

Editorial

Harvey Kwiyani

Memories of the year 2020 will stay with us for a very long time. Many of us will remember it as the year that saw the kingdoms of this world slowed down, some to a screeching halt, because of a pandemic that spared no continent and touched all but a handful of countries of the world. As we come to the end of the year, there is a glimmer of hope emerging as news about possible vaccines hit the airwaves. At the time of this writing, more than 1.4 million people have died around the world in 2020 alone. Here in the UK, official figures say that 65 thousand people have died of coronavirus related causes. In the United States, some 300,000 people have died. That is a huge number that will leave an indelible mark on the world. We join the many Christians praying for the nations in this difficult time. Indeed, it has been encouraging to see many calls for prayer in the past few months. The nations need their praying communities to lift them up before the Lord — we believe beyond any shadow of doubt that God answers prayer.

2020 will also be remembered as the year that, in his death, George Floyd began to change the world. His untimely death at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis, a modern-day lynching as per Floyd's brother, set the world ablaze with anti-racism protests. The problem

of racism that is embedded in the very life of United States of America, America's *original* sin as some have called it, was finally unveiled for the world to see. For 8 minutes and 46 seconds, on 25 May, a nonchalant police officer kept his knee on Floyd's neck, ignoring his pleas saying "I can't breathe," until he died. That video circulated around the world and something snapped. For the first time in centuries, it became difficult to deny that anti-black racism exists. Black Lives Matter became a worldwide slogan — we cannot sit down to watch a football game without being reminded. People of all races rose to demand justice for Floyd and that finally, something be done against the ill-treatment of black people especially in the United States but also across the wider Western world. Many corporations that had for so long resisted engaging in the subject of race had no choice. The world changed quite a bit. Of course, racism is embedded in the current world order, and it has been for more than 500 years, but we pray that when the dust settles, we will not return to that world but will keep on reshaping our world to a more equitable future where black lives will truly matter.

I am saying this because I believe 2020 has been a busy year for the theologians among us, especially those interested in the theology of God's mission in the world. Both the global pandemic and killing of George Floyd pose to us serious theological questions. At the surface, of course, we ask: Where is God in all this? Of course, we do believe that God is here, and that without God's presence in the world, it would be a lot worse. However, for black people like George Floyd, that question does not just wonder about 2020. It demands answers for the history of the past 600 years, questions that must be posed not only of the white people in America but also the European nations (Portugal, Spain, Britain) that benefited from the kidnapping and trading of Africans and from the blood and sweat of enslaved Africans on the plantations in the Americas. Where was God when all this was happening? Today, where is God when black and brown people are disproportionately dying from the virus in Britain and in the United States? Where is God today when black and brown people in Europe and North America are cornered between a rock and a hard place,

with racist police brutality on the one side and the virus on the other side? Yet, many Africans are still trying to migrate to the West, some desperate enough to risk crossing the Mediterranean on a dinghy boat. There is a theological question in all this that, I believe, we (especially black and brown theologians) need to wrestle with, but we need as much support as possible from sympathetic Westerners. The work of pulling down racist ideologies and economic systems requires the effort of all of us.

This issue of the journal includes five carefully chosen essays to reflect different aspects of the theological (and missiological) discourse happening in African Christianity in 2020. In the first essay, from Liverpool in England, Joseph Ola and Harvey Kwiyani have sought to do three things. First, they have tried to draw a line connecting Afua Kuma, a celebrated Ghanaian Christian poet, and Tope Alabi, a Nigerian musician (of Yoruba renown) and worship leader, suggesting that they are theologians—oral theologians—for the African church. Second, in doing so, they have also sought to highlight them as African *women* theologians. Third, they have sought to explore how these two women understand God in their spoken works. The reader will learn something of how many Akan and Yoruba Christians, many of whom will never access academic theology, speak about God. In the second essay, Kyama Mugambi (from Kenya) wrestles with the question of the place of Christianity in Africa. He seeks to shed some light on the debate on the current shape of African Christianity, with its colonial heritage, and how it moves forward and takes a central place in world Christianity. In the third essay, Ezekiel Ajibade (from Nigeria) explores the general images that are used to identify and describe preachers in Nigeria. Of course, with one in every five Africans being Nigerian, it makes sense that Nigerian Christianity has significant impact in the shaping of the Christianity of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. In the fourth essay, Luc Kabongo (writing from South Africa) explores the place of the African church in ensuring that black lives in Africa matter, too. He connects the words of Jesus in John 13 to the African philosophy of ubuntu to discuss the potential of a Christianity in Africa that promotes justice

for all. In the final essay, Moritz Fischer (contributing from Hermannsburg, Germany) uses the story of the little known but very important Nzambe Malamu Church from the Democratic Republic of Congo to explore the transnational nature of African Christianity. In this essay, Fischer honours the memory of Aidini Abala, an intriguing charismatic leader whose ministry and impact continue long after his death more than twenty years ago. In reading these essays, you will get to understand something of African Christianity, and in so doing, you will learn something about the world Christianity of the 21st century. I pray you will enjoy.

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General Editor