

Reformation & African Christianity

Mapping the Transitional Movement of African Christianity from the Margin of Classical Reformation to the Centre of Modern Reformation

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Abstract

Celebrating 500 hundred years of reformation around the world, there is a need to re-engage the missionary character of the reformation and its significant impact on African Christianity as African Christianity currently appears to house the reformational ideals of the Christian faith. The present study examines the historic impact of the ideals of the reformation within African Christianity. In particular, the paper describes the significant movement of African Christianity from the margins of the reformation, to the centre of global Christianity, and the attending cultural politics, which invigorate this important missionary enterprise. Similarly, the paper underscores the missionary quest of the reformers to contextualise Christianity within their different cultural domains, and the importance of this missiological endeavour for modern African Christianity. Consequently, the study reiterates the emerging patterns in the praxis of African Christianity, which resonate with the specific trends and trajectories of reformation and its indebtedness to this important religious heritage.

Keywords: African Christianity, Reformed Christianity, Christian missions, Cultural politics, Contextualisation, Evangelicals, African Reformation, Catholicism

1. Introduction

African Christianity is largely a reformation branch of the Christian church as readily seen in its fidelity to the confessional ideals of *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* in its daily religious practices.² These ideals are practically exercised in the recognition

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² There are five elements of the reformers' theological declarations, which are readily framed in terms of "solas." They are the "sola scriptura" (scripture alone over traditions), the "sola fide" (faith alone over works), the "sola gratia" (grace alone), the "solus Christus" (Christi alone over priestly class), the "soli Deo gloria" (glory to God alone rather than the veneration of saints). See Thomas Schreiner (2015), *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification. What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters*; Matthew Barrett (2016), *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture. What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters*; David Vandrunen (2015), *God's Glory Alone: The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life. What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters*; Carl R. Trueman (2017),

of the authoritative character of the Bible in matters of faith and practice across Africa, and the attending emphasis on the exclusive need of faith in Jesus for salvation.³

Considering the numeric growth of reformation-oriented Christianity on the African continent, there are ironically more Christians in sub-Saharan Africa who model the ideals of reformation in Africa than in Europe and North America.⁴ Significantly, there are now more Christians in sub-Saharan Africa who adhered to these reformation ideals than in Germany – the birthplace of Martin Luther; or France – the land of birth – of John Calvin; or even Switzerland, the home country of Huldrych Zwingli. The number of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa with these beliefs and ideals of the reformation are more than the number of Christians of this same strand of Christianity in Europe and North America put together.⁵ In this regard, African Christianity is not only reformation-driven on these two fronts in its pastoral operations and ministries but it clearly pursues these ideals of reformation in active evangelism and witnessing. This active evangelism has further stimulated church growth and the planting of evangelical churches across Africa.

Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God. What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters; Stephen Wellum (2017), Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior. What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters.

- ³ According to Mercy Oduyoye, “throughout Africa, the Bible has been and continues to be absolutized: it is one of the oracles that we consult for instant solutions and responses” [Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995:174), *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*]. Concerning the use of the Bible in African theology, Tinyiko Maluleke observed, “the Bible has enjoyed a respected status and place in African theology.” See Maluleke (1997), “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99(14). For Mbiti, “Nothing can substitute for the Bible” in Africa [Mbiti (1979:90), *Concepts of God in Africa*]. Also see Mbiti (2004:219-227), “The Role of Jewish Bible in African Independent Churches,” *International Review of Mission* 93(396). Similarly, Musimbi Kanyoro observed, “African Christians are ardent Bible-believers. If a Christian family owns only one or two books, it is likely that these are a hymnal and a Bible. They listen to the Bible being read on church-organised occasions, and those who are literate read it for themselves.” See Musimbi Kanyoro (1999), “Reading the Bible from an African Perspective,” *Ecumenical Review* 51(1), 18.
- ⁴ The twentieth-century growth in evangelical Protestantism was “concentrated” in sub-Sahara Africa [See Brian Stanley (2004:62), “Twentieth-Century World Christianity: A Perspective from the History of Missions,” *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century. Studies in the History of Christian Missions*, 52-83(Grand Rapids, Michigan)]. Similarly, Philip Jenkins has shown the evangelical character of the “Next Christendom” particularly its Pentecostal brand. He suggests the increasing popularity of conservative evangelicalism in Africa, Asia and Latin America. See Jenkins (2002), *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press); idem, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); idem, *God’s Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe’s Religious Crisis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- ⁵ See Matthew Michael (2017:149-174), “African Evangelical Thought: Its History, Trends and Trajectories,” *A New History of African Christian Thought: From Cape to Cairo*, ed. David T. Ngong (New York: Routledge).

