

M.E.S., Numéro 117, Vol. 2, Avril-Juin 2021

<https://www.mesrids.org>

Dépôt légal : MR 3.02103.57117

Mise en ligne le 17 janvier 2022

POVERTY, POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MISSION THEOLOGY FROM AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

by

MOSSAI T. SANGUMA, PhD.

UPU Rector and UPC Professor.

Introduction

Chuck Van Engen used to encourage his doctoral students, while doing missions-in-context, they must not forget the four drawing circles which represent four major areas: the World, Church, Bible and Personal Experience. Those four drawing circles became his special property.

We amused ourselves by counting down one circle at the time as he gave his lecture. When he would say the word “Church” we would draw one circle. The World, one more circle. The Bible a third circle, and when he talked about his childhood missionary experience, the fourth circle. The game was, each student had to draw those circles in such a way all should be interconnected to prove we understood the integrated part of those circles.

Though it seemed like we were ridiculing how teacher presented his ideas, it was such a meaningful way of learning the four dimensions of mission-in-context. What we discovered at the time was those four dimensions were, in fact, very well connected and could bring the relevant context in which the God’s mission has to be applied.

The Mission theology in context we are going to study will focus on Africa, but will interact with the same dimensions, or interconnected circles.

I remember the time Van Engen could not explain the integrative themes in mission theology without drawing those four circles.

For this study, mission theology will deal with three major topics. Our intention is to look at factors that make Africa appear so strange in the rest of the world.

The theological question is: Where is God in all these situations? Why has Africa embodied terrible things like poverty, political instability and ethnic strife which negatively affects one of the largest continents in the world and have made African lives so difficult? What is the mission in this context while God’s mission is redemptive, reconciliation that seeks human transformation?

A friend of mine told me that talking about conditions in Africa is like trying to solve the impossible task of finding

solutions for all the world’s problems. My friend decisively opted to give up on those concerns because he could not find the answers he wanted. Why discuss conditions when no one has answers?

Just because my friend is unable to solve ethnic strife, poverty or political instability concerns, this does not mean that God is also unable to deal with it. God is sovereign, able to provide solutions to world problems. Still, all those problems affect the Church, and as Christians we have to find a way work with these concerns.

As the Church is part of this world, Christian individuals also live in the world. Though guided by the Holy Scripture, we sometimes tend to look outside the Bible in order to solve our world problems. This is a very complicated problem that leads us to discuss the three factors (poverty, ethnic strife and political instability) by relating to the four dimensions or circles that Chuck Van Engen cherished: World, Church, Scripture and Personal Experience.

By doing so, we preferred to use two contextual methods¹: Anthropological model; Integrative themes are taken according to the study of humankind concern. What has touched people’s hearts enough to communicate their concerns related to their suffering spirits? Though those themes stand as part of a people’s culture, they seek the best way of getting rid of pain.

So, the method of our studies will enable us to culturally explore and gain understanding of those themes in order to raise missiological and theological questions.

Transcendental model: We also will use a transcendental model as a method to find the truth lying within the subject, particularly to members of the subject’s community. Does this truth match God’s truth or does it state only the world’s truth? In each case, what would be to deal with such truths as they become theological and missiological issues?

By studying mission theology in African context, one has to relate to the simple question of what makes Africa so different from other continents. What are the missiological concerns, and/or what is God’s response to God’s people on that continent?

It is necessary to acknowledge certain challenges that face missions today. Field missionaries called by the Lord in Africa should examine concerns. Several aspects need to be taken into account:

- When someone is sent to Rwanda, he or she has to think of ethnic strife

- If the mission is directed to Sudan, missionaries should consider reading missiological materials on religious conflict.
- But missionaries to South Africa, will not necessarily think about what is happening in Sudan or Rwanda but will focus missiological reading materials on apartheid or racial issues.
- Missionaries to the Democratic Republic of Congo will focus more on poverty and political instability caused by armed conflict on within its borders.

Besides the list of concerns mentioned above, there is much more missiologists and theologians must deal with in order to provide answers. Mission work in Africa is multifactorial. But the critically theological and missiological question to be raised is, "Why has Africa been dealt so many multi-dimensional challenges? Or, "Where is God in all of these challenges?"

Additionally, there are more challenges that missionaries to Africa must consider: The rapid growth of Islam has become an obstacle for Christianity in Africa as well as the quiet, rapid and careful advance of Asian religions due to politico-cooperation with China, India and others.

