

MISSIO AFRICANUS

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN MISSIOLOGY

VOLUME 3 | ISSUE 1
APRIL 2017

**REFUGEE CRISIS
IN EUROPE:
THE ROLE OF
THE AFRICAN
CHURCH IN
A GLOBAL
CONVERSATION**

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MALAWI ASSEMBLIES OF GOD:
AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL OMISSION**

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**SENT FORTH:
AFRICAN
MISSIONARY
WORK IN THE WEST**

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ISSN 2059-173X

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Missio Africanus Journal of African Missiology
Volume 3. Issue 1.
April 2017.

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Editor's Notes

Welcome

to the third issue of *Missio Africanus*



This issue explores a wide range of subjects. In the first essay, Andrew Mkwaila, writing from Malawi, explores the possible impact of a *missio-Dei*-shaped ecclesiology on the Malawi Assemblies of God. This is a very helpful essay that highlights some of the issues that the African understanding and praxis of mission needs to wrestle with if African Christians will embrace mission as something that the church is *by nature*. Indeed, while Africans have converted in large numbers and have made evangelism a central characteristic of their Christianity, mission is still something that is yet to find a proper translation into their Christianity. An intentional sending of missionaries across the countries of the continent only happens at a very small scale except when it involves the expanding of multi-national denominations (usual, just like multi-national corporations, driven by financial gain). Mkwaila argues that, more often than not, the missionaries did not pass on their zeal for mission to their converts. Can the African church correct this omission to become the mission-sending powerhouse of this century?

The second essay, written by Bernard Appiah, a Ghanaian based in Britain, holds neo-Pentecostal Christianity and African traditional religions in Ghana in a comparative tension as he discusses development as a means of missional engagement with locals Africans and the use of media. Appiah's essay offers a perspective on the long-standing question, "are African Pentecostals being shaped more by Africa's old traditional religions and not mission Christianity?"

Kyama Mugambi's essay discusses a model of partnership between a congregation in Germany and another in Kenya — a relationship that led Mavuno Church - Nairobi to plant a sister-church in Berlin (Mavuno Church - Berlin) and then, made it possible for the two congregations to collaborate when the Mavuno Church - Berlin responded to the

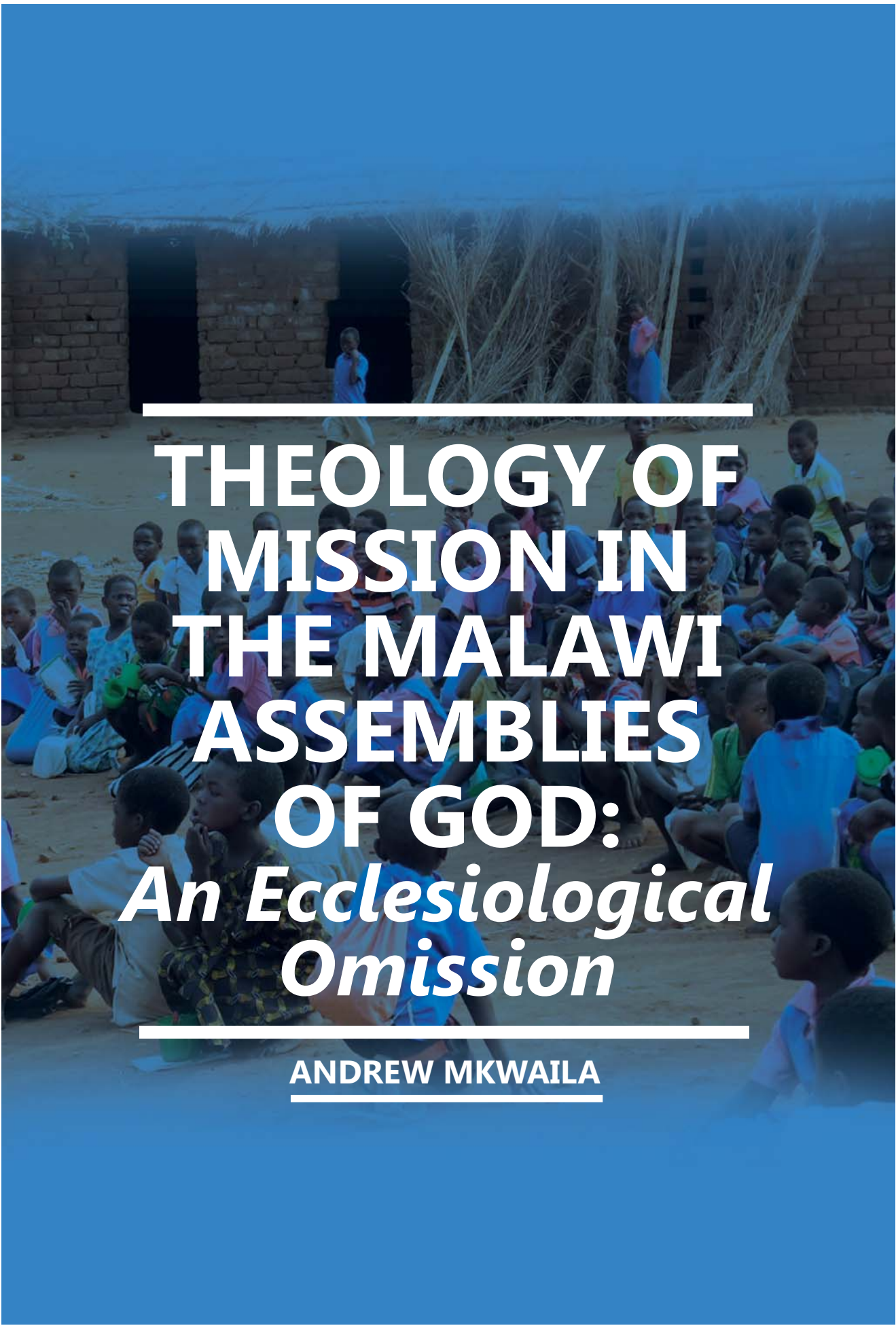
refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016. Mugambi gives us a model of partnership and collaboration that is hopeful for the future, pointing to the many models that will emerge as such adventures become more needful and frequent.

William Obaga is a church-music historian of Kenyan origin but now writing in Germany. He explores the role of folk music in the inculturation of the gospel in Kenya — and by extension, across sub-Saharan Africa. He discusses some differences between the music of the early missionaries (those of the 1800s) and that of the Africans — and how they both respond to music in their spirituality. African culture, being generally musical and prone to dance and movement, seem to have found a new way of embracing the gospel by creating space for a folk-type of music that allows for a "folk-theology" to emerge as lay people do most of the leading. As a result, there is a democratisation of the ministry taking place, and this, Obaga suggests, is making possible a new inculturation of the gospel in Africa.

The final essay, written by Harvey Kwiyani, focuses on the presence of African Christianity in Europe. Using the term of "blessed reflex", he discusses the missionary potential of African churches in Europe; their opportunities and challenges. Echoing the missionaries of old, he wonders, "are these churches the hope of European Christianity?" He goes on to explore how the first-generation Christian migrants will pass the faith on to their children who are growing up in a secularised Europe.

This is an exciting collection of essays. I pray you will enjoy them.

Harvey Kwiyani
Editor
harvey@missioafricanus.org



THEOLOGY OF MISSION IN THE MALAWI ASSEMBLIES OF GOD: *An Ecclesiological Omission*

ANDREW MKWAILA

THEOLOGY OF MISSION IN THE MALAWI ASSEMBLIES OF GOD: An Ecclesiological Omission¹

Abstract

The theology of mission in the Malawi Assemblies of God has its origins in a determination arising in the late 1990s and early 2000s to send out foreign missionaries. This article traces the roots of this theology of mission arguing that the nature of its focused and pragmatic development led to a myopic application neglecting other key areas of theological consideration including notably that of ecclesiology. The article concludes by putting forth constructive proposals as to how local churches of the Malawi Assemblies of God may translate such a theology of mission into their congregational life.

Keywords: Theology of Mission, Ecclesiology, Malawi Assemblies of God, Missional Church.

Introduction

At the close of the twentieth century a movement to engage in cross-cultural missions emerged in the Malawi Assemblies of God (MAG) as well as in many of its sister churches in Africa. For almost two decades now, the church has been giving increased attention in its formal and informal training structures to the fact that “God calls His Church—including the African Church—to actively participate in His mission to redeem fallen humankind.”² The discussion regarding missions has since moved beyond its infancy; a number of missionaries have been sent by the MAG in recent years to other countries in Africa, and theology

of missions courses occupy a place of central significance in many of its training programs. Yet, despite this progress, valid questions are being raised regarding this movement and the underlying theology of missions that has been developed to support it.³ The questions that have been raised have centred on the efficacy of the nascent missions movement. The core of the concern has been whether the church is producing the number of missionaries commensurate with its age and the prominence given to mission in the church’s discourses. This particular concern and others are comprehensively addressed elsewhere; however, we do well to note that the issues relating to international missions engagement are only one factor among many that a robust missiology in the MAG will need to contend with if it is to be a fully efficacious force in shaping the church.⁴ This essay focuses on a subject that has received almost no attention yet, namely that of *ecclesiology*. The thesis being advanced here is that the implications of the *missio Dei* – as it has come to be understood in the MAG – are far-reaching and should, among other things, lead to MAG local congregations that consciously view themselves as agents of *missio Dei*, and allow that understanding to shape the entirety of their life together as the people of God.

This essay reviews the origin of the discourse regarding missions in the MAG and seeks to demonstrate that the effective omission of ecclesiological considerations in its missiology was in fact a natural result of the trajectory established when the missions movement in the MAG was born. Subsequently, elements aimed at the construction of a missional ecclesiology are presented in the hope of spurring further discourse and action towards fostering local congregations that are ever increasing in their embodiment of God’s mission.

A Developing Theology of Missions in the MAG

The MAG is a fellowship in the tradition of “classical Pentecostalism.” The defining feature of classical Pentecostalism has been the baptism in the Spirit.⁵ This experience has traditionally been viewed and interpreted in a mission-oriented perspective—the Spirit empowers believers for sharing the Gospel.⁶ The result of both the collective and individual experiences of the coming of the Spirit was that, in many segments

¹ This paper is an adaptation of a chapter of the author’s doctoral dissertation entitled *Towards A Missional Ecclesiology in the Malawi Assemblies of God*.

² Enson Mbilikile Lwesya, ‘Ten Million Reasons for Developing Great Theological Training Systems in Southern Africa: Towards Re-Engineering Our Training Systems,’ *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership* 3 no. 1 (2012):13.

³ Unless dictated by the immediate context, missions should be understood as implying international and/or cross-cultural missions, despite the theological deficiencies surrounding this popular understanding.

⁴ A key source for understanding and assessing these tensions is Enson Lwesya’s article entitled ‘Comparing Apples and Mangoes Towards Assessing the AAGA Missions Enterprise,’ *PneumAfrica*, 2 no. 1 (2016).

⁵ Allan Loder, ‘The Classical Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit-Baptism: Some Exegetical Considerations,’ *Didaskalia* (Otterburne, Man.) (2002), 13(2), 73.

⁶ Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 65.

of the movement, a wave of missionary outreach was ignited that has continued in one form or another to the present day. Very early on in the life of the movement, missionaries began to fan out across the globe, perhaps most conspicuously from North America, often through individuals and movements connected in some way to the Azusa Street revival of 1906.

Notably, however, as classical Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God began to be established in Africa in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the impetus to organise and conduct sustained international missionary engagement in the same measure in African Assemblies of God churches, such as in the MAG, as it was in the North American churches, has seemed to be lacking. An exception to this was that, in a limited sense, the MAG was a cross-cultural movement right from the beginning as it sought to evangelise and win converts across Malawi's many constituent tribes.⁷ However, for a long time, the church did not develop a sustained vision for cross-cultural missionary work beyond the borders of Malawi, a factor that characterised many other churches in Africa.⁸

There may have been several reasons for this perceived lack of missionary endeavour and vision. Perhaps one reason was the ecclesiology bequeathed to the church by US-AG missionaries who worked together with the MAG church in its early days. While the MAG was started by Malawians, US missionaries played a very significant role early in the life of the movement by working alongside their Malawian counterparts and being heavily involved in the training programmes of the movement. The primary theoretical framework for US missions involvement from the 1950s was the stated goal of developing *indigenous churches* that would be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating as suggested by such missiologists as Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, and popularised in the Assemblies of God by Melvin Hodges.⁹ When the US-AG missionaries were involved in starting new churches and helping young churches grow, their goal was churches that attained to these three-selves. Over time, this indigenous church model and the three-selves, in turn, became a paradigm through which younger Assemblies of God churches, such as the MAG, came to measure their progress towards maturity as a movement.

Consequently, while this concept of the indigenous church served to strengthen the MAG and – along with an evangelistic understanding and interpretation of Spirit baptism – helped the MAG to become engaged in its evangelism, it did not help foster foreign missions outreach. Self-propagating both in the eyes of the missionaries and the Malawians themselves was defined as reaching only other Malawians with the gospel.

Former leader of the Malawi Assemblies of God, Lazarus Chakwera, argues that the concept that the development of younger churches such as the MAG would be reached when they were able to minister and evangelise independently in their own nations was in fact a popular misreading of Hodges.¹⁰ In other writings, Hodges stated that Western missionaries alone could never reach the unsaved and that the indigenous New Testament churches that the missionaries should seek to establish should realise and fulfil their own missionary responsibilities beyond their national borders.¹¹ Regardless of Hodges' broader intent, the misreading prevailed. Thus, in the MAG, while there was no theological objection to foreign missions, there was no impetus for it. As such, in its early decades, the church did not systematically engage in foreign missions.

This may not have been the only reason for this lack of cross-cultural missionary vision. In the minds of many MAG members, a missionary was synonymous with the *white* people. The fact that Malawi is an economically-challenged country meant to some that Malawians could not participate in missions as they did not have the necessary finances as the [Europeans and Americans] did.¹² In the 1990s, however, this perspective began to change. In the MAG and its sister churches in Southern Africa, people began to wonder why Africans could not be missionaries. Slowly, a missionary consciousness began to develop.

Perhaps the first substantive official recognition of this expanded cross-cultural missionary calling occurred in 1997 at a conference of denominational leaders, Bible school teachers and others from across the Assemblies of God churches from East Africa. This conference took place in Iringa, Tanzania. The meeting squarely addressed the subject of missions, reflecting the emerging realisation that Africans should play their full role in cross-cultural missions. While a

⁷ Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, *The Development of the Eleventh-Hour Institute to be Utilized as a Means of Mobilizing, Training, and Sending Missions Workers from Malawi and Nearby Countries to Unreached Peoples* (Deerfield, IL: Trinity International University, DMin diss, 2000), 18.

⁸ Yusufu Turaki, "Evangelical Missiology from Africa: Strengths and Weaknesses," in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 277.

⁹ Warren B. Newberry, 'Contextualizing Indigenous Church Principles: An African Model,' *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 8, no. 20. (January 2005): 96, http://www.apts.edu/aeimages//File/AJPS_PDF/05-1-WNewberry.pdf.

¹⁰ Chakwera, *The Development*, 18.

¹¹ Chakwera, *The Development*, 19.

¹² Gregory Chawanangwa Mvula and Enson Mbiliile Lwesya. *Flames of Fire: The History of the Malawi Assemblies of God and Pentecostalism in Malawi* (Lilongwe, Malawi: Assemblies of God in Malawi, 2005), 305.

number of resolutions emerged from that meeting, one in particular was significant for the fostering of the missionary initiative in the MAG and its sister churches. That resolution was to “train toward the ultimate goal of harvest, which means we must train missionaries from East Africa to the world, pledging ourselves to prepare more [training] material for missions.”¹³

At least two major actions resulted from the Iringa meeting. The first was the formation of a Regional Missions Agency in which the MAG was a participant. The long-lasting impact of this board was limited in that, very soon, it faltered. The logistical mechanisms to sustain a multi-country missions board among the Assemblies of God churches of East Africa did not exist. Nonetheless, its formation did represent progress in that, prior to that time, the MAG and some other East African AG churches did not have a missions-sending agency. Thus, even though it was short-lived, it became the precursor to a fully-fledged missions department within the MAG.

The other concrete action that resulted from the 1997 meeting was the formation of a mobile school of mission called the Eleventh Hour Institute (EHI) which was established with the two-fold purpose of affirming the cross-cultural missions efforts of African pastors and missionaries and to provide short training courses for missionaries from Africa.¹⁴ Chakwera, who had been recognised as having a robust vision for missions, was delegated to head the institute.¹⁵ Therefore, the first EHI training session which was conducted in 1999 was held in Lilongwe, Malawi. This first meeting attracted a cross-section of participants from the MAG including, significantly, families who were commissioned as missionaries to North Africa. Early progress towards becoming a missionary-sending church was being realised relatively quickly.

Around the time of and subsequent to the Iringa meeting, a rising awareness of missions in Malawi manifested itself in other ways. In association with the US Assemblies of God, the MAG opened a seminary in Lilongwe whose Master’s Degree-level training focused almost exclusively on missions. The stated aim of the school was to “mobilize the church for global mission in Pentecostal power.” At the undergraduate level, the MAG Bible school also changed its mission statement from “providing quality theological education” to “biblical training to touch the nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.” The call that MAG leaders discerned to participate in missions led them

to establish the institutions, initiatives, and processes noted above as a means of inspiring the church to fulfil that missionary calling. Naturally, one of the primary tasks of the mobilisation effort became articulating a missionary theology that would provide the biblical underpinnings for its missions efforts. Thus, in the case of the MAG, the attempt to engage in missions became a catalyst for sustained efforts in developing a theology of missions.

This developing theology was articulated primarily in the form of a biblical theology of missions. Both in the seminary and the meetings of the EHI, keynote courses that were developed and taught took a biblical theology approach. A diachronic approach to the Scriptures was adopted that attempted to showcase the *missio Dei* as the unifying theme of the Scriptures and, consequently, as the responsibility and privilege of the MAG to participate in.

Despite these consistent efforts in deliberately casting a theology of mission, over the years, the number of missionaries who were deployed by the MAG did not meet the hopes that were widely shared, both by leaders like Chakwera in the MAG itself, and some of its missionary partners. At the beginning of 2012, for instance, the MAG had approximately five missionaries deployed in African nations and India. Looking at these figures, some close partners have continued to question the efficacy of these educational and awareness initiatives.¹⁶ The feeling being expressed by these sentiments is that the MAG and its sister churches in Africa have not made significant progress in fulfilling its missionary mandate, and that much more could be done to reach the nations.¹⁷ This well-intentioned criticism obscures a fundamental shift that has slowly been occurring in the MAG from the self-perception of the church as being an exclusively missionary-receiving church to also being a missionary-sending one. The limitations placed on the self-understanding of the church created by a misinterpretation of Hodges’ indigenous church principles have largely been shed. In and of itself, this represents something of a radical transformation.

It is possible, therefore, to concur that far more can and should be done in missionary outreach, while simultaneously acknowledging that great strides have been made towards fostering a critical mass in the church that has been inculcated with a missionary vision. Thus, Chakwera’s assertion that in Africa there is a realisation that mission is from everywhere to everywhere and that the realisation has dawned that the African church also has a role to play in missions

¹³ Chakwera, *The Development*, 16.

¹⁴ Africa’s Hope. Eleventh Hour Institute adopted from <http://africashope.org/what-we-do/ministries/ehi>.

¹⁵ Chakwera, *The Development*, 11.

¹⁶ Antonio Pedrozo and Brad Walz, ‘Missional Mentoring: How National Churches with Strong and Effective Missions Outreaches Can Mentor Those Without,’ in *Globalizing Pentecostal Missions in Africa: The Emerging Missionary Movement in the Africa Assemblies of God*, ed. Denny R. Miller & Enson. M. Lwesya (Springfield, MO: AIA Publications, 2011), 110.

¹⁷ Dick Brogden, ‘Planting Churches among Unreached Peoples: How Do We Partner in Actively Reaching These UPGs?’, in *Globalizing Miller & Lwesya*, (Springfield, MO: AIA Publications, 2011), 13.

was not only descriptive; it was also prophetic.¹⁸ While Malawi is still largely an oral society and, consequently, much of the emerging missionary vision has been expressed through undocumented sermons, exhortations and business meetings at all levels of the church, there is a small but growing amount of literature that documents this emerging missionary theology. For instance, Warren Newberry, a long-time AG missionary to Malawi, documents how the budding missionary theology has manifested itself through calls by MAG leaders to expand the concept of the indigenous church, as it is popularly understood, to include “self-missionizing.”¹⁹ Speaking of the spiritual vitality in much of the church in Africa, Enson Lwesya argues, “because the Church is so blessed, it must refresh others. Its greatest way to do this is by extending itself to people from other tribes, nations and languages.”²⁰ Lwesya further argues that a missionary vision has, in fact, now emerged in the MAG and credits the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of initiatives, such as the EHI, for this progress.²¹

The purpose of highlighting these efforts in articulating a theology of mission is not to make the assertion that they are fully developed theological formulations, but rather to underscore the point that theologising on mission is now occurring on a consistent basis in the MAG. Prior to the late 1990s, mission was not even on the agenda at all. As was indicated earlier, a biblical theology of mission approach is now being utilised to teach missions in both formal and semi-formal training arms of the MAG. Biblical theology has become the consensus methodology and perspective of theological thinking about mission in the MAG.

