Conspectus

Volume 34

October 2022

SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

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Editorial

Conspectus 34 presents five articles, each responding responsibly to various contextual questions from the African continent. These papers situated within various theological sub-disciplines, including Missiology, Systematic Theology, Biblical Studies, and Practical Theology, with a golden thread of contextualization running through them.

Contextualisation entails presenting the gospel from a context-sensitive perspective, continually seeking the Scriptures as a way to engage and challenge our different realities. The contributors in this issue have done well to respond to the contextual questions in ways that are consistent with our objective to publish research that is God-honoring (Bible-based, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led) and that serves our contexts well. May their labor of love contribute to faithful participation in the mission of God, responsible handling of Scripture, careful engagement with various communities, and the proclamation of Christ, the only hope of the world.

Conspectus 34 Articles

In the first article, "The Pneumatological Phenomenon in Acts 2:1–6: Implications for Christian Mission in Africa," Dr. Isaac Boaheng explores the value and use of the mother tongue, or vernacular, in both missions and Christian life. Boaheng opines that for the Church to fulfill its mandate, it must be called back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots, and to the absolute necessity of the Spirit's empowerment for effective participation in the mission of God.

This is followed by the article, "The Contemporary *Missio Dei* Paradigm and its Expression in the Global South" by Rev. Richard Otiso, who contends that the *Missio Dei* paradigm has undergone a significant shift in the Global South,

transforming the region from being receivers to being active participants in the mission of God. Otiso end by exploring the opportunities for participation in God's mission in post-pandemic Africa.

Next, is the article entitled, "African Theology for the African Church: The Need for an Evangelical Approach," by Dr. Greg Kame who puts forth a case for an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa by exploring the origin of African evangelical theology. He proposes a good starting point for African scholars to consider developing a robust African evangelical theology for the African Church. Kame proposes soteriology as a key to an African theology that avoids the pitfalls of syncretism or liberalism.

Subsequently, Mr. Yimenu Belay, in his article, "Scripture and Context in Conversation: The Ethiopian *Andəmtaa* Interpretative Tradition" contends that the Ethiopian *Andəmta* interpretive tradition is a homegrown, contextualized hermeneutic practice that demonstrates a productive dialogue between text and context. Belay engages the rich history of the Ethiopian interpretive tradition and further points to the transformative dimension of the biblical text.

Finally, the article, "In Search of *Cura Vitae*: A Theology of Healing and Hope for Ethiopia" by Ms. Youdit Tariku Feyessa concludes the papers. The context of this article is the current conflict-riddled nation of Ethiopia. The author challenges the Ethiopian church to respond amid turmoil involving the convergence of history, conflict, Scripture, and theology of action. She argues that a lamenting and *metanoic* church should be able to find healing, hope, and transformation amid hopelessness and despair.

The issue concludes with three book reviews: first, Mr. Michael Blythe reviews *African Public Theology* (2020, edited by Agang), published by

Langham. Second, Dr. Desmond Henry reviews Gitau's *Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective* (2017), published by InterVarsity Press. Finally, Dr. Anna-Marie Lockard reviews Lee's *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (2021), published by Baker.

I wish to thank the authors and book reviewers for their meaningful contributions and for choosing to partner with *Conspectus*. My appreciation goes to the Editor, Dr. Cornelia van Deventer, the Editorial Team, the Review Board, the Editorial Board, and the Seminary for the successful publication of this volume.

May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands. (Ps 90:17 NIV)

New Editorial Board Chairperson

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Desmond Henry has been elected by the Editorial Board as the new chairperson. He was appointed to succeed Dr. Johannes Malherbe, who has done a phenomenal job over the past two years. Dr. Henry serves as International Director of the Global Network of Evangelists for the Luis Palau Association and has been a valuable member of the *Conspectus* Editorial Board since 2020. This volume also contains a book review written by our new chairperson. Dr. Henry, thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity. We are honored to welcome you as the new chair.

Special Gratitude

Special gratitude is reserved for the Editor of *Conspectus*, Dr. Cornelia van Deventer, for affording me this privilege to oversee the publication of *Conspectus* 34. On behalf of the Editorial Team, we welcome you back from maternity leave. Conspectus is continuing to develop and remain faithful to its core mandate to publish God-honoring research under your leadership.

In conclusion, to the readers of *Conspectus*, as you engage this volume, our prayer is that the theological dialogues and proposals advanced herein will inspire you to make a shift from a "cognizance of context" to a "commitment to context." The proposed shifts require an acknowledgement that part of our role is not just to observe or examine our societies but to transform them. *Nkosi Sikelela iAfrika*.

In Christ
Dr. Caswell J. Ntseno
Associate Editor

The Pneumatological Phenomenon in Acts 2:1–6: Implications for Christian Mission in Africa

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Abstract

The book of Acts presents an exciting story of the beginning and growth of the Christian Church amidst inner problems and outward conflict. As a book that gives an account of how the Christian gospel spread from Jerusalem to various parts of the known world of the first century, Acts provides a useful paradigm for Christian mission in every generation. Of interest to the present study is the place of the Holy Spirit in Christian mission in Africa as evident in the Pentecostal experience and its accompanying events. Thus, this article explores how contextual applications of missiological principles derived from the Pentecost experience might help improve Christian mission in contemporary Africa. The article conducts a textual analysis of Acts 2:1–6 to unravel the meaning of the text. After a critical analysis of relevant texts, the article argues that in order to fulfill its mandate, the Church must be called back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots, and to the absolute necessity of the Spirit's empowerment for the effective participation in the mission of God. The article also notes that the missiological implications of the Pentecost experience include the importance of the use of the vernacular, or mother-tongues, in both missions and Christian life. After concluding that contemporary missionaries can only succeed if they are empowered by the Spirit, the study charges the Church to seek divine empowerment for mission, both locally and globally.

1. Introduction

The term missiology refers to the study of Christian missions, their methods, and purposes (Anderson 1998, 1). Missiology is a dynamic field which grows

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and adapts to new, changing environments. In missiological studies, the mission of God is referred to as the *Missio Dei*, a term which was popularized by scholars like Karl Barth and Karl Hartenstein (Fubara-Manuel 2007, 5). Church structure, religious plurality, culture, and historical consideration are some of the factors that affect Christian missiology. Anderson (1998, 1) outlines six elements of the theology of mission which are summarized below.

Firstly, theology of mission must be systematized and contextualized for a given society. This is crucial in cross-cultural communication of the Christian faith where anthropological factors such as primitive religion, linguistics, cultural dynamics, and cultural change play a major role.

Secondly, theology of mission relates to the missionary nature of God. The Triune God is in mission to the world; God's mission is centered on Christ's work on the cross, and he uses the Church to reach the world. For Bosch (2009, 392), the *Missio Dei* is "primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the Church (Israel) is privileged to participate." Mission is, therefore, primarily, God's activity.

Thirdly, theology of mission relates to the missionary nature of the Bible, which contains the account of God's missionary activity. From the creation stories in Genesis to the creation of the New Jerusalem in Revelation, the Bible contains different stories which contribute to the Christian understanding of the *Missio Dei*. Though the Bible was revealed in piecemeal fashion, the overall argument of the Bible has to do with God's salvific mission for rescuing humanity from the penalty of sin. An authentic Christian mission must therefore be biblically grounded.

Fourthly, theology of mission must include the missionary nature of the Church. Mission is God's own activity; however, he has invited the Church to participate in its realization. The Church must be missionary in its work and in its self-understanding because of the missionary nature of Christ, who serves as the foundation of the Church. Each generation of believers must therefore do all they can to expand God's kingdom and to ensure the survival of the Church in subsequent generations. A sound theology of mission must therefore facilitate an encounter between the kingdom, the Church, and the world.

Fifthly, theology of mission relates to the missionary nature of the Christian ministry. From a holistic biblical perspective, Christian ministry is not the preserve of the clergy. Christian leaders are to equip their followers to enable them to partake in God's mission. As Anderson (1998, 11) puts it, the role of the minister as an "equipper of the saints for the work of the ministry" needs to be emphasized in any theology of mission formulated for any given context. This idea is rooted in the New Testament concept of the priesthood of all believers. The Church's emphasis on the role of individual believers in mission will certainly have a multiplying effect as new converts discover their gifts and actively participate in making new disciples for Christ.

Sixthly, theology of mission and pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) are inseparable. The pneumatological dimension of mission is prominent in Charismatic and Pentecostal theology of mission, though not entirely missing in the missiology of mainline historic churches. A correct theology of mission must emphasize the role of the Spirit "in the call, appointment, orientation, and maintenance of the missionaries" (Anderson 1998, 11). The present study focuses on the pneumatological aspect of mission with particular reference to Pentecost. In this regard, the study examines the Spirit baptism that took place at Pentecost and how this miraculous experience must inform contemporary African Christian mission.

With this brief background, the study now proceeds to the next section, where the background to the book of Acts is considered.

2. Background to the Book of Acts

Most New Testament scholars attribute the book of Acts to Luke who is also considered to be the author of the Lukan gospel (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 120). In this sense, Acts serves as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1). The use of similar vocabulary (especially medical terms) and similar style of writing in both books is used to support Lukan authorship of Luke-Acts. Luke-Acts and Hebrews are regarded as containing the most cultured Greek among the New Testament books (Gundry 2012, 333). Suggested sources for the writing of Acts include recollections from memory, notes from personal diaries, information from Paul and other Christians (in, among others, Jerusalem and Syrian Antioch), and written sources regarding the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:23–29) (Gundry 2012, 333–334).

Though there is almost consensus among scholars that Acts originated from Rome, scholars disagree widely when it comes to dating the book. The view that Acts was written in the second century (AD 115–130) is supported by the argument that the book was written to reconcile opposing early Christian groups of Jewish Christianity, represented by Peter, and Gentile Christianity, represented by Paul (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 121). The view that Acts was written between AD 80 and AD 95 is buttressed by the claim that a date later than AD 95 is not accurate for Acts because of "its optimistic attitude toward the Roman government—an attitude that would have been inconceivable after the persecution of Domitian in the middle 90s" (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 121). Another view is that Acts was written before AD 70, and this is supported by Luke's portrayal of Judaism as legalistic, and his ignorance of the Pauline letters. Considering the debate surrounding the date of the writing of Acts, the present author maintains that no suggested date is conclusive.

Acts was written to provide open-minded Gentiles with an historical account of the origin of Christianity (Gundry 2012, 336). In the process, the author emphasizes "religious piety, moral purity, and political innocence of believers," and portrays Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism which is open to all who come to Jesus by faith. The book demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit in both the establishment and the expansion of the Church from Jerusalem to Rome and to other parts of the world. Acts also serves an apologetic purpose, providing a defense of the Christian faith against attacks from other religions, especially Judaism. It also shows that Christianity is a universal religion, not a religion for a particular ethnic group or class of people. Therefore, one finds the gospel being preached to Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch,[1] Cornelius (a Roman), Gentiles at Antioch, poor and wealthy, men and women, educated and uneducated (see chs. 8, 10, 13, 15). In Acts, God ensured the spread of his gospel from Jerusalem to the end of the world despite opposition from non-Christians.

3. Exposition on the Pentecost Story

This section expounds Acts 2 (particularly vv. 1–6) with the goal of appreciating the miraculous events that took place at Pentecost so as to deduce what implications this phenomenon has for mission in contemporary Christianity.

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[1] The "Ethiopian eunuch" was not Ethiopian in the modern sense, as the eunuch was an official of the Nubian government at Meroë. The title "Candace" is a Latin term which could mean "Queen Regent," "Queen Mother," or "Royal Woman."

When the day of Pentecost had come (v. 1). Pentecost (Greek: *pentecoste*, meaning fiftieth) was a Jewish festival that was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover-Sabbath before YHWH with gifts and offerings (Exod 23:14–17) (Bruce 1988, 49). It was also called the Feast of Weeks (*Shabuoth*) (Exod 34:22a; Deut 16:10) or the Day of Firstfruits (Num 28:26; cf. Exod 23:16a) because on that day people presented the first fruits of their wheat harvest to God (Exod 34:22a). Pentecost was celebrated at the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. In 2 Chron 8:13, the feast of weeks is mentioned only in the list of regular yearly feasts celebrated in the Solomonic temple.

By the time of the first Christian century, Pentecost was celebrated to commemorate the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:1 ff.) and the yearly renewal of the Mosaic covenant (Jub 6:15, 19) (Longenecker 1981, 269; Bromiley 1985, 826). The Pentecost in the year of the Lord's resurrection was the last Jewish and the first Christian Pentecost which became the spiritual harvest of the redemption from sin. In the view of Bromiley (1985, 799), Luke's use of the phrase "When the day of Pentecost had come" (lit. "In the complete filling up of the day of Pentecost," Acts 2:1) is meant to link the Christian Pentecost to salvation history. The phrase is reminiscent of Luke 9:51, where a similar momentous phrase is used. Bromiley therefore considers the Old Testament Pentecost as having gained some religious significance before the Christian Pentecost occurred.

…they were all together in one place. The expression "in one place" is further expanded in verse 2 to indicate that this refers to a particular place or the same house. Church tradition holds that the place where the gathering took place was the upper room mentioned in 1:13. However, one cannot be certain about the identity of this one place where the disciples had gathered. The gathering was in obedience to Jesus's command that the disciples should wait in Jerusalem to be "clothed with power from on high" before departing (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4–8).

…a mighty wind…tongues as of fire (vv. 2–3). While the apostles and disciples were together waiting in prayer for the fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit (2:1), the Pentecost event occurred. The Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost was demonstrated by three signs. First, there was the sound of a violent rushing wind that filled the house (2:2); then, there was the visible sign of tongues of fire resting on each person (2:3); finally, there was the miraculous speaking in foreign languages unknown to the speakers (2:4). The use of "wind" and "fire" in connection with the Spirit (vv. 2–3) is significant. The word "Spirit" (Greek: *pneuma*) relates to *pnoē*, which is translated "wind" here. The nouns "spirit" and "wind" or "breath" derive from the verb *pneō* which means "to blow, to breathe" (Toussaint 1983, 357). As Jesus had earlier breathed on the eleven disciples, God was now breathing on the 120 (cf. John 20:20–22; see also Job 4:9, 33:4). The sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven signifies the Spirit's sovereign power reminiscent of the image of end-time, resurrection life that may be inferred in Ezek 37:9–14 and God's presence implied in John 3:8 (Toussaint 1983, 357).

The sound like a strong wind was followed by the manifestation of the Spirit in the form of a gleaming flame that neither burns nor consumes. The use of fire to symbolize God's presence is found in Old Testament passages like Gen 15:17; Exod 3:2–6; 13:21–22; 19:18; 40:38. According to Horton (1996, 31), "fire" in this context underlines "God's acceptance of the Church Body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:21, 22; 1 Cor 3:16), and then, the acceptance of the individual believers as also being temples of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19)." The temple in the Old Testament was the place where God dwelt, but now his Spirit dwells within each believer, making the believer the temple of God. Therefore, believers would no more

be required to come to the temple in Jerusalem to meet God. They are now themselves "living temples" through whom "God would take the gospel to all nations in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8)" (Miller 2011, 41). The fire not only symbolizes the purifying, enlightening, and quickening power of the Spirit but also evokes eschatological judgment (Isa 26:11; 66:15–16, 24).

In the Old Testament, "the Spirit is considered as the manifestation of God's actions in relation to Israel, guiding selected leaders (Moses, Num 11:16–17; Joshua, Deut 34:9; Othniel, Judg 3:10; Gideon, Judg 6:34; David, 1 Sam 16:17) and inspiring various prophets (Saul, 1 Sam 10:6; 19:23–24; Isa 42:1; 61:1; Ezek 37:1; Mic 3:8)" (Squires 2003, 1218). The Spirit gave gifts to people (Num 11:25; Prov 1:23; Dan 4:8–18) and will rest upon the eschatological Davidic leader (Isa 11:2–5). The Spirit played a key role in the lives of Jesus (Luke 4:1), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and John's parents (Elizabeth, Luke 1:41; Zacharias, Luke 1:67). Considering the foregoing data on the Holy Spirit together with the various prophecies given by Jesus and John the Baptist in connection with his coming, it becomes apparent that the Pentecost event "stands in continuity with God's action in Israel" (Squires 2003, 1218).

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 4a). The Holy Spirit baptism is described in terms of filling and outpouring to signify abundance. The metaphor of being "filled with the Spirit" signifies the pervasive nature of the experience, meaning, "the Holy Spirit possessed them completely" or "the Holy Spirit came into them entirely" (Miller 2011, 42). What happened in this verse is a direct fulfillment of Jesus's prophecy about the Spirit baptism in Acts 1:4–8 which he described as receiving "the gift my Father promised" (v. 4), being "baptized with [in] the Holy Spirit" (v. 5), and as the moment "when the Holy Spirit comes upon [them]" (v. 8).

…[they] began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (v. 4b). Speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) among the disciples became an immediate and direct effect of their being filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 10:46; 19:6). The new spiritual life, initiated, controlled, and directed by the Spirit, manifested itself in the speaking of tongues towards God. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues that occurred this day is different from speaking in unknown languages in private, prayerlike communication with God, which Paul talks about in 1 Cor 12–14.

…from every nation under heaven (v. 5). Stott (1994, 68) asserts that "Although all the nations of the world were not present *literally*, they were *representatively*." The expression "every nation" must therefore not be understood in an absolute sense. The table of nations presented in Acts 2:9–11 compares well with what is presented in Gen 10 and includes descendants of all three of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The representatives from the various nations help fulfill Jesus's prophecy that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

…the tongues spoken were translated to his own language (v. 6). This verse also highlights the missional purpose of Spirit baptism. The Pentecost phenomenon serves as a sign of the universality of the Christian gospel indicated by the speaking of tongues which were heard in the home language of non-Palestinian Jewish and Gentile-proselyte pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. Fifteen nations are mentioned representing at least fifteen different mother-tongues. In this event the tongues spoken were translated into the language of each person, the relevance being the imminent transfer of the gospel from Jerusalem to every part of the world (Ladd 1993, 385). The phenomenon of speaking in tongues therefore facilitated the multicultural audience's appreciation and recognition of God's wondrous activity.

4. Missional Perspectives on Pentecost

The event that took place on the day of Pentecost has many missiological implications. This section explores missiological themes such as Pentecost and *kerygma*, Pentecost and the *ecclesia*, Pentecost and mother-tongue development, and Pentecost and the *Missio Dei*.

4.1 Pentecost and kerygma

A crucial theme at the heart of Acts is the Spirit empowering believers for *kerygma* (the proclamation of the gospel). The filling of the Spirit in the context of Acts (mentioned again in 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9) is usually linked with the bold, effective proclamation of the gospel message. Therefore, Peter, full of the Spirit, was empowered to proclaim the gospel to the people who had gathered at that time. Peter stood up to explain the miraculous event that had taken place in response to the allegation that the disciples were acting under the control of alcohol. Through Pentecost, the disciples were transformed from a timid clique to mighty courageous men ready for the propagation of the gospel.

Peter's reference to the crowd as "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem" (2:14) indicates that the people included Jews from Judea and others who had pilgrimed to Jerusalem for the festival. Peter begins with a rebuttal of the accusation of drunkenness by drawing his audience's attention to the fact that the third hour of the day in which the event had taken place was too early for a group of revelers to be drunk (vv. 14–15). He then makes the point that Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28–32). This means that the occurrence at Pentecost had a strong biblical foundation and so must be considered as a divine act meant for a divine purpose.

Peter moves on to present Jesus as the Messiah that the Old Testament promised the Jews (vv. 22–32). According to him, the miracles, wonders, and signs that characterized Jesus's life and ministry were divine proofs that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 22). He argues further that the crucifixion of Christ was not the result of a human plot but a fulfillment of God's eternal salvific purpose (v. 23a). Yet, God's foreknowledge about the crucifixion does not exonerate from guilt those who committed this evil act (v. 23b). Peter repeatedly used the pronoun "you" to draw his audience's attention to the fact that they must also bear some of the blame for Jesus's crucifixion because it was necessitated by their sins too (see Matt 27:22; Luke 23:18). He then moves to the subject of the resurrection by saying that Jesus came back to life after death because it was impossible for death to hold him captive (v. 24). For Peter, David's assertion that God would not let his soul stay in *Hades* was a Messianic prophecy referring to the resurrection of Jesus (v. 31, cf. Ps 16:10). The disciples were all aware of the resurrection (v. 32).

