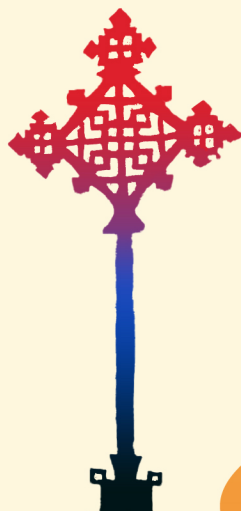


THÉOLOGIE CHRÉTIENNE AFRICAINE TEOLOGIA CRISTÃ AFRICANA AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Rétrospective et Perspective
Retrospectiva e Prospecção
Retrospect & Prospect



Journal of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa
Revue de l'Association Chrétienne de Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique
Revista da Associação Cristã de Teologia e Educação em África

Volume 1 | n° 1 | 2024



African Christian Theology

*Journal of the Association for Christian
Theological Education in Africa*

VOLUME 1
(2024)



ACTEA

NAIROBI | KINSHASA

Théologie Chrétienne Africaine

*Revue de l'Association Chrétienne de
Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique*

VOLUME 1
(2024)



ACTEA

NAIROBI | KINSHASA

Teologia Christã Africana

*Revista da Associação Cristã de
Teologia e Educação em África*

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Teologia e Educação em África*

Volume 1 • Number 1 • March 2024

Published by / **Publié par** / **Publicado por**



Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa

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Nairobi, Kenya

P.O. Box 49332-00100
Nairobi, Kenya

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Kinshasa-Gombe, Rép. Dem. du Congo

ISSN: 3006-1768

e-ISSN: 3007-1771

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African Christian Theology is the academic journal of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). The mission of ACTEA is to strengthen theological education through accreditation, scholarship, and support services to serve the church and transform society. The journal is one way in which ACTEA engages theological educators and church leaders in addressing relevant issues facing the church and society in Africa. *African Christian Theology* serves the whole of Africa and provides a venue for conversations between different regions of Africa, as well as an organ through which African voices can address World Christianity at large. Following in the footsteps of Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, Kä Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, and Isaac Zokoué, the journal promotes World Christianity perspectives through deep engagement with African contextual realities. Articles are published in English, French, and Portuguese; each article has a trilingual abstract in those languages.

ACTEA was founded in 1976 by the Theological and Christian Education Commission of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA). Under its continued sponsorship, ACTEA operates with internal autonomy in the accreditation of programmes of theological education throughout Africa, in order to stimulate the improvement and standardization of such programmes, and in order to secure academic recognition for such programmes wherever possible, especially among the constituencies of these institutions in Africa and among similar institutions and their constituencies overseas. ACTEA is a founding and constituent member of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). ACTEA maintains offices in Nairobi and Kinshasa and can be found online at acteaweb.org. For further information on any aspect of ACTEA, please email the Executive Administrator at admin@acteaweb.org and copy the Executive Director at director@acteaweb.org.

The colours of ACTEA's logo are blue, red, and gold. Blue signifies royalty and speaks to ACTEA's efforts in raising a royal priesthood of God's servants throughout Africa. Red is the colour of blood and symbolises the redemptive act of Christ on the cross. Gold represents the preciousness of God's Word and the work which God's people do. Gold also reflects ACTEA's mission of prophetic proclamation of glorious hope in Christ, to African peoples first and then to the world, through theological education.

<https://africanchristiantheology.org/>

Théologie Chrétienne Africaine est la revue scientifique de l'Association Chrétienne de Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique (ACTEA). La mission d'ACTEA est de renforcer l'éducation théologique par l'accréditation, la recherche et les services de soutien afin de servir l'église et de transformer la société. La revue est l'un des moyens par lesquels ACTEA stimule et implique les enseignants en théologie et les responsables d'église à aborder les questions pertinentes auxquelles sont confrontées l'église et la société en Afrique. *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* est au service de l'ensemble de l'Afrique et constitue un lieu de dialogue entre les différentes régions d'Afrique. Elle sert ainsi d'organe par lequel les voix africaines peuvent s'adresser au christianisme mondial (« World Christianity ») dans son ensemble. Suivant les traces de Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, Kā Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, et Isaac Zokoué, la revue promeut les perspectives du christianisme mondial à travers un engagement profond avec les réalités contextuelles africaines. Les articles sont publiés en anglais, en français, et en portugais ; chaque article est accompagné d'un résumé trilingue dans ces langues.

ACTEA a été fondée en 1976 par la Commission d'Éducation Théologique et Chrétienne de l'Association des Évangéliques en Afrique (AEA). Sous le parrainage continu de l'AEA, ACTEA opère avec une autonomie interne dans l'accréditation des programmes d'éducation théologique à travers l'Afrique, afin de stimuler l'amélioration et la normalisation de ces programmes, et d'assurer la reconnaissance académique de ces programmes partout où cela est possible, notamment parmi les circonscriptions de ces institutions en Afrique et parmi les institutions similaires et leurs circonscriptions à l'étranger. ACTEA est un membre fondateur et constitutif du Conseil International pour l'Éducation Théologique Évangélique (en anglais, International Council for Evangelical Theological Education ou ICETE). ACTEA a des bureaux à Nairobi et à Kinshasa et peut être contactée en ligne à l'adresse suivante : acteaweb.org. Pour plus d'informations sur n'importe quel aspect d'ACTEA, veuillez envoyer un courriel au Directeur Francophone à directeur.francophone@acteaweb.org et une copie au Directeur Exécutif à director@acteaweb.org.

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Teologia Cristã Africana é a revista acadêmica da Associação Cristã de Teologia e Educação em África (ACTEA). A missão da ACTEA é reforçar a educação teológica através de acreditação, pesquisa e serviços de apoio para servir a igreja e transformar a sociedade. A revista é uma das formas através das quais a ACTEA envolve educadores teológicos e líderes da igreja na abordagem de questões relevantes que a igreja e a sociedade em África enfrentam. A *Teologia Cristã Africana* serve toda a África e proporciona um local para conversas entre diferentes regiões de África, bem como um órgão através do qual as vozes africanas podem participar no diálogo de assuntos do cristianismo mundial (“World Christianity”). Seguindo os passos de Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, Kä Mana, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew F. Walls, e Isaac Zokoué, a revista promove as perspectivas do cristianismo mundial através de um profundo envolvimento com as realidades contextuais africanas. Os artigos são publicados em inglês, francês e português; cada artigo tem um resumo trilingue nessas línguas.

A ACTEA foi estabelecida em 1976 pela Comissão de Educação Teológica e Cristã da Associação de Evangélicos em África (AEA). Sob o seu patrocínio contínuo, a ACTEA opera com autonomia interna na acreditação de programas de educação teológica em toda a África, a fim de estimular a melhoria e a padronização de tais programas, e a fim de assegurar o reconhecimento acadêmico de tais programas sempre que possível, especialmente entre os stakeholders destas instituições em África e entre instituições semelhantes e os seus stakeholders no estrangeiro. A ACTEA é um membro fundador e constituinte do Conselho Internacional para a Educação Teológica Evangélica (ICETE). A ACTEA tem escritórios em Nairobi e Kinshasa e pode ser encontrada online em acteaweb.org. Para mais informações sobre qualquer aspeto da ACTEA, envie um e-mail para o Administrador Executivo em admin@acteaweb.org com cópia para o Diretor Executivo em director@acteaweb.org.

As cores do logótipo da ACTEA são o azul, o vermelho e o dourado. O azul significa realeza e fala dos esforços da ACTEA para erguer um sacerdócio real dos servos de Deus em toda a África. O vermelho é a cor do sangue e simboliza o ato redentor de Cristo na cruz. O ouro representa a preciosidade da Palavra de Deus e o trabalho que o povo de Deus realiza. O ouro também reflete a missão da ACTEA de proclamação profética da gloriosa esperança em Cristo, primeiro aos povos africanos e depois ao mundo, através da educação teológica.

<https://africanchristiantheology.org/>

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(AICs refers to African Indigenous Churches, African Initiated Churches, and/or African Independent Churches.)

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(EICs est un anacronyme anglais qui désigne Églises indépendantes africaines, églises indigènes africaines, églises initiées africaines, et/ou églises indépendantes africaines.)

Arte da capa criada por Wexer Creative, Nairobi e Mombasa, Quênia e © 2024 pela ACTEA. As silhuetas dos edifícios são da Basílica de Nossa Senhora da Paz em Yamoussoukro, na Côte d'Ivoire, a maior edifício da igreja do mundo, e o Centro Internacional de Convenções Kenyatta em Nairobi, Quênia, e do Teatro Nacional da Nigéria, em Lagos. Os símbolos, incluindo a acácia e a cruz etíope, representam o compromisso da revista para com todas as regiões de África, urbanas e rurais, anglófonas, francófonas e lusófonas (bem como arabófonas), e para com todas as tradições cristãs africanas, protestantes, católicas romanas, ortodoxas, pentecostais e IIAs. A cruz no centro de África, concebida a partir de uma fotografia de uma cruz etíope exposta na casa de um dos nossos redactores-gerais, transmite tanto o compromisso evangélico central da revista como o seu compromisso com a africanidade.

(IIAs é um anacrónimo que se refere a igrejas indígenas africanas, igrejas iniciadas em África e/ou igrejas independentes africanas.)

The specialist review journal, *BookNotes for Africa*, published from 1996–2019, offered short academic reviews of recent Africa-related publications relevant for informed Christian reflection in Africa. Because of its importance, ACTEA was happy to promote *BookNotes for Africa* to its constituent schools. In 2018, the over 1,200 reviews published in issues 1–30 were published by Langham Global Library in a permanent reference collection, *Christian Reflection in Africa: Review and Engagement*, edited by Paul Bowers. A second enlarged edition including reviews from issues 31–40 together with a number of more recent reviews is forthcoming.

Inspired by the legacy of *BookNotes for Africa*, the editors hope that the book review section of *African Christian Theology* will be as robust and as helpful. This section of the journal includes both critical review essays and short book note style reviews. While the majority of books reviewed have been published recently, as is customary, we will sometimes publish retrospective reviews of older texts.

La revue spécialisée, *BookNotes for Africa*, ('Notes de Livres pour l'Afrique'), publiée de 1996 à 2019, proposait courtes critiques académiques de publications récentes liées à l'Afrique et pertinentes pour une réflexion chrétienne éclairée en Afrique. En raison de son importance, ACTEA a été heureux de promouvoir *BookNotes for Africa* auprès de ses écoles constitutives. En 2018, les plus de 1 200 comptes rendus publiés dans les numéros 1 à 30 ont été publiés par Langham Global Library dans une collection de référence permanente, *Christian Reflection in Africa : Review and Engagement*, sous la direction de Paul Bowers. Une deuxième édition révisée comprenant les comptes rendus des numéros 31 à 40 ainsi qu'un certain nombre de comptes rendus plus récents est à venir.

Inspirés par l'héritage de *BookNotes for Africa*, les éditeurs espèrent que la section des critiques de livres de *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* sera aussi solide et utile. Cette section de la revue comprend à la fois des essais critiques et de courts comptes-rendus sous forme de notes de lecture. Bien que la majorité des livres analysés aient été publiés récemment, nous publierons parfois des analyses rétrospectives de textes plus anciens.

A revista especializada, *BookNotes for Africa* ('Notas de Livro para África'), publicada de 1996 a 2019, oferecia pequenas resenhas acadêmicas de publicações recentes relacionadas com África, relevantes para uma reflexão cristã informada em África. Devido à sua importância, a ACTEA teve o prazer de promover a *BookNotes for Africa* junto das escolas que a constituem. Em 2018, as mais de 1.200 resenhas publicadas nos números 1–30 foram publicadas pela Langham Global Library numa coleção de referência permanente, *Christian Reflection in Africa: Review and Engagement* ('Reflexão Cristã em África: Recensão e Engajamento'), editada por Paul Bowers. Está a ser preparada uma segunda edição alargada que inclui as resenhas dos números 31–40, bem como algumas resenhas mais recentes.

Inspirados pelo legado da *BookNotes for Africa*, os editores esperam que a secção de resenhas de livros da *Teologia Cristã Africana* seja tão robusta e útil. Esta secção da revista inclui ensaios de recensão crítica e pequenas resenhas de livros. Embora a maioria dos livros recenseados tenha sido publicada recentemente, como é habitual, publicaremos por vezes resenhas retrospectivas de textos mais antigos.

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EDITORIAL

**In memory of those who went before,
in honor of those who follow behind**
Introducing African Christian Theology

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Describing the shift of World Christianity from the Global North to the Global South, Mark Noll posited that “as much as the new shape of Christianity in the world affects general world history, much more does it influence matters of Christian belief and practice.”¹ Given global Christianity’s shift to the South, Christian beliefs and practices in recent decades have not been driven by Western Christian theology. Nearly thirty years ago, western scholars recognized that the majority of Christians on the face of the earth are found in Africa, Asia, and Latin America — and that “the proportion . . . grows annually.”² Therefore, in retrospect and prospect, global Christianity is increasingly envisioned to be highly influenced by non-Western Christian theologies. For example, diaspora missiologists are consistently reminding us that the global church is thriving because of the movement of Africans across the world.³ Africans migrating to North America and Europe are planting churches in areas where traditional Christianity has been declining.

It is, therefore, important to closely study and understand the African Christian theologies that are shaping world Christianity in a new way. African Christianity is not just shaping Christian belief (theology), but also practice (praxis). For example, what are the parameters of salvation? That is, is salvation only a matter for individuals, or is salvation also for larger groups? How does the world of spirits influence people’s daily lives? How should believers read the Bible? These and many other questions have implications for church growth and movement in foreign lands. In retrospect and prospect, God’s people are on the

¹ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*, 33.

² Andrew F. Walls, “Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect,” 85. This chapter was first presented as a lecture for an African Theological Fellowship forum in Accra, Ghana, in 1997.

³ E.g., see the work of Afe Adogame, Jehu J. Hanciles, and Harvey Kwiyani.

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move around the world, and, as they move, they make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19–20).

In June 2021, David Tarus, the executive director of ACTEA, began a conversation with me (Joshua) that ultimately led to the founding of this journal, *African Christian Theology*. David was captured by Byang Kato’s vision to establish a theological journal that would serve the needs of African Christianity. I am passionate about resourcing church leaders on the continent. Many fine existing journals are limited in scope, inaccessible (as they exist only in print format or are behind paywalls too expensive for most in Africa), or effectively have a regional rather than a pan-African focus. We are thus launching this journal not in competition with other journals, but to supplement them and to provide new opportunities for scholars and practitioners to produce knowledge and to engage in debate and conversation. It responds to “the need for African Christians to make sense of or to grow in understanding of the Christian faith that they have inherited as Africans, a faith that they share with many other people around the world.”⁴

The editors have committed evangelical perspectives, as this is ACTEA’s periodical, but the journal is broader in scope, ecumenical, and welcomes articles from scholars from across the Christian tradition — Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, AICs. *African Christian Theology* exists to serve the whole of Africa, providing a venue for conversations between different regions of Africa. We strive to follow in the footsteps of faithful Christian ancestors. These include the early Egyptian theologians — such as Origen, Clement, Athanasius, and Didymus the Blind, along with Antony and Pakhom (or Pachomius), the founders of Christian monasticism, who laid the foundations of orthodoxy across the world, within the Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Latin, and Ethiopic traditions. These also include the early North African theologians — such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine — who lay the foundations for Latin theology and thus for all Western articulations of Western articulations of the Christian Faith. We also recall — though most have forgotten — the thousand-year history of indigenous and vernacular African Christianity in ancient and medieval Nubia (Sudan and much of South Sudan), the presence of Christian communities in the Mali Empire (now Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, and parts of Niger and Burkina Faso) during the reign of Mansa Musa (r. c. 1312 – c. 1337), and the rich theologizing of the sixth century Yared the Melodist of Aksum (Eritrea and northern Ethiopia).

We also follow in the footsteps of those who have more recently joined the ancestral cloud of witnesses. These legends of African Christianity have completed their races, but their theological thinking has continued to impact

⁴ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations*, 9.

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the present of African Christianity. They include Cameroonian Jean-Marc Éla; Central African Isaac Zokoué; Congolese Kā Mana and Vincent Mulago; Gambian Lamin Sanneh; Ghanaians Kwame Bediako, Kwesi Dickson, Afua Kuma, and John S. Pobee; Kenyans John G. Gatū and John S. Mbiti; Nigerians David Tuesday Adamo, Ogbu U. Kalu, and Byang Kato; Sierra Leoneans Edward W. Fasholé-Luke and Harry Sawyerr; Tanzanian Charles Nyamiti; American Thomas C. Oden; and Scotsman Andrew F. Walls. Together these theologians promoted World Christianity perspectives through deep engagement with African contextual realities. Of course Euro-American contextual theologies have something to offer to us here in Africa — but they should *not* be considered normative. African contextual theologies have just as much to offer to the rest of the world. With Mercy Amba Oduyoye, we recognize that “a bird with one wing cannot fly and that the foot that stays to crush another cannot move either.”⁵ Because *birds have two wings and feet that crush others remain immobile*, the pages of *African Christian Theology* welcome the voices of women. African Christians must produce a theology which bears “the distinctive stamp of mature African thinking and reflection,”⁶ and this theology must be informed by the perspectives of both men and women.

This issue is themed “African Christian Theology: Retrospect and Prospect.” As we look ahead to where we are going, it is fitting to look back to see where we have come from. This theme is deliberately coordinated with the theme of ACTEA’s General Assembly in September 2023, “African Theological Education: Retrospect and Prospect.” The issue opens with a Prologue from Professor Jesse Mugambi, observing that in the past, Euro-American missionaries expected African converts to abandon “primitive” African culture and to culturally mimic the missionaries’ provides a demonstration that missionaries often replaced the concept of *conversion* with the practice of *proselytization*. Next we offer revised versions of two of the keynote addresses from the General Assembly: Jehu J. Hanciles provides “An Anglophone Perspective” and Yacouba Sanon “A Francophone Perspective on the consultation’s theme.

Next we turn to assessments of the legacies of three key African theologians. Dieudonné Djoubairou, a former student of Isaac Zokoué (1944–2014), explores the theological heritage and contribution of his teacher in an article written in French. Aiah Foday-Khabenje explores “The Evangelical Legacy of Byang H. Kato” (1936–1975), whose vision as the General Secretary of the Association of African Evangelicals led to the founding of ACTEA. Joel A. Carpenter explores the theological entrepreneurship of Kwame Bediako (1945–

⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 122, alluding to the widespread African proverb.

⁶ Edward W. Fasholé-Luke, “The Quest for African Christian Theologies,” 173.

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2008). After those three examinations of theological educators, Stephanie A. Lowery's article turns to a churchman and examines the radical ecclesiology of Archbishop David Gitari (1937–2013), who led the Anglican Church of Kenya from 1997–2002, often at odds with both political and ecclesial power structures. The article section of the issue closes with Mercy Amba Oduyoye's reflection of "The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa." We also feature seven book review essays in English and one in French together with three shorter 'book note' book reviews (two in English and one in French). We regret the lack of articles in Portuguese — for reasons beyond our control, articles planned in that language for this issue were postponed.

Our journey to publication of this first issue has been a long journey, only made possible through the practice of *harambee*, many hands pulling together.⁷ In addition to each of our board members, reviewers, contributors to this issue, and each other, the editors extend our hearty thanks to the following:

David Tarus, without whose vision this journal would not have become possible. Zabusu Diakumbi Mbunzu, ACTEA's Francophone Administrator, Steve Hardy, and Tobias Houston assisted with checking Portuguese translations. Titus Batson and Mesfin Teshome provided crucial technological support. During the long journey between conception and publication of this inaugural issue, several editors of other journals freely offered their guidance and aid, and we thank each one: Nelson Jennings, editor of *Global Missiology*; Elias Bongmba, then editor of *Journal of Religion in Africa*; Todd Scaewater, editor of *Journal of Language, Culture, and Religion*; Lukwikilu Credo Mangayi, editor of *Missionalia*; Jeff Miller, then editor of *Priscilla Papers*; Sara Fretheim, then assistant editor of *Mission Studies*; and Felix Wilfred, chief-editor of *International Journal of Asian Christianity*. Similar aid was provided by Knut Holter, the editor of two Peter Lang series, Bible and Theology in Africa and Religion and Society in Africa.

Finally, we thank you, our reader, who are to be counted among "those who follow behind." We close with the blessing with which Harry Sawyerr (1909–1986) concluded *Creative Evangelism*: "May the Church in Africa be the vehicle of abundant life for all Africans."⁸

*Tolle lege.*⁹

⁷ *Harambee*, Kenya's national motto, is a kiSwahili term meaning "let's all pull together!"

⁸ Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa*, 158.

⁹ According to his *Confessions*, in 386 Augustine of Hippo heard the singsong voice of a child nearby chanting *Tolle lege, tolle lege* (Latin: "Take and read, take and read"; *tolle*

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can also be translated ‘take up’). Augustine picked up a copy of Paul’s Letter to the Romans which happened to be nearby and began to read. This marked the beginning of his conversion to the Christ. He relates this in *Confessionum libri XIII* 8.29.

¹⁰ First published in *The Journal of African Christian Thought* 1, no. 1 (1998): 2–16.



ÉDITORIAL

**En mémoire de ceux qui nous ont précédés,
en l'honneur de ceux qui nous suivent**
Présentation de la Théologie Chrétienne Africaine

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Décrivant le passage du christianisme mondial du Nord-Sud, Mark Noll a affirmé que « si la nouvelle forme du christianisme dans le monde affecte l'histoire générale du monde, elle influence bien davantage les questions de croyance et de pratique chrétiennes. »¹ Compte tenu du déplacement du christianisme mondial vers le Sud, les croyances et les pratiques chrétiennes des dernières décennies n'ont pas été guidées par la théologie chrétienne occidentale. Il y a près de trente ans, les universitaires occidentaux ont reconnu que la majorité des chrétiens de la planète se trouvaient en Afrique, en Asie et en Amérique latine — et que « la proportion . . . augmente chaque année. »² C'est pourquoi, rétrospectivement et en perspective, le christianisme mondial est de plus en plus considéré comme fortement influencé par les théologies chrétiennes non occidentales. Par exemple, les missiologues de la diaspora nous rappellent constamment que l'Église mondiale prospère grâce au mouvement des Africains à travers le monde.³ Les Africains qui migrent vers l'Amérique du Nord et l'Europe implantent des églises dans des régions où le christianisme traditionnel est en déclin.

Il est donc important d'étudier de près et de comprendre les théologies chrétiennes en Afrique qui façonnent le christianisme mondial d'une manière

¹ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* [La nouvelle forme du christianisme mondial : Comment l'expérience américaine reflète la foi mondiale], 33 ; notre traduction.

² Andrew F. Walls, « Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect [La nouvelle forme du christianisme mondial : Comment l'expérience américaine reflète la foi mondiale], » 85; notre traduction. Ce chapitre a été présenté pour la première fois sous forme de conférence lors d'un forum de l'African Theological Fellowship [Communauté Théologique Africaine] à Accra, au Ghana, en 1997.

³ Par exemple, voir les ouvrages en anglais de Afe Adogame, Jehu J. Hanciles, et Harvey Kwiyani.

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nouvelle. Le christianisme africain ne façonne pas seulement la croyance chrétienne (théologie), mais aussi la pratique (praxis). Par exemple, quels sont les paramètres du salut ? En d'autres termes, le salut concerne-t-il uniquement les individus ou également des groupes plus grands ? Comment le monde des esprits influence-t-il la vie quotidienne des gens ? Comment les croyants doivent-ils lire la Bible ? Ces questions, et bien d'autres encore, ont des implications pour la croissance et le mouvement des églises dans les pays étrangers. Rétrospectivement et en perspective, le peuple de Dieu est en mouvement dans le monde entier et, au fur et à mesure de ses déplacements, il fait des disciples de toutes les nations (Matt 28:19–20).

En juin 2021, David Tarus, directeur exécutif de l'Association Chrétienne de Théologie et d'Éducation en Afrique (ACTEA), a entamé avec moi (Joshua) une conversation qui a abouti à la création de cette revue, *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine*. David a été conquis par la vision de Byang Kato, qui souhaitait créer une revue théologique répondant aux besoins du christianisme africain. Je suis passionné par la recherche de ressources pour les responsables d'églises sur le continent. Beaucoup de bonnes revues existantes ont une portée limitée, sont inaccessibles (parce qu'elles n'existent qu'en format imprimé ou se trouvent derrière des murs payants trop chers pour la plupart des Africains), ou ont en fait une portée régionale plutôt que panafricaine. Nous lançons donc cette revue non pas en concurrence avec d'autres revues, mais pour les suppléer et pour offrir aux chercheurs et aux praticiens de nouvelles possibilités de produire des connaissances et de s'engager dans des débats et des conversations. Il répond à « la nécessité pour les chrétiens africains de donner un sens à la foi chrétienne dont ils ont hérité en tant qu'Africains, une foi qu'ils partagent avec beaucoup d'autres personnes dans le monde, ou d'en améliorer la compréhension. »⁴

Les éditeurs ont des perspectives évangéliques, puisqu'il s'agit d'une oeuvre d'ACTEA, mais la revue a une portée plus large, œcuménique, et accueille des articles de chercheurs de toute les traditions chrétiennes — protestante, catholique, orthodoxe, pentecôtiste, EICs.⁵ *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* existe pour servir l'ensemble de l'Afrique, en fournissant un lieu de dialogue entre les différentes régions d'Afrique. Nous nous efforçons de suivre les traces de nos fidèles ancêtres chrétiens. Il s'agit notamment des premiers théologiens égyptiens, tels qu'Origène, Clément, Athanase, et Didyme l'Aveugle, ainsi qu'Antoine et Pakhom (ou Pacôme en français et Pachomius en latin), les fondateurs du monachisme chrétien, qui ont posé les bases de l'orthodoxie à

⁴ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations* [‘Moralité vraiment chrétienne, vraiment africaine : Considérations fondamentales, méthodologiques et théologiques’], 9 ; notre traduction.

⁵ EICs sont Églises indépendantes africaines, Églises initiées par les africaines, ou Églises indigènes africaines. Dans la littérature anglaise, on parle d'AICs.

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travers le monde, au sein des traditions grecque, copte, syriaque, latine, et éthiopienne. Il s'agit également des premiers théologiens nord-africains - tels que Tertullien, Cyprien et Augustin — qui ont jeté les bases de la théologie latine et donc de toutes les articulations occidentales de la foi chrétienne. Nous rappelons également — bien que la plupart l'aient oublié — l'histoire millénaire du christianisme africain indigène et vernaculaire dans la Nubie antique et médiévale (Soudan et une grande partie du Sud-Soudan), la présence de communautés chrétiennes dans l'Empire du Mali (aujourd'hui le Mali, le Sénégal, la Gambie, la Guinée, la Mauritanie et certaines parties du Niger et du Burkina Faso) sous le règne de Mansa Musa (r. c. 1312 – c. 1337), et la riche théologie de Yared le Mélodiste d'Axoum (Érythrée et nord de l'Éthiopie), datant du VI^e siècle.

Nous suivons également les traces de ceux qui ont rejoint plus récemment la nuée ancestrale des témoins. Ces légendes du christianisme africain ont achevé leur course, mais leur pensée théologique a continué à influencer le présent du christianisme africain. Il s'agit du Camerounais Jean-Marc Éla, du Centrafricain Isaac Zokoué, les Congolais Kā Mana et Vincent Mulago, le Gambien Lamin Sanneh, les Ghanéens Kwame Bediako, Kwesi Dickson, Afua Kuma et John S. Pobeé, les Kenyans John G. Gatū et John S. Mbiti, les Nigériens David Tuesday Adamo, Ogbu U. Kalu et Byang Kato, les Sierra-Léonais Edward W. Fasholé-Luke et Harry Sawyerr, le Tanzanien Charles Nyamiti, l'Américain Thomas C. Oden, et l'Écossais Andrew F. Walls. Ensemble, ces théologiens ont promu les perspectives du christianisme mondial en s'engageant profondément dans les réalités contextuelles africaines. Bien sûr, les théologies contextuelles euro-américaines ont quelque chose à nous offrir ici en Afrique, mais elles *ne* doivent *pas* être considérées comme normatives. Les théologies contextuelles africaines ont tout autant à offrir au reste du monde. Avec Mercy Amba Oduyoye, nous reconnaissons qu' « un oiseau qui n'a qu'une aile ne peut pas voler et que le pied qui reste pour en écraser un autre ne peut pas bouger non plus ».⁶ Parce que *les oiseaux ont deux ailes et des pattes qui écrasent les autres restent immobiles*, les pages de la *Théologie Chrétienne Africaine* accueillent des voix de femmes. Les chrétiens africains doivent produire une théologie qui porte « la marque distinctive d'une pensée et d'une réflexion africaines mûres, »⁷ et cette théologie doit s'appuyer sur les perspectives des hommes et des femmes.

Ce numéro a pour thème la « Théologie Chrétienne Africaine : Rétrospective et Perspectives ». Alors que nous regardons vers l'avenir, il

⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* [‘Introduisant la Théologie des Femmes Africaines’], 122, faisant allusion au proverbe africain très répandu ; notre traduction.

⁷ Edward W. Fasholé-Luke, « The Quest for African Christian Theologies [‘La Recherche de Théologies Chrétiennes Africaines’], » 173 ; notre traduction.

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convient aussi de regarder en arrière pour voir d'où nous venons. Ce thème est délibérément coordonné avec le thème de l'Assemblée générale d'ACTEA en septembre 2023, « l'Éducation Théologique Africaine: Rétrospective et Perspective. » Le numéro s'ouvre sur un prologue en anglais du professeur Jesse Mugambi, qui observe que dans le passé, les missionnaires euro-américains attendaient des convertis africains qu'ils abandonnent la culture africaine « primitive » et qu'ils imitent la culture des missionnaires, ce qui démontre que les missionnaires ont souvent remplacé le concept de *conversion* par la pratique du *prosélytisme*. Nous proposons ensuite des versions révisées de deux des discours principaux de l'Assemblée générale : Jehu J. Hanciles présente « une perspective anglophone » et Yacouba Sanon présente « une perspective francophone » sur le thème de la consultation ; ces deux articles sont également en anglais.

Nous nous pencherons ensuite sur l'évaluation de l'héritage de trois théologiens africains de premier plan. Dieudonné Djoubairou, ancien étudiant d'Isaac Zokoué (1944–2014), explore l'héritage théologique et l'apport de son professeur dans un article écrit en français. Aiah Foday-Khabenje explore « The Evangelical Legacy of Byang H. Kato [L'héritage évangélique de Byang H. Kato] » (1936–1975), dont la vision en tant que secrétaire général de l'Association des évangéliques africains a conduit à la fondation de l'ACTEA. Joel A. Carpenter approfondit l'esprit d'entreprise théologique de Kwame Bediako (1945–2008). Après ces trois études sur les éducateurs théologiques, l'article de Stephanie A. Lowery se tourne vers un homme d'église et examine l'ecclésiologie radicale de l'archevêque David Gitari (1937–2013), qui a dirigé l'Église Anglicane du Kenya de 1997 à 2002, souvent en désaccord avec les structures de pouvoir tant politiques qu'ecclésiales. La section articles du numéro se termine par la réflexion de Mercy Amba Oduyoye sur « The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa [L'Avenir du Christianisme en Afrique Subsaharienne] ». Nous présentons également sept essais critiques de livres en anglais et un en français, ainsi que trois brèves critiques de livres plus courtes (deux en anglais et une en français). Nous regrettons l'absence d'articles en portugais — pour des raisons indépendantes de notre volonté, les articles prévus dans cette langue pour ce numéro ont été reportés.

Notre chemin parcouru jusqu'à la publication de ce premier numéro a été long et n'a été possible que grâce à la pratique de l'*harambee*, c'est-à-dire l'union de plusieurs mains.⁸ Outre les membres du comité, les évaluateurs, les contributeurs à ce numéro, et tous les autres, les éditeurs adressent leurs remerciements les plus sincères aux personnes suivantes :

⁸ *Harambee*, la devise nationale du Kenya, est un terme kiSwahili qui signifie « tirons tous ensemble! »

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David Tarus, sans la vision duquel cette revue n'aurait pas vu le jour. Zabusu Diakumbi Mbunzu, administrateur francophone d'ACTEA, Steve Hardy, et Tobias Houston, qui ont contribué à la vérification des traductions portugaises. Titus Batson et Mesfin Teshome ont apporté un soutien technologique crucial. Au cours de la longue période qui s'est écoulée entre la conception et la publication de ce numéro inaugural, plusieurs éditeurs d'autres revues ont offert gracieusement leurs conseils et leur aide, et nous les remercions tous : Nelson Jennings, rédacteur de la *Global Missiology* ; Elias Bongmba, qui était alors rédacteur de la *Journal of Religion in Africa* ; Todd Scaewater, alors rédacteur de la *Journal of Language, Culture, and Religion* ; Lukwikilu Credo Mangayi, rédacteur de la *Missionalia* ; Jeff Miller, alors rédacteur de la *Priscilla Papers* ; Sara Fretheim, alors rédacteur adjoint de la *Mission Studies* ; et Felix Wilfred, rédacteur en chef de l'*International Journal of Asian Christianity*. Une aide similaire a été apportée par Knut Holter, éditeur de deux séries de Peter Lang, *Bible and Theology in Africa* ['Bible et Théologie en Afrique'] et *Religion and Society in Africa* ['Religion et Société en Afrique'].

Enfin, nous vous remercions, vous, notre lecteur, qui faites partie de « ceux qui nous succèdent. » Nous terminons par la bénédiction avec laquelle Harry Sawyerr (1909–1986) conclut *Creative Evangelism* ['Évangélisation Créative'] : « Que l'Église en Afrique soit le véhicule d'une vie abondante pour tous les Africains. »⁹

*Tolle lege.*¹⁰

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⁹ Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* ['Évangélisation Créative : Vers une nouvelle rencontre chrétienne avec l'Afrique'], 158 ; notre traduction.

¹⁰ Selon ses *Confessions*, en 386, Augustin d'Hippone a entendu la voix chantante d'un enfant qui se trouvait à proximité et qui chantait « *Tolle lege, tolle lege* » (Latin: 'Prenez et lisez, prenez et lisez'). Augustin prit un exemplaire de la Lettre de Paul aux Romains qui se trouvait à proximité et commença à la lire. C'est le début de sa conversion au Christ. Il raconte cela dans *Confessionum libri XIII* 8.29.

En mémoire de ceux qui nous ont précédés, en l'honneur de ceux qui nous suivent :
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¹¹ Publié pour la première fois dans *The Journal of African Christian Thought* 1, n° 1 (1998) : 2–16.



EDITORIAL

Em memória dos que nos precederam, em honra dos que nos seguem

Apresentação da Teologia Cristã Africana

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Descrevendo a mudança do cristianismo mundial do Norte Global para o Sul Global, Mark Noll afirmou que “por mais que a nova forma do cristianismo no mundo afete a história mundial geral, muito mais influencia as questões de crença e prática cristãs.”¹ Considerando a deslocação do cristianismo global para o Sul, as crenças e práticas cristãs nas últimas décadas não têm sido orientadas pela teologia cristã ocidental. Há cerca de trinta anos, os estudiosos ocidentais reconheceram que a maioria dos cristãos na face da terra se encontra em África, na Ásia e na América Latina — e que “a proporção. . . cresce anualmente.”² Por isso, em retrospectiva e em prospectiva, o cristianismo global é cada vez mais visto como sendo altamente influenciado por teologias cristãs não ocidentais. Por exemplo, os missiólogos da diáspora estão constantemente a lembrar-nos que a igreja global está a prosperar devido ao movimento dos africanos em todo o mundo.³ Os africanos que migram para a América do Norte e para a Europa estão a plantar igrejas em zonas onde o cristianismo tradicional tem vindo a diminuir.

É, por isso, importante estudar e compreender cuidadosamente as teologias cristãs africanas que estão a moldar o cristianismo mundial de uma nova forma. O cristianismo africano não está apenas a moldar a crença cristã (teologia), mas também a prática (práxis). Por exemplo, quais são os parâmetros de salvação? Ou seja, a salvação é apenas uma questão de indivíduos ou é também uma

¹ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* [‘A Nova Forma do Cristianismo Mundial: Como a experiência americana reflete a fé global’], 33; nossa tradução.

² Andrew F. Walls, “Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect [‘África na História do Cristianismo: Retrospectiva e Prospectiva’],” 85; nossa tradução. Este capítulo foi apresentado pela primeira vez como uma palestra num fórum da African Theological Fellowship [‘Irmandade Teológica Africana’] em Accra, Ghana, em 1997.

³ Por exemplo, ver o trabalho em inglês de Afe Adogame, Jehu J. Hanciles, e Harvey Kwiyani.

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questão de grupos maiores? Como é que o mundo dos espíritos influencia a vida quotidiana das pessoas? Como é que os crentes devem ler a Bíblia? Estas e muitas outras questões têm implicações para o crescimento e o movimento da igreja em terras estrangeiras. Em retrospectiva e prospetiva, o povo de Deus está a mover-se pelo mundo e, à medida que se move, faz discípulos de todas as nações (Mateus 28,19–20).

Em junho de 2021, David Tarus, o diretor executivo da ACTEA, iniciou uma conversa comigo (Joshua) que acabou por conduzir à fundação desta revista, *Teologia Cristã Africana*. David foi cativado pela visão de Byang Kato de criar uma revista teológica que servisse as necessidades do cristianismo africano. Sou apaixonado por fornecer recursos aos líderes da igreja no continente. Muitas das boas revistas existentes têm um âmbito limitado, são inacessíveis (uma vez que existem apenas em formato impresso ou estão protegidas por um acesso pago demasiado caros para a maioria das pessoas em África), ou têm efetivamente um enfoque regional e não pan-africano. Estamos, portanto, a lançar esta revista não para competir com outras revistas, mas para as complementar e proporcionar novas oportunidades para académicos e profissionais produzirem conhecimento e se envolverem em debates e conversas. Responde à “necessidade dos cristãos africanos darem sentido ou crescerem na compreensão da fé cristã que herdaram como africanos, uma fé que partilham com muitas outras povos em todo o mundo.”⁴

Os editores têm uma prospetiva evangélica, uma vez que é a revista da ACTEA, mas a revista tem um âmbito mais vasto e ecuménico e acolhe artigos de investigadores de toda a tradição cristã — protestante, católica, ortodoxa, pentecostal, IAI.⁵ *Teologia Cristã Africana* existe para servir toda a África, proporcionando um espaço de diálogo entre as diferentes regiões de África. Esforçamo-nos por seguir as pegadas de antepassados cristãos fiéis. Entre estes contam-se os primeiros teólogos egípcios — como Orígenes, Clemente, Atanásio, e Dídimo o Cego, juntamente com António e Pakhom (ou Pachómio), os fundadores do monaquismo cristão, que lançaram as bases da ortodoxia em todo o mundo, no âmbito das tradições grega, copta, siríaca, latina e etíope. Estes incluem também os primeiros teólogos norte-africanos — como Tertuliano, Cipriano e Agostinho — que lançaram as bases da teologia latina e, por conseguinte, de todas as articulações ocidentais da fé cristã. Recordamos também — embora a maioria tenha esquecido — a história de mil anos do cristianismo indígena e vernacular africano na Núbia antiga e medieval (Sudão

⁴ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations* [‘Moralidade Verdadeiramente Cristã, Verdadeiramente Africana: Considerações Fundacionais, Metodológicas e Teológicas’], 9; nossa tradução.

⁵ AIAs são Igrejas africanas independentes, Igrejas africanas iniciadas, ou Igrejas indígenas africanas. Na literatura inglesa, são designados por ‘AICs.’

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e grande parte do Sudão do Sul), a presença de comunidades cristãs no Império do Mali (atualmente Mali, Senegal, Gâmbia, Guiné, Mauritânia e partes do Níger e do Burkina Faso) durante o reinado de Mansa Musa (r. c. 1312 – c. 1337), e a rica teologia de Yared o Melodista de Aksum (Eritreia e norte da Etiópia), do século VI.

Seguimos também os passos daqueles que se juntaram mais recentemente à nuvem ancestral de testemunhas. Estas lendas do cristianismo africano completaram as suas corridas, mas o seu pensamento teológico continuou a ter impacto no presente do cristianismo africano. Entre eles contam-se o camaronês Jean-Marc Éla; o centro-africano Isaac Zokoué; os congoleses Kâ Mana e Vincent Mulago; o gambiano Lamin Sanneh; os ganeses Kwame Bediako, Kwesi Dickson, Afua Kuma e John S. Pobe; os quenianos John G. Gatũ e John S. Mbiti; os nigerianos David Tuesday Adamo, Ogbu U. Kalu, e Byang Kato; os serra-leoneses Edward W. Fasholé-Luke e Harry Sawyerr; o tanzaniano Charles Nyamiti; o americano Thomas C. Oden; e o escocês Andrew F. Walls. Juntos, estes teólogos promoveram as prospetivas do Cristianismo Mundial através de um profundo envolvimento com as realidades contextuais africanas. É claro que as teologias contextuais euro-americanas têm algo a oferecer-nos aqui em África — mas *não* devem ser consideradas normativas. As teologias contextuais africanas têm igualmente muito a oferecer ao resto do mundo. Com Mercy Amba Oduyoye, reconhecemos que “um pássaro com uma só asa não pode voar e que o pé que fica para esmagar outro também não pode mover-se.”⁶ Porque *os pássaros têm duas asas e porque pés que esmagam os outros permanecem imóveis*, as páginas da *Teologia Cristã Africana* acolhem as vozes das mulheres. Os cristãos africanos devem produzir uma teologia que tenha “a marca distintiva do pensamento e da reflexão africanos maduros,”⁷ e esta teologia deve ser informada pelas prospetivas de homens e mulheres.

Este edição tem como tema “Teologia Cristã Africana: Retrospectiva e Prospetiva.” Ao olharmos em frente para onde estamos indo, convém olharmos para trás para vermos de onde viemos. Este tema é deliberadamente coordenado com o tema da Assembleia Geral da ACTEA em setembro de 2023, “Educação Teológica Africana: Retrospectiva e Prospetiva.” A edição abre com um Prólogo em inglês do Professor Jesse Mugambi, que observa que, no passado, os missionários euro-americanos esperavam que os convertidos africanos abandonassem a cultura africana “primitiva” e imitassem culturalmente a cultura dos missionários, o que demonstra que os missionários substituíram frequentemente o conceito de *conversão* pela prática do *proselitismo*. De

⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology* [‘Introdução à Teologia das Mulheres Africanas’], 122, aludindo ao provérbio africano muito difundido; nossa tradução.

⁷ Edward W. Fasholé-Luke, “The Quest for African Christian Theologies [‘A Procura de Teologias Cristãs Africanas’],” 173; nossa tradução.

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seguida, apresentamos versões revisadas de dois dos discursos principais da Assembleia Geral: Jehu J. Hanciles apresenta “Uma Perspetiva Anglófona” e Yacouba Sanon “Uma Perspetiva Francófona” sobre o tema da reunião; estes dois artigos estão também em inglês.

Em seguida, passamos à avaliação dos legados de três importantes teólogos africanos. Dieudonné Djoubairou, ex-aluno de Isaac Zokoué (1944-2014), explora a herança teológica e a contribuição de seu professor num artigo escrito em francês. Aiah Foday-Khabenje explora “O Legado Evangélico de Byang H. Kato” (1936–1975), cuja visão como Secretário-Geral da Associação dos Evangélicos Africanos levou à fundação da ACTEA. Joel A. Carpenter examina o empreendedorismo teológico de Kwame Bediako (1945–2008). O artigo de Stephanie A. Lowery volta-se para um homem da igreja e examina a eclesiologia radical do Arcebispo David Gitari (1937–2013), que liderou a Igreja Anglicana do Quênia de 1997 a 2002, muitas vezes em desacordo com as estruturas de poder político e eclesial. A secção de artigos da edição encerra com a reflexão de Mercy Amba Oduoye sobre “The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa [‘O futuro do cristianismo na África subsariana’].” Apresentamos também sete ensaios de recensão de livros em inglês e um em francês, juntamente com três recensões de livros mais curtas (duas em inglês e uma em francês). Lamentamos a ausência de artigos em português — por razões alheias à nossa vontade, os artigos planeados para esta língua foram adiados para uma edição futura.

A nossa viagem até à publicação deste primeiro número foi uma longa jornada, apenas possível graças à prática do *harambee*, muitas mãos a trabalhar em conjunto.⁸ Para além de cada um dos membros do conselho da revista, dos revisores, dos colaboradores desta edição, e de todos os outros, os editores agradecem vivamente aos seguintes:

David Tarus, sem cuja visão esta revista não teria sido possível. Zabusu Diakumbi Mbunzu, Administrador Francófono da ACTEA, Steve Hardy e Tobias Houston ajudaram a verificar as traduções portuguesas. Titus Batson e Mesfin Teshome prestaram um apoio tecnológico crucial. Durante o longo percurso entre a conceção e a publicação deste edição inaugural, vários editores de outras revistas ofereceram gratuitamente a sua orientação e ajuda, e agradecemos a cada um deles: Nelson Jennings, editor da *Global Missiology*; Elias Bongmba, then editor of *Journal of Religion in Africa*; Todd Scaewater, editor do *Journal of Language, Culture, and Religion*; Lukwikilu Credo Mangayi, editor de *Missionalia*; Jeff Miller, que na altura era editor de *Priscilla Papers*; Sara Fretheim, que era então editor-adjunto da *Mission Studies*; e Felix Wilfred, editor-chefe da *International Journal of Asian Christianity*. Ajuda semelhante foi prestada por Knut Holter, o diretor de duas

⁸ *Harambee*, o lema nacional do Quênia, é um termo kiSwahili que significa “vamos puxar todos juntos!”

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séries de Peter Lang, *Bible and Theology in Africa* [‘A Bíblia e a Teologia em África’] e *Religion and Society in Africa* [‘Religião e Sociedade em África’]. Por fim, agradecemos-lhe a si, nosso leitor, que deve ser contado entre “os que seguem atrás.” Terminamos com a bênção com que (1909–1986) concluiu o *Creative Evangelism* [‘Evangelismo Criativo’]: “Que a Igreja em África seja o veículo da vida abundante para todos os africanos.”⁹

*Tolle lege.*¹⁰

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⁹ Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* [‘Evangelismo Criativo: Para um Novo Encontro Cristão com África’], 158; nossa tradução.

¹⁰ De acordo com as suas *Confissões*, em 386, Agostinho de Hipona ouviu a voz cantada de uma criança que estava por perto a cantar *Tolle lege, tolle lege* (Latim: ‘Tome a lei, tome a lei’). Agostinho pegou num exemplar da Carta de Paulo aos Romanos que estava por perto e começou a ler. Este facto marcou o início da sua conversão a Cristo. Ele relata o facto na *Confessionum libri XIII* 8.29.

¹¹ Publicado pela primeira vez *The Journal of African Christian Thought* 1, n.º 1 (1998): 2–16.



PROLOGUE

African Christian Theology: *Past, Present, and Future*

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Abstract

In this essay, Professor Mugambi reflects on the concepts behind the phrase “African Christian Theology.” Along the way he examines how forms of African Christianity arrived in their current state, highlighting African agency. As he seeks the conceptual core of this label, he promotes the value of theologizing in African vernaculars. After his retrospective musings on African Christian Theology, he turns to the future offerings which African Christianity may provide to the global Church.

Resumé

« Théologie Chrétienne Africaine : Passé, Présent, et Futur »

Dans cet essai, le professeur Mugambi réfléchit aux concepts qui sous-tendent l'expression « Théologie Chrétienne Africaine ». En cours de route, il examine comment les formes de christianisme africain sont arrivées à leur état actuel, en mettant en évidence l'action de l'Afrique. Tout en cherchant le noyau conceptuel de cette étiquette, il promeut la valeur de la théologie dans les langues vernaculaires africaines. Après ses réflexions rétrospectives sur la théologie chrétienne africaine, il se tourne vers les offres futures que le christianisme africain pourrait faire à l'Église mondiale.

Resumo

“Teologia Cristã Africana: Passado, Presente, e Futuro”

Neste ensaio, o Professor Mugambi reflete sobre os conceitos subjacentes à expressão “Teologia Cristã Africana.” Ao longo do seu percurso, examina como as formas de cristianismo africano chegaram ao seu estado atual, destacando a agência africana. Ao procurar o núcleo conceitual deste rótulo, promove o valor da teologização em vernáculos africanos. Depois das suas reflexões retrospectivas sobre a teologia cristã africana, debruça-

se sobre as ofertas futuras que o cristianismo africano pode oferecer à Igreja global.

1. Preamble

The main focus in this article is **conceptual clarification** about notions implied in the label “African Christian Theology” — which connotes a wide range of assumptions and implications. Most denominations of North American and European Christianity have established their missionary outreach in various African countries, as extensions of their Western denominations. The denominational replicas operate as extensions of the “mother” churches back home in Europe and North America — Adventist, Anglican, Apostolic, Baptist, Charismatic, Roman Catholic, Congregational, Episcopal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Salvationist, Zionist, and such others. Such labels inevitably imply some alien influence, both linguistically and conceptually. How African is “African Christianity”? This question is open to scholarly discourse.

African expressions of Christianity have resulted from African responses to Western missionary outreach in Africa. David B. Barrett in his book *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968) has documented such contextual responses. He identifies tens of thousands of African Independent churches (AICs) which sprung in reactions against Western denominations across various African countries. They are comparable to the Protestant European denominations that resulted from the Reformation — sparked by Martin Luther following his publication of the *Ninety-Five Theses* against Roman Catholicism.

Five centuries after the European Reformation, African Christianity is articulated in the English language and cultural symbols. The quest for African Christian Theology will come of age only when African languages and symbols become normative among the majority of African Christians. Until then, African Christian Theology will remain tentative, transitory, and experimental. One of the major constraints toward a definitive expression of African Christianity is the history of Christian missions in Africa, intertwined with the history of European colonization of this continent. One of the cultural and religious aftermaths of European imperial domination has been denigration of the African cultural and religious heritage, characterized by the superimposition of Western religious and cultural norms on the African sense of personal and social identity. This challenge is reminiscent of the European Reformation, sparked by Martin Luther in 1517 CE. Hopefully, the Reformation of African Christianity will sooner become normative.

2. Introduction

This reflection is in response to a request by the editors of *African Christian Theology* for me to reflect on the “retrospective” aspect of the theme of this issue. My focus is a concise commentary on conceptual core of the theme “African Christian Theology.” I thank Joshua Barron for inviting me to contribute this essay.

This three-word label — *African - Christian - Theology* — is heavily loaded: with multiple meanings, perspectives, concerns, and implications. These three terms are loaded with *vagueness* and *ambiguity*. Each word in this label — *African Christian Theology* — has multiple connotations. The noun “Theology” is derived from the two Greek words — *Theos* (God) and *Logos* (“word” or “reasoning” or “discourse”). In English the word “theology” implies “reasoning” or “reflecting” about “God.” Likewise, the verb “to theologize” means to reflect rationally about a topic within “Theology,” irrespective of denominational commitment. Another noun derived from “theology” is “theologian” — a person who specializes in “Theologizing.” The adjective “theological” may refer to any one of the following three possibilities:

- a) *associated with, or based on, or about theology;*
- b) *relating to, or based on, or about God’s revelation to humankind; or*
- c) *“about God’s nature, God’s designs, and God’s will.”*

There are other adjectives, nouns, and verbs which categorize the multiple uses of the noun “theology.” The label “**African Christian Theology**” refers to the category of “theologizing” that is conducted by African theologians — both lay and ordained — or theologizing by non-African theologians with some interest in the theologizing conducted within Africa by African Christians. Clarifications about presuppositions implied in the trilogy “African Christian Theology” are prone to some inevitable risks — including conceptual vagueness, varying degrees of interpretive clarity, and contextual ambiguity. Such uncertainties blur any discourse and critique about “African Christian Theology.” My role in this essay is an attempt at *conceptual clarification*, based on my understanding and appreciation of the challenge to theologize about this theme — on the basis of my perspective as an African Christian theologian.

