

## Factors that Influenced the Catholic Church's Involvement in Social Change in Nairobi County, 1963–2023

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**ABSTRACT:** The Catholic Church has played a significant role in shaping social change in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi County, through her involvement in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and social justice initiatives. Despite extensive historical accounts of the Church's contributions to national development, limited research has comprehensively analyzed the motivation/drive/reason/ factors influencing her involvement in these initiatives in Nairobi county from 1963 to 2023. This study sought to fill this gap and achieved by focusing on the following specific objective: to discuss factors that influenced the Catholic church involvement in social change in Nairobi County 1963-2023. The study was guided by Social Movement Theory, Critical theory, Faith-Based Organizational Theory and Liberation Theology, which provide analytical frameworks for understanding the Church's motivations for social change. Social Movement Theory helps contextualize the Church's influence by resources, frame issues, and influence by societal norms, while Liberation Theology emphasizes its moral obligation to advocate for the poor and oppressed. Faith-Based Organization Theory, guides the analysis by examining factors such as leadership dynamics, organizational culture, and partnerships with other stakeholders in driving social change efforts. A case study research design was employed, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the Church's initiatives in Nairobi. The study utilized qualitative methods, including interviews, observation, focus group discussions, and document analysis, to gather rich insights from Church leaders, beneficiaries of Church-led programs, and historical records. Sampling was purposive, targeting individuals who had direct experience of the Church's institution or interventions. Data was analyzed thematically to identify motivation of the Church's contributions to education, healthcare, and social justice. The findings of this study will contribute to the broader discourse on religion and social change by highlighting how faith-based organizations particularly the Catholic Church has played a pivotal role in addressing socio-economic inequalities that has yielded to social change. The study has provided practical discourse for policymakers, religious institutions, and development organizations on enhancing collaboration with the Catholic Church to promote sustainable social change. By documenting the Church's historical and contemporary (1963- 2023) contributions, this research will serve as a valuable reference for future studies on the intersection of religion and social development in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi County.

### I. Introduction

This study explores the key factors that shaped the Catholic Church's engagement with social change in Nairobi County between 1963 and 2023, a period characterized by Kenya's shift from colonial rule to independence and the rapid urbanization of its capital. The Church, building on its missionary roots, responded to Nairobi's complex socio-political and economic challenges, such as poverty, injustice, and ethnic tensions, by investing in education,

healthcare, advocacy, and reconciliation initiatives. Its actions were informed by Catholic Social Teaching, theological principles, legal considerations, and the adoption of new technologies. Drawing on both document analysis and interviews, this study critically examines these driving factors and situates them within the broader scholarly literature. Through this analysis, the evolving role of the Catholic Church in promoting social change in Nairobi is illuminated, highlighting the ways in which the institution has adapted to meet the changing needs of Kenya's urban society.

### **1.1 Post-Independence Changes - National shift in political landscape.**

Political landscape entails -Post-Independence Changes / Constitutional Change / Democratic / The Community Needs the Catholic Church's involvement in social change within Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023 has been intimately connected to the nation's shifting in political landscape, including post-independence transitions, constitutional reforms, and ongoing struggles for democracy. Through this period, the Church actively engaged with the evolving needs of the community, reflecting a nuanced and adaptive approach to social advocacy.

#### **1.1.1 Post-Independence Changes**

After Kenya achieved independence in 1963, leadership within the Catholic Church shifted from foreign missionaries to local clergy, a process often referred to as "Africanization." This transition mirrored the broader socio-political change underway as the nation moved from colonial rule to self-determination. In Nairobi, the capital and political epicenter, the Church's influence became particularly significant in responding to new challenges related to governance and civil rights. Scholarly research indicates that, in the years following independence, the Church concentrated much of its effort on addressing deficiencies left by colonial policies, especially in education and healthcare. The establishment of Catholic schools and hospitals in Nairobi during this period played a crucial role in supporting nation-building initiatives (Kollman, 2014). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Church's early post-independence approach was relatively cautious. Some scholars contend that Church leaders deliberately avoided confrontation with the state to preserve institutional stability (Gifford, 2009). This contrasts with subsequent decades, when the Church adopted a more outspoken stance, indicating a gradual evolution in its engagement with social and political issues.

#### **1.1.2 Constitutional Change**

The promulgation of Kenya's 2010 Constitution represented a significant turning point for the Catholic Church's engagement in social reform initiatives. The expanded guarantees of freedom of worship, education, and association provided a legal framework that enabled the Church to more effectively operate schools, hospitals, and non-governmental organizations (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The Church played an active role in supporting constitutional reforms, particularly through civic education and advocacy efforts. As Chepkwony (2018) notes, the Church was instrumental in mobilizing communities to understand and claim their newly established rights. For instance, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) organized workshops in Nairobi aimed at promoting constitutional literacy among citizens. Nevertheless, scholarly analyses indicate that the Church's support for the 2010 Constitution was not uniformly embraced within its ranks. Certain members of the clergy expressed reservations about specific provisions, such as devolution, due to concerns that these changes might intensify ethnic divisions (Mutua, 2013). Despite such internal debates, the Catholic Church's broader contribution to constitutional advocacy was consistent with its historical commitment to social justice, as articulated in CST.

#### **1.1.3 Democratic Struggles**

Kenya's transition from one-party rule to a multi-party democracy in the early 1990s was a turbulent process, marked by significant struggles surrounding human rights and political freedoms. The Catholic Church emerged as a notable actor during this period, particularly under President Moi's administration (1978–2002), often taking a vocal stand against authoritarian policies. Prominent figures such as Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki openly criticized state corruption and abuses of power (Throup & Hornsby, 1998). The Church's role in advocating for reform is especially evident in initiatives like the Ufungamano Initiative of the late 1990s, which brought together religious leaders to push for constitutional changes (Karanja, 2008). Nevertheless, scholarly debate persists regarding the consistency of the Church's involvement. While some dioceses and clergy were

outspoken, others maintained a more cautious or neutral position, likely to avoid state retaliation (Sabuni, 2015). This variation underscores the complexity of the Church's engagement, as it sought to balance its spiritual mission with the political realities of a volatile era.

#### **1.1.4 Community Needs**

Nairobi's rapid urban growth has brought a cascade of social issues—slum expansion, soaring unemployment, and deepening inequality, just to name a few. In response, the Catholic Church took an active role, launching micro-enterprise programs and scholarship opportunities aimed at the city's most vulnerable residents. Mwaura (2017) highlights the Church's particular attention to areas like Kibera and Mathare, noting its commitment to the principle of preferential option for the poor, a central tenet of Catholic Social Teaching. Organizations such as Caritas Nairobi didn't limit their involvement to spiritual support; they provided food assistance, healthcare services, and vocational training to those on the margins. Still, some scholars like Ombati (2019) point out that while these interventions offered immediate relief, they often fell short in tackling broader structural issues, such as persistent land ownership inequalities. Despite these criticisms, the Church's efforts undeniably filled significant gaps left by insufficient public services, especially in Nairobi's informal settlements. (KNA-DC/LND/3/8/14 Roman Catholic Mission Plots- 1963)

#### **1.1.5 Political Reforms and Instability**

The Catholic Church's willingness to confront political corruption and violence became especially pronounced during periods of upheaval, notably under the Moi administration and in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 elections. The Church consistently denounced electoral malpractice and advocated for peaceful solutions, with the Catholic Bishops' Conference releasing pastoral statements urging justice and reconciliation (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Kenya, 2008). Scholars such as Lonsdale (2009) have highlighted the Church's significant impact on shaping public discourse around governance and morality. Nonetheless, the Church's interventions were not without controversy; during the 2007 elections, for example, some clergy were accused of showing partiality toward particular political camps (Branch, 2011). This highlights the difficulties religious institutions face in maintaining neutrality in highly polarized political environments.

