



BOAZ ADHENGO

# REBORN

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## **P R E F A C E**

The title of this book may depict a common feeling that it's a personal oration about a walk towards salvation; which partly is the magnitude of its fundamentals. But in the real, the book expounds on an enlightened wisdom that brings understanding from an artist's perspective as to why intellectualism discourages liberty of development, especially since the dawn of colonialism. A small light in a dark room is endlessly visible however thick such a darkness prescribes itself to be; and ignorance is one such dark valley that transcends the African thought which hinders the dissemination of theological knowledge in a pattern conversant with its culture, for endlessly since the intimidation of colonial subjugation, Africans are even afraid of their own cultures let alone their identity as natives of the continent. The emotional plight of ever appetizing to live amongst the westerners has robbed the continent of its salvation and most remained confused as to what constitutes a truthful approach to Christianity. The endless debates about Africanization of Christianity lose substance especially when geography approved Egypt to be a country in Africa. Mostly so, the testaments also proclaim that months before Jesus Christ was born, there was a decree for him to be killed, and this prompted His mother to flee to Egypt where He was born. Remember King Herod? Boukolou in Egypt? City of Alexandria?

Further, racial conflicts that emanate from interpretation of the scriptures rob the space that could have otherwise been used to encourage a closer interaction with the gospels, an avenue of promoting righteousness and good morals. Yet, vocabularies such as *inculturation* and *incarnation* remain key words to the teachings of Christianity.

Everybody has secrets and answers about how God has worked in their lives, and we need to find those teachers and mentors to enable us develop a culture of support for one another. And in each day, my struggles to walk with God translates into ministry, because faith without works is as good as dead yet all these, even unto my gift of writing, am doing through love to which am not ashamed to acclaim how knowing Jesus has brought me much joy and happiness.

Nobody plans on sinning, the obvious delinquency is that we just don't have plans on "*not sinning*" and will often find ourselves trapped back to our former worldviews. In proverbs 4:28 we are told "*above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life*". This is only possible if we learn to set boundaries and live an authentic life; we have to be intentional about our character by developing visions of moral authority and this becomes the basis of christened leadership. Your attractiveness to people will be determined largely to the extent on how you handle yourself and this may put our minds at conflict with the reality; knowing that as the chosen generation of God, we are at a spiritual warfare with the devil and our ultimate goal is to defeat this

evilness. The best bit is that conflicts with all their tribulations ultimately present opportunities for us to make choices which influence situational outcomes; and God desires that we bring our choices to Him.

In the midst of tribulation, God provides His presence, His purpose and His power; three things that act as our protection. His presence changes our perspective on the conflict, His purpose changes our priority and His power changes our possibilities (Isiah 26: 3- 4, Isiah 55: 8 – 11).

In our age and era, miracles are not a frequent phenomenon hence the popular comment that it is easier to make a baby than to raise the dead. Meaning people are increasingly failing to see the importance of salvation yet we always remain eager to receive a blessing. In my moments of tribulation, the conflict that ensued in my heart from the wild burned my emotions as I watched the fruits of my success wither in a day. This *wildfire* disrupted my livelihood and in my heart, peace remained absent. It is in these moments of tribulation that I realised that the fire of the *Holy Spirit* and peace found in Jesus Christ together constituted a conversion that helped me challenge the *wildfire*. *Peacefire* is found in having faith through God's grace as the ultimate weapon; and the Greeks recommended fighting fire with fire. To me, this meant lighting a *peacefire* to destroy the *wildfire*; and during this period of conflict, God exposed to me habits and attitudes that reflected not His image, and He exposed them so that I could change; and am continuously grateful because now am knowledgeable of

His presence. My narration about the path towards salvation and this new living is well spoken in my book, “*Abundance of God*” published in 2018. Learn to overcome evil with good, to return a curse with a blessing and to love your enemy.

Without love, a book such as this would never be easy to compile and am grateful to Ms. Sonia Atak for her courage and constant smile that pulled me into her pastoral group meetings not only to bond with other friends but engage into a conversation with God, through listening His word as we read in the Bible and prayers. Am happy to have made progress and now comprehensively relate my gift of writing to glorify God and give thanks for the wonderful life am experiencing.

To all the East Assembly fraternity, am happy to be part of this wonderful congregation yet the nitty-gritty bit is my cohorts at *Buruburu Young Christians* who now elaborate themselves as *Youth for Christ - Buruburu*, indeed, this little light of mine is shining.

Sometimes the void of thought is filled with emotions and it is amazing how those considered young or small would develop larger impacts by exposing their faith. Much thanks to Hannah Muthoni, maybe saying *Kelly* is just enough. You have been diligent in your commitment to win a heart, and your prayers are sincere. May the Lord bless you with much abundance.

As if not to explain a precept for the chapters, my main expectation is that the contents as displayed narrate a self-explanatory review on what each page holds, for the secret belies in the reading. Yet, in Africa and most commonly in my rural village of *Bondo* in *Nyanza*, we laugh about it, that to hide a secret from a fellow *dholuo*, put it in a book; because illiteracy is the major curse that even those who know how to read fear.

God is the all-powerful and only to Him we pray for help; it is my sincere hope that the spirit of illiteracy will not engulf your heart and the *wildfires* that pre-empt ignorance will be extinguished by the *peacefire* that we are intentionally lighting in this publication.

People perish for lack of wisdom, and this is not one such moments although we are in conflict, a spiritual warfare. Always remember that in conflict, Jesus Christ doesn't come to take sides, He comes to take over.

May this book be a source of inspiration to you with all its enlightenment. Amen!



# **CHAPTER ONE**

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## **origins of christian art**

Roman temples were built as an expression of political power and the economic change that happened after the extension of the Empire to the East. A single large temple complex usually dominated Roman cities in the East, when a city had more than one, there would always be one dedicated to the patron god which dominated the others. *Gerasa*, one of the eastern cities, had two main temples; those of Zeus and Artemis.

After the conquest, the Romans provided the peace and prosperity essential for the successful growth of their cities. They also gave economic and political support to the Hellenised cities in the area, thus Roman city planning in the East can be considered as a natural extension of the Greek school, and subject to Hellenistic influences. As a general rule, a typical Roman city was divided by two main streets, which appear to follow some pattern of orientation. The *Cardo Maximus* runs north to south, and the *Decumanus* runs east to west. The secondary streets were laid out in the manner of a chessboard, and parallel to the two principle streets. Both public and private buildings were distributed among the squares or the rectangles. The number of the main streets depended on the size of the city, while the general layout for them depended on the topography of the site. In settlements where topographic conditions did not allow for the typical layout, the site contours were followed.

*Gerasa*, known today as *Jarash*, is one of the best preserved classical cities. It is located at the eastern edge of the *Ajlun* Mountains, some 40 km north of Philadelphia, now the

Jordanian capital Amman, and about 240 km southeast of *Baalbek*. The River *Chrysorhoas* was a rich natural feature of the city, and it stretches from north to south dividing the site into two parts. The land of the western part on which most of the public buildings appear to have been built rises sharply, the eastern part is lower and flatter where the residential quarter may have been built. The site was first occupied by Semitic peoples, Amorites or Ammonites, and by the Nabataeans.

The first settlement was exposed to Greek influence and officially founded as a Hellenistic city. The Seleucid king Antiochus III (223-187 BC) of Syria defeated the Ptolemies of Egypt in 198 BC, and established at *Gerasa* a Hellenistic centre, which was called *Antioch* on the *Chrysorhoas*. However, the Hellenistic city layout has not yet been well identified. The blocks uncovered south of the south *Decumanus* indicate the use of the Hippodamian plan which was centred on the Camp Hill. Archaeological remains uncovered from the Temple of Zeus point to the Hellenistic period. The first change was marked when *Gerasa* became a member of the free cities confederation known as the *Decapolis*, 63 B.C. This incorporation brought *Gerasa* to be influenced by the Roman tradition with new classical forms that dominated the surviving context. The first Roman plan of the city was established in the second half of the first century AD.

Temples in the Ancient East had an extremely long history with a strong monumentality, and large-scale buildings

rising high above their surroundings on extensive terracing, such as the oval temple at *Khafaji* in Mesopotamia dated to the early third millennium BC. Another case in point is the Temple of Ammon at *Deir-el-Baharia*, in Egypt that was built by Queen *Hatshepsu* and dated to 1550 BC.

The Greeks constructed strong monumental features by using the orders or terraces, if you like. The major fifth-century temples on the acropolis of Athens are a clear example of temples being raised to the highest position. Pergamon is another example of building the temples on terraces to dominate the surroundings. The monumentality and visibility of temple buildings could be achieved by the general layout axis, the height factor and decorative elements. The temple compound usually takes up a major quarter in the city. Inscriptional evidence indicates that the two main temples of *Gerasa* (of Artemis and Zeus) were constructed by the citizens who raised the money from within the community and themselves decided on the size, shape and decoration of structures. This was probably supervised by the central governmental authority who applied the law not only in achieving the aesthetic aspects of townscape but also in forbidding structures which degraded its general appearance.

This is evidential that art predates Christianity and has been part of humanity for a long decade. The *inculturation* basics of Christianity has permeated to delve into embracing the communicability of art as an agency in itself, a medium that is *tabula rassa* yet impactful if applied correctly.

The decorations on the world's oldest temples indicate the complexity of art and the heritage of scientific architecture that existed in such a past where, this future as we live it was still a prediction. The buildings have been able to survive archaeological evolution and technology has not corroded their meaning. Even the intellectual smugglers have not been able to steal away such a cultural heritage and this has brought respect with concern to the essence of art as a practice of humanity.

Looking back at the history of Christian art through the prism of its very ubiquity in the *Middle Ages*, and its diversity in the early modern and modern world, it is sometimes hard to remember that the very development of Christian art itself was not inevitable or unproblematic. Christianity developed out of the religious culture of *Judaism*, and availed itself of *Judaic* theology and prophecy in what became the Old Testament, the first part of the Christian Bible. The Jewish Holy Scriptures recounted the creation of the world, the stories of Adam and Eve, and Moses, who received the Ten Commandments from God, and who led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. These stories, together with the later Greek writings that told of the life of Jesus Christ and of his followers, the Apostles, came to form the source material for much Christian art. However, Judaism had prohibited the pictorial representation of God, and was deeply suspicious of *representational religious art* because of their fear of idolatry.