Considering the developments of a mission theology in the MAG, the noted need for the MAG to be involved in missions led it to begin to develop a theology of mission that could encourage a church in an economically-challenged African country to engage in mission. This emerging theology called for a hermeneutic that sees the *missio Dei* as the unifying theme of Scripture. While the deployment of more missionaries by the MAG is desired, it is difficult to

imagine that even the church’s current small scale missionary deployments could have been sustained without the underlying changes in thinking about missions facilitated by this emerging theology. While more issues regarding cross-cultural missions continue to emerge, such as missions and African migration,²² missionary care,²³ contextualisation²⁴ and missions to unreached people groups,²⁵ all these issues relate to and draw from the underlying justification for missionary enterprise by MAG and its sister churches being founded upon a biblical theology of mission that is being currently articulated.

The concern with cross-cultural missions in the MAG, and the articulation of a theology of mission that has accompanied it, represent a welcome development that should rightly be celebrated. Yet, at the same time, it may be argued that it is an incomplete development. Notably missing from the theology of mission that the church has embraced have been issues related to the life and ministry of local congregations in context. While not intentional, ecclesiology remains a *de facto* missing element of the MAG’s emerging theology of mission. The next section explores the reasons for this omission.

Ecclesiology: A Glaring Omission

Speaking of the limitations of the term *missio Dei* as it has emerged in Western theology, John Flett remarks that “*missio Dei*’s genesis as a response to the prolonged interrogation of mission motives, methods and goals helps explain this deficient theological development. It is not, in the first instance, a constructive concept; rather it serves a critical function.”²⁶ A similar limitation appears to have emerged in the MAG’s theology of missions in that while a biblical theology of mission should point to an all-encompassing perspective that affects every aspect of the church’s life and theology, the fact that the MAG has developed its initial thinking about mission as a specific response to the need to deploy missionaries appears to have caused its missiology to be truncated and almost exclusively focused on the issue of foreign missions. This appears to have occurred because, while a biblical theology has been articulated, the questions that have been asked of that

¹⁸ AG-US. (2005). Minutes of the of the 51st Session of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Denver, Colorado, 67. He made this statement while delivering a keynote address at the world missions session of the 2005 US-AG General Assembly.

¹⁹ Newberry, ‘Contextualizing Indigenous Church Principles,’ 112.

²⁰ Enson Mbilikile Lwesya, ‘Missional Implications from Africa’s Trends: Globalization, Migration, Urbanization and Mission,’ *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership* 1, no.1 (2010).

²¹ Miller and Lwesya, *Globalizing*, 2011.

²² Enson Mbilikile Lwesya, ‘Missional Implications from Africa’s Trends: Globalization, Migration, Urbanization and Mission,’ *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership* 1, no.1 (2010).

²³ Milward Mwamvuni, ‘Missionary Care: How is the Two Third’s World Church Doing?’, *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2010).

²⁴ Andrew Mkwaila, ‘Contextualization and African Pentecostal Missions,’ *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership* 2, no.1 (2011). Also see John L. Easter. ‘The Spirit, Context and Mission: A Pneumatological Framework for Contextualization,’ *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership* 2, no. 1 (2011).

²⁵ Miller and Lwesya, *Globalizing*.

²⁶ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2010), 293.

theology and the majority of the resulting theological and practical applications that have arisen as a result of that theology of missions have related to cross-border missions work. Substantively missing from the dialogue have been questions related to ecclesiology and the shape of the life and ministry of the local church in context.

It is something of a paradox that the most significant theological development in recent decades in the MAG, and one that has the potential to shape every aspect of the life of the church, should be confined primarily to one area of its ministry, namely, international missions. While further reflection and action in the area of missions is welcome and needed, the concept of the *missio Dei* by theological necessity calls for a broader, all-encompassing application. If the *missio Dei*, as it is understood in the MAG, is a concept that encompasses all of Scripture and is a concept that provides a hermeneutical key that explains who God is and his purposes in history and through his people, then it can legitimately be expected to shape everything that the MAG does.

Towards A Missional Ecclesiology

To draw a synthesis between the theological understanding of mission and the existential situation of the local church in Malawi is, in essence, to ask the question of what it means to be a missional or missionary church in the Malawian context. As part of the discussion that follows, I refer to the missional church conversation in Western society.²⁷ This exercise is a recognition that the journey into a discovery of what it means to be the church in a particular locality and culture is one in which local churches everywhere are called to engage. Therefore, while the church in Malawi is deepened and strengthened by asking what it means to be missional, it does so from a different starting point from the church in Western society. A consideration of that process in Western society will, however, ultimately strengthen the discussion as it relates to the African context. As the Chichewa proverb states; "*madzi atupa ndi ya m'njira*," which, being translated, means "a river is strengthened by streams that enter it along the way." As a means of facilitating such a re-examination and discussion, seven suggestions are made regarding elements that local churches in the Malawian context may foster to interpret a missional theology for their everyday lives and to be missional congregations.²⁸

Fostering a Missionary Self-Understanding and Vision

A fundamental challenge for a missionary congregation is the ongoing need for the church to educate itself and restate its reason for being in the light of God's mission. Every vision requires constant renewal. In the context of the life of the church, each congregation must continually seek to renew its understanding of God's mission from Scripture and its own place in furthering it.

The task for every church is to attempt to ensure that its vision for mission is not a preserve of a small segment of the congregation or of the leadership, but rather is diffused throughout the church through ongoing education. The need for this process is made more evident when one considers the rapid pace of social change in many urban contexts in Africa. A congregation cannot come to a place of remaining static in its understanding of its mission in the world. As the world changes, so must its appropriation and articulation of the eternal truths of mission.

It is also important that any missional vision must have the correct starting point. That starting point is an understanding of God who, in love, is the source of mission. A consideration of the character and acts of the Trinity must be the framework in which every congregation grounds its own self-understanding. The church participates in a mission to which God himself is already also committed. A missional vision is one that acknowledges this and seeks to let the missionary intent and actions of God act as parameters for understanding and providing the essential impetus to the pursuit of mission.

Creating and Renewing Structures for Mission

A missionary congregation is tasked with the challenge of creating administrative structures that are appropriate vehicles for it to carry out its mission to the world. Charles Van Engen makes the following statement regarding administration in the local congregation: "Administration is essential because knowing what we ought to do does not necessarily lead to doing it. The proper understanding of the Church's missionary nature does not automatically issue in appropriate action. This can only be done through intentional administration."²⁹

²⁷ For more on this, see Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 1998). Also see Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

²⁸ These suggestions arose out of a period of study of two leading MAG congregations conducted in 2012. These congregations are the International Christian Assembly (ICA) and Glorious Temple. The congregations were selected because of a public profile they have developed within the movement as being churches committed to mission. The suggestions should not be considered as prescriptive, rather they should be considered as pointers to missional being arising from a consideration of how these two congregations are seeking to pursue missional faithfulness.

²⁹ Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 184.

The specific organisational and administrative structure of missionary congregations cannot be universally prescribed. Even within the framework of the same denomination, organisational arrangements in local churches, structures designed to mobilise the body and engage the world can look quite different. Each congregation must navigate its context and its own internal make-up to ensure that, from an organisational standpoint, it is structured to effectively engage in mission.³⁰ This will invariably mean creating completely new structures and ministries where necessary on the one hand and renewing already existing ministries on the other. In many cases, this may involve a combination of both.

It is also important that those ministries and functions that do not interface with the world directly, perhaps by design or otherwise, be fostered with an awareness of how their internally focused roles relate to God's wider purposes for the world and the role that the church has to play in fulfilling it. The internal life of the church witnesses to the world and to the realities of what life in the kingdom of God looks like. Jesus states, "by this shall all men know that you are my disciples: if you have love one for another" (John 13:35).

Embracing Diversity and Fostering Unity

With at least nine major ethnic groups, diversity has long been a feature of the ministry landscape in Malawi. Changes in politics, economics, rural to urban migration, and other factors mean that, for the foreseeable future, the phenomenon of diversity in Malawian society is going to continue to be an increasing trend. In the context of this reality, the task of fostering unity is not an easy one.

One particular feature of much of African society has been tribalism. This is to some extent a latent feature of some segments of Malawian society, yet one that is rarely discussed in public. Speaking of the potential role of the church in Africa in addressing tribalism, Nigerian scholar, Ferdinand Nwaigbo, remarks:

A church that justifies tribalism and mollifies its powerful force of divisiveness, condoning injustice and oppression, distorts its mission of love and unity and falls short of the revelation of God. A church that stands for co-operate humanity and hungers for justice is a true revelation; it is a symbol of hope for contemporary Africa.³¹

In addressing issues relating to tribalism and other points of tension that sometimes arise from various kinds of diversity, the church has the potential to be such a symbol of hope to the community and an embodiment of the "already but not yet" kingdom. In the context of diversity and difference, the declaration of a unity that is available in Christ is a powerful articulation of the Good News, one that declares the advent of the one new humanity and peace between God and humanity. The ministry context in Malawi and Africa means that local churches on the continent will continue to encounter diversity of various kinds. Fostering unity is not only essential for the health of congregational life; it is also a witness to the unity of the kingdom of God and a tangible reflection of its reality.

Pursuing Discipleship in the Light of God's Mission

A missionary congregation seeks to allow God's mission to shape all that it does, especially the critical function of discipleship. Biblical discipleship seeks to equip believers in Jesus Christ for participation in God's ongoing mission in the world.³² It is at once both a product and a key instrument of mission. This calls for a new conceptualisation of discipleship different from what traditionally prevails in much contemporary Christian thought. The end goal of discipleship and spiritual formation in the missionary congregation is to prepare its people for a life that furthers God's mission to the world.

In a reflection on the impact of the non-Western world on theology of mission, Wilbert Shenk argues that "a new criterion of theological validity ought to be adopted: "Only theology that motivates and sustains the church in witness and service to the world deserves to be accredited."³³ In a similar fashion, in the context of the local church, a model of discipleship that does not motivate its membership to face the world in mission must be rejected as biblically inauthentic. As members are equipped for and engage in service, the benefits will be realised, not only in terms of ministry results, but also in terms of their spiritual renewal and vitality.

Practising Pastoral Ministry

Closely related to discipleship is the practice of pastoral ministry. Consistent with tradition in the Pentecostal community, the laity in the missionary congregation should be viewed as being empowered by the Spirit of God for ministry. This ministry includes

³⁰ Guder, *Missional Church*, 227.

³¹ Ferdinand Nwaigbo, 'Tribalism Versus Evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa,' *AFER*, 47 no. 3 (2005), 158.

³² Matthew 28:19-20.

³³ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission: Impulses from the Non-Western World," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 25 no. 3, (July 2001), 105.

not only ministry to the world but priestly edification and care of the body. Thus, the laity has an indispensable role in the provision of pastoral ministry. However, the involvement of laypersons in ministry cannot validly negate the role of individuals who are called to this role in their capacity as leaders in the congregation.³⁴

As with all other dimensions in the life of the church, pastoral ministry must be shaped by God's mission. Thus, pastoral ministry in the missionary congregation is not viewed as a function that maintains the spiritual status quo but rather one that seeks to shape the congregation for mission. In pursuit of this ministry objective, the classical care and nurture functions of pastors must be valued. This calls for pastors to view their ministries as a call to come alongside their members as they live life in the light of God's mission and share both joys and sorrows. Ultimately, pastoral ministry in the local congregation is a reflection of Jesus who is the chief missionary pastor.

Ministering in a Manner Appropriate to the Context

The imperative of developing contextually appropriate ministry is one that arises from both theological and pragmatic concerns.³⁵ Ministerial appropriateness deals with form and function; Scripture and context and is a multi-faceted issue.³⁶ A missionary congregation is one that constantly seeks an awareness of its environment and the society in which it is found and seeks to shape its ministry accordingly.

Engaging in Church Planting and Cross-Cultural Missions

The mission of God that local congregations are called to participate in is one that knows no geographical boundaries. Regardless of a church's financial standing, the call to participate in mission in some manner is one that needs to be pursued and that also has positive potential for ministry in the local context:

As the church takes up its task to be engaged in missions, there will be a reflexive effect. As the church develops a vision for and becomes involved in missions to the ends of the earth, the more likely it is that the church will also be a missional church near to home. Mission has the potential to revitalize a missional vision for the whole world, including the neighbourhood.³⁷

The benefits of belonging to a denominational network, such as the MAG, includes having an available mission agency and structure that individual churches can partner with in various ways and according to their abilities. In considering these features of a missionary congregation that have been described, Flett's admonition is one that merits serious attention: "As there is no breach in the being and the act of God, so there can be no breach in the being and the act of his community. The Christian community is a missionary community or she is not the Christian community."³⁸

While suggestions have been made here as to how to translate a theology of mission into practice in the local church, it is hard to overemphasise that being a missionary congregation cannot simply be achieved by the mere institution of new behaviours or programmes. Rather, it must be a result of realising that the church is missionary by nature and that the Spirit who indwells the church is a missionary Spirit; consequently, it seeks to express that in the various respects described here and potentially in others that have not been articulated.

Conclusion

The emergence of the theology of the *missio Dei* in the MAG has been a welcome and needed development in supporting a nascent missionary movement. A consideration of this theology and the Malawian context points to the urgent need for this thinking about mission to be extended to the ecclesiology of the MAG with a view to shaping local congregations into communities that pursue and reflect God's mission.

In conclusion, it has been argued that it is not sufficient to pursue God's mission in a few select areas of its life and ministry, such as foreign missions; rather, that God's mission ought to be the defining reality that shapes everything that its local churches do. In other words, it must foster churches that

Let(s) God's mission permeate everything that the congregation does—from worship to witness to training members for discipleship. It bridges the gap between outreach and congregational life, since, in its life together, the church is to embody God's mission.³⁹

³⁴ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 474.

³⁵ Andrew Mkwaila, 'Contextualization and African Pentecostal Missions,' *Ethne: The Online Journal for Pentecostal and Missional Leadership*, 2 no.1 2011.

³⁶ Charles H. Kraft. 'Why Appropriate?' in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft & Dean S. Gilliland, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005).

³⁷ Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 220.

³⁸ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

³⁹ Lois Barret, *Treasure in Jars of Clay: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), x.

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ANDREW MKWAILA

Andrew Mkwaila is the executive Pastor of International Christian Assembly, Lilongwe Malawi and an adjunct faculty member at Malawi Assemblies of God University (Lilongwe, Malawi) and Pan-African Theological Seminary (Lome, Togo). He may be contacted at andykwaila@hotmail.com.





CHRISTIANITY'S ENCOUNTER WITH GHANAIAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS COSMOLOGIES

BERNARD APPIAH, PH.D.

CHRISTIANITY'S ENCOUNTER WITH GHANAIAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS COSMOLOGIES

Abstract

The relationship between Christianity and indigenous religious cosmologies in Ghana during the pre-colonial missionary days was said to "divergent." However, this essay argues that there were many points of convergence between the two religious worldviews. The relationship between Christianity and the indigenous religious cosmologies was a major determining factor on the success or failure of the early mission's efforts, and it is still a significant factor for Christian churches today. Consequently, the success of contemporary neo-Pentecostals depends upon the ability of the groups to contextualise their beliefs and praxis within indigenous society.

Keywords: traditional religions, neo-Pentecostals, African Pentecostalism, mission.

Early Missions to Ghana and Contributions to National Development

Roman Catholic Franciscan Friars who came with the Portuguese traders as chaplains were the first missionaries to arrive on the coast of West Africa. Initially, the focus of their mission was to provide pastoral care to the traders and not to Africans. As such, there was no notable presence of Christian missionaries on the coasts of West Africa until about 1828. The first missionaries to arrive in Ghana

(formerly the Gold Coast) came from the Basel Mission in 1828 and they were based at the Akwapim ridge of the Eastern Region. Physical traces of their presence in the area are characterised by the stone buildings, stone wells, and tombs of those who died on the mission field due to tropical diseases. In 1835, Wesleyan missionaries arrived and established their base at Cape Coast. They were soon followed by the German Bremen Society in 1847 who settled in the Trans-Volta area. In 1881, 1898, and 1906 the Catholic missionaries, the African Methodist-Episcopal Zion missionaries and the Anglican missionaries arrived respectively.¹

One important factor that helped the growth and expansion of the missions' activities was the contribution they made to national development. Socio-economic development formed a significant part of their mission strategy.² The early missionaries to Ghana made several contributions to national development. Among these were the setting up of colleges and schools, some of which remain the best schools in the country. These include teacher training colleges such as the Presbyterian Training College established in 1848 in Akropong (the oldest college in West Africa apart from the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone); the Wesley Training College in Kumasi; Adisadel College; and a number of secondary schools such as Mfanstipim Senior High School, Presbyterian Boys Senior High School, Holy Child Senior High School, and Aburi Girls Senior High School.³ Similarly, hospitals were built, such as the Agogo Hospital by the Presbyterians and St Joseph's Hospital by the Catholics in Koforidua. The missionaries also developed the reading and writing of the indigenous vernacular languages.⁴ Those missionaries set a precedent with their national development agenda that most of the older churches have continued to follow; and, lately, the neo-Pentecostal churches are following suit with the building of schools, universities, hospitals and student hostels.⁵ Despite the successes highlighted as the missionaries' major contributions and legacy to the nation's development, there were also some failures.

¹ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. Studies in African Pentecostal Christianity 1. Accra, Ghana: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001, 16.

² Pascal Fossouo, "Missionary Challenges Faced by the First African Church Leaders in Cameroon and in Ghana," *Exchange* 37 (2008): 265-266.

³ Florence Mable Bourret, *Ghana: The Road to Independence, 1919-1957* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 133.

⁴ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960: Younger Church in a Changing Society* (Accra: Ghana University Press 1966), 271.

⁵ Examples of churches with such initiatives include: The Royalhouse Chapel International; International Central Gospel Church; Lighthouse Chapel International; Action Chapel International; Perez Chapel International.

Attitude towards Akan Cosmology

The main area of perceived failure of the missionaries' activities among the Akans was their reluctance and inability to contextualise the message of Christianity. In an argument explaining why Akans perceived Christianity as a foreign religion, Kofi Busia noted that:

Those who have been responsible for the propagation of the Christian gospel in other lands and cultures have not shown sufficient awareness of the need for an encounter between the Christian religion and the cosmology of the people alongside European cultures and traditions.⁶

In this sense, they built Christian congregations that were in opposition to the indigenous way of life. In a much stronger critique, Kofi Asare Opoku states that, 'the church in Africa [...] was part of the cultural invasion of Europe which did not have much regard for the dignity of African culture and which therefore adopted a disdainful and condemnatory attitude to things African [...].'⁷

Contrary to Opoku's critique, there seems to be no evidence to suggest this was a *deliberate* attempt to erase the cultures of the people. It appears to me that what happened was a clash of civilisations – over and against a clash of cosmologies – where the missionaries had the upper hand because of political and imperial authority. Christian groups, even today, are often suspected of trying to erase indigenous cultures. Some strands of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana are often accused of this.⁸ However, it was the processes by which the missionaries tried to propagate the gospel and build Christian communities in Ghana that gave rise to these allegations. For instance, they built *salems* (exclusive Christian communities) with the intention of separating converts to Christianity from the rest of the communities. This caused some locals to refer to Christianity as the 'white man's (*sic*) religion' and associated it with what they thought was a superior culture. Of course, Europe's history of slavery and imperialism did not help. In many cases, the social development work of the missionaries made Christianity unattractive even after the missionaries were long gone because it was thought to replace of slavery and because of this,

some have considered the Western missionary enterprise an offence to African society.⁹ To many, Christianity became synonymous with civilisation, and was therefore not accepted for its religious value but rather as a religion that offered material blessings.