3. Where on the Global Map is Africa?

The part shaded red on the map below¹ indicates the northern strip of Africa, bordering the Red Sea. The Roman emperors ruled that strip under the Latin name *Africa Proconsularis* or, in ordinary English, the “Roman province of Africa.” During the heyday of the Roman Empire, the word “Africa” referred administratively to this area that borders the Mediterranean Sea — now in Tunisia and Libya. However, even at that time *Africa* was used to refer to the

¹ Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_Empire_-_Africa_Proconsularis_\(125_AD\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_Empire_-_Africa_Proconsularis_(125_AD).svg)

entire continent.² The people of Israel also interacted with “Ethiopians,” as illustrated by the ‘Ethiopian’ dignitary who visited Israel (Acts 8:26–30).³

Africa Proconsularis



The tendency to isolate North Africa from the rest of this continent is erroneous, because the name of this entire continent is derived from the northern strip — *Africa Proconsularis*. African Union (AU) membership includes all nations of this continent, without exception — northwards from the Southern Cape to the Mediterranean Sea; and eastwards from the Atlantic

² E.g., by the first century Roman geographer Pomponius Mela in his *De Situ Orbis* [Latin: ‘On the Situation of the World’].

³ A word of explanation is needed. In ancient Greek cartography, *Ethiopia* meant simply “land where people with dark skin live.” It referred primarily to Nubia (modern Sudan and South Sudan) and then by extension to all of the continent south of the littoral areas under Roman rule; it could also refer to what are now South India and Sri Lanka as well as to a region between the Black and Caspian Seas where retired Nubian soldiers had established a colony. Luke informs us that the “Ethiopian eunuch” served under the government of “Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.” But “Candace” here is not a name as in English today; it is properly *Kandakē*, a Nubian word that means “ruling queen” and which was the title of the regnal queens of the Nubian kingdom of Meroë. This Nubian government official may have eventually travelled with the gospel to *Aksum*, the heart of what became Ethiopia (modern Eritrea and northern Ethiopia), but he was himself an official of the Nubian government. Some centuries after the New Testament period, after their conversion to the Christian faith, the ancestors of those whom we know as Ethiopians appropriated the names *Ethiopia* and *Ethiopian* to themselves. — *Joshua Robert Barron, managing editor*

Ocean to the Red Sea. The African Union Aspirations expresses this Declaration:

Agenda 2063 seeks to deliver on a set of **Seven Aspirations** each with its own set of goals which if achieved will move Africa closer to achieving its vision for the year 2063. These 7 Aspirations reflect our desire for shared prosperity and well-being, for unity and integration, for a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth are realised, and with freedom from fear, disease and want.⁴

Furthermore, African presence in the Bible — Both the Old Testament and the New Testament — is too remarkable to be overlooked or ignored, because there are biblical narratives that make significant references to Africa.

4. African Christianity as Object for Research

Much of the research and publication about “African Christianity” has been, and continues to be, conducted by largely foreigners — written in foreign languages, published abroad, and intended for non-African readership. Likewise, a significant percentage of theologians on staff in tertiary institutions within Africa — including seminaries, theological colleges and universities — have been trained by foreigners or trained abroad by foreign staff with limited knowledge about the inner dynamics of Christianity and culture in Africa. The content of many theological books available in Africa — including those *about* Africa — has gaps which isolate the “foreign authors” from their “African readers.” Identity gaps are inevitable whenever *authors* distinguish themselves as the “Subject” and their African *readers* as the “Object” of study — or as the “target” audience for new denominations and mega-churches.

The “Subject-Object” differentiation has its background and setting in the history of Christian missions — alongside the colonial powers throughout this continent. Such differentiation is characterized by denominational spheres of influence throughout all the colonies where Christian denominations were introduced as an integral aspect of imperial expansion. Imperial demarcations of Africa remain intertwined with the denominations and sects from abroad, and some others with African founders. Consequently, the label “African Christianity” is loaded with much vagueness and ambiguity.

Christianity in Africa has a broad spectrum of denominations — including almost all categories found worldwide. In every former colony or protectorate within the continent of Africa, the colonial mainstream denominational legacy remains intact, with newer denominations having smaller proportions of adherents. African Instituted Churches (AICs) have significant presence in some African nations, especially in the former British and French colonies.

⁴ “Agenda 2063,” AU Watch, <https://www.au-watch.org/agenda-2063/>

Megachurches are increasing in both size and their demographic share of African Christians.

The large congregations of megachurches are indicative of organizational skills and effective publicity. Their principal preachers are effective communicators, with support staff to manage the large audiences. Despite the large audiences, the sermons are focused on personal commitment and self-disciplined lifestyle. Effective oratory is one of the essential attractions, in addition to conceptual clarity. Former imperial languages are used for preaching, particularly English (for Anglophone countries) and French (for Francophone countries). Electronic public address gadgetry is used; and some of the megachurches provide online transmission to reach worshippers who might not manage to attend in person. Cities such as Nairobi and Lagos have become favorite host cities for megachurch preachers.

It is worthwhile to reflect about the long-term implications for continued use of foreign languages for worship in African Churches — languages that are not used at home and in social functions. This trend of preaching in foreign imperial languages has a tendency to entrench the notion that worship should be normatively conducted in foreign languages, while “Mother Tongue” is only for used at home. This legacy originated from the history of Western Europe, where Latin was used by the elite and liturgically in Christian worship while “mother tongues” would be used in homes and at work. In the East African Community, Kiswahili has become a lingua franca — understandable by most people and usable both at work and elsewhere. The African Union has also included Kiswahili as one of the official languages.

The training of African scholars toward scholarly theological authorship has hardly been adequate. These shortcomings have resulted in relatively scanty publication of African Christian theological authorship, in both African and foreign languages. The elevation of kiSwahili as one of the official languages of the African Union is one of the significant innovations toward consolidation of African cultural and religious identity. In the same way that Latin became the lingua franca of European Academia, Kiswahili might become a lingua franca of African Academia. Such an innovation, should it materialize, would facilitate the Africanization of Christianity, and the Christianization of Africa. The Churches in Africa have providential opportunity to promote kiSwahili as one of the languages of African Christian theological authorship, teaching, training and research.

5. African Christian *Theology* as Object for Research

Christian Theology as “Subject” and “African Christians” as “Object” might imply the conceptual “objectification” of African Christians on the one hand, and the researchers about Africa, on the other. Field research is useful and valuable, if conducted with the objective toward some improvement. However, field research has too often been conducted by students as a prerequisite for

passing examinations. It is worthwhile for churches at all levels to conduct research periodically as means to evaluate their own achievements in relation to inputs. Through self-commissioned research, organizations have opportunity to improve their own performance, with due consideration of available resources.

The names and labels of most Christian denominations in Africa remain in foreign languages, hardly amenable to accurate rendering in African languages. Here are some illustrations:⁵

<u>English</u>	<u>Swahili</u>
Africa Inland Church – Kenya	<i>Kanisa la Africa Inland Church Kenya</i>
Anglican Church of Kenya	<i>Kanisa Anglikana la Kenya</i>
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya	<i>Kanisa la Kiinjili la kiLutheri katika Kenya</i>
Presbyterian Church of East Africa	<i>Kanisa la kiPresibetarian la Afrika Mashariki</i>

Almost all the Christian denominations introduced into Africa from Europe and North America have no signboards in African languages; and those with translated signboards have a tendency to use innovations whose background remains unknown — except by the few members who might have studied in a theological college or a Bible School. Consequently, a majority of African Christians are members of denominations with *history* that remains *mystery*, but still relevant for worship in Christianized communities. The foreign-language Catechisms are translated into African languages for the purpose of Baptism and Confirmation, but the history of Western denominations with adherents in Africa remains unknown for the majority of African Christians in mainstream denominations.

Some African church members do not mind the “foreignness” of their churches, mainly because “modernity” is associated with Christianity — which, in turn, is associated with European and North American cultures. Autobiographies have been published, mainly in English, but they are rare exceptions among all denominations. One such exception is by Moderator John G. Gatũ (3 March 1925 – 11 May 2017). He served as an exemplary Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and was a prominent ecumenist — and also an exemplary mentor. He documented and published his autobiography titled *Joyfully Christian, Truly African* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2006). Gatũ also etched his theological legacy in the proposal for *Moratorium* on Missionary Funds and Personnel, as one strategy to ensure that African churches would attain maturity and rely on their own resources, instead

⁵ It is also telling that the official internet presence (websites and social media profiles) of each of these denominations are only in English; they do not have pages in Swahili or in any of the major African vernaculars (e.g., Kikuyu, Luhya, Dholuo, Kamba, Kalenjin, Gusi, Somali, Meru, Maasai, Turkana) spoken in Kenya. — *the editors*

of remaining dependent on the “mother denominations” that had sent missionaries to Africa.

6. Reverse Christian Missionary Outreach from Africa

European nations that sent their missionaries to Africa are “officially secular” – yet also “nominally Christian.” Missionaries coming from those nations to Africa endeavor to sustain abroad the ecclesial legacy of their predecessors back home. Secularism has become normative in the nations that used to send missionaries to Africa. It is difficult to ascertain whether “African Christianity” will be sustainable, and if so, for how long. The tendency toward “secularism” is looming,⁶ at the same time that communication technology increasingly substitutes physical interaction with virtual networks. Physical interaction has become obsolete for some elite, having been replaced with online connectivity. Visa restrictions, though normative, are no longer cumbersome, because instant communication is possible for those who need it — without the hassle of applying for entry permits and visas.

Media channels are readily accessible on mobile phones, making it possible to receive instant news. The world has become a “global village,” particularly for people with access to online connectivity. It might be too early to determine whether “African Christianity” will have the capacity for effective “Reverse Mission” to Europe and North America. International travel is becoming increasingly redundant, replaced by instant connectivity. It is now possible for preachers in Europe and North America to instantly broadcast their sermons to Africa and elsewhere. Similar “Reverse Mission” from Africa to elsewhere is also possible.⁷ The missing link is readiness, at both ends, to appreciate that the era of physical missionary outreach has become overtaken by online communication.

⁶ For a critique of assumptions that the tide of secularism is fated to overwhelm religiosity in general and Christianity specifically, see Rodney Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.,” *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249–273. On the interplay of secularism and Christian witness, see Mechteld Jansen, “Christian Mission and Secularism,” chapter 28 in *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies*, edited by Kirsteen Kim and Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga, 493–510 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). On secularism and Christianity in Africa, see Dick See, “Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church,” *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 76–87; and Benno van den Toren and Willem J. de Wit, “Secularization and Discipleship in Africa: Conclusions and Recommendations,” *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 152–160. — *the editors*

⁷ There is a growing literature documenting the reality of African mission work in Europe and America. See, for example, Paul Araoluwa Ayokunle’s review of Johnson Ambrose Afrane-Twum, *Christian Mission in a Diverse British Urban Context: Crossing the Racial Barrier to Reach Communities*, in this issue. — *the editors*

The imbalance of Power and Influence may make it difficult for Africa to re-evangelize Europe and North America — as reciprocation for the Missionary Enterprise, especially during the twentieth century. Visa restrictions, racial attitudes, and resistance to criticism are some of the factors that can make “reverse” or “reciprocal” missions from Africa to Europe and North America difficult. It is ironic that Western missionaries keep coming to Tropical Africa, where Christianity is already established — complete with churches and cathedrals, schools and hospitals, universities and colleges, conventions and conferences — while there is a major recession of Christian presence in their own countries of origin.

7. “Africa Christianity” or “Christianity in Africa”?

The two labels — *African Christianity* and *Christianity in Africa* — have different connotations. Missionaries brought **European Christianity** into Africa. After a while, the African converts internalized the Gospel, and became African Christians. European Christianity became out-of-place among African people who had acquired access to the Gospel — and now happily apply it within their African contexts. It seems likely that **African Christianity** will influence the **Secularizing West**. The **Holy Spirit** requires neither an air ticket nor a visa to travel abroad. Communities of Faith can interact instantly; and the Holy Spirit will guide the interactions accordingly. European Christianity reached Africa and within a short while, African Christianity had come of age. African Christianity will reach the West, and the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

These two labels — *Christianity in Africa* and *African Christianity* — are not synonyms but have different conceptual emphases. The first label, *Christianity in Africa*, often refers to the package that missionaries introduced and inculcated into African converts who would have to mimic missionary teaching, because of a presupposition that African culture was “primitive”: that is, “depraved” and “heathen.” Such derogatory adjectives as *primitive*, *depraved*, and *heathen* appear in the reports of Western missionaries in Africa. In contrast, many of the African converts, after reading the Bible for themselves, appreciated and internalized the insight that the Holy Spirit can never be claimed and confined as a monopoly of any culture or empire. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit empowers converts of every culture, ethnicity, or status to accept and internalize the essence of the Gospel, and also to share the Word of God among those not yet converted.

The spread of Christianity in Tropical Africa has been mainly the achievement of African converts. While the stories of missionary activity have been more frequently told in the western press and church history textbooks, the larger share of mission work in Africa was performed by African Christians, and not by western missionaries.⁸ It has become a routine for evangelical and

⁸ On this point, see Jehu J. Hanciles’s article in this issue. — *the editors*

charismatic speakers from Europe and North America to visit Africa on preaching itineraries, attracting large audiences. The large audiences are perhaps more for curiosity and entertainment than for conviction and conversion. Most of the audiences in such rallies are already Christians, who attend with intention to learn how Christianity is conducted outside Africa.

8. The Future of “Africa Christianity” and “Christianity in Africa”

The old “colonial” dispensation of “Christianity in Africa” had its role in Tropical Africa, and through it some Africans accepted the Christian faith within the competing denominations. At the same time some Africans established their own denominations which were condemned as “anti-Christian.” These dynamics flourished while the ecumenical movement was gaining momentum. The Gospel, like mustard seeds planted or scattered in fertile soil, will germinate and become trees of many varieties, transforming the cultural ecology of the society. Any attempts to confine the Gospel in the cultural norms and molds of missionaries eventually flounder. Some converts discern the essence of the Gospel and after training they take over the initiative to share their experience of conversion with their fellows in the community.

The entries in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* contain many illustrations of this insight; and similarly, the *Journal of African Christian Biography* contains articles on this theme.⁹ African Christian scholarship is gaining momentum, in both imperial and African languages.¹⁰ One of the most significant achievements in the maturation of African Christianity is Professor John S. Mbiti’s translation of the New Testament from the Greek into his home language, kiKamba: *Utianiyo wa Mwiyai Yesu Kilisto* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 2014). With this achievement, John S. Mbiti (1931–2019) became the pioneer in the next phase toward maturation of African Christianity. Western publications on Africa have frequently been rather condescending, especially during the era of imperial domination. But such condescendence has encouraged African scholars to research and publish their works from African perspectives. In response to such achievement, among others, Professor John S. Mbiti cites the remark by Jesus to the Pharisees:

⁹ The *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB) is available online at <https://dacb.org/> and regularly updated with new entries; DACB also published the *Journal of African Christian Biography* (JACB), which is published four times a year and is available online at <https://dacb.org/journal/>

¹⁰ For the European languages, the proliferation and success of book series published by the Western press but devoted to aspects of African Christianity and predominately publishing African voices demonstrate this clearly; e.g., African Christian Studies Series or AFRICS (Pickwick Publications), ASET (Africa Society of Evangelical Theology) Series (Langham Global Library), African Theological Studies / Études Théologiques Africaines (Peter Lang), Bible and Theology in Africa (Peter Lang), among many others. — *the editors*

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Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. (Matt 21:42–43).

This reminder by Jesus is an appropriate message with which to conclude my reflection. Africa was represented from the beginning of Christianity, and continues to proclaim the Gospel within the limits of available capabilities and resources. The term African Christianity refers to the broad spectrum of African Christian responses to the Gospel — Adventist, Anglican, Catholic, Charismatic, Episcopal, Independent, Interdenominational, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Reformed. Each of these denominational clusters focuses on some perspectives of biblical teaching. It is impossible for any denomination (or cluster of denominations) can claim to be comprehensive about the teachings of Jesus Christ. The greatest challenge facing Christian Leadership in the twenty-first century is modesty to admit the limitation of perspectives — appreciating the fact that no single perspective is comprehensive in its endeavor to comply with demands of the Gospel. The least achievable challenge is to *do the best*, while praying that *God will do the rest*.

Jesse N. K. Mugambi
Nairobi, 27 March 2024



KEYNOTE

African Theological Education: Retrospect *and* Prospect — *An Anglophone Perspective*¹

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Abstract

Christian theological thinking and vocation has a long and illustrious history on the African continent, dating back to prominent theologians in Roman North Africa and Egypt. To appraise the *prospects* of theological education in Africa against its complicated and fraught background, I will discuss two issues of primary importance: 1) the need for theological education (programs, research, and institutions) to deeply engage African realities and context; and 2) why overcoming the debilitating effects of captivity to the Western theological/intellectual tradition will be Africa's greatest gift to the global church. These issues are *primary* because they will largely define or determine the prospects of African theological education for the next generation and beyond.

Résumé

« L'enseignement théologique africain : Rétrospective et perspectives — Une perspective anglophone »

La pensée et la vocation théologiques chrétiennes ont une longue et illustre histoire sur le continent africain, qui remonte à d'éminents théologiens de l'Afrique du Nord romaine et de l'Égypte. Pour évaluer les perspectives de l'enseignement théologique en Afrique dans ce contexte compliqué et difficile, j'aborderai deux questions de première importance : 1) la nécessité pour l'enseignement théologique (programmes, recherche et institutions) de s'engager profondément dans les réalités et le contexte africains ; et 2) la raison pour laquelle surmonter les effets débilissants de la captivité à l'égard de la tradition théologique/intellectuelle occidentale sera le plus grand don de l'Afrique à l'Église mondiale. Ces questions sont primordiales car elles définiront

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as a keynote address on 26 September 2023 at ACTEA's General Assembly (25–29 September 2023) in Nairobi, Kenya.

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ou détermineront en grande partie les perspectives de l'enseignement théologique africain pour la prochaine génération et au-delà.

Resumo

“Educação Teológica Africana: Retrospectiva e Perspectiva — Um ponto de visita anglófono”

O pensamento e a vocação teológicos cristãos têm uma longa e ilustre história no continente africano, que remonta a teólogos proeminentes do Norte de África romano e do Egípto. Para avaliar as perspectivas da educação teológica em África, tendo em conta o seu contexto complicado e cheio de problemas, discutirei duas questões de importância primordial: 1) a necessidade de a educação teológica (programas, pesquisa e instituições) se envolver profundamente nas realidades e no contexto africanos; e 2) a razão pela qual a superação dos efeitos debilitantes do cativeiro da tradição teológica/intelectual ocidental será a maior dádiva de África à igreja global. Estas questões são primordiais porque, em grande medida, definirão ou determinarão as perspectivas da educação teológica africana para a próxima geração e para além dela.

Keywords

Western missions, Fourah Bay College, Western intellectual tradition, reformation, curriculum, global, colonial, Christian missions, black Atlantic, missionary schools, transatlantic, African church, indigenous, higher education, religion, context

Mots-clés

missions occidentales, Fourah Bay College, tradition intellectuelle occidentale, réforme, programme d'études, global, colonial, missions chrétiennes, Atlantique noir, écoles missionnaires, transatlantique, église africaine, indigène, enseignement supérieur, religion, contexte

Palavras-chave

Missões orientações, a Faculdade Fourah Bay, tradição intelectual do oriente, reformação, currículo, global, colonial, missões cristãs, Atlântica preta, escolas missionárias, transatlântico, igreja africana, indígena, educação do nível superior, religião, contexto

1. In Retrospect: A Journey of a Thousand Steps

Even the most cursory assessment confirms that Christian theological thinking and vocation has a long and illustrious history on the African continent. This history goes all the way back to the very beginnings of the Christian movement, to the large number of prominent theologians of the early church nurtured on African soil; these include Tertullian (160–240), Athanasius

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(c. 296 – 373), Origen (c. 185 – c. 253), Augustine (254–430), and others. These individuals founded theological institutions, established communities of Christian scholarship, and shaped theological enterprise — with an impact well beyond the Roman world. I often have to remind my own students that Augustine of Hippo was of African ancestry and that he made his towering theological contributions to the Church precisely *as* an African bishop wrestling with African problems. But the story of theology and religious education on the sub-continent² dates to the early nineteenth century and this process could be summarized with three broad observations from that colonial era.

a. African Agency: The Indispensability of the African Contribution

For more than a century and a half — from about 1800 — formal education in tropical Africa was primarily the domain of European missionary operations, especially in British colonies. By the early twentieth century, Western missions supplied at least 90% of all schools — from primary up to the tertiary level — in British colonies.³ The widespread acknowledgment of the role of Western missions in the building and expansion of schools often leads to the faulty assumption that the rise of education in Anglophone Africa depended entirely on foreign funds and European personnel.⁴ This is inaccurate. In fact, most of the work — of teaching and administrative leadership — in African schools was undertaken by Africans, not by foreign missionaries.⁵ Meaning that the growth of schools in colonial Africa was an African endeavor — indeed, some schools were founded by Africans themselves — not to mention that the lion’s share of the funding was local, as operational costs were primarily borne by African converts.⁶

So, in *retrospect*, like the establishment and spread of Christianity in (colonial) Africa, “mission school expansion was more of an African, rather than

² I.e., sub-Saharan Africa excluding Ethiopia and Eritrea.

³ Brian Stanley, “Twentieth Century Christianity: A Perspective from the History of Missions,” 65.

⁴ Ewout Frankema, “The Origins of Formal Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Was British Rule More Benign?” 340; Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, 349.

⁵ The first grammar school established on the continent (in 1845) by the Church Missionary Society had an African tutor from the beginning; see Jehu J. Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context*, 66–68.

⁶ Frankema, “The Origins of Formal Education in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 341. The Sierra Leone Grammar School, for instance (the first in Africa), became self-sufficient — i.e., free from mission support — within two decades after it was founded; Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, 237, 327.

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a Western undertaking.”⁷ Both were more of an African, rather than a Western, undertaking. African contribution and agency were vital for the educational production that boosted the growth of the African church. And this recognition is especially crucial at a time when severe shortage of human and material resources is one of the most conspicuous blights on the African theological education landscape.

b. Theology in Service to the Church

Sierra Leone, my country of birth and home to the first Christian settlement established by Protestant missions on the continent, epitomized the intimate link between mission and education — including theological education — in British colonial Africa. By the 1820s, there were more African Christians in Sierra Leone than the rest of the subcontinent put together. By the mid nineteenth century, the level of school enrollment in this small British colony was the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, the percentage of children in school in Sierra Leone was higher than the case in England at the time.

Sierra Leone became home to earliest center of theological education in tropical Africa. It was here that Fourah Bay College (FBC), which started life as an institution for advanced technical training and religious education in 1827, was established. FBC had a troubled existence but became a training center for African clergy and African teachers, and supplied a significant number of the African agents who became missionaries in West Africa and beyond. It also functioned as an important linguistic center where the Bible was translated into various African languages and, by the 1870s, was offering degrees in Arts and Divinity.



Seal of Fourah Bay
College

FBC exemplified in two ways the transformation potential of theological training when programs combine academic excellence with service to the Church. First and foremost, the institution was designed as an instrument of local empowerment, built on the assumption that African students “could and should attain learning that met the same standards as their English sponsors.”⁸ For much of the nineteenth century, FBC was the premier breeding ground of Africans in church and society whose intellectual stature and accomplishments exposed the myth of white supremacy.

⁷ Frankema, “The Origins of Formal Education in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 341. He notes that “[between] 1903 and 1925, seven out of eight official staff members in the Protestant missions were African,” 340.

⁸ Joel A. Carpenter, “To Be Agents of a Life-Giving Transformation: Christian Higher Education in Africa with Response,” 4.

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There are many examples of these individuals. Perhaps the best known is Bishop Ajayi Crowther (c. 1809–1891), the preeminent African Christian of the nineteenth century and a product of FBC, who so impressed a Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge that the professor’s doubts about the mental capacity of the “Negro” were demolished.⁹ There was also James Africanus Horton (1835–1883). He took on the name *Africanus* long before we started talking about decolonizing religion or the curricula. After graduating from FBC, he became the first African graduate of Edinburgh University, qualified as a medical doctor at the age of twenty-four, and became a leading champion of African self-government. Institutions of higher education like Fourah Bay College reflected a belief in African potential and demonstrated the indispensability of African gifts and contributions for the building of the African Church.

Second, FBC benefitted from the *transatlantic/global* currents — cultural and intellectual — of which European missions were only a part. This made it a potent site of innovation and social transformation beyond European assumptions. Among other things, it appointed its first black principal in Rev. Edward Jones (180–1865), a leading black Christian who had emigrated from emigrated from South Carolina. As a leading black educator, Jones exercised profound influence on the first generation of African pastors who took their place alongside (and eventually replaced) European missionaries in positions of leadership in the Anglican church in West Africa.¹⁰ As Andrew Walls once observed, we often forget that it was in the churches that “Africans first took leadership and managed modern institutions before such experience was widely accessible elsewhere in the colonial state.”¹¹

c. Theological Education, Globalization, and Liberation

By the early twentieth century, the British empire included more than a quarter of the world’s population and claimed more colonies on the African continent than any other European power. The collusion between Christian missions and British empire-building in Africa is a historical fact. But more relevant is the fact that missionary monopoly of education served both the cause of mission and the needs of empire. Throughout colonial Africa, Western education was the primary tool for the spread of European models and cultural values. Much critique has focused on the corrosive impact of this process, in which Christian missions played a leading role, on African cultures. But it also helped to embed African churches and societies more fully within the global

⁹ Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop: Samuel Adjai Crowther* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 71.

¹⁰ Jehu J. Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context*, 96–103.

¹¹ Andrew F. Walls, “Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect,” 106.

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order. The unprecedented transformation of African societies by these Western projects cannot be denied. To this day, the notion that African Christianity is a product of colonial imposition, and a pale imitation of Western forms, remains surprisingly widespread. But it is important to note that Africans usually converted to Christianity for *African* reasons, and that the vast majority of Africans (in the colonial era) had only minimal exposure to a white missionary.¹²

More to the point, the extensive transatlantic movements and ideological streams associated with black Christians of the diaspora were arguably more decisive in the beginning; a focus on Western initiatives tends to obscure this important fact. Indeed, in retrospect, this black Atlantic movement was crucial for the foundation of the African Church and the formation of Christianity as an African religion.¹³ It also contributed immensely to African theological training. Black Christian emigrants (from the US) not only established the earliest churches still in existence on the sub-continent today,¹⁴ many were also leading educators who led the earliest calls for African churches shaped by indigenous resources and compatible with the African cultural heritage.¹⁵ This also included calls in 1874 (a century and a half ago) for the establishment of an African University in West Africa.¹⁶ A similar impact emerged in South Africa where, in addition to the establishment of training institutions for African leaders and communities, black Christians in African church movements were effective in subverting white control in churches. So much so that the British colonial authorities (in South Africa) eventually placed travel bans on black Americans in the early twentieth century.¹⁷ These transatlantic alliances and interactions between Africans and black American leaders — which lasted into the twentieth century — impacted theological training and ministry in important ways and provide crucial and interesting lessons for our present context.

2. Theological Education in the Midst of Historic Change

This retrospective view of African theological education demonstrated that

¹² Richard Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, 65.

¹³ E.g., see Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877–1900*.

¹⁴ See Sylvia M. Jacobs, “The Historical Role of Afro-Americans in American Missionary Efforts in Africa,” 17.

¹⁵ Including Edward Jones (1807–1865) in Sierra Leone, Alexander Crummell (1819–1898), a prominent black missionary and educator in Liberia, and Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912) of Liberia, whose long and distinguished career that encompassed the roles of Presbyterian clergyman, educator, diplomat, and statesman.

¹⁶ Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission*, 157, 168–169.

¹⁷ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 187–189.

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not even the travails and predicaments of colonialism neutralized the impact and contribution of African agents and elements. In my view, three historic developments in the final decades of the twentieth century are critical for our evaluation of theological education in Africa today.

a. The End of Colonial Rule: The Boom (and Bust?) in Higher Education

By the 1950s, graduates from mission schools and Christian institutions of higher education increasingly monopolized employment in the modern sectors and urban centers of the colonial state. Many of the political leaders who emerged at the dawn of the post-colonial African state had received a Christian education. With political independence, the story of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa changed even more dramatically.¹⁸ In the early 1960s, there were only 41 institutions of higher education (with 16,500 students) “in all of Africa.”¹⁹ By 2010, there were 5.2 million students enrolled in higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa—the vast majority of which were government-run. But the political turmoil and unrelenting socio-economic crises afflicting many African nations occasioned severe cuts in education funding at all levels. By the 1990s, writes Carpenter, “even the finest African universities were in crisis,”²⁰ at a time when unprecedented growth in secondary education was generating a massive and growing demand for tertiary education.

b. The Multiplicity and Diversity of Theological Training

All this had far-reaching implications for African theological training institutions and initiatives which now operate in an environment in which governments have asserted greater control of the resources of higher education and increasingly imposed regulations and policies designed to maximize enrollment and contribution to national development. By 2017, there were close to 1,500 (estimated 1,468) pastoral programs and theological schools across Africa — up from less than 100 (perhaps 70 to 80) in 1950.²¹ From the 1980s, also, there has been a significant rise in the number of private Christian universities on the continent — many founded by Pentecostal-Charismatic ministries. By 1999 there were thirty-one private Christian institutions in Nigeria and seventeen in Kenya. But this expansion lags well behind the extraordinary demand.

¹⁸ Few have tracked these developments more insightfully than Joel A. Carpenter. Among his writings, see “New Evangelical Universities: Cogs in World System, or Players in a New Game?,” “To Be Agents of a Life-Giving Transformation: Christian Higher Education in Africa;” and “Christian Universities Grow in Africa.”

¹⁹ Carpenter, “New Evangelical Universities,” 5.

²⁰ Carpenter, “Christian Universities Grow in Africa,” 25.

²¹ Carpenter, “Christian Universities Grow in Africa,” 25–26

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c. *Africa's Emergence as a Heartland of Global Christianity*

However, few factors in recent decades have had a greater impact on theological education and training in Africa than the exponential growth of African Christianity. The basic facts are now a commonplace. Christianity has emerged as the largest religion in Africa, and its rate of growth in the sub-continent over the past century is also unparalleled in the history of the faith. Between 1970 and 2000, “every Christian family grew faster in Africa than in other continents”²² and, by 2010, the share of the population that is Christian in sub-Saharan Africa had climbed from 9% (in 1910) to 63%.²³ By one estimate, the continent now accounts for an estimated 25% of the world’s Christians—compared to 11% in North America.²⁴ Alas, the unparalleled growth in Christian churches, movements, and communities completely outpaced theological training resources. There are few areas of more urgent need within African Christianity than resources for theological training, reflection, and engagement.

The situation reflects a daunting paradox in African theological education. Sizeable expansion of theological institutions and programs, coupled with a significant increase in academic vitality and theological production by leading African theologians for two generations, is juxtaposed with the painful deficits such that theological education in Africa remains in a state of perennial crises and disarray, with few bright spots.²⁵ A state of affairs pithily, if somewhat unkindly, summarized by the common view that the Africa Church is “a giant standing on the ‘clay legs’ of its” theological education institutions.²⁶

3. The Case for Reformation

There is no shortage of diagnostic analysis. But recent assessments have extended the conversation beyond the myriad socio-economic handicaps that perpetually undermine academic enterprise and institution building to new focus on the *intrinsic deficiencies* within training programs and academic structures themselves, with regards curricula, educational vision, methodologies, contextual relevance, conceptualization, etc. This shift of perspective is vital for a meaningful assessment of the *prospects* facing African theological education. But the endemic nature of the problem and the seriousness of the crisis means that a reformation of African theological

²² Gina A. Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World's Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe*, 7.

²³ Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population*, 10.

²⁴ Zurlo, *Global Christianity*, 3.

²⁵ See Christopher D. Howles, “A Giant on Clay Legs? African Theological Education and the Formation of Missiocentric, Missionary-Sending Church Leaders.”

²⁶ Christopher D. Howles, “A Giant on Clay Legs?,” 5.

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education is needed for the prospects of theological education in Africa to alter significantly. In this regard, *two interrelated areas need urgent attention.*

a. *The Disconnect from African Realities*

The strength and gravity of this issue is better demonstrated than described. The three brief accounts which follow — all related to the disease outbreaks — powerfully illustrate the predicament in need of attention.

Narrative 1

In 1918, the influenza pandemic — the deadliest in history (at that point) — infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide, roughly one-third of the planet's population. By the time it subsided, it had claimed an estimated 20-50 million victims.²⁷ It is not well known that sub-Saharan Africa “suffered the highest average mortality rate of any continent in the pandemic.” Some 2.4 million people (nearly 2% of the continent's population) died within 6 months.²⁸

Those readers familiar with the history of African Christianity will recall that the ravages of the pandemic pushed traditional societies to breaking point and transformed the religious landscape. Between 1918 and 1921, a wave of new religious movements spontaneously emerged in different parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The dynamism, popularity and rapid growth of these movements astounded colonial authorities and took existing Christian denominations by surprise. Most important for our purposes, there is scant indication that these prophet-healing movements — or African Independent Churches, as they became known — received any attention in theological institutions or programs. Even though they demonstrated the potent interconnection between disease epidemics and religiosity in African societies. Serious academic or theological examination of their significance came much later, in the 1960s; and initially from European, not African, scholars.²⁹ Yet, by the 1980s, adherents of these AIC churches represented 12% of the total African Christian population.³⁰

²⁷ History.com editors, “Spanish Flu.”

²⁸ Howard Phillips, “Influenza Pandemic (Africa).” Phillips records that the “some 50 million” in Africa who died “were disproportionately those aged between eighteen and forty.”

²⁹ E.g., Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets of South Africa* (1948); Frederick Burkewood Welbourn, *East African Rebels: A Study of Some Independent Churches* (1961); Frederick Burkewood Welbourn and Bethwell A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home: A Study of Two Independent Churches in Western Kenya* (1966); and Harold W. Turner's 2-volume *History of an African Independent Church* (1967).

³⁰ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, 7.

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Narrative 2

Between 1980 and 2000, the HIV/AIDS virus affected 40 million people worldwide and claimed at least 22 million lives.³¹ Africa, which emerged as the epicenter of the epidemic, accounted for 71% of infections.³² Yet, African theologians and biblical scholars in schools and universities throughout the continent who were only too eager to engage Western thought and remained wedded to Western theological discourse, demonstrated scant awareness of the fact that the devastation crises unfolding around them called for urgent theological reflection. With rare exception, those tasked with training church leaders and preparing a new generation for ministry in the African context and remained “theologically” disengaged from the realities around then. This was even more astounding given the fact that many of these same African theological educators lived among communities devastated by the pandemic and witnessed firsthand how the disease impacted students in their classrooms. Yet their teaching, publications, research agenda and theological reflections remained unchanged.

Narrative 3

In 2013, the Ebola outbreak, one of the deadliest disease epidemics in recent memory, began in a small village in Guinea and spread to neighboring Sierra Leone and Liberia within months.³³ By 2016, the disease had spread to 7 more countries. It ultimately caused 11,325 deaths and rendered an estimated 30,000 children orphans.

More so than any disease epidemic on the continent, the Ebola outbreak was profoundly intertwined with religious life. Western public health experts were forced to concede the limitations of scientific solutions alone. Cultural practices (including normal forms of greeting), the prevalence of religious gathering, and spiritual practices all conspired to spread the disease. Most important, since victims were more contagious when dead than alive, burial practices and rituals became major sources of contagion. In essence, it was foolhardy to approach the catastrophe solely with scientific tools or medical resources. Successful containment required cultural intelligence, understanding of religious beliefs, and close collaboration with local religious authorities.

Once again, amid a situation which raised profound religious questions and called for urgent theological engagement, trained theologians and religious specialists on the continent were mainly silent. In the face of public health crises,

³¹ Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “World Christianity 2023: A Gendered Approach,” 3.

³² As of 2018, Africa still accounted for two-thirds of new HIV infections. Ayesha B. M. Kharsany and Quarraisha A. Karim, “HIV Infection and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa: Current Status, Challenges and Opportunities.”

³³ “2014–2016 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa.”

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social upheaval, and immense suffering, the theological educators and programs purportedly designed to equip pastors and religious leaders for ministry in the African context were missing in action. There was little to demonstrate that these programs or systems of theological training functioned as vital source for the critical tools or resources that African churches and religious communities needed in their effort to cope with the unfolding calamity — notably one in which religious practice and spiritual views were implicated.

There can be no question that disease epidemics invariably bring to the fore pressing issues and questions within religious communities and the wider society which invite urgent theological responses. These include agonizing questions related to human suffering, healing and wholeness, the links between entrenched social injustice and public catastrophe, and even how the African understanding of evil can both inform a biblical spirituality and also generate bad theology with real-world effects.³⁴

The silence and disengagement manifest throughout the theological education landscape made rare instances of meaningful theological response particularly evocative and resounding. One such example was Botswanan biblical studies scholar Musa Dube, for whom experiencing the devastation of the HIV epidemic precipitated a breakthrough in her theological calling and a reorientation of her theological commitments. In her book, *The HIV & AIDS Bible* (2008), she tells the story of her transformation from “being exclusively academic” to becoming a public theologian fully engaged with the community beyond the academy. She was also equally forthcoming about the failure of the African theological establishment to respond. As she put it,

*For me what is tragic is not that . . . HIV/AIDS has cruelly presented us with a framed picture of our shattered dreams, nor that HIV/AIDS has transformed our future into a raging river we must cross without a bridge. Rather what I find tragic is that [theologians and religious studies scholars] . . . are stunned and stoned into silence.*³⁵

Ultimately, this critique of theological “silence” is not just about public health calamities. It is rather a commentary on theological disengagement with the Africa context generally. And the issue extends beyond public health calamities. In addition to outbreaks of deadly disease, African societies are routinely afflicted by other deadly epidemics (of political violence, economic hardship, political oppression, injustice, corruption, lawlessness, etc.) that also cry out for deep theological application.

³⁴ Such bad theology includes ideas that link catastrophe to divine judgement or insist that faith confers immunity to infection. See Christo Greyling, “A Discussion with Christo Greyling, Director of Faith Partnerships for Development at World Vision.”

³⁵ Musa W. Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays*, 34; emphasis added.

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b. Captivity to the Western Intellectual Tradition

There are many possible explanations as to why African theological education and research is poorly engaged with African realities. Throughout the continent, the design and structure of theological programs and curricula content are faithful recreations/pale imitations of Western forms. This state of affairs reflects the endurance of colonial designs, despite the post-independent transitions mentioned above, as well as the inequities of economic globalization. But, more crucially, it is sustained and reinforced by a steady stream of African theologians and scholars who are trained in the West or whose education is Western based.³⁶ These factors have served to entrench captivity to the Western intellectual tradition in African theological institutions/centers and theological program at all levels. Sadly, even Western scholars have noticed the pervasive tendency for African theologians to overlook the critical issues of their own contexts. In 2008, the editors of the *Global Dictionary of Theology* expressed surprised at

the number of scholars from the Global South who tended to do theology in the manner of their Northern teachers . . . [that] entries drafted by theologians from Asia, Africa, and Latin America did not differ significantly from entries that would have been written by their European or North American counterparts This situation raised the critical question: who is going to do authentically Asian, African or Hispanic theology if not scholars from those particular locations . . . ? It is clear that the theological academy has some way to go in educating a generation of theologians who will take their contexts seriously.³⁷

Fifteen years (and a generation?) later, those expecting to see changes across the African theological landscape that reflect a constructive response to this tacit rebuke will be disappointed. As Christopher Howles observed recently, “theological education [has been] replicated across Africa in the image of North Atlantic forms, methods, epistemologies, and theologies, leaving them fragmented and dis-integrated, deprived of well-functioning contextualized theological traditions.”³⁸ Musa Dube, another vocal critic of African theological education, puts it more forcefully:

One finds that in many African institutions, the theological formation of students is based on western theology — *a theology*

³⁶ Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible*, 42.

³⁷ William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Introduction,” *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, xi.

³⁸ Howles, “A Giant on Clay Legs?,” 8.

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that . . . has no immediate, obvious, or direct relevance for the African context . . .

Such formation has unfortunately given rise to a *socially divorced theological education*, an educational consciousness that hardly has anything to say about the presence, activity, and will of God in particular African contexts. Such theological formation has often produced stillborn church leaders and scholars, whose *theological voice is nonexistent*.³⁹

Such blunt insider assessments are sobering. To take them seriously is to understand why the call for reformation is long overdue. Fortunately, the shoots of reform are already manifest in notable instances of institutional innovation and academic scholarship. In the case of the former, the most obvious and outstanding example is the Accra-based *Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, & Culture* (ACI) founded in 1998 by eminent African theologian, Kwame Bediako (1945–2008). ACI’s program of theological education was built from scratch with the specific aim of equipping students for ministry and deep engagement in the African context, in a way that fosters research freed from captivity to Western norms and theological models.⁴⁰ With close to 800 graduates, ACI reflects a vision that shines brightly on the African theological education landscape because of its pioneering quality. Additionally, in the past 4–5 decades, Africa has produced many outstanding theologians who have challenged dominant Western norms (often enshrined in the myth of normativity), pioneered new concepts/constructs that have added powerful intellectual currents to the global discourse, and championed fresh approaches that celebrated the African heritage and experience.

Regrettably, the pioneering efforts of a relatively tiny number of theological programs and African scholars (at home and abroad) accentuate rather than ameliorate the extent and severity of the problem. In fact, institutions and scholars on the frontiers of change and innovation are the first to acknowledge the formidable nature of the challenge. The truth of the matter is that our captivity to the Western intellectual tradition is debilitating and suffocating. Western theological education has great value and can be adapted to the needs of Christian communities globally. But Western “systematic” theology, like any other body of theological discourse, is heavily contextual and ethnocentric.⁴¹ It

³⁹ Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible*, 42–43; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ For the story of Bediako’s founding of ACI, see Joel A. Carpenter, “Kwame Bediako, Promoter of African Christian Thought,” pages 100–120 in this issue. — *the editors*

⁴¹ Even if the nature and objectives of Western theological education are constantly debated — see Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “World Christianity 2023: A Gendered Approach.”

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is designed to promote knowledge of (and expertise in) issues or topics pertaining to the Western world — along with the language requirements.

Ending captivity to Western norms must start with the recognition that, adopted wholesale and uncritically, Western-oriented training forestalls meaningful theological exploration in Africa and undermines the research agenda needed to refresh theological training and the theological curriculum. The nature and extent of the restructuring and reconceptualization require can be paralyzing. But some aspects are more obvious than others. Two are worth mentioning. First, the deep separation between the disciplines of theology and religious studies that prevails in Western institutions has no place within African theological education. Second, because Western theological training is inextricably tied to the discipline of philosophy, its approach is heavily textual and — like philosophy — lines of inquiry are typically focused on the authority of certain texts.⁴² In both cases, the Western paradigm leaves African theologians with a significant handicap for research in African contexts, because training precludes the scientific study of human society and engagement with lived religion. In essence, new approaches require significant methodological reorientation.

It is important to emphasize that much of the material that informs African theological reflection (and religious engagement) is embedded in social, economic, and political realities. From an African perspective, theological reflection just for its own sake, removed from the travails and demands of human society or inattentive to rapidly changing realities, is an absurdity. Over decades ago, South African missiologist David Bosch explained that one of the most exciting things about African theology is that it must be done on the “frontiers.” He explained that

Africans are doing theology because they are compelled to. They are doing theology on the *frontiers*, where there are many dangers, where ambushes await one and where one can easily take a wrong turn. It is, however, precisely because of these *dangers* that their theologizing is so exciting and so worthwhile.⁴³

Bosch’s assessment remains true. Doing theology in African contexts is not for the faith-hearted or for anyone content to stay at a safe distance. It requires commitment to Bulawayo, not Berlin! It requires commitment to Nairobi, not New York; commitment to Accra, not Atlanta.⁴⁴ It calls for attention to the complex and volatile developments that shape and transform African societies.

⁴² Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, “World Christianity 2023: A Gendered Approach,” 13.

⁴³ David J. Bosch, “Missionary Theology in Africa,” 16; emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Bulawayo is Zambia’s second largest city; Nairobi is the capital and largest city of Kenya; Accra is the capital and largest city of Ghana; Berlin is the capital and largest city of Germany; New York is the largest city in the USA; Atlanta, Georgia, USA is home to the influential Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). — *the editors*

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To be effective, in other words, African theology (broadly understood) must be socially conscious, radically innovative, and publicly engaged. This demands interdisciplinary approaches, methods, and strategies; and for many theological training institutions, this will mean building programs from scratch — as ACI has successfully done.

My call for *reformation* reflects the fact that the prospects for theological education in Africa are inextricably tied to formidable predicaments that must be confronted and overcome. It is also based on the recognition that African Christianity or the African Church finds itself in a historical moment of global significance. Over 20 years ago, my mentor (the late Andrew Walls), made the remarkable claim that “anyone who wishes to undertake serious study of Christianity these days needs to know something of Africa.”⁴⁵ This can be interpreted in a number of ways. At the very least, it conveys the provocative insight that African Christianity matters greatly — (in global financial parlance) it is too big to fail! — and that the nature and quality of African theological production will increasingly have great implications for the worldwide church.

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⁴⁵ Andrew F. Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again: Reconceiving the Study of Christian History,” 106.

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KEYNOTE

African Theological Education: *Retrospect and Prospect — A Francophone Perspective*¹

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Abstract

Christian Theological Education in Francophone Africa began with the arrival of Western missionaries over 100 years ago. From a non-formal format, it developed throughout the years to reach university level. This presentation examines the stages of this development of Theological Education and addresses some of the challenges facing Theological Education in Francophone Africa. It is the belief of the writer of this paper Theological Education plays an essential part in the strengthening of Christianity in this region and its future lies not in the proliferation of theological institutions but in the join efforts of all the actors to empower the church in Francophone Africa.

Résumé

L'enseignement théologique chrétien en Afrique francophone a commencé avec l'arrivée des missionnaires occidentaux il y a plus de 100 ans. D'un format non formel, il s'est développé au fil des ans pour atteindre le niveau universitaire. Cette présentation examine les étapes de ce développement et aborde certains des défis auxquels l'enseignement théologique est confronté en Afrique francophone. L'auteur de cet article est convaincu que la formation théologique joue un rôle essentiel dans l'enracinement du christianisme dans cette région et que son avenir ne réside pas dans la prolifération des institutions théologiques, mais dans les efforts conjoints de tous les acteurs pour renforcer l'Église en Afrique francophone.

¹ This was the third keynote address delivered at the inaugural General Assembly of the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA, founded in 1976), held 25–29 September 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Resumo

A educação teológica cristã na África francófona começou com a chegada dos missionários ocidentais há mais de 100 anos. De um formato não formal, desenvolveu-se ao longo dos anos até atingir o nível universitário. Esta apresentação examina as etapas deste desenvolvimento da Educação Teológica e aborda alguns dos desafios que a Educação Teológica enfrenta na África Francófona. É convicção do autor deste documento que a Educação Teológica desempenha um papel essencial no fortalecimento do Cristianismo nesta região e que o seu futuro não reside na proliferação de instituições teológicas, mas na união de esforços de todos os actores para capacitar a igreja na África Francófona.

Keywords

Theological Education, Non-formal and Formal Theological Education, Francophone Africa, Missions, Missionaries

Mots-clés

Enseignement théologique, enseignement théologique non formel et formel, Afrique francophone, Associations, Missions, Missionnaires

Palavras-chave

Educação Teológica, Educação Teológica Não Formal e Formal, África Francófona, Missões, Missionários

Introduction

Discussing theological education in Francophone Africa is a complex task, given the vastness of the continent and the diversity of its regions and the plurality of experiences. The region called Francophone Africa (FA) comprises former French colonies where French is the official language and the language in which formal education is carried out. There are eleven countries officially recognized as Francophone. Eight of these are in West Africa: **Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo**. Three are in Central Africa: **Congo** (the Republic of the Congo or Congo-Brazzaville), **Gabon**, and the **DRC** (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Thirteen other countries where French is one among other official languages (or is otherwise widely spoken as a second language) include: **Burundi, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritania, Rwanda, Chad, Tunisia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles**.² The

² “88 États et gouvernements.” The population of these 26 countries out of the 54 countries in Africa (i.e., nearly half) was estimated at 442 million in 2020 out of a total

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encounter between Christianity and the different countries of FA took place at different times; the educational systems inherited from the different colonial empires or imposed by them were also different. Though it is possible to isolate common features related to history, culture, religion, and education, the reality is that Africa is not a monolithic entity, and FA is no exception. The diversity in theological education is reflected in the variety of theological institutions and theological initiatives across the region.

Theological Education (TE) in Francophone Africa, initiated by Western missionaries, has developed over the last 100 years from non-formal theological education to university-level theological education. How did this development take place? How did we get to where we are today? What are some of the challenges facing Theological Education in Francophone Africa today? How can these challenges be met? These are the questions this paper seeks to answer.

In recent years, the number of TE providers and agencies have considerably increased in FA. There is a momentum in theological education. Churches, Theological Education Institutions, and their partners have become aware of the central role that theological education plays in the rooting and growth of Christianity in their region and have decided to join hands to transcend their individual weaknesses by gathering together in regional associations.³ It is argued that the future of theological education in Francophone Africa lies in part in strengthening these associations that are seeking to empower Theological Education Institutions in areas such as curriculum development and governance issues, encourage teacher exchange and research, and oversee accreditation and faculty promotion. In this presentation I will focus on Protestant and Evangelical Theological Institutions whose history and contributions are less known.

I have identified three phases in the development of theological education in FA, beginning from the early 1900s to the present day. The first stage is the infancy of theological education, followed by a period of formalization, and the present state is proprietorship in theological education. Let me start with a brief historical survey that shows the chronology of the arrival of missionaries in this part of Africa (See Table 1).⁴

African population of 1.3 billion (i.e., 33.0% of the African population) and is projected to reach between 845 and 891 million in 2050 (i.e., 34.0% to 34.8% of the African population); “Afrique Francophone.” Africa’s population is estimated at 1,452 billion in 2023; “Population of continents.”

³ E.g., ASTHEOL, CITAF and RUPA; see section 2, “Opportunities,” below.

⁴ While Christianity has been present in Africa since the first five centuries of the Christian era and during the first wave of the evangelization of the continent in the 15th century, the main focus of my study is on the missionary movements of the second half of the 19th century to the present day. For a history of Christianity in Africa, see

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A Brief Historical Overview

1. During the second half of the 19th century, Western missionaries were established on the coastal territories under French, British, or German rule in the Guinea Gulf.
2. The Christianization of Africa, on the Protestant side, was achieved through a great diversity of missionary organizations.
3. Anglo-Saxon missionary societies dominate the scene. Among eighteen missionary societies I have identified, only two originated from France.

These missionaries were Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, etc. The diversity of Mission agencies matched the diversity of doctrinal positions.⁵ Needless to say that the churches which grew out of the missionaries' work were in turn characterised by a great doctrinal diversity, reflecting the doctrinal diversity within Protestantism.

In French West Africa (FWA),⁶ Mission agencies realized that they needed to coordinate their efforts in order to be more efficient. They set up the *Fédération Protestante de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* ('Protestant Council of French West Africa') in April 1945.⁷ In 1950 this became the *Fédération Protestante d'AOF*, then the *Fédération Évangélique de l'Ouest Africain* in June 1959. For the first time, African representatives would be allowed to participate in the council alongside Western missionaries. In June 1960, the Federation broke up. It was swept along by the political changes in the French colonies. It was dissolved after the French West African territories voted overwhelmingly in favour of the 1958 referendum to join the Franco-African Community. The Protestant Federation thus disappeared with the dissolution of the FWA. In its place, national Federations of Missions and Churches came into being.⁸

I conclude from this brief historical survey by pointing out that the unity of the Missionary Agencies was short-lived, swept away by the political circumstances of the time. It was unable to adapt to the socio-political changes

especially Jean Koulagna, *Le christianisme dans l'histoire de l'Afrique*, and also Mark Shaw and Wanjiru M. Gitau, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*.

⁵ The Ivorian historian Célestin Kouassi makes a similar observation on eight Protestant missions in French West Africa (from 1842 to 1924) whose activities he analyzed; *Tous un comme nous : Diversité et unité d'action du Protestantisme en Afrique Occidentale Française (1895–1960)*, 40.

⁶ *Afrique Occidentale Française* ('French West Africa'): Such was the name given to all the French colonies in West Africa.

⁷ Several meetings and discussions were held, beginning in Dabou, Côte d'Ivoire October 1943; Kouassi, *Tous un comme nous*, 66–84.