The advanced technological influence of Westerners is a missiological threat to African efforts as much of the time missionaries don't have access, or are able to share highly technical resources. This particular technology among young African people has become a *hollywoodism*² How can Africa educate their young missionaries without the needed technical resources? This becomes a serious problem in African mission training where youth are fired up for mission, but don't have the tools.

We cannot ignore or forget the complexity of evangelization elites where occultism is gaining a place among well-educated people. Most Africans are self-underestimated in terms of the prophetic role they play. Such factors are putting missiologists and theologians in critical situations when trying to deal with the missiological concerns according to African context.

I. AFRICA, A CONTINENT OF PARADOX

An early perspective of Africa showed the continent as a fertile land, full of provision, a place of refuge, a continent of protection, and a vast land of discovery and research.

This is not the case in today's world. It has become a land of poverty and famine, a place of political instability, and a place of ethnic divided people. All these factors have placed Africa into a context of "suffering" and attached a stigma for those investors who are willing to be part of investing both economical as well as evangelistic to this continent.

Africa was a fertile land at the time of Abram, as we read in Genesis 12:10. The text describes how the Old Testament considered the continent of Africa as a place of abundance where famine victims would escape the hardships of their own country, and travel to Africa. Pharaoh's dream however, provided a different vision, that the land of abundance will not be remembered at all (Gen 41:27-31).

Does this mean that the Pharaoh's dream was prophetic as we are still experiencing it today?

Joseph also was sold into Egypt by his brothers but was able to serve as distributor of food. His role also helped his brothers to survive. Africa, as a continent of provision, allowed other countries (cfr. 41:57 of Genesis) to come buy grain was sold by Joseph. Additionally, God promised Jacob to go to Egypt because he will make him into a great nation (Genesis 46:3).

We also see in Matthew 2:13-15 of the New Testament the story of Joseph and Mary fleeing for Jesus' life to Egypt -- the land of protection chosen by the Lord himself.

The same land of protection and provision was also a place of discovery and research where examination of mission history proves the Portuguese went around Africa seeking a discovery route to India. The journey however, turned out to be a black land for colonization rather than a search for species and furthering evangelization.

The paradox begins where a once abundant African continent is now home to the poorest of the poor.

As an example, the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa is rated as the poorest country in the world (UNDP HDI 2011, 187 out of 187), but has an estimated \$24 trillion (USD) in mineral wealth compared to the GDP of China, Japan and USA that have a total of \$25 trillion (USD)³. Does this tell us something about the same Africa known at the time of Joseph, Jesus, and others?

The above analysis leads us to the three areas needed to be addressed by missions in Africa.

1. African Contextual Factors

Missions in Africa must be contextual. Many countries in Africa are not politically stable in the sense the work of Jesus can be accomplished without struggles. Therefore, it will be wise to contextualize African missions as it relates to the country itself.

If the country like South Africa for example has challenging factors like HIV/AIDS epidemics where 20 percent of documented medical check-ups prove positive, missionaries to South Africa must take this into consideration.

Wherever a country like Rwanda and Burundi are ethnically divided -- and this has been going on for centuries -- missionaries to Rwanda must have a ministry of ethnic reconciliation in their strategic planning. A country such as the Republic of Congo, which has been politically unstable for years, must allow missionaries to endeavor to understand the unrest in order to organize their mission strategy. Further, the Nile River is generating conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt as each country seeks to own the historic river as noted in the Scripture.

We are not choosing to focus on one unique problem, but our priority in selecting three contextual mission stumbling blocks lie within their side effects. Knowing this context, one has to

study the demographics, ethnicity and socio-economic of people in order to set an accurate mission strategy. For instance, demographic mission studies will allow one to establish a multi-ethnic church in a given area. We need to know who is going to be our target and how we'll deal with all their particular problems.

An important task will be to find which boulder you need to get rid of in order for your ministry to function well.

Is it "tradition or culture" when we look at the "Educate the Girls" project in the CEUM. Is it also an "age" issue hindering our ministry if we know church elders are the only members who give directions for all to follow? Does a tribal majority dictate the rules or policies, or is it more congregational type of leadership system? Even within the country's numerous struggles, what are the major factors causing missionary conflict? And how do we get out from under it, so that the Word of God can find a place to be in your Church?

All we have mentioned can make our entire mission contextual if we want to do something serious and to see changes come about.

