

## How to Tell the True Church from the False

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Have you ever walked around one of the great cities on this continent—say, Harare or Nairobi or Lagos—and been struck by the vast array of churches scattered throughout? Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans, Adventists, Holy Spirit churches, Apostolic Churches, Zionist churches etc., dot the urban and rural landscapes of Africa. For many observers the multiplicity of denominations is the great scandal of Christianity. For others, the wide diversity of groups is a testimony of Christianity's dynamism and vigor. In this chapter we want to tackle some questions that explore the differences that divide Christianity and that wrestle with the vexing question of the boundaries of the true church. In the course of our exploration we will seek to discover those essential marks or notes that distinguish genuine Christianity from her many counterfeits.

**1. How many different denominations and church groups are there in Africa? Why the great number? What are some major differences between these various groups?**

### **The fact of Diversity**

The church in Africa is a wildfire of diversity. Thousands of denominations with vastly different theologies, polities and liturgies compete for the African soul. Take as representative the case of Nigeria. Christianity in this nation of some 70 million people and 500 tribes is represented by a large Roman Catholic presence (10% of the population), an even larger Protestant presence of well over 16 million (appx 23% of population) distributed among 35 different denominations and a smaller percentage of African independent churches of over 600 separate varieties! What accounts for such diversity? Two reasons can be suggested here. One concerns the need among groups with a strong adherence to the Bible to preserve biblical distinctions in areas that are secondary and yet important but about which no consensus seems to exist. Areas such as baptism, polity and spiritual gifts have largely accounted for differences among many truly Christian denominations. Thus Baptists seek to baptize only those who can profess faith while Anglicans and Presbyterians baptize infants. Some groups insist on the rule of bishops, others only of elders and pastors. Pentecostals emphasize the charismatic gifts of healing and speaking in tongues while others do not. These differences are important but not of the essence of the Gospel, that is to say they do not affect in any major way the message of salvation by faith in Christ. For this reason

denominations who differ in these secondary areas often cooperate in evangelism, mission and theological education to name a few areas. They differ in non-essentials but hold firmly to saving essentials.

#### Critical Divisions between the Churches

More critical is the second reason for the splintering of the churches in Africa. When churches differ over essential matters like the authority of scripture and salvation through Christ, separation must inevitably occur. This separation is often total because no adequate basis for unity exists when fundamentals of the Christian faith have been denied. Broadly speaking, the different denominations and churches can be categorized into four groups by their respective views on religious authority. Denominations and churches that accept the Bible as the infallible and inspired word of God and authoritative in all matters of faith and practice can be broadly classified as evangelical. Evangelical type denominations have their theological roots in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century which held strongly to the principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). Liberal or Ecumenical protestantism is a label for those denominations and churches that have drifted from adherence to the authority and reliability of scripture and have substituted human reason and social or cultural consensus as the basis of religious authority. Such churches accept the higher critical study of the scripture and argue that such study has shown the Bible to be a flawed and merely human document and therefore not in any unique way the word of God. A third group consists of those who accept church tradition as equal to or greater than scripture. Roman Catholicism is sometimes held up as the great exemplar of this third view of authority. A final type of church would be all those who base their religious authority on direct revelation, either through an inspired prophet or through members of the congregation in general. Many of the independent churches in Africa would fit in this category. Thus while many differences that seem to divide Christians are small and still allow for a good deal of cooperation, other differences are critical in nature and have caused deep and abiding schisms that are not easily breached.

2. As we examine some of the Biblical words for the church such as body, bride, temple and called out ones what definition of the nature of the true church emerges?

#### The Church as the Body of Christ

The church, in some passages of the New Testament, is described as the body (*soma*) of Christ. In Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians there are many references to the church in such terms. In many cases it refers to the Christian community, the church as a unified divine organ (Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 10:17, 12:13, 27). All believers in Christ are interrelated, enjoying the same position and sharing in the same dynamic relationship to Christ irrespective of their different backgrounds (1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Eph. 2:16). All believers must receive nourishment and growth in Jesus alone. He holds the church - His body - together (Col. 2:19). All members have roles

(functions) to play in building up fellow believers (Eph. 4:12, 16). Christ the Saviour leads and possesses the church (Eph. 5:23, 30). The church as the body of Christ rightly belongs to her Lord because He suffered to establish the church (Col. 1:24). Christ's peace should rule the totality of believers who are called members of one body (Col. 3:15). In I Cor. 12:12-27, the Apostle Paul explains the interplay of the many members of Christ's body. Each member of the body has a distinct function just as do the parts of the human body (12:15-17). These various members have been designed by God (12:18-20), to function effectively for the good of the whole body.

