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Challenges Facing African Christianity in the Post-Modern World

Frank Adams

KEY WORDS: *Contextualization, Traditional religions, Afrikania movement, missions, exclusivism, pluralism, time, universalism*

CHRISTIANITY IS the outcome of the response of faith of the early church to the saving presence of God in the God-man, Jesus Christ. That saving presence was radiated through the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. 'The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth. This was the glory which he received as the Father's only Son' (John 1:14). Any authentic theology must start ever anew from the focal point of faith, which is the confession of the Lord Jesus Christ who died and was raised for us; and it must be built or rebuilt in a way which is both faithful to the inner thrust of the Christian revelation and also in harmony with the mentality of

the person who formulates it.¹

Since Christianity must be culturally continuous, we must retrieve and interpret these fundamental religious values in the African traditional religion and identify how these values provide a way of understanding the gospel, that is, God's revelation in Christ. The revelation of God in Christ is forever available to people of all generations and cultures. This eternal availability of God's saving presence in Christ is rooted in the historical incarnation. However, the very fact of historical incarnation suggests that the presence of Christ is not always effectively mediated to one culture.² There

1 D. von Allmen, 'The Birth of Theology: Contextualisation as the dynamic element in the formation of New Testament Theology', in *IRM* Vol. 64. (January 1975), p. 50.

2 O. Imasogie, *Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Accra: Africa Christian Press, 1983), p. 18.

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is always a search for living and relevant symbols that mediate the saving presence of God in Jesus Christ. The basic question now is; 'Does God have something to say to the African People through cultural ideas of faith?' Does African traditional religion provide clues to name this 'More' of God?

This exercise of rediscovering and naming this 'More' of God in African traditional thought has become necessary because the early missionaries did not recognize the potency of the religious value in the African worldview and how it could be used to interpret Christianity in Africa. The superficiality of the average African commitment to Christ is the result of the failure of early missionaries to take African culture seriously.

Historically, Christianity was brought to Sub-Saharan Africa after it had taken definite form in the West. 'The framework of the theology brought from the West to Africa however, was set, forged in the interaction between the original Jewish world view and that of the Greeks and later Europeans.'³ After over a thousand years of its existence in the West, Christianity was introduced to Africa with little or no attempt at local cultural integration. Christianity was equated in the minds of Africans with western Christianity, education and civilization; it was a foreign religion, which had been transplanted to a foreign soil and which had not taken root. The early missionaries thought that their understanding of God as revealed in Christ had an identical application in all situ-

ations irrespective of different worldviews and self-understandings.⁴

Africans may not come to a full understanding of Christ unless Christ is presented to them from the perspective of their worldview. According to Bediako, '...the African who has become a disciple in the kingdom is called to bring his "Africanness" into that kingdom to enrich it and to contribute to its varieties of beauty'.⁵ Mbiti also makes the point that 'Christianity must become "native" in tropical Africa just as it is "native" in Europe and America. It must therefore deepen its roots in the context of our community life, the soil where the gospel is being planted.'⁶

There are several challenges facing Christianity in Africa and we will discuss the following: (i) Christianity and African Traditional Culture; (ii) African Christianity and the concept of time and history; (iii) African Christianity and religious pluralism, and (iv) African Christianity and Afrikania Movement.

1. Christianity and African Traditional Culture

The critical debate between the missionaries and traditional leaders posed serious questions regarding the role of culture in Christianity. The traditional leaders took the approach of 'cultural revivalism', that is, reviving the cul-

3 Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), p. 229.

4 Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 19.

5 Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 371.