Old Testament writings defined idols as objects made by man, which contain no divine essence and which are not, therefore, appropriate to represent the divine. But Christianity as it developed in Europe, from Rome, also took much from *Graeco-Roman* social and artistic culture, where images of divinities, and their deeds, were not proscribed in the same way. This affected one crucial way in which Christianity differed from Judaism, namely the centrality of artistic representations of the Christian God. In adapting *Graeco-Roman* pagan imagery to form images of Christ, and in developing and multiplying images of Christ, the emergent Christian church went against Judaism's prohibition regarding images and idols, and this helped to mark out the developing church as distinct from the religious and theological culture of Judaism. The very existence of Christian art is therefore one of the things that makes up the specific and fundamental character of Christianity.

The earliest surviving Christian art is found in Rome, in the *catacombs* – the elaborate underground tomb chambers in which the Christian communities buried their dead. There is some uncertainty as to the date of the earliest catacomb paintings, but according to current opinion, it would seem that the earliest Christian catacombs, and their wall-paintings – *carried out in fresco and tempera* – probably date from the 3rd century. This visual material is relatively small-scale and private, occurring as it does in a funereal context, and the subjects chosen for representation tend to be those appropriate to private tombs, with an emphasis on

hope and comfort. Perhaps surprisingly, images of Christ's death at the Crucifixion, which later became such a fundamental subject of Christian art, are rare in the catacombs.

The character of Christian art changed, or expanded, after the official recognition of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Constantine, in 313 CE, and the later establishment of Christianity as the sole state religion within the Empire. The state that developed under these early Christian emperors was a continuation of the Roman Empire, but centred on the city of Constantinople (now the Turkish city of Istanbul), founded by Constantine in 324. The original name of Constantinople was Byzantium, which gives the state and its rulers the name by which scholars refer to it today: Byzantium, or the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine emperors in fact regarded their state as '*the Roman Empire*', and in its early years the area they ruled embraced most of the territory of the former Roman Empire right around the Mediterranean. Changing political events and the personal circumstances of successive emperors meant that the administrative centre of the Empire shifted several times during the early phases of the development of Byzantium, with the result that the major monuments of early Christian art from this period are found in several centres besides Constantinople, including the Italian cities of Milan and Ravenna.

One of the central tenets of Christianity is the incarnation – the '*being made flesh*' – of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the

incarnation insists upon the dual nature of Christ – fully divine and also fully human – and therefore insists upon his real birth, as a human being, from a real, human mother. It is for that reason that images of Christ’s mother, Mary, appear so frequently in Christian art: the existence of his human mother is a proof of Christ’s own humanity, and she is venerated on account of her motherhood of Christ. But the birth of Christ was not an ordinary human birth: he was born to a virgin, and thus had no human father. This aspect of the story of Christ’s birth emphasized his divinity, and supported the Christian doctrine that stated that he was the Son of God. Virgin birth had been a sign of divinity or heroic status in classical mythology, and therefore the Christian church was not alone in emphasizing the virgin birth of its central figure. However, Christianity put quite exceptional stress upon Mary’s virginity, both before the birth of Christ, and afterwards. Thus Mary’s husband, Joseph, is often relegated to a position of little importance, even in images portraying the story of the Nativity of Christ. It is often said, in the context of Christian art, that images function as the ‘*books of the illiterate*’. The origin and context of this view is not so often articulated, however, the saying arises with Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) and in his words, he acclaimed that what a writing does for the literate who reads it, a picture does for the illiterate who looks at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do *and* painted likenesses [are] made for the instruction of the ignorant, so that they might understand the stories and so doing, learn what occurred.

According to Gregory, images could fulfil a useful purpose not only in stimulating religious feelings, but also in conveying the important messages of the scriptures to those who could not read them. What exactly did ‘*illiterate*’ mean in this context? It used to be assumed that the ordinary lay population in the earlier medieval period was almost totally illiterate, and that only the most educated of clerics had a decent knowledge of Latin. However, more recent scholarship has discerned more subtle gradations and levels of literacy, from a reasonable reading knowledge of the local vernacular, through an ability to read and write in the vernacular only, through the ability to read Latin, right up to the elites who could not only read and understand Latin, but write elegantly in it as well. Some laypeople might have had a basic ability to understand some limited Latin, but might also have found pictures very helpful in reminding them, or guiding them, as to the meanings of the texts.

Christianity was, from the start, a religion of the book. The New Testament, originally written in Greek, and the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, were translated into Latin at the beginning of the 5th century CE, by St Jerome, and became the authoritative text of Christianity. The combined text in Latin was known as the ‘*Vulgate*’, because Latin was the ‘common’ (*vulgatus*) language of medieval European scholars and churchmen. When Bible texts began to be illustrated this tended to be done only with its individual books, written and illustrated as separate entities. Among the earliest surviving Bible illustrations are those from the so-called Cotton Genesis in London (British

Library, Cotton MS. Otho B. VI), dating from the late 5th century. This manuscript was damaged in a fire in 1731 but charred fragments remain of most of its original 330 or so miniatures, forming an extensive visual narrative illustrating the Book of Genesis. From this period onwards, individual books of the Bible were written and illustrated; for use in religious services, preaching, missionary activity, monastic observance and study and, later, for private reading and prayer. The most important types of illustrated books for religious practice in the earlier *Middle Ages* were books containing the four Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, and Psalters, containing the 150 Psalms from the Old Testament.

After the early use of illustrated Gospel books and Psalters by preachers and missionaries, other books of the Bible began to be produced in illustrated form, some for the monastic and ecclesiastical milieu, but some also for private individuals. One of the most popular of these was the Book of Revelation, or the Book of the Apocalypse. About 140 illustrated Apocalypse manuscripts survive from the era before printing, and they continued to be produced in number in printed form. The earliest illustrated Apocalypses date from the 9th and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, coming mostly from Germany and Spain, and these were presumably designed for liturgical use or monastic study. There is also a very large group of illustrated Apocalypse manuscripts from England and France, produced between the mid-13th and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although this group too was probably created initially for clerical use, the Anglo-French

Apocalypses increasingly came to be made for wealthy and aristocratic lay patrons, including royalty.

It is clear that the beauty of these manuscripts must have appealed to their patrons, regardless of (or besides) their religious or prophetic content, and it has sometimes been suggested that, as well as powerful commentaries on salvation history, these manuscripts were also something of a medieval '*coffee-table book*', providing an exciting tale to be read and enjoyed; sometimes equated with medieval romances. As well as this, however, Apocalypse manuscripts could certainly have been used as instruments of personal, spiritual, or devotional contemplation, and presumably this versatility partly fuelled their popularity.

Having said all these with concern to origins of Christian art, is there a legitimate place for the appreciation of art and beauty in our lives? What could be the relationship of culture to our spiritual life? Are not art and the development of aesthetic tastes really a waste of time in the light of eternity? These and more, are questions that Christians of the twenty-first century often ask about the fine arts.

Unfortunately, the answers we often hear to such questions imply that Christianity can function quite nicely without an aesthetic dimension. At the heart of this mentality is Tertullian's (160-220 A.D.) classic statement, "*What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? The Academy with the Church? We have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor inquiry since the evangel.*"

This bold assertion has led many to argue that the spiritual life is essential, but the cultural must be inconsequential. And today much of the Christian community seems inclined to approach aesthetics in the same hurried and superficial manner with which we live most of our lives.

But what is aesthetics? Let us begin with a definition. Aesthetics is the “*philosophy of beauty and art. It studies the nature of beauty and laws governing its expression, as in the fine arts, as well as principles of art criticism*”. Academically, aesthetics has been included in the study of philosophy. Ethical considerations to determine “*good*” and “*bad*” include the aesthetic dimension. At the heart of aesthetics, then, is human creativity and its diverse cultural expressions.

Aesthetic taste is interwoven all through the cultural fabric of a society and thus cannot be ignored. It is therefore inescapable - for society and for the individual. Human creativity will inevitably express itself and the results (*works of art*) will tell us something about its creators and the society from which they came. Through art, we can know another’s view of the universe; thus the term art can mean many different things. In the broadest sense, everything created by man is art and everything else is nature, created by God. However, art usually denotes good and beautiful things created by mankind.

On the contrary, aesthetics then becomes a study of human responses to things considered beautiful and meaningful

while the arts study's those human actions which attempt to arouse an aesthetic experience in others. For example, a sunset over the mountains may evoke aesthetic response, but it is not considered a piece of art, because it is nature and not a creation by mankind.

While art may have the secondary result of earning a living for the artist, it always has the primary purpose of creative expression for describable and indescribably human experiences and urges. The artist's purpose is to create a special kind of honesty and openness which springs from the soul and is hopefully understood by others in their inner being (*this will be important when we discuss idolatry in chapter two*).

At the very center of Christianity stands the incarnation (“*the Word made flesh*”), an event which identified God with the physical world and gave dignity to it. A real man died on a real cross and was laid in a real, rock-hard tomb. The Greek ideas of “*other-worldly-ness*” that fostered a tainted and debased view of nature (and hence aesthetics) find no place in biblical Christianity. The dichotomy between sacred and secular is thus an alien one to biblical faith. Paul's statement, “Unto the pure, all things are pure,” (*Titus.1:15*) includes the arts. Notably, the Old Testament is rich with examples which confirm the aesthetic dimension. In Exodus 20:4 -5 and Leviticus 26:1, God makes it clear that He does not forbid the making of art, only the worshipping of art.

God is concerned with architecture. In fact, Exodus 25 shows that God commanded beautiful architecture, along with other forms of art (metalwork, clothing design, tapestry, etc.) in the building of the Tabernacle. Similar instructions were given for the temple later constructed by King Solomon. Here we find something unique in history - art works designed and conceived by the infinite God, then transmitted to and executed by His human apprentices!

In Genesis 1:26 - 27, for example, we read: *“Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over . . . all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him male and female He created them”*.

After creating man, God told man to subdue the earth and to rule over it. Adam was to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15) which was described by God as *“very good”* (Gen. 1:31). The implication of this is very important. God, the Creator, a lover of the beauty in His created world, invited Adam, one of His creatures, to share in the process of *“creation”* with Him. He has permitted humans to take the elements of His cosmos and create new arrangements with them. Perhaps this explains the reason why creating anything is so fulfilling to us. We can express a drive within which allows us to do something all humans uniquely share with their Creator.

However, because sin entered and affected all of human life. A bent and twisted nature has emerged, tainting every field of human endeavour or expression and consistently marring all results. The unfortunate truth is that divinely endowed creativity will always be accompanied in earthly life by the reality and presence of sin expressed through a fallen race. Politically we could say “*man is a noble image bearer but a morally crippled animal*”. His works of art are therefore bittersweet.

Understanding this dichotomy allows Christians genuinely to appreciate something of the contribution of every artist, composer, or author. God is sovereign and dispenses artistic talents upon whom He will. While Scripture keeps us from emulating certain lifestyles of artists or condoning some of their ideological perspectives, we can nevertheless admire and appreciate their talent, which ultimately finds its source in God. This should and can be done without compromise and without hesitation.