Smith observes that the three factors of (1) literacy, (2) the ability of the European to control his (*sic*) environment and (3) the ability to evolve a material culture that seemed superior were bound together with the white man's worship of Christ, and that to the African, they provided a strong motive for announcing oneself as a baptismal candidate.¹⁰ This intriguing observation by Smith of the materialistic nature of European Christianity happens to be the same criticism levelled against neo-Pentecostal churches today. These are today criticised for being more concerned with the existential needs of their members. The difference, however, is that many of these neo-Pentecostal churches place their belief within the indigenous cosmology that tends to address the needs of the whole person and provides answers to the anxieties of their members. The neo-Pentecostal church 'recognises malevolent spirit forces, while at the same time proclaims the supremacy of the All-powerful Benevolent Christ [...] setting the whole cosmic struggle in the context of the supremacy of Christ. This approach would have affected the worldview of the Akan from the centre, thereby influencing his entire religious outlook.'¹¹

The missionaries' attitudes towards Akan cosmology significantly hampered and undermined their evangelistic efforts. These attitudes manifested themselves in many ways; for instance, they questioned the validity of Akan cosmology and of the cosmic powers and the relationship between Christianity and that cosmology. Instead of connecting Christianity with this indigenous cosmology (which many indigenes could identify with) they were suspicious and sometimes outright negative. As a result, they produced Christians who would attend a mass or church service in the morning and go to *tigare* in the evening; this created a double allegiance and later led to accusations of syncretism.¹² The denial of the

⁶ Kofi Abrefa Busia, "Has the Christian Faith Been Adequately Represented?" *International Review of Missions* 50, (1961): 86-89.

⁷ Kofi Asare Opoku, "The Baobab Tree of Truth: Reflections on Religious Pluralism in Africa" World Council of Churches, wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd34-08.html.

⁸ Birgitte Meyer, "Make a Complete Break with the Past: Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:13 (1998): 317.

⁹ Fossouo, 'Missionary Challenges,' 264.

¹⁰ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 101.

¹¹ Larbi, *Ghanaian Pentecostalism*, p. 29.

¹² *Tigare* is considered one of the powerful deities in the southern part of Ghana. It is a deity known to originate from the northern regions of the country. Southerners generally consider these deities from the north as more powerful. The northern regions of Ghana have gained notoriety in the country as being home to some of the powerful deities.

existence of spiritual forces such as witchcraft, sorcery, amulets, charms and other *abosom*, (god), contravened the beliefs of the indigenous religions. Because Christianity failed to acknowledge the indigenous cosmology of the Akan, there was a basis for people to reject the Christian message while publicly claiming allegiance to the Christian God for other reasons. According to Asamoah:

"[...] anybody who knows African Christians intimately will know that no amount of denial on the part of the church will expel belief in supernatural powers from the minds of the Christian, and he becomes a hypocrite who in official church circles pretends to give the impression that he does not believe in these things, while in his own private life he resorts to practices which are the results of such beliefs."

Both African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal/neo-Pentecostal churches quite unconsciously operate within the framework of the reality and impact of spirit forces on humans. However, neo-Pentecostals consider all spirit forces within the indigenous religions as malevolent even though they also often resort to the indigenous religious practitioners for spiritual help. Some neo-Pentecostal pastors are reported to visit indigenous religious practitioners for spiritual powers to enable them to function effectively in their supernatural gifts.¹³ Despite the continuity of some aspects of indigenous religions in neo-Pentecostal churches, some neo-Pentecostal Christians still consult indigenous religious practitioners. This, in my opinion, demonstrates how Pentecostalism and indigenous religions complement each other in many ways even though there are often clashes between them resulting from their differences in praxis. Of course, most neo-Pentecostal churches and their leaders argue that their holistic gospel leaves little to no room for their members to consult the agencies of the indigenous religions for solutions to life's problems.¹⁴ However, it is evident that some of their members do actually visit traditional religious shrines – which makes one to wonder how much neo-Pentecostal preachers are placing the cosmic struggle under the supremacy of Christ instead of considering indigenous religions as demonic only to realise that their members patronise these practitioners. These double allegiances – one to Christianity and the other to

traditional religions – will continue to be a challenge. The gospel of neo-Pentecostals involves substantially presenting a Christian God who is interested in the total affairs of all those who worship him, hoping to maintain relevance to indigenous religious adherents. It will be interesting in years to come to see how neo-Pentecostal churches will negotiate this challenge.

Socio-economic Development among Neo-Pentecostals and Indigenous Religions

The early Christian missionaries to the Gold Coast made several contributions to national development and churches within the various strands of Christianity have continued in these efforts. Kwame Bediako is of the view that, 'The distinction between the historical churches, of missionary origin, and the independent or African instituted churches, have become less meaningful as features which were once thought to be characteristic of the latter have been found to be shared also by the former.'¹⁵ Ogbu Kalu adds, "Pentecostals believe that Jesus has bequeathed enormous power to the body of Christ and they are meant to re-establish the divine claim in every community and entire nations, not only through prayer but also by translating that power to meet people's physical needs."¹⁶ As such, since the late 1990s, neo-Pentecostals in Ghana have developed an emphasis on socio-economic development. There have been many contributions: The Light House Chapel, Perez Chapel (formerly Word Miracle Church), Action Chapel International, and the Church of Pentecost. Some have built universities, while others have built hospitals, schools, drug rehabilitation centres, professional and executive training centres, and many other social organisations. Notable among these initiatives is the Winners' Forum, a trade fair that was initiated in 1996 by the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC). The aim of the fair was to encourage entrepreneurship among the members of the church and Christians generally. Besides the forum, the ICGC set up a Central University College in 1997 which only received its Presidential Charter as a fully-fledged liberal arts university in March 2016, offering courses from certificate to doctoral level.¹⁷ In addition to these examples of development initiatives, the Royalhouse Chapel International set

¹³ Asamoah, E. A. "The Christian Church and African Heritage," *International Review of Mission* 44, no. 175 (1955), 101.

¹⁴ Modern Ghana, Online News, 14 May 2010, 'Pastor in Juju Scandal' <http://www.modernghana.com/newstthread/162109/1/117853>.

¹⁵ An interview between this writer and Rev. Derek Amanor, Royalhouse Chapel International in Accra, Ghana.

¹⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 66.

¹⁷ Ogbu Kalu, 'The Third Responses: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experiences in Africa, 1970-1995', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 7, no.1 (1998), 14.

up The Compassion Ministry in the year 2000. The main focus of the ministry has been the alleviation of poverty and pain of individuals in underprivileged communities, and help for those who have suffered natural disasters and tragedies, through their Outreach for Comfort and Rescue to the Needy Ministries.¹⁸ Some churches have also set up various philanthropic initiatives towards reintegrating the homeless and street children into their communities, providing spiritual support and rehabilitation for drug addicts and commercial sex workers, supporting single parents with developing employability skills, and supporting widows, widowers and the aged by providing them with financial and material support.¹⁹ Some of these churches have set up hospitals and prison-outreach ministries, with members visiting to donate items and fete with whoever is inside at times like Easter and Christmas. There have been instances where some of the leaders of these churches have celebrated personal milestones of their lives with inmates of prisons, at orphanages, witch camps and at disaster relief centres.²⁰ Some have even gone to the extent of refurbishing offices of state organisations, such as the police, prisons and doctors' and nurses' residences as a way of motivating these public servants to continue with their services to those deprived communities.²¹ Such acts complement the work of the state in reducing poverty and bringing relief to those in need.

These examples make it clear that the contributions of these churches to socio-economic development represent a shift from being organisations led by religious entrepreneurs milking their followers in order to enrich themselves to actually adopting a strategy that combines spiritual and scripturally-based beliefs, praxis, and initiatives to assist their members facing socio-economic deprivation.²² These churches have simply followed in the

footsteps of the older mainline churches and the early missionaries. This prompted Ogbu Kalu to note that this lack of understanding by some Western scholars is the source of agitation for a type of Christianity that fits into the African religious worldview, and this, he adds, is partly responsible for clearing the grounds for the establishment of the Pentecostal movement and subsequently neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa.²³ To the contrary, indigenous religion practitioners have, over the years, not established many socio-economic development initiatives, apart from their apprenticeships to train younger priests, such as exist at the Akonnedi Shrine in Larteh-Akwapim; Ataa Ahia Shrine in Bubuashie in Accra; and the Obuotabiri Shrine in Koforidua. Thus, it appears to me that the main difference between indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana so far has been their leaders' orientation towards socio-economic development. That said, I have to acknowledge that we are seeing changes as some of the leaders in indigenous religions, like Nana Kwaku Bonsam, are showing a change of heart. Quite a few of indigenous religious practitioners have claimed to provide scholarships for needy children in their communities.²⁴ Some have spoken of development plans to build primary and secondary schools to augment the efforts of the government for accessible education for all. Bonsam has stated that he has already built one primary school and handed it over to the government for management. Among other community-based initiatives, he founded a football team called Nananom Eleven Football Club to develop talent among young people. In his defence, Bonsam added, 'I have also built roads, tarred them and put streetlights on them. I would do more when I become MP as I already have my money and cannot steal the people's money. My gods would even kill me if I did that.'²⁵ This favourable orientation towards socio-economic development among some of these followers of

¹⁸ "Brief on Social Interventions of the International Central Gospel Church",

<http://www.centralgospel.com/?id=10433&PHPSESSID=be43d267964501dfef6d88159a0d54e3>.

¹⁹ A link on the homepage of the church's website. http://www.royalhousechapel.org/Christian_Leadership_College.aspx.

²⁰ Sam Korankye Ankrāh, *The Rising of the Sun: Shining from Obscurity*. (Accra: Royalhouse Chapel International, 2010), 121-133.

²¹ 'Bishop Korankye-Ankrāh celebrates 50th birthday with prisoners', Ghana News Agency, 26 February 2010, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=177542>.

²² A news and events item on the church website at

http://www.royalhousechapel.org/Events/Rev_Sam_Korankye_Ankrāh_fetes_Nsawam_Prison_Inmates.aspx.

²³ In his book, *Ghana's New Christianity*, Paul Gifford infers that some neo-Pentecostal pastors in Ghana are in the ministry to fleece the flock and enrich themselves. See Gifford, Paul. *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

²⁴ Ogbu U. Kalu "Yabbing the Pentecostals: Paul Gifford's Image of Ghana's New Christianity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 15, No. 1 (2005): 3-15.

²⁵ Nana Kwaku Bonsam, also known in private life as Steven Kwaku Osei Mensah, was raised as an Adventist who attended the Seventh Day Adventist Church very regularly. See list of functions and areas of expertise at <http://www.kwakubonsam.com/service.php>. Nana Kwaku Bonsam attempted to run for the parliamentary seat of the Offinso North Constituency in the Ashanti region in 2012 and in 2016. Both these attempts did not materialise. See Jed Lipinski, 'The Devil is Running for a Seat in Parliament', *The New York Times*, 15 November 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/17/nyregion/the-devil-is-running-for-a-seat-in-parliament.html?_r=0.

traditional religions connects with the consciousness of the influence of the spiritual. Bonsam believes the awareness of the people to the spiritual and the continuing relationship between humans and the spirit-world can be greatly harnessed to inculcate discipline for development and to eradicate corruption – the bane of Africa’s development. This is the same line of thought held by the neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana.

Creating a New Neo-Pentecostals Identity in Ghana

Many African scholars, such as Afe Adogame, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Cephas Omenyo, Abamfo Atiemo, Ogbu Kalu and Emmanuel Larbi have observed over time that the indigenous religions have influenced the organisation, beliefs, and praxis of neo-Pentecostal churches. Although most Pentecostals would vehemently deny it, a great deal of neo-Pentecostal ecclesiology in Ghana is shaped as a direct result of the influence of indigenous communities that create their social context. While Pentecostals branded indigenous religious traditions, as doorways to demonic oppression, neo-Pentecostals seem to be reclaiming some of those traditions for themselves.²⁶ Indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostalism are not mutually exclusive of each other. Abraham Akrong commends neo-Pentecostals in their work in helping to redefine African Christianity in African culture, with all the peculiar concerns defined by the indigenous religions.²⁷ Ambivalent relationships exist between indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostals, for ‘Africans are religious and spiritual, almost unable to explain life without reference to religion and the spirit world.’²⁸ This can be explored further by examining how both indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostals contest for space by the use of media and other forms of communication.

Contesting for Space: Use of Mass Media and Communication Platforms

The continuous and ubiquitous growth of neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana has given church leaders who want to have a presence in the

religious marketplace few options to be seen and heard. It is a difficult thing to say of religion, and particularly of Christianity, but great competition exists among the various churches for space and recognition in Ghana. According to David Maxwell, ‘what is new about African Pentecostalism is its recent growth, enormous vitality, and its appropriation of the electronic media to the point that this has become part of Pentecostal self-definition.’²⁹ To add to Maxwell’s observation, electronic media has become a tool for neo-Pentecostal churches to create a new identity for themselves that blurs any influences from indigenous religions on their history, ethos, beliefs and praxis. The media is used as an ‘icon of modernity’ which the indigenous religions have not as yet fully taken advantage of, although a few indigenous practitioners have a media presence and virtual following.³⁰ It has become a contested space for prominence by a younger generation of leaders in some of the neo-Pentecostal churches alongside the established status of leaders such as Nicholas Duncan-Williams, Mensa Otabil, Gordon Kisseih, Charles Agyin-Asare, Dag Heward-Mills, and Sam Korankye Ankrah. Some of the younger generation of leaders of neo-Pentecostal churches have used the media to settle scores and quarrels about the authenticity of the source of their spiritual powers. The younger generation seems to be obsessed with creating an identity of superiority over the previous generation in order to create space for themselves in the religious arena, basically because there is saturation. Due to this saturation, they have often turned on one another to eliminate competitors and to remain relevant. Public feuds have continued, as some clergy, claiming others are fake and do not come from God, call for a contest to prove superiority in supernatural gifts creating more uneasiness within the church body by questioning the ability to work miracles purported to come from God.³¹ The contests not only occur within the churches. On numerous occasions they have occurred with practitioners of the indigenous religions too – calling for the re-enactment of the biblical contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.³² Such contexts seem to be embedded within the Pentecostal self-understanding; demonstrating the power of the Spirit is proof of authentic

²⁶ Daily Guide, 16 March 2011, ‘Nana Kwaku Bomsam to run for Member of Parliament’, <http://www.ghanatoghana.com/Ghanahomepage/nana-kwaku-bomsam-run-member-parliament>.

²⁷ Abamfo Atiemo, ‘Deliverance in the Charismatic Churches in Ghana’, *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 4, (1994 -95): 43.

²⁸ Abraham Akrong, ‘Salvation in African Christianity,’ *Legon Journal of the Humanities* XII, (1999-2001): 8-10.

²⁹ John S. Pobee, *West Africa: Christ Would Be an African Too* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996),10.

³⁰ David Maxwell, editorial, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 255.

³¹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Anointing through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana,’ *Studies in World Christianity* 11, no. 1 (2005): 13.

³² A spat between Bishop Daniel Obinim and Rev Sam Korankye Ankrah and the eventual intervention of the Ghana Pentecostal Council. See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/religion/Obinim-accuses-Sam-Korankye-Ankrah-of-fornication-421623> and <http://citifmonline.com/2016/03/08/gpcc-chides-charlatan-obinim-for-insulting-korankye-ankrah/>.

ministry, the gospel and the Christian God.³³ The response of indigenous religions has also been to step up to these contests to prove their authenticity as worshipping the Supreme Being who, they argue, is the same as the Christian God.

Stepping out of the Shadows: Using Media to Create a New Identity

In the 1990s, after the liberalisation of the airwaves by the government, several television stations and FM radio stations were opened. Some neo-Pentecostal churches, such as Christian Action Faith Ministry International, International Central Gospel Church, Lighthouse Church International and Word Miracle Church, quickly took advantage of the situation and registered their presence on the airwaves to feature their own programmes. Their advertisements for these programmes featured a presentation of their worship services that promised something new and spectacular; “your impossibilities shall be turned into possibilities, your lack shall turn into abundance, and your failures shall be transformed into successes.”³⁴ This continues to be their unique selling point and has helped most of these neo-Pentecostal churches to rise to prominence in Ghana. Harvey Cox argues that indigenous churches like neo-Pentecostals in Ghana “help people to reclaim ancient spiritual resources that seemed lost [and] are growing because they help people to apply those resources in a new and bewildering context.”³⁵ Such churches give members ‘confidence that with the aid of the Holy Spirit and prayer they can overcome all the vicissitudes of life’.³⁶ This helping people apply old spiritual resources in their Christian life has for a long time helped neo-Pentecostals to stay relevant in the society. These churches contextualise Christianity by making it look like a product of their members’ cultures and this enhances their acceptance.³⁷

It is worth noting that the way neo-Pentecostals use the media resonates with the “primary task of the new movements; to advertise God’s new salvific

plan in Christ through the power of the Spirit.”³⁸ Leaders are often presented as icons or exemplars of the message of wellbeing that they carry. The repeated airing of their programmes on television and radio turns them into ‘religious superstars’ as Gifford has referred to them.³⁹ The content of these television and radio programmes usually includes personal testimonies of the preachers portraying themselves as having been redeemed by God from poverty, moral failure, and captivity by the devil. The programmes are a way of giving the audience opportunities to deal with evil in their lives to demonstrate the superior power of God in overcoming the negative influences of Satan and evil spirits.⁴⁰

However, this appropriation of the media is also not entirely new. Only in the sense that it is a modern medium of communication that indigenous religions have not fully and widely utilised could one say that it is new. Asamoah-Gyadu observes that “what we see in the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches today are contemporary Christian appropriations of what has always been a crucial part of indigenous religions in Africa.”⁴¹ There was, for example, a radio and TV broadcast in the late 1980s to 1990s by the Afrikania Mission led by Osofo Okomfo Kwabena Damoah, which aired every Wednesday evening and ceased a couple of years after the demise of its founder and charismatic leader. Therefore, the domination of the airwaves by these neo-Pentecostal churches does not – in its entirety – represent a break in the influence of traditional religions on neo-Pentecostal churches. It is their message and promise to provide their followers with the supernatural weapons they need to confront the forces of evil as they manifest themselves in disease and discord that makes the difference.⁴²

³³ The biblical narrative of a contest between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal in a contest to prove whose object of worship is superior recorded in 1 Kings 18.

³⁴ Frank D. Macchia, “Pentecost as the Power of the Cross: The Witness of Seymour and Durham,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 30 (2008), 3.

³⁵ Asamoah-Gyadu, “Anointing through the Screen,” 11. Other promises include, “your life will never be the same,” “come and receive your breakthrough,” “God will change your destiny,” and “the Spirit will meet you at the point of your need.”

³⁶ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 258-259.

³⁷ Cephas Omenyo, “Charismatic Churches in Ghana and Contextualisation,” *Exchange* 31, (2002), 252-277.

³⁸ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 150.

³⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of ‘Mediatized’ Religion in an African Pentecostal Context,” *Material Religion* 1, no. 3 (2005): 343.

⁴⁰ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 32.

⁴¹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of “Mediatized” Religion in an African Pentecostal Context,” 351.

⁴² Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of Faith”, 351.

Indigenous Religious Response to Neo-Pentecostals' Use of Media

Bonsam has to some extent become the new public face of the mainstream indigenous religions in Ghana, making use of modern media technology to reach out to the wider public to extol the virtues of the indigenous religions. He has followed in the footsteps of Okomfo Kwabena Damoah. But, unlike Damoah, Bonsam remains conventional in his understanding and expression of the indigenous religion. His regular pay-per-view use of the media poses a 'pound for pound' challenge to neo-Pentecostals who have dominated the airwaves after the death of Damoah. Overall, indigenous religions' use of the media follows a pattern already used by neo-Pentecostals. Bonsam, like many other indigenous religious practitioners often narrates his encounters with his god, *Kofio Kofi*, in a very succinct but subtle manner, stating that his charge from the *nananom* (ancestors) is to help humanity. He has stunned viewers and listeners by insisting they offer Christian prayers before the start of interviews and proceedings at functions where he is invited. He has managed to create an image for himself through the media which De Witte observes is usual in the neo-Pentecostal churches.⁴³ Again, like other leaders within the neo-Pentecostal churches, he has a fully functional website.⁴⁴ To promote his famous god, whom he claims provides help to people from diverse backgrounds (including pastors), Bonsam is presented as the perfect image of wellbeing. Bonsam features videos and pictures of himself divining, dancing or being possessed and providing solutions to people's problems.⁴⁵ Generally, most of the stories presented in these pictures and videos depict the priest intervening with incantations to cast out malevolent spirits and giving *akwankyerε* (prophetic spiritual direction) free people to enjoy God's grace and material prosperity. Bonsam also maintains international connections just like neo-Pentecostal religious leaders. He pays frequent visits to Europe, although he has not yet established a shrine on the continent. He is aware that for many Ghanaians, if 'a pastor belongs to an international network, it

legitimizes the gospel that he or she advocates.⁴⁶ He therefore uses his trips abroad as a medium to obtain recognition to legitimise what he does. Videos of his events and functions are then carefully edited, with special sound effects with Akan traditional music for appeal, and posted on YouTube.