Peter then considers Jesus's ascension to heaven and him sitting at the right hand of God, from where he poured the Holy Spirit on his followers (v. 33). He again cites David, saying that David had not ascended into heaven, but he was able to prophesy about the ministry of the risen Lord and Savior, who has now received the seat of authority to bring all powers under subjection to God (vv. 34–35). In verse 36 he states emphatically that the crucified but risen Jesus has now been made both Lord and Christ (v. 36).

Some lessons can be drawn from Peter's sermon for Christian proclamation of the Word of God. First, Christian proclamation should be Christocentric, focusing on the person and works of Christ (vv. 22–24, 29–36). Second, it should be scripturally based. Peter's example includes Joel's prophecy (v. 17; Joel 2:28) and David's words in Psalm 16 (vv. 25–28) and Psalm 110 (v. 34). The Bible is God's revelation to humanity about his will and purpose. Therefore, an authentic Christian proclamation must be

supported by the Bible. Third, even though the Bible was written to be understood by everyone, not all people have the same level of understanding. There is the need to explain biblical texts for one's audience to enhance their understanding. The method that Peter used, which serves as a perfect model for contemporary Christianity, is expository preaching. Peter, after quoting Scripture, exposited it for contemporary relevance (see, e.g., the exposition of Ps 16 in v. 31). Fourth, since the power for effective witnessing comes from the Holy Spirit, Christian proclamation must be done by Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered disciples. Fifth, Peter's sermon highlights the need to make proclamation personal rather than making a generic reference (cf. vv. 22, 29, 36). He appealed to the conscience of individuals to make a personal, conscious decision to accept Christ. Therefore, he demanded a response from his audience comprising repentance, confession, and forgiveness (vv. 28, 38, 40–41). Christian salvation necessitates an individual response; therefore, Christian proclamation must invite the individual to make his or her own personal independent decision. That notwithstanding, it could be noted that the individual act of responding to the call was part of a broader corporate action.

4.2 Pentecost and the ecclesia

The word *ecclesia* (which means assembly of called-out ones) is rendered "church"[2] by English translators. God's plan for being glorified among the nations was to form the Church. It is not by chance that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost. God was going to transform the physical harvest associated with the Jewish Pentecost into a spiritual harvest of people at the Christian Pentecost. There exists the scholarly opinion that the Church already existed from the time that Jesus called his first disciples to follow him (cf. Matt 4:18–22; 9:9; 18:17) and so the Pentecost experience was meant to empower the already-existing Church to undertake the divine mandate of taking the gospel to all parts of the world (Matt 28:19–20) (Miller 2011, 43). The disciples before Pentecost should be considered as the embryo from which the Church proper developed with equal opportunity for both Jews and Gentiles to be part. Until this time, YHWH's people consisted of Israel, along with a few Gentile proselytes. Paul refers to this inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church as a mystery, which had not been formerly revealed, although it was typified in this Jewish feast with two loaves (Eph 3:4–7). The Church, which had an initial membership of 120 grew to about 3 000 converts through the Pentecost experience and the subsequent proclamation of the gospel by Peter (2:14–41).

The unity and diversity of the *ecclesia* are signified by the appearance of something like tongues of fire dividing and resting upon each person (2:3). The Church's diversity is seen in its composition and location. Since a large number of people accepted the Christian faith at Pentecost, fellowship could probably not happen at a single place. Therefore, in addition to worship in the temple are gatherings in Christian homes (2:46; 5:42). There were many house-churches similar to Jewish synagogues (Ladd 1993, 386). The Church comprises different people of different places and different times who have all come to faith in Christ. Yet, the *ecclesia* is a unity in that all the members are part of the one body, whose head is Christ. The oneness and the universal scope of the *ecclesia* is highlighted by the *glossolalia* (Ladd 1993, 385). The Pentecostal event is designed for the whole world and is purposed to unite the diverse tongues in a new unity of the *ecclesia*. Thus, in the book of Acts one finds the growth of "one Church in diverse cultures" which looks forward to the day when a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language will stand before the Lamb (Rev 7:9).

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2 The word "church" also comes from the word Kyriakos ("of the Lord").

The life of the early Christian Church was marked by two key distinctive Christian elements, the first being "the apostles' teaching" or *didache* (2:42). The believers first continued steadfastly "persisting in or continuing in" the apostles' teaching and fellowship (defined in terms of breaking of bread and prayer; v. 42). The specification of "the teaching of the apostles" underlines the unique authority and status they had among the early Christians. The apostles were the people who had seen Jesus personally after the resurrection and had been commissioned to proclaim the gospel. The importance of the Twelve is reiterated by the need to replace Judas with Matthias (1:26). The apostles were the major source of authority because they had received the Lord's message through the power of the Holy Spirit (Bruce 1988, 73). While Acts gives no idea about the subjects in which the new converts were instructed, one could gather from the bits of catechetical materials scattered throughout the New Testament that teachings to new converts dealt with common topics such as the meaning of the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the second coming of Christ, new life in Christ, renunciation of pagan beliefs for Christ's and the brethren's sake, faith and worship, Christian virtues and responsibilities, and life in crisis periods (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 126–127; Ladd 1993, 386).

Second, the early church was devoted to fellowship. The Greek word used in Acts 2:42 for "fellowship" is *koinonia* which also means "community." *Koinonia* was used in the Greco-Roman literature to express the mutuality and commitment characteristic of marriage. It goes beyond "friendliness" or "companionship" to include ideas such as "participation, having a share in and two-way trust" (Ntsiful and Twum-Baah 2017, 128). It has to do with the sharing together of people in and with Christ. The intimacy implied in their fellowship is made explicit by the phrase "the breaking of bread," which probably alludes to the Eucharist and a common meal (Ladd 1993, 386; Toussaint 1983, 340; see 1 Cor 11:20, 34). Fellowship among members of the early church included prayer and worship (2:42). Prayer (both corporate and individual) was central to the communal experience of the early church. According to Bruce (1988, 73) the format of the prayer followed the Jewish prayers but with different content. Fellowship is Christian love in action. Therefore, the disciples shared a common life illustrated practically by their common ownership of material wealth (2:44–45; 4:32–5:11; cf. 11:27–30; John 13:24–25). The church had one heart and was determined to do everything in common to help reduce the plight of the poor among them.

Spirit-empowered believers love one another so much that they value one another more than they value their possessions (2:44–45). This corroborates well with the Lukan theology of transformation which involves commitment to a new Lord and to one's neighbor. The communal aspect of the early church resonates well with the African traditional communal sense of life. This is aptly expressed by the *Ubuntu* philosophy of "I am because of who we all are." Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999, 31) explained *Ubuntu* as follows: *Ubuntu* is to say "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours…. A person is a person through other persons." *Ubuntu*, unlike the Western aphorism, "I think, therefore I am" (*Cogito, ergo sum*), says "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share." Therefore "what dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me" (Tutu 1999, 31). The interdependence, solidarity, generosity, brotherhoodness, and interconnectedness that characterized the early church are all captured in African *Ubuntuism*. The African concept of "being self through others" must be emphasized by missionaries so that African churches can share resources to ensure the survival of the under-resourced. The purpose of such acts of sharing is not for all people to have the same number of resources, but to have everyone getting the basic necessities for existence (2 Cor 8:15).

The African communal sense of life also informs the African communal view about sin and salvation. In Africa, "To be delivered from sin into fullness

of life is to be freed and empowered to live a community-centered life. It is to be given the capacity to contribute actively to the *sensus communis* [common sense]" (Asante 2001, 362). On the Day of Pentecost, the people who confessed Christ—and were baptized— did so as a group (corporately), though to be part of that group one had to have made a personal decision to accept Christ and his salvation. While recognizing the individual responsibility in salvation, it is also important to acknowledge that humans were created as social beings to live in a community, and the Church itself is a community. About three thousand being added to the Church in one instance is surely more an example of *Ubuntu* than it is of individual action. The communal dimension of the Church is also underlined by Peter's use of the second person plural pronoun throughout his sermon. The point then is that in as much as individual decision is important, such decisions are made as parts of a broader corporate action. Christian missions in Africa will be enhanced if the communal sense of the Christian life, the Church, sin, and salvation are developed and promoted from a Christian viewpoint.

5. Pentecost and Mother-tongue Development

One's mother-tongue is the native language into which one is born and bred. The mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19–20) implies a cross-cultural missionary task. As missionaries move from place to place, they encounter different languages. The Pentecostal experience, in which God (through the Holy Spirit) gave utterances to the apostles and then communicated the message embedded in the divine utterances to each of the hearers in their own mother-tongues (Acts 2:6–8, 11), highlights the significance of language in missions. The experience underscores the fact that Spirit-directed Christian mission must break linguistic barriers to make God's message accessible to all people. Thus, in Christian mission, the Christian message must be brought home to its hearers in their own native language. This is an area where the early Christian missionaries who came to Africa did exceedingly well. Realizing that their missionary enterprise could not succeed without breaking the linguistic barrier they encountered, the missionaries studied African languages and then captured them in writing. They educated the indigenes and also began to translate the Bible into African vernacular. The vernacular Bibles helped the African converts to better appreciate the message propagated by the missionaries. Africans, having discovered affinities between their own culture and Bible culture (especially in the OT), were enthusiastic to share their discoveries with others, and this eventually led to the conversion of many. According to Mojola (2014, 3),

> the pioneer African readers of these texts could not avoid noticing the similarities between many of the stories of the OT and stories from their own cultures, between many OT religious practices and institutions and those of their own, in short, the OT could easily have been read as an African book without much difficulty.

On the significance of mother-tongue development and use of native language in propagating the Christian faith, Bediako (1995, 60) asserts that,

> the happenings on the day of Pentecost, as recounted in the second chapter of the Acts of Apostles…give an important Biblical and theological warrant for taking seriously the vernacular languages in which people everywhere hear the wonders of God. The ability to hear in one's own language and to express in one's own language one's response to the message which one receives, must lie at the heart of all religious encounter with the divine realm. Language itself becomes, then, not merely a social or a psychological phenomenon, but a theological one as well. Though every human language has its

limitations in this connection, yet it is through language, and for each person, through their mother tongue, that the Spirit of God speaks to convey divine communication at its deepest to the human community.

Christian mission can therefore not succeed without taking into consideration the linguistic context of the target audience. As Bediako has rightly argued, from the perspective of Pentecost it is apparent that language is not merely a cultural tool but a theological tool as well. Mother-tongue theologizing helps grassroots participation in theological discourses. Since Christian theology is meant for all Christians, it must not be too academic and technical to exclude the participation of the masses who lack formal theological training. The significance of mother-tongues in missions is also highlighted by Ekem (2007, 47) in his assertion that "The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries." Mother-tongue development in Africa, for example, will promote oral theology—"the interpretation of the biblical message through sermons, teachings, prayers, discussions, songs, witnessing and any oral communication" (Gehman 1987, 28)—which Africa, being an oral society, needs to enhance public theological discourse. While many Bible translation projects have taken place since the missionary era and still many more projects are ongoing, there are many African mother-tongues into which the Bible has not been translated. This means that there are many Africans who have no linguistic access to God's word or access to God's word through other African vernacular with which they are familiar. The need for more translation work to be done in Africa is obvious. Christian mission must therefore take the issues of linguistic development and mother-tongue translation of the Bible seriously.

From the Pentecostal perspective, there is no superior language; all languages are accepted by God. At Babel, God judged those proud men by confusing their languages (Gen 11:1–9). At Pentecost, God turned this confusion of tongues into a miracle of miraculous speech that brought great blessing upon the people. There was therefore a reverse in the curse of Babel as people from different lands who had gathered heard the *glossolalia* spoken by the disciples in their different languages. Hence, Pentecost provides an answer to the chaos at Babel and restores humanity, the deeper significance being that "God speaks to men and women—always in the vernacular. Divine communication is never in a sacred, esoteric, hermetic language; rather it is such that 'all of us hear...in our own languages...the wonders of God'" (Bediako 1995, 61). With the understanding that a proper comprehension of the Christian faith is rooted in the indigenous languages, Christian missionaries must employ the vernacular language as a theological and linguistic tool for any authentic Christian mission. To promote the use of mother-tongue in Christian mission, there is the need to have the Bible and other Christian literature published in the vernacular. This will also enhance mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics and theologizing. Finally, because of Pentecost, people will no longer go to Jerusalem to worship God in the Hebrew language; they are free, in the far corners of the earth, to worship God in their own languages.

6. Pentecost and Christian Mission

Pentecost founded the early church as a missionary community, in which everyone is involved in the mission by receiving the Spirit for evangelistic purpose. That Pentecost serves as the basis for (cross-cultural) mission is seen from Acts 1:8 where Jesus told the disciples that the Pentecost experience would empower them to be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the world. Earlier, Jesus had commanded his disciples to remain

in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). The expression "to be clothed with power" means to be fully and completely enfolded in the presence of God. The empowerment for mission comes from the Holy Spirit. The word "power" from which "empowerment" derives, according to Wright (2006, 35–36) is "the ability to do things," "the capacity to accomplish goals, or influence the outcome of events and processes," that is, "effective action, making a difference, influencing events, changing the way things are or will be." Luke locates the beginning of the Christian mission in the founding gift of the Spirit, and emphasizes that the Spirit's power not only begins the mission, but sustains it as well. Luke's empowerment–witness motif (that is, "you will receive power" and as a result "you will be my witnesses," cf. 1:8) is key to the understanding of Pentecost and the message of the entire book of Acts. It is important to note that each of the seven key outpourings in Acts resulted in powerful missional witness: Pentecost, the First Jerusalem outpouring (2:1–4); the Second Jerusalem outpouring (4:31); the Samaritan outpouring (8:14–17); the Damascene outpouring (9:15–18); the Caesarean outpouring (10:44–48); the Antiochian outpouring (13:1–3); the Ephesian outpouring (19:1–7) (Miller 2011, 29). The church's geographical progress from Jerusalem to Rome (as found in Acts) was made possible because the Holy Spirit acted through the disciples.

The "sound like the blowing of a mighty wind" (Acts 2:2) also has some missional implications. Recent hurricanes have shown that wind is among the most powerful elements in the world (Miller 2011, 41). As noted earlier, Jesus once used the metaphor of wind to describe the Spirit's redemptive power (John 3:8). From the Pentecost perspective then, "The Spirit works tirelessly throughout the world inspiring and empowering the church, revealing Christ to the lost, and drawing people unto him" (Miller 2011, 41). Stott (1994, 60) therefore rightly asserts that, "Without the Holy

Spirit, Christian [mission] would be inconceivable, even impossible.... As a body without a breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead."

The Holy Spirit is strategist and tactical director of the broader mission of the Church (1:8; 4:29–31). He appoints missionaries, commissions them, and directs their paths. Examples abound in the book of Acts to support the fact that the Spirit empowers and directs believers for cross-cultural mission. For example, the Spirit arranged for the missionary encounter between Philip and the African official (Acts 8:29); the Spirit instructed Peter to meet the Gentile messengers of Cornelius for a missionary course (10:19); the Spirit confirmed the salvation of the Gentiles by falling on them (10:44–47; 11:15–16); the Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul out on their mission to evangelize even Gentiles (13:2–4); and the Spirit guided Paul and Silas on their cross-cultural mission (16:6–7). These examples validate Keener's (2009, 72) assertion that "God empowers his people with the Spirit to cross cultural barriers, to worship God, and to form one new, multicultural community of worshipers committed to Christ and to one another." Luke insists that the Church's missional activity is to always be fully directed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit expands the Church, continually urging the believers beyond their natural boundaries. Pentecost is hence to be seen as the drive or stimulus for missionary activities.

Discussions on the missional dimension of the Pentecost cannot be complete without a word being said about efforts made by African Pentecostal churches in this regard.[3] The Pentecostal movement is one of the largest Christian movements in Africa. Pentecostalism places high

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[3] The discussions here are not in any way meant to say that historic mission churches or other Christian movements are not doing well in mission. Historic mission churches have contributed and continue to contribute to the missionary enterprise of the Christian Church. The author has chosen to focus on Pentecostals because of the emphasis they place on the events associated with the Day of Pentecost.

emphasis on pneumatological experiences. Its members believe that the original Pentecostal experience in Acts 2 can and must be experienced by every Christian; therefore, they consciously and earnestly seek this experience (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). The Pentecostal emphasis on pnuematological phenomena corroborates well African religious beliefs which also place emphasis on spiritual phenomena (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). According to Kalu (2008, 125) "the rise of Pentecostalism intensified the passion for mission and enlarged the scale of missionary enterprise." This is so because being Spirit-filled and Spirit-led gives one the enthusiasm to partake in the mission. The mission-mindedness of Pentecostals goes hand in hand with eschatological focus. Pentecostals preach a lot about the *Parousia* (or the second coming of Christ). They are "credited for the transformation of faith that has been underway in Africa since the middle of the 20th century" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 14). They organize large crusades in villages and cities to win souls for Christ. They also make holiness a core part of their message. Missionary endeavors cannot be successful and appropriate without converts being taught to be holy. It is important to note that the Pentecostal emphasis on holiness has reduced in recent times (Atiemo 2016, 12–13).

Furthermore, "the concept of mission and practice of mission in African Pentecostalism emerged just as much as responses to the indigenous worldviews and cultures, the contemporary experiences of communities in the face of the collapse of their economies, and their appropriation of biblical resources as they did for the surging intensity of secularism" (Kalu 2008, 125). Sanneh (2009) has argued that the gospel message must translate into every culture just as Christ incarnated into the human environment. African Pentecostals take this issue seriously and contextualize their theology to address issues related to the influence of spiritual forces on human lives.

7. Conclusion

The passage examined in this study is a pivotal section of the book of Acts, revealing the significance and purpose of the Spirit's empowerment for global mission. From the study the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, God is in control of history; he determines what happens as well as when, where, and how it happens. This conclusion derives from the fact that the Pentecost experience was a fulfillment of God's prophecy which he sovereignly made manifest at his own appointed time. This fact connects well with the second conclusion that God offers divine guidance to those who willingly submit to his preordained plan, making sure that everything plays out in accordance with his will and purpose. Thirdly, God's salvific plan is not limited to a group of people; rather God is willing to save all who come to Christ through faith. This is evident from the fact that the Pentecost experience distributed the gospel message to all people who were present irrespective of their place of origin. God's message through the disciples was heard in various languages, meaning the gospel proclamation must overcome any linguistic or cultural barrier. More so, the Church must prioritize missions. Any Christian denomination that does not make missionary activity its prime focus is not living up to expectation. For the Christian Church to fulfill its mandate, it must be called back to its Pentecostal and missionary roots, and to the absolute necessity of the Spirit's empowering for the effective participation in the mission of God. Contemporary missionaries can only succeed if they are empowered by the Spirit. The Church must therefore seek empowerment from the Spirit for missions, both locally and globally.

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The Contemporary *Missio Dei* Paradigm and its Expression in the Global South

Conspectus

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Abstract

For a long time, the Global South has been unprepared for the ecclesiastical responsibility of mission work that has been naturally part of Christianity in the Global North. This could be so because, traditionally, Christianity has been introduced in the Global South through mission work. This article examines the contemporary *Missio Dei* paradigm and its expression in the Global South. It begins by explaining the development of the concept of *Missio Dei* and proceeds to elaborate its expression and reception in the Global South. It is generally considered that to understand the paradigm of *Missio Dei* in the Global South, it has to be viewed through ecclesiological structures native to the Global South. Concurrently, I seek to answer this question: what is the theological implication of Covid-19 for the African Church, and which strategies are being employed to mitigate the condition within the Global South? This paper undertakes a qualitative methodology in which a systematic literature review is conducted from the available scholarly sources that leads to both theological and missiological inferences. Additionally, an extensive analysis of the concept of *Missio Dei* will be conducted as it relates to the Global South, demonstrating that the *Missio Dei* paradigm has shifted very significantly in the Global South, transforming the region from traditionally receivers of mission work to active participants in mission work. The Global South is now ready for both home and diaspora mission work. Findings and recommendations from this paper will be beneficial for current and future scholars in both theological and missiological fields.