⁸ Kouassi, *Tous un comme nous*, 104–119.

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of its time. A readjustment of the Federation's missions with a view to tackling common challenges such as "Christian literature, radio broadcasting, work in national languages . . . the organisation of youth, the training of pastors . . ." could have saved it. As I turn to the history of Theological education in Francophone Africa, an important lesson we can learn from the story of the Fellowship of Mission Agencies in West Africa in the first half of the 20th century is that we must learn to adapt or we will perish.

1. The Infancy of Theological Education in Francophone Africa: Informal and Non-Formal TE, From the late 1800s to the early 1900s

Christian theological in Francophone Africa started with the missionaries who first preached the Gospel to the peoples in that region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This statement is not to say that theological endeavours began on the continent only around that time. Indeed, the vitality of African Christianity and the vigour of its scholarship are widely attested.¹⁰ But within the scope of the current exploration, it was around and shortly after the time of the Berlin Conference (November 1884 to February 1885) which enacted the Scramble for Africa that many Protestant missions first set foot on the continent. Christian theological education in French colonies developed from the time the missionaries began their endeavours. Usually, after establishing a Mission station, the missionaries would work to convert — or sometimes to merely proselytize¹¹ — the 'natives', beginning with their domestic workers (cooks and other helpers).

Andrew Scheaffer and Elie Sanon note that the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) used mission stations as bases from which they went out to evangelise in the surrounding areas.¹² This strategy was also used by other missionaries such as the Assemblies of God.¹³ But while some history of missions

⁹ Kouassi, *Tous un comme nous*, 115. According to Kouassi, the Federation's General Delegate, Georges Mabilie, encouraged the institution to move in this direction, but he was not followed.

¹⁰ Names such as Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius, Augustine, and many others come to mind. See Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*.

¹¹ On the crucial distinction between *proselytization* and *conversion*, see Andrew F. Walls, "Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church," and Joshua Robert Barron, "Conversion or Proselytization? Being Maasai, Becoming Christian."

¹² André Schaeffer and Elie Sanon, *Une mission, une Église, une vision, une histoire : Histoire de l'Église de l'Alliance Chrétienne au Burkina Faso*, 25.

¹³ *Église des Assemblées de Dieu, Soixante quinzième anniversaire des Assemblées de Dieu du Burkina Faso*, 6.

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textbooks focus on the work of missionaries, in actual historical fact the transmission of the gospel from Africans to Africans was a cooperative effort between the missionary and the locals. The role played by Africans in the spread of the gospel on the continent is attested by many. African agency was paramount in the growth of Christianity in Africa. The ‘natives’, as they were called, worked side by side with the missionaries — and sometimes on their own far beyond missionary reach — to proclaim the Good News to their families, villages, and often beyond their own borders. The contribution of these Africans in the growth of Christianity is widely documented and attested by scholars such as Lamin Sanneh, Kwame Bediako, and Tite Tiénou, to name only a few.¹⁴

Among the converts, some were selected to receive further training. These students were taught to read and write, received accelerated training, and were sent out into the field. Eventually, some of them will become pastors and or evangelists. This strategy was widespread among other Mission societies such as the Assemblies of God in Burkina Faso.¹⁵ The first type of theological training offered by the missionaries to their household staff was **informal** or **non-formal**. As it is understood today, these are types of training or education characterized by flexibility and adaptability. There is no rigid curriculum and no diploma or degree earned at the end. In all cases, the teaching resources used by the missionaries were usually limited to the Bible and to material they translated and adapted into national languages and French. In terms of results, one of the main characteristics of the products of these Mission-Station-Based Bible schools was their devotion to the Lord and their zeal for evangelisation.

Needless to say that the missionaries who were sent to Africa belonged to theological traditions which they brought with them. As a logical consequence of their allegiance to their sending organization they taught new believers according to their theological and liturgical traditions and organized the new founded churches according to their ecclesiastical structures. The theology they taught was developed in their original cultural contexts. Inspired or influenced by the *tabula rase* ideology, many pioneer missionaries considered Africans as clean slate on which the history of salvation was to be written. For most Mission agencies and their workers, the urgent task was the salvation of the souls. This explains why they focused more on evangelization and church planting than on

¹⁴ E.g., see Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*; Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*; and Tite Tiénou, “The Great Commission in Africa.”

Before the arrival of the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghanaian Methodists had established Methodist Assemblies in Aboisso, Côte d’Ivoire between 1868 and 1923; “Notre histoire.” The Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris (1860–1929), a Methodist/Episcopalian, brought the Gospel to thousands along the coast from Liberia to Côte d’Ivoire.

¹⁵ *Église des Assemblées de Dieu, Soixante quinzième anniversaire*, 6–7.

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social work. To be fair, missionaries were not indifferent to the needs of the people. In some cases they put in place relief services to meet those needs through health centres and schools.

It is important to note that most missionaries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were trained ministers and received further preparation before embarking on their missionary work, most of them did not consider higher theological education as a necessity or a priority. At most, they themselves were holders of Master of Divinity degrees. Confronted with the realities on the ground, some missionaries went on to deepen their knowledge of African cultures, either through personal research or by attending seminars. Over the years, commendable efforts have been made to adapt certain aspects of culture to the Gospel, such as songs, music, etc. Although often superficial, these contextualisation models were small steps in the right direction. Confronted with the realities on the ground, some missionaries will go on to pursue their studies and focus on some specific issues encountered on the mission fields: e.g., polygamy, witchcraft, etc.

In the particular case of French West Africa, a 1944 conference on education in French West Africa granted permission to Protestant missions to open catechism schools where learners would be taught in French.¹⁶ These schools would eventually serve as a breeding ground for the recruitment of the first French-speaking African pastors. Gradually, Mission agencies and churches would move from non-formal theological education to a more formal format with the opening of Bible schools. As for Seminaries, we will have to wait several years later before we see the first ones open.

2. The Formalization of Theological Education in Francophone Africa: Formal Theological Education: From the 1930s to the 1980s

The numerical growth of the Church and the need for Christian leaders led to the opening of the first Bible training centres for Christian leaders. Traditionally, Bible schools have always been the basis for training pastors and evangelists in Francophone Africa. The vast majority of church leaders are the product of these schools. In practice, each denomination has one or more Bible schools. Given the low level of literacy, the first Bible schools offered theological education in local languages. Later, with the increase in the number of people educated in French, theological education was offered in French. Each Bible school will characteristically follow the curriculum and the doctrinal line of the

¹⁶ Kouassi notes that the creation of schools was a recommendation of the Dabou 1943 conference which laid the foundations for the federation of missions; *Tous un comme nous*, 71. The colonial administration gave the permission to Mission Agencies to open schools in 1944 at a conference in Dakar, Senegal.

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founding mission of the denomination to which the Bible school belongs to. Unsurprisingly, the curriculum was mostly a “copy-paste” of that of the Bible schools approved by the sending Mission agencies. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the establishment of a few Bible schools in West Africa.

Observations and Analysis

1. Theological Education in local languages is still a very important part of theological education in FA. The first heads of these Bible schools and most of their teachers were missionaries.
2. There were two Levels corresponding to students’ formal education in French. Students with middle school education were put in Level 1 and students who reached high school were put in Level 2.
3. Due to lack of sufficient personnel, some schools keep levels 2 and 3 on the same campus.
4. Today, most teachers in the majority of these schools are nationals. They received their theological education from Seminaries across Africa and sometimes in the West. The leadership of most schools is in the hands of nationals.
5. To this day, the curriculum is still much like the one inherited from the missionaries.
6. Many of these schools and others are offering Bachelor’s Degrees in Theology.
7. Two Bible schools were founded as the result of an inter-church cooperation between the several churches.
 - a. IBACY was founded by churches and C&MA missions of Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, in cooperation with the UEESO church and Mission Biblique; the conservative Baptists of Côte d’Ivoire; the WEC church of Côte d’Ivoire.¹⁷
 - b. IPH was founded by the WEC churches: EPE of Burkina Faso, AEECI of Côte d’Ivoire, and churches of Ghana, Guinée, Sénégal, and the DRC.¹⁸

¹⁷ IBACY is the *Institute Biblique de l’Alliance Chrétienne de Yamoussoukro* (‘Biblical Institute of the Christian Alliance in Yamoussoukro’); Yamoussoukro is the capital of Côte d’Ivoire. UEESO is *l’Union des Églises Évangéliques Services et Œuvres* (‘the Union of Evangelical Churches Services and Works’); WEC is Worldwide Evangelisation for Christ.

¹⁸ IPH is *Institut Pastoral Hébron* in Bouaflé, Côte d’Ivoire; EPE is *Église Protestante Évangélique* (‘Evangelical Protestant Church’); AEECI is *l’Alliance de l’Église Évangélique Charismatique Internationale* (‘the International Charismatic Evangelical Church Alliance’).

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The theological task of missionaries was to translate the message of the Gospel into the new host culture. This was a daunting undertaking. Their lack familiarity with most customs led many to uncritically deem numerous aspects of African cultures as demonic or immoral and reject them. In spite of this failing, missionaries did an excellent job in most places in translating the Word of God into local languages.

Theological Education in most Bible schools before nationals took the leadership of these schools was the reflection of Theological Education as seen and done in the sending Institutions of the missionaries. As mentioned before, the curricula remained almost identical: Doctrine, Ecclesiology, Old and New Testament, Church History, Preaching, Pastoral Theology, Christology, apologetics, etc. While these subjects are important across cultures, the issue is that they are too often taught from Western perspectives. Many teachers continue to follow the old script, debating questions that are debated in the West, maybe with a touch of local flavour. There hasn't been a breakthrough regarding the curriculum. Not yet. Another major area that has not undergone much change has to do with textbooks. Bible school libraries often lack adequate resources. The resources that do exist are often outdated and most of them deal either with outdated issues or are irrelevant to African Christians. Timid changes are perceptible in Bible schools where younger teachers have received their training in Seminaries on African soil at the feet of teachers eager to put the African context and realities at the heart of their theological enterprise. This leads me to my third point.

3. The Halls of Higher Theological Education: Since 1969

Historical Overview

The history of Protestant and Evangelical seminaries and universities dates back to the eve of the formal independence of most African states. The wait lasted more than 100 years before the first seminary opened. In West Africa, the first Protestant missionaries set their feet on the continent were the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS). They arrived in Benin in 1842. In Central Africa, the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) dropped their suitcases in the DRC in 1848 and in Cameroun in 1878 (see Table 1). The first Christian University opened in 1959 in the DRC; it had a theology department. Over the last thirty years, a large number of seminaries have been opened both in West and Central Africa. This proliferation of seminaries is an interesting development in the landscape of theological education in Francophone Africa. Just a few years ago, only the so-called historic churches, that is, churches founded by Western missionaries, valued such training. Many charismatic and African Initiated Churches were rather reluctant and suspicious of theology in

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general and higher theological education to be more specific. Today all that has changed.

Francophone African theologians have been in charge of theological education for quite some years now. They are aware of their responsibilities and most of them are taking it seriously. According to data gathered through the Network of Francophone African Theologians (RTAF: *Réseau des Théologiens Africains Francophone*), which was established in September 2021 and operates through a WhatsApp group, there are approximately 60–80 Protestant/Evangelical Seminaries throughout Francophone Africa. They are owned and run by churches or by private individuals. More than a 100 people in the network claim the title of Doctor (PhD) in areas such as systematic theology, philosophy, church history, biblical studies, intercultural studies, theology and development, missiology, apologetics, Egyptology, patristic studies, liturgy, linguistic and Bible Translation, urban theology, political theology, migration, leadership, pastoral and practical theology, etc.¹⁹

While in West Africa the trigger for this movement seems to have been the creation of the *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne* (FATEAC: 'Christian Alliance Faculty of Evangelical Theology') in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1993, in Central Africa the tradition of seminaries and Christian universities dates back to 1959 with the creation of the *Université Protestante du Congo* (UPC: 'Protestant University of the Congo') in Kinshasa, DRC, though the enthusiasm of recent years has been greater. On the Evangelical side, the *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui* (FATEB), known to English speakers as Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST), can be rightly considered as the firstborn of Evangelical theological schools in Africa. This school was founded in 1977 in Central African Republic (CAR) under the impetus of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), the forefather of the current Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA).²⁰ Even so, traditionally, it is the DRC, and to some extent Cameroon, that have led the way in the field of theology, across all Christian traditions including Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals. Given the growing number of Christians in Francophone Africa and the mushrooming of African-initiated churches and ministries, these collective or individual initiatives are to be welcomed. These seminaries seek to respond to specific concerns such as urban missiology, African spirituality, etc. In a word, the reasons given by the promoters are the search for relevance, i.e., bringing theology into line with contemporary African realities.

¹⁹ RTAF administrators, WhatsApp, 6 September 2023.

²⁰ For the history of FATEB, see Jack Robinson, "Early History of Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB): FATEB's Precursors, Founding, and First Five Years, 1966–1982."

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However, this multiplicity of Bible schools and seminaries in the Francophone space presents a number of dangers: the race for diplomas, cheap training of ministers, the fragmentation and dispersion of human resources, competition between seminaries and Bible schools, etc. It's a well-known fact that poorly trained ministers mean poorly fed Christians. On the other hand, well trained and committed ministers can lead Christians to maturity and oversee healthy churches. Credible associations and reliable organisations are essential to harness forces and capitalise on the available resources in Francophone Africa. If anything, the initiatives taken in the past couple of decades demonstrate that French African theologians are laying claim of the ownership on theological education in their region. However, there are many challenges to overcome.

4. The Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education in Francophone Africa

Collaboration is the key word for the future of Theological Education in FA. Those involved in Theological Education in FA cannot afford the luxury of working in isolation. First, let's look at three major challenges facing theological education and theological educators in FA: Textbooks, curriculum, and isolation.

A. Challenges

The first challenge is the inadequacy of textbooks. It is a general fact that on the library shelves of most Bible Institutes and Evangelical seminaries in Francophone Africa, the vast majority of books are outdated and deal with subjects that are not always of interest African researchers. In many cases, the issues tackled are also far removed from the African realities experienced by ordinary African believers. Several colleagues have expressed their frustration with this situation. Sadly, for lack of appropriate resources, some Francophone teachers and researchers find themselves doing theology by proxy, discussing and debating issues that are not always relevant to African Christians.

The second challenge has to do with irrelevant curricula. A professor in an Evangelical university in Cameroun expresses his frustrations as follow:

The problem in our theological schools and seminaries in Africa is the slavish reproduction of knowledge. Instead of working to get students to produce theological knowledge, we teach them Western theological knowledge. And they get degrees up to doctorate level by showing that they have a perfect mastery of the theories that come from the West. This is why those we select to produce new knowledge only produce on the basis of the way in which they have

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been formed, shaped, or deformed by the reception (and not the construction) of previous knowledge.

Our schools of theology are founded on elitism in a pedagogical perspective of transmitting knowledge. This is the misfortune of African theologians, who are mired in “theological thrift” (a concept so dear to Jean-Marc Éla, whose memory we regret).²¹

This is quite a harsh judgment. However, the same frustration had been expressed before by others. For instance, at the colloquium marking the twentieth anniversary of the Alliance Seminary in Abidjan (FATEAC), Ahoga Augustin, a Beninese scholar observed:

We have imported everything from Western education structures. The classical or traditional cryptic literary approach remains our only approach in an oral culture context. We have been so deeply programmed that it never occurs to us to look for other approaches. Even when Western faculties innovate, we remain clinging to what we have received.²²

Another harsh criticism. Ten years earlier, Tharcisse Gatwa from Cameroon had also called for curriculum reform in theological education in Francophone Africa.²³

Although this frustration reflects the general situation in many cases, the reality today is more nuanced. Seminaries are more and more aware that the curricula inherited from Western seminaries are not suitable to the need of the Church in Africa. They are increasingly listening to the communities they serve, with a view to regularly revising their curricula. Some have already introduced subjects that would rarely be found in Western seminaries: African Traditional Religions, African Church History, etc. Courses on Anthropology, Ethnicity, and many more are tackled from African perspectives. It remains unfortunate, however, that such improvements done in one seminary are ignored in others. This brings us to the third challenge.

²¹ Albert Tedzogang, remarks in the RTAF forum, 15 September 2023; my translation. Prof. Tedzogang teaches at *l'Institut Universitaire Évangélique du Cameroun* (IUEC : ‘Evangelical University Institute of Cameroon’) in the *Faculté de Théologie et des Sciences des Religions de Ndoungue* (FTSRN: ‘Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Ndoungue’). Jean-Marc Éla (1936–2008), the well-known Cameroonian theologian, wrote on the dangers of “theological thrift” and the need for African theologians to rethink their faith in light of Africa’s contemporary realities. See Jean-Marc Éla, *Repenser la théologie africaine : le Dieu qui libère*.

²² Quoted in Rubin Pohor and Issiaka Coulibaly, *Christianisme authentique en Afrique contemporaine. Actes du Colloque International de la FATEAC*, 32.

²³ Tharcisse Gatwa, “Theological Education in Africa: What Prospects for Sharing Knowledge?”

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A *third challenge* is isolation in Theological Education. Unless theological institutions come together and join human and academic resources Francophone Africans theological contribution to the global theological discourse will continue to lag behind. Many Theological Educations lack the appropriate resources and personnel to sustain a robust theological training with the highest academic standards. Individualism and self-promotion often tend to get in the way of genuine collaboration. We must learn to be together and work together. Concerned theological educators have paved the way for us to follow.

B. Opportunities

Having identified some challenges, let's look now at some opportunities. Efforts are already underway to overcome these challenges and should be encouraged. I will briefly mention three major players in Theological Education in Francophone Africa.²⁴ These are associations or networks of theological schools in Central and West Africa:

- *L'Association des Institutions d'Enseignement Théologiques d'Afrique Centrale* (ASTHEOL; 'The Association of Theological Teaching Institutions of Central Africa');
- *Le Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophones* (CITAF; 'The Council of Theological Institutions of French-speaking Africa');
- *Le Réseau des Universités Protestantes d'Afrique* (RUPA; 'The Network of Protestant Universities in Africa').

ASTHEOL

The Association of Theological Teaching Institutions of Central and West Africa (ASTHEOL: *Association des Institutions de Formation Théologique d'Afrique Centrale et Occidentale*) has existed since the 1970s.²⁵ It has two branches and operates mainly under the aegis of the Conference of Theological Institutions of Africa (CITA). ASTHEOL-Centre has its headquarters in Kinshasa, DRC. ASTHEOL-Centre and West has its headquarters in Yaoundé in Cameroon and brings together theological institutions in Congo-Brazzaville,

²⁴ More recently, ACTEA — the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa, or *Association pour l'Éducation Théologique Chrétienne en Afrique* for francophone regions and *Associação para a Educação Teológica Cristã na África* for lusophone regions — has been more active in Francophone Africa, and has recently set up a Francophone Regional office in Kinshasa. But as this is a relatively recent effort, ACTEA's involvement in francophone Africa is beyond the scope of this presentation.

²⁵ ASTHEOL lacks an online presence.

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Gabon, Cameroon, Chad, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Burkina Faso, among others. Sadly, this oldest theological association (more than 50 years old) is struggling and unable to move forward.

CITAF

The *Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone* ('Council of Theological Institutions in Francophone Africa'), based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, was set up in Lomé, Togo in 2005, after several years of reflection and discussion.²⁶ It was born of the conviction that from now on the Biblical and Theological Institutions (IBT) of Francophone Africa must fully assume their destiny.²⁷ Thus, from the beginning, the sense of ownership was very strong among the founding members of this Council.

CITAF is a platform/network of Bible schools, institutes, seminaries, and universities of theology, set up to serve as a permanent framework for consultation, collaboration, research, academic excellence, accreditation and monitoring of biblical and theological institutions (IBT) in Francophone countries in Africa.²⁸ CITAF works in Francophone Africa, most of which is sub-Saharan (**West Africa**: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Togo); **Central Africa** (Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo); **East Africa** (Burundi), **North Africa** (Morocco) and **Madagascar**. CITAF currently has around 200 member institutions.

Common Minimum Programme (PMC)

Programme Minimum Commun (PMC: 'Common Minimum Programme') is CITAF's accreditation standard. It forms the core of CITAF and guarantees its solidity, effectiveness and vitality. It is an unprecedented tool in the field of theological education in Francophone Africa. It should be noted that the PMC places all IBTs at the same level of education in order to facilitate bridges between students and schools. Abel Ndjeraréou writes the following regarding the PMC:

The publication of this second edition of the *Programme Minimum Commun* (PMC) is to maintain the Momentum of the value of fraternal communion, of the will to serve our Master together, and of the vision of an ever better future in theological formation and

²⁶ Discussions were held in Bangui, Central African Republic, 18–19 July 1994, 11–13 September 1997, 10–12 September 1998, and 19–20 July 2001; and also in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, 23–28 August 1999; and in Lomé, Togo, 25–29 July 2005. CITAF's website is <https://citafafrique.org/>

²⁷ Abel Ndjeraréou and Célestin Kouassi, *Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone. CITAF : Une vision, une valeur, une volonté*, 12–13.

²⁸ Rubin Pohor, Coordinator, CITAF. Address to the RTAF, 13 September 2023.

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education. Of the several historical anchor points for the regrouping of Francophones for targeted actions, I place this Momentum in that of 1980 in Chapoulie where Professor Tite Tiénou issued this challenge: “The hour of active solidarity has struck!” The materialisation of this ‘active solidarity’ was the birth of CITAF for the development of the branch of biblical and theological formation throughout the Francophone movement.²⁹

Theological Diploma

CITAF organises the annual *Bac théologique* (‘Theological Baccalaureate’) at continental (Francophone) level to enable level III IBT students to get a theological diploma (High School/Secondary School Diploma) in order to pursue a theological degree in a Seminary.

Teacher mobility / Assistance and mutual aid between IBTs

Within CITAF there is a system of mutual assistance between IBTs (strong IBTs support weak IBTs by sending them teachers or hosting their students for the third year of their degree programme).

The High Academic Authority (HAA)

CITAF has introduced peer evaluation by the High Academic Authority (HAA), chaired by Professor Tite Tiénou, based on the same principles as CAMES (the continental board for higher education in Francophone Africa), for academic advancement.

The School of Governance (EDG)

CITAF has set up a School of Governance (EDG: *École de la Gouvernance*) which organises seminars on governance in partnership with organizations providing technical support such as *Tearfund* (strategic planning, roles of boards of directors, Integral Mission) and *Initiative Francophone* (translation, colloquia on contextualisation), and the training of academic directors with the assistance of *ICETE* (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education), and *Institut National Démocratique* in Côte d’Ivoire for the supervision and observation of elections, etc.

The CITAF Journal and CITAF Publications

CITAF has a publishing body, *Les Éditions du CITAF* (‘CITAF Publications’), and a journal, *La Revue de Formation et d’Actualités Théologiques* (‘The Journal of Theological Training and News’) or *REFAT Mag*, managed by its Technical Commission in charge of coordination of academic research. *Les Éditions du CITAF* publishes books, teachers’ research work, course booklets, the proceedings of EDG conferences, symposia with partners, and so on.

²⁹ Ndjéraréou and Célestin Kouassi, *Conseil des Institutions Théologiques*, 7.

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Overall, CITAF is doing very well and finding innovating ways to foster theological education in Francophone Africa.

RUPA

The Network of Protestant Universities in Africa (RUPA: *Réseau des Universités Protestantes d'Afrique*) was created in June 2011 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.³⁰ It brings together eleven Protestant universities in Central and West Africa. The impetus for the creation of this network came from the observation that “these universities were suffering from a problem of academic, administrative and financial governance, a lack of strategic planning and a shortage of resources necessary for their full development.”³¹

RUPA’s overall objective is to promote a proactive policy of cooperation between higher education and university institutions, with a priority focus on modernising the training on offer. To this end, it operates in the following areas: academic, technological, and human training of students, their integration into the world of work; training teachers and researchers, training in university governance; boosting research to create knowledge, facilitating mobility of members of the university community, and stabilising human resources.³² Truth be told, RUPA is also struggling.

These three major players have been on the forefront of theological education in Francophone Africa: for more than half a century for ASTHEOL, fifteen years for CITAF, and ten years for RUPA. Their good intentions must be encouraged and supported.

RTAF

A new initiative in the Francophone theological landscape deserves further mention here. The Network of Francophone African Theologians (RTAF: *Réseau des Théologiens Africains Francophones*) is an initiative begun by Prof Fohle Lygunda li-M in September 2021³³ with support from TearFund. According to its chart, the network exists for mutual encouragement of its

³⁰ RUPA’s website is www.npua-rupa.org

³¹ RUPA, “Création,” Historique, Network of Protestant Universities in Africa – Réseau des Universités Protestantes d’Afrique.
<https://www.npua-rupa.org/pages/creation.html>

³² RUPA, “Création.”

³³ Prof. Lygunda li-M also simultaneously founded RTAF’s anglophone sister-group, Network & Engagement on Theological Reflections in Africa (NETRA), which likewise makes use of the WhatsApp platform. In November 2023, after this keynote address was delivered in September 2023, RTAF became ATAF: *l’Association des Théologiens d’Afrique Francophone* (‘the Association of Francophone African Theologians’).

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members. It pursues *innovation* by “encouraging innovative theological reflection,” focuses on *recycling* by “encouraging capacity-building activities,” and promotes *networking* by encouraging connections and sharing information about opportunities.³⁴ The group has roughly 550 members among which are full time professors, Associate and assistant professors, pastors, theology students and friends of theology. The heart and lungs of the RTAF is the quest for a theology that is relevant to Africans.

In this quest, the RTAF and the associations mentioned above, as well as other associations, in particular CITAF, echo the 1980 call made by the leaders of Francophone African churches at their consultation in Chapoulie, Abidjan. These leaders came from various places: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Chad. At the opening of this consultation, Professor Tiénoú declared: “The time for active solidarity has come... The more we know about each other, the better we will be able to act towards each other.”³⁵ During this and the next two consultations that followed, these leaders from Francophone Africa expressed their concerns about the lack of well-trained pastors, evangelists, and teachers, and the need to have more Bible schools and seminaries. They urged church leaders to pay special attention to the training of ‘African teachers’. While acknowledging that this is a long-term project, they pleaded for inter-African solidarity in order to make it possible.³⁶ Though RTAF is fairly a new organization, it already has a number of concrete achievements to its credit, including public conferences and, in particular, its most recent academic workshops held on 11–13 September 2023. RTAF is another sign that things are moving in Francophone Africa and there’s hope.

Other Major Players

Other major players in the area of theological education include *Initiative Francophone*, Overseas Council, Langham Partnership, ScholarLeaders, Tyndale House Foundation, Local Leaders International, and the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), among others. *Initiative Francophone* provides expertise in Bible Translation, encourages African churches to think about their problems in terms of African values, and works to promote African languages. Langham Partnership, ScholarLeaders, and Tyndale House Foundation have established a partnership between key seminaries and universities in Francophone Africa: *Université Shalom de Bunia* (USB: ‘Shalom University of Bunia’, in Bunia, DRC), *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui* (FATEB: ‘Bangui Evangelical School of Theology’, in Bangui, Central African Republic) and *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de*

³⁴ According to its group description on the WhatsApp platform.

³⁵ Abel Ndjéararéou, *Comme sous l’arbre à palabre : Un livre de souvenir et d’avenir*, 17,

³⁶ Ndjéararéou, *Comme sous l’arbre à palabre*, 26–38.

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l'Alliance Chrétienne (FATEAC: 'Christian Alliance Evangelical Theological Seminary'; in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire) in what is called *Engagement pour l'Afrique* ('Commitment to Africa').³⁷ Within this partnership, the emphasis has been on "building up Doctoral-Level Theological Education and Research-Culture," "developing a collaborative culture between the three libraries, providing information and training in various tools and on-line resources and to assisting staff in attaining the highest professional skills and credentials possible so as to support a solid Research Culture together," and organizing joint "colloquia and publications," and providing and enhancing "a reliable internet infrastructure at the highest level possible."³⁸

Starting a few years ago, Overseas Council International organises what they call Virtual Institute for Excellence (IVE). The theme in 2023 was "Partnership in theological education in Francophone Africa." The workshop revolved around Informal, non-Formal, and Formal Theological Education in Francophone Africa. Similarly, Local Leaders International has been active in supporting Francophone theological Institutions enhance their online programmes by providing training to their representatives.

Langham Partnership is also active through LivresHippo, a Langham Literature imprint in collaboration with a consortium of several publishing houses: *Centre de Publications Évangéliques* in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (CPE); *Presses Bibliques Africaines* in Cotonou, Benin (PBA); *Éditions CLÉ* in Yaoundé, Cameroon; *Excelsis Diffusions* in Charols, France; and CITAF. LivresHippo, the francophone counterpart of HippoBooks,³⁹ seeks to enable Francophone theologians and scholars to share their ideas on the global stage while writing for the Church in Africa. Its vision is to stimulate the spiritual and intellectual growth of the African church by developing books by African Christian authors that address African realities from an evangelical perspective. In line with this vision, LivresHippo produces biblically sound pastoral and academic resources

³⁷ The ebb and flow of progress in francophone theological education is demonstrated in the history of these three institutions, which have each experienced both thriving and struggle. E.g., USB has developed continually since its founding as a theological school in 1959, but due to war in the DRC has not operated continually and has had to relocate. Nonetheless, as of 2016, USB was one of only eleven universities in DRC authorized to offer doctoral programmes. FATEB, <https://fateb.net/>, was founded in Bangui in 1977 and for decades has been the premier Protestant institution of higher theological education in francophone Africa, but current instability in Central African Republic is forcing them to move most of their operations to what had been their extension campus in Yaoundé in neighbouring Cameroon.

³⁸ Personal archives from meetings and proceedings.

³⁹ HippoBooks is a joint imprint of Langham Literature, based in Carlisle, England, and of ACTS (African Christian Textbooks) based in Bukuru, Nigeria.

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adapted to the African context and written by African authors and scholars, living on the continent or in the diaspora.

Given the relatively youth of Evangelical Seminaries, given the vitality of Evangelical movements and especially charismatic and revivalist churches, given the openness and enthusiasm of many churches for theological education, it is urgent to strengthen the associations that are striving to ensure the quality of theological education in Francophone Africa.

5. Conclusion: The Future of Theological Education in Francophone Africa

As I conclude, I stand by what our elders have previously said more than forty years ago when they first convened in Chapoulie, Abidjan in 1980 and issued the call for active solidarity. Indeed, the future of Theological Education in Francophone Africa lies in *inter-African* and *inter-church* collaboration. Seminaries and Christian universities in Francophone Africa must break away from the isolationism they have inherited from their founding missions. Additionally, mainline churches and theological Institutions need to be more welcoming of African Initiated Churches, a segment of the Church that is growing fast. In many cases, these churches are the popular face of Christianity today in our region. The major players already operating in the field have each their own expertise which they offer to Seminaries and Universities. The missions they have set themselves are aimed at finding answers to the challenges that we mentioned here, namely contextualising curricula, training and keeping track of teachers' careers, facilitating teacher mobility, stimulating scientific research through the production and publication of knowledge, computerizing and connecting libraries, improving governance in Seminaries and Universities, etc.

If Francophone African theologians and researchers are not to miss out on the realities of African Christians and the needs of the Church in Francophone Africa, they would be wise not to fall into the trap of rigid specialisation, so dear to the West. Doctoral studies in our Seminaries should emphasise *interdisciplinarity* while recognising the place of specialities. African Francophone theologians can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring the rich anthropological and sociological data made available to them by their African colleagues in these sciences. Contextualization starts with knowing our context and knowing it right. It goes without saying that in a digitalised world, distance learning and the use of new technologies in theological education in Francophone Africa are key factors that must be taken into account. Finally, in order for Francophone theological education to be relevant, African Francophone theologians must have the courage to break away from the pattern of thought inherited from the West and dare to propose their own agenda that

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considers of the realities of Christians and the needs of the Church in Africa. When they do so, the following chapter in the history of Theological Education in Francophone Africa might be titled: The Flourishing of Theological Education in Francophone Africa.

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Isaac Zokoué

Regard d'un apprenant sur l'enseignant, sur son héritage et sa contribution théologiques

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Résumé

Dans cet article, il est question d'un regard d'apprenant sur Isaac Zokoué (1944–2014), l'enseignant et le théologien. Celui-ci a fait l'objet d'écrits provenant d'amis, des camarades, collègues et personnes n'ayant pas eu des relations directes avec lui. Il est à constater la rareté d'écrits relevant d'apprenants aux pieds de Zokoué. Comme ceux qui nous ont précédé, dès l'entame, l'identité de Zokoué a mérité notre attention. Il est né des parents chrétiens et a grandi dans un environnement ayant bâti sa personnalité de l'homme de Dieu. Très tôt, il reçut l'appel du Seigneur pour le servir à plein temps. Sa vocation pastorale n'a souffert d'aucun doute, ainsi que son rôle d'enseignant et de théologien. Sa sagesse, son humilité, son approche pastorale, sa profondeur d'esprit, sa rigueur scientifique et ses qualités de leader sont un héritage qu'il laisse derrière lui et qui fait de lui un « ancêtre de l'avenir ».

Abstract

This article provides a learner's view of Isaac Zokoué (1944–2014), the teacher and theologian. He has been the subject of writings by friends, comrades, colleagues, and people who had no direct relationship with him, but there has been a scarcity of writings from those who learned at Zokoué's feet. Like those who preceded us, Zokoué's identity merits our attention from the outset. He was born of Christian parents and grew up in an environment that shaped his personality as a man of God. Very early on, he received the Lord's call to serve Him full-time. His pastoral vocation was unmistakable, as was his role as a teacher and theologian. His wisdom, humility, pastoral approach, depth of mind, scientific rigor and leadership qualities are the legacy he leaves behind, making him an "ancestor of the future."

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Resumo

Este artigo é sobre a visão de um aluno sobre Isaac Zokoué (1944–2014), o professor e teólogo. Ele foi objeto de escritos de amigos, camaradas, colegas e pessoas que não tiveram uma relação direta com ele. É de salientar a escassez de escritos de aprendizes aos pés de Zokoué. Tal como os que nos precederam, a identidade de Zokoué mereceu a nossa atenção desde o início. Nasceu de pais cristãos e cresceu num ambiente que moldou a sua personalidade de homem de Deus. Muito cedo, recebeu o chamamento do Senhor para o servir a tempo inteiro. A sua vocação pastoral era inquestionável, assim como o seu papel de professor e teólogo. A sua sabedoria, a sua humildade, a sua abordagem pastoral, a sua profundidade de espírito, o seu rigor científico e as suas qualidades de liderança são um legado que deixa e que fazem dele um “antepassado do futuro.”

Mots-clés

Zokoué, pasteur, théologie/théologien, enseignant, héritage

Keywords

Zokoué, pastor, theology/theologian, teacher, heritage

Palavras-chave

Zokoué, pastor, teologia/teólogo, professor, património

Introduction

La réflexion qui se met en route est une réponse à un appel à contribution sur une des grandes figures du monde évangélique d’Afrique en général, et d’Afrique francophone en particulier. Il s’agit du Professeur Isaac Zokoué (1944–2014) dont la vie, la pensée et les œuvres ont déjà fait l’objet de quelques écrits et continuent d’intéresser la recherche théologique. On pourrait bien se demander, au risque de se répéter, s’il faille encore écrire sur lui. Certes, il y en a et il y en aura toujours à écrire sur celui qui a été surnommé à juste titre un « monument théologique »,¹ un « ancêtre de l’avenir »² en Afrique francophone contemporaine, surtout parmi les évangéliques.

Si la majorité d’écrits sur cette personnalité proviennent de ses camarades, collègues, collaborateurs et amis, ceux qui sont écrits d’un point de vue d’apprenant sont peu nombreux.³ Par conséquent, la présente réflexion s’inscrit

¹ Rubin POHOR, « Editorial », dans *Revisiter la théologie en Afrique contemporaine Isaac Zokoué*, 7.

² Emmanuel TCHUMTCHOUA, « Préface », dans *ZOKOUÉ L’Homme et l’œuvre*, vii.

³ Abel NGARSOULEDE a publié un article intitulé « Il s’appelaït Zokoue. » L’aspect de l’approche de Ngarsoulede se situe beaucoup plus sur le plan de connaissance générale.

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dans cette perspective et s'intitule : « Isaac Zokoué : Regard d'un apprenant sur l'enseignant, son héritage et sa contribution théologiques ». Il s'agit d'un sujet à caractère interdisciplinaire qui pose un problème de ce que laisse l'enseignant comme souvenir sur l'apprenant, un problème de valeur, de réception et de pérennisation de son héritage qui ne laisse pas indifférent. La question qui mérite d'être posée est celle de savoir en quoi l'homme Zokoué, son héritage et sa contribution théologiques peuvent-ils être une inspiration pour « les moins jeunes, les jeunes et toute la génération après lui ? »⁴

La réponse à cette question nous conduira tour à tour à des considérations générales incluant la présentation de l'homme, de son héritage et sa contribution théologiques avant de terminer par une évaluation critique.

1. Éléments Préliminaires

Il convient d'ouvrir cette réflexion avec quelques éléments préliminaires, à savoir l'homme Zokoué, notre contact personnel avec lui et ce qu'on pourrait appeler son école.

a. L'Homme Zokoué

Isaac Zokoué est né le 17 septembre 1944 à Fort-Crampel (actuel Kaga-Bandoro en République Centrafricaine), d'Éli Zokoué et de Kengue Louise. Son cursus académique commence en 1956 avec ses études primaires à Balimba (Sahr) en République du Tchad. Ce cursus se poursuit au Lycée Felix Eboué de N'djamena de 1959 à 1960 et au Lycée Barthélémy Boganda de Bangui en République centrafricaine de 1961 à 1968 où il obtient son baccalauréat série D. Il entama ses études universitaires à la Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique (FLTE) de Vaux-Sur-Seine en France de 1968 à 1972 sanctionnées par un diplôme de Maîtrise en Théologie. Il continua à la Faculté libre de Montpellier en 1983 et à l'Université de Strasbourg II en 1993 où il obtint respectivement son premier doctorat en théologie systématique et un doctorat d'État.

Sur le plan professionnel, Zokoué reçut l'appel au ministère ecclésiastique quand il fut encore au lycée Boganda.⁵ Après sa formation de maîtrise en théologie, il fut appelé à la tête de l'église de Ngoubagara où il exerça comme pasteur de 1973 à 1976. Sa distinction comme universitaire lui a fait valoir, de 1983-1984, un poste du premier secrétaire exécutif africain du Groupe Biblique Universitaire d'Afrique Francophone (GBUAF). Il dirigea la Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB) comme doyen de 1986 à 2000.

Par contre ; notre approche est fondée beaucoup plus sur notre relation apprenant-enseignant.

⁴ Expressions que j'emprunte à Daniel BOURDANNE et Augustin AHOGA dans leurs propos d'appréciation publicitaire de l'ouvrage de Kamnadj BARKA, dir., *Zokoué : L'Homme et l'œuvre*.

⁵ Rubin POHOR, « Biographie sommaire du Professeur Isaac Zokoué », 173.

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Parmi tant d'autres responsabilités qu'il a assumées, il importe de retenir les suivantes : secrétaire exécutif et président de la commission théologique de l'Association des Évangéliques d'Afrique (AEA), initiateur des conférences théologiques évangéliques francophones et du Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone (CITAF) dont il a été le tout premier président de sa Haute Autorité Académique (HAA), coordonnateur du programme de doctorat de la FATEB, président du dialogue national en république centrafricaine ayant stabilisé le régime du président Bozizé, et président du conseil des sages de ce pays dans la même période.

Ces éléments identitaires suffisent pour nous permettre de parler de notre contact avec l'homme et de comprendre sa pensée.

b. Contact de l'Apprenant avec son Enseignant

En 2005, je me suis inscrit au cycle de doctorat de la FATEB à la suite de deux tentatives d'inscription à la Faculté Libre de Théologie Évangélique (FLTE) de Vaux-Sur-Seine qui ont échoué par défaut de bourse. Je me suis donc retrouvé parmi les quatre premiers doctorants retenus pour commencer la jeune école doctorale avec un programme de doctorat en théologie systématique. Zokoué était annoncé cette année-là comme le directeur de ce programme, avec Benno van den Toren comme un des facilitateurs majeurs tout en résidant dans son pays, Pays-Bas. Avec sa présence sur place, il convient de dire que Zokoué était perçu comme la pièce maîtresse de ce programme doctoral.

Ce premier contact avec lui s'est fait lors d'un test d'anglais pour apprécier notre niveau et capacité de pouvoir en faire un vrai outil de recherche. Cela nous a permis de réaliser son engagement à s'assurer de la capacité de ses apprenants à entreprendre des sérieuses recherches. Si la connaissance de l'anglais chez certains encadreurs francophones semblait être facultative, chez Zokoué, elle était essentielle et ce, au regard du nombre et de la qualité d'ouvrages théologiques en anglais.

A la suite de ce premier contact, plusieurs d'autres contacts⁶ ont eu lieu dans le cadre des cours et séminaires où l'homme d'apparence occidentalisée s'est révélé pourtant à moi comme un théologien africain évangélique ouvert d'esprit comme cela ressort de ses propres propos : « Nous avons des défis à relever tout en restant ouverts. Gardons une vision synoptique par rapport à ce qui se passe ailleurs dans d'autres facultés ». ⁷ Cette affirmation permet de le connaître dans

⁶ Le premier contact pour parler de notre programme se situe ce lundi 10 octobre 2005 où chacun s'est présenté et les généralités du programme du Doctorat de la FATEB ont été abordées.

⁷ Propos tenus par le concerné lors d'une séance de prise de contact avec les doctorants le 10 octobre 2005 à la FATEB à Bangui.

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son ambivalence : serein, concentré, profond, discipliné, perfectionniste.⁸ Zokoué était réservé tout en étant ouvert et lent tout en étant prompt quand s'imposent les circonstances. Sa lenteur qui se confond souvent à sa promptitude dans la gestion des situations lui a valu le surnom de « moteur diesel ».⁹ Si la lenteur de certains frise l'indifférence, celle de Zokoué cachait plutôt sa sagesse d'étudier la meilleure façon de se prendre face à une situation qui l'interpelle. Au fil du temps passé sous son encadrement, nous avons observé ce qui conviendrait d'appeler l'école de Zokoué.

c. À l'École de Zokoué

Parler de l'école de Zokoué, c'est parler de ses principes de mentorat. Si chaque mentor a sa façon de conduire à la connaissance celui ou celle qu'il encadre, Zokoué n'était pas du reste. Il se voulait clair avec nous par rapport à ses attentes lorsqu'il affirmait : « Le niveau du DEA / Doctorat est un niveau de recherche, d'où il n'y a rien à attendre du professeur. Celui-ci est là pour vous aider à dire ce que vous pensez, à bien formuler votre pensée. La bibliothèque est là à votre disposition. Investissez-vous dans votre centre d'intérêt et nous sommes là pour vous aider. Cherchez à relever le défi que vous vous êtes fixé ».¹⁰

Contrairement à certains encadreurs qui sont tentés d'offrir ou de dicter tout à leurs apprenants, Zokoué se présente comme un guide, un facilitateur ou un appui attentionné aux côtés de ses apprenants. Celui-ci pousse, incite, stimule et bouscule à la réflexion, à la recherche, à l'autonomisation et à la meilleure expression possible de la pensée. Une telle façon de faire induit à le présenter comme très chiche, dur, avare voire insensible vis-à-vis de l'apprenant. Bref, avec lui, l'apprenant doit travailler seul et ne pas penser à tout attendre de son encadreur. Sa rigueur scientifique lui a également valu le sobriquet « crocodile » parce qu'il ne pouvait rien laisser passer sans le soumettre au crible de la critique, de la rigueur et de l'excellence.

Avec ces propos liminaires qui ont jeté des faisceaux de lumière sur l'homme, le point suivant aidera à le connaître sous ses multiples fonctions.

⁸ J'emprunte ce qualificatif à son fils aîné Jean-Marc qui aimait m'assister lorsque j'avais des problèmes techniques sur mon laptop.

⁹ Un surnom qui s'est imposé au regard du temps réel qu'il s'est donné pour accorder toute son attention sur notre travail. Sur une durée de cinq ans qu'a duré la formation doctorale, sa lenteur, pendant les trois premières années, a failli nous pousser à l'abandon. Mais, après avoir pris conscience du temps qui s'écoulait et de l'échéance qui restait, la façon dont il a pris notre encadrement en mains a été remarquable. Finalement, il s'est hissé en tête des directeurs des thèses de doctorat à la FATEB en conduisant à son terme la première thèse soutenue dans cette institution.

¹⁰ Propos tenu par Zokoué lors de la séance inaugurale des doctoriels à la FATEB en 2005 à Bangui .

2. Zokoué : Un Pasteur, un Enseignant, un Théologien

Les obsèques de Zokoué ont permis de le faire connaître sous ses multiples fonctions de pasteur, d'enseignant et de théologien.

a. Zokoué : Le Pasteur

Il est vrai que la vocation pastorale de beaucoup de personnes est souvent mis en doute. Celle de Zokoué ne souffrit cependant d'aucun doute, tant au niveau national qu'international. Dès le lycée, il faisait déjà office d'animateur de culte.¹¹ Dans l'un de ses séminaires doctoraux, il nous confia lui-même que lors de grandes consultations internationales où il était souvent invité comme personne ressource, parfois comme le seul africain parmi les invités, on l'appela respectueusement pasteur tout en l'invitant à dire une prière. Cette distinction relève de l'aptitude qu'il démontra sur le terrain et qui lui valut des témoignages nostalgiques lors de ses obsèques le 23 septembre 2014 à Bangui.¹²

Fort de ses expériences pastorales, Zokoué conclut un de ses articles en ces termes : « Les pasteurs africains doivent s'asseoir et repenser leur ministère. Beaucoup l'ont déjà fait, mais assez timidement. Il ne suffit pas non plus d'être africain pour être un bon pasteur en Afrique. Le pastorat en Afrique, selon le modèle biblique, doit être bien défini en fonction des spécificités du continent. »¹³ Si la carence des pasteurs selon le modèle biblique et la négligence sont caractéristiques du ministère pastoral africain dans beaucoup d'endroits, ces propos de Zokoué font montre de sa profonde conscience, de sa sensibilité et de sa force d'un pasteur dont plusieurs auteurs¹⁴ lui reconnaissent et qui se traduisent également dans sa fonction d'enseignant.

b. Zokoué : L'Enseignant

Si certains pasteurs brillaient par leurs limites dans l'enseignement, Zokoué s'en était démarqué par sa passion d'enseigner et de former ses étudiants dans la rigueur, dans l'ordre et dans l'excellence académiques et scientifiques. Doyen de la FATEB de 1986 à 2000 cumulativement avec sa fonction d'enseignant, on ne

¹¹ POHOR, « Biographie sommaire », 173.

¹² Paul MPINDI, *Le pasteur et ses problèmes*, 101–127. Dans ce livre où l'auteur traite de l'abus du pouvoir en son Chap. 4, il y a un lien à établir entre les témoignages rendus sur Zokoué lors de ses obsèques et le caractère d'un grand leader dont il fit preuve partout où il fut passé. Il assumait toujours ses fonctions avec désintéressement.

¹³ Isaac ZOKOUÉ, « Le modèle biblique du pastorat et les pratiques actuelles dans les Églises africaines », *Revisiter la Théologie en Afrique contemporaine*, p. 55-72.

¹⁴ Lire avec beaucoup d'intérêt plusieurs contributions dans l'ouvrage *Zokoué, l'homme et l'œuvre*, sous direction de Kamnadj BARKA.

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saurait indiquer avec précision le nombre des personnes ayant reçu de lui de l'encadrement dans le domaine d'enseignement.¹⁵

Comme mentionné plus haut, Zokoué était un enseignant. Il était un formateur qui explique et démontre ce qu'il enseigne, mais aussi un enseignant qui inspire. Très ordonné et discipliné dans ses enseignements, personne ne pouvait se perdre dans ses cours. La profusion de témoignages après sa mort prouve à suffisance qu'il a marqué plus d'une génération. Il a assumé sa carrière pastorale et d'enseignant tout en maintenant sa carrure de théologien.

c. Zokoué : Le Théologien

L'unanimité est totale quant au statut de théologien reconnu à Zokoué. Ses collègues le témoignent, ainsi que ses écrits. Il suffit de lire ces propos de Tite Tiéno, l'un de ses proches: « Isaac Zokoué, avec René Daïdanso, a été un des pionniers de la formation théologique au niveau universitaire en Afrique francophone. Comme Daïdanso, il a été pasteur, théologien, administrateur des églises et des œuvres . . . »¹⁶

En faisant ici mention de son titre de théologien, Tiéno sait de qui ou de quoi il parle. Il fait partie, avec Zokoué, de la première génération des théologiens évangéliques d'Afrique francophone. L'héritage de celui-ci, sa contribution et ses œuvres lui donnent d'être une référence.

3. Héritage et Contribution Théologiques

Le départ de l'homme auprès de son Seigneur, comme mentionné ci-haut, permet de parler de son héritage et sa contribution théologiques.

a. Héritage Théologique

L'héritage théologique de Zokoué est ce qu'il a laissé derrière lui comme « discours sur Dieu »¹⁷. Il se situe essentiellement à deux niveaux : pastoral et théologique.

Il est certes vrai que les circonstances de deuil réservent souvent beaucoup d'émotions. Celle du deuil de Zokoué n'est pas du reste. Mais au-delà des émotions, il y a lieu de faire une lecture et analyse de certaines vérités. Tel est le cas de ce que ses obsèques ont offert au public, car beaucoup de voix se sont élevées pour magnifier avec insistance sa grandeur de personnalité et d'esprit.

Au plan pastoral, Zokoué a laissé derrière lui le culte francophone très florissant au sein de l'église Ngoubagara avec la présence des plus hautes

¹⁵ Lire pour s'en convaincre Tite TIÉNOU, « Préface » de son livre à titre post hume : *Revisiter la théologie contemporaine*, 5-7. Cet ouvrage s'impose comme une référence en présentant les écrits théologiques de Zokoué.

¹⁶ Tite TIÉNOU, « Préface ».

¹⁷ Simple définition qu'il donne lui-même de "théologie" dans « Revisiter la théologie », *Revisiter la théologie en Afrique contemporaine*, 17.

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autorités du pays. A cela il faut ajouter l'Alliance des Evangéliques de la Centrafrique (AEC) et l'Union des Jeunes Chrétiens (UJC) qui portent ses marques. On se souviendra toujours de ses caractéristiques pastorales à travers un pastorat fondé sur la Bible, son art d'écoute, sa sagesse dans l'approche des conflits, son amour pour ses adversaires ou contradicteurs, son africanité dans l'approche des sujets¹⁸ et son dévouement pour une Église africaine fondée sur la parole de Dieu, libre, dynamique et prospère.

Au plan théologique, il laisse derrière lui une bibliothèque personnelle sélective, une faculté de théologie (FATEB) en plein essor, une éducation théologique qui fait son petit chemin en Afrique francophone et pour laquelle il restait très attentive, une vision de l'émergence de l'Afrique francophone sur le plan théologique et une approche africaine évangélique de la théologie. Une contribution théologique s'en dégage.

b. Contribution Théologique

Par contribution théologique, il s'agit de ce qu'on apporte à la tâche et à la pensée théologiques. Si certains travaux de beaucoup de théologiens ne sont généralement que des redites et que d'autres apportent du nouveau aux débats scientifiques, ceux de Zokoué se classent dans la deuxième catégorie. Son apport se situe essentiellement à deux niveaux : au niveau des œuvres, initiatives ou entreprises ayant reçu son implication directe ou indirecte et au niveau des publications ou d'interventions théologiques.

Au niveau des œuvres ayant bénéficié directement ou indirectement de son implication, on peut citer le début des constructions de la FATEB comme en ressort de sa brève biographie¹⁹, alors qu'il était président de la commission théologique de l'AEA. Il faut également citer l'organisation des conférences évangéliques francophones, notamment celle de Chappolie en 1980 sur le thème de « Levons-nous et bâtissons » et celle de Bangui sur le thème de « L'église locale en mission ». D'autres œuvres incluent la création du Centre de Recherche de Théologie en Afrique (CERTA), le programme doctoral au sein de la FATEB, ainsi que le Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone (CITAF).

