

# INTEGRITY OF MISSION IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL IN AFRICA: A PERSPECTIVE FROM AN AFRICAN IN DIASPORA

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Tite Tiénou  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois (USA)

## Introduction

The present reflections on integrity of Christian mission in Africa come from an African in diaspora, an *émigré* presently living in the United States. From this particular viewpoint, three “realities” seem especially relevant and important for framing my ideas. First, the integrity of mission is rooted in the nature of the Gospel and the nature of the Church: the Gospel is for everyone (Romans 1:16) and, in the oft quoted words of Emil Brunner, “The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning”<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, the Church is now solidly rooted in Africa. Thirdly, on the continent the word *mission* is problematic as it is often ambiguous and misunderstood. In light of the foregoing, I have decided to examine the integrity of mission in light of the Gospel by exploring the following issues: the Church as African and its implication for mission, the meaning of mission in Africa, the place of Africa in the world, the opportunities for the integrity of mission in Africa and the requirement of integrity for the agents of mission.

## The Church as African: Implications for Mission

Today the presence of the Church in Africa should be an important aspect of any discussion of Christian mission to or from the continent. Given the abundant literature documenting the presence of Christianity in Africa, its growth and its impact, it would seem unnecessary to call attention, once again, to the fact that Christianity is alive and well in Africa and bears an African imprint. There are, however, reasons for a reminder that, in Africa, the Church is indeed African and has been so for a very long time. According to Andrew F. Walls

Christianity is indigenous to Africa, [and] it antedates the oldest African Islam... [M]odern African Christianity is not only the result of movements among Africans, but has been principally sustained by Africans, and is to a surprising extent the result of African initiatives<sup>2</sup>.

In spite of the above, some people either express skepticism about African Christianity or seem surprised to learn that the “continent [is now] a major base of the Christian faith”<sup>3</sup>. One even finds statements that give the impression that Christian presence in Africa is a paradox. So, for example, a 1996 publication on mission introduces its survey of Africa with these words:

In Africa, optimists quickly become realists. Realists become pessimists. And pessimists become cynics...

An abysmal education system, along with many other sad measures of economic and social illness.

Yet Christians live there. They are sharing Africa’s pain and pointing her to a future beyond the worst hurts this world can offer<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Donald G. Miller in “Pauline Motives for the Christian Mission” *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson. Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1961, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew F. Walls *The Significance of African Christianity*. Friends of St. Colm’s Public Lecture, Church of Scotland St. Colm Education Centre and College, May 21, 1989. Printed by the Overseas Ministry Study Center, New Haven, CT, 1993, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup>Kwame Bediako *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995, p. 252.

<sup>4</sup>*Mission Today* ‘96 “Regional Overview: Africa”, p. 69.

Should we really be puzzled to find Christians in places where “sad measures of economic and social illness” prevail? Should we not just acknowledge the fact that “Africa has become, or is becoming, a Christian continent in cultural as well as numerical terms”<sup>5</sup>? For reasons that cannot be fully understood, the human problems of the continent do not seem to have adversely affected the growth of the church in Africa. One thing is certain: “[d]uring the past thirty years, the economy of Africa has deteriorated at the same inverse proportion as church membership has grown. The more Christian the continent becomes, the more *pauperized* it is increasingly becoming”<sup>6</sup>. It is an undeniable fact that in Africa Christian vitality exists in a context of poverty. The question is not: why and how? but what lessons can be learned? Here is neither the occasion nor the place for an investigation of lessons to be learned from Christianity in Africa. I will rather point out a major mission implication of the present situation: Christian mission in contemporary Africa must address multiple complex issues at once. In this continent doing mission with integrity and with the whole Gospel in mind requires that one accepts the fact that

with the 1990's a new period of African Church History has begun: *A Church Challenged by a Continent in Crisis...* In this situation the Church has to live up to the challenge and find answers to the cries of the time, to the fears and anguish which plague the minds of so many Africans today<sup>7</sup>.

In order for the Church to “live up to the challenge” she must make teaching and training a key aspect of mission. In my experience “mission to and in Africa” often means evangelization and making converts. This conception of mission seldom includes the necessary aspects of pastoral care and the deepening of the faith of those who identify themselves as Christians. But Christian mission is not just about gaining converts; it is also about making sure that the converts become mature disciples and servants of Christ. That is why, in the words of Art Glasser, “the Christian movement must focus on consolidation while reaching out in expansion”<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, one of the greatest missiological challenges of the Christian movement in Africa is the ability to continue the practice of mission as evangelism (meaning the focus on increasing the number of converts) without neglecting the requirement of devoting enough energy and resources to the need “to cope with the elementary issue of absorbing new members, let alone with the deeper issues of formation and training”<sup>9</sup>.

