

# Editorial Comment



## Africa: Hope in the Midst of Darkness

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

**A**frica is a huge mess. It is riddled with wars, six million dead in the Congo alone, famines, AIDS, poverty, corruption and more. Yet the gospel has made tremendous gains in the 20th Century. How is it that so many have put their faith in Christ and yet the situation does not seem to have improved at all? Should not the transformational power of the gospel have made a greater impact? What went wrong?

Africa is an object lesson and a case study of all the things you should not do by both the global world powers and the Church. The global powers, seeking access to Africa's vast natural riches and human capital, have sought to control the continent for their own benefit. Colonialism and slavery have resulted. Even after the colonial powers left, there is still fierce competition for Africa's resources, leading to further bloodshed and corruption. In their attempt to fix what they have broken, the global community has flooded the continent with foreign funds and resources, thereby destroying local markets and creating ongoing dependency, and enriching the corrupt leadership of the various countries. It is a lot for any people to overcome.

### The Church Is Part of the Problem

The global Church, on the other hand, has worked very hard to help African peoples with the best of motives but also with many of the worst possible mission strategies. Yes, the mission strategy that one employs does make a huge difference. Missionaries came to Africa with their foreign culture, funds,

strategies, and structures that in many cases created dependency and prevented the gospel from becoming truly indigenous to the people of Africa. In general Africans failed to take true ownership of the gospel and the mission to take it to every tribe and tongue of Africa and the world. As David Taylor reports on page 6, one ray of hope is that this is beginning to change.

Our friend, Glenn Schwartz, who writes regularly for us (see p. 28), saw first hand the devastating impact of these poor mission strategies on the people of Africa. He has spent decades teaching the global Church about self-reliance and the dangers of dependency so that the mistakes made in Africa will not be repeated elsewhere. We feature him in each issue because the global Church must learn from its mistakes and employ the most effective strategies for the establishment of self-supporting and self-propagating church-planting movements in every people on earth. Unfortunately, there are still mission organizations that continue to promote the same mission strategies that created dependency in the African church. As a result we see an ongoing need to focus on this subject in each issue of *MF*.

### Proclaiming an Incomplete Gospel

For the gospel to have its full impact in transforming a people and their culture there must be a transformation of each person's worldview. The Christian faith cannot simply be laid on top of a more foundational worldview. If all we do is get people to "pray the prayer" so they are bound for heaven and get them to go through the motions of following Jesus,

then we should not be surprised when there is a lack of transformation in their lives and the surrounding culture.

In general, when the first missionaries came to Africa they did not come with the goal of making the gospel indigenous to the people and applicable to every aspect of life. All they knew was to present the gospel in the way that they had received it along with all the cultural baggage and limitations. Ken Turnbull talks about this problem in his article starting on page 16. He says,

African theologian Dr. Van der Poll summarizes well the result of this dualism:

Because the Gospel was not brought to the people as a new totally encompassing life view, which would take the place of an equally comprehensive traditional life view, the deepest core of the African culture remains untouched . . . . The convert in Africa did not see the Gospel as sufficient for his whole life and especially for the deepest issues of life. For that reason, we find the phenomenon across Africa today that Christians in time of existential needs and crises (such as danger, illness and death) fall back on their traditional beliefs and life views. It is precisely an area where the Gospel should have most relevance, yet the Gospel does not mean much in practical terms for the African.

Professor B. J. van der Walt states,

We cannot ignore the fact that perhaps the dominant type of Christianity on our continent is of an escapist and pietist nature. Their Christian faith is something of another world, without any relevance to the burning issues of Africa. However, if we want a new Africa, we need a new type of Christianity.... Our eyes have to be opened, our vision broadened, we have to know how to serve God in every part of our existence.

This points out powerfully that it is not enough just to send missionaries to every tribe and tongue. If we bring an incomplete or culture-bound gospel along with an ineffective model of doing discipleship, then we have failed. Our job is to make disciples who can make disciples, not just to get people saved but to bring every person into a life transforming relationship with Jesus that is able to bring transformation to all of Africa. We must proclaim a gospel where every aspect of life is submitted to the lordship of Jesus.

### Hope in the Midst of Darkness

Mistakes have been made, the damage has been done. How should the global Church move forward in helping the African church? We must focus on working with African leaders as servants to develop strategies of ministry with the end result in mind. Our goal should be to see rapidly multiplying Church Planting Movements within every people group in Africa. We know enough now about what God uses to create these Church Planting Move-

ments. We should apply these principles and expect God to bring them about in every people with the resulting personal and societal transformation.

The most encouraging reason for hope in Africa is that a growing number of leaders seem to understand what many around the world do not—that world evangelization is impossible without reaching all of the unreached people groups. David Taylor points to this on page 6,

The country of Kenya has led the way by becoming the first country to engage all of its unreached peoples with national missionary teams. It is very likely that based on the momentum we are seeing in Africa, all of the unreached peoples on the continent will be fully engaged and reached in the next decade. In spite of all they have been through—in spite of wars, plagues, famines, and natural disasters—the gospel of the Kingdom is being preached to every ethne and the finish line is well within view. For the first time in history, this generation of Africans will actually be able to say, “every nation, tribe, people and language” on our continent has been reached.

In the midst of all of the suffering Africa has gone through God is bringing

about a victory in mission strategy that bodes well for the future of Africa.

### Spreading the Vision

Thank you to all of you who have sent in gifts to help support the work of *Mission Frontiers* in spreading the vision of reaching the unreached peoples to Christian leaders all over the world. We have been asking our readers to send in gifts of \$180 to help us send *MF* to 30 Christian leaders around the world. Our goal is to raise 1,500 of these gifts by the end of the year. We have now received gifts of various amounts equaling 283 of these gifts. This is an increase of 45 since our last issue. We also appreciate larger and smaller donations which will also count towards our goal.

Please consider sending a gift to help us keep *MF* going out to Christian leaders around the world. Just go to [www.missionfrontiers.org/donate](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/donate). You can also give through Paypal.

Also please remember to send back your reply card located on the back cover. We do not want you to miss the next issue of *MF*.<sup>f</sup>

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