Confronted with a proliferation of numerous daily deaths on land, in the air, in the sea even underground, the tremendous pressure to LIVE FULLY the contemporary person is subjected to tends to be overwhelming. The tempting option is to give up on life and, as some are already doing, readily embrace unauthentic living deviations like drug addiction, alcoholism, money-mania, criminality, exaggerated hedonistic escapism, satanic cultism... and suicide as a last resort. Dr. Wachege's book providentially GIVES US HOPE TO LIVE ON.

One is persuaded to concur with this well-established African-scholar priest in the affirmation that: "It is a kind of abysmal anathema or, in African terms a taboo, to investigate, discuss, reflect deeply upon, have mutual sharing and transmittal of material on death intertwined with living. Nevertheless, my informed conviction is that, by dodging or suppressing talking, speaking, hearing, listening, contemplating on and writing about death which is nowadays omnipresent, one would not actually understand and appreciate life and living... In a way, death spurs us for immortality."

Fr. Dr. Wachege was born in Kimbaa in Kimbu District of Kenya during the Mau Mau uprising in 1952, in a staunch Catholic family of eight girls and four guys. He is the second born and eldest son of Mwaimu Stephen Chege Gakinya and Mama Christine Wairimu. He is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya and a priest co-worker in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. He has now published five scholarly books and a considerable number of published articles in referred journals. These books are titled: Jesus Christ our "Muthamaki" (local Elder), African Women Liberation: A Man’s Perspective; African Single Mothers: Socio-Ethical and Religious Investigations, Salvation and Being Saved: An African Socio-Relegio-Philosophical touch.
I would also not like to forget all my fellow HFB Karate Club members. Thanks to Sensei James Kagwi, Sensei Isaac K. Mwangi, Brigadier Gitihora, Aketch, Mbiji, Paul and Wambui, Regina, Ruth, Mulama, Kamau Chege, Mr. Flexible (Congar), Kanyatta, Karogo, Champion (Jacob) and you all for helping me adhere to the principle of “all work and no play makes somebody a dull somebody.” Let me also express my hearty gratitude to all my respondents and to all thinkers from whose invaluable ideas and insights I draw for the realisation and enrichment of the monograph.

Lastly and most of all, I humbly and deeply thank God for endowing me with gratuitous gifts and charisms and, above all, for allowing me to reach 50 years in life (24 March 2002) thus providentially enabling me to celebrate my golden jubilee in life through this book in particular.

PREFACE

Very few people give much thought to death. We attend funerals, have a general idea of what death involves and extend our sympathy to the bereaved. From the media we learn of a plane crash, car accident or some other tragedy like the recent terror bomb attacks in United States of America. For a few fleeting moments it registers and perhaps we are aware of a sense of shock. Then the business of our lives takes over and the tragedy is forgotten.

In Living To Die, Dying To Live: African Christian Insights

Dr. Wachege approaches the discourse of death by giving it realism, the fact that death is a social reality which society must contend with at one time or another. Further, the author systematically leads the reader into the Christian and African perspectives on death. As much as it is in the nature of human beings to avoid thinking about death, so have most scholars in the social sciences, arts and humanities neglected the subject matter. Dr. Wachege has succeeded in breaking this barrier and has addressed the subject with authority in his new book.

In the introductory reflections, the author notes that society must deconstruct the subject of death by de-tabooing it. He reminds the reader that traditional Africans were aware of the fact that there is life after death. This is entrenched in the strong beliefs in ancestors and saints (in Christianity). Yet, it is a kind of abysmal anathema or taboo to investigate, discuss, reflect deeply upon, have mutual sharing and transmit published material on death intertwined with living. Dr. Wachege moves on to show the reality is that death is certain but the time of death is uncertain. He enforces the fact that nothing is more certain than death but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death. In the book, the reader is reminded that every
One of the most disturbing trends in the causes of death in Kenya today is that caused by young school children as they burn or Lynch their colleagues, friends and school mates. Disturbing because the perpetrators are young people still in their formative years and with many years ahead of them to live. Disturbing too because of what this says about the society in general. What could have happened in our society to cause young adults to set their colleagues ablaze? At another level, what do the increasing number of muggings and car-jackings in the country that in many cases result in death say about our society? Dr. Wachege treats this subject with compassion yet with incisive comments that should make readers and leaders think more deeply about the issue.

The author handles the issue of death across age groups, social groups and professional groups with brutal honesty. It does not matter how wealthy or poor, how old or how young, how educated or uneducated, how devout or how irreligious one is. Death will surely come to one. Pastors and priests, popes and paupers, rulers and the ruled, bishops and barmaid, lecturers and lecturers, sisters and scholars will all face death when “their time comes.” Whether this is comforting or disconcerting, it is the reality. Death cannot be bribed to leave one to live.