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https://www.sats.ac.za/conspectus/
This article: **https://www.sats.ac.za/conspectus/contemporary-missio-dei-paradigm-global**
https://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2022.2.2

SATS

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

As Christianity is transforming over time, new meaning is also developing over the concept of Christian theology (Wood 2018, 16). Traditionally, it has been understood that Christianity was limited to evangelism and defined within the confines of divine revelation and human experience (Muller 2014, 6). In that sense, mission work has been an inherent feature of Christianity. However, mission work has been understood traditionally in different dynamic forms. It is a way through which revealed truth about God is assigned human meaning and communicated to the contemporary population in a given geographical location. Viewed through this lens, it implies that mission work is responsible for molding new faiths, disseminating the message of God, and availing the necessary requirements for accessing the content of missiological revelation. Largely, mission work has been engaging both exegetical and canonical understandings of the biblical text within diverse contexts (Sawatsky 1987, 12). This has implicitly created roles that for a long time have been distinct identities of the Global North and the Global South. The Global North has been the mover of mission work whilst the Global South has been the receiver of mission work.

Historically, mission work has been understood in various ways. In the Global North, it is mainly considered as a divine call to God's people to reach as many nations as possible with the message of God as a means of offering salvation and expanding the Kingdom of God (Kool 2008, 21). In the Global South, however, it has been mainly viewed through a cultural perspective in which mission work is simply a conflation of globally east and south people with Western Christianity (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 4). This understanding is deeply rooted in the Global South owing to the fact that Christianity was introduced there by missionaries from the West. In these two views, albeit divergent, the concept of authentic Christian theology comprising Christology and the Holy Trinity is still consistent, or has so been, within the spheres of theological teachings. However, there have been developments over time with the concept of Christianity being viewed as a religion of the West becoming vacuous and less sufficing under theological scrutiny (van Klinken 2017, 42). This has led to the evolution of the Global South assuming roles of mission work that was traditionally a reserve for the Global North, leading to what some scholars refer to as reverse missiology (Adedibu 2013, 408). Similarly, with the outbreak of Covid-19, the Global South has been immensely affected with numerous theological implications that have birthed new theological trends and changes in ecclesiology. Therefore, this article endeavors to examine the concept of *Missio Dei* in the contemporary Global South as well its expression within this geographical location.

2. The Concept of *Missio Dei*

There has been an immense debate in the world of Christian theology surrounding the etymology of the word "mission." While some scholars hold that there is no equivalence to the contemporary mission directly mentioned or alluded to in the Bible, there are others who argue for its origin from the great commission in Matthew 28 (Jensz 2012, 244). Peskett and Ramachandra (2003) postulate that the earliest use of the word "mission" and the inception of the concept of "missionary" is attributed to the envoys of the Pope that were out to convert Asians and native Americans to Catholic Christianity. Up to now, there is still a rift between those who try to understand mission work as a human initiative and those who think of it as a work of God (Harold 2019, 21). In the Brandenburg Missionary Conference of 1932, Karl Barth supported the same notion of understanding mission as the work of God himself (Bentley 2009, 19). It

has further been strongly affirmed that the authentic concept of mission work should entail understanding the nature of God followed by human experience in disseminating what God wants of his people. In this sense, most missiologists have become contented with the understanding that mission is a work of God accomplished through human activity (Adedibu 2013, 64).

Even as the study of missiology is expanding and changing over time, missionary theology owes much of its transformation to the influence of Karl Barth. It is through him that a basis of understanding mission chiefly as work ordained and commissioned by God was founded (Bentley 2009, 17). Tormond Engelsviken (2003, 9) in his work, *Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology*, illustrates that the use of the word *Missio Dei* was first discussed in the Willingen IMC conference in 1952. Engelsviken argues that, however the exact terminology was employed, it is reasonable for one to conclude that the conference was the foundation of the term *Missio Dei*.

Because mission was understood as a work of God, it became insufficient to incorporate other aspects of human influence into the confines of missiology. It was in its basic scope a subject to explore the Triune God. However, as time changed, the missionary theology has equally experienced a paradigm shift. Primarily, there was need to examine mission work in light of the doctrine of ecclesiology. This was necessitated by the fact that for mission work to be successful, an understanding of the structural concept of Christian denominations was mandatory (Adedibu 2013, 67). Consequently, besides communicating the message of God, creating ecclesiological communities became mission work's other fundamental tenet (Bevans 2015, 131). In that light, the *Missio Dei* concept was birthed in which it was defined as the voluntary action of emulating God in sending his Son and the Holy Spirit to do his work on earth.

In the Global South, the reception of *Missio Dei* was initially an act in creating new Christian communities and opening churches in various places. It was an idea in which the church was considered as a representation of the personage of the Trinity and that mission work was ordained by God to expand his work on earth (Sonea 2017, 77). By the beginning of the twentieth century, different mission representations were already established in the Global South. By this, the Global South was becoming a diverse ground for evangelization to be soon filled with mainly Catholic, Protestant, Adventist, and Orthodoxy theologies. As elaborated above, the basic comprehension of mission work described by Willingen, in which *Missio Dei* was believed to have arisen from God, was embraced by all the early Christian denominations arriving in the Global South (Sonea 2017, 81). The opening of new churches and the creating of Christ awareness in the Global South became *Missio Dei's raison d'être*, but this would soon not be the case as there was a need to point the Global South unto God through his word and will (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing. 2020, 17).

While *Missio Dei* emphasized the doctrine of the Trinity and God's action in the world, its consequences brought about distinct changes in ecclesiological and theological perceptions. Since the Global South was uniquely a ground for evangelization through mission work it became necessary to differentiate *Missio Dei* from the activities of the Church (Bentley 2009, 22). This is clearly reinforced in Lutheran missiology whereby the *Missio Dei* is given priority before church mission (Rasolondraibe 2004). This understanding has had a varied impact on the *Missio Ecclesiae* as well as the ecclesiological structures within the Global South. In the most dominant view, mission work has been cast as an independent entity that is separate from the Church and taken to be God's own activity.

However, since Christianity at large and churches in the Global South are products of mission work, it becomes inevitable to look at missiology

and ecclesiology through a similar lens. For this reason, the concept of *Missio Dei* had to expand in order to incorporate not only the doctrine of the Holy Trinity but also soteriology and Christology. By including these doctrines, *Missio Dei* and the Church became functionally synonymous and inherently inseparable (Engelsviken 2003, 490). Even though they operated on different theological planes, their roles quite often overlapped making it impossible to have mission work without the Church and *vice versa*.

However, since the Global South was continually the receiver of mission work, it was natural for missionaries to dominate church activity as this established mission continuity. Unlike the Global North in which the Church had a constituent of mission work, in the Global South, the Church was structured in such a way that it seemed mission work was a prerogative of the Global North (Sonea 2017, 86). *Missio Dei* was therefore construed in a different light in the Global South, the most dominant view being a representation of God's work on earth by creating and opening new Christian congregations (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 14). In a sense, mission work could comprise the activities of the Church, but the Church could not entirely be a substitute for mission work in its functions. Similarly, the missiological perspectives of the different denominations established in the Global South differed concerning the interdependence of the Church and *Missio Dei*. For instance, in the Catholic Church's layout of ecclesiological structures it is elaborated that the Church in its nature is missional and therefore mission work is inherently a feature of the Church which cannot survive on its own (Bevans and Schroeder 2004, 61). This is further illustrated by the nature of activities of the Church through which the doctrine of the Trinity,, soteriology, and the Christocentric principle are the central foundations of faith formation. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder add that churches were established through *Missio Dei* and therefore by default assumed a missiological role

in which they are commissioned to call people of the nations to faith, offer salvation through Christ, and communicate the Word of God.

The Global South seems to have approached the understanding of mission work on a two faceted approach: firstly, mission work as God's work was primarily meant to save the world of its iniquities, and consequently this became an overlapping role of the Church as well (Bentley 2009, 39). This was broadly based on the concept of the triune character of God, which meant the source of the Church's missionary activity was God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Engelsviken 2003, 11). The Church had to find a link to connect with this redemptive mission of God. By reinforcing the concept of the triune God, the understanding of *Missio Dei* was primarily anchored on the Christocentric principle as it was through the gospel teachings of Christ that mission work spread in the Global South (Sonea 2017, 87). The aim of the Christocentric principle was to build a Christian religious foundation whose doctrine focused on the revelations of Jesus Christ as an arbiter of any truth claims about the nature of God. This precedence was received well in the Global South. However, as time went by, the understanding of the Christocentric principle varied in different church denominations, and this brought about differences in the structural understanding of the *Missio Dei* amongst Christians in the Global South (Adedibu 2013, 62).

Secondly, while the first approach emphasized the centrality of Jesus Christ as an arbiter of Christians' teachings about God and respectively incorporated the Church in the *Missio Dei*, the second approach was based on the concept of cosmocentric Trinitarianism. This approach focused on the "providential work of the Father through the Spirit in culture and World history" in addition to Christ and his Church (Sonea 2017, 77). This was marked by a mission work in which the Church was not considered as part of *Missio Dei* in the community, and it aimed at conducting mission work

through the principle of God the Father as the head of the Trinity and his providential work through his Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In a sense, there was a formation of two parallel approaches to *Missio Dei* in the Global South. However, due to the popularity of the gospel of Christ, the Christocentric approach seemed to win the day.

This was not the only concept of *Missio Dei*. As different factions of Christianity continued to appear, there was also an extensive expansion of knowledge regarding this concept (Harold 2019, 26). Due to differences in cultures and environments, there was a need to progressively redefine the concept of *Missio Dei*. Missiological thinking in the Global South progressively evolved and in time adopted a new approach in which the traditional concept introduced by European settlers was viewed as imperial and Eurocentric (Adedibu 2013, 71). This is also echoed in the ecumenical missiology and in the current missionary practice in the Global East in which the concept of mission work is termed as "mission from the margin" (Sonea 2017, 76).

The main point of departure of the Global South from the western model of *Missio Dei* is the initial exclusion of the receiver community in mission work (Melinda 2015, 24). This led to reluctance to participate in mission work, and consequently to a change in the understanding of *Missio Dei* in the Global South. Scholars and stakeholders of mission work in the Global South have adopted, in the contemporary context, a paradigm shift in their understanding of the *Missio Dei* in which an invitation to partake in the *Missio Dei* is favored as the most appropriate approach to winning the unchristian world (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 17). In such a circumstance, the traditional view of *Missio Dei* as introduced by early missionaries to the Global South falls short since in its activities of mission work, the participation of the objects of mission work was not called upon.

3. Expression and Reception of the *Missio Dei* Paradigm in the Global South

As expressed in the abstract of this article, *Missio Dei* in the Global South has experienced a paradigm shift over time since the introduction of mission work in the region. Historically, the Global South has been a recipient of mission work, and this has remained so for the longest part of the establishment of the African Church (Melinda 2015, 21). Conceptually, in the Global South, *Missio Dei* remains defined in accordance with its traditional view in which it is understood as God's work on earth (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 13). This is vividly depicted in the earliest works of missionaries that settled in the Global South in which churches were opened, the message of God preached in new territories, and people converted to Christianity. *Missio Dei* was established with the intention of extending Christian religious faith to generations after generations through a well-founded belief in the work of God and the salvation conferred by Christ (Harold 2019, 16).

Over time, the Global South has held divergent views concerning the concept of *Missio Dei*. Most of the differences arose practically based on the rather disturbing events of political dispositions through which the Global South was conquered by Western authorities as a form of colonialism (Engelsviken 2003, 485). To some extent, this has impacted the understanding of *Missio Dei* in which a sect of Global South believers has contended that the classical expression of *Missio Dei* is territorial take over to not only create a new faith through the opening of churches but to also pass on a Western culture (Frescura 2015, 71). However, much this view seems weak in the actual intentionality of the *Missio Dei*. In the greatest part of it, this understanding has not stood the test of time as there have been progressive changes in the understanding of *Missio Dei* in the Global

South. To a greater extent, the Global South has maintained a tendency to hold on to true faith in God and primarily put more focus on trying to win back those who have fallen from faith, rather than converting unbelievers (Sonea 2017, 87).

The transformation of the Global South was not an easy course for the initial mission work in the region to pursue. This is so because during the arrival of Western missionaries, the Global South was largely populated by many different religious traditions and for the message of God to be passed on to them it meant total abdication from their former religious beliefs (Knoetze and Verryn 2021). Missionary outreach power was limited, and language barriers were an additional stumbling block for the introduction of *Missio Dei* in the Global South. Amongst the earliest missionary units to dominate the Global South included the Catholic Church in which Fatokun (2005) reports experiences of reprehension. This prompted a change in the missionary model by which the calling of locals to faith concentrated more on learning the ways of the locals before letting them understand and consequently believe the work of God (Fatokun 2005, 362). Although the traditional concept of *Missio Dei*, as influenced by Barth and later defined in Willingen, meant that emphasis should be put on the doctrine of Trinity and the Christological principle, it had to be considerably adjusted to fit the cultural and religious dynamics of the Global South. It, therefore, became necessary to first set physical centers through which mission work would later be established. The major focus of the *Missio Dei* became opening new churches as opposed to communicating the work of God through the salvation of Christ.

Over time, the Global South embraced *Missio Dei* in its traditional understanding and many were converting to Christianity, albeit with the view that the Church was established as a means of continuation of faith while mission work was mandated to primarily bring on board those who have not yet heard of the faith (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 11). The Global South has since undergone a paradigm shift in the understanding of the *Missio Dei* in relation to ecclesiology. There is no general consensus regarding the concept of *Missio Dei*, as different Christian churches have slightly varying interpretations (Bentley 2009, 32). For instance, the Protestant church holds that the true Church of Christ transcends the physical building and therefore *Missio Dei* is not necessarily required to open up churches for it to succeed (Bevans and Schroeder 2004, 42). Engelsviken (2003, 32) adds onto this idea by arguing that, in the traditional sense of defining *Missio Dei*, it is understood as the work of God and one cannot be wrong to say God's work can be achieved outside the boundaries of church and missionary institutions.

Given that the Global South has over time embraced *Missio Dei*, it has nonetheless never emphasized mission work outside its territory (Adedibu 2013, 415). In the contemporary *Missio Dei* paradigm, trinitarian theology has taken center stage in regard to understanding mission work. This has unified the understanding of both the Global South and the Global North (Sonea 2017, 77). This perspective implies that the *Missio Dei* originates from God, and it only begins when a community of believers understand the work of the personage of the Trinity. For this reason, the Global South has recognized the obsolescence of the initial view that mission work was a way of integrating cultures and spreading Western Christianity to a more dynamic view in which it is seen as a call to communion in God (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing2020, 16). This paradigm shift has prepared the Global South for extensive mission work both in its territory and beyond, including diaspora mission work.

4. *Missio Dei* Implications for the African Church in the Post-Covid-19 Era.

Missio Dei in the Global South has been a call for participation in God's work. The theological foundations of mission work highlight the connection between ecclesiology and missiology whose roles at some point overlap in the African Church (Bevans 2015, 131). In the Global South, it is paramount that the African Church be understood distinctively from mission work even though they share functional units. This means that the call of people to salvation through Jesus Christ and the spread of the gospel is a fundamental identity of the African Church (Hexham, Sundkler, and Steed 2001, 96). The unifying of the doctrine of Trinity, soteriology, and Christology as the purpose of *Missio Dei* transmitted its very essence to the Church and it is from this basis that ecclesiological structures have sprung in the Global South. The African Church is in every aspect a product of mission work.

More broadly, the African Church in its nature has encompassed the *Missio Dei* albeit in a separate operational dimension (Adedibu 2013, 417). The Church in its physical form has been transmitting the work of God through salvation and the holy communion that transforms believers into witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection, while in its *Missio Dei* dimension the Church has reached out to communities with the message of God. The operation of the two activities as functional units has been a typical characteristic of the African Church. This is an idea brought about and built by the initial missionary expedition in the Global South (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 15). In this sense, a church had to formerly be understood as a physical building in which believers gathered to worship and commune with God. On the other hand, mission work was construed not as a separate institution but an extension of the functions of the Church where the work of God is carried out outside of its walls (Fatokun 2005, 362). This has been the practice over time, up until the outbreak of the Coronavirus.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, a shift in the understanding of mission work and the description of the Church initially held by the Global South was inevitable (Owino 2021, 10). To begin with, the understanding that a church was mainly a physical building into which believers had to come for religious service was being replaced with a different view in which it was not necessary for the believers to physically be present in the church building. This is in response to the directives by various governments in the Global South to ban mass gatherings as a measure against the spread of the coronavirus. In the wake of these directives, the African Church had to transform in its nature and operational structure. Frost and Öhlmann (2021) contend that this should lead to the understanding for the African Church that *Missio Dei* and the Church are one thing. They further assert that the Church should not be only about the salvation offered by the death and resurrection of Christ but should equally include the promise of the Kingdom of God through doing God's work on earth (Frost and Öhlmann 2021, 9).

Another aspect of transformation for the African Church in the post Covid-19 era has been the introduction of technology in the preaching and communication of the Word of God. It has been necessary for almost all congregations to find the technological means through which both its congregants and the wider society can be accessed. This has technically meant that *Missio Dei* by this design has become one with the Church. By broadcasting the message of God and calling people to faith, the African Church has conflated the initially distinct roles of mission work with the functions of the Church (Bevans 2015, 121). In this sense, the Word of God stands as the functional unit and common factor whilst God becomes he who sends, and the Church becomes receivers of God's work.

The African Church has been entangled in an identity crisis over its ecclesiological and missiological roles in society (Adedibu 2013, 422). The classical understanding, brought about by western missionaries, shaped an ideology in which mission work was viewed through a lens of physical extension of churches and conquering unchristian territories (Fatokun 2005, 319). This notion was passed over generations in time until a paradigm shift was experienced in which the traditional concept of *Missio Dei* was seen as the passing on of a foreign culture in addition to the gospel. A further shift has been experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic in which *Missio Dei* has been open to technology, and now the unchristian world can receive the message of God without having to be physically available in a church building.

On the other hand, the implications of Covid-19 have equally had a negative impact on the development of both ecclesiological understanding and the *Missio Dei* in the African Church (Bevans 2015, 116). Since, for the first time, churches have been forced by circumstances to operate with no or a few congregants present, there has been a new conditioning in which members of the African Church are beginning to perceive the role of the Church in Christianity. This is seen in effect whereby most ecclesiological teachings have adopted a theological understanding in which the physical church is considered as a place where a community of faithful ones worship, whereas the true Church is a representation of Christ in one's life (Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing 2020, 22). Such a line of thought has therefore put emphasis on individual lives rather than community, giving rise to a decline in the physical church community. Given the implications of Covid-19, some members of the African Church have nonetheless embraced the idea of the "true Church" through remaining at home and connecting to their local churches through technological devices.

5. Conclusion

The Global South has been a ground for mission work, initially from the Global North and currently from its members. Due to the introduction of Christianity in the Global South through mission work initiated by the Global North, it has been a long-held notion that the Global South was incapable of mission work outside its territory. This could be true as evaluated in consideration of the weaker economic power and financial constraints of the Global South populace as compared to the Global North. Such an initial setting birthed a different view of the *Missio Dei* in which the Church was separated from missionary institutions as opposed to the definition given in the Willingen conference. Over time, the Global South experienced a paradigm shift in the concept of *Missio Dei*, and there was a redefining in which it was necessary for members of the Global South to partake in the activities of mission work. This was in line with developing objections of the traditional concept of *Missio Dei* in which some of the members of the Global South believed that, in addition to the gospel, there was too pervasive a dissemination of foreign western culture.

As far as the Global South is concerned, *Missio Dei* has been mainly viewed as not only a representation of God's work through the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, soteriology, and Christology but also an expansion of Christian territory through the opening of new congregations. This in a sense separates ecclesiology from missiology. From this perspective, *Missio Dei* is the initiative of God whilst the Church is a human invention through which the Word of God will be passed on by God's people. Additionally, the idea of the Church has progressively taken different meanings amongst different Christian denominations in the Global South. Lately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been immense changes to the ecclesiological structure in the Global South whereby the use of technology to conquer

unchristian territories and call people to salvation has been part of *Missio Dei*.

Alongside this understanding, the African Church has undergone radical changes in its understanding of missiology which have been necessitated with changes of events in time. It has become necessary for a clearer view that the Church and mission work be viewed as one thing. Similarly, it is safe for one to conclude that the Global South has undergone immense changes in the perception of missiology that has prepared it for mission work both in its territory and outside via diaspora mission. The ecclesiological transformations in the African Church in the post-Covid era is enough testimony for the theological flexibility of the African Church and serves as a hallmark of the contemporary *Missio Dei* paradigm shift in the Global South.

