed peoples worldwide. It also underscores the role of theological discourse in addressing such tragic events.

Another intention was to offer a new perspective on selected AFER texts, which appeared to have lost their theological grounding and have been misused the theological concept of scapegoating for the psychosocial one. Similarly, the frequent *ad personam* accusations in these texts illustrated this scapegoating method, which diverges from Post-Conciliar theology that emphasizes dialogue – a practice rooted in early Church history.

Some other texts seem composed in a manner that undermined credibility of the AFER. Historically, it is notable that the evangelical efforts of missionaries, often resulting in martyrdom, were closely linked with the 19th-century political competition for Africa.

Finlay, selected AFER texts claimed to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ but employed a psychological understanding of scapegoating rather than true alignment with Gospel principles.

The document from the inaugural Synod for the Bishops of Africa that revealed a contemporary tendency in religious life to become detached from the concept of presence, which is essential to permeate history and facilitate meaningful transformation.

"By reason of its deep conviction that *the synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture but also of faith*, because a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived, the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops considered inculturation a priority and an urgent task in the life of Africa's particular Churches. Only in this way can the Gospel be firmly implanted in the Continent's Christian communities"[51].

Theological reflection, then, regardless of its branch – whether biblical, patristic, dogmatic, fundamental, pastoral, liturgical – aims to help individuals to understand faith and apply its teachings to life. It also gives preference to personal spiritual growth and foster this growth in unity with others.

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