6 'The Ways and Means of Communicating the Gospel' in *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, ed. C.G. Baeta, (Oxford: University Press, 1968), p. 337.

ture in its totality. The missionaries took the approach of 'cultural anti-revivalism', that is, doing away with or throwing away the cultural practices.⁷

The 'cultural revivalists', including the Afrikania movement, argue firstly that the commitment to the cultural heritage of the people will serve as the basis of the search for cultural identity and cultural pride and unite them as a society. Secondly, reviving one's culture would also create authentic values for the future, 'their perception of reality, their understanding of themselves, and their shared apprehension and interpretation of societal experience'.⁸ Thirdly, there is the assumption that recovering and developing one's cultural past becomes the basis of making a contribution to global civilization. Fourthly, they argue that cultural revivalism will lead to mental freedom from a colonial mentality. According to Okomfo Damuah, 'mental bondage is mental violence, religious bondage is invisible violence and cultural bondage is cultural suicide'.⁹ Colonial rule makes the colonised people intellectually servile to the ideas and values of the colonial government. Fifthly, they argue that the reason why some societies in Ghana are not developing is because they tend to use foreign ideas to which they have no ideological attachment. Okomfo Damuah mentioned that, 'the main trend is to discover our own authentic native val-

ues and grow from those roots rather than trying to be an extension or offshoot of other traditions'.¹⁰ Lastly, they argue that reviving the cultural past will contribute to national integration and nation building.

The argument of the 'cultural anti-revivalists' (referring to the missionaries) is that if Christianity is going to grow in Africa and also 'catch-up' with modernity, then Africa must abandon a great part of its cultural practices that are archaic and primitive.¹¹ The attitude of the church towards all traditional beliefs suggests that Christians should abandon any form of contact with spirit-powers and spirit-ancestors, all use of magic and fear of witchcraft.¹² Any attempt to revive the cultural practices would be irrelevant to the goals and concerns of the African Christian.

The firm stand of these two groups has led to tensions, confusion, controversies and inconsistencies; this is due to the failure to distinguish between what may be regarded as positive and negative elements in the culture. It is this failure that led the revivalist group to regard the entire culture as positive, good, and perfect, while the anti-revivalist group saw everything in the culture as negative, worthless and good for nothing.

The grounds for evaluating when a tradition should be accepted, refined or abandoned may be several. Some may

7 K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity* (Oxford: University Press, 1997), p. 232.

8 K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 233.

9 K. Damuah, *Afrikania Handbook—Reformed African Traditional Religion* (Accra: Afrikania Mission, 1983), back cover.

10 K. Damuah, *Afrikania Handbook*, back cover.

11 Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 235.

12 S. G. Williamson, *Akan Religion and Christian Faith* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1965), p. 81.

see a tradition to be dysfunctional and hampering the progress of a society, 'others may see it as discordant with the ethos of a new set of cultural values that a new generation is bent on establishing',¹³ while others still may see it as morally unacceptable to the society.

In my view, neither the revivalists nor the anti-revivalists are entirely correct in their argument and criticism. Both of these positions are mistaken and unjustifiable. The anti-revivalist position (I am referring to the extreme group) implies that though culture is the embodiment of a people's way of life, nothing useful can be derived from the ideas, values and practices of their culture. They see no reason why the past must be revived. Gospel and culture are for them 'polar' concepts that cannot be integrated.¹⁴ In my view, to argue that a great part of a people's culture must be rejected is unacceptable. In fact, a total rejection of one's cultural past would be absurd. The revival of some cultural values is very legitimate and relevant, and this is what this study is seeking to do. But not every aspect of a cultural heritage ought to be revived.

Thus, it will be impossible for me to support the position of the revivalist, if that position were to advocate the revival of the whole corpus of the culture. For the revivalist also argues that for development to take place the whole culture must be revived. I disagree with this position, because some cultural elements hinder progress. The revivalist who does not show any

awareness of the negative features of the culture that impede progress, is misguided and his view will be counterproductive.

My position is neither cultural revivalism nor cultural anti-revivalism, but appropriating the positive elements in African culture. By appropriation I mean critically examining ideas and values embedded in African culture and giving them a theological meaning. Some of the values would have to be retrieved, refined, improved, and re-evaluated. There are values that can be regarded as so fundamental to the existence of the African culture that they transcend every generation. Appropriating these elements and giving them theological meaning will suggest that something worthwhile can be developed from the African cultural past.

