

Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing Witness of the Spirit Among Africa's Gospel Bearers

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By

Philomena N. Mwaura

Kenyatta University
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

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Introduction

I count myself honoured to be asked to address this 11th International Conference of IAMS on the theme, "The Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing Witness to the Spirit." When I was asked to contribute to this conference, I was notably delighted and alarmed. Delighted because of the graciousness shown to me by the organizing committee; but nevertheless alarmed because the task presented a dilemma. To write adequately about the issues of integrity of mission, requires an exhaustive survey of the context and content of mission by the church in Africa in a context that is both diverse and complex. This was a daunting task bearing in mind that I do not consider myself a missiologist in the real sense of the word and neither am I a clergyperson or engaged in ministry on an active basis. Perhaps however, this gives me a privileged objective position from which to ask the questions, what is mission? What is the content and context of mission in Africa? What does integrity mean and how does it relate to mission? In what ways does the Church in Africa embody integrity of mission? What challenges face the Church in Africa today and how is she responding to them? How can the Church in Africa be better equipped to be a bearer of the Good News in an integral manner?

This paper will address these questions bearing in mind that mission implies, "the calling of the church at every level and in every place to be part of God's mission in the world" (Kirk 1999:24). This calling embodies gospel values of promotion of life, justice, love and integrity in proclamation and service.

What is mission?

Various scholars have articulated the problem of defining the word mission which covers a broad spectrum of issues and has undergone tremendous paradigm shifts in the over two thousand years' existence of the Church. Musimbi Kanyoro (2002:76) captures this ambiguity when she asserts:

Mention 'mission' and 'missionaries' and you think of all the foreign brothers and sisters living in our villages, working in hospitals, translating our Bibles and teaching women hygiene and sewing. They bring themselves and their money to run our churches.

This is an incomplete understanding of mission but one which nevertheless still permeates the ordinary Christian's view of mission and some churches too. Mission is no longer thought of as the Church's activity abroad or in another culture. The "mission frontier is no longer a geographical one but one of belief, conviction and commitment" (Kirk: 1999: 24). In the words of a South African missiologist J.N.J. Kritzinger (2002 – 21):

The understanding of mission is not confined to projects involving (overseas) travel or directed exclusively at "saving souls" or "planting churches." I understand Christian mission to be an inclusive complex of activities aimed at the anticipation and provisional realization of God's reign in history. It includes evangelism but it is much wider. Mission is the "cutting edge" of the Christian movement, embodying a way of life that refuses to accept the status quo and keeps on trying to change it, being pushed and pulled by the Spirit of God towards the final dawning of God's reign."

Another South African missiologist, David Bosch describes mission perceptively as "the church crossing-frontiers in the form of a servant" (Bosch 1980 cited in Mazibkuto 2003: 227). These are intercultural frontiers, in a world that is pluralistic and is becoming a global village, defined by, gender, racial, ethnic, religious and class frontiers. The challenge here is how to witness to the gospel in a way that it becomes the Good News to people in their concrete situations.

According to Bosch (1991: 9), Christianity is a missionary religion based on the belief that the reign of God has come to humanity in Jesus Christ. This implies the whole of humanity and the message is to be shared with all and by all. John Pobee (1990:55) provides a broader understanding of mission within the African context. He avers;

Mission is enabling people to do the will of God, working for a community of communities, bringing wholeness and healing.....in eschatological tip toe, in expectation of the full revelation of the sovereign rule of God. The key words are **enabling** not only by word of mouth but also in life style commitments; seeking community out of a plurality of people's cultures, religions, gender, ages.....seeking **wholeness** and **healing** in a world "out of joint" and a world in which human inhumanity to one another is everyday occurrence, a world in which people live in fear, hopelessness, cynicism and scepticism and abject poverty; a world that nevertheless time and again experiences the breaking in of God's sovereignty with or without the cooperation of human beings....."

It is evident from the foregoing that mission is the work of the Triune God in the world to deliver it from the powers of death and decay and to establish His sovereignty over creation and the whole cosmos. The Christian community is called to participate in this integral mission of God right from wherever she is located, her Jerusalem (Acts 1:8) with the power of the Holy Spirit. As we shall see later, the African context of mission is one that requires healing and restoration of wholeness. This brings us to the next question what is integrity in mission?

Meaning of Integrity

Integrity has been defined as that, "state of wholeness and completeness which the process of life of faith is always striving to bring into being" (Hunter 1990: 397).