Bonsam and other indigenous religious practitioners use mass media to espouse the virtues of indigenous religions and to convey that they are not evil as some Christians have made them to be. They also argue that intentions of god and the ancestors are to provide the weaponry needed to defeat evil, witchcraft, and any negative forces that create discord and disharmony with the cosmos. In an interview with an Accra-based newspaper, *The Daily Guide*, Bonsam tried to differentiate the position of the Creator and his famous god, *Kofio Kofi*. He claimed, "I am a Christian and cannot challenge the Almighty God. I am called Steven Osei Mensah. I give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."⁴⁷ In effect, Bonsam identifies with some aspects of Christianity. He is, however, very emphatic about the role of other 'gods' like *Kofio Kofi* who serve as mediums of the Supreme Being to humankind. In a YouTube video at a divination function in Amsterdam he is seen praying in Jesus' name before beginning his activities.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The awareness of the Supreme Being (God) was part of the cosmology of the indigenous Ghanaian peoples long before the arrival of the missionaries. Despite the early missionaries' efforts, the indigenous Ghanaians still wanted to be identified as Christians who sympathised with the indigenous religions. This was largely because the missionaries failed to contextualise the gospel in ways that recognised the role of indigenous religions. As a result, many people went to the church during the day and visited the traditional shrine at night. The missionaries of old were accused of imposing their European understanding of Christianity on the Ghanaians while totally ignoring the powerful role

⁴³ The Afrikania Mission "a neo-traditional movement" sought to reform and 'update African traditional religion, and to promote nationalism and Pan-Africanism' Peter B. Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁴ Marleen De Witte, "Altar Media's Living Word: Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2003), 180.

⁴⁵ The website of Nana Kwaku Bonsam Shrine: www.nanakwakubonsam.com.

⁴⁶ Video of Nana Kwaku Bonsam at a function: <http://www.kwakubonsam.com/video1.aspx>.

⁴⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, "Of Faith", 347

⁴⁸ The Daily Guide, "Nana Kwaku Bonsam declares, 'I am a Christian.'" <http://news.myjoyonline.com/news/200805/16604.asp>

⁴⁹ A YouTube video of a divination function in Amsterdam where Nana Kwaku Bonsam is seen chanting 'Praise the Lord', a popular Christian chant among neo-Pentecostals in Ghana. He begins his function by praying in the name of Jesus; link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtVX5dzVZeI>, accessed on 23 June 2011.

of the indigenous religions. The same problem exists today, even though neo-Pentecostal churches have been able, in small ways, to place the Christian message within the context of indigenous religions in order to make the message more meaningful for their converts. However, this overlap between indigenous religions and the neo-Pentecostal churches causes conflicts between the two as indigenous religious practitioners want to claim authenticity and originality in providing the

foremost understanding of the existence of God. One can assert, therefore, that both the indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostal churches need each other to remain relevant to their communities. The contest for space in the religious market place provides them with the impetus to out-do each other to gain the recognition and approval of the people, and to remind them of their relevance to cosmic balance both in private and national life.

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BERNARD APPIAH, PH.D.

Bernard Appiah is lecturer at Birmingham Christian College where he teaches African Christianity and Church Administration courses.
Email: otopah01@yahoo.co.uk





REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE: THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN CHURCH IN A GLOBAL CONVERSATION

KYAMA MUGAMBI, PH.D.

REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE: THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN CHURCH IN A GLOBAL CONVERSATION

The rise of world Christianity calls us to explore new ways of working together as Christians across the continents, especially when faced with huge issues like the refugee crisis that shook the world in 2015-2016. This essay explores, by way of example, how this may happen. It wonders what a church in the majority world may contribute to a resource-rich church in Europe to help, even in a small way, in responding to the crisis? Of course, it asks the question, "what is the role of the African church at this time?" The essay argues that there is indeed a place for the African church to contribute to the Western church in the dialogue on refugees.

The Macedonian Call from Berlin

"We need the help of brothers and sisters from the worldwide body of Christ to join us in reaching out to refugees with the love of Christ." The call is a familiar one, often heard from resource-poor communities of the global south seeking help from those who have more material wealth. However, these are not the words of a pastor or mission leader working somewhere in Africa or South East Asia. These were the words penned by Horst Engelmann, a respected leader in mission in

Germany in November 2015 at the height of the refugee crisis that saw almost one million migrants enter Germany in a few months.¹ The call was an invitation for churches around the world to join with churches in Germany to care for the increasing number of immigrants. One of the churches that echoed this impassioned plea was Mavuno Church Berlin, a German Christian community in Berlin with ties to a Pentecostal church in Nairobi, Kenya.

The enormity of the current world refugee crisis demands urgent responses. The current numbers in Europe and elsewhere, even if estimated conservatively, are large. Add to this the complexity of managing migrant communities within urban centres and the seemingly inevitable clash of cultures and religions set against the backdrop of terror threats and multi-dimensional economic challenges; all contribute to form a multifarious landscape upon which the refugee crisis unfolds.² Elfan Rees, the chair of the executive committee for the World Refugee Year 1959-1960, argued over half a century ago that addressing the challenge of refugees "will only be possible by international co-operation on a much more massive scale than has hitherto been achieved."³ In this paper, I will argue that this is still true today in the specific case of refugees in the European Union. This cooperation needs to extend beyond secular non-governmental organisations to the *church global* whose mandate, in part, is to model the Gospel as it relates to the vulnerable. Using two examples, we will see how the church in Africa can have a role to play and catalyse this discussion though her contribution has not been evident.

The International Organization for Migration reports that in 2015, close to one million refugees arrived in Europe by land and sea.⁴ The UN and Europe are keeping a close watch on the numbers as the crisis continues to unfold.⁵ It needs to be said here that statistics for refugees are generally problematic and, according to Rees, "Statistical procedures vary across the world from the scientific to mere guesswork. It is probably wise to assume that even the most conservative estimates are inflated."⁶ However, even with the most conservative

¹ Horst Engelmann, "Outreach Weeks in German Churches & beyond: Serving Refugees, March 10-20, 2016," November 9, 2015.

² June J. H. Lee, *World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2015), 77-78.

³ Elfan Rees, "The Refugee Problem: Joint Responsibility," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 329 (May 1, 1960): 15-22; Peter Gatrell, *Free World?: The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-1963* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89-91.

⁴ "EU Migrant, Refugee Arrivals by Land and Sea Approach One Million in 2015," *International Organization for Migration*, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://www.iom.int/news/eu-migrant-refugee-arrivals-land-and-sea-approach-one-million-2015>.

⁵ "The Sea Route to Europe: The Mediterranean Passage in the Age of Refugees," *UNHCR*, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/5592bd059.html>; "UNHCR Proposals in Light of the EU Response to the Refugee Crisis," *UNHCR*, September 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/55f28c4c9.html>; Philippe Fargues, "Europe Must Take on Its Share of the Syrian Refugee Burden, but How?" 2014.

⁶ Rees, "The Refugee Problem."

of estimates, what cannot be in doubt is the trauma, vulnerability, and poverty that attend the majority of those who fit the definition of “refugee.” To quote Rees again here:

Nothing tempers the cold wind of exile for the ultimate refugees – those who come within the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner. Leaving home and hearth of their own decision, withal compelled by fear, risking their lives *en route*, they reject, as they go, any right to the protection of their government and so arrive, defenceless and helpless, in a strange country with a strange language and other customs, the bewildered guests of embarrassed hosts who have no obligations toward them other than those dictated by common humanity. They are indeed the “men who came to dinner.”⁷

The point made here is that the refugee issue involves large numbers of people living in desperate conditions and in need of intervention by their fellow human beings of goodwill. We now look at African engagement in the refugee discourse.

The Crisis and Africa’s Voice

The national financial and social burden of refugees remains unevenly distributed around the world. Using available data on refugees, Oxfam reports

that “the six wealthiest nations host less than nine per cent of the world’s refugees while poorer countries shoulder most of the responsibility.”⁸ European governments, informed by the complex context of that continent, have given varied official responses to the refugee crisis in 2015.⁹ Taking Germany, for instance, we see a combination of policy decisions along with financial commitments which the nation made to manage, receive, and accommodate refugees.¹⁰ Germany’s response to the crisis in 2015 was to make a commitment to receive hundreds of thousands of refugees as part of its contribution. This is consistent with the refugee convention of 1951 and the protocol of 1967, of which it was a signatory country.¹¹ The nation made public these commitments thus inviting dialogue at continental and global levels.¹²

Germany has had a fair share of challenges on this issue locally. While the policy to partially open its borders to refugees seemed, for many outside, to be warm and amenable to refugees, some of the local sentiments were negative, even deceitful, and violent.¹³ This has been further compounded by incidents that point to violence from the migrants themselves and the repercussions of this on local populations.¹⁴ The point made here is that the refugee issue is expansive in terms of numbers and geographical scope, and it is also highly complex, locally and internationally. Germany is one example;

⁷ Rees, “The Refugee Problem.”

⁸ “A Poor Welcome from the World’s Wealthy,” accessed July 18, 2016, https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/mb-a-poor-welcome-refugees-180716-en.pdf.

⁹ Fargues, “Europe Must Take on Its Share of the Syrian Refugee Burden, but How?”; “Framing Migration: Rhetoric and Reality in Europe,” *CritCom: A Forum for Research and Commentary on Europe*, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/critcom/framing-migration-rhetoric-and-reality-in-europe/?gclid=Cj0KEQIAzO6zBRC25Ju1idGJiZkBEiQAP3Sf6JhH3aOa8KSGtTwyDCAjoQ28DIB0Yu1OzyT2h9b5-EaAhFN8P8HAQ>.

¹⁰ Simon Morgan, “Germany Wins Hearts with Warm Response to Refugee Crisis,” *Business Insider*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-germany-wins-hearts-with-warm-response-to-refugee-crisis-2015-9>; “Germany Rethinks Its Response to the Refugee Crisis,” *Stratfor*, accessed December 25, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/germany-rethinks-its-response-refugee-crisis>.

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” *UNHCR*, accessed July 19, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>.

¹² Morgan, “Germany Wins Hearts with Warm Response to Refugee Crisis”; Leonid Bershidsky, “German Response to Refugees Puts U.S. to Shame,” *BloombergView*, November 17, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-11-17/german-response-to-refugees-puts-u-s-to-shame>; “Germany’s Response to Refugee Crisis Encouraged Illegal Migration: Czech PM,” *The Globe and Mail*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/germanys-response-to-refugee-crisis-encouraged-illegal-migration-czech-pm/article27935934/>.

¹³ Andrew Griffin, “Picture of a Refugee Holding an Isis Flag. It’s a Complete Lie,” *The Independent*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-flag-picture-that-claims-to-show-refugees-attacking-police-goes-viral-and-is-a-lie-10501290.html>; Kirstie McCrum, “Truth behind Picture Claiming to Show Syrian Refugees Waving ISIS Flag,” *Mirror*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/islamic-state-fighter-refugees-clashing-6447418>; “German Migrant Crisis: Arson Suspected in Refugee Home Fires,” *BBC News*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35174668>; “Violence against Refugees Rising in Germany,” *DW.COM*, accessed December 25, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/violence-against-refugees-rising-in-germany/a-18829303>.

¹⁴ This situation continues to unfold with new twists that continue to complicate the scenario. One example is the recent incident of attacks on German women over the New Year celebrations in Cologne. “Cologne Attackers Were of Migrant Origin - Minister,” *BBC News*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35280386>; James Rothwell, “Cologne Sex Attacks: Mob Attacks Group of Migrants in ‘Manhunt’ for Suspects,” January 11, 2016, sec. World, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/12092354/Cologne-sex-attacks-New-Years-Eve-cases-rise-to-more-than-500.html>; “Germany Shocked by Cologne New Year Gang Assaults on Women,” *BBC News*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35231046>; Simon Shuster, “Racist Violence in Germany Again Tests Merkel’s Openness To Refugees,” *Time*, January 13, 2016, <http://time.com/4178642/racist-violence-germany-refugees/>; “Migrants Protest in German Cities after ‘Revenge’ Attacks,” *Mail Online*, January 16, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3402818/Migrants-protest-German-cities-revenge-attacks-New-Year-s-Eve-wave-assaults-women.html>.

the same is true of many other countries in Europe.¹⁵ What is missing in this complex discourse though, is the African contribution. Many refugees in Europe originate from Africa, especially from the Western and Northern regions, but Africa has not spoken audibly on the subject.

Africa, like Europe, has had a history of refugee crises stretching back over the last 50 years. Historically, most of the African national boundaries that the refugees are crossing have only been in effective existence for less than 150 years. European governments formulated these boundaries driven by political and economic motives. While people movements have been there before, large refugee movements in Africa can be traced back to the last 50 years. They coincide with the beginning of the struggle for selfhood of the African states in the 1960s.¹⁶ Fifty years after independence, many African countries have experience of hosting refugees from other countries. Of course, there are many more refugees in some African countries than all those who have crossed the Mediterranean put together.¹⁷ Thus, Africa does have something to say about refugee crises, not just because her context has produced many refugees, some of whom have fled to Europe, but also because she has also been the host of the majority of these refugees. The numbers have varied over the years. By and large, the ratios of refugees to host country populations have been very high, often much higher than those we now see in Europe. It is for this reason that the absence of Africa's voice in the global discussion matters and needs to be queried.

If Africa were to contribute, we would need to ask what the starting point of this discussion would be. The continent has faced much political upheaval in the last 20 years. Africa's credibility on the global platform has consistently suffered from the

missteps that have arisen in her relatively young democracies. This may be why the world does not often consult African states for political or policy input in global issues such as the one in this discussion. While negative examples of African political failures dominate the African sections of world news, some of the fledgling African economies regularly feature in the lists of top emerging markets in which to invest or do business.¹⁸ Local investment, infrastructure, and policy development are beginning to bear fruit, eventually positioning many countries for global business.¹⁹ Even so, Africa is still not a contributor in financial terms when it comes to the global refugee crisis. There are hardly any instances where the continent has given technical or material assistance.

What is interesting is that although the continent has not previously contributed to the global discourse on refugees, the assembly of world states through the UN resolution 1208 in 1998 recognised Africa's experience in addressing refugee crises.²⁰ This unanimously adopted resolution, while affirming the need for a concerted international response to the refugee crisis on the continent, recognised "the extensive experience of African States in hosting refugees and in dealing with the effects of refugee camps and settlements."²¹ This is an important admission given the relative youth of Africa's national governments and the small sizes of the individual economies.

How will this reported African experience on refugees be tapped for the benefit of the international community? If historical and economic hurdles limit government-to-government interactions, and NGO dialogue revolves around donor-recipient relationships, is there any way in which Africans can contribute?

¹⁵ "How to Manage the Migrant Crisis," *The Economist*, February 6, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21690028-european-problem-demands-common-coherent-eu-policy-let-refugees-regulate>; Niraj Chokshi, "The Stunning Acceleration of Europe's Migration Crisis, in One Chart," *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/10/the-stunning-acceleration-of-europes-migration-crisis-in-one-chart/>; "Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Graphics," *BBC News*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>; "Europe's Migrant Crisis in Numbers," *The Economist*, February 5, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/02/daily-chart-5>.

¹⁶ Cassandra R. Veney, *Forced Migration in Eastern Africa: Democratization, Structural Adjustment, and Refugees*, 2007, 8–9; B.C. Nindi, "Africa's Refugee Crisis in a Historical Perspective," *Transafrican Journal of History* 15 (January 1, 1986): 96–107.

¹⁷ Veney, *Forced Migration in Eastern Africa: Democratization, Structural Adjustment, and Refugees*, 4; "Refugees: The African Numbers That Put Europe to Shame; It Needs to Think Again," *Mail & Guardian Africa*, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-09-27-refugees-what-can-europe-learn-from-africa/>.

¹⁸ "Best Emerging Markets For The Money - In Photos: Best Emerging Market Countries To Invest In This Month," *Forbes*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eglg45elefh/best-emerging-markets-for-the-money/>; "Africa Scoops Five Places In Emerging Markets' Top 10 Property 'Risk Index,'" *Forbes*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rogeraitken/2015/10/26/africa-scoops-five-places-in-emerging-markets-top-10-property-risk-index/>; "The 20 Fastest-Growing Economies This Year," *Bloomberg.com*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-25/the-20-fastest-growing-economies-this-year>.

¹⁹ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *Ibrahim Forum 2013: Africa Ahead: The Next 50 Years* (Addis Ababa: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2013).

²⁰ "Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998)," *Refworld*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae9acc50.html>.

²¹ "Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998)," *Refworld*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae9acc50.html>.

I propose here that there is at least one way in which we can approach this dialogue. This is through the church. The Protestant church in Africa has had troubled times in her interaction with the Western church in the past 50 years.²² That said, during this same period the church in Africa has grown in numbers and influence on the global stage, and has emerged as a force to be reckoned with. As Andrew Walls and others famously observed, the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the global south.²³ The African church is now welcome to the global table to make her contribution on varied issues such as leadership, discipleship, and missions.²⁴

In addition to this, we are now in an era when missions are not just a one-way street, but two-way between Africa and the West.²⁵ Unlike the global political, economic, and NGO arenas where there has been little or no space for the African voice, the African church has value to bring to the table.²⁶ Churches in Africa experience at first hand the plight of refugees and the effects of migration in a religiously and ethnically diverse context. The African-led churches in Europe and North America are often ethnically and racially diverse spaces that are keenly aware of the dynamics of migrant life.²⁷

The church in Europe, though not as politically

powerful as it once was, shares in the universal Christian mandate to take care of the alien, the marginalised and the poor – attributes which describe aspects of the refugee's life. Speaking about the present European Refugee Crisis, Olav Tveit, Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, headquartered in Switzerland, restated the challenge for churches worldwide to "rediscover their identity, their integrity, and their vocation as the church of the stranger. For we are the Church of Jesus Christ, the child refugee (cf. Matthew 2:13)."²⁸ The global church is one arena where meaningful, inclusive and mutually enriching dialogue can take place over the issue of refugees in Europe. The African church, therefore, is one way through which Africa can contribute to the discourse on refugees in the world in general, and in Europe, in particular.

The Case of Mavuno Church Berlin and Forum Wiedenest

We turn now to practical examples of how this dialogue is unfolding between Christians in Kenya and Germany. Mavuno Church is a charismatic church planted by the Nairobi Chapel in 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya.²⁹ This church, like its mother church, Nairobi Chapel, has a vision to plant churches in Africa and around the world.³⁰ Mavuno Church has launched congregations in five countries in Africa.³¹

²² The tension between the Anglican church in Africa and that of the West illustrates this tension well. Michael Paulson, "African Anglicans Try to Transform US Church - The Boston Globe," September 5, 2007, http://archive.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/09/05/african_anglicans_try_to_transform_us_church/; "Anglican Church around the World," BBC, July 15, 2008, sec. Special Reports, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3226753.stm>; Luis Lugo, Brian J Grim, and Elizabeth Podrebarac, "Global Anglicanism at a Crossroads," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/19/global-anglicanism-at-a-crossroads/>.

²³ See Todd Johnson and Sun Young Chung. "Tracking Global Christianity's Statistical Centre of Gravity, Ad 33 - Ad 2100." *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 369 (April 2004): 166-81. Also Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4; Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 116-117.

²⁴ Take, for example, the invitation of an African to address Urbana conferences on missions, and the adoption of African models for discipleship and outreach by American churches. See "Africans Redefine Mariners Church Outreach," *The Orange County Register*, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/church-525826-mariners-mavuno.html>; Oscar Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 2006, <https://vimeo.com/69504380>.

²⁵ Toyin Falola, Nimi Wariboko, and Wilhelmina Kalu, eds., *African Pentecostalism: V. I: Global Discourses, Migrations, Exchanges and Connections: The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu* (Asmara, Eritrea; Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2010), 268-269; Todd Johnson, "The Global Demographics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal," *Symposium: Global Perspectives on Pentecostalism* 46, no. 6 (November 2009): 479-83, doi:10.1007/s12115-009-9255-0; Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010), 159-176.

²⁶ Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 4:00-12:00.

²⁷ Evangelos Karagiannis and Nina Glick Schiller, "... the Land Which the Lord Your God Giveth You.": Two Churches Founded by African Migrants in Oststadt, Germany," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Roswith Gerloff, Klaus Hock, and Afe Adogame, 1 edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 265-78; Afe Adogame, "Who Do They Think They Are? Mental Images and the Unfolding of an African Diaspora in Germany," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Roswith Gerloff, Klaus Hock, and Afe Adogame, 1 edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 248-64; Alle G. Hoekema, "The Position of African Christians in the Netherlands," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, ed. Roswith Gerloff, Klaus Hock, and Afe Adogame, 1 edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 314-22.

²⁸ Olav Fykse Tveit, "Statement on Refugees in Europe — World Council of Churches," Document, accessed December 29, 2015, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/statements/statement-on-refugees-in-europe/>.

