

Insights and Ironies: Some Contributions of African Missiology

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Published in www.GlobalMissiology.org July 2014

Abstract

This paper takes a look at African missiology, seeking to draw missiological insights from the published sources of African Christian Theology. The aim is to draw from these insights what lessons can be discerned as contributions to the wider task of Christian mission.

It is found that there are valuable insights that the wider church can learn from, an example of which would be the unique take on the interplay of faith and culture of some African scholars.

At the same time there are also intriguing ironies which only deep reflection from the African churches can address. One of the many such ironies discussed is the co-existence of a holistic worldview with a faith that often divorces ethics from professed belief. Others are seen in the areas of relationships with Islam, tribalism, prosperity theology and poverty and African-led churches in the West.

Background

The Christian faith flourished in Africa from the very earliest days of the Church. This is evident from the biblical stories of Simon of Cyrene (modern day Libya); the Ethiopian eunuch; the people from Cyrene mentioned in Acts 11:20; Simon called Niger; Lucius of Cyrene and Apollos of Alexandria. The eminence of such African theologians from the second century as Origen, Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine gives further credence to the claim that the Christian faith found ready and immediate acceptance on the African continent. Furthermore, African influence has played an important role in the development of Christian theology and development (Oden, 2008).

This early North African Christianity was however eliminated with the rise of Islam in the seventh century, and Christian presence on the continent was restricted to a small population in the east until the end of the 15th century. The Portuguese Catholic mission of that time was short lived, and it was not until the coming of further Western missionaries during what is known as the modern missionary movement of the last two centuries that Christianity really took hold in sub-Saharan Africa.

The missionaries were not the only Europeans to come to Africa at this time however. Concurrent with this missionary movement was the expansionist colonial advance of the nineteenth century and the close association between the missionaries and the colonialists of that era was a very mixed blessing indeed. The access that colonialism gave to European missionaries came with a great price. Not only were these missionaries identified with (and in

some cases indistinguishable from) agents of cultural and political domination, but they also shared what might be called the colonial mind-set. The assumption of superiority not only of European civilization but of all aspects of European culture had many ramifications. One of these ramifications was that the theology that prevailed in the churches planted in Africa by these European (and later American) missionaries was almost completely non-African in its cultural orientation.

In the mid twentieth century, as colonial dominance declined and as there was a realisation of the value of African culture in itself without reference to Europeans, African Christians also began to rethink theology. From the basic question of what it means to be at the same time both authentically African and truly Christian comes the stream of theology that is now identified as African Christian Theology. Africa is of course a large and diverse continent, and it goes without saying that there can be no one definitive African Christian Theology. It would be rather more accurate to refer to African Christian Theology as a family of theologies.

As has been indicated, the concerns of the first generation of African Christian theologians largely revolved around the question of identity. This has been an important, although at times controversial, endeavour but in more recent times the range of concerns has broadened, not to cover the range of Western defined systematic categories, but to encompass more of the interests of the African churches. It is in the light of this that we seek to elucidate some of the missiological insights of African Christian Theologies.

The Quest for African Missiology

In 1986 John S. Mbiti, a prominent theologian from Kenya, wrote lamenting that, to that point, there had been almost no missiological reflection written by Africans (Mbiti, 1986). This is not to say that there had been nothing written about missions, but that which did exist dealt almost exclusively with non-African missionaries working in Africa. Mbiti attributed this dearth of missiological thinking in African theology to several inter-related factors. He listed these factors as a recipient mentality (mission is something that is done to the African church rather than that the church does); the related idea that mission is the job of the church in the developed Western world; a lack of viable alternative models for mission to those of the foreign missionaries in Africa; and the very presence of so many foreign missionaries on hand to do that which is properly the calling of the African church.

Byang Kato of Nigeria had foreshadowed this call from the starting point that Christianity and the Christian message, while being particularistic in its exclusive claims, is truly universal in its applicability. This universality leads to the observation that Christianity is an African religion and not just a “white man’s religion”. Kato then made the link between this thought and the need for Africans to develop their own missiological understanding (Kato, 1980). Unfortunately Kato was killed in an accident even before this short article was published, and it was not until some years later that this line of thinking could be developed.

