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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

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Series D: International Relations Activities. 1961-1992

Box 54, Folder 3, Africa, 1971-1979.

memorandum

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

JUN 28 1977

date June 22, 1977

to Marc Tanenbaum
from M. Bernard Resnikoff

subject

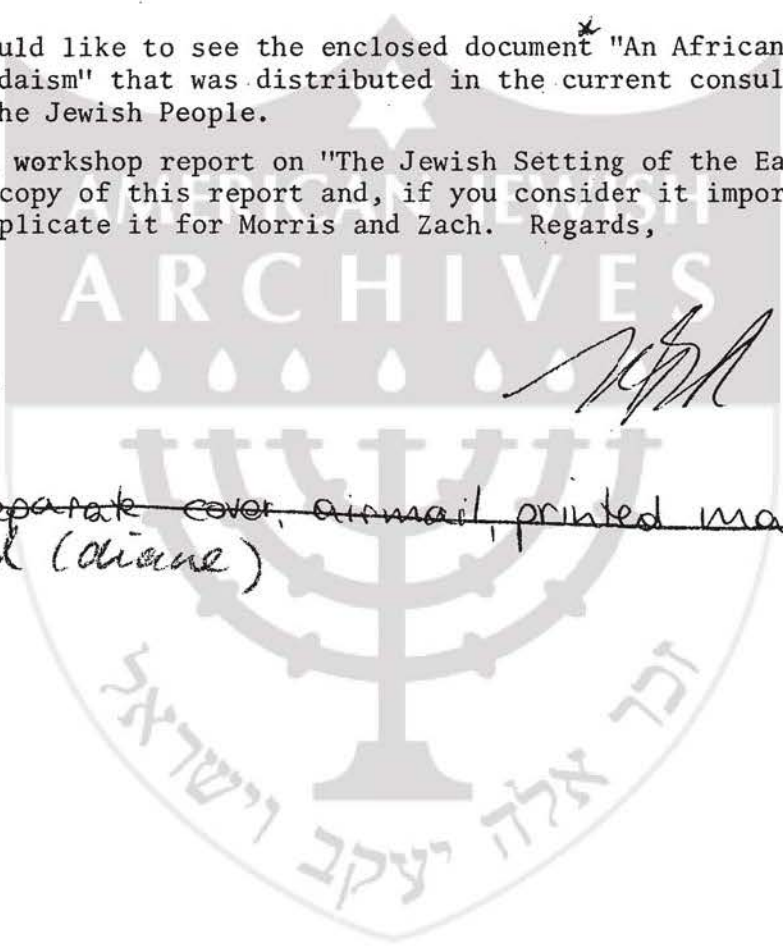
I thought you would like to see the enclosed document "An African Christian's Evaluation of Judaism" that was distributed in the current consultation on the Church and the Jewish People.

I also enclose a workshop report on "The Jewish Setting of the Early Church". I have only one copy of this report and, if you consider it important, you might wish to duplicate it for Morris and Zach. Regards,

MBR:fp
encl: 2
cc: Morris Fine
Zach Shuster



~~Sent under separate cover, airmail, printed matter.~~
attached (diane)



An African Christian's Evaluation of Judaism

The following facts have determined the attitude of Africans to Judaism:

1. Africans in this century do not know Judaism by direct experience. For most Africans the Jews are the people of the Old Testament, the victims of anti-Semitism under the Nazis and the citizens of the modern State of Israel.

2. During the 1960s, sentiment in Africa was very much in favour of Israel as an example of a new State that was turning deserts into vineyards. Israel offered scholarships in Agriculture, Physical Education and medicine to young Africans who were excited by the opportunity of study in a progressive technological country. Israel offered hope that the developing countries could make it in the development race. In return, Israeli construction companies like the Solel Boneh established profitably in African countries like Nigeria.

3. International politics (specifically the Middle-East problem) changed all this about four years ago when the Arab members of the Organization of African Unity used their membership of the ~~xxxxxxx~~ continental organization to get African states to break diplomatic relations with Israel on the matter of Israel's stand in the Arab-Israel conflict.

The willingness and ability of Israel to use force to maintain her stand in its beleaguered^e territory began to remove from her the sympathies reserved for the underdog. The Palestinians began to have a case. Israel began to look like the instrument of Western European aggression (vide the Balfour Declaration and the fact that it was Ugandan soil that was first offered to the Zionists in their days of landlessness). By the time of the Israeli raid on Entebbe Airport in 1976, communications between Israel and African countries had broken down and African States in the United Nations supported the motion to equate Zionism with racism. The persecuted had become the persecutor.

It is like what happens when you watch the Jew of Malta as portrayed in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. All Africans who passed through British-type colonial schools up to secondary level know of the calumniated Shylock protesting: "Is a Jew not a human being?" And they loved him. They know also of the Shylock, now at a vantage point, ready with knife to cut what has become proverbial as the pound of flesh. They hated him.

4. Now something happened in Nigeria early in 1977 to indicate that a change is coming. Brigadier Joe Garba, Nigeria's Federal Commissioner for External Affairs, stated in a public speech that the Arab States in the O.A.U. were displaying paternalism to their African colleagues, particularly in the matter of O.P.E.C. politics and development aid politics.

