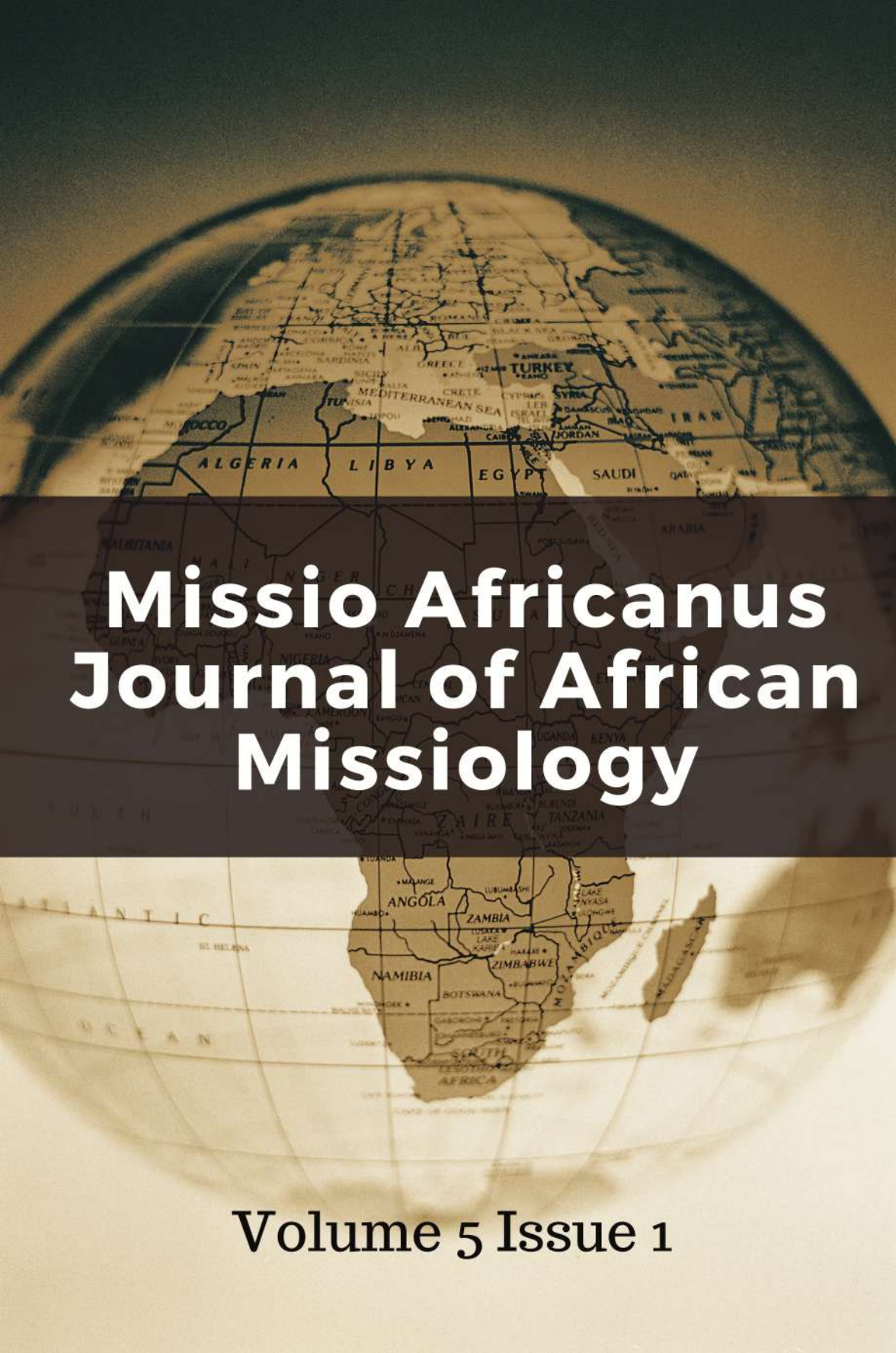

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Editorial

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 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.

Harvey Kwiyani
General Editor

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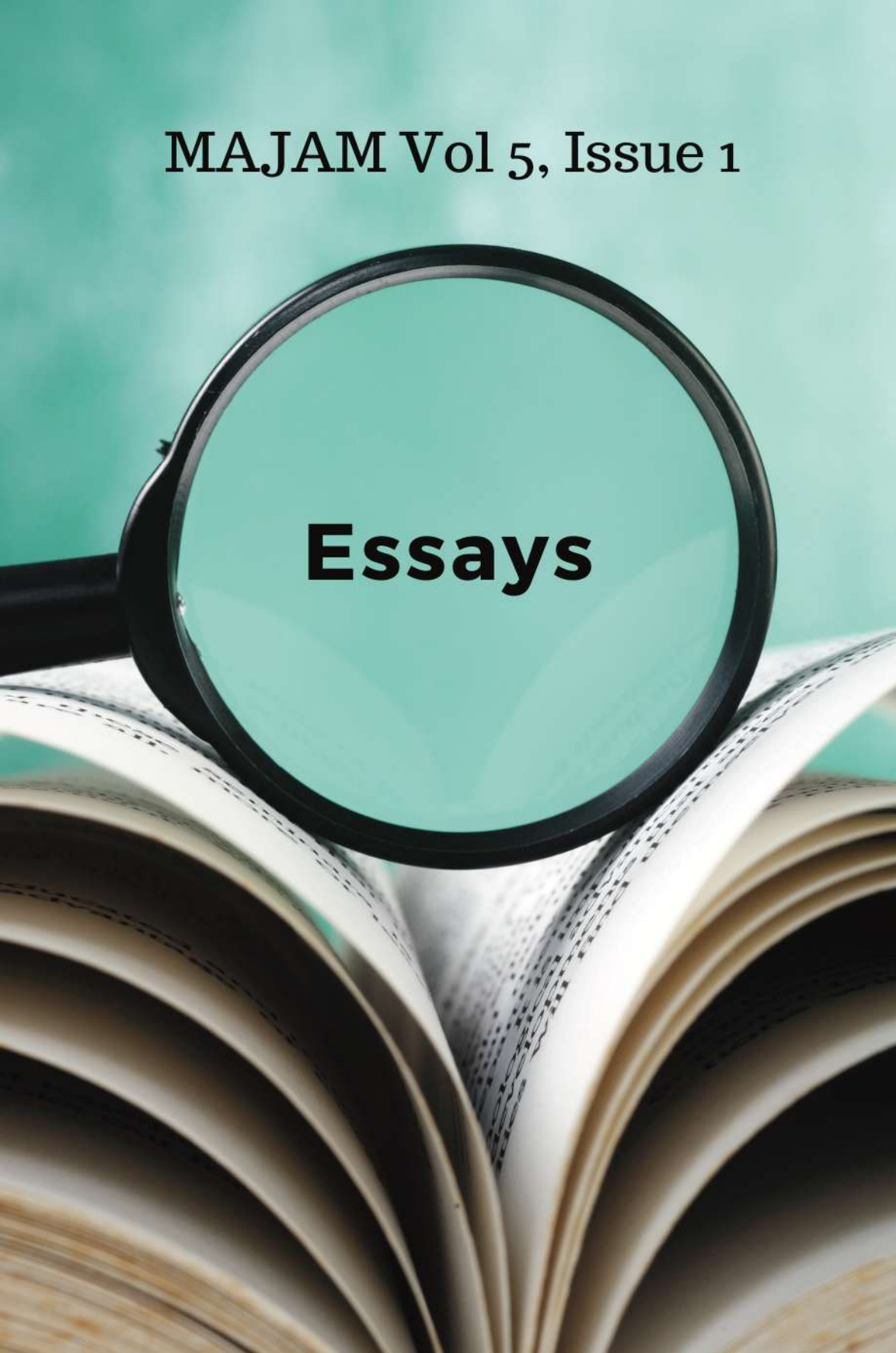

God in Oral African Theology: Exploring the Spoken Theologies of Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi

Joseph Ola and Harvey Kwiyani

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Abstract

In this essay, we explore the conceptualisations of God in African oral theology (focusing on the traditions of the Akan people of Ghana and of the

Yoruba of Nigeria). We examine the spoken-word works—prayers and songs —of two African women, Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi.[1] *We hope to begin to lay out an agenda for an intentional Africanisation of Christian Theology in Africa and the African diaspora in ways that, on the one hand, honour the spoken theologies of the many Christians in the continent who shape other people's thoughts about God in various ways while, on the other, highlights the role of African women doing theology.*

Introduction

A typical definition of theology says it is the knowledge of God. The term "theology" comes from the Greek word, *theologia* (θεολογία), which comes as a result of combining *theos* (Θεός, translated 'god') and *logia* (λογία, 'utterances, sayings, or oracles'). *Logia* gives us the Greek word *logos* (λόγος, which is generally translated 'word, discourse, account, or reasoning'). Its Latin root is *theologia*, which got translated into French as *théologie*, and into German as *theology* before eventually becoming 'theology' in English. In a nutshell, theology is a subject about the knowledge (*logos*) of God (*theos*). This *knowledge* is often said to be gained in the process of the *study* of God (or, generally, God's word) which is believed to take place in classrooms, libraries, seminaries, and universities, with the help numerous textbooks, some hundreds of years old and others being currently written). We agree that this understanding of theology is valid and is important for the development of the church. However, because of its tendency to hide in books usually behind the red brick walls of ivory towers of academic institutions and, therefore, its dependence on the interpretation of well-read experts, (and historically, a great number of these experts have been white and male), it lends itself inaccessible to the majority of world Christians who do not have a way to read or write theological books, most of whom are women. As a result, we find Agbon Orobator's definition of theology as "talking sensibly about God" helpful and have made it the foundation of our propositions in this essay.[2]

We have several convictions that serve as a base for the argument

being made in this essay. First, we believe that all Christians do theology. Of course, all Christians have some thoughts (knowledge, reason) about God but, surely, this does not make all Christians theologians (in the professional sense of the world). We do believe that this knowledge about God does not necessarily need a classroom, a library, a seminary, or a professor, but it is nonetheless, knowledge about God that is for the edifying of the Body of Christ. In a religious context like sub-Saharan Africa, even people who do not identify as Christians have their notions about God that can be said to be expressions of theological thought. Yes, we do talk about Muslim theologians as well. Even the religiously unaffiliated[3]—the *nones*—do engage, directly or indirectly, with the God-question prior to committing to either category.[4] This engagement with the God-question—or, to put it simply, 'thinking and/or talking about God'—this essay posits, is the basic unit of theology.

This first conviction leads to the second one; while we appreciate the significance of written theology (and we are doing this in this paper), we also believe that to understand a people's theology, it is often helpful to get to hear their God-talk in their most natural context – in the stories they tell and the songs they sing. People shaping that God-talk in communities, congregations, and denominations function as their theologians even though many of them may not have studied theology. It is in this sense that we consider both Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi theologians. They ought to be considered among the ranks of great African women theologians like Mercy Oduyoye, Musa Dube, Esther Mombo and Isabel Phiri. They are the same—African women theologians—but of a different kind—and their kind is just as important. Of course, the same can be said of other African women worship singers whose lyrics espouse and propagate theological nuggets that go on to live in people's hearts, giving them the words that they use to express their faith. We speak here of the likes of Sinach, Ada Ehi, Mahalia Buchanan, and many others helping Africans believe God fervently. Public theologians like Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi remain only a footnote in the grand theological discourse shaped in the ivory towers of European and North Amer-

ican seminaries and universities. Thankfully, African theology is a seeded ground. In spite of the gradual erosion of popular theology that is infused into African culture and family life,[5] reservoirs of authentic African theology—*written*, *symbolic* and especially, *oral*—still abound.[6] As such, thinking and 'talking sensibly about God'[7] in Africa, for the most part, occurs as oratory, usually in *unacademic* contexts. *Oral* African theology, we therefore argue, should inform *written* and *symbolic* African theology and this should go back to inform oral theology. Both Mbiti and Bediako readily acknowledge that 'academics [are] not the only theologians' and, as such, should draw their attention to the 'informal or … implicit theology'[8] found among people of little or no theological education as 'song, sermon, teaching, prayer, conversation, etc.'[9]

Our final conviction is that Africa is—or, at least, *should be*—the principal domain of theology in today's world. The reasons for this are here for all to see. John Mbiti's declaration back in the 1960s that "Africans are notoriously religious" was right.[10] Religion permeates all of African life, thus making *thinking and talking about God* ubiquitous on the continent.[11] In spite of the immense variety that exists within African cosmology and across African ethnicities, religion remains the blood of the African life. Besides, to the astonishment of different predictions, Africa is now the continent with the most Christians.[12] At the point of this writing, Africa mostly likely has 150 million more Christians than Europe. We, therefore, share Andrew Walls' concern about the West's continued dominance of theological discourse around the world. We are further concerned that the influence of Western theological thought shapes a great deal of the theology coming out of Africa.[13] Yet, as the African proverb goes, 'Until the lions can tell their side of the story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.' It is to this domain of African oral theology that we now turn with the goal of exploring the act of theologising—specifically regarding the conceptualisation of God—by critically engaging with the *oral* works of these two notable non-academic female African theologians across two generations: Afua Kuma (from Ghana) and Tope Alabi (from Nigeria).

Madam Afua Kuma

Afua Kuma[14] (1900-1987) came from the Akan tribe in Ghana. She joined the Church of Pentecost in her later years where, as a 70-year-old traditional midwife, she began to 'sing the praises of Christ in the exalted language of praise songs to traditional rulers'[15]—a form of Akan poetry called *Apae*[16]—and this she continued to do till her death seventeen years later. Some of her praise-language prayers were translated and compiled by John Kirby into *Jesus of the Deep Forest.*[17]

Tope Alabi

Tope Alabi[18] (born in 1970),[19] is a contemporary Nigerian gospel singer,[20] actress and film music composer[21] from the Yoruba. Unlike Kuma, Alabi is well-educated and is still alive. In 2019, she was crowned as 'Queen of Yoruba language'[22] and celebrated for her 'vast knowledge in [Yoruba] language as well as her ability to capture the attention of non-Yoruba speaking Nigerians.'[23] Except for brief mentions in journal articles,[24] not much had been written of her work in academic contexts in spite of her significant influence both in the world of Yoruba movies[25] and in the Christian *Oriki* music genre specifically. This essay will make a novel contribution towards the latter and critically consider the works of these two women with a view to unpacking an African conceptualisation of the Christian God.

Conceptualising God

Sticking with Orobator's definition of theology as 'talking sensibly about God', what people like Kuma or Alabi do through their oratory is nothing short of theology. One could not read Kuma's *apae* in *Jesus of the Deep Forest* or listen to Alabi's *oriki* of God in *War,*[26] *Kabi O Osi* (The Unquestionable One)[27] or *Oba Aseda* (The Creator-King),[28] without being led to imagine the images being painted and what they tell us about God. They communicate, through a very pictorial language, an invitation on a journey which lead their listeners to *think*

about God—to *conceptualise* what God is like. Before proceeding to highlight and analyse some excerpts from their works, it needs to be mentioned that both the Akan and the Yoruba generally, besides Kuma and Alabi specifically, share many things in common in terms of cosmology, geography and identity.

First, both among the Akan and the Yoruba, as among most Africans, not only is belief in God predominant, so is also the belief 'that God and other invisible beings are actively engaged in the world of men…[and that] the universe is created and sustained by God.'[29] Besides, both the Akan and Yoruba have a similar traditional political structures where, as Anyidoho submits, 'authority [is] vested in the traditional political rulers, the royals, who also occupied the top position in the social hierarchy.'[30] Among the Yoruba, Salami writes, the traditional ruler (usually a king or high chief) is viewed as *'iku baba yeye'* which literally means *'death, father-mother'* (often interpreted as 'the awesome power that is the father and mother of death'). It is this king/chief ideology that provides both Kuma and Alabi the framework for conceptualizing deity.[31]

Second, the *apae* among the Akan and *oriki* among the Yoruba serve similar purposes. *Apaes,* for the Akan, are a form of traditional praise appellation performance used for eulogizing political rulers by crediting them with unrivalled powers, obligations and competences so that others may revere them.[32] This is done, Anyidoho adds,

> by chronicling their royal ancestry, their military manoeuvres and exploits, their unrelenting stand against their enemies, their annihilation of non-conforming subjects, as well as their affluence and magnanimity.[33]

Likewise, for the Yoruba, *orikis* are both attributive names or appellatives expressing who a child is (or hoped to become)[34], and praise-chants for kings, titled men and other people containing a recitation of their feats recounted in order to amplify their self-image and sense of identity in themselves or their groups.[35] These *orikis*, Akiwowo adds, are supposed to incite the recipients to even greater

accomplishments.[36] For Kuma and Alabi, therefore, these language tools—the *apae* and *oriki*—become, as Salami puts it, 'the crucible where God is forged.'[37]

Third, specifically, both Kuma and Alabi share an identity complex given the peculiarities of their contexts. Kuma lived two-thirds of her life in the colonial era which, virtually everywhere in Africa, influenced the sociocultural make-up of different communities. This undoubtedly necessitated, for Kuma, a negotiation between staying true to her cultural identity with its practices on the one hand and exposing herself to the influence of Western cultures and beliefs (including, of course, embracing the Christian faith) on the other.[38] Alabi, however, grew up in post-colonial Nigeria, albeit in a traditional Yoruba setting in the ancient city of Ibadan.[39] Her education, transition from Catholicism to Pentecostalism, working at Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and being involved in Nollywood[40] equally demands similar identity negotiation to Kuma's—more so in a context of decolonisation. What Anyidoho says of Kuma, therefore, could be said of both of them, that there is 'a simultaneous existence of multiple value system, beliefs, thoughts, and ways of life … (as indeed can be said of almost all Africans).'[41] This, no doubt, shaped their theologising process.

A final point of similarity is their blurred distinction between the *Persons* of the Godhead. Kuma's emphasis is chiefly Christological; the opening words of her book expresses this clearly:

> We are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ.
> We shall announce his many titles:
> they are true and they suit him well,
> so it is fitting that we do this.[42]

In the book there is no specific mention of 'God the Father' or 'God the Holy Spirit' except for few references to God as 'Jehovah' (*Onyankopcn*), hence Young's assertion that Kuma seemed to have 'collapsed the Trinity into an Akan variant of Oneness Pentecostalism' which her robust appellations of Jesus extol.[43] The same could be said

of Alabi. While she appears somewhat trinitarian in her songs,[44] she makes overlapping allusions and descriptions such that there is no distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For both Kuma and Alabi, therefore, their conceptualisation of God, on one hand, transcends the trinitarian models of systematic theology while, on the other hand, acknowledges the oneness and unity of the three *Persons* of the trinity. Given the abundant materials that had been written based on Kuma's prayer compilation and Alabi's large discography, a lot could be said about their conceptualisation of God, however, due to volume of writing, only two thoughts are hereby presented.

1. Everything Points to God

D.O. Fagunwa's classic, *A Forest of a Thousand Daemons,*[45] gives an inkling into the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian and pre-colonial religious worldview of people who live in such contexts as Kuma's and Alabi's[46] —that their farms, forests, water bodies and air space, while being the domain of farming, hunting or fishing, are also the domain of spirit-beings and that God can be seen, metaphorically, figuratively, emblematically or otherwise in everyday items, sceneries and occurrences. Hence, Salami writes,

> The Yoruba, like many other people with similar worldview [including the Akan], seek to see and create an invisible world wherein lives God in the structures of the visible in which they live. In other words, the conception of their relation to God is underlain by their concrete material relations in the visible world (as below, so above).[47]

Such worldview supports the idea that everything—persons, animals, places or things—can, and should, point humans to God. Bearing this in mind highlights a central theme to the theology of these African voices, viz: God is the ultimate being who finds ultimate expression through anyone and/or anything that had ever commanded man's attention in creation.