In the biblical story integrity has several shades of meaning. Firstly, it means simplicity as opposed to duplicity in one's intention. In this sense of simplicity and unadulterated motive, integrity

points to the virtue of being in dialogue with God. This is also a word constantly used in Job where the lord says of Job to Satan:

He still holds fast his **integrity** although you moved me against him to destroy him without cause (Job 2: 36).

Secondly it means unwavering commitment to the work of God, wholeheartedly seeking out the way of life of Christ without pretence, ostentation or hesitation. Integrity is thus unity of being, or existing as a self before God. It is the purity of heart, to will one thing. The vision of God for our integrity is the “blessing that attends being who we are in our prayers before God, and being no one else, neither the ‘good me,’ the ‘bad me,’ nor the ‘not me’” (Hunter ‘1990: 397).

This is the vertical dimension of integrity. It also has a horizontal one, which is the interpersonal or the social dimension. It is important to note that duplicity, double mindedness and unreliability contaminates human relationships as well as our relationship to God. A serene integrity before God provides fortitude for maintaining integrity with one’s fellow human beings. Prophet Micah told the people of Judah that God requires of them that they do justly, love God, mercy and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6: 8). Amos, his contemporary in Israel urged the people to:

Hate evil and love good.....Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream..... (Amos 5: 15 (a); 24).

Another model of integrity is found in Titus 2: 7, “Show yourself in all respects as model of good deed and in your teaching show integrity.” It is clear from the foregoing that integrity is a requirement for the individual Christian, lay or leader and of the church as the “people of God.” Maintaining integrity in mission means the wholeness of a christian’s character, an integrity between the way one lives and what they teach. On the other hand it consists in doing; acting justly and showing mercy to one’s neighbour. It implies putting in practice Jesus’ mission statement which was concerned with restoration of wholeness (Luke 4: 18 – 19):

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

In view of this brief discussion of integrity one is prompted to ask, does the church in Africa live up to this vision of following Jesus Christ? What is the model of her ministry? How effective are her mission strategies? In a context where Christianity is said to grow at an alarming rate how “sound” is this Christianity? How integral is the spiritual and other formation of the clergy? During a time when the church is being challenged by scandals of misappropriation of funds, sexual abuse of women and children, leadership and power struggles, how does the church bear witness to the Spirit and does its leadership have integrity?

The African Context: A Mission Challenge

Let me outrightly state that it is impossible to generalize about Africa because of its diversity in its national boundaries, religions, language, ethnic communities and cultures. Though some experiences like colonialism and continual dependence on the north in terms of governance and economy are similar in most countries in Africa, there is away in which each country is unique. Examples will however be drawn from various countries depending on the issue being discussed. We shall highlight a few issues which I consider important since it is impossible to deal with all of them.

As presently constituted, the African continent faces various challenges that militate against its social and political integration and integral human development. It is a continent with diverse cultures, religions, political ideology and wracked by religious and ethnic intolerance and tension between

traditional and foreign values. The continent has also been affected by major paradigm shifts in the global economy and geopolitical configuration. Although Africa is a rich continent with varied natural and human resources, she is a “bleeding continent,” and rendered poor by external and internal factors. The impact of the economic policies of the Bretton Woods institutions and the perennial problems of corruption, impoverishment and oppression of the masses through inept and bad governance has been well documented. However, a few illustrations of some of the problems Africa experiences will suffice.

Africa has experienced civil strife as a result of dysfunctional political systems, and power struggles that have led to military coups and civil wars. These violent conflicts have led to the acute increase in the number of uprooted people (refugees) from their original homes. People have consequently crossed national borders accompanied or unaccompanied by their families as refugees (Brown 1995). Some are only displaced from their habitual places of residence though they still remain within their national borders. These are the Internally Displaced Persons (Lee: 2001). Africa is said to have the largest concentration of refugees and Internally Displaced People. The situation has also arisen due to systematic discrimination and religious persecution as in the Sudan as well as armed conflict and environmental disasters. The high number of refugees and displaced people in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan (Southern and Western), Rwanda and Uganda reflect the absence of peace, justice, true reconciliation and protection of human rights.

Generally, conflict result in general violation of human rights, of its victims. All categories of human rights are affected and violated by conflict. It violates the fundamental rights of people because it leads to loss of human life and curtails the liberty of individuals. In conflict situations too, the structures for vindicating these fundamental rights do not operate. For example, the ability of people to pursue and enjoy their economic rights is eroded. The social rights of citizens to healthcare, education and proper nutrition are heavily affected. Equally, conflicts lead to the breakdown of social structures and this makes it difficult for victims to enjoy cultural and social rights. Conflict situations further leads to the breakdown of all patterns of interaction and care within and between communities. Hence the traditional rights of “brotherhood” and solidarity are disrupted (Mwagiru; 1997: 5 – 6).