This sudden outburst showed the artificiality of pro-Arab, anti-Israel, diplomacy among Black African States. Newspaper articles since then have called for a review of the situation. (See Sunday Times, Lagos Nigeria, April 10 & 17, 1977. Attached) Meanwhile, the Israeli Embassy in Lagos remains closed, but the construction firm of Seel Boneh is still operating in Nigeria, and Israeli citizens still live in Bodija Estate, Ibadan.

If all this is Israeli politics rather than Jewish religion, it is because, as I have said above, Judaism is not a live issue in most of Africa. (There are churches and mosques all over Africa, but synagogues are conspicuously absent.) Islam, on the other hand, is very much a living faith among many Africans ^{who know the Qur'an in Arabic and} who therefore have a soft spot for Arabia and the Arab countries. A similar sentiment exists for Israel among African Christians who accept the scriptures of the Old Testament with all the love for Jerusalem and Zion which this engenders. *They generally know no Hebrew.*

Ethiopia and the Bible

The relationship of Ethiopians to the Old Testament history and religion (and to Christianity subsequently) is a special case within Africa. The Ethiopians consider that their royal dynasty is descended from a union between King Solomon and the queen of Sheba. The ramifications of this connection have been adequately traced by Edward Ullendorf in his Ethiopia and the Bible.

This tradition was solid until the dethronement in 1975 of the Conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah, Elect of God, King of Kings, Haile Selassie I, who was the secular head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Ethiopians contingent at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria in January 1977 carefully stood clear of any reference to the legend of the Petha Nagast and presented Ethiopia after Haile Selassie as a secular revolutionary state. Here, too, then, politics of another type have modified the pride with which Ethiopians traditionally identified with the Hebrew heritage.

African Christians and the Old Testament

In spite of the fact that African Christians (like others) have been taught that the Jews were the people who did Jesus to death, nevertheless if there are any Christians anywhere in the world who identify with the scriptures of the Old Testament, they are members of African indigenous churches.

The reason is the undeniable presence of what J.J. Williams wrote about in his book, Hebrewisms of West Africa. I have explored this for the Yoruba people (south-west Nigeria, Dahomey and Togo) in The Vocabulary of Yoruba Religious Discourse (Ibadan, Daystar Press, 1972) and I am pressing the philological exploration further in "African Words in Bible and Qur'aan", which is yet uncompleted. The title of the French language edition of the proceedings of the first consultation of African theologians, Pour une

theologie Africaine (Editions CLE, Yaounde, 1969) suggests that a comparative study of Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (the title of the English language edition) will lead to the emergence of a distinctively relevant style of Christian theology for Africa.

Anti-Hamitism

But nationalistic black Africans would point beyond the prehistoric cultural similarities to the ideological divergence between Israel and Africa. The Hebrews cursed Canaan and Cush together as children of Ham: "a slave of slaves will he be." I have called this "Anti-Hamitism in Genesis" in my contribution to the W.C.C. study, Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism (1975).

In the presence of this ideology in the scriptures of the Jews, all philological delineation of the prehistoric identity of the languages and cultures of Canaan, "Israel", Misraim and Cush is of mere academic import. African Christians will accept Christianity ("In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile") but hardly Judaism which considers their ancestors as under the same curse as the Canaanites whom the Hebrews exterminated or subjugated.

It happens that, truly, Africa had more in common with Canaan than with "Israel": kingship, walled cities, agriculture as more than pastoralism, polytheism rather than monotheism, palaces, temples, agricultural festivals (New Yam Festival, etc), hill divinities and hill shrines, seers and magicians. 'El, Ba'al, Yamn, Dagon - all have linguistic

reflexes in West Africa. Whereas it was Zipperah the daughter of the priest of Midian who taught Moses circumcision, that ~~ritaxdexpnssage~~ rite has been a traditional rite de passage in Africa from time immemorial.

It is very important to note that, beginning with Abraham, Israel has stood, like Joseph, "separate from all his brethren" (Edom, Canaan, Midian and all the other Shemites). It must be expected that Israel will stand ideologically ~~and~~ (that is, theologically) separate from his Hamitic cousins in Africa. From about 70 A.D. till 1948 (and till today), Shem has lived in the tents of Japheth rather than in the huts of Ham. The sixth century B.C. Jewish garrison in Jeb (Elephantine) vanished, leaving behind only a trail of legend. Only the Falasha, the black Jews of Ethiopia, remain as Pharisees on African soil.

The African Christian's evaluation of Judaism will remain ambivalent: sometimes, as in the nineteenth century, the African will gain inspiration from the Ethiopianism in the Old Testament ("Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God.") Sometimes, as in the twentieth century, the Hebrew curse on Ham will impose a silence of embarrassment between Jews and black Africans. Sometimes, as in the 1960s, Africans trying to turn deserts into vineyards will be attracted by the Zionist feats of Israel under Ben Gurion. Sometimes, the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah will be taken up by African Christians as ancestral quarrel.

Ibadan, 1977

Modupe Oduyoye

WORKSHOP on

The Jewish setting of the Early Church in relation to trends towards indigenization in Third World churches

in Jerusalem, June 10 - 21, 1977

It so happened that from January 1, 1976, the Swedish Theological Institute (STI) in Jerusalem came under the administration of the Church of Sweden Mission. It was then natural to think of a widening of the pattern of contacts from a limited Scandinavia-centered point of view to including the many churches with which for historical and other reasons the Church of Sweden has established a net of relations.

A workshop on "The Jewish setting of the Early Church in relation to trends towards indigenization in Third World churches" is an attempt to find out what such a widened perspective might mean for the work of the Institute as well as for a dialogue between the Church and the Jewish People.