Thus, Kuma says of Jesus:

The great Rock we hide behind
the great forest canopy that gives cool shade
the Big Tree which lifts its vines to peep at the heavens,
the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves
encourage the luxuriant growth below.[48]

She uses word-pictures from her everyday sceneries—rocks, forest, trees, heavens and fertile forests[49]—and descriptors that reveal that people find their occupation (*kente* weavers,[50] farmers, hunters and, by inference, everyone), security ('the great rock we hide behind'), *help* (lifted vines…encouraged to grow) and enjoyment ('the great forest canopy that gives cool shade') in the Jesus that she is praising just as subjects of a ruler find their satisfaction in the security of their ruler's commands. In one of Alabi's eulogies, too,[51] the same imagery appears:

The rain of heaven that truly satisfies
The brilliant sun keeping everything in its time[52]

Or in another where she visualises God as a highly intoxicating and expensive wine:

You excite me and You lift up my spirit
You intoxicate me and I stagger
like one drunk with expensive wine
You rock me back and forth in excitement
In You I find joyful pleasures, *Kabiesi!*[53]
My Chief and Bridegroom.[54]

The fascination of the Yorubas with intoxicating drinks and their high alcohol-tolerance is not unknown in literature.[55] What is, however, noteworthy is why Alabi chose 'expensive wine' over 'palm wine' (which could be fermented to varying degrees of alcoholic

content). For her, likening the influence of God to palm wine would not be superlative enough because there are far more intoxicating (and more expensive) wines out there.

2. God as Ultimate Power

The second and most significant point to make about the conceptualisation of God by these African women is the power-dimension. The African worldview readily acknowledges that cosmic powers—both good and evil—are involved in regulating the experiences and behaviour of humans.[56] It is, therefore, typical of *apaes* and *orikis* to engage the use of metonyms, metaphors, and similes that describe the recipient (in this case, God) as being the embodiment of superior power—superior in royalty, majesty, reliability, dependability, protective ability, justice, mystery and relatability. In fact, for the Yoruba, Salami notes, 'God is seen not only as *powerful,* but God is also conceived as *power itself*.'[57] A close examination of the works of Alabi and Kuma will reveal that this, in fact, is their motif—to identify God as the ultimate 'powers that be' in their trado-cultural understanding and amplify God as being transcendent beyond any powers ever known on earth. This feeds into their conception of God as King, Healer, Deliverer, Liberator, Friend, Diviner, to mention but a few.

This conception of God is achieved in a number of ways, only a few of which are highlighted below. First, by comparing praiseworthy earthly figures, ancestors or divinities (as in the case of Yoruba *orikis*) to God and distinguishing the latter as being incomparable. For example, Kuma says,

> Mere chiefs and kings are not his equals,
> though filled with glory and power,
> wealth and blessings, and royalty
> in the greatest abundance.
> But of them all, he is the leader,
> and the chiefs with all their glory follow after him.

He is the one for whom
women lay down their cloths on the path,
and pour sweet-smelling oil on his feet.
They run to and fro amidst shouts of praise before him.
It is true: Jesus is a Chief![58]

In this preceding excerpt, not only does Kuma call Jesus 'a Chief', she made it clear that he surpasses all human chiefs in glory and power—and this she does without belittling the fact that human chiefs —in her context—are, indeed, very glorious and powerful. In *Ka Bi O Osi*,[59] Alabi recreates a Yoruba coronation event to show that God is far greater than any earthly king.

You weren't rushed home
Where they placed the crowning leaves on Your head
No one had to conspire to crown You King
Who were those who stood to cast their votes
Deciding it was Your turn to reign?
Who are Your King Makers?
Let them stand to be counted.
Who is Your forerunner that brought You into heaven?
Who is that person who suggested
That You should come [and] create the earth?
Can someone please show us Your Father or Mother?
Impossible!
You are God unquestionable!
'The Ancient of Days',
'The Ageless God' is His Name
You are God unquestionable![60]

Another way these African theologians deify God in their chosen instruments of eulogy is to describe him in very colourful terms as the one capable of 'astonishing reversals of so-called natural laws and unexpected outcomes of simple actions.'[61] For Kuma, for instance, Jesus is a hunter whose trap is capable of catching more than mere

visible animals; it "catches the wind", which he then bundles up "with lightening and ties the load with the rainbow"—an ordinary rope will not do.[62] Rather than catch fishes from the ocean, he catches them from tree tops and rather than hunt for birds on tree tops, he catches birds from the ocean.[63] With these and many other allegories, she credits Jesus with supreme power capable of conquering natural forces. Alabi's work is replete with this approach as well. In *War,* she conceptualises God as a mighty warrior who is capable of illogical feats of power:

> Our powerful warrior!
> Going ahead of us yet shielding our back from the enemy…
> The powerful shadow that turns away the day of death.
> Your dew softens the enemy's bullet and makes it of no effect
> Your rain beats every mountain till they crumble
> Yet, you are the everlasting mountain![64]

It makes no logical sense for one warrior to shield his army both from their front and behind nor for dew to turn bullets into soft harmless balls, nor for rain to beat mountains into crumbles momentarily. All of these allegories paint a picture, in Yoruba imagery, of power at its peak.

Another way both Kuma and Alabi conceptualise God as being 'ultimate power' in their use of *apae* and *oriki* is to often employ (self-coined) praise names for Jesus (or God) in the dialect of their everyday reality using complex noun formations to create fascinating interesting imageries. For example, Kuma uses words like:

> *Ôkatakyi* – Hero, brave one![65]
> *Akyerâkyerâkwan* – You-who-show-the-way[66]
> *Adubasapôn* – Strong-armed One[67]
> *Okuruakwaban* – Source-of-great-strength[68]
> *Owesekramo* – the untiring Porter[69]
> *Ôdôkôtôbonnuare* – Hard-working Farmer[70]
> *Okokurokohene* – powerful Chief[71]

Okwatayi-mu-agyabenaa – one who is not limited to a single place[72]
Woyâ saremusâe – Lion of the grasslands[73]

while Alabi uses words like:

Olodumare, Ekun Oko Oke[74] – *Olodumare,*[75] The Indomitable Tiger
Arugbo-ojo[76] – Ancient of days
Ad'agba-ma-tepa[77] – the old one who needs no walking stick
Alagbada-ina[78] – one who wears fire as his *agbada*[79]
Alawotele-oorun[80] – one who wears the sun as his underwear
Ari-iro-ala[81] – one who needs not know your dream before offering an interpretation

It needs to be said, however, that these self-coined praise names sometimes have no literal meaning but brilliant sound mimetics. Their utterance, in spite of their literal meaninglessness, naturally commands a sense of awe and wonder in the listener, appealing to their 'auditory and visual sensibilities' in the hope that it will 'appeal to the emotion of their God.'[82] In revisiting his English translation of Kuma's prayers three decades later, Jon P. Kirby SVD describes the experience as being transported back into the world where he first heard those words and relived 'its thrilling staccato beat, […] assonance and lingual gymnastics'.[83] He notes,

> The Twi is courtly language and often archaic, so readers don't always know exactly what the words mean but their hair stands on end, nonetheless. For them it is not the past; it is their hidden soul.[84]

This is a tool Alabi also uses frequently in her eulogies of God. She is known to have used words like:

Gbengbeleku-tin-da-nibi-owu
Atabatubu

Arabata ribiti aribitirabata
akaba karabata gbaa
Porimapopo-babanlaku-babami-iparekete

While bits and syllables of such compound names mean one thing or the other, the name as a whole is meaningless, but the gesticulation of the performing artiste and the rhythm of the words often describe immense greatness and mystery.

Sometimes, these praise names or eulogies are directly imported from the invocations, incantations and praise-prayer songs originally intended for historically known ancestors and/or divinities,[85] albeit amplified and Christianised. For example, in *Eru Re To Ba,*[86] Tope Alabi sings,

You are to be dreaded
The king who speaks and fire emerges
You are to be dreaded

A Yoruba listener will readily identify the imagery here being that of Sango, one of the *orisas* (divinities) in Yoruba cosmology[87] who was a monarch—the fourth Alaafin of Oyo[88]—who, in various myths, is described as *Onina-l'enu* (One who could eject fire from his mouth and kill his enemies with lightning).[89] To make the distinction, however, Alabi goes on to use biblical imagery to put this 'Sango-like' God she's praising in a class of his own—a superlative class that will make the Sango of history only of infinitesimal fraction in power.

The God who speaks fire…
You who spoke and the red sea dried…
You who fed a whole king to maggots…
You who made Esther queen suddenly…
You brought water from a rock
Who is like you?[90]

By that rhetorical question, she makes her point: Sango may be

powerful, but he is no match for the 'King of kings'.[91] It makes sense for Alabi—and other Yoruba Christians—to conceptualise God as being both *like* and *much more* powerful *than* ancestors. In conceptualising God as such, Kuma and Alabi are making the point that, whereas they would have worshipped these ancestors and/or divinities in their pre-Christian past, now they know that all power truly belongs to God. Their listeners are therefore admonished, inconspicuously, not to mistake God for anything *less*, and not to settle for the worship of anything *less*; God alone is deserving of worship. An example of this is found in Alabi's *War:*

> …You go so far fighting the battle of your children
> that people mistake it for witchcraft…
> The door! The key! The inner chamber! You are the access!
> You are the access to come out and to go into everything.
> You are the way![92]

In this short excerpt, not only is she making the point that witchcraft is a *lesser* power to God's, but she's also painting the image that everything a witch would do—enter into an 'inner chamber' from where s/he could have spiritual access to someone else's life—find their truest and purest reality in God.

Conclusion: Their Legacy

Through the aforementioned language tools and many others, both Kuma and Alabi are leaving African Christians a legacy of a robust and dynamic African identity such that Africans don't have to stop being African to be Christian; they can be both. Though unschooled in theology, they uphold a reality which must inform the scholarship of *writing* African theologians—and this is already happening. Bediako's position, for example, that 'Christianity in Africa [is] a historical reality in African life'[93] aligns with and celebrates the pioneering work of such oral theologians like Kuma. And together with the cloud of witnesses of African theologians in the land of the living dead—

Afua Kuma, Lamin Sanneh, John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Ogbu Kalu, to mention but a few—the likes of Tope Alabi invite other African Christians to begin to *think* and *talk* sensibly about God consistently with our *Africanness* so that we may continue to speak about the Africanisation of Christianity in the same breath as we speak of the Christianisation of Africa. May this be so.

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1. Afua Kuma was a Ghanaian Christian woman who made use of traditional Akan poetry in public prayer. Tope Alabi is a Nigerian musician and Christian worship leader of Yoruba heritage. More will be said about them in the course of the essay. In this essay, we use 'Africa' to describe the continent as a whole and 'African' as an all-inclusive way of describing people of the continent, whatever their ethnicity. We do include the African diaspora in our use of Africa, but we do often spell it out just for clarity's sake. When we speak of African cultures, though, we have in mind mostly the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa which is the part of Africa that has become increasingly Christian in the past century.
2. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).
3. This includes those who describe their religious identity as 'atheist', 'agnostic' or 'nothing in particular'. As of 2010, this group accounted for 16% of the religious distribution of the world 2% of which was found in sub-Saharan Africa. See Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," *The Pew Forum on Religious and Public life* (2011): 24-25, https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.5098.1761.
4. Hence, as Nnaemedo rightly posits, "the divergent voices concerning the nature of God as represented by theists, atheists and agnostics" necessarily implies "thinking" about God. See Bartholomew Nnaemedo, "Philosophical inquiry into God-definition question: The context of mercy," *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 3 (2019): 147-48.
5. Culturally, it is an essential parental duty to pass on the ideas of worship and culture to the children. Through their words and deeds, fathers mentor their sons while mothers mentor their daughters in the trado-religious make-up of their societies. The increasing rate of globalisation, however, is progressively eroding this channel of theology on the continent—unfortunately so.
6. John S. Mbiti, "The biblical basis for present trends in African theology," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 4, no. 3 (1980): 119.
7. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 3.
8. Andrew F. Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian scholarship in Africa," In memoriam, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32 (2008): 192-93.

9. Unfortunately, as Mbiti rightly observed, such theology is 'often unrecorded, often heard only by small groups, and generally lost to libraries and seminaries.' Mbiti, "The biblical basis for present trends in African theology," 119.
10. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 1.
11. While it is not untrue that there are Africans who will self-identify as being a *none*, it is nothing short of strange. See Matthew Parris, "As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God," *The Sunday Times* 2008, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/as-an-atheist-i-truly-believe-africa-needs-god-3xj9bm80h8m.
12. Todd M. Johnson et al., "Christianity 2018: More African Christians and Counting Martyrs," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 1 (2018): 21.
13. The gravity of this reality dawned on me when, in a recent conversation with two graduates from notable African seminaries, they both admitted to have never been exposed to the works of African theologians in their studies at the seminary.
14. Also known as 'Christiana Gyan' (also spelt 'Gyane'). For a detailed biography, see Akosua Anyidoho, "Techniques of Akan Praise Poetry in Christian Worship: Madam Afua Kuma," in *Multiculturalism & Hybridity in African Literatures*, ed. H. Wylie and B. Lindfors (Africa World Press, 2000), 71-75.
15. Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian scholarship in Africa," 193.
16. *Apae* is courthouse praise poetry of the Akan folkloric tradition.
17. Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, trans. Jon Kirby (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981). This was compiled originally in Twi language through the help of a Roman Catholic priest, Father Kofi Ron Lange, who knew Afua Kuma personally and recorded her prayers for posterity. A sequel is currently being put together and titled *The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II*, the manuscript of which we were privileged to peruse; *Jesus of the Deep Forest* has gone on to become a much-cited work especially in the area of what Oduyoye calls 'Oral Christology' in an African context. See Mercy Amber Oduyoye, "Jesus Christ," in *The Cambridge companion to feminist theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 154; See also Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 73; Joseph Kwakye and Jon P. Kirby, *The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II*.
18. For a full biography, see Rachael Odusanya, "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements," *Legit*, 2018, https://www.legit.ng/1194921-tope-alabis-biography-achievements.html.
19. The same year Afua Kuma discovered her gift of praising Jesus *Apae* style
20. John Shepherd et al., *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 1: Media, Industry, Society* (A&C Black, 2003), 171.
21. Odusanya "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements".
22. OakTv, "Tope Alabi crowned luminary of Yoruba artistry at #UBAat70," 2019, https://oak.tv/newstrack/commentsection-tope-alabi-ubaat70/.
23. OakTv Tope Alabi crowned luminary of Yoruba artistry; By her own admission, her preference for singing in Yoruba, besides being versed in the language, is that God speaks to her oftentimes through Yoruba adages and then unpacks the deep meaning of the adage to her. See Channels Television, "Artiste of the week: Singer Tope Alabi talks on her inspiration Part 2," (YouTube, 2012). https://youtu.be/h6osdNNVLvc.

24. See Onyeka Uwakwe, "Students, Internet Use and Information Dissemination in Nigeria: Towards the New Media," *Communication Panorama African and Global Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2015); Floribert Patrick Calvain Endong, "Religiosity versus spirituality in the contemporary Nigerian gospel music," *Human and Social Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016); A. O. Oikelome, ""Pop Goes the Gospel" - The Growth of Gospel Music in Nigeria," *International Journal of Multi-disciplinary Research* 3, no. 1-2 (2010); J. O. Adeoye, "Patriotic Music: A tool for sustaining national security in Nigeria," *Journal of Science and Science Education, Ondo* 4, no. 1 (2013); George Olusola Ajibade, "New Wine in Old Cups: Postcolonial Performance of Christian Music in Yorùbá Land," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 2 (2007); Austin Emielu and Grace Takyi Donkor, "Highlife music without alcohol? Interrogating the concept of gospel highlife in Ghana and Nigeria," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 16, no. 1-2 (2019); Damilola Mayowa Babarinde, "Emergent Issues in the Hybridisation of Christian Gospel Music in South-West Nigeria," *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies* 21, no. 1 (2019); S. T. Adeyemi, "The culture specific application of sound in Nigerian video movies," *Nigerian Music Review* 5, no. 1 (2004); S. Joseph Bankola Ola Koyi, "Creativity, Film and Democratic Practice in Nigeria," in *Theatre, Creativity and Democratic Practice in Nigeria*, ed. Ameh Dennis Akoh, AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye, and Osita C. Ezenwanebe (Maiduguri, Nigeria: Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists, 2014).
25. Prior to becoming a well-known artiste in Nigerian 'Gospel Music' genre, she had been involved in composing soundtracks for Yoruba movies—by 2010, she had composed soundtracks for more than 2,000 Nigerian movies. See Channels Television, "Artiste of the week: Singer Tope Alabi talks on her inspiration," (YouTube, 2012). https://youtu.be/zSlbU5gXAAQ; See also Adeyemi, "The culture specific application of sound in Nigerian video movies," 51.
26. Tope Alabi and T.Y. Bello, "WAR (Spontaneous Song)," (YouTube, 2019). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGzDvEDOuZY.
27. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Kabi O Osi (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, 2019). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yp864FzGBEE.
28. Tope Alabi, "Oba Aseda," (YouTube, 2017). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lh1hvLEFm0w.
29. John S. Mbiti, "African views of the universe," in *African History and Culture*, ed. R. Olaniyan (Ibadan: Longman, 1982), 196.
30. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 74.
31. Oladipo Salami, "Creating God in our image: The attributes of God in the Yoruba sociocultural environment," in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion, Amsterdam: John Benjamins*, ed. Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006), 102.
32. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
33. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
34. In this sense, in traditional Yoruba families, there is an *oriki* for every child born into the family. Mothers and grandmothers tend to be versed in these poetic and highly descriptive adulations which they recite to the child as he grows—sometimes to placate him/her and other times, to remind him/her of his worth.
35. Akinsola Akiwowo, "Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of oriki of Orunmila," *Journal of Cultures and ideas* 1, no. 1 (1983): 144.
36. Akiwowo, "Oriki of Orunmila," 144.

37. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 104.
38. Anyidoho therefore posits, "Her two names, Afua Kuma (by which she was identified in her community) and Christiana Gyan (acquired after her Christian baptism, and which appeared mainly in the church records) are symbolic of the multiple influences in her life." Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 74-75.
39. Odusanya "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements".
40. Odusanya "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements".
41. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 75.
42. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.
43. Richard Fox Young, "Clearing a Path through Jesus of the Deep Forest: Intercultural Perspectives on Christian Praise and Public Witness in Afua Kuma's Akan Oral Epic," *Theology Today* 70, no. 1 (2013): 43; This is corroborated in the yet-to-be-published sequel, 'The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II', where she writes: "The priests called the name of Jesus, / and the Holy Spirit drew near." See Kwakye and Kirby, *The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II*, 26.
44. For example, *Iwo Lawa O Mabo* (It is You We Shall Worship) seemed to have been dedicated to God the Father; *Logan Ti O De* (Immediately He Arrived) to God the Son and *Emi Mimo* (Holy Spirit) to the Holy Ghost.
45. D. O. Fagunwa, *The forest of a thousand daemons*, trans. Wole Soyinka (London: Thomas Nelson Ltd, 1968).
46. Both in Ghana's Eastern Region and South Western Nigeria, one will find lushly vegetated forested hills with many different birds and animals and a similar cosmology undergirding how people view these creatures and all of life.
47. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 106. (Word in brackets ours.)
48. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.
49. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39.
50. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39. 'Kente' is a type of cloth intricately woven and admiringly colourful. It is common among the royalty of the Ashanti people.
51. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Iwo Lawa O Ma Bo (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, 2019). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mra_dVAj7lQ.
52. As translated in the subtitle of the music video. See Tope Alabi and T.Y. Bello, "Awa Gbe O Ga (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, May 17, 2020 2019). https://youtu.be/9DaHRD2q1ek.
53. A word used in saluting Yoruba kings. It literally means "The Unquestionable One" albeit used in the same context as the English will use "Your Royal Majesty".
54. As translated in the subtitle of the music video. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "'Iwo Lawa O Ma Bo' (Lyrics and Translation)," *T Videos*, 2019, https://tweb.live/videos/watch/1vOByu0Ujdc.
55. For example, see Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (Lutterworth Press, 1966), 317-19. According to Neil, the missionaries that served in Southern Nigeria historically had a major issue with the natives' alcohol use and the very high rate of importation of gins and liquors. This became a disturbing issue for Western Missionaries working in the Southern part of Nigeria necessitating the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1905 and 1907 to raise a debate about this in the House of Lords. (p. 318)
56. See Robert B Fisher, *West African religious traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 100-02.
57. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 106.

58. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 20.
59. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
60. Based on subtitle from the music video. Translated by Oreofe Williams. See Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
61. Oduyoye, "Jesus Christ," 154.
62. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
63. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
64. Alabi and Bello, "WAR."
65. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5, 7, 10, 17, 39.
66. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.
67. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.
68. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.
69. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 9.
70. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 10.
71. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 11.
72. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39.
73. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 46.
74. Alabi and Bello, "Iwo Lawa O Ma Bo."
75. While there is no consensus on the exact meaning of *Olodumare,* a suggested etymology is *Olodu Omo Are* which, put together, could mean 'an entity that is very enormous, yet whose location cannot be ascertained. *Odu* means 'a very big clay pot'; *Are* means 'location unknown'.
76. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
77. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
78. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
79. What *kente* is to the Asante people of Ghana, *agbada* is to the Yoruba males. It's a kind of clothing
80. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
81. Tope Alabi, "Eje Ka Gbadura Episode 13," (YouTube, 2019). https://www.youtube.-com/watch?v=6uDE56bQezE.
82. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 115.
83. "Afua Kuma: Praying in Her Own Words | T I C C S NEWSLETTER #33," SVD Curia, 2006, accessed May 17, 2020, https://www.svdcuria.org/public/formatio/newsl/ticcs/ticcs0633.htm.
84. Kirby (SVD), "Afua Kuma: Praying in Her Own Words."
85. Yoruba traditional religion, for instance, have five fundamental beliefs including a belief in *God (Supreme Being)*, *divinities*, *ancestors*, *spirits* and *mysterious powers*. See J Ọmọṣade Awolalu and P Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press & Book Industries, 1979), pp. 34, 240. As such, the invocations, incantationns used n) and ayajo (charming), prayer songs which incorporate praise (oriki) and petition.
86. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Eru Re To Ba (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, 2019). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAp1i632qM8.
87. Also known as 'the deity of thunder and lightning'.
88. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (London: Routledge, 1921), 34.
89. Jonathan Olumide Lucas, *The religion of the Yorubas: being an account of the religious beliefs and practices of the Yoruba peoples of southern Nigeria, especially in relation to the religion of ancient Egypt* (Lagos: CMS Bookshop, 1948), 104.

90. Alabi and Bello, "Eru Re To Ba."
91. Another example of this will be *Owo kembe rebi ija* (the one who wears baggy trousers to the war front)—a name Alabi frequently uses which, however, was the *oriki* for Ogunmola, a Yoruba ancestral warrior. See Alabi, Lamidi Kolawole, 2017; Alabi, "Eje Ka Gbadura Episode 13."
92. Alabi and Bello, "WAR."
93. Kwame Bediako, "The roots of African theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (1989): 58.

Christianity and the Fate of Africa: A Critique of the Debate

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Introduction

Africa's unrealized social, political and, especially economic, potential is the subject of much public debate. The arguments in this discussion revolve around three themes – leadership, colonialism and religion. This paper is a critique of contemporary arguments which conflate Christianity and colonialism in a bid to locate the source of Africa's plight. I argue that while both Christianity and colonialism have shaped Africa's recent past, the merging of the two in public discourse must be interrogated. I propose that the premises of these arguments must be rectified in order to properly situate religion in the matrix of Africa's solutions for its future.

Christianity's failure on the continent is the subject of intellectual discourse and heated exchanges on social media.[1] Known to be noto-

riously religious, the African faithful are uncritical, observers say, in their belief in an imported faith.[2] Africans' apparent unwillingness to question the motives of a foreign religion hinders progress in a modern world. This modern world is said to nurture prosperity by moving away from religion in pursuit of the benefits of science.[3] The argument goes that for Africans to think freely and secure their continent's future, they must rid themselves of Christian religiosity that has little to offer.

"Of what use is this religion in Africa?" ask those who genuinely doubt the value of Christianity for a continent full of woes. "What has this thing done for us since it came?" The failures and excesses, particularly of the Pentecostal preachers, accentuate the frustration and resentment towards Christianity. Layered on top of this angst is the extractive, colonial heritage that attended the missionary years in Africa. This critical argument goes on to assert that African Christianity's provenance in Europe, with its North American cousins, renders it useless for any practical purpose on the continent. Only a truly imperialism-free, "melanized" Christianity can be trusted as a means by which African society can address its problems. Until such a Christianity is found or created, the faith must be treated with the disdain and suspicion it deserves. I note here that these critics do not acknowledge early 20th century African Initiatives in Christianity as a sufficiently authentic African Christianity.[4]

I suggest here that an adversarial engagement with religion in Africa must also be subjected to scrutiny. Africans interested in this debate must apply the same intellectual rigour to ask themselves why they are asking these questions. To put it differently using, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's language, African intellectuals must apply the hermeneutics of suspicion on their suspicion of Christianity![5] They need to be critical about their own criticism of the value of Christian faith for the continent. We take a moment now to revisit the history of the argument.

Criticisms against Christianity in Africa

The charge sustained by European trained African pre-independence, and early post-colonial thinkers is that Christianity is a violent, colonial, and white, affront to African progress.[6] On the charge of violence, Christian history has little it can do to defend itself. A cursory look at ancient and modern history reveals a long, tragic, savage and embarrassing account, in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere. One has to admit though, that religiously instigated violence isn't unique to Christianity. That is to say that the charge isn't materially different from human carnage elsewhere in the name of this, or other religions. As a matter of fact, secular humanistic ideas whose devotion to science should have produced human progress have not fared any better. Some of the worst human tragedies came from these intellectual experiments in 'secular, scientific morality.'[7] History reveals that violence is a human condition with horrific consequences. Religion and ideology are inadvertent vessels of this violence.

The other assertion is that Christianity is colonial. I suggest here that this assertion needs a more nuanced response. Many initial missionaries to Africa South of the Sahara were white Europeans.[8] Colonialists were also white Europeans. Unfortunately a number of missionaries extolled the virtue of imperialistic priorities of colonial governments.[9] White settlers and civil servants also facilitated the presence of missionaries who served their religious needs during their injustice filled time in Africa. However, the presumption that because missionaries came from Europe they rendered the faith inherently colonial or white is problematic in many ways. The logic of 'race equals religion' is difficult to sustain. Further more, the argument that Christianity came from European colonial impulses does not account for early Algerian, Tunisian, Libyan, Egyptian, Nubian and Ethiopian Christianities whose maturity and proliferation predates continental European Christianity as we know it.[10]

Aside from these patristic and medieval period examples, a closer look at more recent missionary history challenges the colonial label of

Christianity. The temporal gap between the missionary enterprise and actual colonialism in Africa renders the argument at least partially void. On average, most 19th century missionaries began work in sub-Saharan regions, at the mission agencies cost, on average half a century before the substantive colonial invasions.[11] Pioneer missionary work started in earnest long before Bismark's imperial convention in Germany. The pioneer colonialists of different European ethnicities poured in after the license given in the 1885 Berlin conference.[12] Colonial entrepreneurs and bureaucrats came into the continent after the missionaries had already outlined the potential of the continent through their prolific writings.

Colonialist and Missionary: Friends or Foes

In Kenya, there was a long period between the advent of the missionary era in 1844, and the formal establishment of the Kenyan colonial government in 1920. The formal establishment of the colonial political infrastructure was 75 years after missionary entry and 15 years after the railway, the single biggest statement of confidence in the colonial enterprise. Not only did missionaries and colonialists arrive at different times, their priorities were materially different.

Even when colonialism did take root, the relationship between the mission and the government was far from harmonious. Colonial businesses and governments frequently clashed with missionaries. To them, the missionaries seemed too obsessed with the natives. Faced with the choice between colonial governments' political priorities and the prospect of African's quest for religious and educational freedom, missionaries staked their efforts on the latter.[13] Furthermore, missionaries often quarrelled among themselves over doctrine, worship practices, and, yes, followers- black African converts. That was the reason for the famous 1913 conference on missionary comity in Kikuyu, Kenya.[14] Knowing what we know in Africa, it is hard to discount the tribal dimension of these disagreements among missionary agencies which came from different European ethnic groups.

Eventually, the colonial governments began to exert control and manage the missionaries' movements in the colonial territories. This paved the way for the geo-ethnic distribution of denominational affiliations we see in sub-Saharan Africa today. The result of this government control was a tense environment comprising delicate webs of relationships between missionary agencies, white settlers, and bureaucrats. The point here is that just because they were all white didn't mean the missionaries and colonialists agreed.

It is common knowledge among keen students of religion and politics, that the mission school was the first incubator for revolutionary African activism.[15] The first tier of African political leaders, almost without exception were the product of Christian missionary education.[16] What was it about that Christian missionary experience that caught these intellectuals' mind? We do not have enough room to fully explore this, but suffice it to say that Christianity always contained the subversive message of freedom for all humanity. Themes of equality enshrined in Christian teaching sowed and watered the seeds of activism among these courageous freedom fighters. Those who read phrases like "he who the Son sets free is free indeed," "it is for freedom that He set you free," "all were made in the image of God," "in the image of God He created them," "let justice roll down like a river," "loose the chains of injustice – and set the captives free," and so on, could not help but publicly question the iniquity of colonialism.

The message of the gospel is revolutionary in its very nature. Jesus subverted the human order of leadership, governance, economics, social norms and demonstrated that God can break through these to offer alternatives. These themes of justice and liberation found resonance among many on the continent in the 19th and 20th centuries. Deep Christian reflection on the continent, however, dates much further back than the last couple of centuries.

Ancient African Christian Reflection and Western Thought

Stretching back to the first 400 years of Christianity, African contributions to the establishment of Christian faith and the safeguarding Orthodoxy cannot be overstated. We include in this long list of contributions – the founding of society-shaping monastic movements by Anthony with the fathers and mothers in the Egyptian desert, the crafting of systematic theological reflection by Origen in Egypt, the introduction of trinitarian theology by Tertullian in Tunisia, and the forceful defence of the deity of Jesus by Athanasius. We cannot fail to include Augustine of Hippo's writings which inspired faith based principles of moral philosophy upon which contemporary Euro-American governance, democracy, leadership and even modern law come from.

European philosophers, secular or religious, alike were shaped by this body work. Africans helped lay the foundation of serious academic instruction in the European academy for over a millennium.[17] Ironically this heritage of African critical thought contributed to a groundswell of intellectual engagement that precipitated in the enlightenment thinking. Without these germ ideas from the likes of Augustine, it is hard to imagine what modern Western thought would be. A brief overview follows below of the development of key strands in this thinking, that eventually brings us to the critical theory used to challenge African Christianity.[18]

We begin with Rene Decartes (1596-1650) who interrogated the link between thought and identity. "I think I therefore am," was the maxim credited to him. His dualism argued that mind and matter are separate and distinct, coming together in the human. A Catholic himself, unaware of the future secular Europe that would inherit his ideas, Descartes offered an ontological argument for God. He tried to show that God is apart from the human, and exists because he is separate. This benevolent God, he taught, offers the possibility for humans to perceive him, and their reality. It must be remembered Descartes' Europe was in a period of political and religious foment. The church

was behaving badly and the geo-politics was nothing short of tumultuous.

It was Thomas Hobbes (1588 -1671) who articulated the value of the state in regulating human society. He theorized about the possibility of an objective science of morality. In his view religious experience of necessity must agree with reason and human experience. Some of these ideas provided the foundation for the interface between religion and state made famous in intellectual circles by the writings of John Locke (1634 –1704). Locke explored ideas about democracy, the definition of church and state, and religious tolerance. These thoughts came from the forge of church-sponsored universities upon which intellectual learning thrived, at the time. Together Hobbes and Locke contributed to the development of the capitalist state responsible for both democracy and imperialism that precipitated the centuries long pillaging of what we now call the global South.

Perhaps the most notable challenge to Europe's religious heritage was François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire (1694 -1778). Influenced by Locke's ideas, he ventured to the margins of mainstream thought, exploring the possibility of reason outside the church. Riding on the elite, and popular 'enlightened' disaffection with religious institutions he offered that the Bible and even Christ could be antithetical to reason and progress in society.[19] He roundly rejected the value of the church and Islam for society while maintaining a soft spot for Hinduism and Confucianism. There was virtue, he conceded, in those who gave up much for religious calling. He popularized the (somewhat factual) notion that Christianity came from a violent past. Voltaire's opposition to religion established the tradition of the secular, anti-religious criticism now finding its way among African elites in the 21st century. David Hume (1711-1776), Voltaire's contemporary, contributed to religious skepticism promoting human experience as the sole sources of human knolwedge.

The next salvo against religion, in a Europe increasingly enamoured with empiricism, came from Auguste Comte (1798–1857). He argued that the quest for truth occurred in 3 stages – theological

[fetishism], metaphysical [abstract, with an unreliable grasp and use of science], and posivitism [concrete, with pragmatic empiricism]. Dissatisfied with the sectarian pursuits of religions of the day, Comte even proposed a religion of humanity, basically the pre-cursor to secular humanism. This 'religion' was Comte's proposal for extra-ecclesial solutions for morality in society.

Despite European "progress" in empiricism and philosophy, the problem of religion in society refused to go away. Each in their own way, these three intellectuals shared a common commitment unmasking 'the lies and illusions of consciousness,' and thereby challenging religion. Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) pioneered a modern interpretation of reality. They urged their students to look beyond the prima-facie, or obvious meanings to search the less visible and less flattering truths. Children of their times though they were, they pioneered what Paul Ricoeur called the 'hermeneutics of suspicion.' A term that continues to find much use in philosophy, intellectual history, and related fields in the humanities.

This hermeneutic demanded a reading between the lines to find the omissions, and contradictions to see what is said through what is left unsaid. Such readings of life and thought of necessity required the suspension of so-called absolutes to find the hidden meanings. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) advanced this, now widely accepted, scepticism about absolutes. He questioned the categories of right and wrong, sane and insane, and human nature. He did not deny the binaries but investigated them interrogating what was contingent. Foucault's mission was to show the relationships between power and knowledge.[20]

By this time religion had shifted in Europe from its foundational role in intellectual discourse to an idea on the same plane as any other idea, fit to be relativised. Others came afterwards to build on these ideas into a fabric of intellectualism whose worldview marginalized religion. Noam Chomsky (1928), for example, a non-religious thinker questioned his own society's ideas of western democracy, capitalism and even cast a disapproving glance at socialism. His view, reminis-

cent of Marxian thinking, saw organised religion as an attempt to control. As we come to the present hermeneutics of suspicion applied against religion, I argue here that, we must not lose sight of the intellectual history that has produced it. More importantly, we must remain cognisant of the role played by early thinkers on the continent.

I write this extremely brief intellectual history to problematize the history of Western intellectualism and its import on African response to religion. For those who saw philosophy, and later on technology, as the solution to the need for God, religion became a dispensable idea. While the Western world shifted from an appreciation of the metaphysical, African thinking continued to essentialize religion. Spirituality remained one of the core elements of their worldview through which they process meaning and their reality. In the words of Mbiti, Africa remained "notoriously religious."[21]

Africa and Christianity in the 20th Century

It is on this religious substratum that the unexpected growth of Christianity occurred. There are very few such moments in the history of Christianity where this magnitude of increase has been witnessed. From reportedly under 10 million in 1910 to half a billion only a century later.[22] Many of the initial 10 million were in the historically Christian communities of Egypt and Ethiopia. The move shifted from over 90% traditional religion to almost 50% average Christian population over Africa, with Africa South of the Sahara accounting for the largest proportions. Much of this growth came about in the 1960s to the 1980s, that is, decades after the missionary era.[23]

There aren't many ways to explain this phenomenal growth. One possibility is that the missionaries really didn't leave but evangelized fervently remotely from their domicile in the West. This is not easy to sustain given the evidence. Another possibility would be that the colonial culture and education continued to perpetuate Christianity after the missionaries left. This is a popular theory in various forms.[24] While partially true, the problem is that it does not account for the

prolific conversions found amongst Africans through the efforts of indigenous churches, which had little or nothing to do with colonial governments, let alone Euro-American missionaries.

A third possibility is that African Christians took responsibility for evangelization, articulating their own faith in terms that their compatriots understood.[25] This is easy to see in the historical and demographic data available today. The rise of Christianity after the end of the missionary and colonial eras bears witness to this indigenous impulse for Christianity. The most prevalent, and arguably the fastest growing Christianity is the effervescent, exuberant expression that has found its way into nearly every historic mission denomination and catalysed the formation of numerous new independent churches. This Christianity takes African spirituality seriously and aims to articulate life and meaning through its lenses.

This is a Christianity with a markedly different ethos than missionary Christianity even where it shared denominations. The settler, and the white evangelist alike, did not recognize it or care for it. Yet, it survived persecution first from the missionary, then the imperialist, then from its own African intellectuals. It prevailed against the odds, resiliently holding fast to the African psyche. Modern African Christianity's resilience forces us to rethink our engagement with it.

Could it be that this faith finally found a way to dock itself to the African worldview and find sustenance in the indigenous intellectual and spiritual DNA? If so we must ask ourselves where the notion came from that tried to create an Africa apart from religion, or apart from Christianity for that matter. I submit that it is not inherently African to construct a reality without spirituality. We must interrogate the very suspicion that recently emerged about African engagement with Christianity. We must now allow for the possibility that there is more than one way to evaluate the value of religion in society. A hermeneutic of suspicion and intellectual disdain for religion is not the only way. Appreciative, emic engagement can also yield fruitful reflection.

I advocate for a thorough re-examination of the "hermeneutic of

suspicion" that has sought to demean Christianity in Africa over the last 40 years, and most vehemently in the last decade in public discourse. I affirm the cumulative and collaborative benefit of pooling philosophical reflection over the centuries to bring to bear on current issues.[26] I also welcome honest critique of the failures of Christian community at a time when the Christian message could have been even more effective against the travails of the continent. However, I urge an audit of the project ascribing Western post-enlightenment priorities to a context without a similar intellectual and political history. The arguments citing violence, and colonialism are no longer sufficient to sustain mature intellectual engagement with the role of Christianity on the continent. African intellectuals must interrogate the very frameworks used against their religious realities. There is an urgent need to reexamine Christianity and its import on Africa's future using categories and priorities borne from within the continent.

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1. For intellectual engagement see for example Franco Frescura, "A Case of Hopeless Failure: The Role of Missionaries in the Transformation of Southern Africa's Indigenous Architecture," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 28, no. 2 (2015): 64–86.
2. See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 1.
3. Gifford explores some of these themes here Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2015).
4. This omission of immensely creative attempts at translation of Christianity into African culture is as glaring as it is unfortunate. These contributions to 20th Century Christianity in Africa deserve a greater place in intellectual and public discourse. Kalu and Anderson's work is particularly helpful in advancing this discourse. Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 21st Century* (Trenton, N.J.; London: Africa World ; Turnaround, 2001).