#### **1.1.6 Ethnic Tension**

Ethnic divisions have long posed significant challenges in Kenya, particularly within Nairobi's complex urban landscape, where multiple communities coexist in close quarters. The aftermath of the 2007–2008 elections underscored the Church's involvement in peace and reconciliation efforts, initiatives that included peacebuilding workshops and facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue. Wachira (2010) highlights that these interventions by the Church helped to ease tensions in volatile areas such as Kibera. Yet, there is considerable debate regarding the Church's approach. Scholars like Kagwanja and Southall (2009) contend that the Church's response was largely reactive, stepping in only after violence had erupted, rather than proactively addressing the deep-seated ethnic grievances fueling the conflict. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the Church's reconciliation initiatives, drawing on Catholic Social Teaching's emphasis on solidarity, played a vital role in restoring a measure of community cohesion during a particularly turbulent period.

#### **1.1.7 Economic Disparities**

Economic disparities in Nairobi widened considerably, prompting the Catholic Church to increase its social interventions mainly in sectors like education and healthcare. The Church's support for micro-enterprises, such as small-scale agriculture and artisan cooperatives, was intended to provide economic empowerment for marginalized populations (Gitau, 2018). This approach aligns with Catholic Social Teaching, emphasizing both the common good and the dignity of every individual. Still, it's important to note that scholars have pointed out limitations: persistent funding challenges and heavy dependence on external donors often threaten the sustainability of these initiatives (Ochieng, 2020). On the other hand, others maintain that the Church's sustained investment in education, particularly through Catholic-sponsored schools, has contributed meaningfully to reducing inequality over time (Kollman, 2014). Ultimately, the Church's economic interventions reveal a significant, though sometimes restricted, capacity to address the city's economic challenges.

The Catholic Church's influence on social change in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023 is deeply intertwined with the region's post-independence evolution, ongoing constitutional reforms, and persistent struggles for democracy. Over these decades, the Church has responded to pressing community needs, including episodes of political instability, ethnic friction, and sharp economic inequality. Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, principles like human dignity and solidarity, the Church's efforts have consistently aimed to address Nairobi's shifting social landscape. Studies generally recognize the Church as a major player in Nairobi's social change, highlighting its involvement in advocacy and community development (Chepkwony, 2018; Mwaura, 2017). Yet, there's no shortage of critique. Some researchers (Gifford, 2009; Ombati, 2019) point out that the Church's political engagement hasn't always been steady, and scaling its initiatives across a city as complex as Nairobi presents ongoing challenges. These contrasting findings reflect just how complicated and nuanced the Church's mission remains in Nairobi's fast-changing urban environment. (KNA- KNA/1/68 The Organization of the Kenya Catholic Secretariat 1965/1973)

## 1.2 Philosophical Foundations

The Catholic Church's involvement in social change within Nairobi County, spanning from 1963 to 2023, was fundamentally anchored in Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Core CST principles such as human dignity, social justice, the common good, solidarity, preferential option for the poor, participation, subsidiarity, and stewardship of creation shaped the Church's ethical approach to Nairobi's evolving urban landscape.

### 1.2.1 Human Dignity as a Core Principle

The principle of human dignity occupies a foundational place within Catholic Social Teaching, emphasizing that each individual possesses intrinsic worth by being a creation of God. In the context of Nairobi, the Church operationalized this principle by actively supporting marginalized populations, including slum residents and the unemployed. Scholarly research, such as Mwaura (2017), highlights the Church's establishment of shelters and vocational programs in areas like Kibera as a concrete manifestation of this commitment. For instance, Caritas Nairobi's initiatives prioritized educational opportunities and skills development, aligning closely with the broader aim of empowering individuals and upholding their dignity. Yet, this approach is not without its critics. Some scholars, notably Ombati (2019), have argued that the Church's focus on charitable activities may have inadvertently come at the expense of more robust advocacy for structural reforms. This critique underscores an ongoing tension between providing immediate aid and pursuing systemic change, raising important questions about the most effective paths to long-term social change.

#### According to respondents in a focused group discussion:

*The church has followed the core principles as outlined in the scripture for instance in Isaiah 58:6-8 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.*

*They further added that in Micah 6:8: He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. In Zechariah 7:8-10 And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’ (R87)*



**Figure 1:** The above is an illustration of Christ the King Kibera Primary school, and the main parish church.

**Note:** By building this church and the school it shows the church's responsibility in uplifting the human dignity of all people and especially the poor. The permanent structures act as avenues from which the church uses in responding to needs of the needy and especially the fatherless, by offering quality education. Through this the church has administered true justice, shown mercy and compassion to the less fortunate. Therefore, the permanent structures are a contributing factor to the church's involvement in social change.

### 1.2.2 Social Justice and Advocacy

Social justice stands as a central pillar within Catholic Social Teaching (CST), prompting the Church to address inequalities and systemic injustices in Nairobi. During the Moi era (1978–2002), the Church actively opposed corruption and political oppression, operating from the conviction that justice is fundamental to genuine human flourishing. Chepkwony (2018) highlights the significant contributions of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC), which mobilized local communities, fostered civic education, and advocated for fair governance actions consistent with the Church's philosophical commitment to social justice as an active, public responsibility. Nevertheless, the Church's engagement has not been without critique. Gifford (2009), for instance, argues that the Church's advocacy has at times been selective, concentrating on visible issues such as electoral violence while neglecting more of internal forms of injustice, particularly gender disparities within its institutions. This discrepancy underscores the tension between the Church's professed ideals and the complexities of their practical implementation.

A responded read the scripture on the Catholic church drive to help the needy:

*"Psalm 82:3 - 'Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. and in "Proverbs 31:8-9 - 'Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy'" (R62)*

### 1.2.3 The Common Good

The Church's guiding principle of the "common good," essentially, prioritizing collective wellbeing over individual gain, shaped much of its response to Nairobi's urban issues. This vision drove the creation of schools and healthcare facilities, especially in areas that were often overlooked. Kollman (2014) highlights Mater Misericordiae Hospital as a concrete example, showing the Church's intent to make healthcare more accessible across communities. Yet, the situation wasn't without its contradictions. Critics like Ochieng (2020) argue that

the Church's institution-building sometimes skewed toward urban elites, those who could actually afford the services. So, while the Church's philosophy championed inclusivity, in practice, the poorest residents were sometimes left out. In short, the Church's commitment to the common good was clear, but real-world limitations occasionally got in the way of true inclusivity.

#### **1.2.4 Solidarity and Community Engagement**

Solidarity, essentially the commitment to mutual support, played a critical role in the Church's reconciliation initiatives, particularly during periods of severe ethnic unrest, such as the 2007–2008 post-election violence. The Church actively facilitated inter-ethnic dialogue forums and peacebuilding workshops in Nairobi, efforts that were quite significant given the prevailing tensions (Wachira, 2010). These initiatives exemplify the practical application of Catholic Social Teaching's focus on solidarity as a foundation for social cohesion. Yet, the Church's approach has not escaped criticism. Some scholars (notably Kagwanja & Southall, 2009) argue that these solidarity efforts were largely reactive, only mobilized in response to crises rather than proactively addressing the deeper, structural roots of ethnic division. This critique highlights the ongoing challenge of translating the principle of solidarity from abstract philosophy into effective, preventive strategies. (KNA-PC/NRB/LAND/3/14/107- Land for the Catholic Church 1966)

#### **1.2.5 Preferential Option for the Poor**

The concept of the preferential option for the poor—firmly rooted in Catholic Social Teaching—has notably influenced the Church's priorities in Nairobi, especially regarding marginalized communities. This principle didn't stay theoretical; it materialized through initiatives such as micro-enterprise programs and scholarships targeted at children living in informal settlements. Gitau (2018) specifically documents the Church's engagement in Mathare, where support for small businesses served as an anti-poverty strategy. The underlying rationale is straightforward: those facing systemic marginalization warrant particular attention and resources. Yet, the effectiveness of this approach isn't without criticism. Some scholars, like Ombati (2019), argue that the Church's focus on charitable interventions often failed to confront broader structural problems and land tenure inequalities, for instance, that perpetuate poverty. This leads to a dilemma: How can immediate relief efforts be balanced with addressing the root causes of economic injustice?