The aim behind the planning was: a) to get people from various parts of the world together at a spot which is, after all, a kind of starting point for them all and thus a common denominator of a very specific kind, b) to establish personal contacts with theological seminaries in the third world so as to open up lines for students from those places to come on scholarships for studies at the STI.

The specific aim behind the theme of the workshop was to start tackling the "indigenization" debate from a somewhat different angle. A crucial issue for many third world churches is the problem of the Western dress of the Christian church in the midst of an indigenous cultural context. What are the criteria for a change from a Western to an indigenous dress? This is where the Jewish setting of the Early Church comes in, because the evangelion, and the new community based on it, was set in a particular religio-cultural framework from the very beginning. There was never a pure, naked form. Never a zero-point. What is the relation between that "given model" and a pluralistic universality of the church? Is there a problem of the Jewishness of Jesus in relation to the Universality of Christ? Are there short-cuts back from a third world context to the "biblical model" that could be opened up and elaborated? Could attempts at indigenization combined with a reflection on a "given model" be useful also for a fresh look at the role of the People of God among the nations?

THEME I The Biblical milieu in Asian/African perspectives.

- a Points of contact on a non-western level of reference.
- b The problem of a western frame of reference for Biblical exegesis as handed over to third world churches with the missions.

THEME II Preparatio Evangelica. The problem of the OT as the necessary background for an understanding of the NT writings.

- a The OT and indigenous holy writs. The problem of inclusive and exclusive views.
- b The OT as "a syncretistic document" and the influence of such religions and religious traditions that happened to be nearer in time and place to the birthplace of Christianity.

THEME III The view of history.

- a The Jewish-Christian (and Muslim) view of history in relation to Eastern and African views of history.
- b The Semitic view of history and development as imposed on the world at large through western culture and education in relation to indigenous understandings of the meaning of history.

- THEME IV The Semitic-Jewish culture as the background of the NT vocabulary, symbolism, and moods of expression.
- a Biblical key words such as faith, justice, liberation, sin, redemption, in relation to corresponding concepts in African/Asian contexts.
 - b The mental pictures of God and divine phenomena as described in words compared to the use of idols/eikons/avatars. The basic approach to worship including tensions between the personal and the impersonal.
- THEME V Attempts at indigenization. Its possibilities and its limits.
- a The sacraments of baptism and eucharist. What can be context-related and what needs to be preserved from the original context in order to maintain the essence of the "institution".
 - b The structures of church organization and the structure of worship. Where to find the true points of a mutually enriching fecundity between the originally Jewish setting and the many new contexts of a world-wide church.
- THEME VI The Jewish People and the promised land.
- a The literal and historical vis-à-vis the spiritual and allegorical interpretation of the OT prophecies.
 - b The relation/similarity/difference between the promises to Israel as the People of God and other peoples as called by God to a new future in communion with him.

For each theme the participants had prepared introductions and the following is an attempt at highlighting some of the issues that were felt burning during the workshop.

I Meaning of indigenization

Indigenization of theology is that ongoing process that modifies and adapts to the modes of thinking or acting in the church. It happens in the alteration of goals, structures, or processes in theological thinking; it is seen in the alteration of customs, values, and institutional thinking, bringing about growth, development, transformation, and modernization of thought and action. So we articulate the Gospel and organize our church structures and church organizations in ways that are relevant to the life situation of the people. The end result is the legitimization of potentiality for a continuous rearrangement and refocusing of present possibilities, creating an untrammelled flow, exchange, and mobilization of all that works for good for the theological community. This comes about because the theological community has brought about purposive exposure to and an ability to face problems created by modernity and has the guts to create novel opportunities for creativity. All this comes about because the people themselves "feel" that they must relate themselves and the Gospel to the people they are ministering to, though there were occasions when the process of indigenization was "imposed" on the church by outsiders, e.g. by some missionaries and educationalists.

II Points of Contact

Immediate and natural points of contact between biblical materials and local traditions are seen in the following.

- (i) A sense of community consciousness in and through which individuals express their identity.

- (ii) Arising from this, religion is a societal affair, reminding one of the way the Old Testament speaks of Israel in terms of the People of God.
- (iii) It is no wonder then, given the first two points, that the relation between the Old Testament and local holy writs and oral traditions becomes obviously apparent, resulting in an inclusive view of incorporation with a concern to maintain monotheism.

III Problem of time and history

There was a general agreement to avoid the dichotomy of secular history and salvation history as seen in the attempts to speak of "pockets and bundles of time" in history, emphasizing the belief that times are "differentiated" by the nature of the experience to which they point and the way Yahweh grants them (determining how and when they may occur). So there is a questioning of any belief in time understood as an irreversible, unceasing, forward-bound line of movement. Times are determined by their quality, rather than their quantity. A problem arises when you try to relate such an understanding of time and history to an Indian context which is generally a-historical. How do you relate the Jesus of history to the kind of Indian tradition where one cannot care less about history?