#### **The Church as the Bride of Christ**

In other passages in the Bible, the church is called the bride (*numthe*). The Old Testament depicts the joy that exists between the bride and the bridegroom (Isaiah 61:10; Psalm 19:5; 62:3; Jer. 7:34; 16:9). The beauty of the glorified church is portrayed like that of the bride in the presence of her bridegroom (John 3:29; Rev. 21:2, 9, 18:23). Christ has the church at the centre of his program for all of history (Eph 1:22,23). Christ plans to present his bride as blameless before his heavenly Father (I Thess. 5:23). Just as the term "body" points to the cooperative oneness of the church, so the term "bride" points to her purity and holiness.

#### **The Church as the Temple of God**

Furthermore the church is described as a spiritual temple (*naos*). In the Old Testament the temple referred most commonly to the physical structure erected in Jerusalem. But the Old Testament concept did not stop there. Certain passages make clear that the physical temple was but a type of a greater temple, a heavenly sanctuary which was holy to God (Ps. 11:4, 18:6). The book of Revelation speaks of God in His heavenly glorious temple (*naos*) (14:15, 15:6, 16:1,17). Seen in light of its metaphorical and theological usage the term "temple" refers to the spirit-filled body of the Christians, which is said to be a habitation of God. Hence, individual believers in Christ are called His temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19-20). Believers are God's own because the Spirit indwells them making them God's possession forever (Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 6:16). The singular use of the word "Temple" when referring to the church emphasizes the oneness of the church community and reinforces the fact that Christians are to avoid disunity and division.

#### **Other names for the Church**

"Called out ones" (*hetois*) and "Saints" (*hagios*) are two other designations of the church. In the cultic sense, called out ones or holy ones are those who are dedicated to God, fully belonging to him and set apart for His service and good pleasure alone (Is. 48:2, 52:1; Matt. 4:5). The word "church" (*ekklesia*) appears 115 times in the New Testament. Only twice, the term is used to refer to non-christian assembly (Acts 19:32-39,41). Two times it is used to refer to the children of Israel in the Old Testament. In other words, the term is primarily used to refer to the saints, i.e. believers in Jesus Christ. In other places the

church is linked to the Kingdom of God (Matt 16:18) not as its embodiment but as its witness. The witness of the church to the worldwide and historically progressive spread of the rule of Christ over all of life reminds us that in addition to the oneness of the church as a body and the holiness of the church as bride, temple and called-out saints, the church must proclaim (as did the Apostles) the message of the Kingdom and seek its extension throughout the world in mission.

Can we draw these various word pictures together and come up with a definition of the church that would incorporate the truths embedded in each term? One suggested definition for the church would be the following: All believers on earth and in heaven who belong to Christ and are committed to the Apostolic Gospel, to biblical / oneness, to God-centered holiness and to worldwide mission. Local congregations around the world from countless denominations who follow Christ and embrace these four marks of oneness, holiness, apostolicity and global or catholic mission-orientation are therefore but parts of the one true church.

3. What do we mean by the terms "visible" and "invisible" church? What is the relationship of the two? What are the marks of a true church as taught by evangelical church fathers like Luther and Calvin? How applicable is their teaching on the marks of the church in Africa today?