2. African Christianity and the concept of Time and History

Another significant feature in dealing with African Christianity in the post-modern world is the African conceptualisation of time. It is a renewal of history, a fresh appreciation of past events revisited in the present and projected into the future. It runs ahead towards the new, towards the future, even in repetitions. As Paul Tillich explains, 'the time of creation is not determined by the physical time in which it is produced but by the creative context, which is used and transformed by it'.¹⁵ Mbiti's understanding

13 Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 223.

14 Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 238.

15 P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology III* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 317.

of the African view of time was first expressed in his doctoral thesis, in which he attempted to examine New Testament eschatology from an African cultural perspective. He did a study of the Akamba (his own tribe in Kenya) and came to the conclusion that the Akamba's view of time can be conceived of as two-dimensional 'with a long past and a dynamic present', but the future is virtually non-existent.¹⁶ He later generalised this to be true of the thinking of all of Africa.

The linear concept of time in Western thought with an indefinite past, present and infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realised and cannot, therefore constitute time.... What is taking place now no doubt unfolds the future, but once an event has taken place, it is no longer in the future but in the present and what is past.¹⁷

According to Mbiti this understanding of time undergirds the African understanding of himself or herself, the community and his or her universe. He asserts, 'when Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events but not just for the sake of mathematics'.¹⁸

The modern Africa is discovering the future dimension of time due to Christian teaching, western education and modern technology. Mbiti's concept of time may be identified with the Akamba tribe, but it is an over-generalisation to state that this concept of time is true for all of Africa. Nor is it the 'key' for understanding 'the African worldview'.

The diversity of Africa with over a thousand languages shows that the concept of time among the Akamba tribe may be different from that of others. The concept of time of the Asante people (a major ethnic group in Ghana) is different from that of the Akamba people, because the past is revisited in the present and projected into the future. It is more than cyclical or linear; it has the notion of a 'spiral'. While Mbiti's understanding of time cannot be accepted as definitive for all Africa, it does give valuable insights into a concept of time among Akamba that is very different from that of the Asante. What is different between the Akamba and Asante is that while in Akamba future is virtually non-existent, in Asante the past is projected into the future. This means that any religion that does not give the Asante a linkage to his past as a key to future orientation is likely to be misunderstood or ignored.

3. African Christianity and Religious Pluralism

Christianity exists in a world of religious pluralism, so the Christian attitude to other religions is a pressing issue on today's pastoral agenda. In Africa one of the major challenges fac-

¹⁶ J.S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: University Press, 1970), p. 24.

¹⁷ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1970), p. 17.

¹⁸ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 18.

ing the continent as a clash of civilizations is religious pluralism. The three major religions in Africa are: Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR).

The major question confronting the African Christian is the Christian attitude to other religions. How do we confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ as we live and work together with neighbours of other faiths? Why have Islam and the ATR, the other major religions in Africa, posed a great challenge to Christianity, denying the claim of Christianity to be the final or even the highest type of religion? The Christian faith has always claimed that Christian religion is not only superior to all others, but is final and absolute truth for all time. This claim has indeed never been admitted by these major religions. In 1922, Syed Ameer Ali, in his book *The Spirit of Islam*, maintained that every department of the life, teaching and example of Mohammed is superior to that of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ S.A.W. Bukhari of the Jamalia Arabic College, Madras, writes; 'Revelation is not the monopoly of one section of the people to the exclusion of another. Allah is not the God of the Jews or Christians or Muslims only.'²⁰

In Africa, Islam and ATR are reacting to the global transformation that is taking place. The reaction is a mixture of anger, incomprehension and violent hatred—a clash of civilizations in which Muslims and ATR are seen as the main opponents. This has raised

many questions like: Does the Quran preach violence? Do Muslims hate Jews and Christians? Why is the message of peace and compassion of the world's religion lost in the din of anger and hatred?