Let us take a look at three challenges that are facing missionaries in Africa and make mission theology very contextual:

a) Poverty

Myers in his description of poverty finds it difficult when he sees people with names who are made in God's image being called poor. He describes "poor" in western perspective as helpless, homeless, destitute, indigenous people (Dyrness & Chan 2008: 687). In Africa, a person is considered poor if he or she simply lacks the means of living. Poverty is defined by Myers as the lack of economic goods necessary to make God's people live a worthy life, but still live in shocking conditions. People living in inhumane conditions causes them to become weak, indigent and forced into degrading human situations because they lack opportunities.

In Africa, despite all the efforts some African leaders are trying to do to modernize their countries, we still see, feel, smell and live in poverty. How can we grasp the poor living conditions of our world? How can we affirm that they are all created in God's image? Why this big difference?

Despite differences from the rest of the world, we also notice suffering is everywhere. But the differences in African context to one another of those created in God's image are overwhelming. This can easily lead to a critical theological reflection about God's people. Who are God's people, and who are not God's people? We need to commit ourselves to fight poverty, which is the basis of all diseases in Africa, and the basis of all the economic disaster.

b) Political Instability

This is very common in all African countries. Power is the real issue for politicians, and justice issues are almost everywhere. Even some countries like Kenya and Cameroon, which never experienced political instability in Africa, are now getting into conflicts. Political instability³¹ affects churches in areas of religious, social and marital conflicts. Involvement of other western countries aggravates the political instability in Africa.

c) Ethnic Strife

Ethnic tension has not yet gained equal attention in world evangelization. Though ethnic tension is a major deterrent for world evangelization, it has not been a crucial question despite all its side effects. Ethnicity has become no doubt, an obstacle for world evangelization that needs careful and immediate mission attention. Ethnic tensions erupting in Africa have left undesirable results, and world evangelization is still not clear about what to do with ethnically divided people. Africa, a continent of multi-ethnic groups, was divided during colonial administration into several countries regardless of the ethnic group to which people belonged.

As missiologists, theologians and missionaries look to this century for world evangelization, the issue of ethnicity as an obstacle for mission effort remains un-discussed. Nominal Christians in Africa, as well as their neighbors, are not yet ethnically reconciled.

The aim of this study is to draw attention to a theological understanding of ethnicity in African theological perspective and its impact on African mission theology. Politicians in Africa most always use ethnicity as their political basis for their political parties. Ethnic identity, in order to become a blessing to people, has become a means for political competition, and therefore has lost its way. When we talk about ethnicity, we want also to mention tribal groups as well. There are tribal conflicts everywhere in Africa. This is a critical challenge for missions in Africa.

But broad scopes of studies indicate ethnic strife is the root cause of African problems. African theologian's thoughts, influenced by the fight for independence in the 1950s to 1970s, greatly impacted the contemporary African missiologists as well as theologians' way of theologizing mission in context. Those who started theologizing in the nineteenth and twentieth century lived in the heyday of slavery and colonization. Practicing theology in Africa was more experiential than just an interpretation of words, which permitted African theologians to start with what was more than dehumanization of African people in terms of morality, politics, social behavior, religion, and culture. Their theologizing has been directed to that context.

Observe the case presented by John Samuel Mbiti in his book of "Value of African Culture." Mbiti is a conservative African theologian and churchman, known as the father of African theology (Cohn-Sherbok 1999:204). In the book he

³¹Since Africa has been the center of civil wars, and democracy has not yet been established as it is in the western countries, we realize that the Church of Christ continues to be ethnically contaminated. The Rwandan genocide is no secret. Neither is the evil practice of terrorism in Algeria, the twenty-five years of ongoing civil war in Angola, the

ethnic conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda and Burundi, the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo nor are many other events, too numerous to mention here. All of these conflicts have left a great deal of damage and hatred that hinders the mission of the Church in the twenty-first Century (Sanguma 2003:232-254).

discusses *The Crisis of Mission in Africa*, ranking racism and tribalism as fifth in African society illnesses, and stated African churches should fight to eradicate the systems in their society.

He urges us to consider the church as an instrument of love and grace needed to help remove the sting of the evil in the African continent, and to bring reconciliation among those who experience differences. He prefers love and grace without cost. This does not mean that he excludes the option of suffering for Christ to bring reconciliation for ethnic divided people, because he believes to remove the sting of evil, we will be stung. But we must advocate in our prophetic voice with love and grace. He talks of this reconciliation not only for the racial and tribal conflicts but also for corruption, poverty, exploitation of the weak and the ignorant, injustice, unemployment, crime and sheer hypocrisy.