Underlying all this, the author’s message is clear: Life does not end with death or to put it another way, death is not a conclusion to life. The good news though is that despite all this, there is hope, something to look forward to. In the book, death comes out clearly as the pathway to a more fulfilling and never-ending blissful life in “a land where joys shall never end.” The author however, is quick to add that this comes with some effort on the side of the living. In order to gain that enviable life that is free from all worries and pain, one must constantly strive to lead a life free from sin. To the author, sin becomes the root cause of
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moment we approach death, we are born with a halter round our neck, every step we take brings us nearer death.

The author further provides an in-depth exposé on the types of death. We are reminded that some deaths are sudden and accidental, planned and deliberate, while others are unplanned yet not accidental. This section of the book brings a powerful research subject, which goes into medical, legal, philosophical, theological depths to address issues contiguous to the mode of death. The writing of this book coincided with the tragic and ghastly terror bombing on the ‘New York’ World Trade Center and the Pentagon where many died. In 1998, the two United States Embassies in East Africa were terror bombed killing hundreds of Kenyans and some non-Kenians. There are thousands more who perish each year as a result of car accidents, plane crashes, shootings during robberies and riots. These are sudden deaths. The author also writes about euthanasia, genocidal and torture-related deaths, which are planned and deliberate. For example, in 1994, thousands of Tutsis and Hutus were massacred in one of the most horrible ethnic genocides the world has witnessed since the Nazi assault on Jews. And finally, there are disease-related deaths, the HIV and Aids pandemic currently claiming millions of lives every hour around the world, is a good example. Consequently, Dr. Wachege notes, “there is too much death.”

Inspite of the pervasive nature of death, people are afraid of death as the author elaborates. St. Alphonse De Ligouri reminds us all that “consider that you are dust and that you shall return to dust. A day will come when you shall die and rot in the grave where worms shall be your covering. The same lot awaits all; the peasant, the prince and the vassel”. People fear death, because death is depriving. “An end will come, the end is coming” Ezekiel 7:6. Death puts an end to all earthlings’ goods, pleasures, riches and the pomp of the world. Benjamin Franklin wrote, “home may be a castle or a caravan, but when the light of life goes out all are brought to the same level”. Death is a levelling ground and since it takes place in a hierarchal world, a world characterized by masters and slaves, it is no doubt that most people loathe death. For example, by looking at sepulchres of the dead, one cannot distinguish who has been a servant and who has been master. “Men women” says Seneca, “are born unequal, but after death all are equal”. Horace says that death brings down the scepter, to the level of the spade thus when death comes, the end comes, we bring nothing to the grave. That is frightening indeed, especially to the fun loving materialistic human creatures. Everyone wishes that death would not catch up with them. All know that they must die, but the delusion of many is that they imagine death as far off as if it were never to arrive. The life of a person is like the life of a blade of grass. Death comes, the grass is dried up. The flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods fall off (Isaiah 11:6).

Dr. Wachege juxtaposes the fear of death with the hope and life that comes with the event. It is from this argument that he derives the apparently philosophical title of his book Living To Die, Dying To Live.

He interrogates the African/Christian insights on life’s centrality despite death and the underlying African philosophy of living and relying. From the Christian point of view—death is consoling and desirable. To sinners it appears full of terror but to the saints it is amiable and precious. It is precious, says St. Bernard, “as the end of labors, the consummation of victory, the gate of life”. It is the end of toils and labor. Over and above that there is crowning after death. Thus Dr. Wachege urges Christian readers not to fear death because by dying in the state of grace
their bodies will become immortalized. St. Augustine said "he who loves God and desires to see him, regards life as a punishment and death as a source of joy". The death of the Christian that loves God is called not death but sleep. St. Francis of Assisi began to sing at the hour of death and invited brethren to join him.

In conclusion, the author observes that death to an African is conceived and explained in living terms. This view is compatible with Christianity whereby the disciples and the followers of Christ live fully by participating in Christ’s death and resurrection as he explains in the final chapter of the book.

Living To Die, Dying To Live: African Christian Insights is an informative monograph, which transcends disciplinary boundaries. Theologians, philosophers, historians, media practitioners, journalists, members of the legal fraternity, sociologists, demographers, political scientists as well as the general readership will find this book very useful. The subject discussed in this book is well researched and the author meticulously integrated research findings with concepts and theories on the subject.

Living To Die, Dying To Live: African Christian Insights is Dr Wachegha’s fifth publication. From the time I read one of his earlier publication, African Women Liberation: A man’s perspective (1992), I have been captivated by his style of writing, very reader-friendly. His current release is a challenge to everyone in the society, for we all must understand death because although the hour is uncertain, we will surely die to live. This is very good news. I recommend this book to all categories of readers.

