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Francis Anekwe Oborji

**Concepts of Mission:
The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology**

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006

ISBN-10: 1570756635 ISBN-13: 978-1570756634 240 pgs. Paperback
Amazon US \$24.08

Reviewed by Zachs-Toro Gaiya

PhD student in Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

In reviewing this piece of work, one needs to know the dominant influence of the author in the emergence of modern Roman Catholic missiology. The author, Francis Anekwe Oborji, is a Nigerian Roman Catholic priest, serving as professor of missiology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. He served as Executive Secretary of International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM), of which he is one of the founding officers. He is also the author of *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion*, AMECEA Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Kenya, 2005, as well as other articles and books.

In this work, *Concepts of Mission*, Oborji seeks to describe pertinent issues in mission in the past, present and future. Consequently, the book is divided into three parts - the first part is on the basic issues; the second part deals with issues in mission in historical perspective; and the third part describes new perspectives in mission. These three parts are divided into ten chapters with the last chapter summing up the arguments presented in the entire book. The author has one fundamental question in mind, "What is the subject matter of missiology today and how are these related to the practice or paradigms of mission?" Oborji notes that the subject matter of mission lies in the aspects of proclamation, evangelization, and contextual theologies. He describes the need to see these concepts of mission as unifying forces that define the discipline of missiology.

Oborji faithfully represents his constituency with an erudite presentation of the magisterium documents. He provides a thought-provoking African challenge that needs increasing awareness. As an ecumenical thinker, he interacts fairly with mainstream protestant missiologists and their work. The unity of the entire work is maintained despite the origin of the material as lecture notes for the teaching of missiology.

Looking at the different parts more closely, Oborji's work in part one has two chapters where the author discusses the growth and development of missiology, and the contributions made especially during the Vatican II period. During the Vatican II theological deliberations, Oborji admits that there was

largely a hazy cloud hovering the meaning and understanding of mission and evangelization. In an attempt to address this problem, Vatican II (re)formulated mission's understanding around three concerns: *missio ad gentes*, pastoral activity and re-evangelization or new evangelization. Until the reconceptualization of mission by the Vatican II, mission and Christian unity was largely unaddressed systematically by the Roman Catholic Church. However, in this forum, there is the recognition that repentance is needed and there should also be the realization that unity is anchored on "the common faith in Jesus Christ, his Gospel message . . . (p.16) and the Bible (as) the common sacred book for all Christians" (p.17). On the other hand, this council also adds, "that tradition and Scripture are bound closely . . . and both flow from the same wellspring" and make up a "single deposit of the Word of God." The emphasis on traditions here naturally causes a peculiar divide between Catholics and Protestants despite the ecumenical disposition of the council.

In part two, Oborji presents in five chapters various mission models and their historical development. In particular, he reflects on such models as conversion, church planting, adaptation and inculturation, interreligious dialogue and *Missio Dei*. According to Oborji, the historical developments in these mission models are primarily influenced by popes, theologians and missiologists from the three 'branches' of Christianity (i.e., Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants). He recognizes the immense contributions of individuals such as Voetius, Warneck, McGavran, Kraemer, Nida, Freytag, Vicedom, Hoekendijk, Stamoolis, Yannoulatos, and Ruett. Here, Oborji was far from making any claim to be describing the history of mission. Instead it is a summary of some major historical developments that shaped Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant views on mission, thus the materials here generally provide good reading for all Christians. In addition, Oborji tries to make the various concepts simple and understandable for his readers, yet without being simplistic in his treatment of the issues described. Concluding this section, Oborji warned against a "one-sided" mandate of the Church in her missionary activities. In her proclamation of the gospel, there should be an emphasis on justice because it is aimed at the restoration of the "dignity of the human being". When justice is not pursued, the church is working "against the (very) nature of mission itself" (p.149), and consequently working against herself.

In part three, Oborji turns his attention to handling new perspectives in mission. He discusses new perspectives in mission in the space of three chapters, including ecumenical dialogue and contextual theologies, particularly from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Acknowledging the differences that exist among the groups, Oborji appeals for a fraternal attitude and collaboration among Christians and especially missiologists, but then added that this "does not mean renouncing one's own or ones church's principles and beliefs" because "true ecumenism . . . must respect doctrinal and theological convictions" (p. 176). For Oborji, four major areas need collaboration amongst Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations. These areas include

concerns for human dignity, peace and reconciliation, art and science, and pastoral care (p. 173).