While evangelism is still needed in Africa in spite of the geometrical progression of Christianity<sup>10</sup>, for the foreseeable future “formation and training” will be significant frontiers of mission because of what Isaac Zokoué calls “the crisis of maturity in Africa”<sup>11</sup>. Why is it, then, that evangelism is still considered the primary focus of mission in Africa? I do not presume to know all the answers to this very important question. I think that the lack of a clear ecclesiology may provide a clue. In many cases mission agencies produced what may be called “junior” churches in Africa, described by Sidbe Sempore as a “‘missionary’ hurriedly built for Africans and without Africans”<sup>12</sup>. It is not surprising that these “hurriedly

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<sup>5</sup>Lamin Sanneh *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup>J. N. K. Mugambi “A Fresh Look at Evangelism in Africa” *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXVII, No. 346 (July 1998): 357. Italics in the original.

<sup>7</sup>John Baur *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, p. 371.

<sup>8</sup>Arthur F. Glasser “Missiology” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984, p. 726.

<sup>9</sup>Lamin Sanneh *Whose Religion is Christianity?*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that in 1956 the growth of Christianity in Africa (south of the Sahara) had so impressed Roland Oliver that he declared: “If things were to go at the same rate, there would be no pagans left in Africa after the year 1992” in *How Christian is Africa?* London: The Highway Press, 1956, p. 8. Obviously, even in 2004, there are “pagans” left in Africa!

<sup>11</sup>See Isaac Zokoué “The Crisis of Maturity in Africa” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (October 1996): 354-364.

<sup>12</sup>Sidbe Sempore “Les églises d’Afrique entre leur passé et leur avenir” *Concilium*, No. 126 (1977):15. In French. “Nous héritons de cette Eglise “missionnaire bâtie B la hâte pour nous et sans nous”.

built” churches have not paid sufficient attention to significant aspects of church life. Moreover Klaus Fiedler contends that

When faith missions started their work in Africa, they did not think much in terms of ecclesiology for their converts, because they simply did not expect the developments that took place... This poses for faith missions the challenge to take conscious ecclesiology seriously... The priority of the faith missions was always evangelism<sup>13</sup>.

I do not believe that “faith missions” are alone in giving priority to evangelism. Be that as it may, the question is: what can we expect from “junior” churches? What does “participation in mission” mean for them?

### **Mission by Africans?**

In 1989 Jesse N. K. Mugambi made this observation: “up to the present, there is virtually nothing published by African theologians on the mission of the Church in Africa”<sup>14</sup>. Only people unfamiliar with the ambiguities surrounding the word “mission” in Africa can be surprised by that. After all, “the missions introduced a clear dichotomy: mission is the foreigners’ affair, the church is for the ‘natives’”<sup>15</sup>. It is for this reason that

we in Africa have misunderstood our call to mission. The word mission itself raises certain ambiguities in our understanding. Mention mission and missionaries and you think of all the foreign brothers and sisters who live in our villages working in hospitals, translating our Bibles and teaching women hygiene and sewing... Thus mission among ourselves and for ourselves is not an issue that keeps up awake with concern<sup>16</sup>.

As long as such misunderstanding persists, there will be no significant qualitative participation of Africans in mission. Africans will continue to position themselves as recipients of mission thereby delaying the requirement to “rethink our mission task as Africans in Africa”<sup>17</sup>. For me this requirement is essential for the integrity of mission in the continent because “no movement can merit the title ‘church’ unless it is a missionary community”<sup>18</sup>. However, the church in Africa will not take her rightful place in mission unless she deals adequately with the numerous issues related to the place of Africa in the world.

### **Africa in the World**

In Europe and the United States one faces “the constant portrayal of Africa as a place beset by famine, drought, and civil war, or as an open-air ethnographic museum for the West”<sup>19</sup>. This portrayal of Africa reinforces the continent’s “otherness”. The perception of Africa as distant and other may be the result of the particular relationship between Africa and Europe. As Chinua Achebe writes,

It is a great irony of history and geography that Africa, whose land mass is closer than any other to the mainland of Europe, should come to occupy in European psychological disposition the farthest point of otherness, should indeed become Europe’s very antithesis<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup>Klaus Fiedler *The Story of Faith Missions*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1994, p. 401.

<sup>14</sup>Jesse N. K. Mugambi *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections based on an African Experience*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Klaus Fiedler *The Story of Faith Missions*, p. 364.

<sup>16</sup>Musimbi Kanyoro “Thinking Mission in Africa” *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXVII, No. 345 (April 1998): 221.