Mumbi Machera
Lecturer, Department of Sociology
University of Nairobi

FOREWORD

The subject of death is one that many treat with caution whether it is in public or in private. It is a taboo subject to many who consider it a bad omen to even think about it, let alone discuss it out in the open. Others believe that to think about one’s own death is to wish it upon oneself. Yet, paradoxically, death is a fact of life or of living that is never too far away from people’s thoughts and lives as it permeates every aspect of their lives as long as they are living on this earth.

Every day, newspapers, television stations, the radio and other media bring home to all the horrifying pictures and reports of death whether they be through accidents, catastrophes, terrorism, diseases, “mercy killings” or natural disasters. At another level, death has inspired poets, musicians, writers, film producers and other creative minds to create moving stories wrought and woven around the theme of death. Yet, many are still uncomfortable with the subject and refer to death in sugar-coated euphemisms such as “passing on”, “resting”, “promoted to higher glory” and “called (by God)”, among others.

In his new book, Living to Die, Dying to Live: African Christian Insights, Fr. P. N. Wachegha, tackles the subject with a candid fervour that is bound to tease the minds of the open-minded and shock the faint-hearted. He handles his subject matter brilliantly bringing his meticulous research, academic excellence and experiential knowledge together for a thorough exposition of the subject of death within the limits he has set himself.

Deeply and sharply aware of the various dynamics at play in current socio-cultural settings with a multitude of influences brought about by African cultures, western civilisation, globalisation, the mass media and the tremendous advances and
Developments in information technology especially the Internet, the scholar-priest analyses the issue of life, death and life after death in the light of African traditions, philosophy of life and religiosity and then crowns it all with insights from Christianity.

Dr. Wachege draws a parallel between African concepts of ancestral life and Christian canonisation of saints and beatification of holy people. In this case, death does not deplete families but rather, it enriches them since through it, such families have representatives on "the other side", or, as some would say "across the bridge where there is no more sorrow." Death is therefore seen as an interlude between earthly life on the one hand and celestial life on the other. The point is made that in the African mindset, one lives to die and one dies to live fully.

The questions then that beg answers are: why does death inspire so much fear and anxiety and cause so much sorrow if, or rather, when, it leads to such blissful happiness and joy at the other end? Why are so many afraid to die despite the hope of reuniting with departed Loved Ones and, even more importantly, the promise of meeting and living in unending happiness with God? Why do so many do their utmost to cling to this life full of so many struggles, disappointments, discouragement and pain when death leads to a life free from all these? Perhaps some of the answers to these questions may be found in the causes of death for, as the book clearly shows, many deaths are as a result of humankind's actions towards its own kind.

Despite the unease and discomfort with which it is treated the world over and especially in Africa, death has contributed to some of the most controversial, emotional and much-talked about moral debates of our times. These include debates on abortion, capital sentence and euthanasia. The author chooses euthanasia and goes into lengthy, unemotional and intellectual detail about what euthanasia is, the types of euthanasia, the controversy surrounding it including discussions on its legalisation. Finally, he takes a look at the Church's response to it. The subject is treated ably in a section that examines selected ways in which death occurs.

Undoubtedly, there are many causes and types of death all of which lead to the same end, that is termination of earthly life. Dr. Wachege's selection include unnatural deaths mostly, those caused by human action and/or reaction. These include genocide, students butchering each other, torture, political deaths, diseases focusing on the deadly HIV and Aids, accidents, car-jackings and muggings, and martyrdom. All these have one thing in common, they are unnatural in the sense that they do not follow the natural order neither are they caused by natural catastrophes. They are evidence of humankind's inhumanities to its own kind.

The significance of this is that though they do not follow the natural order, they do have an impact on the natural order and are therefore of great relevance to the world today. Of special relevance here are deaths caused by Aids which latest statistics say, is causing 750 deaths each day in Kenya alone. Most of these are young people in the productive age bracket who are dying and leaving their old parents to bury them and take care of their children. These deaths are reversing the social order and the natural death pattern. They are also having a great effect on the socio-economic structure of the country as the young adults die in the prime of their lives and when they are most productive.

Dr. Wachege also looks at accidents whether road, air, sea or train, which as well as impacting the natural order of life on earth, also have great personal impacts. Cases where several members of one family are wiped out in accidents abound, in some cases wiping out a family line or a whole generation of an extended family.
One of the most disturbing trends in the causes of death in Kenya today is that caused by young school children as they burn or lynch their colleagues, friends and school mates. Disturbing because the perpetrators are young people still in their formative years and with many years ahead of them to live. Disturbing too because of what this says about the society in general. What could have happened in our society to cause young adults to set their colleagues ablaze? At another level, what do the increasing number of muggings and car-jackings in the country that in many cases result in death say about our society? Dr. Wachege treats this subject with compassion yet with incisive comments that should make readers and leaders think more deeply about the issue.

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