



Wanted:

Christ-centred missionaries

...why Africa needs more mission, not less

BY JAMES R HENDERSON

Africa needs Christianity more than ever before.

But, some might say, has Africa not been evangelised more than any other continent and is now exporting missionaries to the west? Can the Africans not take care of their own redemptive needs?

Good questions. There are, however some underlying assumptions – that the Gospel has indeed been preached extensively in modern Africa, and that quality indigenous training programs exist for the balanced spiritual formation of pastors and church leaders.

In Africa there are so many false gospels. This is a growing concern in evangelical circles. The impressive statistics about growth of Christianity in Africa may not reflect the depth of understanding of converts. In fact many may not be converted to Christ at all, but rather to shadows of the Christian message.

A typical example of what has happened is in the Cameroon. Anatole Dlordon is a Christian worker who has been there. Note the words of his recent report published in the August 2005 edition of the UK-based *Evangelical Times*: “Since the 1960s and 70s Pentecostal and Charismatic groups have made great advances in the Cameroon, resulting in a multitude of ‘lively’ churches that lack teaching in the fundamental truths of the Bible. Added to the above problems, the churches have absorbed Cameroonian society’s tribalism, paganism and low moral standards. Little wonder that extreme sects abound under the banner of Christianity...”¹

This has been my own experience of working in Africa – “extreme sects abound”! Sadly, the worst of the western self-styled evangelists seem to have taken Africa by storm, and have led hundreds of thousands captive into whipped up emotionalism and false hope. Men and women, young and old alike, sincere in their beliefs, inexperienced, fresh from seminaries, their minds often full of badly constructed theologies, have assaulted African spirituality with misinformation and garbled gospels that distort the grace of Christ.

Tite Tiénou, a theologian born in Burkina Faso, adds his voice to the increasing number of Christian thinkers who express concern over what is regarded as a deep crisis in African Christianity. He refers to the “Health and Wealth” gospel exponents who feature so heavily on television, radio and through other media. “Numerous preachers have

convinced multitudes of Africans that prosperity awaits them if they join the Christian faith. No wonder there is little by way of serious reflection on suffering...telling Africans they deserve to be rich is...the proclamation of a truncated gospel²

Some doubt whether sufficient consideration has been given consistently to the grounding of believers in the faith. Perhaps for many who received the missionary messages it was just an outward transfer of religious allegiance for reasons other than personal conviction of sin, repentance, and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. Cultural, economic and safety factors were relevant. In a pluralist society, such as Africa is and also such as is now dominant in the west, it is easy to add fragments of Christianity to one's personal faith mix.

"Africa has many problems, but God is working...one of the problems in Africa is that many church leaders are really pagan at heart...I'm not afraid to preach this to members, pastors or bishops...the great Commission also says to make disciples", writes Tchadian theologian René Daidanso ma Djongwe³ He highlights the issue. The fact that little concerted effort was made to instruct new believers has made African Christians more susceptible to every wind of doctrine that blows in from the north Atlantic.

What can the Worldwide Church of God do about this? Well, we can join in the cry of alarm, and we have done this and continue to do so.

Groups and individuals contact us and ask us to come and preach balanced doctrine to them. Often they have read of us on the main WCG web site or on the African site (www.wcg.org/africa/). For example, some independent churches in northern Rwanda and also in Liberia, intrigued by our stance against the dualistic nonsense preached by most "deliverance" and "spiritual mapping" ministries, have asked us to come and address their own assemblies on the subject of sound practical theology.

The Worldwide Church of God finds itself in a seemingly unique position. Few denominations have undergone a transformation from an error-laden sect to a liberated instrument for Christ and lived to tell the tale. This enables us to see clearly other groups trapped in heresy and legalism.

Not only throughout Africa but I also think in many other places throughout the world, the "doctrines of grace are little understood and are ignored by most churches, in spite of such doctrines being in their traditional creeds...Charismatic practices and Catholic dogma contrary to Scripture remain unchallenged...the most urgent need – and the key to the future health of the church – remains in establishing proper theological training for those leading the churches. The task facing us here is enormous..."⁴

The WCG holds major conferences around Africa, such as the one held near Johannesburg in June of this year with Dr and Mrs Tkach. Not only do our own people get reminded of the fundamentals of Christian teaching, but pastors and teachers from other groups also receive instruction. We are devoted to training as a means of preserving the flock, which was a priority for Paul, Peter and the other NT writers.

The growth in the WCG is modest compared to the published growth of Christianity in general in Africa. There are new churches and new converts that come into our fold, as well as new affiliations. I want to assure you that these new people are not being enticed by some unbiblical promises, but to them we preach an undiluted “Christ crucified”, and our aim is to nurture them and build them in the faith of our Lord and Saviour.

¹From *Missionary Tragedy in the Cameroon*, by Anatole Dlordon. Page 16, Evangelical Times Ltd (Charity), UK Vol 39 no. 8

² From *The State of the Gospel in Africa* by Tite Tienou. Evangelical Missions Quarterly, April 2001, Vol. 37 no. 2

³ Rene Daidanso ma Djongwe (Tachadian theologian), quoted in *Africa: “The hopeless continent?”* by Harold Fuller. From Evangelical Missions Quarterly, April 2001, Vol 37 no. 2, page 158

⁴ From *Missionary Tragedy in the Cameroon*, by Anatole Dlordon, Page 16, Evangelical Times, August 2005, published by Evangelical Times Ltd. (Charity), UK, vol 39, no. 8