The Scope of an African Missiology

Mbiti and some of those who have followed him in calling for the development of an African missiology have gone further to identify the areas that such a missiology should cover. One of the key starting points identified by Mbiti and shared by others was seen as the need to break

what had become the traditional mentality of mission whereby it is only possible to conceive of Africans as on the receiving end of rather than the originating end of mission (Kanyoro, 1988).

Mbiti is insistent that the basis for African missiological reflection must be the Bible and what God has revealed in it. Mbiti's insistence has not come about because there are no other philosophical constructs from which to work. African cultures have their own distinctive world-views and philosophies and Mbiti himself has written in this area (Mbiti, 1990). In fact the story of the development of African Christian Theology is the story of how African Christians can live with these African world-views and philosophies. The perspective that calls for a biblical basis to missiological reflection has rather come from the realisation of the inadequacy of alternate constructs to provide real authority in matters of life and godliness.

Beyond this basis, Mbiti identified some issues that need to be addressed by an African missiology, not least of which is the need to rethink the meaning of conversion. Traditionally and in Western contexts conversion has been seen as an intensely individual process. In Africa however, Mbiti argues, the individual is not central and so there needs to be more exploration of the corporate nature of conversion, re-centring on the preaching of the Kingdom of God. This gives a communal focus, and also integrates the holistic nature of the gospel message.

Religious plurality is an outworking of modern globalisation and as such it is one of the key challenges which all missiological thinking must face (Mbiti, 1986; Kanyoro, 1988; Tiénou, 1993).

Questions of ethics and power dominate African life and it is not surprising therefore that these issues will be prominent in the consideration of an African missiology.

The groundwork has therefore been set for a ground breaking and visionary work on African missiology, but the few that have been produced have failed to fulfil that potential.¹

Unfulfilled Promise

Gwinyai Henry Muzorewa from Zimbabwe in 1990 produced *An African Theology of Mission* (Muzorewa, 1990), a title that promises much but the work itself disappoints. Muzorewa's view of salvation is so far from orthodox that it would find little acceptance among mainstream African (or any other) evangelical theologians. His position is that any knowledge of God (including that from traditional religion and other religions) is knowledge of Christ and therefore salvific. This is therefore a universalism that clearly has not interacted seriously with other faiths and a stance which the other faiths themselves would find both condescending and unacceptable. Further, while Muzorewa writes eloquently on the need for an African theology of mission, he doesn't articulate what it might contain, apart from the fact that it must be indigenised to the African situation and avoid the shortcomings of the Western church. This then falls short of the African missiology called for by Mbiti.

¹ David Bosch from South Africa has in fact, in his 1991 *Transforming Mission*, produced a missiology that is both ground breaking and visionary. BOSCH, D. J. 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. Bosch is not however writing from the perspective of the African churches and is not generally included in the African Christian Theology stream of theologians.

Despite the fact that there does not yet appear to be a comprehensive expression of African missiology, there are numerous missiological insights coming from African theologians that not only address many of the points Mbiti raised, but give new insights to the task of global mission.

Faith and Culture in African Missiology

African theologians have provided helpful insights into the nature of the faith-culture interaction. Indigenisation refers to the adaptation of the gospel to suit another culture. Many accept the concept unquestioningly but as the Ghanaian Kwesi Dickson has pointed out, to many indigenisation is limited because it deals only in externals whereas for genuine engagement something deeper is needed (Dickson, 1974).

In regard to this Mbiti has stated,

To speak of 'indigenising Christianity' is to give the impression that Christianity is a ready-made commodity which has to be transplanted to a local area. Of course, this has been the assumption followed by many missionaries and local theologians. I do not accept it any more.

(as quoted in Bediako, 1995, 117)

Two West Africans, Lamin Sanneh from Gambia (Sanneh, 2009), and Kwame Bediako of Ghana (Bediako, 1995) have sought to understand the interplay between the Christian faith and culture in terms of 'translatability' rather than indigenisation or even contextualisation.