The Challenge from the Non-Christian Religions

It is often said that our age is one of increasing materialism, which has resulted in the widening the gap between the rich and the poor. This has also resulted in a revolt against all forms of religion. Sometimes these developments are associated with political movements, and politicians use these occasions for their own ends. A combination of politics and religion produces a compound of immense dynamic energy. This has been the case again and again in the history of the church. A typical example is the Reformation period. In Africa we find many of the non-Christian religions, in alliance with political movements, asserting their claims with fresh vigour.²¹

They bring a challenge that is both positive and negative. On the one hand they deny the claim of Christianity to be the final or even the highest type of religion; on the other hand, they invite Christians to join with them in resisting the advance of materialism, unfair trade, civil wars and ethnic tensions, and HIV AIDS.²²

The main tradition of Christendom has always claimed that the Christian religion is not only superior to all oth-

19 E.C. Dewick, *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions* (Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 16.

20 Dewick, *The Christian Attitude*, p. 21.

21 Dewick, *The Christian Attitude*, p. 13.

22 Dewick, *The Christian Attitude*, p. 14.

ers, but is final and absolute truth for all time. This claim has, indeed, never been admitted by the adherents of other faiths. In 1862, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, founder of Aligarh Muslim University, published a commentary on the Bible at Ghazipur. He commented, 'We Mohammedans hold that Jesus Christ is honourable in this world, and in the world to come.... The Apostles of Christ were inspired men.... The Injeel (Gospels) are all true and sacred records, proceeding primarily from God.'²³ In 1922 Syed Ahmer Ali maintained that in every department of life the teaching and example of Muhammad is superior to that of Jesus Christ. Sir Md. Iqbal has affirmed that while European (Christian) ideas are today hindering the progress of humanity, Islam alone points the true way of advance.²⁴

Approaches to Religious Pluralism in Africa

There are three different approaches to religious pluralism: Exclusivist, Pluralist and Inclusivist

a) Exclusivist Paradigm.

This approach maintains that all people have sinned, including members of other religions, and that Christ offers the only valid way to salvation.

²³ Dewick, *The Christian Attitude*, p. 16. Sir Syed was following the example of the great Muslim theologians of the 11th century who in their controversies with the Christians used to appeal to New Testament text. *The O.T. in the World Church* (London) 1942, p. 152.

²⁴ Dewick, *The Christian Attitude*, p. 16.

Hendrik Kraemer's Exclusivist Approach

Kraemer, an advocate of exclusivism, says, 'God has revealed the Way and the Life and the Truth in Jesus Christ and wills this to be known through the world. That salvation is found only through the grace of God revealed in Christ.'

Byang Kato's Exclusivist Approach

Byang Kato's starting point is that the Bible IS God's Word in its entirety, without errors. It is the final authority in all that it affirms. He considered 'inerrancy' so important that he would not accept infallibility as an adequate description of the trustworthiness of the Bible.²⁵ In Kato's view, the whole exercise of exploring other religious values and ideas and appropriating them for a possible contribution to African Christian thought is a denial of 'the sufficiency of the scriptures as the sole authority for faith and practice'. He is of the view that the church in Africa is heading towards universalism, which he defines as 'the belief that all men will eventually be saved whether they believe in Christ now or not'.

He gives reasons why universalism poses a threat to African Christianity. First, he mentions modern mission agencies. Some American Baptist missionaries have a universalistic view and those who oppose such a view ask why these missionaries should be allowed to serve on the mission field.

²⁵ Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), p. 4.