5. For a summary see G. D. Robinson, "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion: A Brief Overview and Critique by G. D. Robinson," *Premise* II, no. 8 (September 27, 1995): 12.
6. Few intellectuals were as effective in forcefully advancing this agenda than the venerable literature professors and authors, Okot p'Bitek and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. See Christopher Wise, "Messianic Hallucinations and Manichean Realities: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Christianity, and the Third World Novel," *Christianity and Literature* 45, no. 1 (1995): 31–51; Frederick Hale, "A Ugandan Critique of Western Caricatures of African Spirituality: Okot p'Bitek in Historical Context," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 21, no. 2 (2008): 19–31; Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (East African literature bureau, 1970); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, vol. 3 (Penguin, 2012); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, vol. 4 (Penguin, 2015); Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (East African Publishers, 1995).
7. Twentieth century world wars and communist regimes stand out as stark examples here.
8. There are important, less known but no less significant exceptions from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Coptic Egypt. See for example Andrew F. Walls, "Sierra Leone, Afroamerican Remigration and the Beginnings of Protestantism in West Africa (8th-19th Centuries)," *Transkontinentale Beziehungen in Der Geschichte Des Außereuropäischen Christentums*, 2002, 45–56; Ugo Zanetti, "The Ethiopian Church, an Adult Daughter of the Coptic Church," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2016): 11–31; Otto Meinardus, "A Brief History of the Abunate of Ethiopia," *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* 58 (1962): 39–65.
9. See for example Fidelis Nkomazana and Senzokuhle Doreen Setume, "Missionary Colonial Mentality and the Expansion of Christianity in Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1800 to 1900," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 29, no. 2 (2016): 29–55, https://doi.org/10.4314/jsr.v29i2.
10. Some have argued that these early expressions are not really African Christianities. The argument is beyond the scope of this paper, however it is worth mentioning here that these Christians saw themselves as Africans. See "Council of Carthage (A.D. 419): The Code of Canons of the African Church," 419AD; Athanasius, "Ad Afros Epistola Synodica: To the Bishops of Africa.," 368AD.
11. 15th Century Central-West African initiatives came from a Europe that was very different from the context that produced the 1885 Berlin Conference imperialism. Though similar to 19th century colonialism in its penchant for dehumanization, 18th century slave trade had different political and economic priorities. For 19th Century mission and exploration, see for example Frederick D Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1893); Johann Ludwig Krapf and E.G. Ravenstein, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa* (London: Ticknor and Fields, 1860).
12. Afe Adogame, "Conference Report: The Berlin-Congo Conference 1884: The Partition of Africa and Implications for Christian Mission Today," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, no. 1 (2004): 186–90.
13. See James Karanja, *The Missionary Movement in Colonial Kenya: The Foundation of Africa Inland Church* (Cuvillier Verlag, 2009); John Lonsdale, "Kikuyu Christianities'," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29, no. 2 (1999): 206–229; Robert L. Tignor, *Colo-*

nial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu, and Maasai from 1900-1939 (Princeton University Press, 2015).

14. J.J. Willis, *The Kikuyu Conference: A Study in Christian Unity* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1913).
15. Lamin Sanneh eloquently argued this point in Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Orbis Books, 1989).
16. Henry Muoria, for example, was a leading Kenyan intellectual voice for liberation and the product of the mission station. See H. Muoria Mwaniki, *Kenyatta Ni Muigwithania Witu* (Nairobi: Mumenyereri Press, 1947); Wangari Muoria-Sal et al., *Writing for Kenya: The Life and Works of Henry Muoria*, vol. 10, African Sources for African History (Brill, 2009).
17. Oden made this case forcefully in Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010).
18. Any overview of Western intellectual history will of necessity be limited, more so, when offered in the context of an article like this on. I offer the caveat that this brief account leaves out many threads some might consider important for this discussion. Nevertheless, I consider it necessary to sketch the Christian, African, and European, ancestry of the arguments used to disparage Christian faith on the continent.
19. This is now a familiar thought pattern upon which religiously liberal societies base their morality and social functions.
20. Power and knowledge are essential themes in Critical theory which tries to assess societal function and culture on the basis of power relationships. Critical theory belongs to this intellectual ancestry with thinkers like Karl Marx and Emmanuel Kant as important shapers. Many will remember Marx's maxim that religion is "the opium of the masses," because of its potential to control them.
21. There are a few who are attempting to challenge this notion. Platvoet and van Rinsum, for example think that Africa's religiousity is a myth stemming from John Mbiti's "religionism." Their arguments are hard to sustain given the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. See Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?," *Exchange* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 123–53, https://doi.org/10.1163/157254303X00190.
22. Todd Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, "Status of Global Christianity 2019, in the Context of 1900 to 2050" (Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2019), www.worldchristiandatabase.org.
23. "Sub-Saharan Africa Will Be Home to Growing Shares of the World's Christians, Muslims," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed October 2, 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/19/sub-saharan-africa-will-be-home-to-growing-shares-of-the-worlds-christians-and-muslims/.
24. See some discussions on this here Mark Bray, "Education and the Vestiges of Colonialism: Self-Determination, Neocolonialism and Dependency in the South Pacific," *Comparative Education* 29, no. 3 (1993): 333–348; Kwesi Kwaa Prah, "The Burden of English in Africa: From Colonialism to Neo-Colonialism," *TESL-EJ (Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language–Electronic Journal)* 6, no. 1 (2002); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (Psychology Press, 2001).
25. Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, Mark Shaw and others describe this phenomenon as translation – the entry of Christian message into the thought, life, and culture of

the recipients. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 1st edition (Maryknoll, NY; Edinburgh: Orbis Books; T & T Clark, 1996); Sanneh, *Translating the Message*; Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010).

26. This includes the Western intellectual heritage I have described above.

Images of African Preachers on the Nigerian Public Sphere

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Abstract

This essay seeks to examine images of preachers—biblical and traditional—on the Nigerian public sphere, with an aim to reflect on what is *in the light of* what ought to be*. It seeks to explore biblical ideals of preachers and attempts to reconcile those with prevalent contemporary reality in Nigeria. To do this, the essay will first explore the concept of public sphere and, after this, discuss how the public sphere shapes perceptions and images people have of*

preachers. In the end, it will recommend three images that may best represent the biblical ideal while also resonating with the African cultural milieu.

Introduction

Christian preachers are spokespersons for God. As such, the image they bear among their listeners in religious communities affects the weight of the message they carry. In many African communities, preachers as God's messengers are as important as the message they bear. Any image less dignifying than something in the semblance of God is usually not accepted. Today, however, these standards are hard to maintain. By and large, our contemporary reality presents us with different images of preachers, who they are and who they ought to be. In the current public sphere, preachers are not only participants, they are also subjects of public scrutiny. The African public sphere is shaped by a communal worldview; no one is above public scrutiny. Thus, the image a preacher registers on the mind of the public largely affects his or her participation in the same public sphere. Preachers have lives to live, while having a message to bear and an example to model for those who follow them.

The Public Sphere

The "public sphere" is a term with relative definition depending on the field of study in which it is being used—be it in education, politics, social science, economics, architecture, urban planning and geography. There is, however, a relationship in the use of the term among various disciplines in respect of space—physical or otherwise—where humans meet, interact, opine, define and possibly influence one another. In such spatial disciplines as architecture and urban planning, public sphere will denote interactions in open spaces of the city like parks, recreational areas, festival spaces, streets, playgrounds etc. In social science, the public sphere deals more with a platform of communication that shapes public opinion. Jürgen Habermas sees the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something

approaching public opinion can be formed."[1] The public sphere is an extensive sphere, cutting across what some regard as public and private. The public sphere is found in elections, Olympic ceremonies, actions of a commando unit, a theatre debut, childrearing, factory work, watching television and other events and avenues. A more dynamic concept and description of the public sphere is the one expatiated upon by Ann-Katrin Arnold. According to her,

> "The public" is an imaginary group of people, and the public sphere is an imaginary place. It is a space constituted between the state and the private sphere of citizens, households, and private corporations. It is most of all a communicative infrastructure. This infrastructure allows the free exchange of information and ideas, deliberation on issues of public concern, the formation of public will, and the transmission of public will to official authorities. Authorities then have to be accountable for their actions, again through the communication channels of the public sphere. It is helpful - although rather libertarian - to look at the public sphere as if it were a market, the notorious "free marketplace of ideas." The goods of the public sphere are ideas, and the currency is public opinion.[2]

In other words, the public sphere is less a specific location and more a realm of communication. It could be found in literature, in media, in the religious arena and virtually anywhere opinions could be expressed and concerns shared.[3] The product of a functional and effective public sphere is a society where every citizen has freedom of participation, and all strata of leadership—political, social or religious—are held accountable.

If there is a continent that needs a vibrant public sphere, it is Africa. A document by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa articulated comprehensively some of the cogent factors that would necessitate such a vibrant public sphere. These include:

> continuing struggles over the role of the state and the place of the market; the technocratisation of (economic) policy and "agencification" of government; the enlarged, perhaps even determinant role assumed by international financial institutions in domestic economic policy making; the intensified pluralisation of the media; shifts in the demographic profile of African countries that favour children and the youth as a proportion of national and regional populations; changes in the spatial distribution of population that speak, on the one hand, to the acceleration of formal and informal processes of urbanisation and, on the other hand, to intensive internal population movements that pose various challenges; increased organisation and activism for the rights of women and girls, and for greater gender equality; a widespread revival of religion and the emergence of new religiosities; multiple transitions and transformations in the domain of (popular) arts and culture; continuing struggles for the democratisation of national political systems; the rebirth of electoral pluralism and the restoration, nominal or otherwise, of elected national parliaments; an apparent demilitarisation of politics side-by-side with a reinforcement of the security moorings of the state and the expansion of the remit of the policing authorities; the transformation of old social movements and the emergence of new ones as part of a generalised redynamisation of associational life; an increased investment in sub-regional and regional cooperation, integration and even unification processes; an intensified refraction of global influences into the local/domestic arena; and a revival of reciprocal interest and engagement between Africa and its Diaspora.[4]

Christians are active participants in the public sphere, and the place of preachers is critical because they bear the message of the church and largely represent both the voice of God and the voice of the body of Christ in the public sphere. On the other hand, they are also subjects of discussion in the public sphere because of their leadership responsibility and assumed proximity to political leaders and leaders from other spheres of life. In fact, preachers who are also the

teachers of the church are creators of visions for the public sphere. According to Richard Voelz, the preacher-as-teacher in the context of what he called critical pedagogy, "enacts the kind of ecclesiology, where preaching functions as (and encourages) the transformation of culture, social action and social change."[5] He further opined that,

> Preaching becomes both critique and resistance of the prevailing cultural pedagogies that enact oppression, marginalization, suffering, and/or suppression of particular histories, cultures, and identities. This kind of ecclesiology honors the multiplicity of experiences of the gathered community and encourages those participants to shape a vision of the world together that promotes justice and equality (or righteousness, *shalom*, etc.). Critical pedagogy would ask Christian preachers to be very specific about what they mean when they interpret the *basileia tou Theou* (variously defined as the kingdom, reign and rule, or realm of God) of Jesus in current contexts.[6]

The image with which preachers engage the public sphere is critical to the whole idea of preaching as a divine call with a transformative goal, and to that, this paper turns to address.

Traditional and Biblical Images of Preachers

Several images appear in the Bible as to who preachers are and the way they should be viewed in the public sphere. Some of the Greek words used to describe preaching gives some insight. Michael J. Quicke offers a long list of some of these words.[7] A few among them will be discussed here. First, there is *kerysso* (Romans 10:14-15) which translates "I herald." This is suggestive of a town-crier in a market square. Preachers are heralds of the King who disseminate information to the people under the authority of the King who sent them. Second is *euangelizomai* (Act 14:7). It means "I bring good news", "I preach good tidings", "I instruct concerning the things that pertain to Christian salvation." Thus, preachers are evangelists burdened with the salvation of souls. Third is *didasko* (Act 4:2; 5:25) meaning "I teach

or hold discourse with others in order to instruct them". Preachers are teachers and instructors. Then, there is *dialegomai* (Act 17:17; 18:8; 19:8; 20:9 24:25) meaning "I converse, discourse one on one, argue, discuss." Preachers are, therefore, people who engage in conversation, discourse and argument based on their conviction of the word of God and the need of the hour. All these terms and actions define preachers in the public sphere. Preachers herald the kingdom message, share the good news, teach the saints and engage in discourses that affect both private and public life. As teachers, not only do they set the stage for public discussion as earlier observed, they also motivate actors in the public square. As people engage in discourse, they resemble Paul's engagement with the marketplace in Athens as described in Acts 17:16-21. The work of preachers is not confined to the pulpit of their local assembly. The biblical image they carry is beyond that.

Thomas Long, in his book *The Witness of Preaching,* observes that "preachers have at least tacit images of the preacher's role, primary metaphors that not only describe the nature of the preacher but also embrace by implication all the other crucial aspects of the preaching events."[8] While these images vary, Long put together what he called the "organizing metaphor of ministry" and painted the images of preachers as a herald, pastor, storyteller/poet and witness.[9] As heralds, preachers are messenger of God who is their King.[10] As pastors, preachers are therapists and healers.[11] As storyteller/poets, preachers balance what the scripture says with what the community is experiencing, doing so rhetorically.[12] As witnesses, preachers testify to what they have seen and heard in the scriptures.[13]

In a more recent work, Robert Stephen Reid edited a book putting together thoughts of some scholars in homiletics on what should be considered the contemporary images of preachers' identity. In the book, James F. Kay described the preacher as a messenger of hope. His assertion is that sermons ought to bring hope from God to the contemporary community as exemplified in the book of Hebrews.[14] Lucy Lind Hogan paints the picture of a lover. A sermon and its preacher should live and preach God's love for the world.[15] Andre Resner pictures the preacher as God's mystery steward. The preacher

creates an awareness of God's great mystery which is the end of this present age, ushering in a new world.[16] For Charles L. Campbell, the preacher is "a ridiculous person." To the sensibility of a contemporary on-looker, it is ridiculous to see a preacher leave the pulpit and liturgical assembly to do street preaching, where he or she openly confronts and invites their listeners to a gospel response. Yet, that is a reality of their call.[17]

In the same book, Lincoln E. Galloway described the preacher as a fisher. He draws on the concept of Jesus' call to his disciples to be fishers of men and on his own life in Montserrat in the Caribbean to describe how the language of fishing may impact the perception and work of a preacher.[18] John S. McClure sees the image of a preacher in a host and guest. A preacher is best understood within the framework of hospitality. He or she hosts the congregation and is a guest of God. The congregation also hosts the preacher. Preachers are not isolated individuals with absolute authority over their listeners. They are rather "a member of a community that is searching together for an adequate interpretation of God's purposes."[19] Anna Carter Florence pictures the preacher as "one out of your mind." She drew this from the response of the disciples when Rhoda gave them the news that Peter had been released from prison in Acts 12. A preacher has the choice to believe in "Rhoda's news" or believe Peter is still in prison. Preachers are also called to help their congregation choose between the two.[20] Finally, Robert Stephen Reid, the editor of the book, projected the image of a preacher as "one entrusted." Preachers are entrusted with the responsibility of eliciting a faithful response from their hearers. They achieve this by a theologically appropriate use of rhetoric.[21]

The works of Thomas Long or Robert Stephen Reid are not exhaustive. Whether self-identified or tagged, images are important to the functionality of the public sphere. According to Voelz,

> It has become an almost commonplace exercise for preachers to examine and re-examine their fundamental assumptions about the practice of preaching through "identify[ing] the trope, the imaginative

> figure of thought which best captures what they believe they are 'up to' in preaching." Through this work, homileticians, preachers, and students of preaching are engaging in the kind of critical reflection by which an image comes to represent a system of beliefs about the preacher's role and identity, the work of God in preaching, the role of listeners, relationships with sacred texts, the human situation, and a host of other entailments.[22]

The question that arises at this point is, who do Africans consider their preachers to be? Would they fit the image of a herald, sharer of good news, teacher or persuasive speaker? Where would they fall in Reid's classification of the preacher as a messenger of hope, a lover, God's mystery steward, a ridiculous person, a fisher, host and guest, one out of his mind, or one entrusted? If these are to be regarded as biblical ideals, then every normal preacher should bear these images. But the public sphere in Africa may provide a mixed reaction to the assessment of their preachers. In preparation for this paper the writer posted on his Facebook wall:

> *"Hello, friends, I am working on a paper presentation titled, "Images of African Preachers in the Public Sphere in Africa: Separating the Ideal from the Real." From your experience and others who have shared with you at one time or the other, what is the public image or perception of people about preachers in Africa (both positive and negative)? Your input will be appreciated."*[23]

In a few days, responses (positive and negative) filled the page from participants on this social media. In a positive light, African preachers are great communicators of the gospel who have taken the gospel beyond the continent to the entire world through their teaching, preaching and writing. They are men of signs and wonders through whose ministries many have come out of bondage mentally, socially and spiritually. According to one of the commentators, Stephanie Adejoke Henry, "The African preacher is seen as that preacher who has a conviction about the wonder-working power of

God, having experienced the power of the gospel and is eager to shine this light to his brethren as well as impart them for a ripple effect."

The basis for the African preachers' zeal for the gospel is the love for God's word and the belief that it is as relevant today as it has even been. John Wesley Zwomunondiita Kurewa explicated this fact when he wrote,

> African preachers have long been able to move and inspire their congregations through the use of the Bible in their sermons. Therefore, biblical proclamation is not a new thing in the life of the African Church. Rather, it is the only way of preaching that we know; and it is the only way of preaching that was ever effectively introduced to the African church.[24]

While it is argued that preaching from the Bible may not necessarily amount to authentic biblical preaching, the first step of loving the word of God is established, and all that is needed to be built upon is the right handling of the text. Altogether, African preachers must be appreciated for being instruments in the hands of God to bring the phenomenal growth that Christianity has encountered in the continent. Churches are planted daily at every nook and cranny of several African societies as the continent becomes increasingly open to the gospel, and people flock to these churches for weekly fellowships, Sunday worship, mass crusades, conventions, and occasional or continuous prayer vigils. The media in several African countries has been literally "taken over" by preachers of God's word. Several denominations now have their own satellite Television stations where the word of God is preached day and night with evidence of miracles, signs and wonders, and massive response to the call to salvation in Jesus Christ.[25] God is working in Africa, the preachers are instrumental to this, and many in the public square have come to admire and appreciate this.

There are, however, few negative impressions that some African preachers have left on the psyche of the society which needs to be redeemed. Some African preachers are regarded as materialistic,

habitual fundraisers, not vocal enough on national issues, exploitative and competitive. Quite a number are not text-driven in their preaching. One commentator actually wrote, "I have witnessed discussion by some preachers where many of them, friends in ministry, were equating the success of their ministry to what they have acquired through it."[26] Some writers have also corroborated these negative remarks in their works. Gary S. Maxey and Peter Ozodo wrote about *The Seduction of the Nigerian Church.*[27] The cry is that the presumed revival in Africa, especially in Nigeria is losing its cutting edge due to doctrinal errors. The church is being more and more powerless to halt the social and moral decadence in the society because it is not getting its own acts right. The preachers are implicated in this decline. According to Maxey and Ozodo, a fundamental shift in the popular teaching and belief of the Nigerian Church is largely the reason behind its current failure. The large-scale loss of holy lifestyle among church membership is the most obvious result of this theological flaw.[28] The picture painted by Olawale Gbadamosi in *This Prodigal Church* is dire:

> Some of our men of God have become so powerful that even the politicians would be green with envy. Some have unending protocols, long retinue of aids and officials in addition to having security cordons thrown around them. Of course, there are reasons that appear plausible adduced for some of these positions, but if we are honest enough to appraise them in the light of the gospel and eternity, we would discover that these are sure signs of some spiritually fundamental problems that are urgently begging for attention. Worse still some have even become so detached from the reality in their congregations: the poverty stricken people, the weak and the poor as long as they are getting their own huge 'cut' from the Gospel.[29]

In another work, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, Femi Adeleye added that there is a crisis in the church where "Jesus and the proclamation of the gospel keep being squeezed into oblivion by 'more important matters'– blessing the minister, celebrating a birthday,

commemorating a car or building and multiple appeals for fund (sic)."[30]

While there are quite a number of things to appreciate and celebrate about preachers in Africa, some of the negative images, arising from the African public sphere, can be inimical to the preachers' participation in the same public sphere when they ought to be salt and light. The image of a preacher does not affect the preacher alone; it impacts the boldness with which their congregational members would address issues in the public sphere. In Africa, people are not isolated from the family or community they belong to. Each person represents his or her community, and the church member is as good or as bad as the church or pastor is.