²⁹ "Mavuno Church Website," n.d., <http://www.mavunochurch.org/new/>; Oscar Muriu, "The History of Church Planting at Nairobi Chapel," *Chapelites: Anniversary Edition*, November 2014.

³⁰ "Mavuno Church - Mavuno History," *Mavuno Church*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.mavunochurch.org/new/content.php?id=51>; "Nairobi Chapel Church Plants," July 23, 2014, http://www.nairobichapel.org/NC/inc_nc.php?sec=ministries&nc=Daughter%20Churches&ncp=Daughter%20Churches%20intro.

³¹ These are Nairobi in Kenya, Kampala in Uganda, Lusaka in Zambia, Blantyre in Malawi, and Kigali in Rwanda. See "Mavuno Church Website."

The church has also sent teams to start church planting work in an additional five countries.³² Mavuno Church has, within its community of churches, a congregation in Berlin, Germany,³³ called Mavuno Church Berlin, which was launched in 2011. At the time, a German couple, Daniel and Nancy Flechsig, were commissioned from Kenya to go back to Germany to plant a sister-congregation to Mavuno Church. They had been on a three-year cross-cultural training exchange programme under the Forum Wiedenest Institution partnership with the Nairobi Chapel, and it was during this stay in Kenya that they caught the vision. The board of elders approached the Flechsigs to ask them to lead the 100-year-old EFG Lichterfelde, which was experiencing a steady decline. In a rare turn of events the EFG Lichterfelde submitted itself to Mavuno Church's leadership and vision, and was relaunched as Mavuno Church Berlin (or in short, Mavuno Berlin) under the leadership of the Flechsigs.³⁴

The process of relaunching itself as Mavuno Berlin has been a time for great learning, for both the church in Berlin and Mavuno Church in Nairobi. The leadership has progressively negotiated and overcome many cross-cultural, multi-linguistic, and leadership challenges coming from this initiative. Mavuno Berlin, right from its inception, was incarnational in its context, serving the community; through the 'Spread the Love' initiatives the church emulated the Mavuno church.³⁵ In 2015, with the influx of Syrian and other refugees into Germany, the church sought to be relevant by reaching out to them and serving them. In September 2015, Mavuno Berlin through Daniel Flechsig made a passionate plea to the Mavuno Churches for prayers and support as they navigated the challenges of caring for refugees in their city. It is this plea for prayer that inspired in the author the need for these reflections.³⁶

Similarly, on November 9, 2015, Horst Engelmann, the Director of World Mission at Forum Wiedenest, a Christian mission training institution in Bergneustadt, Germany, issued an invitation for support with refugees from church networks connected with them.³⁷ This invitation was directed to "Christians from Kenya, Sri Lanka, Egypt, USA, South Africa and other countries."³⁸ Forum Wiedenest, the Brethren institution, has a cultural and theological training partnership with Nairobi Chapel and, by extension, with Mavuno Church and their partners around the world. Engelmann's request came, among other churches, to Nairobi Chapel and Mavuno Church. The invitation was to engage with the German church in outreach mission weeks from 9-20 March 2016 in Germany, Greece, and other places in Europe. In his letter, Engelmann made an admission that is unusual for the Western church: "We need the help of brothers and sisters from the worldwide body of Christ to join us in reaching out to refugees with the love of Christ."³⁹

The outreach mission week of March 2016 was hosted by Forum Wiedenest and their partners. Teams of volunteers from German churches affiliated with Forum Wiedenest joined many other teams from around the world serving refugees. The teams were cross-cultural in composition. They engaged with the refugees in on-going projects as well as new initiatives. There was cross-cultural training and the exchange of time and resources. This outreach addressed the needs of the refugees in Germany using an approach that integrated cross-cultural input from Christians from around the world.⁴⁰ The team included three members from Mavuno Church in Nairobi.

³² These are Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Johannesburg in South Africa, Gaborone in Botswana, Bujumbura in Burundi and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

³³ "Mavuno Berlin," *Mavuno Berlin Website*, accessed January 1, 2016, <https://web.facebook.com/217099715011720/photos/a.217121368342888.64636.217099715011720/217121371676221/?type=3>; "Mavuno Berlin Launch," *Mavuno Berlin Launch: Facebook Post*, accessed January 1, 2016, <https://web.facebook.com/217099715011720/photos/a.217121368342888.64636.217099715011720/217121371676221/?type=3>.

³⁴ "Mavuno Berlin Launch."

³⁵ "Mavuno Spread The Love - September 2010," n.d., <https://mavuno.wordpress.com/2010/09/04/spread-the-love/>; "Take 10 from Mavuno Berlin: Highlights from 2011," *Campus News - Mavuno World*, 10, accessed January 1, 2016, <https://mavunoworldcampuses.wordpress.com/2011/12/22/take-10-from-mavuno-berlin-highlights-from-2011-2/>.

³⁶ Kyama Mugambi, "Refugee Situation Berlin," September 16, 2015; Ole Glöckner, "Refugee Situation Berlin: Reply," September 21, 2015.

³⁷ "Forum Wiedenest," *Forum Wiedenest*, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.wiedenest.de/ueber-uns/ueber-uns/schulungszentrum.html>; Engelmann, "Outreach Weeks in German Churches & beyond: Serving Refugees March 10-20, 2016."

³⁸ Engelmann, "Outreach Weeks in German Churches & beyond: Serving Refugees March 10-20, 2016."

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Significance and Role of the African Church

The request for help by Mavuno Berlin and Forum Wiedenest is important for this dialogue in several ways. First, this invitation is a unique example of an opportunity provided by a Western church community for the church in Africa to actively engage with a cause that is of mutual concern. As mentioned above, the two-thirds-world-churches are rarely at the table as participants with something useful to offer. Conversely, many interactions between Western churches and the two-thirds world have been in contexts where the church in the West had both the gospel and resources to offer. The West has often relegated the two-thirds world to the role of recipients. This is a role the global south has seemed to encourage. In their plea for help, Engelmann and Flechsig demonstrate extraordinary humility, and a willingness to step outside historical precedence to forge a new direction in global cooperation for a crisis that affects humanity. Such a posture is highly unusual both in the religious and secular contexts. What is also unusual is the reception of this message by Mavuno Church. For instance, Muriithi Wanjau, the senior pastor of Mavuno Church, accepted the invitation and considered engagement in this outreach as a key step forward.⁴¹ Wanjau responded to the invitation by sending a self-funded team, including a pastor and church leaders, from Nairobi. If Engelmann demonstrates a unique humility in his admission of need, then Wanjau demonstrates uncharacteristic boldness in his consideration of the offer. We see in Wanjau a willingness to step beyond the recipient posture of the African church into a posture of contribution on a global scale. Oscar Muriu, the senior pastor of Nairobi Chapel in Kenya, and the likes of Mensa Otabil, the senior pastor of International Central Gospel Church, in Accra, Ghana, model this boldness to contribute on the global stage.⁴² This complementary humility and boldness in leadership in both continents is a welcome and useful change that will forge a way forward for the future worldwide church in this and other issues.

Second, the incarnational presence demonstrated by this initiative carries a powerful witness of the unity of the church globally. Engelmann states it in this way: "Our intention is that participants from other countries will mix themselves with the German participants making the teams a shining example of

how people from different ethnic backgrounds can work together in unity." Through his extensive experience as a missionary engaging Christians from both Africa and Europe, Engelmann is keenly aware of how effective cross-cultural teams can be when they act in unity to a common cause. In the teams envisaged in this refugee initiative, we saw "cross-cultural triangles" formed for service. Such cross-cultural triangles, formed by a host's culture or cultures, joined by a visitor's culture or cultures, serving a third culture, have proved inspiring and effective for all who participate. One such example is the 'Spread the Love' community, an impact initiative started in Nairobi but emulated around the world.⁴³ Wiedenest's outreach week also demonstrates interdenominational unity extending beyond geographical, cultural, and racial boundaries. This interdenominationalism is important for the health of the worldwide church. It is also an indicator of the new and fast-growing kind of Christianity that is emerging in the majority world.⁴⁴

Third, this invitation opens up a new space for cross-cultural dialogue. In providing an opportunity for the church in Africa to engage with the refugees in Europe, possibilities emerge of what global, reciprocal dialogue looks like. Presently, I am not optimistic that this kind of dialogue can even occur, let alone be effective, within global intergovernmental, and NGO forums in the short-term. However, I am hopeful that this inter-church engagement may serve as a catalyst for inclusive discussions in Christian circles for African, European, North American, Latin American, and Asian Christians. Here, all can sit at the same table and deliberate on what they can share with each other. This will make a way for the kind of reciprocity that has been lacking in global discourse on pan-human crises. If, as the UN resolved, Africa has something to share with the world about engaging with the refugee crises, then this is one avenue where this experience can be tapped into.⁴⁵ The responsibility is, therefore, immense for leaders of these communities, to continue to initiate and carry out this kind of dialogue.

Fourth, Christianity in Africa addresses very different theological concerns from the church in the West. Many of these concerns will resonate with refugees around the world. They include concerns about poverty, slavery, religious conflict, health, suffering,

⁴¹ Muriithi Wanjau, "October US Trip Report," November 2015.

⁴² Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 20:00–22:00; Shaw, *Global Awakening*, 159–176.

⁴³ Outreach, "Go Spread the Love," accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.marinerschurch.org/compass/go-spread-the-love>.

⁴⁴ Dale T. Irvin, "The Church, the Urban, and the Global: Mission in an Age of Global Cities," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 177–82.

⁴⁵ "Security Council Resolution 1208 (1998)."

hope in the face of struggle, family, and community.⁴⁶ Could it be that long-term solutions for addressing refugees may be catalysed by active engagement with African Christians? Could it be that the global church, while fulfilling its mandate for mutual support, may provide pointers for what cross-cultural, inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation may look like? Jonathan Bonk suggests that “Africans ... with all of their daunting challenges—perhaps in some ways because of them—will continue to give a central place to God.”⁴⁷ Could it be that the African church, participating with the European church, will provide an important, yet missing, spiritual and moral dimension in the global discussion on refugees that until now has been addressed by UN agencies, secular NGOs and Western governments?

The answers to these questions may not be fully addressed by the limited scope of Mavuno and Wiedenest’s interaction with each other during the few months towards the end of 2015, going into 2016. We are not even certain whether, given the current immigration challenges in Europe, the churches can overcome the inherent logistical hurdles of bringing in Christians from Africa to Europe. Be that as it may, the decisions and interactions of the leaders of these institutions will provide glimpses of what is possible; eventually, such initiatives could increase to incorporate more of the churches around the world.

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KYAMA MUGAMBI, PH.D.

Kyama Mugambi is the Director of the Centre for World Christianity Africa International University, Nairobi, Kenya. He is also senior pastor in the Mavuno Chapel network of churches. Email: kyama.mugambi@gmail.com



⁴⁶ Jonathan J. Bonk, “Africa Unbound,” *ChristianityToday.com*, November 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/november/38.46.html>; Muriu, *Urbana Missions Conference 2006: Interdependence Model of Missions*, 08:00–10:00.

⁴⁷ Bonk, “Africa Unbound.”



THE *PAMBIO* AND A NEW MUSICAL INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL IN AFRICA

WILLIAM O. OBAGA, PH.D.

THE *PAMBIO* AND A NEW MUSICAL INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL IN AFRICA

This essay explores the role of local music in inculturating the gospel in Kenya and throughout Africa. The *pambio* (lit. "chorus") is an example of the role of music in the inculturation process. The use of the *pambio* type of African folk hymn usually democratises the leadership of worship and liberates (and empowers) the laity to lead by spontaneous theologizing. The other aspect of inculturation through the *pambio* is that, in African contexts, music creates community and community creates music. In this role, members of diverse denominations are bonded in their diverse contexts of communal life. Thus, the *pambio* plays a significant role of blurring religious differences and leadership roles in worship and proclamation. This essay, then, wonders what these new ways of inculturating the gospel mean for African Christianity. It engages some African scholars to help discuss some of these implications.

Key words: music, *pambio*, inculturation, translation, mission.

Translating the message: the primary and essential step in inculturation

*Christ has been presented as the answer to questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?*¹
—John V. Taylor

The translation of the gospel into a vernacular language, its inculturation or contextualisation in any locality, and its embodiment in a people's spatial existence are interrelated and inevitable processes that have been noted in mission history. As we reflect on the translation, reception and indigenisation of Christianity in Africa, we need go no further than to begin by reflecting on Paul's experience with the Athenians on one of his missionary journeys. Paul's encounter with the Athenians at worship and, conversely, the Athenian encounter with the radical gospel message, provide a glimpse of the transformative nature of the gospel on world cultures in the history of Christianity (Acts 13:22). Paul noted two things about the worship in the Areopagus in Athens: the nature of Athenian religious zeal and their piety towards an unknown deity. Paul discerned that God had preceded his preaching of the gospel in Athens, and his function then was to point the Athenians to the gospel. God's mission was to cause the gospel to break into the culture, as it had to the first gentiles; being received and embodied into the culture through the language, art, architecture and music of the Greeks and Romans.

Although Christianity was planted in the North African belt during the apostolic era, the gospel remained unknown in most of sub-Saharan Africa until the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, African communities had a deep religious zeal in their diverse cultures and regions. Unlike the Greeks and Romans, African religions were monotheistic (although this was not apparent to early Western missionaries). The African religious experience and devotion was universal, but it was not practised in structured routine; rather it was experienced in every day existence in time and space, whether or not worship shrines existed among certain communities. However, the advent of the gospel through the missionary agencies introduced the knowledge of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, that gospel was couched in Western clothing; in its structure, space, format and practice. The first and most important task of the missionaries was to translate the gospel into the vernacular languages of the Africans. This task was the foundational step to the incarnation of the gospel in the cultures and customs of the African peoples. Thereafter, the gospel went through an inevitably long and slow process of inculturation to become embodied in the transformative experiences of African Christian communities. Thus,

¹ John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 16.

it began the process of being transformed from the European to the African worldview. For example, I grew up in a Swedish Lutheran mission church in Kisii, in Kenya, and my early experience was of singing slow, tedious hymns without emotion, this being the missionary expectation. A smile, clap, or movement while singing was frowned upon as it was considered profane. Christianity was not embodied or deeply experienced in the local culture until the missionaries left in the 1980s and 90s. Today, children, young people and adults sing *pambio* and dance to their rhythms as a matter of course. They now feel at home in the gradually contextualising worship experiences.²

Africans distinguish between secular and religious dancing in community life. Whereas the purpose of secular dancing is pleasure and entertainment, religious dancing helps to induce a devotional frame of mind.³ This is the reason that dancing in the worship of indigenous African churches nearly always leads to the ecstatic possession of the spirit, an aspect inherited from the customs of religious devotion in African traditions. While these churches initiated and have practised this form of adaptation to music in their Christian worship from their founding, the dancing element has been one of the factors by which mainline Christians have categorised them as syncretic churches. Kenyan mainline churches view this distinction through the prism of Westernised liturgies, which they consider the ‘proper’ way of worship. But what has happened in African indigenous churches for more than a century has been this innate experience of indigenisation or inculturation of the gospel through music.

Mainline churches have been left behind in this respect due to their reluctance to review what they have inherited from the rich body of Western liturgical tradition. It is this reluctance that has engendered the coherence of the centre and the periphery; the centre being controlled by clergy through Western-oriented liturgy, and the periphery being characterised by indigenised art forms. Of course, the *pambio* is an indication of how African Christianity is being embodied through gradual contextualisation or the inculturation

process. It is sung spontaneously, in a “call and response” format, and is free for anyone to lead and to improvise theological lines of commentary as they sing, with body movement, clapping and stomping. This

For five or six decades, many African scholars have reflected systematically and historically on the contextual needs, prospects, and realities of African Christianity. They have expressed their opinions from different standpoints, thereby revealing the diversity of the inculturation process in Africa. A review of the perspectives of three eminent African scholars, namely, John S. Mbiti, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako, illustrates the remarkable changes that modern Christianity in Africa has undergone from being a purely Western-clothed religion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to an African religion since the mid-twentieth century.

The thesis of this paper is that African Christianity – as an African religion – has been in the process of “becoming itself” by its rootedness in the African worldview, and this self-identity is best communicated through the medium of heartfelt church music and folk-theologising. This is further demonstrated in the rapid expansion of a grassroots Christianity characterised by the narrowing primacy of denominationalism even as the denomination remains the basis of the nucleus identity. This process of becoming is discernible in the ongoing embodiment of the gospel as it gets inculturated into the daily life of African communities. The embodiment of the gospel in African communities runs through all aspects of society, both “sacred” and “secular” (as generally, all African life is sacred),⁴ and it is significantly manifested in the new Christian folk musical expressions that encompass generational and intergenerational groups in and out of organised worship. In mainline churches this manifestation is dichotomised into the dominant and controlling Western forms of liturgy, hymnody and instrumentation; and the peripheral forms of folk hymnody, the *pambio*, and youth choral music, which is more popular but generally not based on the liturgical rhythm of worship.

² William O. Obaga, “A History of Church Music in Kenya, Especially 1844-1919” (Luther Seminary, 2014), 9. See also p. 385-86. The term *pambio* (lit. “chorus”) is a Kiswahili word for the type of neo-folk hymn of the community that has gained universal utility in all Christian denominations in sacred and secular spaces since the 1980s. This term, therefore, denotes a similar type of hymn commonly found throughout contemporary Africa.

³ Even then, for Africans, the gap between the secular and religious is almost non-existent. For many traditional cultures, dancing, even in secular contexts, is done as a religious act. Henry Weman, *African Music and the Church in Africa* 1960, no 3 (Uppsala, Sweden: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1960), 74.

⁴ An argument eloquently made by Laurenti Magesa in his *What Is Not Sacred?* See Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013.

In East Africa, African Pentecostal Christianity has appropriated the *pambio* together with contemporary youth music styles, while African indigenous churches have maintained the typical African hymnody, instrumentation, dance and forms of space-use that have defined their identity for more than a century. Thus, African indigenous churches have always embodied an African folk style of hymnody, the exception being mainline Protestant churches and older Pentecostal churches in Ethiopia, for whom indigenised, folk-like hymnody is universal and has helped give them one of the unique identities in African Christianity. Let us now look at our three key African conversational partners.

John S. Mbiti

John S. Mbiti's pioneering, enduring, and prolific scholarship makes an unequivocal case for the contribution of African religions and indigenous African philosophical worldviews in post-colonial theological discourse. Stated briefly, Mbiti's grand theme has been an argument for the relationship between traditional religions and indigenous African cultures and their importance for making sense of Christianity in an African context. Like other pioneers of his time, Mbiti took the risk of being categorised as heretical in the 1960s and 70s when he undertook an extensive survey of African religions and indigenous thought forms and patterns of life, as well as the lifecycle, which he analysed and simplified to make it accessible to the global reach.

Mbiti's extensive scholarship, which spans over four decades, is sensitive to the priority of African epistemology in understanding both African religiosity and the nature of God; he considers the factors that have led to the appropriation of Christianity in African cultures. As one of the pioneers of inculturation in Africa, Mbiti has developed a seminal case for the efficacy of African religions. He recognises that when early missionaries encountered African religion, they could not comprehend it because it was embedded in everyday life. Thus, they forbade many cultural practices in which, from their standpoint, traditional religion seemed to inhere. It was thus an impediment for the growth of Christianity. However, in Mbiti's view, "African traditional religions should

be regarded as preparation for the Christian Gospel."⁵ They played their primary role as *praeparatio evangelica*. This was an inherent factor for the reception and rapid expansion of Christianity on the continent.

The reception and indigenisation of the Christian faith was accelerated by an avid religious attitude already prevalent among the African peoples. In this regard, Mbiti states, "Africans are notoriously religious," elaborating further, "religion permeates all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it."⁶ In other words, the innate religious piety of people in sub-Saharan African societies had prepared them to receive and interact with Christianity when it finally came. Furthermore, in every African society, religion is entirely embedded in a people's local language so that to properly understand their religious life, one has to know their language.⁷ Furthermore, Mbiti argues, "We can add nothing to the gospel, for this is an eternal gift of God; but Christianity is always a beggar seeking food and drink, cover and shelter from the cultures."⁸ Here, Mbiti is sensitive to the differentiation of the gospel as gift and Christianity as the form in which the gospel is diffused and experienced in its journey throughout history. This quest of the gospel for food, drink, cover and shelter from the cultures is what Lamin Sanneh expounds under the seminal theme of "translating the gospel" into the vernacular from which it is further absorbed into the culture. It should be noted that once the gospel had been translated and received, its wanderings did not end. This is why I believe that inculturation is an on-going phenomenon.