Indigenisation can be understood as "changing the clothes of the gospel message" to make it more culturally acceptable. Indigenisation then changes some of the external forms and practices of the gospel in order to make it more easily accessible to the target culture. Contextualisation, in as much as it differs from indigenisation, would be described as utilising the thought forms and concepts native to the target culture in order to present the gospel in an intelligible way.

Translatability on the other hand, has as its starting point the translation of the Scripture into the vernacular of the culture. The logic of translatability is that when the Word of God in the translated Scriptures is allowed to speak to people in their mother tongue, authentic faith will result, authentic not just to the Bible, but also to the cultural setting of the believers. There is therefore no need to adapt or present the gospel in a culturally appropriate manner, it comes to the recipients in their mother tongue and in their cultural vernacular from the very start by virtue of the prior translation of the originating texts.

The approach of translatability recognises that, as Sanneh puts it, recognises that,

Language is not merely a tool fashioned to achieve limited or temporary goals. It is also a dynamic cultural resource, reflecting the spirit of the people and illuminating their sense of values.

(Sanneh, 2009, 200)

Thus, the translation of the Scriptures not only makes the Christian faith accessible to the culture to which the language belongs, it also opens up the culture to the influence of the gospel. This

means that when faith results it doesn't need to be indigenised, it has grown from within the culture itself.

The implications of translatability are profound. One of the major implications is that the message of the gospel is universal and of its very nature subverts any possibility of cultural possessiveness. If the faith that springs from hearing the Word of God in their own language is equally accessible to all people and cultures, then no culture can, of itself claim superiority and the cultural imperialism that had marked many of the missionary efforts of the past are robbed of their power and relevance.

Another implication and advantage over other models of gospel/culture interplay is that translatability gives room for the culture to change. Indigenisation and contextualisation may tend to be rather static processes, with gospel and culture being brought together at one specific time, with no inbuilt capacity for continual adaptation. Culture is not a static entity and, as it does not rely on agents outside of the culture to adapt or integrate gospel and culture (as some of these other models often do), translatability is not static either. Related to this is the observation that Sanneh makes, to the effect that translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular sets into motion a theological train of events that is not able to be controlled. He uses the metaphor,

When one translates, it is like pulling the trigger of a loaded gun: the translator cannot recall the hurtling bullet. Translation thus activates a process that will supersede the original intention of the translator.

(Sanneh, 2009, 60-61)

This loss of control is at the same time exciting and threatening. It forces us to give full recognition to the sovereignty of God in mission but removes the reassurance for those of us who may not want to "recall the bullet," but wouldn't mind at least controlling its trajectory.

Bediako uses the example of William Wade Harris, the Liberian prophet of the early twentieth century, to illustrate the way that African theology and mission can take on new and extra-orthodox aspects when liberated from "Western missionary controls". His point is that fresh and often inspiring insights can be gained by this unfettered take on the Christian faith through the eyes of a totally non-Western world view.

Bediako finds the theological basis for translatability in the incarnation. In that event we have the ultimate translation; that of the ineffable Word of God, the fullest possible divine expression, translated into human flesh, comprehensible and accessible to all people. This then means that translations of the Word of God into the various languages of the world are each, in and of themselves, equal in validity and significance as they follow, in minute scale, God's pattern of translation. This means that God speaks with equal authority into all cultures and that all genuine responses to that Word are authentic. Bediako insists that this approach is not to be seen as a new one, tracing it as he does back to Clement of Alexandria and his insistence that the Septuagint was equally God's Word as the Hebrew Scriptures. This is also seen in the New Testament writers' ready adoption of the Greek text of what we now know as the Old Testament as their quoted version. Thus, the process of translation and the principle of translatability have been a part of the Christian transmission of the Gospel from the earliest days. The net effect in the early church of this translation of the message from its Judaic setting to a Hellenistic one was to relativise the Jewish setting of the message and de-stigmatise the Greek one. Today, as in the

earliest days of Christianity, the process of the translation of the gospel into another culture robs the messenger culture of any position of power assumed by virtue of being the bearer of news and raises the recipient culture to an equal status.