IV Images and Symbols

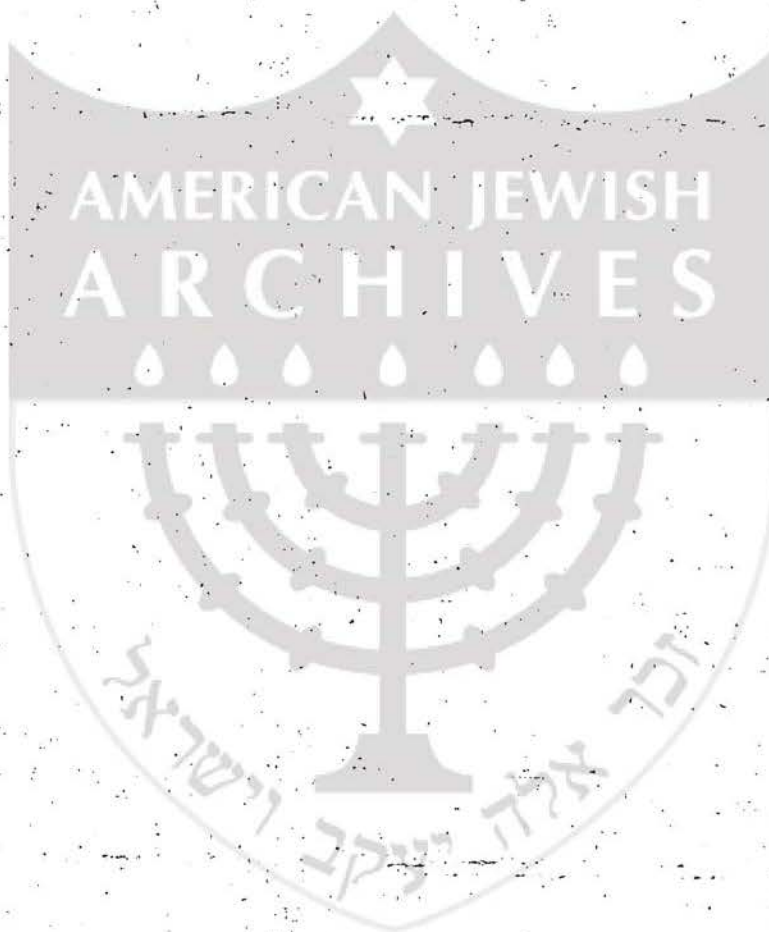
Indigenization demands a decision to say something about God to the contexts we come from but the question is: How and what do we say about God? For example, anthropomorphisms are used in the Bible which avoid use of idols, yet in certain cases where indigenization took place, the use of idols and how idols are to be differentiated from eikons cropped up. The African solution is that, since God has never been expressed in and through idols, therefore there is not any problem. However, Asian Christians have to differentiate between idols and mental images of God. Symbolically water, bread, and wine are expressions of spiritual grace, and the important thing is that reality is more important than symbols.

V Biblical Key words and God - People - Land specificity

In trying to indigenize one cannot escape from biblical key words like faith, justice, liberation, and their counterparts in Africa and Asia, especially when one has to deal with the problem seen in the God - People - Land specificity. That we cannot escape from the problem of election, which brings in its wake historicity and materiality and the issues seen in the Jewish-Christian-and-Other-Faiths dialogue, is obvious. So the consideration of biblical key words in relation to biblical - local contextuality and the God - People - Land specificity poses no small problems.

No one can deny that God is faithful to Israel (the God-People-Land specificity) and that in His covenants (with Noah and at Mount Sinai, for example) with Israel it is His intention to use Israel to lead all nations to Him. However, with the establishment of the New Covenant as understood by the Christian Church we now have to play the role of the Old Israel (the biblical-local contextuality which is our present situation). Between now and the time when all of mankind (and that will include Israel) will be led to God is the interim period in which the Church together with other religions will co-operate with God in expediting the Salvation of mankind. This will create a situation characterized by mutual jealousy causing mankind to turn to God. Thus the People of God and their history and the way both people and history have been recorded in the Old Testament seem to give us a model after which to pattern our adoption of new intake from local contexts. That is to say, the way biblical materials get

Canaanized, Assyrianized, Babylonized, Persianized, etc, should be a guide line to us in our effort to Africanize and Asianize our theology. In the process naturally many problems arise, and there were many occasions when disagreements were expressed, e.g. the ways history and time are understood in various parts of Africa, and the place of Holy Scriptures in the thinking of Asian Christians.



77.06.19
/gn

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date January 26, 1979
to Marc Tanenbaum
from M. Bernard Resnikoff
subject

I had occasion to write Abe recently asking for an elaboration of a cryptic comment I read recently that the AJC is getting involved in third world programming. What I did not know, and still do not know, are the objectives and the program aims of such a program.

Pending the receipt of such information, but relying on a hunch, I reached out to Father Engelbert Mveng on a recent, whirlwind visit to Israel.

Responding promptly and favorably to a request of the Israel Interfaith Committee to help share in the expenses of bringing Mveng from Paris to Israel and return, I had a dinner meeting with him last night and am escorting him to an audience with the Apostolic Delegate later this day, may be joining him at a luncheon in his honor at the Hebrew University Faculty Club and am alerting our Paris office to his return there briefly.

You probably know about his ecumenical association of African theologians. Now being conducted by a steering committee of seven, composed of two Roman Catholics and five Protestants, the aim is literally pan-African with the hope of creating a continent-wide program by the end of 1979 in some African country that is accessible to most.

In addition, he continues to have an interest in creating a Bible study center here in Jerusalem and this is the primary purpose of his visit at this time. He would also hope to open a satellite center in Yaounde.

And beyond this, he is hoping to escort one hundred or so black Christian pilgrims to Israel about August 1979. (something for our own visitors program?).