Secondly, the new political awareness in Africa promotes universalism. There is a search for political solidarity and the goal of African Government is to unify all ethnic groups into one nation. 'Universalism would be an excellent tool for uniting people of different faiths.' Thirdly, Africa is searching for personal identity and this makes the continent prone to syncretism. Fourthly, the reawakening of African traditional religious thought by some African Christian scholars promotes universalism.²⁶

Kato agrees to a partial and superficial method of adaptation of African Christianity. His viewpoint is that Christians should be willing to adapt African culture to Christianity provided it does not conflict with scripture. Kato's understanding of the relationship between other religions and the Christian faith is that they constitute two distinct and discontinuous entities. Kato's viewpoint on the centrality of the Bible as the starting point for doing theology in Africa is his important contribution to modern African Christianity.

b) The Pluralist Paradigm

John Hick's Pluralist Approach

John Hick adopts the pluralist view, according to which, God is the centre and all religions serve and revolve around him. Hick's theological argument is based on the affirmation of the universal salvific will of God.²⁷ 'We say

as Christians that God is the God of universal love, that he is the Creator and Father of all mankind, that he wills the ultimate good and salvation of all men.'²⁸ Hick asks whether such a God could have 'ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation'? His answer is 'No'. It is precisely the doctrine of a God of universal love that dictates Hick's answer. The theological argument of the universal salvific will of God is a fundamental principle of the pluralist approach.

Hick has been criticized by many theologians for abandoning the central Christian truth of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation and subverting the distinctiveness of Christianity.²⁹ But Hick argues that 'New Testament scholarship has shown how fragmentary and ambiguous are the data available to us', so much so that he has called Jesus 'the largely unknown man of Nazareth'. Hence, there is not enough historical evidence on which to base a claim for the divinity of Jesus; such evidence as there is shows that the historical Jesus did not make for himself the claims that the church was later to make for him.³⁰ According to Hick, the attitude of Christians to other religions need

²⁶ Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, p. 16.

²⁷ G. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1986), p. 25.

²⁸ G. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, p. 25.

²⁹ Green, M. (ed.) *The Truth of God Incarnate* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), Ch. 1,2,4,5.; J. N.D. Anderson, *The Mystery of the Incarnation* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1978), Ch. 3.; J. Lipper, 'Christians and the uniqueness of Christ', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28 (1976), pp. 359-68.

³⁰ D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, p. 27.

not be characterized by mistrust, desire to convert or superiority, but a will to learn and grow together towards the truth.

Osofo Komfo Damuah's Pluralist Approach

Komfo Damuah began his Christian ministry as Roman Catholic priest. He furthered his education in the United States. Twenty five years after his ordination, he left the Catholic Church and founded the Afrikania Mission and took the name of Osofo Okomfo (fetish priest) Kwabena Damuah. While in the Roman Catholic ministry he did his PhD at Howard University and wrote on the topic, 'The changing perspective of Wasa Amanfi traditional religion in contemporary Africa'. The focus for Damuah's study was his own people group in the Wasa Amanfi, which he came to consider as a statement of divine self-disclosure through the traditional religion.³¹ Damuah also linked his study to the modern African search for independence from the colonial rule. He proposed five key statements for Africa independence, in relation to the profundity of African Traditional Religion and how it pervades every aspect of traditional Africa:

- How this characteristic is ingrained even today in the twentieth century non-westernised African
- How Christianity and Islam do not seem to satisfy adequately Africa's quest for identity and self-determination
- How a reconstructed African Tradi-

tional Religion may be considered as a likely answer to Africa's search for freedom and self-determination

- How African Traditional Religion can exist in its own right on equal terms with other religions within an ecumenical framework.

