

MISSION SPIRITUALITY AND AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP: AN AFRICAN REFLECTION

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I. Historical perspective of the African Church

The 1910 World Missionary Conference met to evaluate and plan the evangelization of the non-Christian world and particularly Africa which was then termed 'the dark continent'

A century later, the 2010 Conference will address the subject of mission from a different premise. Today mission is "from everywhere to everywhere". One of the significant realities today is the recognition that the centre of Christianity has shifted from the global north to the global south. Yet the one message expected to come out is the need for concerted effort globally and locally to do God's mission in a world that is in greater need than it was in 1910. In a world today that is diverse and with a population of 6 billion people, the harvest today is indeed plenty and the laborers few!

This paper aims to look at the wholistic mission of the church in Africa that has been championed by the Church Mission Society-Africa with sister agencies. We will start with a historical overview of the Church in Africa and introduce the African worldview as directly connected to African spirituality, the current challenges in the continent and then focus on two key strands in the CMS-Africa's response to the African predicament.

The African church has been in the continent for nearly two thousand years. Western missionaries zealously spread the gospel through out the continent in the 19th and 20th centuries. The recent history of the Christian church in Africa is linked to the period when colonialists occupied Africa in search of resources such as land and cheap labour.¹ Christian missionaries arrived on the African soil almost hand in hand with the colonial masters, and although they worked in consultation they were not always in agreement. Missionaries questioned certain colonial practices including slave trade, exploitation of the locals and such oppressive practices. The one belief that both missionaries and colonialists held commonly was that African social and cultural system were primitive and animistic and hence needed to be replaced with European values. In essence, missionaries saw as their mandate to evangelize the heathen Africans including civilizing them to make them the exact replica of the European or American.²

The evangelization of Africa which is credited to the missionary movement of the 19th century was a sacrificial move on the part of missionaries' called to do God's mission. It is on record that on their journey out from Europe some missionaries packed their belongings in their coffins and indeed many of them died of tropical diseases even before they reached their destinations. This sacrifice has eternal value for the kingdom of God and the African church owes it to our western brothers and sisters.

Apart from sharing the gospel and planting churches in Africa, missionaries are applauded for their contributions in education, health and agriculture in African countries where they had a presence. Indeed mission schools produced African leadership that was later to take the front stage in the struggle for independence of Africa.

It is noted that before the coming of missionaries and even after, Africa was religious. Otieno asserts that the typical African worldview is driven by religion, he states ' the interdependence between these life sustaining forces in the universe constitute the very essence of African spirituality³ , it is how these forces are mediated and managed that promote the abundance of life'. Most traditional African societies believed in a Supreme God. The origin of God seemed to have been the mystery to many Africans as stated by O'Donovan⁴. Another important feature of many African religions is the belief in ancestral spirits who mediated between the living and the spirit world. Community life as opposed to individualism is another salient feature of the African worldview. Burnett emphasizes this

when he quotes the famous African statement “I am, because we are”⁵. This statement in essence summarizes what community life is like in Africa although, this is now changing and what was referred to as the traditional African religion is today a mix of African traditional religion and other belief systems.

One of the criticisms against the western missionary movement was the failure by missionaries to acknowledge or even understand the social and cultural values and systems the African people. Their perception was that the existing cultural practices and beliefs were evil and had no place in the kingdom of God. This presentation of the gospel seems to have confused many in Africa who equated civilization to Christianity, a perception that still lingers on.

The missionary movement brought a gospel to Africa that was dualistic and the root causes of dualism can be traced back to as early as the Greek influence on the Judo-Christian tradition on Christianity. The Greek theory dichotomizes the world into two spheres of sacred and secular. The resulting conflict in Africa between these contradictory world views (which will be examined later) perhaps explain why Christianity has not found much depth in the continent despite the presence of the church for many years. The notion of the sacred and the secular has influenced the church and the mission field to this day.

