

Does History Matter?

An AJET Editorial

To answer this question, history matters a lot for it helps us understand our contemporary situation. It has been said that no present day events can be detached from their past. Hence we can emphasize that history is vital for assessing the heritage of the present day developments, be it in church, education, beliefs and worldviews. History helps us understand contemporary life in terms of origins, reasons for actions and methodologies for it stimulates action, enabling people to set directions for the course of future events. The articles in this journal focus mainly on past beginnings.

In the first article, Richard J. Gehman observes that the first six years of Africa Inland Mission marked a pioneer stage of her history with real hardship and uncertainty. Despite many problems, the Mission experienced gradual change as the years went by because the Lord raised influential Missionary pioneers who gave themselves wholeheartedly to the work of the Mission. These first pioneer missionaries were involved in itinerant evangelism/outreach ministries, evangelism through schooling and medicine, language learning, and Bible translation. Mission station strategy became a vital means of establishing the church. The vision of the early Missionaries was to train the Africans in order to embrace the work as their own. This strategy would allow for a quick spread of the gospel.

However, between 1920 and 1945 the Mission entered a period of ambivalence toward education. It had no vision for higher education. Unlike other denominational Missionaries who received seminary theological training, those in the AIM sending homes believed that education was not a priority in preparing one to be a Missionary in Africa; more so for the African people.

In the second article Watson A. Omulokoli points out that, early missionaries in Kenya “realized and envisioned the need for working out strategies towards cooperation and unity in their mission endeavours.” Firstly, the missionaries “recognized and wanted to demonstrate their common allegiance to Jesus Christ. Secondly, they were aware of their shared objective of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the supreme aim

in their respective groups. Thirdly, they wanted to minimize competitive conflicts especially in their spheres of operation.

At their conferences they discussed educational matters, indigenous churches, and customs of the indigenous people. However, Omulokoli notes that the 1911 Conference ended in deadlock because of traditions of the sending mother Missions or Societies that preferred a cautious approach, especially when it came to full-fledged union.

Benno van de Toren, in the third article, envisages a systematic exploration of the way in which the concepts of God (or the lack of such a concept) in Africa's prevalent worldviews determine their respective conception and practice of human authority. He argues that a Christian understanding and practice of authority should distinguish itself from the perspective of African Traditional Religion, in which the practice of authority suffers from its sacralisation of human authorities. It should also distinguish itself from (post)modern influences, which miss a transcendent moral basis for a critique of human authorities. Lastly, it should distinguish itself from Islamic concepts of authority, which are based on the dominant metaphor of God as King of the Universe and Master. In looking for an answer to Africa's crisis of authorities, Christians should instead be guided by a proper understanding of the Triune God, who revealed Himself in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the fourth article Esther J. Kibor examines, in an interview form, the theories, contributions and influence of Friedrich Froebel upon education in the 19th and 20th century. The gist of the article is that many of the principles found in education are sometimes practiced blindly without knowing their origin. Nonetheless, the article points out that much can be accomplished from harsh circumstances.

On discussing the attitude of the historical churches to poverty and wealth, James Ndyabahika, in the last article, notes, "the economic growth does not eliminate poverty." Inequality between "rich" and "poor" will continue to grow. He observes that a big fraction in the church are very poor while the "rich promote the Jesuit philosophy; the *end justifies the means*." To him, "wealth acquisition, which does not take care of the needy, the marginalized and the poorest of the poor, is brutal and inhumane."