In Mbiti's study of African Traditional Religion, values and morals, he exhorts Africans to understand these elements (values and morals) of helping "people to live with one another, to settle their differences, to maintain peace and harmony, to make use of their belongings, to have a relationship with their total environment"⁴ (Mbiti 1991:12). To him, if ethnic and racial relationships are not good among African people, this shows a lack of cultural values and morals in African religions. Are those who are ethnically hated only non-Christians? Or, are there some Christians who live within an ethnic identity that dominates emotions, feelings, and attitudes? Those Christians need to examine a faith that lacks the morals and values, and learn to live with one another while settling their differences harmoniously.

In context of searching for solutions to African problems, Mbiti approaches his proposed ideas in two dimensions. Africans must fight against tribalism, poverty, corruption, and exploitation, with tribalism being number one. He never neglects the external factors in favor of the internals. He thinks external factors constituting domination and humiliation must be addressed while dealing with the internal factors such as corruption, poverty, and exploitation.

The Father of African theology, concludes his analysis saying community orientation for the Christian and the world is significant because Jesus requested one great commandment: Love one another, as found in John 15:12. He believes that love is a connecting force that binds people in one community⁸ (Gibellini 1994:36). Africans should take advantage of their similarities in order to grow in their faith of community rather than encouraging ethnic differences, which is the "evil sting" he referred to earlier in this section. John Mbiti, in his philosophy of "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore we are" responds to the ethnic conflict in Africa by describing to Africans the values and morals of African culture.

He concludes with five major elements important in the process of bringing peace and reconciliation to ethnic and tribal people of Africa:

- Racism and tribalism is the African ill that needs to be removed with love and grace.

- African churches must not encourage division based on ethnic identity, racial differences and many other forms of conflicts. Churches of Africa must consider their prophetic role in order to remove the evil hatred that little by little is devastating Africa. Churches must seek for reconciliation all the time even though we understand that in removing the sting, one must be stung.
- Africans must fight against cultural colonization and alienation, which have become part of Africa's ills.
- Africans must always reflect on the importance of community in its real sense by applying vertical and horizontal relationships in order to sustain the way Africans value nature, the environment, and companionship.
- Africans must read the Bible to see what Jesus' great commandment asks them to conform to.
- It is important that we consider some of Mbiti's responses to the African problems. As father of African theology, his contributions help us to specify the context from which Africa is aligned. Understanding him is understanding the context of mission theology in Africa.

II. MISSION THEOLOGY IN AFRICA

In Mission theology, the main focus of studies is God's mission to the world. God's mission from 'missioides' shows that God is a sending agent, that he is a source of inspiration due to his love for the world. It is He who sends and knows to expect an excellent outcome from His messenger. It is He who takes redemptive and reconciliatory action. The gospel according to John 3:17, 5: 30, 11:42 and 17:18 sufficiently proves it is God who sends. God has the authority to send His son Jesus Christ. This also implies God's great desire to be face-to-face with humanity while saving and transforming.

If everything is right with the world, no big deal to be concerned or to send someone to check. This means that who is sent should have a mandate. That is what missions are all about. God's mission started way back in the Old Testament with the creation stories, the fall of Adam and Eve, until Jesus his son was sent. God's intention is to keep his people in his glory. God's mission and purpose is expressed in John 3:16-18. Receiving the eternal life is to inherit his kingdom and to partake in his glorious life. So God's mission concerns all God's relationships to save humanity. The origin of mission finds its place in his relation with the world through his God's missionary people and humanity.

To relate to the above theology, one should understand that mission theology in context has to consider the mission to be redeeming, relational and contextual.

Our focus in this study of mission theology in African context will underscore two discussions: Redeeming mission theology, and Cross-cultural and/or reconciliation mission theology. These two aspects encompass the four dimensions involving mission theology: the Scripture, the world (society), the Church and personal experience.

I remember the time I was arguing with Chuck Van Engen about his four circles while he was discussing those four dimensions. He said something to the effect: “you cannot do theology of mission without discussing the world, the church, the scripture and your own experience.”

We already discussed God’s action through the history of humanity in the light of Old and New Testament Scripture.

A. The redeeming mission theology: African theologians have directed their theology toward redemptive theology, but I would prefer to use the term redeeming mission theology for this particular studies. Colonization and slavery have directed theologians into redeeming theology of mission. So many books have been published on what we called “theology of liberation” expressing great hope of effecting theology in pressure areas like apartheid, slavery, economic domination, third-world stereotypes and western domination where culture was combined with the Biblical commentaries to advance desires.