It is acknowledged that missionaries did a commendable job before passing on the baton to Africans. Mission stations across Africa typically with a school, a medical centre and a church were well managed. When missionaries started handing over these institutions to Africans, the process does not seem to have been done with careful planning⁶. Africans seemed ill-prepared to handle the responsibilities that soon became theirs. This is cited in most African countries including Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria.

1.1 Our Context

The African Church has been in the hands of Africans for several decades since independence. Some of the evangelistic mission organizations in the continent include the African Evangelistic Enterprise serving across the continent since 1960 when Billy Graham preached in Nairobi. AEE is a child of the East Africa Revival movement. This ministry focusing in evangelism of African cities made a mark in the continent⁷. The East Africa Revival movement despite its legalistic attributes made impact in the spirituality of the greater East African region. The transparency, accountability and oneness in this movement left a mark that lingers on in church life in East Africa today.⁸

Several surveys by church-related agencies have placed the rate of church growth in Africa at 3% annually.⁹ This growth has been phenomenal both within the ecumenical and the Pentecostal movements. Yet despite this impressive growth there are underlying issues in African spirituality that need to be underscored and addressed. The African church is commonly referred to as ‘a mile long and an inch deep’. Although this statement arouses negative emotions among many African church leaders, it is largely true. This growth of the church in Africa will become wasted if proper and effective discipleship is not applied. To raise genuine disciples of Christ to do mission in obedience to Christ’s command.. A key aspect of the African people that has not been addressed especially by Africans themselves is the African worldview whose values place religion and spirituality at the core. It helps define who they are. While analyzing Reinhard Bonnke’s theology and its undoubted appeal in Africa,, Frank Kursechner-Palkmann points out that the Pentecostal movement is the fastest growing Christian force in the world.¹⁰ The theology of Bonnke revolves around Satan, demons, healing and the Holy Spirit. This doctrine appeals to an African audience that has had real experiences with the spirit world.

1.2 Islam

Islam has been real and active in Africa for several centuries now, but more recently the strategy seems well calculated to Islamize Africa. The turning point can be traced to the 1979

Medina conference when Muslims took stock of their mission in Africa and consequently re-positioned themselves to seek more converts in the continent. Recently Statistics place Christians at 48.37% while Muslims were at 41.32%.¹¹ Most cities and towns in Africa today are woken up by the Muslims call to prayer. Today many of the key business sectors in the continent including communication, tourism are run or being earmarked for purchase by Muslims. Key mobile phone and the tourism companies in East Africa are now owned by Muslims.

Traditionally Islam and Christianity co-existed but more recently there have been conflicts between the two groups particularly in Sudan and Nigeria. The church in Africa is becoming increasingly aware of the challenge of Islam. This awareness is crucial since it presents numerous opportunities for dialogue and evangelism. The traditional attitude on the part of Christians has been lacking the great commission message to 'disciple all nations'. Today most of us are convicted that we need to reach out our Muslim brothers as 'Christ also died for them'.

1.3 Poverty

Poverty has been a perennial challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa. While other continents particularly Asia and Latin America have made positive progress in this regard, Africa has remained stagnant. The United Nations Millennium Development goal number one addresses poverty and points particularly to Sub-Saharan Africa with increasing numbers still living on less than a dollar a day. Political conflicts climatic changes, famine, diseases such as HIV/AIDS and global economic recession have deepened the poverty challenge in Africa. The church is slowly recognizing that God's mission is irrelevant in Africa without addressing poverty as a primary concern.

1.4 Unemployment

Unemployment is yet another challenge in Africa. This is compounded by a youthful population of 60% in Africa who are under 25 years of age.¹² This situation presents multiple challenges including crime, idleness, opportunistic diseases and political unrests with young people being used by politicians in conflict areas. Child soldiers have been a significant feature of political strife in Africa including in Northern Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and more recently in the Kenyan crisis of 2008. The South African case of xenophobia in 2008 involved this same youthful population who out of their own vulnerability targeted their own brothers 'on the basis of borders that were not even of our own making as Africans'.¹³

Other challenges in our context include ethnic tensions, secularism, gender imbalances, child abuse, corruption and related injustices. In the midst of all this, the one question asked by both Christians and by members of other faiths is "Where is the church? This question is obviously based on the premise that Christians form the majority in Sub-Saharan Africa and yet what has been their social and economic impact? Indeed the reality is that the church is visible on Sundays in Africa but the question is; where is the church from Monday through Saturday?