Interestingly, African Christianity has held to these ideals of reformation in the existential crucible of excruciating hardship, continuous persecution and difficult socio-political challenges. The salvific importance of Jesus in human redemption is celebrated everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa with songs, spirited worship, and passionate gatherings in crusades and missions outreaches.⁶ Recent statistics have suggested the paradigmatic shift in the centre of Christianity and the conservative ideals of the reformation from its Euro-American residential homelands to the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America.⁷ This paradigmatic shift is intriguing because during the 16th century reformation, the African continent was clearly a mission field with no significant Christian presence. Yet, after 500 years, African Christianity has moved from been at the margin of reformation to the very centre of reformation by the sheer geometric rise in the numbers of Christians with reformation faith in sub-Saharan Africa.

In this sense, modern Africa has now become the new haven of reformation's theology, and the new Wittenberg of modern reformation. Thus, it is only appropriate to underscore the importance of African Christianity in these 500 years of reformation as the new Wittenberg of global reformation and the new face of the ideals of the reformation. Drawing from these antecedents, this paper engages the importance of this transition of African Christianity from the margin of reformation to its centre, and describes the pertinent directions, trends and trajectories of this tectonic shift in the modern demography of reformation.⁸

2. Reformation and Cultural Politics

Reformation began in Europe with the intrigues of the post-medieval politics where European monarchs wanted independence from the political hegemony of the papacy who has in various occasions intruded on the politics of the European states,

⁶ See Marleen de Witte (2005), "The Spectacular and the Spirits: Charismatics and Neo-Traditionalists on Ghanaian Television," *Material Religion* 1,: 31-35; Birgit Meyer (2005:275-306), "Mediating Tradition: Pentecostal Pastors, African Priests, and Chiefs in Ghanaian Popular Films," in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press); idem, "Religious Remediations: Pentecostal Views in Ghanaian Video-Movies," *Postscripts* 2005, 1.2(1.3), 155-181; Obododimma Oha (2000:192-199), "The Rhetoric of Nigerian Christian Videos: The War Paradigm of The Great Mistake," in *Nigerian Video Films*, ed. Jonathan Haynes (Athens: Ohio University Press).

⁷ See Kwame Bediako (2000), "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension," *African Affairs* 99(395): 303-323; Andrew F. Walls (2002), *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books).

⁸ See Marcia Pally (2011), *The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans); Soong-Chan Rah (2009), *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers, Illinois: InterVarsity Press).

and thus directly challenging their autonomy.⁹ The nailing of the 95 theses of Martin Luther and the resulting ecclesiastical protests emanating from this very act launched also a subtle political uprising against the papacy because it challenges the infallibility of the popes and several abuses of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰ Seen from this perspective, this protest of Luther is not merely an ecclesiastical one but it also has cultural and even political ramifications because it usurped the authority of the papacy, rejected the use of Latin in worship and replaced it with German tongue. It challenges the political authority of the papacy thereby providing an opportunity for monarchs and princes in Europe to undermine the hegemony of the papacy over them.

In this way, the nailing of the 95 theses by Luther, while it is theologically significant, it also has cultural and political significance in its advocacy for the nationalisation (germanisation/contextualisation) of Christianity for German people rather than the excessive Latinising of the German church.¹¹ Significantly, Luther translated the Bible into German, and composed hymnals in German tongue for the German protestant church, thus undermining the cultural and ecclesiastical hegemony of the papacy over the German people. Similarly, contextualisation (or nationalisation of Christianity) came to occupy a central importance in the discourse of the African Christianity immediately and after the exit of the expatriate missionaries. There is a close similarity between Luther's act of defiance against the cultural and ecclesiastical impositions of the papacy over the German people, and the pioneering protest and defiance of African scholars at the cultural imposition of an irrelevant Christianity, which was not properly contextualised to the worldviews of the African people.