How, then, is the ideal image of the preacher separated from the reality that is seen daily? What likely images can be suggested for African preachers as both the ideal and a potential model that could be pushed to be a perfect representation of Christ in the public sphere? To this, the paper now turns.

Separating the Ideal from the Real

The ideal image of any preacher is the scriptural ideal. This is connected to the theology of preaching itself. Biblical preaching is all about the inspired scripture, an acceptance of its authority, inerrancy and sufficiency, and an acceptance of that same scripture to be the standard for the preacher.[31] Several of these ideal and scriptural images of preachers have been enumerated. Preachers are proclaimers or heralds, bearers of good news, encouragers, witnesses or testifiers, discussants, debaters, those who impart divine truth through teaching, biblical interpreters, and defenders of the faith. In contemporary biblical parlances, they are messengers of hope, lovers, stewards of God's mystery, naked street preachers, fishers, host and guest, faith motivators and people entrusted to seek a faithful response from others. These are the ideals, and there are preachers who portray them in Africa.

However, there is a contemporary reality that paints some African

preachers in a negative light. It, therefore, becomes necessary at this juncture, to cast a vision for African preachers to repair some of the dented images that represent them in the public sphere and move boldly to shape the same public sphere. This requires suggesting few images that are representative of the biblical images so far studied, but arising from an African theological perspective and rooted in an African socio-cultural milieu. Three familiar African images are offered: father/mother, priest(ess) and prophet(ess).

Father/Mother

The image of a father is a strong one among Africans. Among the Yorubas of southwestern Nigeria, a pastor (often a synonym for a preacher because preaching is assumed to be his major responsibility) is often called *Baba wa ninu Oluwa*, meaning "Our father in the Lord." A father is a leader and the head of the family. In the context of this discourse, a father is a speaker and a counsellor. He confidently represents the family with dignity and integrity in the community and protects the same. Paul painted this fatherly image of a preacher in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (NIV).

> We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

A preacher–father or preacher-mother is a hard worker who would not desire to burden his or her children. Today, some preachers in Africa have become a burden to their listeners because some of the sermons end up in fundraising to meet the needs of the preacher—

even when the church members' needs are not met. The preacher–parent, is devout, upright and blameless. Integrity is their watchword. They are also exhorters and encouragers. When a preacher–father image is projected, the church and the society where its members are found will be a disciplined church and society. God's kingdom and glory are the ultimate goal of the preacher–father's sermon.

It also interesting to note, however, that earlier in the 1 Thessalonians passage, Paul has used the image of a mother to describe their ministry. He stated in verse 7-9, "But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." This a unique way to describe the nature, temperament and duty of a good preacher – a gentle nurse who cares for her flock and nourishes them with the word of God. The image of motherhood in Africa is not just that of childbearing and nurturing. In the words of Remi Akujobi, "with motherhood, a woman is considered blessed, she acquires a higher status in society, she is respected and mythologized."[32] Therefore, whether the preacher is a male or female, they ought to bear the image of blessedness, respect and godly, but humble veneration.

Priest(ess)

Priesthood is a powerful figure and image in the African worldview. This is a carryover from African traditional religion. In the words of Kodzo Mawusi, the priests and priestesses act as leaders of the cult.[33] People expect them to be "custodians of the moral codes and all that are righteous in the society. That is why, as people in a position of leadership, they expect of them that they must by themselves, be people of honour, virtue and integrity."[34] The priests in African traditional religion also have other functions such as guarding the community's customs and traditions and passing them on to the next generation. They confer blessings to members, (for example) before going for a battle, serve as intermediaries between the people and God, preside over sacrifices and offerings, and advise people on

proper ways of social living. They also carry out cleansing rituals to enable a member to be accepted back in the community and reconcile various warring parties.[35]

In relation to preaching, Eben Kanukayi Nhiwatiwa identified images of African preachers using the Shona culture in Zimbabwe. The images include *varimumhepo* (medium who brings the message above), *svikiro* (spirit medium), *mutumwa wa Mwari* (God's messengers), *muparidzi* (one who proclaims the message), *mushumairi* (the one who presents God's word to people), and *mufudzi* (shepherd).[36] With particular reference to *mushumairi,* Nhiwatiwa noted that "the root of the word goes back to *shuma*, to "represent, report (to higher authority)," and at times it means work has been done. The preacher is *mushumairi* in that he/she introduces the word of God to the people for deliberation."[37] Though preaching goes beyond an informational activity or just introducing the word of God to people, this suggests the representational, teaching and guiding responsibility of the priesthood.

The preacher–priests in African paradigm would, therefore, be people of honour, virtue and integrity. They would be intercessors and custodians of customs and tradition of the community—the preacher-priest is also a preacher-teacher. All of these resonate with the biblical image and functions of a priest as a teacher. The role of priests as teachers was highly acknowledged each time Israel went astray. It was the lament in 2 Chronicles 15:3, "For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law." When Jehoshaphat was to restore Israel, he engaged the priests in going around the towns of Judah to teach the people (2 Chronicles 17:7-9). Ezra was a priest-teacher per excellence. It was boldly said of him "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." (Ezra 7:10). The revival that occurred in Nehemiah 8 was a product of his (and other priests' and Levites') exposition of God's law. One of the problems with African pulpits is a lack of sound exposition of God's word.

When preachers see themselves as priests, they see their role as not

just proclaimers but explainers and expounders committed to sound biblical exegesis and expositions. That is what roots the word of God in people's heart. Jesus, the great High Priest, was mostly known as the Teacher while on earth. The image of a priest would really bring sanity and depth to the African pulpits and engender revival in the society. Stephen Olford affirmed this when he stated, "I believe that the expository preaching of God's infallible Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, concerning Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, is the ultimate hope for humanity's deepest need, church-wide renewal, national righteousness, and social justice in the world.[38]

Prophet(ess)

The image of a prophet resonates with the African culture and with biblical revelation. In a traditional African society, the prophets are mediators between God and the people, they lead people in worship, they act as spokespersons of their communities, foretell future events in the community, warn people of impending danger, and interpret messages from the spirits and ancestors. They pray to God on behalf of the people, act as judges and preside over disputes, advise people on religious matters, bless the people who undertake special missions in the community, carry out cleansing rituals and are the guardians of the community's customs and traditions.

The prophets' importance is what makes African Independent Churches place a high premium on the office and title of "prophet" in their movement. There is a contemporary challenge with this, too. Some preachers assume the role of prophets and bear the title, but play negative roles in the public square. Whether the prophetic ministry is to be foretelling or forth-telling is a critical issue among African preachers. In the opinion of Nhiwatiwa,

> One image of the preacher that indicates the African congregation's conflicting expectations is that of the prophet. While Africans do not see the preacher as a prophet, they expect her or him to play that role occasionally. Unlike in the West where *prophecy* means proclaiming a

> courageous message without exception to persons and institutions, in Africa *prophecy* means the powers of seeing through an individual's life and foretelling the future.

Prophecy consists of the two dimensions of foretelling and forth-telling. But an assumption that a prophet is known by a long white garment or braided hair or long beards (in an attempt to perhaps simulate the biblical Old Testament prophets) is not helpful. Getting back to the ideal is, therefore, required. The preacher-prophets are simply the mouthpiece of God for their generation. They foretell, and they forth tell. They declare the counsel of God for the now and for the future. Contrasting the contemporary reality from the ideal, Olawale Gbadamosi inquired,

> Is there any similarity between the prophets of this generation and the prophets such as Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel and John the Baptist? Not much! Or the condition in the church and the nation has become so good and godly that there are no stern words from our prophets? These prophets hardly ruffle feathers. Both sinners and saints alike are perfectly at home with them. They have no tough words for the chronic and hardened sinner on the need for him to turn from his wicked ways and go back to God. They rarely carry a burden on their hearts and certainly not a tear in their eyes – which were the distinguishing emblems of prophets of old. They purport to be acting for God while their interests and motives are actually the driving forces. Unlike Elisha who shunned the gift, like Balaam who loved the wages of righteousness and perverted God's gift because of love of money, these men would stop at nothing to reap material gains from that office. Some will even cajole and deceive saying, "Thus saith the Lord" when the Lord has not spoken."[39]

The preacher-prophets are those who will speak the mind of God without any desire for material gain. Anywhere they are, God is not silent. They speak truth to powers and challenge the status quo. McMickle stated that "when the preacher has the courage to speak

truth to power not only inside the church building but also in the streets and boardrooms and jail cells or the secular order" he or she is into prophetic preaching.[40] The preacher–prophets are in the order of such preachers like Martin Luther King Jr., Mojola Agbebi and Simon Kimbangu.[41] In the words of McMickle,

> We must be willing to do this if we are to be faithful to and worthy of following in the footsteps of Samuel who confronted Saul, Nathan who confronted David, Amos who condemned Jeroboam, Jeremiah who challenged both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and John the Baptist who did not grow mute or meek in the presence of Herod Antipas. In a time of "patriot pastors" and the belief that critiquing the leaders of the nation is both ungodly and unpatriotic, it is time for prophetic preaching. It is time to hear the words, "This is what the Lord says."[42]

However, the prophetic image in Africa will remain that of a miracle-worker and a problem-solver, whatever that might denote. An African preacher cannot brush that aside as his or her image, too. Jesus is the solution to all human problems, and wherever the word of God is preached, the truth is re-enacted in the life of the hearers. Spiritual gifts may differ, and each preacher must recognise their limitations in this regard. Whether through the grace of God upon the preacher's life or a teamwork with other genuine servants of God who are so gifted, African preachers cannot shy away from the expectation of their people to see God meet their needs and solve their problems through such preachers' ministry.

Conclusion

The public sphere has taken a dimension beyond the definition of Jürgen Habermas to be virtually everywhere opinions are shared about the welfare of a people—formal and informal meetings, books, print, electronic and social media, and practically everywhere. The ideal image of a preacher is the one found in the Bible. What is observed occasionally is a mixture of the biblical model and what

some African preachers have assumed, and which is not portraying well, their image in the public sphere. The public sphere is both a place for assessment and contribution. Some preachers have done well, and some have not. The public assessment of some needs improvement, and the contribution they need to make needs to go beyond the shadows of compromise. This paper has, therefore, postulated three images that African preachers can assume if they will do well in the public sphere: father/mother, priest(ess) and prophet(ess). These are powerful images arising from African tradition and culture and equally rooted in the scripture. With these images embedded, African preachers should be able to effectively participate in the public sphere and bring the needed transformation to the continent through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Let My People Breathe: Black Lives Matter and the Church in Africa

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Abstract

The world was recently reminded of centuries-old racial discriminations and inequalities through the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minnesota in the United States. In the light of the events that ensued his senseless killing, this article looks at and reflects on the realities of discrimination in Africa. It stresses that the perpetrators of discrimination against black people are not only people of other races but also fellow black people. It also points out that

the church has been a perpetrator of discrimination through some of its actions and its alliance with structures and institutions that undermine black lives in Africa. It bemoans a church whose prophetic voice is increasingly silent or weak as Africa sees the killing of many Black lives by Black people themselves. This article aims to call the church to recover its prophetic mandate in society by tangibly demonstrating that black lives matter. It uses the interpretive framework of John 13:35 to point out the realities of lack of love in society such as the marginalisation of the youth, women, persons living with disabilities, homosexuals, poverty, migration and the lack of access to land. It attributes this lack of love to self-hatred. It concludes that the African church is called to be known in all seasons by the way it loves and implements the philosophy of ubuntu which encourages solidarity. The African church, therefore, needs to demonstrate through its actions that it is a leading voice in showing that black lives matter.

Introduction

The world was recently reminded of centuries-old racial discriminations and inequalities through the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in the United States. His killing at the hands of four police officers led to global protests that revealed the existing wounds of black people's marginalisation around the world. These protests asked for this marginalisation to stop because all human beings were created with equal right and worth. This unfair treatment has, whether implicit and explicit, made it apparent that black lives do not matter. The guilty parties have not only been people of other races but also black people themselves. The protests were started by the #BlackLivesMatter movement—a movement that was founded in 2013 following the acquittal of white police officers who were involved in the brutal killing of an African American man. Its mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on black communities. It also aims to create space for black imagination and innovation so that joy can become a palpable reality and the quality of life of black people can be improved. The movement calls for black lives of different back-

ground, origin and nationalities to be liberated from the current oppressions and discriminations they face.[1]

Racial discrimination is something that black people are familiar with around the world. Therefore, anger, sadness, frustration, and fatigue are not episodic responses, but chronic conditions caused by different events of discrimination in their lives.[2] This is why what happened in the United States resonated with most black people from all over the world. In South Africa, the government urged its citizens to "support the movement, and South Africa and other countries across the globe joined in solidarity with the struggle for social justice."[3] While this move is applaudable, it is also problematic in the African context. It comes out like a finger pointing effort and hypocritical from African governments that are known for undermining Black lives. The South African Council of Churches responded to the president's call for the support of the #BlackLivesMatter movement by holding a silent protest on 7 June, 2020. It used that opportunity to remember that almost two months before their protest, there was a Black South African, Collins Khosa, who was also a casualty of law enforcement officers' brutality. This is a reactive action by an institution which is guilty of undermining black lives through some of its actions. It is also guilty of being silent or an ally of many African governments with a reputation of undermining black people. The protests that followed the killing of George Floyd made this author—as a Christian—to wonder if black lives matter to the African church. It is a reflection of how black lives matter to the African church. The latter continues to grow numerically, "but so too grow the realities of poverty, tribalism, corruption, violence, and civil wars" [4] which, in my estimation, are a knee on many Africans' neck. The African church is an institution that has participated in atrocities such as the "political imagination of Tutsi and Hutu as distinct races or tribes," which culminated in hatred and the killing of Black lives in Rwanda and other countries on many occasions.[5] These facts challenge a re-imagination of the African church as an institution that promotes black lives. In this article, I use John 13:35 as a framework to reflect on the role of the African church in affirming black lives. This passage

equates followers of Jesus to lovers of others. These followers could help catalyse "meaningful reconciliation built on the bedrock of eliminating all forms of structural [discrimination]."[6] Discrimination has meant that many black people *cannot breathe* in their local communities, their countries and local churches.

The Framework of John 13:35

This passage captures the legacy the church is supposed to be known for. In it, Jesus challenges his disciples to strive to be known by the way they love one another. Some scholars argue that it is meant to be an inward-focused love among believers. Tertullian is said to have used these words to encourage Christians: "See how they love one another, the pagans."[7] The gospel of John is generally interpreted as focusing on building up the community of disciples around Jesus. However, Elizabeth Johnson points out John 3:16 which talks about God's love for the whole world.[8] That passage clarifies the mandate of the church to be a tangible sign of love to the whole world, not only its inner circle.

This mandate can be connected to an existing philosophy which encourages Africans to live in solidarity with one another as an expression of love. This philosophy is called *ubuntu.* It prioritises "communal interests above individual's." [9] It promotes "mutual respect, decency, civility and good manners."[10] It frowns upon the ill-treatment of fellow human beings or the neglect of their human rights. It embraces the enhancement of "the communality of our human race and the advancement of truth, reconciliation and unity."[11] The African church can be inspired by both John 13:35 and the philosophy of *ubuntu* in order to be a role model in testifying through its actions that black lives matter. This role could be critical in the African context that has a track record of undermining Black lives.

A Context That Undermines Black Lives

History reminds us that slavery and colonialism undermined black lives. That same history reminds us that some fellow Africans were lured by the things slave traders and colonisers offered them and sacrificed the lives of their fellow Africans. Mongo Beti points out that Africa is known for its countless "tribal identities"[12] which, often times, prevail because they undermine the lives of others. This made Wole Soyinka remark that Africans are "destructive" of life like all other human beings.[13] This is evidenced by the many acts of violence the continent is suffering. Such acts do not allow the majority of Africans to breathe. Magezi Baloyi calls these acts of Africans undermining the lives of their fellows as self-hatred. Even nowadays, "black-on-black violence typifies Africa," says Baloyi.[14] It is expressed "in different forms such as "mob justice, xenophobia, homophobia, black undermining and even harassing other black persons."[15] This self-hatred negatively impacts the youth, promotes poverty, exposes the poor calibre of our leadership, marginalises others, has pushed many people to migrate and exposes other problems such as the lack of access to land.

The Youth

Nearly 1 in 3 Africans are between the ages of 10 and 24, and approximately 60% of Africa's total population is below the age of 35.[16] According to the United Nations Population Fund (2019), "youth are more than 1.8 billion in the world and nearly half of this number is in sub-Saharan Africa."[17] Yet, our current African societies seem to heavily rely on the knowledge and the wisdom of the adult community (age group from 35 and above) and marginalise the youth for its lack of experience. Local churches in poor communities such as where this author lives seem to be a perfect sample of this systemic marginalisation of the youth. The majority of church leaders across denominations are adults. The youth is noticeably leaving local churches because they *cannot breathe* in them. The middle age and

senior members of the church seem to constantly have their knee on the neck of the youth telling them that they have no adequate experience to participate in leading. Youth unemployment is also very high on the continent. Ziyanda Stuurman stresses that "youth unemployment figures are an important indicator of the status of any economy and society."[18] Unemployment is a reality of the distressed; it affects a person's self-esteem and self-confidence. According to the World Bank, the youth account for more than 60% of unemployment. This leads to youth poverty, which also does not allow people to breathe.

Poverty

According to the United Nations, more than 700 million people live in extreme poverty around the world. The majority of them are in sub-Saharan Africa.[19] In the context of South Africa where the population is multi-racial, "poverty" affects black people the most.[20] In March 2018, the World Bank in partnership with Statistics South Africa released a report stating that "South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, on every scale and measure in modern economics."[21] Mostly black people are at the receiving hand of this inequality. The poverty and inequality are enabled by fellow Africans who are leaders in their respective countries.

Failing Leaders

Baloyi stresses that negative forms of leadership that characterise Africa have suffocated many ordinary people and many others have succumbed to them.[22] Many of them have to tame ethnocentrism and nepotism.[23] It was ironic to hear the head of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat condemn discriminatory practices against black people in the United States. This is the head of an institution that did nothing to perpetrators of genocides in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. The African Union also never holds African heads of state accountable for killing many of their own citizens.[24] This is an institution that has been communi-

cating that black lives don't matter because it gives the benefit of a doubt to heads of states who are known for undermining the lives of their fellow citizens. Failing leadership is also seen at the local church level. In the context the author lives in, church leadership has become a family business. This nepotism disempowers other church members and undermines their ability to participate in expanding "the impact of the church beyond the borders of its walls."[25] We also see failing leadership in local communities where many black people are marginalised by their fellows.