II. The Paradox – Africa's Resources verses Africa's Woes

The Church Mission Society (CMS- Africa) has been accompanying the church in Africa addressing the above question. CMS has a history of over two hundred years in Africa involved in sending missionaries, planting churches and evangelizing. Earlier on, CMS knew that mission was from the West to the rest of the world, today CMS acknowledges with gratitude to God that mission is 'from every where to everywhere'. CMS Africa, has its mission motivated by the conviction that Africa is blessed. This empowering message is rooted in the belief that the church is God's principal agent of social and cultural

transformation. We believe that this century is indeed the defining moment for the church and CMS is envisioning the church in Africa to address the area of wholistic discipleship, an area that has not been seen as an integral ministry of the church. The five marks of mission as defined by the Anglican Communion and adopted by CMS Britain calls the church to preach the gospel, make disciples, serve the poor, tackle injustice, and save the planet. This broadly summarizes the mission of the church.

The heartbreaking paradox is the recognition that despite her problems, Africa is indeed endowed with resources that can be exploited to make a significant difference in the continent. Miller and Allen together with the Africa Working group, continental team training in Worldviews and referred to as Samaritan Strategy, are assertive that despite Africa's brokenness, she is blessed with unimaginable abundance.¹⁴

Africa is the second largest continent on earth. It is home to over 874 million people which form about 14% of the World's population. Africa is the world's richest continent in terms of natural resources.

In terms of Agriculture, it has been argued that Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo combined have the potential to feed the entire continent. Farming, herding, ranching and commercial crops mark the African landscape. Besides, the African continent is home of some of the greatest rivers of the world. Deposits of some of the world's known minerals exist in Africa; cobalt, platinum, diamonds, gold, copper to mention but a few. Besides, Africa's energy potential is almost unlimited. Libya, Nigeria and Angola are among the world's top ten oil producers. On solar potential, Dr. Adeyemo writes, 'The Sahara desert alone covers a solar energy field area of about 9,065,000 kilometers, which holds more potential to produce more than Africa's energy needs for all her domestic electrical appliances'.¹⁵

Not only is Africa's rich heritage remarkable, but the scripture makes a lot of reference to Africa. It was the middle-East and Africa that served as the birthplace and early homeland of Judeo-Christian faith. Africa played a vital role in the life of Jesus. Africa was the place of refuge for Jesus when King Herod threatened his life.¹⁶ There are many more references in the scripture about Africa affirming that from the beginning God's eye was on Africa, to bless her and not to curse her. This is the Biblical message that is inspiring and giving hope to us in Africa.

Yet, the people of Africa are the greatest source of wealth in Africa. They are made in God's image and are gifted by God in diverse ways to bless the continent. Africans form 3,500 ethnic groups speaking some 2,110 languages. Africans are renowned for their culture, music, celebrations, colors and art. They are respected for their generosity, perseverance, respect for elders and strong sense of family.

III. The Root Problem

Today many Africans are convinced that the African Worldview is the root cause of our problems. Dennis Tongoi, in the 'forward' of the book, *Against All Hope; Hope for Africa*, asserts that the numerous development initiatives in Africa will fail unless the worldview of the African people is identified, acknowledged and addressed.¹⁷ Jakonda S.Z affirms this position when he states 'Despite all modernization, the typical African Worldview has always been governed by religion'.¹⁸ This indeed is the gap that both the missionary church as well as the current church has failed to address. The African indigenous church movement largely grew out of this failure by the church to address pertinent issues rooted in the Africa culture and religion. African cultural practices such as polygamy, witchdoctrines, the place of ancestral spirits, clan and communal responsibility left African Christians hanging and the result has been Christians torn between the two worlds.