¹⁸ Il suffit de lire les titres de ces quelques articles pour se laisser convaincre par son africanité dans le traitement des sujets qu'il se donne ou qu'on lui demande de traiter : « Plaidoyer pour une nouvelle vision du doctorat en théologie dans le contexte africain », « The crisis of maturity in Africa [La crise de la maturité en Afrique] », « Le modèle biblique du pastorat et les pratiques actuelles dans les églises africaines », « La pépinière africaine du christianisme occidental, une histoire presque oubliée ? »

¹⁹ POHOR, « Biographie Sommaire, » 173–174.

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Au niveau des publications, il en a produit plusieurs.²⁰ On peut se limiter à mentionner ici ses trois publications et ses trois interventions. Au chapitre de ses publications, *Jésus-Christ, Le mystère des deux natures* (2004) s'impose comme sa contribution majeure. L'auteur y pose le problème de compréhension de la double nature de Jésus-Christ dans une perspective africaine avec cette question cruciale : Jésus-Christ, Vrai Dieu-Vrai Homme ? Une question préoccupante pour l'Église de tout temps et en tout lieu. Zokoué essaie de faire l'analyse des enjeux et la signification de la théologie de Chalcédoine et celle de Karl Barth pour l'Église et les chrétiens d'Afrique. Somme toute, il parvient à la conclusion selon suivante :

En assumant notre humanité, le Christ veut nous conduire au Père. C'est pourquoi, toute élaboration christologique, quelle que soit la forme qu'elle prend, doit dans le fond s'articuler sur la double nature du Christ. En effet, une christologie qui ne met en évidence, de manière claire et articulée, la divinité et l'humanité de Jésus-Christ prend le risque de rester en deçà de la révélation biblique. Car c'est en sa qualité de Dieu-homme que Jésus-Christ est Sauveur.²¹

Cette affirmation met en évidence la position de l'auteur sur sa christologie dans une perspective africaine, ce qui n'est pas une contribution de moindre. Outre cet ouvrage, plusieurs autres sont sortis de sa plume. Le privilège était d'avoir reçu directement certaines de ses publications de sa propre main.

Sa *Brève mise au point sur Noël* (2007), d'une douzaine de pages, donne à première vue, l'impression d'un livret avec un simple contenu pastoral. Mais sa lecture conduit à la découverte d'un exposé théologique d'une densité et d'une profondeur remarquables. Il s'agit justement d'une mise au point face aux allégations selon lesquelles Noël est une fête païenne et dont sa célébration est un non-sens. Partant de l'origine de cette fête, c'est-à-dire la célébration de la « Naissance du Soleil » le 25 décembre, en passant par une démonstration de mutation de sens des mots ou groupe de mots dans la Bible (baptême, Parole comme Logos, etc.), Zokoué est parvenu à la conclusion selon laquelle : « Pas de Pâques sans Noël ! Pas de Pentecôte sans Pâques ! Pas d'Églises sans

²⁰ Par exemple, « Revisiter la théologie » ; « Co-operation in theological education » ; *Brève mise au point sur Noël* ; « Plaidoyer pour une nouvelle vision du doctorat en théologie dans le contexte africain » ; « Une valeur, une volonté, une vision » ; « The crisis of maturity in Africa » ; « Le modèle biblique du pastorat et les pratiques actuelles dans les églises africaines » ; La pépinière africaine du christianisme occidental : une histoire presque oubliée ? » ; « The Church as Pneumatic Community : Toward an Ecclesiology for the African context » ; « Droit d'aînesse/respect des aînés / Eglise et Etat » ; « Christianisme en Afrique et Perspectives » ; « Le rôle de la théologie dans la transformation de l'Afrique » ; *L'arbre de l'oubli* ; « Jésus ; seul espoir pour l'Afrique. »

²¹ Isaac ZOKOUE, *Jésus-Christ Le mystère des deux natures*, 213.

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Pentecôte. . . Tout se tient. »²² L'auteur voit une sorte de cohérence et logique entre ces fêtes chrétiennes au point de dire que s'il n'en existait pas une seule dans cette chaîne de réalisation du salut, il aurait fallu l'inventer. Pour lui, « Noël, c'est la fête de l'Incarnation ; car Dieu qui est esprit se fait chair. Le mystère de l'incarnation reste opaque pour l'esprit humain. »²³ Une forte et solennelle déclaration dogmatique à retenir dans ce livret.

L'arbre de l'oubli (2003), une autre publication de Zokoué avec presque le même nombre des pages que la précédente, soit quatorze, est le fruit d'une conférence-débat à la suite d'un séjour de recherche au Bénin. Son originalité et sa profondeur théologiques donnent goût à la lecture du début jusqu'à la fin. Au centre de sa réflexion se trouve la découverte à Ouidah de ce que l'on a appelé « la route de l'esclave » qui, selon celui-ci, « recèle une richesse culturelle et religieuse qui n'est pas encore suffisamment exploitée. »²⁴ Une route de l'esclave qui conduit à un arbre dénommé « Arbre de l'oubli » et dont le rituel qui l'entoure a inspiré la réflexion contenue dans ce livret. Dans un premier temps, l'auteur prend le soin de définir l'Arbre de l'oubli comme un lieu d'enjeux politiques et économiques, de déracinement et de dépersonnalisation. A l'opposé de l'Arbre de l'oubli, pour le rappeler, il y a dans le parcours « l'Arbre du Retour », c'est-à-dire le retour de l'esprit de l'esclave dans son pays d'origine lorsqu'il sera décédé dans son pays de servitude. Dans un deuxième temps, il tente de montrer ce qu'implique le rituel de l'Arbre de l'oubli.²⁵ D'abord ce rituel implique « une mort à soi et à son passé »; ensuite, il implique une résurrection « dans un autre milieu, une autre culture, un nouvel environnement » et enfin, il implique « le point de rupture le plus fondamental, le plus existentiel pour tout résumer ». Dans un troisième temps enfin, l'auteur situe les racines lointaines de l'arbre de l'oubli dans Genèse 3 où Adam et Eve étaient dépersonnalisés à cause de leur désobéissance à Dieu. Ils sont devenus des esclaves. Pour Zokoué, « l'arbre de l'oubli a sa racine dans l'arbre de la connaissance du bien et du mal ». Mais il ne se limite pas là, il va plus loin pour parler d'un troisième arbre qui est l'arbre sur lequel Jésus-Christ a été crucifié, c'est-à-dire sa croix vue par celui-ci comme un arbre du souvenir et non de l'oubli, le souvenir de la victoire de Jésus-Christ pour rendre libres les esclaves et les faire entrer dans le Royaume éternel de Dieu. Zokoué fait ici preuve d'une articulation théologique de la culture avec la Bible à l'effet d'obtenir l'impact dans le milieu où se trouve localisé l'arbre de l'oubli.

²² ZOKOUÉ, *Brève mise au point sur Noël*, 9.

²³ ZOKOUÉ, *Brève mise au point sur Noël*, 9.

²⁴ ZOKOUÉ, *L'arbre de l'oubli*, 3.

²⁵ Les implications encadrées par les guillemets sont de ZOKOUÉ, *L'arbre de l'oubli*, 8-9.

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Du nombre de ses interventions, il faut également retenir « La pépinière africaine du christianisme occidental : une histoire presque oubliée ? »,²⁶ « Plaidoyer pour une nouvelle vision de doctorat en théologie dans le contexte africain, »²⁷ et « Pistes et jalons d'une christologie africaine »,²⁸

Son intervention portant sur « La pépinière africaine du christianisme occidental : une histoire presque oubliée » est un cri en faveur de la justice que le monde doit rendre aux africains à travers leurs illustres représentants connus sous le nom de Pères de l'Église. Ceux-ci ont fait du christianisme occidental ce qu'il est devenu aujourd'hui. L'auteur fustige ici ce qui frise l'oubli et appelle les dirigeants des pays de l'Afrique du Nord à la réhabilitation de cette contribution de l'Afrique dans le développement du christianisme mondial.

Son « Plaidoyer pour une nouvelle vision du doctorat dans le contexte africain » est un vibrant appel et un encouragement pour des études doctorales contextuelles. Son argumentaire repose sur le problème d'immigration qui rend de plus en plus difficile l'accès aux pays d'accueil en Occident, le problème de cherté, la nécessité d'immersion dans les réalités africaines, la disponibilité du potentiel théologique africain, le problème de malentendu avec nos frères et sœurs chercheurs de l'Occident et l'offre de nouvelles opportunités.

« Pistes et jalons d'une christologie africaine » est un autre sujet de son intervention.²⁹ Nous avons eu le privilège de le suivre en direct. Les travaux en commissions qui ont suivi cette intervention prouvent à suffisance l'intérêt du sujet. Rappelant certaines contributions africaines sur la christologie, à savoir la christologie du Proto-Ancêtre de Bénézet Bujo, du Maître d'initiation de Titianma Sanon, du Guérisseur de A. Shorter, de la libération pendant l'Apartheid en Afrique du Sud et du cosmothéandrique de Julien Éfoé, Zokoué est parvenu à s'interroger sur l'efficacité réelle de l'inculturation de ces titres de Jésus dans nos communautés chrétiennes africaines. La réponse qu'il donne à ses questionnements se trouve dans l'expérience quotidienne des africains. Pour lui, les titres que les africains pourraient donner à Christ devraient provenir de leurs expériences de vie quotidienne et non empruntés aux théologiens. Selon lui, l'ancestrologie devrait donc être un point d'ancrage pour le renouvellement de la théologie en Afrique. Zokoué plaide pour une théologie africaine évangélique qui innove et invente en s'inspirant des valeurs ancestrales. Par

²⁶ ZOKOUÉ rapporte : « *The Center for Early Christianity* avait organisé une consultation du 11 au 12 avril 2008 à Addis Abeba, en Éthiopie, sur l'apport du christianisme africain occidental. Les participants invités (au nombre de 17) qui le voulaient pouvaient écrire un court article de deux pages sur l'un des sujets proposés. Ce texte était donc ma modeste contribution ».

²⁷ Isaac ZOKOUÉ, *Plaidoyer pour une nouvelle vision du doctorat en théologie dans le contexte africain*.

²⁸ Isaac ZOKOUÉ, *Pistes et jalons d'une christologie africaine*.

²⁹ ZOKOUÉ, *Pistes et jalons d'une christologie africaine*.

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conséquent, il invite à la prudence, la modestie et un travail sérieux sur les titres de Christ proposés ici et là. Les pistes sont là, mais il reste un travail de fond à faire pour que toute la réalité de Christ soit prise en compte et que la doctrine chrétienne africaine du Christ soit enseignée dans nos institutions théologiques. Il termine son intervention en posant des jalons d'une christologie africaine avec des repères culturels tels que les liens de parenté, liens avec des divinités et la nature, les symboles, dictons, paraboles, proverbes, etc.), historiques (mythe de la création) et religieux (croyance en Dieu suprême, monde des esprits, pratique des sacrifices sanglants, croyance en Au-delà...) et un essai d'inculturation de Jésus, le dernier Adam ; Jésus, Fils de Dieu, Sauveur et Médiateur ; Jésus, notre frère ; l'incarnation ; mort et résurrection de Jésus.

Ces publications et interventions de Zokoué permettent de comprendre ce qui l'a préoccupé le plus et ce qui peut être compté comme ce qui reste de lui ou ce qu'on peut retenir de lui, surtout lorsqu'on sait qu'il n'est pas donné à tout le monde d'être, pour reprendre Tchumtchoua, « Ancêtre de l'avenir. »³⁰

c. Ce Qui Reste de Zokoué

Ce qui reste de Zokoué peut se résumer essentiellement en deux points : son approche pastorale et théologique, ses œuvres théologiques.

En effet, si le départ de certains hommes de Dieu auprès du Seigneur n'aurait peut-être rien de ce qui resterait d'eux comme souvenir, pour Zokoué, l'on se rappellera toujours de son attitude personnelle et de son approche pastorale des situations généralement très délicates. Sa lucidité, sa prudence, son courage, son tact, son attention, son écoute, son appel et son interpellation pendant les temps de crise resteront gravés dans la mémoire de ses compatriotes et de ceux qui l'ont connu à l'international. Sa voix pastorale fera toujours écho au sein des évangéliques d'Afrique.

Son approche pastorale n'allait pas sans sa théologie. Cette façon de faire le distingue des pasteurs qui souffrent de la carence d'articulation théologique dans leur ministère. On se souviendra toujours de sa façon d'articuler la pastorale avec la théologie. Son intervention sur le thème « Revisiter la théologie » devenue le titre de l'ouvrage qui porte son nom à titre posthume en est l'excellente illustration. Ici, devant les plus hautes autorités de son pays, Zokoué a plaidé en faveur d'une remise en honneur de la théologie face à la vie sociopolitique du pays. Sa voix au niveau de cette tribune retentira toujours.

On se souviendra encore de ses œuvres théologiques (réalisations ou productions) après lui. On le verra essentiellement à travers son ouvrage *Jésus-Christ, Le mystère des deux natures* (2004) qui est une de ses publications majeures, à travers la FATEB où il a assumé la fonction du Doyen pendant quatorze ans et du coordonnateur du programme de doctorat à travers le CITAF

³⁰ TCHUMTCHOUA, « Préface ».

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qu'il a conçu tout comme le CERTA, sans oublier ses pertinentes et percutantes interventions lors de grandes rencontres théologiques.

4. Évaluation Critique

L'évaluation critique se fera en termes de ce qui est positif et négatif dans l'ensemble de ce que nous venons de relever ci-haut.

a. Ce Qui Est Positif

On ne le dira jamais assez, Zokoué a marqué plus d'une génération par son sens pastoral et théologique en face des situations qui l'ont interpellé tant au niveau national qu'international. Homme d'église, il s'est imposé aux autorités politiques et administratives de son pays par sa grandeur d'esprit, son charisme et sa pertinence en matière de résolution des conflits. Il est un patriote qui a toujours cherché la paix au sein de son peuple.

Sur le plan théologique, il s'est montré très positif dans la vulgarisation de la théologie africaine évangélique dont il était vu comme un des ténors en Afrique francophone. Épris de l'innovation et de la créativité, il était dominé par la recherche de l'excellence académique.

b. Ce Qui Est Négatif

Comme nous l'avons surnommé « Moteur diesel », sa lenteur et ce qui s'apparente à son indifférence ou à son impassibilité ne lui ont pas permis, aux yeux de certains,³¹ d'être relativement productif en matière de publications.

Par ailleurs et comme Ngarsoulede a su le relever, « Zokoué était un chef de famille . . . Il a toujours eu du temps pour la famille après le travail ou le voyage à l'extérieur. L'homme Zokoué pouvait passer la journée entière à la maison avec sa famille, aux côtés de son épouse ou avec les enfants. »³² On note ici sans aucun doute la discipline de l'homme et la valeur que celui-ci accordait à la famille, cellule de base de la société. Mais l'on reste avec d'interrogations en observant de plus près l'impact qu'il a pu laisser sur cette famille qui a tant bénéficié de son attention et son affection. Cet impact ne serait pas trop visible.

Conclusion

À la question de savoir ce que la personne de Zokoué, son héritage et sa contribution théologique peuvent laisser comme inspiration pour la génération après lui, nous avons répondu en le présentant comme une personne qui a le

³¹ Ceux qui ne le connaissent pas bien s'indignent sur la limite de ses publications. Pour beaucoup, il aurait fait mieux au regard de sa popularité dans le monde évangélique. Son audience à l'international lui offrait d'opportunités de publier dans les maisons d'éditions de grande renommée.

³² NGARSOULEDE, « Il s'appelait Zokoue. »

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mérite d'être nommé « Ancêtre de l'avenir », un enseignant qui inspire, un pasteur qui s'identifie à son peuple et un théologien modèle en humilité, sagesse et mentorat.

Sa contribution pastorale réside dans sa sérénité face aux situations qui s'imposent à lui, son art d'écoute et son identification à son peuple. Sur le plan théologique, il lègue à la nouvelle génération sa rigueur scientifique, sa forte personnalité théologique évangélique et son africanité théologique francophone. Au regard de ce riche héritage que Zokoué laisse aujourd'hui derrière lui, force est de se demander si la génération héritière en est consciente et se montre prête à le pérenniser valablement et véritablement.

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From ‘Devil’s Baby’ to Ambassador for Christ: *The Evangelical Legacy of Byang H. Kato*

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Abstract

This article outlines Byang Kato’s legacy, especially his contribution to evangelical theology in sub-Saharan Africa. Kato was raised in African traditional religion, dedicated as a fetish priest at birth. He converted to the Christian faith at age twelve, rising to become a world class evangelical scholar before his tragic death. Kato contended for biblical orthodoxy. Kato warned about syncretistic universalism and endeavored to provide a remedy through sound theological education in Africa. Kato also joined the African identity debate, advocating for a ‘third race’ identity. Kato’s warning is a call for constant vigilance, and his prophetic voice deserves attention. In an era when Africa has become the heartland of Christianity, one pitfall is for the fastest growing church to become the fastest declining church, in terms of biblical fidelity. An authentic paradigmatic Christian expression is required. The church must contend with non-Christian worldviews. Kato’s hermeneutics has much to contribute to today’s Christianity.

Résumé

Cet article présente l’héritage de Byang Kato, en particulier sa contribution à la théologie évangélique en Afrique subsaharienne. Kato a été élevé dans la religion traditionnelle africaine et a été consacré prêtre féticheur à sa naissance. Il s’est converti à la foi chrétienne à l’âge de douze ans et est devenu un érudit évangélique de classe mondiale avant sa mort tragique. Kato a défendu l’orthodoxie biblique. Il a mis en garde contre l’universalisme syncrétique et s’est efforcé d’y remédier en dispensant un enseignement théologique solide en Afrique. Kato a également participé au débat sur l’identité africaine, en plaidant pour une identité de « troisième race ». L’avertissement de Kato est un appel à une vigilance constante et sa voix prophétique mérite d’être entendue. À une

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époque où l'Afrique est devenue le cœur du christianisme, l'un des pièges est que l'église qui connaît la croissance la plus rapide devienne l'église qui connaît le déclin le plus rapide, en termes de fidélité biblique. Une expression chrétienne paradigmatique authentique est nécessaire. L'Église doit faire face à des visions du monde non chrétiennes. L'herméneutique de Kato a beaucoup à apporter au christianisme d'aujourd'hui.

Resumo

Este artigo descreve o legado de Byang Kato, especialmente a sua contribuição para a teologia evangélica na África subsariana. Kato foi criado na religião tradicional africana, tendo sido dedicado como sacerdote fetichista à nascença. Converteu-se à fé cristã aos doze anos de idade, tornando-se um acadêmico evangélico de classe mundial antes da sua morte trágica. Kato defendia a ortodoxia bíblica. Kato alertou para o universalismo sincretista e esforçou-se por encontrar uma solução através de uma educação teológica sólida em África. Kato também se juntou ao debate sobre a identidade africana, defendendo uma identidade de "terceira raça." O aviso de Kato é um apelo à vigilância constante, e a sua voz profética merece atenção. Numa época em que a África se tornou o coração do cristianismo, uma das armadilhas é que a igreja que mais cresce se torne a igreja que mais declina, em termos de fidelidade bíblica. É necessária uma expressão cristã paradigmática autêntica. A igreja tem de se confrontar com visões do mundo não cristãs. A hermenêutica de Kato tem muito a contribuir para o cristianismo atual.

Keywords

Byang Kato, African identity, Biblical Christianity, Christian African, African Evangelicalism, Syncretistic universalism

Mots-clés

Byang Kato, identité africaine, christianisme biblique, chrétiens africains, évangélisme africain, universalisme syncrétique

Palavras-chave

Byang Kato, identidade africana, cristianismo bíblico, cristão africano, evangelicalismo africano, universalismo sincretista

Introduction

African contribution to theological discourse has not been adequately acknowledged in the history of the Church. Africans were among the forty

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authors of the Bible, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.² Many key Bible characters have deep connections to Africa. Israel as a nation was birthed in Africa. Abraham and the Lord Jesus Christ with his earthly parents found refuge in Africa. The shaping of classical Christianity was largely done on African soil.³ However, for reasons of scope when I refer to the African church today, I will limit my comments to sub-Saharan Africa. The history of the Church in sub-Saharan Africa is relatively modern, under two and half centuries. Even in the current history of the church, the contributions of Africans are not adequately captured.

Protestant forms of Christianity began entering sub-Sahara Africa with the return of freed slaves from Europe and North America in the late eighteenth century.⁴ The establishment and spread of Christianity were in tandem with commerce, civilization, and colonialism. Christianity was shaped by western perspectives and theologizing. Efforts of African intellectuals to free themselves from colonial shackles and attain freedom gained momentum in the middle of the twentieth century. While the core of these efforts was for political freedom and liberation, church men and women endeavored for self-theologizing, devoid of paternalism from western missionary endeavors. A few competing theologies emerged with the magisterial works of some of the burgeoning theologians from various denominational background. This article focuses on the contribution of Byang Kato, a young Nigerian who emerged on the scene of theological discourse in the mid-1970s, critically engaging the emerging theological systems. Kato was opposed to the work of some of the leading African theologians then. In his groundbreaking work, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*,⁵ he lamented what he deemed as 'syncretistic universalism' in the Church. In critiquing the theologies of others, Kato aspired to define and establish what he considered to be biblical Christianity and evangelicalism.

Brief Biography of Byang Kato (1936–1975)

Byang Kato was born and raised in Kwoi, from the Ham or Jabba ethnic group in Kaduna State in the predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria. Kato

² Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation, "Purpose of *The Mission of God Study Bible* and How to Use It," vii.

³ Thomas C. Oden, *Rebirth of African Orthodoxy: Return to Foundations*, 48.

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 139.

⁵ *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975) was the monograph revision of Byang Kato's doctoral dissertation, "A Critique of Incipient Universalism in Tropical Africa" (1974). Paul Bowers has noted that *Theological Pitfalls* was Kato's "maiden effort" which should be understood "not as a final word but as a first word, a promise of what might have come had Kato been spared." "Evangelical Theology in Africa: Byang Kato's Legacy," 85.

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was born on 23 June 1936 to Hari and Zawi who were adherents of the African traditional religion of the Jaba people. The Jaba were resistant to the predominant Islamic region in Northern Nigeria and were vulnerable to suppression by the Islamic ruling class.⁶ As a child, Kato was dedicated as a fetish priest to the tribal God known as *Pop-ku*.⁷ Given the circumstances of his birth and childhood, Kato self-identified as the "Devil's baby."⁸ His immersion into the traditional culture and belief system was exceptional. Raised as a child in the best tradition of his tribe, he performed the traditional rite of passage to transition from childhood to adulthood, at the age of ten.⁹ The initiation rites conferred further sense of ethnic identity, evidenced by the visibly incised tribal marks he bore on his temples. The initiation rite was an important milestone in his development as a traditional African child. The initiation was also the means of acquiring essential skills for livelihoods and other manhood responsibilities in the society.

Kato encountered Christian missionaries in his village and converted to Christianity at the age of twelve. His conversion to Christianity was another important milestone that radically changed his life, and from being the 'devil's baby' to an 'ambassador of Christ.'¹⁰ A missionary lady of the Sudan Inland Mission (SIM, now Service in Mission) presenting the gospel message on a gramophone in the village square in Kwoi attracted Kato. He followed the missionary to Sunday School at the SIM central church in Kwoi and eventually enrolled in the mission primary school. Kato gave his life to Christ when his Nigerian teacher taught the class the bible story about Noah and the Ark, emphasizing the way humans and other creatures were saved through the flood. Kato perceived the need for salvation through Jesus Christ from the pending judgement of a sinful world and testifies: "One day the teacher told us the exciting story of Noah and his ark. At the end he solemnly applied the story to us in a personal way, inviting us to accept the Lord as Savior. I did so with a child's faith and sincerity, little realizing all that was involved."¹¹ However, Kato's father objected to his son's association and enrolment in the missionary school, a threat for the young Kato succeeding his father as fetish priest in the

⁶ Yusufu Turaki, *Tainted Legacy: Islam, Colonialism and Slavery in Northern Nigeria*, 113.

⁷ Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato: Ambassador of Christ*, 17.

⁸ Byang Kato, "The Devils Baby," 1.

⁹ de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, 17–81.

¹⁰ In April 1975, Kato wrote an appeal which summarized his own approach to Christian life: "Our greatest need is to live up to the claims we make as Christians in Africa, and promote the Christian message for Africa in all areas of life and everywhere possible as true ambassadors of Christ." *Biblical Christianity in Africa*, 37. Recognizing this, de la Haye gave her biography of Kato the subtitle *Ambassador of Christ*.

¹¹ Kato, "The Devil's Baby," 2.

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clan. Ironically, Kato's grandfather intervened and prevailed on Kato's father for the young man to enroll in school, one year later, at Byang's own expense. However, Kato's father ensured Byang met his obligations in helping on the farm and could have been involved with daily negotiations with the family, living out his faith while under the same roof with his father. Converting to Christianity added to young Kato's woes in the family, as he was persecuted by his father. He also worked part-time in the home of missionaries to earn money for his school fees.¹²

Kato had a blended educational experience, receiving his primary education in a regular mission school but being self-taught for his secondary education. Kato studied on his own and took correspondence courses to sit and pass the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations to gain entrance to Igbaja Bible College and the London Bible College. He gained admission to the London Bible College in 1963, the first African to do so, and graduating in record time with a Bachelor of Divinity with Honors in 1968. Three years later, he proceeded to the USA for postgraduate studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master in Systematic Theology (MST) and a doctorate (DTh) in systematic theology, the first person from the evangelical community in sub-Saharan Africa to do so.

Kwoi, Kato's birthplace, remained a vital part of his world. His wife, Jummai Rahila Gandu was a princess of the Jaba ruling house. His three children were also born in Kwoi. He worked among his compatriots and his local community as a teacher, in print media, writer and counsellor, and as pastor before he left Nigeria for further studies. He endeared himself to people, regardless of their social standing. The Kwoi community immortalized him by naming a street in the municipality in his honor, Byang Kato Road.¹³

Kato returned home to his alma mater to teach at the Igbaja Seminary following his studies in the UK. He was elected the following year as General Secretary of the ECWA Church¹⁴ and moved to Jos before leaving for postgraduate studies in the USA in 1970. Immediately after his studies in the USA, Kato was appointed as the first African General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) – now Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA).¹⁵ This appointment was the peak of his career, in terms of his theological contribution and for which he is remembered. He doubled as the Executive Secretary of the AEA Theological

¹² de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, 22.

¹³ Aiah Dorkuh Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato: The Life and Legacy of Africa's Pioneer Evangelical Theologian*, 142.

¹⁴ The Evangelical Church Willing All is an African denomination that grew out of SIM mission work in what is now Nigeria. One of the largest church denominations in Nigeria, it now has congregations in at least nineteen countries.

¹⁵ See AEA's website, <https://aeafrica.org/>

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Commission. As the leader of this organization of African evangelicals, he was connected to the global evangelical family within the World Evangelical Alliance. He served on the executive board of WEA as Vice President and was first Chairperson of the WEA Theological Commission. Kato was plenary speaker at the maiden Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization in 1974, where he presented two papers. However, Kato's tenure as the preeminent leader of African evangelicals lasted for a little over two years before his tragic death by drowning at Mombasa, Kenya.

Byang Kato's Theological Legacy

Because Byang Kato did not craft a theological tradition of his own with his name on it, some do not find Kato's theological contribution to be popularly acceptable. His polemics may not fit into the mode of theological innovation like others with unique philosophical ideas of their own. However, my earlier study demonstrates the defining contours of Kato's theological legacy, especially his hermeneutics, understanding of African Christian identity, and contribution to evangelical theological education.¹⁶ A critical evaluation of Kato's life and ministry shows how his theological views were shaped. His education and the socio-cultural context in which he was raised may have shaped his worldview and his theology.

Kato was schooled in "the Anglo-American 'fundamentalist evangelical' movement with their hard-won battle over biblical inerrancy and fundamentalist hermeneutics and theological convictions."¹⁷ According to Asumang, "the authoritative voice of the Bible interpreted largely from a fundamentalist evangelical hermeneutics is the bedrock of evangelicalism."¹⁸ Kato thus favored the literal grammatico-historical interpretation of Scripture.¹⁹ The Anglo-American evangelical movement is a coalition of different evangelical traditions. According to Harris,

Fundamentalism developed out of nineteenth-century Anglo-American evangelicalism. It was a strange coalition of diverse evangelical groups who rallied against the common enemy of theological liberalism. In particular, they were unified in upholding the truth of scripture—which they conceived primarily in terms of factual reliability—against the theories of higher criticism.²⁰

¹⁶ Aiah Foday-Khabenje, "An Analytical Biography of Byang Henry Kato (1936–1975): His Theological Legacy and Contribution to Biblical Hermeneutics, African Christian Identity and Evangelical Theological Education."

¹⁷ Annang Asumang, "State of Preaching: Insights from Global South," 6.

¹⁸ Asumang, "State of Preaching: Insights from Global South," 6.

¹⁹ Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 78.

²⁰ Harriet A. Harris, "Fundamentalism and Evangelicals," 2.

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There have been debates about the differences between what are now two distinct traditions of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism. Stott highlights the difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism, writing: “The evangelical faith is not a synonym for fundamentalism. The word ‘fundamentalism’ originally referred to publications of Christian truths or affirmations of the Christian faith called ‘The Fundamentals’. However, the word has become a slur which evangelicals reject; they would not accept the fundamentalist label.”²¹ For others, such as Asumang, the lines between fundamentalism and evangelicalism appeared to be blurred.²² Kato battled liberalism to the left and also the conservatives to the extreme right, like the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) with roots in American fundamentalism and separatism.

Kato metaphorically referred to the rather uncomfortable position he found himself as “meat in the sandwich,”²³ caught in the middle of the extreme left liberal ecumenists and the extreme right separatists with legalistic zeal, aggressive separatism and belief in their own extremist interpretation of Scripture. According to Breman, Kato stated:

We are called names, ‘neo-evangelicals’ by the right, and ‘separatists’ by the left. Missionaries have refused to have fellowship with me because I’m too ecumenical, and in other places, I’ve been called a separatist who has been deceived by American missionaries! . . . maybe we are in the right place when we are criticized by both sides.²⁴

The evangelical stream of the Church which Kato embraced for his doctrinal and theological beliefs had itself become a mark against him for some. Quoting from an anonymous source, Asumang states:

a statement released in 1960 . . . sums up the ethos of this fundamentalist hermeneutics. It asserts that the choice before every new generation is “between a Christianity that is consistent with itself and one that is not . . . between one that is wholly God-given and one that is partly man-made.” We have to choose whether to

²¹ John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness*, 19–20.

²² Asumang, “State of Preaching,” 7.

²³ Byang Kato, *The Spirits*, 17.

²⁴ Quoted in Christina Breman, “A Portrait of Dr. Byang H. Kato,” 146; citing Kato, “Ecclesiastical Structures Today.” On the historical tensions between the ecumenists of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) and the evangelicals associated with the Lausanne Movement and organizations such as the Association for Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), see Wouter Theodoor van Veelen, “‘No other name!’ The Contribution of Byang H. Kato to the Salvation Debate.”

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bow to the authority of the Son of God, or whether on our own authority to discount and contravene a part of His teaching; whether to rest content with Christianity according to Christ, or whether to go hankering after a Christianity according to the spirit of our age; whether to behave as Christ's disciples, or as His tutors. We have to choose whether we will accept the biblical doctrine of Scripture as it stands, or permit ourselves to re-fashion it according to our fancy.²⁵

The fixation of the pioneers of African theologies in the post-colonial era of the late 1960s was the indigenization and inculturation of Christianity into African worldviews. Thus, the tendency was the cohabitation of African traditional religions and "Christianity under one camp."²⁶ Kato draws his importance in laying the foundation for understanding evangelicalism, especially in the African context.

With the confusion about the meaning of the word 'evangelical,' there is need to explore the meaning of this term and Kato's understanding of it. The word 'evangelical' originates from the Greek word *euangélion* and means 'Good News.' While this may be a reference to the whole Bible, God's word to the world, specifically, the good news is about the person of Jesus Christ atoning for sins of all people for their redemption and justification. The first four books of the New Testament, narrating the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, from four different perspectives, are referred to as the Gospels or Good News of Jesus Christ. Evangelicals have a high view of the Bible, all sixty-six books as the word of God and adhere to its infallibility and inerrancy.²⁷ The Bible is authoritative in all things about faith in God and the conduct of believers. This belief is consistent with orthodoxy, defended by the Reformation and Church fathers in the early church, believed to be consistent with the Apostles' teaching and New Testament Christianity. Alluding to the well-known survey findings by Bebbington, Stott writes: "Evangelicalism is characterized by *conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism*"²⁸—this emphasis on the Bible, the Cross, conversion, and activism are known as the evangelical quadrilateral.

Evangelicals read the Bible with these presuppositions and follow a particular way of interpretation to inform their hermeneutics. A preferred evangelical hermeneutic is the inductive Bible study method, that looks for

²⁵ Asumang, "State of Preaching," 7

²⁶ Kato, "Critique of Incipient Universalism," ThD diss., 13.

²⁷ It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage with the debate regarding the parameters of the *infallibility and inerrancy* of Scripture.

²⁸ Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 28.

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evidence in the text and the context to possible conclusion or inferences about the meaning of the text. According to Bombaro:

A truly evangelical reading of Scripture would be a gospel-oriented reading of Scripture, where the Bible's in-built hermeneutic of christocentrism would override special interest interpretations; that self-presenting biblical hermeneutic already stands codified in at least two other extra-biblical sources of authority — “the canon of Truth,” and the classic, consensual interpretation of Scripture. These three things, together, preserve the Bible's authoritative witness, nature, and content from fraudulent biblicist manipulations and misappropriations.²⁹

While the high view and approach to interpretation is shared by evangelicals generally in the global Church, application of the gospel is contextual. Thus, at the heart of evangelical theology in Africa is engaging the dominant socio-cultural and African traditional religious worldviews with the biblical worldview that is authentically African and biblical. Sound theology affirms the validity of Scripture and its authoritative relevance.

Kato's 'lone' voice “in the chorus of positive evaluations of the African pre-Christian religious heritage”³⁰ informing hermeneutical discourse in Africa may appear to be 'rejectionist.' However, a study of Kato reveals his theological constructs were non-conformist and more consistent with the received apostolic teaching, trustworthy and entirely reliable for faith and conduct.³¹ The way the early interpreters of the Bible shaped the understanding of the church was articulated by Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 445), a French monk. According to Oden:

Christian teaching consists in “what you have received, not what you have thought up; a matter not of ingenuity, but of doctrine; not of private acquisition, but of Public Tradition; a matter brought to you, not put forth by you, in which you must be not the author but the guardian, not the founder but the sharer, not the leader, but the follower.”³²

Classical doctrinal belief was that which has been believed and lived out by the faith community in all cultures and believed from the time of the apostolic witness. Also, that which has been accepted by the general consent of both clergy and laity in the whole church, over the whole world, in all generations.. This is succinctly stated as universality, apostolic antiquity and conciliar consent.³³

²⁹ John J. Bombaro, Review of *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*, 84.

³⁰ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, xviii.

³¹ Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 195.

³² Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitory*, XXII.27, quoted in Oden, *Rebirth of African Orthodoxy*, 114–115.

³³ Oden, *African Orthodoxy*, 191.

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Kato affirms the place of the early patristic fathers, and writes:

It is often forgotten that the Apostolic Creed, on which most Western church creeds are based, was composed by Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Athanasius, the great architect of the earliest Christian creed and defender of Orthodoxy, arose out of Africa. Other theologians of Africa, Arius and Origen, of course, were not condoned in their false views. Inevitably, many cultural tendencies were passed on to the converts by the Western missionary.³⁴

Kato's theological vision was preservation and application of these conservative perspectives of biblical Christianity in the African church, even if and rightly so, these views had resonance with other regions of the world. Kato's angst and opposition for much of what was trending in theological circles was the basis for his writing and theological contribution. Kato states the purpose for his doctoral research thus:

The primary purpose of this study is to sound an alarm and warn Christians from both sides of the argument concerning the dangers of universalism. The noble desire to contextualize Christianity in Africa must not be forsaken. An indigenous theology is a necessity. But must one betray scriptural principles of God and His dealing with man at the altar of any regional theology? Should human sympathy and rationalism override what is clearly taught in the Scriptures? Many voices in Africa and outside the continent are answering these questions in the affirmative. Their number is increasing as the days go by. In a small way, at least, the writer wants to alert the Christians in Africa and the gullible enthusiasts of Africa indigenization from overseas concerning these trends. The second purpose is to bring to the attention of the proponents of 'African Theology' ecumenists, and all others with universalistic tendencies, the fact that there is another way of looking at the relationship between Christianity and African religions. It is not neocolonialism to plead the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ. It is not an air of superiority to herald the fact that all who are not "in Christ" are lost. It is merely articulating what the Scriptures say.³⁵

Kato was not opposed to contextualization and African Theology *per se*, however, he was skeptical about the tendency to *merge* African traditional

³⁴ Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 176. Kato's assertion here about Origen is unfortunate, reflecting western defamation of Origen. While some of Origen's speculations err into heterodoxy, everything he taught as doctrine was accepted as orthodox.

³⁵ Byang H. Kato, "A Critique of Incipient Universalism in Tropical Africa: A study of the religious concepts of the 'Jaba' people of West Africa," 59.

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religious beliefs and practices with Christianity. He actually introduced the subject of contextualization in his plenary presentation at the maiden Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization.³⁶ He states: "Theology should be expressed in the context of every people for their understanding and practice, but Christian Theology does not need polarization, which has a tendency of adding to or subtracting from the gospel of Christ."³⁷ He emphasized the need for contextualization and states:

If there is any need in the Church of Christ in Africa today, it is the need for theology expressed in the context of Africa by Africans and for Africans. Professor John S. Mbiti has rightly observed, 'Mission Christianity was not from the start prepared to face a serious encounter with either traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa. THE CHURCH HERE NOW FINDS ITSELF IN THE SITUATION OF TRYING TO EXIST WITHOUT A THEOLOGY.'³⁸

On his reticence about the emerging 'African Theology,' Kato made his reservation known and states:

When it comes to the case of localizing theology, the immediate question that can be legitimately raised is what is the basis of such a theology? Will the Bible still be the source of such a theology? If the answer is affirmative, then is the Bible divided? The obvious answer is that the same Bible speaks to the American, the Asian and the African. If that is the case, then theology is one. There cannot be American theology or African theology. It is true that the term is used sometimes to describe the area where a view is prevalent. But it is a misnomer.³⁹

In his apparent rejection of the term 'African Theology,' Kato did not deny the expression of theology in the context of Africa, however, he urged African theologians to contribute to understanding biblical theology, for the understanding of the "universal body of Christ." In dealing with local issues specific to own context, "the ever-abiding Word of God remains the authoritative source. But this biblical theology should be expressed in terms that are meaningful to every people in their own situation to meet their peculiar needs."⁴⁰

In critiquing others, Kato highlighted his alternate view, convicted that it was a biblical view, on the issues he engaged them. Thus, Kato laid out the

³⁶ Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 201.

³⁷ Byang Kato, "Warning to Evangelicals," 29.

³⁸ Byang Kato, "Written Theology," 1; all caps emphasis original.

³⁹ Kato, "Written Theology," 2.

⁴⁰ Kato, "Written Theology," 2.

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contours of biblical Christianity which he deemed as evangelical theology. Kato summarizes his theological position, writing:

When it comes to the question of Christian understanding of theology, there is only one theology. Theology may be discussed under various departments such as Old Testament Theology, Pastoral Theology, etc. But they are all derived from the same source which is the Bible. All true theology must therefore, be Biblical Theology if it is to be anything Christian. It is accurate to speak of liberal or conservative evangelical theology. The yardstick for determining which is which of course, is the Bible. The liberal views the Bible as a changing book according to man's circumstances. He accepts certain parts and rejects others. The evangelical accepts all the 66 canonical books of the Bible as God-breathed, without error in the original manuscripts, faithfully transmitted and is absolutely trustworthy.⁴¹

Kato's stance on the doctrinal place of the Bible in theologizing and the classical doctrines of the Church were his theological emphases. Even if he himself did not set these out in a systematic account in his writing, Kato was concerned about the historic or classical doctrines of the Christian faith and wrote: "Unless the church in Africa wants to isolate itself from historic Christianity, it should take a position on these vital doctrines."⁴² Kato endeavored to build institutions to promote sound theological training. Kato's contribution went beyond mere rhetoric and warning the church, as he provided a recipe for overcoming theological errors as well as a roadmap for sound theological education. He articulated a vision for sound evangelical theological training on the continent as the cure for these theological pitfalls at all levels, including informal, off-site and home-based education, education for children, and above all, graduate-level theological education.

Speaking on the subject of Christian Higher Education at the First International Conference of Reformed Institutions for Christian Scholarship, Potchefstroom, South Africa, in September 1975, Kato said:

A Church without a sound theological basis is like a drifting boat in a storm without an anchor. The wind of every doctrine is blowing against the Church today. The wind of contextualization is testing the relevance of the boat of evangelical theology. The ill-wind of ecumenism with its call for secularization of Christianity is proving very tempting to the average Christian. The wind of Black theology, with its legitimate quest for human dignity but without an adequate term of reference, appears convincing. The wind of

⁴¹ Kato, "Written Theology," 1-2.

⁴² Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 149.

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African Theology with its rightful search for the African personality yet failing to see the unique nature of Christian revelation, is very appealing. For the ship of evangelical faith to stand the test of the times, it must be grounded on the hope of our fathers.⁴³

Kato saw biblical ignorance as a threat to New Testament or biblical Christianity. In the first place, belief about the Bible and cultural presuppositions have implications for Christian doctrine and practice and thus, theological beliefs. Turaki notes that for Kato, “the Bible was authoritative over the whole of life and everything in life was captive to the Word of God [and thus] his primary tool for doing theology was the Bible.”⁴⁴ While all may lay claim to the bible, the practice may not be consistent with biblical orthodoxy, for which Kato contended. The place and authority of the Bible, what the Bible is, how it is interpreted and applied—biblical hermeneutics— was central in the disputations with other African theologians. The opinion one holds about the Bible also inform the approach and method of interpretation and application.

The orthodox position affirms that the Bible is the Word of God, revealed through the agency of the Holy Spirit, causing God’s word to be written by humans, so others could hear and understand the message and apply in their own contexts (2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:20–21). There are others who subscribe to neo-orthodox and liberal views of the Bible and their view of the Bible is mundane, thus undermining its infallibility, inerrancy and authority. Evangelicals, like Kato, hold the orthodox view of the Bible. Evangelical Theology contends for orthodoxy, including fidelity to the Bible as the Word of God, and therefore inerrant, infallible, and authoritative.

Kato crafted the blueprint for evangelical theological education in Africa. Kato’s plan, according to Nystrom, included four objectives:

- i. Develop African evangelical scholars who would write and publish their theological reflections in the African context.
- ii. Develop graduate schools on the continent where African leaders can be trained without having to leave the continent.
- iii. Develop a theological journal for the publication of the theological ideas of African scholars.
- iv. Develop an accrediting agency to set standards for theological education and monitor the progress of schools to maintain standards.⁴⁵

His plan resulted in the establishment of the first two postgraduate theological schools to serve the whole of sub-Saharan Africa; the Accrediting Council for

⁴³ Byang Kato, “Creating Facilities for Evangelical Theological Training in Africa,” 363.

⁴⁴ Yusufu Turaki, “The Theological Legacy of the Reverend Doctor Byang Henry Kato,” 152.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Nystrom, “Let African Christians Be Christian Africans.”

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Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA, now the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa), an institution for the standardization and accreditation of theological education; and the Christian Learning Materials Centre (CLMC, now Christian Learning Materials for Children), which produced curriculum and Sunday school materials for the nurture and development of children by the church.

Kato's contribution to theological education went beyond Africa; he made an important contribution to the global evangelical church as well. Firstly, Kato himself exemplified a rigorous pursuit of sound theological education in the church in Africa. He paved the way and encouraged both his peers and younger leaders to pursue biblical studies. For example, a renowned African Christian theological educator and a contemporary of Kato, Tite Tiéno, states:

My own introduction to the importance of theology in Africa dates back to the second general assembly of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) in January 1973 at Limuru in Kenya. It was there that Byang Kato became the first African evangelical leader to call attention to theological endeavours in our part of the world. The challenge he gave marked a turning point in evangelical theological development in Africa.⁴⁶

Kato's successor at AEA, Tokunboh Adeyemo, also testifies getting inspiration from Kato for his own theological career.⁴⁷ The list also includes Yusufu Turaki,⁴⁸ among renowned theological scholars in Africa. Kato was a member of the Lausanne Continuation Committee that was setup at the maiden Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization. He was also elected as Vice Chairperson of the World Evangelical Alliance and first Chairperson of WEA's Theology Commission. He made AEA known widely in Africa and beyond.

The quest for African independence and identity was at the heart of African intellectual discourse, including theological reflections. The general perception about the impact of slavery and colonialism in Africa was that it resulted in a loss of African identity and human dignity. The belief was that some Western missionaries aided and abetted their compatriots in the colonial enterprise and thus, contributed to the diminution of African culture and traditional religions, leading to loss and quest for African identity. Thus, the importance of African Christian identity in African theological discourse, to which Kato contributed.⁴⁹

The main proponents of African Christian identity conceived theology primarily as a response to missionary underestimation of the value of African

⁴⁶ Tite Tiéno, "The Theological Task of the Church in Africa: Where Are We Now and Where Should We Be Going?" 3.

⁴⁷ Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Foreword," 11–13.

⁴⁸ Yusufu Turaki in an interview with author in Jos, Nigeria on 27 May 2019.

⁴⁹ Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 133.

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traditional religions and their focus was on establishing how pre-Christian beliefs⁵⁰ would lead them to Christ in the same way as the missionary message from the Bible, even if packaged in Western culture.⁵¹ When African intellectuals turned to African traditional cultural heritage to explain African distinctiveness, African theologians proposed to look to Africa's traditional religious heritage for framing their own distinctive identity. For African theologians like E. Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria (1913–1993), John S. Mbiti (1931–2019) and Jesse N. K. Mugambi (b. 1947) of Kenya, and Kwame Bediako of Ghana (1945–2008), answering the questions African intellectuals were asking was taken to be the defining task of African theology.⁵² But as I have noted elsewhere,

It would appear however that the quest for authentic African identity, by African intelligentsia, paradoxically resulted in exacerbating the identity crisis. The assimilation of Western culture through education and way of life informed much of their reasoning. And yet politically, they wanted to distance themselves from anything Western, and created a portrait of an “African” that was not a true African,⁵³

though perhaps this is more obviously the case for politicians like Robert Mugabe (1924–2019) and for secular African philosophers. Kato especially rejected what he saw as “some theologians seek[ing] to find [their African] identity in African traditional religions,”⁵⁴ such as the “radical continuity” approach of Idowu.⁵⁵

Kato perceived the question and answer to the identity problem differently. In the first place, he questioned the reality of a single African persona. Commenting on the Kinshasa Declaration about “the renaissance of African Personality,”⁵⁶ Kato wrote:

⁵⁰ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 236–239.

⁵¹ Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 164.

⁵² Paul Bowers, “Byang Kato and Beyond: The 2008 Byang Kato Memorial Lectures 1,” 6.

⁵³ Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 135.

⁵⁴ Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 26.

⁵⁵ Timothy Palmer, “Byang Kato: A Theological Reappraisal,” 12; borrowing the language of “radical continuity,” “radical discontinuity,” and “middle ground” of Kwame Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” in *Issues in African Christian Theology*, edited by Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw, and Tite Tiénou (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998).

⁵⁶ The “Kinshasa Declaration” was given by the Executive Committee of the AACC on 31 October 1971 following AACC conference held in Kinshasa, Zaïre (now DR

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One gains the impression that African peoples enjoyed homogeneity and possessed a single ethos in terms of African Personality in the recent past. Now this loss is being recovered in ecumenism, according to the declaration. But apart from the solidarity of the human race, is there any evidence, written or oral, that all 1,000 peoples or tribes of Africa were one united group of people?⁵⁷

Kato argued further:

The Bible addresses itself to the black man, in his plight. It has done so in pointing out both the dignity and depravity of all men. It is the responsibility of Christian theologians to bring these facts to the knowledge of the public. According to the Bible, believers, under whatever human condition, are already liberated (Gal 5:1).⁵⁸

Kato saw conversion to Christianity as a rebirth – being born again of the Spirit — and therefore becoming a new creation. His new identity was primarily that of a Christian, a child of God and follower of Christ, and a new creation, in accordance with what the Bible says (John 1:12; 2 Cor 5:17). Consequently, he argued that “a search for identity fails to appreciate the uniqueness of Christianity.”⁵⁹

Kato may have been lonely in his theologizing in his time. However, the *ecclesia*, the body of Christ, the church as a whole, was not lost on him. As an African, his personhood was tied to his community, especially the Jaba ethnic people of Kwoi. However, as a Christian, his selfhood went beyond his tribe and, indeed, his Nigerian heritage. Kato's sense of community went beyond *ubuntu*, the highly appreciated African way of relational life, the collectivist culture of interdependence of most African peoples. The search for a true African identity is often skewed to vindicate the African or the Black person. The call has been to turn to a Black theology of liberation or an integrated theological synthesis of ATR beliefs with Christianity – “African theology” – as espoused by some theologians in Kato's time.

However, the more that has been written about the subject of self-understanding or identity, the more elusive the identity question has become. Kato's identity in Christ was his answer to the daunting quest for identity. According to Kato: “From the biblical point of view all people of the world are divided into two groups: the people of God, and the people outside the covenant relationship with God.”⁶⁰ The distinction does not depend on one's race, tribe,

Congo), 18–31 October 1971. Kato quotes the declaration in full in Appendix III of *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 201.

⁵⁷ Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 156.

⁵⁸ Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 52.

⁵⁹ Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 13.

⁶⁰ Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 21.

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culture or geography (Luke 12:30). The African identity debate has undercurrent of racial prejudice between Africans (the black people) and their western colonizers with their missionary compatriots. The perception was that slavery and colonialism in Africa resulted in loss of African identity and human dignity. Western missionaries may have aided and abetted their colonial compatriots in demeaning African cultural and belief systems.

Kato's take on the question then was to argue for a "third race" for all who have found new birth in Christ, apart from the earthly identity or race. This resonates with the New Testament and Early Church eras, when in addition to the 'two peoples,' Jews and Gentiles, Christians comprised a third people group, drawn from all ethnic and cultural groups.⁶¹ However, Kato urged "While God should be given the first place in the believer's life, the government also deserves the loyalty of all its citizens, the Christian included."⁶² Kato asserted a 'Christian African' identity, Christian first, then African.⁶³ This describes an identity that transcends the confused split personality between the authentic traditional African and the de-Africanized person by foreign or Western cultures — indeed, that transcends the defaced image of all humanity without Christ, regardless of race, status or origin. Kato's conception of the Christian African identity satisfies the yearning and quest for human dignity and self-worth, not only for the African or Black person but for the whole of humanity, lost and dead in sin. Kato believed he had attained a new identity in this life and the life to come — that of a Christian African.⁶⁴

Conclusion

I have sought to highlight Byang Kato's unique theological contribution in African theological discourse, specifically exploring Kato's life and ministry and theological contribution in the fields of biblical hermeneutics, theological education, and the daunting question of African Christian identity. While Kato certainly "prioritized evangelicalism ... he did not categorically dismiss the sociopolitical aspects of the gospel,"⁶⁵ but recognized that "Christians cannot isolate themselves" from "the strong prophetic demands in Scripture for social justice."⁶⁶ If Kato was radical, it was because he had experienced a radical conversion to Christ. Kato's spiritual journey from birth as a 'devil's baby' to an

⁶¹ For a discussion of Christian identity as a third *genos* (anachronistically translated 'race'), see Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*.

⁶² Byan H. Kato, "Christian Citizenship."

⁶³ Kato, "Critique of Incipient Universalism," 265–266; cf. Kato, *Biblical Christianity*, 52.

⁶⁴ Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 288–289.

⁶⁵ van Veelan, "'No Other Name!'," 69.

⁶⁶ Byang Kato, "Jesus Christ Frees," paragraph 4, quoted in van Veelan, "'No Other Name!'," 70.