#### The Church: Visible and Invisible

In the New Testament the church is declared to be the central purpose of God in this present age. The church as it is known today is the outcome of Christ's life during His earthly ministry. The church actually began to function after the resurrection and ascension of Christ (I Corinthians 15:20, Colossians 1:18). One concept of the church as presented in the New Testament is that of an organism, a living union of all true believers in Christ. However, another concept is that of the local church - a company of professing believers in a particular geographic area (I Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:2, Phillipians 1:1). These two different concepts of the church are sometimes referred to as "invisible" and "visible" in nature. The nature of the church is both local and universal in scope. The "invisible" church specifically refers to all who are saved in the present age, whether they are now on earth or in heaven. Thus, the term includes all genuine believers who constitute the true body of Christ, both the living and dead believers (saints) in Christ (Matt. 16:18, Acts 9:31, I Corinthians 6:4, Ephesians 1:22, 23; 3:16, 21; 4:1-15). The one true church of God consists of all redeemed individuals "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, worshipping and confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, to the glory and God the Father (Phillipians 2:10, Revelation 5:9; 7:9, Col. 3:11). All members of the church find their unity in the risen Christ. On the other hand the "visible" church refers to an assembly of professing believers in Christ, who have been baptized and who are formed into a body to do God's will. So, a "visible" church includes the universal fellowship of believers on earth who meet visibly in particular local assemblies. They are visible and tangible in operation, demonstrating that believers belong to Jesus Christ. Generally speaking, the

church includes the whole local body which worships Christ in a locality (I Cor. 11:18; 14:4-19). The professing believers in the "visible" church may not all be true believers. The visible church is a mixed group. Some who attend church, though orthodox, may not be true believers, and therefore need to receive Christ (Matt. 6:21-23). All that hear the Gospel are not necessarily saved. But only those who are genuinely saved are the true members of the invisible church. They are identified as members of the universal church. These have been called, sealed, and sanctified to be saints in Christ. The spiritual house (I Peter 2:5, 9) is not simply the local church, nor even a group of believers. It is rather the mystical body of Christ -- the church universal.

#### **Luther and Calvin on the Marks of the Church**

Martin Luther, the key figure of the sixteenth century Reformation, believed in the four classic attributes of the church. He declared that "The church is holy, because its members are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It is one, because it has one Lord and is united to Him; it is apostolic, because it is founded on the proclamation of the apostle, the gospel of Christ; It is catholic, or universal, because it is not restricted to one people, nation or time." Yet how are these attributes detected in practice. Luther advised that two important notes be looked for: pure preaching of the Word of God and the correct administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution.

Similarly, John Calvin, another key church reformer, stated that the church includes all the elect, the dead and the living. "The church is catholic, that is universal. It cannot be divided, for this would mean that Christ is divided, and that is impossible. Its head is Christ, and through Him all the elect grow up together as one body." He believed that the Catholic church is "invisible" and is known only to God but that at the same time it overlaps the visible church, which though comprised of particular churches in different localities yet embraces all the living believers throughout all the world "who consent to the same truth of divine doctrine and are united by the bond of the same religion." In the visible church are many hypocrites, mere professing Christians who are mixed up with the genuine ones and have all the external rights and privileges belonging to that name. However, Calvin insisted that all Christians should associate themselves with the external communion of the church, even though the church be imperfect. Calvin emphasized the fact that none of the elect is perfect, and that they should stand daily in need of the forgiving grace of God.

What are the visible marks of the church that demonstrate her genuineness? Following the reformers we would suggest Biblical teaching and Biblical practice as the two sides of the one true church.

#### **Loyalty to Biblical Teaching and Practice**

The Bible forms the basis for faith and practice of members of a true church of Christ. Members give their total loyalty to the Word of God for it is there that the living Christ speaks to his church and the true church recognizes his voice. The true church is the one that is sound in doctrine, pure in life,

and "ready to do every good work" (Titus 1:9, 2:12). The true church teaches the plain truth of the Word of God openly to every man's conscience in the light of God.

Another mark of a true church is demonstrated when members walk in love because God is love (I John 4:7-12). Believers love both God and His Word, as well as fellow members in Christ. Members in the body of Christ also walk in holiness because they have been called to be holy. Therefore they actively resist all forms of evil in order to live a holy life based on the knowledge of their new position in Christ (I John 4:7-12). Members limit their fellowship by walking only in the light and in the wisdom of God since the former have become imitators of God (I John 1:5-7; Ephesians 4:32, 5:15; James 1:5, 3:17).

Therefore, a true church accepts the total record of the Bible as divinely inspired, authoritative and absolutely trustworthy. Members of a true church preach that the only way of salvation for mankind is in Christ Jesus (Acts 4:12). The life of the church that is in genuine union with Christ is to be Spirit-controlled. Both pastor-teachers and church members are to be loyal to Scripture--the Word of God. Christ is the only supreme Lord over their lives. They strive to live holy and loving lives in accordance with the Word. By so doing, believers of true churches become living witnesses of the Gospel of Christ to the lost world which deeply needs salvation in Christ.

