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Jeremy Mudditt 1938-2010

A Tribute

by Dr Bruce J. Nicholls

Founding Editor, *Evangelical Review of Theology*

THE WORLD EVANGELICAL Alliance (formerly Fellowship) (WEA/WEF) owes a great debt of gratitude to Jeremy Mudditt. As Director of Paternoster Press, he pioneered a partnership with us in the publishing of most of our many publications and negotiated an evangelical publisher for a North American edition.

When I launched the *Evangelical Review of Theology* as Editor in October 1977, Jeremy took on the responsibility for Paternoster Press to publish it on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. It was a bold step to accept full financial responsibility for its subscriptions and sales. This relationship continues to the present. He then extended the partnership to include our monographs and most of our books. He also became the publisher for the WEF publications.

Jeremy devoted his whole life to evangelical publishing. In 1957 he joined the family business in London, Paternoster Press; he replaced his father as its Managing Director in 1975. I was privileged to work with him during the years when Paternoster was located in Exeter (1962-1992). Owing to ill health he sold the company to STL and moved with it to Carlisle (1992-2004) where he continued to work freelance with the company (which is now owned by Koorong Books, Australia) until recent months.

Jeremy died peacefully on April 21, 2010 after a long battle with cancer. He was only 71 years of age. As Dr Robin Parry wrote, 'He died, as he lived, in the hands of Pater Noster—"Our Father".' His passing marks the end of an era.

Jeremy was not only a colleague in publishing, but also a wonderful brother in Christ. When the memory of his publishing fades, the memory of him as a person will always remain. He was a man who loved and served his Lord with singleness of purpose; he was passionate to share the Good News of the Kingdom. In his profession, he was a detailed perfectionist and a man with a global missionary vision.

He will be remembered for the twinkle in his eye and his amazing knowledge of literature, art, music, history and theology. I remember him as an enchanting host at the restaurant whenever I was in England and visited Exeter. He was always courteous and gracious in all our business communications. Above all, he was a family man devoted to Meg, his wife (who died on Oct 12, 2009). It was a joy to receive their annual Christmas letter.

We will always thank the Lord for Jeremy and look forward to a wonderful reunion on the Day of the Resurrection.

Evangelical Theology in Africa: Ways, Perspectives, and Dilemmas

James Nkansah-Obrempong

KEYWORDS: *Association of Evangelicals in Africa, holistic ministry, political action, hermeneutics, poverty, ecumenism*

I Historical Background of Evangelical Movement in Africa

The evangelical movement as an organized institution in Africa started with the formation of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), formerly known as AEAM (Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar). Until this time, there was no organized and vibrant evangelical movement on the continent. AEA was founded on February 26, 1966 at Limuru, Kenya. It brought to that meeting 102 evangelical leaders from 23 African nations and missionaries from other nations. Its vision and mission were to:

- Create, promote and build a united movement of the body of Christ to promote evangelical unity, fellowship, and Christian witness in Africa

- Unite evangelicals in Africa for holistic ministries that make a difference
- Mobilize and empower evangelical churches and mission agencies to do effective ministries on the continent, and
- Transform Africa through evangelism and effective discipleship

To achieve this holistic, transformational ministry, AEA created eleven Commissions to address the different needs of the church and society at large. The commissions included the following: communications, evangelism and missions, ethics, peace and justice, Pan Africa women alliance, relief and development, theological and Christian education, youth and sports, prayer and church renewal, stewardship and accountability, evangelical focus on children and information technology. These commissions have been decentralized and they are currently located in different parts of Africa. The reason behind this decentralization was to bring the work and presence of the commissions near to the evangelical fellowships in the

James Nkansah-Obrempong (PhD Fuller), Vice-Chairman of the WEA Theological Commission, is Professor of Theology at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST). This is an edited version of a paper delivered at the WEA Theological Commission Consultation on 'Evangelical Theology and the Evangelical Movement in Latin America' held 24-25 July 2009 in São Paulo, Brasil.

regions where AEA serves. Some of the commissions are more active than others.

Today there are over seventy million evangelicals in Africa. These are made up of Christians from the mainline denominations—Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and others from some of the new mission founded churches. We must point out that there are many evangelicals in Africa who are not members of the AEA, but they hold the tenets of evangelical theology. Most of these Christians are in the mainline denominations in Africa and some of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Evangelical Christianity is growing very rapidly in Africa. There are 33 national Evangelical fellowships, 34 Associate Members—made up of para-church organizations, and 11 special members representing local churches in countries that have no evangelical fellowships. We will now look at evangelical theology, its ways, perspective, and dilemmas.

II Evangelical theology: Its Ways, Perspectives, and Dilemmas

1 Ways

The evangelical movement in Africa sees itself as the custodian of evangelical theology or orthodoxy, and upholds Christian values and ethos in the respective countries in Africa. There are certain characteristics or distinctives of evangelical theology. These includes the centrality of the gospel, faith in Christ as the means of salvation, faithfulness and obedience to God's Word

and acceptance of its authority for doctrine and practice, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in effecting transformation in peoples' lives. Evangelical theology simply is a trinitarian theology. John Stott in his book, *Evangelical Truth*, reiterates this notion of the evangelical faith.¹

- Evangelical theology upholds biblical revelation and the authority of Scripture for faith and practice
- Evangelical theology is commitment to the centrality of the cross of Christ for humanity's and creation's redemption
- Evangelical theology recognizes and accepts the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church to effectively apply the blessings of God to his people.