<sup>17</sup>Musimbi Kanyoro “Thinking Mission in Africa”, p. 226.

<sup>18</sup>J. N. K. Mugambi “The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa” in *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, edited by Jose B. Chipenda, et al. Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup>Robert Lyons “Photographer’s Note” *Another Africa: Photographs by Robert Lyons; Essay and Poem by Chinua Achebe*. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1998, p. 118.

<sup>20</sup>Chinua Achebe “Africa’s Tarnished Name” *Another Africa: Photographs by Robert Lyons; Essay and Poem by Chinua Achebe*. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1998, p. 105.

In today's world Africa has easily become the "very antithesis" of all continents. One can make the case that this image of Africa describes the continent's place in the world. Africa's "otherness" exposes the continent to all sorts of experiments by and from the outside and pushes Africans to the margins of humanity<sup>21</sup>. No wonder there is so much pessimism about Africa in the world. It would appear that at no time in recent memory has there been as much pessimism concerning the present and the future of the African continent and its nation-states as now. The pessimism is often due to the dire economic conditions of the continent. So, for example, a 2002 publication of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development states: "Africa's participation in the world economy has declined alarmingly over the past 50 years in terms of GDP, exports, and foreign investment. Only the continent's share of global population grew as its birth rate accelerated during the 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>22</sup>. For African *émigrés* living in the United States, like myself, the weight of pessimistic news about Africa is sometimes unbearable. In January 2000 in a series of articles the *Chicago Tribune* devoted to Africa someone commented: "No wonder everybody is going *out of Africa!*" Then, in June, Steve Chapman (a journalist of the *Chicago Tribune*) put it succinctly with this title in the Commentary section: "Africa's sad present and its very grim future":

...the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of optimism about the future of humanity. Until you consider Africa

For years, the continent has been a bleak landscape of chaos, bloodshed, failure and stagnation. Unhappy as the colonial era was for Africans living under foreign rule, the post-colonial era has been far worse<sup>23</sup>.

Chapman is only one of the more recent Afro-pessimists<sup>24</sup>. Afro-pessimism should, therefore, be the broader context for any reflection on the African continent these days. Even if Afro-pessimism is the background against which one must examine the challenges and opportunities facing Africa, I do not wish to engage in refuting or examining it in detail. Rather against this background I want to consider four major challenges and three great opportunities for Africa and Africans.

### Challenges Facing Africa and Africans

As Africa enters the twenty-first century her children face, I think, the following four major challenges: they must deal with the lingering effects of Afro-pessimism; they must come to terms with the marginalization of Africa in the present world order; they must refuse solutions to Africa's problems based on ignorance and they must find room for God and morality in nation building.

Afro-pessimism will, for the foreseeable future, represent an important lense through which many people see Africa and react to Africans. Afro-pessimism reinforces the negative image of Africa and Africans. The negative image and the undeniable fact that Africa "trail[s] the rest of the world in practically every area of human endeavor"<sup>25</sup> mean that "Africa stands naked before the rest of the world"<sup>26</sup>. Since Afro-pessimism contributes significantly to the "nakedness of Africa", Africans need to

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<sup>21</sup>Achille Mbembe *De la postcolonie*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 2000. See pp. 7-8; 267-275.

<sup>22</sup>OECD *Publications on Africa* (Spring 2002), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>*Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 2000, Section 1, Commentary, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup>I first encountered Afro-pessimism in French weekly publications in the spring of 1990 (particularly in *L'Express*, 27 April 1990 and other French weeklies in March and April 1990). At that time some French journalists were predicting that Africa would be wiped out in fifteen to twenty years. Across the Channel, the press covered Africa in the same manner: see for example *The Economist* (September 7, 1996). Examples of Afro-pessimism in the US press are numerous. I mention the following: Robert D. Kaplan "The Coming Anarchy" *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 1994), pp. 44-76; "Africa: The Scramble for Existence" *Time* (September 7, 1992), pp. 40-46; Jeffrey Goldberg "Their Africa Problem and Ours" *The New York Times Magazine* (March 2, 1997), pp. 30-39. Afro-pessimism is also disseminated in popular and academic publications.

<sup>25</sup>Samuel Ofori Onwona "Africa's Prospects in the New Millennium" *Global Future* (Fourth Quarter 2000), p. 15.