Victims of displacement may live in refugee camps within their countries or outside and experience trauma, loss of self esteem, loss of loved ones and living in appalling and dehumanizing conditions with irregular supplies of food, lack of adequate shelter, clothing, sanitation, security, basic health care and access to education for their children.

Many of the conflicts in Africa are in the form of ethnic clashes which sometimes leads to genocide as in Rwanda and the current extermination of the black Sudanese in Darfur, western Sudan by Arab militants. This has led to the death of over 30,000 people and displacement of another over 1,000,000 in a period of less than sixteen months. What is worse, ethnic political ideology has the power to objectify human relations as a means of imposing hegemony by one group over another. This “othering” of certain groups leads to perception of individuals and groups with particular ethnic identities as objects rather than as subjective and rational human beings. On the basis of this, one ethnic group is made to feel superior and more human while others appear inferior and dehumanized. The situation of conflict, no matter its nature, negates the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of the human person. The issues of refugees, internal conflicts, ethnic cleansing and civil strife are global justice issues. They cry out for understanding and action. The whole world, developed and the two third worlds is threatened by these problems. Effective response requires immediate and ongoing assistance to the victims but also long term restructuring of the global, political and economic order. As Tedla (1985: 118) observes:

Refugees perhaps, more than any other group of people today, embody human suffering and vulnerability. Uprooted and homeless, they bear in their persons the marks of the suffering Christ wounded, despised without a place to rest.

Individual African countries and the Northern powers are both to blame for these problems in Africa in the last forty years. As Klaus Nurnberger argues (2002: 504) “western powers have contributed substantially to the subjugation of populations by authoritarian regimes, widespread destruction through

armed conflict and the misappropriation of scarce resources by the military when these resources should have been used for development.” African leaders themselves have been corrupt brutal and indifferent to the plight of their citizens. What has the Church in Africa regarded as its mission in this context of civil strife and bad governance?

Economically, the situation in tropical Africa is characterized by poverty unemployment and underemployment besides the oppressive burden of escalating external debt. The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) have relegated the adjusting countries even further from the fulfillment of the dream of a greater Africa. In Kenya, the Economic Survey (2003: 199) observes that:

In the recent past, economic liberalization, SAPs and globalization may have improved economic growth prospects in some parts of the country. But even where growth has occurred, the gap between the rich and the poor has greatly widened. Conditions for the poor have worsened in many places, especially in Arid and Semi Arid areas. SAPs, deregulation and commercialization and increased reliance on the private sector have reduced the scope or changed the scope of government intervention on behalf of the poor.

It further says that though the economy grew from 1.2% in 2002 to 1.8 percent in 2003, inflation rose by 3.6% hence sinking the poor into severe poverty. Today poverty is said to cover 57% of the population who live below the poverty line.

Mugambi and Nurnberger note the marginalization of Africa in the global economy and policies that have made her a consumer of products from the north rather than a producer. Mugambi (1998) argues that Africa contributes less than 2% of world trade and less than 1% of world industry. What is the mission of the church in this situation of injustice created by trade imbalance? What is its impact on individual Christians and how can the church’s mission have integrity? Is the church co-opted into the system or is it prophetic?

Other issues include maternal and child mortality rates which for example have increased. According to the Kenya Health and Demographic Survey (2003), expectancy at birth for both sexes declined from 59 years in 1989 to 54 years in 2003. Kenya also recorded an upsurge in child mortality rates with infant mortality rate increasing from 62 per thousand in 1993 to 78 in 2003. There has also been no improvement in nutritional status of children and the death of children under five years has been aggravated by the resurgence of formerly controllable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and now worsened by HIV/AIDS. The health problems have been exacerbated by lack of a public health policy framework, collapse of medical care services and high cost of medical care. Although the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS has declined from 13.5% in 2001 to 10.5 in 2003 it is still a crises of major proportions in Kenya and Africa at large (Economic Survey 2004).