Bediako wants to go a step further to claim that the process actually gives endorsement to pre-Christian aspects of the culture by virtue of their use, through translation, in the expression of the gospel (Bediako, 2010). There are real dangers in such a position however. The mere fact that cultural forms are used in the expression of eternal truths does not convey authoritative properties on the form so used; the authority still lies with the eternal truths of the Scriptures.

In this distinctive approach to the Christian gospel and culture, African theologians have thrust the focus squarely back on the gospel side of the equation and placed the gospel as the main factor that is active in the spread of the faith. Translatability is a welcome reminder to those sharing the gospel that God is the one who speaks through his Word to bring people to faith.

Islam and Religious Pluralism

Sanneh points out that it is this very issue of the interplay between faith and culture that constitutes one of the profound differences between Christian and Muslim missiology. Islam officially allows no translation of its defining and authoritative text, meaning that while Christianity and the Christian gospel can translate into the recipient culture and hence transform it from within, Islam seeks to impose its own distinctive cultural imprint on the culture, either to super-impose upon it or effectively to shatter it. There are some elements within Islam that are giving implicit recognition to this by producing translations of the Koran into the vernacular, arousing some debate and controversy within that faith.

Although Christianity in Africa has learned over many years to co-exist with Islam, the rise in recent times of well-funded, politically active, radical Islam has set new challenges for the African church (as indeed it does for all Christian people). The issue of the Christian's response to religious pluralism is thus set in sharp relief. Bediako is able to claim that African Christianity has some unique contributions to make in the globalised setting where there is less and less geographical differentiation of religious affiliation. Bediako's argument is that Christianity in the West has existed in a religiously homogeneous environment for so long that it has lost the ability to relate to other religions except in an adversarial manner. African Christianity on the other hand has no such handicap, having existed in a pluralistic environment for all of its life. African theology, Bediako claims, has in its articulation of African Christian identity, the framework to effectively engage in meaningful and non-adversarial dialogue with non-Christian religions. The search for authentic identity is such a fundamental necessity that it cuts across religious divides and is able to provide common ground for interaction between people of disparate faiths who all yearn for this expression. That the Christian faith in Africa has struggled with the issue therefore puts it in an ideal situation to interact with Africans who follow other creeds. Bediako cites an academic interchange with a Muslim scholar to illustrate this claim (Bediako, 2008).

This insight turns to irony however as the practical realities of violent and radical Islam contrast so starkly with the irenic approach of the Islamic scholar Bediako quotes.

Interaction with other, often hostile, faiths remains a vexed issue in Africa (as elsewhere).

Discipleship and Social Responsibility

Matthew 28:18-20 is surely one of the most quoted passages of the New Testament in respect to mission. It is of course the “Great Commission” and goes beyond merely advocating proclamation of the gospel to the much more demanding task of making disciples.

If this is indeed one of the prime tasks of mission, it raises some serious questions about the state of mission in Africa.

As one writer puts it,

Among the puzzling realities of the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the developing world is the apparent credibility gap between the widespread profession of faith by a great number of adherents, and the disproportionate lack of evidence of positive change in society and the environment.

(Egbubu, 2008, 25-26)

Indeed, in many societies it is the ones that claim to be Christians that are the most open to corrupt practices and exploitative ways.

It is ironic that cultures that portray themselves as being holistic in their worldview should so regularly display such a disjunction between confessed faith and lived reality.

The problem is far greater than a mere individualistic one of course. The problems of Africa are notorious and Emmanuel Katongole has written exploring the role of mission in the social problems of the continent (Katongole, 2002).

Katongole outlines the atrocities perpetrated by King Leopold of Belgium in Congo in the early twentieth century and uses that as a metaphor for the violence, dispossession and exploitation that has marked Africa’s history, not only in colonial times but in the post-colonial era as well. He then asks whether Christianity has any missiological insights or answers to the problems of Africa.

Some, like John Mutiso-Mbinda would call for a radical ‘mission of liberation’:

Since the mission of the church is an extension of the ministry of Christ, the church in Africa will only gain credibility by disassociating her mission from both Western and African agents of oppression and by taking a prophetic role in each separate African society.