Oborji's faithfulness to the Roman Catholic magisterium and tradition is obvious, yet he tried to sustain a fair balance by engaging other mission concerns that are largely outside his immediate Roman Catholic purview. He is mainly explicating contextual theologies emerging from the Third or Two-Third's world and from within the Roman Catholic perspective. His perspective is helpful because it brings a non-western interpretation and understanding of the missions' traditions of the church to the non-Catholic Western reader. He describes concerns that caused the development of contextual theologies and illuminates their consistent appeal in non-western regions of the world. By interacting with these various brands of contextual theologies, Oborji reveals their quest to "relate the Christian message to the socio-cultural, political, and economic reality of their region" (p. 181), and "their contributions to the development of the common Christian heritage" (p. 181) thus creating theologies that best fit their unique non-western settings, yet have global applicability. For instance, Oborji describes the dawning of liberation theologies in Latin America; notes Christological formulations and their implications for humanity and structures of power in Asia (India, Korea, and Japan); and explains African theological concerns about Christological and Ecclesiological issues and lately with Pneumatology and hermeneutically related issues. Such Christological formulation especially from Africa is "from below" rather than "from above." As an African missiologist, his contribution in describing these non-western global and missiological trends is invaluable.

In an era of globalization, Oborji's work is significant. Christian missiologists from the Northern Hemisphere should appreciate and engage with the emerging voices from these non-western settings who are confronted with realities and issues that are unique to their cultural and political settings. Since "Third World theologians are now engaged in a fruitful and mutually critical dialogue . . . the emergence of theological reflection . . . (from) the Third World today should not create anxiety" but rather a "sincere dialogue with a view (to) healing and reconciliation" (pp. 204-205). While not sacrificing theological excellence and fidelity to Scripture, "it is necessary to encourage (the) exchange of opinions and information (and personnel) among local churches . . ." (p. 204). This correlates well with the biblical account in Acts 13 whereby the church's gifts and best personnel were jointly channeled for mission works. This would also demonstrate our unity in diversity.

On the other hand, there is a flaw in Oborji's description of contemporary trends shaping missions in the non-western regions. Significantly, Oborji's reflections omitted the significant place played by contemporary Pentecostal missions especially in his discussion of mission in the majority world. In this regard, he ignored or downplayed the reality of the exponential growth of this movement as depicted by works of people like David Barrett and Philip

Jenkins who had shown (via statistics) and missiological reflections that not only does the majority world now contain the largest number of Christians (or Christian movements) on earth, but Pentecostalism has the largest and fastest growing missions and churches on earth. Unfortunately, Oborji did not give much attention to this phenomenon in his work. Also, conspicuously missing is how African migration in the “Diaspora” is revitalizing and reshaping Christianity globally. This new trend is gradually replacing some earlier movements (e.g., the cross-cultural missionary enterprise, McGavran’s homogenous unit principle (HUP), short-term missions, etc.) that have contributed to the growth of Christianity. For example, in Europe a Nigerian leads God’s Embassy and in North America, a Ghanaian leads The Calvary worship center in Burnaby, British Columbia. Both are examples of churches with non-Africans in the majority but led by Africans. Additionally, a discussion on the contributions women in mission is also missing, though they have made significant contributions to Christian missions worldwide. In this same light, Latin American and Asian missiologists are under-represented, where the rapid proliferation of Charismatic Renewal movements within the Roman Catholic faith is found. This growth, in turn, is a revitalization of the Roman Catholic Christianity.

Despite these flaws, Oborji’s work should be used especially when read in conversation with other authors who will make up for the omissions. To this end, I strongly recommend his book to students and faculty members who need an introductory or general guide to missiology presented from a non-western and Roman Catholic perspective.

T. Desmond Alexander

From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth

Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, 2008. pb, pp. 208. \$16.57 US\$ on Amazon

ISBN: 978-1-84474-285-1

Reviewed by Andrew G. Wildsmith, Scott Christian University

Dr. T. D. Alexander (PhD, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland) is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Postgraduate Studies at The Union Theological College in Belfast. He specializes in the Pentateuch and Biblical Theology, but has written in other areas as well.

Alexander aims to describe the Biblical meta-story from Genesis to Revelation in order to answer the foundational questions: "Why was the earth created?" and "What is the reason for human existence?" His method is to start at the end of the story, with Revelation 20-22, on the assumption that, "a story's conclusion provides a good guide to the themes and ideas dominant throughout" (p.10). He sees very strong links between Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22, and traces the central themes in these chapters throughout the Bible. He has arrived at this approach by observing what the individual Biblical books say, how they relate to one another and how they work together to form the larger picture of God's intentions for us and our world. Whether we describe this as a hermeneutical circle or as a process of analysis and synthesis, it comes from a lifetime of reading and meditating on the individual parts of the Bible while also discerning how, as perceived by the eye of faith, these parts relate to one another or fit together to form the larger meta-story.