The issue of HIV/AIDS has received great attention by churches, NGOs, governments and international organizations like the United Nations. It has raised moral, theological, economic, political and social concerns. We need not belabour the point that Africa suffers most severely from the pandemic which is aggravated by lack of adequate health care, high cost of drugs and poverty. The churches in Africa in 2001 through the Global Consultation on the Ecumenical Response of the Challenge of HIV/AIDS in Africa held in Nairobi, admitted that knowingly and unknowingly it has contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS. They acknowledged that the way scriptures have been interpreted and the emphasis on the theology of sin, among other issues have helped to promote the stigmatization, exclusion and suffering of people with HIV/AIDS. They also accepted that HIV/AIDS is there among the children of God.

Coupled with this is the fact that HIV/AIDS is a gender issue. Tropical Africa is the only part of the world in which more women than men are infected; 55 percent of infected adults are women. Teenage girls are five times more likely to be infected than boys (Phiri: 2004: 5). It is important to acknowledge that physiological differences between men and women, social, cultural norms, economic and power

relations between men and women have a great impact in the process of who gets infected and how one can prevent infection and who looks after the sick.

Another issue related to women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is gender violence. Despite over fifteen years of gender sensitization in tropical Africa, gender based violence against women and children in the form of sexual abuse, murder, disinheritance, psychological and spiritual violence still persist. Gender Development Index as measured by access to reproductive health services, schooling and economic empowerment (for women) has not been significant in Kenya. According to the Economic Survey (2004), reported forms of violence against women and girl children in the form of rape, attempted rape, defilement, incest, assault / battering rose from a total of 7195 in 1998 to 9901 in 2002. Again, according to the International Labour Organization, tropical-Saharan Africa has the largest proportion of working children, nearly one third of children under age 14 (under 48 million). Most children work in the informal sector without legal or regulatory protection. As workers the children are abused in various ways and have no rights (Daily Nation 21/6/2004:21). About 70% of children work in agriculture, commercial hunting and fishing or forestry; eight percent in manufacturing, eight percent in wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels, seven percent as domestic workers and 8.4 million are trapped in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, prostitution pornography and other illicit activities. Approximately, 1.2 million of these children have been trafficked. Is society neglecting her children in whom the future depends? What happened to the African's value for life and children? These are heart-rending issues and again we ask, what is the church's mission to the vulnerable groups, women, children, the disabled, aged and destitute? Before we discuss how the church is responding or should respond to these issues in a holistic manner, let us examine the situation of the church in Africa and its capacity to witness.

The Nature of the Church in Africa

It is now a generally accepted notion that in the 20th century there "occurred a shift in the center of gravity of Christianity from the north to the southern continents, from the western to the non-western world, with Africa playing a key role in this new configuration of the Christian world" (Bediako 1998:52). The church in Africa is said to be dynamic and to be growing at a tremendous rate that is awe inspiring. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, during the 20th century, the proportion of Africans who were Christians rose from 9% of the whole to almost one half (Barrett et al 2001: 1: 13). Philip Jenkins (2004: 20) is also of the opinion that within a quarter century from now, half the world's Christians will be located in just the continents of Africa and Latin America. But what type of growth is this? Is it in terms of demography or discipleship? What is the character of this Christianity?

Christianity in Africa like elsewhere is diverse. It is characterized by denominational and sectarian fragmentation and too little ecumenical co-operation. Every major Christian tradition is represented in Africa. Similarly there are a number of theological positions represented such as liberalism, fundamentalism, evangelicalism, ecumenism, Pentecostalism etc.

Besides the traditional expressions of Christianity there has been a proliferation of varieties of churches and ministries. Initially at the beginning of the 20th century to around 1975, there was the rapid development of the African Instituted Churches growing out of the initiative of charismatic African leaders, usually rooted in a prophetic call. Since the mid 1970s, there has been a further rapid expansion of Christianity associated with the electronic media mega churches with contacts from the north and carrying out mass evangelistic campaigns. Some espouse a holiness ethic while others promote the prosperity gospel. The struggle for survival has led to a massive appeal of this type of Christianity and a marginalization of former mission churches and the African Instituted Churches. This is the type of Christianity that is said to be growing fastest. Though the growth is not so much in evangelizing the unreached but urging for more commitment to ones Christian calling, it is nevertheless a challenge worth taking seriously.

This fragmentation has been blamed for enhancing denominational rivalries, divisiveness and intolerance (Oduyoye: 1997: 70). It has also promoted a culture that is inimical to social cohesion and enhancement of national or pan African consciousness. Lamenting about this situation, Mugambi (2001: 24) writes:

Africa has been in need of that peace which the Gospel promises, but throughout the history of Christianity in this continent there has been much more denominational strife and competition than exemplary co-operation and sharing. It is this scandal of competition and rivalry, among other weaknesses that has rendered African Christianity a liability than an asset in social reconstruction of Africa.