Naturally I brought your name up, and speculated with him how he thought you and your department might be associated with him. He said he needed help in organizing the first pan-African meeting; would welcome scholarships to enable scholars to study at his Bible center; would need help for establishing a central office in Africa for his association and would be seeking a travel budget to accomplish these purposes. So far, there has been some help from the WCC and a formal request has been submitted to the Vatican.

To help fill out the picture, I attach a copy of a four-page memorandum he gave me, a printed copy of his communiqué and a copy of a 1979 brochure, which I will ask that you share with Abe Karlikow even as I send a second copy on to the Paris office.

From you, I need a reaction, copies of any correspondence you have with the good Father and any suggestions you may have concerning the ways we here should relate to the Israel Interfaith Committee with respect to the Israel-centered programs of this new organization. Best regards.

MBR:jw
 Encl. cc: Abe Karlikow, Nives Fox

Jan. 21, 1971

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
New York Reception Center

Dear Rabbi Tannenbaum,

As we discussed, here is the back-
ground on Father Mveng. I look forward
to hearing from you about his
appointment to meet you. Would you
also advise me whether you will want
our interpreter to come along?

Thank you.

Elaine Heifetz
971-5647

EH

CLS

COUNCIL ON LEADERS AND SPECIALISTS

of The Experiment in International Living

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BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Rev. R. P. MVENG, S.J.
Director of Cultural Affairs
Ministry of Education
Yaounde, Federal Republic of Cameroon

PROGRAM OFFICER: Lewis Carnahan

Participant in the International Visitor Program, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State (256 L 72). Visiting the United States January 17 - February 7, 1972. Rev. Mveng is accompanied by Department of State Escort-Interpreter, Mr. Scott Slaybecker.

NATIONALITY: Cameroonian

PRESENT POSITIONS: Director of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Education, Yaounde
Professor of History, Federal University of Cameroon, Yaounde

ACADEMIC TRAINING: Doctorate, Sorbonne, Paris, 1970 (Thesis: "The Greek Sources of Black Africa History from Homer to Strabo")
Licence in Theology, University of Lyons, 1963
Licence in Philosophy, University of Louvain, 1959

PUBLICATIONS: Guide Bibliographique du Monde Noir, 2 volumes

TRAVELS ABROAD: Rev. Mveng has traveled extensively in Europe, and has made several trips to Israel. He visited the United States August 1968 for Pax Romana Congress in Philadelphia.

KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH: Adequate

OTHER LANGUAGES: French, Latin, Greek, German, Italian, Ewondo, Kikongo

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: May 9, 1930; Cameroon

MAILING ADDRESS: B.P. 876, Yaounde, Federal Republic of Cameroon

DIETARY RESTRICTIONS: None

INTERESTS: The Post informs us that Rev. Mveng is intensely involved in establishing an African cultural identity and wishes to meet with individuals, organizations and institutions able to contribute to this project. Rev. Mveng will serve as President of the African Committee of Biblical Congress of Jerusalem during the month of March, 1972. This conference is bringing together representatives from 19 African countries, plus the United States, France, Israel and Italy, to undertake a study of the influence of the Bible and Christianity in Africa from pre-colonial times to the present. Rev. Mveng is therefore anxious to meet with leaders of black religious organizations in the United States, particularly in connection with participation and financial support.
(continued, over)

INTERESTS (continued):

Reverend Mveng also wishes to meet with appropriate people and organizations in connection with his Guide Bibliographique du Monde Noir - he has done extensive work in this connection in Europe, and now would like to do the same, insofar as time permits in the U.S., such as, for example, the African Bibliographic Center in Washington. He is also interested in sources of financial support for the Guide.

An extensive list of suggested contacts has been furnished by our Ambassador to Burundi, Thomas P. Melady. These names will be furnished to the appropriate sponsors.

NOTE: Rev. Mveng wishes to attend Mass daily, and is willing to do so early enough in the morning, for example, that it would not interfere with appointments beginning at 9:00 or 9:30 AM. I would suggest that the sponsor mention in his letter of welcome a church close to the hotel where Rev. Mveng has reservations.

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES



January 18, 1972
LHC/sbh

PAN AFRICAN CONFERENCE OF THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIANS

17th - 23rd DECEMBER, 1977 - G.I.M.P.A., GREENHILL

ACHIMOTA, ACCRA-GHANA

COMMUNIQUE

INTRODUCTION

We African Christians who met in Accra, Ghana from the 17th to the 23rd of December, 1977, in the context of the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians and for the purpose of discussing the Emerging Themes in African Theology, address ourselves and the rest of the Christian Community in Africa and in other parts of the world in this Statement.

The purpose which brought us together in Accra is our own depth of concern for the faith in Jesus Christ in Africa. It is this faith in the Lord of history which speaks to us concretely today in the context of our joy in praising the saving Lord, in sharing our problems among ourselves and with the awareness of the very real presence of the incarnate Jesus with us to comfort us and to give us hope.

Our meeting here was filled with the experiences of a new life which was manifested in such characteristics as being together beyond the denominational barriers and even beyond the usual rules of formal representation. Among us were Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics who have shared each other's voice freely out of our concerns rather than in the limitations of officiality. We have also experienced living together as a Community of God's people with our brothers and sisters from the Black American world, from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands. In this experience we have felt the warmth of togetherness as a people who share similar concerns as captives in the world full of oppression and injustices which are more than often, not of our own making; but above all as peoples who share equal hope.