<sup>26</sup>Sulayman S. Nyang "Africa: A Continent of Unending Conflicts?" *West Africa* (12-18 September 1994), p. 1582.

devise ways of coping with its lingering effects. But how? Should Africans engage in major media campaigns promoting a positive image of the continent? Should they focus on the analysis of the causes for the continent's present predicament with the hope that better understanding will promote a more balanced assessment of Africa and Africans? Is it more prudent to rally Africans around "a bright vision for Africa" with concepts like "African Renaissance"? Is it not best to ignore Afro-pessimism altogether?

I do not believe that we need to invest time and energy in attempts to mount a rebuttal to Afro-pessimism. Such attempts at rebuttal may concede too much to Afro-pessimism and may, at the same time, be overly optimistic. Take the concept of African Renaissance for example. Its proponents use it to point to positive indicators in the continent. These indicators signal rebirth. The very notion of rebirth implies that there is death or general breakdown. But Africa has not died; she has not experienced a general breakdown. She certainly has had, and she continues to have, many problems caused by her sons and daughters as well as by outsiders. Can we seriously equate these problems with death or general failure? Moreover, how sure are we that we are now living at a time of rebirth for Africa? Has Africa not seen other periods of "Renaissance"? What have we learned from them? I recall a history professor from my High School days in Burkina Faso who, in 1967, spent much time on the idea that the nineteenth century was a time of African Renaissance! I have often asked myself: "What is the legacy of this nineteenth century Renaissance?"

Die-hard Afro-pessimists cannot be silenced with indications of an African Renaissance. Given the complexity of the continent and the multiple challenges it faces, one can always find enough bad news to illustrate "Africa's" sad plight! Afro-pessimism is not, however, just about reporting bad news on Africa. Ultimately Afro-pessimism can cripple the self-confidence of Africans because, as Siradiou Diallo points out, the scorn it generates towards Africa and Africans erodes Africans' dignity<sup>27</sup>. In light of this, I think that the protection of the dignity of Africans is one of the best ways of dealing with the lingering effects of Afro-pessimism. Africans may sometimes have to appeal to God directly, through prayer, as I did in 1990<sup>28</sup>, and implore God to restore their self-confidence and human dignity. Christians can have a significant role in the restoration of Africans' human dignity if their theology and practice of mission are solidly based on what the Bible teaches regarding human nature.

The marginalization of Africa in the present world order, which is the second challenge Africans face, is linked to Afro-pessimism. Since it is often taken for granted that Africa is marginal in the world, especially in economics and politics, I will not provide much description here. Africa's marginalization takes many forms. At times she is ignored altogether even by people and nations claimed to be her partners in development. At other times silence and indifference are replaced with comments such as "Africa, the bottomless pit of need!"; "On Africa, No Attractive Options for the World" (*Herald Tribune*, November 23-24, 1996, p. 8); "Some Places Globalization Forgot: Africa and Mexico" (*Herald Tribune*, January 2, 1997, p. 2).

The marginalization of Africa also affects events in the continent. It seems to be related to present uncertainties. These uncertainties have implications for nation-building, social stability as well as Christian mission. So, on the one hand we are witnessing the destruction of many African nation-states by implosion or by the revival of ethnic or micro-nationalism as in other countries in the world. On the other hand fewer Africans seem to trust in the worth of nation-building as they point out the failures, the mistakes, the greed and the impasse to which the past forty years (or so) of independence have led us. Indeed it appears that we live at a time when Africa is once again ruled by chaos. In such a situation, how does one address the topic of nation-building?

I do not believe that Africa's problems, whatever they are, can be solved by outsiders. This means that, in a sense, Africa's marginalization by the outside world (whether such is possible, real or fiction) does not have an immediate impact on nation-building. Nevertheless, taken together with the implosion of many African nation-states and many Africans' misgivings about the worth of nation-building at the

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<sup>27</sup>Siradiou Diallo "De la critique au mépris" *Jeune Afrique*, No. 1525 (26 mars 1990): 33, 36, 37.

<sup>28</sup>See in the Appendix my "Prayer for Troubled Africa." Kenneth Kaunda, the former President of Zambia did the same in 1991 when he was so burdened about Africa that he could not sleep. See his prayer in *Africa Forum*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1992): 15-16.

present time, Africa's marginalization must be taken seriously.

