

Editorial: The African Church in the Year 2000

Five years ago Scott Theological College began the *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. Much has happened in Africa and in African Christianity since that time. New post-graduate schools of theology appeared in Nairobi. New magazines like *Beyond* and *Step* carved their niche in the media. David Barrett published his *World Christian Encyclopedia* and demonstrated that 17% of the world's evangelicals now live in Africa. Church attendance continued to grow. Parachurch agencies like InterVarsity, Life Ministry and Navigators increased their profile in Universities and Schools throughout the continent. Hundreds of young African evangelicals have returned home with doctorates in various theological disciplines. Evangelical Fellowships emerged in Kenya and Zambia. The Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar(AEAM) extended its influence. The Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa(CTEA) facilitated the enrichment and upgrading of hundreds of theological schools across the continent. Independent churches organized themselves into the Association of African Independent Churches(AAIC). African evangelicals like Tokunboh Adeyemo, Tite Tienou, David Gitari and (albeit posthumously) Byang Kato published books and articles that attracted attention from Christians all over the world. The 1980's have been auspicious years for evangelical Christianity on this continent.

Yet despite the signs of growth that the last five years brought the task of building and perfecting the Megachurch of Africa remains daunting. How much like a lion in winter the Africa Church appears. Like a lion she is impressive in her size and physical strength. Yet the spiritual chill of traditionalism and clericalism cling to her like a winter frost. The need for renewal remains. What would the editor of *EAJET* writing in the year 2000 have to say about African Christianity in the late 80's and 90's? Dream with me for a moment

EAJET celebrates in this year of 2000 AD its 18th year of publication. Looking backward over the last decade and a half this editor can only comment in astonishment on the way God has skillfully shepherded the Church in this continent. Consider a few of the more remarkable developments:

1) **The Church and Culture.** This broad issue, so hotly debated in the 70's and 80's, has seen a glorious resolution of conflict. Problems remain but consider what has transpired. The dualism between sacred and secular that so plagued the churches 15-20 years ago has been overcome. The worldliness that this dualism brought into Christianity (for it segregated whole areas of life such as business, money, the realm of the spirits, public justice, work, urbanization and its effects, art, etc. from the rule of Christ and the transforming

power of the Gospel) has at last been countered by vigorous movements of the church that seek to bring all of modern African life under the explicit Lordship of Christ and seek to redeem God's good creation in Africa which has been so ruined by sin, for God's glory once again. The most significant sign of this transformation of culture has been the rise of several major Christian universities in East Africa. These universities, founded by major Christian denominations as well as a consortium of some of the independent churches, offer a wide range of majors and have gained respect around the continent and in the west for their high standards. The most notable feature of these institutions is the vigorous Christian commitments and perspectives they bring into their teaching. The approach to politics, art, science, sociology, psychology etc, has not only been *accomodated* to the Christian faith but rather these truly Christian universities have *transformed* the way these subjects are understood. A truly Biblical worldview has made this transforming vision possible. These universities are producing a new generation of African leadership in all fields, leaders who because of their distinctively Biblical worldview respect the God-giveness of much of African culture and preserve it from simply being swept aside by modernization. A new African culture is coming into being, one that preserves African cultural authenticity by centering it more fully on the Triune God who has created it and seeks to develop its potential for his glory.

2) **Church and State.** The church/state conflicts which emerged in Africa in the 70's and 80's were finally overcome in the 90's. The harassment of churches and clergy which included closure and detention finally came to an abrupt halt when African political leadership found they could not silence the prophetic voice of the churches and grudgingly accepted the church's role as the conscience of the state. Though some churches lost courage and slipped into a cowardly silence as the rule of law was threatened by power-hungry politicians most persisted in their cry that God's law, as represented in the 10 commandments, are supreme over all human laws and authorities and faithfully continued to act as God's representatives in defending his law. This view that successful nation-building ultimately comes from submission to God's moral law saved Africa from political and economic disaster. The church was able to keep its credibility as a representative of God's law in society by refusing to encourage revolutionary movements on the one hand or by seeking positions of privilege and power in government on the other. The faithful proclamation of both law and Gospel produced the legions of Christian moral crusaders who were able to renew a love and fear of God's law throughout society. Totalitarian trends withered in the moral climate created in the nation by Bible-believing and preaching churches.

3) **Church and mission.** The last 15 years have seen the evangelisation and discipling of millions of East African muslims. All-African interdenominational mission agencies proliferated and thousands of East African young people gave their lives for fulltime service in other African countries as well in service to the rapidly declining nations of Europe and North America. AEAM, IVCF-Africa, Life Ministry, Navigators and a host of other para-church agencies paved the way for this new student volunteer

movement. Theological colleges and seminaries were filled to capacity with these newly recruited young people seeking to be equipped for both church ministry and cross-cultural mission.

4) **Church and Theology.** The theological anemia that had plagued the church in the 70's and 80's has been largely overcome. Liberal theology which nearly destroyed spiritual vitality with its denial of the authority of Scriptures, the transcendence of God, the divine lordship of Jesus Christ and the necessity of the new birth had become a nearly forgotten footnote of African Church History during the 90's when it was bypassed by a surge of top quality books by African evangelical writers establishing evangelical supremacy in the areas of systematic theology, philosophy of religion, comparative religion, new testament, church history, christian education, ethics, preaching and pastoralia. Like gnosticism in the 2nd and 3rd centuries the liberalism that had infiltrated protestant and catholic theology so mightily in the first 75 years of the twentieth century shrank into obscurity during the last 25 years of the century due to the evangelical theological renaissance that illuminated the continent.

. . . . but it is not the year 2000 and the future that we dream about has not become a reality. Are we foolish to engage in such triumphalist visions? No more foolish than the Church of the first century which proclaimed Christ faithfully and confidently and released the power of the Spirit into the Roman empire, transforming it intellectually, culturally, politically and spiritually before the third centennial of Christ's death and resurrection was celebrated. Work and Pray. Then watch the transforming vision take shape.

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