In Matthew 10:8, Jesus gave power to his disciples to heal the sick and raise the dead while he was still on earth. He came to set citizens and slaves free, to heal the blind and fulfill His purpose -- to redeem those who suffered under a heavy burden of human domination. Mission in context of Africa should be redemptive like Jesus’ mission.

Jesus brought food to 5,000 people when they were hungry. People who sought healing at a nearby were healed. Sinners were asked to sin no more.

Now, the theological and missiological question to be answered is: Do we act in the way of Jesus while we are called to missions in Africa? Are we redeemer or enslavers? Are we liberators or imprisoners? Africa has become a paradoxical continent because of lack of redeeming mission theology.

What have we accomplished in eradicating poverty in Africa, while countries of no potential wealth have become super powers? Africa is left with great economic crisis, political instability, and ethnic division. In redeeming mission theology, the important premise is externalists believe solutions should come from outsiders, and not from insiders who have been enslaved so much they are unable to find solutions.

However, it takes courage and boldness to find a leader in Africa like Jesus who can model the kind of leadership that could redeem African from past domination.

Author Adam Hochschild book, “King Leopold’s Ghost” exemplified the lack of redeeming mission theology in African lands like the Congo, which allowed for corruption, forced labor and tyranny to propagate throughout Africa’s history. Now, in terms of poverty, ethnic strife, political instability, a redeeming mission theology in context should be applied.

B. God’s Social Concern for the World in Cross-cultural Mission theology

The other aspect of mission theology in context we need to reflect on is cross-cultural mission theology. That Africa is a cross-cultural, multi-ethnic nation within itself has not been

explored. Theologians and missiologists who failed to realize the African continent is multi-faceted only encouraged past explorers to divide Africa into Northern Africa and the Southern Africa. And because of this stereotypical attitude, Southern Africa became known as Black Africa or Dark Africa.

The fact is, Africa is multi-ethnic and all are in God’s image. Being interconnected from by cultural diversity raises a missiological question. How can we relate to each other while we are so different? How can the gospel be proclaimed to people who do not look like us, and how can we relate to one another to bring that Good News to unreached people? The issue of mission theology of difference comes to the table.

A. Mission theology of difference.

Living in harmony with one another is living with differences according to God’s purpose in the World.

The mission theology of difference begs reflection on why is it so difficult to embrace unity in some parts of the world. Why is division so common among God’s people and why can’t they live in harmony? What is God’s purpose for difference? Why didn’t God create people to look, act and behave alike, instead of creating individuals with their own unique fingerprints and behaviors?

The study has lead us to mission theology of differences while studying the Word of God. Exploring the Bible for oneness in Christ and tribal connectedness can be helpful when reflecting on the matter.

God’s intention for the diverse people on earth is accomplished in His Incarnated Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus demonstrated this sense of unity in diversity to the public as he was eating, sitting, dialoging, and drinking with sinners and tax collectors.

He spoke to a Samaritan woman and allowed a prostitute to wash and kiss his feet (1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:11-16; John 4:7; Mark 14: 4-9; Luke 19:5). Can these texts speak to us in a special way to understand God’s concern for everybody? Jesus teaches we must not attempt to restrict people from being part of the Body. Christians, who incorporate predispositions based upon erroneous religious beliefs, have a tendency to disregard unity. This cannot be! In the Pauline writings, we learn about the unity of the Body. To be one in Christ does not mean being dependent on oneself. Rather, it is being mutually interdependent. The wonderful symbol of the physical body provides a good image for the necessity of unity (1 Cor. 12:12).

The oneness in Christ is a theory to be used in search for ethnic identity that may cause disunity among God’s people. This theory may help us to be connected with others despite our differences.

John D’Arcy May writes an article in *Studies in World Christianity* saying “one of the greatest challenges faced by any culture is

the degree of difference it is prepared to tolerate, the limits it sets on the dialectic of sameness and otherness, both in its own internal development and in its encounters with others”⁵ (May 2000:223).

The “degree of difference” May discusses is what happened among Jews while integrating Gentiles within their community. Their level of tolerance stopped at circumcision. In order to staunch obstacles leading to relationships, we need to search for elements of societal worldview that are the foundation of the differences. It can be language, color, circumcision, status (cast), ethnic group, age, or any kind of specific group.