The third challenge Africans face is the need to refuse solutions to Africa's problems that are based on ignorance. The marginalization of Africa, the dysfunctional nature of many of her nation-states and many Africans' doubts about the merits of nation-building may promote the idea of looking to outside sources for help and solutions. Indeed, non-Africans sometimes reinforce the idea that positive changes in the continent come from the outside. In 1995 Jacques Godefrain, then France's Minister of Cooperation, declared: "Fifty years ago we told Africans to become nations and they became nations. Ten years ago we told them to become democrats and they became democrats"<sup>29</sup> No wonder some have wondered if Africa does not need to be re-colonized! Yet, many solutions to Africa's problems may be based on selfishness, even on the part of foreign states or they may be the application of policies formulated out of ignorance. As far as selfishness or self-interest is concerned, we must never forget this sobering statement attributed to Charles de Gaulle: "A state does not have friends, it has interests!" (*Un état n'a pas d'amis, il a des intérêts!*)

Matters are further complicated by the widespread ignorance of African realities. Let me illustrate. *The New York Times* is recognized as a reputable daily newspaper in the United States. One can assume that it can inform its readers accurately. Yet, over the course of forty years (1955 to 1995), *The New York Times* has consistently portrayed Africa negatively<sup>30</sup>. I note, in fairness to *The New York Times*, that Howard C. French, its Africa correspondent, has recently published *A Continent for the Taking: The Tragedy and Hope of Africa* (New York: Knopf, 2004), a rather balanced treatment of the continent.

It is, frankly, a pity that so many of us look to the outside for solutions to Africa's problems. What kind of solutions can one expect from states that are bent on protecting their own interests and whose "African" policies are often rooted in negative images of Africa? Elochukwu E. Uzukwu is right: "The solution to Africa's problems is through mobilizing and ably harnessing its internal resources instead of depending on external aid."<sup>31</sup> Let us always remember that nation-building and development cannot be the results of philanthropy.

The fourth challenge, that of finding room for God and morality in nation-building, is especially important for us Christians. Here I only present why and how this is a challenge. I will indicate below how Christians can respond to this challenge positively. The challenge is brought into focus by the following paradox. On the one hand religious people (Christians in particular) stress the positive role of religion in nation-building. On the other hand some writers seem to have a particular problem with religion when it comes to nation-building: for them religion has a negative impact on nation-building and development. Edem Kodjo's...*et demain l'Afrique*, Paris: Editions Stock, 1985, provides an illustration of this attitude. Although the book is an analysis of the African condition and a proposal of hope for the future of the continent, it contains no substantial treatment of the role religion or Christianity can play in what he calls the path to salvation (la voie du salut, chapter 13) for Africa. There are only oblique and negative references to religion such as "the future of the continent is neither in autarchy (isolationism) nor a new millenarianism" (p. 289: L'avenir du continent africain ne se trouve ni dans l'autarcie ni dans un nouveau millénarisme). Edem Kodjo is not alone in viewing religion negatively in matters pertaining to nation-building and development. Consider, for example, Daniel Etounga-Manguelle's opinion in "Does Africa Need a Cultural Adjustment Program"<sup>32</sup>. He seems to attribute Africa's backwardness and stagnation to the power religion has over Africans. For him Africa will progress only if she is liberated from religion and invisible powers. I find this negative view of religion, on the part of an African academic, a serious intellectual bias. Likewise, the dismissal of religion by an African politician of the stature of Edem Kodjo

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<sup>29</sup> "Nous avons dit aux Africains, il y a cinquante ans, de devenir de nations, et ils sont devenus des nations. Nous leur avons dit, il y a dix ans, de devenir des démocrates et ils sont devenus des démocrates". *Jeune Afrique*, no. 1820 (23-29 novembre 1995), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> See Peter J. Schraeder and Brian Endless. "The Media and Africa: The Portrayal of Africa in *The New York Times* (1955-1995)." *Issue*, XXVI/2 (1998): 29-35.

<sup>31</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu. *A Listening Church*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Etounga-Manguelle "Does Africa Need a Cultural Adjustment Program" in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, edited by Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the continent by a person who is charged with the responsibility of enabling citizens to be about nation-building. No person with religious convictions should allow this bias and this misunderstanding to remain unchallenged!

### **Opportunities for the Integrity of Mission in Africa**

The present challenges facing Africa may provide us (Africans and non-Africans alike) with the greatest opportunity for a fresh and creative examination of issues related to the integrity of mission in the continent. I see three areas of opportunity for Africa and Africans: Africans can turn marginalization into a resolve to find intra-African solutions to African problems; Africans may be able to think realistically about nation building and development; Churches in Africa have a window for being hope generating churches. These areas of opportunity are, in my mind, the positive side of the challenges Africa faces at this time.

I have already tipped my hand, as it were, when I presented the third challenge. I will therefore be brief as I direct your attention to the first area of opportunity. We can turn our present marginalization in the world order into a resolve to find intra-African solutions to African problems. This collaboration in nation-building is crucial at this time when Africa seems to be facing its greatest challenges since its partition during the age of imperialism.