Because of the *Fall*, absolute beauty in the world is gone. But participation in the aesthetic dimension reminds us of the beauty that once was, and anticipates its future lustre. But having said that; how should a Christian approach art in order to evaluate it? Is beauty simply “*in the eye of the beholder?*” Or are there guidelines from Scripture which will provide a framework for the evaluation and enjoyment of art?

In the light of Romans 12:2 and other biblical passages, the challenge for the Christian is to resist being “*poured into the mould of the world*” without also throwing out legitimate aesthetic interests. At the individual level, a Christian should seek to bring his maximum efforts toward the development of the person, intellectually, aesthetically and socially to the full use of his powers, in compatibility with the recognized standards of excellence of his society.

Three words are important to keep in mind while defining Christian responsibility in any culture. The first is *cooperation* with culture. The reason for this cooperation is that we might identify with our culture so it may be influenced for Jesus Christ. Jesus is a model for us here. He was not generally a non-conformist. He attended weddings and funerals, synagogues and feast. He was a practicing Jew. He generally did the culturally acceptable things. When He did not, it was for clear spiritual principles.

A second word is *persuasion*. The Bible portrays Christians as salt and light, the penetrating and purifying elements within a culture. Christianity is intended to have a *sanctificial* influence on a culture, not to be swallowed up by it in one compromise after another.

A third concept is *confrontation*. By carefully using Scripture, Christians can challenge and reject those elements and practices within a culture that are incompatible with biblical truth. There are times when Christians must confront society. Things such as polygamy, idolatry, sexual

immorality, and racism should be challenged head-on by Christians.

Too often today Christians, like the Pharisees, are seeking to eliminate the leprous elements which touch their lives.

With increasing isolation, they are focused more on what the diseases of society can do to them than how they might affect the diseased! Nowhere is this more critically experienced than in the arts. We mostly shy away from those contexts which disturb us. And there is today much in the arts to disturb us; either through our participation as creators, spectators or performers.

Ugliness and decadence abound in every culture and generation. From this we cannot escape. But Jesus touched the leper. He made contact with the diseased who was in need. As Christians, our focus should be NOT on what art brings to us, but rather what we can bring to the art! Therefore the development of imagination and a wholesome, expanded analysis of even the many negative contemporary works is possible when viewed in the broad themes of humanity, life, and experience of a truly Christian worldview. Great art is more than a smiling landscape. Beauty and truth include terrible and ominous aspects as well, like a storm on the ocean, or the torn life of a prostitute.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

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### **ethnology of worship**

The discussions of idolatry, apparently died in the writings of one of the leading writers of the enlightenment, arguing that idolatry is a false concept without analytical value, because no known nation ever worshipped idols as such, but always a deity represented by them; that there has never been a people on earth who has adopted this name of ‘*idolater.*’ This word becomes an insult if not a term of outrage. Gentiles used images to represent deities in the same way as many Christians used images to represent God - and Catholics were guilty in particular of appearing like “*idolaters*” with their cult of saints.

The fact that only Christians truly worshipped God could be equally applied to many Gentiles who had been accused of idolatry. Hence the charge of idolatry only had a rhetorical meaning, as if to say, “*your gods are false, and mine is true.*”

Polytheism was a different matter - one could accuse Greeks and Romans of this. However, the charge of exclusivism which attached itself to those who accused others of idolatry was more serious than the charge of polytheism, since it alone led to intolerance and religious persecutions.

We must take note that all religions, polytheistic or monotheistic, sprang from the natural and hence universal human awareness that there is a superior power, which ignorant people, including the ancient Hebrews, tended to worship in a figurative manner *according to the senses*, but which the more learned, those devoted to wisdom, came to identify as a supreme spiritual being. Thus, in many cultures it led to a dual religious system, combining popular

polytheistic worship (through images) and elite philosophical monotheism.

The crucial enlightenment distinction between idolatry and superstition in reality has ancient roots. There was an ancient Hellenistic, “*pagan*” concept of superstition, shared by Epicurean, Stoic, Platonic, and Skeptical writers, by which *superstitio* (*deisidaimonia* in Greek) was understood as an excess of religious fear. It is important that within this philosophical tradition superstition was not necessarily identified with religion. In fact, in the writings of Cicero, Plutarch and Seneca, it was primarily defined in opposition to religion properly understood; as Cicero put it, “*superstitiosus*” and “*religiosus*” are terms of censure and approval. Therefore, the pagan was remarkably similar to the Christian concept and thus, by contrast, there can be no secular definition of idolatry - from a secular perspective, because where belief in demons is questioned, idolatry becomes unreal.

Any genealogy of the discourse on idolatry must begin by acknowledging the centrality of its condemnation in the *Mosaic Decalogue*, as expressed in Exodus and Deuteronomy. We must also note the possible ambiguity between the rejection of images as representations of other Gods, and the rejection of images per se, including images of ‘*natural things*.’ Let us consider the formulation of the prohibition in Exodus 20, 3–6 (similar to Deut.5, 7–10):

*“You shall have no other gods rival to me. You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, and I punish the parents’ fault in the children. . . .”*

If we take this to imply that Yahweh is not simply the exclusive God of Israel, but in fact also the only genuine creator-God, the distinction between the aniconic worship of Yahweh and the worship of naturalistic idols becomes the distinction between the worship of God-creator and the worship of creatures, the fundamental point in Christian definitions of idolatry. In this reading, *monolatry* implies philosophical monotheism because all other gods (like Baal) are not equal rivals, but must be “*creatures*” of one sort or another. As Psalm 96 offers, “*all the gods of the gentiles are idols.*” The Septuagint, interestingly, translated “*all the gods of the gentiles are demons*”—a version that inspired Christian writers from Clement of Alexandria to Aquinas.

Christianity drew its understanding of idolatry from Hellenized as well as *Mosaic Judaism*. An important example of this is the *deutero-canonical* book of Wisdom, often attributed to Solomon but probably written in the time of Augustus in the second half of the first century BCE, by an Alexandrian Jew who was possibly a writer of the generation that preceded Philo. The book was written in Greek and eventually translated into *Syriac* and *Latin*, but not by Jerome. Despite some hesitations, the book was incorporated into the Christian Bible as inspired.

It was rulers who wished to be honoured when not present who first ordered the making of statues that were later deified by ignorant people. This cult of idols led to all kinds of extravagant and morally repugnant rites and mysteries. While Israel stands out for its knowledge and worship of the creator God, so does Egypt stand out as the prime example of the cult of idols, and is therefore punished (evoking Exodus in great detail).

The *Platonic* influences of the early Christian writers were not purely pagan in origin, but converged with developments within late Second Temple Judaism, so that, for example, the use of the term *logos* by John is close to the depiction of wisdom as the divine force active in the world of men by pseudo-Solomon. In the New Testament, Philo's contemporary Paul (another Hellenized Jew) made central to Christianity a definition of idolatry which is congenial to this literature: *the sin of idolatry is to worship the creature rather than the creator* (Romans 1:25). This philosophical concept of idolatry encompassed, but also superseded the possible biblical emphasis on exoteric action (the worship of physical images) as the key to the denunciation of idolatry, although Paul remained caught in the crucial ambiguity between the idea that idols "*do not really exist*" and the idea that they involve a *demonic presence*. In any case, because of its association with monotheism, for Paul, the prohibition of idolatry was one key aspect of the *Mosaic Law* that need not be relativized in the light of Christ, unlike, for example, circumcision.

The Christian concept of idolatry was not simply an inheritance from Judaism. It was from the very beginning crucial to how the movement related to the pagan world; the rejection of paganism was essentially a rejection of idolatry. We could also say that in a monotheistic context, the concept of idolatry was closely linked to religious intolerance, although of course Christians were as intolerant of internal doctrinal dissent, or heresy, as they were of external rivals in worship. The way this link operated was in some interesting ways the reverse of the way the rejection of superstition was used by pagan writers to rationalize a plurality of traditional cults under the umbrella of philosophical theism.

Christian intolerance of idolatry led to the perception of Christianity by Roman authorities as a dangerous and irrational superstition - *superstitio* is the word used by Suetonius, Tacitus or Pliny to describe the new sect which refused to participate in local and state cults. In this respect, Christians were perceived as similar to Jews, but without the legitimacy conferred by antiquity. Christians were persecuted on largely political grounds for this reason. Once their religion conquered the official empire, however, Christians themselves became persecutors of pagan cults, precisely on account of a growing unwillingness to compromise with idolatry, which was perceived as a deep offence to God. Interestingly, from a Jewish perspective, the relationship was inverted as Christians were vulnerable to the accusation of compromising with idolatry. Thus, idolatry - *the first kind of superstition* - consists of giving to the creature the honour which is due the creator. Idols can be physical images, which may have devilish powers, or natural creatures, like deified men, or even nature as a whole.

The Protestant Reformation made an important contribution to the historicization of idolatry. There is indeed a peculiar relationship between events taking place in the 1520s in Mexico and Europe. While the Spanish were busy destroying the idols of freshly-conquered Mesoamerica, reformed writers from Lefevre to Calvin denounced the European cult of saints and relics as idolatrous, and incited the people to iconoclasm. Obviously, the difference between Catholic and Protestant responses was not over the concept of idolatry, which they shared, but its range of application. The *Reformation* attacked popular Christian piety towards saints and relics as a deviation from worship of the true God, that is, as a tendency to worship the created over the

creator, in effect rejecting as artificial the distinction between *latria* and *dulia*. For Catholics, the problem within the Christian Church was one of popular superstition, which involved a pact with the devil and therefore required ecclesiastical authorities to correct it, though it remained possible to use images for educational purposes, or to show veneration towards Mary the mother of Jesus or the saints.

The religious instinct (*semen religionis*) which should naturally lead all men to God was utterly clouded by sinfulness, to the point that reason alone could never attain the knowledge of God. With the exception of the first centuries of Christianity, the history of religion, including much of Jewish history, became a history of idolatry. The sin of idolatry resulted from a human inability to understand God in terms other than those of the flesh. This led to fragmentation; the worship which belongs to God alone was spread over a wide range of recipients, largely on imagined human grounds.

The *Jeromite* friar Ramon Pane', instructed by Columbus to study the beliefs and idolatries of the natives of Hispaniola, might have understood very little of their oral traditions, but nevertheless, he was scrupulous. He did, however, find it easy to identify idolatry, as the local *cemi's* were objects understood to carry powers of healing and divination. Pane' had no doubt that they were idols, although he wavered between a skeptical approach, by which they were "*dead things*" manipulated by the *behiques* or shamans to deceive others, and the attribution of real demonic powers, in which case the idols were also devils. The real question was whether the Christian concept of idolatry served to interpret native religion, or itself needed interpretation in the light of an observed reality. Pane''s precocious account, researched

and written between 1493 and 1498, in fact signalled the early modern missionary shift from mere condemnation to linguistic and cultural research.

