
Interview: Bishop Charles Palmer Buckle

Ghana bishop calls for debt cancellation and a Marshall Plan for Africa

The Right Reverend Charles Palmer Buckle, a Roman Catholic bishop from Ghana, spoke at the National Summit of Africa debt workshop Sept. 9 in Baltimore, and called for a full cancellation of Africa's debt. The debt workshop at which he spoke was sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. Bishop Buckle stated categorically that there should no longer be any conditions imposed on the developing countries, as has been the case through the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programs. He also called for a "new, just economic order" and for a Marshall Plan for the development of Africa. He was interviewed on Sept. 10 by Lawrence Freeman.

EIR: I understand that you are calling for debt forgiveness in this Jubilee 2000 year. Could you tell us more about this campaign?

Bishop Buckle: Definitely there is a campaign started, most probably because of what the Pope himself said in 1994, when he put it into writing that at least the developed countries should consider, if not outright cancellation of the debts of Africa, at least giving Africa a great big relief, because that is the only way that Africa can start self-reliant development of itself. The debt of Africa is really crushing. Let's be frank and honest about it: It is supposed to be in the region of over \$200 billion, which means that every African today that comes to birth has a debt burden of \$235 on his or her head. This is quite unfair.

EIR: Some groups are calling for a partial debt moratorium. President Clinton has called for a \$70 billion debt reduction for the most heavily indebted countries. Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. called for a full debt cancellation from the advanced-sector countries and the IMF. Are you advocating a complete cancellation of all debt, and are you advocating that the African countries now finally be relieved of having to pay any of this foreign debt?

Bishop Buckle: Definitely I am for total cancellation of the debt. Also I am for no conditions to be imposed by the creditor nations. Whatever conditions there are should come from the African countries themselves. Why am I in favor of total cancellation of debt? I would like to say in the first place, from debt servicing and from debt rescheduling, have we not

paid these debts already a long time since? The interest that has been paid on these debts—for every dollar we received in debt, we have paid \$1.30—so we have already paid it.

Secondly, look at the exploitation that Africa has been through these last 40 years, not to talk about the past 400 years of slavery, economic exploitation of raw materials from Africa, exploitation of human resources from Africa. It is just unfair to think that we should still carry a debt burden into the next millennium, after all the exploitation that Africa has been through.

But apart from that, let us ask ourselves, do the creditor countries really need the money? It is all paper debt. Their development has been going on irrespective of the debt that is owed them by Africa. Why then should we have this debt burden on our heads like a sword of Damocles?

Finally, a lot of the debt was acquired in very unethical and immoral circumstances. It was during the Cold War times. It was for strategic reasons that America gave a lot of money to governments in Africa, knowing fully well that these governments were corrupt, these governments were not using the money for development. It was just to keep the governments as strategic allies. Not only America; the British government did the same. The French government did the same. The German government did the same. Just looking at the unethical ways in which some of these debts were accrued, it would just be unfair to have this debt burden still hanging around the necks of Africans, and especially of generations to come.

So, as far as I am concerned, there is a need for a total cancellation of the debt, because we have already paid for it, and it is immoral. It is unjust for anybody to be born into debt.

EIR: The other point that you have raised is a call for a Marshall Plan for Africa? Could you explain what you mean by this?

Bishop Buckle: Many countries in the developed world are worried that, if the debts are cancelled, will Africa not get back again into debt? Will the money that should accrue from this nonpayment of debts not be misused for arms or for prestigious projects, or even find its way back into Swiss and American banks and British banks, because of corrupt government? That is why I said there should be no conditions imposed from outside. We are going to impose the conditions from within.