On the other hand, reformation itself is a purely European activity with the entire participants of European descent, and the agitation itself could easily be situated in the post-medieval protests. These many-sided protests against the church were generated by the forces of renaissance and humanism, which critically evaluate the role of the church in the larger politics of the state.¹² Of course, it was a "pan-

⁹ See Ulinka Rublack (2005), *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: University Press); Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell (2000), *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press); Patrick Collinson (2004), *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Modern Library).

¹⁰ Concerning this uniqueness and the magisterial importance of the reformation in human history see Diarmaid MacCulloch (2004), *The Reformation* (New York: Viking).

¹¹ See R. W. Scribner and C. Scott Dixon (2003), *The German Reformation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

¹² See Anthony Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

European movement” expressed in the quest of the European monarchs and dissatisfied clergies to create a new religious/political order.¹³ Without any representation from Africa, or the global south, the reformation in Europe becomes a formidable global movement, which largely went beyond its nationalistic undertones to assert a universal one. Interestingly, the cultural conditioning of the reformation gave way for the universal importance in the history of the church so that the unique cultural coding of the reformation in its local quest to address the immediate spiritual climate of Europe – whether in the writings of Luther for the German church, Calvin for the French church, and Zwingli for the Swiss church – did not directly impact the global importance of their theological thinking on matter of faith and practice.¹⁴

The universal emphases of these reformers were exported in missionary activities to Africa. The differences in their individual contextual challenges and the disagreements among them did not cloud the central theological messages of these reformers, which clearly underscore the salvific importance of Jesus for the redemption of the world and the supremacy of the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice of the Christian church. It was this unifying nexus in the reformers’ theology that was transported to Africa. Even though the various theological squabbles between these reformers continued to come up in heated theological debates, the reformation heritage preserved in African Christianity resonates largely around the exclusive importance of Jesus Christ for human and cosmic redemption, and the importance of the Bible for faith and practice. The theological debates of the reformation, especially in the different views of the reformers, were also transported to Africa with the distinctive colourings of the reformations from the lands of Germany, France, Switzerland, Holland and Britain into the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Significantly, the exportation of reformation ideas to Africa was facilitated by four important factors.¹⁵ First, the invention of printing press in Gutenberg helped

¹³ See Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Owen Chadwick, *The Early Reformation on the Continent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ See Scott Hendrix (2009), *Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon); idem, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Timothy Lull and Derek R. Nelson (2015), *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress press); Robert Kolb and Charles Arand (2008), *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker); Alister McGrath (2012), *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell); Hans Schwarz (2015), *True Faith in God: An Introduction to Luther’s Life and Thought*, rev. and exp. ed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

¹⁵ There is the re-exportation of Christianity back to Europe. Concerning this new phenomenon, see Hanciles (2008: 350-373; 207-228), *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll: Orbis); Adogame Afe (2008:310-334), “Up, Up Jesus! Down, Down Satan! African Religiosity in the Former Soviet Bloc – the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations,” *Exchange* 37(3).

to spread the ideas of reformation to the different parts of Europe and onward to Africa and the new world – as the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America where then called.¹⁶ Divine providence was clearly at work in the invention of the printing press in Germany, the homeland of the reformation – and at the same time when reformation was gathering momentum. This act of providence greatly helped the cause of the reformation, and the spread of the reformation's ideas around the world. One can readily say that the printing press was “the brain” of reformation because it helped to spread the intellectual and popular defence of reformation against the political propaganda and the machineries of the papacy.