In summary, evangelical Christianity upholds these three fundamental ideas—the word, the cross, and the Holy Spirit. Any person who calls him/herself evangelical will hold to these fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Evangelicals in Africa have upheld these basic tenets of the Christian faith and have defended them.

These tenets of the Christian faith, evangelicals insist, have social, political, and economic implications for Christian engagement in society. Currently, the evangelical community in Kenya is actively engaged with the government of Kenya and other stakeholders in the constitution of Kenya on issues to do with abortion and religious equality and freedom. They have

¹ John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: a personal plea for unity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 28.

threatened to vote against the constitution in a referendum to be held in August 2010 if the rights for the unborn and religious liberty for all citizens are not protected in the constitution of Kenya.

However, some brands of African evangelicalism have not done so well on social, political, and economic issues that affect people's lives. Some of these groups tend to dichotomize the physical and the spiritual dimensions of human life. While there are good successes that can be celebrated by evangelicals in Africa, we are yet to see noticeable transformation in evangelical Christianity, especially its impact on the socio-political and economic life of many African societies.

On a positive note, since the early 1970s, African evangelicals have tried to develop an African evangelical theology that is truly biblical and truly African. This has been a rewarding but very difficult project. The growth of Christianity in recent years in Africa may be attributed to some of these initiatives by African evangelicals to make the faith relevant for the African Church. The challenge lies in being faithful to scripture while taking seriously the African cultural, religious, socio-economic and political contexts.

2 Perspectives

In Africa, different perspectives of the evangelical faith emerge in actual practice. Gabriel Fackre² gives six perspectives on evangelical faith:

- Fundamentalist—polemical and separatists

- Old evangelicals—emphasizing personal conversion and mass evangelism
- New evangelicals—acknowledging social responsibility and apologetics
- Justice and peace evangelical—socio-political activists
- Charismatic evangelicals—stressing the work of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, healing and worship, and
- Ecumenical evangelicals—concerned with unity and cooperation.

Fackre's categories are true of the evangelical theological perspectives found on the continent of Africa. We must point out that some of his characterization overlaps in actual practices in individual evangelical Christians, institutions or even denominations. For example, you might find a charismatic believer who is also engaged in socio political issues in his country, and very much committed to personal conversion and mass evangelism.

These different perspectives in evangelical theology most often pose great challenges for evangelical Christianity. For example, such different perspectives on matters of faith have caused tensions, fighting, and competition within the evangelical community. Unfortunately, accusations, competition, and disunity within the evangelical community make cooperation with other evangelical bodies elusive.

More recently, with the new hermeneutics gaining grounds in Africa, new theological perspectives are being developed in Africa some of which are very questionable and need some critical response from the evan-

² Referred to in Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 25f.

gelical community. But some of the concerns raised by some disadvantaged and marginalized people in society are worth addressing. For example, African women theologians are raising some fundamental theological issues relating to women's experiences that they feel are not being addressed by the current theological discourse. These are causing concerns for evangelical theology, and require evangelical theologians to take gender issues seriously, as well as paying attention to the marginalized, such as the poor, children, and the destitute in society.

These concerns again could push evangelical theology in a direction that will develop a vibrant theology that addresses human needs as well as one that engages the intellectual realities of modern Africa.

3 Dilemmas

The dilemmas evangelicals in Africa face are diverse. African is a huge continent and it not easy to foster a common continental voice. In the same way, it becomes difficult to foster evangelical unity on the continent. In this case, a lot depends on national Evangelical Alliances dealing with specific issues and concerns affecting them. The help one can give in such situations depends on whether the particular nation in question will seek assistance from the continental body, AEA. Here are some specific issues that have heightened evangelical dilemma in Africa.

a) Human Sexuality

The evangelical Christian community's response to homosexuality in Africa is very critical. The current debate on

homosexuality and the answers being provided by human rights and civil society activists need a critical response from the evangelical fraternity. The cultural and sociological issues associated with HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa and the resultant socio-economic impact on society is one of the challenges facing the evangelical church. Evangelical theology must address human sexuality in Africa. The church shies away from these issues any time they come up. To foster biblical moral values in a post-modern society can cause some tension. Often evangelicals have been accused of not being tolerant and sensitive to human plight; but this is not true.

b) Economic Challenges

Poverty and unemployment on the continent are critical issues for the church whose members are very poor because of some of the systemic evils in many African nations. For example, national statistics in Kenya shows the youth form 70% of the population. The majority of youth in Kenya are unemployed. This is true of many African nations. These concerns pose a challenge for the church. Does evangelical theology address these problems?