Moreover, by "cover and shelter," Mbiti seeks to refer to the reality of the incarnation of the gospel in all cultures through inculturation, contextualisation and embodiment. Futher suggests that while the catholicity of Christianity must not be negated for the sake of making an exaggerated effort to indigenise Christianity in Africa, the African religious character does indeed provide a basis for the rooting of Christianity in African cultures.⁹ In culture, the gospel acquires an indigenous imprint and appeal because God speaks to all people through their languages and customs without discrimination.

⁵ John S. Mbiti, "Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa," *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 236 (1970): 432.

⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, England: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 1.

⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 30.

⁸ John S. Mbiti, "Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa," *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 236 (1970): 438.

⁹ John W. Kinney, "The Theology of John Mbiti: His Sources, Norms, and Method," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3, no. 2 (1979).

Lamin Sanneh

Lamin Sanneh, an erudite and influential scholar, has made a profound perspectival analysis of the nature of the missionary movement throughout the centuries, especially its key role in the *vernacularization* of the gospel since the beginning of Christianity.¹⁰ Sanneh's analysis has helped to illuminate the power inherent in the gospel once translated into a people's mother tongue. Sanneh's analysis of this theme is not entirely new but it is a wake-up call. Martin Luther, the reformer, and others before him, were keenly aware of the significance of translating the gospel into the vernacular language despite the risks that went with doing so during the Middle Ages.

Sanneh points out that a missionary engaged in vernacular translation began from a vantage point as the custodian of the Christian religion but soon relinquished that status once the people hearing the translated message began "operating in a medium in which they have the first and last advantage."¹¹ They interpreted the message for themselves during the inculturation processes that ensued. For Sanneh, translating the message is not a mechanical exercise but something of the genius of a people which reflected their spirit and sense of values.¹² As we will notice later, this vulnerability is today being experienced, perhaps imperceptibly, by African clergy who have become the new "orthodox" custodians of the Christian religion. This means that these African clergy are gradually having to relinquish control to the laity in the embodiment of the gospel. The indigenous domestication of the gospel has been enabled by its strategic alliance with the local conceptions of religion, which explains the reason that those in the peripheries of churchmanship have become the subjects of the inculturation process despite the clergy's power and their instruments of control.¹³

Among his many thoughtful observations, Lamin Sanneh has echoed Mbiti in asserting that missionaries found a pervasive religious climate in Africa, which proves that God had already set the paradigm for translating the message into the mother tongue. Sanneh also echoes Oliver Wendell

Holmes' and Edwin Smith's suggestion that the Bible in a people's mother tongue is "the shrine of the people's soul."¹⁴ Hence, the concepts of God expressed in a people's culture provide an entry for the gospel.

Sanneh observes that once the gospel had been translated into the vernacular, missionaries found themselves disarmed and somewhat marginalised, as the African converts began to operate in a medium in which the missionaries were disadvantaged. The radical nature of the translated message created limitations for the missionaries as Christianity took root and developed at the hands of the people. The missionaries found themselves at the periphery of indigenous claims on Christianity and were gradually forced to relinquish this control into local hands. The translation of the message into vernacular languages set in motion the revolutionary process of inculturation, which, in turn, triggered the process of the embodiment of the gospel in African cultures.

Kwame Bediako

Bediako is a renowned scholar of the history of African Christianity. His legacy is that of a brilliant historical synthesis of African Christianity and African theological thought anchored in an African worldview. Carefully informed by hindsight, Bediako has examined how contemporary African Christian reality is informed by its beginnings as a colonial missionary Christianity in an encounter with African religions and customs.¹⁵ Whereas Mbiti's early scholarship was an apology for the inevitable role of African religions and thought in the appropriation of the Christian faith into the African life-world, Bediako argues that the translation of the gospel, probably the single most important missionary legacy, was the necessary precursor to the appropriation of the gospel.¹⁶ For Bediako, the assimilation of the gospel in the mother tongue was the root of the vitality with which the faith has remained an influential force throughout Africa while the initial grip of Western dominance and influence has continued to decline. He suggests that when African converts began interacting with the translated message, which created the

¹⁰ The term "vernacularization" is hereby borrowed from Kwame Bediako who uses it to refer to "appropriation" and "inculturation."

¹¹ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 152.

¹² Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* no 42, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), 165.

¹³ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 11.

¹⁴ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Religion and the Variety of Culture: A Study in Origin and Practice* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 66. Also Edwin William Smith, *The Shrine of a People's Soul*. London: Edinburgh House Press, 1929.

¹⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 59ff and 109-25.

¹⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 58. See also 81.

awareness that God spoke their language too, they made sense of and laid claims on Christianity as Africans rather than simply accepting it as a Western religion.

Like Sanneh, Bediako's work synthesises the processes of translation, appropriation, and inculturation which had led to the diminishing of missionary authority,¹⁷ and the resurgence of the faith in Africa during the 20th century played a key role in the renewal of the faith as a non-Western religion.¹⁸ He makes a critical appraisal of prejudiced nineteenth-century missionary attitudes and approaches while endeavouring to minimise the negative aspects of mission history – and these need not be exaggerated beyond the existing criticisms – in order to make the case for Christianity as an African religion. This view reinforces Sanneh's analysis of how Christianity evolved in Africa from the beginning as the converts accessed and internalised the message in their vernaculars. It also lays the ground for my argument that the translated message and appropriated Christianity continues to undergo a third process, which is the embodiment of the message into the forms of ongoing Africanisation.

Bediako argues for a positive reassessment of missionary history since the gospel was communicated through them as a human agency. He emphasises that translating the message was a first step in the vernacularisation of the gospel. He maintains that the Holy Spirit interpreted the Word as it was being "heard" in the vernacular so that Africans could hear God's mercy and providence as God's gift revealed in and through Christ. There was, therefore, a convergence of processes to the reception of the message and its inculturation and indigenisation of Christianity. It is in this light that we should recognise the gradual and ongoing embodiment of the gospel in various aspects of the African worldview, which, historically, began at the gospel's point of entry.

Continuing Inculturation through African church music

Apart from the Orthodox churches of Egypt and Ethiopia, most of the churches in Africa have their

music rooted in and influenced by Western music traditions. During the missionary era (from the mid-nineteenth century up to the Second World War), missionaries translated hymns and liturgies into vernacular languages alongside the Scriptures.¹⁹ The singing of those hymns was the first practical experience African converts had of interacting with the teachings of the Christian faith. For over one and a half centuries now, much has happened to the church's song in the context of African Christianity. While many Western hymns are still popular, many other types of hymnody that define an African worldview have emerged.

The birth of African indigenous churches with no connection to Western missions brought forth authentic indigenous African hymnody, performance styles, and appropriate spatial contexts of performance.²⁰ These indigenous churches ushered in the process of the inculturation of Christianity by creating music for worship that met their needs and enabled African Christians to feel at home in the church. This new type of song was based on African folk tunes accompanied by African instruments and dance. It continues to characterise the hymnody of the indigenous independent churches in East Africa and practically all churches in Ethiopia (apart from the Orthodox church). Towards the middle of the twentieth century, the *kwaya* (pl. *makwaya*, a translation of "choir") music emerged, a type of choral singing that began with the translated hymns and then modelled new forms based on Western hymns but with a significant African flavour. This music has since evolved into a folk choral anthem, composed, arranged, and taught by ear. Its music uses the ideas of Western harmony, but in an African polyphonic structure. More importantly, it frequently employs the African call-and-response form. These varied forms of African church music have become the most powerful vehicle for the indigenisation of Christianity in Africa.

In one generation, a newer type of church song has emerged; the *pambio*, as it is known in East Africa. This type of song has an African folk-like character with a stimulating African rhythm based on a simple text sung in a call-and-response pattern. It has become the hymn of the masses for all occasions,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸ *Christianity in Africa*, ix.

¹⁹ Matthias Ittameier, "Aus Ostafrika," *Nürnberger Missionsblatt* (1888): 85

²⁰ Indigenous African churches spectacularly inculturated the worship space by freeing themselves from the type of sanctuaries that had evolved for centuries in a Western European context. Missionary or mainline churches throughout Africa today have maintained the European type of sanctuary along with the liturgical rituals it was always intended for. A contextualised sanctuary could provide for contextualised methods of worship ritual, which for the most part can be found in the indigenous churches.

sacred and secular, transcending the religious devotional context. This type of hymn can trace some influence from Western hymnody, but it is characteristically African. East Africa's *pambio* hymns and their counterpart *choruses* of Southern, Central and West Africa are now popularly found in Western hymnbooks around the world. In addition, in many countries, such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and all southern and central Africa, a typical Anglo-African anthem is popular, which is African in melody and rhythm but is modelled on the English anthem in theoretical respects. These and other developments illustrate how music continues to embody the gospel, whether through official inculturation processes like that of the post-Vatican II African Synod of the Roman Catholic Church or through the natural processes in the wider social environment of African Christianity in general.

The inculturation of the gospel through music in the African church has not evolved solely through doctrinal discourse in the academy even though this has been an important aspect of African Christianity. Instead, it has happened through the creative intercultural engagement that begins with translating the message. The received message in written Scripture was also embodied in Western hymnody. It was introduced in what appeared to the missionary as a perfect, unchangeable art form, and the Africans embraced the message but rejected "unsingable" tunes.²¹ However, these hymns provided the raw material for creativity whereby a new type of heart-music emerged that lifted the gospel into the community's soul in a familiar form. Singing in a call-and-response form, dancing to the rhythm of the music, and expressing a poetry that utilised African linguistic expressions, such as metaphor and story-telling, took the gospel into a new translation process; the translation of form into the African heart and soul.²² This is what I call the embodiment of the gospel in its wider context.

In African societies, body and soul were not dichotomised and divided, even though this dualism was present in their consciousness. In everyday life, they did not distinguish between sacred and secular; but they distinguished evil from good and impure from pure. Religion and music were, therefore, part and parcel of a person's and a community's being. For the African, religion and music were a daily-lived experience in each cycle of

life and in all activities of human existence. The people were conscious of the need for God's unbroken presence. In this light, conversion into the Christian faith was embraced, but its Western form and routine separated the secular from the sacred. Christianity was highlighted in a structured Sunday/Sabbath worship but without bridges into the daily events of community life. This challenged their understanding of how the Christian religion functioned in the totality of their life-world. As they made efforts to make sense of the Christian religion, some African converts kept their old religion side by side with their new faith.²³

Before the advent of the missionaries community life was dominated by what could be considered "secular" events, such as economic activities, commemorations, birthing of children, marriages, death and funerals, leisure, and education. But these events could not happen without music. The people could not stop singing lullabies to their infants, or while planting and harvesting, or singing dirges at the death of a loved one, and so forth. The music of these events included texts that carried religious connotations or references to the Superior Being. In this way, secular life and religion were intertwined. The reception of the gospel practised in the European format required re-translation into community life. An effort to reconfigure Christian living in the light of community life called for the retranslation of the message in an embodied form of inculturation; and the failure to recognise this made Christianity a foreign religion.

Today, the use of music in the total life of a Christian community has made some progress. In Kenya, the ways in which the gospel has continued to be inculturated can be observed in its embodiment partly through the *pambio*. In fact, the *pambio* is a pan-African phenomenon that has empowered communities to freely express their ideas about God in various contexts of their lived community experience. The embodiment of the gospel as a lived experience springs from the quest of the incarnation of the gospel in the cultural context of a people. It is the result of intercultural connections bridged by a new medium expressed from the hearts of the people.

I contend, therefore, that in African, the gospel has been embodied in thought and deed through the inculturation of music more than any other way. In

²¹ Tunes that were derived from the Gregorian chants, and most tunes in the minor key as well as those with jerky rhythms or heavy melodic curves were generally unappealing.

²² A transition from European to African forms and, in many other respects, in hybrid form.

²³ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, England: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 32.

turn, music has played a key role in the growth and consolidation of a grassroots Christian communion that is relationally ecumenical and functionally missional. This is notable in the life-world of the Christian community beyond church officialdom and the controlled formal worship space. The clergy now find themselves responding in their affirmations to the extemporised proclamations of the lay leaders through the new hymns and body movement that goes with its rendition. But the response and participation of the clergy from the mainline churches of sub-Saharan Africa, including the Catholic Church, are based on the assumption that this genre of song remains peripheral, rather than being an integral part of worship; the chief domain of liturgical rites is usually still essentially missionary-inherited or Western-oriented.

A community gathered at a church or in a para-church or non-church event often sings the *pambio*. The clergy may be in the community, but the laity lead in singing this type of hymn from beginning to end. Since the text is not written, it is improvised, starting with familiar lines. Here the lay leader takes full control of the key, tempo and length of the song, as well as the proclamatory word carried in the music. If, as Lamin Sanneh argues, the translation of the message in early missionary Christianity subverted the authority of the missionary/messenger, the rise of grassroots Christian music today has created room for universal, mass participation and lay leadership, including children, young people, women, and men, and thus somewhat subverts the authority of the clergy. This has also affirmed Martin Luther's idea of the universal priesthood of all believers and thereby radically undermined or challenged the privileged and controlling church hierarchies whether protestant or Roman Catholic. Through these types of grassroots music, the marginalised groups, such as children, young people and women, find a voice to lead the masses, frequently an ecumenical composition, without hindrance.

In denominational and inter-denominational contexts, the clergy find themselves swaying to the music of the laity and appreciating their extemporised sermons. Members of the clergy today usually join the response part of the "call-and-response" —responding to the message being proclaimed by the laity through the *pambio*. Here, the typical and historical liturgical call of the clergy, "the Lord be with you" is reversed. This symbolises the ongoing inculturation of the gospel processed by the ordinary folk, which is thus embodied in and

communicated through their heart music regardless of social rank or denomination. This is an important aspect of an ongoing process of Africanisation or indigenisation, a yet-to-be-defined process of the reconfiguration of African Christianity, as today's dominant religious expression makes the community feel at home.

While the *pambio* has developed rapidly in Kenya during the past four decades and has now spread throughout Tanzania and other East African countries—Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, for instance—in Ghana there is a different but related type of folk hymnody, the *ebibindwom*.²⁴ This type of hymn is common in the Methodist Church in Ghana. It functions in ways similar to the East African *pambio* but with more folk-like melodies inherited from folktale songs. The epistemic characteristics of the *ebibindwom*, which is traceable to Akan secular traditions, include spontaneous interruption and the offering of affirmations to the preacher during sermons, a practice also inherited from folktales. Unlike Kenya's *pambio*, this type of hymn, sung with dance and procession, has been officially permitted and promoted in Ghana's Methodist Church since about 1940.²⁵ This was perhaps the earliest protestant church in Africa to permit the use of an African type of hymn in a formal process of inculturating the gospel.

The lyrics of the sacred *ebibindwom* convey orally the biblical message as narrative, and a homiletic exhortation as reflection. Overall, the hymn transcends theological doctrine, theses, and definitions. Thus, it creates room for worship to be experienced in fellowship, devotion, oral biblical knowledge, and reflection. It also permits active audience participation. The verses of the *ebibindwom* are repeated and as it is sung its call-and-response structure builds upon constant improvisations by the song leaders who are biblically well-informed, whether literate or illiterate.

The formal acceptance of the *ebibindwom* in the Ghanaian Methodist worship space contrasts with the peripheral *pambio* of mainline church worship in Kenya. But both types of hymnody are similar in their African characteristics of spontaneity, galvanisation of community, call and response, offering of a fellowship experience, room for lay oral proclamation, and space for lay gender-sensitive leadership. These indigenous forms of music-making with proclamation in Christian worship have been the most public of the processes of indigenisation of Christianity in Africa.

²⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ed. *Christianity, Mission and Ecumenism in Ghana* (2009), 9-36.

²⁵ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Christianity, Mission and Ecumenism*, 13.

Conclusion

Inculturation in African Christianity has not happened by means of throwing away the Western forms of expression in which the gospel was clothed when it was first initiated. Rather, while the Western clothing in which it came has always stood in tension with the quest for relevance in Africa, the gospel has undergone, and continues to undergo, a creative process of reception, accommodation, and creative intercultural interaction. It has now become apparent that this is the natural, gradual, and enduring process of gospel translation. This process is not unique to Africa; Western Christianity began from Hebrew roots and took on African²⁶ and Hellenistic influences but became inculturated in the same way over the centuries.

Inculturation in Africa today is happening in two ways; first, through academic Catholic-Protestant theological discourse which aims for liturgical transformation in organised worship; and second, its incarnation and rootedness into the culture, customs, life-world, and rhythm of the African societies through grassroots initiated activity from the peripheries over which the regulators of organised liturgical processes have no control. The expression of this latter process is in the rhythm of life and is observable in religious and secular events and practices, churchmanship, and daily Christian living in the sacred and secular events of the communities.

In Kenya, for example, varied forms of Christian piety have become commonplace, such as prayers in many religious and secular activities of everyday life; invocation of scriptural statements and/or Jesus' name to validate views and beliefs in private conversations and arguments; and lay biblical reflections and commentary at all events of the life cycle. Few, if any, of these events escape the use of music as the driving force. Music helps to invite participation, create community, reinforce memory, and to communicate and diffuse biblical ideas. The *pambio* or chorus is therefore effective in mission. Consequently, the continuing transformation of society from a purely non-Christian to a Christian culture has spurred the emergence of this simple form of Christian folk hymn. This type of hymn, because of its location as a substitute to the secular

folk song, feeds the society in its transition from non-Christian to Christian. The *pambio* hymn employs the characteristics found in folk songs (apart from the Christian text) from call and response to a simple text wrapped up in metaphoric language to the sacred dance or body movements that accompany the singing in typical African style.

In hindsight, it has become increasingly clear to scholars that the translation of the gospel into African vernacular languages was the most powerful missionary gift to African Christianity; and translation was not only of the Scriptures but the totality of Christian resources, which included the liturgy, catechisms, and hymnody. In addition, hymns were sung to the accompaniment of Western instruments: flutes, piano, violins, trumpets, harmoniums, and others. Early Christian converts began to interact with the gospel through these resources as they comprehended them, and they endeavoured from the start to make sense of them in order to understand the nature of God as revealed in Scripture through the different ways in which they expressed their response to the gospel. The gospel incarnates into the culture when it is translated and then inculturated. But its high point is its embodiment in the culture when expressed through music and other expressions, including art and the worship space. These are the outward expressions of the embodied gospel which need further reflection; the worship communities continue to make sense of the Western type of worship space and other aspects in lieu of the functioning of African Christian music in such spaces.

The gospel as originally inherited, and now interpreted to reflect its relevance to the African context, is conveyed through the varied indigenous musical expressions of music—in text and music—across the continent. The medium of singing and movement provides room for ordinary Christians to participate universally as gospel commentators, interpreters, composers, leaders and performers. Such universal participation is a typical feature of community in African contexts. African music invites participants “to participate in the making of a community,”²⁷ and in such universal participation “the atmosphere of invitation discards any performer-audience dichotomy.”²⁸

²⁶ The historical theological discourses of early African theologians, such as Tertullian, Athanasius, Augustine, and other African church fathers, laid the foundation of much of later Western thought. Additionally, the founding of monasteries by Egyptian monks and their spread to other North African desert regions influenced the birth of European monasteries that later became the chief centres of theological, musical, educational, scientific, and agricultural advancements. Universities developed from monasteries and, overall, Europe's modernisation cannot be spoken of without considering this basis. The European clothes in which Christianity returned to Africa has its roots in these historical transformations.

²⁷ Claudio Steinert, *Music in Mission: Mission through Music: A South African Case Study* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2007), 12.

²⁸ Steinert, *Music in Mission*, 12.

The key principles in Christian life outside of organised worship and the liturgical worship space reflect the blurring of denominational boundaries through grassroots ecumenical participation and leadership, de-emphasising hierarchy and gender, and showing a thought-process that is intuitively realised through various other aspects of African epistemology. Spirits and evil forces, for example, are often addressed in the form of metaphors in prayers, sermons and conversations which are often replicated in lyrics, especially of the *pambios*. These ideas are commonly illustrated in simple song texts that feature a cosmic battle between Christ and the evil one, thus providing an important element of assurance. Jesus is depicted by a wide variety of metaphors that signal different themes; the everlasting winner of the cosmic battle; the rider of a car without brakes (Jesus is sovereign and nothing deters his exercise of power over evil), and many others. This is an essential aspect of assurance, not because of fear, but because of the promise of wellbeing. Sometimes, the devil is depicted as placing various weapons of destruction in a Christian's way, but Christ the victor defeats the devil and his evil ways. This folk-theologising provides opportunity for improvisation and the lifting-up of ideas and concepts derived from the sermons, scriptural interpretations, and the life-events. This kind of grassroots theology is packaged in short, simple song texts and extemporisations of scriptural themes and concepts by lead singers, which serve as lay commentaries. Theological ideas also feature commonly in social conversations and in Christian prayers over everything in sacred or secular contexts. These ideas are encapsulated in the songs composed orally, arranged aurally in two, three, or four-part harmony, and taught by ear, often topical and spontaneous.