What are some of those conditions? In Ghana, for instance, where 40% of our GDP is used for paying debts each year, this means that we are taking 40% away from vital services like health care, like subsidies for agriculture, like education, like social services. Ghana therefore must continue to pay the debt that it owes the developed world, but pay it into a fund in Ghana—pay it to itself, so that that amount of money, with the supervision of the NGOs, civil society, and the churches, can be used as further income for development projects in the health sector, in social services, in the agricultural sector, and in the sector of education. So all said and done, the country will have to pay the debt, but have to pay it into a central fund that will be monitored, supervised, and used in the same country, like Ghana, for social services, for health care, for education, for agriculture. This is a way in which whatever money should be accrued from the debt will be beneficial to the country.

Number two, we are talking about a Marshall Plan. There are many people who are calling for reparations from the northern countries—America and Europe—for exploiting Africa over 400 years. They are talking about reparations to the Jews for the Nazi holocaust, which was only about 25 years of Nazi persecution in Europe. Then Africa has a right to ask for reparations too. But I am not interested in money for reparations. I believe that the best form of reparation would be that America and Europe come together and put together a plan to help develop Africa—that is what we call a Marshall Plan. I thought that this is what was done for Europe after the Second World War. America cancelled all the debt that the various European countries owed her, and America put together the Marshall Plan to help Europe develop its industries, to develop its potential. And today Europe has become America's greatest trade partner. So I believe that there is enough money in the system, if America and Europe will come together and put together a Marshall Plan, not only for Africa but for the entire Third World, so that helping us to develop our potential, we become also vital and valuable trade partners. It is something that the economics of the world demands, that a certain reparation be made *in the form of a Marshall Plan towards the development of the Third World countries*.

EIR: We did a study of the Marshall Plan, and particularly Britain was given sums of money and used it to pay off its debt. What they did in Germany is to set up a National Reconstruction Bank, an independent credit authority, and as you are suggesting, they used dollar-backed marks and instead of returning them to the United States, they put them in this reconstruction bank, which formed a capital base, and then they lent money out for investment in the country. This of course created the German miracle of the postwar period. What you are saying is that each country in Africa would have a separate bank into which these debt payments would go.

Bishop Buckle: Definitely. And Japan too, the same way.

EIR: The advanced sector countries could float lines of credit into the African banks for this similar reconstruction plan.

Bishop Buckle: Definitely. And if it has worked in the case of rebuilding Germany from all the destruction that had gone on, from the ashes of Germany, then I would even say that they do not need to put in too much money into Africa. It is not that the whole African continent is war-torn and destroyed. We do have the infrastructure. All we need is investment. We do have the brains. The brains are here in America. The brains are in Europe. What we need is to be able to bring back those brains to come and help in Africa, and at the same time give them just remuneration. When we look at a Marshall Plan, it should not be seen in terms of having to start in Africa from scratch. Africa is already doing fairly well. But Africa needs quite a lot of investment, and this is a way whereby the investment can be engendered, and it can be monitored inside the country itself by civil society, for the benefit of the country.

EIR: What about infrastructure in terms of water, power. Nigeria could develop an east-west oil pipeline. There is no way of getting from one country to another. The colonialists left no infrastructure deliberately. They just looted the resources. And what Germany did in the Marshall Plan was to put this money into hard infrastructure—roads, power, and water management, and also “soft infrastructure”—education and social services. Then you can hire the people in that country who are unemployed and you are creating net wealth in the country. I think that the infrastructure deficit has held back the potential of most of the countries in Africa.

Bishop Buckle: I am not an expert in economics and economic policy, but I think that what you said is in the right direction. If the resources are there and made available, with the help of expertise, from both Europe and America, channeling them in consultation with African governments, whether it be into infrastructure or into education of the people so they can then develop their resources, it will be a secondary stage of development that would be necessary. I am hoping that the malice that was in colonialism is over and done with. Whether we like it or not now, the world is a global village. If the developed world does not help the underdeveloped world and the developing world to develop itself, the underdeveloped and developing world will pull down the developed world.

Is that not what Malthus said? If we do not stop exploiting the Third World, the Third World will have to move into the First World in order to survive. And this is what is happening with floods of migrants, illegal immigrants, refugees, all heading towards America, all heading towards Britain, all heading towards Europe in order to survive. So it is in the interests even of the developed world to develop the underdeveloped

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and developing world, so that it can stem the flow of migrants into the north. When people are satisfied in their home countries, they will not come to the north.