The most important part of his thesis was the last chapter 'The Search for a New Synthesis'. He states what he considers to be the problem:

The conflict over the meaning of being African runs through all African life today—religion, the arts and popular culture and education—so that it is in these areas that many of the crucial struggles over Africa's future in the world are being decided. When it comes to religious values, contemporary Africa is the battleground of four contending forces: Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam and religiously indifferent materialism. The traditional religions seem to be everywhere in decline, ... There is no attempt to capitalise on any specific traditional religion. Nowhere in Africa is there anything parallel to the organised pressures for a return to Hindu theocracy found in India, State Shinto in Japan.³²

Having isolated traditional religion as the most crucial index of the critical state of African societies, Damuah then sought to show how neither Christianity nor Islam seems to satisfy adequately Africa's search for identity and self-determination. Damuah's new synthesis is a reconstruction of the traditional religion, which he affirmed as

³¹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 24.

³² Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 25.

being within the divine purpose for Africa and for the world. He states:

The time has come when the African intellectual must take a new look and help resuscitate Traditional African Religion so that she can take her rightful place in the struggle for liberation and self-determination. The fact that she has been able to survive despite the encroachment of Christianity and Islam is an indication that there is something in the tradition, which God wants, preserved.³³

The Afrikania mission that Damuah established seeks to be a 'universal' religion from Africa and from African tradition, reaching to the wider world with universal vocation. It is traditional African religion with the aim of fulfilling the dream of the new Africa. 'It is Africa's religion of today's generation, but it is open to all, irrespective of race, creed, colour or ideological orientation.'³⁴

The most fundamental challenge of Damuah and Afrikania to Christianity in Africa is the issue of identity – in particular, the problem of the identity of Christian Africa. Damuah sums up the challenge Afrikania poses to Christianity in Africa:

Mental bondage is mental violence
Religious bondage is invisible violence
Cultural bondage is cultural suicide
The time for liberation (is) now.³⁵

c) Inclusive Paradigm

The Inclusive Paradigm affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.

Karl Rahner's Inclusivist Approach

Rahner maintains that salvation comes only through faith in God through Christ and again argues the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions. To hold the two principles in balance he argues that:

When we have to keep in mind both principles together, namely the necessity of Christian faith and the universal salvific will of God's love and omnipotence, we can only reconcile them by saying that somehow all men must be capable of being members of the Church; and this capacity must not be understood merely in the sense of an abstract and purely logical possibility, but as a real and historically concrete one.³⁶

Rahner gives four theses to explain his position:

1. Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right. Rahner adds a statement to this thesis by saying that the fact that Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion must be balanced by the difficulties involved in discerning 'when the existentially real demand is made

33 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 27.

34 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 32.

35 K. Damuah, *Afrikania Handbook—Reformed African Traditional Religion* (Accra: Afrikania Mission, 1983), back cover.

36 D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, p. 83.

- by the absolute religion in its historically tangible form'.³⁷
2. The universal salvific will of God revealed in Christ, God's grace, can be experienced by non-Christian religions. He argues that God must somehow offer grace to all those who have never properly encountered the gospel. The grace of God must be made available through, and not despite, the non-Christian's religion.
 3. A non-Christian may have already accepted God's grace in the depths of his or her heart by doing good. If a non-Christian has responded positively to God's grace, through selfless love for another, then even though it is not known objectively, that person has accepted the God that is historically and definitively revealed in Christ. God's salvation cannot be divorced from Christ; hence the term 'anonymous Christian' is more appropriate than 'anonymous theist'.
 4. The church cannot be seen as an elite community of those who are saved as opposed to the mass of unredeemed non-Christian humanity. The church is a tangible sign of the faith, hope and love made visible, present and irreversible in Christ. The Inclusive approach affirms that the only possible normative truth basis for Christians is Christ, while accommodating the salvific experience in non-Christian religions. The inclusivist challenges

the pluralist removal of Christ and his church from the centre of the universe of faiths and those exclusivist who sever the relationship between Christ and other faiths.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism

The Lordship of Christ is one of the central affirmations of the New Testament. The manner in which it was expressed was developed in the West where religious pluralism was not a big issue. Those of us Africans whose history, tradition, culture, and social relationships are different from those in the West do not find it easy to bear the burden of this heritage. This means that the involvement of African Christians in pluralist communities should be taken seriously. The divine-human encounter in Jesus Christ is the basis for this confession.