Secondly, reformation was transported to Africa and around the world by the forces of colonisation, which largely seeks to extend European empires abroad by means of imperial conquest and the founding of colonies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Interestingly, the different churches around Europe also seek to replicate these colonial and political arrangements by extending their ecclesiastical influences through the founding of ecclesiastical colonies in Africa and beyond. In fact, most reformation churches in Europe went to Africa to plant churches with a biblical conviction of missions but shaped by a colonial ideology. The African churches planted were generally perceived in terms of spiritual/reformation colonies, which are the direct extensions of the mother churches overseas. The impact of colonisation in shaping the thought of the church was profound because the church saw itself in terms of the worldly empire seeking to spread, extend and annex lands and people for God and herself in the new world. The church in Europe and North America understood and operated the Great Commission within the political and administrative structures of colonisation. While it is unfair to muddle up the spiritual goals of the church with the mundane activities of worldly governments and empire builders, it is no exaggeration to say that the churches in Europe employed this vehicle of colonisation to accomplish a spiritual objective. They did not participate or engage in the material exploitations, or annexing of geographical territories for the European monarchs, and in fact, in many places in Africa, there are unresolved tensions between the colonial administrators and the missionary enterprise.

Similarly, the colonial conquest of Africa helped to provide the needed missionary access and protection for missionaries to the interiors of Africa. The spiritual character of this missionary enterprise in Africa is bedevilled by the historic ambi-

¹⁶ See Wolfgang Iordorf (2014), *From Gutenberg to Luther: Transnational Print Cultures in Scandinavia 1450-1525* (Leiden: Brill); David J. Davis (2013), *Seeing Faith, Printing Pictures: Religious Identity during the English Reformation* (Leiden: Brill); Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979), *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press); idem, “An Unacknowledged Revolution Revisited,” *American Historical Review* 2002, 107(1); Fran Rees (2006), *Johannes Gutenberg: Inventor of the Printing Press* (Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books).

guities between the operations of the missionaries and their colonial counterparts. The relative peace provided by the colonial regimes among warring African tribes also helped to create an administrative cover and protection for the missionary activities in the global south.

On the other hand, colonisation was also a spiritualised exercise for the European missionaries especially seen in the shaping of churches in Africa to operate in liturgy and doctrines like ecclesiastical colonies of churches abroad. The colonial mind-set of the period influenced this church planted in Africa to mirror the spiritual, doctrinal and denominational lining of the home churches, thereby undermining the unique cultural and contextual realities of these African churches. Like Luther, the pioneering scholarship in African Christianity and the subsequent ones, protested against the cultural conditioning of the Christianity transported to Africa. They underscored largely the relevance of the Gospel to the African people but they rejected the demonisation of African cultures and the insensitivity to the contextual realities of the African church that largely came with the missionary enterprise. In this rejection of the cultural conditioning of the Gospel, and their quest to contextualise the Gospel in the African societies, the pioneering African theologians trod in the path of Luther who also rejected the Latinisation of Christianity and sought to indigenise Christianity for the German people. The task of Luther and the task that confronted these pioneering scholars were the same. For example, Bolaji Idowu sought a continuity between the Christian God and the pre-Christian deity of the Yoruba people in spite of their differing cultural and ritualistic forms.¹⁷ Similarly, John Mbiti also argued for the pre-Christian spiritual/religious experiences of the African people that prepared the ground for the reception of the Christian deity by the African communities.¹⁸ In addition, Kwame Bediako has also underscored this particular interest in his quest to show the continuity between African understanding of the ancestors and the biblical representation of Christology.¹⁹

In recent times, Allan Anderson has celebrated the ingenuity of the African Independent churches in their quest to contextualise the Gospel within the milieu of African contextual realities through a theological/pragmatic protest against the irrelevant character of the mainline missionary-founded churches. Anderson has

¹⁷ See Bolaji Idowu (1962), *Olòdùmare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman), idem, *Toward an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Idowu (1965), *The Predicament of the in Africa: Christianity in Tropical Africa. Studies presented and discussed at the seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press).

¹⁸ See Mbiti (1969), *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger Publishers).

