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Blaikie's sociological study reveals a clear line of demarcation between evangelicals and secularists in Australia.⁵¹ If fundamentalist denominations are taken into account as well, the cleavage is even more pronounced. Should evangelicals succeed in developing a more coherent and conspicuous position, the fundamentalist reaction will sharpen and a third mediating element will come into prominence, representing a more realistic expression of Australia's undoubted but largely unexamined evangelical heritage.

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Recapturing the Initiative in Theology in Africa

Tite Tiénou

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(We are grateful to the Chairman of Africa Update: 1986 for sending the conference material to ERT for publication. The following article by Tite Tiénou is one of the two major papers presented. (See Theological News Vol. 19 No. 1 for details of the event). Concerned with African Evangelical Theology, Tite Tiénou reflects, with a mature and constructive critique, the state of initiative of African Evangelical Theology, its effects and remedies. The exhortation 'the church must become the centre of theological instruction and discussion' will find spontaneous echo in any third world situation.)

Ed.

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this paper is to help evangelicals understand the current status of theology in Africa and its implications to fulfilling the Great Commission, and to suggest correctives which are needed.

In the 1978 Byang Kato Memorial Lectures I delivered at Igbaja Theological Seminary in Nigeria, I raised a question which intrigued the committee. The context was one of attempting to map out an evangelical theological strategy in Africa. I asked then, how shall we, African evangelicals, recapture the initiative? As you can see, the title of the present essay suggests that the matter is not yet settled. Consequently, it shall be our purpose to answer the following three questions: How was the initiative lost? What have been the effects? and How can evangelicals recapture it?

HOW DID EVANGELICALS LOSE THE INITIATIVE?

⁵¹ N. W. H. Blaikie, *The Plight of the Australian Clergy* (Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1979) Indicated by charts on 67 and by summary remarks on 158 *et al.*

Many of us recall the second General Assembly of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (held in 1973) as a turning point in evangelical theological development in the continent. Shaken from their slumber by the late Byang Kato, evangelical leaders and missionaries realized that African theology was being developed without them. They called for the establishment of graduate schools of theology. The Bangui Evangelical School of Theology and the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology are a direct result of the 1973 evangelical consensus.

Actually, the very excitement at Limura 1973 was, in many ways, an [p. 153](#) avowal of a certain malaise among evangelicals. As I recall, Kato did not have to do any convincing. The leaders knew that the lack of theology was one of the chief problems of African Christianity. Their resolution to create graduate schools of theology, an AEAM Theological Commission, and scholarship programmes was strikingly similar to actions of the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC). In that sense the AEAM 1973 General Assembly was both a recognition of a problem and a cry for help.

What is the situation thirteen years after the second General Assembly of the AEAM? There are at least four institutions which are the direct result of actions taken in 1973. The two graduate schools, the Theological Commission and the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa are examples of evangelical theological initiatives since 1973. I am not a prophet of doom but, beyond the facade of each of these institutions, chaos and disintegration are ever present threats. Surely, evangelicals have not yet fully captured the initiative on the theological scene in Africa. How did that happen?

There are, of course, many possible answers to the question of how we got where we are. I would suggest the following two reasons as the most important causes of the loss of evangelical initiative in theology in Africa: the evangelical dilemma and fragmentation.

The evangelical dilemma in Africa can be best described with the words *proclamation not reflection*. Evangelicals generally perceive themselves as primarily *proclaimers* of the Word. In that sense, they are concerned with making the gospel kerygmatically universal. In their emphasis on gospel proclamation, evangelicals tend to neglect reflection and theological expertise. Sometimes reflection is even perceived as an adversary of zeal in gospel proclamation. The irony is that such a choice is, in itself, theological decision. So, in a paradoxical way, evangelicals in Africa (and elsewhere?) have a theology of no theology!

The second reason for the evangelical loss of initiative in theology is fragmentation. I am speaking here of denominational and doctrinal fragmentation which prevent us from *really* working together at a common theological agenda. Suspicion of ecumenical liberalism, outside influences, and inherent African realities all contribute to the fragmentation of evangelicals in Africa. The result is that many groups try to do alone some things which could best be done co-operatively. Even when we agree to co-operate, each group wants to do it on its own terms. That can only lead to disastrous results.

Harold Fuller kindly sent me the following quote of John S. Mbiti heard on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation network on May 26, [p. 154](#) 1985: 'The Christians in Africa have a faith but not a theology. Western missionaries agreed to contextualize Christianity in music and church decorations, but not in theology'. This reminds one of Mbiti's thesis in his article 'Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church'. What Mbiti says of the Christians in Africa generally is especially true of evangelical Christians.

EFFECTS OF THE LOSS OF INITIATIVE

The *first* and most notable effect of the evangelical loss of initiative in theological development in Africa is that African theology is made without us. Observers attribute the

origin of the debate on African theology to a 1956 article in the *International Review of Missions* by Paul D. Fueter entitled 'Theological Education in Africa'. In the same year a group of Black French-speaking priests published their *Des Prêtres Noirs s'interrogent et suggèrent*. Do you know of a similar evangelical event dating back to 1956?