Two, if they help us develop, we will become vital and valid trade partners.

Three, Africa is very rich. Africa is still a virgin, untapped in terms of natural resources, in terms of human resources, in terms of human intelligence, and everything. The potential in Africa is immense. I have been to school where there are so many children. The tendency is to look at the children as problems for the future. But just imagine if we could invest in the education of these children. Who tells me that we do not have the African Einsteins who are yet to be discovered, the African Alexander Bells, the inventors, they are there. These are brains that are only waiting to be brought to blossom. That is why I believe very strongly that Africa has a lot of wealth and can play a major role in the development of the world, not only for itself. Believe me, I am a dreamer, when I say that the third millennium is going to be for the Third World, and for Africa in particular. Because I see the potential. I do not want to say that European civilization has more or less exhausted itself. No. But I can say for sure that African civilization, African intelligence has not yet been tapped.

EIR: You said Malthus. Malthus had a theory about population growth going faster than food production. I think history has totally proven that wrong. There is a neo-Malthusian theory that developed in the 1960s and the 1970s, especially after the death of President Kennedy, with the counter-culture movement in the West. If you look at the potential for agricultural development in Africa, it is enormous. People say that the continent, with a mere 700 million people, is overpopulated. This is a fraud. We believe that there is potential for billions of people in Africa, and billions more on this planet, and that each person, made in the image of God, has the power of creativity to advance the entire human race. I would like to know what comments you would make to those people who say there are too many people in Africa?

Bishop Buckle: One has to admit immediately that it was because Europe was overpopulated that they started the exploration. Sometimes history must be rewritten. Europe was overpopulated; they were fighting among themselves, they did not know what to do. They needed more space—that

brought them to Africa and the New World. But if you look at the population now in Europe, about 200-some million people, and Africa is twenty times the size of Europe—still, even if you take the Sahara Desert out, Africa is not overpopulated. It is not at all the case. Secondly, those children that have already been born, cannot be unborn. The young people we have in the continent are already there. Therefore, they must be allowed to grow and blossom into their fullest potential. Africa today is about 65% below the age of thirty-five. You can imagine the potential there. As for birth control, it will come with education, when people come to know that I can take care of so many children, and I choose to have so many, or so few. It comes with education. It cannot be forced, especially not in Africa, where we treasure life. And every life in Africa is considered a blessing from God, and it definitely is a blessing from God. So if you ask me, whether the problem has to do with overpopulation, I would say no. Look at China.

If the theory is correct that the more people there are, the more geniuses there are, and every genius is worth 4,000 people, you can imagine, if we are able to discover geniuses in a continent of 700 million, what a great resource that would be for the world. Those who keep harping on the fact that there are too many people in Africa, that Africans are having too many children and the rest, sometimes I wonder if they do not have a hidden agenda.

EIR: Henry Kissinger put out a document in 1974, called the National Security Memorandum 200, which explicitly said there are key countries around the world which had too many people and they are using up the resources that would otherwise be used by the West. And in Africa, he mentioned Nigeria. So there is a hidden agenda. Some people do not want Africa to have a large population.

Bishop Buckle: I must say that it is even sad and unfair to think about it, and very unjust. But again, in the world that we have today, why is it that 80% of the world's resources are being used by 20% of the population—America and Europe? That is definitely very selfish, for anyone to think that you are using 80% of the world's resources, and even human resources, in terms of brains. Most of Africa's brains are here in America or in Europe, being used or misused. In the name of social justice and fairness, let us not talk about it and look at the beautiful potential there is in every child that is born,

and let's help this child come to the full potential that God has given to it. And I believe that the world will be more fortunate for it. Who would have thought that with the discovery of the microchip, today we can do such wonders? Now this is just one tiny little micro-thing, and how much information it can contain! Who can tell me that we are not going to discover through some of these children the cure for AIDS, the cure for other sicknesses, and other inventions that will make the world even more pleasant to live in? Who tells me that we are not going to discover how to make good use of the sand of the Sahara Desert? Or of the sun in Africa, for creating more complicated and more complex technological gifts and benefits to the world? As a man of religion, I believe that any child that God allows to be born has a mission, has a vocation, and it is our duty to make sure that this child answers the vocation that God has for it, and fulfills the mission for which he or she came to the world. No person has been allowed to be born by God to become a burden. Each one is an asset.