In an interview a respondent quoted the scripture to retaliate why the catholic church has preferential option for the poor

*“Luke 3:11 John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”* (R98)

#### **1.2.6 Participation and Subsidiarity**

The principles of participation and subsidiarity advocate for empowering individuals and communities to take an active role in shaping their development, emphasizing decision-making at the most immediate and capable level. In Nairobi, the Church promoted this ethos through parish-driven initiatives and targeted leadership training at the grassroots. For example, the CJPC played a significant role in equipping local leaders to assert their rights during constitutional reforms (Chepkwony, 2018). Subsidiarity was reflected in the Church's decentralized structure, which enabled parishes to adapt interventions to the specific needs of their communities. Nevertheless, some scholars contend that the Church's hierarchical organization occasionally undermined these participatory ideals, as directives from the Archdiocese could overshadow local efforts (Sabuni, 2015). This tension underscores a persistent gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation.

#### **1.2.7 Stewardship of Creation**

Following the release of *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis in 2015, the Catholic Church in Nairobi began to address pressing environmental issues, such as pollution and waste management in urban slums. These efforts included launching public awareness campaigns and collaborating with NGOs to encourage sustainable practices. Mwaura (2017) highlights that such initiatives had a notable impact in urban settings, where environmental degradation and poverty are closely intertwined. Yet, as Ochieng (2020) points out, the Church's environmental programs

have often lagged behind its more established social and educational initiatives. This slower integration suggests that ecological concerns are still being woven into the broader mission and philosophy of the Church. The process appears ongoing, reflecting a gradual but growing emphasis on environmental stewardship within its institutional framework.

The Catholic Church's role in shaping social change in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023 cannot be overstated, with its efforts deeply rooted in Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Foundational principles such as human dignity, social justice, the common good, solidarity, preferential option for the poor, participation, subsidiarity, and stewardship of creation have consistently guided the Church's interventions in education, healthcare, advocacy, and reconciliation. Scholars like Mwaura (2017) and Chepkwony (2018) affirm that the Church's actions largely reflect these principles, highlighting a strong alignment between doctrine and practice. Nevertheless, critics, including Gifford (2009) and Ombati (2019), point out persistent challenges: selective advocacy, difficulties scaling initiatives, and, a notable gap between the Church's ideals and its practical applications. These differing viewpoints illustrate the complex, often fraught process of translating philosophical principles into tangible outcomes within Nairobi's dynamic urban environment.

### 1.3 Religious & Theological Foundations

Drawing upon its foundational religious and theological principles, the Catholic Church's involvement in social change within Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023 was deeply influenced by the teachings of Jesus Christ, Catholic doctrine, papal encyclicals, and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). These guiding tenets provided both a spiritual and ethical mandate, compelling the Church to prioritize service to the marginalized, address social injustices, and actively promote peace throughout the region. (KNA- MOH/30/10 The Social services 1964-1968)

**Theological foundations are also quoted from the scriptures:**

*According to James 1:27; Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. A respondent further added "Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

#### 1.3.1 Teachings of Jesus Christ

The teachings of Jesus Christ, especially the call to love one's neighbor and support marginalized individuals (Luke 4:18-19), formed the foundation of the Church's social engagement in Nairobi. This commitment manifested in practical initiatives, such as healthcare services and educational programs, notably within informal settlements like Kibera. As Mwaura (2017) notes, the Archdiocese of Nairobi established feeding programs that exemplified the Church's dedication to compassion and service, echoing Christ's ministry. Nevertheless, this approach has not been without criticism. Scholars, including Ombati (2019), have pointed out that while charitable activities provide necessary immediate relief, they sometimes overshadow the need to address deeper, systemic issues such as inequitable land distribution. This critique underscores a persistent tension within the Church's mission: balancing acts of personal charity with efforts aimed at structural reform. Ultimately, while the Church's actions reflect its theological principles, questions remain regarding the scope and depth of its social impact.

*According to Luke 3:11 John the Baptist answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." 1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

#### 1.3.2 Catholic Doctrine

Catholic doctrine, particularly the concept of the Church as the "Body of Christ," tasked with serving humanity, fundamentally shaped its social engagement in Nairobi. The Church's commitment to social justice—rooted in its mission to defend human dignity—motivated efforts like those of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission

(CJPC), which played a significant role in advocating for fair governance and human rights amid Kenya's democratization (Chepkwony, 2018). For example, after 2010, CJPC's civic education initiatives in Nairobi empowered ordinary citizens to participate in constitutional reform. Yet, scholarly analyses indicate that the Church's adherence to its doctrinal positions sometimes resulted in conservative responses to contemporary issues, such as gender equality, leading to friction with progressive movements (Gifford, 2009).

According to a respondent

*"I understand the reason why the catholic doctrine compels her to involve herself in social justice because they want to become that religion which is acceptable to God as state by the letter of St. James "James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (R103)*

### **1.3.3 Papal Encyclicals**

Papal encyclicals have played a significant role in shaping the Catholic Church's social engagement in Nairobi. *Rerum Novarum* (1891) laid the groundwork for local advocacy on workers' rights, particularly within the city's informal economy. *Laudato Si'* (2015) later shifted attention toward environmental issues, resulting in initiatives like waste management campaigns in marginalized urban areas. *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), released against the backdrop of Kenya's lingering ethnic divisions following the 2007–2008 post-election violence, reinforced the Church's reconciliation efforts. Wachira (2010) observes that these encyclicals were foundational in the development of Church-led peacebuilding workshops that encouraged interethnic dialogue. Despite these advances, some scholars, such as Ochieng (2020), critique the Church's inconsistent application of encyclical teachings. While social justice concerns received substantial attention, environmental issues were comparatively neglected until recent years. This points to a gradual, ongoing integration of ecological theology into the Church's broader mission.

### **1.3.4 Second Vatican Council (Vatican II)**

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) marked a significant reorientation of the Catholic Church's relationship with the modern world, prioritizing engagement with contemporary social issues. The Council's document, *Gaudium et Spes*, explicitly called upon the Church to address human suffering and advocate for justice. This directive notably influenced the Catholic community in Nairobi, prompting initiatives such as support for micro-enterprises in Mathare as expressions of solidarity with marginalized populations (Gitau, 2018). Nevertheless, scholarly analysis indicates that the Council's progressive ideals were not universally adopted among Nairobi's clergy. Some preferred to maintain traditional pastoral functions, rather than embrace social activism (Kollman, 2014). This variation underscores ongoing challenges in realizing Vatican II's vision across a diverse ecclesiastical landscape.

### **1.3.5 Theological Imperative for Peace and Justice**

The Church's theological commitment to peace and justice has significantly influenced its engagement with Nairobi's socio-political crises, notably during the 2007–2008 post-election violence. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Kenya responded by issuing pastoral letters that called for reconciliation and condemned the violence, anchoring their appeals in biblical principles of peacemaking KCCB (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Kenya, 2008). In Nairobi, these interventions translated into concrete efforts, such as facilitating community dialogues aimed at mending ethnic divisions (Wachira, 2010). Yet, some scholars and observers have critiqued these peacebuilding initiatives as largely reactive, noting that the Church often intervened only after conflict had erupted, rather than engaging proactively to address underlying ethnic tensions (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). This critique highlights the broader challenge of transforming theological ideals into preventive, not merely remedial, action.

### **1.3.6 Service to the Poor**

The imperative to serve the poor, which is deeply rooted in biblical teachings such as Matthew 25:35-40, has significantly shaped the Church's approach to social outreach. In Nairobi, this theological commitment took concrete form through initiatives like Caritas Nairobi, which provided healthcare and education to residents of

informal settlements. Mwaura (2017) highlights that such programs not only addressed immediate needs but also fostered community empowerment in neighborhoods like Korogocho. Yet, there is a critical perspective to consider. Some scholars, notably Ombati (2019), have observed that the Church's efforts, while well-intentioned, often operated independently of governmental programs. This lack of link sometimes resulted in fragmented interventions that struggled to address the structural roots of poverty. Evidence show a more collaborative approach integrating the strengths of both religious and state actors could potentially enhance the effectiveness of theologically inspired service initiatives.

The Catholic Church's foundational teachings, anchored in the life and message of Jesus Christ, official doctrine, papal encyclicals, and the reforms of Vatican II, have provided a substantial basis for its social initiatives in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023. These religious principles informed the Church's involvement in education, healthcare, peacebuilding, and advocacy, consistently aligning with its mission to support marginalized communities and advance social justice (Mwaura, 2017; Chepkwony, 2018).