For example, 85 percent of my friends, upon our first meeting, their first question is, “Where are you from?” What should my answer be? As I answered I was from Pasadena, it was not what they expected as a response. In retrospect, I should have responded with the question: “Why? Do I look different?” I am black, but there are many blacks here as well. I assumed, that because of my English accent, they thought I was different.

The issue is why people always are sensitive to differences? Is this because they want to learn from those differences or because they are careful in dealing with someone different?

Each person who raises the question, “where are you from?” raises it according to his or her own field interest, perhaps checking their own degrees of tolerating differences. For some black folks, it was not a matter of color, because I looked like them; but they mostly were confused that I spoke with a strong English accent, therefore I was obviously not one of them. I should be African, or Black Caribbean.

Unity of differences is always a big problem in society. I once wrote: “For all Africans, unity is that ideal state [not to share their beliefs with outsiders] in which they wish to live but they remain open to cooperation”⁹ (Sanguma 1990:128). In the discussion of a holistic approach in healing ministry, I stated that healing in Africans involve the necessary tools of love, faith and reconciliation to build unity (1990:140). As seen through biblical history, we know God has blessed diversity, and the harmonious combination of differences is what God likes and blesses. He confused the peoples’ language at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). The Trinitarian theory of God of the Old Testament implies the oneness of our Lord (Gen. 1:1-3). God’s promise in Genesis 12:3 says, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” exemplifies God’s desire for oneness of his people and his inclusive world blessing.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul exemplifies how difficult it is to live in harmony with one another, but not impossible. He calls for good relationships with each other in the church, and demonstrates to the congregation to live and work together in unity as they also grow together. The perfection is possible only if there is a harmonious combination of differences. We cannot ask God for blessings while we are seeking to exclude

others. In Christ, there is no uniformity but rather unity of the diversity.

This theory is true in any scientific experiences. The creation and interaction of cars, planes, ships, or computers brings appreciated results. People bless God for everything working together. He who works for disunity has no place to dwell in God. We are God’s creation and we are called to continue with his creation (invention). We cannot be creative by neglecting different pieces of the objects we are creating it. Combining the right parts brings harmony, honor and respect to each other part, and earns God’s blessings.

But the word of God is clear: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Mark 12:31) and “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:43). In Christ there is no scientific calculation on limits one must love; there is no dialectic word such as sameness or otherness. There is no doubt, as Van Engen says, the word “together” shows we belong to Jesus Christ and it is what our fundamental motivation is based upon⁶ (Van Engen 2000:16).

People must work to resolve differences. Tribal connectedness within itself is not enough for unity of diversity; it is another way of unity of uniformity, as shown in Gen. 11 where God’s dealt with the citizens of Babel. The question is not the existence of a tribal group, but the way they treat other groups outside their circle.

How does this statement sound to you as J. A. Kirk argues, “Belonging to a particular group of people is a gift of creation (2000:78). Kirk adds: *Ethnic and cultural distinctiveness thus reflects the rich diversity of human life and allows people a sense of security in being able to identify with a group of people with its own history, customs and traditions* (2000:78)¹⁰.

The author implies human diversity is also a blessing from God. The loss of this diversity can lead people within that particular group into a serious “selfhood and disorder.” J. A. Kirk raises the issue of “right of being different.” If people have the right to be different, and can still fit into a group, diversity is richer. And when diversity correlates well, then we can discover God’s blessing upon this group. People who have a hard time cooperating with others should ask themselves, “Do those people have the right to be different?” Are they created in God’s image or, are they alone created in God’s image?

Stated, earlier, there is no way we can escape differences. Differences can be found everywhere and anywhere. Our tasks are to bring those differences into harmony with Christ. When we understand how blessed we are living with our differences, then we will be able to encourage others to live in harmony with one another and not allow those differences to be the cause of disorder and conflict in our society.

III. AFRICANS IN AFRICAN MISSION THEOLOGY

As we come to understand the complexity of God’s mission for the world and His intention to his people, three aspects should be taken into consideration: Mission theology in Africa

should be relational, differential and sacrificial. God's initiative to seek the fallen creature long ago, his willingness to go after the lost people in the garden of Eden, prove sufficiently his great desire to see his people being socialized with him. His great expectation is to see his people come to know him and serve him obediently. Throughout the Old Testament histories, people who failed to obey his will went through discipline.

The world for God, ought to be a dwelling place of redeemed people. A place of people with salvation whom they always seek for God's kingdom and righteousness. We need to understand that all that opposes the Kingdom of God is the work of Satan. Mission theology must address all the worldly behaviors that compete and does not allow the kingdom of God to rejoice in this inheritance. God is concern with the issue of poverty in Africa, the issue of political instability due to injustice and the issue of ethnic strife which is in the basis of ethnic division and the inequality among God's own people.