It appears there is much to be desired today if the above marks of a true church are to be powerfully demonstrated by the church in Africa. Some denominational churches and para-church organizations do not seem to have the sound doctrine coupled with sound practice that is taught in the Scriptures. Many churches stumble on in confusion about what constitutes a genuine church or body of Christ. There must be a renewing wind of the Spirit to revive both orthodoxy and orthopraxy within our divided congregations.

4 In light of both our definition of the church and the marks of a true church, what evaluation should an African evangelical make of some of the cults that are found in Africa such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and other cultic groups?

#### **The Cultic Presence in Africa**

Cults are on the increase in Africa. More and more new cults and sects are emerging with new doctrines which seem to be diametrically opposed to the Christian faith. Jesus Christ strongly warned His disciples that many cults would seek to counterfeit the genuine Gospel that sets people free (Matt. 6:21-23). Why do cults thrive? Experts suggest that cults grow among "people who have no solid Christian background." Nominalism in our churches make thousands susceptible to dangerous cults which mix Christianity with Paganism (Christopaganism). An outstanding specialist on cults stated that, "These cultists emulate Christianity: their voluminous writings are sprinkled with biblical quotations; they talk much about Jesus and Jehovah, and claim to have the only true interpretation of the Scriptures."

The most common cults present in Africa include the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventism, and the Saints of the Latter Days (Mormonism), just to mention a few. The steady rise of cults is partially due to the decline of

authentic Christianity in the mainline denominations.

#### **The Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists and Mormons**

The Seventh-Day Adventists worship on the Sabbath as in Judaism. Adventism teaches that when one is saved it is only "past sins" that are forgiven. They do not believe that anybody is now saved forever or already has everlasting life as stated in the Bible (John 3:16, I John 5:12, 13). Also their teachers and preachers teach and proclaim that tithing is essential to salvation. They teach that only those who are good enough can get to heaven. This, of course, is salvation by works and not by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

In addition Adventist theology teaches that the prophecy of Revelation 12-17 points to the experience and work of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The followers believe that the writings of Mrs. White are as inspired as the Holy Scriptures.

Another cult growing in popularity is Mormonism. The followers do not regard the person and work of Jesus Christ as sufficient for one's salvation. Like the Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons believe and teach that baptism is essential for the salvation of both the living and the dead. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that baptism does not save the living and nothing can save the dead. They demand good works for salvation. Mormonism counts Adam as a god, and teaches that man can become god. The cult's doctrine that elders in the Mormon churches should have as many wives as possible goes against the explicit declaration of the Bible that the bishop (elders) "should be the husband of one wife" (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). In sum both Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists hold beliefs that seriously distort the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### **The Teachings of the Jehovah Witnesses**

But the threat posed by the two cults mentioned above is not as great as that posed by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Historically this movement was founded by C.T. Russell as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society and the International Bible Students Association. The title "Jehovah's Witnesses" was applied to the group in 1931 under the leadership of J. F. Rutherford. After Rutherford's death in 1942 Nathan H. Knorr became the chief officer who contributed immensely through his writings and teachings toward the numerical growth of the cult in various cities of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Of most concern to Christians in Africa is the cult's denial of the deity of Christ and by implication the doctrine of the Trinity. The followers of the cult regard Christ as one of the first beings created by God. Christ existed as a spirit being before his incarnation. He was a chief of the angels, highest of all Jehovah's creation, the direct creation of God, the "only begotten", and in his name, created all things - angels, principalities and powers, as well as the earthly creation.

Thus, as far as Jehovah's Witnesses are concerned, Christ is not God but rather a creature. Passages in the Bible which teach the deity of Christ are explained away. In the New World Translation, the Jehovah's Witnesses

have included in their translation of the New Testament several quite erroneous renderings of the Greek. For example, John 1:1 is mistranslated in order to agree with the teaching of the cult, as follows: "Originally, the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Bruce M. Metzger explained that "By using here the indefinite article 'a' the translators have overlooked the well known fact that in Greek Grammar nouns may be definite for various reasons, whether or not the Greek definite article is present." Metzger further argued that "it must be stated quite frankly that, if the Jehovah's Witnesses take this translation seriously, they are polytheists."