The current situation of the continent also provides the opportunity to think realistically about all aspects of life in Africa, nation-building, development, social harmony and religion. For me, whatever else nation-building is and means, it is about providing citizens with the conditions for them to peacefully contribute to the common good of the society and nation of which they are members. Given this, freedom and justice are two of the foundational pillars of nation-building. When the state provides these two ingredients or strives to do so, citizens can carry on the task of nation-building. It is in this connection that I think the following words of Scripture are particularly meaningful: "Righteousness and justice are the foundations of [God's] throne" (Psalm 89:14) and "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

For us to think realistically about nation-building and development, we must ask if the state in its present form in Africa, provides its citizens with the necessary conditions for participating in nation-building. In the following analysis of the nation-state I am indebted to Jean-François Bayart *L'état en Afrique: la politique du ventre*. Paris: Fayard, 1989; "Les églises chrétiennes et la politique du ventre" in *Politique Africaine*, 35 (octobre 1989): 3-26; and to Achille Mbembe *Afrique indociles* Paris: Karthala, 1988.

According to Mbembe the authoritarian principle best describes how the state functions in post-colonial Africa. This authoritarian principle has led the state into becoming what he calls the theologian-state (l'Etat-théologien), that is the state grants itself the right of being the sole possessor of truth, particularly in matters related to politics and nation-building (1988, 127-128). Lamin Sanneh expresses the same phenomenon when he writes about "the state that is over-extended with the rhetoric of omnicompetence"<sup>33</sup>

Though they may not be familiar with the terminology, Africans know, at the practical level and by experience, what it means to be governed by a state which perceives itself as all-competent. All Africans have dealt with either centralized bureaucracies, or single party politics, or arbitrary laws or governments refusing to be accountable to citizens they claim to serve and represent. In essence the theologian-state, in granting itself all competence, has monopolized all political power, activity and discourse. In so doing it has prevented the population from active participation in politics and therefore in nation-building (see Mbembe 1988, 141). This means that generally civil society is absent from most aspects of nation-building in independent Africa.

Another characteristic of the post-colonial state in Africa is that of unchecked profiteering. J.-F. Bayart and Achille Mbembe graphically describe as the rule of the stomach (la politique du ventre ou la gouvernementalité du ventre). The rule of the stomach expresses itself in corruption of all kinds and by the exploitation of the citizens by the state.

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<sup>33</sup>Lamin Sanneh "Religion and the State" *Africa Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1992): 16.

The authoritarian principle, the rule of the stomach and the presence of pirates or bandits in power produce one net result: institutionalized injustice. In this sense the post-colonial state in Africa has perverted the Pauline belief according to which “rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong...[The state] is God’s servant to do you good” (Romans 13:3 and 4). The African state seems to operate by the opposite principle.

The nation-state, in its present condition in Africa, has failed to provide citizens with the basic requirements for nation-building as mentioned above: freedom and justice. Given this reality one should not be surprised that Africans concluded that they should protect their own interests since the state was not going to look after its citizens’ interests. Even when majority rule is adopted as a result of political reforms people may not see a better tomorrow because, as Gerald P. O’Driscoll, Jr. writes, “in a system of majoritarian rule with no protected rights, democracy is just two wolves and a sheep deciding what is for lunch”<sup>34</sup>. Alas, there are instances (too many perhaps) in Africa where the Church is one of the wolves! Her participation in the integrity of mission requires that she cares for the rights of the weak, the downtrodden and exploited members of society as she embraces the fact that “it is not enough that Christian mission be redemptive; it must be prophetic as well”<sup>35</sup>.

For me thinking realistically about nation-building, development, social harmony and mission means that we must always remember that no human endeavor that is worth doing can be accomplished in one individual’s lifetime or by just one individual. This is true of nation-building; it requires the contribution of all citizens and it cannot be done in a few short years.

The Church, like other organized bodies of African societies, has tended to work for the short-term and, unfortunately, her “language and practice are not different from the tyrannies which are called governments in Africa”<sup>36</sup>. In addition John S. Pobee notes that “[a]buse of power— the corruption of power— the sinful use of power is as much evident in church as in politics”<sup>37</sup>. This means that, among other things, the Church has tended to adopt the common attitude of protecting her own interests. Consequently, in many African countries the Church denounces institutionalized injustice only when her own interests are in jeopardy. This can hardly count as participation in nation-building. And such behavior is certainly not an example of Christian mission done with integrity.

The Church’s attitude is sometimes rooted in questionable theological understanding of what position the Christian should adopt vis-B-vis the state. A theology of “preaching Jesus Christ... [for an] appointment for the hereafter”<sup>38</sup> coupled with an interpretation of Romans 13 which implied blind and complete obedience to the state as a minister of God removed Christianity from influencing the direction in which nation-building moved.