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eminent 'ambassador for Christ' contains an important theological lesson. Kato demonstrated his self-understanding of his faith and contended for biblical Christianity to safeguard the church in Africa from syncretistic universalism. He pioneered the establishment of evangelical Christianity in Africa by envisioning and outlining a plan for sound theological education at all levels, especially for founding advanced-level evangelical theological institutions in Africa. The challenges the Church faces in the current era resonates with the issues Kato battled. Therefore, Kato's theological legacy is an important lesson for the contemporary church, especially in Africa.

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Kwame Bediako, Promoter of African Christian Thought

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Abstract

Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) was an influential African Christian theologian. Bediako's theological achievements have received a fair amount of scrutiny, but his work as an organizer, promoter, developer, and sustainer of Christian thinking is arguably at least as valuable as his ideas. This article surveys the scope of what Kwame Bediako achieved as a Christian intellectual entrepreneur, it examines how he did it, and it explains why such work is so important. This essay traces the development of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture, the formation of networks and resourcing initiatives for Christian thought in Africa and beyond, and Bediako's methods as an intellectual agent. The strategic importance of these efforts is enormous. Bediako's achievements should challenge others to do their part to strengthen the infrastructure of Christian thought, in Africa and worldwide.

Résumé

Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) est un théologien chrétien africain influent. Les réalisations théologiques de Bediako ont fait l'objet d'un examen approfondi, mais son travail d'organisateur, de promoteur, de développeur et de soutien de la pensée chrétienne est sans doute au moins aussi précieux que ses idées. Cet article étudie l'étendue des réalisations de Kwame Bediako en tant qu'entrepreneur intellectuel chrétien, examine la manière dont il y est parvenu et explique pourquoi ce travail est si important. Cet essai retrace le développement de l'Institut Akrofi-Christaller de Théologie, de Mission et de Culture, la formation de réseaux et d'initiatives de ressources pour la pensée chrétienne en Afrique et au-delà, ainsi que les méthodes de Bediako en tant qu'agent intellectuel. L'importance stratégique de ces efforts est énorme. Les réalisations de Bediako devraient inciter d'autres personnes à faire leur part pour renforcer l'infrastructure de la pensée chrétienne, en Afrique et dans le monde.

Resumo

Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) foi um influente teólogo cristão africano. As realizações teológicas de Bediako têm sido objeto de um exame minucioso, mas o seu trabalho como organizador, promotor, originador e sustentador do pensamento cristão é, sem dúvida, pelo menos tão valioso como as suas ideias. Este artigo analisa o âmbito do que Kwame Bediako alcançou como empresário intelectual cristão e examina como o fez e explica por que razão esse trabalho é tão importante. Este ensaio traça o desenvolvimento do Instituto Akrofi-Christaller de Teologia, Missão e Cultura, a formação de redes e iniciativas de recursos para o pensamento cristão em África e fora da África, e os métodos de Bediako como agente intelectual. A importância estratégica destes esforços é enorme. As realizações de Bediako devem desafiar outros a fazer a sua parte para reforçar a infraestrutura do pensamento cristão, em África e no mundo inteiro.

Keywords

Kwame Bediako, Gillian M. Bediako, African theology, institutional development, intellectual promotion, fund-raising, African theological education, African theological publishing

Mots-clés

Kwame Bediako, Gillian M. Bediako, théologie africaine, développement institutionnel, promotion intellectuelle, collecte de fonds, enseignement théologique africain, édition théologique africaine

Palavras-chave

Kwame Bediako, Gillian M. Bediako, teologia africana, desenvolvimento institucional, promoção intelectual, angariação de fundos, educação teológica africana, publicação teológica africana

In the summer of 1974, Kwame Bediako (1945–2008), a Ghanaian scholar who was enrolled at the London Bible College (LBC), came home very excited after attending the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. As a student delegate, Bediako had met some dynamic Christian mission theologians from around the world, and he heard them rock the Lausanne conference with critiques of the evangelical missionary establishment that rode upon western cultural assumptions and world power, ignored patterns of injustice and oppression in the world, and presented the Gospel primarily in terms of personal salvation. As a result, the conference-issued *Lausanne Covenant* (1975) proclaimed that the gospel message also implied “a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression, and discrimination,” and urged Christians “to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.” “The salvation we claim,”

the Covenant added, “should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.”¹

Bediako, a promising young intellectual who had earned a doctorate in African literature in French from the University of Bordeaux, was energized by this surprising turn at Lausanne and by the Global South “radical evangelicals” who influenced it.² He, in turn, seemed to have made an impression on conference planners, because he was invited thereafter to participate in several follow-on consultations and to write a good half-dozen articles.³

Yet what Bediako did right after Lausanne speaks volumes about his subsequent career. He and his wife and fellow theologian, Gillian M. (Mary) Bediako, drew up plans for “A Centre for Mission Research in Ghana.” The Bediakos felt called to Christian scholarship, and they saw the need for a new kind of agency — a gospel and culture study center — for pursuing and sustaining that vocation.⁴ Starting up a study center is not the first aim of most scholars, but at Lausanne, Bediako and his new-found friends saw the power of the western evangelical mission industry, and they sought the means to sustain an alternative vision.

Kwame Bediako went on to become a widely influential Christian intellectual leader, whom Andrew Walls (1928–2021) deemed to be “the outstanding African theologian of his generation.”⁵ Much has been written already to assess Bediako’s theological achievements, and some of that conversation also addresses his and Mary’s creation of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (ACMC), in Akropong, Ghana.⁶ But Kwame Bediako’s work as an organizer, promoter,

¹ “The Lausanne Covenant,” 4–5. On the overall impact of Lausanne ’74, see Brian Stanley, “Lausanne 1974: The Challenge from the Majority World to Northern-Hemisphere Evangelicalism.”

² Among those that Bediako met and heard at Lausanne were C. Rene Padilla (1932–2021) of Argentina, Samuel Escobar (b. 1934) of Peru, Orlando Costas (1941–1987) from Puerto Rico, David Gitari (1937–2013) from Kenya, and Vinay Samuel (b. 1942) from India.

³ Bediako participated in two of the Lausanne movement’s ensuing consultations: on gospel and culture in Willowbank, Bermuda, in January 1978; and on world evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand, in June of 1980. Among his early pieces in this field, see Bediako, “The Willowbank Consultation Jan 1978—A Personal Reflection,” and “The Missionary Inheritance.”

⁴ Kwame Bediako and Mary Bediako, *Ebenezer, This is how far the Lord has helped us: Reflections on the Institutional Itinerary of Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research & Applied Theology, 1974–2005*, 5.

⁵ Andrew F. Walls, “Kwame Bediako and Christian Scholarship in Africa,” 192.

⁶ Tim Hartman, *Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity*, is a helpful recent summary of Bediako’s work which also recounts others’ assessments of it. See also Sara J. Fretheim, *Kwame Bediako and African Christian Scholarship: Emerging Religious Discourse in Twentieth Century Ghana*.

developer, and sustainer of Christian thinking went far beyond Akropong, and it is arguably at least as valuable as his ideas. This essay will survey the scope of what Kwame Bediako achieved as a Christian intellectual entrepreneur, it will examine how he did it, and it will explain why such work is so important.

I. What Bediako Achieved

Before we start, it might be helpful for those who are not familiar with Bediako's contributions as a theologian to have a summary.

Scholarship

Kwame Bediako was a very creative thinker and a prolific writer and speaker. His international publications included two major treatises on African Christianity⁷ and a collection of essays on Jesus Christ in an African context.⁸ He also produced several collections of public lectures that were published locally, and he wrote 90 chapters and articles that were published in African, European, North American and Asian books and journals.⁹ Bediako delivered the Duff Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, the Henry Martyn Lectures at Cambridge University, and the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. Throughout his career he spoke at universities and conferences across Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. This international work was important to Bediako. Says Walls, "He did perhaps more than anyone else to persuade mainstream Western theologians . . . that African theology was not an exotic minority specialization but an essential component in a developing global Christian discourse."¹⁰

Bediako's abiding quest as a scholar was to answer the question of identity: what did it mean to be Christian and African? Embedded in that question was a concern to answer the critics, especially in Africa, who said that Christianity was an alien and fundamentally alienating imposition on Africans. But as Bediako argued in both of his major works, *Theology and Identity* and *Christianity in Africa*, Christianity has become deeply embedded in Africa, and thus it is becoming, once again, a non-Western religion. His argument was based on Andrew Walls' and Lamin Sanneh's idea that Christianity was eminently translatable and was making itself at home in

⁷ *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (1992) and *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (1995).

⁸ *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (2004).

⁹ "Chronological Listing of Kwame Bediako's Writings," in Hartman, *Kwame Bediako*, 153–161.

¹⁰ Walls, "Kwame Bediako," 192.

cultures worldwide,¹¹ and he cited some dramatic grassroots expressions of the African-rooted Christianity that he encountered in Ghana.¹²

Especially after they returned to Ghana, the Bediakos engaged in “mother-tongue” theologizing, which meant conducting biblical and theological studies in local languages to yield new insights into how Christian faith and practice translated into local cultures. This work underscored another concept that the Bediakos had first encountered at the University of Aberdeen with Andrew Walls and Harold Turner: that the primal spirituality of indigenous peoples forms the spiritual undercarriage for all religion, not least for Christianity.

Bediako had his critics, especially those who thought that he focused too little on the pressing social and economic struggles of Africans and on what Christianity had to say to politics and the state.¹³ Even so, said an eminent Ghanaian theologian, “Kwame Bediako has left us an impressive legacy in Christian scholarship and helped to redefine Africa’s place in the scheme of the God.”¹⁴

“*New Wineskins*”

That intellectual and spiritual legacy would be plenty for most Christian thinkers, but from the very start of his calling as a theologian, Bediako felt compelled to do more. It seemed clear to him early on that the new and robustly African approaches to Christian theology he was advocating needed a freshly crafted institutional framework to nurture and sustain them. That was a common feeling that he caught from the other “Third-World” evangelical theologians he met at Lausanne. It was propelled by the strong reaction they had to the western evangelical values and vision that they encountered.¹⁵ Bediako’s own contribution to this conversation was a hard-hitting critique of western “institutional Evangelicalism” as a sort of missions-industrial complex, and a call to “unhinge the word ‘Evangelicals’ from its usual institutional posts.”¹⁶ The

¹¹ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, chapter 3, “The Translation Principle in Christian History,” 26–42; and Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*.

¹² Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, chapter 4, “How Is It that We Hear in Our Own Languages the Wonders of God? Christianity as Africa’s Religion,” 59–74.

¹³ Two important critics were Emmanuel Katongole: see his *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination*, 155–162; and Tinyiko Maluleke: see his “In Search of ‘The True Character of African Christian Identity’: A Review of the Theology of Kwame Bediako.”

¹⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Bediako of Africa: A Late 20th Century Outstanding Theologian and Teacher,” 15.

¹⁵ One of this group’s most important early publications put these critiques front and center: see *Proclaiming Christ in Christ’s Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism*.

¹⁶ Bediako, “World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of Christian World Missions,” 52–68; 67 (quotation).

new wine of this group's radical evangelicalism, they were convinced, would need new wineskins to carry it.¹⁷

Akrofi-Christaller Institute

Over the ensuing decade following Lausanne, the Bediakos kept revising their memorandum on a center for mission research. They showed their vision to trusted mentors and partners, such as Prof. Walls at Aberdeen and to the Rev. S. K. Aboa, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG). Aboa was a biblical scholar and translator, a church diplomat, and the former principal of the Presbyterian teacher training college in Akropong, a small town northeast of Accra.¹⁸ Aboa endorsed the Bediakos' idea of a center to PCG officials, and it was approved by the denomination in 1985, with Kwame and Mary as its founding staff. Two years later the Centre formally opened. It was chartered as the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (ACMC), and it was given the old Basel Mission buildings in Akropong to use.¹⁹

The Bediakos set out with Rev. Aboa's help to collect materials for a research library and archives and to develop a variety of programs to train and form Christian workers.²⁰ They served agencies of the PCG, and others as well, such as Women Aglow and the Full-Gospel Businessmen. They conducted Bible studies (in mother-tongue languages), weekend retreats and conferences, and intensive training programs for lay leaders, newly ordained pastors, and PCG missionaries. These "in-service" trainings and retreats became regular features of the ACMC's work.²¹

Meanwhile, the Bediakos and their board members raised funds to develop facilities. The old Basel Mission buildings were beautifully restored in 1992. Four years later, ACMC had a new student hostel and then in 1998 a dining hall. Major funders of these projects included the international mission agencies of the Dutch and German sister churches of the PCG.²²

¹⁷ Gillian Mary Bediako, "New Wine in New Wineskins': Kwame Bediako as Visionary Institution Builder."

¹⁸ Akropong is a royal seat, housing the palace of the regional king and his council. It became a center for the Basel Mission and the location for its seminary and teacher training college.

¹⁹ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 9–12.

²⁰ Evidently, Rev. Aboa had already been collecting fugitive materials documenting the history of Christianity — and Christian scholarship — among the Akan people. The Bediakos' dream of a center to engage such work thus was deeply attractive to him. Video interview of Mary Bediako with the author, 30 April 2021.

²¹ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 13–14.

²² Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 15, 19.

The ACMC staff grew as the activities multiplied. Some remarkable young teacher-scholars began their careers there, notably Eric Anum,²³ who went on to lead the Organization of African Instituted Churches in Nairobi and then took a teaching post in religion at the University of Cape Coast. Cephas Omenyo²⁴ went from ACMC to become a professor and then dean at the University of Ghana; and John Azumah, who taught at ACMC,²⁵ went on to Columbia Theological Seminary in the U.S. and then came back to head the Lamin Sanneh Institute at the University of Ghana. And for more than a decade, the Bediakos were also working at Andrew Walls' study center at the University of Edinburgh for several months each year, where Kwame was Duff Lecturer from 1987-1993 and then a lecturer in theology for Walls' African Christianity project until 1999. These were tremendously busy and productive times for the ACMC as it grew in facilities, staff, programs, and library resources, with ongoing support from the German and Dutch sister churches and from two American charities: the Stewardship Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts.²⁶

In 1995, Kwame was invited to lecture for the theology faculty of the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The theology faculty was impressed with Bediako and sought to hire him. He countered with the idea of collaborative M.Th. and Ph.D. programs that would engage students in alternate semesters at UKZN and at ACMC. The idea was approved, and the program began in 1998 and continued through 2004, with the Bediakos lecturing in UKZN several months each year. Under the new South African regime, however, the theological program at UKZN was being de-emphasized in favor of studying religion on a more secular basis. ACMC leaders therefore decided to go it alone. Ministry of Education officials in Ghana encouraged them to seek "specialist university" status to offer their own postgraduate degrees. This new status began in 2006, with a name change as well as a university charter, for the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture (ACI).²⁷

ACI had gained university status, but according to many who visited or studied there, it operated by a different institutional vision, more like that of *ashrams*, small and disciplined communities of scholars who lead a life of study and piety.²⁸ Bediako encouraged his colleagues to do their work collaboratively with high mutual trust and helpfulness. ACI was to be a place of spiritual formation as well as intellectual development. The "research fellows" who

²³ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 13–14.

²⁴ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 14.

²⁵ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 28.

²⁶ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 18–21.

²⁷ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 22–26; video interview of Mary Bediako by the author, 14 February 2022.

²⁸ Andrew Walls, "Of Ivory Towers and Ashrams: Some Reflections on Theological Scholarship in Africa: Guest Editorial."

taught at ACI and the master's and doctoral fellows joined staff at all levels for Bible study and worship (much of it in the Twi language) every morning. In their formal studies, the scholars explored the piety and practice of ordinary believers to understand how the gospel entered vernacular speech and practice.²⁹ Said the Bediakos, these grassroots "concerns and struggles of the church . . . were providing the essential resource and raw materials for the reflection, writing and action emerging from the Centre."³⁰

Despite some hard times initially and fluctuating levels of financial support, the ACI has grown since Kwame Bediako's death in 2008. It is not a large institution, but it is intently focused on research and writing in ways that most African theological seminaries are not, and it maintains its service to grassroots Christian programs. Having survived the passing of its founder, ACI's next challenge will be another succession, as some of its longest serving academics and administrators, including Mary Bediako, are now retiring. Much of its recent faculty development has been based on a grow-your-own staffing plan, but as the ACI seeks to influence African realms of theology more broadly and offer its unique approach to the wider Christian world, that pattern might need to change.

ACI looms so large among Kwame Bediako's accomplishments as a theological entrepreneur that one might be tempted to rest our case on this achievement alone. But there is more to see.

INFEMIT

One of the most exciting aspects of the Lausanne Congress for Kwame, Mary recalls, was finding so many kindred spirits there. At that meeting and in ensuing Lausanne consultations, Kwame saw a "new reality" being formed that he wanted to be a part of. He was learning that "individual vision was not enough . . . brilliant individuals come and go." If Christian thought and mission needed some "radical reshaping," then their movement to do that needed networks and institutions.³¹ In the wake of Lausanne, Bediako and several others of the "radical discipleship" group participated in the Consultation on Gospel and Culture in Willowbank, Bermuda in January 1978, and then in the June 1980 Consultation on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. They came away dismayed that those meetings reasserted pragmatic and narrowly instrumental "church growth" mission strategies and reaffirmed the primacy of evangelization. These moves relegated justice and social transformation to the

²⁹ The best exposition of the aims and daily life at ACI is in Fretheim, *Kwame Bediako and African Christian Scholarship*, chapter 6, "Reading the Akrofi-Christaller Institute as Text: Bediako's Magnum Opus," 148–190. Fretheim enrolled as a student at ACI, so she writes this chapter as a participant observer.

³⁰ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 16.

³¹ M. Bediako, "New Wine in New Wineskins," 17.

status of potential “effects” of the Gospel rather than being integral to the Gospel.³²

This group decided to form their own network and develop their own mission theology. They held their first international conference on Christology in Bangkok in 1982,³³ and in 1983 the group, led by Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel, established the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS). Its agenda included conferences and seminars on holistic mission theology. By 1996 OCMS was offering non-residential postgraduate degree programs. In 1984 the group founded a journal, *Transformation*, and in 1987 they added Regnum Books. That year they also incorporated as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT).³⁴ The creative duo of Samuel and Sugden led these pioneering efforts. Yet INFEMIT was in effect a worldwide alliance of regional networks, most notably the Latin American Theological Fraternity, led by René Padilla (1932–2021) and Samuel Escobar (b. 1934). Kwame Bediako was a party to all these initiatives of INFEMIT, which he served as a board member. He also published with Regnum books, wrote articles for *Transformation*, lectured at OCMS, and helped to lead INFEMIT conferences.³⁵ INFEMIT was not Bediako’s only international network, but it was an abiding one for him, and an inspiration for the network that he developed for Africa.

African Theological Fellowship

Beginning with his student days at the London Bible College and then at the University of Aberdeen, Bediako built relationships with like-minded African peers. One of his most important early contacts was David Gitari (1937–2013), an Anglican priest from Kenya who eventually became archbishop. The two men got to know each other during the Lausanne Congress and ensuing consultations, and together they participated in the founding of INFEMIT in

³² Bediako, “World Evangelization,” 53–64. See also C. René Padilla, “Evangelism and Social Responsibility from Wheaton ’66 to Wheaton ’83;” and Chris Sugden, “Evangelicals and Wholistic Evangelism,” 29–51.

³³ See the resulting volume, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies*, edited by Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel; and see Bediako’s chapter, “Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religion,” 81–121.

³⁴ Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Local-Global Perspective*, 71–97.

³⁵ One memorable role he played was as a co-drafter of a declaration, “Freedom and Justice in Church-State Relations,” which was ratified by the participants of an INFEMIT conference held in Osijek, Croatia, in April 1991. It was a delicate balancing act, since the newly added Eastern European delegates at the conference wanted nothing to do with Marxist thinking, while the Latin American delegates were keen to critique Western capitalism. See “The Declaration of Osijek, ‘Freedom and Justice in Church State Relationships.’” For a brief assessment of the meeting, see Ward and Laurel Gasque, “‘Third World’ Theologians Meet.”

1987, with Gitari becoming its board chair. Even before that, however, at an INFEMIT consultation in Tlayacapan, Mexico in 1984, the African Theological Fellowship (ATF) was formed with Gitari as its chair and Bediako as its general secretary.³⁶

The ATF developed around three regional centers. St. Andrew's College of Theology and Development, founded by David Gitari, was in Kabare, Kenya; the Evangelical Theological House of Studies (ETHOS), which was affiliated with the theology faculty of the University of KwaZulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. It was led by Anthony Balcomb. In western Africa, ACOM was the regional center. ATF's conferencing, publications, and mentoring began to quicken in the 1990s as the network received funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts. In 1995, Francophone Africa added leaders and institutions to the network, and with the ATF's blessing, ACOM began to develop master's and doctoral degree programs conjointly with the University of KwaZulu Natal. The ATF was now running at full steam with regular conferences, themed collaborative studies, a newsletter, and over 90 African mission scholar pastors and theologians on its mailing list. Gitari remained the chair, but ACOM was the administrative center.³⁷

African Theological Initiative

One of Kwame Bediako's early contacts in African theology was Tite Tiénou (b. 1949), a Bible institute director from Burkina Faso. They met at the Lausanne sponsored "Willowbank" conference in early 1978. By the early 1990s, Tiénou, with a planning grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, was developing a program to strengthen theological scholarship and education in Africa. When he convened a planning meeting in London in 1991, he made sure that Kwame Bediako was there. Pew made a grant of \$2 million for the African Theological Initiative (ATI), and Tiénou, now the founding dean of a new postgraduate theological school in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, directed the ATI and named Bediako to chair its advisory and selection committee. When Tiénou and his family had to flee Côte d'Ivoire in 1997 during a wave of anti-foreign violence, Bediako took over as the ATI's director. Until its funding expired in 2002, the ATI made dozens of grants for Ph.D. support, sabbatical research and writing projects, library expansion, conferences, continuing education, and other capacity building projects. It was a bold program, Tiénou recalled, that was run by Africans, for Africans, and on African terms.³⁸

³⁶ "Introducing the ATF," *ATF Bulletin* no. 1 (October 1995): 1.

³⁷ "Introducing the ATF," Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 19–20, 22.

³⁸ Tite Tiénou, "Church and Theological Education: Legacies of the African Theological Initiative; Tenth Kwame Bediako Memorial Lecture, 13 June 2018."

Publishing Initiatives

One of the components of the Pew-funded project to strengthen the ATF was the development of publishing. In 1995, ACMC opened an editorial office for a new imprint of INFEMIT's Regnum Books: Regnum Africa, and Mary Bediako became the editor.³⁹ Regnum Africa has developed its portfolio at a slow pace, but it continues. ACMC's adventure with journal publishing began in 1998. With startup funding from the ATI, ACMC established the *Journal of African Christian Thought* (JACT). The ATI provided a natural constituency, and so did the ATF. The first issue published selected papers from the summary conference of a multi-year ATF study program, "The Church in the African State: Towards the 21st Century."⁴⁰ African theological and religious studies programs have created many journals through the years, but most have not survived. JACT is now a quarter-century old. Its circulation is not large, but it is indexed by several global databases.

Special Projects

As Kwame Bediako's notoriety as a theologian grew, his speaking circuits afforded him increasing opportunities to engage in projects, personally or via the ACMC. Here are just a few examples. In early 1993, as Bediako was in Edinburgh fulfilling his annual lecturing duties, he was able to enroll the ACMC library in Prof. Walls' Pew-funded African Christianity Project's "Library Resource Development Scheme." Bediako then spoke at the Hendrik Kraemer Institute in the Netherlands, where he also enrolled the ACMC in a library development scheme. He also became an adviser of projects that ACMC did not house. In June he was in the U.S. for an advisory board meeting for the Mission Research Development Project. Then in November he was in Nairobi, serving as a theological consultant at a World Vision Africa Directors' Conference.⁴¹ Reports in the early 2000s show continuing international travel and speaking. In 2001 Bediako spoke at meetings of both the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the United Bible Societies and conversed with their leaders about how ACMC might serve their needs to train and equip new translators.⁴² ACMC and the Bediako household thus were continually abuzz with new opportunities to serve.

³⁹ Kwame Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report for 1995," 300; Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report — 1996," 328. These annual reports were presented to the annual synods of Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG).

⁴⁰ "Editorial," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1:1 (June 1998), 1.

⁴¹ Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology Report for 1993 to Synod," 235.

⁴² Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research & Applied Theology Report for 2001 to the 2nd General Assembly – 2002," 377.

II. How Bediako Did It

Networking and Friend-making

Being a scholar can be a lonely business, especially in text-driven fields like theology and the humanities. Research and writing projects take long hours alone at a desk or in a library. People who excel at such work do learn to communicate with others and disseminate their discoveries. Yet these fields seem to attract introverts who tend to treat networking, promotion, and advocacy as secondary skills, not as primary ones.

Kwame Bediako was not made like that. From his earliest days as a scholar, he was someone who could stir things up and get things moving. He was named head prefect of his secondary school in his final year. At the university he was politically active and vocal, at one point publishing a four-page newspaper.⁴³ After his dramatic conversion while a graduate student at Bordeaux, he caught the attention of campus missionaries. After enrolling in LBC, he met the general secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Chua Wee Hian (b. 1939), who nominated him as a student delegate to the Lausanne Congress in 1974. The following year while at LBC, he and John Howell, an Australian student, organized a missions conference and invited Andrew Walls to come and give a talk. Walls spoke about the rise of Christianity in Africa, and he argued that it was becoming the new Christian heartland. For Bediako that thought was life-changing, and it led him three years later to apply to Walls for doctoral study in Aberdeen.⁴⁴

Bediako's time in Aberdeen brought him into the Christian intellectual ferment there that engaged Walls, African church historian Adrian Hastings (1929–2001), Gambian Islamist Lamin Sanneh (1942–2019), and Harold W. Turner (1911–2002), a religion scholar from New Zealand. Aberdeen was the seedbed of the three main ideas that Bediako pursued: Christians' search for cultural identity, the Gospel's radical translatability, and the generative power of primal religions. But for Bediako, Aberdeen—and his annual lectureships at Edinburgh afterward—also introduced him to the networks of British and European mission theology, including mission study centers in Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. The Rev. S. K. Aboa, a church diplomat for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, who first met Bediako in Aberdeen, also introduced Bediako to the PCG's missions-minded friends in European sister churches. And among the Bediakos' student friends at Aberdeen were Tim and Kerry Dearborn, who traversed American and Canadian networks of “world

⁴³ Asamoah-Gyadu, “Bediako of Africa,” 10–11; Walls, “Kwame Bediako,” 188–189; Bernhard Dinkelaker, *How Is Jesus Christ Lord? Reading Kwame Bediako from a Postcolonial and Intercontextual Perspective*, 126–127.

⁴⁴ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 5–6.

Christian” evangelicals. Bediako eagerly engaged these opportunities to learn, but at the same time he was broadening his networks.⁴⁵

One prime illustration of Kwame Bediako’s networking prowess comes from the founding of the ACMC. Bediako was summoned by PCG leaders in 1984 to become pastor of the Ridge Church, an ecumenical Protestant congregation in Accra. Ridge Church had been the parish home of expatriates in Accra for business, educational or diplomatic service. By the time Bediako arrived, it had also become a church full of influential Ghanaians. From Ridge Church’s parishioners and from their networks of friends, Bediako put together a very influential board of trustees for his new venture. The board chair was Dr. Emmanuel Evans-Anfom (1919–2021), a distinguished physician who had been Ghana’s commissioner of health and the vice-chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. S. K. Aboa was the vice-chair, and another board member and its main legal adviser, Yeboa Aboa, was the founder and director of the Ghana Stock Exchange. When the ACMC made its inaugural public appearance in 1986, the ceremony took place in the British Council Hall in Accra, with speeches from the ambassadors of Switzerland, Germany, and Great Britain. Representatives came from both the Akrofi and the Christaller families, the general secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana was there, and so was Prof. Kwesi Dickson (1929–2005), the most distinguished theologian at the University of Ghana. Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III, regional king of Akropong-Akuapem, also attended.⁴⁶ Recall that this new Centre being celebrated so grandly had only two employees—Kwame and Mary. These dignitaries came to honor essentially what was the compelling vision behind this little ‘Mom & Pop shop.’ Without a doubt, Kwame knew how to network and to win friends, and he continued to exercise that gift throughout his ministry.

Linkages and Partnerships

Building personal relationships via networking is a very valuable tool for endeavors, but if these personal relationships are going to be productive in any sustained way, an important second step is to see them blossom into longer-term inter-institutional commitments. We see these kinds of relationships developing frequently in Kwame Bediako’s career. ATF and INFEMIT are classic cases of longer-term partnerships that started with the cadre of “radical discipleship” mission theologians that first met via the Lausanne movement and took on lasting institutional form.

⁴⁵ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 7; Video interview of Mary Bediako with the author, 30 April 2021.

⁴⁶ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 10; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology Report to Presbyterian Church of Ghana Synod, August 1987,” 144.

The partnership between ACMC and the theology faculty of UKZN is another. It began with ATF and the friendship between the Bediakos and Anthony Balcomb and Moss Nthla of ETHOS, and other radical evangelicals in South Africa. When Balcomb and Nthla heard that Bediako had been talking with INFEMIT leaders about collaborating with OCMS in England, they encouraged him to think about a program that was fully based in Africa. As we have seen, a partnership with UKZN emerged, it lasted for seven years, and it enabled ACMC to establish postgraduate degree programs.⁴⁷

Another long-term and mutually beneficial set of partnerships came out of ACMC's relationship with a cluster of mission-and-renewal oriented agencies among Lutherans in southern Germany. The main bodies were the Association of Churches and Mission of Southwest Germany (EMS), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Wuerttemberg, both in Stuttgart; and the Wornersberger Anker, a community within the Wuerttemberg Church specializing in spiritual renewal, discipleship training and leadership development. Rev. Aboa and Andrew Walls introduced Bediako to these German evangelicals. They were deeply impressed with him and the ACMC vision, and over a decade they supported several important projects: a new Toyota SUV, the renovation of Basel House and the Akropong Seminary facilities, desktop computing, and a new student hostel and dining hall. Support for these and other projects also came from Dutch Protestant church agencies, notably the Hendrik Kraemer Institute and the Board of Missions.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most striking feature of these relationships was that they were reciprocal. Bediako was convinced that what he had learned as a theologian about Christianity in Africa was powerfully instructive for all Christians, not just for Africans, and he was not shy about sharing his discoveries with others. Africans need not always be beggars, he insisted. They have so much to offer.⁴⁹ Therefore he spoke at gatherings of European church groups almost every year, and several times their leaders commissioned the ACMC to conduct gospel-and-culture seminars, either for European guests or for networks of sister churches throughout Africa.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 22–25.

⁴⁸ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 10–11, 14–15.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, chapter 14, “The Place of Africa in a Changing World: The Christian Factor,” 252–267; and Bediako, “A New Era in Christian History—African Christianity as Representative Christianity: Some Implications for Theological Education and Scholarship,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 9:1 (June 2006): 3–12.

⁵⁰ Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology Report for 1989 to PCG Synod, August 1990,” 188; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report for 1992,” 313–314; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report —1996,” 329; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research & Applied Theology Report for 1999,” 188. See also Hans Visser, “The Influence of Kwame Bediako in the Netherlands,” 95–96.

Fund-Raising

This offer of mutual benefit was one of the keystones of Bediako's achievements as a fund-raiser. Even as a startup organization in the late 1980s, Kwame and Mary readily gave of themselves to potential partners and funders. Kwame lectured regularly at home and abroad to many Christian groups, and Mary organized and crafted many of the materials that were used in the events that the ACMC hosted. As the ACMC's staff and capabilities grew, they could offer even more programs and services. The promise that many more good things would happen because of funding for projects or facilities was a critical ingredient of proposals from the ACMC. Being faithful (and proficient) during their early days in "small things," as Mary Bediako put it, gave assurances to ACMC's prospective funding partners that they would succeed with the next step in project scale or complexity.⁵¹

Another critical aspect of Kwame Bediako's achievements as a fund-raiser was his success right at home in Ghana. International funding agencies have seen endeavors in lower-income nations that are built on foreign funds eventually collapse once the donor interest wanes. The ACMC, however, relied on a network of Ghanaian Christian professionals and businesspeople. For the first seven or eight years, the PCG donated facilities and paid salaries, but beyond that startup funding, ACMC found the ways and means to support its activities. Ghana is not a high-income nation, but its networks of Christian businesspeople and professionals have resources to offer, and ACMC did not let external funding drive away local support. The Bediakos' initial contacts with people of means and influence via Ridge Church spread out from there along the networks of evangelical parachurch ministries, such as the Full Gospel Businessmen, and to this day, ACI regularly holds fundraising events.⁵²

Vision-casting

No one who was acquainted with Kwame Bediako can avoid mentioning his personal qualities, and certainly his charm and persuasiveness mattered in his developmental work. He was not a large man, but he had a large and warm personality, and he projected what he cared about in very dramatic and compelling ways. He loved to teach, preach, and talk, and he was artful at it, using his voice and body as instruments. His presentations were like musical compositions in their thematic and rhythmic progression, and they certainly were stirring.⁵³ Even so, Bediako's delivery was doubly powerful because he had

⁵¹ Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 15–16.

⁵² Video conversation, the author with Prof. Benhardt Quarshie, ACI rector, 23 September 2023. Quarshie informed the author that he was headed off the next day to a fund-raising event sponsored by a cluster of local churches.

⁵³ See, e.g., Asamoah-Gyadu "Bediako of Africa," 9–10; Watson Omulokoli, "Kwame Bediako, A Deeply Christian Scholar, and the Implications of His Example," 82–83;

a compelling vision to project: the center of the Christian faith has shifted. Africa is the new Christian heartland. The quality of Christian thinking and practice now increasingly depend on what might arise in Africa. And Bediako saw in African Christianity such potential depth, power, and integrity that it could bless and enliven Christianity worldwide.

Yet he also saw a theological crisis in Africa. The continent was experiencing “the proliferation of Bible schools” with “models and methods imported wholesale from elsewhere” which “appear not to connect with the redeeming, transforming activity of the Living God in the African setting.” African Christianity sat at a crossroads, he believed, so he had set about “recapturing the central place of theological reflection and insight...for the nurture of Christian lives and minds and for the equipping of the people of God and the transformation of society.”⁵⁴ And what African Christian thinkers were rediscovering about the cultural translation of the gospel and the spiritual underpinnings of primal religious consciousness was that these were pearls of great price for the church worldwide. In the West, Bediako insisted, such insights have been “neglected and unused in theological education and Christian scholarship.”⁵⁵ So the quest was to see the very best of Christian thinking and teaching arise in Africa, shape the faith there, and then guide the whole Christian world. That was the heart of Bediako’s vision, and he delivered it with great eloquence for audiences close to home and around the world. His organizing, institution-and-network building and his friend-and-fund-raising all rode on this mighty challenge.

III. Why It Matters

Given Kwame Bediako’s intellectual prowess and originality, most Christian thinkers who encounter him want to lean into his teaching and scholarship. It is deeply valuable thinking, and Christian scholars who engage it will profit from it. But near the end of his life, Bediako insisted that his own theologizing wasn’t his most important calling. He believed that “the practice of Christian scholarship is the nurture of a living community of scholars and much less the nurture of one’s individual career.”⁵⁶ He spent his career nurturing scholars, both at Akropong and around the world, and he made it his business to build and support the basic undercarriage for this community of scholars. Bediako was an organizer, a promoter, and a builder who worked long, hard,

and see especially “Kwame Bediako: His Life and Legacy,” a video documentary produced by James Ault.

⁵⁴ Bediako, “The African Renaissance and Theological Reconstruction: The Challenge of the Twenty-first Century,” 29.

⁵⁵ Bediako, “‘Why Has the Summer Ended and We are not Saved?’” 5.

⁵⁶ Kwame Bediako, “Andrew F. Walls as Mentor,” 9.

and effectively to strengthen the infrastructure for Christian scholarship, in Africa and beyond.

According to Mary Bediako, Kwame “often lamented that Africa has never lacked brilliant individuals but has had few enabling institutions in which such individuals might find space to develop and flourish.”⁵⁷ And indeed, the African Christian scholarly enterprise is still thin and fragile compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the world.⁵⁸ Starting up more Bible schools for Africa was not the solution. Too many of them were running on imported ideas and practices, and very few were developing the foundations for original African scholarship: well-educated and creative faculty members, funding for research and writing, library and archival development, associational networks, conferences and seminars, and journal and book publishing. African Christian thinking needs this equipage. Kwame Bediako saw the need and by God’s grace, he went after it. Africa needs more theological entrepreneurs. Who will answer the call?

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⁵⁷ Gillian Mary Bediako, “Reflections on the Scholarship of Kwame Bediako and its Importance for African Theology,” 21. I hope that it has been clear throughout this essay that it is impossible to think of Kwame Bediako’s work without seeing his creative and industrious partner, Gillian Mary Bediako, by his side, co-laboring for the same ends.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Chammah Kaunda, “Checking Out the Future: A Perspective from African Theological Education.” Kaunda analyzes the implications for Africa of the Global Survey on Theological Education, sponsored by the World Council of Churches and conducted between 2011 and 2013.

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A ‘Radical’, Prophetic Ecclesiology? *Recovering Ecclesiological Insights from Archbishop David Gitari*¹

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Abstract

Archbishop David Gitari was a man who boldly critiqued any individual or group he believed were acting in ungodly ways. He described his calling as prophetic; others labeled him a radical. This paper explores Gitari’s implicit ecclesiology, seeking insights for self-identified evangelicals. One key influence on Gitari was the 1974 Lausanne Congress which concluded that verbal gospel proclamation was not opposed to social justice but worked in tandem with it. Therefore, Gitari preached about the holistic nature of the gospel and demonstrated it by pursuing community health care, for instance. He also expected that the calling to live out the gospel belonged to all of God’s people, not just church leaders. How does Gitari’s ecclesiology speak to today’s context? This paper examines Gitari’s writings and speeches, concluding that the church in Kenya today needs to adopt a holistic view of the gospel, a prophetic voice, and apply the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Résumé

L’archevêque David Gitari était un homme qui critiquait hardiment tout individu ou groupe qui, selon lui, agissait de manière impie. Il qualifiait sa vocation de prophétique ; d’autres le qualifiaient de radical. Cet article explore l’ecclésiologie implicite de Gitari, en cherchant à en tirer des enseignements pour les évangéliques qui s’identifient comme tels. L’une des principales influences sur Gitari a été le Congrès de Lausanne de 1974, qui a conclu que la proclamation verbale de l’Évangile n’était pas opposée à la justice sociale, mais qu’elle fonctionnait en tandem avec elle. Par conséquent, Gitari a prêché sur la nature holistique de l’Évangile et l’a démontrée en poursuivant les soins de santé communautaires, par

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented on 4 March 2023 at the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology’s annual conference (3–4 March 2023) in Limuru, Kenya.

exemple. Il s'attendait également à ce que l'appel à vivre l'Évangile appartienne à tout le peuple de Dieu, et pas seulement aux dirigeants de l'Église. Comment l'ecclésiologie de Gitari s'inscrit-elle dans le contexte actuel ? Cet article examine les écrits et les discours de Gitari et conclut que l'Église du Kenya d'aujourd'hui doit adopter une vision holistique de l'Évangile, une voix prophétique et appliquer la doctrine du sacerdoce de tous les croyants.

Resumo

O Arcebispo David Gitari era um homem que criticava corajosamente qualquer indivíduo ou grupo que considerasse estar a agir de forma ímpia. Descreveu a sua vocação como profética; outros rotularam-no de radical. Este artigo explora a eclesiologia implícita de Gitari, procurando ideias para evangélicos auto-identificados. Uma influência fundamental para Gitari foi o Congresso de Lausanne de 1974, que concluiu que a proclamação verbal do evangelho não se opunha à justiça social, mas trabalhava em conjunto com ela. Por isso, Gitari pregava sobre a natureza holística do evangelho e demonstrava-a através da prestação de cuidados de saúde comunitários, por exemplo. Também esperava que a vocação para viver o evangelho pertencesse a todo o povo de Deus, e não apenas aos líderes da igreja. Como é que a eclesiologia de Gitari se relaciona com o contexto atual? Este artigo examina os escritos e discursos de Gitari, concluindo que a igreja no Quênia de hoje precisa de adotar uma visão holística do evangelho, uma voz profética e aplicar a doutrina do sacerdócio de todos os crentes.

Keywords

David Gitari, prophetic, ecclesiology, Lausanne Covenant, priesthood of all believers, church and society, church and politics, holistic gospel

Mots-clés

David Gitari, prophétique, ecclésiologie, Pacte de Lausanne, sacerdoce de tous les croyants, église et société, église et politique, évangile holistique

Palavras-chave

David Gitari, profético, eclesiologia, Pacto de Lausanne, sacerdócio de todos os crentes, igreja e sociedade, igreja e política, evangelho holístico

The late Anglican Archbishop David Mukuba Gitari (1937–2013) was well-known for his outspoken critiques of the Kenyan government, as well as any other individual or group he believed were acting in ungodly ways. He repeatedly described his calling as a 'prophetic' one, not in the sense often used

today of predicting the future, but in terms of rebuking leaders for ungodly actions, as the Old Testament prophets frequently did.² For his socio-political activities, he was derogatorily labeled a radical. While some have focused on his political activities, this paper will explore Gitari's implicit ecclesiology, seeking insights for the present-day church, particularly those who self-identify as evangelicals.

An 'implicit ecclesiology' is one which is revealed indirectly in words and actions, as contrasted with an explicit ecclesiology which is directly articulated. How did Gitari's theological commitments lead him into areas where others feared to tread? And how does Gitari's life speak to today's context, where some Christians continue to argue about the place of social justice and politics in the church? Though it was not often explicitly stated, this paper will demonstrate that Gitari held a particular view of how the church should function (not her structure, but her ethos), and that this is part of his legacy which evangelicals today can carry on. The question remains: what ecclesiological insights can be derived from Archbishop David Gitari?³

Early Influences

A short biographical sketch indicates that the archbishop grew up in a household where his parents Samuel and Jesse — both first-generation believers — were deeply committed Christians. Gitari remembers, "My parents were so committed to the mission of the church that in our home compound there was a chapel and every day my father would ring the bell at 6.00am for morning prayers and again at 6.00pm for evening prayers. He would start the service whether or not there was a congregation in attendance."⁴ Gitari also notes that his parents boldly acted counter-culturally due to their faith: "My parents were highly respected for enlightening and liberating the people from superstition, retrogressive culture and fear. For instance, according to Kikuyu custom if a woman gave birth to twins, the two children were abandoned to die as they were considered a bad omen."⁵ The same would happen if a baby developed the upper teeth before the lower ones. In April 1923 when Samuel learned an infant was to be thrown out, he and his wife rescued and raised the child for some time, and remained involved in his life into adulthood.

² For instance, see the dedication paragraph in David Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, where some form of 'prophecy' is used three times (7), as well as his explanation that in the New Testament, prophecy refers to "forth-telling or the powerful proclamation of the gospel in such a way that the hearers are built up, encouraged and consoled;" David Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 5508–5509.

³ I am deeply grateful for Prof John Karanja, who generously took time to offer feedback on this paper.

⁴ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 424.

⁵ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 422–438.

Another example of his father's willingness to stand against the norm was when he protested against torture of suspected Mau Mau collaborators.⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising that the archbishop was shaped by the strong character of his parents. He remembers, "My father, Mukuba, was man of extraordinary courage. To the best of my knowledge, he was the first person in Gichugu division to refuse to allow his daughter to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM)."⁷ Unsurprisingly, his parents' faith influenced their son. After reflecting, he concludes, "I must admit that my inspiration to join the full-time ministry of the Church came from my parents."⁸ His parents also demonstrated a faith that applied to all areas of life, instead of subscribing to the false dichotomy of a sacred-secular divide; that same mindset will be seen in Gitari's life.

Gitari described himself as coming from a conservative, evangelical tradition, and that upon graduating from a theology programme at Tyndale College in Bristol, he had not been taught about how the church should relate to the political arena.⁹ However, even before Tyndale, he already had a desire and willingness to advocate for the rights of others — as a teacher at Thika High School, he remembers the students demonstrating only once, "demanding the construction of an underground footpath across the highway. We had to cross the road dangerously at least four times a day."¹⁰ Like his parents, the young teacher was an advocate for the rights and dignity of others.

Theological Commitments and Influences

His willingness to confront injustice and act for the good of others was an established pattern before Gitari's church career began. What, then, of the major influences on him as a churchman? One major influence on Gitari's theology and praxis, specifically his view of the church's relationship with the world (in regard to social justice and politics) was the Lausanne Congress in 1974, at which evangelical Christians from around the world issued a statement that the gospel was not opposed to social involvement, but rather worked in tandem with it. The Lausanne Covenant included a clause on social responsibility, which says in part,

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of

⁶ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 450–465.

⁷ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 457.

⁸ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 475.

⁹ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 218.

¹⁰ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 626–627.

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race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. . . . The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.¹¹

Gitari's response to this conference and its statement was one of joy, as he saw evangelicals from around the world agreeing that the church has a responsibility to society which cannot be ignored and goes beyond evangelism alone.¹² This commitment to social engagement resulted from belief in God's roles as Creator and Judge, respect for the dignity of all people as bearers of God's image, and a desire to love one's neighbor which involves socio-political action.

Freston describes Gitari as "a product of the Third World evangelicalism which came to prominence at the Lausanne congress of 1974, a sort of Vatican II of world evangelicalism both in the new vistas it opened up and in the subsequent internal battles over its interpretation. Gitari, like some Latin Americans, represented a more thoroughgoing socio-political emphasis than much establishment First World evangelicalism was prepared to swallow for very long."¹³ In his own Kenyan context, Gitari did not fit in with many other evangelicals due to his view of church involvement in politics. For instance, Gitari believed that East African Revival (EAR) had "been weakened by introverted ministry, legalism and leadership conflicts."¹⁴ It is worth noting what Gitari meant by 'introverted ministry': the EAR members stopped evangelizing and encouraging weaker Christians, instead focusing on themselves.¹⁵ They refused to engage in the political arena in any way. The archbishop critiqued the movement for being "an inward-looking spiritual movement concerned more about the kingdom to come than about participating in the kingdom that Jesus Christ came to inaugurate here on earth. Christians are so concerned with their own individual souls that they show no concern for the corrupt and sinful world around them, except to invite sinners

¹¹ Quoted by David Gitari, "You Are in the World but Not of It," 218–219.

¹² Gitari, "You Are in the World but Not of It," 219.

¹³ Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 150.

¹⁴ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 551. The danger of introverted churches is also addressed in Joshua Robert Barron's "The Camel Has Four Legs: A Contextual African Practical Ecclesiology."

¹⁵ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 552, 5471.

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to come out of 'the sinking ship' and join 'the lifeboat' of the brethren."¹⁶ Gitari viewed this as a deficient ecclesiology: God's people were not meant to be an isolationist, purely self-concerned group, but rather acting on behalf of all people; this shows Gitari's implicit ecclesiology. The critique of Gitari as a meddler and a radical was in part a critique of his willingness to comment on political and societal issues.

Going forward from the Lausanne Conference, the man who was soon to become bishop increasing pursued his vision of a church that was not inwardly-focused, but had a transforming effect on the world. In his own words, his participation at Lausanne "opened my eyes to understanding the holistic mission of the church."¹⁷ Therefore, Gitari both verbally preached about the holistic nature of the gospel and demonstrated his commitment to it by pursuing community health care, for instance.

In one of his last publications, Gitari clarified some of the theological truths that convinced him of the necessity of Christian social involvement: 1) the doctrine of creation, which teaches that humans have dominion over creation; 2) the doctrine of humanity, which clarifies that humans are social being and that their social relationships are of concern to God; 3) the incarnation and life of Christ, which led him to go out to where people were and get involved in all aspects of life and stand with those who are harassed and helpless; 4) the kingdom of God as being present among us though not yet complete; 5) and the role of the Old Testament prophets.¹⁸

It is important to clarify that when Gitari spoke of himself as called to prophesy or the church as a whole having a prophetic ministry, he was using the word differently than how it is often used today. He was not referring to foretelling the future. Rather, when he used the term 'prophetic,' he was referring to the calling of God's people to remind those in authority that God has granted them that position and that they are to use it in ways that please God.¹⁹ Part of the church's calling is to hold leaders accountable.

When speaking of the incarnation and the Kingdom of God, Gitari is touching on the gospel story of who Jesus is and what he came to do, and this prioritizing of the gospel is an identifying mark of evangelicals. Yet other evangelicals opposed Gitari, such as the Africa Inland Church, which chose to support the government in most cases. Why was there such a drastic difference between Gitari's response and that of denominations like the AIC? Given that three of Gitari's five points are from the Old Testament, it is possible that a

¹⁶ Gitari, "You Are in the World but Not of It," 218.

¹⁷ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, location 1004.

¹⁸ Gitari, "You are in the world but not of it," 219–230. John Karanja also mentions his theology of God as a factor prompting Gitari's activist approach; "Evangelical Attitudes toward Democracy in Kenya," 80.

¹⁹ E.g., David Gitari, "The Claims of Jesus in the African Context," 18.

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serious weakness in systematic theology played a role here. A 2017 article in *Christianity Today* concluded that most theologians give too little attention to the Old Testament.²⁰ If an individual or denomination underutilizes the Old Testament, their understanding of Jesus, the gospel, and the kingdom would be skewed at best.

Other motives were also a factor. In Kenya under the rule of the second president, Daniel Toroitich arap Moi (1978–2002), evangelicals feared being deregistered by the government, or wanted to have a chance at influencing the government and benefiting from it. So insecurity or desire for benefits were other reasons for many evangelicals to refuse Gitari's approach. Another reason for differences between Gitari and some evangelicals was their interpretation of the gospel as personal and spiritual only. Gitari viewed the gospel as much broader than that: for him, the gospel spoke to all areas of life, without limit. A consequence of this view of the gospel is that if all areas of life are of concern, then it is understandable that Gitari was willing to work with other Christian denominations as well as non-Christians in areas where interests overlapped, such as politics. Unfortunately, for many evangelicals, Gitari's ecumenical involvement indicated that he was compromising the gospel.

Not only did Gitari view the scope of the gospel more broadly, but he also disagreed with the manner in which many Christians in Kenya chose to relate to society, particularly with regard to politics. The Bossey Statement of Church and State Relations (1976) indicated four possible relationships between church and state: 1) active identification with the state and its goals, 2) withdrawal from the political arena, 3) critical and constructive collaboration with the state, and 4) resisting the state.²¹ In deed and word, Gitari repeatedly advocated for option #3, likening this type of relationship to one's relationship with fire: get too far away and you freeze, get too close and you burn.²² The church needed to speak out when it saw leaders involved in wrongdoing or engaging in actions that would harm people, and should encourage the government when it acted justly.²³

By no means did the bishop favor abandoning proclamation of Christ. Rather, Gitari was convinced that both gospel proclamation and social involvement were aspects of the church's divine calling. Therefore, he critiqued the theology of presence for a variety of reasons; his first was that "the word 'presence' is rather passive and static. Christian evangelism cannot satisfactorily be expressed by this term."²⁴ Quoting John Arthur, the bishop emphasized that

²⁰ Caleb Lindgren, "Sorry, Old Testament: Most Theologians Don't Use You."

²¹ Gitari, "You are in the World but Not of It," 216.

²² Gitari, "You are in the World but Not of It," 229–230.

²³ Karanja categorizes evangelical institutions in Kenya (from 1985 to the present) based on their responses to the political arena as being either activist, loyalist (to the government), or apolitical; "Evangelical Attitudes," 70.

²⁴ David Gitari, "Theologies of Presence, Dialogue, and Proclamation," 1117.

Christian presence is an approach with surety about its social goals “but so reticent about any explicit witness to Jesus Christ as Savior of the world,” an approach Gitari found unacceptable and unbiblical as per Romans 1:16.²⁵

To those who claimed the church's role in politics was prayer alone, Gitari disagreed. “Although every true Christian should pray for God's help and guidance in his or her life, we must also rise up in the power of prayer and confront the evil in the world. God has given us a mind for thinking and working. When we pray he gives us directions to follow, and the power to confront evil in the world. We have to co-operate with God in bringing about a just, united, peaceful and liberated nation.”²⁶ He also rejected the argument that the church could not get involved in politics because it is a “dirty game”, noting that the game is made dirty by the players, it is not intrinsically that way, and that the church must be concerned about the welfare of people, which is what politics is.²⁷

It is important to emphasize that by engagement in politics, Gitari was not advocating allying the church with one political party, or even with having an individual church leader take up a political position without first relinquishing their church position.²⁸ He was clear and consistent on those points.²⁹ Rather, he wanted the church to have a strong witness in society so that she would have a credible voice with which to speak about social issues, whether they were deemed political or not.