The saving Word of the Lord which provides freedom to the captives has been our guiding stick. This was not only manifested through our daily worship and singing, but also in drama, in plenary presentations and group discussions. We affirm emphatically that it is the message of the Old and the New Testaments which demonstrate the boldness and power of our dialogue as African Christians with the Third World Theologians.

THE AFRICAN REALITY

The examination of the living Word of the Lord has led us to consider the living realities of Africa today.

We thank God for the dynamism and vitality of African Christian communities and churches. The rapid growth of the people of God in Africa, the uniqueness of the African experience of Christian life through worship, original African liturgy, Bible reading and community life, are for all of us a matter of hope and confidence.

We realize that African unity is the unity of spirit and soul, an indivisible unity in terms of historical reality which may even transcend geographical differences. Our unity is one which participates actively in the total community of God without fading away in the wind of unspecified universalism. We also realize that there are elements which threaten this unity of our people and we deplore all such elements which seek to shake the solidness of our deep rooted unity, be they in the form of economic isolation, of power manipulation or even of the styles of life.

Colonialism has hampered our unity throughout the history of our relations with the Western world. Despite our contemporary experience of the post-colonial era in most of Africa, colonialism continues to be perpetuated in Southern Africa. The white regimes in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa are nothing but disguised colonial occupations. This is characterized in the white minority's domination of the African majority through military force. In South Africa, the colonial domination is perpetuated through the Bantustans. Therefore, the minority regime's program of independence for the so-called Homelands is nothing but a fraud aimed at vitiating the forces of liberation from white colonialism and thereby deceive the world at large into thinking that the black majority people of South Africa have accepted white domination. The ends of this colonial occupation are served by institutionalized white racism in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Racism is not an African creation but a white making. Africans deplore the fact that white racists from Zimbabwe and South Africa are not being exported to Latin American countries with the material support of and international manipulation by these powers.

Ethnicity in Africa, as anywhere in the world, must not be confused with racism. Ethnicity is a positive element in any human society. It can, however, also be misused by outside powers to serve the ends of racism and cause disunity, wars and human suffering.

We have no intention of under-rating the internal misuse of power and injustices in relation to ethnicity or despotism, but we also realize that more than often such structures of internal oppression are perpetuated by questionable alliances under the disguise of friendship treaties or development aid. We affirm that our history is both sacred and secular. We see God's movement in our hope for a free and just society in Africa. Any destruction of this hope, be it in the misuse of power and authority, in the exploitation of man's resources by national institutions or by

multinational corporations is a direct and damnable violation of the destiny of God's people. God's demand of all creation is that human beings be subordinate to God's will for the total human community and thereby make true Christ's command to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The African reality lays claim on the inseparability of the understanding of love and its practical expression. Therefore, love for us signifies that communal act of obedience by the whole human community to God who is eternally with us. In Africa today this understanding of love is not only being destroyed by the ill effects of some national institutions and multinational corporations, but the ill effects inherent in these institutions and corporations also cause great disunity, often perpetuated through militarism. The resultant suffering in this situation has led to thousands of deaths, including detentions and painful refugee situations. It is our belief that God's demand of the Churches in Africa is that they not only oppose any form of oppression and suffering but also sever any alliances, directly or indirectly, with the forces of oppression, e.g. by reviewing their stockholding portfolios in multinational corporations which facilitate the systematic militarization of governments where the struggle for survival, the suppression of human rights and the violation of human dignity are so rampant today.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

We see that the methodology of studying the presence of Christianity in Africa must shift from hagiography of yesterdays to a more critical approach which starts from the African world-view and examines the impact of Christianity and the varieties of African responses. We note that the old strategies in mission are no longer relevant for proclamation. The tendency nowadays is largely confined to the maintenance of the inherited church structures. Moreover, there is a gap between the rhetoric of church officials, administrators and theologians with the reality in the villages. We observe that this has made the African masses passive, so that the problems of limited funds to run these institutions and the confused concept of stewardship make it impossible to realize the call for self-reliance and moratorium,

The missionary church in Africa has used education as a means of domestication which has also led to misunderstandings with our colleagues in the wider dialogue as was evident during the Christian-Muslim conference in Chambesy, 1976. This education has also produced the elite class in our various countries.

We are therefore impelled to rethink the relevant strategies for the future of God's people in Africa. However we take a serious note of the fact that efforts are being taken to contextualize the gospel and to take full responsibility for the maintenance of the church. We proclaim that the Basis of the church in Africa is in the vitality of the African Christian communities. Beyond the missionary structures and power, our Christian communities in poverty, humility and faith, continue to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, creating their own Christian way of life, and their own language to express the originality of their Christian experience.

In the traditional setting there was no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. On the contrary, the sacred was experienced in the context of the secular. This healthy way of understanding our African society must be taken seriously by the Church.

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN THEOLOGIES

When we consider the Emergence of New Theologies in Africa, it is important for us to state a few words about the context of the theological situation, to present the theological trends today and finally to identify the sources of African Theology.

(a) Context of African Theology

Despite the colonial experience of depersonalization and cultural invasion, the African cultures have kept their vitality

This vitality is expressed in the revival of African language, dances, music and literature and in its contribution to human sciences and to the human experience. This cultural vitality is the support of the African people in their struggle for the complete liberation and for the construction of a human society. Despite this, it is necessary to recognize the persistence of the situation of domination which resulted from colonialism.