Yet, scholarly literature also points to significant challenges: the Church has often been more reactive than proactive in addressing conflict, maintained conservative doctrinal positions, and encountered difficulties engaging in systemic advocacy (Gifford, 2009; Ombati, 2019). These differing assessments highlight the inherent complexity of translating theological ideals into practical action within Nairobi's rapidly evolving urban context.

*A church leader responded shared during a focused group discussion “one thing that motivates the catholic Church to play her role in social change is the 1969 Pope Paul VI challenge to the African Bishops – that projected the vision of a missionary Church that would be: “Self Governing, self - supporting and self- propagating... you may, you must have an African Christianity... and become African Missionaries”. (FGD 1 -R7)*

According a respondent from Strathmore university referring to land documents

*land grants from the government has motivated the church to initiate projects such as the Strathmore university. this institution was started by the opus Dei which had begun as a professional accountancy. Strathmore admitted its first students in February,1977. In 1989, Strathmore college split into two distinct institutions, one remained the present Strathmore school in Lovington and the other was merged with Kianda college in the land that they acquired as a grant from the government to form one single institution – the current Strathmore university. This has led to the growth of the university in the number of students admitted and the number of courses offered. In January, 2001, the Commissioner for Higher Education authorized Strathmore college to begin degree courses with two faculties: Commerce and Information Technology. In April, 2008, Strathmore College was awarded a university Charter and became; the Strathmore University. Therefore, the acquisition of land became a factor that motivated the church to initiate the establishment of the university that has helped the church in playing her role in social change. (R23)*

#### 1.4 The Constitution of Kenya and Canon Law

The Catholic Church's role in shaping social dynamics in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023 was deeply intertwined with both national and ecclesiastical legal frameworks. Following Kenya's 2010 Constitution, which expanded protections for freedoms like worship, education, and association, the Church found a more conducive environment for running schools, hospitals, and various non-governmental organizations. At the same time, Canon Law functioned as an internal regulatory system, ensuring that the Church's outreach and institutional work remained firmly rooted in Catholic doctrine and ethical standards. This dual legal context guided the Church's engagement with society throughout the period.

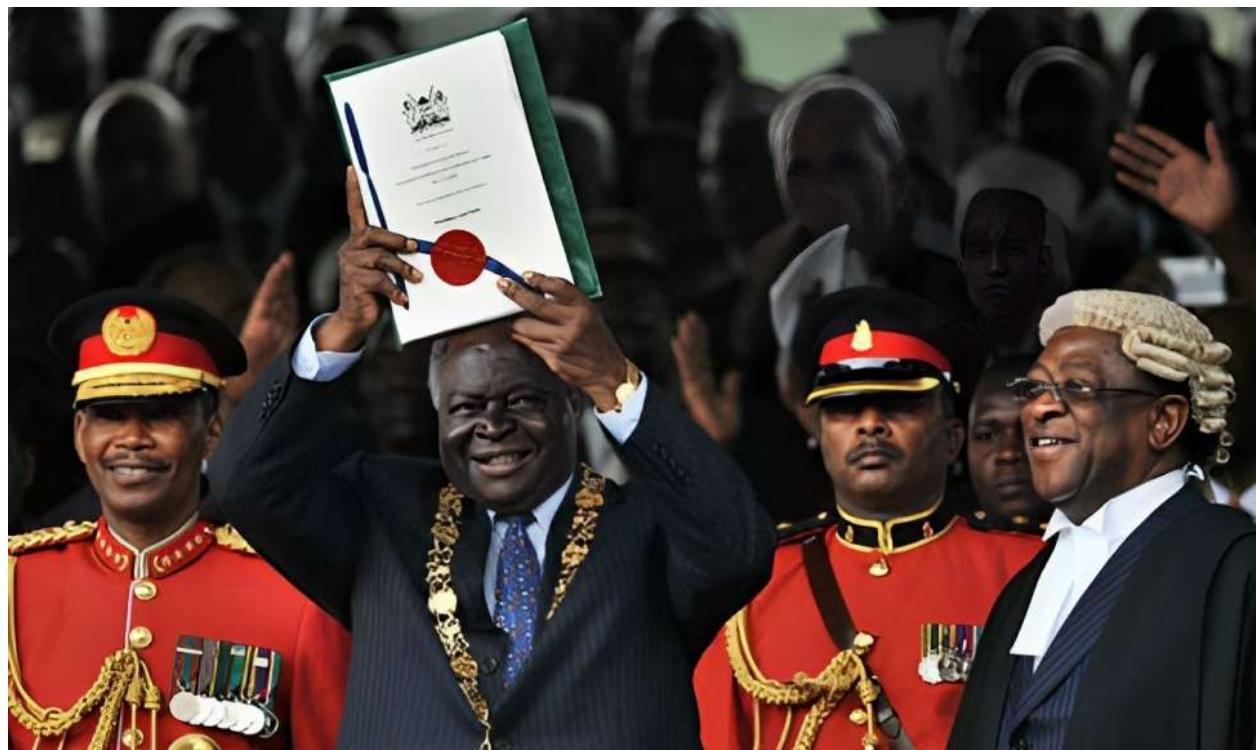
##### 1.4.1 The Constitution of Kenya

Following the adoption of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, the Catholic Church's role in Nairobi's social landscape underwent a significant change. The Constitution's provisions—specifically, the right to freedom of worship (Article 32), education (Article 43), and association (Article 36) laid the groundwork for the Church to expand its social engagement (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). These legal guarantees enabled the Church to establish and manage a range of institutions, from schools and hospitals to NGOs, particularly in marginalized neighborhoods

such as Kibera and Mathare. As Chepkwony (2018) observes, the Church actively utilized these constitutional rights to promote civic education through bodies like the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC). During the 2010 referendum, for instance, the CJPC organized workshops to enhance constitutional literacy among Nairobi residents. This initiative empowered citizens to better understand and claim their rights. Nevertheless, scholarly debate exists regarding the Church's reliance on constitutional freedoms. Some argue that this occasionally resulted in friction with the state, particularly when the Church's advocacy, such as anti-corruption campaigns, challenged government interests (Gifford, 2009). Ultimately, the relationship between constitutional empowerment and political constraint remains complex, which is nuance position of the Church.

According to a legal respondent:

*Article 32 of the Constitution of Kenya gives legal foundations of the freedom of Worship. The Constitution states that "Every person has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion." It further enunciates "Every person has the right, either individually or in community with others, in public or in private, to manifest any religion or belief through worship, practice, teaching or observance, including observance of a day of worship." (R46)*



**Figure 2:** An illustration below is of the Kenya constitution The Constitution of Kenya CoK- 2010 was promulgated on 27th Friday of August, 2010.

Note: Raised constitution by the president then His Excellency Emilio Mwai Kibaki in the presence of the Attorney General; Amos Wako the Attorney General. The constitution allowed the church to develop initiatives of social change; hence rationalizing the foundation for catholic church involvement in social change.

#### 1.4.2 Role in Constitutional Advocacy

The Church played a notably proactive role in Kenya's journey toward the 2010 Constitution, positioning itself as a key advocate for social change. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Kenya, for example, issued a series of pastoral letters urging the public to endorse constitutional reforms aligned with social justice values (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Kenya, 2008). This intervention was particularly pronounced in Nairobi, where the

Church actively mobilized urban populations in support of the referendum process. Karanja (2008) further identifies the Church's participation in the Ufungamano Initiative, a broad alliance of religious leaders who, starting in the late 1990s, pressed for comprehensive constitutional review. Nevertheless, consensus within the Church was far from absolute. Certain members of the clergy voiced reservations about specific constitutional provisions, such as devolution, expressing concern that such measures might intensify existing ethnic divisions (Mutua, 2013). These internal disagreements underscore the complexity of achieving unified ecclesiastical advocacy amidst diverse perspectives within the Church's leadership.