Marginalisation

In some communities, the elderly, especially women as marginalised as witches. Many of them have lost their lives because they were accused of witchcraft. Friday Eboiyehi points that "the persecution of elderly women suspected to be witches is … widespread" and many of them have been murdered by their neighbours.[26] Such actions should be understood as part of the general marginalisation of women in African societies. Mensah Adinkrah describes this brutal killing of elderly women as "a form of gender discrimination."[27] The latter is also a normalised reality in the African church. For instance, many denominations restrict women participation in leadership. Some do not allow women to be ordained as ministers while others do not allow women to go to church when they are menstruating because they are unclean, among many other things. Gender-based discrimination sometimes translates into gender-based violence. In South Africa, for instance, discrimination against women overwhelms media headlines regularly.[28] It has reached crisis levels. The government acknowledges the crisis and has been mobilising the general population to collaborate with it in order to curb the crisis. Many women have been killed, raped or physically injured. And in most cases, the perpetrators are known to the victims.

People living with albinism and disabilities are also marginalised in many African communities. For people living with albinism, for instance, their "skin colour leads to negative social constructions

amongst Africans, including beliefs that they are evil, cannibals or cursed."[29] In countries such as Namibia, people living with albinism have to hide for fear of being killed for their body parts to be used in traditional medicine rituals.[30] In East Africa, especially in Tanzania, traditional healers think that people with albinism are immortal and that their genitals bring wealth.[31] In South Africa, many people think that they are a "curse."[32]

In many African communities, the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community is also marginalised and many of them have been killed by their fellows. Anti-LGBT rhetoric is the norm in many countries across Africa. The former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, once said, "Homosexuals are worse than pigs and dogs."[33] Some African countries such as Uganda and Zimbabwe have laws that have declared LGBT relationships illegal. Many black lives have been lost as a result of these laws. Even in countries like South Africa where it is legal to be a LGBT, many people still see it as evil and kill known LGBT, especially women. Some church denominations are also vocal about the evil nature of LGBT and they do not want to be associated with someone from the LGBT community. Many people from this community have migrated outside of local churches like many other fellow Africans who migrate because they can't breathe in their homes, be it a local church, a local community or their country of origin.

Migration

The United Nations (2020) estimates that "3.4% of the world inhabitants are migrants. This percentage is on the increase annually."[34] The migration of massive numbers of Africans to the West, East and South Africa is increasingly becoming problematic. Migrants face numerous hostilities from their hosts; from political leaders to local communities. The church sometimes gets to play the role of a servant leader in welcoming and caring for vulnerable migrants. However, in South Africa, sometimes both the church and migrants are rejected by local community members who see immigra-

tion as a liability. Many of these migrants would have loved to remain in their places of origin if they could breathe there.[35] Their leaders who are Black like them do not allow them to breathe the shared air God provided for them. They are known for being greedy and reign over their fellows through terror and tyranny. They have dispossessed their fellow citizens of their collective wealth and treasure such as land.

Lack of Access To Land

The lack of access to land is still a painful reality for many Africans. Many of them have been killed for trying to have access to the land of their ancestors. The colonial history of Africa created a problem of access to land that indigenous Africans are still at pains with. Maathai states that "across much of Africa, land ownership and distribution remain volatile issues."[36] The colonisers brought the concept of the title deed that has been an alien concept for many Africans. This is because land "is tightly connected to life as a whole … [it] is seen as a natural endowment that can neither be bought nor sold. Its tenure is based…on use and access. Every community member has common rights to the land because it is a communal good."[37] Because land is viewed as a birthright for all, "all members of the community are expected to share its resources."[38]

The Consequences of Self-Hatred

All the above-mentioned factors demonstrate some of the ways black lives do not matter to many Africans as well. They form a paradox both to the love admonition of John 13:35 and the solidarity which *ubuntu* philosophy preaches. Frantz Fanon wrote, "Negro symbolizes sin because one catches oneself hating the Negro."[39] Malcolm X concurs with this sad reality through these questions: "Who taught you to hate yourself, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race you belong to – so much so

that you don't want to be around each other?"[40] These questions point out the many ethnic, tribal or inter-country conflicts we regularly see in Africa. In many African contexts, it seems like distinctiveness has always been a reason for *othering* fellow human beings. The author is of the view that distinctiveness is an accident of history. Yet, in the day-to-day lives, it is used to justify hatred for a certain family, tribe, clan, and nationality amongst Africans. It is used to negate the value of *ubuntu* and the human rights of fellow creatures. It is used to maintain a status quo in the faces of power in many African countries. Few faces have been postured as the messiahs of their fellow citizens. However, reality shows us that they are self-centred and serve their own interests at the expenses of the majority of their fellow citizens. In South Africa, for instance, it can be said that the president of the country prioritises the governing party's interest over the country's. President Cyril Ramaphosa has once said that he would rather be seen as a weak president than split the governing party, the African National Congress (ANC).[41] According to him, his primary mission is to unite the ANC which currently suffers factionalism. His predecessor also shared this same sentiment. However, in their oath of office, the presidents of South Africa commit to protect and promote the rights of all citizens above anything else.

There has been many cases of corruption from the South African governing party's members that have gone unpunished for the sake of its unity. The preservation of this unity practically means that many black lives continue to be undermined by the people who supposedly liberated them. This is why the majority of South Africans still wonder why the face of poverty remains black when the government of the day is predominantly black."[42] Many Africans share this sentiment. Poverty is a tangible sign of the lack of love. Many people are poor because someone else is rich and making sure there is not a fair distribution of resources. In many African countries, the face of wealth is political leadership. Therefore, those who aspire to being wealthy get involved in politics. African politicians seem to be faithful ambassadors of the colonial system they fought against to liberate

their fellow citizens. Their actions reflect their being "good students of oppressive, exploitative and corrupt colonial regimes."[43]

Self-hatred seems like a pandemic in many local communities. It is seen through the destruction of assets such as healthcare centres, libraries, schools, municipal offices, cars of innocent people when there is a service delivery protest or a strike action. Frank Chikane stresses that "citizens of a democratic country have the right to protest but should refrain from stoning innocent motorists, or looting shops, or destroying goods of ordinary street traders who have nothing to do with the things they are protesting about."[44] Their right to protest should always take into consideration their duty to be law-abiding citizens who respect the right and dignity of other citizens. Self-hatred acts are seen regularly when ordinary people pollute their own environment. In many neighbourhoods, many people litter their own environment and relegate the responsibility of the maintenance of a clean environment to their governors.

Self-hatred contrast our aspiration to live in shalom communities which Linthicum defines as "an environment where socio-economic justice is available to all and community's problems and their resolve is a concern for all."[45] Such communities are characterised by "order and harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy and well-being."[46] These communities are desirable because, in them, Black lives matter. They are places where the quality of life is at its best. This is the kind of community the church is called to foster and catalyse as a way of it to be known by the way it loves.

The Role of the Church

The church has a challenging task to demonstrate that black lives matter in the face of growing inequalities and the worsening of the living conditions of the majority of Africans. It would do so by being a tangible sign of love and practise *ubuntu* in working in solidarity with the vulnerable and the marginalised, which is the majority of the African population. It has done so in many places such as the Democratic Republic of Congo where it catalysed the advent of democracy

through a national conference and multiple discussions between political actors. It helped facilitate "the building of a new society" where the lives of all its citizens matter.[47] In South Africa during apartheid, the Black Church sided with liberation movements to defeat an oppressive political system. This institutional legacy needs to be revived and contextualised so that the church can continue to be an advocate of life, and good quality of life for every African.

Nowadays, it seems like the church's prophetic voice is either weak or silent. It is faced with an independent Africa that seems to undermine black lives more than to promote and improve them. It, therefore, has to *pick a side* which cares for the common good.[48] Such a choice would raise its prophetic voice in society by speaking into national challenges.[49] It would call out the former liberation movements, now governing parties, that destroy black lives like we see them happening in many African countries.[50] It would collaborate with political powers without alienating its identity. It would not be silenced in its partnership with the powerful but would camp in its side to contend for socio-economic justice that would uplift the marginalised of our society.[51]

In South African, Kelebogile Resane points out that after the advent of democracy in 1994, many church leaders who were vocal against apartheid became allies of the new democratic government. From that time, the church "prophetic voice started being weak."[52] It would be advisable that " the church be vigilant against the disruptive influences of ideological allegiances in its midst."[53] Additionally "the identification with the interests and views of one's own political party, cultural group, class or gender has a way of inadvertently colouring one's moral views…on global problems."[54] In the global problems that matter to ordinary Africans, the church should "learn to make its contribution, not on the basis of its strong Christian morality, but on the basis of the cultural values shared by all members of the society in their diversity."[55]

The church is called to promote an inclusive society where all the generations matter. Jesus was unto something when he equated the kingdom of God to people such as children (Mark 10:13-16). In many

African societies, however, children's voices are not listened to. The youth voices are also not listened to. Local churches in the community the author lives in seem to be a microcosm of such a societal lack of consideration of the youth and children. The author reckons that all generations have wisdom to contribute to the building of a society. The church must intentionally source that wisdom. Such an intention would communicate that all lives matter including those of children and the youth.

Unlike politicians who tend to prioritise the well-being of their party or the political class at the expense of the rest of the population, the church must prioritise the common good. It should remain in tune with Jeremiah 29:7 which challenges it to intentionally seek the peace and the prosperity of the context it is in. In Africa, the peace and prosperity are urgently needed for the majority of the population who are poor and need improvement in their quality of life. The church, therefore, needs to be involved in poverty alleviate actions. Many lives of Africans are lost due to poverty. Many more lives are constantly in a survival mode because of poverty. A church that is a tangible sign of love should learn to journey with people out of poverty towards a fulfilling quality of life. It is meant to be a messenger of hope in the African context that is a lot "more interested in what it is doing to transform society so that justice and peace may prevail than in what it believes in."[56]

The church needs to be seen to preferentially serve the marginalised and bring them to the centre of local communities. Many people have normalised the marginalisation of others around them. Within the mainstream society, the rich's voice gets preferential treatment by governors. The church should be seen amplifying the voices of the marginalised because all lives matter. It, therefore, needs to be calling out injustices and demanding responses from "people in power" as well as ordinary people who ill-treat others.[57] Tutu challenges it to not be "neutral in situations of injustice."[58] He explains that "if an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate" that neutrality.[59] The presence of injustice undermines the reign of love Christians are

meant to promote and solidarity *ubuntu* is all about. Martin Luther King also challenges the church to not be neutral in remaining silent to acts of injustice. According to him, "silence is betrayal" and can be a weapon for accomplices.[60] Silence usually happens when the church collaborates with the powerful who undermine Black lives through their policies and practices as well as when there is the fear of being controversial.

It is mainly because of poverty that there is a lot of migration and internal displacement in Africa. When people realise that their lives don't matter to those who are meant to care for them, they move somewhere else in the quest for a caring environment. African rural communities have increasingly become undesirable environments. Many residents of these communities are moving to urban areas where they hope they would live in a caring environment. Many Africans are also crossing their national borders seeking a good quality of life elsewhere. A crucial role the church could play as a proactive interaction with the issue of migration and displacement is to be involved in initiatives that foster the improvement of good quality of life. It is been proven that the majority of internally displaced people and migrants "would prefer to remain in their places of origin if they can enjoy a good quality of life there."[61] Migration is seen as a liability in many host communities. This has sometimes resulted in violence against migrants or internally displaced people.

If migration and internal displacement are mainly caused by poverty, it can be argued that poverty and the worsening of the living conditions of Africans are caused by poor governance. This is why the voice of the church is critical to call out governors to act in a way to communicate that the lives of their fellow citizens' matter. Many of these governors accuse the former colonisers and the current biggest economies in the world to be the reason why the majority of their fellow citizens are poor. Ironically, some of these governors are among the richest people in the world. It seems like the most normal leadership model we see in Africa is not servant leadership. Many local churches are a sample of that model.

The African church should portray a leadership that communi-

cates that all Black lives matter. The church leadership seen in many local communities is a microcosm of political leadership. Nepotism is very common in those churches. The author reckons that people need to be elevated to leadership position based on their merit. Nepotism is a loquacious communication that not all lives matter, only a few. This is against the biblical principle of equal worth and dignity of all human beings because they were all created in God's likeness (Gen. 1: 27). Servant leadership would also raise a caring voice and speak truth to power in emotive issues such as access to land. Many Africans are still landless in their motherland. The land is still in the hands of very few people who are title deed holders. In the context of South Africa, the majority of "empty land is owned by the government."[62] A church whose priority is to love tangibly and live in solidarity with the marginalised would sit on the government neck so that land could be distributed speedily.

Conclusion

This article reflected on the worldwide protests that were sparked by the killing of an African American by 4 police officers. It focused on the realities of discrimination happening on the African continent. It stressed that these discriminations are mostly perpetrated by Africans to Africans. And the church participates in these discriminations directly through the ill-treatment of its members or indirectly by being a silent or weak prophetic voice in society. In other instances, the church is an ally to established powers and institutions that undermine and kill Black lives. This article used the interpretive framework of John 13:35 to remind the church of its calling to strive to be known by the way it loves and cares. The implementation of such a calling would demonstrate that Black lives matter. It would reverse the current trends of self-hatred we see at macro and micro levels of the African society.

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"In and Out of Africa": The Transnational Pentecostal Church Nzambe Malamu, Its Migratory Entanglements and Its Missionary Strategy

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Abstract

Transnational churches as Nzambe Malamu do not portray the Pentecostal movement as a whole, but only one of its segments. I examine here a certain Pentecostal Church, whose outreach is worldwide, from three different

perspectives: (1) the historic-postcolonial, (2) the socio-ecclesiological and (3) the aesthetic-performative dimension of the Pentecostal movement, which all correlate with one another. I want to show how the research of the Pentecostal movement is enriched by this interdisciplinary approach. Each of these three issues is limited and will be enlarged by a critical encounter by its neighbour-disciplines. Recognising the contours of this certain segment, our established mainline churches with their theologies as well as the Pentecostal Evangelicals are challenged to a constructive debate. Hopefully the debate with transnational Pentecostal Churches forces all its contributors to fashion a networked intercultural-interdenominational and ecumenical "Theology of Migration" which is already in process.

With the following considerations, I investigate one Pentecostal church whose outreach is spread worldwide, taking the following threefold perspectives which represent subdisciplines of Theology. These are: (1) the historical-postcolonial, (2) the sociologic-ecclesiological and (3) the practical-theological dimensions of the Pentecostal Movement. All are correlating and opening various perspectives to each other. Using these three observational postures, I want to show that the research of the Pentecostal movement[1] must enlarge its power of understanding by an interdisciplinary approach. Each of the three herewith connected perspectives leads us to formulate questions which find their answers partly through interdisciplinary extension towards its two neighbouring perspectives. One may assume these perspectives follow the three temporal dimensions of past, present and future: to have become a church, to be a living organized church in its present ecclesial self-description, and thus, to be a limb of the body of Christ—with its *becoming* effects—which is diffusing itself in external ways by performative practices (*Praxis Pietatis*) towards the forthcoming Kingdom of God. These three dimensions of time are related to each other and are finding a climax in the central figure of the church-founder Aidini Abala. He himself figures by his visionary charisma as a supposed irreplaceable witness of Christ.

The Historical-Postcolonial Perspective: Abala, Founder of Nzambe Malamu, Between Religious Traditions and Anticolonial Rebellion

Apôtre Alexandre Aidini Abala was born on 15 July 1927 in Ngibi in the province of Ituri, Northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. He died in South Africa almost three months after his 70th birthday on 10 October 1997. He had gone to South Africa to undergo special medical treatment after a long period of sickness. By his ancestral name, Aidini, he is allocated an African identity.[2] This is due to a concrete cultural tradition of the social interests of the clan into which he is born, and this demonstrates the influence of his family origin which is responsible for this name-giving ritual. As an individual, Aidini represents a socially constructed and powerful "reality." Until our present times, and over 20 years after his death in 1997, people in and out of the DRC mention him with high respect and appreciation in public as well as in Christian circles. He is qualified as "a person of integrity, powerful, and acting with the authority of the Holy Spirit." He is often characterized as "humble and strong."[3] His power management in the ministry of a church "was not without controversy" as an interviewee informed me.[4] As historians, we have to deal with the discourse about a personality which is in correlation to his call. We have even to be ready to deal with conflicts since one cannot keep controversies out of the way. On the one hand, we are presented the picture of Aidini as an outsider, frontier-crosser and energetic critic of a bigoted Christian, religious leader insisting on church traditions without knowing why he is doing so. On the other hand, Aidini was the fatherly founder of the Nzambe Malamu who did not even fear church splits in certain cases. To the contrary, one may ask a question, was he so keen on resolving differences and on reconciliation? It seems he believed it would be wiser to accept the split of opponents and rivals without showing aggression if the "truth" was concerned, and to thus keep the majority of believers following him.

He biographically told of himself and his career for the first time in 1996, one year before he died.[5] The title of that biography was

Apostle Aidini Abala – God Is Calling You to Serve Him! By that time, the Nzambe Malamu branch in Germany still called itself by the German name *Evangelische-Pfingstbruderschaft-Europas-in-Deutschland* (E.P.E.I.D). The main content of *Aidini Abala – God is Calling You to Serve Him!* is the history of his life which he puts into the centre of his descriptions. He characterizes his oral autobiography as an *experiment* that moves between two poles in one and the same immense web of relationships. The book is constructed in such a way that every segment extends concurrently from one phase of his life to the next, always between the contraries of desire and fulfilment. Abala's life-report is so far rhythmically constructed between call and response, between the one pole of being "called out" and the other a responding pole of positive reply as a successor of Christ. The latter is about the "crisis management" which is giving answers to the danger.

Abala's crisis management serves as a model for the whole Nzambe Malamu church in its religious practice. The listeners, especially those who are involved in the service and in its performative liturgy, are animated to give resonance. Emphatically, they are encouraged to accompany Abala with their own inner power of imagination: moving from one life-threatening situation to the next and from a productively interpreted turning point of their lives to the next. Each time the protagonist comes to new and decisive insights, he or she is seemingly empowered to do extraordinary deeds by which he or she implements the renewals, enlarging the actual sphere of influence of Nzambe Malamu concerning the foundation of its congregations, the winning of new members, and the expansion into new countries and regions beyond Africa.

The specialty here is that the biography of the *charismatic* Aidini Abala is performed by himself with the aim of documenting and underlining the legacy of his apostolic assignment. Today, his successors in church administration use the narrative for posterity, and in so doing, preserve the life of Abala for present purposes. When he reinvents himself performatively in the life of Jesus, of Paul or of the apostles, he embodies with his sermons the ideal Christian and the stereotypical parishioner of Nzambe Malamu.

The term *"transnational"* is justified and used by several scientific disciplines. It lends itself to fall back upon several of these different concepts. They all are plausible, if regarded from a transdisciplinary perspective. That means that we don't have to ask after "identities" which one can separate from each other as "units" concerning geographical, ethnological or nation-state points of views, but combine and interrelate empirical methods and disciplines historically to one another.

First, I ask myself about the "space" in which we may situate the specific discourses around Nzambe Malamu and, vice versa, reflected on how the discourses themselves constitute this space. The awareness for the conditions of the construction of Nzambe Malamu and its historical entanglements *between* the three continents Africa, America and Europe demands us to examine a useful term which is in use in the English-speaking world of sciences: "Black Atlantic" or even "Circum-Atlantic". The term was introduced in connection with globalization and postcolonial discourses by Paul Gilroy who relates the content to Stuart Hall.[6] But the scientific community in the meanwhile prefers the use of the well-established concept called by the adjective "transnational." The latter seems to be more practical concerning the research of the formation of networks. In our case we investigate networks of a Pentecostal movement. If I prefer to rely on the idea of "transnationality," it is because I want to show that we don't deal with the formation of identities just in an "international" but also in a "transnational" sense, analysing subversive processes of an ecclesiogenetic Pentecostal-charismatic counter-culture. This counter-culture stretches over "spaces", e.g. the real as well as symbolic "Atlantic."[7] As historians, we ask for dynamic processes happening between places. We are interested in power-structures and how they came into being. Here, in the space between Africa, the Americas and Europe, it is the area which was, for centuries, used for the inhuman slave trade. It is the very same space which still claims our injustice, actually the so-called neoliberal world economic order which is committed to neoliberal capitalism. Every year, thousands of migrants try to overcome the Atlantic or the Mediterranean Sea on

their passage from Africa to Europe. In this way the history of injustice has been written and is still being written.

