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Hope for Africa

An AJET Editorial

In his book, *Hope for Africa*, Professor George Kinoti of the University of Nairobi, reviewed the familiar litany of Africa's woes. Poverty, disease, war, and oppression are but a few of the reasons why Africa still lives with the disgrace of being the world's poorest continent. But while Kinoti's list sounds familiar, his diagnosis of the problems of Africa has at least one surprising note. Christianity, says Kinoti, has contributed to the problem.

How has African Christianity made matters worse? Kinoti believes that the Church has "failed to apply the gospel to the whole of life, limiting it to spiritual life only." This one dimensional Christianity "reads the bible selectively" glossing over those texts that "talked about justice, peace, and material well being." Kinoti's hope for Africa is that the church will truly become the church of Jesus Christ, a community of faithful disciples who "seek to apply the whole of the Word of God to the whole of life." Only such a renewed Christianity can "play an active part in bringing peace and prosperity to Africa." The Church should work for the *shalom* of God. Shalom "encompasses the whole of

human life -- spiritual, intellectual, social, material." As Kinoti concludes: "Africa desperately needs *shalom*."

George Kinoti is not an enemy of African Christianity. Kinoti writes as a concerned Christian who believes that the hope of Africa lies in a renewed Christian faith that overcomes the dualism of the past. What is dualism? Dualism divides the world that God created into two categories: things that are inherently evil and things that are inherently good. Some things are higher and more spiritual. Other things are lower and inferior. The task of the believer is to avoid those parts of creation that are evil and to limit oneself to those aspects that are good. This dualism is seen most clearly in the either/or thinking that characterizes much of twentieth century Christianity.

There are actually two kinds of dualism that plague the African church. The evangelical version of dualism calls for an inward Christianity that fails to apply the gospel to the whole of life. The liberal form of dualism calls for a political and social Christianity that neglects personal salvation and transformation through faith in Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned against any version of Christianity that "seeks

Christ without the world or [seeks] the world without Christ." The first error is that of pietistic versions of the faith; the second is that of humanistic versions of the faith.

The true distinction for the believer is not between good and evil aspects of creation and culture. The true issue for the Christian is that of *antithesis*. Everything in creation and culture, though inherently good can be pushed in one of two opposite (antithetical) directions. What are the two opposite poles? Worship of the true and living God or worship of idols. Politics can be as holy as prayer if done for God and not idols. Preaching can be as misdirected as prostitution if done for self glory instead of the glory of God.

To capture a biblical wholeness we need to rediscover the biblical doctrines of creation, fall and redemption. These are the great truths that oppose all dualistic versions of the faith. When African Christianity embraces the truth that all is good by creation; all is misdirected by the fall; and all can be redirected by redemption in Christ, then she will have discovered a comprehensive world view upon which can be built a holistic witness to the gospel.

The articles in this issue seek to promote just such a holistic world view. Watson Omulokoli's study of the strategy of the Church Mission Society

in East Africa is a good model for all of us of the search for balance and God-centeredness. Mark Shaw's suggestion that the Kingdom of God, understood in a multi-faceted way, is a useful framework not only for telling the story of African Christianity but also for connecting that story to other branches of church history, particularly in the west. The contributions by Nkem Emeghara and James Plueddemann seek to apply the gospel to the areas of culture and education respectively.

Searching for that third way between the one dimensional Christianity of either the right or the left is not an easy task. Yet in finding that third way lies the hope for African Christianity. And in such a "third way" Christianity, lies the hope of Africa.

Contributors to this issue:

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