#### **1.4.2 Canon Law as an Internal Framework**

Canon Law serves as the Church's internal legal framework, shaping the organization and daily function of dioceses, parishes, and religious communities throughout Nairobi. The 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law placed significant emphasis on the Church's responsibility to advance social justice and the common good (Code of Canon Law, 1983). In practical terms, this meant that the creation and management of institutions such as schools and hospitals in Nairobi were closely guided by Canon Law, ensuring these establishments consistently reflected Catholic doctrine and values. For instance, educational initiatives within the Archdiocese of Nairobi are deliberately structured in line with Canon 795, which advocates for comprehensive, faith-based education (Mwaura, 2017). Nevertheless, critiques persist regarding the top-down nature of Canon Law. Some scholars argue that its hierarchical structure sometimes restricts local, grassroots initiatives; decisions handed down by the Vatican or archdiocesan authorities may overshadow the priorities of local communities (Sabuni, 2015). This ongoing tension underscores the complexities involved in balancing centralized ecclesiastical authority with the need for local autonomy.

##### **1.4.2.1 Canon Law on Catholic Education Can793-801**

*Although Can793 mandates parents with the responsibility to care for their children's education. Can 794 says that the duty\$ right to education belongs in a special way to the church, to which it has been divinity entrusted the mission of assisting persons so that they are able to reach full Christian life. S2. Pastors of soul have the duty of arranging everything so that all the faithful have a catholic education. Can 801\$- The church have a right to establish \$ direct school of any discipline, type and level.*

##### **1.4.2.2 Canon Law on Catholic schools can 803-806**

*The instruction to education in a catholic school must be grounded in the principle of catholic doctrine; teachers are to be outstanding in correct doctrine of integrity of life. Even if it is in fact a catholic no school is to bear the name catholic school without the consent of the authority. The catholic Religion instruction \$ education which is imparted in any schools whatsoever or are provided through the various instruments of social communication are subject to the authority of the church. The CCB issue general norms \$the diocesan Bishop regulate \$ watch over it. The Bishop is to be concerned with these designated teachers of religious instruction in catholic schools and even the catholic religious teachers teaching in non-Catholic ones. In his own diocese, the bishop has the right to appoint or approve teachers of religion and even remove them or demand that they be removed if a reason of religion or moral requires it. The Bishop has the right to watch over \$ visit the catholic schools in his territory even those which members of Religious institutes have founded or directed.*

##### **1.4.2.3 Catholic Universities and Other Institutions Of Higher Studies Can 807-814**

*Prescripts/ laws established for catholic universities apply equally to all higher institutes learning. The church has a right to erect and direct universities which contribute to true human-culture, the fuller development of the person of the fulfillment of the teaching and the function of the church. The university must approve various discipline taught \$ studied and their academic authority. Teachers appointed in catholic university, beside scientific and pedagogical qualification must also be outstanding in integrity of doctrine failure to which they are removed from their function. The KCCB and Bishop of the diocese have a duty and right to ensure that the principles of catholic doctrine are observed faithfully in these same universities. He must ensure that faculty's or at least a chair of theology is erected. In all catholic universities there ought to be classes which are specifically theological. Those who teach theological discipline in any institution of high learning must have a mandate from*

*their Bishop. The Bishop erects priest in charge of the pastoral care (Chaplain/ Rector) for students in catholic universities /centers even in non-Catholic ones, to give them (these youth) assistance especially spiritual assistance.*

#### **1.4.3 Interplay Between Constitution and Canon Law**

The intersection of the Kenyan Constitution and Canon Law has shaped the Catholic Church's operations in Nairobi's complex socio-legal environment. Constitutional protections—particularly the right to association have enabled the Church to establish organizations such as Caritas Nairobi, which delivers healthcare services and supports micro-enterprise initiatives. Simultaneously, Canon Law ensures these actions remain grounded in Catholic doctrines of charity and justice (Gitau, 2018). For instance, Caritas Nairobi's projects in Korogocho are intentionally structured to align with both constitutional freedoms and the Church's mandate to serve marginalized populations, as outlined in Canon 747. Still, scholarship indicates that this dual adherence can generate friction. The Church's commitment to traditional positions on issues like family sometimes conflicts with the Constitution's progressive stances on matters such as gender equality (Ochieng, 2020). This ongoing tension highlights the nuanced and often challenging process of navigating both secular and religious legal frameworks within Kenyan society.

According to a legal professional respondent:

*"Article 33 guarantees freedom of expression and assembly. These provisions enable the church to advocate for social justice without fear of persecution. Catholic Church in Kenya particularly in Nairobi County are involved in various social justice initiatives, including: Advocating for the rights of women and girls, including fighting against gender-based violence and promoting girls' education. Providing humanitarian aid to marginalized communities, including refugees and internally displaced persons. Advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities, including promoting accessibility and inclusivity. Engaging in environmental conservation efforts, including promoting sustainable agriculture and reducing pollution. Further the responded added that While generally churches have a significant role to play in promoting social justice in Kenya, they must also be aware of the legal implications of their actions. For example, churches must ensure that their advocacy efforts do not infringe on the rights of others or promote hatred and discrimination. The church must comply with the relevant laws and regulations governing their operations." (R7)*

#### **1.4.4 Impact on Social Interventions**

The Church's involvement in Nairobi's education and healthcare sectors was, in large part, a product of its navigation through constitutional and Canon Law frameworks. The constitutional guarantee of education allowed Catholic-sponsored schools to flourish, particularly serving marginalized populations (Kollman, 2014). Meanwhile, Canon Law went beyond mere regulation; it actively required Catholic institutions to prioritize assistance for the poor, which materialized through scholarship opportunities for children in informal settlements. Despite these positive outcomes, some scholars have observed notable limitations. Reliance on constitutional freedoms sometimes left the Church vulnerable, as state support could be unpredictable, especially during periods of political instability (Branch, 2011). Furthermore, Canon Law's rigid structures occasionally restricted the Church's responsiveness to urgent, local challenges, such as the demands brought about by Nairobi's rapid urbanization (Ombati, 2019).

The interplay between the Kenyan Constitution and Canon Law has profoundly influenced the Catholic Church's approach to social change in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023. In particular, the 2010 Constitution marked a significant shift, broadening the Church's capacity to implement social initiatives by guaranteeing freedoms of worship, education, and association. This legal recognition enabled the Church to expand its outreach and service programs across Nairobi. Simultaneously, Canon Law remained a guiding force, ensuring that these activities consistently reflected core Catholic values and doctrinal standards. Scholars such as Chepkwony (2018) and Mwaura (2017) have documented the Church's strategic engagement with both legal frameworks, highlighting its

effectiveness in advocating for social justice and supporting marginalized population, but this dynamic has not been without its challenges. Critics, including Gifford (2009) & Sabuni (2015), have noted persistent tensions between the Church and state authorities, internal disagreements within the Church itself, and structural limitations that impede responsiveness at the grassroots level. Ultimately, these divergent perspectives underscore the complex negotiation required to reconcile secular and religious legal systems within Nairobi's rapidly evolving urban environment.

### 1.5 Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) served as a foundational ethical compass for the Catholic Church's involvement in social change within Nairobi County between 1963 and 2023. Rooted in principles such as human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good, CST actively shaped the Church's responses to pressing urban challenges, including persistent poverty, social injustice, and ethnic tensions. Rather than remaining purely theoretical, these teachings informed and motivated the Church's practical interventions, guiding its efforts to address the evolving complexities of Nairobi's urban landscape over the decades.



*Figure 3:Nuns leaders of different congregations during the AGM of AOSK held in Karen who discussed in union on their role in mission by going back to their roots/foundations of their involvement in social change.*

**Note:** Religious women in Nairobi county, have been the backbone of essential community services, running schools, clinics, guest houses, and agricultural projects. Their lives are immersed in service, often offering refuge, education, healing, and dignity where society may have failed.