For example, he sees the New Jerusalem (Rev. 20:2) and the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8) as God's dwelling places. There He lives in perfect fellowship with human beings who experience the presence of God. In Genesis 3 mankind's rebellion ruins that perfect relationship so God withdraws His direct presence from earth. Alexander starts with Eden as a sacred garden where Adam and Eve meet face to face with God in perfect peace, and describes how humans sin and are expelled from God's presence. Alexander then proceeds through Scripture highlighting the various ways in which God's presence is revealed in the tabernacle, the temple in Jerusalem, the church, and finally in the New Jerusalem. It is Jesus' intervention that climaxes God's presence in the fallen world and Jesus' atoning death, resurrection and ascension that provides the gateway to the road leading to the New Jerusalem.

Alexander uses the same approach to deal with his other chosen themes: re-establishing the sovereignty of God with humanity as His viceroys; destroying the devil who is the source of the evil that Man chooses in the Garden; accomplishing the redemption of creation through the sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb; reinvigorating the lives of people from every nation as holy people in the New Jerusalem where the tree of life reappears as a major symbol; living securely among the people of God in New Jerusalem a theme which is drawn from Revelation's description of New Jerusalem's foundations, walls and gates that are embossed with names of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. This summary of his themes fails to uncover the riches of Alexander's exegesis and connects the themes with the meta-story: the actual delight of the book is in its details.

Let me summarize his method of presentation: Alexander identifies a central theme found in Revelation and Genesis and then follows that theme as it develops through the whole Biblical narrative from beginning to end. The emphasis is on following the theme within its historical development, not on identifying a historical period and then examining how the themes are understood in that period. The historical events of the progress of redemption are the foundation and background for the themes so that the book's subtitle is correctly given as "An Introduction to Biblical Theology" rather than "A History of Redemption".

Two features of his approach were very helpful. First, at the beginning of each chapter he summarizes the main themes of the previous chapters and how they intertwine to form the Biblical meta-story. He then introduces how the new chapter relates to those previous themes. The last chapter is his conclusion which summarizes the main findings of the whole book. Second, Alexander also skillfully applies some the themes he has uncovered to the lives of believers today because he believes that, "Good theology always has pastoral implications." (p. 11)

Alexander also avoids twin disasters: 1) trying to define the relationship between modern science and the opening chapters of Genesis and, 2) trying to adjudicate between rival eschatological systems in Revelation. He simply (and wisely) avoids the first, and acknowledges and briefly describes the second (pp. 117-118). He does note that all the systems agree that Satan is completely defeated at the end, a point that is related to his "destroying the devil" theme. Alexander remains focused on his main aim and refuses to be drawn into important discussions meant for another time. While his approach to Revelation and to the relationship between Israel and the Church reveal a generally amillennial leaning, this is not trumpeted, and his careful tracing of the themes that connect the OT and NT people of God remains helpful to Christians who might take a different approach or who think they are neutral in regard to that aspect of the eschatology debate.

Alexander is a British evangelical and most of what he writes will resonate with all those who trust that the Bible is true and authoritative. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is one of a growing number of books that attempt to, in one way or another, illuminate the Bible's grand meta-narrative. These include: Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004; Rodger Crooks, *One Lord, One Plan, One People: A Journey Through the Bible From Genesis to Revelation*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011; Daniel Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992; Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*, Nottingham: IVP, 2003; Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-Line of the Bible*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2003; Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Books, 1988. As noted above, the structure of Alexander's book focuses more on the Biblical Theology side of the story, while some of the books just listed focus more on the historical side, VanGemeren's for example.

Whereas *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is not written for an African audience, Alexander deals with the whole story of salvation from Genesis to Revelation, the story of God's relationship with human beings, and this is of as much interest and importance to Africans as it is to Christians everywhere. Like practically every person brought up in a family, church or culture that has some inkling of Biblical stories, African believers inherit the Bible as a mostly unconnected series of narrative fragments. Christians, including African Christians, training as church leaders need to know how these fragments connect, and need to know all the other parts of the Bible usually left out of Sunday School classes, in order to have a maturing grasp of God's story of the progress of redemption. I have taught such a course in two pastoral training colleges in Africa. In one of those classes a first year diploma student asked a question about Saul that eventually revealed that he was conflating King Saul with the Saul who became the apostle Paul. If students come in with a knowledge of the Bible that is limited to twelve baskets of fragments, they should go out with a synopsis of Biblical history in chronological order and with some awareness of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, particularly of the theological progress of our redemption.