We recognize that, for one to do God's mission, it has to be within a cultural setting and consequently the value systems and beliefs inevitably come into play. Christian workers and missionaries therefore need to study and understand the worldviews of the people they work with. It has been observed for instance that some of the strongest Christian countries in Africa have experienced the worst injustices. Rwanda which was home of the East Africa revival

movement suffered one of the worst forms of genocide witnessed in this century. The African worldview for instance teaches ‘My tribe is better than yours, Men are more superior than women, fatalism and witch doctrine,’¹⁹ among other unbiblical and disempowering views of life in Africa. Unfortunately these lies take precedent in Africa especially in times of crisis.

Miller & Allen have correctly argued that the key to social and cultural transformation lies in the worldview of the people.²⁰ This is true anywhere but more so in Africa with traditions and cultural practices that are so deep-rooted. We are convinced that churches as well as Governments and development experts in Africa need to address this crucial aspect of human beings for any sustainable development to take place.

We argued earlier that Africans are religious people and that religion and worldview inform each other. The concept of worldview refers to the total set of beliefs or assumptions that comprise the mindset of an individual consequently determining how they view reality.²¹ World view is the underlying set of ideas that enables people to cope with life in a given culture.²² Darrow and Allen have argued in their book that ideas have consequences and that indeed as the Bible states we reap what we sow (Gal: 6; 7). Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo of the centre for Biblical Transformation affirms this school of thought when he states the ‘Faith is processed in the mind and acted out in the visible...world after the mind had approved of it’.²³

The Africa working Group, convinced that a paradigm shift in Africa is necessary in order for the church in Africa to make a difference, have designed a comprehensive training on worldview specifically aimed at invoking the Biblical Worldview in the African context.

CMS Africa is part of the Africa working group .We believe that the church is God’s principally ordained agency for social and cultural transformation. We recognize the brokenness of the church in Africa yet we know that Christ sees the church as his bride continuously being made perfect. The church is perhaps the single most important indigenous sustainable institution, with members in virtually every sphere of society (arts, music, business, governance, education, farming etc).The time is therefore ripe for the African church to present the whole gospel so that the kingdom of God may be experienced in Africa.

God’s intentions for us in Africa as for the rest of the world are echoed in the Book of Isaiah 65:20;

Never again will there be an infant who lives for a few days
Or an old man who does not live out his years;
He who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth;
He who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

In a continent experiencing the very opposite of prophet Isaiah’s message, we are catalyzing the church to dream, a dream that is coming to reality. Yet, for the church to effectively advance God’s intentions, its leadership requires fresh vision and equipping. Since 1999, a group of passionate and gifted men and women have been envisioning church leaders across the continent, providing them with a fresh vision for the church as God’s primary agent of wholistic transformation across the spheres of human existence, social, cultural, spiritual, political, economic and environmental.

Churches that have received this world view training are making remarkable contributions to the transformation of their communities. They are effectively and practically addressing issues like the HIV and AIDS pandemic, responding to conflict with Biblical peacemaking principles; and effectively engaging in social, political, business and environmental concerns using their local recourses. Not surprising, they are also more effective in their evangelistic outreach. They are realizing how powerful the Christian message becomes when the church both proclaims and demonstrates the good news of the kingdom.

Today, these African trainers referred to as Samaritan Strategy are advancing this tested wholistic Discipleship training program into every corner of the continent. Since 1999, this network of trainers has empowered over 3,000 churches and over 100,000 church leaders in 35 African countries.

The partnership between Church Mission Society-Africa with the Africa working group has been strategic for God's mission in Africa. CMS history in evangelism, church planting and community development in Africa for over two hundred years has created strong links with churches in the continent. We are humbled to see God at work as we hear many stories (like the one below) from across the continent where Christians and churches are reaching out to those in need –bringing the kingdom of God to them.

3.1 Sheep care ministry- A seed project story

The Vision Conference in year 2002 was a day of awakening for Pastor Luke and three other members of the Power Revival Centre. It gave birth to a new vision; that of changing his church and surrounding community for the glory of God by sowing a seed of Love. This seed grew to become the Sheep care community centre, a registered local self-help group.