#### 1.5.1 Human Dignity

Human dignity stands as a foundational concept in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), grounding the Church's commitment to valuing each individual, particularly those marginalized within Nairobi. In response, the Church has established various initiatives, such as healthcare clinics and educational scholarships in areas like Kibera and

Mathare, to embody this principle in practice. Mwaura (2017) notes that Caritas Nairobi's provision of free medical care, among other efforts, stems from a firm belief in the intrinsic worth of every person. These actions are consistent with CST's call to uphold human dignity through service. However, some studies contend that the Church's charitable efforts, while valuable, have not sufficiently addressed deeper structural inequalities, most notably, issues like inequitable land distribution, which continue to undermine the dignity of Nairobi's urban poor (Ombati, 2019). This perspective highlights an ongoing tension: the gap between CST's ideals and the complexities of implementing systemic change in Nairobi's urban environment. (KNA- DC/7/13- The Roman Catholic Church Mission Plots- 1965)

### **1.5.2 Solidarity**

Solidarity, the principle of collective unity, significantly shaped the Church's approach to reconciliation, particularly during the upheaval that followed the 2007–2008 post-election violence in Kenya. The Church initiated forums for inter-ethnic dialogue and organized peacebuilding workshops in Nairobi, to rebuild fractured community ties. Wachira (2010) underscores the Church's involvement in facilitating such dialogues in marginalized areas like Korogocho, aligning these efforts with the ideals of Catholic Social Teaching, which emphasizes mutual support. Yesome scholars, notably Kagwanja and Southall (2009), argue that the Church's solidarity initiatives were largely reactive, stepping in only once conflict had already erupted. This suggests that, while the commitment to solidarity was evident in the Church's actions, its effectiveness in preventing ethnic tensions from escalating remained limited.

### **1.5.3 Subsidiarity**

The principle of subsidiarity, which emphasizes decision-making at immediate or local level capable of addressing issues, significantly influenced the Church's decentralized strategies in Nairobi. Parishes were given authority to develop interventions tailored to their communities, such as implementing vocational training initiatives in underserved urban areas. Chepkwony (2018) observes that the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) equipped local leaders to advocate effectively for their constituencies, showing subsidiarity in action.

For instance, parish-driven projects in Mathare specifically targeted challenges like unemployment within the community. Nonetheless, some scholars contend that the Church's hierarchical framework at times conflicted with the ideal of subsidiarity. Top-down directives from the Archdiocese occasionally constrained the autonomy of local parishes (Sabuni, 2015). This ongoing tension underscores the practical difficulties of fully realizing subsidiarity within a highly centralized institution. (KNA- DC/NRB/P/3/3/14- The Roman Catholic Schools in the Anglican Church Area – 1964)

### **1.5.4 The Common Good**

Catholic Social Teaching's focus on the common good, with its prioritization of collective welfare, motivated the Church to establish key institutions such as schools and hospitals in Nairobi. One notable example is the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, which aimed to provide accessible healthcare to marginalized populations and exemplified the Church's stated commitment to societal well-being (Kollman, 2014). These initiatives played a significant role in addressing urban poverty and inequality. Yet, critics contend that some Church-affiliated institutions primarily served wealthier urban residents, with financial barriers excluding many low-income individuals. This dynamic, as Ochieng (2020) notes, raises concerns regarding the extent to which these institutions truly embodied the principles of the common good. This contradiction highlights the practical difficulties of translating Catholic Social Teaching into truly equitable access to essential services.

According to respondent:

*Donor support- the Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB), Catholic Agency For Overseas Department (CAFOD), Catholic Organization For relief And Development Aid (CPFRDAID) & others, supported in the prevention of transmission of HIV from mother to child & provision of their general health care. The Catholic Relief service in 2006 got a grant from the American Government & used it to support the Catholic Church health facilities with antiretroviral therapy for the HIV positive patients. (R84)*

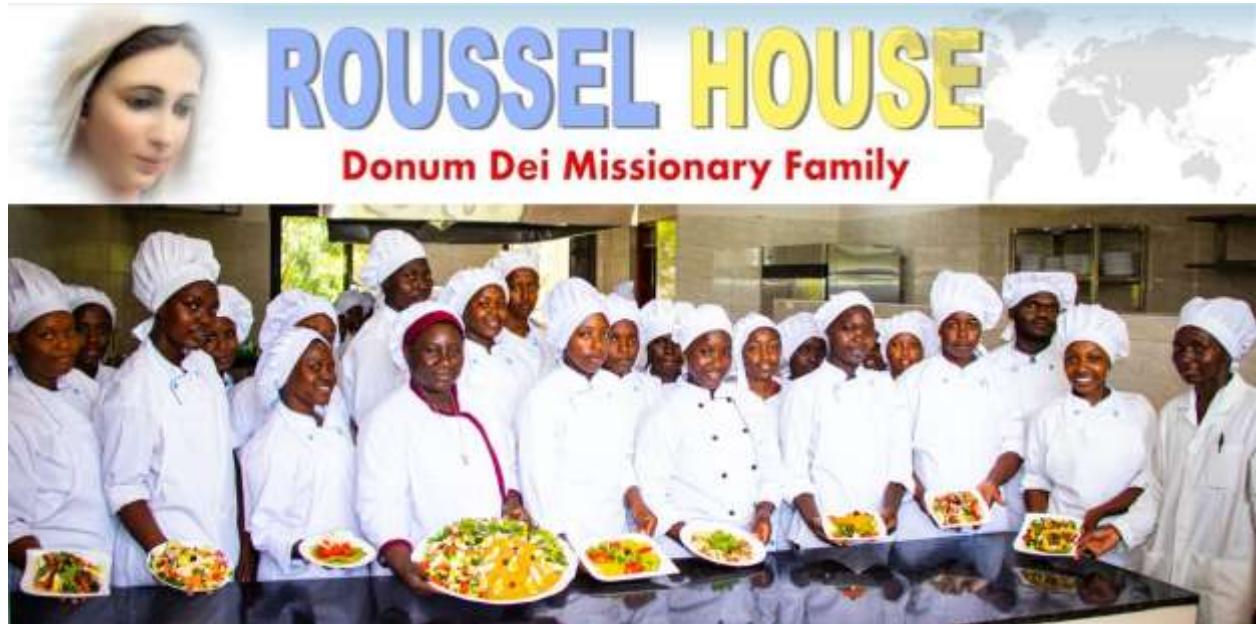


**Figure 4.** The above is an illustration of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital.

**Note.** The Hospital aimed to provide accessible healthcare to marginalized populations and exemplified the Catholic Church's stated commitment to societal well-being.

#### 1.5.5 Preferential Option for the Poor

The principle of the preferential option for the poor stands at the core of Catholic Social Teaching, and in Nairobi, this was evident through targeted efforts toward the city's most vulnerable groups. Practical initiatives—such as micro-enterprise programs and educational scholarships for children living in slum areas were implemented to address the needs of the marginalized. Gitau (2018) specifically notes the Church's active support for small-scale businesses in Kibera, which provided residents with opportunities for economic empowerment.



**Figure 5:** St. Therese Technical & Vocational College of hospitality by Sisters of Donum Dei.

**Note:** A respondent who is a manager of this college remarked:

*“Here in Karen this college is placed somewhere easily accessible to different slums. Here we are in the middle, with Kibera not very far away, and Ngong, Dagoretti, and Kawangware also nearby. Most of our students walk from their homes to the center. I later saw it differently, as an example for my students. I tell them God wanted them to move out of the slums and come to Karen, where there are nice houses and wealthy families, so they can develop positive thoughts, saying to themselves, “I can escape the poverty in the slum”, and become what they aspire to be, like people in Karen.” (R168)*

Despite these efforts, critiques persist regarding the overall impact of such interventions. As Ombati (2019) observes, the Church's programs often tended to alleviate immediate hardships rather than address the deep-rooted structural issues, such as persistent inequities in land tenure. This limitation highlights the broader challenge of translating the preferential option for the poor from a guiding principle into meaningful, systemic change.

### **1.5.6 Participation**

CST's emphasis on participation, essentially promoting active engagement in societal matters, significantly shaped the Church's approach to empowering Nairobi's communities. The CJPC's civic education efforts, especially visible during the 2010 constitutional referendum, provided citizens with tools and opportunities to partake in governance (Chepkwony, 2018). These initiatives helped cultivate a sense of agency, enabling communities to advocate for their rights and pursue reforms. Yet, Sabuni (2015), for instance, argues that the Church's hierarchical structure sometimes imposed limitations, as decisions from leadership occasionally overshadowed grassroots voices. This ongoing tension highlights the challenge of fully realizing CST's participatory ideals within the Church's established organizational framework.