¹⁹ See Bediako (2004), *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis); idem, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 1995).

termed this particular development as “African Reformation.”²⁰ The entire works of the pioneering African scholarship in the virulent protest of the preceding personalities could be broadly placed within the reformation, particularly in Luther’s quest to free the German church from the ecclesiastical control and conditioning of German church. It is also evident in Luther’s passion to indigenise the Bible and the Gospel for the German people. Through this generalised view, African scholarship itself has taken a path in actualisation of the ideals of the reformation. More specifically, the works of Byang Kato also narrowly pursued this quest to critically position the African church within the reformation traditions.²¹ For Kato, African Christianity must not be based on African cultures but on *Sola scriptura*, and the exclusive character of faith in Christ must be emphasised for the salvation of the African people. In this way, Kato went further than these pioneering theologians to clearly articulate a reformation agenda in terms of fidelity to scriptures alone and the need for an exclusive faith in Jesus for human salvation. Considered this way, African Christianity has shown expressive desire in its history to engage and replicate the ideals of the reformation. Significantly, African Christianity has continually expanded and continued the reformation ideal in its conservative fidelity to the Bible and its continuous advocacy for human salvation in the finished works of Christ.

Thirdly, the industrial revolution also aided the transportation of reformation ideas around the world in general, and in Africa in particular. The industrial revolution providentially helped the cause of missions to transport God’s missions around the world. This industrial revolution was characterised by the inventions of fast ships and steamboats, improved health/medical services, telegraphs and improved postal services, and good networks of roads through the colonial domains of the European empires. If the printing press was the “brain” of the reformation, the industrial revolution in history was the “feet” of reformation because by the miracles of the industrial revolution, the message of reformation was transported to the shores of Africa. In addition, the Great awakening also helped to revitalise and invigorate the reformation’s ideas. It helped to facilitate the transportation of reformation’s ideals to the continent of Africa. If the industrial revolution is the “feet” of reformation, the Great awakening was the “heart” of the reformation, and greatly

²⁰ Allan H. Anderson (2001), *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press).

²¹ See Byang Kato (1975), *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel); idem, *Biblical Christianity in Africa* (Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1985). Concerning the influence, critical and evaluation of Kato see Timothy Palmer (2004), “Byang Kato: A Theological Reappraisal,” *AJETS* 23(1), 3-20; Keith Fernando (2007), “The Legacy of Byang Kato,” *AJETS* 26(1), 3-16. See also Turaki (2001), “The Theological Legacy of the Reverend Doctor Byang Henry Kato,” *AJETS* 20(2), 157-175; Bediako (1999:386-425), *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. (Oxford: Regnum Books).

helped to re-energise the cause of the reformation and the transportation of these ideas to the shores of Africa. The fiery messages of George Whitefield and evangelical authority of John Wesley created room for purity and missions.²²

Lastly, the reformation was greatly helped by the founding and creation of missionary agencies in history, which saw their sole responsibilities and task to evangelise the entire world and spread the fervent messages of reformation around the world. This task of the missionary agencies helped the cause of reformation because it underscores the missionary character of the reformation and the onus of Europe and North America to see to the propagation of the Gospel to the continent of Africa and even beyond. If the spiritual awakening of the 18th century was the heart of the reformation in history, the creation of the missionary agencies became the “hands” of reformation theology, and greatly affected the planting of missions and reformation on the continent of Africa.

3. Significant Patterns and Current Trends

Reformation has come to stay on the African continent as clearly seen in the thriving of evangelical theology and conservative theological orientations on the African continent. The presence of reformation theology is seen daily in spirited sermons on the supreme importance of the Bible for faith and practice, and the centrality of Jesus’ death and resurrection for the salvation of the human race. These central doctrines of reformation are seen in both mainline churches and even within the African churches outside of this ecclesiastical setting. There are patterns and trends, which have attended the expression of an evangelical/reformational thought on the continent of Africa. There are four important patterns and trends which clearly show the direction and presence of reformational thoughts on the African continent.

First, the reformation theology in Africa has taken a critical disposition towards the African cultures, especially in places where African cultures seek to undermine the supreme authority of the Bible. In the immediate post-colonial era, the debate then was whether the Gospel will be merged with the African culture? Or what role should the African culture play in the transmission of the Christian Gospel? The 60s and 70s saw the revival of African cultures because of the hostile attitudes of the expatriates towards African cultures, and the general demonisation of African cultures. However, the exit of the missionaries brought to the fore the invigorated quest to merge the Christian Gospel with African cultures. This period witnessed an unprecedented emphasis on contextualisation and the necessity to indigenise the

²² See Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe (2012), *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Donald M. Lewis (2014), *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History and Culture in Regional Perspective* (Downers, Illinois: InterVarsity Press).