Even when we sample the recent literature on African theology, evangelicals are conspicuous by their absence. In 1984 Orbis Books published *Theology in Africa* by Kwesi Dickson. Orbis Books also published *The Origins and Development of African Theology* by G. H. Muzorewa in 1985. The year 1984 saw the release of *African Theologies: A Profile* by Justin S. Ukpong (Gaba Publications). These are monographs. To the best of my knowledge, no African evangelical theologian has recently published a monograph.

I know that some of you are aware of *Biblical Christianity in Africa*, by Byang Kato (a 1985 release by Africa Christian Press). You would note that this is a reissuing of previously published articles.

Articles and other short essays continue to be written by evangelical authors in Africa. Mention should be made of O. Imasogie's 'The Church and Theological Ferment in Africa' published in *Evangelical Review of Theology* (Vol. 9, No. 4, Oct. 1985). This is a sequel to his *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Africa Christian Press, 1983).

The lack of presence of African evangelical theologians in publication means that in the arena of public debate their voices cannot be heard. This is serious because ideas have a way of shaping history.

The *second* and more serious effect of the loss of evangelical initiative in theological development in Africa is the impact on evangelism, church growth and spiritual maturity. An observer puts it this way: 'Africa has the fastest growing church in the world, it may have the fastest declining church also!' The point being made is that p. 155 numerical growth far outpaces spiritual depth and maturity in African Christianity. In time, we will see decline in numerical church growth. This is already taking place. As you can see, theology and evangelism are not necessarily antithetical. Theology can sustain depth and zeal in Christians. An evangelical theology will have as its main aim spiritual maturity and Christlikeness (cf. [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)). And, if we believe D. J. Bosch, good theology is always missionary in nature (1984:15). A missionary theology in Africa will not refuse to face the various challenges presented by the current status of Christianity in Africa.

HOW CAN EVANGELICALS RECAPTURE THE INITIATIVE?

It may be providential that in the current development of theology in Africa, there is a gap between academic theology and popular theology. Adrian Hastings repeatedly calls attention to this fact. Academic theology is rather aimed at an international audience. In this category we find the writings of Mbiti, Pobee, Tshibangu, Sawyerr and Fashole-Luke; to name only a few. Popular theology is found in hymns, preaching and even counsel given by pastors and other spiritual leaders.

The providential fact is that evangelicals are numerous in popular theology. After all, many of us pride ourselves in being practitioners! The problem is that popular theology is not always grounded in Scripture. That is where academic theology may be of help. Evangelicals in Africa can recapture the initiative by experimenting with a third way which neither remains in scholastic discussions nor disdains real life issues. That is how evangelical theology will remain missionary.

Once we recapture the initiative in theology, will we then be content to congratulate ourselves? No! Our basic purpose is not just to be on the cutting edge. It is more comprehensive than competition with this or that group. Our basic motivation is obedience to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The Great Commission cannot be

considered fulfilled unless and until there is teaching and discipleship. This underscores the role of theology. I agree with Imasogie that ‘mission is much more comprehensive than bringing people to initial commitment of their lives to the Christ’ (1985:369).

I am conscious of the fact that I am addressing strategists and decision makers. The question you may be asking is: How can we do what you tell us needs to be done? Let me first remind you of the need that ‘the Church must become the centre of theological instruction and discussion’ (Imasogie 1985:369). With Imasogie I am suggesting that p. 156 we should not put all our eggs in one basket. I am alarmed at the overemphasis on theological schools and institutions. That is a very narrow strategy. We should rather develop a more comprehensive strategy which includes the local church, theological training institutions as well as a vigorous programme of publications. I will leave specific discussions to you. But we need more creativity in this area.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude my presentation with a summary and a challenge. We have seen that evangelicals have been rather absent in the thirty-year debate on African theology. We have mentioned the evangelical dilemma and fragmentation as contributing factors to this loss of initiative. We have also reviewed two consequences of evangelical absence from the theological scene in Africa: evangelical theologians are forced to react because they do not participate in the public arena of debating the ideas; the lack of theology is detrimental to church growth and Christian maturity.

The situation is critical but not hopeless. It is still possible for evangelicals to recapture the initiative. As we look to future trends, evangelical theologians will need to probe into three basic problems of current Africa: cultural identity, the issue of race and colour, and the problem of poverty. Are there biblical and theological answers to these problems? Can they be dealt with in church, theological training institutions, and in society adequately? What role, if any, can foreigners play in the finding of solutions? These are the challenges for the future!

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Creativity—Human and Divine

Harold M. Best

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(The following is a very refreshing way of doing theology in non-theological jargon! Though written by one who is essentially a musician, yet the article contains enough theological analysis to be included in ERT. The plea here is to look at human creativity apart from modern consumerism—as a gift in itself. The seven ‘theses’ are somewhat involved by way of terminology; yet looking at ex nihilo creation, Lucifer, imitation, ... from new angles makes the reading compelling. It is interesting that the author discusses the category of