There are scholars who are skeptical of this growth and draw parallels between what happened to the church in North Africa between the 4th and 7th centuries and what is happening to the church in Africa today. Hastings (1967: 54) writing about this Christianity observes that “the hundreds of dioceses both in Egypt and to the west are proof of numbers; its vitality is demonstrated not only by its quarrels – Arianism in Egypt, Donatism in Numidia – but by creation of new forms of life in monasticism.”

Fears are expressed that today’s African Christianity might face the same fate and the question is asked “does the church have a future in Africa?” (Oduyoye 1997: 68). Though Islamic invasion of North Africa in the 7th century is blamed for disappearance of the church particularly in the Maghrib, the church had long been torn apart by schism, being allied to empire, elitism and failing to evangelize. Evangelization is not opening branches, erecting church buildings or mass conversions. It is about following Christ, being animated by Christ and becoming the “salt,” “leaven” and “light” of the world. The church today is being accused in some cases of being co-opted by oppressive forces in government and thus creating tensions and suspicions among the citizenry which in worse cases have resulted in violence. The Genocide in Rwanda in 1994 is a case in point where church leaders and their adherents were implicated by either omission or commission in militia killings (Baum: 1997: 54). The Church in Africa is accused of having been silent in the face of this evil. It is worth noting that the current World Council of Churches General secretary, Samuel Kobia in a recent visit to Rwanda and other parts of Africa apologized on behalf of the Church in Africa and the rest of the world for this great omission and failure to perceive the challenge to the Christian gospel that the Genocide posed.

The institutional church is also accused of being stymied by bureaucracy and only responding to crises in an emergency manner. The leadership is also seen as complacent and compromised to the world. Is this a problem of leadership formation or does it have anything to do with the general collapse of the moral fabric of Africa society? The shift from tradition to modernity heralded by the Christian missionary enterprise, colonialism and aggravated by modern globalizing influences in culture, economics and politics have resulted in eroding or in some instances destruction of African communitarian values, and morality. Norms have been introduced that are discordant with the African heritage, without necessarily replacing it. Mugambi (2004:2) again argues that African ethos, the foundation of her ethics has been destroyed. This leads one to again ask, to what extent has evangelization as witness, discipling and “God living among us” been effective in Africa?

Methods and approaches of mission that denigrated African culture and world-view are blamed for what Dickson “(2000) calls “uncompleted mission.” African Christians are said to have multiple identities and to live in different moral planes; the traditional, Christian, state¹ and business. Some theologians claim that African Christians do not feel at ease inside the church. Jean – Marc Ela (cited in Mpagi 2002: 195) for example says that, the Christian belongs to a church which through its catechism and sacraments create an empty shell, with no real influence on the social problems. The Africa Christian still lives according to the traditions in the village or neighbourhood. Without entering deeply into issues of Gospel and culture one is driven to ask, why do Africans find it easy to revert to traditional religious beliefs and practices in moments of crises? Could it be that Christianity is too cerebral and does not address deeply felt needs of the people? Has it failed to create a holistic synthesis of all dimensions of

¹ Mugambi argues that the modern missionary enterprise introduced an ethic that elevates the individual above the community and the church above family. The state also introduced a legal regime derived from the colonial past and an economic system that emphasizes profit at the expense of human relations (Mugambi 2001: 36)

being? The separation of Christian piety, expressed in church attendance and participation in other church activities, from a morally transformed character imbued with gospel values has been blamed for the apparent hypocrisy exhibited by some people. The question again arises, why is there a deterioration of moral propriety at a time when Christianity is said to be growing? Why is there disregard for human life through perpetuation of ethnic violence, gender based violence, sexual abuse of children and drug abuse? Why as has often been asked did a genocide occur in Rwanda, the home of the Great East African Revival and where 90% of the population is Christian?

The church is challenged in this context to experience a renewal of its mission by reorientating the gospel message in order to lead those within it to a more mature faith. She needs to be more sharply aware of the theological and missiological questions raised by the worsening socio-economic, political and religious situation and their impact on society in the form of lowered moral standards. The worse the situation gets, the more Christians become preoccupied with struggle for survival. The proliferation of New Religion are perceived by scholars to emerge from a quest to attain a meaningful spirituality or to attain healing or well being due to challenges of poverty, illness, family and sometimes national instability. Commenting on the rise of New Religious Movements in Africa, Nthamburi (203:29) says

“many Christians are now leaving the traditional churches in search of salvation and religious efficacy elsewhere. This is particularly noticeable among the youth who are seeking to find a new meaning for human existence. They feel that the traditional religious experience does not offer them an adequate understanding of their Christian faith which is decisive for their human existence.”