Christian Gospel within the African milieu. After four decades of these debates, the dust has finally settled. There is a growing recognition that a critical contextualisation should be practiced by the African church where the supreme authority of the Bible should be used to judge every African culture.

Secondly, the reformer's emphasis on conversion and piety has also found great expression in African Christianity with crowded stadium, multitudes at the crusade grounds and solo-evangelistic heralds on the streets preaching the exclusive character of human salvation in Christ. This evangelical culture has often underscored the cosmic and individual sacrifice of Jesus for human sins. Thirdly, the reformation theology in Africa has an obsessive disposition to the pneumatic operations of God in active works of guidance, miracles and supernatural encounters. While the reformers have largely disassociated themselves from miracles and healing because of the gross medieval abuses and frauds, the African church has enriched the reformation heritage by an emphasis on the active working of God's Spirit and the possibilities for the working of healing and miracles within the church. According to Jenkins, the church in Global South has a predilection for the Pentecostal orientations. In the context of this charismatic/Pentecostal interest, it appears the original divide between the Roman Catholics and the Protestant movement is beginning to give way because – within the Roman Catholic church at the moment – there is a vibrant reformation theology at work, especially as seen in growing presence of charismatic movement within the Roman Catholic church and their emphasis on the supremacy of the Bible above church's traditions in matters of faith and practice.

The Pentecostal trends within the African church partly come from the centrality of the supernatural worlds in the daily lives of the African people, especially the recognition of the active presence of benevolent and malevolent spirits in daily human experience. For many Africans, the supernatural space is populated by the workings and operations of the supernatural beings. Pioneering works of Mbiti and Idowu, and in recent times Bediako, have shown the prevailing and converging presence of the supernatural worlds in the daily experiences of the African people. This supernatural disposition has clearly affected and heightened the spiritual awareness of the African Christians to the supernatural worldview of the Bible and the quest to filter this worldview through the pre-Christian prism. The cumulative impact of this supernatural consciousness has contributed to the Pentecostal disposition of African reformation theologies. These Pentecostal elements have made inroad into Roman Catholic churches, thus seeking to bridge the doctrinal boundary between Roman Catholicism and the protestant faith.²³

²³ There are global studies that suggest the inroad of evangelical influence and impact on Roman Catholicism. See Noll & Carolyn Nystrom (2005:11-265), *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Baker Academic).

In addition, African evangelical theology has occurred in the context of severe persecution and difficulties. The rise of aggressive Islam in Africa and its agenda of Islamisation of the African continent have brought the African church under intense period of persecution with violent attacks on churches and massacres of Christians. It appears evangelical Christians have largely formed a bastion of resistance against the quest of radical Islam to conquer Africa. The Christian communities in Nigeria, Chad, Ghana, South Sudan, Kenya and Central African Republic have come under attacks from Islamic terrorists that seek to overrun these Christian settlements. While classical reformers have largely wrestled with intra-Roman Catholic persecutions and have tasted a little of the Muslim invasion by the Turks, the church in Africa has continually witnessed the terrible period of persecutions by Islam and the attending tragedy of incompetent government who have largely failed to protect Christian communities in these places. The African continent has become a battleground between the thriving forces of Islam and a powerful community of Christian evangelical witness. It has become a theatre of conflicts and zone of persecution where Islam is seeking to violently conquer the spirited presence of a vibrant reformed African church.

In its critical academic aspects, reformation theology in Africa has begun to acquire the needed academic competence to speak critically into issues of contemporary Africa. This dawn of criticalness is seen by the publication of reformed/evangelical works, which have gradually engraved the intellectual image of the African evangelical scholarship. The era of sloppy evangelical scholarship is gradually passing away, and new critical evangelical works from Africa have received global patronage. While there are many cases of uncritical and sheepishly acceptance of everything in the name of Christianity, there is also a growing movement in modern Africa that has critically challenged several teachings of the church. The modern African church is increasingly confronted with a critical audience who are no longer satisfied with the emotional messages from our pulpits, which often lack spiritual content. Drawing from these critical perspectives, the critique of the African church on tithing and excessive emphases on materialism has also received a central stage in sense.