The analysis of idolatry was justified on practical grounds. Not only was it necessary for those in charge of identifying and extirpating idolatrous survivals, it also allowed men to learn about the true nature of the devil and his *modus operandi*, that is, how the devil imitated, but also perverted the true religion, leading a pious impulse towards practices that were cruel, unclean, and vain.

The connection between the historicization of idolatry and the crisis of demonology is not simple. There were many orthodox Christian writers, Protestant or Catholic, who engaged in antiquarian research about the history of gentilism in order to defend, rather than challenge, the biblical account of divine intervention. On the other hand, the decline of demonic influences, together with the decline of miracles and the growth of euhemerism, represented the naturalization of religion and is more obviously associated with libertinism. What both tendencies shared was the fact that they were responses to a skeptical crisis. Nevertheless, sexual immorality was generally one of the main attractions of idolatry in the past as reflected in Scriptures such as 1 Kings 14:23, Amos 2:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 10:7-8.

Idolatry, therefore, is largely a primitive religiosity and can be explained as an historical delinquency characterized by the greed and zeal to know God; others have misused it as a tactic of governing the masses thereby capitalising on its core uncritical acceptability. If one bears this description in mind, it is clear that the practices associated with ancestor cults cannot be excluded from idolatry. This means that any

honours (owing to God) paid to an idea, ideology, entity, object or person other than God constitutes a form of idolatry. Therefore, paying homage to a human being or venerating a person (or the memory of such person) in a way which should be exclusive to God, makes such an individual guilty of idolatry. Furthermore, ascribing divine characteristics to a person (even a deceased one) constitutes also a form of idolatry. In essence then, individuals who venerate the ancestors in a worshipful manner are practicing worship and therefore idolatrous.

One of the key issues in terms of ancestor veneration or worship centres on the practices in Africa and the controversy around whether or not the practices should be considered veneration or worship. Do Africans worship the ancestors or simply remember and honour them as some scholars suggest?

It is argued that it is incorrect to speak of worshipping of forefathers. They are not worshipped as gods, but are only honoured as members of the community; now only with higher status and power, the same applies to Roman Catholics. Catholics draw a clear distinction between the levels of honour given:

- *Cultus civilis* denotes “civil honour” which is given to earthly superiors, such as magistrates and kings.
- *Douleia* or veneration is given to the saints and angels.
- *Hyperdouleia* or highest veneration is offered to the Virgin Mary.
- *Latreia* or worship is paid to God alone.

By this hierarchy of terms, Roman Catholics seek to justify their claim that they worship God alone in spite of the honour they render to various other beings.

The Bible asserts that God alone is worthy of worship as stated in Psalm 29:2 but also records instances of individuals who worshipped other objects. In some accounts, individuals were worshipped as in Daniel 2:46, false gods as reflected in 2 Kings 10:19, images and idols (Isaiah 2:8; Daniel 3:5), heavenly bodies (2 Kings 21:3), Satan (Revelation 13:4) and demons (Revelation 9:20). Thus, worship denotes the supreme honour or veneration given either in thought or deed to a person or thing. It stands to reason that the distinction which is drawn between the worship rendered to God and honour rendered to ancestors is nebulous at best. Thus, whether or not Africans really worship their ancestors is difficult to prove or disprove because worship emanates from the innermost part of the being. What matters is not the outward ritual or external behaviour but the inward response of the heart towards God.

Most traditional Africans acknowledge the existence of a *Supreme Being* or Creator but the nature of this *Being* is very nebulous and is perceived to be distant and uninvolved in their daily existences. The ancestors are foregrounded and to a very large extent fulfil godlike functions. Rituals in which the spirit of the dead ancestor is invoked cannot be regarded as mere veneration. In spite of the fact that those who participate in these rituals claim that it is performed out of respect for the ancestors as in Africa, it has all the distinctive characteristics of ritual worship. And it has been argued that in most African societies where ancestor rituals are practised, the main function is to strengthen the bonds between the ancestors and their descendants. Consequently,

the ancestors have been elevated to the position of mediators between God and human beings, mainly by African theologians who have sought to find elements of continuity and synergy between the traditional African religion and Christianity. That in most cases ancestors has become the recipients of prayers, sacrifices and offerings from their living descendants. The ancestor becomes an instrument of God to benefit their descendants.

African theology of ancestors does not indicate that African Christianity has no need of the Old Testament, but rather is an indication that the Old Testament validates this theology. The African Christian experiences a seemingly irreconcilable juxtaposition in relating his traditional African worldview to the Christian faith. This tension is one of the main driving forces which have led numerous scholars to develop a new theology by validating Africa's pre-Christian heritage, thus African traditional religions must be rehabilitated from western ethnocentric caricature.

Rituals did not have any meaning in isolation, but formed part and parcel of the greater picture of devotion, worship and religion. Phenomenological similarities between sacrifices in the Old Testament and those offered to ancestors in Africa may be interesting, but for the real meaning of such rituals one must interpret them within their wider cultic contexts.

In terms of African traditional ritual, blood sacrifices have two distinct features which isolate it from sacrifices in the Old Testament. Firstly, the blood is understood to create a new bond between those who participate in the rite and secondly where deities or ancestors are worshipped the

blood is believed to revitalise the one to whom to sacrifice is made.

In the Old Testament sacrifices were never a means of revitalizing God or man. The Bible expressly forbids the Israelites to partake in blood (Leviticus 3:17). African priests and people do partake in blood and some actually drink the blood of the animal. If ancient Israelites acted similarly, it is plausible that they had learnt the practice from surrounding nations, but the Psalmist makes it clear that this is an abomination and an unthinkable act in God's eyes: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Psalm 50:13). To this rhetorical question the implicit answer is that such a thing is unthinkable. In the Old Testament the blood of the animal was poured out at the foot of the altar or sprinkled on the altar as a symbolic reference to the fact that the victim's life was given to Yahweh.

The notion of sacrifice is expounded and developed further in the New Testament to culminate in the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God, for the sins of mankind. This one ultimate sacrifice invalidates any further sacrifices to the ancestors.

The New Testament makes it clear that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a precursor to the complete and perfect sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for once and for all. The Old Testament sacrifices were a mere foreshadowing of this and were inadequate in themselves as Hebrews 10:1-4 points out. Consequently, even if African traditional sacrifices were found to be essentially similar to those sacrifices in the Old Testament, they should be obsolete when one considers Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

Sacrifices have become redundant and obsolete because just as Christ made himself available for sacrifice to humanity, so when we share in the life of Christ, we make our bodies available for God's sacrifice to others as pointed out in Romans 12:1. Therefore, in Christ, Christians are involved in God's sacrifice by serving others. It is interesting to point out that sacrifices and the priesthood were also abandoned in Judaism as a result of the destruction of the temple by the Roman Empire. *Rabbinic* theology followed the prophetic emphasis of keeping to the *Mosaic Law* rather than performing ritual sacrifices.

The understanding of sin in traditional Africa puts it as essentially communal. Sin is not considered to be a confidential or private matter, largely because the African's theory of existence is "*cognatus ergo sum*" – "I am related by blood, therefore I exist". Consequently, in this paradigm which foregrounds the communal theory of existence, sin elicits disharmony and disintegration of society much like the medieval concept of the *Great Chain of Being*. Sin is chiefly an offence against one's neighbour. Disruption of the harmony of the status quo is the result of offended ancestral spirits or witchcraft. These evils can be removed, the balance and harmony restored only by proper sacrifices and traditional rites.

In Biblical terms, sin is essentially a transgression of God's will (John 8:46; James 1:15; 1 John 1:8) and thus constitutes a rebellion against Him. Such actions are by their nature sinful mainly because they are in opposition to the will of God or contrary to his laws. When man chooses to commit sin, he essentially negates God and thus breaches the human-divine relationship and ultimately defies God's

sovereignty and honour. Sin is essentially disobedience engendered by wilfulness and misplaced pride.

This is not the case in African Traditional Religion where sin does not necessarily constitute a rebellion against God or a transgression of His law but rather a rejection of the accepted way of life or status quo which is believed to have been handed down by the ancestors, divinities and God. Essentially then, it can be argued that the traditional life is perceived to be the ideal and the main concern for mankind; that of preserving and maintaining it, to remain in harmony with it and as a result, experience material prosperity and prestige. Sin is thus considered to be a disruption of the cohesion of the ordered cosmos and the cause of disharmony.

To the traditional African, salvation is understood to mean getting answers for the daily problems of life and overcoming the agents of evil or the hard realities of daily existence. However, it should not be assumed that salvation in the African sense is reduced to the enjoyment of time, public esteem, prosperity and health and is thus devoid of moral conscience. Traditional Africans do maintain a belief that God, who is understood to be omnipotent, abhors evil and punishes individuals for their wicked acts. Being saved is equated with being accepted into the community of the living and the community of the dead ancestors. Furthermore, Africans believe that God punishes the wicked and rewards the good individuals in the here and now. This traditional African conception of salvation has led some African theologians to conclude that the Christian paradigm of salvation has been manifest in traditional religion long before the beginning of the church.

This differs from salvation in the Biblical sense. In the Bible, salvation is directly related to deliverance from sin and the consequences of sin and guilt (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 10:22), from the law and its curse (Galatians 3:13; Colossians 2:14), from death (1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 Corinthians 15:51-56) and judgment (Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:28). The Bible defines salvation as founded in God's initiative and grace (Romans 3:21; 6:23; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

The main aim of African theology is that it attempts to find a way in which Jesus Christ can be an African among the Africans and therefore make Christianity more acceptable to Africans. Desmond Tutu, who expressed himself at times in favour of Black theology, argues that African theologians have attempted to demonstrate that the African religious experience and heritage are real and legitimate. He argues that it should have formed the main vehicle for conveying the truths of the Gospel to Africa. He also asserts that many of the religious insights of traditional African religion are parallel to those of the Bible. According to Tutu, the African was more attuned to the realities of the Bible than the occidental ever was.

As soon as theologians attempt to reinterpret Biblical and theological dogma in terms of African traditional religion through the filter of their own prejudiced viewpoints, hermeneutical problems are inevitable. Most African theologians use structural similarities between African traditional beliefs and Biblical theology as a point of departure. The problem generally arises from the theological methodology they employ and their own prejudiced analysis. This is what has commonly been termed *adaptationist* reflectivity, the intellectual smuggling of some cultures to fit a paradigm where they were never evident.