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African Theology for the African Church: The Need for an Evangelical Approach

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Abstract

As the African Church increasingly disconnects from Western theological influences to take responsibility for developing her own theology, clear questions arise for evangelical theologians in Africa: How might evangelical Africans do theology in a theological setting that is increasingly plagued by theological liberalism and religious syncretism? What is the most Bible-centered and God-honoring way of doing theology in Africa? This article responds to such questions by arguing for an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa. To this end, four main issues are addressed. First, I state the meaning of African theology as explained by some African theologians. Second, I summarize the history of Christian theology in Africa, leading to the arguments put forward by some notable African theologians in defense of an African theology. Third, I show how dangerous it is to approach African theology from a liberal or syncretic perspective. Finally, I make a case for an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa by exploring the origin of African evangelical theology, and propose a good starting point for African scholars to consider towards developing a robust African evangelical theology for the African Church.

1. Introduction

It is good that the African Church is increasingly disconnecting from Western theological influences to take responsibility for developing her own contextual theology. However, this signals an imperative need for theological research and writing in the evangelical tradition that would help steer the course of theological development in Africa in the right direction. By right direction I mean emerging African scholars should pursue the path towards becoming evangelical theologians rather than liberal theologians. I frown at the pace at which liberal theology is gaining grounds in Africa because pioneer liberal theologians like
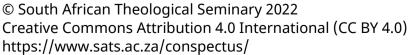
Conspectus

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

Schleiermacher[2] approached theology as a discipline that presupposes Christian experience as interpreted by the Christian community to be the primary source for determining the knowledge of God. They did not see theology from one defined perspective. To them, "Religion is for you at one time a way of thinking, a faith, a peculiar way of contemplating the world, and of combining what meets us in the world: at another, it is a way of acting, a peculiar desire and love, a special kind of conduct and character" (Schleiermacher 1893, 27). As Smith (2008, 184) also noted, liberal theologians do not begin their theology with the assumption that God has spoken. Rather they resort to speculation, which makes their approach simply a subjective and conceptual comparison of what scholars in the field have been or are saying on a given subject.

Given the need for a robust African theology that will be essential for African Christianity, I make a strong case for emerging African theologians to pursue a path towards becoming evangelical theologians for the evangelical Church. This is because, evangelical theology is a theological system that focuses primarily and decisively on the Bible. Evangelical theologians approach the study of theology with the conviction that the Bible is God's full and final revelation. Barth (1963, 5) defined the evangelical tradition as one that draws on the New Testament writings and the Reformation tradition of the sixteenth century. I could not agree more with Muli (1997, 32) that an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa is most relevant for the African Church because it "raises important issues with which evangelicals have to wrestle to make Christian theology authentically biblical and authentically African."

Four main issues are addressed in this paper. First, I state the meaning of African theology as explained by some notable African theologians. Second, I summarize the history of Christian theology in Africa leading to the case for an African theology by some notable African theologians. Third, I show how dangerous it is to approach African theology from a liberal or syncretic perspective. Finally, I make a case for an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa by exploring the history of the concept of African evangelical theology, and propose a good starting point for African scholars to consider towards developing a robust African theology for the African Church.

2. The Meaning of African Theology

Even though the term "African Theology" is a foundational concept in many theological circles in Africa today, the question still remains: What should be its appropriate and acceptable definition? It is defined differently depending on who is defining it and the perspective from which they are expressing it. Ukpong (1984, 4) explained the divergent views on African theology as follows: "African theology is seen as liberation theology, for others, it is black theology and for others still, it is simply a theology for Africans." Turner (1971, 64–65) has also explained what "African" and "theology" mean in the context of the term African theology. He explained that "African" in this context refers to the attempt to find points of similarity between Christian notions and those drawn from the traditional religions of Africa. "Theology" according to Turner refers to the hope that the systematic theology expressed in the language and concepts of traditional religion and culture, may one day be written.

In view of this understanding, Mbiti (1979, 83) once asserted, "I will use the term 'African Theology' in this paper, without apology or embarrassment, to mean theological reflection and expression by African

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1 Schleiermacher is often thought of as the father of Liberal Theology. See McDermott (2010, 134).

Christians." Kurewa (1975, 36) explains African theology as "the study that seeks to reflect upon and express the Christian faith in African thought-forms and idiom as it is experienced in African Christian communities, and always in dialogue with the rest of Christendom."

Despite the different perspectives on how the concept of African theology has been explained by different scholars, one thing is clear: African theology is simply Christian theology expressed from the perspective of African culture and context. But how did the concept of "African theology" originate? And how did it come to be a foundational expression in theological circles all over Africa?

3. The Advent of African Theology in the Mid-twentieth Century

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were only a few pockets of Christianity in Africa. The largest Christian community at the time was the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Ethiopia which had survived the advent of Islam, unlike their other ancient Christian neighbors in Sudan (ancient Nubia) and parts of Eritrea and Somalia. There were Coptic Christians in Egypt, small groups of Christians in the Cape region of South Africa where Dutch settlers had settled in 1652, and some small Christian communities in Angola and Mozambique, which were Portuguese colonies. Over the next two centuries, Christianity rapidly expanded in most parts of Africa.

Many factors contributed to this astonishing growth, but the most important historical factor was the colonization of Africa by European powers. This to some extent eased missionary work on the continent as many Christian missions were established by different Roman Catholic and Protestant orders. Their primary goal was to convert Africans to Christianity and establish a ministry base in the continent based on their Western theological convictions. In all of this, Africa was simply at the receiving end, consuming all the theological convictions and ministry praxis from the West. The missionary system did very little to encourage Africans to think objectively towards developing their own theological convictions.

By the mid-twentieth century, the African Church began experiencing a great revival and awakening. Many Africans began receiving sound theological education which enabled them to think critically on important issues of faith and practice. Because of this enlightenment, African scholars began to protest a missionary interpretation of religion and culture in Africa. They began reading Scripture using an African cultural lens and advocated for an Afri-centric Christian thought.

Kinoti (1997, 75), for instance, observed that Christianity in Africa is a white man's religion (evidenced by the denominations we belong to, the hymns we sing, the liturgies we use, and so on), and challenged African Christians to begin to think and do things for themselves and not to allow Western theologies to govern their beliefs and conduct.

Idowu (1995, 31) criticized the missionary efforts to introduce the God of the Bible to Africans by arguing that God belongs to the whole earth, and he alone reveals himself to all the peoples in the world "whom they have apprehended according to the degree of their spiritual perception... as those who have had practical experience with him." Idowu (1965, 19) further argued that God,

created man in his own image—a rational being, intelligent will, someone addressable and therefore responsible (response-able): someone to whom God could communicate his revelation...and with whose spirit the Divine Spirit could have immediate communication. We can deny this primary revelation only when we rob the created order of its revelatory quality and relieve man of his inherent capability to receive divine communication.

Mbiti (1991, 63) rejects the Western view that considers African religion as polytheistic and therefore not authentic because of its many divinities and demigods. He believes that African religion is as authentic as the Western religion because African traditional religion is equally monotheistic. To him, the divinities and demigods in African religion are simply personifications of how God manifests in the affairs of men. He argues,

> the life of this invisible world is in some way higher than that of man, but God is higher still. In order to reach God directly, it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person. (Mbiti 1991, 63)

Recent trends in publications by African scholars clearly indicate that Africans are serious about doing theology in a way that is relevant to the African context.[2] Though a commendable effort, the push for an African theology spells danger especially for conservative evangelicals in Africa. It is important to be aware of the potential dangers the process entails so as to avoid them.

4. The Dangers Involved in Advocating for an African Theology

As mentioned before, the move towards advocating for a Christian theology within an African cultural context is good because it is a proactive effort towards contextualization for the African people. However, the danger lies in the steps involved in developing this African theology. It seems to me that in a bid to argue for an African theology in Africa, many theologians Africanize Christian theology rather than contextualize it in the African context. By attempting to Africanize Christian theology, these theologians see the African culture/experience and not the Bible as the starting point for African theology and this undermines the biblical basis of African theology.

For instance, in developing Christology for African theology, some African theologians portray Jesus as an ancestor. An ancestor in typical African thought is an exemplary but deceased personality who—through mandatory communication from the living by means of sacrifices, rituals, libations, and so on—acts as an intermediary or a mediator between the living family or clan and God. These theologians reject the doctrine about Jesus as taught by the missionaries and argue that even though better than all other ancestors, Jesus is basically the same as the ancestors and fulfils the same role.

Orobator (2009, 68) is an example of an African theologian who argues in this regard. His Christology does not start with Christ as articulated in the gospels, but with the ancestors. His argument for this is that the gospel accounts of Jesus are built on faith that cannot be justified by facts. Orobator agrees with Bujo and Nyamiti that Jesus "completes and perfects all there is in the African perception of ancestor" (16). Bujo (1992, 83) Africanized rather than contextualized biblical theology in paraphrasing Hebrews 1:1–2: "For after God had spoken to us at various times and in various places, including our ancestors, in these last days he speaks to us through his Son, whom he has established as unique Ancestor… from whom all life flows for His descendants." John Parrat (1995, 47) acknowledged that "the fundamental tools of the Bible and Christian doctrine should…provide the basis of African Theology." However, he goes on to weaken the evangelical strength of his position by arguing that the

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2 For example, see: Kwame Bediako (1992); John Parratt (1995); Michael Battle (1997); Benezet Bujo (1992); Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (2009). Recent evangelical voices include Samuel W. Kunhiyop (2012); Matthew Michael (2013); James Nkansah-Obrempong (2013).

Bible and Christian doctrines should not be "a straightjacket by which Africans are constrained, and should not stifle innovation."

This approach in developing a theology in the African cultural context does not do proper justice to Scripture. It fails to search Scripture to understand Christ but rather portrays him as a creation from the missionaries' culture who must be replaced by a Jesus of African culture before his message can be accepted. I agree with Kato that African theology as understood in this light is simply religious syncretism. He argues,

> Christianity has gone full circle. Christianity in Africa, or in the Third World for that matter, has come to the stage it was in the second century. Just as syncretism plagued the church in the days of apologists, so it challenges the historic faith in Africa today. (Kato 1975, 1218)

However, does this mean that the move towards interpreting the Scriptures from the perspective of an African cultural context is unbiblical? By no means! In his book on what makes a living church, John Stott underscores the need for churches to understand their own theology. According to Stott (2007, 53), the reason many churches are theologically sick is because "they have a false self-image. They have grasped neither who they are (their identity) nor what they are called to be (their vocation)." Abate (1989, 27–38) also explains that the Church only remains relevant in a suffering world not when it tries to elevate culture above the Bible but when it seeks to bring to light the "God who suffered for all so that humanity may not live in ignorance....[It should] proclaim the victory won by Jesus over suffering and pain...thus the church becomes in Christ the hope of the world, the instrument for the redemption of humanity."

Given that God is supra-cultural, it cannot be a theological fallacy if Africans interpret Scripture from the perspective of our cultural context. However, for true justice to be done in this regard, African scholars must not bring their indigenous cultures into the biblical text. Instead, the biblical text should shape the indigenous cultures of the African people. Mbewe (2020, 10) articulates this very well when stating the purpose for his book written for pastors and ministry leaders in Africa. He writes,

> [This book] tries to apply biblical principles to what is obtaining in Africa so that we are drawn back to belief and practice that follow God's design for the church. I am not trying to make the bible more African; I am trying to get the church in Africa more biblical. (Mbewe 2020, 10)

Also, to make a strong case for a biblical worldview in Africa, Mburu (2019, 23) writes,

> In order to have a truly biblical worldview, believers need to ground their entire orientation to life in a cohesive biblical base, based on biblical assumptions. Their worldview must be informed and shaped by biblical beliefs and values. In addition, it must be consistent with the entire story of the bible from Genesis to Revelation, that is, with the biblical metanarrative.

In this article, I join these notable evangelical African scholars to argue for an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa.

5. An Evangelical Approach to Doing Theology in Africa

As Tiénou (1977, 3) correctly noted, Kato played a key role in promoting the idea of an evangelical African theology. In his presentation on "Theological Trends in Africa Today," Kato shared at the 1973 Christian Education Survey Conference in Kenya that the spiritual battle for the soul of Africa would largely be fought on theological grounds (Kato 1985, 11). Kato understood the need for a robust theology that will empower the African Church to stand victorious against the threat of theological liberalism and religious syncretism. He did a lot to set the stage for sound theological work among evangelicals in Africa before his death in 1975 at the age of 39. Building on the foundations set by Kato for a robust African evangelical theology, there is need for Africans to think critically about a good starting point for doing theology in Africa in the evangelical tradition.

While there may be other matters to consider, I argue that doing theology in Africa from an evangelical tradition should begin with soteriology. From there other relevant doctrines in African theology could be developed. This is because soteriology is the end and purpose for which all other doctrines are derived. It covers relevant topics on biblical issues such as regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Ryrie (1987, 277) underlines the fundamental role that soteriology plays in theology:

> Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, must be the grandest theme in the Scriptures. It embraces all of time as well as eternity past and future. It relates in one way or another to all of mankind, without exception. It even has ramifications in the sphere of the angels. It is the theme of both the Old and New Testaments. It is personal, national, and cosmic. And it centers on the greatest Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that a biblically accurate view on the meaning and method of salvation is closely correlated with understanding other theological views such as the nature and function of God as well as human nature. Hence, through a carefully developed soteriology, African theologians in the evangelical tradition should be able to correctly develop a Bible-centered Christology, eschatology, bibliology, anthropology, and theology proper.

6. Soteriology for African Evangelical Theology

Adeyemo (1983, 6) is right to allude that the concept of salvation in African Traditional Religious thought is "ritualistic[3] and I believe"[4] that this has a negative impact on the move towards developing a Bible-centered soteriology in African theology, because, as Maganda (2002, 148) noted, "Some African Christians not only have resorted to the practice and beliefs of the [African] Traditional Religion, but they have also tried to equate the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ with that of the ancestors in Africa Traditional Religion." Hence, for African theology to be Bible-centered, a Bible-centered soteriology could be a very good starting point, but this is possible only through proper hermeneutics. In his article "The salvation Debate and the Evangelical Response," Adeyemo (1983, 19) again advised that "to understand the Word and communicate it with relevance, evangelicals particularly of the Third World, must evolve meaningful and effective hermeneutics." This "effective hermeneutics," I argue, must focus primarily on the Pauline epistles as the starting point, as they are central to understanding soteriology. This explains why the works of many

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3 What Adeyemo seeks to communicate with the use of the term "ritualistic" is the complex preparation often required in the quest for salvation in African Traditional Religions.
4 By this, Adeyemo means the complex process of salvation in African Traditional Religion is not necessarily designed to be attractive but simply practical or useful to its adherents.

soteriologists are heavily indebted to the Pauline corpus. Many scholars acknowledge that the book of Romans, in particular, is a primary "work of theological teachings that covers many themes and key doctrines of the Bible" (MacArthur 2003, 265). Soteriology is one of the major doctrines covered in the book of Romans, and many mainline Protestant theologians like Luther and Calvin built their soteriologies mainly from the epistle of Romans. While paying close attention to Romans in particular and the Pauline corpus in general, I have considered Scripture in general in developing and articulating some theological principles that I believe are central to understanding soteriology, which may be helpful for the development of African theology in the evangelical tradition.

6.1 A Biblical understanding of God's glory

A biblical understanding of God's glory (especially on matters pertaining to salvation) is an essential theological principle that is central to understanding and developing a soteriology for African theology that will identify with the Bible. Here is what Africans need to understand about this theological principle: God in his sovereignty shows mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills. His purpose for "showing mercy on whom he desires" and "hardening whom he desires" is "to make known the riches of his glory" (Rom 9:13). This implies that, as far as predestination is concerned, God's glory is the motivation. The very fact that the text rebukes a person for answering back to God on this matter implies that it is misleading to look at predestination from a human point of view.

From the creation in Genesis, God's glory has always been a key motive for his actions (see Gen 1:26–28). The fact that God created humans in his own image indicates that he created them for his glory because, if they reflect God's image, it also means they represent his greatness, his excellence, his beauty, and so on. After Adam and Eve were created, God wished to see more people in his image. That is why he commanded them to be fruitful and to multiply and fill the earth. Isaiah 43:7 clearly states why God created his people—"*whom I have created for my glory*, whom I have formed, even whom I have made" (emphasis added).

This means that humanity is created for God's glory and whatever he chooses to do with us, he chooses to do so that he will be glorified. This explains why God admonishes those who exalt themselves. Even God's act of loving humanity serves his glory as it reveals his divine attributes. God loves us for his sake and for his glory, not ours. This explains why humanity can have full confidence in God's love; it exceeds affection for us. Rather, it is a love that is committed to his glory.

God's covenantal love towards Israel illustrates this point. According to 2 Sam 7:23, God's redemption of his people would cause him to make a name for himself. This did not guarantee prosperity for the nation of Israel. Several times they were troubled or oppressed by foreign nations, and even lived as slaves in Egypt. However, God makes a name for himself by rescuing them out of slavery with his powerful hand (Isa 63:12–14). God's dealings with Israel were motivated by his glory.

The death of Christ is another good example. In Jesus's priestly prayer, he asserts, "I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given me to do" (John 17:4 KJV). Again, in John 12:27–28, as his death was drawing closer and his heart was filled with sorrow, Jesus prayed saying

> "Now my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name." Then a voice came from heaven saying: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

As God's glory was the motivation for Jesus going to the cross, so is humanity's salvation and the forgiveness of sin motivated by the glory of God.[5] If God's glory is the fundamental motive for every divine action, then African churches should understand God's dealings with humankind on matters of salvation from this point of view. When we situate predestination in the realm of God's glory, we can share in Paul's exclamation: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom 11:33).

6.2 A Biblical understanding of God's sovereignty

The second theological principle that is central to understanding and developing a soteriology for African theology that will identify with the Bible is a biblical understanding of God's sovereignty. Here is what Africans need to understand about this theological principle: God is not just sovereign over all things, he also has the right to rule over us according to his good pleasure. Paul's reference to the potter and the clay in Rom 9:21 justifies this claim: "Does not the potter have a right over a clay object, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?" During the Reformation, people embraced the fact that God was sovereign, and in his sovereignty, he has offered salvation by grace through faith not based on any merits in humanity but solely for his good pleasure. In contrast, our generation often requires God to justify why he acts the way he does.

According to Rom 9:21, God's sovereignty implies the right to do with creation and humanity as he pleases since they were created for him. Thus, Paul rebukes his readers in Rom 9:20: "But who are you, o man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'" While robust interaction with God is not sinful, God has the right to rule over humanity without being interrogated over it.

It should be a sobering thought for Africans to come to terms with the fact that the Lord has the right to wound or heal us, and to give to us or take away from us. Sadly, many African churches speak only of his love and care for us. While these must be affirmed, our understanding must expand to the realization that we should both befriend a loving savior and revere a supreme king. This line of thinking will influence the development of a good African evangelical theology for the African Church.

6.3 A Biblical understanding of election and reprobation

The third and last theological principle I wish to share in this article that is central to understanding and developing a soteriology for African evangelical theology is a biblical understanding of election and reprobation, otherwise known as predestination. Here is what Africans need to understand about this theological principle: Given that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) and since "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), God, being just and committed to fulfilling his word has ensured that all sinners must pay the price for their sins by facing his wrath which he has revealed against all ungodliness (reprobation). However, as explained in Rom 5:8, God has graciously demonstrated his saving love (through the atoning work of Christ) to some guilty sinners, thereby saving them from his wrath. This is known in biblical and theological terms as election.

In Africa, some people struggle to grasp the theological concept of election. As Michael (2013, 174) explains, the term "election" basically has one meaning for most Africans and that is the act of voting a person to political office, and this meaning usually carries the dirty package of African

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5 See 1 John 2:12; Jer 14:7; Ps 25:11; 79:9.

political connotations. Since African elections are not always fair and transparent, Michael explains that it is natural that this similarly transfers to the concept of election in theological discussion. The result is that most Africans consider the term "election" to be inappropriate to describe the divine choice of believers before the foundation of the earth. However, to understand the biblical concept of election, Africans must not view it from our African experience but from God's perspective as explained in Scripture. As the first man, Adam represented humanity: made in God's image and sinless before the fall. Likewise, Adam's sin has implications for humanity as a whole. The fate that awaited the entire human race was death. In response to this, God's redemptive plan, known as the eternal covenant or covenant of redemption,[6] emerged.