The Christian movements are manifested in the new charismatic churches and ministries particularly in west and east Africa and popular religious expressions in the Catholic Church especially in Uganda and Tanzania. The traditional religious movements advocate a return to traditional spirituality and cultural values which are envisaged as having the potentiality of restoring the lost dignity, integrity and ethos. Those who join the movements seek personal and communal salvation. Such movements include Budu dia Congo of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mungiki of Kenya, Godianism and Afrikana mission of Nigeria and Ghana. This phenomenon will influence the way the gospel is presented in this 21st century. The church is challenged to be cognisant of all the challenges facing communities today and evolve a mission that is integral and does not exclude on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, class or disability.

Though I have painted a gloomy picture of the African continent and the nature of the church in Africa this is not the whole story. This is however done to show that the church's mission in Africa today is enormous. Neither are the problems in Africa or church unique to Africa. Nevertheless, the missionary task is becoming more complex as new issues arise and changes occur in every sector. This calls for more imaginative ways of doing mission being church and theological formation. The church in Africa is alive and dynamic and the new expressions of Christianity are making the church visible. They are also signs of renewal and revival and what requires to be done is to strengthen theological formation of the “people of God” and their commitment to God's calling.

A New Vision for the Church in Africa: Towards Integrity in Mission

During the eighth General; Assembly of the world council of churches in Harare in 1998, the assembly in its focus on Africa recognized five areas that demanded critical attention by the Church in Africa with the support of the ecumenical movement, namely;

- Continue the unfinished task of working towards the transformation of their social, political and economic systems and institutions with a view to creating a just society in which women and young people have opportunity for full participation.
- Seek and pursue peace and reconciliation for their people and communities
- Work towards the establishment of appropriate ethical values in work, governance and management and good stewardship.

- Do everything in their means to help contain and overcome the scourge of HIV/AIDS
- Affirm the right of the African children to hope for a bright future which, with all strength and ability, they will help to create (Kessler 1999: 226).

In addition, national councils of churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) were encouraged to collaborate with civil society and churches in their areas in order to “provide moral leadership, articulate a new vision for Africa and motivate and mobilize Africans to participate in the building of just and sustainable communities” (Kessler 198: 226). The AACC in turn in its eighth General Assembly at Yaounde, Cameroon in November 2003 had as its theme, “Come let us rebuild” based on Nehemiah (2: 17 – 18). It focused on overcoming violence, wiping out HIV/AIDS, overcoming violence and the need of the churches to take seriously the plight of children and persons with disability.

The church in Africa perceives herself as God’s instrument for rebuilding and renewal. She is called like Nehemiah to insert herself in the struggle of her people. This awareness is itself a sign of hope and a recognition of her complicity at times in the problems that bedevil her different contexts. Although usually unnoticed the churches have been involved in the quest for peace and have been advocates for truth, justice, reconciliation and healing. They have also been involved in transformation of communities. But she can do more. How can the Church do mission today in a more holistic way and with moral commitment? We shall suggest a few ways in which a new vision for mission of the church in Africa can be realized and hence reflect integrity in mission.

In view of the foregoing we can ask: what should be done to enhance integrity of mission in the light of the gospel and to bear witness to the Spirit of God in a context full of challenges? Among others, the following suggestions may shed light and possibly provide a way forward

(a) Promoting peace-building and reconciliation

The deep hurts and painful experiences that the African continent has experienced invites the Church to mediate peace, reconciliation and healing. It calls for an ecumenical mission and vision that entails partnering in suffering by accompanying our members who are suffering whether it is ill health through HIV/AIDS, ethnic conflicts “conflict diamonds” as in the DRC or any other form of suffering. We should not as “people of God” fail in our moral duty to stand up for justice and speak out where it is violated. These experiences are also a Kairos moment for the universal Church to partner in mission with us guided by the principle of reciprocity. As Samuel Kobia said during his visit to Kenya in May 2004, Africa has a spirituality of hope, resistance and resilience. It is her capacity to celebrate life even in the midst of distress that has kept her alive. This celebration of life is based in her spirituality which is relational, communal and grounded in God. It is this spirituality that acknowledges God as the grounding of their humanity that has led to a renewal and revival of the church in Africa. The hope igniting Africa is not based in despair but a vital imagination achieved in community, the church. Hope forges communion and a common purpose.