For lecturers seeking a textbook for such a course, in Africa and elsewhere, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is useful depending on the cultural setting and the previous knowledge of the students. I will use it as the main textbook for an MA level course called Progress of Redemption, though the lectures will organize the Biblical books into historical and chronological eras with certain common Biblical themes highlighted in each era.

Libraries of theological schools and colleges in Africa should have this book in their stacks, and some will benefit from using it as a textbook at the first degree level and above.

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Richard J. Gehman

**From Death to Life:
The Birth of the Africa Inland Church in Kenya, 1895-1945**

C-M Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2013. Paperback, 356 pages.

900 Ksh in Kenya. \$21.50 on Amazon.com

ISBN: 978-1-62890-379-9.

Reviewed by Georgette Short, Lecturer at Scott Christian University

Dr. Richard J. Gehman, a retired AIM missionary from the USA, served the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Kenya for 36 years. He was a lecturer or principal of Scott Theological College (now Scott Christian University) in Machakos, Kenya for most of that time. He is the author of several other books, including *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (East African Educational Publishers) and *Learning to Lead: The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa* (Oasis International Ltd).

When Peter Cameron Scott led his small band of pioneer missionaries from the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) to Kenya in 1895, their first few years of ministry were not promising. Some missionaries resigned while others, including Scott himself, succumbed to deadly tropical diseases or were weakened by famine and drought. Today however, the AIC is the largest Protestant church in Kenya, with local churches in almost every part of the country. It has experienced remarkable growth and development, especially through the sacrificial efforts of its earliest African members.

Richard Gehman's fascinating book *From Death to Life* describes the first 50 years of the AIC in Kenya from its inception in 1895 until 1945. His detailed, scholarly research has unearthed hundreds of pictures, testimonies and stories about how the AIC began which highlight the challenges and advances these first missionaries and Kenyan believers faced.

Gehman sees three phases in the growth of the AIC during this period. Phase 1, from 1895-1901, covers the very early years, when missionary resignations, famine and death so affected the work that it almost failed. The small number of Wakamba who became believers were the reason why the work continued as they shared the gospel that had changed their lives with others in their community. Living in the Mumbuni area, as I do, it is heartening to see what a pivotal role this village played in these early years in Kenya.

In Phase 2, from 1901-1929, evangelists and teachers were trained and the gospel was taken to other tribes within Kenya. Some of the challenges

faced in this period include enculturation issues and the growth of nationalism, but the biggest challenge was that posed by the missionaries' reaction to female circumcision. The missionary stand against this deeply held cultural practice, one still very much disputed today, caused many African believers to leave the church in this time period.

Phase 3, 1929-1945, deals with the development of Bible schools and how AIM was administered. The 1930's and 1940's were demanding times as the Second World War restricted movement of missionaries and drew both Westerners and Kenyans into the conflict. However the church grew and spread during this period and slowly moved toward being truly indigenous.

One strength of this book is its individual accounts of missionaries and Kenyan believers that Gehman discovered in the course of his research. These touching stories highlight what God can do through fallible but committed expatriate and African believers. Gehman shows how the first people the missionaries led to Christ were excited about their new faith and how keen they were to pass it on to others despite the challenges and opposition they faced. These remarkable African Christians are the main reason the gospel spread. Without them the AIC would not be what it is today.

Gehman provides statistics for various AIM stations around Kenya, charting their growth or decline. This, along with descriptions of the work being done by missionaries and nationals, and many wonderful photographs give a more complete picture of how the work of the AIC progressed.

The author's concluding section utilises the metaphor of parenting to describe this early period of the AIC. It is a very apt way to look at the suffering involved in birthing the AIC, the guidance the early believers received from the missionaries, the education they desired, and how the missionaries, like all parents, surrendered control to their adult offspring as they came into maturity.

As Dr. Joseph B. Onyango Okello says on the back cover of the book, from what Gehman records of the birth of the AIC, it is a miracle that it remains up to today. Considering the way the church began and the serious challenges it faced, it truly was remarkable that it not only survived, but thrived. God's hand can be seen in the lives of the early missionaries and their first converts as well as in the way he brought good out of potentially disastrous situations.

This is a wonderfully readable book which captures not only what the first AIM missionaries and the early Kenyan converts did to build the church, but also how their faith in Christ impacted their lives and the lives of those they came into contact with. I am looking forward to reading his next instalment.

The book is useful as a resource for AIC members and the libraries of AIC Bible colleges as well as all those interested in missions and church history.