(Mutiso-Mbinda, 1979, 116)

Katongole however takes a more considered approach. He discerns three current paradigms from which the social concerns of Africa have been approached by the church, which he labels as a spiritual paradigm, a pastoral paradigm and a political paradigm. The first of these, an approach which Katongole identifies with Bediako, takes as mission’s goal the formation of spiritual identity. In this model then, societal repercussions are the benefits that flow on from the fundamental spiritual benefit. The pastoral paradigm, identified particularly with the approach of

the Roman Catholic church, is one in which the missional response to societal ills is mainly in terms of reaction to crisis situations rather than everyday life. The third paradigm Kantongole discerns, that which he labels the political one, is one in which the church is called to confront oppressive political structure and seek reform what is evil. This is in line with the call of Mutiso-Mbinda as quoted above and Kantongole identifies it with the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC). All three of these paradigms are seen as sharing the common assumption that the sole locus of social and political action is the nation-state. Kantongole suggests another paradigm that works outside this structure in which he calls for the mission of the church to act with “constructive social imagination” and be an alternative social expression of the gospel (Katongole, 2002).

Kantongole’s analysis is impressive, but it would seem that despite his careful attempt to differentiate them, the essence of his alternative paradigm is in fact the true practical out working of what he has chosen to describe as the spiritual paradigm.

In any case, the missionary task of the church with respect to the manifestly imperfect social and political setting of Africa is to live lives that have been radically changed by the gospel.

Reconciliation as a Missiological Category

Reconciliation is one of the issues which the African situation has particularly placed on the missiological agenda. It is no coincidence that the loudest voices calling for this come from the most fragmented parts of the continent. Stan Chu Ile, Fohle Lygunda li-M and Ande Titre are three people with very different theological heritages, but all from the Democratic Republic of Congo. All three have separately written recently on this topic (Titre, 2008; Chu Ile, 2009; Lygunda li-M, 2009).

Lygunda li-M advocates the need for reconciliation, starting from reconciliation within the church itself but proposes no practical theological basis on which this can be done. Both Chu Ile and Titre go further than this however.

Chu Ile also highlights the need for reconciliation to begin from within the church, and he especially envisages this as a possibility through a deeper understanding of the unity implied in the Holy Communion / Eucharist. A greater understanding of the church as the family of God not only raises for Chu Ile the possibility of restoring church unity, but also can be an outward looking element by which others are invited into the reconciled community.

Titre’s approach is somewhat different to this. He also examines the metaphor of the church as family, even in the more African understanding of “clan”. This term gives better expression of the participatory nature of life within the community, but there are limitations inherent in the image. Titre points out that the clan is essentially exclusive of non-members and self-seeking in its activities. Moreover, if the metaphor is forced it leads to a system of authority whereby blind obedience is demanded and practiced. Titre is thus reluctant to use this image, preferring a balanced biblical message whereby the ministry of reconciliation springs out of the reconciling work of Christ.

The West, with its constricted, nuclear concepts of family, can learn from Africans in their wider clan or tribe based understandings of this important biblical metaphor for the people of God. Certainly the African concept is not perfect, but in many ways it is stronger and theologically

richer than our often anaemic Western expression of the image. If we can agree that the family is one of the many metaphors the Bible provides, African insights will enhance that imagery. There is also irony here however because these same African concepts of family are often used to give rise to the evil of tribalism.

Wholeness, Poverty and Prosperity

The holistic and communal world-view of Africans is widely celebrated and often compared favourably with its compartmentalised and individualised counterpart in the Western world. This is the point taken up by Manas Buthelezi when he claims that for the African the whole of life is lived out in the context of religious belief – including the most mundane and prosaic. This means that there is no dividing line between the sacred and the profane; in effect all of life is sacred and in essence sacramental. Everyday life and the good gifts that God gives us as we live our life thus constitute the sphere in which we experience God. Poverty then means that we are deprived of this experience of God and as such is the great evil from which we need salvation. The pathway to receiving the good things that God intends for us in Buthelezi's analysis is education, employment and development (Buthelezi, 1997).