A Participatory, Prophetic Church

Thus far, the emphasis has been on Gitari's formation and his role as a prophetic leader in the church, a role in which he made a significant contribution to Kenyan history.³⁰ However, few have studied what kind of response the archbishop hoped for from fellow Christians, from lay Christians as well as fellow church leaders. In other words, Gitari preached and acted in hopes of producing certain responses from the government and from his Christian brothers and sisters. What was the ethos and praxis Gitari hoped to cultivate in the church?

The archbishop himself was exceptionally educated for a Kenyan in his day, despite the attempts of certain church leaders to hold him back.³¹ This gave him

²⁵ Gitari, “Theologies of Presence, Dialogue, and Proclamation,” 1118.

²⁶ Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, 32.

²⁷ Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season*, 32.

²⁸ A helpful book on this topic is Bernard Boyo's *Church and Politics: A Theological Reflection*. Interestingly, Boyo is a member of the Africa Inland Church; perhaps this book indicates changes within this denomination about their political role.

²⁹ Ben Knighton, “Introduction: Strange but Inevitable Bedfellows,” 38.

³⁰ Freston correctly discerns that both Gitari's character and his specific context enabled him to bring about the results that he did; *Evangelicals and Politics*, 150.

³¹ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 872.

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global connections and solid biblical training, both of which were key factors in his ministry. However, Gitari's goal was not to be the sole voice or actor in the church. Rather, he envisioned and even assumed a participatory, prophetic role for other church leaders and indeed for all Christians.

As others have noted, Gitari was well-known for his fiery sermons. He was intentional in his popular, accessible, and biblical approach. Analyzing the Kenyan context, Freston notes that in the era of President Moi's *Nyayo* philosophy, evangelicals in particular were limited in their resources with which to respond to state control.³² "What resources did evangelicalism have for resisting...? The church had a limited theology of secular power, but a well-developed tradition of evangelical biblical hermeneutics."³³ This, therefore, was a tool quickly adopted by Gitari.

While in certain contexts a sermon may not be a powerful or effective tool, John Lonsdale highlights the pervasive influence of the Bible across Kenya, such that "Biblical texts and images give Kenyans a moral and political language that most of them share, so that no matter what their ethnicity, they can understand each other on matters of personal and public morality well enough to agree on what they disagree about."³⁴ Not just the Bible, but religion in general has a recognizable place in the public realm in Kenya, unlike its banishment to the private realm in many Western countries. This is a less compartmentalized view of life, and since religion is part of all aspects of life, "there is a religious angle to national debates, which should not be ignored. This creates the conditions for religious leaders to speak and be heard."³⁵ Therefore, by speaking in easily-accessible sermons, drawing upon a common 'language' of the Bible, Gitari was able to reach out to Kenyans across the socio-economic spectrum and mobilize them for action.

His sermons were at times attended by thousands, and his words repeated in national newspapers. Gitari's sermons roused the crowds, leading to debate and at times responses from the government. Cannily, the then-bishop took up this tool and honed it to a fine edge, delivering sermons that clearly and carefully expounded a biblical passage, then applied the passage's points directly — sometimes in great detail — to current issues of his day, such as his sermon on

³² President Moi's slogan was '*fuata nyayo*' (Swahili: 'follow the footsteps'), described as the way of peace, love, and unity. Freston notes that in practice the *Nyayo* philosophy produced "a totalitarian political culture." *Nyayoism* "treats the church as 'part and parcel of the government.' Church leaders are . . . just leaders; and all leaders must be part of the leadership corps . . . The church is not considered as an entity over against the state"; Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 147; quoting G. P. Benson, "Ideological Politics versus Biblical Hermeneutics: Kenya's Protestant Churches and the *Nyayo* State," 185.

³³ Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 147–148.

³⁴ John Lonsdale, "Compromised Critics: Religion in Kenya's Politics," 80.

³⁵ Paddy Benson, "Faith Engaging Politics: The Preaching of the Kingdom of God," 103.

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Naboth's vineyard linking to the sin of land-grabbing in his own region. Whether he was viewed as friend or foe, Gitari was a formidable man. A Kiswahili poem describing him as 'bold' and 'dangerous' was not exaggerating his influence on Kenya.³⁶ Gitari's goal was to mobilize the *wananchi* (citizens) and provoke the government into doing what was right.

Nevertheless, the mobilizing of Kenyans was never at the expense of having trained leaders in the church. One example of this came early on in his days at a bishop, when serving in the Mt. Kenya East diocese. Noticing a dire lack of clergy, Gitari founded what is today called St. Andrew's College, Kabare in 1977. The bishop was concerned that the church should have well-trained leaders with in-depth knowledge and experience, and that any ordinand should have a 3-year training period.³⁷ That same year, CORAT Africa was invited to study the development needs of the diocese. Based on that report, and in line with his concern for a holistic approach, the college would train community health workers.³⁸ To Gathogo, it is unarguable that Gitari was a creative and critical (in the best sense of that word) thinker, as well as a leader who "rightly saw the danger of hiding behind the 'call to the ministry' in recruiting candidates who would not comprehend deep theological and contemporary concerns."³⁹ The archbishop also advocated at 4 synods (1979, 1981, 1983, and 1986) for the ordination of women; the motion finally passed in 1986.⁴⁰ Once again, Gitari had shown himself to be a thinker not limited by his own traditions and culture, but one willing to think more widely and to advocate for those he believed were being treated unjustly. His actions ensured that the women, who were already serving, would receive better treatment and equal training to their male peers.

In his autobiography, the late archbishop reflected on the role of the bishop and fellow clergy, noting that part of their calling is the "prophetic proclamation of the gospel," which includes challenging injustice, participating in transformation of society, and indeed even at times "holy defiance."⁴¹ Gitari assumed that it was not just his calling to take a prophetic role, but indeed that all clergy should be doing the same. He did not want or intend to be the lone voice taking a stand against oppression; he perceived this to be the calling of each church leader.

Another example of Gitari's implicit goal of a participatory church is how he speaks about the prophetic role of the church as a whole, not just her leaders.

³⁶ Julius Gathogo, "Meddling on to 2008: Is There Any Relevance for Gitari's Model in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence," 147.

³⁷ Julius Gathogo, *Beyond Mount Kenya Region: 40 Years of Theological and Practical Education at St. Andrew's College, Kabare (1977–2017)*, 17, 50–52.

³⁸ Gathogo, *Beyond Mount Kenya Region*, 21–23; Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 1104–52.

³⁹ Gathogo, *Beyond Mount Kenya Region*, 52, 53.

⁴⁰ Gathogo, *Beyond Mount Kenya Region*, 87.

⁴¹ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 5595–5610.

For instance, after emphasizing the importance of the church's prophetic role in a sinful, fallen world, Gitari switches to speaking of the Christian community, an indicator that in his view all church members, are part of this prophetic role. "The Christian community that does not live a different life — that within itself has hatred, division, quarrels, corruption, injustices — has nothing to tell others. The message of the Gospel as proclaimed by the church can only be heard if the church lives up to its calling."⁴² It is significant that Gitari mentions the participation of each and every Christian, and that the church's prophetic voice has 'weight' only when the community of believers is living in ways which demonstrate the Gospel power at work among them. The archbishop expresses this view of the church more explicitly when he says, "it is not merely the top church leaders who can change the world — it is ordinary people if only they can be equipped and empowered. Sometimes people in Kenya ask: 'Why is the church not speaking?' They really mean: 'Why are the Bishops and Moderators quiet?'" Gitari highlights that Jesus chose twelve ordinary men to be his disciples, and made good use of their strengths while knowing their weaknesses. The archbishop concludes, "The church...cannot fulfill its mission unless it is willing to choose and equip ordinary men and women and then use their potential fully."⁴³ Gitari championed the Kenyan people and at the same time expected them to be active participants in God's mission.

Again, in terms of addressing Kenya's corruption, Gitari directly addressed the *wananchi*, the common citizens: "You, Kenyan voter, you vote for an incapable person to become a parliamentarian because he/she gave you Ksh 500. Consequently you suffer for the next five years, as your member has nothing to deliver for the well-being of the constituency and the nation" (Ksh 500 is less than US \$6.00).⁴⁴ Gitari was calling on each voter, noting their agency and their accountability for their votes. He charges the wealthy to stop being complacent, then continues, "Corruption is however a two way traffic. The giver and the receiver are both corrupt. Christians, who are now 82% of the population of Kenya, could transform this country if they pledged never to give or receive a bribe. It could be true that the culture of corruption has become the way of life in Kenya. If Christians were to say no to corruption, then this nation would be transformed."⁴⁵ This rejects the argument that one person cannot make a substantive contribution, or that one must be important and powerful (i.e. wealthy) to make a difference in Kenya's society. Gitari's charge to Kenyans was founded on the assumption that indeed one person, regardless of their social

⁴² Gitari, "The Claims of Jesus in the African Context," 18–19.

⁴³ David Gitari, *Responsible Church Leadership*, 47–48.

⁴⁴ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 5658–5659. "Ksh" is the local abbreviation for "Kenyan shillings," KES in foreign exchange listings. In 2014 at the year-average exchange rates, Ksh 500 was equivalent to USD \$5.68, € 4.28, or UK £ 3.45. At the time of writing, Ksh 500 was the equivalent to USD \$3.24.

⁴⁵ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 5675–5677.

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status, can have an impact in society, and cannot shirk their responsibility for society's state. As usual, Gitari bases his argument on biblical grounds, specifically Isaiah 32 in this instance.

Another example of Gitari's desire for individuals to have agency and responsibility is his view of relief work, which he believed should not focus primarily on hand-outs, but on equipping people so as to prevent the need for handouts in the first place. In "The Sanctity of Human Life: Priority for Africa," he urges

we should go beyond development and seek the root cause of poverty, ignorance and disease. Kenya grows enough food to feed all its twenty-six million citizens. But there are parts in this country where people are suffering from famine. It may be that poor distribution of food and corruption are the root cause of hunger. Going beyond development means seeking to transform society. Those in authority are quite happy when the church participates in education, health, agriculture, famine relief and other humanitarian activities. But the moment we ask what is the root cause of poverty, ignorance, disease and death, some politicians will tell us to keep away from politics and confine ourselves to purely spiritual matters. Our biblical understanding is that a human being is a psychosomatic unit. He is composed of spirit and body and the two cannot be separated.⁴⁶

There are two points to notice here: one, Gitari wanted to move beyond relief work to addressing root causes of problems, which was yet another reason he engaged in the political realm. Secondly, that Gitari did not want to perpetuate unnecessary and unhealthy dependency; his hope was to move beyond handouts to enabling the people so that in future, such handouts would not be needed. So both in the church and society he sought to move away from a passive, dependent attitude of individuals, and move towards a society of empowered individuals exercising their agency. "The book of Genesis reminds us that, 'A human being is created in the image of God' and for that reason, every human being has an intrinsic dignity for which he should be honoured and respected, not exploited or eliminated. Every human being should be treated equally with the respect and dignity he or she deserves and be allowed to participate fully in civic society."⁴⁷ The Bible teaches humans are worthy of respect, and therefore the agency of each individual must be recognized, whether in the church arena or in the broader societal arena.

Evangelicals may not agree with Gitari's interpretation of Scripture in all areas, but it cannot be denied that he did seek to base his words and actions in the Bible. Therefore, if one is to disagree with Gitari, it should be on

⁴⁶ David Gitari, "The Sanctity of Human Life: Priority for Africa," 21.

⁴⁷ Gitari, "The Sanctity of Human Life," 21.

hermeneutical grounds, not on his commitment to Scripture. Gitari ruffled feathers for his willingness to speak directly, confront societal norms, and act on behalf of those both inside and outside of the church. But if his detractors were honest, they would have to admit that he was consistent in his beliefs and actions, and that those beliefs were derived from the clear teaching and examples of the Bible. That is one reason why he consistently made use of sermons to produce change and used Scripture to exhort others. In retirement, he pondered, "It may be that those who are leaders of our churches have come to their present position at a time like this. These are the days of tribalism, corruption and impunity. They can save the situation if only they do not keep quiet. Study the situation carefully and preach the gospel in season and out of season, 'correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instructions' (2 Timothy 4:2)."⁴⁸ Preaching, rebuking, and correcting were actions to take toward fellow Christians and indeed all whom a Christian had contact with, in Gitari's view.

Earlier five of Gitari's key theological commitments were mentioned: 1) the doctrine of creation, 2) the doctrine of humanity, 3) the incarnation and life of Christ, 4) the kingdom of God as present though not yet complete; 5) and the role of the Old Testament prophets. The doctrine of creation was a reminder that all humans are entrusted with dominion of creation, which in turn was a reminder that those serving in non-ecclesial callings were also participating in a God-given calling. The doctrine of humanity emphasized the social nature of humans, and God's concern with human relationships. Again, this relational, social view of humanity means that each Christian has a part to play in working towards peace, reconciliation, and just relationships with their neighbors. Christ's example of going out to where people were and addressing their concerns applies to church ministers, but again validates the calling of Christians who are primarily engaged in work outside the church walls. The point is that in each of Gitari's key theological commitments, the mission and witness of the church rely upon each Christian playing their particular role and working together for the sake of God's kingdom.

Studies of church organizational structures have their value, and also of value is the study of a church's culture, and whether that culture seeks to value and empower each Christian. From Gitari's example, one can envision a church that prioritizes the kingdom of God and values each member's role in witnessing to that kingdom in their various ways. It is common to describe Gitari as a brave individual, which he certainly was, but he did not desire to stand alone. Rather, he longed to see an active, participatory church, in which each Christian is called to witness to and engage with the world.

In considering a bishop's work, he concluded that "when a bishop visits a parish, then his main work is the ministry of the word and sacrament. When a

⁴⁸ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 5708–5710.

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bishop visits a parish then all those who have been baptised and are already partakers of Holy Communion would be invited to come forward and the bishop would lead a special liturgy *commissioning them to lay ministry, for we believe in the priesthood and witness of all believers*. So the bishop could *commission all those who were baptised and those who were already communicants to lay ministry and witness.*⁴⁹ Though Gitari does not use the phrase often or note it as one of the key doctrines he draws from — it occurs just once in his autobiography — the doctrine itself is important in understanding Gitari's implicit ecclesiology. It shows that he did not view the church as solely a hierarchical structure, where only leaders were called to ministry and witness.

From the example of his parents and also from major theological influences, we can deduce that Gitari expected that the calling to live out the gospel's transformative power belonged to all of God's people, not just the church leaders. These commitments call for a particular ethos and praxis in the church. What would it take for the evangelical church to become a church that radically embraces God's mission, prophetically speaking truth to those in power and living as a witness to the inaugurate-but-not-yet consummated kingdom? What kind of ethos would such a church need?

Such a church needs leaders who are unthreatened by those around them or beneath them in the church hierarchy, for one. It needs leaders who will equip lay Christians to live out their faith wherever they are, reaching across cultural barriers of gender and ethnic group for the common cause of the Kingdom. Such a church culture calls Christians to be bold and courageous, knowing that standing for the truth will bring with a painful cost — including attempts on one's life, in Gitari's case.⁵⁰ As Paul says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23–24). Gitari threw himself wholeheartedly into his prophetic calling and counted the cost more than once in loss of friendships, attempts on his life, attacks on his integrity, and more.

His life also reminds evangelicals that we need to think more deeply about our ecclesiology, specifically how the church relates to the socio-political realm. As Karanja notes, the main evangelical institutions in Kenya could be grouped into three categories "1. 'Activist' institutions, or those institutions that have openly criticized some state activities; 2. 'Loyalist' institutions...that have allied themselves with the state; 3. 'Apolitical' institutions... that have largely kept aloof from politics."⁵¹ Gitari's life challenges evangelicals to reconsider whether options #2 and #3 are truly viable options for the church. Karanja notes that the Anglican church in Kenya has historically held "a holistic theology that seeks to

⁴⁹ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 3203–3207, *emphasis mine*.

⁵⁰ Gitari, *Troubled but not Destroyed*, Kindle loc. 4574–4604.

⁵¹ Karanja, "Evangelical Attitudes," 70.

address the physical, spiritual, and intellectual needs of humanity. It emphasizes that God is concerned with every sphere of human life, including politics and economics, and that all systems of government are ultimately accountable to God.⁵² Examining Karanja's words as a fellow evangelical (though not an Anglican), these statements are hard to disagree with!

Karanja's own conclusion — with which Gitari would have agreed — is that deep divisions among evangelicals will remain as long as some evangelicals offer uncritical support of the government.⁵³ Yet Karanja, again like Gitari, holds out hope that evangelical churches in Kenya can yet effect change in the political and social sphere: "the willingness of evangelicals from mainstream churches to forge political alliances with people of other faiths bodes well for the evangelical contribution to democracy for two reasons. First, democratic practice requires cooperation with people who do not share one's religious beliefs. Second, evangelicals are more likely to have a significant influence on the government in a democratic direction to the extent that they work in concert with other groups."⁵⁴ If evangelical ecclesiology is willing to wrestle with how to engage culture and politics, and work for the good of the nation without compromising her witness to the gospel, it would doubtless change Kenya.

From a certain point of view, Gitari *was* radical, in that he expected Christians to take a stand and count the cost of representing Christ, in that he fearlessly engaged in the political arena, in that he worked with ecumenical groups. Yet the call to following Christ has always been radical.⁵⁵ And while some will continue to disagree with certain choices the late archbishop made, he still serves as a reminder that Christians need to think deeply about what the gospel of Christ consists of and what it asks of Christ's followers. Gitari's life also challenges evangelicals to think more deeply about ecclesiology, and how the church relates to those outside itself. Further, though Gitari does not refer to it often, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is implicit in much of his work, and this doctrine too deserves more attention from evangelicals, regardless of their denominations' ecclesial structures.

Conclusions

The Lausanne Covenant begins by confessing that God calls a people out of the world to be his own and sends them back into the world as witnesses. The Covenant continues, "We confess with shame that we have often denied our calling and failed in our mission, by becoming conformed to the world or by

⁵² Karanja, "Evangelical Attitudes," 70.

⁵³ Karanja, "Evangelical Attitudes," 88.

⁵⁴ Karanja, "Evangelical Attitudes," 88.

⁵⁵ As Joshua Robert Barron noted, "Evangelicalism was radical in its very roots . . . E.g., Wilberforce's call to nominal 'Christians' in (middle and upper class) Britain to become 'real Christians' was nothing if not radical, a 'return to the roots';" personal correspondence, 15 March 2023.

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withdrawing from it.”⁵⁶ Gitari sought to awaken the church to her calling in the world — neither conformed nor withdrawn, but shining her light, with each church member actively witnessing to God, in line with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Gitari was radically committed to applying the gospel and Christian witness to every area of life. He envisioned a church committed to God’s purposes in the world, boldly standing for what is true.

Late African-American civil rights activist John Lewis (1940–2020) once said, “Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”⁵⁷ In regards to her distinctive, gospel-shaped witness, the Kenyan church seems at times to have lost her way. Today, out of love for neighbors and a desire to show them a glimpse of the nature of God’s good kingdom — present in seed form though not yet fully mature until Christ returns — it is past time for evangelicals in Kenya to follow the example of the late Archbishop and get in some good, necessary trouble.

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⁵⁶ “The Lausanne Covenant,” 3.

⁵⁷ From a June 2018 tweet; quoted in Joshua Bote, “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble’: Rep. John Lewis in his own words.”

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The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa

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The original version of this article, “On the Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,” was first published as the Conclusion chapter in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Todd M. Johnson, 445–477, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2017). A paperback edition of that volume was published in the Center for the Study of Global Christianity series (Hendrickson Academic, 2020). Used with permission and lightly edited.

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La version originale de cet article, « On the Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa » (‘Sur l’avenir du christianisme en Afrique subsaharienne’), a été publiée pour la première fois en tant que chapitre de conclusion dans *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (‘Christianisme en Afrique subsaharienne’), édité par Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu et Todd M. Johnson, 445–477, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2017). Une édition de poche de ce volume a été publiée dans la série Center for the Study of Global Christianity (Hendrickson Academic, 2020). Utilisé avec autorisation et légèrement édité.

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A versão original deste artigo, “On the Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa” (‘Sobre o Futuro do Cristianismo em África Subsaariana’) foi publicada pela primeira vez como capítulo de Conclusão em *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* (‘Cristianismo em África Subsaariana’), editado por Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu e Todd M. Johnson, 445–477, Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2017). Uma edição em brochura desse volume foi publicada na série Center for the Study of

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It would be presumptuous of me to say I am telling the future. This attempt is only an educated guess arising out of my own experience of the evolution of Christianity in the space under review, my memory of the shifts as I involved myself in the study of global Christianity from the epoch of the early church through to the modern ecumenical movement. Through all this I made it my business to focus on the area of the world in which God had placed me. One's locus is critical for what one observes and what one hopes for. This concluding chapter is therefore anchored on what I have read in the preceding chapters of *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* as they illuminate my experience of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1940, when I became aware of my being part of this development. In fact I am, by this contribution, making a wish-list, expressing what I pray for and hope will come to pass. Most germane of all, it represents what I would like to be involved in if I had the requisite talents, and therefore what I would encourage those who have the gifts to undertake. But before I launch into this dream or vision, let me say how I see the landscape before us.

Although *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* restricts its enquiry to Africa south of the Sahara, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of North Africa as a cradle of Christianity and the source of the highly important Ethiopian Orthodoxy. This also reminds us that the story of African Christianity goes back to the conversion of the Ethiopian official recorded in the New Testament¹ and must not be defined solely in relation to the Western Christianity that came with missionaries from the North Atlantic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In surveying Christianity in Africa today and seeking to discern what might be significant for its future, this concluding chapter will consider its organisation, its social function, its interaction with the political arena, its spiritual services, developments in liturgy and spirituality, and continuing concerns.

Organisation of Christianity in Africa

The scene as we have it at the beginning of the twenty-first century of the Christian era has developed mainly as a result of the denominationalism of North Atlantic Christianity that Africa has inherited. This has spread through the work of missionaries from the Western churches and Africans who came

¹ The "Ethiopian official" in Acts 8 was a government official of the Nubian kingdom of Meroë in what is now Sudan; he was not an official of the kingdom of Aksum in what is now Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. "Candace" was not the name of an Ethiopian, that is, Aksumite, queen but rather *Kandakē* is the Nubian title that means "regnal queen." — *JRB, editor*

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into contact with their preaching. The latter became independent evangelisers when they moved to new locations or were employed by Western missionary societies as catechists and evangelists. These are the people who spread Christianity in Africa by initiating and animating small cells of converts who pray, sing, and listen to the Bible being read and its stories being told. These cells grow into societies and congregations and eventually into churches, either associated with existing denominations or new communities of Christians, new churches that have their own names.

Within congregations, interest groups serve the church's mission while they become home bases for the members of the church. Within congregations also are various singing groups, women's groups, men's groups, and youth groups. There are groups dedicated to praying, called 'prayer warriors' in some churches. Others are constituted as visiting groups for various categories of sick, housebound, or incarcerated persons. All these interest groups serve the church and Christianity and provide structures that counter the anonymity of large congregations. Africa's traditional way of organising society so that no one feels isolated has influenced this development.

Denominationalism persists and its historical causes are many. From the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became autocephalous, and political developments resulted in the Eritrean Orthodox Church attaining autocephaly from the Coptic Orthodox Church. Thus Oriental Christianity is well represented in Africa. The Western churches in Africa multiplied following political independence in the 1960s as denominations that could not gain access to Africa for political reasons arrived. The idea of comity of missions proposed at the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference never really worked, so one finds many denominations in any one geographical location. There is no reason to assume that this trend will not continue. Like elsewhere in the world, the internal organisation of churches does get modified, but generally, national denominations are divided into 'parishes' that are under the jurisdiction of a single 'overseer'. This trend continues either from the practice of dividing existing ones or by constituting new ones from newly grown societies, but often it is to cope with the growing numbers of ordained persons with leadership skills. New parishes or dioceses create room for more bishops.

Christianity continues to grow in Africa as the number of churches increases. At the 2013 assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Busan, South Korea, almost 100 member churches from Africa were present. Beyond these are many more — Pentecostal, Charismatic and some traditional denominations that dissociate themselves from the Ecumenical movement. Many African Initiated Churches and of course the Roman Catholic Church do not belong to the WCC. Oriental Christianity in Africa has a growing diaspora, as does the Eastern Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Both have been spreading in Africa in the form of immigrant congregations but increasingly attracting nationals. This trend is bound to continue and affect the landscape of

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Christianity in Africa in its organisation and spirituality. As persons have acquired the tendency to do ‘church shopping’, in search of an amenable spiritual home where their well-being (*alafia*) will be guaranteed, forms of Christianity and church organisation will continue to multiply to serve these needs.

Churches in Africa organised according to the North Atlantic heritage of the nineteenth century are commonly known as ‘mainline churches’. In my view, this designation glorifies the ‘Scramble for Africa’ and its parallel ‘scramble’ for mission fields. It is questionable whether they are ‘mainline’, as some of the newer African Initiated Churches outstrip them in numbers, visibility, buildings, and media presence. Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is growing and all signs indicate that this trend will continue as they attract persons in transition, those seeking anonymity and those who are interested in their teachings and spirituality. The Christianity of ‘mega’ media presentations is also fast becoming the order of the day.

The African Initiated Churches have by and large avoided the ecumenical councils of the nineteenth-century denominations and have organised their own manifestations of ecclesial unity to demonstrate the oneness of Christ or have remained free-standing. Many of the mission- founded churches, following their ‘mother churches’, have been associated with the WCC since its formation in 1948. This form of ecumenism exists in Africa in the All Africa Conference of Churches and in various national councils of churches. Although these councils meet periodically, by and large the churches keep their own denominational counsels. They make joint statements on national issues and occasionally pray together. My hope is that they do not ‘unchurch’ one another in the current atmosphere of subtle and not-so-subtle competitiveness. From the mid-twentieth century, ecumenical vision fostered the establishment of joint theological education institutions, but today some of these are being discontinued in favour of denominational establishments. When churches in Africa got into tertiary education, ecumenism was thrown overboard, hence the proliferation of church-sponsored universities. This trend of denominationalism will continue as Bible schools and denominational theological institutions multiply. The saving grace is that persons from all denominations are welcome into these new church educational institutions.

There are manifestations of unity in the Christian faith community that I pray will continue to grow and increase. Such initiatives as Evangelical fellowships, ministers’ fraternities, and non-denominational and inter-denominational youth fellowships are providing ecumenical relations to minimise inter-church conflicts and intra-Christian competitiveness. All these showcase Christianity as a reconciling, healing and caring faith community that has the possibility of uniting in the service of society. The risk of co-option by political entities cannot be minimised, as has been demonstrated by cases in

Swaziland and Zimbabwe. On the other hand, they can serve to foster inter-religious relations, as we see in Ghana and Nigeria.

The organisation of Christianity into concert bodies of Christians is inevitable and indeed a *sine qua non* to the identity of the religion. A group that distinguishes itself by faith and practice is bound to be named and to stimulate expectations from those outside. Therefore monitoring the development of Christianity in terms of how it is organised is a worthwhile exercise. Doing it together might enable learning and developments that will promote the Christian presence in Africa.

Christianity at Work

Christianity is a visible manifestation of God's mission on earth, the task of restoring creation and enabling human beings to reveal themselves as made in the image and likeness of the source Being, God. I have read these research pieces² asking myself, "What on earth is Christianity on earth for?" With this in mind, the attempt here is to indicate the socio-economic contribution of the church. Literacy, the symbolic representation of oral speech, has been one of the most attested contributions of Christianity to life in Africa. Ethiopian Orthodox manuscripts in Ge'ez are among the most ancient Christian literature. The nineteenth-century missions to Africa were known for their introduction of Western forms of education. Contemporary Christian churches are fully involved in education at all levels, with their doors open to all. Modern education has had an impact on political development of Africa as it has instilled the unity and dignity of humanity and hence democratic principles that one hopes will increasingly bring well-being to community life.

Christianity of the missionary period was associated with the opening of schools, at times in cooperation with the governments of the day. In this way Christianity provided a service of enabling people to acquire literary skills, first to read the Bible, but broadly to become educated. Translating the Bible meant a collaboration between foreign missionaries and local native speakers. The terminology 'reducing' spoken words into script might not be too palatable, but it is a service of Christianity that continues to serve Africa well and might develop into more lucid expressions of Christian belief in the mother tongues of Africa.

With schools also came health services, clinics and hospitals and the training of healthcare providers of many types that have become the bedrock of medical services in Africa. Because Western medicine gained ascendancy over indigenous healing practices, the question is raised as to the role of Christianity in raising suspicions about them and thwarting their development. The early manifestation of Christianity in parts of Africa cast doubts upon traditional medicine, associating it with witchcraft and traditional religion, which

² That is, the previous chapters in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. — the editors

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missionaries saw as antithetical to the Christian gospel. Now that 'scientific research' has begun in the field of herbal medicine and Africans are falling over themselves to try Chinese traditional medical herbs and practices, I hope Christianity will join in rehabilitating African medical practices that are proving to be lifesaving for many. In the field of healing, too, we need to believe and work on the basis that the hand of the Divine works everywhere and among all peoples, including Africans.

Contemporary health challenges are revealing stigma as a human trait that needs to be countered and I can see Christian theology contributing positively to the creation of inclusive communities that care for all who are under the threat of exclusion. Several churches are already serving in the arena of the trauma of HIV/AIDS but are yet to face the current threat of Ebola. In the field of health care, prevention and eradication are undertaken in partnership with governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but for me the change of attitudes of persons towards 'the other' is a specifically religious, and definitely a Christian, service. It is God's mission and therefore the church's duty. We do have evidence to the effect that health services have been used as a means of attracting people to a central place for the purpose of evangelising them. For Jesus, however, healing was not a means of attracting followers. Rather, it was part of his mission of turning the world right side up, part of the task of getting the world to how God wills it.

An aspect of healthcare services promoted now mostly by NGOs is the campaign against harmful traditional cultural practices that impact negatively on the health of women. Some churches have tried to discourage these practices, saying they are contrary to Christian beliefs. This line of argument has sometimes backfired or been simply ignored by church members themselves. In general, little progress has been made towards minimising violence against women inherent in widowhood rites because people simply brush it off, saying "It is our culture." Maybe working with NGOs that approach the challenge from a human rights angle will yield positive results in the future. Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are addressing issues of witchcraft, spirit possession and curses with exorcism and other forms of deliverance ministries. An ecumenical approach to these religio-cultural challenges might yield a way forward for the mitigation of harmful practices like marriages for underage girls. The harm caused by tampering with female genitalia (commonly referred to as female genital mutilation, or FGM) for cultural reasons continues, benefiting a section of society to the detriment of others. The church must work assiduously to provide alternatives. On FGM we have the example of the Presbyterian Church in Kenya to show that Christianity can be at work in this field.

The nineteenth-century missions aimed to replace the trade in human beings with trade in other resources that abounded in Africa. This of course has resulted in the exploitation of Africa's natural resources for the benefit of the trading partners, many of whom were also the senders of Christian missionaries.

This rape of Africa by North Atlantic countries is now increasingly becoming a free-for-all, thanks to the controversial principle of globalisation. There is evidence that at the beginning of this encounter some Christian missions promoted agriculture and skills in building and carpentry. Skills development and other forms of economic activity have not been the forte the churches, and yet we have the unemployment of young people as a constant issue in our sermons and prayers. The survey we have in hand shows that Christianity has not made much impact on the economy of Africa, except the negative factor of its association with those who came to exploit, to steal and to kill.

Voluntary services and charitable works by Christians and churches reach people in difficult situations throughout Africa. The changes in the traditional organisation of family life, mainly as a result of urbanisation, have impacted negatively on traditional safety nets. We have more destitute people, people living on the streets of our cities, people traumatised by conflicts of many kinds — displaced, homeless and neglected. These human conditions pose multiple and complicated challenges to Christianity in Africa and the churches face them not head-on but with lamentations and moralising rhetoric. Preaching and announcing the love of God goes some way to give hope but needs to be complemented with practical action.

'Family life' appears on the agenda of many churches, but the content stops at premarital counselling and how wives should make husbands comfortable in the marriage. The rampant increase in divorces should alert the churches that their format of family life education is defective. The child factor is often totally ignored or left to the very comfortable atmosphere of Sunday school. Families need to be empowered to mentor children. Periodic gifts to orphanages, incarcerated persons and the destitute is a Christian duty, but churches need to begin to research the causes and join in rooting out these situations that demean human dignity. After-care of formerly incarcerated persons and those rescued from forced military service, many of them children and women, is yet to attract the attention of churches and Christians in Africa.

Christianity has the potential to make a difference in these situations, as over the years Christian organisations and churches have convinced partners of their ability to deliver services at the local level. Churches are present in slums as well as in kraals and villages. People gather at least weekly and are reached with messages of hope and education for practical life. One hopes this continues and intensifies and diversifies to reach all who are in need. The research here presented³ gives me hope that this will happen because Christians realise that they are in God's mission and at work with God.

Christianity in the Political Arena

³ That is, in the previous chapters in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. — the editors

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In Christianity, the “give to Caesar and to God” solution has become more and more complicated as the organisation of the community grows more and more complex. Separation of church and state served the Enlightenment process in Europe and enabled Christianity to escape from the clutches of kings and popes. It continues to be an issue in the secularisation of the North Atlantic nations. In Africa, however, the need for the church to be independent of the state does not spell secularisation. Constitutions of secular states are careful to note that although they are not aligned to any one faith community, the state is not against religion and follows the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to provide freedom of religion for the individual. The need for the church to be independent of the state does not necessarily spell the secularisation that leans towards atheism.

This has meant that although most states adhere to the practice of not espousing one particular religion, on occasions when heads of African states have shown signs of espousing one religion the moves have most often been nipped in the bud. Christianity is as free as all religions to develop and thrive unhindered by the state. States might or might not require the registration of religious bodies, but the tendency to give them privileges because of the services they render the people is almost universal. Although most of the nations we are surveying do not have state religions, it is our experience that, in Namibia for example, governments do consult religious leaders on major issues and in periods of crisis. This is evidence that Christianity is expected to provide effective leadership for citizens, especially for the management of crisis situations. During election years, all churches are on their knees praying for peace. Examples abound of Christianity’s services in this area. Namibia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Ghana are obvious cases.

This contribution of Christianity to political development has been present from the beginning of missions, and schools became the locus for political debates as independence from colonial powers was being mooted. Churches have had waves to ride when they sided with local ambitions for independence against the coloniser’s struggle to stay in power. The case of churches in Malawi and their relations with white settlers is only one graphic example. Whatever the case, Christianity cannot stay out of politics, for as the Mfantse proverb goes, “It is as the house stands that the shrine has a place to lodge.”

This places the onus on the churches of the future to present a profile of Christianity that calls for God’s justice, righteousness, and mercy for all humanity. The church’s own integrity must be pristine. The tendency for politicians to seek theological legitimisation for their political positions cannot be pandered to by Christians. Most challenging, however, is how politicians can play one Christian community against another to get their way. This calls for vigorous ecumenical relations that enable the churches and their leaders to take their own counsel and not to be manipulated by politicians. Religious conflicts can be used to fuel political interests. This calls for churches to work together as

well as to promote inter-religious dialogue so as to present a united voice from the communities of faith on controversial national issues.

The political arena is full of traps for the churches, not least being the registration of churches and the privileges that accompany being recognised and consulted. As the political landscape of Africa becomes more complex and churches continue to diversify, the practice of heads of state adopting particular churches widens and the danger of Christianity being drawn into the legitimisation of political moves becomes more and more real. Recent attempts by certain heads of state to pronounce Christianity as the national religion are worrisome, especially when taken together with the state of Christian–Muslim relations in parts of Africa and the moves of certain Muslims to gain control of politics in many parts of the world, including some African countries. This calls for both an ecumenical as well as an inter-religious approach if Africa is to be saved from more religious conflicts that aim at religious takeover of countries that make a mockery of the religious freedom entrenched in the UDHR and in national constitutions. For some years now, attention has been focused on the patterns of evangelisation because of clashes with people of other faiths arising from the language of their proclamations. We continue therefore with an examination of patterns of evangelism in Christianity.

Spiritual Services of Christianity

To evangelise, at its roots, means to proclaim the good news of the love of God in Christ Jesus to all humanity. The proclamation is expected to elicit a response from the hearers. The Matthew 28 text on which the Church bases its mandate to evangelise specifically includes: covering the whole inhabited world (a geographical mandate), proclaiming the good news of the love of God in Jesus Christ, baptising those who believe this message and nurturing them to become followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Proclaiming the good news should be in both word and deed, as Jesus demonstrated. This means that effective evangelisation has to have both sides and I would expand ‘deeds’ to include attitudes, how we relate to others.

The pattern of evangelisation as discussed by African Christians focuses extensively on the preached word. Sermons are preached to the converted, who sit in church pews Sunday after Sunday, a captive audience who listen without responding unless occasionally prompted by preachers to clap for Jesus. Occasionally a call to the altar may prompt those who have been moved by the proceedings to go up front for special prayers. Many sit listening in vain for the ‘word of God’ for their lives. But they will come back next Sunday because of what fellowshiping with other Christians does for them.

Evangelistic outreach in the form of open-air preaching in stadia, in parks, on street corners, in marketplaces and on television has become the norm in Africa. Strategies for following up those ‘touched’ vary. The increase that this brings to the membership of individual congregations is a matter for research.

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The individual standing at the street corner or moving from village to village in Africa has been known to spawn churches, as seen in the Harris movement.⁴ Many of the city types are private entrepreneurs who expect donations from their hearers as a contribution to their 'ministry'. Teams from churches also go from door to door to share the good news. This has been the special mark of Jehovah's Witnesses, but now several youth groups of other churches are trying this 'personal encounter' format in their bid to proclaim the good news.

This form of evangelisation has become known as 'churching the unchurched.' Other forms might yield the same results. But what of the mandate to meet human needs, as we read from Matthew 25? As you have done to one human being, you have done it to God. In view of this, churches and Christians try to live out the gospel to demonstrate to the 'unchurched' what it means to be Christian.

Evangelisation that results in changing attitudes, having the mind of Christ, living lives of integrity and an ethic that can be called Christian is more difficult to evaluate. We observe this by its absence and by the fact that most preaching consists of listing "all the evil people do" and then adding "and yet they call themselves Christians." The effects of evangelisation depend on how we recognise the lives of the baptised as an attempt to follow 'the Jesus way'. A prominent phenomenon since the 1960s has been the growth of African churches outside Africa, first as loosely organised gatherings of African Christians who missed the way things are done at home or do not feel welcome at local churches where they have relocated. Many of these then seek relations with their churches back in Africa and eventually get sent ministers from home and become branches of the home church. Others remain free-standing churches and many more of these are being added. Many of these diaspora African congregations attract nationals of the host countries and have become a way of showcasing African Christianity around the world. The evangelisation originally aimed at Africans who miss the home church has now become a way of drawing others to Christ.

Another development is the periodic revival events that often carry the unfortunate label of 'crusades'. Some are massive and are held in open-air neutral spaces like stadia so that all might feel invited, welcome and at home. However, they tend to become routinised in such a way that when held by single congregations they are no more than attempts at reawakening the enthusiasm of the flagging church members who might come but do not invite friends to come hear the good news being preached. The attraction of these revivals is the expectation of miraculous healing and testimonies of answered prayers. These

⁴ That is, the 'Harrist' churches that are part of the legacy of the West African Christian revitalization movement founded by William Wadé Harris (c. 1850–1929). — *the editors*

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are meant to induce faith as well as strengthen faith. People are invited to come and participate with the promise that their lives “will never be the same.”

I do not see the churches changing any of these. What I see is that new forms will be added and contemporary ones intensified, especially in line with the development of modern communication technology. By this I am referring to disseminating the good news and building communities by such techniques. Sermons on tape, text messages and tracts might give way to these as more people come to own phones and tablets. Instead of featuring ‘regular’ worship services on television, maybe we shall see more religious drama carrying the good news. With each new development in media technology, the church will be challenged to disseminate the good news appropriately, but the one-on-one contact with the call “come and see” (cf. John 1:39, 46) will never fade away as coming to faith is, in the final analysis, a personal decision.

Developments in Liturgy and Spirituality

Spirituality is an all-encompassing concept that includes what we do with our beliefs — how our faith moves us to live our lives. This is why we need to take spirituality and liturgy together. Liturgy is not only the way we worship in the church but also what the church does after the ‘in-house’ ritual is over. The formal services planned and mostly controlled by the church’s rules and rulers are a tradition that will remain but will be shaped to respond to contemporary needs. The sacramental liturgies remain firmly in the hands of the ordained. You need ordained persons of the particular Christian family to minister the prescribed sacraments, be they two or seven. You need ordained persons to baptise, confirm, marry, and bury, although some of these may be performed *in extremis* by persons with the required dispensation from their official church. The non-sacramental liturgies are open to the leadership of the non-ordained, that is, the lay persons, and in many churches these outnumber the sacramental liturgies.

In Africa, liturgy has been freed from books. Few congregations go by liturgies read from books. By and large, Christian gatherings in Africa depend heavily on the oral and the spontaneous. Even the Eucharistic liturgies that are more formal get modified with the insertion of songs, although leaving the words of the institution intact. The vernacularisation of worship has promoted congregational participation, including much singing and dancing.

Spirituality is writ large in African Christianity. We remember how the activities of the Spirit-filled women of the early church caused “and also the Holy Spirit” to become part of the creed of Nicaea. In today’s African Christianity, a church that does not exhibit “the gifts of the Spirit,” especially in the form of glossolalia and other forms of enthusiastic exhibition of one’s possession of the Holy Spirit, is considered a failed church. It is, however, a source of contention as to the difference between “possessing the Holy Spirit” and being “possessed

by the Holy Spirit.” This debate arises from interaction with African indigenous religious imagination, which can never be discounted.

One thing is certain: a person guided and counselled by the Holy Spirit lives a Christ-like life. It is this that for me is central to the concept of spirituality and its manifestation in the church and by Christians. I look for spirituality in people’s will to enhance the quality of life of others as for themselves. I find spirituality where people are engaged in stamping out evil, in righting wrongs, in seeking justice and doing what is just, and where they sustain and empower those who are engaged in contending with hostile environments, both physical and psychological.

Churches and Christians feature strongly in this arena, with the care of the vulnerable in all aspects of life. Orthodox spirituality, for example, is seen in environmental rehabilitation; sanitation; hygiene; access-road construction; small-scale irrigation; care of refugees, returnees, and displaced persons; infant and child feeding; and gender mainstreaming. These and many others feature in the tasks undertaken by churches in Africa. I have to observe, however, that the church’s spirituality as manifested in its concern for the well-being of women falls short of the standard of Jesus Christ, as it is still ruled by the demands of traditional cultures in Africa. While Christian women are in solidarity with the church, the church tends to take this for granted and operate as if the status quo should be preserved. My hope is that sensitivity to the welfare of women will become an agenda item for the future church in Africa.

As Jean-Marc Éla has pointed out, “The shock of the gospel” in Africa⁵ is the “coexistence of the gospel in Africa with the veritable empire” of injustice “and hunger.”⁶ It is this that the spirituality of the church needs to engage. Christian spirituality has the task of guarding and promoting human dignity. Spirituality as seen in the lives of Christians is expected to be holistic, as Christian life should manifest Kingdom values and communities should experience peace and reconciliation, compassion, and justice. While ecstasy in worship abounds, one rightly expects enthusiasm in seeking the welfare of the vulnerable, all the vulnerable, whatever their religious faith.

Continuing Concerns

As John Pobee reminds us, Christianity came to Africa in a spirit of fear of Islamic expansion, searching for Prester John to help halt the advance of Islam.⁷ Today, the saga deepens in Africa with Boko Haram (“all things Western are anathema,” a home-grown Nigerian movement), Al-Shabaab and other so-called ‘radical’ Islamic groups teaming up with those who want to establish

⁵ Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 109.

⁶ Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), xvii.

⁷ John S. Pobee, “Worship and Spirituality,” in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 340.

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Islamic states around the world and specifically those aiming at Islamising Africa. This has generated Islamophobia, which is becoming a barrier to inter-religious relations that promote mutual respect among people of different faiths. In spite of the common boast that Christians and Muslims live side by side and take care of one another as members of the same social family, Christian–Muslim relations have not enjoyed smooth sailing in Africa, and the seeming détente of the colonial era has given way to turf wars in Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and the Central African Republic and to periodic skirmishes in Ghana and elsewhere. In all this there are Christians and Muslims who insist on an atmosphere of mutual respect and work for it. The future of Christianity depends on this fragile atmosphere of striving for dialogue as represented by the Programme for Christian–Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), based in Nairobi, Kenya. Nationally this trajectory is present in commissions set up and promoted by governments.

The challenge of living in a multi-faith environment is the lot of Africa. From the beginning, Christian missions to Africa took a stand of discontinuity vis-à-vis indigenous religions. We know that this continues but has not succeeded in eliminating beliefs and practices that are closely woven into traditional culture and appear to be simply ‘social.’ We are learning that the indigenous African beliefs are closely woven into the fabric of all that we call traditional African culture. Rarely do adherents of African traditional religion (ATR) present open challenges to Christians and Muslims. This appearance of acquiescence to the presence of these two ‘guest religions’ is deceptive. I do not know about Islam, but I can see a lot of ATR seeping into Christianity and Christianity adjusting to ATR by openly admitting to its tenets and combating some of them. The booming deliverance ministries in Christianity thrive on beliefs associated with traditional religion. The exuberance of dancing in African Christianity reflects traditional religious dances, stimulated by spirit possession known in Akan as *akom*. The fervent exhibitionism in praying, for example, is a direct legacy from ATR. But when, according to traditional beliefs, periods that demand silence and sober living are called for, then Christians who counsel abstinence during Lenten periods insist on flouting these religious exercises, calling them pagan. Yet my sense is that as Christian churches absorb erstwhile adherence to Africa’s autochthonous religious imagination, so Christianity in Africa absorbs the spirituality of ATR in an unannounced way.

Awareness of the fragility of coexistence of people of diverse faiths is for me a key concern that is bound to continue into the future of the continent and the church in Africa. Socio-religious concerns arise also from the interaction between Christianity and African culture. As much of African social culture has a religious component or basis, there has been throughout the presence of Christianity on the continent a tension that has often developed into crisis. Churches have continued to encroach upon and even take over much of what was family responsibility and practice, such as naming that incorporates babies

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into their natural family units. Other rites of passage, especially marriage and death rites, have been Christianised or present uneasy compromises and double rites and meanings. ‘Gospel and culture’ issues remain with African Christianity, requiring the crafting of a theology of religion that will enable further deliberation on them.

Theological challenges have shifted from the traditional dogmatics that produced the classical Christian creeds, which we affirm without attempting to understand. For me, this is the reason for the inconsonance of words and deeds in the lives of Christians in Africa. Presently, the focus of theology in Africa seems to be on the reality and activity of Satan and a cohort of demons that thwart the well-being (*alafia*) of people and so necessitate a theology that emphasises the attributes of God or a ‘demonology’ that explains the machinations of Satan. What all this calls for in terms of ethics and spirituality needs spelling out, not only by experts but also by the whole community. Theology for the people crafted by the people remains a challenge. How we classify the required theology, whether moral or pastoral or any other, is for me not as crucial as what it does in terms of promoting our understanding of what we believe in order that we may live out the same.

The future of Christianity in Africa is bound to be influenced by the themes and issues of contemporary Christianity in Africa, many of which are discussed in this volume. Foremost among them is leadership formation. Leadership is a recurrent theme in all aspects of life in Africa, especially in politics. It stands to reason that it should be a challenge in Christianity too. Gender, for instance, has become and will remain a challenge not only with respect to leadership but also in all aspects of life. On this, Phiri and Kaunda in their contribution to this volume surmise that a gendered approach to African Christianity demands that we explore the injustices that exist in the church, in culture and in the appropriation of biblical text in regard to the relationship between women and men.⁸ The current fear that women’s rereading of the Bible amounts to rewriting it is simply a sign that women’s perspectives have not been factored into interpretation of biblical texts and that some are afraid that the hermeneutical approaches of women will undermine men’s authority and power as currently experienced. I posit that since it is human beings who create culture, cultural practices in the Bible and in our own African contexts should not be construed as the will of God. Since both women and men are created in the image of God and given the responsibility to care for all creation, decisions should be a joint responsibility.

I join these scholars to advocate prioritising women’s experience from now on as this has been a regularly ignored factor in decision-making. Subjugation of women has been the norm on this continent and few interrogate cultural

⁸ Isabel A. Phiri and Chammah J. Kaunda, “Gender,” in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 386–396.

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masculinity. They add that we need not fear to enter the controversy around same-sex relations, as human sexuality is an aspect of the factor of gender, which currently is being interpreted as the power relations between women and men. They hope that we shall outgrow the homophobic stance, with its tendency to castigate its existence among women while pussy-footing around the occurrence among men. It is my hope that we can remain open to the possibility of developing a culture that protects difference in sexual orientation rather than let the current situation shift into gear to make same-sex relations a death sentence. The growth of pastoral theology might help face the challenge of human sexuality in Africa. It is my hope that gender sensitivity will become a task for the African church and all African Christians and that we shall overcome deeply ingrained sexist attitudes.

Church women's organisations are particularly vibrant on this continent and mostly in solidarity with the church, especially taking care of the needs of clergy. Mostly they are co-opted by the church and their energies directed to enhance its mission. I know of only one church that refuses to have a separate women's organisation. But I know of many that succeed in bringing the women to heel when suspected of too much independence. The core issue for the future is how to live in the church as a community of women and men, all called to be Christ to the world. It is my hope that the church will promote theological education for women so that its deficiency among women does not remain a reason for excluding them from the leadership of the entire church while at the same time curbing their leadership in their own women's organisations.

Where leadership is discussed, the participation of women and young people is bound to feature. Today we recognise that young people are not waiting in the wings to become leaders of tomorrow. They are leaders today, and their needs and deeds shape our life together where they do not actually take the lead or dictate the terms. The original role of Sunday schools was to promote literacy and they became a parallel institution for the Christian education of young people. This format will need remodelling and revitalising, as very little of the educational material used in these schools is created in Africa. Children in these schools are nurtured on Bible stories, compete in learning memory verses and once a year present themselves during a week set aside for them to lead the church service. This does not look like a dynamic way of Christianising young minds. The future of the church cannot hang on this. Hopefully the church will struggle to transform its ministry with children and children's ministry in the church.

There was a period in Africa when the ecumenical movement called attention to urban and rural ministry. This made sense then, but today many of the new churches are concentrated in urban areas. Ministry specific to the needs of rural Africa has fallen behind. Christianity is fast becoming an urban religion, albeit occasional forays into rural areas to donate much-needed clothing and occasional contributions towards building churches. Services to rural areas in

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terms of daily needs have been left to other organisations. Who is actually preaching the good news in rural Africa is not clear to me, so I have to ask a question here: Is the future of Christianity in Africa to depend on urban and peri-urban areas, where people crave deliverance and prosperity? Ethnicity, class, and gender are all continuing challenges of the church in Africa. So are the constant socio-political conflicts that disrupt life — land rights, the drying up of groundwater and other environmental challenges that plague Africa. Who brings good news? Economic challenges and wars drive Africans through the desert into the Mediterranean. But who is reading and rereading the Bible? In all of this we depend on the Bible to guide us through.

With globalisation and the exploitative brainwashing strategies that accompany the practice of religion, one cannot discount the growth of scepticism and secularism in Africa. But whatever happens to Christianity in Africa, it is certain that the Bible will remain its Holy Book. Nobody will dare rewrite it, but many will find the need to reread it. I have listened to lessons drawn from biblical texts that turn the events on their heads. Depending on the circumstances of preachers and hearers, the Bible can be made to dispense either life-giving or death-dealing verdicts. Being available to most in their mother tongue, and in various other languages and more and more revised and modernised versions, the Bible and quotes from it are available to all and are on the lips of all. Therefore we cannot ignore its presence in the future of Christianity and what it will mean for Christianity in Africa. The explosion of Christianity in Africa has been attributed in part to the vernacularisation of its Holy Book. The final issue to which I would like to call attention is therefore the contribution of Chris Manus.⁹

From pulpits in churches, on radio and on television, in myriads of Bible study groups, through text messages and songs, insights from the Bible are transmitted in Africa. The challenge here, as Manus notes, is that wisdom is derived directly from the text without reference to the original context of the biblical narrative. Scholarship on the text is totally ignored. Added to this is the fact that few read the Bible in its original languages, and we all know that translations are never ‘entirely innocent.’ Scholarship in this area is waning in Africa. For me, the critical factor is that most of the African translations are made from modern European languages and few resort to the original biblical languages and the critical apparatus that went into the European translations. My hope is that the church and the theological academies will see fit to remedy this lapse. They cannot shirk this task if the future of Christianity in Africa is to remain authentically biblical.