This covenant includes three parties: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit[7] and its objective is to reconcile humanity with God. In this covenant, the Father (a) promises to bring to the Son all whom he had given him; (b) is responsible for sending the Son into the world to be the representative of the people; (c) is responsible for preparing a body for the Son; and (d) gives the Son all authority in heaven and on earth. The Son, in turn, (a) became man; (b) was found under the law; (c) died for the sins of the world; and (d) was raised from the dead by the Father. Finally, the Holy Spirit (a) empowered Jesus to do the will of the Father on earth;[8] and (b) applied Christ's redemptive work onto those who believe.

From the point of view of this redemptive covenant, the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus to save all those whom his Father chose to give him (i.e.,

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6 For reference, please see the following resources: Ralph Allan Smith (2003); Gerhard E. Spiegler (1967); Stanley W. Paher (1997).

7 Normally, covenants are made between those of different authority levels, like a king and his subjects. But in the Eternal Covenant, all the parties involved are equals.

8 Note that the Holy Spirit did not empower the Son but Jesus the man.

those to whom God chooses to show his mercy; Rom 9:18). By default, they deserve to die, but God chooses (out of his good pleasure) to show them mercy. Since all are deserving of his wrath, God's justice upon the sinner and the salvation of only some ought not to be seen as unfair or biased. Hence, reprobation reveals God's justice in ensuring that guilty sinners receive their due punishment. Again, this theological principle could be helpful as Africans work to develop an African evangelical theology for the African Church.

7. Conclusion

Of what good is African Theology to evangelical Christians in Africa if it does not find its foundation in the Scriptures? Torrance (1979, 199) correctly explained that a true living church cannot exist by deriving its essence from human experiences but in the being and life of God and rooted in the eternal purposes of the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ. This implies that a living church must be grounded in a Bible-centered theology. Hence, a proper grasp of biblical and theological principles as explained in this article could help African theologians to begin the process of developing a robust African evangelical theology by developing a soteriology that is rooted in Scripture. With a well-developed soteriology, other essential theological doctrines could be more easily developed for the African Church.

The culturally diverse nature of Africa should not be an obstacle to developing an evangelical theology that identifies with the African culture and context. Since Christian theology in general is composed of views articulated by individuals in a variety of cultures and existential situations, which is why it has a variety of points of view, Africans should not be afraid to be different. It is acceptable for evangelical African theology to have a variety of points of view based on a theologian's cultural situation. However, these need to be rooted in Scripture and a basic unity is still needed when

developing African evangelical theology, so as to differentiate it from other traditions. This could be achieved through a comparative study of the theology of each evangelical African theologian with the aim of identifying the particularities and uniqueness of each and creating a platform that allows for complementing and borrowing from each individual theology (Munga 2000, 250).

In this paper, I have agreed with African scholars like Kinoti (1997, 75), Idowu (1995, 31), Mbiti, (1991, 63) and others that it is time for Africans to start articulating their own Christian theological convictions from the perspective of the African cultural context. I have also challenged the views of liberal theologians like Schleiermacher (1893, 27) and the syncretic view of scholars like Orobator (2009, 68) and Bujo (1992, 83). I agree with scholars like Kato (1975, 1218), Mburu (2019, 23), and Mbewe (2020, 10) that there is a need for an evangelical approach to doing theology in Africa. To effectively achieve this for the African Church, I have argued that African scholars will need to develop a proper soteriology for the African Church as an informative and fundamental step towards developing other key doctrinal issues relevant for a robust African theology.

To this end therefore, I have attempted to develop and explain some key theological principles that could help African theologians to develop a Bible-centered soteriology that could shape as well as enable the process involved in developing other essential tenets needed for a robust African evangelical theology. As Munga (2000, 250) rightly noted, "The future of African theology and its fruitfulness depends on allowing for a continual critical engagement in viewing and reviewing its fundamental assumptions in the light of the challenges that arise from changes in context and situations." With this in mind, African scholars may consider the arguments put forward in this paper as one of the helpful tools that may prove useful to critically view and review our culture and context as we work towards developing the much-needed African evangelical theology for the African Church.

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Scripture and Context in Conversation: The Ethiopian *Andəmta* Interpretative Tradition

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Abstract

The Ancient Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a rich historical and religious heritage that is shaped and anchored by the scriptural interpretation of the *andəmta* interpretive tradition. The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition uses Scripture in dialogue with the Ethiopian context through translating Ethiopic (Ge'ez) into Amharic and presenting different interpretations and applications of the text considering different horizons of readers. The sensitivity to the cultural context is an important aspect of contextualization to address the needs of the people to whom Scripture is being applied, and this is an extensive practice in the Ethiopian interpretive tradition. This article argues that the Ethiopian Church has possessed the most ancient Bible in the Ethiopic language and uses a unique interpretive tradition that focuses on the textual context and the context of the reader, presenting alternative interpretive options. Therefore, the Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretative tradition enables us to engage in an ongoing dialogue between Scripture and context to shape positively the context of the reader. In addition, it facilitates scriptural teaching by presenting an alternative application for an individual biblical text. Further, the emphasis on the *andəmta* interpretive tradition, with the awareness of balancing both the textual context and the context of the reader, opens a better understanding of the text and its application for contemporary readers.

Conspectus

Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

Ethiopia as an ancient sub-Saharan country received the Christian faith at the earliest time and has sustained the remarkable experience of scriptural interpretation and application for the last 1700 years with continued existence (Woldegiyorgis 2017, 8–9). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church preserved a unique religious culture based on Scripture with a dynamic interactive interpretation practice, and a significant lesson can be derived from this historical practice (An 2015, 116). In addition, the Ethiopian church uses Scripture in continuous dialogue with its context in a unique way in the *andəmta* interpretive tradition that is employed in the production of commentaries for the teaching and preaching of the church (Alehegn 2012, 115). The use of Scripture, the understanding of context, and the conversations through the biblical texts within the Ethiopian church tradition are significant aspects of this religious practice. The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive strategy addresses the Ethiopian context with the significant fusion of the horizons of the readers, presenting multiple applications for a single biblical text as it engages different contexts (Mennasemay 2014, 10).

The first part of the article attests to the history of research on the area of Scripture and context in conversation, in general and in particular, to see how the Ethiopian church traditions use Scripture and context in conversation to underline its transformative role. The second part of the paper aims to depict the scriptural tradition in the Ethiopian context to show the use of Scripture in Ethiopian church tradition. The third part of the paper portrays the contextual nature of the Ethiopian interpretive tradition of *andəmta* and how this tradition facilitates a dialogue between Scripture and the Ethiopian context. The final section of the paper demonstrates the lessons we can derive from the *andəmta* interpretive tradition to shape our use of Scripture and its engagement with context.

The method employed in this study is critical discourse analysis to understand the nature of the *andəmta* interpretive tradition with its interpretive community (Fairclough 2013, 132–134). Different ways of critical discourse analysis focus on the textual and ideological analysis of a written work. As Hjelm (2022, 235) has demonstrated, discourse analysis is "the study of how to do things with words" and the "process of social construction." Discourse analysis is the analysis of words by analyzing identities, relationships, beliefs, and knowledge systems that are constructed in the language. Discourse analysis in textual interpretation is employed through the means of combining social theory and linguistic analysis. Critical discourse analysis focuses on ideology in a discourse which is the reproduction and transformation of relations of domains.

However, I have chosen Norman Fairclough's model because this model s useful for better understanding the nature of the *andəmta* interpretative tradition and the interpretive community (Fairclough 2003, 2–3). Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model contains three interconnected dimensions of discourse: text analysis at the description level, processing analysis at the interpretation level, and social analysis at the explanation level (132–134). This method is important to better understand the *andəmta* interpretive tradition, because text analysis for description, processing analysis for interpretation, and social analysis for the explanation in a critical discourse analysis allows us a better grasp of selected texts in the *andəmta* commentary of the Ethiopian church tradition. A critical discourse analysis focuses on both the text and the social context of the interpretive community. The method considered in this research is important to better understand the Ethiopian interpretive tradition and its facilitation of the dialogue between text and context.

2. History of Research

The understanding of Scripture and context in conversation is an important issue that has been addressed by different scholars attesting to how Scripture needs to address the existing social, political, religious, and cultural context of the people. In the aim of creating a framework for our actual examination, it is important to consider the views of some selected scholars who engaged on the issue of Scripture and context in conversation, first in a broader framework and then focusing on our particular context. For instance, Keener (2015, 19) has pointed out the significance of cultural sympathy in applying Scripture in different contexts because sensitivity to the culture gives a foundation for Christians in reading Scripture across different cultures. In addition, Pears (2010, 16) has also argued that using Scripture and appreciating the tradition of the interpretive community is a key duty for contextual theological activity. The needs and questions of the interpretive community is essential not only for contextual theologians, but all interpreters of Scripture. However, according to Bergmann and Vähäkangas (2021, 3), contextual theology has often been limited to evangelism and gospel proclamation. Despite this, the nature of contextualization goes beyond the above-referenced issues because the nature of Christian theology and the Scripture itself entertains dialogue between God's message and the context in which the recipients are situated.

In the presence of views on the need for contextualization, evidence indicates that in the Global South, the Bible was read through the worldviews of the Global North. Lim (2019, 5) has argued that "it is important to remember that the Bible comes to many parts of Asia…as the *coloniser's* text." The same is true for the African context, because despite Africa's rich Christian heritage, Protestant missionaries have brought the Bible and the message of the Bible to Africa in the culture of the West, ignoring sensitivity to the African cultural and religious contexts. Lim (2019, 6) has also argued that even though the center of Christianity has moved from the Global North to the Global South, theological and biblical studies are still under the influence of the West's theological formulation which ignores the existing context of Africa.

The art of contextualization is applying Scripture to different contexts, addressing the needs of the receiving community. Flemming (2009, 13–14) attests that "contextualization has to do with how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting." Within Western theological thought, contextualization is mainly synchronic. In other words, the development or evolution of theories of contextualization are not necessarily given due prominence. Bevans's (2002, 37–127) six models are examples of a synchronic approach. However, An (2016, 149) has argued that these six models do not fit the Ethiopian situation because the church tradition in Ethiopia has "developed through a multifaceted process of contextualization through its long history." Conversely, a diachronic approach considers the long history of the interaction between text and context in the Ethiopian context (150).

It is important to acknowledge that Scripture is in itself contextual since God's revelation addressed andtransformed whole people and their communities.Likewise, God's revelation still addresses and transforms real communities, whose contexts are to be acknowledged. The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition and its commentary are important pieces of evidence that address the Ethiopian context. The way the Ethiopian *andəmta* addresses the context is by presenting alternative application options for an individual biblical text. The *andəmta* interpretive tradition is sensitive to the context without ignoring the author's intended meaning. I contend, therefore, that the Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition is a viable alternative to Western approaches that often decontextualize biblical texts.

3. Scripture in the Ethiopian Church Tradition

The use of Scripture in the Ethiopian church tradition is fascinating because the Ethiopian Church has possessed Scripture in the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) language since the sixth century (Ullendorff 1997, 33). The Bible in the Ethiopic version has also been translated into the modern era national working language, Amharic, and later into other local languages to be relevant to the context (Fellman 1977, 154). The use of Scripture in the Ethiopian Church is nourished by its interpretive tradition that is developed by the "elements from different sources of both internal and external traditions through the dynamic interaction" (An 2016, 150).

The Ethiopic (Ge'ez) Bible is the most ancient translation of the Bible in the world. The coming of the Nine Saints after Frumentius facilitated the translation of the Bible from Greek to Ethiopic (Ge'ez). However, different views exist about the actual time frame in which the Bible was translated into the Ethiopian ancient language (Batu 2021, 277; Isaac 2012, 60–62). Despite these disagreements, the translation of the Bible to the local language allowed the existence of "an extensive body of ancient Ethiopic literature and the evolution of a distinct Ethiopian culture" (Isaac 2012, 59). It is argued that both the process of translation and the interpretive tradition address the existing context of Ethiopia dynamically. For instance, in the translation process, there are special elements that would be relevant to the context of Ethiopia (Batu 2021, 277). Pawlikowski (1971, 196) has pointed out the presence of the Judaic influence in the Ethiopian Church. This heritage is acknowledged and married with Christian expression in the Ethiopic interpretation tradition. This reveals an understanding among some Ethiopians that Ethiopia is the chosen nation that has replaced Israel (Brooks 1996, 171–172). That the Ethiopian social and cultural context is shaped by Israel's Scriptures is demonstrated in different ways. For instance, the dietary prescriptions of the Pentateuch are commonly observed in the Church of Ethiopia and the wider community. A significant number of Judaic elements are appropriated in the Ethiopian context despite there being some disagreement about the time of their adoption and incorporation within the Ethiopian cultural and religious context (Hailu 2020, 299–300).

The use of Scripture in the religious and cultural context is deeply rooted in the use of *sëm ena wërq* (wax and gold) hermeneutics of *Qiné* that address the plain meaning and the hidden meaning of the biblical text. Unlike a Platonic philosophical outlook, marked by duality between knowledge and practice, the Ethiopian Church tradition of *sëm ena wërq* considers *Tëwahedo* (unity) in interpretive and philosophical creativity (Mennasemay 2014, 30). This method is one of the ways to apply critical thinking to the biblical text. The interpretive tradition was common both in the written form and the oral enterprise of the Ethiopian tradition. It addresses the Ethiopian context, the physical and the spiritual, the observable, and conceptual in a holistic manner. This is incorporated into the biblical interpretation of *andəmta* attesting to the presence of multiple interpretations and applications within the single biblical text to address the different dimensions and horizons of different readers. In general, in the Ethiopian church tradition, Scripture has shaped different dimensions of life from the ethical and practical, to the philosophical outlook. Since Scripture was received early in the sixth century, its language has had a significant influence on the religious, political, and social aspects of the country. The dietary, judicial, and other laws are an indication of this practice and the impact of Scripture (Tzadua 2009, xx).

4. Text and Context in the Andəmta Interpretive Tradition

The *andəmta* interpretive tradition in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church addresses different horizons, demonstrating sensitivity to the context of

the reader. "The *andəmta* corpus of Amharic commentary on Ge'ez biblical and patristic texts derives its name from the repeated use of '*andəm*,' meaning 'and (there is) one (who says),' to introduce different interpretations" (Lee 2011, 40). The main text in the *andəmta* interpretive tradition is the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) text, translated into Amharic. This interpretive tradition does not open a door for personal speculation because the interpreters stick strongly to the source text, which is then connected to the reader's context (Batu 2021, 400). In the *andəmta* interpretive tradition, the mode of exegesis is an Amharic commentary on the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) text translated and interpreted by the use of different strategies, containing many alternative comments as options to give meaning to different horizons (Alehegn 2012, 115). Since the interpretive tradition is not static, it addresses different horizons of dynamism, presenting alternative applications in different contexts of readers with important explanations relevant to each situation. This makes the *andəmta* interpretive tradition a rewarding and important hermeneutical approach that teaches how the biblical text could be relevant to different contexts of readers.

The historical origin of the *andəmta* interpretive tradition is viewed differently by different scholars. For instance, Cowley (1989, 375) has pointed out the historical continuity from the Antiochene literary interpretive tradition against the allegorical interpretive traditions of Alexandria. However, Batu (2021, 401–404) has argued that *andəmta* integrates both the Antiochene literary interpretation and the Alexandrian allegorical interpretative tradition with a unique adaptation in the Ethiopian context relevant to Ethiopian Christian readers. The perspective of An (2016, 156) is interesting because he has articulated that the Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition is unique with its nature of incorporating the internal and external traditions developed uniquely in the Ethiopian context. He

correctly stated that contextualization in the Ethiopian Church "has taken place in the dynamic interactions of primal religious, Hebraic-Jewish, and Christian traditions" with a unique venture that has grown on the Ethiopian soil to address the needs of the people of Ethiopia. Hailu (2020, 301) has also attested to the dynamics of the Judaic elements incorporated and assimilated in the Ethiopian context with the integration of external and internal socio-religious and cultural elements in the Ethiopian church tradition. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the nature of the Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition is unique in two important ways. First, it is developed through the integration of different elements inside and outside the Ethiopian context. Second, it is aimed to serve the Ethiopian context by addressing the needs of the people in its underlining of various interpretations and applications of the text.

The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition has produced commentaries on the OT and NT in a format that aims to present fresh insights for the readers to better understand and apply Scripture in different dimensions of their lives. In the pursuit of developing commentaries, two important things are the biblical text and the context in which the text is interactively applied. Therefore, the first step is directly translating the Ge'ez into Amharic, intending to be faithful to the original biblical text. The second step is explaining the translated text by the use of two important technical activities. First, reference is made to other texts which could better demonstrate and communicate the word or the phrase in the process of interpretation. Second, stories are included to better illuminate and demonstrate the idea that is being interpreted. Because of these fascinating activities and the different horizons of readers, the *andəmta* interpretive practitioners are considered the "four-eyed." Beyond translating and interpreting the text by the use of the above techniques, these practitioners always think of different interpretive options to be applied

to different readers within different contexts. According to Mennasemay (2014, 10), "the characterization of the traditional practitioners as 'four-eyed' suggests the idea of discovering different horizons of understanding, entertaining multiple viewpoints, and comparing, critiquing and coordinating them." The Ethiopic interpretive tradition gives an interpretation and application to the text, supporting each possibility to address the intellectual and spiritual needs of people in different contexts.

This contextualized nature of the Ethiopian interpretive tradition is highly sensitive to the Ethiopian identification with Israel as seen in the Ethiopian national epic *Kebra Nagast*, which tells of the replacement of Israel by Ethiopia (Wallis Budge 2000, 6–7). The *Kebra Nagast* claims the transfer of the abode of God's glory from Jerusalem to the Axum of Ethiopia (An 2015, 110). Based on this assumption, the contextualized meaning of the term "Zion" is not a geographical location but the abode of God's glory. According to Tefera (2015, 40), the term "Zion" is found 150 times in the Bible and interpreted in the Ethiopic tradition in different senses. The use of the word "Zion" is depicted in six different ways: these are hill, whole Jerusalem, heavenly Jerusalem, St. Mary, the Christian empire of Ethiopia, and the Axum Zion Church of Ethiopia (40–50). These interpretations are a sign of the contextual interactions that make the biblical texts relevant to the Ethiopian context. The understanding and the interpretation of different terms in the Bible referring to Ethiopia as the chosen nation helped to create self-identity and a unifying factor in nation-building. An (2016, 158) has argued that the uniqueness of the Ethiopian context has been created because of the scriptural interpretation claiming the belief that they are God's chosen people and legitimate successors of Israel incorporated in the national history of the country.

The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition in the OT and NT claims that Ethiopians have worshipped God from the creation, continuing through the giving of the law to Moses, and to the reception of the gospel in the NT as referenced in Acts 8 (Tamiru 2020, 180–184). The interpretation of different biblical texts both in the OT and NT are highly connected with the Ethiopian identity. For instance, king Melchizedek of Salam in Gen 14:18 is considered an Ethiopian king (57). Even though Melchizedek is identified with Christ in Heb 7, Ethiopian tradition asserts that he ruled Ethiopia based on the belief that Ethiopia is the land of origins (EOTC 2015, 641–42; Hancock 1992, 48–53). In addition to the above, the Ethiopian *andəmta* commentary on the gospel of Matthew interprets the wise men of Matt 2:1 as Ethiopians, claiming they understood the birth of the Messiah as God leads them towards the newly-born king of the Jews (EOTC 2002, 71–73). The texts we have seen here are some of the important indications of how the Ethiopian interpretive tradition connects the biblical texts with the context of the reader to make them relevant. Unfortunately, because the emphasis is given to the context of the reader, the original and the historical context of the Bible is backgrounded.

Despite its shortcomings, these activities weave together the historical, the literal, and the context of the reader—horizons that have often been separated from each other. Despite modern attempts to integrate the above three horizons within a single interpretive framework (see Tate 2008, 266–268), many of these exegetical traditions fall short of what the Ethiopian interpretive tradition achieves.

5. Lessons from the Ethiopian Interpretive Tradition

The Ethiopic interpretive tradition is both textual and contextual and, despite some weaknesses, its importance in drawing lessons for teaching and preaching the biblical text in different contexts is remarkable. This interpretation engages the reader's context by acknowledging it and also

inviting it to be engaged and transformed by the text. Therefore, the relationship between text and context in Ethiopia is transactional—text transforms context, and context brings questions and interpretational possibilities to the text.