Questions of development and holistic mission are always a challenge for evangelical Christianity. The church in Africa speaks about holistic ministry, but in practice, they do not do holistic ministry. This can be frustrating for many, not only in the church but also outside of the church. Speaking prophetically to social, economic, political, and environmental concerns will always be a challenge to evangelical Christians in Africa. This is because

African evangelicals hold diverse views regarding social engagement. There are those who see social reforms as part of the mission of the church and there are those who do not see it that way.

c) Political Situation on the continent

The question of the church and its involvement with politics has come to the fore in recent years in many African nations. This was true in Kenya during the last general election. Many evangelical Christians got actively involved in politics by either seeking for an elected position or in campaigning for political parties. This caused uproar in the nation. For the first time Christian leaders, bishops, pastors, and others vied for political positions. The media followed the trend closely and held talk shows on the matter.

Evangelicals must give leadership in matters relating to social justice and economic emancipation for the poor and the marginalized and maintain its prophetic voice. The evangelical community knows they need to do this but they do not know how to do it.

Evangelical Christianity wants to engage civil society and advocate for good governance. What informs such engagement will always be a problem. Consequently, evangelical Christianity has not given clear direction in this area because of the diversity of opinions on this matter. This can be frustrating for many.

Another dilemma is dealing with dictators and national leaders who have lost their moral right to lead. What is happening in Zimbabwe and many other places in Africa is a big

challenge to evangelicals in Africa. We knew what we must do, but we do not speak candidly to the situation. Therefore evangelicals have lost their prophetic voice.

d) Spiritual Matters

The Christian population in Africa is fast growing, which means the evangelical movement must take seriously discipleship. Failure to disciple Christians can lead to lack of genuine Christian commitment on the part of the believer.

We lack good discipleship materials written from an African perspective. We need materials addressing some of the social, cultural, political, and economic issues that would help African Christians live as followers of Christ. The AEA commission for theological and Christian education was created to help meet this need.

Lack of trained personnel to pastor and disciple the growing numbers of people coming to faith in Jesus Christ continues to affect the spiritual maturity of Christians in Africa. This is because churches in Africa do not see the importance of training people for ministry. The cost involved in theological training is huge and many churches shy away from training. In order to meet these training needs that are relevant for the African church, theological institutions must see the need to develop curricula that address the pastoral concerns and needs of people. It must go beyond just giving basic theological training. Theological training must develop the intellectual life of the African Christian to be able to engage effectively the contextual issues facing Christians and the world.

Discipleship will always be a challenge for the evangelical church in Africa. This requires immediate attention. We must endeavour to help Christians integrate their faith into their day-to-day lives. There should be a public witness to evangelical Christianity. Theology and ethics must be held together.

e) Disunity among Evangelicals

There is great competition among the evangelical churches that is threatening the unity of the body of Christ in Africa. This has thwarted our efforts to work together and present one voice or a strong Christian witness on the continent. Despite this shortcoming, the evangelical movement is learning to engage with society in a way that has not been the case before.

However, there is tension between ecumenists and evangelicals. In many African states, this tension is real and it has fragmented the voice of the church. There is need to build bridges and mend fences to foster good working relationships with other Christian communities so that we can fulfill our God-given mandate to disciple the whole world.

f) Theology and Culture

Issues relating to theology and culture have moved to centre stage in evangelical theological reflection on the continent. African Christian theology developed as a means to deal with theologies which were imported into Africa.

The dilemma African evangelicals are facing is to develop an African Christianity that is authentically African and truly biblical. The concern to relate theology to culture without

accommodating or losing the essential core of evangelical theology can be a challenge. Unlike our Catholic counterparts who have given much reflection in this area, evangelical Christians in Africa are behind in this effort. It is important that we give theological direction on the complex issues culture raises for theology. It is encouraging to see the efforts made in this area by evangelical Christians in Africa who have published theological works on some theological issues.

g) Globalization

It is important for evangelical theology to foster, unity, integrity, and faithfulness to the evangelical faith in a pluralistic religious society so that the evangelical faith is not lost. In this case, evangelical theological institutions can play a critical role to ensure the purity of the evangelical tradition. This requires that care must be taken to employ professors who are committed to the essentials tenets of the evangelical faith as we have outlined earlier on in this paper. Along with globalization comes the incipient materialism and the consumeristic culture that are creeping into the church. The evangelical community must respond to these cultural developments from the west which are rapidly gaining ground in the African church. Modern methods and technology must be used carefully so that we are aware of the dangers but also exploit the benefits.

h) Theological Responsibility

Christianity is declining in the west and the evangelical church in Africa has a role to play in preserving evangelical Christianity for future posterity.

Yet, there are not many institutions in Africa training Christian leaders and workers for the future church. Where such training is taking place, there are no adequate resources for the training to be credible. There should be cooperation between the west and African institutions to help them to be successful in this mission. African evangelicals and others from the 'south' must live up to this theological responsibility.

Religious pluralism, liberal secularism, the prosperity gospel, issues relating to post-modern philosophy and the new theological hermeneutics being developed on the continent are important challenges for evangelical Christians. We must reflect, think, and provide guidance for evangelical Christians to respond to the issues raised by these ideologies. We must contend for the faith that was once delivered to us by our ancestors.