The obvious mark of a Christian is the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (2 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 10:9; Col. 2:6 etc). It signifies a new relationship of the believer to Jesus Christ, of commitment and loyalty, of surrendering oneself to God and to the one Lord, Jesus Christ. It is an affirmation that by virtue of his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has been exalted above all lords.

There are three main points in the New Testament that can help in understanding the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism. The first is the connection between the confession of Christ's Lordship and faith in his resurrection. The second is the relation between the exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord and his humility, his suffering, his emptying himself, his servanthood. The third is the unique

³⁷ D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, p. 84.

combination of the fatherhood of God with the Lordship of Jesus Christ.³⁸

This leads us to a major question as to how Christians can witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as they live with neighbours of other faiths. Christians should witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the salvation of Jesus Christ and being actively involved in the struggle for justice. Christians should also share with neighbours of other faith that in Jesus Christ the Ultimate has become intimate with humanity, 'that nowhere else is the victory over suffering and death manifested so decisively as in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ'.³⁹

4. African Christianity and Afrikania Movement

Christianity is universal, so the particularity of African Christianity should provide a contribution to the universal church. This contribution will defuse the Afrikania claim that what Africa needs is African Traditional Religion as an alternate to Christianity. The following statements of Komfo Damuah confirm the challenge the movement poses to the church. His fundamental problem with Christianity in Africa is stated in this way:

Christianity is generally viewed by Africans as not indigenously African, but rather a white man's religion, because as in other 'pagan' areas of the world, Christian missionaries often opposed or denigrated traditional local customs and institutions: veneration of ancestors, traditional tribal ceremonies and authority systems, and polygamy...⁴⁰

Damuah proposed a solution to the problem of what he called 'the great dilemma facing Africans today' by calling for a 'new synthesis', a reconstruction of the traditional religion which he considers as the divine purpose for Africa and for the world. He mentions in the Afrikania handbook what the movement wants to achieve:

It is not a new religion. It is a traditional African Religion 'come alive', reformed and updated. Afrikania is here not to destroy but to fulfil the dream of a new Africa. It is Africa's religion of today's generation, but it is open to all, irrespective of race, creed, colour or ideological orientation.⁴¹

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge Afrikania poses to Christianity in Africa is the question of cultural identity: the question of Ghanaian Christian identity. Bediako has raised the following questions that need further research. Have churches in Africa, especially the mainline churches, adequately indigenised the Christian gospel by making full use of the poten-

38 S.J. Samartha, 'The Lordship of Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism' in G.H. Anderson, and T.F. Stransky (eds.), *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), pp. 19-24.

39 G.H. Anderson, and T.F. Stransky (eds.), *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 36.

40 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* (Edinburgh: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 26.

41 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 32.

tial elements of faith rooted in our traditional religions? Does Africanisation of the church hierarchy, leadership and the ordained ministry amount to an adequate rooting of the faith in a community?

Conclusion

African Christianity can evolve only out of the interaction of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the cultural experience of the people. Christianity has always been incarnate within a culture—first Hebrew, then Greek, then Roman, Western and African. Andrew Walls argues that ‘the principal evidence of the ongoing life of traditional African religion lies within African Christianity.... African Christianity is

shaped by Africa’s past.’⁴² As Bediako rightly mentioned, ‘No Christian theology in any age is ever simply a repetition of the inherited Christian tradition; all Christian theology is an “adaptation” of the gospel.’

This study has shown that Christianity takes shape in the local setting and within the history of the people concerned. The Christian message is one and unchangeable, but the people employ their worldviews and the totality of their being to understand the message of Jesus Christ, to make it relevant to their daily life.

42 A. Walls, ‘African Christianity in the history of religion’ in C. Fyfe and A. Walls (eds), *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 4.

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Walter C. Wright

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