The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition is a homegrown contextualized hermeneutical tradition that teaches the dynamic nature of the interpretive tradition unlike many Western methods of hermeneutics that focus exclusively on historical context, literary context, or reader context. The textual and contextual interpretive analysis of the text in the *andəmta* interpretive traditional commentary teaches important lessons for the use of text and context in a dialogue aiming to shape the context of the reader by scriptural teaching. In addition, this interpretive tradition is sensitive to the needs of the believing community, allowing different people to hear God's message, and the message to be relevant to the social, political, and religious context. The Ethiopian social, cultural, political, and religious activity is highly influenced by scriptural interpretation.

The Ethiopian religious and legal systems are shaped by two important books: the *Kebra Nagast* (Brooks 1996; Wallis Budge 2000) and the *Fetaha Nagast* (Gelaw 2001; Tzadua 2009). The first book is about the glory of the kings of Ethiopia, and it claims that Ethiopian kings are the descendants of King Solomon of Israel. The covenant and the glory of Israel are transferred to Ethiopia, claiming Israel is replaced by Ethiopia. The second is the rule of the kings, and it has been serving as the constitution of Ethiopia until the modern era when it was adapted and upgraded to be relevant in the Ethiopian constitution and the court system. These two books are imported from other areas but produced in the Ethiopian context using OT and NT texts to serve the Ethiopian context.

In addition to this, the Ethiopian interpretive tradition of *andəmta* contributes to the creation of self-identity as the unifying factor attesting to the belief that Ethiopia is the chosen nation that replaced Israel. This interpretation avoids the limitation that God is only a God of Israel because Ethiopian Church scholars claim that Ethiopians have been worshipping God even before the giving of the law to Moses (Tamiru 2020, 52–53). This activity paints God as not only the God of Israel, but also the God of the Ethiopians. The worship of God according to the Ethiopian theological and biblical commentaries stretches from the time of the unwritten law of God (creation) to the written law of God (Torah and the gospel) framing God's salvation history from creation to redemption (Belay 2020, 80). This interpretive tradition attests to the eternal plan of God in an organized, inclusive way avoiding antithesis between God's revelation in the OT and NT.

The two extremes in the modern exegetical traditions—the focus only on the author and the text on one side, and only on the present reader's context on the other side—can be challenged by the Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition. The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition fuses different horizons such as author, the text, and the readers. The readers' horizon is also presented with many alternative applications.

6. Conclusion

The Ethiopian church tradition is ancient, with fascinating historical and religious practices that are uniquely demonstrated, especially by the interpretive tradition of the *andəmta* in the production of different commentaries. This interpretive method addresses different contexts by bringing Scripture into dialogue with the context. This interpretive tradition is developed in the rich Ethiopian history of scriptural tradition, bolstered by the belief that the Ethiopian Church holds the most ancient

translation of the Bible in Ge'ez which has been continued by translation into Amharic and other local languages. The Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition practitioners are considered as "the four-eyed" because in their interpretive activity they consider different horizons of readers to address the interpreted Scripture with relevance to different contexts. For instance, I have argued that the word "Zion" has been given different alternative meanings with the significant support of illustration, story, and exegetical explanation that leads to contextual understanding to create the Ethiopian identity as the chosen people of God. The OT and NT are interpreted in connection with the Ethiopian identity as it addresses the needs of the Ethiopian context.

In general, it is possible to argue that the *andəmta* interpretive tradition in the Ethiopian context teaches three important things that we need to consider in terms of Scripture and its contextualization. The first is the importance of contextual engagement in the biblical interpretations addressing the different horizons of the Ethiopian context such as the social, political, and religious dimensions to shape and create an identity that is built from contextual biblical interpretation and understanding. The second important issue we can learn in this analysis is that the Ethiopian *andəmta* interpretive tradition helps to break unnecessary shackles that hinder critical thinking and engagement because it does not stick to a single interpretation or application of a text but rather presents an alternative interpretation for every text. Third, the Ethiopian interpretive tradition focuses on both the textual context and the context of the reader to be applicable, which is the end goal of contextual interpretation.

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In Search of *Cura Vitae*: A Theology of Healing and Hope for Ethiopia

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Abstract

This article argues that Ethiopia has seen an increase in ethnic-based atrocities and killings, creating a "society of enmity" which is in need of *cura vitae,* healing. The failure of the Church to minister healing and hope in this context has been largely brought about by political motives. This article examines and challenges the position of the Ethiopian Church amid a society of enmity and argues that the Church ought to search for *cura vitae*, healing of life, through the theology of lament and *metanoia*. A lamenting and *metanoic* Church would be able not only to enter the space of the sufferer and partake in naming what is going on, but would also enable self-questioning for authenticity that leads not only to healing but also to taking new action towards transforming the self and society for the better.

1. Introduction

Human history, though surrounded with remarkable discoveries, often correlates with hideous conflicts, war, and destructions. World War I and II, vivid examples of the worst nightmares of human history, led to the death of 12–22 and 70–85 million people, respectively (Kaldor 2012, 27–31). The twentieth century entertained the most excruciatingly ugly encounters of ethnic-based cleansings and genocide where six million Jews were executed during the holocaust for being Jewish; one third of the Tutsi population in Rwanda, 800,000 people, were massacred within only one-hundred days, mostly with machetes (Katongole and Rice 2008, 75). Still, in the twenty-first century, conflicts are common in most parts of the world; the war between Ukraine and Russia, and the conflict in Sudan, Congo, and Ethiopia are only a few examples. Thus, the world is in a state of

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Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

continual yearning for healing, *cura vitae* from the entanglement of terror, atrocities, and enmity.

Cura vitae is a blend of two Latin words, *cura*, meaning care, concern, and thoughtfulness and *vitae*, meaning life. *Cura vitae* is a concept borrowed from Daniël Louw (2008, 211) "about a theology of life and the healing of life from the viewpoint of Christian spirituality." This article will focus on search for *cura vitae*, particularly for Ethiopians who are in grave danger of ethnic-based atrocities. Ethiopia is home to multiethnic people—often characterized as, though contested, "Museum of peoples" (Levine[1] 1974, 21), signifying not merely communality but also cultural, religious, and ethnic heterogeneity (Hailu 2021, 31). Diversity often seems to display an aesthetic quality, but unfortunately this is not the case for Ethiopians; rather, monstrosity dominates. The political, religious, cultural, and social space is engulfed by inflated ethnic consciousness, ethnic-based tensions, conflicts, hatred, and enmity. Two main reasons stand out for this, the "divergent historical narratives" (2021, 31) and the use of ethnicity as a political weapon (Abbink 2011, 3; 2017, 2–45).

Hailu (31–32) discusses this in depth: the country's socio-political history exhibits contrasting historical narratives of the "assimilationist, Ethio-nationalist" thesis on the one hand and an "exclusivist, ethno-nationalist antithesis" on the other that exert not only a "political culture" of "ethnic-based hostility in Ethiopia" (Teklu 2021, 1, 9), but also shake the "bond of togetherness and create[s] insecurity of life" (1–2). Furthermore, Abbink (2011, 3) argues that the 1991 new state of order, ethnic federalism, which uses ethnicity as a political weapon, is the other cause of tension.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front party (EPRDF) government utilized ethnicity as an instrument of power, politics, religion, culture, and economics. Such a political system fueled not only ethnic-based favoritism, but also exacerbated the ethnic-based hostilities and conflicts in the country.

Currently, the recent political shift from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front party (EPRDF)[2] to the Prosperity Party (PP) brought widespread political, economic, cultural, and religious upheavals. Even though the majority looked at the change with much optimism, others did so with massive suspicion. However, the long-awaited change was overshadowed within a blink by escalated ethnic tension and unrest in different regions. The mushrooming of ethnic-based powers created instability in various parts of the country resulting in death, homelessness, starving, and an increase in rape. In the same way, the recent war between the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) and the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)[3] has brought vast damage in terms of refugees, mass displacement, mass killings, ethnic-based atrocities and enmity, and countless instances of destruction and despair in the country. Thus, the country is in search of *cura vitae* now more than ever. Mohammed Girma (2021) best described it thus: "Ethiopia is at war with herself—all over again." It is thus important that she focusses on her healing.

In all these upheavals, the Church's position has been seemingly ambivalent. It has been either to ally with the government rhetoric in most cases, or to remain silent as if nothing had happened. Therefore, the

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1 Donald Levine is known for his rigorous work on Ethiopian history and social life. His 1974 *magnum opus, Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multi Ethnic Society,* has significant influence and acceptance in Ethiopian studies.

2 The EPRDF, the Ethiopian People's Republic Democratic Front Party, ruled Ethiopia for twenty-seven years under Meles Zenawi's rule; then Haile Mariam Dessalegn succeeded him after he passed away.
3 The previous ruling party was defeated by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed who was a member of the ruling party in 2019.

main objective of this article is not merely to examine and challenge the response and position of the Church in such a time of national crisis, but also to call for ways of searching for a theology of *cura vitae* for Ethiopia through lament and *metanoia*. The paper argues that a lamenting Church and a *metanoic* Church can entice the sparks of healing and hope for the country. A lamenting Church can see and name what is going on and can enter the space of the sufferer to grieve as well as to take responsibility; a *metanoic* Church is capable of questioning her authenticity and can turn for a new action towards constructing societal transformation. In searching for *cura vitae*, I will be conversing with prominent African scholars, Father Emmanuel Katongole and Theodros Assefa Teklu, both of whom wrote a theological analysis for ethnic-based hostilities in Africa—Rwanda and Ethiopia respectively. Systematically merging both *cura vitae* and *metanoia* will enhance the curative aspect of life, since without *metanoia*, a lament would not proceed to hope and transformation.

The article is organized into three main sections. The first section is describing, situating, and naming the current malice in Ethiopia via interrogating Emmanuel Katongole's examples from the Rwandan genocide, and Achille Mbembe's notion of "society of enmity." The next section contains an exposition of church praxis using Katongole's postures of the Church and evaluating the posture of the Church therewith. The final section engages the task of searching for *cura vitae*: healing, anticipating, and living in hope, and regaining solidarity through the theology of lament and *metanoia*.

2. Naming the Malice: Ethiopia as "the Society of Enmity"[4]

While I am writing this, the current escalated war between the federal government (PP) and TPLF has not yet come to an end. A recent mass weapon attack on Afar civilians in five districts left many dead, disabled, homeless, and more (Addis Standard, July 2021). Ethnic-based hatred, killings, cleansing, genocides, displacement, gender-based violence, destruction of public goods, and annihilation of sacred spaces have become common phenomena in the country. According to the Ethiopian National Displacement Report 2021, 4.2 million people were internally displaced among which 3.6 million were due to the recent war. Amnesty International reported than more than 600 civilians were brutally massacred with machetes and buried *en masse* in a place called *Mia Cadra*,[5] due to their ethnic otherness. Mass graveyards on the border of Amhara and Tigray, Benishangul Gumuz, and in many districts of Oromia have been discovered from time to time—as if a decoration for the daily news. This signals what Hatzfeld (2005, 1) called the "machete season" of/for Ethiopia—heralding Ethiopia as the "society of enmity" according to Mbembe (2019, 23–24).

Mbembe (2019, 23–24) states that the "society of enmity" is often characterized by "forms of exclusion, hostility, hate movements, and, above all, by the struggle against an enemy." Shreds of evidence here and there signal the birth, growth, and maturation of a society of enmity in Ethiopia. Some agree that such a society was birthed by the ruling political

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4 "Society of enmity" is a term borrowed from Achille Mbembe (2016), who uses it to refer to an era marked by "forms of exclusion, hostility, [a] hate movement, and above all, by the struggle against an enemy."

5 *Mia Cadra* is a place in Tigray near the Sudanese border; many ethnic Amhara often go there in search of jobs as day laborers.

ideology of ethnic federalism for the past thirty years, where the fourteen self-administered regions of Ethiopia were divided based on their ethnic affiliations, despite the existence of ethnic others dispersed all over the country. On top of the ethnic federalism, fabrications of distorted, twisted, and one-sided historical narratives of victimhood and domination exacerbated the ethnic-based atrocity/enmity in the country.

The society of enmity inevitably leads towards exterminating the ethnic other—the enemy. Teklu (2021, 12–20) best theorizes and illustrates such enmity using the example of the man lynched publicly by a mob. The young man was accused of carrying a bomb, which later proved not to be the case, and was hanged upside down and killed in the midst of a public rally in a place called Shashemene. According to Theodros (2021, 12), the lynched man signifies what Mbembe and Agamben's sovereignty and bare life represent. The former, sovereignty, is "the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die," (Mbembe 2019, 66). And the latter, "bare life," illustrates "a sub-human category far removed from his/her human and political rights" (Teklu 2021, 20). Nobody is held accountable for the death of the lynched man, until today. Thus, the lynched man, the mass graveyards, and the people who are still dying affirm the malice of the society of enmity in the country.

To add more, a video was recently circulating on social media which shows a person burned alive by police forces for being from a different ethnic group, political ideology, and on suspicion of spying for the TPLF.[6] In the video the police are seen not only filming using their mobile phones with a sense of patriotism, but they are also heard mocking the live burning man for taking more time to die. To add one more excruciating story, a teen boy was killed in front of a rally by police for his ethnic otherness and for being accused of showing affinity to another political group. The police carrying out the execution were telling the community that anyone who repeats the same mistake will suffer the same fate of the boy.

Teklu (2021, 9–13) conceptualizes Ethiopian politics as the "hatred of the ethnic other," characterized by a "political culture of alliance/enemy-making." According to his (16) analysis, "the political culture of alliance/enemy-making implemented in its modernized form transformed the friend-enemy distinction in politics, not merely dominating but exterminating the perceived enemy." Such political ideology has long roots in the history of Ethiopian politics. However, it intensified during the "student revolutionary movement" (18–22) and culminated in the EPRDF regime and under the Prosperity Party, where the political ideology of enemy-friend distinction fused with ethnic federalism (Abbink 2011, 3; 2017, 59).

Thus, the political act of enemy-making and enemy-naming has contributed to the society of enmity in Ethiopia. The government categorized and named the TPLF as *Junta* (organized traitors), a name given after a sudden attack made on the Northern defense force. Later, the name *Junta* was used by many to describe those who have a different political stance from the ruling party. Those who oppose the ruling party are referred to by this name. These are mostly people who adhere to or are sympathetic to the ideologies of TPLF. This marks what Bell (1975, 145–148) calls the "politicization" of ethnicity. Enemy naming is not only associated with the TPLF sympathizers, mostly Tigrayans, but is also common while addressing Oromos who are against the ruling party, labeling them *ONEG Shene*.[7]

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6 The video was reported on by the Guardian in March 2022.

7 *ONEG* is the Amharic name for the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) party starting from the 1970s which has been struggling for the liberation of the Oromia people, who according to them, have been oppressed by the Amhara, *Neftegna*, for quite a long time.

People from the ethnic Amhara have been referred to as *Neftegna*, where thousands and thousands were massacred in Oromia region just for being of the *Neftegna* ethnicity. Enemy naming, such as *Junta*, *ONEG Shene*, *Neftegna*, as Abbink (2017, 59) would argue, brought about the creation of various ethnic rebel movements and contributed vastly towards the society of enmity in Ethiopia. People labeled as *Junta* and *ONEG Shene* were characterized as bandits, terrorist, and anti-Ethiopia, fit to be ostracized and killed (Teklu 2021, 21). According to Teklu (2021, 24) "such a growing hatred will eventually develop into tragic episodes of an apocalyptic doom unless people change their evil ways," which at the end will lead to "a total degeneration of politics into necropolitics in which killing an ethnic enemy becomes a moral good and an end in itself."

Searching for *cura vitae* seems timely and vital in such a society of enmity, but what sort of cure will heal the deep wounds, give hope, and enhance the societal cohesion in Ethopia? In all this, the main question is in what ways Ethiopia will come out of such atrocity, a "society of enmity," to live together as one nation and people? What is the role of the Church in all these happenings—who is going to be the herald of hope, a beacon of healing, and an instrument of social re-cohesion? These questions will lead us to the next discussion, evaluating the position and response of the Ethiopian church in this adverse situation.

3. The Church at the Crossroads

Ethiopia is a "Christian island," an ancient claim referring to the 1700 years of Christian heritage, since the fourth and fifth century. The Ethiopian church kept her faith confession in spite of the various challenges and persecution throughout church history. The church was known not only as a center of excellence in education but also as a space of resilience, reconciliation, and solidarity. However, in spite of the country's long religious history, ethnic-based enmity currently abounds.

Girma (2021) identified four reasons through which religion contributed to the current escalated war and ethnic-based atrocities in the country. The first one is, since religious institutions are sources of a "moral compass in society," lack of peaceful "cohabitation and reconciliation" is a reflection of "moral decay in religious institutions." The second reason is the internal crisis of religious institutions concerning ethnicity; over-extended adherence to one's ethnic group is evident in most cases. The other is that "religion could be used as a mobilizing factor.... Supporters of the warring groups use their pulpits to demonize their perceived enemies and paint their leaders in a messianic light. This comes with the risk of dogmatizing ideological position and desensitizing conscience when atrocities are committed by those who are supported by a particular group." And the final point Girma identified is "religious laced conversation pushes politics from ideas that can be challenged to dogma that should be defended at any cost."

Building on Girma's analysis of the role of religion in the current situation, the Tigray war, I am going to evaluate and analyze the Church's position and response towards the current situation in the country. Limiting my scope to the evangelical churches of Ethiopia, I analyze the position, response, and attitudes of the Church using Katongole's (2008) "postures of Christianity."

Katongole in his book, *Mirror to the Church*, identified three important characteristics of Christianity while evaluating the position of the Church's engagement within a troubled society. He analyzed and evaluated the Church of Rwanda's response before and at the time of the Rwandan genocide which resembles the current state of Ethiopia, and he also gave a comprehensive evaluative framework that helps to explain the position of

the Church. The postures include the pious, the political, and the pastoral, which are the dominant postures Christianity adopts in relation to politics and economics (Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove 2009, 90–96).

Even though Katongole asserts the inadequacy of the three postures in the African context, the strength lies in locating the stance of the Church on societal engagement. Such analyses will help to describe the current state/position/location of the Church of Ethiopia. It will help not only to locate the position of the Church but also to provide critical evaluation, thereby indicating and proposing better ways of societal engagement in a time of crisis. Katongole's (2009, 94) observation is apt:

> I have noted that the failure of the church in Rwanda—both before and during the genocide—was made possible, in part, because the church located itself neatly within the dominant story of Rwanda. Having done so, it was unable to question (let alone provide any bulwark against) the demonic formation of Hutu-Tutsi tribalism.

The first posture Katongole argues is the pious posture. This posture expresses doing right and being faithful to self-spirituality, yet being insensitive to the surrounding social ills. This posture mainly focuses on the gospel message in the heart of believers, but it fails to question the reasons for the occurring injustices. Katongole uses Mark 15:21, the story of Simon the Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ. According to Katongole, Simon is an obedient and pious Christian who obeyed the officials' order to carry the cross to Golgotha; however, he neither dared to question the reason behind the crucifixion nor was interested in knowing why it was happening. He rather kept on obeying what he was told to do by the officials (Katongole and Wilson-Harrtgrove 2009, 96–99).

Many Christians in Ethiopia seem to have a pious posture. In spite of all the atrocities and enmities that divide the country, the killings of innocent civilians, the rape and all sorts of misery, the response of the Church has only been silence upon silence. The Church was reluctant to raise her voice against the injustices in the country; rather she was busy holding press conferences and meetings that were initiated and organized by the government. Without objection, the church was feeding the displaced, as requested by the government without asking the why question, and without being bothered by the injustices and the sufferings the people were enduring. The pious posture best describes the Ethiopian Church's social engagement in the time of this grave danger.

The second posture Katongole discusses is the political posture. This posture is demonstrated by the Church's loyalty to the authority in case of social injustices. He used the example in John 18:19–22. This biblical text is about Jesus being asked by the high priest about his teaching and his disciples. Jesus's answer was that the priest knew and had heard what Jesus taught since he was speaking about it openly. However, one of the official's guards slapped Jesus for his disrespectful reply to the high priest. Using this incident, Katongole analyzed the response of the Church and its relationship with the authorities. According to Katongole (2009, 102), the political posture considers loyalty to the state/government by getting involved directly or indirectly, like the guard. "The political posture takes responsibility for the world as it is and does not worry about compromising itself by getting involved in the systems and processes of this world." Even though the execution of Jesus was political, carried out by the authorities, the religious leaders worked hard towards its fulfillment.