This situation of domination also exists in the Churches. The organization model imported from the West is still proposed and accepted. This is particularly true in Theology. The life of our churches has been dominated by a theology developed with a methodology, a world-view and a conception of humanity using Western categories.

(b) Present Trends in Theology

African theology has already emerged and is alive. Among the various approaches in African theology are:

- (1) a theological approach which while admitting the inherent values in the traditional religions, sees in them a preparation for the Gospel.
- (2) a critical theology which comes from the contact with the Bible, the openness to the African realities and the dialogue with non-African theologies.
- (3) Black theology in South Africa takes into consideration the experiences of oppression and the struggle for liberation, and gets its inspiration from the biblical faith as expressed in African language and categories as well as from the experience and reflections of Black North Americans.

These three approaches are not exhaustive, but they reveal the dynamism of the theological movement on the continent.

(c) Sources of Theology

1. **The Bible and the Christian Heritage:** The Bible is the basic source of African Theology, because it is the primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from the Scripture. For the Bible is not simply a historical book about the people of Israel. Through a re-reading of this scripture in the social context of our people struggling for the realization of their humanity, God speaks to us in the midst of our troublesome situation. This divine Word is not an abstract proposition but an event in our lives, empowering us to continue in the fight for our full humanity.

The Christian heritage is also important for African Theology. This is the heritage that springs out of the life and history of the Church since the time of our Lord, with long tradition of scholarship, liturgies, experiences, etc. African Christianity is a part of world-wide Christianity.

2. **African Anthropology:** The destiny of the human person and the context of life are basic assumptions in the life of the African people. Human destiny is the dramatic conflict between life and death which finds its meaning in the victory of life over death. There is unity and continuity between the destiny of human persons and the destiny of the cosmos. The victory of life in the human person is also the victory of life in the cosmos. The African anthropology and cosmology are optimistic. The salvation of the human person in African theology, is the salvation of the Universe, and in the mystery of Incarnation, Christ assumes the totality of the human and the totality of the cosmos.

3. **African Traditional Religions:** The God of History speaks to all peoples in particular ways. In Africa the Traditional Religions are a major source for the study of the African experience of God. The beliefs and practices of the Traditional Religions in Africa can enrich Christian theology and spirituality.

4. **African Independent Churches:** The experience of the independent churches have developed through their long history a type of worship, organization and community life rooted in African culture and touching the daily life of the people.

5. **Other African Realities:** The experiences of cultural forms of life and arts, extended family, hospitality and communal life are the expression of deep feelings of love and care. The struggles for the transformation of socio-economic systems, the struggles against racism, sexism and other forms of economic, political, social and cultural oppressions, all these are to be taken seriously as sources for theology.

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

We believe that African Theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African peoples to shape a new future that

is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present. The African situation requires a new theological methodology that is different from the dominant theologies of the West. African theology must reject, therefore, the prefabricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises out of and is accountable to African people.

In the depths of our theological reflection we encounter God in the poor of today. In this we feel called to proclaim the love of God for all people within the dynamics of a conflictual history. Because of our commitment to the struggles of our people to be free, we believe that the theology that arises from that commitment will have three characteristics.

(a) African Theology must be contextual theology. African Theology will not be able to be a theology of African life and culture unless it is accountable to the context in which the people live. Also in drama, novels and poetry, Africans demonstrate the importance of the contextual expression of theology. The theme of contextualization in theology is clearly the liberation of our people from a form of cultural captivity.

(b) Because oppression is not only found in culture but also in political and economic structures and the dominant mass media, African Theology must also be liberation theology. The focus on liberation in African Theology connects it with other third world theologies. Like Black Theology in North America, we cannot ignore racism as a distortion of the human person. Like Latin American and Asian theologies there is the need to be liberated from socio-economic exploitation. A related but different form of oppression is often found in the roles set aside for women in the churches. There is also oppression in the exploitation of the people through national and multi-national institutions. In all these instances of captivity we need to be liberated. We recognized that there are many forms of oppression. There is the oppression of Africans by white colonialism, but there is also the oppression of Blacks by Blacks. We stand against oppression in any form because the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all forms of dehumanization. Therefore African theology concerns itself with bringing about the solidarity of Africans with Black Americans, Asians and Latin Americans who are also struggling for the realization of human communities in which the men and women of our time become the architects of their own destiny.

(c) Throughout this document, we have referred to the need to struggle against sexism. If that struggle is to be taken seriously by the Church, then our seriousness will be reflected in the way we do theology. We recognize that African women have taken an active role in the church and in the shaping of our history. They have shown themselves to be a coherent part of the liberation struggle. But we cannot ignore their exclusion from our past theological endeavors. Therefore the future of African Theology must take seriously the role of women in the Church as equals in the doing of theology.

CONCLUSION

In post Independent and in Southern Africa, theology confronts new challenges, hopes and opportunities. The vigor of the traditional African religions and cultures and the renewal of the Churches, thanks principally to a return to the Scriptures, present us the resources for our tasks.

Our belief in Jesus Christ, liberator, convinces us that there is a noble future for our countries, if the processes of nation building are geared to providing the urgent basic needs of all instead of the privileges of a few. We are confident that the creative vitality of our own traditional religions and cultures can provide the inspiration for a free and just form of community organization and national development.