In similar fashion Jehovah's Witnesses interpret Colossians 1:15-17 in a way that seems to deny the full deity of Christ. They seize upon the word "First-begotten" (*prototokos*). In answer to the argument of the cult, responsible Bible scholars have pointed out that the force of the Greek supports the full deity of Christ for what is "begotten" must be of the same kind as the "parent." God can only beget God. The Holy Scripture makes it clear and plain that "in Christ all the fulness of the deity lives in bodily form", and that consequently all believers "have this fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:9-10).

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Philippians 2:6 shows that Christ is not equal with God. They fail to understand that Christ simply stripped His prerogatives as God's equal in a special mutual subjection that exists within the Holy Trinity, in order to accomplish the work of salvation. Having achieved this goal, "God also had highly exalted Christ Jesus, and given him a name which is above every name . . . of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth . . . to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:7-11). Also both the Old and New Testaments use 'Jehovah God' to refer to Jesus (John 12:39-41, cf. Isaiah 6:5, 44:6). Jehovah's Witnesses resemble 4th century Arianism in their view that the Son of God was the first and highest created being. The sect identifies the son with Michael the Archangel. The truth of Christ's deity, incarnation and atonement are thus seriously distorted and represents a spiritual danger to thousands in Africa. Furthermore, in the area of eschatology the sect believes that in 1918 Jesus came to the Temple of God and commissioned 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses and later they include Jonadabs, meaning an indefinite number of earthly "men of good will."

How then should the evangelical church in Africa respond to such cults? In the midst of our conflict with them appropriate responses should include love, a positive Christian witness and clear biblical refutation of cultic teaching.

**5. The New Testament constantly talks of false teachers, false Apostles even within true churches ( see I Timothy 1:3-11, 1 John 4:1-3, 11 Cor. 11:13). Briefly, discuss the different marks of these false apostles and the heterodox trends in teaching that they seek to promote and apply this to the African setting.**

#### **False Teachers in New Testament Times**

In the New Testament one reads that numerous churches faced the problem of internal false teachers and false apostles who claimed to speak the truth but in fact distorted the Christian message. Normally they preached another Jesus,



another Spirit, or different gospel other than the truth declared in the Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1-3, II Peter 2:1). Such false teachers and apostles paid much attention to religious trivia, such as myths and endless genealogies in which Judaism prided itself (I Timothy 1:3-11). They were legalistic, argumentative and empty talkers. They often exalted themselves with self confident boasting (II Corinthians 10:5, 1 Corinthians 4:12). They set themselves against the true knowledge of God and distorted the Word of God in order to gain followers. The apostle Paul denounced dishonesty in tampering with the Word of God by such false teachers. Paul declared in strong terms, "We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways, we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Corinthians 4:2). Further these false apostles and teachers felt it necessary to produce instant and visible results in terms of impressive numbers of followers in order to appear successful in their ministry. Consequently, they were quite willing to employ even deceitful means in order to achieve their ends.

The Apostle John (I John 4:1-6) warned believers against "many false prophets who have gone into the world" and the dangers they put in the way of Christian fellowship. So-called prophets who refused to confess Christ's deity and incarnation, were energized and filled with demonic spirits. Every Christian heresy can be traced to a faulty view of Christ's person and His work. This is the spirit of error (Anti-Christ).

What kinds of teachings earned the label "false" in Apostolic times? The common denominator of a wide variety of false teachings is the tendency to downplay the person and work of Christ and therefore to imply that His accomplishment on the cross is somehow insufficient for salvation. The clear indifference or even hostility to Christ the only Saviour made the alternative systems proclaimed by the false Apostles "another Gospel" (Gal. 1:8).

#### **False Teachers in Africa Today**

In Africa today there are both false teachers and false apostles and prophets. These are represented in different denominational churches, independent movements and sects throughout the continent. Some African theologians and church leaders do not totally accept the written Scriptures as the basis for one's faith and practice in life. In fact, some sects such as the "Brethren of Cross and Star", teach that truth is found only in the New Testament and not in the Old Testament. Others believe and teach that the Bible is not inerrant and divinely authoritative. Some theologians in Africa teach and stress the need to combine both traditional religions and Christian faith together. This, they believe, would harmonize the plurality of African cultures in the interests of Christian unity and national aspirations for self-identity and cultural authenticity. The goal of some seems to be an African theology based on African Traditional religions (customs and beliefs) rather than the Bible.

