



MOYA CHRONICLES

A PUBLICATION OF MISSIO AFRICANUS



A HOLISTIC GOSPEL FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH

Okuchukwu Akpe

Several concerns are plaguing the African continent ranging from bad governance, illiteracy, lack of social infrastructure, exploitation, corruption, insecurity, and others. Amid the political tension as Nigeria prepares to elect another president in the next few months, a trendy jargon, *èmi l'ó kàn* (meaning “it’s my turn”), has emerged from the political space. While this slogan has generated several reactions, it has also found adoption in various spheres of life and writing, including this essay. I begin this piece with a thought on *èmi l'ó kàn* because, in agreement with one of the multiple perspectives on the clause, it points to concepts deeply ingrained in the Yoruba (African) ethos—concepts that speak about Africans’ sense of justice, fairness, equity, reward, and entitlement—justifiably. In this write-up, I reflect on a holistic gospel for the African Church—a gospel that supports its faith profession with demonstration. The reflection is twofold; first, I reimagine the African Church and its role from a scriptural perspective, and second, I contemplate some weaknesses of the contemporary African Church and suggest ways it can embody a holistic and transformative gospel.

The African Church and Its Role

Two ideas immediately come to mind whenever someone speaks of an African church. First is the thought of a predominantly African congregation. Second is the notion of a church confined geographically to the African continent or its socio-cultural milieu. While these assumptions are sometimes the case, they are not always accurate and can be limiting for missions. A more helpful way to contemplate the African Church is to think of it as a product of the *indigenisation concept* or the *homing principle* of the gospel. This concept speaks of the gospel’s incarnational character—its ability to infiltrate and interact with different elements of its host culture (in this case, Africa), thereby making a home for itself. This continuous process results in a community of believers like the African Church.

One key role of the Church is to bear witness to the kingdom of God in words and deeds. Hence, in its evangelistic endeavour, the Church must pay attention not only to its message but also to its recipients and the culture it intends to reach. It is high time the church in Africa jettisoned a

spirituality that emphasises one side of the equation over the other. A spirituality that does not reflect in daily living, fairness, justice, goodness, and other godly virtues is defective. As such, I have suggested a few areas of reform for the African church in realising a holistic propagation of the gospel.

Indices of a Holistic Gospel for the African Church

First is **theology**. A theology that uncouples the religious and social life has not fully understood the God of the Bible and does more harm than good. The church in Africa must insist on a theology that stresses the need to demonstrate faith in social action, as with the Messiah's jubilee year symbolising justice and freedom for the oppressed and broken (Isaiah 11:1-5). Of course, in Christ, the jubilee year of restoration has begun (Luke 4:17-21) and should be evident in loving acts. Some of these demonstrations of love in biblical records, which the African Church can find inspiration from, include showing kindness to all, even strangers (Deuteronomy 10:18-19), feeding the poor and the hungry (James 2:14-17), and promoting justice (1 Kings 3:16-28) among others.

Second, **compassion**. Compassion is a true biblical practice well-informed by sound theology. Biblical compassion depicts tenderness and the feeling of being touched by the situation of the oppressed, disinherited, and the sinned-against. While the Church in Africa must not neglect its primary role of preaching the gospel, it must also be alert to its environment's economic, social, and political misery. Compassion must move the Church to get involved in alleviating the suffering of the people. The Church must draw from God's grace of compassion, who said about the enslaved Israelites in Egypt, "I have seen the misery of my people, and I am concerned about their suffering, so I have come down to rescue them." (Exodus 3:7-8 paraphrased). During his earthly ministry, Jesus was also often moved with compassion to heal the blind, feed the hungry (Matthew 15:30, 20:34), and attend to the marginalised. Likewise, the gospel the church professes must touch those excluded

and disinherited by the current world order, or it will not be the gospel at all. It must compel the African Church to reach those in the slums, pub houses, jungles, and Internally Displaced Persons camps. This holistic gospel must speak truth to power, saving the deteriorating environment and communities ravaged by terrorism.

The third is **the church model**. The Church in Africa has embodied, over time, an institutionalised structure that has increasingly distanced it from the people. There must be a rethink and the development of contextualised ways of doing church that help the church to be closer to the people and see their struggles. The church will not have to wait for the helpless to come to it. Instead, identifying them and attending to their needs will be quick. The Beautiful Feet Ministry in Jos, Nigeria, is doing well in this regard through a small group discipleship-making approach filled with love and aimed at a holistic community transformation. This strategy has recorded outstanding results and continually produces mission-minded people of disciple-makers who reach and lead small groups in several zones plagued by high crime rates, drugs, and hardship.

I am, therefore, using this essay to invite the African Church to proclaim a holistic gospel. We have to integrate our gospel proclamation with demonstration for it to be missional indeed. As we do this, may the missional potential of African Christianity emerge gloriously.



Okuchukwu Akpe is a Bachelor's student of Missiology at ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja with budding interests in African Christianity & Cross-Cultural Mission.

SUBSCRIBING IS EASY

WhatsApp 'SUBSCRIBE'
to +44 7566 826690

and we will add you to our lists. You can also
access previous episodes on our website:

<https://missioafricanus.com/category/moya-chronicles/>