In order to serve the people, the Gospel and the Churches in these tasks we pledge to renew ourselves according to the needs of today discerned by us under the light of the Spirit of God present among us. For this we need an interdisciplinary methodology of social analysis, biblical reflection and active commitment to be with the peoples in their endeavors to build a better society. Towards this end we have formed today an Ecumenical Association of African Theologians. Conscious of our deficiencies and weaknesses, yet encouraged by the nobility of the task before us, we undertake this journey of service through theology so that all the women, men and children of our lands may be able "to have life and live abundantly."

copies of this statement are available from:

Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
P.O. Box 1263
New York, New York 10009

YAOUNDE - CAMEROUN

MEMORANDUM

HISTORIQUE L'Association oecuménique des théologiens Africains a été créée à Accra (Ghana), le 20 décembre 1977, à l'occasion du 2e congrès de l'Association oecuménique des Théologiens du Tiers Monde.

Ses objectifs et son Bureau Directeur se trouvent dans le Document Annexe.

Depuis sa fondation l'Association a pris part à la Conférence de Kinshasa sur Christianisme et Religions Africaines (Janvier 1978) à la Conférence de Maryknoll (New York) sur la problématique actuelle de la théologie Missionnaire (Août 1978), à la Conférence oecuménique de Yaoundé sur l'Expérience religieuse dans les rapports de l'homme avec la nature (Septembre 1978).

L'Association est actuellement membre de l'Association Internationale des Sciences Missiologiques, et de l'Association oecuménique des Théologiens du Tiers Monde.

Elle a organisé une première rencontre du Bureau Directeur à l'occasion de la Conférence oecuménique de Yaoundé à laquelle 4 membres sur 7 du Bureau Directeur furent présents.

A l'heure actuelle, l'Association compte des membres dans les pays suivants : Botswana, Afrique du Sud, Kenya, Zaïre, Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar, Egypte, le Ghana, le Libéria, l'Ouganda, la Sierra Leone, Le Cameroun, le Bénin, La Côte d'Ivoire....

PROGRAMME - Le programme à court terme de l'Association à l'heure actuelle comporte les points suivants :

- 1) La première rencontre panafricaine des Théologiens Africains en septembre ou décembre 1979.

Nombre de participants : 30 à 40.

LIEU : Nous pensons à plusieurs capitales africaines, particulièrement aux Institutions Universitaires ou autres (Yaoundé, Dakar, Abidjan, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam ...).

Coût : 15.000.000 CFA.

Aide sollicitée [REDACTED] : 10.000.000 CFA. (soit 50.000 Dollars USA)

- 2) -L'organisation d'une réunion préparatoire de la Rencontre panafricaine.
Date : Décembre 1978
Lieu : Kinshasa.
Nous avons déjà l'accord pour cette réunion. Elle a effectivement eu lieu du 12 au 16 décembre 1978.
- 3) -La Publication d'une Revue dénommée "BULLETIN DE THEOLOGIE AFRICAINE". Le Zaïre a accepté de financer le premier Numéro qui sortira en janvier 1979. Coût annuel de la Revue à raison de 3 numéros par an: 15.000 dollars USA.
- 4) -La création et l'organisation d'un Bureau central de l'Association pour aider le Coordinateur dans sa lourde tâche.
Budget annuel : 3.000.000 CFA. (soit 15.000 dollars USA)
Ce Bureau n'ayant reçu aucune aide financière depuis la création de l'Association, nous faisons appel à la générosité de certains Etats Africains, au Saint Siège, au Conseil Oecuménique des Eglises, et à tout organisme d'assistance missionnaire.
- 5) -Campagne de collecte des fonds : Nous avons écrit à plusieurs Etats Africains et à des Organismes religieux. Nous avons été surpris d'apprendre que la Théologie ne figure pas dans leurs programmes d'aide. Nous avons donc décidé de tenter une autre voie :
 - a) Nous publions un agenda artistique réalisé à partir de l'art africain et destiné à faire connaître notre Association. Nous voulons vendre cet agenda à des Etats et Organismes Africains qui peuvent l'offrir à l'occasion du Nouvel An.
 - b) Nous préparons également pour l'année prochaine l'édition d'un disque de musique religieuse africaine au profit de l'Association. Nous souhaitons également une large diffusion de ce disque en Afri et dans le Monde.

Responsable du lancement et de l'organisation de notre Association, je me trouve en face de difficultés matérielles insurmontables, et je suis bien obligé de m'adresser à ceux qui nous ont encouragés dès le début.

Nous ne demandons pas de prendre en charge tous nos projets, mais de nous aider dans la mesure du possible, à lever ce nouveau défi qui est lancé à la face de l'Afrique.

- 6) Nous avons d'autres projets au programme que nous voulons également porter à votre attention :
- a) A Abidjan, en septembre dernier, nous avons tous émis le vœu d'un Concile Africain. Notre Association, dès sa création, a inscrit dans son programme la préparation théologique d'un tel Concile.
 - b) Nous avons également repris à notre compte le projet d'un Centre d'Etudes Bibliques pour Africains à Jérusalem, projet issu du Congrès sur la Bible et l'Afrique Noire (Jérusalem, Avril 1972).

CONCLUSION : - Tels sont les projets et la situation de notre jeune Association. Nous comptons beaucoup sur vous pour nous aider à lever ce nouveau défi de l'Histoire.

E. MVENG. s.j.

Coordinateur de l'Association Oecuménique des Théologiens Africains.

B.P. 1539 Yaoundé - CAMEROUN.

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