Lyrics, theology in song and ‘gospels’ all derive directly from biblical texts and events. Thus the narrative theology in song that we experience in church

⁹ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, “The Bible in African Christianity,” in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 421–432.

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keeps people mindful of biblical and Christian teaching. Contemporary Christianity is awash with a belief in the spirit world. Every event and happening to individuals and communities is believed to have a spiritual provenance. Pastors derive their interpretations and counselling related to them from the Bible. The manifestation of 'spirit possession' as experienced in the autochthonous religious imagination is now present in the church, especially during 'crusades,' revivals and other special events like 'all-night' sessions of prayer and deliverance. The Bible is used to authenticate these exhibitions and 'prayer warriors' are always at hand to banish the spirits that war against the faith and the well-being of the faithful.

In Africa the Bible is everywhere and in all hands. People boast of the number of Bibles that they have placed strategically in their homes, offices, and cars. The Bible has become for them a talisman. As more and more mother-tongue Bibles are on the way, and the Bible societies ensure that they are affordable, the prevalence and power of the Bible will remain a major aspect of the profile of Christianity in Africa. With Bible in hand and the Blood of Jesus as their weapon, African Christians will continue to demonstrate the hold that Christianity has on Africa. They constitute the content of Christian preaching and counselling and with the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the church and in the individuals all is brought to fruition to the Glory of God.

Conclusion

I have tried to base my view of the future of Christianity in Africa on the content of the entire volume of *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* and on my own experience of 80 years in the church. It has not been possible for me to touch every chapter of the volume, as I have tried to stay close to my own experience and what I see or wish for the future of Christianity in Africa. My concluding remark is also personal. I have learnt from the vagaries of church history that the church belongs to God and that it is that factor alone that keeps it in the world. For this reason the church and for that matter Christianity will remain a part of the African landscape for as long as God needs it to be. Today, Christianity should be accepted as one of the 'traditional religions' of Africa. Having existed on the continent for over two millennia, it deserves no less an accolade.

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Missiology in Africa

Authentically African, Magisterially Missional

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Kwiyani, Harvey, ed. *Africa Bears Witness: Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century*. Nairobi: African Theological Network Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 218.

Reprint edition: Kwiyani, Harvey, ed. *Africa Bears Witness: Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century*. Foreword by Emma Wild-Wood. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2024. Pp. xix + 220.

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The chapters of this ecumenical volume are built around the premise that mission theology must reflect the “polycentric and multidirectional nature of mission in the twenty-first century” (xi). Exploring “mission theology and practice taking place in Africa today” (xii), it makes African theologizing on mission accessible both to those of us who live here and to World Christianity at large. Its contributors represent Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, as well as the African American Diasporic community. Editor and contributor **Harvey Kwiyani** is a Malawian missiologist and the founder and editor of *Missio Africanus: A Journal of African Missiology*. Because of its importance as a contribution to the literature on African missiology, this book warrants a review essay rather than a short review.

In the eponymous first chapter, **Kwiyani** sets the tone by reviewing how “mission history” or “history of missions” should not be, but too often has been, merely the history of Western missionaries. I will add that the same is true of missiology. He calls us to recognize the importance of African agency in the growth of Christianity on the continent and explores the roles of migration and revivals in African Christianity. For Kwiyani, “the mission of God in Africa must connect with African theology in ways that make it truly African,” “start from the premise the mission belongs to God,” and be freed from attachment to

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empires and colonialism (12–13). He proposes the Malawian concept of *umunthu* (analogous to the more-widely known South African concept of *ubuntu*), or personhood, as a helpful foundation for contextualizing mission theology which allows for a soteriology and missiology which are holistic in scope. His development of an *umunthu* approach to the practice of *Missio Dei* is reminiscent of patristic ideas of *theosis* (θέωσις) and *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις).

J. N. J. Kritzinger of South Africa writes on “**Mission in Prophetic Dialogue: Exploring the ethos of transformative encounters in Africa.**” He defines *dialogue* as “embracing, listening and identifying” and *prophetic* as “communication that unmasks evil while imagining hopeful alternatives” (18). He develops his themes through case studies from Burundi and South Africa. American missiologist Susan Higgins has observed that “all cultures have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Likewise, Kritzinger observes that cultures have both healthy and unhealthy aspects. He then insists that all healthy aspects of a given culture must be mobilized “in the struggle against violence and injustice” (22) if we are to have a hope of transformation. Christian mission cannot be silent in the face of systemic injustice and abuse. The witness-bearing prophetic voice of mission “is inherently communal and public” and “is the courage to call publicly on people to turn away from their self-centred, loveless and violent ways, towards the way of God” (30).

The third chapter, “**Mission as New Catholicity, Afro-Westernization and Globalization,**” is written by Jean Luc Enyegue of Cameroon. Acknowledging that some previous Roman Catholic missionaries were guilty of being more interested in proselytization (in the form of making Africans to be [Roman] Catholic or even simply to make them culturally Spanish or Portuguese) than in the conversionary processes involved in making disciples, he highlights the connection between the westernization of Africans and the Africanization of Christianity (34–37). While decrying the past reification of western culture as inherently “Christian,” he warns the African Church against a pendulum-swing overcorrection into “African cultural essentialism” (35). Proper Africanization is simply “the deepening of the Christian faith in Africa” (37). As I and others have explored elsewhere, Christian conversion offers the opportunity for Africans, within their various particularities, to become more authentically African; there is no need to forsake one’s Africanity to follow Christ. Likewise when African Christians migrate to increasingly post- and non-Christian areas of Europe and North America and take up the task of evangelization, they should recognize that Europeans and Americans can be (or become) authentically Christian *as* Europeans and Americans. African Christians on mission should not repeat the proselytizing mistakes made by many Euro-American missionaries in Africa but should instead “remain mindful of the catholicity of inculturation” (41).

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J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu of Ghana writes the fourth chapter, “**In the Power of the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal Theoretical Framework for Missiology in Africa.**” It is impossible to consider African Christianity without reckoning with its pentecostal and charismatic forms, which Asamoah-Gyadu refers to as “pneumatic Christianity.” Within these traditions, mission is understood as “an interventionist strategy of the Holy Spirit in the execution of a Christological mandate in a world that is alienated from a holy God” (44). This type of missiology explicitly both makes room for and expects the supernatural, in a way that is an inherently better fit for African worldviews which are far more holistic than the narrower mapping of Euro-American thinking based in the Enlightenment. For African pneumatic Christianity, the encounter with “the Holy Spirit [is] the dynamic presence of Christ in the church” which should, and does, lead to revival and to spiritual renewal. The movement of pneumatic Christianity in Africa reminds us of “the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church today” (57) and thus that our mission is only the mission of God when it is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

J. Frederick Marais of South Africa wrestles with the legacy of bad theology and sinful praxis in the fifth chapter, “**Kenosis as a Missionary Strategy for a church in need of conversion: Re-imagining mission in Post-Apartheid South Africa.**” As an American who has lived in South Africa, I can attest that American Christians who are still living with a pre-desegregation Jim Crow theology could learn much from this chapter. During the apartheid era, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa was in a position of power. Likewise the Church in general used to occupy positions of power throughout Europe as well as in North and South America. Within current political realities, however, this is no longer the case. Marais explores “the possibilities that arise when the kenotic nature of the life of Christ shapes the identity and mission of a church that lost its power” (63). Building on the work of Michael J. Gorman’s *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* (Eerdmans, 2009), Marais applies a “kenotic of status” as a foundation for the DRC to develop a “missional habit” that repents from the injustices of apartheid. In order to participate in God’s mission today, the DRC must “become aware” of its privileged socio-economic status, repudiate “abuse of power”, and engage in “selfless act[s]” (67–69) in a repenting and redemptive manner. Only by transforming from a “community of hierarchy” to a community of “equality and participation” can a church turn away from “a deep[ly] engraved culture to the enslavement of power” and turn towards Christ and to participation in Christ’s mission.

Elias O. Opongo of Kenya writes on “**Catalytic Church Mission and Peacebuilding in Africa: A review of the Church’s Prophetic Role in Socio-Political Change.**” Building on the assertions of Stan Chu Ilo that in order to be transformative, “missional theology in Africa” which emphasizes “reconciliation must be both Trinitarian and Afrocentric” (75), Opongo notes

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that reconciliation and justice are not mutually exclusive. The Church is obliged to work for community reconciliation just as her members have been reconciled to God in Christ, but it is absolutely necessary that all abusers and “perpetuators of violence ... be held accountable” (76). Neither identifying “with any political community” nor “bound to any political system,” the Church should take up a prophetic role. Not only do churches engage in proclamation of the Word and in charitably providing various social services, but they also have a “responsibility to speak up against injustices, oppression and marginalization of people, as well as social, political and economic structures that threaten the wellbeing of human persons” (78). We are not called to be keepers of the *status quo* but to be makers and builders of peace. Opongo argues that the African Church’s peacebuilding is no mere sideline “in her commitment to mission” but is rather a core part of the *missio Dei* and of the Church’s participation in that mission.

Rowanne Sarojini Marie of South Africa contributes chapter 7, “**Mission and Development.**” She argues that “mission and development share,” and have shared from New Testament times, “a symbiotic relationship” (87). This reflects the holistic approaches common both to biblical texts and to African cultures. While “the Christian church has always been involved in the transformation of society, particularly as it relates to the poor and oppressed, as an imperative of its missional responsibility” (92), it is necessary that her ministries move beyond mere relief and welfare to address the underlying issues of justice. The need for welfare and relief have often been created by forms of injustice. The Church must challenge the very causes of oppression and of poverty. Development empowers people and gives them agency to create change. Empowering mission fuels both empowerment and participation, the processes which enable healthy, people-centered forms of development, which are free of dependency and enslavement.

Chapter 8, “**African Charismatic Movements and Urban Missiology,**” is co-written by **Ignatius Wilhelm Ferreira** of South Africa and **Joseph Bosco Bangura** of Sierra Leone. As noted above, African Christianity is increasingly pneumatic in character. Demographically, the African continent is becoming urbanized at an unprecedented rate. This is especially reflected within pneumatic African Christianity. Rapid growth in urban settings has resulted from the robust engagement of pneumatic Christianity with African cultures and from the deliberate “meeting the needs and aspirations of the marginalized” (105). However, many African Charismatics are enamored of centralized and hierarchical leadership structures, which in turn lead metropolitan missions to be centripetal, focused on those of higher economic status (the urban elite) who can support the movements, rather than having a centrifugal commitment to “all segments of society” (111). Likewise urban missiology is limited by the

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excesses of prosperity theology,¹ which can result in a form of Christianity which is ultimately ungrounded from biblical texts.

Chammah J. Kaunda of Zambia provides the ninth chapter, “**Neo-Propheticism and Re-Branding of *Missio Dei* in African Christianity.**” He provides a review and critique of neo-prophetic movements within African Pentecostalism, focusing on two case studies. He notes that their missiology borrows heavily from African worldviews, especially in the ascription to spiritual leaders a mediatorial role between the spirit-world and the physical realm. But the claims of such Christian neo-prophets that their words are “supernatural utterances” effectively disempower ordinary worshippers (123). According to a constructionist missiological turn, “the measure of life-giving participation in the mission of God is whether it promotes abundant life for all, whether it is sustained by just and equitable social actions, and whether it emerges from the margins” (116–117). But the practiced missiology of the neo-prophets fails this test, because instead of participating in God’s mission, they consider themselves to be the very “embodiment of God’s mission” (125). But neo-prophetic movements are successful as movements because they offer answers to the questions that Africans are asking, and do so in traditional terms of African worldview. Kaunda adroitly explains African neo-propheticism, but leaves the reader with more questions than answers about missiologically appropriate responses to these movements.

Peter Maribei and **Kyama Mugambi**, both of Kenya, collaborate in the tenth chapter, “**Contextualised Missions and Theological Education in the Global South: A Case Study from East Africa.**” All too often, formal theological pedagogy in Africa is modeled on methodologies and approaches designed in the West and delivered prepacked to African contexts. It is questionable whether those models are effective even in the West. It is unquestionable that those models often fail in Africa. As a result, sometimes formal theological education fails to be relevant on the ground. This is not the place to discuss the many current positive developments in formal theological education in Africa, nor its remaining challenges. But because of those challenges, a number of congregations, usually megachurches, have launched innovative non-formal models of theological education. Maribei and Mugambi examine one of these models, developed by the Mavuna family of churches in Nairobi. Called the “Transformation Loop”, it seeks for personal transformation of believers as well as institutional and cultural transformation in society.

¹ See my discussion on this in my “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity,” *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 33, no. 1 (2022): 88–103. A revised version of was published as “Is the Prosperity Gospel the Gospel? The Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 47, no. 4 (2023): 321–338.

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Learners move from being *complacent* Christians to being *consumers* of Christian content, then become a *connected* member of a Christian community (both at a small group and at a congregational level), mature to a *commitment* to mission and then eventually to a Christian who is “*compelled* to go out to transform society” (131). Mavuno emphasizes that merely knowing a lot about one’s faith isn’t enough, but that one’s commitment to the Christian faith must result in “tangible impact on society” (137). Maribei and Mugambi propose “integrative theological training methods” that combine the best of non-formal and formal theological education to better prepare church leaders for “mission-oriented approaches” (140). Such will necessitate innovative cooperation between theological institutions and churches.

William O. Obaga of Kenya writes about the importance of indigenous forms of music for Christian mission in the next chapter, “**The Pambio in Mission: Meaning and Significance in African Christianity.**” *Pambio* is a kiSwahili word referring to a chorus or refrain of a hymn; it is also the East African regional name of a new genre of Christian music in Africa. These “chorus hymns” involve much repetition, elements of antiphonal call-and-response, and (of course) dancing.² The *pambio* has effectively become a heart-song within African cultures, and is used in secular contexts as well as religious. Because ordinary believers express their theologizing through the *pambio*, that medium has become a powerful “vehicle of communicating the Christian faith in an African context” (145) in ways which make sense within local cosmologies. Because it has proven so adept in inculturating the gospel, theological pedagogy, and “diffusion of the gospel” (154), mission theorists and practitioners should pay serious attention to the *pambio*.

Joseph Ola of Nigeria notes the “disparity between the youthfulness of African Christianity ... and its leadership” (155) and calls for a “**Missiology for a Youthful Continent**” in the twelfth chapter. Instead of generational divides such as I have witnessed in baTswana congregations in South Africa and in Maasai congregations in Kenya, African Christianity needs a cross-generational mutuality (as well as mutuality between the sexes) which “recognises the relevance of both the young and the old” (and of both the female and the male!) “and makes both of them feel welcome” and at home in church (167). When a given denomination or congregation exists merely to meet the needs of one generation (whether older or younger), it has placed itself on a path towards death. But ministry models and missiology which make room for creativity and encourage the participation of all believers across generational lines “will produce an even more vibrant Christianity in Africa with more churches

² In many African cultures, the concepts of “dance” and “sing” are linguistically inseparable.

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looking more like a river that is kept alive by constant movement and energy, rather than an unadventurous and unperturbed lake” (168).

Linda Ochola-Adolwa of Kenya and **Harvey Kwiyani** collaborate on the chapter that is the most difficult to read, but perhaps the most important to read: **“African Women in Mission Challenging Gender-based Violence in East Africa.”** At one and the same time, African women are today responsible for some of the most exciting growth in all of Christian history and are the most affected by abuse and violence on the continent. Ochola-Adolwa and Kwiyani make a cogent case that

An African women’s theology of mission is necessary not only for the African continent but also for the wider context of World Christianity. The world needs to hear of the missional fortitude of the African woman who, against all odds, continues to bear witness of Christ, shining his light and sharing his love. As a block, black women form quite a significant portion of world Christianity. Their theology matters and . . . their missiology should matter as well. . . . A missiology according to African women must exist because, of course, African women have played a key role in the spreading of Christianity not only in the continent but also around the world. (170–171)

African women theologians, such as the members of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, have “made theology accessible to other African women” (176) in ways that both African men and Western theologians have shown themselves unable to do. Empowering theologizing in turn encourages engagement in mission. This is true not only in times of *shalom* but also in experiences of violence. Theologizing women are equipped, and equip others, to name and unmask “the evils that diminish the lives” of other women (183).

Kimberly Hill, an African American, writes on **“African American Presbyterian Mission Work as an Exercise in Recognizing and Redefining Identities, 1916–1935”** in the penultimate chapter. It is increasingly well-recognized, at least by World Christianity scholars, that African agency was the heavy lifter for the modern growth of Christianity in Africa and that, as Lamin Sanneh puts it, that “colonialism was an obstacle to the growth of Christianity” in Africa (qtd. 184). Some of these Africans were returnees descended from captured and enslaved Africans. Hill examines the work and legacy of two of these, Althea Brown Edmiston and her husband Alonzo Edmiston. They successfully identified with the Kuba people in what was then central Belgian Congo, learning local language and culture and, most importantly, acting as advocates for the local concerns of the Kuba community. En route, their ecclesiology was informed (and formed) by indigenous African polity more than their inherited Presbyterianism. Hill finds their methods mirrored in missional

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activities of African immigrant churches in the West, showcasing the importance of leaders who understand and invest in their neighbors.

Kwiyani returns to conclude the volume with a final chapter, “**African Christians and Missionaries in Europe.**” He starts by examining “the rise of African migration to Europe, and the consequent growing presence of African Christians in Europe and proceeds to focus “on mission and the missional role that African Christians could play in Europe” (196). The *blessed reflex* of future believers from then un-evangelized lands back to Europe and North America to reinvigorate Euro-American Christianity, hoped-for by missionaries and mission proponents in the days of William Carey, is upon us. African Christianity in Europe is growing apace. However, it is almost entirely growing within the communities of African immigrants, remaining “an exclusively African phenomenon” (203). They are tremendously effective at evangelizing other African migrants, but they are not yet reaching out to the native indigenous Europeans. Leaders of these growing African churches are fluent in the “language of mission” (205) but in practice only engage in outreach to other Africans. What is needed is for these African-European Christians to embrace the work of contextualization and to begin to imagine “what cross-cultural mission to Europeans should look like” (204). Only then will they be able to move beyond “homogenous unit missiology” and “to engage Europeans in mission” (206).

Finally, **Kwiyani** and **Angus Crichton** of the UK (and of Uganda) pen a short conclusion, “**Tending and Attending to an African Missiology,**” which I will leave for readers to discover. This book belongs in every anglophone theological library on the African continent — and in the Global North as well. Thankfully, the first edition of this book is affordable in local markets in East, West, and Southern Africa — something that is rarely the case. It should also find a place on the shelves of theological institutions in the West / Global North, wherever any are willing to move beyond parochial approaches to Christianity and into the broader world of World Christianity. I heartily recommend it to my fellow practitioners, whether they are engaged in mission on the ground or in the academy. Kwiyani, as the editor, and Mugambi, as the publisher of first edition, are to be commended for a job well-done. Thanks is due to the Langham Global Library imprint for keeping this important volume in print and making it accessible to readers across the continent as well as in the West / Global North. I should add that Kwiyani and Langham have taken the opportunity to make a few minor corrections and one clarification in the new edition and that **Emma Wild-Wood**’s new Foreword serves as an excellent short introduction to this anthology. *Tolle lege.*



L'Église peine à jouer son rôle en Afrique alors que la démocratie n'apporte pas nécessairement le bonheur au peuple

ESSAI CRITIQUE DU LIVRE

ANDRIA, Solomon, dir. *Église, politique et démocratie : Réflexions théologiques africaines*. Carlisle, Cambria, Royaume-Uni: LivresHippo, 2022. Pp. vi + 123. £8.99 (broché).

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Introduction

Cet ouvrage collectif de six chapitres est publié sous la direction du Dr **Solomon Andria** (Madagascar), qui a servi pendant vingt ans comme professeur de théologie systématique à la Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne d'Abidjan (FATEAC) et ancien coordonnateur de LivresHippo dans le département de littérature de Langham Partnership en Afrique francophone. Les contributeurs représentent cinq pays (Bénin, Cameroun, Centrafrique, Madagascar, et Tchad) et ont une expérience de la diaspora (intra ou extra africaine). Une telle précision vaut la peine dans la mesure où les positions théologiques varient d'une tradition ecclésiastique à l'autre et que les réalités de pratiques politiques varient d'un pays à l'autre. Le directeur de l'ouvrage le reconnaît également en affirmant que « même en occident la démocratie varie dans sa forme selon le pays » (1) et que quelques contributeurs de cet ouvrage auraient répété certains sujets mais différemment car « ils voyaient la même réalité sous divers angles » (3).

L'objectif de l'ouvrage est « d'aider le lecteur à mener une réflexion sur l'impact de l'Église en Afrique sur les sociétés africaines » (1). Cet objectif part d'un constat, celui d'une Église en Afrique qui grossit mais qui ne grandit pas, cela avec « peu d'impact sur la société africaine » (1). La présente recension que nous voulons critique (constructive) se propose de déceler et d'indiquer les éléments de l'impact des réalités contextuelles de l'ensemble des contributions

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sur le discours théologique concernant l'Église, la politique et la démocratie en Afrique.

L'apport de l'ouvrage

Le lecteur de cet ouvrage, qui est conçu dans une perspective évangélique, ne sortira pas mains bredouilles. Les contributeurs ont fourni un effort particulier d'aborder les différents aspects de la problématique sous examen dans une approche multidisciplinaire, en s'ouvrant aux apports des auteurs de différentes orientations théologiques ainsi qu'aux disciplines d'autres sciences humaines et sociales. Encadrée par une introduction et un épilogue (tenant lieu de conclusion), la structure de l'ouvrage est bien pensée, allant de clarification des concepts-clés dans une démarche historique à la proposition de l'engagement politique du chrétien en Afrique.

Le premier chapitre (5–27), par **Mamy Raharimanantsoa** (Madagascar), se focalise sur **l'histoire de la définition du concept démocratie depuis son origine**. On y découvre l'histoire de la définition de la démocratie, un concept fondamentalement occidental, né dans l'Antiquité grecque mais ignoré en pratique dans beaucoup d'endroits en dehors de l'Occident. L'auteur fait remarquer que la définition de la démocratie aujourd'hui demeure fidèle à son sens étymologique, celui d'un gouvernement de tous. Pour lui, « les chrétiens peuvent [...] se réjouir des acquis de la démocratie parce que celle-ci leur donne une voix par le droit de vote » (27). Outre le fait qu'une telle conclusion peut ne pas avoir de sens dans beaucoup d'endroits en Afrique, où la vie est généralement influencée par une vision du monde liée plutôt aux religions traditionnelles, une des questions importantes serait donc celle de savoir comment appliquer et vivre la démocratie dans un tel contexte.

Le deuxième chapitre (29–48), par **Enoch Tompté-Tom** (République Centrafricaine), aborde le sujet de **la théologie et la politique**. Il se sert de la Bible et de l'histoire de la théologie tout en ayant le rapport entre l'Etat et l'Église comme fil conducteur. L'importance de ce chapitre est de conduire le chrétien vers une réflexion qui prend en compte la vision de Dieu pour la société. Sans ambages, l'auteur qui s'adresse plutôt aux théologiens qu'aux chrétiens en général, déduit que « le théologien africain peut être appelé à s'exprimer sur les questions politiques, à prendre position et à s'engager » (48). Une telle conclusion qui s'inspire essentiellement de l'herméneutique biblique d'influence occidentale (33–37) ne tient malheureusement pas compte de contingences idéologiques vulgarisées par les différents groupes évangéliques issus des missions. Une théologie politique résultat d'une étude approfondie et contextuellement appliquée de la Bible serait probablement plus percutante parce que pertinente.

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Le troisième chapitre (49–68), par **Jean-Patrick Nkolo Fanga** (Cameroun), traite de **l'Église et la démocratie en Afrique**. L'auteur permet au lecteur d'appréhender la contribution de l'Église, pas nécessairement celle d'obédience évangélique, dans le processus démocratique sur le continent. Se servant de quelques données de la Bible et des approches théologiques des pères de l'Église, des théologiens de la réforme et de ceux des africains du monde contemporain, l'auteur conclut en plaçant l'Église devant sa responsabilité d'être la conscience de la société. Il propose que « chaque dénomination chrétienne constituant l'Église en Afrique devrait avoir en son sein des structures de réflexion et d'action sociopolitique » (68). Pour l'auteur, il faut également que l'Église s'emploie à « convaincre ses contemporains de solliciter l'aide de Dieu pour la bonne marche du pays » (68). Dans le contexte africain, une telle conclusion théorique sera cependant butée à la vraie réalité des églises qui, pour des raisons d'appartenance tribale ou d'intérêt mercantile, peinent à assurer leur mission prophétique.

Le quatrième chapitre (69–82), par **Afolabi Ghislain Agbede** (Bénin), examine la question de **l'Église et l'avenir de la politique en Afrique**. L'auteur s'était assigné l'objectif de « voir comment, avec sa pensée théologique, l'Église d'aujourd'hui pourrait influencer et agir sur l'avenir de la démocratie » (69). Après avoir discuté de la relation entre l'Église et la politique dans le contexte biblique ainsi que dans celui de la réforme du XVI^e siècle, l'auteur pense qu'au XXI^e siècle l'Église devrait considérer son engagement politique comme faisant partie de sa mission. Pour lui, cette mission est celle « d'interpeller les politiques à l'instar des prophètes » et de « former ses membres à s'engager dans la sphère politique sans s'éloigner des directives divines » (1). Malheureusement les indications claires sur la découverte de ces directives ne sont pas données par l'auteur d'une manière explicite.

Le cinquième chapitre (83–91), par **Barka Kamnadj** (Tchad), traite de **l'indépendance au multipartisme et perspective biblique**. L'auteur fait un survol rapide de l'histoire politique en Afrique en se situant dans le contexte précolonial, colonial et postcolonial. Il évoque les systèmes sociopolitiques de ces différentes périodes. Il en ressort une sorte d'évolution dont l'essentiel était et reste encore en défaveur de l'Afrique. Cela conduit l'auteur à proposer quelques idées d'alternative devant « conduire les pays africains à la stabilité [et à] la sérénité, et [devant] favoriser un environnement propice au développement économique et à l'épanouissement de l'homme » (87). Les éléments de cette alternative incluent la bonne gouvernance, le multipartisme, l'évangélisation et la gestion de la création (87–90). Il est toutefois vrai qu'un lecteur averti aurait de difficulté à lier ces éléments à la vraie question de multipartisme énoncée dans l'intitulé de ce chapitre.

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Le sixième chapitre (93–103), par **Oliva Razaka** (Madagascar), propose quelques pistes sur **l'engagement politique du chrétien en Afrique**. Ce dernier chapitre est en réalité un exposé d'un laïc qui partage ce qu'il sait de l'engagement du chrétien à la situation de sa société. L'auteur est un ancien de la marine nationale de son pays, Madagascar, et journaliste indépendant. Il évoque l'engagement de Dieu vis-à-vis d'Israël comme un modèle à suivre (96–99) ainsi que quelques exemples dont celui de Rainisoalambo, un chrétien qui aurait contribué « à la transformation de la société malgache de son milieu » (100). Pour l'auteur, « la prédication est au centre de l'engagement politique du chrétien » (103). Un lecteur averti trouvera dans ce chapitre plus un texte d'édification qu'un traité théologique à l'instar des autres.

La conclusion de tout l'ouvrage, intitulée en termes d'**Épilogue** (105–110), est une synthèse réflexive dressée par **Solomon Andria**, le directeur de la publication. Se servant d'une métaphore africaine, l'auteur s'y présente comme le doyen d'âge dans la culture africaine chargé de faire la synthèse de tout ce qui a été dit et de prononcer des paroles de solidarité pour que les participants à la réunion « rentrent chez eux heureux et avec un message précis » (105). C'est exactement ce qu'il fait dans cette dernière partie de l'ouvrage. Le lecteur lira cet épilogue avec profit pour des recherches ultérieures. Quatre thèmes y sont mis en exergue (106–110) :

- 1) Le fait qu'il y a démocratie et démocratie ;
- 2) l'exigence faite à l'Église d'être à l'écoute de Dieu ;
- 3) la problématique du christianisme africain et la démocratie ; et
- 4) la question de savoir si la démocratie représenterait en soi une valeur essentielle.

Evaluation Critique

En dépit des éléments positifs susmentionnés, on aurait plutôt souhaité que cet ouvrage émane des Actes d'un colloque pendant lequel le contenu de chaque chapitre aurait pu être discuté de vive voix entre les contributeurs et d'autres participants pour offrir des perspectives théologiques complémentaires. Ces perspectives sont diverses et variées en termes d'orientations théologiques selon les différentes disciplines théologiques et de réalités contextuelles en Afrique qui sont tout aussi plurielles plutôt qu'uniques. On aurait ainsi évité les redites parfois contradictoires relevés par le directeur de la publication lui-même (3). On ne peut donc pas vraiment dire que cet ouvrage est « une cérémonie des familles », ou « une rencontre de réconciliation » ou encore « une réunion » (105) parce que l'historique de la conception et de la production de cet ouvrage ne fait pas entrevoir que les contributeurs s'étaient retrouvés pour échanger et découvrir ce que prênaient les uns et les autres. On pourrait y percevoir une

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sorte de déséquilibre tant du point de vue confrontation d'idées que de la représentation en termes de disciplines théologiques et de perspectives géographiques.

Trois des contributeurs, y compris l'éditeur, sont issus du domaine de la théologie systématique — Andria, Tompté-Tom et Agbede. À cet effet, connaissant comment se fait la théologie systématique dans le corpus théologique en vigueur, le danger d'une approche essentiellement spéculative sur base des cadres théoriques issus fondamentalement de la philosophie occidentale est permanent dans cet ouvrage. Aussi, bien qu'on puisse également noter l'apport de l'histoire (premier chapitre) et de la théologie pratique (troisième chapitre), l'aspect missiologique de la question sous examen n'est pas expressément souligné. L'ouvrage intitulé *Église et pouvoir politique en RDC, partenariat à tout prix ?*,¹ de la professeure Angélique Ngale Yakengbo (RD Congo), offre une réflexion missiologique dont le résumé pourrait servir de supplément à l'ouvrage sous recension.

Du point de vue géographique dont dépendent les pratiques politiques comme le note le directeur de cette publication, les contributeurs sont majoritairement de la diaspora (inter ou extra africaine). On ne peut donc pas conclure que les points de vue émis dans ce document soient vraiment représentatifs de différentes réalités contextuelles en Afrique. Si jamais cet ouvrage était utilisé dans le cadre d'un cours sur la théologie politique ou publique dans les différentes facultés de théologie comme nous le proposons en conclusion, les étudiants devraient dialoguer avec les auteurs en apportant les aspects contextuels de leurs milieux respectifs.

La question de méthodologie attire l'attention de tout observateur averti. Quelques observations dont les suivantes peuvent être faites :

Premièrement, le fait que les idées présentées dans cet ouvrage émanent en substance d'une reconstitution des travaux antérieurs publiés sur la question de l'Église, de la politique et de la démocratie. Les matériaux rassemblés pour confectionner les différents chapitres de cet ouvrage ne sont pas nouveaux. Les contributeurs ont donc réussi à faire l'assemblage et la restitution de ce qu'ils auront lu dans des bibliothèques. A un certain niveau de leurs recherches, ils auraient pu insérer des expériences actuelles des églises de leurs pays ou de leurs milieux pour éviter à l'ouvrage de sembler plus idéaliste que réaliste. En parlant ci-haut de l'apport de chaque chapitre, nous avons également indiqué ces éléments du réalisme souhaité.

¹ Angélique Ngale Yakengbo, *Église et pouvoir politique en RDC, partenariat à tout prix ?* (Kinshasa : Édition Usawa, 2022), 226 pages.

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Deuxièmement, l'utilisation de la Bible par chacun des contributeurs devrait attirer l'attention de tout lecteur averti. Il serait donc intéressant de faire une étude comparée approfondie de points de convergence et de divergence dans l'utilisation de la Bible pour déterminer à quel degré ces recours aux données bibliques seraient de quelle approche herméneutique. L'impression qu'un lecteur averti pourrait avoir de ces recours à la Bible est que les auteurs aurait fait fi des considérations exégétiques en cours dans le milieu des sciences bibliques. Sans doute, les biblistes pourraient certainement émettre des points de vue qui éclabousseraient certaines conclusions proposées ici et là dans cet ouvrage.

Les deux dernières observations à souligner portent sur l'utilisation du terme *Église* et sur l'absence des femmes dans la production de cet ouvrage. Le mot *Église* revient plusieurs fois dans chaque page de cet ouvrage en commençant par l'intitulé de l'ouvrage lui-même. Un lecteur averti se poserait certainement la question de savoir de quelle Église il s'agit d'autant plus qu'en matière d'engagement politique la théologie chrétienne prônée par la mouvance évangélique ne jouit pas des mêmes présupposés théologiques que ceux qui caractérisent l'orientation catholique. Lorsqu'un théologien catholique parle d'Église, il n'aura pas en tête les regroupements évangéliques, à moins de les spécifier. On aurait donc souhaité que les contributeurs de cet ouvrage fassent la part de chose en se servant du terme *Église* d'autant plus que leur approche est celle dite évangélique.

Concernant l'absence des femmes, aucune théologienne n'a été associée à ce projet de réflexion théologique alors que dans beaucoup de milieux en Afrique, aussi bien l'Église que la société civile vivent de l'implication très active des femmes. N'est-ce pas là une des évidences que la théologie en Afrique a été et continue encore d'être généralement masculine ? Bien qu'il soit vérifiable que les femmes théologiennes elles-mêmes semblent encore traîner le pas en matière de l'engagement théologique pro-actif, il revient quand même aux promoteurs des projets de publication de les impliquer d'une manière intentionnelle.

En guise de conclusion

Suis-je vraiment sorti heureux après avoir parcouru cet ouvrage ? Suis-je vraiment reparti avec un message précis ? Oui, certes, dans tous les deux cas ! Ma joie est de voir les théologiens Africains francophones briser leur silence et aborder ce sujet en toute responsabilité, un sujet qui n'est pas souvent traité dans le milieu évangélique. Le préfacier de l'ouvrage a également évoqué cette réalité en relevant que « l'Église [évangélique] s'est [longtemps] abstenue de participer au processus de gestion de son environnement politique, social et culturel » (v). À cet effet, outre ces quelques observations sus-évoquées qui n'altèrent en rien

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la pertinence de cet ouvrage, le niveau du débat était à la hauteur des enjeux et cet ouvrage devrait être considéré comme un des documents de référence pour un cours académique obligatoire sur la théologie politique ou sur un aspect de la théologie publique.

Je sors de cet ouvrage avec un message précis : Bien qu'en Afrique « la démocratie n'apporte pas nécessairement le bonheur au peuple » (110), la mission de l'Église ne devrait pas ignorer les aspects de la vie publique souvent abandonnée à la seule politique politicienne. Cet ouvrage insiste sur le fait que dans son mandat d'être le sel de la terre et la lumière du monde (Matt 5 :13-16), l'Église devrait avoir un impact transformateur sur la société humaine au sein de laquelle elle est appelée à exercer sa mission. Jésus n'a-t-il pas indiqué dans sa dernière prière au Père qu'il envoyait ses disciples ainsi que tous les autres disciples à venir dans le monde comme lui-même y était envoyé (Jean 17:18) ? À en croire les contributeurs, cette réalité d'une mission formatrice de la société humaine n'aurait pas encore été très évidente, surtout du côté des églises évangéliques en Afrique francophone. Sinon, « il y aurait eu moins de racisme, de tribalisme, moins de migration, de corruption, moins de guerres » (110) dans les pays où les chrétiens sont pourtant majoritaires.



Situating “African Biblical Studies” within “Biblical Studies”

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Mbuvi, Andrew M. *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies*. London: T&T Clark, 2022. Pp. xiv + 234. £85.00 (hardback), £28.99 (paperback).

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What a pleasure to read a book in which I as an African biblical scholar could revel so completely! Andrew Mbuvi has written a book about us and for us, within which we are invited to participate as conversation partners. Others, I would hope, would read this book as well, carefully, and completely. Indeed, it would make a superb textbook in a Biblical Studies classroom anywhere in the world, both introducing and analysing African Biblical Studies but also requiring scholars and students elsewhere to interrogate the version of Biblical Studies to which they have been subjected.

I have followed Mbuvi by capitalising ‘biblical studies’ in the term ‘African Biblical Studies’. Mbuvi’s tensive social location as an African biblical scholar from Kenya living and working in the United States of America is evident in his book and in his project: “My classification of ‘African Biblical Studies’ aims at solidifying the relationship that I seek to emphasize, the historical connection that inextricably binds African interpretive endeavors, for better or worse, to the larger discipline of Biblical Studies” (103). Mbuvi does remarkable work in doing precisely this, situating African Biblical Studies both within African continental terms that resonate with African biblical scholarship on the African continent and within the larger Euro-Anglo-American discipline of Biblical Studies.

The book begins by acknowledging African biblical scholar-and-theologian ancestors, dedicating the book to **John S. Mbiti** (1931–2019), Charles Nyamiti (1931–2020), **John S. Pobee** (1937–2020), and **David T. Adamo** (1949–2022). Mbuvi does more than mention them, he invokes their presence, much as an African praise singer might, honouring their work as ancestors who have gone

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before us yet who remain among us. While these particular ancestors receive the dedication, many others surround us as we read through Mbuvi’s book. Wälättä Petros, Kimpa Vita, Isaiah Shembe, Simon Kimbangu, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Christian Baëta, Chinua Achebe, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, Canaan Banana, Lamin Sanneh, Justin Ukpog, and many more accompany us and shape our understanding of African Biblical Studies. Alongside the living-dead, Mbuvi gives special attention to many of the elders among us whose work has constituted African Biblical Studies, including Takatso Mofokeng, Itumeleng Mosala, Mercy Amber Oduyoye, Teresa Okure, Musa W. Dube, Madipoane Masenya (ng’wana Mphahlele), Allan Boesak, and many, many others. Reading this book is a thoroughly ‘African’ experience, an extended conversation among ourselves, the living and the living-dead.

I invoke these names in order to remind the reader of my review of just how different a book on Biblical Studies this is. In which other Biblical Studies book would one find these names assembled together?

Mbuvi is not only deeply versed in the African roots of African Biblical Studies, he is also well-read in a wide range of contemporary African biblical and theological scholarship. Indeed, I know of no other single-authored book in the field of African biblical scholarship which is so comprehensively situated within the interdisciplinary scholarship that constitutes our discipline. The extensive Bibliography (203-219) and the useful Name and Subject Index (220-225) are a substantive resource. Yet Mbuvi is not offering a totalising model of African Biblical Studies, instead, he tells a particular story, the story of how African Biblical Studies emerges from within European colonialism and racism to become a vibrant African decolonial discipline.

His narrative structure is persuasive, beginning with the kind of Bible which is constructed by the European Enlightenment, which forms the foundation of both the formation of the discipline of Biblical Studies and the formation of the missionary-colonial project, both of which are inherently racist (chapters 1-4). Mbuvi never loses sight of these beginnings of the Bible in Africa, but his emphasis in the remaining chapters is on African agency, African identity, and African appropriation of the missionary-colonial (initially) translated Bible.

Forms of decolonial appropriation of the Bible are an African reality from the beginning, through the very process of translation into African vernaculars, through African theoretical and political movements such as *Négritude* and Black Consciousness, through the multitude of African Indigenous / Independent / Instituted / Initiated Churches (AICs), and through early forms of African Biblical Studies (chapters 5-6). The narrative gives careful attention to the contours of a postcolonial African Biblical Studies, focussing on biblical studies method (chapter 7), before going on to enlarge the scope and extend the dialogue partners of African Biblical Studies by including African literature’s use of the Bible (chapter 8).

Gerald O. West

Situating “African Biblical Studies” within “Biblical Studies”

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY: *African Biblical Studies*, by Andrew M. Mbuvi

The remaining chapters take up particularly troubling areas for African Bible Studies, including the Bible as itself, inherently, a site of oppression (chapter 9), the question of an appropriate biblical-theological African eschatology (chapter 10), the reality of the presence of ordinary African readers and hearers of the Bible as constitutive of African Biblical Studies (chapter 11), the pervasive problem of gender and sexuality within African culture and/as religion and so within African Theology and African Biblical Studies (chapter 12), and the question of an appropriate African biblical-theological Christology (chapter 13).

Mbuvi concludes his book by weaving the various strands of his narrative together as he offers us a proposal for how we might take our decolonial work forward, forging a “hermeneutic of hope” (198).

As my overview of Mbuvi’s chapters indicates, Mbuvi is thoroughly African in the way he ignores the Biblical Studies boundary between biblical studies and theology, and between the Hebrew Bible (and Septuagint) and New Testament. He moves comfortably and confidently across these boundaries. Each chapter is full of significant detail. I have learned a great deal in reading this book, and there is much I will return to in order to delve more deeply into terrain that I am not familiar with. The footnotes too are a treasure, full of pertinent detail.

Mbuvi’s book is characterised by analytical, insightful, nuanced, and respectful discourse. When he engages the work of other African scholars, he does so in a generous, inclusive, and critical manner. What impresses me in particular is the way in which Mbuvi moves from theorising to exemplifying, from an actual example to reflection on that example, etc. African reality and African theorising are united in a praxiological movement: reality, theorising, reality, theorising, etc. The book is full of wonderful examples, whether of an African reading of a particular biblical text, or of the contribution of a particular African novelist or biblical scholar, or of a particular historical moment. These ground the book in African soil.

Mbuvi is also attentive to the body of interdisciplinary scholarship that is associated with the wider discipline of Biblical Studies, being particularly attentive to African American, feminist/womanist, and postcolonial scholarship. Mbuvi does much of his biblical scholarship in the USA, so he is attentive to how his book engages with that reality and how it might make a contribution there. I have no doubt it will, but my primary delight is that the book will make a significant contribution here at home, on the African continent. Mbuvi has been remarkably inclusive of the diversity that is the African continent, so I am sure the book will be well received throughout Africa.



African Agency in Mission

Apolo Kivebulaya and Religious Change in East Africa

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Wild-Wood, Emma. *The Mission of Apolo Kivebulaya: Religious Change and Social Change in the Great Lakes c. 1865–1935*. Eastern Africa Series 47. London: James Currey, 2020. Pp. xxvii + 317; maps; photographs. £85.00, USD \$125 (hardback), £24.99, USD \$29.95 (ebook). Reprint edition: Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2022. Ksh 1,500/= (paperback).

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This book provides a history of religious change in East Africa through the lens of the life of **Apolo Kivebulaya** (c. 1865 – 1933). The book closely examines a previously less visible and poorly documented history, arguing that Kivebulaya and other African Christians contributed to the production and spread of spiritual knowledge, practices, and relationships. Given the fact that most of the existing documentation was written by European missionaries, the biography ensures that Africans remain at the center as the primary agents of Christian witness. The biography demonstrates excellent engagement of sources, including archival material and sources only available in East Africa.

The first chapter focuses on the news of Apolo's death and the various ways in which the Christian community at home and abroad received the news and memorialized him. Canon Apolo was remembered in stories of his life published by European missionaries as well as by Ugandan clergy, educators, and revivalists. The chapter provides the context of Kivebulaya's life and mission, the social upheaval experienced by common people in the kingdom of Buganda. The ritual sacrifices of humans and animals carried out by the Kabaka for protection increasingly exposed the common people to a life of instability and violence. This upheaval left the society open to the innovations introduced by the European missionaries. In light of these experiences, Kivebulaya sought a radical break from the past in his approach to the Christian faith unlike the

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missionaries and elite Christians of his day who sought to establish a connection between selected local customs and deities and the Christian faith.

Given their limited capacity to reach out to large numbers of people, the CMS¹ missionaries in particular encouraged the spread of literacy as a way to evangelize more effectively. The third chapter details how Kivebulaya was drawn into the circle of one of the foremost translators of the Bible, **Henry Wright Duta**,² where he participated in reading and interpreting scripture. The gospel of Matthew pointed to an alternative way of life in society, which was attractive in light of the war and upheaval that Kivebulaya had experienced. Kivebulaya lost his wife early in the marriage, at around the time he was preparing for baptism and resolved never to marry again. This set him apart given the fact that marriage marked full entry into adult life as a Baganda man. This was a radical break with what was socially expected, although at that time, many missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant remained single, due to the hardship of the work of pioneering in missions. In the case of Kivebulaya, Christianity not only loosened social ties, because of the priority of loyalty to God, it also created a new set of social relations based on his loyalty to God.

Kivebulaya's missionary journey to neighboring Toro is the focus of the fourth chapter. Previously exiled Toro leaders who had received baptism while in Buganda provided Kivebulaya with a starting point. Kivebulaya notes however that besides the ruling elite, his communication in Luganda was not well understood by the common people. His commitment to learn Runyoro-Rutoro and to work on a primer won him respect. This was done mainly through organizing reading groups, holding church services, and visiting homes. Several important themes emerge from this chapter: First is the use of biblical narratives by the Toro leadership, notably Omukama Kasagama, for the purpose of uniting the kingdom under one ruler. Second is the place of prominent women at court in promoting the education of women and girls as well as in the role of female Christian teachers. Third is the persecutions faced by Kivebulaya and the other Baganda evangelists due to the suspicions held by the Toro about the Baganda. Kivebulaya's arrest in Mboga led to a deepening of his conversion experience. Kivebulaya became ordained at Namirembe Cathedral and received recognition from the CMS missionaries, who increasingly saw him as a valuable resource and colleague.

¹ The Church Missionary Society, now known as the Church Mission Society, was founded in 1799 by evangelical Anglicans.

² Henry Wright Kitakule Duta was an early Baganda convert to Christianity. He was licensed as one of the first indigenous lay evangelists in what is now Uganda in 1891, became involved in bible translation work, was ordained as a deacon in 1893 and an Anglican priest in 1896. See Louise Pirouet, "Duta, Henry Wright (B)," Classic DACB Collection, *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, n.d., <https://dacb.org/stories/uganda/duta-henry/>

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Kivebulaya's experiences as the senior most clergy man in Toro are described in the fifth chapter. He was involved in teaching and training the first Batoro clergy as well as in examining candidates for baptism and confirmation. Although Kivebulaya epitomized the ideals expected by the European missionaries of African clergymen through his ascetic lifestyle and itinerant teaching, the European missionaries failed to consider the challenges experienced by the African clergy in the work of mission, notably the difficulty of balancing travel with family responsibilities. A second theme in this chapter revolves around the changes to societal life and behavior brought about by the Christian faith. These included abstinence from the consumption of alcohol, as well as greater opportunities for women as through literacy as well as in their role as Christian teachers. In addition, many non-Christian spiritual practices were discontinued, because they came to be viewed as witchcraft. A third theme is that of one of Kivebulaya's most important accomplishments was that he petitioned the CMS in London for the translation of the entire bible in Runyoro at a time when the CMS position in Uganda, was to prioritize the Luganda bible in the development of a national church and to translate only portions of the other Ugandan languages.

The sixth chapter describes Kivebulaya's move from Butiti to Mboga, when he was granted sabbatical leave from his station in late 1915. His intention was to strengthen a church that he had begun about 20 years before. Relocating to Mboga from that time, he spent the next fifteen years planting churches and evangelizing the forest peoples. While holding on to the influences that had shaped him, he nonetheless adapted his methods to fit the new communities he was serving. He opted to travel with and teach the hunter gatherer communities rather than organize their lives around the church and school. Some communities like the Wambutu negotiated access to their community in exchange for new technologies like salt and literacy. However, they protected themselves by moving suddenly and without notice. He also demonstrated divine power through a number of dramatic encounters, which showed his spiritual expertise. In this season, Kivebulaya was no longer able to leverage his connections to the political leadership given that Mboga was under Belgian authority and under the influence of Roman Catholic missions. He navigated the work of church growth amidst the mistrust of both the Belgian authorities and the Catholic missions.

The final chapter describes his final days, up to his death in Mboga. Weakened by his illness and receiving a terminal diagnosis, he was carried back from Buganda by porters at his request. Through making this last journey back to Mboga, Kivebulaya communicates decisively that home for him is now among the faith community he has served over the years, rather than among his community of birth and origin. The chapter also describes the inspiration from

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Apolo's life and death and how young people rallied to the call to take up the work of missions to other people groups because of his example.

Kivebulaya's commitment to be collegial and to find partners enabled his work to succeed. First, after only three months in Toro, Kivebulaya was forcibly returned to Kampala as a prisoner of the Imperial British East Africa Company. Upon his release, he returned to Toro as a member of Bishop Tucker's party, where as one of the fifteen Christian teachers in the party, he was deployed across the kingdom of Toro to evangelize. Second, among the Toro, Kivebulaya himself hardly acknowledged the role of the political interests of the rulers in his acceptance or rejection in the different places where he visited, although he could hardly have been unaware of these interests. He worked closely with previously exiled Toro leaders who had received baptism while in Buganda in order to establish himself. Third, by working with young people in Mboga who became teachers and evangelists Kivebulaya navigated the language barrier among 5 different hunter gatherer communities with whom he worked in his last phase of ministry. These young people would become the next generation of church leaders. Fourth, his travels to Kampala two or three times in a year on foot ensured that the church in Buganda remained aware of his work. During these visits he was able to participate in clergy meetings, staying in touch with other Christian workers and remaining encouraged in the work. He ensured that he did not cut himself off from the center. He remained in touch through prayer and letter writing both at home in Uganda and abroad. Finally navigated around the tensions between the Ugandan clergymen and the European missionaries. A younger more vocal generation pointed out the superior attitude of the whites and the reluctance to release decision making to the locals. While Kivebulaya remained somewhat insulated from these pressures because of his location with the forests of Congo, nonetheless he remained committed to his ideal of a global Christian community.

As noted by Dana Roberts, as early as the 1910 Edinburgh missions conference, global mission was a world-wide vision that included all the continents of the world. However at that time, almost all the students participating in the conference were of European descent.³ From the historical perspective of world Christianity, Apolo Kivebulaya's biography is particularly beneficial for African Christians and African Christian scholars, given that he live and worked in the same general period, between 1865 and 1933.

³ Dana A. Roberts, "Naming 'World Christianity': The Yale-Edinburgh Conference in Historical Perspective," Yale-Edinburgh Group on World Christianity and the History of Mission 2019 meeting at Yale Divinity School, 27 June 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbSYWkuEATs>

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Essentially, this biography points to the fact that at around the same time as young people were being energized by the possibility of evangelizing the world in their generation, Apolo Kivebulaya was similarly energized the possibility of evangelizing the world even moving beyond his own Buganda community into neighboring Toro and later on to the Wambuti in Congo.

The historical development of the academic discourse with regard to World Christianity has mostly been concentrated in North America. An important contribution made by the biography is that it provides insights into the discourse on world Christianity from the lens of an African missionary.

In terms of research it also provides a challenge to African scholars to write the story of African missions.

Editors' note:

The Twaweza Communications edition is available locally in East Africa in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan. Contact:

Twaweza Communications Ltd

Parklands Road, Mpesi Lane

PO Box 66872-00800

Nairobi, Kenya

www.twawezacommunications.org



The Increasing Breadth and Depth of African Christian Theology

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Bongmba, Elias Kifon, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*. Routledge Handbooks. London: Routledge, 2020, 2022. Pp. xvii + 535. £200.00 (hardback), £42.99 (paperback), £32.24 (paperback).

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The spread of Christianity in Africa is linked with the presence of Western missionaries and colonialism. However, this connection does not extend to the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church (EOTC) and the Egyptian Coptic Church, as both of these churches existed before the era of Western missionary activity and colonialism. Colonialism is characterized by its exploitation and imposition of cultural practices, which undermines local traditions, customs, and religious beliefs. It is important to note that colonialism, overall, had a detrimental effect leading to their subjugation, humiliation, and exploitation. African theology as a discipline emerges after the liberation of most African nations from their colonial oppressors. Initially, it arises as a response to Western dominance in Africa, particularly in terms of culture and language. African theology seen as playing a role in restoring African identity. Throughout the years, African theology undergoes different stages and experiences various developments. This book recounts these developments and explores the issues surrounding African theology.