In addition, theology at the heart of reformation missions to Africa has drawn its motivation from mainstream eschatological perspective, which has negatively affected the church's role in the public space. In particular, an other-worldly disposition has characterised the main tenet of African Christianity, which until recent times has contributed to its snubbing of the public space, thus leading to the unwarranted dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Historically, the other-worldly disposition of African Christianity in the past has caused the neglect of the

public space in spite of the commitment of the missionaries to the training and education of African Christians during the colonial period. The neglect and passivity of African Christians to politics and the public space come from the treatment of the public space in the metaphoric domain of the “unclean” or “dirty space.” Thus, any involvement in politics is largely seen in terms of living in the region of perpetual uncleanness.

In recent times, the African church has sought to retake the public space through involvement in politics by agitating for Christian candidates in elections and key administrative positions, but this act has not in any way translated to good governance. The African church has largely maintained a disturbing neutrality or passivity in the faces of oppressive African regimes. The serene romance between the church and the government has added an element of suspiciousness, allegations and condemnation of the church’s relationship with the state. In some parts of Africa, the church has often, through the silence of her sacred voice, given its overt approval to the oppressive regimes. This condition is exacerbated by the otherworldly disposition of the church in some quarters, which has largely undermined the effectiveness of the church’s pastoral ministry. The apolitical disposition of the African church in some African countries has not appropriately allowed the critique of the many politically generated problems of the African people.

Lastly, the advent of reformation theology in Africa brought about an important emphasis on the economic empowerment of the church where the missionaries were involved in planting trees, vocation training and other entrepreneurial activities in their quest to create a vibrant church that is self-supporting, rather than looking externally for funds and financial assistance from foreign donors. This colonial empowerment scheme is largely abandoned in most churches in Africa. The empowerment of the church’s membership has not taken a central importance in the ministry of the African church. Although there are cases of small-scale workshops or seminars on empowerment, the church has not on a large scale taken to this important aspect of reformation missions, namely the economic empowerment of God’s people. The tragedy here is that most African churches have membership who lacked economic power to actualise their career purposes and calling, thus becoming a liability to the church. Most importantly, the continuous economic powerlessness of members has subjected the African churches to gimmicks in order to survive the increasing economic hardship and recession currently witnessed by many African countries.

4. Conclusion

The reformation was originally a European event, however, after 500 years; the reformation has increasingly become a defining African activity or movement with

more than half of the population of global reformation adherents currently situated in sub-Saharan Africa. This present shift in the population of adherents of reformation from Europe and North America to Africa has serious theological implications. It suggests that Africa is now the new “Wittenberg” of reformation, and the new reformational hinterland is no longer Germany but the suburbs of Johannesburg, the streets of Kumasi, and the ghettos of Lagos.

While the nailing of the 95 theses on the walls of the Wittenberg’s church sparked protests around Christendom against the abuses of the papacy, the churches in the Global South must also nail new theses, not only on the walls of our churches, but on the walls of our government and in public places. Through this act, we could spark a new protest, not against the church, but against the oppressive regimes that have continually undermined the humanity and dignity of the African people. The church must exercise its prophetic mandate and duly protest against political and ecclesiastical structures that challenge the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ, the defining place of the scripture in matters of life and faith, and the sanctity of human lives, especially in the killing of many African people through the negligence of African governments. The African church must engineer a reformation not merely of the church, but also of the many insensitive regimes in Africa and even beyond. The African church is the new Wittenberg, and we must re-enact reformation and protest against the status quo, which has largely undermined the biblical truths, namely our faith in Christ and the dignity of the human lives. Like Martin Luther King Jr, the namesake of the reformer, Martin Luther, the nailing of our theses/protests will be against unjust policies and ideologies of the modern society. As a Christian social activist, King’s protest was not against Roman Catholicism, but against racism and social inequality, which has generally dehumanised the African-American people in the socio-political climate of the pre-civil right American society. Drawing from this legacy, the African church must nail her theses/protests against social injustices, inequality, racism, ethnicity, corruption, and oppressive regimes, whether within the ecclesiastical hierarchies or in the larger society. We must protest against conditions of poverty and destitutions that have continually sabotaged the desires of most African people to live a dignified life as Christians and God’s own people.

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