At the conference organized by CMS and facilitated by Mr. Dennis Tongoi they were challenged that human lives and success largely depend on the worldview they hold. They sat together and listed their resources; an empty mabati (iron sheet) church which was only used for few hours on Sunday and a group of young jobless people.

A simple survey in Soweto slums – Nairobi, revealed that many school going-age children were not in school; the majority were roaming in the streets and/or scavenging for food. Pastor Luke met them and challenged them to do something for nothing instead of doing nothing for nothing. That by loving God, themselves and others they would realize their destiny and bring change to their community and beyond.

Sheep Care was the center's response towards the findings of the survey and the first ministry to be implemented by the Centre. They offered to teach them for free and after some weeks two children were brought by their guardians and they started teaching them in the church hall. Later the team came across street children and after interacting with them it emerged that their greatest needs were for Love and Food. Pastor Luke began by dividing the maize flour in his house to make porridge for some 20 children. Breakthrough came when some of the hard-core street children were rehabilitated and reunited with their families. From then on, parents and guardians began to bring their children to the centre.

To date the school has a population of 350 children. The school takes care of baby class pupils to class 7. The Lord has enabled the school to build 12 classrooms as church members as well as other visitors got touched by the ministry; they now have enough desks as opposed to sitting on the dust and 8 volunteer teaching staff. Their biggest challenge is feeding these children.

From then on, four other seeds have been planted. The BISAK Ministry which is an acronym name for; Balanced Ecosystem, Improved Nutrition and Income generation, Social development, Alternative agriculture and Kitchen gardening. The formation of BISAK ministry was triggered by deteriorating environmental standards in Soweto slums. The ministry strives to realize a healthy and sustainable environment for God's creation. In addition the ministry seeks to address the increasing malnutrition and orphans in the area due to HIV/AIDS

Other ministries include the Sheep Care School of Computer Studies which strives to bring computer training and services to Soweto community. It is also an income generating activity to the centre. The Water and Sanitation Ministry is bringing water nearer to the residents at an affordable rate. God has worked through his servants and now there is a borehole in the centre. The borehole has incredible yields and they intend to use the water to plant trees, run the alternative agriculture project, fish farming, and meet all the Center's water needs and share with the community at a small fee.

The Art and Design Ministry identifies and exposes the art talent in the community. It concentrates only on art that glorifies God. The products are sold thus generating some income while creating employment opportunities through utilization of such talents.

Pastor Luke and his church whose Motto is "Care and Feed the flock" have indeed risen to the challenge by demonstrating love to their neighbors. This is a church with a clear

mission to its community utilizing available local resources from within the community and wholistically reaching out in word and in deed. This indeed is the teaching given by the Samaritan Strategy training which is a mindset transformation as churches and Christians like Pastor Luke become agents of hope in their own communities.

IV. Business as Mission

On the economic front, we realize the challenges in the continent are equally complex, with both historical and current factors coming into play. Africa stands today as the poorest continent with only 1.7% of the world's GNP generated in the continent. Yet as has been pointed out, there are abundant and untapped resources in the continent which can transform the continent to an economic power base.

During the Lausanne World Evangelization meeting in Thailand in 2004, a new strategy for doing God's mission namely Business as Mission (BAM) was born and endorsed as one key strategy for the 21st Century. BAM was found particularly strategic for encouraging business people and entrepreneurs to engage in mission dei especially in the least developed countries and among the un-reached people groups. For the last four years, a passionate group of African leaders have been envisioning the church and Christians in Africa to embrace business as mission as a viable missionary strategy in Africa. BAM is calling on the African church to release entrepreneurs and business professional within the church to transform the world through their business activities.