Adaptionism first attempts to establish the foci of African religions and then attempts to relate them to Christian doctrine. The starting point should be not the Bible or Christian tradition, but African traditional religion assessed as a generic category. The hermeneutical problem therefore is that in spite of the fact that aspects of this culture are part of the present experience of the African Christian; the African experience is being interpreted primarily according to Christian tradition and sources. The problem then is that the *adaptionist* approach many African theologians invoke, portrays a convoluted or impure method as they do not realise that their understanding and experience of traditional religion has already been influenced to the core by Christianity. Some African theologians elevate ancestors to the position of mediators between God and mankind and attempt to equate these ancestors to the Catholic notion of the saints.

When one considers the related notions of Communion of the Saints and the eucharist, one must conclude that the theology underlying these notions hinges on three components, namely: hierarchical authority, the integral divinity of the individual consciousness and conscience, and transubstantiation. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints is essentially an expression of the belief that the living and the dead were united in the body of the single Church. Therefore, Catholic Christians argue that it has a direct bearing on the church triumphant in heaven and attempt to use the doctrine to justify praying to the dead specifically to those saints who have been officially canonised.

The term "*communion of the saints*" does not originate from the Bible but from the Apostle's creed which developed

over a period of centuries. The phrase does not appear in the writings of the early *Church Fathers* and is not evident in the *African Creed* or other Creeds which were in existence before the 4th century AD, e.g. the Ante-Nicene Creeds. Reformers believed that the communion of the saints in the Apostle's Creed was an expansion of the preceding phrase ("the holy catholic church"). It delimits the communion to the fellowship between the believers and Christ and fellowship between the Christians living on earth. The Christian veneration of saints may be rooted in the Greco-Roman idealization of heroes and the intense feelings for holy figures and the martyred dead in Judaism.

Protestants, on the other hand, viewed indulgences, masses and alms for the dead as meaningless. They also rejected prayers to the saints because they asserted that God alone had power thus any apparition would only be understood to be demonic, angelic or illusory. This controversy is what sparked the Reformation.

The Protestant reformers rejected the redemptive role of the saints mainly because they believed that all who participate in the new life of Christ through faith are representatives and believers and implicitly saints. Deceased saints, they believed were at the most mere examples for them to emulate. In addition they believed that the doctrine of the saints which the Catholic Church expounded had been exploited to breed superstition and gain material wealth. Hence, the fundamental principle for the Reformers was the pre-eminence of Christ. They believed that the Catholic doctrine of the saints had elevated saints into a position which rightfully belonged to Christ and thus constituted a form of idolatry. The same thus holds true of the belief in

the mediatory role of the ancestors not only in Africa but also as practiced by Korea and Japan.

Many African Christians of the independent churches cling to a sense of fellowship with their departed ancestors based on a premise similar to that of the Catholic notion of Communion of Saints. As a result, communion with the deceased and ancestral spirits is accepted. This communion with the ancestors imbues the ancestors with a new meaning as intercessors with God for their protection. The premise of a community which encompasses the living, unborn and the dead is an accepted Christian notion, but the notion that the living may communicate with the dead is unknown in the New Testament.

In Botswana, most African Independent Churches such as the Zion Christian Church, Mount Ararat Church and others maintain that the ancestors are understood to be an extension of the church and constitute a community of saints as exemplified in the Roman Catholic Church. That these churches consider the ancestors to be intermediaries between God and his Church on earth and as a result prayers are made to God through them. The Roman Catholic Church's doctrine on the communion of the saints holds that these saints intercede in heaven for the church on earth. The doctrine does not consider the saints to be omnipresent or omniscient divinities. They are believed to be humanly beings. The Catholic Church does draw a distinction between adoration which should be directed to God alone, and veneration which is directed at the saints.

Roman Catholicism is essentially founded on the notions of hierarchical authority, incarnation and mystical spirituality. Protestantism on the other hand is based on the preached

Word of God without any exaggerated symbolic or mystical traditions. Thus the fundamental differences between different Christian interpretations of the faith is to be found in the area of religious authority.

The Protestant *sola scriptura* affirms that only the Scriptures as God Word has direct and absolute authority, provided that the hearer is inspired by the Spirit of God



## **CHAPTER THREE**

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### **christianity in africa**

What are the theological roots of Christianity in Africa as a historical reality for African life, as African Christians themselves, and particularly African theological writers, perceive them? What, insofar as it can be discerned, underlies the African apprehension of Christianity at the specific level of religious experience?

These are not idle questions. For when one turns to the academic literature of African theology since its first flowering in the late 1950s, one of the more difficult problems is the fact that the chief non-biblical reality with which the African theologian must struggle is the non-Christian religious tradition of his own people and that African theology has become something of a dialogue between the African Christian scholar and the perennial religions or spiritualities of Africa. The traditional religions of Africa belong to the African religious past. Yet this is not so much a chronological past as an ontological past, which, together with the profession of the Christian faith, gives account of one and the same entity; namely, the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian. The quest for African Christian theologies amounts to attempting to make clear the fact that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity, thus it becomes evident that what African theologians have been endeavouring to do is to draw together the various and disparate sources which make up the total religious experience of Christians in Africa into a coherent and meaningful pattern. Perhaps the real significance of the concentration of interest on the African religious past in

African theology has been to make the issue of identity itself into a theological and Christian problem. It constitutes the African response to the earlier widespread identification of Christianity with European values as documented in the missionary history of African churches.

But still many people today, both in Africa and elsewhere, tend to believe that the introduction of Christianity to the continent is a relatively recent phenomenon. One of the grounds alleged in favour of this view is the appeal to statistical data that suggested that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, only 3% of the African population were classified as Christians. Another aspect also referred to is the fact that most of the denominations and indigenous churches have historical existence of not more than two centuries. This is a misconception and an intellectual terror to the real experiences that remain visible but untapped.

Many scholars today classify the region north of the Sahara as essentially Islamic in religious orientation. However, Christianity in this region of Africa has a history stretching right back to the earliest days on the faith and because it is as old as Christendom in Asia, in a sense that it can also be called a traditional religion in Africa. For when in the first century Christianity started to spread from its origins in Palestine it also took root in North East Africa not long after Pentecost. The first urban centre of Christianity in Africa was Alexandria in Egypt. While the New Testament has no record of missionary activity in Africa as documented for Asia and Europe, various contacts are implied. Notably, the

accessibility of Africa from Palestine is shown by the story of the flight into Egypt by Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus in Matthew 2:13-15. Another gospel character, Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross of Christ, also came from North Africa. Then in Acts 8:26-40 one also reads of an African on his way home who became a Christian – this time an African called an Ethiopian (though not someone from Abyssinia but rather from a region overlapping with present-day Egypt-Sudan).

Aside from the possibility that some converts on the day of Pentecost also brought the faith to Africa, there is also the popular tradition claiming that the apostle Thomas who allegedly went to India made his way there via an initial stage of the journey during which he stopped over in Alexandria and made his way south along the Nile. At any rate, according to Coptic Christian tradition, the gospel of Jesus Christ was brought to Egypt and Alexandria by Mark the Evangelist, despite its being contradicted by another traditional witness of Syrian Clementine Homilies which portrays the apostle Barnabas as first preaching the gospel on the streets of Alexandria after his break with Paul. Thus Egyptian Christianity holds on to Mark as Patriarch and even had a tradition of electing Eastern orthodox patriarchs in the region beside a tomb in Alexandria alleged to be the evangelist's.

In this regard, there seems to be a consensus that the first Christian converts in Africa would have been Greek speaking Jews and proselytes from Alexandria. However,

from the beginning, efforts were made to bring the gospel to the Copts, i.e. the Egyptian natives of Hamitic origin. While apparently the lingua franca in Egypt was Greek, the large peasant population knew only Coptic and so by 300 AD the first translations of the Bible into the latter tongue became a reality. The Coptic tradition and language eventually came to rival the Greek so that an abundance of local Christian religious literature as well as translations from Greek were produced during the fourth century. The Copts eventually outnumbered the Greeks and the indigenization of the faith led to rapid growths in both the number of converts and the geographical territory occupied by Christians in Egypt. So much so that by the fourth century the region witnessed to not less than eighty 'Sees' or *church districts*; each headed by its own bishop and with the bishop of Alexandria as the overseeing Archbishop.

The importance of the early Egyptian Church in early Christianity cannot be overemphasized. Apart from Alexandria which could claim being the first centre of theological learning and catechetical schools (*and without rival in its time*) the Egyptian Church can also lay claim to a most influential role in the development of Christian monasticism.

The second acclaimed centre of Christianity in Africa was central North Africa. Unlike Egypt, this was a Roman colony, popularly referred to as *Roman Africa*, owing to Roman influences and the capital in Carthage. This region comprised of quite a large area and it spanned the territories

of present day Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. The exact date of the origin of Christianity in this *Roman Africa* is not known with precision. Neither are we sure about the place from which the influences initially came, though some scholars would suggest that this was Rome. However, other consider it more likely that the initial influence on Carthage came from further East as there were many commercial ties and trade routes between the capital and that region.

Although the precise date that Christianity penetrated North Africa still remains unknown, the origins of the faith in this region appears to date from before 180 AD, as it was at this time that the Church in Carthage became famous as a result of the martyrdom of twelve of its members who refused to compromise their unshaken allegiance to Christ. These believers from *Scillium* in *Numidia* – seven men and five women – were tried, condemned and executed in Carthage on July 17<sup>th</sup> 180 AD, thus by the end of the fourth century, the Church in North Africa had become vigorous with full intellectual and spiritual life, well organized and well disciplined. It was a major centre of the Christian faith during those years and played home to the widely recognized *Trio of African Saints* who each in their own way made a number of significant contributions to the history and dogma of subsequent Christianity. However, unlike in Egypt where the faith was indigenized, the early Church in North Africa was very Roman and Latin was the official language for both correspondence and liturgy as well as in spiritual literature. Even though the local Punic language was occasionally employed in preaching, it was

impossible to find enough clergy fluent in this tongue. The mother tongue of the locals – *Berber* – fared even worse.

Besides Alexandria and Carthage, the third major centre in early Christian North Africa was Ethiopia (*Abyssinia*). The Church apparently spread through this region when, in the fourth century, two Christians named *Fruventius* and *Edesius* arrived there from Tyre. The local church traces its origin to the time when these two disciples of Christ preached the gospel in the Kingdom of *Aksium*.

Many years after the initial contact, Fruventius went to Athanasius (Bishop of Alexandria) from whom he received Episcopal consecration in 350 AD. On his returning there, he developed a great expansion of the Church in *Abyssinia*. History explains that after winning over the King of *Aksium*, Christianity became the official religion in the region and a large church was subsequently built there.