Much of the so-called "African Theology" is a different gospel which effectively denies the uniqueness of Christ as the world's only Saviour and Lord. It is right that Christians of every culture should aim to restate the gospel in ways that would be meaningful within their cultural contexts, but the aim should not be to exalt cultural norms over scriptural absolutes. Today some independent

non-evangelical movements or sects teach that one is saved only if he is able to speak in tongues, engage in long prayers, and heal others. An independent church in Ethiopia exalts healing, exorcism and glossolalia as the heart of the Christian faith. Similar groups exist throughout the continent of Africa. Such groups are in danger of stressing peripherals at the expense of the one essential: salvation by faith in Christ alone. In similar danger of neglecting the centrality of the gospel are teachers and groups which claim to receive new revelations that are to be regarded as authoritative as Scripture.

Syncretism (Combining Africa traditional religions and some Christian beliefs), is the danger risked by many who attempt to contextualize Christianity. Dr. Kato warned that many theologians in Africa spend their time defending African traditional religions and practices that are incompatible with biblical teaching.

We must assert again in the churches of this continent that religions do not save. That prerogative belongs only to the Lord Jesus. As far as the scripture teaches there is only one way of salvation: "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is *none other* name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Only in Christ has salvation come to the nations. The Gospel of Christ can never "come to terms" with the so-called African religions. The two are quite distinct.

**6. Given the grave theological divisions within African Christianity how would you answer someone who insisted that all churches should become one? Compare the different views of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) on this point. Why is it important to avoid "unity in the dark"?**

#### **Church Unity according to the AACC**

The preceding sections show that the confession of the true church is the supremacy of the person and work of Jesus Christ whose written Word becomes the only authority in matters of belief and practice in the daily living of members. The total loyalty of all members of the true church is toward their Lord and Saviour. The fact that this confession is not upheld by all churches in Africa creates deep scepticism about any meaningful union taking place apart from a massive theological reformation.

Not that efforts for the formal reunion of churches are lacking. The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) founded in 1963 has worked zealously for church union. Yet on what basis has the AACC (a close affiliate of the World Council of Churches) sought unity among the fractured body of Christ? What are the purposes or goals for the Christian Church in Africa? What views does AACC hold? Are these goals and views of AACC in concord with the Holy Scriptures?

Evangelism, according to AACC, is not to be interpreted in the narrow sense of "saving souls" but in the wider and more political sense of serving mankind. The purpose of teaching the gospel is "to satisfy the longings of the Africans" for "identity, authenticity and liberation." Historic Christianity has always expressed grave doubts concerning whether merely humanising the gospel offers any genuine hope for mankind. The AACC has continued to imply

that its first loyalty is to renew the African cultural heritage. Dr. Byang Kato expressed the fears of many that AACC was rapidly becoming a champion of a syncretistic gospel which seemed to demand that traditional religion be accepted as a valid way of salvation. Kato warned that

According to the Word of God, no one people can claim the monopoly of God's free gift in Christ Jesus, not even the Jews who have received the oracles of God (Col. 3:11). Any claim of monopoly of God's grace by any one group or class of people is foreign to the gospel. Paul calls such claim of monopoly as not really a gospel (Gal. 1:6, 7). This must be distinguished from the unique claims of Christ. It is Christ the Saviour, and not the sinners to be saved, who can claim uniqueness.

#### **Unity according to AEAM**

Sensitive to the dangers of syncretism, the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) was formed in the 1960's to affirm the authority of scripture in our doing of theology and as the only basis for lasting unity between churches. While deeply concerned about political, social and economic problems confronting contemporary Africa the Association still has made its first priority the faithful proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour of the world (John 12:29, 3:16; I John 2:2).

The true hope for unity of churches in our spiritually divided continent is not a diluted gospel accommodated to human desires. What is needed more than ever if we are to see growth not only in unity but also in holiness, intellectual cogency, spiritual vigor, evangelistic zeal, cultural potency and social relevance is a return to the historic New Testament faith. For the African Churches to become authentically one, holy, catholic and apostolic nothing less than a turn from our dreams, traditions and private revelations and to a new acceptance of *sola scriptura* will do.