The way forward is for Christians and churches to abandon worldly foolishness and interested vigilance. In so doing they may become hope-generating churches. This is the third area of opportunity. Hope is necessary for nation-building because “despair does not constitute the basis for the reconstruction of our continent”<sup>39</sup>. But how can churches generate hope if they are not different from other institutions of society? For, as Lesslie Newbigin wrote, “the most important contribution which the Church can make to a new social order is to be itself a new social order”<sup>40</sup>. That is, the Church should be what God intended her to be. This is both the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for African Christians

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<sup>34</sup>Gerald P. O’Driscoll, Jr. “Some Succeed, Others Resent their Success” (A Review of Amy Chua’s *World On Fire*) *The Wall Street Journal*, Vol. CCXL, No. 125 (December 26, 2002):. D 10.

<sup>35</sup>Arthur F. Glasser “Missiology” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 726.

<sup>36</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup>John S. Pobee *Celebrating the Jubilee of the World Council of Churches*. Accra: Christian Council of Ghana/Asempra Publishers, 1998, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup>José B. Chipenda and André Karamaga (editors) *The Right Time for Change: What Hope for Crisis-Stricken Africa?* Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu *A Listening Church*, p. 149.

<sup>40</sup>Lesslie Newbigin *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1991, p. 85.

today in nation-building and Christian mission. It requires integrity on the part of those involved in mission.

### **Integrity: Required Characteristic in the Agents of Mission**

The multiple crises affecting the African continent have been fertile ground for a situation of “generalised insecurity”<sup>41</sup> which is conducive to what Hannah W. Kinoti calls the “*mutatu culture*” where “making money is the most important thing”<sup>42</sup>. Let me note, in passing, that the glorification of “making money” and the “grabbing mentality” are not specific or limited to Africans and the African continent. Nevertheless, an overall climate of economic instability can foster a culture where this general human tendency is reinforced. In this culture (due to insecurity and the scarcity of everything) the basic reflex is to grab as much as possible, as quickly as possible and by any means possible. Consequently ethics and morality tend to be viewed either as nuisances or as irrelevant and unimportant. I have, in fact, heard an African student/church leader say: “I am too poor to be honest!” In this kind of context, where the satisfaction of one’s appetites has the highest priority, can Christians contribute to “a new social order” unless they, by their moral commitment, provide a way of true and costly service? For me moral commitment is integrity. But, what is integrity?

One should not have to define integrity for religious people in general and Christians in particular. After all, the word integrity is more readily associated with religion than it is with politics and economics. Perhaps the simplest way of defining integrity for our purposes here is “wholeness” as its synonym. For the Christian integrity is that “wholeness in obedience to God”<sup>43</sup> which is manifested in moral uprightness in word and deed. According to Stephen L. Carter, integrity

requires three steps: (1) *discerning* what is right and what is wrong; (2) *acting* on what you have discerned even at personal cost; and (3) *saying openly* that you are acting on your understanding of right and wrong<sup>44</sup>.

Thus explicated, integrity is not exclusively a Christian virtue but it is the “stuff” without which it is impossible to live the Christian life. I wonder, quite frankly, if it is possible to sustain a life of integrity without the kind of transformation of heart and mind (which is the work of the Spirit of God) available only to people who know God as articulated in the Bible. It is, therefore, a tragedy when Christians who claim to know God lack integrity because integrity is essential to their identity. This lack prevents them from doing mission with integrity.

In themselves Carter’s three steps of integrity could provide an agenda for African Christians who intend to serve church and society and carry out God’s work in a manner consistent with the Gospel. But there is an even more fundamental reason why integrity should be the basis for what is currently called reconstruction in Africa: integrity is anti-corruption. In Carter’s words, “if integrity has an opposite, perhaps it is corruption—the getting away with things we know to be wrong”<sup>45</sup>. Nobody can deny the fact that corruption is an impediment to nation-building and to church life in Africa as so many people seemingly have made it a practice to “get away with things we know to be wrong”. I should think, then, that an antidote to corruption would be worth examining as a possible ingredient in a missiology focused on accomplishing mission with integrity.

Can integrity really have that function and can it also be an agenda for reconstruction at the national level? I provide the following example as an illustration that integrity can even be part of politics and economics at the national level lest it seems that the foregoing is just theory and rhetoric. In 1983 Thomas Sankara and the group of revolutionaries who seized power in what was then Upper Volta promoted the idea that there is a link between integrity and nation-building. It is instructive that in 1984,

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<sup>41</sup>André Karamaga “The Christian Presence in Africa” *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, edited by Jose B. Chipenda, et al. Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup>Hannah W. Kinoti “Morality is Vital to Economic and Social Development” *Vision for a Bright Africa: Facing the Challenges of Development*, edited by George Kinoti and Peter Kimuyu. Nairobi: AISRED, 1997, p. 255.