*“Our programs, focusing on women, single mothers & youth to restore dignity and self-sufficiency to heal the wounds of societal neglect, and provide opportunities for a better future. Our work aligns with the CST, particularly in reducing poverty, ensuring quality education, promoting gender equality, and reducing inequalities. The mission also contributed to global efforts towards a more just and equitable world and reflecting our commitment to holistic social change.” (R162)*

### **1.5.7 Stewardship of Creation**

Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, significantly influenced the Church's engagement with environmental challenges in Nairobi, particularly in marginalized areas grappling with pollution. The Church's collaboration with NGOs led to concrete initiatives in waste management and public environmental awareness. As Mwaura (2017) observes, these interventions notably benefited communities such as Dandora, where environmental degradation and poverty intersect. Nonetheless, some scholars, including Ochieng (2020), contend that the Church's environmental programs have not developed as robustly as its social outreach efforts, indicating a comparatively gradual incorporation of ecological concerns within its broader Catholic Social Teaching framework. This points to an ongoing, evolving integration of environmental stewardship into the Church's mission.



**Figure 6:** CJPC Coordinator, Fr. Emmanuel Ngugi and the Christians participate in tree planting

**Note:** According to a respondent who attended the above tree planting shared that:

*“Equity Bank through the Catholic Justice and Peace Department (CJPD) had donated over 7,000 trees as the Archdiocese marked the World Environmental Day 2021. The event that was attended by parish CJPD representatives from the Archdiocese was held at the Holy Family Utawala parish. The celebrations began with the Holy Eucharist led by the CJPC Archdiocesan Coordinator, Fr. Emmanuel Ngugi among other priests. In the homily, Fr. Ngugi encouraged the leaders to respect what God has created and take care of Mother Earth to their best ability. “We are the light of the World, let us make this place better than we found it for our future generations”, he said. CJPC were challenged to sensitize the Christians in their parishes to plant more trees and help take care of mother earth.” (R117)*

Catholic Social Teaching—with its core tenets of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, the common good, preferential option for the poor, participation, and stewardship of creation—has served as a significant ethical framework guiding the Catholic Church’s efforts toward social change in Nairobi County between 1963 and 2023. Scholarly literature consistently affirms the Church’s commitment to these principles through various initiatives, notably in education, healthcare, and reconciliation (Mwaura, 2017; Chepkwony, 2018). Some scholars point out that the Church’s interventions often adopt a reactive posture rather than proactive strategies, and its hierarchical structure can sometimes hinder broader participation. Further, persistent challenges remain in confronting complex systemic issues (Ombati, 2019; Sabuni, 2015).

### **1.6 Technology**

The Catholic Church’s approach to social change in Nairobi County, spanning from 1963 to 2023, has been notably shaped by its integration of technological advancements. Over the decades, the Church transitioned from traditional forms of communication to employing radio, television, websites, and social media platforms. This progression has enabled the Church to broaden its outreach, particularly among Nairobi’s youth population, facilitating both religious instruction and value dissemination in a rapidly urbanizing environment.

#### **1.6.1 Digital Evangelism and Outreach**

The Church’s approach to technology in Nairobi reflects a strategic adaptation to the city’s rapidly expanding digital landscape. With the rise of widespread internet access, institutions like the Archdiocese established platforms such as Radio Waumini, which became a significant vehicle for broadcasting spiritual guidance and

messages on social justice across diverse urban audiences (Mwaura, 2017). Recognizing the influence of social media, Church leadership actively utilized platforms like Twitter and Facebook to engage younger demographics, particularly around events demanding civic engagement—such as the social media campaigns observed during the 2010 constitutional referendum, which encouraged increased civic participation (Chepkwony, 2018). Empirical studies support the conclusion that these digital outreach efforts have broadened the Church's influence among Nairobi's technologically adept urban population (Gitau, 2018). Nevertheless, critical scholarship has emerged, suggesting that much of the Church's digital evangelism tends to focus on inspirational content, sometimes at the expense of more substantive engagement with Nairobi's complex social challenges (Ochieng, 2020). This tension underscores an ongoing challenge: achieving a balance between expanding digital outreach and fostering deeper, more meaningful dialogue on pressing societal issues.

### **1.6.2 Community Mobilization and Organization**

Technology significantly enhanced the Church's capacity to coordinate events and engage communities in Nairobi. Online platforms and mobile applications played a crucial role in organizing parish activities, such as peacebuilding workshops during the aftermath of the 2007–2008 post-election violence. As Wachira (2010) observes, SMS campaigns and email newsletters enabled the rapid dissemination of information about reconciliation initiatives in areas like Kibera. These digital tools proved particularly effective in Nairobi's dynamic urban environment. Nevertheless, research indicates that the Church's reliance on technology for outreach was constrained by persistent digital divides; marginalized populations in informal settlements often lacked access to smartphones or stable internet connections (Ombati, 2019). This disparity highlights ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable participation in technology-driven initiatives.

### **1.6.3 Donation Collection and Resource Management**

The Church has increasingly adopted technological solutions—such as mobile payment platforms like M-Pesa—to facilitate the collection of donations and the management of resources for its social initiatives. This integration has enabled parish communities to support projects in areas such as scholarships and healthcare in Nairobi's informal settlements. Kollman (2014) underscores how digital payment systems have allowed organizations like Caritas Nairobi to efficiently fund micro-enterprise ventures, aligning with the Church's broader mission to serve marginalized populations by ensuring resources are distributed to vulnerable groups. Yet, there are significant concerns. Some scholars, including Ochieng (2020), contend that an over-dependence on digital donations may inadvertently exclude lower-income parishioners who lack access to mobile banking infrastructure, thereby risking the deepening of existing inequalities. This dynamic highlights the ongoing challenge for the Church: developing technological strategies that are not only innovative but also genuinely inclusive. (KNA- XP/1/1 - Roman Catholic Mission – General - 3<sup>RD</sup> /10/1968)

#### **1.6.3.1 Practice of Sound Business Innovations & Implementation Of Strategies.**

The church and faith-based organizations attain their objectives through practicing sound business practices, innovative implementation of strategies, and integrating initiatives appropriately. In other terms, the effective strategic organization or planning predicts a future of success, decides on it, and implements the best practices to attain this future. Developing and implementing winning plans and strategies for faith-based institutions is a continuous journey that needs progressive reviews and refinement of strategic plans as well as associated measures (Holt, 2010).

*"Partnering with internal stakeholders, internal teams, and trusted consultants from both inside and outside environments can assist leaders to develop better strategic plans and implement the income generating projects successfully. Hence projects can bring great income to the church to support her mission. Support systems and self-reliant practices are usually rooted in the unique charisms of different congregations and of different parish needs. Good examples of such income generating projects include but not limited to Cardinal Otunga plaza, Roussel Guest House, John Joseph Mc Carthy Guest House,*

*The Missionaries of Africa Guest House along Ngong Road as well as the Holy family Basilica Parking as per shared illustrations" (R157)*



**Figure 7:** Cardinal Otunga Plaza hosts the Nairobi ArchDiocese Secretariat and other offices was blessed and Inauguration/ officially opened on 16th August 2013 by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops Chairman and the Nairobi Arch Diocese Arch Bishop, John Cardinal Njue.

**Note:** The Plaza build at a cost of 500million has a basement and nine floors. The Archdiocese intends to have its offices on the 7th and 8th floor. The Conference room and a cafeteria is on the 9th floor, while the rest of the offices are rented out. There is also a data center for information technology which is availed at a fee. Inside, the building is equipped with modern amenities to ensure a secure and efficient environment. Integrated systems, including CCTV, access control, and a robust data network, support the daily operations of the Archdiocese. From the functional basement to the contemplative chapel, Cardinal Otunga Plaza stands as a testament to modern design serving a historic mission.



*Figure 8: Roussel House in Karen, Nairobi. Managed by the Sisters of Donum Dei.*

**Note:** This Centre offers a unique blend of tranquility and modern comfort. It's a guest house; a venue for meetings, with a state-of-the-art conference facilities equipped with a translation system, making it an ideal choice for travelers, leisure and business. It also offers both a unique fusion of spiritual retreats and luxury accommodation where the religious and members of the clergy can pause to rejuvenate themselves for the mission.