The fourth centre of Christianity in North Africa was in Nubia (*Sudan*). The Church there had its origins in the sixth century during the reign of the Emperor Justinian (527-565 AD). This came about as the result of two different missions: the first partly under the leadership of Presbyter Julian (a monophysite from Egypt who founded a church there in 543 AD. This church was established in the region of *Nabodae* in Northern Sudan and was further strengthened through the missionary work of Longinus from Alexandria who was sent there earlier in 508 AD. The latter had also built a church and even ordained clergy and taught the

people the order of the divine service and all the ordinances of Christianity. The second mission came to Sudan in the time shortly after Julian came to power. The Christology of this mission was not monophysite and thus, owing to doctrinal disputes, Julian dissuaded the northern locals from welcoming these missionaries. As a result, the mission went south and settled with some success among the *Makorites*. Now, with missionary activity in both the northern and southern regions of the country, the Christian faith took strong root and greatly flourished also in this part of Eastern Africa. Many Churches were built and the region, like its neighbours to the north, became a Christian kingdom for many years to come.

As can be ascertained from the above discussion, the first Christian churches in Africa were predominantly present only in the eastern parts of Northern Africa including Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. The Europeans unjustifiably labelled Africa the *dark continent* because the interior seemed impenetrable to explorers who had to give up their journeys prematurely for a variety of reasons. Included in these determinants were inconveniences like the hot climate, poisonous insects, a lack of good waterways and harbours, et cetera. Yet despite all the initial setbacks, it was to be in the region south of the Sahara in which Christianity would ultimately experience the largest amount of growth and expansion within the continent of Africa. It will only be knowledgeable if we can embark on the real historical flow that narrates factual happenings on how Christianity came to be in Africa, the real broth and this

starts with the apostles themselves, almost after the first Pentecostal celebration.

During the early church's initial expansion phase where congregations were established in Syria, Asia Minor, Achaia, Italy and Africa; there were strong leadership structures in Alexandria, Carthage, Hippo-Regius and Ethiopia. Over a period of two millennia, the Christian church with a westernised character has spread all over Africa. Today there is a strong African consciousness and critical approach to Africanise Christianity, to decolonise it and to de-westernise it.

Christianity in Africa was certainly not founded with European involvement like organised missions to Africa or colonialism. The roots of the Christianising of Africa reach back to the missions of the Apostles. The Christian Church blossomed in North Africa for six centuries before the arrival of Islam in this region. In those early centuries C.E., Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Anthony, Pachomius from North Africa, Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine were the pillars on which the universal Church were standing. During the second and third centuries, North Africa became the centre of Christian activities and produced leaders such as Augustine and Tertullian. The fourth and fifth centuries were difficult for the church in North Africa. Doctrinal issues and internal struggles divided the church. In the seventh century the political scene changed dramatically with the arrival of Islam in Africa. This had serious implications for the spreading of Christianity. The zeal for

spreading the gospel was replaced by a yearning for political gain and expansion. When the Arabs invaded and occupied North Africa, which started in 640 C.E., the expansion and growth of Christianity were terminated. Fortunately the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church tradition survived in the region.

During 697 C.E., when the Arabs conquered Carthage, the Nubian King Mercurios arose to establish a Christian kingdom stretching from Aswan to the Blue Nile. The yielding of this kingdom to Turkish-Islamic attacks during 1270 C.E. contributed to the rebirth of the Ethiopian Church. Christianity then prospered in the mountains of Ethiopia. In 1527 C.E. much of this church was destroyed by an Islamic jihad.

While this was happening in Egypt, King Afonso of the Congo came to the fore. He became the first Christian ruler south of the Sahara. Owing to his Christian convictions he dedicated himself for two decades to the establishment of a Christian kingdom. In 1526 C.E. King Afonso, in collaboration with his son, Bishop Henrique, developed a programme for evangelization which was implemented in all the provinces of his kingdom. After his death his successors maintained links with Rome for three centuries. Consequently, Islamic resistance in North Africa prevented the Christian voice from being heard in the rest of Africa and this was to change much later, when European seafarers and missionaries became active in Africa.

West Africa was only introduced to Christianity in the 15th century when Portuguese seafarers travelled around the African continent. Portuguese commercial voyages played an important role in the spreading of Christianity to West Africa because they were accompanied by Roman Catholic priests in such expeditions; thus the spreading of Christianity among the Africans they encountered during their voyages. These priests, however, had very little success and little was accomplished. In any way, Africa as a continent has had a lasting traceable participation in Christianity.

We all have our presuppositions and ideologies and theological assumptions. Hence the hermeneutical circle can become a vicious cycle, as we read our own prior concerns; beliefs and ideas into and then out of context. Everything in the world is fluid, including Africa. Even Christianity is not cast in iron and stone. Rather, Christianity is cast in new forms and new understandings. What is changeable in the message and mission of the church has probably been the most crucial issue since the foundation of Christianity. In fact, the greatest polemics in the church revolved around what may be changed or may not be changed.

The Christianity of the west is certainly not a replica of the primitive church in the first-century Mediterranean world. Throughout the epochs of history, the character of Christianity has changed but not its identity. The identity is evident in the corporate allegiance of the gospel of Jesus Christ, despite the multiple variations of interpretation:

Western, Eastern, African, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal.

The particular history of a church and the culture within which church finds herself are not the only vessels within which a feasible theology can be formed and formulated. Christians can never dissociate themselves from the history of Christianity, Western theology or even Orthodox theology. Western theology has made vast contributions to theological insights and Western theologians were serious in their efforts to understand Scripture. Along the way, they also made mistakes and we should learn from these mistakes and guard against repeating them. Christianity has ceased to be an exclusively western religion in our generation. Scholars who have studied in the western world but who practically belong to the Church in the Global South are writing many important books on Christianity today. They have received advanced theological education from institutions of higher learning in the west, but do not belong to the west despite living there. Indeed, much of their work is a celebration of the triumph of the Church in the non-western world.

Jesus who is the Christ, the apostles and the Church Fathers in sowing the Gospel had respect for other peoples' cultures. Jesus and his apostles came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, Jesus' attitudes towards the Jewish cult were represented in two categories: fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of

his time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of words in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, his fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a “*critical yes*”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of his time. His autonomy found expression in his challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion and in this process he was giving birth to the era of Christian worship.

When Jesus preached the Gospel, he used categories familiar to his audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during his time. St Paul wrote, “*To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some*”. St Paul was talking about missiology, and at the same time using the language of contextual theology in which lies the theology of *inculturation*: bringing the Christian experience into the culture of the people, a process that makes alive the dynamic and eternal motion of the *incarnation*.

Having said that, we define *inculturation* as the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people. A continuous struggle to make Christianity ‘*feel at home*’ in the cultures of different people. On the other hand, *incarnation* refers to the abiding reality of the hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature in Jesus Christ. For so many theologians, the idea of the *incarnation* expresses the whole process of *inculturation* thus genuine *inculturation* should be based upon the mystery of the incarnation, seen not only as a mystery and as an event in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but as a process to be carried on in history till the end of time.

A popular quote has been narrated to express the Greek mythology and use of philosophy, the metaphysical underpinnings that make it an intellectual hub showing how all things work towards the glory of God. That philosophy was necessary to the Greeks to generate righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. For, “*your way will not stumble*” the Scripture says, if you attribute to *Providence* all good things, whether belonging to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good either directly or indirectly as in the case of philosophy. But it may even be that philosophy was

given to the Greeks directly; for it was a “*schoolmaster*”, to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew.

The western dialect and prose towards unsteady documentation and misconception about what really it meant to be African resulted to ethnographical accounts that not only facilitated colonialism but perverted the religious vigour of original Christian practices within the continent. The early churches in Egypt, Algeria and Sudan faded in meaning as commercial conquest elaborated superiority of racial cultures. Evil became associated with black and the descriptions of good were racially justified. To this extent, the African distrusted even his own self and was not able to define his human nature; he became culturally robbed and left naked of traditional experientialism genetically acquired or otherwise. Yet, *incarnation* and *inculturation* remain defining terms of what Christianity is all about and how well it gets to touch the lives of many.

The distrust for things that are African has been a serious obstacle to the progress of *inculturation*. Many Africans are afraid and ashamed of being Africans. With the slave trade and later colonialism, the European gave Africans the impression that they were a superior race. In French colonies, through the principle of assimilation, they tried to stop the indigenous languages of colonies, which they considered inferior to the French Language. In British colonies, English was taught at schools. Many Africans have grown with the impression that their language is inferior and is their culture. Consequently, many Africans

see their traditional poetry, including freelancing with songs, dancing, and theatrical renditions as pagan. When we lose our culture, we lose our identity; we suffer self-alienation because we become less African, and unfortunately never European. To achieve our goal in *inculturation* we must liberate ourselves from this negative self-image syndrome. *Inculturation* does two things: it roots the gospel in a culture and inserts that culture into Christianity.

Notably, the scriptures have been translated to local dialects and the Pentecostal culture has been widely welcomed within the African communities. Reception of the Gospel is, on the deepest level, an expression of African peoples' *conscientization*, by which they rise to a new awareness, a new conscientiousness kindled by faith in Jesus Christ and his message: 'who came so that they may have life and have it more abundantly' ( John 10:10). They could affirm a saving relationship to the Cross, to the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, creating in the hearts of men and women something gloriously new to be claimed and reclaimed in every new generation. Where this has not happened, it's because of stagnation and stifling traditions. Where this has happen there is a kindled resolve, through the Church to serve and inspire individuals, groups, nations, and the continent. In the Church, in Christ, was 'a new creation, old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new' (2. Cor. 5:17).

Of all that has been said and done the most important is the acknowledgement that the Holy Spirit is the interpreter of the Bible. The Spirit guides believers into truth (*John 14:23; 16:1-3*). According to 1 Corinthians 2:13, the Spirit illumines “*the minds of spiritual people to the understanding of Scripture*”. Before the eyes of the Lord, we are all human and our geographical demarcations or racial judgements will lose meaning, only the heart should be looked at, what comes out is what defiles, not what we accept as our identity.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

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### **the wave from antioch**

A bitter pill which the majority of writers on Christianity and missionary activities in Africa should swallow is that they have not been writing African Church History. What should be the specifics about the history of the church? Is the church anything more than just another kind of sociological construct, informed by its particular ideology; a religious department fashioned by economic forces and social tensions and struggles?

Christianity in Africa has had more than its share of the attention of western writers, including throngs of social scientists and their disciples, most of whom are interested in everything except the Christian religion. It is as if in our concern to describe the sunlight we concentrate on the shadows, using that derivative relationship as the justification for a reductionist approach where the artistic supersedes the aesthetic functions.