The Church in Africa should also see her mission as bringing wholeness to people as Jesus did. Jesus’ ministry was grounded on Shalom, an Old Testament concept of peace that is inclusive of harmony and well-being. Shalom entails, peace, justice, healed relations between individuals in the society, between God and humanity and between humanity and nature. The mission of the Church in Africa is to bring Shalom to all the people and institutions. It is important to acknowledge that the Church in Africa has been involved in peace initiatives in the continent, though this has rarely been acknowledged. Members of the ecumenical community have become involved in catalytic or supportive roles in a number of these initiatives.

These constitute signs of a reconstructing rather than a dying, despairing continent. The ecumenical movement in Africa through the AACC, Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) and others are playing significant roles as peacemakers, reconcilers and advocates for the poor and disadvantaged. The Sudan Ecumenical Forum in June 2004 for example made a commendable contribution towards the signing of the Sudan peace protocols.

Nevertheless, the challenges of post-war reconstruction remain an area of concern. This is where confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing are necessary. This reconciliation should not be a hasty process but one that respects and restores human dignity. It should be seen as a process that leads victims of violence to discover the mercy of God welling up their lives. It is discovering God's reconciliation through Christ. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to bring forgiveness and reconciliation among people who are hurting, both victims and victimizers. As Esther Mombo (2003:12) asserts, "for reconciliation to be there, the victim must forgive,

The perpetrators cannot forgive themselves.
That forgiveness must carry something of the unboundedness of
grace that God gives. We must not count trespasses more than God
does.

(b) Providing visionary leadership and discipling the nations

Commenting on the apparent superficially and nominality of African Christianity Madu (2003: 34) says that as long as Africa's cherished ideals and values are not met by the gospel then its cogency for the African becomes questionable and Africans will continue to ask "is this the Christ or shall we look for another?" This is a challenge to integrity in evangelization as both proclamation and service. Evangelization as Bediako (1998: 53) suggests implies

good strategy.....sound theology, that is sound biblical
understanding; not only statistical information, but spiritual insight.

The future of the Church in Africa depends on the sound, committed and honest theological reflection that will occur but not mere numbers. The ongoing criticism of the prosperity gospel in charismatic churches as impoverished, disempowering and unbiblical will do little to stem the tide of those who subscribe to it. In the absence of alternative teaching that appeals to people's intellect and spirituality, thousands of Christians will continue to patronize charismatic churches. Jesus' great commission (Matthew 28: 18 – 20) is as Bediako (1 bid) says about "discipling the nations, the conversion of things that make people into nations, the shared process of thinking the shared and common attitudes, world views, languages, cultural habits of thought, behaviour and practice..."

The Good News is about transformation of cultures. When a people have the Good News and turn to God in Jesus Christ they express their response creatively in a new way of community, structures, rituals and celebrations, reflection and spirituality. Doing mission in an integral manner in Africa implies surrendering ourselves to Christ to be purified, sanctified and renewed. It entails Christ confronting and transforming our lives and institutions to be like him. Until the Gospel effects this transformation through being inculcated in the African context, we shall continue lamenting about "uncompleted mission," "superficial gospel" and "schizophrenic spirituality." Dedicated scholarly theologizing, and evangelization are the mission challenges for the Church in Africa, for there is great need for sound theological formation.

(c) Integrity in Leadership

For mission to have integrity there is need for courageous, empowered and effective leadership committed to evangelization and ecumenism. Our church leaders should have pastoral integrity. Leadership in church and society today is a contentious issue. Generally however, Christians in Africa listen and respect their church leaders more than their political ones. The onus is therefore upon church leaders to embody in their leadership like Jesus, integrity, dignity and humility. It should be a leadership that listens carefully most of the time, frequently speaking with encouragement and reinforcing words with believable action. The pastor must teach like Jesus with conviction and what he / she believes in.

Paul summarizes this when he says:

We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways, we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4: 1 – 2)

A leader should have a stand, be dependable, uphold justice have convictions and courage. In this sense pastoral integrity "is that which holds a pastor up, enables a pastor to hold out for what he or she believes and gives him or her comfort to hold on to when things get rough" (Hunter: 1990: 398).