**Figure 9:** The Holy Family Minor Basilica in Nairobi opened a new car silo underground parking where motorists can park their vehicles.

**Note:** The new parking facility at Holy Family Minor Basilica has a capacity of 516 slots, split into four levels underground. Cardinal Njue officially opened the catholic archdiocese of Nairobi parking silo, on Monday 2nd December 2019. The underground parking with four basement levels accommodated up to 536 cars and used an automated system of payment and selection of parking bays for motorists. A feasibility study commissioned by the Archdiocese of Nairobi in 2014 noted that 10,000 cars that get into the city daily had nowhere to park. This was a challenge that the Archdiocese sought to solve by constructing the parking silo which commenced in January 2018. Everyone in the Catholic church should always envision the transformation of people's lives through various initiatives and visions. The construction of this infrastructure is a contribution from all parishioners, with a highest contribution coming from the parishes that are within Nairobi county. Beside this Silo parking ensuring decongestion, within Nairobi city, safety and security of the vehicles, it as well ensured the Archdiocese of Nairobi continues to be self-sustaining. The parking silo has been a new revenue stream for the Archdiocese of Nairobi. Respondents who are beneficiaries of the holy family basilica parking in a focused group discussion shared that:

*"Safety & location- It only allows cars with valid tickets or cards to enter and exit, which helps prevent theft or damage. It has 24/7 CCTV surveillance, carbon monoxide detectors, fire extinguishers, and a backup power generator. For cool it uses solar energy to reduce electricity costs. It also has special lighting that turns on only when it senses movement, which saves power. Electric cars can also be charged at the facility. This is great for people who drive environmentally friendly vehicles. Good Location - If you're attending a meeting, conference, or church service in Nairobi CBD, this parking space is very convenient. It's also close to main roads like Uhuru Highway and Mombasa Road, which*

*“makes leaving the city much easier. It is located in City Square, right at the end of Koinange Street. The church sits between Kaunda Street, Parliament Road, and City Hall Way. This area is usually very busy because it’s near many government buildings, offices, and meeting places” (FGD 7- R9)*

Another respondent in the same focused group discussion shared that:

*“Large Capacity, technology, accessibility by all & cost - The parking silo has space for 516 cars. It is built underground and has four levels. Even during busy times, there is usually space available. Modern Technology- has an intelligent parking system, meaning sensors and digital signs that show drivers where parking spots are free. It makes the whole process quick and easy. Comfort and Accessibility- The parking is easy to use even for people with disabilities. There are two lifts and wide stairs. The design also allows in natural light through glass walls. Cost Friendly- parking is Ksh 100 and Ksh 50 for every added hour. Overnight 11 PM to 5 AM Ksh 3,000. Lost ticket replacement is Ksh 500. Monthly Fee Ksh 15,000 but Neighbours Ksh 12,000 (FGD7-R5)*

One of the respondent of this focused group discussion summarized the thought of this focused group discussion as follows:

*“The Holy Family Basilica is not just a place for worship. It also provides a secure and modern place to park your car regardless of your faith/ religion and mission in town. Whether you’re going to church, a meeting, or visiting the city, this parking facility offers peace of mind. The **Holy Family Basilica parking charges** are fair and reasonable, it being a location right in the city center. With over 500 parking slots, high-tech systems, strong security, and helpful staff, this is a great place to leave your vehicle. The goal was to provide more safe and secure parking spaces in Nairobi’s city center, which often has very limited parking. This parking facility was built not just for people attending church services but also for visitors, office workers, and anyone else spending time in the city. The money collected through the **Holy Family Basilica parking charges** helps the church with its activities like helping the poor, offering health services, and supporting education.” (FGD 7- R15)*



Figure 10: St. Charles Lwanga a guest house of the missionaries of Africa Ngong' Road, in Nairobi County.

**Note:** St. Charles Lwanga House is the Provincial House of the Eastern Africa Province of the Missionaries of Africa at the service of its members, with a wing to welcome guests.

According to a respondent, who has benefited from this project:

*"This project is a six-storey mixed-use building designed to serve both administrative and hospitality functions for the Missionaries of Africa and for guests. The Key facilities within the building include modern offices, a conference room for meetings and events, and dedicated archives. For hospitality, it has comfortable guest rooms, a dining hall, a resident parlor for social gatherings & a nurse room to provide onsite care. Its promotes the financial mussels of the missionaries of Africa in their service to the people of Nairobi county and especially as per of the income sponsors needy students, the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed, in South B slums namely: Sanasana, Kayaba, songambele, mariguini, fuatanyayo, kisii village, kenya wine, commercial & kabirira,"* (R29)

#### 1.6.4 Engaging Youth through Technology

The Church in Nairobi has notably intensified its outreach to the city's youth through technological platforms, especially social media and digital content. YouTube, for instance, emerged as a central medium for disseminating educational videos and livestreamed Masses intended to attract younger audiences. The Archdiocese of Nairobi's YouTube channel, in particular, offered catechetical content specifically crafted for urban youth, aiming to foster both spiritual and social engagement (Gitau, 2018). This digital strategy aligned with the Church's broader mission to address urban challenges such as unemployment and moral disorientation among young people. Yet, research suggests these efforts have not always resonated as intended. Some studies indicate that the Church's digital content has, at times, appeared outdated or disconnected from the actual cultural interests of Nairobi's youth, thereby limiting its impact (Sabuni, 2015). This criticism underscores the persistent difficulty religious institutions face in adapting traditional messages to a rapidly evolving technological and cultural landscape.

### 1.6.5 Environmental and Social Advocacy

Technology amplified the Church's voice in advocating for environmental and social concerns, grounded in principles like stewardship of creation from Catholic Social Teaching. The Church utilized websites and social media to promote environmental initiatives—such as waste management campaigns in Nairobi's slums—which Mwaura (2017) connects to the influence of Laudato Si' (Pope Francis, 2015), particularly in raising awareness about pollution in districts like Dandora. However, some studies, e.g Ochieng (2020), argue that the Church's digital engagement with environmental issues has lagged behind its efforts in social justice, indicating a slower adaptation of ecological priorities within its online strategy. This points to a gradual evolution in how technology is being leveraged to address emerging challenges.

### 1.6.6 Challenges and Limitations

While technology certainly amplified the Church's efforts toward social change, it wasn't without its complications. In Nairobi, particularly within informal settlements, limited internet access meant that digital initiatives often failed to reach some of the most vulnerable groups. Ombati (2019) even points out that by relying heavily on digital tools, the Church risked sidelining those already marginalized, which seems to contradict its commitment to prioritizing the poor. There were also serious concerns about cybersecurity and the management of misinformation on social media platforms—both of which, at times, compromised the Church's credibility (Sabuni, 2015). These challenges make it clear that a more thoughtful and inclusive approach is needed if technology is to benefit all segments of the community fairly.

Technology has significantly shaped the Catholic Church's approach to social change in Nairobi County between 1963 and 2023. It enabled digital evangelism, streamlined community mobilization, improved donation collection, and fostered youth engagement and advocacy. Scholars such as Mwaura (2017) and Gitau (2018) argue that the Church's adoption of technological tools has expanded its mission, particularly within Nairobi's increasingly urban context. Yet, not all perspectives are positive. Critics point out persistent challenges, including issues of digital inequality, shallow forms of online engagement, and a notable lack of focus on environmental advocacy (Ombati, 2019; Ochieng, 2020). These divergent viewpoints highlight the ongoing complexities of integrating technology into the Church's social mission, especially regarding inclusivity and the faithful application of Catholic Social Teaching principles.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This study has critically examined the major motivation for the Catholic Church in social change initiatives in Nairobi County, 1963 to 2023. It showed theological and philosophical foundations, Technology, Catholic Social Teachings, Democratic struggle and the Kenyan Constitution of 2010, The Vatican ii Document encyclicals/ papal letters like the Laudato Si': *On care for our common home*, by Pope Francis in 2015. The catholic church has empowered the local Christian to be self – reliant to support in her financial struggles. Reliance on social teachings, the catholic church has followed her status to line with her teachings e.g Sacred Scriptures, The Code of the 1983 Canon Law, The Traditions of the Church, Magisterium, the Vatican ii Documents among others.

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