God is against poverty (Deut. 15:15, Exodus 22:25, Deut. 15:4-10). The poverty that enslave the African people for so long is the work of Satan as the Scripture states so clearly in Leviticus 25 and Deut. 15:15 which implies that we have received so much from God, so why don't we want others to receive from us? Poverty is not in God's desire, he does not want to see poverty exist but contrary, he wants his people to mutually be helpful (Deut. 15:11).

The same thing goes to God's intention to political instability due to injustice, corruption, and inequality. God complained about it at the time of Samuel when his children accepted bribes and got so corrupted receiving what they did not deserve it (1 Samuel 8:3). Most of Africa political instability is due to the hungriness of power, the lack of unity even though so many biblical texts show the law that prevent the inequality (Lev 25, Deut. 19, 15:12ff, 10:18-19, 1 King 5:13-16 and 9:15-23). As God sought to have a good relation with the humanity, God's humanity should live with harmony with one another. For all the above confirmation about God's purpose for the world, mission theology in Africa must be relational and put God the center of our relation.

1. Mission theology in Africa is relational and must be sensitive to ethnic differences

African people enjoy their traditional way of living in community. Someone is because they are. The relation is the most important things in their society. Breaking relation in Africa is the rudest thing ever. So mission in context of Africa should be relational. Relations in Africa is above the law, this means someone can break the law because of his relation with the other. The fear of breaking relation in a marriage as we usually call divorce is not so frequent in Africa, it is due to the fear of not breaking completely relation between husband and wife. For this reason, a substitute comes in with the term polygamy. You do not love your first wife anymore but because you do not want to break this relation forever, you may decide to keep the first wife and add one more wife (the

second wife) that will make you become polygamist. Nobody talks about it as most of us try to value our culture.

We are not advocating that polygamy is a good Christian practice but it has become a mean of avoiding breaking relation with the one whom you used to have good relation before but because the love is no longer stronger as it used to be, the easiest way for you is to add more wives. If we understand that the relation is the most valuable thing in African community, mission to Africa should be relational. This relation should be maintained within their society, the Church and also with their God.

Mission theology in Africa should be relational and sensitive to Ethnic difference. The theory of difference as affirmed by God to promote diversity in Genesis at the time of tower of Babel, needs to be considered while doing mission in African context. The oneness in diverse culture, language and race is a blessing and not a threat to human group. Africa by itself has so many tribal groups as in Democratic Republic of Congo alone, has 450 tribal groups with several cultural backgrounds. Those diversities should be taken as a mean of harmony rather than the distinctiveness where one should take advantage of it to dominate others or to look down of someone's shoulders. Mission theology in Africa should be sensitive in difference and work toward the oneness of the diversified cultures. The exclusiveness of others due to cultural boundaries or racial benefits or intellectual categories should reflect on the purpose of God to make people different and seek to harmonize their differences so that in place of exclusiveness, the connectedness should gain place in Africa. Sumithra and Kuma said that humanity can survive only if we accept the concept of peaceful coexistence.⁷ We need each other for real mission work in Africa.

2. Mission theology in Africa should be sacrificial and redeemable. This has to do with all the damage colonial history has left in Africa. To explore the possible mission to Africa, it should be redeemable. What needs to be done so that Africa should be redeemed from their past history, from their poverty, from their political instability, and from their ethnic strife? The redeeming mission theology should be at stake as it fit into God's will for the whole nations. This is the *mission deo* concept to make mission relevant in Africa. Most of mission approach has been done in the sense of making disciples of all the nations taken from Mathiew 28:16-18, but the emphasis on the redemptive action to be taken to free God's people, has been ignored. Mission theology in Africa must take into consideration the redeeming aspect in order to release Africans from their colonial damages. Talking about the redeeming mission theology in Africa, means talking about the redeeming act from colonial sting, apartheid, ethnic strife and many more that are the work of devil.