These leaders must be properly equipped through relevant theological education. This therefore calls for evolving a theological education curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the continent. Theology and mission go together. Often times, theological education in Africa has been criticized for being irrelevant due to its being patterned on curriculum in northern institutions, especially that of the historic churches and institutions. The formation of the clergy has also been called to question. Mbiti's cry in the 1970s that the African Anglicans, Lutherans and Roman Catholics are more entrenched in these traditions than their real owners still reverberates today despite years of attempts at inculturation. Developing a relevant theology and formation of the clergy is a mission task that calls for integrity and being sensitive to the experience of the Holy Spirit. We need visionary leadership that is able to engage in a dynamic and informed way with the myriad of issues confronting Africa.

(d) Integrity of Mission in a Pluralistic Context

As noted earlier, Africa is a continent that has various religions and Christian traditions. These have an ultimate role in the ultimate concerns of people. Expressing integrity in mission entails recognizing that in a pluralistic context, religions and denominations can only fulfill their prophetic role in collaboration. This is an important reason for dialogue. Dialogue has not been a common practice in the Church due to fundamentalist currents, and misuse of the power of religion by economic and political vested interest. We however need to listen to one another in order to effectively proclaim the Good News. In the process of mutual listening, there is mutual learning and our common experience of God is deepened. This also facilitates common living, while respecting the dignity and difference of others.

Variety and diversity in the African church need not be perceived as a curse despite the rivalry and competition it may create. Each of the different expressions brings into the universal Church certain insights and responds to the "signs of the times" in a particular historical context. Mission with integrity means acknowledging that the Christian faith is centered on Christ and we can appropriate it diversely from our contexts without missing its essence. As Bediako (1998: 53) argues using the Pentecost paradigm of mission, "Pentecost was not about dissolving of cultural diversities: rather it was the divine demonstration that different cultures can and do have one and the same Lord and saviour and therefore are under one and the same discipleship." Again he says "Pentecost was the reconciliation of the nations, but achieved only through Jesus Christ, actualized in the Holy Spirit for the sole glory of God" (ibid). The Spirit of Christ is not one of division but of reconciliation and harmony. It is one that promotes integrity and gives us courage and confidence to owe allegiance to him. The church should embrace the traditional African communal principles, enhancing those principles with the Good News of Jesus Christ and enabling caring communities to develop and thrive.

(e) Integrity of Mission as Shalom to the Marginalized

For the Church's mission in Africa to have integrity it must be inclusive and bring Shalom to the marginalized. As Oduyoye (1997: 73) observes:

"to be church in Africa is to have 'good news' for the motley crowd of humanity who pursue fullness of life without ever achieving it the poor, displaced, deprived, rural / urban poor. These are the victims of SAPs, national debt, the global economic system..."

This list should also include the women. African women theologians are calling attention to the Church to specially focus on women because patriarchy in Christianity has been 'bad news,' instead of

'good news' to them. Patriarchy in the church has sometimes endorsed violence against women and children. Mission with integrity does not involve evangelizing people using notions and structures of patriarchy. The Church should be in mission to bring about "critical non-hierarchical involvement with the other" (Oduyoye: 2001: 88). The Church should adopt a model of the "church in the round" in order to promote gender justice. This is particularly important now in the face of HIV/AIDS.

The Church needs to re-envision the Lukan paradigm of mission in Acts which captures a relationship between proclamation and activities of believers. Proclamation led to conviction of sin (Acts 2: 38), followed by a call to repentance, then baptism and indwelling of the Spirit that leads in turn to witnessing. The Spirit broke barriers of gender, social status, race and even disability. For the excluded in society to experience community and a recognition of their talents, integrity in mission means justice, speaking out against evil, dismantling unjust structures and affirming the dignity of human life. Mission means embracing diversity and accompanying the suffering. It means putting into action Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4: 18 – 19. Mission means engaging people in discussion about matters that affect them and the Church fulfilling the demands of the good News of Jesus Christ. It means promoting Shalom and not excluding any one from the Lord's banquet.

Conclusion

It is not possible to deal with all the ways in which integrity of mission may be expressed by the Church in Africa. However, it is clear from the foregoing that the mission task of the Church is enormous. It involves mobilizing the people through renewal by the Holy Spirit to reconstruct their battered lives and rekindle and fan the spirit of resilience and hope that has been a strength of the continent. Africa is shaken but not destroyed. She has the resources spiritual, human and material to chart her own destiny. This is a task for all, women, men, youth and children and also the church universal. To do this requires visionary leadership and proper discipling to produce theologically formed people with moral integrity. Mission cannot be divorced from a life that is characterized by being Christ like.

May the Spirit of God recreate in us a new mind, will and desire to act in order to participate in bringing God's kingdom on earth!!

Thank you

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