EIR: Africa has been plagued by ethnic wars. Do you have an idea for the solution to this, or do you think that there may be a hidden agenda behind these wars to prevent Africa from becoming powerful?

Bishop Buckle: It is a very complex issue—the issue of conflicts in Africa, both from within Africa itself, and outside Africa. The reasons are both human, because they are engendered by human beings, and social. Some of the reasons date back to history; others are just today and present. Some of them are being engineered today by forces inimical to Africa's unity, in Africa and outside Africa. It is very complicated. We can talk about, for instance, the heritage of colonialism and the creation of nations in Africa. We were just lumped together in 1894, in the Berlin conference where the imperialist powers just decided on how African states would be drawn up with a ruler. They cut nations into bits and put them in different parts. A typical example is my own country of Ghana and Togo, and Ghana and Ivory Coast. There are ethnic groups that have been divided into two, one group of francophones in Togo, another group of anglophones in Ghana. Other groups are divided between Ghana and the Ivory Coast. My mother's own tribe is divided into two. These artificial borders, this lumping of people together by force to become nations, people who were moving over large expanses of this continent, have all of a sudden found that they are constrained to live together. Now these are factors that have led to a lot of conflict, if you take the case of Rwanda, Burundi, and the rest of it. These are some of the factors—colonial pressures, colonial divisions, colonial exploitation, and colonial interests even today.

Apart from that, you have strategic interests, linked up with economic interests, financial interests, political interests and the rest of it. So, in Africa conflict situations can be traced both from outside and from inside Africa.

I would also like to say that we do not despair. What has been done cannot be undone. The past has come and is going away. We now have to look forward and see how we can prevent conflicts from occurring on the African continent, resolve them when they occur, and pull our resources together for the development of building peace and development in the continent. This is where we would also need the help of, I am sorry to say, Christian Europe and Christian America. If Europe and America were as Christian as they should have been, since they have had Christianity for longer centuries; if they were as Christian as they should have been, or even if the Muslim countries were true believers in Allah, as they say, Africa would have had more peace. It shows that Christians did not really become Christians. They had their own hidden agendas. They have constructed all these sinful structures, and today they are still perpetrating some of these sinful structures of oppression, and of exploitation.

Africa has problems, but Africa can solve these problems. That is one thing I can tell you for sure. We are awake. We are doing our bit. The only thing is that sometimes we are overwhelmed, by natural disasters, by manmade disasters, by devious interests of our former colonial masters, by hidden agendas of the present powers-that-be, and of course by our own instinctive selfish motives of power and corruption. But I would tell you that we have been talking about these problems, we are looking these problems in the face, and we are beginning to find solutions to them. All we need is to be encouraged, and we need a more just social system in the world, a more just economic system—a world that does not live by double standards, as we have seen. Look at how much money is being pumped into Kosovo and the Balkans for rebuilding and reconstruction—\$30 billion. And how much has America invested in Africa, only about \$100 million for the development of Africa, for conflict resolution and the rest.

EIR: You say we need a just social system. Back in the 1970s, there was a discussion at the Non-Aligned Movement summit for a new, just world economic order, and we have worked on this issue with the heads of state of India, Mexico, and many other countries over decades. Today, EIR founder Lyndon LaRouche is calling for a New Bretton Woods System, which would be based on a community of principle among sovereign nation-states—not supranational agencies, but nation-states—for the purposes of issuing the credit required for global development. Would you agree with this type of plan?