The book is divided into four main thematic parts and consists of thirty-two entries. The contributors are distinguished scholars of African origin residing both on the continent and abroad. The handbook explores historical and contemporary issues within the realm of African Theology. The goal of the book is to serve as catalyst for discussion and reference on specific topics in African theology, providing a collection of theological explorations in Africa (3). The editor has made efforts to address the existing gaps in the field of African Theology.

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Africa is home to multiple religious traditions, each with distinct theological perspectives. Theology has a rich tradition on the African continent, having evolved in numerous directions following the introduction of Christianity. The book explores theology from different angles, often with a postcolonial lens. Authors employ various methodologies to delve into the origin, relevance, and development of African theology. They tackle topics such as spoken word and theology, indigenous religions and theology, Pentecostalism, liberation theology, black theology, social justice, sexuality and theology, environmental theology, Christology, eschatology, and so forth.

The chapters comprising Part I of this book explore sources and various methodological approaches to theology in Africa. It features four insightful articles. **Elias Kifon Bongmba's** contribution addresses theology in contemporary Africa, while **Odomaro Mubangizi** investigates the intersection of philosophy and theology within the African context. This chapter scrutinizes key trends and themes in African theology and philosophy, shedding light on their origins and methodologies. It discusses significant sources including proverbs, riddles, mythology, symbolism, and rituals, which are intrinsic components of African philosophy. **Laurenti Magesa's** article explores the theology of inculturation, and **Chammah J. Kaunda** raises critical considerations regarding the sources of African theology. He probes into the sources of theology in Africa, stressing the significance of contextuality as the foundation for a wide array of theological reflections that eschew overarching narratives while affirming the wealth of African resources for theological contemplation. Within the African milieu, the multiplicity of cultures is viewed as an indispensable asset for theological inquiry. Kaunda believes that African Theology must address African realities.

The second part of the book explores into various theological movements in Africa, presenting eleven insightful chapters. The emphasis of this section is on fostering dialogue between Christian theology and African religions. One particularly noteworthy chapter by **James N. Amanze** argues that unless Christian theology is contextualized within Africa, its relevance to the African population will remain elusive. Another contribution by **Alice Yafeh-Day's** focuses on African feminist theology, shedding light on its origins in the struggles of African women for economic and socio-political liberation, as well as their efforts to dismantle oppressive structures.

In addition, this section includes an assessment of four waves of Black theology in South Africa, examining how this theology which emerged from the struggle against apartheid, has affirmed the dignity and identity of Africans within the South African context. Other articles explore themes such as the symbiotic and antagonistic dimensions of political and public theology in Africa, political theology in Kenya, and the role of faith leaders in promoting

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social justice. Two articles are dedicated to the theology of reconstruction, advocating for a shift from liberation to reconstruction in African theology.

Moreover, this section addresses public health challenges in relation to theology, establishing a link between theology and health. The argument is made that “both religious assets of Christian churches and African values tend to promote a vision of public health that does not isolate health systems from other spheres of society, indicating a way of theologizing on health issues as an endeavor which is always related to social arrangements and organizations that determine the course of human existence.” (168–169). Additionally, the author contends that a theology of health encompasses both theodicy and theology of society and culture (187).

The discussion of ecumenical theology, as presented by **Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa**, focuses on conducting theology ecumenically within the African context. This approach advocates for “ecumenical theology as a self-consciously contextual and constructive reflection and search for the common Christian theological heritage in an eschatological perspective amidst diverse theological traditions and Christianity” (210).

Furthermore, this section explores theologies of development in the context of poverty, arguing for the need for theology to address complex social needs. Proposed typologies include a *theology of hope*, a *theology of marginality*, and a *theology of abundant life*, which together offer alternative language and discourse to understand Africa’s social context and provide reasons for hope amid challenges.

The final chapter of this section, authored by **Peter Kanyandago**, examines initiatives and missed opportunities in theological enterprise after Vatican II (1962–1965), with a focus on recognizing and rehabilitating the identity and dignity of the African people. It highlights significant trends and shifts in African theology after Vatican II, aiming to affirm the identity and dignity of the African people.

The third section of the book focuses on specific regional and emerging theological perspectives. The initial article in this section delves into the theology, doctrine, tradition, and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the earliest churches in existence. Additionally, this section explores evangelical theology as it is understood within the African context.

Ernst M. Conradie’s article discusses ecotheology in South Africa, offering hermeneutical reflections on approaches to ecotheology. Moreover, this section comprises articles on holistic soteriology as a catalyst for socio-political engagement, narrative theology, postcolonial theology, the theology of African-initiated churches, faith-based organizations, theologies of sexuality, and the theology of peacemaking in Africa. These articles provide diverse perspectives on theological issues relevant to the African context.

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The final part, which consists of seven chapters, focuses on biblical and doctrinal theology. One of the articles, written by **Lovemore Togarasei**, explores into the doctrine of the Bible and its place in African theology. Togarasei challenges claims made by certain segments of African Christianity that their theology is solely derived from the Bible (401). The article presents the Bible as a valuable resource for theological reflection, analysis, and articulation in Africa, while also emphasizing the importance of considering the context.

Another article in this part explores Christology within the African context, attempting to answer the question of who Jesus Christ is and how he is understood in contemporary African realities. The topic of salvation in Africa is also addressed, highlighting various perspectives on salvation and emphasizing its role in the holistic transformation of human life — spiritually, socially, personally, economically, and ecologically.

The chapter on ecclesiology focuses on patristic ecclesiology in Africa, examining the theological development of early North Africa and discussing influential figures such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Augustine, Athanasius, and the Bishop of Carthage. Another article explores the Africanized theology of personhood, exploring the philosophical, biblical, and theological foundations of personhood and how the African concept of personhood relates to the socio-political and socioeconomic conditions of Africans today.

The chapter on liturgy theology places liturgy within the African context, placing importance on the ritual while also recognizing the significance of correct doctrine and belief. The final article, written by the editor of this handbook, addresses eschatology in Africa. It argues against a speculative approach to eschatology and instead encourages the ecclesial community to embrace a transformative praxis and ecological responsibility when considering eschatological teachings. Overall, the articles in this part underscore the importance of considering context in theological reflection and emphasize the relevance of theology to the African experience.

The book holds great significance as it provides a systematic documentation of the history of Christian theology in Africa. It serves as a comprehensive and invaluable resource for anyone interested in African theology, making it an excellent reference for students studying this field. Furthermore, the book raises thought-provoking questions, encouraging further exploration and offering a comprehensive survey of the theological landscape in Africa. Thus, it serves as both a launching pad and a reference point for scholars and theologians engaged in future studies. I wholeheartedly recommend the use of this book in seminaries and religious departments across Africa and beyond.



How African Higher Education Institutions Can Weather a Pandemic

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Munyao, Martin, ed. *Online Learning, Instruction, and Research in Post-Pandemic Higher Education in Africa*. Foreword by George John Law. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. xii + 242. USD \$105.00 / £81.00 (hardback), USD \$45.00 / £35.00 (ebook).

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If one were given the option of just a single book on what African higher education institutions (HEI) can do to thrive in the midst of a pandemic like COVID 19, this would be it. This multi-author volume comprising of thirteen essays is edited by Martin Munyao, Deputy Director of Open, Distance and eLearning (ODEL) and lecturer in the Peace and International Studies Department at Daystar University, Kenya. The book has a foreword by George John Law, founder of Internet Theological Education by Extension Global (iTEE Global), and has twenty-six other authors mostly from Kenyan universities or affiliated to them who collaborate in the chapters. The book comes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on higher learning institutions (HEI) in Africa in terms of their response in the areas of Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) and proffers that a mixture of pedagogical skills, educational technology, and institutional collaboration will result in optimum learning outcomes through ODeL than merely transferring the physical classroom experience online as did most HEIs during the pandemic. For ease of assessment, I have categorized the essays into the four broad categories of HEI strategy, the digital divide, online student experiences, and online instructor experiences which are porous as the issues bleed into each other and argue that although the book has some editorial challenges, it is very valuable tool to understanding how African HEIs coped in the pandemic and what areas need to be addressed for them to be better prepared for similar emergencies.

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HEI Strategy

These essays address eLearning in the context of UN's Sustainable Development Goals, institutional experiences during the pandemic, policy, and technology issues at the institutional level. In the first chapter, "**Distance Education that Matters: Creating Sustainable Online Pedagogy**," Alicia Plant and Martin Munyao explore sustainable online pedagogy in alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which they assert as the center of all the 17 SDGs, and is aimed to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all." They call for faculty to have adequate online pedagogical training and innovative online pedagogy that goes beyond the exigencies of the pandemic and extends to the ideals of SDG 4.

Based on the second edition of the International Association of Universities global survey of the COVID19 impact on HEIs covering 112 countries and territories, Trine Jensen and Giorgio Marinoni's "**The Impact of the Pandemic on Higher and its Potential Implications for the Future**" (*sic*) discusses the results with Africa in focus in chapter 12. Specifically they look at the issues of governance, teaching and learning, and research. African HEIs were shown to be more concerned about their financial sustainability, saw a revenue decrease in tuition and public funding, experienced an increase in expenditures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their operations, and a slight decrease in student enrolment. In terms of teaching and learning, only 14% of African HEIs were able to reach their whole student population during the pandemic as opposed to 39% of European HEIs, they fared lower on the use of digital tools and digital capacity building, they indicated higher levels of the negative impact on teaching and learning due to challenges of digital infrastructure and access to data, and, as regards curriculum changes, the more practical disciplines took on a more theoretical approach while those amenable to eLearning forayed more into case studies and problem-based learning. Research was adversely affected as well with delays due to pandemic restrictions, reduced research funding, and increased amount and quality of collaboration amongst HEIs.

In the seventh chapter, "**Switching to SIDE Mode — COVID-19 and the Adaptation of Computer-Mediated Communication Learning in Kenya**," Lydia Ouma Radoli draws on experiences from learners and teachers of Daystar and St Paul's universities during the transitioning from face-to-face instruction to eLearning or Computer-Mediated Communication which, she argues, is enhanced by the self-identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE). She utilized textual analysis of transcribed focused interviews and text messages and concludes that these two institutions, though not representative of all Kenyan HEIs, swiftly made transitions to user-friendly CMC portals that made eLearning easier, maintained high-level examination integrity, and CMC offers

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more practical and more adept at enhancing independent learning than traditional methods.

Using Spencer Johnson's fable "Who Moved My Cheese" as an analogy, **Rose Ruto-Karir** and **Nokuthula Vilakati** call for a dynamic digital transformation for African HEI's in their management and operations to leverage technology for efficiency and reliance post-COVID19. This eighth chapter is entitled "**Post-COVID-19 Digitalization: A Transformative Potential of Higher Education Institutions in Africa.**" Their definition of digital transformation (DX) is derived from Brooks and McCormack who explain it as "a series of deep and coordinated cultural, workforce, and technological shifts that enable new educational and operating models to transform an institution's operations, strategic directions, and value proposition". To weather future storms, an effective digital transformation network (DTF) is required which is comprised of use of technologies, changes in value creation, structural changes, and financial aspects. They discuss the topic in the global, socio-technological, economic, social, environmental, and political contexts. They conclude the article with a five-pronged strategy for designing a DTF.

Julius Sirma and **Vincent Kogo's** chapter nine, "**Elevating Higher Education Challenges Using Blockchain Technology,**" discusses the use of blockchain technology as a tool for safety and quality and therefore transformative for higher education. The authors examine the contribution of blockchain technology to HEIs in terms of IT infrastructure, computing solutions, and monitoring the various systems. They see it not as a disruptive technology but a foundational one that establishes markets and business models whose adoption and development can take decades. The authors discuss blockchain systems and structures. They point to its efficacy in improving record keeping, increasing efficiency in business processes, pioneering a new market for digital assets, creating a disruptive business model, easing payment systems, and improved teaching and storing space. Challenges to the use of the technology include usability due to its technical jargon and different parameters, scalability to incorporate large numbers of users, difficult interchangeability with other platforms and algorithms, lack of enthusiasm of use due to the ethical and secure use of data, unpredictability of the cost of transactions using Bitcoin, and the immutable nature of blockchain technology that make it impossible to reverse actions like the need to revoke a diploma or change a student's grade.

Addressing the Digital Divide

Two chapters address the issue of the inequity. Issues of how to mitigate the inevitable digital divide that eLearning fosters between the rich and the poor are discussed in the second chapter by **Abraham Waithima** et al, "**Covid-19 Higher**

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Education-Driven eLearning: The Digital Divide’s Impact on Access and Quality in the EAC Region.” They call on governments to ensure that rural areas, where the majority live, have access to internet services and electricity. HEIs are requested to invest in digital infrastructure so that both students and faculty are well equipped in skills and digital tools and to facilitate a smooth interaction between face-to-face and eLearning which would render them disruption-proof in the face of pandemics and other emergencies as well as cater to the various student learning preferences. National commissions and councils are asked to be flexible to allow HEIs to be creative and to revise standards and guidelines that reflect post-Covid-19 realities. They see regional bodies like the IUCEA (Inter-University Council of East Africa) as not only coordinating regional standards and guidelines for eLearning but also promoting greater collaboration between HEIs to increase their capacities and pool resources.

In chapter six, **“The Role of Digital Technology and eLearning during COVID19 Pandemic and its Impact on the Higher Education Sector in Kenya,”** **Laban Ayiro, Martin Munyao, and Anthony Wambua** investigate the equity implications of the digital divide that separates the privileged from the under-privileged in eLearning and argue that recognizing such impediments early will aid in crafting solutions against them that will enhance the learning experience. They note that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the social inequalities as eLearning requires digital gadgets and internet connectivity and also exposed the inadequate eLearning infrastructure of Kenyan HEIs. Unlike the previous two chapters by **John Madegu** and **Rebecca Ng’ang’a** that show the suitability of PBL to online learning, **Ayiro et al** note that the adoption of flipped methodology led to a positive learning experience as opposed to PBL which deemed ineffective in online learning. Based on empirical studies, they cite the social inequalities that magnify the digital divide as lack of access to computer devices, lack of affordable and stable internet, and lack of a conducive study space. Finally, they assert that these inequalities must be considered by governments and HEIs if learners from less-privileged communities are to benefit from eLearning.

Online Student Experiences

Two essays deal with how eLearning from the learner’s perspective and address psychology and researchers’ experiences during the pandemic. **Catherine N. Mwarari** and **Agnes N. Mburu** explore the effectiveness of human-centered effective learning processes and theorize on some of the impediments to online learning in chapter three, **“Psychology of Online Learning.”** The psychological barriers to eLearning they cite are lack of variety in assessment leading to monotony, low levels of volitional control, a fixed mindset as regards intelligence and feeling of isolation, inadequate self-

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motivation and orientation to self-discovery, and negative emotions such as stress. On the positive side, they assert that online learning does provide a formidable alternative to the traditional classroom. They cite that online learning: gives the student access to internet resources that would hitherto merely be summarized in classroom; enhances creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking; is not limited by place, pace, and time of study; advantages those with learning disabilities; and solves the problem of lockdowns due to pandemics and other emergencies.

The challenges that seven epidemiological researchers at Mount Kenya University School of Nursing had to overcome during the pandemic are what **Justice Mutua** and **Fridah Mburu** discuss in “**Ramifications of Nursing Research in the Wake of COVID19**,” chapter 11. They discuss the pandemic restrictions on the researchers’ activities such as recruitment and enrollment, alternative consenting processes, and data collection, storage, and analysis. The effect of the restrictions on the researchers’ career are also highlighted in terms of intra-team and university-wide communication and their mental health. These experiences are offered as a model for nursing research practice in the context of a pandemic.

Online Instructor Experience

Four chapters address problem-based learning, collaboration, and dialogical communication in eLearning. **Rebecca Ng’ang’a**’s reflects on online learning, teaching, and research in the context of the Covid-19 shutdown in chapter four, “**Opinion and Experience in Regard to Problem-Based Learning in Online Mode.**” Using Freire’s idea that education, far from being a tool of socializing the younger generation into the logic of the present, should be a tool of freedom that brings transformation of society by equipping learners with critical analysis and reflection that aid in their participation of making the world a better place. She uses that and similar lens to discuss how a teacher’s personal qualities impact problem-based learning and how gathering online was in continuity with student’s reflections on issues as they were already discussing and reflecting on them offline. Reflection forms the core of this pedagogy and is understood as learning that fosters examining and questioning of one’s assumptions, beliefs, opinions and values through observing, questioning, and coalescing facts, ideas, and experiences to draw out meaning and new knowledge. She reflects from such a position as she discusses the context of online learning, the learning context, online learning as a means not an end, the positive and negative outcomes of online learning, and challenges of online learning and how they are being addressed.

John Madegu’s “**Teaching Problem-based Learning in the Post-COVID-19 Era in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for the Online Instructor,**”

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chapter five, looks at the challenges African online instructors face in teaching PBL after COVID-19, the opportunities that eLearning brings to African higher education, and surmises that, notwithstanding the many benefits of PBL in learning experiences, the inadequate skills of African instructors poses a stumbling block. He explores different aspects of PBL and its attunement to African higher education citing South African and Kenyan examples such as its fundamentals, its rationale in the African context, its relationship to learning theory, and its relevance for African higher education. He asserts PBL is suitable for Africa as it is competence-based, entrepreneurial, an ideal pedagogical tool, and can be used to leverage online resources. He notes challenges to online teaching as instructor competencies, inadequate online teaching skills, diminished funding for HEIs, and high cost of online infrastructure. He concludes the chapter on a positive note as he sees these challenges being mitigated by partnerships with technological companies and foreign direct investments by the many corporations that operate on the continent.

“Enhancing Collaboration in Online Learning” by **Martin Munyao** and **Sarah Wachira**, which is the tenth chapter, addresses the issue of equipping faculty with skills that will help online learners to be engaged students given the challenges of the online context as opposed to a face-to-face format. Taking their cue from Lev Vygotsky’s Zonal Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, they explore different strategies, activities, and benefits of collaborative eLearning. They discuss the following strategies: jigsaw technique, Think-Pair-Share, brainwriting, discussion questions, breakout group discussions, scaffolding instruction, flipped classrooms, and problem-based learning. Collaborative writing, group projects, joint problem-solving, debates, study teams, online forum discussions and chat rooms, and breakout group discussions as eLearning activities that can optimize learner engagement. They note that collaborative learning enhances the learning capacities of students as it lessens remoteness, promotes self-learning, and so results in better performance. However, they further note that for collaborative learning to work there is need to set clear learning goals and expectations, learners must be self-motivated to form their discussion groups, and instructors must be given adequate training and support in order to give timely feedback to students. They conclude with the challenges for collaborative learning which they point out as a lack of communication skills in both instructors and learners, uncooperative and difficult members in groups, the difficulties of being both a worker and a student, and the problem of internet connectivity.

The thirteenth and final chapter, **“Dialogical Communication for eLearning Success,”** by **Evonne Mwangale Kiptinness** and **Winnie Mbatha**, addresses the problem of meaningful interaction in Computer Moderated Communication (CMC) by arguing for the use of dialogic communication in

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eLearning using Social Influence Process Theory (SIPT) with Daystar University as a case study and proffers further areas of research. After contrasting face-to-face learning and eLearning, the authors note the challenges of eLearning in the Global South and particularly in Africa. They explore the difficulties of dialogical learning in the eLearning environment but posit five dimensions that mitigate these: constant engagement of participants, interactive attitude that engages the audience through feedback, interactive resources that produce dialogic communication with the audience, responsiveness when the audience reacts to the received communication, and communication which is the conversation between the communicator and audience. Using SIPT, they argue that over time CMC can bring about interpersonal relationships that lead to meaningful interactions minus non-verbal cues which can be addressed, to some extent, by emoji. This theory is tested in their case study of Daystar University and proven true. Finally, they assert that further research is needed in the areas of eLearning tools, enhancement of eLearning, and the challenges of eLearning such as access to data, stable electrical power, and access to the internet.

Analysis

The book suffers from some editing shortfalls, it nevertheless addresses very pertinent issues for the future of African HEIs if they are to contribute to AU2063, The Africa We Want. The book has some typographical errors, requires the chapters to be grouped in parts, could benefit from multiple level subheadings, and could use footnotes/endnotes. There are several typological errors like capitalizing a second word in a sentence, unnecessary repetitions of words and phrases like “in this chapter”, Chapter 13 has a missing word in the title, and another chapter’s sub-heading is part of a paragraph. The book could be more coherent and less confusing if the chapters were grouped into parts dealing with a similar theme. For example, the second chapter by **Waithima et al**, “**Covid-19 Higher Education-Driven eLearning: The Digital Divide’s Impact on Access and Quality in the EAC Region**” and chapter six, “**The Role of Digital Technology and eLearning during COVID19 Pandemic and its Impact on the Higher Education Sector in Kenya**” by **Ayiro, Munyao, and Wambua**, both of which deal with the issue of the digital divide, could be grouped together. Further, such partitions to the book would have assisted the editors to foster dialogue between authors arguing for different positions; e.g., as when **Ayiro et al** argue that PBL was not as effective during the lockdown “due to the nature of online learning” as compared to flipped methodology yet both the preceding two chapters of **Madegu** and **Ng’ang’a** argue for the opposite. Some chapters require multiple levels of sub-headings so one can distinguish between the various sections and better follow the argument. This

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has resulted in some essays having a single-paragraph section that could have been part of several same-level headings. Some chapters could have used footnotes as an explanatory tool so that the main text is not inundated with matters not directly related to the argumentation.

That aside, this book is a very valuable tool for those wanting to understand how African HEIs coped in the pandemic due to its variety of topics, relevance and focus on Africa, grounding in lived experiences, and its dealing with the pertinent issues of digital infrastructure, access to education, and reflecting on the digital divide. Its variety of topics spanning institutional strategies for digitalization, lessons from the lived experiences of tutors, learners, and researchers, variety of teaching approaches and methods, and addressing equity issues leaves no stone unturned in the African HEI eLearning universe. Though most of the studies are conducted in Kenya, the results are relevant to other African countries as the contexts are very similar and so lessons learned in Kenya are, by and large, transferable to many other African countries. Most importantly, many of these were empirical studies grounded in the lived experiences of researchers, learners, and tutors during the pandemic which means their findings are based on the reality on the ground and therefore very likely to offer real solutions to the problems they were examining. The very pertinent issues of digital infrastructure development, access to digital tools and the internet, government policies that are supportive of better eLearning, and how African HEIs can operate in the context of resource-scarcity are discussed at length. With SDG4 (“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all”) in view and its noble pursuit of educating all people, ODeL seems to be the one sure way of realizing that goal and that of AU2063, *The Africa We Want*.¹ Optimistic as this sounds, the authors caution though that the inequity of the digital divide needs addressing so that eLearning does not continue to exacerbate the rich-poor gap in Africa.

Conclusion

The breadth of the topics covered and the analyses of the authors have satisfied the book’s argument that a mixture of pedagogical skills, educational technology, and institutional collaboration will result in optimum learning outcomes through ODeL than merely transferring the physical classroom experience online as did most HEIs during the pandemic. This indeed is a required addition to every HEI library and the lessons learned in it need to be heeded by all who are involved in ODeL.

¹ See *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (Addis Ababa: African Union, 2015), https://au.int/en/Agenda2063/popular_version



Pneumatology in African Perspectives

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Ngaruiya, David K., and Rodney L. Reed, eds. *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity*. ASET Series 7. Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022. Pp. xiii + 153. £14.99 (paperback).

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The editors, David K. Ngaruiya and Rodney L. Reed, are seasoned scholars and university lecturers. David K. Ngaruiya is an associate professor and former acting Deputy Chancellor for Academic Affairs at International Leadership University, Nairobi, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA. Rodney Reed is also an Associate Professor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya. He holds a PhD in Theological ethics from Drew University, USA. They both have been published widely. The book is authored by ten contributors, all qualified scholars, including an article by David K. Ngaruiya himself. The authors have an international pedigree: Kwaku Boamah from Ghana; Heleen Joziase from the Netherlands, who worked as a lecturer in Kenya; John Kiboi from Kenya; Jeffrey Krohn from the USA, lecturing in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Stephanie Lowery from the USA lecturing in Kanya; Kelosi Molato from Botswana; Esther Mombo from Kenya; Moses Ogidis from Nigeria; Jacob Oyata from Ghana; and Danson Wafula from Kenya.

A cursory glance at the titles of the chapters appears to be a motley of unrelated topics. Still, a closer reading reveals the connecting themes of the Holy Spirit or Pentecostalism. The relationship of the chapters' topics to African Christianity is somewhat tenuous and tangential in most of the chapters, but an in-depth reading manifests some connections. The book has eight chapters, with all the odd-numbered chapters written by one author. Chapter one is by Moses Ogidis, chapter three is by David Ngaruiya, chapter five is by Jeffrey Krohn, and chapter seven is by Kenosi Molato. The even-numbered chapters are co-authored except chapter four, which John Kiboi wrote. Chapter two is by Kwaku Boamah and Jacob Oyata, and chapter six is by Esther Mombo and Hellen Joziase. Chapter eight by Stephanie Lowery and Danson Wafula.

The first chapter deals with Acts 2:1–47, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

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to the Early Church. The author links the passage to partnership in ministry. He suggests that the influence of the Holy Spirit on the Early Church “is considered as a model for the contemporary evangelical churches in Nigeria” (1). He sees the work of the Holy Spirit as the panacea to equality, diversity, and inclusion, particularly for people with disability. He alludes to Luke’s bias in giving an account of marginalized, disadvantaged, and disabled people in his gospel and how he continued this in the book of Acts, where the preaching of the gospel embraces diversity and equality in its focus on the Gentiles. He points out how the Early Church dealt with discrimination in Acts 6, establishing the diaconate ministry to deal with inequity. He applies this to the Church in Nigeria and argues that gender and other prejudices in the Church would be addressed by a proper understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He points out that Acts 2:1–47 promotes inclusivity and partnership in Africa’s eclectic, culturally male-dominated leadership. “The church in Nigeria should learn from the model of the early church, which through the leadership of the Holy Spirit enabled them to do works for the kingdom of God irrespective of their diversities” (13). He further points out how the Holy Spirit enables *koinonia* (fellowship) in the Church’s engagement to build a new community. Although the author gives the impression of an exegetical study of Acts 2:1–47 in his topic, he barely accomplishes it. He instead gives sufficient proof texts to support his central thesis that the Holy Spirit promotes partnership in ministry. He nevertheless accomplishes his main objective of demonstrating that the Holy Spirit engenders partnership in ministry.

The authors of chapter two compared the Montanists and Pentecostals with reference to the churches in Ghana. They see common ground in the emphasis on the importance of the Holy Spirit, the marginalization and the resistance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and those who emphasize it. Also, it stresses “the participation of the Spirit in the church’s activities” (18). The authors see comparisons in the expression of the charismata, the use of scriptures, the doctrine of the end time and the role of women in the two movements. Both movements contended against the views that the charismata ceased after the death of apostles or with the canonization of scripture. The Montanists were denounced as the “Phrygian heresy” (2). Although people associate the beginning of Pentecostalism with the events of Asuza in the USA in the twentieth century and as a new phenomenon in Africa following Asuza’s experience, this chapter points out that one of the early African church fathers and apologist, Tertullian, joined Montanism for a period (22) implying that Pentecostalism had expression in the African Church before the arrival of the Western missionaries. The authors point out that one main contrast between Montanists and Pentecostals of the twentieth century is that while Montanism was reactionary to the heresy of Gnosticism, laxity and low morality in the early

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Church, apocalyptic eschatological concerns, and lack of emphasis on the charismata, Pentecostalism in the twentieth century was birthed by the Holiness Revival Movement that on the whole reacted to similar laxity issues as the Montanists. Concerning Pentecostalism in Ghana, the authors point out three major attraction factors: personal experience, manifestation in enhanced worship and miraculous deliverance. African Pentecostalism became counter-culture in recognizing women's ministry in leadership and in the expression of the charismata. The authors' overall evaluation of Pentecostalism in Africa is that it found fertile ground in the AICs (Africa Initiated/Instituted/Independent Churches) that form the major brand of Christianity in Africa. Pentecostalism and Montanism share a commonality in appealing to the laity as opposed to the established echelons of ecclesiastical power of the priesthood in the main denominations. The two movements were conducive to the "priesthood of all believers" and emphasized holiness, high morality, fasting and innovation in worship services. The authors' final assessment is that "The use of directive and predictive prophecy is more pronounced in Pentecostals, while Montanists emphasized more apocalyptic and eschatological prophecies" (30). The authors conclude on a crucial point, the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the Church and avoidance of splinter groups as follows: "If the church wishes to avoid the rise of such pneumatological movements, the church must always try and keep the activities and roles of the Spirit central" (30). One weakness of the chapter is that it does not address the situation in the rest of African Christianity besides Ghana, though this may be only a necessary limitation of scope.

Chapter three slightly echoes chapter two in pointing out that Augustine, arguably the architect of Western theology, was an early African church father who "utilized reason in his early thinking regarding the Holy Spirit" (33). The author aptly credits Augustine with articulating the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He demonstrates how Augustine articulated the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His part in Creation, distinguishing him from other spirits. The author points out that in AD 393, Augustine, in the plenary African Church Council, defended the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the virgin birth against critics, philosophers, and heretics and, in so doing, laid the fundamental "understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit" (37) in his work *Faith and the Creed*. He stated that "Jesus did not have a divine mother; he was nonetheless born of a human mother" (38). The author also points out that Augustine defended the inspiration of scriptures by the Holy Spirit. Although the author explores the relevance of Augustinian pneumatology to the contemporary African Church, he fails to enunciate that Augustine was a founding father of African Christianity. He, however, recommends following his example. "Like Augustine, the African church must confront errant doctrine through spirit-led preaching" (46). He also, commends Augustine's "Quadrige" hermeneutical

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approach in interpreting scripture. One serious criticism of the author is that, given the book's title, the author failed to tease Augustine's influence in African Christianity in its adherence to scripture and its largely charismatic outlook.

In chapter four, the author proposes to expound pneumatology and the mission of the Church in postmodern Africa. He gives a preamble of Christological debates to the sixth century in the early Church that centred on the distinction of the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity and the various understandings and heresies surrounding the Holy Spirit. He links neo-Pentecostalism in Africa with early church heresies that perceived the Holy Spirit as a divine impersonal force consonant with the teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventists. He briefly defines philosophical terms and the development of post-modernism emanating from Western philosophies. He explains how it could affect the Church in Africa. It is not easy to follow the author's argument in relation to his proposed topic, but nevertheless, he gives useful insights on pneumatology in general without an African focus.

In chapter five, the author engages the Jehovah's Witness's understanding of the Holy Spirit and evaluates their contention that the Holy Spirit has no name; he is it, something and not a person. The author points out the importance of his exploration for Africa because, "a dominant theological theme in contemporary African Christianity is pneumatological" (72). The author's main thesis is "to explore plausible arguments for the lack of a name of the Holy Spirit in the biblical record while maintaining that he is the "third person" of the Triune God" (72). The author surveys the biblical evidence the Jehovah's Witnesses' belief, and expresses sympathy with their position, and offers two trajectories to address their concerns. Firstly, the author cites reputable biblical scholars who point to counter biblical evidence that the Holy Spirit has a name and even that the "Holy Spirit" is in itself a name. Secondly, the unity of the God-head, "There would not be a "need" for a specific name of the Holy Spirit, given that thorough biblical teaching the "name" of God, meaning God is the Triune God..." The author concludes, "The title "Holy Spirit" as his name and the biblical witness to the "name" that encompasses the three persons of the Father, Son and Spirit – are possible rejoinders to the arguments of Jehova's Witnesses" (77). The author qualifies his two trajectories by pointing out the unity of the Trinity in which the Holy Spirit exalts Christ and the biblical equivalency between Christ and the Spirit (79). He further qualifies this by citing another scholar who said, "No Christology without pneumatology and pneumatology without Christology (80). The author suggests the trajectory of equivalence is best illustrated in the book of Acts, where the Spirit is presented as the personal presence of Jesus (81). He points out that in scripture, The Spirit is used two hundred times and the Holy Spirit ninety times and argues that "The Spirit is the Holy Spirit" (82), whose main function is the sanctification of the

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believers. “While Jesus Christ is the “model” for Christian ethics, the Holy Spirit is the “power” for Christian ethics” (84). The author acknowledges opaqueness concerning the name of the Holy Spirit but criticizes the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ naivety of their simplistic conclusion regarding the Holy Spirit as an “It” rather than acknowledging the complexity surrounding the understanding of the Trinity. “A simplistic and superficial conclusion on the part of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, that “there is no name for the Holy Spirit, “results in a complete lack of understanding of the full witness of Scripture” (89). The one major criticism of the author is that while he does a superb job on pneumatology in general, he hardly links it to African Christianity except in a passing citation, “awareness of the spirit world is true of many societies in Africa” (85).

The authors of chapter six highlight how pneumatology empowers women’s ministry, equity, inclusivity and leadership, which resonates with the authors of chapter two. Although their contribution is focused on AICN (Africa Israel Nineveh Church) in Kenya, their applications cite other AICs making profound contributions to pneumatology in African Christianity. They point out how “The Spirit grants being and life, strength and power, harmonizing a person with the rest of humanity and the universe” (94). According to the authors, pneumatology affects African Christianity in that “the Spirit liberates women from dehumanization and gender injustice...and how the AICs’ pneumatology with liberating anthropology undergirds gender injustice in leadership and exercising gifts of the Holy Spirit” (95). The authors further point out how in one of the AICs (AICN), the dress code “symbolizes the discipleship of equals” (96). “The power of the Spirit is not preserved for the chosen few; it is not coupled to hierarchy, office or gender....every human being is enabled to invoke or mediate the Holy Spirit” (98). They, in particular demonstrate how pneumatology in AINC is akin to liberation theology. Being filled by the Holy Spirit, “liberates women from “old” cultural, religious and economic identities and from evil or Satan, but the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit also put them in a new relation to men: the Holy Spirit has set people free to regard men and women as equal” (101). The central thesis of this contribution is pneumatology of the AICs with particular reference to AINC, “viewed as a community of pneumatics, the various gifts of the Spirit are acknowledged and valued. The Holy Spirit is at the centre of the lived Christology of women – Jesus saves through the Spirit – and pneumatology is at the centre of ecclesiology and liturgy” (98). Although limited by space, the authors made a valuable contribution to pneumatology in African Christianity that is worthy of reading.

In chapter seven, the author continues exploring pneumatology in Botswana’s AICs and APC (African Pentecostal Churches). He points out that these groups of churches are imbued with an African worldview, meaning “these churches are African and have African perspectives of life and experience” (106).

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These churches “depict a strong yearning and a desire for the Holy Spirit to take control and lead the church” (107). Members seek deep spiritual experiences. The author points out that the Holy Spirit is perceived both as an impersonal force as well as personal and, in some cases, in a hierarchical manner where he is third in command in the Trinity. He also points out that AICs and APCs were formed by African leaders to deal with African issues that were ignored or minimized by the missionary-initiated churches, in particular, dealing with spiritual forces. Also, “longing to be engaged with the grassroots of public theology” (112). He refers to an African scholar who postulated, “Anybody who knows the African Christianity 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 African people” (112). The author makes an important connection between glossolalia in AICs and APCs with spirit possession in African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and its impact on African Christianity. The AICs in Botswana perceive the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of God, he is Jesus, and he is understood as the angel of God . . . also as the all-embracing, pervading power of God” (114). Although the article oscillates rather than flows, it makes a distinct contribution to pneumatology in African Christianity in pointing out that it is not all about power and gifting of the Holy Spirit by arguing for the Holy Spirit’s transformation of Christians into the character of Christ and producing the fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control).

In the final chapter eight, the authors look into the Holy Spirit’s deliverance ministry in Ghana in the context of Charismatic Ministries (CM), by which they refer to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. They acknowledge the spread of the charismatic movement that has swept across the African continent and its effect on Christianity by assessing Asamoah-Gyadu’s research and published writings on the phenomenon. Their assessment focuses on deliverance ministry, understood as “the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and the use of this power to conquer evil” (127). In this sense, pneumatology is perceived as “the intervention of the Holy Spirit to provide relief from evil forces, leading to a renowned scholar characterizing their soteriology as a “pneumatological soteriology” (127). The authors observe that this type of pneumatology emanates from Africans’ deep-seated belief in evil spirits, of which salvation should go beyond deliverance from sin and eternal damnation to include oppression by evil spirits (28). This understanding of salvation from AICs and CM scratches where it itches compared to missionary-founded churches and finds resonance with African Traditional Religion (ATR). Conversion into Christianity, therefore, entails total break, as observed by one scholar regarding Ghanaian Pentecostalism in which “they have an uncompromising attitude towards traditional religion, which they depict as sheerly diabolical, and

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constantly preach a puritan ethic as the only way to escape satanic temptations” (129). The authors uncover what has become the scourge of African Christianity: cult submission to the spiritual leader, the Man of God (MOG), who is believed to be endowed with the power to protect and transmit to the followers, the intermediary between the spirit world and the Christian. The authors aptly assess that, theologically, this “takes ATR views of spiritual power and inserts them into pneumatology, specifically sanctification” (130). While the authors do well to make this observation, they fail to comment on the criticism often directed to Western missionaries for encouraging the abandoning of traditional religions in order to become Christians, which is the same thing the AICs and CM in Ghana are doing. To their credit, however, they emphasize that “inward regeneration should lead to outward transformation, contrary to non – charismatics who emphasize conversion more than transformation and empowerment by the Spirit” (131). The authors give an apt appraisal of the different implications of soteriology, which, in the understanding of Charismatic Ministries in Ghana that they are evaluating, is understood in terms of practical Christianity. According to CM’s view of deliverance, the “reliance upon the Spirit’s power for growth is linked to sanctification rather than regeneration” (136). The authors do well to point out what, in essence, is fundamental to Christianity, “the Holy Spirit’s power is greater than that of the demonic hordes and that He is indeed capable of delivering a person from demonic activity” (137). The authors address a crucial point at variance with biblical teaching, the CM’s held view of deliverance and never suffering, which they correctly point out is part of Christian discipleship and correctly criticize emphasis on over-realized eschatology leaving little room for the not yet of the Kingdom. They also challenge CM’s emphasis on prosperity and fullness of life here and now, which undermines eschatology. The authors have made a fair and balanced appraisal of soteriology and pneumatology in African Christianity. Their contribution is worthy reading for anybody who wishes to understand African Christianity and the contribution of Pentecostal and Charismatic input on the continent.

In conclusion, this book is a valuable tool for anyone seeking to understand the contours of pneumatology and its relevance in African Christianity. For anyone seeking to understand Augustine’s influence on African pneumatology, Ngaruiya’s article is a valuable resource. Krohn’s contribution is invaluable for anyone wanting a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. Chapter Six is a compelling reading on the impact of pneumatology on gender discrimination in leadership, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Overall, the book is written by able authors with experience grounded in the African theological scene and well qualified to tackle the book’s subject collectively. The reviewer highly recommends their collective contributions.

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- Death
- Eternal punishment
- Intermediate state
- Millennial views
- Final Judgement
- Futurism
- Cultic eschatologies
- Eschatology and ethics
- Eschatology in African cultures
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- Eschatology of other faiths

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- Eschatological perspectives of African Church Fathers
- Eschatology in contemporary preaching
- Messianic age
- Eschatology and art or Eschatology and Sciences
- Africa in biblical eschatology
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BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Koschorke, Klaus. *Grundzüge Der Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte: Asien, Afrika Und Lateinamerika 1450 – 2000*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022. Pp. xiv + 234; maps. 29,00 €, \$31.51 (paperback).

Hans-Christoph Thapelo LANGE

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One of the defining features of Christianity is its capacity to take root in many different kinds of soils. Its historiography, however, has often focused on recounting the growth it enjoyed in European soil. In his book Koschorke addresses this imbalance with an outline of how widely the seed has been sown outside of Europe, as the title in English, “Outlines of Extra-European Christian History: Asia, Africa and Latin America 1450–2000,” suggests. It is designed to be used as a resource in teaching this subject in which Koschorke presents selected episodes from Christianity’s global history. These highlight both its various local expressions and its global interconnectedness from 1450 to 2000 CE in the regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin-America. Koschorke certainly is no stranger to the subject, having occupied the chair of church history at the University of Munich since 1993 until his retirement, also transforming it into a center for the History of World Christianity.

The anecdote from the preface perhaps best expresses what the book contains. It comes from the Portuguese arrival 1498 in India: in search for the fabled prester John and his church, Vasco da Gama and his party celebrated their first mass on Indian soil in a ‘strange’ church. Wondering about the strange décor and many-armed statues, they only realized their mistake later: They had mistaken a Hindu temple for one of the churches of Prester John. Nevertheless, they did later meet the Christians of the church of St Thomas (but no Prester John himself) which had been in existence for almost 1000 years. Apart from illustrating the misunderstandings in cultural exchanges, this story illustrates that indigenous Christianity was often already present, and the missionary effort of the West was only one factor amongst others that drove the spread of Christianity.

Concerning Africa, Koschorke covers the important aspects to understand the broad strokes of its Christian landscape. Slavery, colonialism, genocide, and

BOOK REVIEW: *Grundzüge Der Außereuropäischen Christentums-geschichte*, by Klaus Koschorke

apartheid are each addressed, as are more intricate events such as the consequences of various Catholic councils and events in other colonies. Particularly interesting are the early indigenous initiatives in Africa, such as the Christian Kingdom of Kongo with its first African Bishop consecrated in 1521. Other strains of Christianity such as Ethiopianism, African Independent Churches (AICs), and the later ecumenical movement are also all covered.

The book is divided into six sections which are written such that they can each be read by themselves. This leads to some minor repetition if read from start to finish. Each section begins with background information which is relevant to understand the global or local factors influencing the development of the Christian faith. The background information alone presents useful waypoints of Christian history. The book does well in highlighting the polycentric nature of Christianity — a subject Koschorke has done pioneering work in. However, the scope of the undertaking in this book — to present a global history — naturally leaves much detail to be explored. Koschorke encourages such work to be done. Instead of making the already dense book any thicker, a link provides access to a lot of bonus material which can be used for illustration or lecture preparation. Currently the book is inaccessible to a global audience since is written in German, but an English translation is in the works. A reader from the regions covered in the book will learn a lot, but a reader from the West will almost certainly gain new perspectives on the breadth and depth that World Christianity encompasses. Any curriculum — especially those of mainline church seminaries — will be greatly enriched by Koschorke's book.



BRÈVE NOTE CRITIQUE DU LIVRE

Lygunda Li-M, Fohle. *Des missiologies importées : Leur incidence sur la formation théologique en Afrique francophone*. Yaoundé, Cameroun : LivresHippo, 2023. Pp. xii + 82 £ 8.99 (broché).

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Cet ouvrage apparaît comme le résumé de résultats des recherches antérieures de Fohle sur la formation missiologique. Son contenu se rapproche de l'ouvrage *Transforming Missiology*, publié en anglais aux éditions Langham Monographs en 2018. À cet effet, on doit se demander : quelle est la contribution majeure de son ouvrage dans le débat international autour de la formation missiologique ? Avant de répondre à cette question, il semble important de présenter les principaux points du livre.

Outre l'introduction et la conclusion générale, Fohle divise son texte en trois chapitres. Le premier chapitre clarifie la question de la diversité de la formation missiologique dans le monde, dont les effets sont également perceptibles en Afrique francophone. Dans le deuxième chapitre, l'auteur revient sur l'histoire, les définitions et les malentendus qui entourent la missiologie, la formation missiologique et la recherche missiologique, en se référant à l'Afrique francophone. Dans le troisième chapitre, Fohle développe quelques critères pour l'évaluation quantitative et qualitative d'un programme de formation missiologique.

L'apport de cet ouvrage réside dans le fait que son auteur étudie les grandes périodes du développement historique de la formation missiologique en Afrique francophone. Mais son étude ne fait que deux pages (voir pp. 27–28). À ce stade, nous ne voulons pas donner une opinion absolue sur la périodisation du développement historique de la formation missiologique en Afrique francophone et sur ce qu'elle implique. Il nous semble cependant qu'une réflexion plus approfondie est nécessaire pour examiner dans plus de détails la question de la périodisation du développement historique de la formation missiologique en Afrique francophone. La nouvelle génération relèvera certainement ce défi ; d'autant plus que Fohle n'a pas consacré beaucoup d'espace à cette question.



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Afrane-Twum, Johnson Ambrose. *Christian Mission in a Diverse British Urban Context: Crossing the Racial Barrier to Reach Communities*. Foreword by Harvey C. Kwiyani. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2024. Pp. xviii +213. £21.99 (paperback).

Paul Araoluwa AYOKUNLE

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Christian Mission in a Diverse British Urban Context is a valuable book in the African Christian Diaspora field. It explores the theme of partnership between African Immigrant Congregations (AICs) and white majority churches for “a more effective sharing of the gospel” in the multicultural UK setting (5). The book argues that the UK AICs have become a shelter for their members from migrant challenges, providing a variety of support as these adherents strive to make sense of their new environment. Yet, as the author notes, these congregations must find effective ways of engaging with the local British congregations for a more impactful Christian witness and, in fact, one that better represents God’s kingdom.

In consonance with other literature in the field, like Afeosemime U. Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2020), the book reechoes the remixing of British societies due to migration. It stresses that this demographic alteration has resulted in multicultural cities and various expressions of the Church in the territory. Plus, the proliferating migrant churches are re-energizing British Christianity, which, sadly, has been on a decline for many decades. However, much of the efforts of these migrant churches seem concentrated around their kind as they struggle to evangelize their hosts. Therefore, this book proposes a way out through effective partnerships with the local British congregations. The author suggests a few practical steps, including both parties accepting the activity of the Holy Spirit in mission and his residence in all Christ’s people, rethinking their leadership approaches, and remembering that God’s eternal salvation excludes no one.

By adopting the ethnographic method of participant observation to study four denominations in-depth, the author could see and interact with direct data about the research concern. Hence, the author could compare historical and

Paul Araoluwa Ayokunle

**BOOK REVIEW: *Christian Mission in a Diverse British Urban Context*,
by Johnson Ambrose Afrane-Twum**

theological investigations with empirical analysis, strengthening the book's arguments. The author's language is unambiguous or laden with theological or other jargon that could complicate readers' understanding. The chapters are not unnecessarily long, with the author always attempting to spare the reader any irrelevant information that could detract from the focus of the book. Overall, the book's argument is clear and well-pursued throughout the work.

The author's proposals are practicable. Yet, as an AIC leader, I imagine the struggle that some of my colleagues may have in implementing them. Indeed, many have already developed emotional attachments to their inherited leadership styles, ministerial philosophies, monoculturally-affirming ecclesiology and other practices that could make the author's recommendations somewhat unsettling for them. Of course, I reckon a similar experience would apply to the white Majority Church leaders, as they also struggle with racial assumptions and other cross-cultural ministry inhibitors. Notwithstanding, the author's argument remains relevant and critical for God's mission in the twenty-first century. Indeed, beyond the local British congregations and the UK AICs, the book speaks to mission practitioners and scholars, church leaders, and everyone interested in doing God's mission more effectively in this era of World Christianity. The Christian community is now more multicultural and polycentric than ever. Today, mission is happening from everywhere to all places. So, denying the need for partnership or not leveraging it will only slow down or limit the gains of the Church in its missional endeavours. To this end, *Christian Mission in a Diverse British Urban Context* is an important resource.



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Ajibade, Ezekiel A. *Expository Preaching in Africa: Engaging Orality for Effective Proclamation*. Bukuru, Nigeria: HippoBooks, 2021. Pp. xi +235. £15.99 (paperback).

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Introduction

Gospel proclamation is a sacred responsibility that requires a passionate and dedicated pursuit of excellence in communication. Unfortunately, a deficiency in the commitment to honing adequate skills impedes the impactful delivery of the gospel message. In contemporary times, a lack of commitment to acquiring the necessary skills for effectively disseminating the gospel has led to a discernible scarcity of sound biblical exposition. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of gospel proclamation transcends the literacy levels of both the preacher and the audience. The essence of sound biblical exposition lies not in the eloquence of words but in the clarity with which the message is conveyed. Differences in literacy between preachers and their listeners make the problem much more difficult.

Overview

When addressing audiences with varying literacy levels, a committed preacher can bridge the gap through thoughtful communication strategies and a genuine connection with the hearts of the listeners. There is a pressing need for renewed commitment among preachers to acquire and refine the skills necessary for effective gospel communication to address the current dearth of sound biblical exposition. This involves profoundly understanding the Scriptures, mastering communication techniques, and tailoring the message to resonate with diverse audiences. *Expository Preaching in Africa* addresses this exigency.

Ajibade's work emerges as a pertinent resource that navigates the complexities of effectively proclaiming the gospel within the African setting. It is a comprehensive exploration of expository preaching, uniquely focusing on engaging orality for effective proclamation. Thus, it comprehensively explores

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Engaging Orality for Effective Proclamation,*
by Ezekiel A. Ajibade**

the intersection between expository preaching and African orality. It is, therefore, a groundbreaking exploration of integrating African oral elements into expository preaching.

The book is organized into eight major chapters, covering topics such as homiletic theories and the concept of expository preaching, form and content in expository preaching, the historical context of Christian preaching in Africa, the role of orality in gospel communication, and using African orality to contextualize expository preaching. It draws parallels from diverse experiences, including Korean, African-American, and Ghanaian. Moreover, Ajibade delves into the intricacies of expository preaching, emphasizing the integration of African oral elements — including myths, proverbs, folklore, dance, and drama — to enhance the effectiveness of biblical proclamation. The latter chapters present sample expository sermons rooted in African orality, addressing the potential dangers of contextualization. The book culminates with a thoughtful reflection on the entire discourse and resourceful appendices.

Ajibade's writing stands out because it offers an informed appraisal of the African setting — a viewpoint that many other writers choose to ignore. Ajibade correctly asserts that cultural sensitivity and contextualization are necessary for successful proclamation. Thus, he explains that “contextualization is planting, watering, and nurturing the gospel message within the culture so much that people feel a sense of ownership of it and are ready to run with it without tampering with the biblical roots and essence of the message” (2). Ajibade's combination of orality with expository preaching may seem unconventional but provides an essential viewpoint. The book also significantly enhances the body of current literature by filling in knowledge gaps on preaching in diverse cultural contexts. It establishes that “Africans are predominantly oral in their nature and culture and that they enjoy communication best in an oral atmosphere” (71). Hence, this bridges the gap between traditional expository methods and the rich oral traditions of Africa. The book also provides a rich overview of orality, historical insights, and a thought-provoking exploration of the dangers associated with contextualization and provides a thoughtful evaluation of the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating orality into expository preaching. Ajibade insists that “preaching can surely be done in a contextualized form without compromising the substance of God's infallible word” (192).

Evaluation

The strength of this book lies in the practical techniques offered, the extensive analysis of Africans in the history of Christian preaching (49–70), and the cautionary exploration of potential dangers in contextualization (189–193). Including sample expository sermons serves as practical guidance for

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implementing the principles discussed (171–187). Ajibade’s emphasis on engaging orality aligns with the imperative to reach all segments of society, ensuring that the transformative message of the gospel transcends barriers and resonates with individuals across different educational backgrounds (71). Thus, this book is a testament to the importance of adapting preaching techniques to the unique characteristics of African contexts, where orality plays a significant role in communication. A potential weakness of the book is a lack of a more detailed examination of case studies to illustrate successful implementations of the proposed techniques. While the book excels in highlighting the benefits of contextualization, a more robust discussion on potential pitfalls could enhance the overall balance of the text. Furthermore, a more concrete example of successful implementations and an in-depth analysis of potential barriers could enhance the text.

Conclusion

Preachers, seminary students, and academics who want to learn more about expository preaching in African contexts will find this book very helpful. There are important lessons for pastors and educators who want to make their sermons more engaging and culturally relevant. It also serves individuals interested in the relationship between orality, cultural variety, and Christian preaching, providing insightful viewpoints for modern preachers. Moreover, the examination of possible hazards in contextualization is an essential aid for preachers attempting to strike a balance between theological faithfulness and cultural relevance.