To hold this view of salvation leads in a direction that would soon become unrecognisable as biblical Christian mission. Ironically, emphasising wholeness thus effectively denies any other reality than the physical material reality we see around us, making it less than holistic!

Prosperity teaching, which is becoming increasingly popular in Africa, especially among some Pentecostal churches, also insists on the benefits of the gospel being immediately experienced in a tangible physical way. Prosperity teaching principally teaches that Christian people have the right (and even the responsibility) to be prosperous in all areas of life, especially in terms of financial prosperity and health.² The missionary message of the church is reduced to a sales pitch for these benefits. This degradation of the gospel constitutes a challenge rather than any positive contribution to mission. As Bediako has observed, there is great irony in the fact that while theologians are often claiming that the gospel is biased in favour of the poor, many of the poor prefer prosperity theology (Bediako, 2008).

Spiritual Warfare and “the Excluded Middle”

One of the weaknesses of modern Western mission thinking has been the reluctance to take spiritual warfare seriously. What Paul Heibert has described as the “excluded middle”, the realm of supernatural, spiritual powers (Heibert, 1982), is by no means excluded in African thought. While the vacuum that exists in mainstream Western world views has been identified by Heibert and others, the practical correction of this deficiency has not necessarily followed. A large number of missionaries sent from Western countries are still oblivious to the fact that they simply do not have a theology that recognises the reality of the spirit world and they are therefore poorly equipped for spiritual warfare. Most Africans on the other hand readily recognise the activity of spiritual beings and the majority of African Christians would consider a theology that does not take such powers into account as deficient. If Christian mission is what happens as the advancing Kingdom of God interfaces with the world without Christ, it is natural that one who acknowledges the existence and activity of non-divine spiritual beings would expect to see confrontation with those powers as a missiological issue. African missiology therefore has much to teach the West in this area.

² I have looked in some detail into this teaching elsewhere. YOUNG, P. R. 1996. Prosperity Teaching in an African Context. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 15, 3-18, YOUNG, P. R. 2005. An Evaluation of Prosperity Teaching. *Theological College of Northern Nigeria Research Bulletin*, 43, 4-15.

African Initiated Churches

The African Initiated Churches (AICs), also sometimes referred to as African Instituted Churches, African Independent Churches or African Indigenous Churches, are a significant presence in African Christianity and as such their voice must not be discounted when looking at African contributions to missiology. The African Initiated Churches can be defined as denominations or congregations that are wholly African and in most cases have been started without the input of Western missionaries.

AICs occupy a broad theological spectrum – some indeed are hardly recognisable as Christian churches, but many others genuinely hold to a Trinitarian faith that proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord.

If we were to generalise, the theological distinctive of AICs could be summarised as: a commitment to prophetic ministry (although that is variously defined); a practice of praying with the full expectation of healings and miracles; belief in and regular practice of deliverance ministry; an emphasis on sanctification and holiness. They are in general very committed to evangelism, but not strong in theological formation and susceptible to the prosperity doctrine or even more extreme theological divergences (Talla, 2009). From this very general overview it is apparent that despite some misgivings we may have about these expressions of Christianity, there may well be insightful contributions from AICs in the area of mission.

AICs are generally underrepresented in academic circles and much of what is written about them comes from outside observers (Oduro, 2010).

M.L. Daneel writes as an academic and a pastor in the Zion Christian Church of Zimbabwe and is thus uniquely placed as a commentator on its missionary practices. Daneel identifies a number of missiological themes that merit investigation, but the one on which he focuses most keenly is the link between the sacrament of Holy Communion and mission in the Zion Church of Christ and other AICs in southern Africa (Daneel, 2000).

Daneel describes three different ways in which the sacrament of Holy Communion links in to the mission of the church. These are: the sacrament as a launching pad for evangelistic outreach; the sacrament as an ecumenical activity and the wider witness that emanates from it; and an ecological link to the Eucharist opening up new areas of mission.