In addition, Katongole (2009, 104) argues that the political posture is patriotic and "stirs up religious conviction to motivate citizens of nation states to promote political ideology." This posture is an exact fit to the

Ethiopian Church. The Church of Ethiopia was patriotic and vividly allied and showed her affinity with the government in power. The Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, is from a known evangelical church which led many Protestant churches to believe he is God sent, the Ethiopian Messiah, as an answer to their prayer for Ethiopia's redemption. Thus, the Church was patriotic and supported the government with all the power it has, including supporting the war with TPLF. The Church has her own share in fueling the society of enmity by making allies with the government, praying for the victory of the government, justifying the war, and naming the enemy as *Junta*, *ONEG Shene*, and so on. Furthermore, a good example that illustrates the political posture of the Ethiopian Church could be the president of the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKHC), which claims to have nine million members, who ran for election representing the ruling PP. Such closer affinity with the government, as Girma argues (2021), does not merely blur the neutral space between religion and politics but also "comes with the risk of dogmatizing ideological positions and desensitizing conscience when atrocities are committed by those who are supported by the particular group." The question is, as Bishop Kolini (Katongole and Wilson-Harrtgrove 2009, 133) asked, "How do we become a church of people who can say no to killing?"

The third posture Katongole discusses is the pastoral posture. The pastoral posture is about performing compassionate service to the afflicted, drawing from John 19:38–42 (Katongole and Wilson-Harrtgrove 2009, 99–106). In the narrative, Joseph of Arimathea requested Jesus's body and together with Nicodemus cared for the corpse, washed, aromatized, and buried it properly without asking why, and by whom he was killed. The pastoral posture is busy doing good work, the work of mercy and fulfilling immediate needs, but lacks the bravery to say no to injustices, killings, and oppression.

The Church in Ethiopia predominantly has this posture, doing mainly humanitarian work, and yet is silent and inactive to raise her voice against injustices and killings. The Church of Ethiopia is at the crossroads of either continuing to be silent and being part of the government's decisions, or to make herself a weapon of "interruption" (Katongole 2009, 114) to the "*necro-politics*" (Mbembe 2019). Interruption for Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove (2009, 114–117) is having a "rebel consciousness" which questions the social, political, and economic situation, accompanied by timely action. Thus, from these analyses of the posture of the churches in social engagement, the Ethiopian Church fulfilled all the criteria of the three postures: the pious, political, and the pastoral posture. The Church positioned herself with the ruling party in many ways and contributed her share towards "the society of enmity." One can boldly claim that the current Ethiopian Church resembles the Rwandan Church in the wake of the 1994 genocide.

4. Searching for the *Cura Vitae*

Ethiopia needs healing now more than ever, in order to come out of the grave danger she is in. Agreeing with Girma's call (2021) "while diversity should be respected, and even celebrated, the religious teachings now should focus on healing and reconciliation," I will turn to searching for healing and hope for Ethiopia.

The previous sections brought the two main problems to the surface: Ethiopia as the society of enmity and the contribution and position of the Church towards such a society. What sort of theological move should the Church embrace to bring *cura vitae* amid a "society of enmity"—in the journey of "interrupting" and being the beacon of healing, hope, and togetherness for this country? The notion of *cura vitae*, borrowed from Louw (2008, 211), is described as being,

about a theology of life and the healing of life from the viewpoint of Christian spirituality. It is about how new life in the risen Christ and the indwelling presence of the Spirit can contribute to the empowerment of human beings. It is about hope, care, and the endeavor to give meaning to life within the reality of suffering, our human vulnerability.

Thus, the search for *cura vitae*, the healing of life, will be analyzed using interconnected rubrics of healing and hope, drawing from the theology of lament and *metanoia*, according to Katongole and Teklu. According to Louw (2008, 75),

> healing implies the restoration of a loss and the search for integration and identity; to regain what has been lost or to attain new coping mechanisms, or the reframing of existing concepts and ideas. A holistic and comprehensive approach to healing includes physical, psychological, spiritual, contextual, and relational healing.

Thus, healing presupposes multidimensional aspects, it assumes the whole person's restoration from the loss, searching for integration and identity, and finding the means to cope and heal.

4.1. In search of healing via lament

The first step of searching for the healing of life, *cura vitae*, starts with admitting and accepting the loss and suffering: lament. As Katangole and Rice (2008, 94) aver, healing starts by learning to lament, and learning to lament is "to become people who stay near to the wounds of the world, singing over them, allowing the unsettling cry of pain to be heard." Lament is all about being ready to "become vulnerable," through sharing the wound,

cry, and agony of others. In lament, not only do we learn to identify with the sufferer; we also experience a moment of self-recognition of both denials and arrogances. To lament, as Katongole (2009, 48–51) argues, is to see and name what is going on. In other words, the first step of lament is about opening our ears to hear the various voices of cries, feeling the pain and sufferings of the displaced, the raped, the diseased, the mourning, the orphaned, and the grieving.

Katongole (2009, 48–51) further explains that the cry of lament—*ekah*[8] in Hebrew and *weyo, weyene weyene* in Amharic (Ethiopian language)—is not a simplistic cry of expressing a mere emotion; rather, it expresses a multitude of emotions, questioning one's and God's existence. The Hebrew equivalent of lament, Katongole (2017, 50, 51) elaborates, is an "expression of grief and horror…a whole range of emotions—grief, guilt, anger, compassion, forgiveness, hope, despair, shame, are evoked contemplated, voiced, sifted through the cry of *ekah*." In hearing the lament, we not only hear but also partake in the lament, entering the space of the sufferer so that we can take responsibility, advocate, and cry with the sufferer. Such lament will remind us and our Church of our "tragic failure" (Katongole 2009, 48–51).

The tragic failure of the Ethiopian Church is the lack of such lament; a non-lamenting church not even aware of her failures. The cry of lament is not only concerned with being aware of failure but also of becoming vulnerable and opening a space for expressing grief as well as a space for forgiveness and hope, because in lament we share the wound and healing together. Thus, the only option for being the beacon of healing and hope

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8 The cry of lament as Katongole (2017, 50, 51) describes it, unlike the English equivalent "oh, alas," the Hebrew term *ekah* has a broader aspect and the Amharic term *weyene, woyo* is equivalent to the *ekah*.

demands entering the grieving space. Entering the space of the sufferer, the Church partakes in lament via naming the pain, partaking in the cry, voicing, and advocating. Katongole (2017, 52) avers, in naming grief, "grief itself becomes owned, valorized, and thus ultimately consolable and healable." The Church must name the grief, raise her voice with the displaced, raped, the killed, the massacred, recognizing atrocities and enmities, thereby seeing the possibility of owning the suffering and eventually leading to consolation.

Lament is not only the emotional, physical, psychological, and physiological cry but also theological: a cry for help, deliverance, and consolation (Katongole 2017, 52). Unless the Church laments, healing and consolation will not come. That is the only way for the Church to regain her ability to cry out to the Lord for deliverance, consolation, and restoration, singing a psalm of lament such as Psalm 10:1–2: "God, Listen! Listen to my prayer; listen to the pain in my cries. Don't turn your back on me just when I need you desperately. Pay attention! This is a cry for help! And hurry–this can't wait! (MSG)" As Katongole (2008, 78) explains,

> Lament is not despair. It is not whining. It is not a cry into a void. Lament is a cry directed to God. It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world's deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are. We are enjoined to learn to see and to feel what the psalmists see and feel and to join our prayers with theirs. The journey of reconciliation is grounded in the practice of lament…. Over and again, lament teaches us about both what must be learned and what must be unlearned in order to live well in a broken world.

Therefore, the Church needs to lament, to cry, to enter into the space of the sufferer and start to learn, to see and feel what went wrong and also to unlearn so as not to repeat her mistakes of irresponsibility, ignorance, and arrogance. To lament is an invitation to see, hear, and feel; it is also an invitation to turn to God, yearning for the better; a turn to him who is going to reconcile everything in heaven and earth.

4.2. Anticipating hope through metanoia

Black (2005) asserts that, "the spine of lament is hope." Hearing, naming, and partaking in lament is entering into the *metanoic* space of repentance, which is conversion at the same time as a change of direction (Teklu 2014, 212). According to Katongole (2008, 88), lament is "a conversion towards authentic hope." However, Katongole did not give due emphasis to *metanoia*. Rather, he only briefly discussed it as a prerequisite for hope or as part of lament. I believe *metanoia* is vital for the Church not only to find authentic hope but also as a way to engage and transform the society for the better. In lament we forgive, forget, repent, and start to begin anew. According to Teklu (2014, 214), *metanoia* "is not understood in terms of a pietistic individualistic repentance but rather as a return to first principles that transforms Christians and the world."

Drawing from Russian theologian Sergius Bulgakov, Teklu (2016, 1–24) endeavors to articulate the politics of *metanoia* as a way of Christians fostering societal engagement and transformation. Teklu further argues *metanoia* creates not only the "*metanoic* space," a call for a new action, but also constructs an "imagination of alternative society." Towards this end, Teklu pointed out transformative principles Christians should turn to. First the *metanoic* way of life endeavors to turn away from the shackles of ignorance, arrogance, bias, and vice to a changed mind, heart, and action

of a new examined way of life. This life, *metanoic* life, is embedded in the eschatological realm of the already and the not yet, thereby entering into a new relationship in this world and the coming life. This eschatological outlook has a direct implication for the way Christians engage and relate with the society they live in that is both relational and transformational. Thus, according to Teklu (2016, 7–10), Christian social engagement demands conversion, a *metanoia*, that is comprehensive and multidimensional.

The other principle Teklu (2014, 212–214) explains is that the *metanoic* life presumes a process of "self-transcendence." In other words, conversion entails an examined life, "self-authenticity," and at the same time a "withdrawal from inauthenticity." Teklu (2016, 7–12) further elaborates the meaning and significance of *metanoia* for Christians using Rowan Williams's notion of *metanoia*, as "a comprehensive self-questioning" in order to have a meaningful social engagement. A self-critical church is attentive, learning, open-minded, reads the *kairos*, and acts accordingly. Moreover, a self-critical Church works towards a continual transformation of the self, the church, and society: thus, a self-questioning church brings the self and others to the place of hope, where transformative healing takes place in daily life (Katongole 2017, 169). Since in Christian hope, "the future is more important than the past, and waiting greater than remembering" (Moltmann 2019, 174), Christians find their hope of a new beginning on the cross, the crucified Messiah of the lamenting God crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Hope is found in the forsakenness, despair, and lament of the sufferer. In finding hope, we pass from the past/present agony to the future (Moltmann 2019, 175).

However, as a church, finding hope through conversion demands knowing the time and situation very well. Moltmann is in favor of the term *kairos* rather than *chronos* since the former is about the way future "possibilities are seized and realized," and the latter is only confined to the moment. Thus, in searching for the *cura vitae* through *metanoia,* as Moltmann (2019, 174) best explains, "the *kairos* is very attentive to remembering the past to live the present but without remaining there. Rather it also culminates the future in the present as a way of starting life towards a new beginning." Teklu (2017, 175), in the same vein as Moltmann, asserted that "Christians are beginners." Such hope is endowed with the eschatological hope of the crucified God, the hope of the resurrection, and the coming God (Moltmann 2019, 175). The way of a new beginning is also a shift in identity, transcending from self-centered obsession to the metaphysical life; a shift to eschatological thinking and doing which leads to transformation (Louw 2008, 75).

Therefore, in searching for *cura vitae*, the Ethiopian Church needs to turn towards a continual self-examination to avoid becoming complacent with the *status quo*, marked by advocating not for the cry of the sufferer but for the rhetoric of the government. That way, she starts a new action of hope towards transforming the society for the better because such authentic conversion, *metanoia*, "fosters community (trans-)formation" (Teklu 2014, 7). Because as Louw (2016, 4) asserts, *cura vitae* starts with a vision, as "hope resides in vision."

If the spine of lament is hope, hope is found in lament where the constant look for healing, restoration, and eagerness for new beginnings emerges. Therefore, the search for *cura vitae*, the healing of life, is impossible without searching for healing that starts with lament. The Church should not only open her ears to hear the cry of lament but also enter the space of the sufferers and participate in the lament. The cry of lament is the anticipation of hope and a new beginning that is always founded in eschatological reality. The eschatological anticipation always leads the Church to a position of

lament and *metanoia* as she waits for the coming God while living in this world. This entails being sacrificed for others to be healed, having hope and remembering atrocities, and moving forward to "enjoy the hope of new beginnings" (Tariku 2021, 152–153).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, Ethiopia is a "society of enmity," characterized by rampant hatred, atrocities, killing, massacre, ethnic-based conflicts, and genocides, in most parts of the country. Ethnic-based killing and cleansing, either by the government or other liberators has been disrupting the country in every sphere: the economy, politics, religion, peace, and existence. The article examined and challenged the position/posture of the Church amid such atrocities and despair. The position of the Church's societal engagement has been more pious, political, and pastoral rather than prophetic. A prophetic position would say no to the social injustices, hatred, and killing in the country. On the contrary, the Ethiopian Church rather contributed towards the society of enmity either in one way or another, by allying with the government or by remaining silent. Therefore, this article calls the Church to regain her authentic self, of being the beacon of hope, healing, and solidarity, by a continual search for *cura vitae* for Ethiopia through unceasing lament and *metanoia*.

Lament not only lets the Church hear, see, know, and name what is going on, but it also reveals the Church's "tragic failure." Entering the space of the sufferer, the Church partakes in lament by naming the pain, partaking in the cry, and voicing and advocating. In naming grief, grief "becomes owned, valorized, and thus ultimately consolable and healable" (Katongole 2017, 52). But, lament is not enough; it should be accompanied with *metanoia*. Partaking in lament is entering into a *metanoic* space of repentance, conversion and, at the same time, a change of direction, since lament is "a conversion towards authentic hope." Through *metanoia*, the Ethiopian Church will engage in taking new actions, of both self-questioning and active hoping as a way to engage and transform the society for the better. A lamenting and *metanoic* Church would be able to find healing, hope, solidarity, and transformation amid hopelessness and despair. It is only then that the Lord will say, "I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near" (Is 57:18–19 NIV).

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Book Review: *African Public Theology*

Agang, Sunday B. (ed.). 2020. *African Public Theology*. Cumbria: Langham. 1–422 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78368-766-4. Approx. 231 ZAR (14.99 USD). Kindle.

1. Introduction

This book was compiled at the initiative of Sunday Bobai Agang, who holds a Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary, USA, in Christian Ethics, Theology, and Public Policy. He currently serves as provost of the Nigerian seminary JETS (Jos ECWA Theological Seminary), is a professor of Christian ethics and theology, and is a former pastor. Agang has engaged in multiple post-doctoral endeavors in connection with Wheaton College, Cambridge University, Oxford University, Theological College in Singapore, Asbury Theological Seminary, and Stellenbosch University, South Africa. His academic awards identify him as an exemplary scholar. He has authored multiple peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and books. These include *When Evil Strikes: Faith and the Politics of Human Hostility*, published in 2016, and *Globalization and Terrorism: Corruption as a Case to Ponder*, published in English in 2019 and re-issued in German and French in 2021. Agang has served as chairman, secretary, or member of multiple boards and commissions, including his current position as chair of the Executive Committee of NetACT (Network for African Congregational Theology).

African Public Theology evolved through the efforts of Agang in partnership with Langham Publishing and NetACT. Agang organized planning meetings and worked on this effort during a sabbatical year in 2018 at Stellenbosch University. There he connected with H. Jurgens Hendriks, program coordinator of NetACT and professor emeritus of Stellenbosch, and Dion A. Forster, chair of the Systematic Theology Department at Stellenbosch, who became co-editors.

2. Overview

African Public Theology's method is to root itself in biblical theology while addressing a broad scope of issues facing African society, using theology as a voice for justice. The volume's thesis is that public theology is especially needed in the African context, as it addresses multiple needs: for theology to be reimagined as not only an understanding about God, but as a vision of God's desire for his creation and his people, specifically Africa; for the African church to undergo reform so it can be effective; and for Christians to take their faith public and engage in deliberate action to contribute to change.

Another pointed emphasis is that academically-focused theology is often merely cognitive and therefore irrelevant to the real-life experiences of everyday people. For this reason, the book's intention is to help readers comprehend the import of public theology, begin to grasp the issues that intersect this field in the African context, and catch a vision of the all-encompassing aspects of life that contribute to change.

The work has thirty contributors and is comprised of three sections, with twenty-nine chapters overall. Part One consists of five chapters and focuses on establishing the fundamentals of public theology, emphasizing a Trinitarian and biblical viewpoint. Part Two consists of the bulk of the work, with twenty-one chapters engaging the application of public theology within African society. The issues addressed include economics, education, poverty, land issues, work issues, rural community development, migrants, refugees, human trafficking, human rights, the armed forces, the state, democracy and civil society, leadership, media, the arts, interfaith

issues, gender, and intergenerational issues. It also addresses ecotheology including public policy regarding the environment, science, and health. Part Three brings all this together with three chapters regarding the role of the church, including a vision of the Africa God wants and a call for Christians to mobilize towards this effort.

This volume is self-described as a handbook encouraging theological schools and theologians to network and build on its ideas. The purpose is to empower African Christian leaders spiritually and theologically, spurring belief and action towards God's kingdom coming to fruition in Africa. Its intention is to feed into existing collaborative efforts such as the African Union's *Agenda 2063*, described in an Appendix, as well as groups engaging in related efforts including the African Leadership Study (ALS). This project is ambitious, passionate, and necessary. This work points out that though Africa is proud of its heritage, identity, values, and culture, it is hampered by war, corruption, terrorism, and the abuse of power. Many regions endure a lack of regard for constitutional government, leadership that promotes its own interests, and governments that steal from and inflict pain on their own people through armed forces. These governments fail to tend to their citizens' needs regarding issues of poverty, disease, refugees, orphans, violence against women, prejudice, and inequality. This is where the Church must step up and help. Individual Christians are called to live out their theology by affirming human dignity, being a family, offering charity, showing solidarity, and meeting spiritual and physical needs. Christian organizations can align in coalitions with other churches, universities, and institutions to band together and exert group influence toward enacting change in civil society and public policy. Taking action in this way is the essence of public theology, which carries out God's work in a practical and life-changing way.

3. Evaluation

Despite its myriad authors, the book maintains a unity of focus, refreshingly offering a voice regarding uniquely African challenges directly from African professionals and academics. It uses clear, understandable language and offers an opportunity for reflection through questions and suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter. At the same time, it remains scholarly and suitable for theological institutions. It tackles the difficult and extensive subject of the pressing need for tangible change in African civil society.

The ideas in this compilation are especially relevant in the context of its year of publication, 2020, the year that saw the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Contributors re-emphasize that Africa groans under the weight of its burdens, and that God has something better in store for its people and for the continent.

This was a massive project completed in a relatively short time, and understandably it gleaned from the network of resources available, including several contributors from NetACT and at least half of the contributors from connections with Stellenbosch University. The book's collaborators include men and women from multiple disciplines and countries, representing Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and at least five other African nations. In addition, rather than being written only by theologians, nearly half of the thirty contributors come from additional fields of expertise, including business, law, leadership, communication, Christian education, the arts, and intercultural studies. Several are ordained clergy, and many regularly interact with organizations that are actively enacting change. This adds a practical dimension to this project that is eminently suitable for its purpose.

With this in mind, a similar future project could be strengthened through even greater depth in the variety of contributors, especially African women. Seventeen contributors specialize in some form of theology, but of those, sixteen are male (five of those Caucasian), while only one female

theologian is included—Esther Mombo, who addresses the chapter on "Gender," rather than on theology generally. The more heavily theological chapters that bookend the volume in Parts One and Three are all written by men.

The project does include seven women overall, including Mombo. Two of these were graduate students at the time, one in Drama and Theatre Studies, and one in Journalism (they have since been awarded their Ph.D.s). Therefore, only five experienced, professional women were included in this collaboration. Only four of twenty-nine chapters are written solely by female authors: besides Mombo's chapter on "Gender," these include "Leadership" by Maggie Madimbo; "Democracy, Citizenship, and Civil Society" by Jane Adhiambo Chiroma; and "The Media" by coauthors Bimbo Fafowora and Rahab Njeri Nyaga, (the latter of whom sadly passed away in January 2022). Two other female co-authors contribute to the chapters on "Education" and "the Arts" alongside male counterparts. *African Public Theology* addresses inequity and the lack of inclusion of African women, so while the incorporation of these authors is commendable, the addition of at least one or two more female African theologians would offer an even more well-rounded representation of the female voice of Africa in this volume.