In these instances, the clergy and professional theologians unwittingly cede to the laity. These teachings transfer into other modes of communication, whether or not some of the ideas might be inadvertently heretical or wrong.²⁹ But this freedom is derived simply from the sense of universal participation, the basis of which is the African worldview. The totality of these manifestations should serve as an epistemological reference for theological study, reflection, and reform in African theological academies; the African worldview from which these emanate needs to be taken seriously. It is thus plausible to suggest that most of these ideas reflect the African worldview and are expressed in the wide

range of African songs, hymns, and music exercised in the margins of African Christianity.

Finally, I submit that the characteristic manifestations of spontaneous gospel inculturation in the creation and use of the post-missionary genres of African song threaten the much-guarded vestiges of liturgical orthodoxy of mainline churches. The evolution of indigenous expression in song continues; *pambio* (Kenya, Tanzania), *ebibindwon* (Ghana), or the African "chorus." In my frequent conversations with church leaders from mainline churches, the *ebibindwon* has been purposefully adopted by the Methodist Church of Ghana; but in East Africa the *pambio* is often maligned by leadership in mainline churches for being theologically shallow and musically simple and repetitive, compared to Western hymns. This attitude plays into the hands of some Westerners, such as Claudio Steinert, who argues that "choruses are "indisciplined" because of their spiritual immaturity and are, therefore, inappropriate for worship."³⁰ What is not appreciated, however, is that the texts, though brief, are often loaded in metaphor, while the simplicity of melody in the call-and-response form allows it to be used as a new kind of folk song for the evolving Christian community culture corresponding to a new social and spiritual order.

These various genres of African church music thrive on the periphery of African mainline churches but are in the hands of the laity. The emergent neo-African genres of choral music, participation, and reconfiguration of worship patterns and spatial contexts promise the eventual collapse of the mainstream denominations, as evidenced in Ethiopia's Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, where an authentic African song and dance with a flexible format of the worship rituals now takes precedence. I must emphasise, however, that the song of the periphery in mainline African Christianity has been adopted as the chief repertoire of Pentecostal Christianity. It emanates from the African community in its social life-world, not to mention that African indigenous churches are open to its use even though their chief hymn genre, with the accompanying musical expressions, is to be found in its characteristic African folk tune. Thus, as African societies are transformed into a Christian culture, the gospel is being inculturated or translated from the vernacular text into the whole way of life of the African people in worship contexts and in social life.

²⁹ I have deliberately not highlighted the genre of the music of the African "celebrity gospel singer" for whom music is intended for entertainment and commerce rather than spiritual edification. While the music of this genre fulfils its intended entertainment and commercial purposes, many of the songs carry theologically inaccurate (or heretical) texts. These cannot be analysed in this article; the phenomenon needs a separate study. After all, the purpose of the music is non-liturgical in spite of carrying Christian or biblical themes.

³⁰ Steinert, *Music in Mission*, 89.

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WILLIAM O. OBAGA, PH.D.

William Obaga is World Mission Prayer League's associate director for Africa. He is adjunct professor of church history and music at several institutions in Germany.





**BLESSED REFLEX:
AFRICAN
CHRISTIANS IN
EUROPE**

HARVEY C. KWIYANI

BLESSED REFLEX: AFRICAN CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Abstract:

African Christianity in Europe is on the rise, mostly due to the migration of Africans to Europe. Their congregations have emerged in every major city in Europe. The congregations are almost exclusively African in membership, and are generally shaped along national and often tribal identities. Africans have, so far, failed to evangelise and retain non-Africans in their congregations. They are also struggling to engage their own children — second generation African immigrants — in mission. However, their presence in Europe strengthens Christianity even as European Christianity becomes darker in complexion. African Christians bring with them such gifts as a zeal for evangelism and prayer, African theology, and a sense of community — gifts that could help re-evangelise Europe if they can find ways to partner in mission with European Christians.

Key words: blessed reflex, mission, *umunthu*, African diaspora, African missionary movement.

Introduction

This essay explores the missional potential of African Christians and their churches in Europe. It makes use of the author's long-term involvement with many of these churches and their leaders both in Europe and North America. The essay has two sections. The first section explores some of the general factors behind the rise of African migration to Europe, and consequently, the growing presence of African Christians in Europe. The second section focuses on mission and the missional role that

African Christians could play in Europe. Holding the essay together is the argument that non-Western Christians are here in the West and their presence reinvigorates Christianity in many ways. However, for African and other non-Western Christians to be effective in their mission work and help re-evangelise Europe, there is a need for intentional partnering. Re-evangelising the mission field of Europe needs all Christians resident in it — including all non-Western Christians — to participate in God's mission among its peoples.

African Christian Presence in Europe

There are currently over ten million Africans living in Europe.¹ Most of these come from West African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Senegal; and North African countries including Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia.² However, a census of African residents in Europe will reveal people from all countries of Africa scattered as migrants in all major European cities. In cities like London — where 14 percent of its 12 million inhabitants are of African descent — it is quite likely that every African tribe and tongue is represented. Every major city, from Dublin to Helsinki, from Oslo to Bern, from Lisbon to Athens, has a considerable resident population of Africans. Most of the Africans from sub-Saharan Africa are Christians, and the easy evidence to their presence is the existence of African migrant churches. A majority of these churches have been started in the 20 years between 1990 and 2010. A small percentage of them are growing — though slowly — mostly through migration of their fellow nationals to Europe and the evangelism of other Africans (also especially of their fellow nationals) already resident in their cities. Most of them are struggling to grow — their target audience is too limited and too saturated. Many have started and closed for the same reasons.

The Blessed Reflex

Some two hundred years ago, in the early 1800s, as the Protestant missionary movement gained momentum in the wake of William Carey's work³ — as many hundreds of European and North American missionaries left the comfort and the confines of their homelands in the West to serve in

¹ I use the term "African" to describe the peoples of African origin — sons and daughters of the African civilisation — who racially speaking, will generally have a brown skin and are politically described as "black" people. However, "African," here, also includes all those persons who may not racially identify as black but were born or raised in the continent of Africa, or for one reason or another, they culturally identify as African. Included here are people groups like white South Africans, Kenyan Indians, Arab Africans from North Africa, and many others.

² Some have come from the West Indies, but this essay focuses on those who have come directly from Africa and are thus called African migrants — a label that is not used for the West Indian people of African heritage.

³ William Carey published his essay entitled "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens" in 1792 and left for India in 1793 after forming the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). His impact was immediate; within ten years of the formation of the BMS, there were over ten mission societies formed on both sides of the Atlantic.

what were at the time unevangelised lands, some spoke hopefully of the day when Christians from those unevangelised lands would come to help invigorate Western Christianity. This, they called *blessed reflex*.⁴ It would happen when Christians from lands like Africa and Asia, which had no Christian population at all at the time, would come to be part of the Christian presence in the West, and thereby strengthen Christian witness in Europe and North America. It is not clear how they envisaged this happening. However, before any serious fruit of their missionary efforts had registered, the conversation had shifted from the blessed reflex to Western dominance of the world and the West's colonising instincts had taken over. For the following century, over 20 percent of Europe's population would migrate to the rest of the world; in most cases, dominating and colonising their way through.⁵ Now, two hundred years after that conversation, and on the other side of the colonial empires, the blessed reflex is finally here. Numerous non-Western Christians from all over the world are living in Western cities. The concept itself never took off back then, and has remained a subtext in mission history for two centuries; however, the prophetic seeds of that hope never died. The world Christianity that we see today, to a large extent, is a fruit of the work of the missionary movement of the nineteenth century. World Christians living in the Western cities of Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand are spiritual descendants of those Western missionaries who went overseas mostly in the nineteenth century. This is the blessed reflex.

The blessed reflex is here. Back in the early 1800s, the chance of such a reflex happening was remote. The reality of Christianity catching on in the other lands was unthinkable. Nevertheless, talk about the blessed reflex undergirded the hope that the lives that were lost at sea and in the heathen lands were not being lost in vain. This, also, was its basis — should a time come in the future when European Christianity would need to be strengthened, Christians from other parts of the world should be able to help. Many of those missionaries, like William Carey in India and Charles Ludwig Krapf in East Africa, endured long lives on the mission field and managed to catch a glimpse of the

potential impact of their work. Others, like David Livingstone in Central Africa, saw only small breakthroughs in converting locals to the faith but nevertheless contributed strongly to mission through geographical exploration. Whatever their work, it was not until the end of the Second World War that the light of world Christianity began to rise on a distant horizon.

The growing presence of non-Western Christians in Europe is a direct result of two main factors, both of which gained a great deal of momentum in the second half of the twentieth century and even more in the last quarter of the century; these factors are the exploding of Christianity in Latin America, Africa, and some parts of Asia, e.g., South Korea, and changing migration patterns. Let us take a brief look at each of these two factors.

The Rise of World Christianity

The missionary movement that so effectively took many thousands of missionaries from Europe and North America to the rest of the world in the 1800s and early 1900s found itself in a crisis in the years immediately after the Second World War. In the late 1940s the colonial empires began to crack, as many of the colonies were beginning to agitate for independence. As the Western missionary movement had, in many cases, taken advantage of colonialism and had used it as a vehicle for evangelism, the collapse of colonialism threatened to destroy the mission. And by the 1970s, over 75 percent of the colonies had become independent. Many missionaries had returned, many feeling rejected by their own disciples (as many freedom-fighters had been educated in mission schools, of whom the prime example is Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, who was educated in Marist and Jesuit schools). The close alliance between missionaries and colonial agents made it difficult for Africans to separate the two.⁶ When political colonialism collapsed, where the missionaries continued to lead, a moratorium was called for. Some Asian and African leaders demanded that the missionaries go home and that the West should stop sending missionaries for a while.⁷

⁴ See Kenneth R. Ross, "'Blessed Reflex': Mission as God's Spiral of Renewal," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27, no. 4 (2003). Also see Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 70-72.

⁵ Dudley Baines, *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1930*, New Studies in Economic and Social History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶ For further reading on this, see Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: McDowell, 1959). Another interesting read on this part of the history of African Christianity, see Mongo Beti, *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 1971). Both these books are novels and not academic books. They are, however, helpful as they paint an unflattering image of the public perception of the relationship between missionaries, colonisers, and local Africans.

⁷ Gerald H. Anderson, "A Moratorium on Missionaries," Chicago, IL: The Christian Century, 1974, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1574>. Also see Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, 64-66.

Difficult as that may seem, the withdrawal of Western missionaries led to an emergence of local missionaries and evangelists who went on to evangelise their countries with a type of effectiveness that foreign missionaries could not manage. Western missionaries had, in many places, managed to translate the Scriptures into local languages. This turned out to be all the local missionaries and evangelists needed to reach their communities.⁸ In the case of Africa, before long, Christianity was exploding. African evangelists were converting millions of other Africans every year. Thus, we see world Christianity rising in the second half of the twentieth century, and with it, a worldwide missionary movement. This growth of world Christianity has made possible something that could not happen before; people partaking in God's mission in the world coming from virtually every nation in the world. Most of them work in their own localities, but many others have engaged in cross-border missionary work. Many have crossed continents, even to continents that sent them missionaries two hundred years ago. Mission is finally from everywhere to everywhere. For Africa, we see the rise of African Christianity together with that of the African missionary movement. Many African missionaries work in the continent of Africa, but many others have found their way to other continents, especially Europe.

Reverse Migration

For the four hundred and fifty years between 1500 and 1950, migration patterns around the world were dominated by the movement of Europeans to different parts of the world, first to the Americas and then to Africa and other continents.⁹ This great European migration accelerated in the nineteenth century when over 20 percent of Europe's population relocated elsewhere mostly for economic reasons.¹⁰ While most of them moved to the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, others moved to parts of Africa and Asia. This massive migration enhanced the expansion of the colonial empires and, in most cases, colonialism made the

migrations necessary. The outcome was the spread of Christianity around the world as European Christians migrated. When political colonialism began to crumble, the migration of Europeans slowed down to a trickle. Starting in the second half of the twentieth century, migration patterns changed. Regional migration increased exponentially, such that by 2015, there were over 748 million internal migrants and 232 million international migrants in the world.¹¹ We live in the age of migration.

Many more started to migrate to the West. Even more, for Europe, there was a need to import human-power to rebuild after the wars had destroyed a generation of young and productive men.¹² In some cases, European countries imported labour from their former colonies. Britain, for instance, invited some people from the West Indies to come help drive buses and dig the tunnels for the London Underground.¹³ Now, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, Europe still needs to accept migrants in order to sustain its economy. This is partly because the birth rates of Europeans are lower than what is necessary to keep their populations stable.

African Migration to Europe

The presence of Africans in Europe is largely an unexpected and unintended outcome of Europe's colonisation of Africa — a piece of African history that spans between 1890 and 1970.¹⁴ By the time the colonies achieved their independence, many people in the colonies had caught a glimpse of a better life in Europe. At the very least, European (or Western) education ensured them access to power and influence in their countries. As such, many Africans began to look for ways to come to Europe to study. Often, governments offered scholarships to promising civil servants and young people to train at European universities. Originally, the hope was for those who came to Europe for education to return to Africa to build their newly-independent states. However, as the promise of a developing

⁸ Lamin Sanneh, in his book, *Translating the Message*, has shown that it was actually this translation of the Scriptures that enabled African Christianity to blossom. See Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, American Society of Missiology Series no 13 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 164-166.

⁹ See Frieder Ludwig and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Christian Presence in the West: New Immigrant Congregations and Transnational Networks in North America and Europe* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 408. Enslaved Africans came to be part of this migration, mainly to facilitate the settlement of Europeans in the Americas by providing free labour.

¹⁰ Baines, *Emigration from Europe*, 1.

¹¹ International Organisation for Migration, "World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility." Can be found at http://publications.iom.int/system/files/wmr2015_en.pdf.

¹² Mark Sturge, *Look What the Lord Has Done!: An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 2005).

¹³ The first arrived in 1948 on SS Windrush from Jamaica, and have been referred to as the Windrush Generation ever since. For the next two decades, many people from the Caribbean Islands arrived in Britain, and since then, the population of people of African-descent in Britain has continued to grow.

¹⁴ Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 169-172.

Africa started to fade, many stayed in Europe (and invited their families and some relatives to join them). As the years passed, the general political atmosphere of Africa became less hopeful and the economic situation became more gloomy.

Consequently, many more Africans migrated to Europe. In the ensuing decades, political stability has remained elusive. Many freedom fighters became dictators and their infant democracies turned into dictatorships. Today, over fifty years after independence and more than 150 *coup d'états* later, many feel there is no hope for them in the continent and are willing to risk anything to travel to Europe. The gap between the rich and the poor has continued to grow while corruption and abuse of power are rampant in government institutions. Indeed, poverty and disease, political conflict and civil war, natural disasters and famines, and corruption and bad governance, among many concerns, stand in the way of many young Africans wanting a better life for themselves and their children. The Mediterranean Sea continues to be a mass grave for thousands of Africans who drown every year as they attempt to enter Europe where they are generally not welcome.

Many more Africans spread around the West (including Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand) largely because even though they are not welcome, they are treated better than in other parts of the world. The West is generally more accepting and humane — especially because of the respect for human rights. However, since the turn of the century, migration to Western countries has become difficult.¹⁵ Consequently, Africans have started exploring migration to other non-Western countries. Many are now migrating to China, India, Latin America and even Russia. However, living conditions for African migrants in many of these countries are generally said to be extremely difficult. In most cases, the racism that is experienced in some of those places makes them continue to try to move to Western countries.

African Christianity in Europe

Religion plays a very big role in the life of African societies. John Mbiti's declaration that Africans are notoriously religious is still as true today for most African cultures as it was when he published it in the 1960s.¹⁶ When Africans migrate, they bring their religions (whatever they are) with them. For instance, most Francophone Africans living in

France have come from Islamic countries in West Africa, and they bring their Islam with them. Some have even brought their traditional religions along. However, it is Christianity that has been exported the most in African migration. Part of the reason for this is that Africa as a continent is going through a Christian revival — with ten million new conversions every year for the past fifty years. Christians now comprise almost 50 percent of Africa's population, a huge rise from 10 percent one hundred years ago. In addition, some scholars believe that the immigration laws of most Western countries are more favourable towards Christians, such that most of the Africans settling in Europe are Christians and not Muslims.¹⁷ Whatever the reason, when Africans migrate, they bring their Christianity along.

African Christians exist in Europe as a result of this general migration pattern that sees thousands of Africans enter Europe every year. Just like the Europeans who left Europe in the nineteenth century, most African migrants — including asylum seekers — have come to Europe for economic reasons; to work, to study, and to have better standards for their families. Apart from a handful of occasions, we are yet to see African Christians coming to Europe as missionaries. We are also yet to see African churches in Europe engage with their new contexts in a missional relevant manner. Nevertheless, the presence of African churches is growing in Europe. For instance, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Pentecostal denomination from Nigeria, has close to 720 congregations in Britain, and continues to plant over 25 new churches each year. The Church of Pentecost (CoP), another Pentecostal denomination from Ghana, has 130 congregations in Britain and plants, on average, 10 churches per year. Both these denominations planted their first congregations in Britain in the 1980s, and as such, are growing rapidly in a context where Christianity is generally on the decline. The RCCG and the CoP are the two largest African denominations operating outside Africa. However, there are many other smaller networks and denominations that are growing their churches in the Diaspora, e.g., the Deeper Life Church, Christ Embassy, Christ Apostolic Tabernacle. A typical African congregation in Europe will be fairly small — having 20 to 30 members. In large cities like London, there are several African churches with a few thousand members. However, very few African churches in Europe will grow beyond 150 members. One of the reasons for this is *strategy*;

¹⁵ Immigration is always a difficult political topic at every election in almost every country in Europe and the wider West.

¹⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 1.

¹⁷ Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 307-308.

they tend to have many small churches instead of a few large churches, and in doing so, saturate Europe with their churches. The RCCG's mission statement suggests that it seeks to "plant churches within five minutes' walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes' driving distance in every city and town of developed countries."¹⁸

African Christianity in Europe is in its fifth decade. The first African churches appeared in Europe in the 1960s. However, their congregations continue to remain an exclusively African phenomenon in Europe as populations of Africans in Europe increase. Their membership is often over 90 percent African. They are even divided along national and tribal lines; there are Ghanaian churches, Nigerian churches, Kenyan churches, Yoruba churches, Kikuyu churches, etc. For example, 97 percent of the 16000 members of the Church of Pentecost in the UK in 2015 identified as Ghanaian, with an Akan majority. The statistics for the Redeemed Christian Church of God in the UK are not too dissimilar, where over 90 percent of the 150 thousand members were Nigerian (and mostly Yoruba) at the end of 2015. Very few can include foreign nationals among them. Nevertheless, as Africa's Christianity grows and as Africans continue to migrate to other continents, the continent of Africa will contribute greatly to world Christianity. In some cities in Europe, Africans are slowly becoming the face of Christianity. For instance, in 2010, over 60 percent of people who went to church on any given Sunday in London were African and Caribbean migrant Christians – most of whom are members of African churches or other African Majority churches.¹⁹ Thus, people of African descent, who form only 14 percent of London's population, make up 60 percent of church attendance in the city. Of course, the largest congregation in Europe is the Embassy of God Church in Kiev, Ukraine, which is led by Sunday Adelaja, a Nigerian. It claims over 25,000 members. Its impact in Ukraine and surrounding countries has been tremendous. The second largest congregation in Europe, which is the largest in the UK, is Matthew Ashimolowo's Kingsway International Christian Centre in London. It claims to have over 12,000 members.

Mission and African Christians in Europe

African churches in Europe have *so far* been very successful only in evangelising fellow Africans. A very small portion of them have made any inroads reaching Europeans. Many say it is too difficult to reach out to Europeans. Many have told me, "It forces us to do things differently, and that is too uncomfortable." By "doing things differently," they mean such things as having shorter worship services or having to embrace relational evangelism. For these pastors who at least want or try to engage in mission among Europeans, their presence in Europe makes them believe they have to be missionaries to Europeans. As such, they try to contextualise their ministries for Europeans, experiencing very little success along the way. Most of them lack the training that would enable them to understand what cross-cultural mission to Europeans should look like.²⁰

Others have made up their minds to reach Africans only, saying God has called them to *this* specific people group in the West. For these, there is no need to contextualise their ministries for Europeans. The hard work of cross-cultural ministry is of no interest to them. They live in a bubble of African Christianity in Europe and have no plans to connect with even the wider Body of Christ in their neighbourhoods. Many in this camp focus their ministries on church growth and have embraced Donald McGavran's homogenous unit principle.²¹ For them, it is easier to grow churches if they focus on their fellow nationals and, if necessary, other Africans.