<sup>43</sup>Stephen L. Carter *Integrity*. New York: Basic Books, 1996, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup>Stephen L. Carter *Integrity*, p. 7. Italics in the original.

<sup>45</sup>Stephen L. Carter *Integrity*, p. 12.

on the first anniversary of the August Revolution they gave a new name to the country: Burkina Faso (Fatherland of the Upright People or Home of the People of Integrity). The new name of the country signaled their ideal to make integrity a very important and public aspect of governance and a basis for the fight against corruption. Consequently during the Sankara years (1983-1987) many dignitaries accused of embezzlement were publicly tried by the *Tribunaux Populaires de la Révolution* (Popular Revolutionary Tribunals). Some were found guilty while others were acquitted. This and other similar practices of the Sankara government contributed to a reduction in corruption. The Sankara years were certainly difficult for the citizens of Burkina Faso. So my purpose here is neither to praise Sankara nor to idealize/idolize everything he and his colleagues did. I simply want to point out what a focus on integrity can do for national life and politics. For me Sankara's Burkina Faso shows that integrity can be part of public life. What would happen if churches and Christian mission organizations made integrity their ethical and moral imperative? Would this not be significant for doing mission with integrity and in the power of the Spirit of God? I realize that integrity is an unfinished agenda like all moral qualities and like life itself; it must be practiced daily and in community and cannot be sustained without the kind of renewal and inner fortitude brought by God. That is the reason integrity should be a constant characteristic of the agents of God's mission. I have offered, in the foregoing, what I think are some of the most urgent matters that must be examined as we consider the nature of the integrity of Christian mission in Africa. May God grant all parties involved the strength, the courage and the grace to address them well.

### **Prayer for Troubled Africa**

Gracious God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
Father of all Mankind,  
My soul is troubled today,  
Because Africa, your creation, is troubled.

Gracious God, I call on you because  
You alone care about your creation  
When no one else cares.

My soul is troubled today, Gracious God, for I have  
heard distressing news concerning Africa.  
I have heard that some of your own creatures  
wish that Africa, your creation, would disappear.

Some of them, French journalists, amuse themselves  
by predicting that  
if, through some cataclysmic event,  
Africa were to disappear  
the world would not miss it very much.

My soul is troubled today, Gracious God,  
Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
Father of all Mankind,  
for they give fifteen to twenty years of life  
to Africa, your creation.

Then...? Then, they say, Africa's AIDS-ridden  
socially dysfunctional population  
**WILL BE EXTINCT.**

I am troubled, troubled and confused. Are they right,  
Gracious God,  
Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
Father of all Mankind?

But then, what if?  
what if Africa were to disappear?  
If Africa were to disappear,  
the people who now wish her disappearance  
would have to look for other means of livelihood.

If Africa were to disappear,  
there would be no more specialists of African affairs,  
no more African Studies Departments in Universities,  
no more publications on Africa,  
no more Africana publishing houses.

If that were to happen, Gracious God,  
I would PRAISE YOUR GREAT NAME!

For if Africa were to disappear,  
the world would be  
without famine,  
without AIDS,  
without development workers,  
without diplomats needing hardship wages  
for being posted in God-forsaken Africa.

If Africa were to disappear,  
suddenly nations would balance their budgets  
since they would save all the money they now spend  
on the African bottomless pit.

You know, Gracious God,  
Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
Father of all Mankind,  
that if Africa were to disappear,  
Christians would have  
more time,  
more energy,  
more resources  
to concentrate on fewer  
unreached,  
pagan,  
benighted,  
heathens.

That would surely quicken the fulfillment of the Great Commission  
and hasten your Son's return!

Lord, God, if Africa were to disappear,  
**THE WORLD WOULD SURELY BE A BETTER PLACE!**  
So, Gracious God,  
Creator of Heaven and Earth,  
Father of all Mankind,  
I, troubled man from troubled Africa,  
humbly pray,  
grant their wish: please make Africa disappear.

P.S.: And one more plea: Before you grant their wish,  
please take Africa and her sons and daughter to yourself,  
and let others remain on earth to enjoy it.  
Bring Africa, her sons and daughters to that place where,  
at long last **THEY SHALL NO LONGER BE TROUBLED.**

Komt de kalesoro de worowe  
New Haven, Connecticut, April 26, 1990