It was as refugees, according to St Matthew, that the Holy Family came from Bethlehem to Egypt. In later Coptic tradition the pious story has followed the pilgrimage of the Holy Family from the Nile Delta all along the river to Asyut and back again, altogether a period of some three and a half years. Great miracles occurred during the passage. At place after place in a dry land, as the *divine child* stretched out his hand, fresh water wells would spring up and the trees would bow their heads; yes, the very palm tree to which the Mother held her hand during her birth-pangs gave the family shadow from the heat of the sun. The sick were healed and the dead were raised again. South of Asyut

(later to be one of the great centres of the Coptic Church) the Holy Family, having passed ruins of *rock-temples* and other holy buildings, found refuge in large *rock-tombs* from the early dynasties of Egyptian history. This vivid tradition has more to say about the local Church – which has loved to narrate it - than about historical fact. It has been retold by generations and helped to make Egypt a 'holy land', because Jesus the Child and Mary, the Mother of God, by their holy presence, had made it so.

Twentieth-century literature devoted to the first thousand years of Church history of Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia and North Africa is immense. Finds of sources have added to our understanding of the forces which shaped the spirituality in the Church in those centuries. Archaeological excavations have brought to light invaluable documents and a fascinating world of Christian art. The UNESCO campaign in the 1960s to save the culture hidden in the sands of Nubia has produced sensational results, and even now, innocent-looking mounds in the sands of the desert may hide buildings, ruins and documents which could change our entire outlook on certain periods of this history.

The first beginnings of the Church's history in the Nile Delta must be understood as closely related to the life of the Jewish Diaspora on the Mediterranean coastline. About the first 100 years of Christian beginnings in the Nile Delta, the fundamental fact of the relationship to, and dependence on, the Jewish community in the city stands out as of primary importance. The Jews represented a highly significant

minority in Alexandria with a population of hundreds of thousands. In all of Egypt there were, at the time of Christ, about 1 million Jews, thus representing the largest Jewish community outside Palestine. Two of the five sections of the city into which Alexandria was divided were dominated by the Jews, their synagogues and their culture.

A leading spokesman for the Jewish Diaspora in Alexandria was Philo, a philosopher and Bible expositor, an international and cosmopolitan Jewish scholar, deeply influenced by Hellenistic culture and concerned with establishing areas of contact and understanding between Hellenism and Judaism. Alongside Philo and his assimilationist teaching, there also appeared the more conservative schools of Jewish thought, less given to allegorical interpretation of the Scripture. It was here in Jewish Alexandria, that the *Septuaginta* translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was created.

In this Jewish world, marked by the Torah and the Prophets, the Sabbath and the feasts, the first Christian groups from Judaea appeared as missionaries, refugees and traders. While at first possibly seeking refuge in the synagogue they were soon prepared to proclaim their astounding and necessarily divisive message that the Messiah, the Saviour and the Lord had indeed come in Jesus of Nazareth. Scholars are at present attempting to identify the very place in the city of Alexandria where the first Christians congregated for worship, agape and eucharist, in an area of

the Jewish neighbourhood, later known, from the fourth century on, as *Boukolou*.

A far-reaching generalization can be made at the outset: this religion of the Messiah, proclaimed by Jewish individuals, families and groups, came into Egypt and Africa from the East. It was an Eastern religion, and whatever changes it has since undergone because of its missionary outreach and consequent identification with many cultures, it retains its fundamental consanguinity with its Eastern origins, with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and with those '*homeless wandering Charismatics*' who, in the Holy Land, as the disciples of Jesus had been the first to preach the Christian message. This brings us to a vivid analytics of Paul and Barnabas whose works resulted to the coining of the name Christians, for they preached Jesus Crucified and their first legal gathering was in Antioch; a place where almost five thousand disciples assembled to witness the gifts of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles. This therefore brings us to the major question, as to how a Christian life should be lived given that there is not enough pages that talk about the childhood of Jesus. What is a Godly life?

Jesus led the type of life that God originally planned for all of us. He had the Holy Spirit joined to His spirit from His birth to help, teach and guide him. As a baby and young child, He matured learning from the Holy Spirit. Unlike every one of us, His life was not stained by sin from birth nor was His heart wicked, hard and dark. Although He also learned from the outer person through His experiences in

the world, this influence never dominated His mind, will and emotions. His physical life was sourced and directed spiritually by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was the perfect man in that His inner person followed the Holy Spirit in complete obedience. He lived the perfect life, a life completely without sin and pleasing to God the Father.

By the life He lived and His teachings, Jesus Christ showed how each of us could live a spiritual life that God wants us to. He was absolutely committed to God, dependent on God for everything and spent much of His time in prayer. Jesus lived the life of perfection because He put His love for the Father first and loved people so much that He lived His life for them and then laid down His life for us. He lived a life that put God's kingdom first and He never acted in a way that was focused on Himself. It was a selfless life in that it put God first and all others next, it was a compassionate life that was lived for the good of others.

Jesus lived His life not for Himself but totally for God and we are to do the same (*not my will but Thine will be done*). He demonstrated that people must know God, love Him and obey Him. We are called by God to live a Christ-like life, seemingly impossible from our perspective, but something God is able to do increasingly in our life as we daily submit to Him. When we no longer live but Christ lives in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit, it can become *natural* for the person within, Jesus Christ, to be revealed in our outer life. A pure heart can only be developed in use where there is obedience and a clear conscious before God

and other people. With a pure heart, we are purely focused on knowing God, loving Him, understanding His will and obeying it completely. In this state, we can always be assured that we can come to God knowing that our prayer will be heard and answered.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight (*1 John 3:21 – 22*)

Believers who resign themselves to partially obeying God will limit their spiritual growth and fail to obtain all the spiritual blessings that God has for their life. Being poor ambassadors for Christ, their lives reflect little of the Holy Spirit within. As believers, we must all come to realize that by calling ourselves Christians we take on the responsibility to carry the Holy Name of God in this world. That God places a great importance on His Holy Name and as Christians we must recognize the responsibility taken upon ourselves when we proclaim to the world that we are His children. We are seen by God as His specially chosen people who are a royal priesthood and a holy nation before Him. We must see ourselves this way and live our lives accordingly (*1 Peter 2:9*).

The greatest evil comes from those who are the most self-focused and the greatest good comes from those who have so lost their self-focus that they now live their life for God and live it according to His will. This is God's will for your

life, applying your will to obeying His will; which is the same as giving your old way of living and starting a new life, living each day according to His will. God's will cannot be done on earth unless each of us who are justified by Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection also rise up with Him to a new life of obedience to God. John the disciple whom Jesus loved the most and who had great revelation from God, wrote to Christians telling them that the world was passing away and that only those who did the will of God abided forever with God (1John2:17).

Through reading the gospels we know that the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* were not looked at favourably by Jesus. This is because of the practices and hypocritical tendencies they regularly demonstrated towards Him during His ministry. To better understand these two groups of people, who even championed towards His crucifixion, we begin by definitions.

The word Pharisee in Greek is *pharisaioi*, meaning "Separated Ones"; thus the Pharisees got their name from other groups because of their well-known practices of strict avoidance of Gentiles, of people who were ritually unclean or sinners, and Jews who did not strictly adhere to the laws of the Torah. It is interesting to know that the Pharisees were a lay group of believers and leaders; they believed that education in the Torah on the *do's and don'ts* of living life and worshipping Yahweh insured an individual's salvation and eternal reward. Thus, they emphasized the strict observance of specific religious practices like the Sabbath,

ritual purity regulations, and tithing. They believed if all Jews practiced and fulfilled these specific observances it would lead them as a community to ancestral pride and appreciation.

Not surprisingly the Pharisees were very influential figures in antiquity and are estimated to have come to the fore of Jewish leadership about 150 BC. They probably never exceeded at any given time in their existence more than 6,000 individual members and whilst they adhered to strict observance of following the law, the Pharisees at times also took the liberty for broad and liberal interpretations of scripture to better fit the mould of their philosophies. This led the Pharisees to put great emphasis on oral interpretation of the Hebrew Bible which meant they could adjust their beliefs or practices on any given contingency thus allowing them to be flexible and able to confront any movement they saw either as a threat or outside their belief system. The Pharisees found their main function in the Jewish community as teachers and preachers. This is because the Pharisees, unlike the priestly class of the Sadducees, could not trace their lineage directly from a priestly family.

Since they were not of priestly lineage, the Pharisees were forbidden from offering sacrifice or participating fully in temple activities. While they have been portrayed as enemies, we as Christians are indebted to some of their beliefs and practices; specifically, the idea of resurrection and eternal reward for commoners originally came from the Pharisees. It was first presented to Christians by the former

Pharisee *Saul of Tarsus or Paul*. Paul is not shy to mention in his many letters to the Churches throughout the Roman Empire that he was once a Pharisee. His writings very clearly reflect his former livelihood, in particular with his use and control of the Hebrew Bible. Paul quotes the Old Testament nearly ninety times in his letters found in the New Testament!

Now, on the parallel, the word Sadducee comes from the Greek word *saddoukaioi* meaning aristocratic and were composed of the upper class or wealthy. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees were closely affiliated with Temple ministries as part of the priestly class in Jerusalem. The Sadducees opposed many actions and practices of the Pharisees, especially their tendencies for oral traditions. The reason for this was because the Sadducees had the title of priest. With their title, they believed they held the keys to orthodoxy and truth. Since the Sadducees were part of the priestly class, they were ultimately the institutional religion led and directed by the High Priest. They also pursued policies designed to appease the governing authorities of Rome and were primarily concerned with keeping peace in the nation thereby avoiding trouble with the Romans. Any popular movement was a potential threat to the Sadducees, especially anything that would be regarded as an uprising. The chief priests said of Jesus: *“If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation”* (John 11:48).

In the text of the New Testament, even though both the Pharisees and Sadducees were against Jesus, they also were against each other. In contrast, the Pharisees as lay preachers and teachers associated themselves closely with the Jewish people however much the Sadducees attempted to negate their most of the fundamental beliefs, for example, belief in reward and punishment of the soul in the afterlife, and the belief in angels.

Since Jesus was a layman like the Pharisees, the Sadducees in particular would not have listened to what Jesus was saying. The authority that the Sadducees claimed they had, explains in great sense, why the priests in Jerusalem played the largest role in bringing Jesus before Pontius Pilate ultimately leading to his crucifixion. Even more than the Pharisees, the Sadducees would have attempted to denounce Jesus' ministry and teachings as heresy. While the Pharisees continued to exist after the temple destruction in 70 AD, the Sadducees completely disappeared because of their close association and reliance on the temple.