However, over the years, I have observed that most African pastors in Europe talk the language of mission fluently but carry out their weekly ministries as if they are only interested in reaching Africans. Very often I hear them say, "God brought us here for a purpose, we are the missionaries that God has called to Europe for such a time as this." When I visit their churches, I hear them say, "it is too difficult to evangelise Europeans, they don't like us anyway, so we will let them be as we try to grow our churches the easiest way possible — focusing on our fellow nationals and other Africans."

¹⁸ Redeemed Christian Church of God, 'Mandate', <http://www.rccguk.church/mandate/> consulted August 2016, consulted August 2016.

¹⁹ The common term used to describe these churches in Britain is "Black Majority Church." I avoid it here because of its racial undertones.

²⁰ In response to this need for context-sensitive cross-cultural mission training, we have put together an initiative called *Missio Africanus* whose focus is to provide such training to African as well as other non-Western missionaries working in Europe. More on this at www.missioafricanus.org.

²¹ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 223-244.

Generally speaking, this explains why most African churches in Europe have no non-Africans in their membership. This has serious implications for how we talk about mission in the African Diaspora. Many African pastors feel they do not even need to try engaging with Europeans because, as they say, “the success rate is too little, it is negligible.” Giving up on mission to Europeans is, I believe, nothing but abdicating the future of their churches in Europe because migrant congregations generally do not survive more than two generations. Already, the greatest challenge currently facing African church leaders in Europe is the “faith of the second generation.” Many African pastors are able to establish small vibrant churches that are shaped by their African cultures that attract other first-generation African immigrants; but their styles and strategies fall apart when it comes to reaching their own children. Many are beginning to realise that once their children leave home — either for university or just moving out to be independent — they either go to other Western youth-oriented churches or stop going to church altogether.

Second-generation African migrants are not very keen on staying in their parents’ churches. They would rather go to other contemporary or youth-culture churches (like Hillsong) where they will feel more at home and meet other young people who share their passions and culture. A majority of them become members of these youth-culture churches, while a small percentage leave the church altogether.

That second-generation African immigrants are not staying in their parents’ churches should not be a surprise. The younger Africans in Europe are European, culturally speaking, and just like Europeans find it difficult to stay in African churches, so do young Africans who have grown up in the Diaspora. Their parents’ churches are shaped for a different audience, such that when the younger African migrants visit them, it feels as though they have entered a foreign culture; the services are an immense cross-cultural experience to them. For many, their parents’ African churches are usually the only mono-racial gatherings that they attend. Everywhere else they go, be it at school or at work, they experience life as a multicultural event. Therefore, they find their parents’ churches

very strange. Consequently, African church leaders in Europe will do well to notice that their Christianity needs to be translated into something non-Africans can relate to, whether those non-Africans are their European neighbours or their own children raised in Europe.

What Would Effective African Mission in Europe Mean?

Africans must engage in mission in Europe, not just because the context of Europe needs them to do so, but also because “the church is missionary by nature.”²² To stop engaging in mission means to deny themselves their identity as co-workers with Christ in the mission of God in Europe. Furthermore, they have to choose the hard road of actually doing their best to engage Europeans in mission rather than following the homogenous unit missiology. They need to do this because the legacy of their ministerial work in Europe depends on it. They come to Europe bearing gifts that only they can bring, and when put to good use in a contextually relevant manner, they could help re-evangelise Europe. For the remainder of the essay, I will explore four ways in which African Christians could contribute to mission in Europe.

Evangelism

African Christianity is deeply evangelistic in nature. On the one hand, this is because most African Christians still live in close proximity with those who have not heard the gospel — relatives, neighbours, and others in traditional religions — and have the urgency to share the good news. On the other hand, there has been a great influence in Africa from Pentecostal and evangelical theology which places a great emphasis on the Last Judgment and hell and the need to save as many people as possible before it is too late. Such theologies emphasise that it is every Christian’s duty to plunder hell and populate heaven by converting many people — getting them to be born again — from other religions or from nominal Christianity before death or the day of judgment.²³ Most African churches in Europe have brought this evangelistic zeal along. They distribute tracts on the high street. They engage in door-to-door evangelism. They pray for miracles. Thus, they engage in evangelism on a constant basis, but they

²² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series no 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 372.

²³ This is a title of one of Reinhardt Bonnke’s early biographies, Ron Steele, *Reinhard Bonnke: Plundering Hell and Populating Heaven* (Sovereign World, 1986). It outlines his evangelism, philosophy and strategy. It was written mainly for the African audience which, until its publication in 1986, was the focus of his ministry. It also reflects the general convictions of the many Pentecostal and charismatic Christians in Africa who were encouraged to evangelise to save as many as possible from the impending judgment.

use the strategies that were successful in Africa, and then get frustrated when they fail to see conversions like they did in Africa. To their credit, however, they do this in the European context where most Christians do not engage in evangelism at all. Of course, after centuries of seeing no need to evangelise within Christendom, most of Western Christianity lost its evangelistic edge. Today, even with the new ecclesiological conversations in Europe and North America (like missional church, emerging church, fresh expressions, and others), many still have no idea about how to evangelise — especially how to evangelise fellow Westerners. This is one area in which missional partnerships between Africans and Europeans could be of much help. The Africans have the zeal to pray and evangelise, while the Europeans may have a better grasp of the cultural gap that needs to be bridged in order to connect with the people. If we put these two together, we may have what we need for European Christianity.

Theological Cross-pollination

African theology, when truly done using African cultural lenses, will have different points of emphasis from Western theology. For instance, for Malawians, an attempt to think about *missio Dei* in Malawian terms uses *umunthu* theology which emphasises the humanising effect of God’s mission, expressing itself in generosity, both of God and of Christians too, to those in need.²⁴ For Malawians, *missio Dei* is about God humanising us. The Triune God, the Great *Munthu*, came to earth in the Person of the Son, Jesus Christ, to restore human beings to their full humanity—personhood, *umunthu*—and give them life in abundance. The Pauline corpus suggests that the culmination of this humanising begins with regeneration, whereby the Spirit (breath, Gk. *pneuma*, Heb. *ruach*,) of God brings the human spirit to life. Paul testified to this when he said, “we were once dead in our sins ... but God made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:1-7, my paraphrase). Peter added, “you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Pet. 2:10, NIV). Thus, the real *umunthu* begins with salvation; the secular *umunthu* is only a shadow of the *umunthu* that is made possible by Christ. When everyday acts of *umunthu* are undergirded by

prayers and faith, they become anointed avenues through which God’s Spirit draws people to God’s humanising love. This humanising principle of *missio Dei* rightly extends the concept of salvation in Africa to include many ways in which life and personhood is shared. Many scholars have shown how salvation in Africa is more than the saving of the soul.²⁵ Salvation, even in its Greek translation, *sozo*, includes healing, deliverance, blessing, empowerment, liberation, feeding, clothing, etc.²⁶ All these are humanising acts through which people can have the abundant life that Christ gave to humankind. In all these acts, plus many others, Christian witness is made and the Gospel is shared, even sometimes without proclamation. This, for Africans, is the *missio Dei*.

When foreign theologies like *umunthu/ubuntu* theology are brought into conversation with Western theology in a mutually critiquing and edifying way, they are both enriched and expanded. Instead of dismissing one another, or even trying to convert one another, African and European Christians could listen to one another to discover new ways of understanding God. For instance, in Europe today, this humanising generosity could provide a missional lens through which to discern how to respond to the challenge of refugees and migrants.

Ecumenism and Engaging Other Faiths

Contemporary African Christianity (which has effectively emerged in the past century) has always existed in the milieu of other religions. For most of its existence, it has been a numerically powerless minority. It knows what liminality feels like as both Islam and other Eastern and traditional religions have always competed for adherents in Africa. It was not until 1981 when Christians surpassed Muslims in Africa since the coming of the missionaries in the 1800s. Thus, in the process of its growth, African Christianity has always had to deal with religious and cultural pluralism on a regular basis. For Europe, both religious pluralism and cultural diversity are fairly new — having become more pronounced in the context of post-colonialism and post-Christendom. Current political

²⁴ *Umunthu* means personhood or humanness. It is Malawi’s vernacular for the South African term, “*ubuntu*.” In essence, *umunthu* says that personhood is only possible in belongingness. Thus, “I am because I belong.” See Harvey C. Kwiyani, “*Missio Dei: An African Appropriation*,” *Missio Africanus: The Journal of African Missiology* 1, no. 1 (2015). Also Gerard Chigona, *Umunthu Theology: Path of Integral Human Liberation Rooted in Jesus of Nazareth* (Balaka: Montfort, 2002).

²⁵ For instance, Manas Buthelezi, “Salvation as Wholeness,” in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987).

²⁶ The Greek word σωζω or sozo (Strong’s Gk. 4982) is translated to save, to make whole, to deliver, to make well, to heal, to preserve, to keep safe, among many other variations.

attitudes towards migration and diversity suggest many wish they could go back to the time before non-Westerners arrived (with their cultures and their religions). Even within Christianity, there are huge gaps between denominations and races. Most African Christian leaders will have some experience in inter-religious dialogue. Many grew up with neighbours of other religions. Their experience and understanding of Islam, for instance, will be of great value as European Christians try to figure out how best to relate with their new Muslim neighbours. So, this is yet another area where Africans could play a vital role in mission in Europe.

A Return to Community

One of the greatest challenges facing Westerners is lack of community – which is one of the negative effects of individualism (which, of course, is not just an outcome of social disconnectedness in society, but also economic systems that capitalise on the individual to make maximum profit). Loneliness as a problem has reached epidemic levels in some parts of Europe, especially among the elderly.²⁷ In my work with an RCCG congregation that was trying to discern what God was calling them to do in their community in London, we discovered that within a radius of half a mile around the church, there were many elderly single people who lived alone and felt as though society had forgotten them. When we visited a few of them, we quickly realised that the primary need was companionship. The congregation worked with the City Council to authorise their members to visit some of these lonely people, to take them shopping or to other social events. Before long, the congregation had embedded itself in its community through what they called a befriending ministry.

Most Africans are communal in their outlook. They believe in *ubuntu* – which says “I am because we are.” The proverb that says, “if you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far, go with others” is something that most Africans take seriously. In Europe, Africa’s *communalism* will be the antidote to the individualism that shapes life. In our age of relational evangelism, one of the most important tasks of the church is to be able to form authentic missional communities of faith. Community and belongingness happen to be some of the major needs of Westerners – and we have Africans here who can help discern how best to do that. This, too,

is an area where Africans can play an important role in mission in Europe.

Conclusion

The blessed reflex is here. Non-Western Christians are here to invigorate Western Christianity. As such, African Christianity will continue to exist in Europe as long as African migration to Europe continues. However, a majority of African Christians in Europe have not yet successfully engaged Europeans in mission. They have not even engaged the faith of their children effectively, seeing as it requires cross-cultural efforts. For most of them, the work to do this is too difficult and yields minimal results. However, they cannot give up on mission among Europeans, as the same tactics will be needed to engage their own children — second generation African immigrants in Europe. To help them engage effectively in mission in Europe, there is a need for European Christians to engage African Christians as partners in mission – something beyond renting out their church buildings for services. For instance, it may be possible for European and African Christians to collaborate in planting a church that is multicultural from the start. The two have complementary gifts, skills, worldviews, and theologies. If they work together, they may be able to try something in Europe that, I believe, has not been tried yet, and who knows, this may be a new key to the evangelisation of Europe.

²⁷ For instance, see the Mental Health Foundation’s report on the effects of loneliness in British communities, “The Lonely Society?” For an American perspective, Robert Neelly Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1996). Also Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

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HARVEY C. KWIYANI

Harvey Kwiyani teaches African Christianity and theology at Liverpool Hope University. He is also a Church Mission Society mission partner working in mission education in Britain. He leads the work of Missio Africanus. Email: harvey@missioafricanus.org





CHRISTIANITY IN EURAFRICA: A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN EUROPE AND

STEVEN PAAS
REVIEWED BY
FRANÇOIS PAZISNEWENDE KABORÉ

CHRISTIANITY IN EURAFRICA: A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN EUROPE AND AFRICA.

by Steven Paas, Christian Literature Fund (CLF), Wellington (SA), 2016, 554pp., paper. £34.

Reviewed by François Pazisnewende Kaboré

This textbook covers two thousand years of the spread of Christianity from Palestine to Europe and Africa. The historical accuracy of this research is unquestionable. With art and mastery, the author tells the two-thousand-year-long story of the progress of Christian from Galilee to Africa via the Atlantic. Considering the fact that church history belongs not only to (secular) history but also to theology, the textbook takes a clearly defined position where church history is understood as a "comprehensive description of the past progress of the Church of God, through Jesus Christ in the midst of this world, by the power of the Word and of the Spirit." Thus, the two major parts of the textbook account for the spread of the Word, first from Jerusalem to the Atlantic and, secondly, and second from the Atlantic to Africa, though some parts of Africa were in touch with Christianity from the East. The eagle's-eye view of the approach, coupled with the details of christianisation in some regions and countries in Europe and in Africa, make this textbook an invaluable resource.

Some methodological choices, however, although they have their advantages, could weaken the grasp of the historicity of christianisation in Europe and in Africa. First, as rightly suggested in the textbook, through the study of church history, students should understand why there are various churches, various creeds, various forms of church government, and various alliances and hostilities

against the church. In that regard, an emphasis on "the Church" versus Christianity or Christian cultures favours ecumenism in a post-Vatican II theological context. The different groups of missionaries who visited Africa in the hope of converting Africans did not always share the same ecumenical mindset. In addition, the colonisation of Africa happened alongside the second wave of missionary work Africa, (after the first wave of evangelisation in North Africa by the Church Fathers). Consequently, Africans who were christianised by Catholic missionaries did not experience it in the same way as did those who were evangelised by non-Catholic groups. Of course, those who were christianised by French missionaries did not have the same experience as those who were christianised by the English, German or Dutch. In all these instances, the relations between missionaries (both Catholic and non-Catholic) and the colonial administrations were significant; in some areas, the missionaries did not seem (at least from the point of view of the Africans) to be preaching from the same "church."

Secondly, church history should be done in conjunction with the history of other religions. The treatment of the spread of Islam to Sub-Saharan Africa adds value to the understanding of the process of christianisation. It acknowledges the two major ways Islam spread in Sub-Saharan Africa: first through violence and conquest, and second, peacefully through trade as conquests were not always successful. Although Paas does not share the view that presents Christianity as a continuation of primal traditional African religions, a deeper overview about the state of traditional religions in Sub-Saharan Africa could have been an appropriate addition. For instance, kings, youth, freed slaves, refugees and women were certainly gates through which the Christian faith entered Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the spiritual symbolism of kings, as acknowledged by the author, the short treatment of this key issue does not allow for differentiation of the way in which each category of actors helped in the process of evangelisation. On the one hand, there were very few instances where major kings easily welcomed the Christian faith. On the other hand, youth, freed slaves, asylum seekers and women certainly found refuge and better prospects through embracing the new faith. More importantly, a treatment of traditional religions could have shown evidence of the importance of rooting Christian faith in Africa. Paas provides strong arguments favouring internal weakness and division as a major cause of the easy disappearance of Christianity in North Africa. In addition to this compelling argument, the lack of inculturation (which requires engagement with both the religions

and cultures of the evangelised people) cannot, however, be stressed enough.

Thirdly, given the relatively linear historical approach used, one would have expected the title of the textbook to mention the exact period covered by the research. Christianity in Eurafrica has quite a compelling argument: "Nothing has bound Africa and Europe more together than Christianity". Would that still be the case in the future? The process of christianisation, as presented, comes full circle, with the possibility of Africans re-christianising Europe, while also being missionaries to their own people within Africa.

This textbook is certainly not suited for anyone in need of a short, quick overview of Christianity in Europe and Africa. However, it would fit very well in any library for students in the history of Christianity in Europe and Africa. Those seeking an in-depth approach to the christianisation of some countries in Central or Southern Africa would also benefit from it. Finally, an invaluable contribution of this book is the extensive bibliography at the end of major sections, although the documentation could be enriched with more non-English speaking sources. As for the illustrations, they capture the imagination of the reader. Scholars in the history of the church, in general, and of the christianisation of Africa and Europe in particular, will have this well-researched textbook on their shelves.

Francois Pazisnewende Kaboré, Ph.D.
Director
Jesuit University Institute (CERAP/IDDH)
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire



SENT FORTH: AFRICAN MISSIONARY WORK IN THE WEST

HARVEY C. KWIYANI.
REVIEWED BY
GEMECHIS GARSHAW

SENT FORTH: AFRICAN MISSIONARY WORK IN THE WEST

By Harvey C. Kwiyani.
New York: Orbis, 2014. 244pp.,
paper. £24.

Reviewed by Gemechis Garshaw,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The church's centre of gravity is shifting into the Southern hemisphere. As early as 1976, Andrew Walls pointed out that within the previous three centuries Christianity has undergone a remarkable shift from being a sort of "tribal religion of the Caucasian people" to truly global religion. Along with such development, Christians from the Global South are also migrating to the Western world in large numbers and starting congregations. This new development has attracted scholars from various disciplines, particularly in the United States, to study the missional impact of immigrant congregations on the social, economic, political, and religious life of the West.

The author of this book, Harvey Kwiyani, is an African scholar interested in the study of immigrant congregations in America. The book is the product of his experience as a missionary serving in Europe for seven years, and his exposure to immigrant congregations when he was doing his postgraduate study in Saint Paul, Minnesota. This is his first published book, which started life as a doctoral dissertation and was then broadened and amended for publication. Kwiyani deserves praise for taking the initiative to study the complexity and diversity within the immigrant congregations in America, a group that is too often overlooked in scholarly circles. The study is a timely, thorough, and thoughtful exploration of the experience of immigrant congregations in Minnesota and makes

a valuable contribution to the growing literature on the African diaspora, thus filling a void and providing a fuller understanding of African immigrants.

The book focuses on immigrant congregations in the USA, their struggle for identity, their adaptive strategies, and the challenges and opportunities they present to American Christianity and society. The principal argument of the book is clearly defined and well-argued as follows: In the postmodern world, where Western Christianity is faced with a significant amount of diversity (cultural, racial, and theological), there needs to be negotiation between the diverse cultures within Christianity itself for the churches to effectively engage in mission. Taking the issue of migration as the centre of his argument, he attempts to show the link between migration, mission, and the missional engagement of congregations in a pluralistic world.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of Christianity in Africa and the involvement of African Christians in global mission. Kwiyani makes the link between the two by describing how migration has become the cause for the emergence of African congregations in the West. Chapter 2 traces the history of missions in Africa and Africa's place in global mission history. Focusing on African indigenous missionaries as main contributors to the development of Christianity in the continent, he critically evaluates the role of Western mission organisations in Christian history and Africa's involvement in world mission movements.

Chapter 3 describes the historical development that has resulted in academic awareness of the African missionary movement. Here, he critically engages with European and American conversations on the implications of African Christianity for global mission. Chapter 4 is about the presence and active participation of African denominations in the postcolonial West. Focusing on Pentecostals, mainline denominations, Roman Catholics, and African Initiated Churches in the West, he demonstrates how significant it is for the Western Christian churches to embrace such denominations and to try to look for ways in which they can partner with these denominations in God's mission. What these congregations do is to rehabilitate Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness, but in a self-consciously Christian and theologically active manner. As such, they seek to demonstrate the character of African Christian identity.

Chapter 5 deals with the central question of his thesis: “How is the rising African missionary movement to the West changing the religious landscape of Europe and North America?” (135). Mission history is dominated by stories and adventures about Western missions crossing borders to spread Christianity. Therefore, mission was understood as the responsibility of the Westerners (the “civilised”) towards others (the “uncivilised”). However, with the increase of migrants from the non-Western world every year, and with the growth of migrant congregations, a new phenomenon has emerged—the dynamics of mission has shifted in such a way that Europe and America are also considered “mission fields.”

Chapter 6 underlines the need for a “multicultural missionary movement as God’s preferred future for mission” (171). He describes the social, cultural, and theological challenges that non-Western Christians face in their missionary endeavours: discrimination, differences in theology, politics of migration, and identity crisis. He contends that “the entire Christian church needs to develop a new theological language that looks at faith, race, and mission in healthy ways that encourage cross-racial missional partnerships” (192).

Chapter 7 concludes with a reflection on the nature of non-Western congregations in Europe and America in the light of faithfulness to the *Missio Dei*—God’s mission. He describes how immigrant congregations, particularly African-based congregations, find it difficult to engage in mission in the Western world. Remarking that Christianity is all about welcoming strangers, he contends that “the entire Christian body in the West will need to work together to overcome these challenges in order to make it possible for Christians from different parts of the world to work together for God’s mission in the world” (204). The text concludes with an extensive bibliography and index.

For scholars interested in immigration, African Christianity, African immigrant congregations, and African diaspora studies, this is an indispensable resource and a must read.