By the term "transnational," we especially underline the idea that borders of nation-states are not at all to be interpreted as essentialist marks by which a nation defines its geographic space, thereby establishing a hegemonial identity. Furthermore, we must raise the question, where, why and by whom these frontiers have become much more relative and are even lifted to cross, and even forced to overcome them as far as possible. Nzambe Malamu is one of many churches, beginning with the history of their origin in manifold transnational entanglements (e.g. to the USA, to Great Britain, South-Africa, Canada, Germany etc.), which continue in the context of personal migration.[8] According to Anna Quaas, while doing "transnational research," we have to concentrate on the question of how far "transnational connections" play a role in the churches which we investigate and what could exactly be the meaning of this role. Here, I must stress the findings of Gerrie ter Haar that there were African churches which started with their spread out of the continent of origin by moving overseas to be among the first which participated in international networks, which they did not have access to until the late twentieth century."[9]

We must ask if this so-called *networking identity* of Nzambe Malamu, which was and still is steadily developing during its spread from Africa to Europe, is as novel as it looks. My conjecture is that not only did Aidini Abala himself generate it, but that such a genuine network-like self-understanding was common as an identity-marker among the precursors of the foundation of Nzambe Malamu in the 1940s in Kenya. This continued already for years up to the fifties of the 20th century following the first of Nzambe Malamu as a church. But how did such a small Nzambe Malamu church develop to be an effective and wholesome facet of the globalized world in its transnational religious dimension? It seems here that the "migration-factor" with its social as well as religious implications was beneath other mostly influential factors.

Nina Glick Schiller and Linda Basch, among the very first to

conceptualise "transnationalism" as an analytical frame of reference, state:

> To conceptualize *transnationalism*, we must bring to the study of migration a global perspective. Only a view of the world as a single social and economic system allows us to comprehend the implications of the similar descriptions of new patterns of migrant experience that have been emerging from different parts of the globe. At the very same time, it is in terms of these bounded identity constructs that migrants frame their individual and collective strategies of adaptation …. A focus on transnationalism as a new field of social relations will allow us to explore transnational fields of action and meaning as operating within and between continuing nation-states impose on their populations. Migrants will be viewed as culturally creative but as actors in an arena that they do not control. Transnational flows of material objects and ideas will be analyzed in relation to their social location and utilization – in relation to the people involved with them."[10]

Schiller and Basch, of course, do not relate only to experiences of migration in a narrow, transnational long-term movement away from a place of origin and its duration, but even to inner-state migration that translates into short-time migration which lasts only to a certain limited period. It seems that the only concern of the protagonists of transnationalism is the missionary expansion of the Pentecostal-charismatic version of Christianity.[11] Quaas herself is skeptical of observations which are resulting in the concept being called "reverse mission." Here we pose two questions: How can one assume a "global understanding of mission"? To what extent, historically, is "reverse mission" not a construct, especially as the missionary practice of the historical churches themselves was anything but unified?[12] Besides, according to my own analysis, the personal and organizational commitment of many of these leaders of migrant-churches in many cases takes place beneath their social, economic and political motives to migrate. Sometimes these

different motives are interconnected in a special way. Transnationalism, as a scientific method of research, seems to be more suitable for our case because it helps us understand the striking inner and outer mobility of the protagonists and congregations as well as to investigate their organizational ecclesial units better and to comprehend their dynamics. It is important to examine the original situations and relevant processes in their fluid positioning between possible "centers" and "peripheries." How is the original situation changed? What is different in each new position and how does both interact dialectically with each other? Ogbu U. Kalu states here, combining the questions and the relation between religious and secular motives and how positioning in respect to power-relations works: "They build international and intraregional linkages that enhance their evangelical capacities and image. There will be a tendency to avoid foreign control and yet desire to be recognized as a ministerial partner."[13]

One of the peculiarities of Nzambe Malamu, which is common with other "independent Pentecostal churches originating in the Global South" is its strong distraction. Its congregations are presently spread over three continents and in more than 30 nations. In Germany, the situation is no different. They recently numbered 17 churches. Interesting, in my opinion, is how they construct their collective identity as *a networked storytelling and interpretive community*. We could document how this discursive "brotherhood" could build up networking structures and was, at the very same time – and even up till now – threatened by permanent setbacks. It seems that networking, as well as any other forms of socialization, is threatened by conflict. The function of the Nzambe Malamu relational network depends on maintaining existing external contacts that go beyond the previously established network and its nation-state structure, and that new relationships are established. How far are these contacts vivid and is it possible to establish new ones? This needs enormous flexibility and shows how difficult it is to construct reliable organizational structures. Regional and global identities are constituted in reciprocal processes. This is supported, for instance, on a local level

by regular visits between leaders of congregations and organizing exchanges of visiting preachers on certain Sundays.

At the level of single parishes, there is a striking fluctuation of members as the consequence of inner migration. Inner migration is detectable on a continental level, that means in Africa, in Europe as well as in the Americas. Depending on the spatial frame, this may possibly have to do with *transmigration* among believers of Nzambe Malamu within the Federal Republic of Germany, but also between European nations and/or at a transcontinental level. It also happens that pastors within a country of migration are strategically shifted by church authorities to fill vacancies or to establish new congregations. Lay persons who move for private reasons eventually search again for a connection to an existing Nzambe Malamu congregation close to their new residence – or are even ready to function as an outpost of another forthcoming congregation.

The Sociological-Ecclesiological Perspective: Development of "Nzambe Malamu" as a Transnational Ecclesial Network

A significant role is played by Nzambe Malamu's cautiously so-called "networks". Networks knot or entangle themselves into existing contexts by tackling certain fibres, strands and existing links where they develop further. In doing so, the actors expect to strengthen their individual or collective identity which is created in discourses taking place between the imagination of the past and the visionary projection of a better future.[14] "Network" is a term or an imagination that nowadays dominates the scientific discourse of intercultural theology, as Michael Bergunder stresses.[15] If I understand Joel Robbins correctly, he tries—somehow parallel to my own use of the term "web of relationships or tissue of relationships," (Ger.: *Beziehungsgeflecht* or *Beziehungsgewebe)*—to define the originally sociological metaphor of the *network* (compare other terms: "tissue," "webbing" and "fabric") as a socio-theological category while questioning it ecclesiologically. Robbins defines it as a widespread network of people, which is kept together through their publications and other means of media

productions, conferences, revival meetings and constant travels and mutual visits among the church-leaders.[16]

The heuristic possibilities of the network idea functions in the context of what is meant by "frontier" (Ger.: *Grenze*, Latin: *limes*): It is especially clear that along these so-called frontiers and peripheries, one may identify the construction of Nzambe Malamu's identity by markers of crises and even breaks. Among these, three markers stand out: Charismatic leadership, transnationality and rituals of miracle-healing. The British missionary historian, Kevin Ward, speaks out firmly of the genesis of Global Christianity, which is not only creating the peripheries, but also recreating them: "Christianity was and is being created and re-created on the margins, the boundary, the periphery, and in so doing challenges the validity of all boundaries and peripheries."[17] Of course, such a full-bodied claim concerning all of Christendom can only be maintained against the background of hundreds of micro-analyses which Ward can refer to. A suitable definition of the socio-cultural concept of frontier is given by David Chidester:

> Following comparative research, I define a frontier as a zone of contact, rather than a line, a border or a boundary. By this definition, a frontier is a region of intercultural relations between intrusive and indigenous people. Those cultural relations, however, are also power relations. A frontier zone opens with the contact between two or more previously distinct societies and remains open as long as power relations are unstable and contested, with no one group or coalition able to establish dominance. A frontier zone closes when a single political authority succeeds in establishing its hegemony over the area. In an open frontier zone, contact can produce conflict, but it can also occasion new forms of cooperation and exchange. Attention to conflict has been most prominent. More recently, historians have also tried to identify areas of cooperative innovation in frontier social and economic relations. For our interests, however, the open frontier can be reexplored not only as a zone of conflict and cooperation but also as a contested arena for the production of knowledge about religion

> and religions. Religion, rather than race or ethnicity, provided the basic vocabulary of difference in the intercultural human relations of the frontier. The practices of comparative religion [and Christian denomination, M. F.] in frontier situations tracked the presence or absence of religion, and the similarities and differences among religions, within an open, contested zone of intercultural contact.… Enemies and friends were not divided into rigid, static categories.… On every southern African frontier, an open zone of intercultural contact closed with the establishment of some form of European colonial hegemony."[18]

The German historian, Jürgen Osterhammel, endeavours to use the term "frontier" from the Anglophone scientific discourse, which has long been in common usage in international sociology:

> In relation to the city the frontier is the 'periphery'. In the town [mother congregation] finally the control and the power over the frontier [diasporic mission-field] will be organized. If new cities are founded on the frontier [and new congregations in their context], the zone of contact towards the new environment will be moved further outside; new established trading bases will be erected (e.g. house-churches in camps for asylum-seekers; neighborhood-congregations and prayer-cells are basements for further expansion).[19]

The following two examples show that this kind of analysis is suitable for the historical deconstruction of Nzambe Malamu. In 2008, the former national director of FEPACO-Nzambe Malamu in Germany travelled twice to the Romanian capital, Bucharest, to evaluate the chances of church planting. Although he was not successful immediately in terms of founding a new congregation there and enlarging the catchment area of Nzambe Malamu towards Eastern Europe, he used existing contacts of Congolese living in exile who were already religiously affiliated members of Nzambe Malamu while living in the DRC. The eastern part of Europe, in which there were hitherto few members of Pentecostals from Africa,

is emerging as an attractive metropolitan area for diaspora communities.[20]

The second example refers to Nzambe Malamu's most important daughter-churches. The head of the GBG congregation ("Gemeinde-Barmherziger-Gott" being the literal German translation of "Nzambe Malamu") in Nuremberg regularly visits asylum seekers in the homes in the city. Quite a few of the church members were reached where they were concentrated and included in a home circle. Several refugees became church-members because they felt looked after. Some gathered even in Prayer and Bible study groups. Even some Arabs (former Muslims) and (a few) Asian people got attracted. The formal initiation into the Christian faith was manifested by their baptism in a small river near Nuremberg. This was another decisive step leading to the formation of the congregation.[21] These two case-studies or examples prove the following insight:

> The frontier isn't a passive periphery. Along its invisible lines, certain interests, identities, life-designs and types of personalities arise (e.g. those of the Evangelist, the Missionary or the Apostle), which feather back to the centers. Along the periphery (in the diaspora- and partner-congregations of the global south) the city (central-church) may recognize its counter-type.[22]

When we talk about "networks" we try to define transnational ecclesial "webs of relations." This means something which undergoes constant changes with its intersections, which materialize by personal or institutional contacts and relational entanglements. Especially here actions are planned, visions are reported, and performative actions take place in public services. In contrast, or even as a supplement of an easily structurally slightly ambiguous term, "network", I am concerned with the religious or cultural spaces, which its new inhabitants have to open up to and to "colonize." This takes place at the frontiers after these migrants have overcome the frontiers or frontier strongholds. The latter can be culturally, nationally, ethnically, sexually, age-related or geographically coded in various forms. Especially

the term "nation" is very likely in use. With this identity-marker, a large part of personal and communal aspects of the respective "self" can certainly be determined, as Norbert Elias' intercultural critique of globalization points out with his concept of "Transnational Social Spaces" (TSS)[23]:

> Due to the process of globalization, the conventional comparative analysis of different states, or geographical and social entities, no longer suffices to explain interlacing coherence networks'[24], constituting new social facts that emerged outside the unit of analysis of national societies or their local representations. Rather than simple comparative studies, simultaneous multi-site research with due regard to trans-local social spaces is required. In fact, this constitutes a basic insight of the TSS concept and the general methodological working hypothesis of this paper which should be tested in subsequent case studies.[25]

Nzambe Malamu is, in spite of its relatively big size, just one of several strongly growing churches in the DRC. As a member of the ecumenical Congolese church-body, the Église du Christ au Congo (ECC), which is instituted by state-law to regulate Christian religious organizations, FEPACO is officially registered and classified as a church, (*Église* in French) – subordinated to the Communauté des Assemblées de Dieu au Congo (CADC)[26] as its main theologian, Moyengo Loleka explains.[27] The FEPACO is registered by the number 37.[28] Loleka, who died in 2008 after my interview with him, was the head of the theological seminary of Nzambe Malamu, situated in Kinshasa. He compiled for me a list of 22 churches[29] which he titled "*les dissidents de la FEPACO*" (dissenters of FEPACO). Moyengo stressed: "… but there are even several more churches. Nearly all of their heads have not only been influential members but co-workers of Nzambe Malamu under the leadership of Aidini Abala." I was told, "We all are children of Aidini Abala!" for several times by Congolese and Angolan (mainly Lingala speaking) Pentecostals, who converted to the Pentecostal faith in the nearly 40 years of the work of the

founder of their church. Even those who in the meantime had already joined another Pentecostal Church or founded a church of their own, refer, in the construction of their own identity, to Abala as their founder. One identity-marker of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement is their extremely high rate of church-splits. This also affects Nzambe Malamu time and again.

Here in Germany, one of Nzambe Malamu's daughter churches, the Portuguese-speaking IFEPAA (Igreja de Fradernidade Evangélica Pentecostes na África, em Angola), whose headquarters are in Luanda, Angola, calls itself a Gemeinde-Barmherziger-Gott. The branch which is located in Germany is classified as a migration-church separated from the main body of the church since 2007, stressing its national Angolan identity with its church president residing in Luanda. By transposing the original term "Nzambe Malamu" out of Lingala into the German *Gott ist gutt* (translating "God is good), the self-understanding of this church in its regional version becomes clear. The latter puts the stress on its international Character. The question is whether we can really grasp the phenomenon of the self-dissemination into the northern hemisphere by this church, representing the global south, and do justice to Nzambe Malamu if we label it with terms like "migrant church" or "Diaspora church."[30] We realize by this self-definition clearly that identity is much less shaped by the concept of the migrant church but much more by the level of a specific, transnational as well as regional interconnected webs of relationships. To underline this observation, we can read in the self-description of GBG the following:

> It is the aim of the congregation to lead every human being – independently of his nationality, language and social context – to Jesus, so that everyone finally may "adore God in the spirit and the truth." The Holy Spirit guides us into intensive fasting and praying, so that we receive the strength for the street-evangelization, unity for the house-prayer-groups and love for the social work in the districts of the town. According to our vision we may visit men in prisons and hospitals and open up social facilities (schools, hospitals, old people's

> homes etc.). …. Part of our vision is to spread out the Good News of Jesus all over (Matthew 24:14). Therefor we start to build up new congregations in other towns.[31]

Those migrants found in the diaspora churches, who plant branches of a mother church and build up congregational life, are bridge-builders: between the continents, between the society of the residence here and other migrants there, between various local conditions, which at a time are delocalized, globalized and again re-localized. Concerning its transnationality at GBG there are quite many Germans or Europeans by origin as pastors (male as well as female) in charge as well as co-workers and in leading positions.

The Practical-Theological: Performativity of the Pentecostal Ritual of Healing With Nzambe Malamu

Finally, we discuss the question: what cultural, social and political factors make a church like Nzambe Malamu as interesting as it seems? I investigated the certain role of performative actions, especially in healing-services with Nzambe Malamu. There are only a few examinations using methods of ritual sciences concerning a specific Pentecostal-charismatic performative praxis. There are, for example, studies which interpret rituals in Pentecostal migrant churches as cases of communicating action.[32] By the analysis of concrete performances, I identified aspects of manufacturing and representation as well as tracing the processes of presenting and producing spiritual messages. Performances are like the putting on in a theatre or the carrying out of certain actions which involve and intermingle three aspects: the performer, the performed content as well as the audience are melded into one. We identify cultural processes, in which a collective subject of interactions are involved.[33] By the speech of the "interactive subject of utterance" we neglect the arbitrary differentiation between "collective" or interpersonal and "subjective" identity and try to overcome it where it where it rather obfuscates the contexts to be recognized rather than making them clear.

Intersubjective faith-healing as practiced in churches like Nzambe Malamu is, in cultural studies, termed "rituals of revitalization." These are performed mainly in consequence of an instructing sermon and in reference to certain paragraphs of the bible which are referred to as the script of the whole performance and "in the name of Jesus." Rites are repetitions in its original sense: Referring to a primary cause, which is repeated and presented. Form, procedure and the involved persons with their specific functions are fixed constitutively in order to maintain a higher order to which the whole refers and relates. But they are not only committed to the past, but as a basic religious act clearly have a prospective, future-opening element. Christian charismatic healing services have transcendent references to "performances of hope."[34] By the performance of its Healing-rituals Nzambe Malamu "invents" itself at certain places and times again and again. Regarding their content these rituals are performed mainly to overcome an identity crisis of a single person or of a whole group.[35] This is in regard to the changes to which the ritual is subject to as well as it is depending on contextual factors like the time, the place and the social clientele. Being concentrated on the performance of the healing-ritual I recognized certain continuities or principles of a structure. These are highly meaningful because they stand in opposition to the permanent changes of the social contexts. The experience of contingence and of historical and cultural circumstances within those rituals is transferring the experience of empowerment and life in abundance. Healing-rituals are transmitted via cultural practices which also are labelled as "transferring rituals." The latter can be observed by the point of view of an outsider in a diachronic perspective. From the point of view of the insider who is directly involved in the ritual, it is comprehended synchronically in its effectiveness. The liminality of the healing-ritual and its three successive sequences have been identified and described by Arnold van Gennep in his *Les Rites de Passage*. Our special regard is concerning the second or middle of the three ritual phases of that system.[36] The "virtual text" which is scripted into any liminal ritual – which even is counted as a social drama[37] - is quoted even in ritual Pentecostal healing performances.

The question of the "dynamics" of rituals is answered by cultural studies by recognizing them as "meaningful transformative performances."[38] Not only our investigations concerning Alexandre Aidini Abala and the healing-ritual of the Pentecostal movement are comparable with examples of worldwide cultures and their religions. The significance of the role of the conductor of a ritual as a performer is mostly evident. His ability to "refine the body" shall give access to the "primal powers of the human persona are to be made accessible, which can then be awakened in the audience in the auditorium".[39] One has to give attention not only to these who are directly involved into the ritual and their resonance which is visible in their bodily techniques which are stimulating their perception, but even to those who seem to be passive. They do grant not only the frame of the plot but react on the whole in its visible dimension and in those aspects which are from the outside invisible. The identity-founding effectiveness of a performance co-constitutes as "power," the "world" and "faith." It depends crucially on the coding of the frame, in which the performance is practiced.

In my opinion, the healing rituals of Nzambe Malamu, contrary to explicit self-expression, are not so much about achieving certain healing successes as about implicit self- consecration as a church. As a latter Nzambe Malamu finds itself especially as a migration-church in a permanently extremely fragile situation. Healing rituals do have a centripetal power which is of high importance for the cohesion of such diasporic churches which understand themselves as institutions of salvation. The founders of the churches do have central positions as was in the case of Aidini-Abala. This position was attributed to him until the end of his life and, in addition, until the present. At the moment of his death in a hospital in Durban, South Africa, the following sacred healing miracle is reported by which his fame was strengthened and he virtually was canonized to be a saint: Many sick persons got healed at the very same instant when he passed away, raised out of their beds healthy and they could leave the clinic. The martyr-like death of Abala is associated with mythical magic in the sense of the following lexeme which we might interpret in a Christo-

logical way: "And by his wounds [his death] we are healed!" (Isaiah 53: 5, 1 Peter 2:24).

