POPE FRANCIS CAME AND WENT, SO WHAT?

BY NACHARIA MURHUBE

The Pope came calling last year, and Kenyans lined up to welcome the head of Catholic Church. The visit was quite significant. There presently are two powerful world leaders who came to their respective offices at the same time, March 2013, and where calculated moves influence the globe. These are Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pope Francis, born in Argentina as Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

They have written to each other and are both ridding their power backyards, the Communist Party of China, CCP for Xi and the Curia for Francis, of intrigue, lethargy, and corruption. While Xi leads a global economic and military power house with a population of more than 1.3 billion people, Francis is a moral form with over 1.2 billion global followers. While Xi overseas and goes beyond the attributes of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, Francis combines the attributes of St. Paul and John XXIII and then goes beyond John XXIII.

Xi emerges as a 21st century master of geopolitics, while Francis comes out as a 21st century global leader who surpasses geopolitical considerations.

Francis, the 266th successor to the See of St. Peter at Rome, is unique not simply as head of Catholicism but as a possible latter-day living saint. Avoiding confusion and simplicity in the midst of pompous hype, he enjoys risks in travelling, may be in emulation of his namesake, Francis of Assisi who travelled extensively caring for the sick, poor, and the environment. He seems to be in a hurry to accomplish things probably because he believes he has roughly three years of life remaining for him on this earth.

He has embraced as Chief Shepherd caring for the earthy flock not just of the Catholic variety but of the entire human and non-human existence. He is not closed up and leads by example in taking risks of political and theological nature which, in the process, made him influential on earth. Not afraid to make mistakes, he adapts to situations easily and projects himself as a healer across political, religious, and socio-economic divides.

In Colombia, St. Lanka, for instance, he quickly decided to visit a Buddhist Temple and interact with the monks while giving delayed bishops time to arrive for a final wrap-up meeting. He also went to visit Central African Republic and visited a Muslim house in order to promote interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue as a way of preventing global peace. Muslim followers were among the first to congratulate Francis as pope.

Subsequently, the admirers of Francis cut across religious or non-religious lines. They include communist Cuban President Raul Castro who declared, ‘If the Pope continues telling lies like this, I may return to the church and start praying again.’ In Manila, the Philippines, former Chief Justice and a practicing Catholic, Renato Padilla was ‘excited’ to meet Francis whom he believes ‘is a servant leader with the ability to address the remaining problems of the world.’ Harvard University humanist/atheist chaplain Greg Epstein asserts that Francis was ‘setting good examples...and for those who would never subscribe to a Catholic dogma.’

From Cape Town in South Africa, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgadele welcomed especially the way in which Pope Francis...undiplomatically...the ethical answers to spiritual roots of environmental problems...drawing attention to the high levels of corruption, greed, and wastefulness in our world!’ And in Kenya, there is Mongal Wawaka, the Presbyterian pastor of Eshaba Salient Parish, who politely advices people to ‘sorge for God’ for failure to meet their expectations. Wawaka was one of the non-Catholics that were thrilled by the Papal visit to Kenya, Uganda, and Central Africa at the end of November 2013, three countries that have been victims of terror in the name of religion.

Francis is oblivious of fear and has an infectious smile and a sharp reformist mind that is similar to that of previous reformist giants.

There was Paul of Tarsus insisting that anyone could become Christian and not just the Jews. Francis could also be like Constantine trying to put the Christian House in order amidst condemnation as to the returns of Jesus. There was also Augustine, the man of Hippo, insisting on the primacy of reason which he used in the City of God to defend Christianity when it was accused of engineering the collapse of Rome.

The fact that an Augustinian professor, Martin Luther, used intellect and logic to disrupt church stability, probably informs Ignatius Loyola’s stance on education and reason as ways of combating church crises.

Francis is a member in good standing of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, which Loyola founded in response to Luther. In his visit to Cuba, he made a point of meeting with a Jewish priest who had taught Castro in primary school.

The Jesuits who like books and teach history, are known to obtain multiple documents in different fields, run first class universities and colleges, and enjoy making intellectual waves or what Francis calls risk taking.