Lausanne 2004 defines Business as mission as a movement of kingdom- minded business people whose emphasis is to transform communities through their businesses with an intention to make Jesus known, encountered and followed. BAM recognizes that the daily work of doing and being in business is one way of engaging with society, bringing the kind of transformation desired by the Christian faith.²⁴

Business as mission is part of the World view training specifically developing the business sector. The context for this strategy is the same where our churches from historical days are dichotomized, basically marginalizing business people and professionals and inviting them to church only during fundraising events. It is now getting increasingly accepted that the dichotomy is both unbiblical as well as counter productive to the great commission. We are therefore calling the church to embrace business people, affirm them and then release them to the market- their mission field. BAM is a wholistic mission with a conscious evangelistic engagement with the business world as a place where the Lordship of Christ and the Kingdom of God is hoped for and worked out in decisions, culture, structures and systems of commercial life. BAM recognizes business as a calling, business people as fulltime ministers-not just as mission supporters-and the market place as a prime mission field (Lausanne 2004).

BAM is about real business. In Africa, BAM aims at what we are referring to as the quadruple bottom-line which seeks financial, social, spiritual and environmental outcomes. Tunehag (Lausanne 2004) emphasizes that BAM is about participating in bringing about the kingdom of God.

The BAM seed is now planted in several countries in the region including Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Ghana with growing and passionate teams championing the movement. We see BAM as the entry point for poverty reduction in Africa as gifted entrepreneurs within churches resonate with this new mission thinking and begin to address community transformation in and from the market place. BAM is empowering and inspiring businessmen in Africa to create jobs and make wealth strategically dealing with the poverty challenge. We see BAM as a timely mission strategy given the trends in the world economy as well as the trends in Islam .New opportunities are emerging as business men find unique and more dignifying avenues of doing God's mission .We have businesses in place (see below) demonstrating that BAM is working. We are using the CMS platform to connect best practices for learning as well as connecting entrepreneurs with capital to enhance Business as mission in Africa.

4.1 Herbal Garden – A BAM Company

Herbal Garden (HG) was established in 2006 with the primary purpose of addressing mass poverty through sustainable solutions, thereby, expressing our BAM core values of fulfilling economic, social spiritual and environmental responsibilities .HG aims to contribute to the poverty alleviation in Kenya through foundational principles of a solid work ethic.

HG has its vision, to economically empower families, bring sufficient nutrition, and uplift communities to live in dignity. The vision of HG is to enable strategic partnerships that add value to integrated agribusiness in marginalized communities.

The Aloe Vera project was the first one to embark on where farmers are growing Aloe Vera and the company is processing the various products and marketing them locally and internationally. Already the company has its flagship product (Aloe Vera soap), with the highest aloe content which is successfully helping in a variety of skin ailments. Additionally, HG has formulated ‘Pruna Essential Tea’ made from Pruna-Africanas, which helps in the management of various cancers.

HG is partnering with farmers in training other farmers, income generation, and crop management extension in consultation with the ministry of Agriculture.

We are encouraging farmers to use the added income to plant other crops such as pyrethrum for insecticides and maize for bio fuels.

V. Conclusion

Wholistic ministry is about transformation of those who are disciples of Jesus to bring the kingdom of God to their communities. The African church is increasingly responding to the call of God to do integral mission incorporating both proclamation and demonstration of the good news of Jesus. It is becoming apparent that wholistic mission is not an option if the church is to be relevant to society-become salt and light. Churches are beginning to realise that the gospel is about the kingdom of God This wholistic mission approach is transforming society as dualism is addressed and the whole church is equipped for works of service. This kingdom-based mission seeks to engage all the human and material resources at the disposal of the church. It is equipping more disciples as businessmen and professionals realize that they are fulltime ministers of the gospel and that the market place is indeed their mission field,. This is multiplying the Christian witness and resources at the disposal of the church.

At the same time, Churches are beginning to engage with their own worldview and relating it to the Biblical worldview in addressing pertinent issues such as HIV and AIDS, fatalism and governance. There are parallels that can be drawn between the African worldview and the Biblical worldview and as the church engages in these teachings, Christians are gaining insight of Biblical truths.. Relevant materials are now in the market for use by the African church, including an African Bible commentary done by Africans. Yet we know that transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit moving the body of Christ from where we are to where God intends us to be.

Endnotes

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