Conclusion: How a Church-Founder of a Transnationally Entangled Pentecostal Church, Operating "in and Out of Africa", Receives the Nimbus of a Martyr.

As a summary of my explanations I would like to make the following conclusion: Trans- national churches like Nzambe Malamu do not depict "the Pentecostal movement" as a whole, but one of its segments. This has so far eluded our observation because of its transnational origin and discourse history. In other words, the history of its emergence and its discourse was neglected. But from the perspective of a German researcher this is all the easier because we do meet this church in Europe in the shape of the so-called "migrant congregations" "at our doorsteps." While recognizing the historical-postcolonial, the sociologic-ecclesiological and the practical-theological contours of this segment, the (our) mainline-churches with their established theologies are forced to a constructive confrontation and more, to a vivid encounter. It remains to hope that both these kinds of "protestants" – the established-classical as well as the Pentecostal-charismatics – while struggling with the question: "What is a contemporary church?" do recognize the critical potential which is always hidden in the "other" version of the protest and use it, developing their own respective ecclesial identity. In this sense we all are forced by transnational Pentecostal churches to continue with our work on an entangled intercultural-interdenominational and ecumenical theology of migration.[40] But to do this here right now would transcend our original question concerning the transnationality of the Pentecostal movement with its migratory connections.

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1. Moritz Fischer, "Pfingstkirchenforschung Von den Anfängen zu aktuellen Schwerpunkten," *MD* 3/65 (2014): 43-47.
2. The different ways of writing the name "Aidini", the second part of his threefold name, isn't with its three versions "Aidin", "Adini" and "Aidini" as irritating as it seems from a historically perspective. I prefer to use consequently "Aidini", the written form, which is also used in Abala's official biography, published by FEPACO. "Aidin", therefore, is something like the phoneme of his name. And "Adini" has its roots in a hearing error of an American informer of David J. Gerrard. See David J. Gerrard, "Adini-Abala," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Alexandre, 2003), 308.
3. Edi Mbongompasi, interview by Moritz Fischer, 2009/07/26.
4. Gerrard, "Adini-Abala," 309.
5. *Aidini Abala Frankfurt 96,* vol.1/2.
6. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. See also Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation.* London: Hutchinson, 1987.
7. The term "Trans-Atlantic" and the connected perspective is also used in the following monography: R. Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theologies: The Black Church Movement in Britain in its Transatlantic, Cultural and Theological Interaction with Special Reference to the Pentecostal Oneness (Apostolic) and Sabbatarian Movements* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1992).
8. Personal communication via email from Anna Quaas to Moritz Fischer (2011/02/03). See also Anna Quaas, *Transnationale Pfingstkirchen: Christ Apostolic Church Und Redeemed Christian Church of God.* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2011), 15-39, 194-301.
9. Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 24. Also Quaas, *Transnationale Pfingstkirchen*, 26.
10. Nina Glick Schiller and Linda Green Basch, "Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration," in *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration, Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*, ed. Schiller, Nina

Glick and Linda Green Basch, (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992), 19.

11. Claudia Währisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe: Bringing Back the Gospel* (Leiden, 2009). Währisch-Oblau speaks definitely about "new mission churches."
12. Anna Quaas, *Transnationale Pfingstkirchen: Christ Apostolic Church Und Redeemed Christian Church of God* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2011), 401f.
13. *Ogbu* Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.
14. Währisch-Oblau uses in view on Migrant-churches explicitly the term "Pentecostal networks" (42). She combines therefore some definitions (43) and gives a list of certain discursive fields (44-45), by which Pentecostal-charismatic identity describes itself.
15. Michael Bergunder, "Der "Cultural Turn" und die Erforschung der weltweiten Pfingstbewegung," *Evangelische Theologie* 4/69 (2009): 248-49.
16. Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 125.
17. Kevin Ward, "Introduction," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and B. Stanley (Grand Rapids: 2000), 3.
18. David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 26.
19. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19 Jahrhunderts* (München, CH Beck, 2009), 465.
20. Mbongompasi, interview.
21. Timoleon Adote, interview by Moritz Fischer, 2009/03/29.
22. Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt,* 465.
23. Ludger Pries, "*Transnational Social Spaces*: Do We Need a New Approach in Response to New Phenomena?," in *New Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries, (London: Routledge, 2001).
24. Pries, "Transnational Social Spaces," 3.
25. Dirk Kohnert, "On the Renaissance of African Modes of Thought: The Example of the Belief in Magic and Witchcraft," in *Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Witches, Witch-hunts and Magical Imaginaries*, ed. B. Schmidt (Hamburg: Verlag Dokumentation and Buch, 2007), 43.
26. This is the mission-agency of the US Pentecostal church, the Assemblies of God which has a foreign-department in Congo.
27. Dieudonné Moyengo Loleka, "Le Dévelopement et la Vocation Sociale de l'Église Fraternité Evangélique de Pentecôte en Afrique au Congo (Nzambe Malamu)" (PhD dissertation, UNISA, 2003), 73.
28. Herewith FEPACO is counted under the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (USA) and among their "Division of Foreign Mission" (Springfield) without an own sovereignty. Cecilia Irvine, *The Church of Christ in Zaïre: A Handbook of Protestant Churches, Missions and Communities 1878-1978* (Indianapolis: Dept. of Africa, Division of Overseas Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1978), 11. The following mission-fields where the church is working, are mentioned: Kinshasa, Bandundu, Bas-Zaïre; as a Représentant Légal is referred to Rev. Kabanga-Mauidi. In this handbook are mentioned the US-America independent Elim-Missionary-Assemblies, which important for Aidini Abala's development: "Communauté Elim

Evangélique au Zaïre" is the official designation with its center in Kinshasa, was founded on April 7th, 1975. It is officially designated as "Mission Elim Pentecôte au Zaïre," without mentioning the main-responsible persons. The column which is scheduled for this information is empty. See Irvine, *The Church of Christ in Zaïre*, 18. Elim worked independently, but cooperated even with the AIM and other locally based Mission-agencies in Kenya, Emma Butler, *In The Shadow of Kilimanjaro: Pioneering the Pentecostal Testimony among the Maasai People* (New York, Pinecrest, 2002), 24.

29. Moyengo Loleka, interview by Moritz Fischer, 2007/03/02.
30. Similar studies with focus on African presence in the West: Claudia Währisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception/Charismatic Church Leaders*; Regina Jach, *Migration, Religion und Raum, Ghanaische Kirchen in Accra, Kumasi und Hamburg in Prozessen von Kon-tinuität und Kulturwandel* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005); Benjamin Simon, *Afrikanische Kirchen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2003).
31. "Congregation of Merciful God," (www.gbg-ffm.de.)
32. Gerrie ter Haar, "Ritual as Communication: A study of African Communities in the Bijlmer District of Amsterdam," in *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, ed. Jan G. Platvoet and Karel Van Der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 115-42.
33. Erving Goffman, *Wir Alle Spielen Theater* (München: Piper, 1983); Erving Goffman, *Encounters* (Indianapolis, Ravenio Books, 1961). The contribution of Erving Goffman to Performativity Studies is described and analysed by Constanze Bausch, "*Die Inszenierung des Sozialen. Erving Goffman und das Performative*," in *Grundlagen des Performativen*, ed. C. Wulf, (München: Weinheim, 2001), 203-25.
34. See Theo Sundermeier, *Was Ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft Im Theologischen Kontext* (Gütersloh: Chr Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 83ff.
35. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1996), 107.
36. Arnold Van Gennep, *Übergangsriten* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1986).
37. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu-Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction. A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Victor Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985); Victor Turner, *Das Ritual: Struktur und Anti-Struktur* (Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 1989); Victor Turner, *Vom Ritual zum Theater: Der Ernst des Menschlichen Spiels* (Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 1989).
38. Ursula Rao and Klaus-Peter Köpping, "Die 'Performative Wende' Leben – Ritual – Theater," in *Im Rausch des Rituals: Gestaltung und Transformation der Wirklichkeit in Körperlicher Performanz*, ed. Ursula Rao and Klaus-Peter Köpping (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000), 1-31.
39. Rao and Köpping, "Die "Performative Wende"," 13.
40. Gemma Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration. Pilgrims in the Wilderness* (Leiden" Brill, 2010); Moritz Fischer, "Migrantennetzwerke," *Verkündigung und Forschung* 2/57 (2012): 149-57.

Book Reviews

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Book Review of "World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narrative & Missiology" Edited by Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Dan Yarnell

Olofinjana, Israel Oluwole. Ed. *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narrative & Missiology*: Oxford, Regnum Books International, 2020. £9.60 (285p). Reviewed by Rev Dan Yarnell[1]

Christianity has always been at its core a missionary and migratory movement.[2] Our faith has crossed cultures and continents, challenging ideas and ideologies, expanding and growing as the story of Jesus has been transmitted and translocated around the world. Through intentional missionary endeavours as well as impromptu opportunities, a cacophony of expressions representing much of the world's tribes, tongues and languages can be found. This is equally true in the nominally Christian domain of Western Europe, where decline is often the popular narrative, but where various expressions of diasporic followers of Jesus are engaging in new missionary endeavours, providing new expressions of our 2000 year-old faith.

This new and vitally important work, edited by Israel Olofinjana, brings some sharp focus on many of the key issues that affect the continuing missionary endeavours of Western Europe.

The important range of voices and reflective practices enrich this

volume, proving a wide range of experiences, underpinned by good missiological and theological reflection.

The work begins with a very helpful framing chapter by Olofinjana, which introduces the reader to the main themes as well as tracing an historical reading of the expansion of Christianity. Some of the key salient points are introduced which will be explored by the various contributors as well. The work is then arranged in three parts which provide a very helpful framing of the key contributions.

Section one focuses on the issue of diasporic identities. Stephen Dye brings some important insights in understanding how this affects the missionary identity within the context of the missionary work in Germany, especially in light of developing multi-ethnic congregations. One of his key insights notes that the most effective church planters and missionaries were those who not only related to various immigrant cultures, but they were adaptable to the host culture. This is later defined as transcultural mediators, those who can be the bridge-builders between differing identities. This is then followed by Tope Bellos' contribution as she reflects as a 2nd generation African Christian in Britain and the challenges/opportunities this has presented her with. She explores how her dual identity was a great personal challenge as she was growing up within two differing cultures and world-views, as well as the unique opportunities this has afforded in ongoing Christian mission. Rosalee Ewell follows this with a Biblical and trinitarian reflection on some key scriptures that inform and transform how engaging with God as trinity (missio trinatatis) can empower and shape us in our encounters with others. The final contribution in this section is by Dulcie McKenzie, who provides some important theological and sociological reflection on her own African Caribbean heritage (ACP) and the historical journey of those from the Windrush generation and beyond. Foundational to her reflections is both the issue of identity as Pentecostals who had not found a home within the host culture churches in Britain, as well as the significance of music and congregational worship which reinforced identity as well as empowered them for mission. In her words, it was 'dramatic, performative and transformative.' (p. 83).

This is then followed by a second section entitled missional narratives. Here we engage with four practioners who reflect on their missionary experiences in four different contexts: Flavio Gurratos and his wife as Brazilians working in Britain; Jim Stewart who conveys the experiences of various majority world Christians in Wales; Nils Malmström and his important reflections on various Pentecostal Immigrant churches and their approaches to mission in Sweden; and finally Claire and Mark Ord, British missionaries who explore their experiences in Italy. All four of these are excellent examples of action-reflection approaches to the work of God and their experiences within the wider Western European context. There is a great deal of personal honesty as well as engagement to the wider theological and missiological settings which have enabled them to posit their viewpoints so helpfully and clearly.

The final section focuses on key missiological insights that help to reflect and inform the continuing missional encounters. The strength of this section is the wider cultural, ethnic and theological insights which each contributor provides. S Kim gives a coherent case study of Korean diaspora experiences, especially within Central Asia. This is well informed with clear engagement in reviewing the differences between traditional and diaspora missiology and the way in which the Lausanne Movement has nurtured this approach. His work underscores the importance of 'practicing truly biblical, evangelical ecumenism…' (p.167). This is followed by Usha Reifsnider's important contribution in exploring the historical and missiological interaction between indigenous British Christians and Gujarati Hindu migrants. Noteworthy is the need to nurture and develop diaspora converts, who become British Gujarati Hindu background insiders who would have a stronger voice and presence than the well-meaning and well-trained Western missionaries. The final contribution is by Israel Olofinjana. In this final chapter, after providing a very clear and helpful historical summary of African mission initiatives in Britain, he begins to posit some contours in developing an African British Theology, part of the wider Black Theology, but more finely tuned around African identity as a contextual, postcolonial expression. This holds in

tension the issues of identity and engagement in the postmodern, secular UK environment. He notes the strength of approaches to reverse mission, but moves the engagement on from merely evangelism, church planting and social engagement, as valuable as these are, to seeking to address the deeper structural issues which would bring about a longer lasting socioeconomic and political change, including racism, which could engender the mission work as fresh expressions of good news, thereby transforming and renewing British culture more in line with Kingdom aspirations.

I highly commend this valuable and timely contribution; for its breath and depth of reflections, the extremely valuable case studies, as well as its robust theological and missiological insights. It has been an important contribution which has informed, challenged, and transformed my own understandings and practices in seeking to continue to participate in the trinitarian mission of the good news of Jesus.

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1. Rev Dan Yarnell is Senior Lecturer, ForMission College
2. Walls, A. & Ross, C., eds. (2008) *Mission in the 21st Century*. London: Dartman, Longman & Todd. See especially the afterward by Walls, entitled ' Christian Mission in a Five-Hundred Year Context', pp. 193-204.

Book Review of "Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church" by Harvey Kwiyani

Damilola Abraham

Kwiyani, Harvey *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* London: SCM Press, 2020. £21.99, (156p).

The United Kingdom represents one of the most multicultural societies in the twenty-first century world. People from different racial, ethnic and migrant backgrounds have been representative faces in the different sectors of the British Society.[1] However, the Church in Britain has not been able to maximise the opportunities presented by the cultural diversity of its society as British Christianity remains highly segregated. Harvey Kwiyani, Liverpool Hope University's Mission and African Christianity scholar from Malawi in his book *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church*[2] addresses the problem of segregation in both the British Christian context and among African Christians in Europe and North America by arguing strongly that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of many cultures. The author contends that "there is no other way to conceive the *ekklesia* apart from it being a multicultural community of followers of Christ worshipping and serving God wherever they have been scattered around the world" (p. 3). This evokes the eschatological vision of Apostle John in Revelation 7:9 where a multi-racial, multi-

lingual and uncountable throng of people, known as the church triumphant congregate to worship God. Cultural diversity, the book argues, has come to stay in the church of the West and it is the way forward.

Kwiyani argued persuasively that cultural diversity in contemporary British Christianity which is attributed to migration of thousands of Africans, Asians, and Latin American Christians to the country in the past 70 years, is the *new normal* and will have greater impact on the Western religious and cultural landscape in the 21st century. The book narrated how African Christian migrants (such as Bankole from Nigeria and Kweku from Ghana), the Windrush generation from West Indies, Latin American missionaries and other Asian Christians (particularly from South Korea) have all come to Britain with their version of Christianity which he called 'their faith and gifts,' giving rise to a more diverse British Christianity. These variegated foreign expressions of faith co-existing in the country makes Britain 'the centre of World Christianity.' According to missiologists, these migrations and proliferations of Christians from the third world in the West are a fulfilment of a hope earlier expressed by protestant missionary movement in the 1790s. In a concept termed 'blessed reflex,' defined as 'the rising presence of non-Western Christians in Europe,' Western missionaries had hoped and spoken of a day in the future when Christians from unevangelized lands (Africa, Asia and Latin America) would come to help invigorate Western Christianity. Today, the author concludes, "the blessed reflex is finally here" (p. 20).

In deepening his argument that multicultural kingdom is here to stay, Kwiyani submits that as the world is constantly changing, so should the church. Like the 'sharp penknife' of a guest which represents a new wisdom and understanding in his native Malawian proverb, the cultural diversity in British Christianity, he asserts, is a gift from God (p. 77). The book offers some biblical and historical basis for a multicultural and diverse Christian congregation. Examples include: Jesus commanding his disciples at the eve of his departure to replace the limited commission (Matt. 10:5-6) with the great commission (Matt. 28:19), the dispersion of the Jews from Palestine to

various cities in the Greco-Roman empire, the multicultural nature of the Roman empire in the first century, the multicultural beginning and leadership mix of the first Christian communities, and through the preaching and epistles of Apostle Paul which challenges ethnic and religious distinction between Jews and Greeks. Just like Paul advocated that the body has many members with different gifts and functions (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4), British Christianity will be enriched with the gifts brought to the table by migrant Christians.

In the concluding chapters, Kwiyani touched on some other germane issues such as multicultural ecclesiology, the different models of multicultural congregations, tribalism in the church, and how to make multiculturalism work. He argues for a multicultural ecclesiology since ecclesiologies are significantly shaped by cultures and these cultures will be expressed differently in worship. Hence, multicultural congregations must learn to manage the tension between their *congregational culture* and the many subcultures of their members, learn from one another in humility, be willing to adapt their worship services, music styles, food, greetings, and many other things that will encourage new members with different cultures to feel welcome in their congregation. Certainly, multicultural congregations are the way forward in the West as people of different cultures (races, classes and nationalities) live together. Monocultural churches, especially in the contexts of cultural diversity is unbiblical and it is foolishness to continue to justify segregating churches.

This important book is strong on many fronts. Kwiyani's writing style is engaging, clear and concise. The book is faithful to its main thrust: global churches and Christians in Britain should embrace multiculturalism. This appeal cuts across both British white congregations and African monocultural congregations like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Church of Pentecost (CoP), the Living Waters Church, Calvary Family Church and many other tribal African congregations mushrooming in different parts of the country. Yet, the book serves many other useful purposes: Readers have many things to learn about colonialism, migration, Pentecostalism, history

of missions and African philosophy and wisdom. Although, the book has some emphasis that were not resolved, like the all-important subject of racism. Since racism plays a big role in why many churches have refused to embrace diversity, the author would have done well to unpack it the more. A recent book, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* by a black priest in the church of England, Fr. A.D.A France-Williams is one revealing book which explores the problem of institutional racism in the Church of England.[3] Within American Evangelical context, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith highlights the deep-seated problem of racism in the church.[4] Kwiyani's book is nevertheless a compelling and thought-provoking read. It brings a paradigm shift in the ecclesiology, praxis and practices of churches in a multicultural British context and in the church of the West at large.

As one of the church leaders in a predominantly monocultural Nigerian church in the UK, who has been convinced all along that something is not right in the way my church and some other African monocultural congregations in the UK are constituted, this book has stirred a burning desire in my heart to see homogenous Churches in the UK open her frontiers to other cultures and ethnic nationalities. This noble contribution by Kwiyani, undoubtedly provides the needed clarity, theological and missiological grounding for missiologists, church leaders, scholars, and anyone who envisions multicultural congregations. It is highly recommended.

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1. The likes of Mo Farah (Marathon Sport), Idris Elba (Acting), John Boyega (Acting), Eniola Aluko (Female Football), Anthony Joshua (Boxing), Amir Khan (Boxer) and many others are examples of people from migrant backgrounds or minority ethnic groups that are representative faces of Britain in their various fields.
2. Harvey Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2020).
3. A.D.A. France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* (London: SCM, 2020).
4. Michael O Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).