In addition, this begs the question whether the twenty percent of the volume (six chapters) written by Caucasian male contributors, all well-regarded professors, represent a paradigm that would be considered socio-economically privileged. Could these chapters have been offered to qualified contributors more representative of the broader voice of African experience, including female scholars?

One additional benefit would be a chapter devoted to prejudice. Ideas of racial tension are interlaced through the book, especially tribal and gender discrimination. In addition, chapter fifteen on "Human Rights" by Kajit J. Bagu identifies how the West first realized that the idea of racial superiority was evil after observing the Nazi holocaust during World War II. However, it would be worthwhile and informative to address an updated view of the current dynamic between white and black people in Africa, as opposed to other parts of the world and a different time.

4. Conclusion

African Public Theology provides concrete application of theology and ethics with a focus on healing, including Christianity's relationship with globalization, terrorism, corruption, persecution, human suffering, tribalism, and sustainable economy. This book is eminently valuable and should be included in theological curricula, not just in Africa, but around the world. It is also useful for Christians everywhere as it points readers in the direction of becoming networked and empowered toward effecting change in civil society.

The editor acknowledges that for *African Public* Theology to have an enduring impact it must not only be read and understood, but it should inspire further collaboration and the active practice of public faith.

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Book Review: *Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective.*

1. Introduction

While the title of the book may lead one to conclude that the content of the book defends the proliferation of megachurches in Africa, as seen globally, Wanjiru Gitau's writing presents a contextual response to the changing needs of the urban middle class in Nairobi and how one church has led the way in changing the megachurch landscape in Nairobi. Although Gitau does deal with the cultural and social elements implicit in megachurches, this book's scope goes beyond that of a mere defense of such phenomena in Africa and seeks to contribute to the overall understanding of movemental Christianity in Africa.

2. Overview

The book is divided into six chapters that build on the glocal (denoting the coalescence of local and global) influences, conditions, and innovations that led to the inception, growth, development, and multiplication of the Mavuno church within Kenya, as well as its influence regionally within Africa and globally. The book deals with topics of liminality and bold leadership (Chapter 1); the specific plight of Kenyan—and African—Millennials (Chapter 2); a contextual and missional response by a Kenyan church as presented in the Mavuno Marathon (Chapter 3); leadership in an era of change (Chapter 4); the impact of the Mavuno case study glocally (Chapter 5); and how African Christianity relates to modern concepts and concerns (Chapter 6).

3. A Contextual Approach to Global Trends in Africa

The book reminds readers of the important fact that modern denominations and churches are the by-product of historical movements, revivals, and revitalizations that are fuelled by the Holy Spirit. Set in Africa, Gitau's work carefully details the unfolding narrative of movemental Christianity's growth in Africa, where millennials are flooding into churches and embracing the Gospel, when their counterparts in the West are either indifferent (or opposed) to what has become known as the evangelical megachurch phenomenon. The author does not make a special case for the megachurch model specifically but showcases how this can play an important role in societal transformation.

What makes this work important is the way Gitau frames the liminality of the growth and development of Africa's megachurches and how colonialism, post-colonial reality, and a sense of cultural or worldview dissonance shapes the current religious and cultural landscape in Africa.

Part of understanding the overall success of Mavuno (and countless other megachurches throughout Africa's cities) lies in a deepening understanding of the African cultural, political, and global culture that is causing many millennial Africans to question the fundamental worldview they embrace in a world of discontinuous change. Themes of modernization and globalization are consistent features in the book and are helpful to build a holistic understanding of the influences of the Mavuno movement globally. Gitau argues that the megachurches in the Global South help rewrite the map of reality with the Gospel as their primary compass. She states that "megachurches in the Global South emerge and thrive because they help this demographic make sense of the world by addressing their social, psychological, and spiritual crossroads" (p. 10). Megachurch models serve as bridges between the traditional/missionary African experience of Christianity that is steeped in liturgy, traditional forms of religious practice, hymns, and a Christianity that matches the aspirations and "struggle" of a transitory generation in an era of both discontinuous change and incalculable opportunity. It is the drama, relevance, and boldness of this form of "Pentecostal" faith that ignites the hearts of scores of Africa's people across what was once dubbed the "dark continent," and is now emerging as a bright light for the Christian Faith in the twenty-first century. This story is one of crisis and opportunity, and although its locus is Mavuno Church (Nairobi, Kenya), the contextual principles may serve other African interlocutors as the church should always find herself—in the words of the missiologist David Bosch—between danger and opportunity.[1]

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1 The phrase "danger and opportunity" is used by David Bosch to describe the evident missiological paradigm shifts he was witnessing at the time of writing his magnum opus, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission* in 1991. This is a helpful way to describe the mindset of the leaders that drove the Mavuno movement.

Like many African nations, Gitau asserts that the prevailing global monoculture of the 1990s had a profound impact on the cultural perceptions and aspirations of African Millennials. "Hegemonic cultural influence then led to a loosening of previously held certainties and attachments that formed social bonds. Everything coming from the outside appeared to be superior and more desirable, especially to the young people" (p. 42). Western hedonism and the embracing of its antecedent culture, language, and dress, became the norm, leading to a new era of consumerism and an expanding leadership vacuum. This set the scene for the innovative, contextual, and glocal Mavuno model.

Gitau describes the process of what led to the success of the Mavuno movement (known as the Mavuno Marathon), a systematic and practical tool that is meant to take the need for transformation of the "whole person in the ordinary life cycle seriously" (p. 70). It is no surprise to me that their pipeline of discipleship has resulted in cumulative change in Nairobi as leaders intentionally crafted a workable, process-oriented plan that targeted the unreached in Nairobi and ensured that the consistency and tenacity of their approach engaged those who were estranged from church, and those who were enthralled with a secular mindset. The strategic approach they deployed, rather than simply an attractional church model, moves people through the pipeline of their discipleship process, engaging, connecting, equipping, re-orienting, and releasing disciples for societal transformation. The Mavuno movement does not seek to create Christian converts with a Eurocentric, traditional form of religion, like the mission-oriented churches, nor does it seek to embrace an African traditional worldview preserving African heritage while not seeking holistic biblical fidelity. Mavuno's success is demonstrated in the dynamic way it engages the existing gap in Kenya's (and Africa's) emergent culture. This is a central feature and important contribution of the book. Mavuno's leadership has

demonstrated, with practical proficiency, the relevance of Christianity to the whole of life for the modern African, addressing issues of identity, heritage, and legacy as fearless influencers of society (pp. 86–87). The assimilation and contextualization of glocal trends, theology, and praxis strengthened the approach to ministry.

One of the most encouraging chapters of Gitau's work relates to that of Mavuno's legacy as creators of fearless influencers of society. She cites Mark Shaw, who observes the intimate connections between the growth of Christianity in the Global South and its roots in the broader evangelical movements of eighteenth-century evangelical Christianity. These movements arise as "charismatic people movements that transform their cultural world by translating Christian truth and transferring the power of the gospel to new generations" (Shaw 2010 *Global Awakening*, 29). Shaw also shows that in most of these revivals or global awakenings there is an evident spiritual revival with a wider pattern of revitalizing influences in the wider world. Such is the approach of the Mavuno narrative to Kenyan culture and through its glocal vision. A good example of the influence of the Mavuno mission is its relationship with Mariners Church in Irvine, CA (p. 139). Through its interactions with the movement in Kenya, the senior leadership of this church has adopted and adapted elements into their own culture and vision that have led to increasing levels of success and have affirmed the global impact of movements originating in the Global South.

The concept of what has been termed "redemption and lift"[2] is helpfully unpacked in a discussion on how, in Africa, becoming a Christian potentially sets one up to be prosperous within one's own cultural and social context (p. 149). Gitau argues that the evangelical focus on the redemption of the soul and the personal, cultural, and societal "lift" has not adequately

prepared Christians to deal with the positive consequences of material progress in Africa. She speaks boldly and clearly around this topic, which is of great relevance to the next milieu in the unfolding narrative of African Christianity. I agree with Gitau when she states: "What is needed is an ethical vision of success generated through all the products (the city, technology) and process (capitalist market, modern politics) of modernization in all their constructive (human progress, prosperity) and shadow (alienation, meaninglessness, marginalization of the most vulnerable) sides" (pp. 148–152).

Gitau's final chapter deals with the emergence and significance of megachurch Christianity and its relevance. Starting off with a focus on revival/awakening history, Gitau asserts: "When the old maps of reality have failed, young and upcoming revivalists preached a new light that unblocked immense creative energies in new generations" (p. 153). Global examples of this principle are given as in figures like John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield to demonstrate an important principle: in the face of emerging new worlds, in times of great uncertainty and increasing change, leaders often use unconventional means to lead people to experience the Gospel afresh (p. 154). Gitau has demonstrated that this is the locus of the Mavuno movement and irrespective of leader or context, the prevailing mindset is described within the intersection of generational transition, destabilizing social change, and the need to translate the Gospel into a changing and changed reality.

4. Strengths

The book is relatively easy to read; and the footnotes, figures, and diagrams make it easier to assimilate the concepts being presented throughout the material. The author presents a coherent argument that is well-structured and connects global and local (glocal) facts and information in a compelling way.

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2 A phrase popularized by Missiologist Donald McGavrin in understanding church growth principles.

Gitau persuasively presents the model (as participant observer) which serves as a modern-day map to engage the unique cultural moment Africa is presented with in the era of post-Colonialism. Gitau's work is the opposite side of the same coin as the West deals with post-Modernism. The book is timely and pragmatic in approach.

It is encouraging to read about how innovation on the African Continent is shaping practice and how the influence of a Kenyan church has grown throughout Africa and abroad. This shows how truly polycentric Christian expression and innovation have become.

5. Weaknesses

Gitau does not adequately address the elephant in the room when it comes to African megachurches, Neo-Pentecostalism. The author does look at African Independent Churches and their reaction to cultural changes; but she does not adequately deal with the proliferation of the Neo-Pentecostal awakening and its implications, dangers, and opportunities.

Although the author does draw a distinction between the numerical and cultural change aspects that megachurches are well-known for globally, she also points out that a conviction to evangelize (likened to that of the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth century) are important driving forces in the Mavuno narrative. What is somewhat missing is a broader analysis of the concept, influence, and inherent dangers African megachurches present in general throughout Africa. In her presentation of the Mavuno model, Gitau does not critically engage the veracity of megachurches and their effect.

Gitau does briefly touch on the Prosperity Gospel, and its uncharacteristic relationship with mainstream theology. However, this section needs deeper reflection as its effects are far spread throughout the African religious landscape and emerging African Christian consciousness.

Are all megachurch expressions contextual responses to global trends? How does this model translate continentally as it contextualizes and contends for the Christian faith in areas of religious conflict with other religions?

The influence of church growth theory and other contemporary influences that may have been learned from senior pastor Muriithi Wanjau's time at Fuller prior to starting the Mavuno Church are not adequately credited in the book. The ideas and innovation spoken of resonate with other global movements and streams. Perhaps the author's unconscious bias as a participant observer prevented her from speaking into these more specifically.

6. Conclusion

Gitau's work is of great importance to the church in Africa as we face the realities unfolding in a post-Covid world. In many senses, we are still in an era of ambiguity, change, and development. Gitau's framework presents a holistic and scalable approach that may challenge this generation of African leaders in the church to rethink their approach to Christian ministry in Africa's burgeoning cities.

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Book Review: *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership.*

1. Introduction

Research professor Dorothy Lee presents a scholarly study of Christian traditions surrounding the ministry of women in the NT. Her expertise as a biblical scholar is evident as she interacts with Christian traditions surrounding the ministry of women through reflections on biblical passages and profiles of women in the NT who encountered the Lord and engaged in his mission at various levels. Her analysis leads her to affirm convincingly that "baptism is the primary symbol that draws women and men into a relationship with Christ that transcends all human barriers" (Moloney, p. ix). Her thesis is that all Christians have the capacity to communicate Christ to others and to share his life in multiple forms of ministry. This book makes a valuable contribution to the theological debate of women in contemporary ministry.

2. Summary of the Book

The purpose of Lee's book is to highlight new research that has emerged from different theological traditions across the church. Research which focuses on the role of women in leadership in the early centuries of the church's life, and demonstrates the significant place women held within and beyond the ministry of Jesus (p. 2). She posits a theological discussion of women in ministry and whether they are capable of being icons of Christ—that is, representatives of Christ who can embody his living presence (p. 173). She carefully examines these arguments through tradition and Scripture.

Convincingly, Lee revisits the current arguments against women's full participation in ministry and leadership within the church. Her study explores two points for arguments against women's leadership: On one hand, some claims are based on Scripture—that the Bible itself does not endorse women's leadership, except in relation to other women and children. The second argument arises from tradition—that church teaching has never endorsed women's ministry at the level of ordination. Therefore, the purpose of Lee's study is to revisit the arguments against women's participation in ministry and church leadership (p. 10).

She does so from a clearly biblical and theological point of view. For example, she notes a key theological argument that claims the Twelve apostles are the inheritors of Christ's ministry and that no woman is included among them and therefore cannot function in formal ministry. Lee argues that the key challenge for today's church is the recognition of women's equality and mutuality with men in the proclamation of the gospel. She contends that there is a need to create structures protecting the weak and vulnerable (p. 12). Women's full dignity and authority as children of God and disciples of Christ, whatever their race or culture, need to be included in new ways to fulfill the NT call to a transformed world, where "there is no

longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28; NRSV) (p. 12). From this NT perspective she argues that women should have full access to the church's ministry, whether in lay or ordained ministries, and that this access needs to depend *not* on gender but rather on a sense of vocation and on the church's discernment of calling. She affirms that all Christian women, like all Christian men, should be considered in this important theological discussion (pp. 10–11).

3. Theological and Christological Evidence

Lee exegetes many of the key texts that most theologians argue regarding the place of women in ministry. She concludes that in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, readers are left with a profound impression of the strength and resilience of the women disciples. Although women are not mentioned as frequently as men, and their role is less visible than the Twelve, their ministry role goes far beyond their cultural context. This portrait of women in the NT reflects the ministry of Jesus and his extraordinary openness to women as disciples (p. 35).

Luke's Gospel displays women who are connected to Jesus at profound levels, including at times of crisis in their own lives. They are suppliants who respond in faith and self-giving to Jesus's healing power. They are acknowledged as disciples from the beginning of their journey to Jerusalem. Women are followers of Jesus and are committed to his message, demonstrated by their exemplary service. Jesus's attitude toward women and power challenged the structures of his world. Notable passages include Mark 5:21–43 and Matthew 9:18–26 (pp. 18–19). She further posits that the Johannine Gospel gives us the fullest panoply of women disciples who were able to understand and bear witness to the Gospel of divine glory revealed in Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection. She gives particular emphasis to Mary Magdalene as the apostle of the resurrection and the primary witness to God's triumph over death in Jesus (p. 190).

In reviewing the Acts of the Apostles, Lee notes that women were used as prophets, disciples, and ministers. Several examples include the following: Acts 1:14 notes Galilean women followers; Acts 2:17–18 notes female prophets; Acts 16:13 notes Jewish women in Philippi; and Acts 21:8–9 notes four prophets. While Lee notes that men are more prominent in the Acts of the Apostles than are women, she argues that this reflects the culture of that day, which makes the presence and role of women more remarkable (p. 73). Lee further maintains there is no real opposition to women's authority as leaders and teachers, particularly if these texts were interpreted within their own contexts. She further concludes that the General Epistles support the inclusive vision found in the Gospels and Pauline writings.

Lee addresses the claim that those who advocate for women in ministry are giving in to a liberal agenda arising from Western secularism that is implicitly alien to the Bible and the traditions of the church. She addresses this key issue in the historical context of the NT (p. 154). For example, in the Gospel of John, Lee examines the significant role of women in the meaning of discipleship in Christian ministry and leadership. Lee concludes by demonstrating that women have biblical grounds for the authoritative forms their ministry will take, proclaiming the crucified, risen Christ in word and deed (p. 95).

She discusses at length Paul's writing in I Timothy that creates heated debate among many theologians. Paul's basic premise is that women are to be "silent" in church and are not to teach men. Importantly, the author notes that reactionary scholarship asserts that this key text is a teaching for all time, excluding women from leadership and teaching authority. Moreover, Lee notes Luke Timothy Johnson who takes a different view and

struggles with its meaning for the contemporary world. His hermeneutical solution is to recognize the contextual nature of Paul's teaching and to question whether it is normative. Johnson, Lee states, speaks of the need to "engage" the words of Paul in a dialectical process of criticism within the public discourse of the church (p. 122).

An alternative view argues that the appropriate way to translate the Greek word group is "quietness" rather than "silence," given that I Timothy 2:2 also speaks of living a quiet and peaceful life as citizens. The context suggests possible conflict within the community around misleading teaching, therefore giving rise to the appeal for peaceable living. According to Lee, women are not called to keep silent in church but rather to be quiet, avoiding disputes and false teaching; they are also permitted to learn in a culture that often frowned on education for women (pp. 123–124).

4. Strengths

Wisely, Lee does not attempt to place women on pedestals as if their gifts and graces surpass those of men. Rather, she acknowledges that idealizing women is as dangerous as demeaning or dismissing them. Lee further posits that, certainly, women are as capable of sin as men and can misuse authority and leadership as well as men (p. 188). Woman and men are genuinely equal precisely in their common need of grace and their access to gifts given them by the Spirit for building the church.

Lee contends that throughout history, Scripture has been interpreted in the light of the various contexts in which Christians have found themselves. As Paul's writings have been used by those critical of women in ministry, Lee notes that women in the patriarchal setting of the NT world were much less educated and had little public profile in comparison to men; therefore, women were often held in lower esteem and not permitted to enter theological discussions. Nevertheless, Paul acknowledged the significant

role that women played in churches, and he supported their ministry.

Importantly, Lee does a thorough exegesis of key scriptures that have raised serious questions around leadership of women (p. 111). She gives particular attention to one of the most contested scriptures in I Timothy 2:2. She ponders, why is the advice for quiet submission to true teaching given only to women? One possibility is that it is the women rather than the men who have listened to false teaching and may even be perpetuating it; perhaps the teaching originates from women's lack of education in that century (p. 124). Lee further concludes that gentleness and modesty of demeanor were considered in the ancient world important virtues appropriate to women. Importantly, she draws together this universal truth for Christian women today: "Modesty, in particular, along with self-control in speech and decorum in dress, is a virtue advocated for all women (I Timothy 2:9–10)."

In her study of women in the NT, Lee has sought to catch a glimpse of women's ministry within a variety of literary forms, different voices, and diverse theologies. She contends that the NT's main concern is not female discipleship and leadership, but rather the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (p. 189). This key issue resound throughout her book.

5. Weaknesses

While Lee upholds her purpose for writing the book—to demonstrate evidence from Scripture, historical context, and theological tradition of women in leadership—she also includes extra-biblical literature outside the canon of Scripture. For example, she refers to sources such as the New Testament Apocrypha, Acts of Thekla, Gospel according to Mary, and the Gospel of Bartholomew. It can be argued that these extra-biblical sources weaken the exegesis of key Scriptures within their historical context. Although these texts demonstrate something of how the early communities

beyond the first century understood the NT witness and the trajectories they saw arising from it, these noncanonical writings pose a particular challenge on the issue of women's ministry because of the texts' ambivalent status within the church. Some of these texts stand outside the orthodox Christian faith.

Toward the end of her work Lee often digresses to the discussion of there being too much patriarchal authority in the contemporary home and church. In her efforts to discuss the male headship in the home and church, she often demeans the place of male headship. This, arguably, weakens the premise of her work. For example, she contends that the Father-Son language makes John's Gospel patriarchal. Nevertheless, she affirms that the Gospel is an ancient text arising from a culture very different from our own.

6. Conclusion

Lee's position as an accomplished research professor contributes to an objective discussion of church tradition to show that Christian women were valued as disciples in the early church and given leadership roles. Importantly, the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds were patriarchal and had a clear bias toward maleness. Nevertheless, the cultural realities of life in the ancient world were considerably diverse. A few elite women were able to resist patriarchal restraints and negotiate the complexities of the cultural norms to make important contributions to public life and their church community.

Lee's work demonstrates that there is no single, unanimous voice on women's ministry throughout the history and experience of the church. However, the suppression of women in ministry was not total in the NT world. In some contexts, women's ministry flourished and was valued, despite opposition (p. 169). Lee's work will help readers gain a better understanding of the important role that women played in the NT and how that role can offer contemporary Christian women a place of effective ministry. Her work is scholarly, relevant, and makes a valuable contribution to this pertinent contemporary issue.

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