In his description of the first link, Daneel describes in some detail the proceedings of the thrice yearly Holy Communion services of the two particular denominations he surveys, including the content of the preaching in such gatherings. The culminating Holy Communion celebration at the gathering is followed by a massive evangelistic effort in response to it. As depicted by Daneel, much of what goes on in these services would be theologically unpalatable to more orthodox Christians (including the veneration of the deceased iconic leader of the church to the point of almost obscuring Christ). This ought not obscure the point that these churches in this practice highlight the connection between the celebration and declaration of the passion and death of Christ and the mandate and need to declare it more widely.

There has also been a successful attempt to make these large Eucharistic meetings truly ecumenical, involving a number of different (and even non-AIC) denominations. In this way they testify to the wider church and beyond to unity in Christ. The work of Christ is seen largely as healing – not only physical and spiritual for the individual, but for communities as well.

The third missionary dimension of the Holy Communion is probably the least obvious. Recently, many of the AICs of Zimbabwe have developed a “tree planting Eucharist” as an expression of the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches. This declares that the healing work of Christ extends beyond the human plight to embrace all of creation. The church as bearer of that news of salvation also has a missiological responsibility to practice that healing in the creation.

The wider church needs to be reminded that the Holy Communion is a declaratory act and the declaration of the central truth of our faith cannot be a merely private affair, but is part of the mission of the people of God.

African Mission Outside Africa

There are three geographical dimensions to modern African missionary activity. These are: missionary outreach by Africans within their own national borders; cross-border mission within the African continent; and what has sometimes been called “reverse flow” mission, mission by Africans to Western and other countries that have traditionally sent missionaries to Africa (Kalu, 2007). Some see this as a major missionary thrust, citing reportedly the largest church in Europe (in Kiev), led by a Nigerian, and other large African-led congregations (Hanciles, 2008; Effa, 2013).

Reverse flow mission is largely carried out by Africans who have emigrated from their native lands for economic, professional or political reasons. The churches that are planted are in the first instance established to cater to the needs of this immigrant African population in the host country.

The churches tend to be Pentecostal in their theology and practice. The message preached tends to be all embracing, offering dignity and empowerment in all areas of life, from an African world-view perspective. They are open to the demonstration of the message through healings, prophecies and speaking in tongues (Anderson, 2000). Afe Adogame, himself from Nigeria but living in UK, reports that members of these churches by and large want to cling to their distinctive “African-ness” valuing that cultural heritage above the (usually Western) culture in which they find themselves. They see themselves as light in a dark Western context and understand their mission to include the evangelisation of the post Christian society in which they find themselves (Adogame, 2010). In general though, the African churches in Western countries have made little impact with their evangelistic efforts towards non-Africans. Adogame has proposed many different barriers that may explain why Europeans (for he is examining African churches in Europe) do not feel comfortable in African churches (Adogame, 2007), but largely it is their very African-ness that is the source of the discomfort. In creating and insisting on retaining an environment allows Africans to “feel at home”, they are precluding people of other cultures from being equally at home. Opaku Onyinah, in writing about the missionary activities of the Church of Pentecost denomination from Ghana notes that the reason why the overseas branches are not growing is because, “...the mother church does not allow each overseas branch to develop along its own local cultural context and milieu.” (Onyinah, 2004)

It is ironic that the African missionaries to the West are failing to allow the Christian message to take its full local cultural expression just as they have long accused the early Western missionaries of doing in Africa. It is always easier to point others to the lessons of history than it is to apply those same lessons to ourselves.

Conclusion

In an earlier era it was possible to speak of “the science of missions”, as though missiology was an empirical and universally uniform discipline (Bavinck, 1960). It is now generally recognised that theology, and indeed missiology, have different expression with different settings. All Christian people can therefore hope to gain new perspectives and insight when studying missiology from a different milieu to their native one.

This has certainly proved to be the case with the missiological insights of African Christian Theology. Although there is little published in the way of missiological texts *per se*, a number of insights from Africa that inform the missiological task have been demonstrated.

While there are indeed insights, there are also deep ironies embedded in African missiology.

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