Bishop Buckle: I would say that I subscribe to it. From the past experience, communism has imploded. Capitalism is creating more poverty and misery, even in the capitalist countries. In America now, 90% of the wealth of America is in the hands of about 2% of the American population. In Europe, with all these mergers going on, it is creating a lot

more unemployment, a lot more social unrest. So let's be honest, and say that capitalism is about to strangle itself. It means that it has outlived its usefulness, together with the Bretton Woods institutions as they have them today. So we need a new world economic order, something between communism and capitalism. I would say that as a Catholic bishop, I find quite a lot of indices in the teachings of the present Pope. He has come up with about four documents that talk about the social system in the world, *Sollicitudo Rei, Socialis, Centissimus Annus, Laborem Exercens*. I believe that the Pope is also echoing what your founder has been saying.

It is high time we come up with a social economic system that does not put the power necessarily in a certain superstructure, but is based on economic solidarity, and fairness. If you ask me how it should come up, I do not know, but there is the need for something new. That is where we have to go. I think that this something new can be worked out, if we will look dispassionately at the current economic situation and at the Bretton Woods institutions and admit that a lot of mistakes have been made, they have outlived their usefulness, and let's come up with something new. I believe in that today.

EIR: What specific things are you planning to do with the Jubilee 2000?

Bishop Buckle: The Pope put into writing what was the feeling of many, many people. The cancellation of the debt of the Third World started early in Mexico, in the 1980s, and the Pope only put it into written words. I have been happy to see that not only the Catholic Church but also the Christian Caucus and even the Muslims all around the world are taking up this call for cancellation of the debt.. I am aware, for instance, of the recent [1998] Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion, which also called for the cancellation of the debt. The Jubilee 2000 Coalition, which is made up of about 200 NGOs, are calling for the cancellation of the debt in favor of the Jubilee year. I personally do not think that must be achieved by all means by the year 2000. I am rather looking at it for the next decade. We should talk about it until we reach a point where we say yes, it has been unfair, as with the abolition of the slave trade. Those who called for the abolition of the slave trade started in about 1770. Nobody thought seriously about them, but they kept obnoxiously at it until 1803, and it became law in the British Empire in 1806, and then Europe took it up in 1809, in France and Germany, and in 1835, the whole of Europe came together and set up the ships that went to stop the slave trade on the Atlantic Ocean. So you are talking about 60 to 70 years to really bring to fruition the dreams of William Wilberforce and the rest.

Today, we are the dreamers to talk about a debt-free world. I do not expect this by the year 2000, but I don't expect

the flame to die out. The flame calling for the cancellation of the debt, calling for a more just world economic order. We should continue with this fight for the next 20, 30, 40 years. We should continue this fight until we see an end to an economic form of slavery that is worse than even the form of slavery we have experienced with the slave trade.

EIR: It may come sooner, because the financial system is completely out of control; there is \$300 billion in derivatives, and there is this huge debt. We expect that there will be a major financial collapse in the next weeks, months. In that case, the debt moratorium may come before the end of the year 2000.

Bishop Buckle: I would be the happiest, because the word Jubilee means that there must be jubilation in the hearts of all men and women, the whole of creation must rejoice, because the Lord God has freed us from all forms of oppression and slavery. It is my hope and prayer that we will live the Jubilee in the year 2000 and beyond. In a period of celebration, celebrating life, celebrating love, celebrating solidarity, celebrating joy, happiness, celebrating peace amongst all men. It is my biggest prayer for all mankind, for all races, for all religions, for all political persuasions, for all colors.

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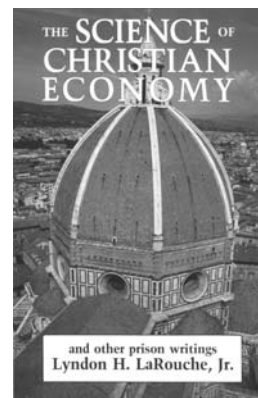
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