Among all the New Testament writers Paul is highly regarded as the first Christian theologian, however, his missionary unfolding still receives little recognition owing to the complexities and zeal involved. Luke, who joined Paul at Troas during Paul's second missionary journey to be his travel companion, records that Paul, the missionary, undertook three missionary journeys, before he journeyed finally to Rome, and founded churches in key cities of Asia and Europe within a span of about twelve years. How was it

possible for Paul to plant and nurture churches in such an impressive way? What strategies, if any, did he adopt to reach out both the Jews and the Gentiles?

After Paul's conversion, he spoke of being called by God to have Jesus Christ revealed not only to him, as it happened on the road to Damascus, but also within him through the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was the spiritual knowledge and understanding that Paul received from the Holy Spirit within him that enabled him to be transformed and complete the call on his life to preach Jesus Christ among the Gentiles (*Galatians 1:5*).

From our own perspective, once we are in Christ, we are on a spiritual path of transformation from "*glory to glory*". The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the spiritual realm giving us a spiritual understanding. This is done most frequently as we daily read and meditate on the words of the Bible. However, the transformation will only take place as we do this with the intention of obeying it. Otherwise, we may learn it with our mind but this learning alone will not do our spiritual life much good unless we apply it to the way we think about and live our daily life.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit is usually slow and gradual but with deliberate purpose, particularly designed by God for each one of us. He knows the best way for each of us to be taught; the lessons we need to learn and in what progression they need to be taught to specifically accomplish His will for our life. Although some of the

teaching may at many a times appear confusing, it is like a *kitenge* fabric that is revealing its beauty once the Master Weaver has finished His purposeful and meticulous work in each believer who draws near to Him with a true heart. His work is performed daily in each *spirit-led* person who diligently seeks to be near Him, who loves Him and follows Him with an obedient heart. The more spiritual we are the more dependent we become on God for everything because we gradually become less self-confident and more confident in what God can do through us.

After the day of the Pentecost, the disciples as lead by Peter gathered and with much zeal progressively preached based on the teachings of Jesus, His way of life and His crucifixion. The opposition from the *Pharisees* and their followers (*the Judaizers*) was still raw and deeply based on the political goals that Rome as the superpower had over its colonies. At this time, Paul who later converted to be Saul was the prime persecutor and chased after the apostles who still preached about Jesus even knowing that Jesus had been prosecuted and crucified. These apostles were seen as sectarian, an unpopular group of people that joined with the Jews to opposed the Roman cults; however, this new group was uncontrollable and had much resilience. And as the story unfolds, the Holy Spirit did miracles and many joined into the so called sect, and subsequently, for their zeal to follow onto the teachings of Jesus, they were referred to as Christians. This was in Antioch.

Thus, Christianity began as unpopular sect of Judaism but later revealed itself as the true religion. A name coined by those who persecuted followers of Jesus Christ became a chosen name of reference for those noble and chosen by God. Even the *Judaizers* who were mainly Jewish agreed to embrace most of the teachings and incorporate them into their way of life. This was one of the main reasons why the Roman Empire destroyed the temple in 70AD, for it was seen as a source of opposition and unpopular leadership. Besides, Romans were mainly gentiles who worshipped pagan gods, spoke Greek and secluded themselves from the Jewish populace, united only because they ruled over them. Romans had allowed for an internal self suffrage but taxes and supreme laws were to be given from Rome. This was the situation even during the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And when the gospel reached the gentiles through the works of Paul, much more debate ensued as to what really constituted salvation. Others insisted that it was through circumcision evident in the flesh but Paul insisted it was through circumcision of the heart; salvation was spiritual and this is what we call being reborn. For the gospel was first for the Jews and then to the Gentiles, and *incarnation* which accepts *inculturation* allowed for the Gentiles to worship without physically altering their bodies. And this is even true of the Christians in Nubia, south of Sudan who accepted the gospel around the sixth century (see chapter three).

According to Protestantism, one is *born again* at conversion, typically in conjunction with baptism, when one

has *received Christ*. Catholic theology is similar, even extending the experience infants through its practice of *infant baptism*. The Catholic sacrament of infant baptism evolved into a religious work, and was rejected by Protestants during the Reformation. Subsequently, Protestantism developed a slightly different doctrine regarding being *born again* - based on a *no works* perversion of grace - that essentially teaches that all one has to do is *profess Christ* and they are then *born again*. Yet, most Christians have great difficulty explaining from Scripture what it means to be *born again* or *born of God*. Indeed, there is great confusion on this subject. The Scriptures are, however, straightforward: In John 3:2-12, Jesus taught that to be *born again* literally means to be born of the Spirit - to become a spirit being.

One of the contributing factors which has obscured the true meaning of the phrase “*born again*” is the mistranslation of John 3:5 in the *Latin Vulgate*. Originally translated by Jerome in 383 AD, the vulgate inserts the word “*again*” into verse five, making it read “*born again of water*.” Yet, no Greek manuscript has the word “*again*” added to the phrase “*born of water*.” This faulty rendering has remained a part of the *Latin Vulgate* and is the basis of the Catholic *sacrament of baptism* - typically given to infants or children.

In order to fully comprehend the scriptural meaning of when one is born again, Jesus’ teachings in John 3:1-12 must be examined. The context of these verses proves that being born again does not mean a conversion or baptismal

experience. Rather, it means a literal transformation from flesh to spirit:

*“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher Who has come from God; because no one is able to do the miracles that You are doing, unless God is with him’.”*

*Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man who is old be born? Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, It is necessary for you to be born again. The wind blows where it will, and you hear its sound, but you do not know the place from which it comes and the place to which it goes; so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.”*

*Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said to him, “You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things? Truly, truly I say to you, we speak that which we know, and we testify of that which we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:1-12).*

The apostle Paul clearly showed that Jesus was born again when he wrote: “Because by Him were all things created, the things in heaven and the things on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether they be thrones, or lordships, or

principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all, and by Him all things subsist. And He is the Head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that in all things He Himself might hold the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (*Col. 1:16-19*). Regeneration renews every part yet not perfectly renewed. Nobody is fully grown up as a Christian and just like infants we have all the parts of a man but not yet a perfect growth. The sanctification is gradual and instrumental to this is the Word of God.

Many still grapple with the amazing facts visible on the works of Paul, how he managed to meet his evangelical targets and how the first Christian massive gathering in Antioch, brought the wave into a worldwide reality, even amidst persecutions that were inflicted upon them by the Pharisees.

A cursory reading of the Book of Acts and Paul’s epistles will show that Paul worked with some strategic plans and that they were governed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Act. 16:6-10; 19:21; 21:11-14; Rom. 15:18-19). Paul had a definite aim in his mission and thus he was enabled to set out strategies that would fulfil that aim. He outlines his purpose in Romans 15:15-16 as to offer the Gentiles to God as “*an acceptable sacrifice sanctified by the Holy Spirit*”. So saying, he identifies his mission as a “*priestly service of the gospel of God*” (Act. 9:15-16; 26:16-18; see also Act. 20:24 and Phil. 3:13-15 for other kinds of purpose statement of Paul). He

had received God's call for Gentile mission directly from Jesus who revealed himself to Paul on the road to Damascus (Act. 26:16-18), and got it approved by the apostles reputed to be "*pillars*" (Gal. 2:9). As far as Paul is concerned, his Damascus experience was his *berufungsvision*. Therefore he worked with the purpose of leading people, especially the Gentile nations, to God's salvation that is in Jesus Paul sees his call to bring the Gentiles to God (*who is Light*) from the power of Satan (*who stands for darkness*) and to enable them to have a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies (Act. 26:16-18). His mission in general and his mission strategy in particular, is thereby motivated by his vision for the eschatological gathering of Gentiles with the Jews to worship the one God, Yahweh.

Paul identified in each region the key cities such as Antioch of Pisidia, Paphos of Cyprus, Philippi, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Caesarea to carry out his mission. Finally he landed as a prisoner in Rome, the capital of the Mediterranean world, where he was teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered for two whole years (Act. 28:30-31). Thus Paul was engaged in mission by journeying from one place to another and taking the gospel to the whole eastern half of Roman Empire, from Jerusalem as far around as Illyricum. Paul chose prominent cities which provided him such strategic locations as the market places, synagogues, lecture halls and houses to reach out easily both Jews and Gentiles with the gospel of Jesus and to expand his mission to the neighbouring towns and

regions. He also chose Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, as a centre of strategic importance for his new Western mission. In all centres he faced both acceptance and rejection. Where he found good response there he stayed a little longer, but whenever opposition was intensified, he moved to another key city. Paul thus was constantly on the move and this was the wave of Christianity as established in Antioch, the zeal and commitment.

Paul's mission was not narrowed only to preaching the gospel, but it included a demonstration of pastoral care and concern. He was not satisfied with just planting churches, but he was keen on constantly nurturing them with the *Word of God* through teaching, counselling, and writing letters of ethical exhortations (Act. 15:36,41; 18:23).

Paul does not use the word salvation and its cognates to refer only to the initial evangelism, but that he employs them to cover the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry - from the initial proclamation of the gospel to the building up of believers and grounding them firmly in the faith. The preaching of the gospel makes the initial experience of salvation possible, and also the whole Christian life is created through the same gospel that is preached (1 Cor. 4:15; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:5-6). Paul's purpose of visiting the Romans does not seem to be for their initial salvation, but all the more for strengthening them spiritually and for mutual encouragement (*Rom. 1:11-12*). This would not have been possible for Paul unless he had

sought for, with a pastoral concern, a holistic growth in churches. His apostolic activity covered strengthening of the churches in faith, leading them to obedience through his exemplary life as well as his letters of exhortation and admonition.

Paul's holistic mission had a definite goal and a plan to achieve that goal. It was not simply fulfilling the spiritual and physical needs of the people, but, more than anything else, the mission seeks to fulfil the purpose of God for humanity. In our mission today, we must follow strategies that are dictated by our zeal for a holistic mission - a mission that eventually fulfils God's plan of salvation for humanity, even while it seeks to meet the total needs of the people.

Christian mission often faces stiff resistance in many parts of the world. Opposition comes both from inside and outside the church, and often from fellow Christians who, like the *Judaizers* of Paul's time, give more importance to doctrines and rituals than to Christ and his life-giving word. Paul was diligent enough to convert such unfavourable situations into opportunities to clarify Christian truth and to consolidate and edify the churches. False teachings and any confusion created by them in churches should not be allowed to go un-addressed. On the one hand, the *trouble-makers* and *intruders* should be confronted firmly and Christian truth should be taught in churches in its right perspective.



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