Among such college is Holcim College in Harlem that is reputedly collecting every written document on Africa that the Jesuits can get their hands on and then become a continental archive. However, it is best compared with other papes, many of them not worth remembering because they give the Church a bad name.

The recent pope who was also no finesse and worth talking about are John XXIII and John Paul II, two men that Francis has canonized in April 2014. John XXIII had a revolutionary soul, had, like Paul roughly 100 years before, a utopian. He showed this by convening the 1962-1965 Vatican II Council that made Catholicism intelligible to many people.

To Tanzania’s top theologian Laurent Magne, John XIII undermined an ‘unprecedented revolution in theology and eclecticism.’ Therefore, the convergence must be said in languages that people understood rather than in Latin.

Three included such languages as Hindi, Urdu, Mandarin, Swahili, Tigrer, Kikwet, Kizama, Kigumia, and Kiamindi. More importantly, there was emphasis on reconciliation with other Christian denominations. The stress on reconciliation, argues Jesse H.K. Mogumeli, Kenya’s leading theologian, ‘was a dramatic shift in Catholic-Orthodox relations.’ Kenya, Prof Mogumeli notes, was ‘one of those nations in which the Decree on Ecumenism was put into practice.’ John XXIII, and his Vatican II, then gets the credit for boosting the spirit of Christian ecumenism.

Not all were happy with Vatican II reforms, among them being John Paul II, whose fame was in helping to dismantle the Soviet system but there was little doctrinal improvement associated with his pontificate. Instead, he occasionally appeared angry with other religions, like Buddhism which he dismissed in 1995 as ‘totally scented’. He was also angry with other partly religions, among them the Jesuits associated with ‘liberation theology’ that dominated the 1960s in Latin America. His hostility might have furthered his feeling that ‘liberation theology’ was akin to the Soviet-inspired communism on his Polish homeland. He even seemed, writes Magne, to engage in ‘practical reformation from the theological vision of Vatican II.’

On his part, Francis appears to be restoring the spirit of Vatican II and going beyond it to raise faith beyond material Christianity. He tries to undo the damage inflicted by John Paul II and Benedict, Magne notes, and urges priests to take risks.

The effort at bridging religious differences is what enables Francis to go beyond Vatican II which had confined itself to ecumenism within Christianity.

The most important aspect of his Africa trip, therefore, was his advocacy of acceptance of the validity of other faiths seeking to reach God. He met different religious leaders to encourage dialogue of faith in the hope of promoting reconciliation. Calling for furthering respect of friendship between men and women of different religious traditions, he assures that religion can never excuse violence. It is this reaching out to other religions that enables him to go beyond Vatican II, to surpass John XXIII, and to come close to St. Paul as a reference.

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Miraa, Wambora impeachment to shape region's politics in 2016

BY MAGUHA MUJONE

It is roughly 18 months before the going to the polls in August 2017 to elect the president, governor, senators, and MCA.

There is growing political anxiety as would be candidates jostle for winning the ticket in the region. The victors will then run for the presidency and the loser will likely be a new candidate in the December 2017 polls on the second ticket.

With the intensifying campaigns, the number of candidates who are running for the governorship in Embu is on the rise. The current Embu governor is Wambora who is facing a tough challenge from Muthoni Amuri who is facing a showdown with Wambora in the August 2017 general election. The two candidates have been jostling for the ticket in the region and the outcome of the election will determine who will be the next governor of Embu.

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The region has been a hotbed of political activity in recent years, with a number of candidates vying for the top job. The political landscape in the region is complex, with a mix of traditional and modern political forces at play.

One of the key issues in the region is the ongoing debate over the issuance of land titles. Land is a scarce resource in the region and the issue has become a major point of contention. The government has been working to address the issue, but progress has been slow.

Another issue that has divided the region is the ongoing debate over the construction of a new airport. The airport is seen as a key development for the region, but there are concerns about its impact on the environment.

The political landscape in the region is complex, with a mix of traditional and modern political forces at play. The region has a history of political instability, and the outcome of the upcoming election is likely to determine the course of events in the region for years to come.