Mission theology in Africa should be sacrificial. The death of Christ on the cross showed the will of God to see everyone who loves to make differences in lives of others to take also the cross and follow Jesus. Taking the cross means also to bear the marks of the sacrificial act of salvation. The greatest love

is seen in someone that lays his life for others. This does not mean physical death in order to free someone from his or her bondage, but it is a sacrificial act with great love to make all efforts to bring someone out of his trouble and suffering. What are we doing to make the life of others better? Does the capitalism, individualism help or is it a system that does all to make someone greedy or allows someone to be in eternal suffering? Jesus's sacrificial action was more of propitiation to God and also as expiation act to God. What can we do as Christians to access or to make God *propitiative* and *expiative* in today's world? Isn't it through sacrificial work that could save somebody? Though we understand that worship, prayer and offering are means to offer our body as a living sacrifice to God, but it means also to live that sacrificial social action that can make others save their physical and spiritual lives.

IV. Conclusion: Compassion as a Family Paradigm

The family paradigm describes the unbreakable bond between parent and child, which illustrates the spiritual relationship between our God (father) and us as his children. Throughout the Bible, God is pictured as a father who has a special relationship, and loves and cares for his children (Ps. 103:3). The compassion of God is understood in that same context. The parent must have compassion for his own children. God has compassion for us on the same level. This demonstrates the guarantee of earning God's compassion as we all are God's children. In the imagery of God's compassion as expressed in the family, God does not set a limit only for his compassion. His compassion expands even more to those who are descendants of family and opens the door for those who are outside that family to have God's compassion. This theological understanding clearly stated in Isaiah 14:1 as follows:

The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.

The biblical context of family does not put any boundary around father, mother and children as in the other cultures in this world. The aliens that will join them will be welcome and will become part of that family. God's compassion extends to all his creatures. Once human beings get to the dimension of that compassion, there will be no discrimination.

The other dimension of God's compassion is the motherhood of God. God's compassion is illustrated in Isaiah 49:15 as a mother who cannot forget to feed and care for her baby. In terms of God's compassion in motherhood context, the verb "to forget" appears. That means God will never fail to recall his compassion over any of his children.

Mission that holds on family compassion will never forget to care for those whom he or she is called to witness to them. This paradigm, once not well handled, will birth paternalism.

However, the dimension of God's compassion in family paradigm is far off of relationship of top down. It has to do with mercy, pity, concerns, and cares that will lift up someone to a comfort. It allows parents to meet the needs of their children. It allows parents (father and mother) to feed the hungry children, to cloth the naked children, to bath the dirty children, and to provide an important comfort to children. The pride of a parent is having his children looking good, healthy, and sound (Jer. 31:20).

The family paradigm of compassion is covenantal. God's covenant with Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac extended to all Israel that God cannot turn away from them. That covenant bound them together to be children of God.

In mission mandate, we must behave as a father and mother who cannot forget feeding his or her children. The missionary full of compassion is like a mother caring for her child, regardless of his misbehavior toward any circumstance. The misconception of family paradigm of compassion led mission of the nineteenth century into the dependency syndrome and paternalism. We need to have a positive understanding of compassion in order to witness effectively to the suffering people.

1. ¹Moreau, Scott ; Netland and Van Engen. *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*. Grand Rapid, Baker Books, 2000.
2. Hollywoodism is a make up word to identify the western influence and its domination over technology that has impacted the African World where the Hollywood systems have been called in Nigeria "Nollywood" as in Gana "Ganllywood" and for sure is spreading all over the world.
3. UNDP HDI 2011, 187 out of 187.
4. Dyrness and Chan 2008, 687.
5. Mbiti 1991:12
6. Gibellini 1994:36
7. May 2000:223
8. Sanguma 1990:128, 140.
9. Van Engen 2000:16.
10. J. A. Kirk 2000 :78
11. Idem

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cohn-Sherbok, Lavinia
1999 *Who's Who in Christianity*. London: Routledge.
- Dyrness, William A.
1994 *Emerging Voices in Global Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Ericksen, Milliard J.
1998 *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Gibellini, Rosino, ed.
1994 *Paths of African Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books
- Kirk, J. Andrew
2000 *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- May, John D'Arcy
2000 "The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity." *Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*. Thomas's H. Olbricht and Hans Rollman, eds. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Mbiti, John S.
1991 "African Traditional Religion: Values and Morals." In *Introduction to African Religion*. Oxford, UK: Portsmouth.
- Moreau, Scott A., Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen, eds.

- 2000 Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Purves, Andrew
1993 The Search for Compassion: Spirituality and Ministry. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Sanguma, Mossai T.
1990 Health Care in Africa: Traditional and Missionary. Chicago, IL: North Park Theological Seminary
- Sanneh, Lamin
1995 West African Christianity: The Religious Impact. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Van Engen, Charles, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson, eds.
2000 "Biblical Foundations of Mission," course syllabus. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary.