

# Edinburgh 1910 and Christian Identity Today<sup>1</sup>

## *An African Perspective*

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*Informed by notions of Christendom, the Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook conceived of Christian faith in territorial terms and fostered an understanding of Christian mission and identity in which the world is “territorially or geographically” divided into the “Christian land” and “mission field.” This missionary vision engendered a unidirectional flow of resources and ideas in which the West was the sender and the non-West the receiver. However, with the recent southward shift of the Christian landscape, each nation sends as well as receives missionaries. Never before has the course of missionary movement been this multidirectional, disparate, and global. But in spite of this new development, Edinburgh missionary outlook still represents an important lens through which people conceive mission and respond to it. Therefore, in the present article we studied the reflection of African missiologists on the missionary outlook of Edinburgh 1910, and emphasized the importance of true theological reciprocity and mutuality as a major step towards overcoming the dichotomy between the older and younger churches, between Western Christianity and the Christianity of the southern continents.*

Today, missiologists posit the question of forging a new Christian identity as a major challenge of the new southward shift in Christianity. But they also realize that the Christian identity must always be based on our fidelity to the revelation of God in Christ, as the source on which we must relate the changes that are taking place today. It is a debate about a new way of being Christian in our increasingly multi-religious, multi-cultural, and globalized society. This awareness for a new Christian identity challenges the Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook of *Christendom* and asks for a new language of conceiving mission in our contemporary world, where majority of Christians now live in the southern continents (cf. Shenk 2002: xi). Following the recent growth of Christianity in the southern continents, therefore, the Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook of “Christendom” is no longer desirable. Therefore, the debate is an invitation to go beyond the missionary outlook of Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference, and forge a new Christian identity that will incorporate Christians from both the old Christendom and the southern continents, and help them realize that we all belong to one family of God, the church (cf. Schreiter 2002: xi ff.). The identity of a Christian today finds testimonial expressions in the altruistic selfless engagement beyond family, religion, tribe, caste, nationality and culture, etc. As a missionary spirituality, such a Christian identity generates interior peace, harmony, companionship, partnership, holistic view, integrity and compassion.

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<sup>1</sup> The article is also published in *Missiology* (An International Journal of American Society of Missiology), 14(2013)3, 300-314. The Italian version of the article is published in *Euntes Docete* (Urbaniana University Journal), LXIII(2010)2, 83-104.

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Furthermore, the call for a new Christian identity in our increasingly pluralistic society addresses the problem posed by the fragmentation of Christians and the world by the missionary paradigm of Christendom, which many missiologists, especially from the southern continents, see today as an antithesis to the emerging Global Christianity. Thus, today, most missiologists (especially from the southern continents) are suggesting that the Edinburgh missionary concept of Christendom be replaced by what some have called “Christ-centered missionary outlook.” This is a missionary spirituality that should guide us in overcoming the dichotomy between Christians of the North Atlantic world and those of the southern continents, or rather between the old missionary paradigm of Christendom and the new missionary outlook of southern Christianity. The debate here is that through Christ-centered missionary outlook and spirituality, we can overcome the existing dichotomy in our Christian identity between the people of North Atlantic world and those from the Global South. Vatican II and post-conciliar teachings equip us with the tool and spirit to confront with courage and determination, this new challenge facing the emerging global Christianity. This is an invitation to allow Jesus to empower us to transcend the multi-religiosity, pluri-culturality, violence, wars, hatred and prejudices that have come to characterize our contemporary world. In other words, it is only through the power of Jesus Christ that we can transcend the dichotomy between the older and younger churches, between North and South, East and West, between people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the new missionary paradigm and spirituality which is been proposed is that based on the recognition that Christianity and Christendom have to return to the source of the Gospel so as to respond to the present situation of the world in a more creative way, “drawing from the living waters of the Gospel, being a church of communion and solidarity, of mutuality and inter-dependence of cultures and religions.”

In contributing to this debate, I will like to expand the discussion by emphasizing the African perspective of the new southward shift in Christianity. In this centenary of Edinburgh 1910, a good number of African missiologists have attempted to reflect on the significance of Africa for the recent southward shift in Christian landscape.<sup>2</sup> African missiologists discuss Edinburgh 1910

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<sup>2</sup> The most recent, among others, include the landmark book of Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom* (cf. Hanciles 2008); Lamin Sanneh’s *Whose Religion is Christianity?* (cf. Sanneh 2003); and Kwame Bediako’s *African Christianity:*

Conference from this perspective. The African approach questions the concept of “Christendom” used at Edinburgh 1910 Conference. For the African authors, in this new Christian epoch the Edinburgh 1910 missionary concept of “Christendom” is patently unhelpful. In other words, the dramatic shift that has transformed global Christianity into a non-Western religion calls for radically new conceptual tools and even new vocabulary in our mission theology and praxis. For these missiologists, the rapid growth of Christianity in modern Africa challenges us to reexamine Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook of “Christendom.” Modern African Christianity has gone beyond the expectations of Edinburgh Missionary Conference, 100 years ago. Therefore, in what follows, I shall attempt to look at the African perspective of the new southward shift in Christian landscape from two perspectives: 1) The African interpretation of Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook; and 2) African significance of the new southward shift of Christianity.

### 1) **The African interpretation of Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Outlook**

African missiologists argue that, in the African context, Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook was rooted on the interplay of optimism and Afro-pessimism in its language of mission for Africa. From the point of view of its missionary optimism for Africa, Edinburgh 1910 conceived mission as movement from the “Christian” world to the “Non-Christian” world (cf. World Missionary Conference 1910: Report of Commission 1 1910: 10). With this type of missionary outlook, it is hardly surprising, then that non-Western representation at the Edinburgh Conference was limited to a handful of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Christians. Not a single African was present at Edinburgh 1910 Conference. This means that the African mission reviewed at Edinburgh 1910 never considered the local community and African Christians as full participants and protagonists in Christian mission. Commenting on this reality, Andrew Walls laments that the missionary agencies had never, as a rule, devoted their best resources or sent their finest and brightest to Africa. It was Asia, particularly China, with its teeming masses and civilizational splendors that had long captured the imagination of the North Atlantic people (cf. Walls 2002: 117). As Jehu J. Hanciles (a missiologist from Sierra Leone) has noted, “a preoccupation with statistical calculation in missionary thinking meant that India and China were identified as “the two great mission fields of the world” (Hanciles 2008: 123). Edinburgh 1910 participants were reminded that “two and a half times as many people await the gospel in China as make up the entire population of Africa” (World Missionary Conference 1910, 1: 84, 204).

Be that as it may, it was obvious to the participants at the Edinburgh Conference, that Africa, a continent three times the size of Europe could not be ignored, no matter its internal complexities or perceived demerits. Thus, in its African report, the conference stated that “no part of Africa is shut against the true missionary.” Again, it added, “... in pagan Africa not only is the way open, but

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*The Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (cf. Bediako 1995). All these will constitute our main source of reference in discussing the topic in the present article.

those to whom the way leads are awaiting the arrival of messengers” (World Missionary Conference 1910, 1: 9). Here again, we observe that the optimism for African mission in the thinking of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, was because, of the acclaimed self-pity for the “dark continent” as a mission field par excellence.

Secondly, African missiologists argue that Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook for Africa was based on the prevalent Afro-pessimism of the continent. Tite Tiènou (a missiologist from Côte d’Ivoire) shares this view (cf. Tiènou 2007: 213ff). The missionary outlook of Edinburgh 1910 reinforces the negative image of Africa and Africans. The Afro-pessimism was most pronounced in the Edinburgh 1910 Conference’s reports and deliberations on the values of African cultural and religious beliefs. As a matter of fact, African culture and religious beliefs, received a considerable attention at the 1910 conference, with “the bantu tribes in central Africa” forming the main focus (World Missionary Conference 1910, 4: 6-37; see also Stanley Friesen 1996). North Atlantic missionaries were the chief source of information and insights about African societies and traditional religion and culture. There is simple no indication that the opinion of non-Western Christians was directly sought on this matter. The participants at the conference applied vigorously, the derogatory term, “animism” in reference to African traditional society and religious beliefs. In fact, this was another reason for the conference’s optimism about the spread of Christianity in Africa. It had to do with the strong conviction that the cultures of “animistic societies” were incapable of mounting long-term resistance to sustained Christian missionary effort.

This implies that at Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference, the missionary significance of African culture and religious beliefs were not discussed. The Conference did not give adequate attention to the more important question such as the missionary significance of African cultural and religious values. This Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook explains why the participants and contributors at the conference did not tackle the question of why is it that Christianity makes more inroads among people of the “primal religions” and cultures than among the followers of the so-called historical religions such as Islam, Buddhism, etc. In fact, in the African context, Edinburgh 1910 Conference did not treat the question of why is it that sub-Sahara Africa, which has the strongest presence and influence of the “primal religion,” has continued to experience rapid evangelization and growth of Christianity than the northern part of the continent which is still under Muslim influence. I think that the major element and reason why Christianity has thrived and has continued to make more inroads in Africa must be located within the dynamism and the missionary significance of the culture and religious values of the continent as well as the disposition of the people for reception of the Christian faith.

However, if today, over half of Christians are to be found outside the “Old Christendom” it means that “massive redefinition of ... *missionary outlook*” is already on the way” (Hanciles 2008: 122). African Christianity epitomizes the new shift in the Christian landscape in many ways. The two most outstanding are: Africa’s sheer demographic scale and its unexpectedness’ missionary significance (which includes also the transformation from below of Christianity by African traditional religion, cultures and languages). In other words, in the new southward shift in Christian landscape, the case of Africa is the most striking. In fact, nowhere has Christianity’s explosive growth over the last century been as dramatic as in Africa, making Africa the “poster-child,” as they

say, of this epochal shift. It is hard to believe that just a century ago, after centuries of notable European missionary efforts that had seen thriving Christian communities in sub-Saharan, serious doubt remained in the missionary circles about the prospects of Christianity in Africa. There was still prejudice over the capacity of Africans to be entrusted with the advance of Christian mission in their land and elsewhere.

This prejudice against African Christianity could be said to be as a result of the old missionary paradigm of Christendom. In fact, in keeping with the Christendom outlook, the world was conceived in terms of two distinct (territorial) blocs: “Christians” and “non-Christians.” Why this was so is perhaps best explained using the findings and reports of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference as noted above. The Edinburgh meeting was convened not to assess mission to the world but “to consider missionary problems in relation to the non-Christian world.” In other words, its sole focus was how to meet the challenge of carrying the gospel from Christian lands (Christendom) to non-Christian lands (heathendom). The designation “world” in the conference title referred not to the mission field but to the missionaries. This implies that, the African “mission field” reviewed at Edinburgh 1910 boasted the smallest number of Christians of any continent (with the exception of Oceania). Yet by the end of the century Africa had transformed into an area “experiencing the fastest church growth in any region in the world.” In other words, in spite of the age-old prejudice and neglect, Africa has emerged as the fastest growing center of Christianity in the contemporary history of evangelization.

Therefore, in the recent southward shift in the Christian landscape, Africa has taken a center stage. Africa is one of the few southern continents where Christianity is most lively today. This challenges us to examine the significance of Africa in the emerging global Christianity.

## **2) African Significance of the new southward shift in Christian landscape**

The southward shift in global Christianity’s center of gravity is extraordinary by any reckoning. In part because of what has been loosely described as “structures of academic dependency,” the most widely published interpretive analysis of this “shift” has been produced by scholars of the North Atlantic world. But it must be said that the seminal works on this topic came from the writings of African scholars such as John Mbiti (cf. Mbiti 1976: 6-18; see also Mbiti 1974), and Engelbert Mveng (cf. Mveng 1990). The African interpretation of the new southward shift emphasizes the transformation of Christianity from *the margin* and the role of migration in Christian expansion. At this juncture, we may ask: why are the new centers of Christian landscape localized within the marginalized zones of the southern continents? In this context, the argument of African scholars, generally speaking, is that African significance for the new southward “shift” must be located within the global transformation of the Christian landscape by these new centers of Christianity’s universality. The growth of Christianity in the southern continents does not mean a displacement of the “Old Centers” of the faith. It does not also mean a redefinition of our missionary concept or goal. Rather it is a confirmation of the history of Christian mission that faith travels through missionary movement of the believing community. Faith travels through migration. When the Christian faith, first travelled, from Jerusalem to Athens, North Africa and then to Rome none of the previous centers was displaced by the new ones. And none of the new centers was

considered inferior to the “Old Centers” of Christianity’s universality. Each encounter was, rather, a manifestation of how the evangelizing church was fulfilling its mission in the world (cf. Sanneh 2003: 36ff.). Indeed, each encounter was a demonstration of Christianity’s universality. Moreover, none of the centers, “old” or “new” considers itself as the sole bearers of the Christian mission. Each center sees itself as a full participant in the evangelizing mission of the church.

It is within this scenario that we find the critical issue facing Christianity worldwide today (and the significance of the question posited at the beginning of this paper), namely that Christians from different parts of the world and with contrasting histories now face the common challenge of forging a viable Christian identity for the new millennium. The vast majority of Christians throughout the world now find themselves living as minorities in societies that are pluralist or where other religions and ideologies dominate. It follows from this insight that Christianity in its historical expansion has always reflected the tremendous diversity and dynamism of the peoples of the world. This characteristic of Christianity must not be taken as something only of the past. In fact, in our own day, it can be said that the world character of Christianity has expanded and deepened that diversity that has always characterized the people of God. Seen from this perspective, the new southward shift in Christianity is not a matter of worries but the triumph of its universality as well as adaptability to all peoples of the world. The history of Christian expansion and adaptability enabled Christianity itself to break the cultural barriers of its former domestication in the North Atlantic world to create missionary resurgence and renewal that transformed the religion into a world faith. Today, attitudes must shift to acknowledge this new situation. There is much to be gained by it. Modern African Christianity provides us with an indispensable example of what is at stake (cf. Sanneh 2003: 130).

#### *The African interpretation of the new southward shift in Christian landscape*

Jehu Hanciles has argued in his recent monumental book (which we cited above), that most of the North Atlantic authors who have discussed this issue present secularist perspective of the new “shift” with a tendency that appears to tag “Southern Christianity” as destructive force within the new world order (cf. Hanciles 2008: 131). By far the best known assessment of this shift within global Christianity from a North Atlantic perspective is the book of Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Jenkins anticipates the possibility that the massive religious upsurge in the South will implode with bloody conflicts (engendered by population growth and attitudes to religious conversion) between Christians and Muslims. Jenkins’s book is presented as a kind of a wake-up call to the West to be weary of the influx of non-Westerners and their religious beliefs in the North Atlantic countries (cf. Jenkins 2002: 133ff.).

Wilbert R. Shenk adds the dimension of population growth as one of the major factors in the growth of Christianity in the southern continents. According to him, as we observe the phenomenal growth of Christianity in this twenty-first century, one dimension stands out that only a hundred years ago could not have been imagined, namely: the southward shift in the Christian landscape. This, church growth, Shenk argues, can be linked to the multiple sources of growth – biological, social, political and economic environment that has contributed to this rapid change. From this secularist interpretation, Shenk postulates that today, and as a result of this population explosion in

southern continents, the critical issue facing the Christian movement worldwide still remains, the question of *identity*. Western Christians no longer assumed their religious identity was essentially the same as their cultural identity. Now they are awaking to the fact that this is no longer a possibility. Christians from other continents face different set of circumstances. From the beginning they have carried the burden of living under censure, stigmatized as being disloyal to family and nation. Shenk adds that as a result of this new reality, the vast majority of Christians throughout the world now find themselves living as minorities in societies that are pluralist. He thus concludes that: "An indispensable resource for working out this identity is the historical experience of the church of the past several centuries" (Shenk 2002: xi). Shenk and Jenkins did not treat the question of the significance of the southward shift in the Christian landscape as a viable resource for understanding the history of Christian missionary expansion. Their concern was centered on population growth and the problem associated with it. This looks like asking the North Atlantic world to be weary of the rising population of the countries in the southern continents, and to make sure that these countries of the global south are never allowed to grow politically and religiously.

However, the approach of African authors is different. African authors see this new southward "shift" as a sign that Christianity is really becoming the world religion which it is meant to be. Again, John Mbiti is a seminal voice of this perspective. According to him, the southward shift signals the birth of new centers of Christianity's universality (cf. Mbiti 1976: 6-18). But Mbiti was quick to add that the southward shift in Christian landscape has presented us with two realities that are in sharp contrast, almost contradiction. While on the one hand, the church has become universal in a literal, geographical sense, thanks to the great missionary movement of the last 200 years, on the other, theological outreach has not matched this expansion. For Mbiti, this is a serious dilemma, and if we do not resolve it, it will destroy our foundations as the church in the world. Thus, he suggests that as the church becomes worldwide, as it affirms the universality for which God's dispersal of history has destined it, theology must strain its neck to see beyond the horizon of our traditional structures, beyond the comforts of our ready-made methodologies of theologizing. For Mbiti, this means that our theology should be with the church where it is, rubbing shoulders with human beings whose conditions, outlook, concerns, and worldviews are not those with which we are familiar (cf. Mbiti 1976: 8-9). He opines that the dichotomy between older and younger churches, between Western Christianity and the Christianity of the southern continents, is a real one, but it is also a false dichotomy. We can overcome this false dichotomy if we really want to. The background for overcoming it, according to Mbiti, lies on our preparedness to embark on theological pilgrimages. Theologians from the new (or younger churches) have made their pilgrimages to the theological learning of older churches. They had no alternative. But it has been in a sense, one-sided theology. Therefore, the new southward shift in Christianity challenges us to embark on pilgrimage of true theological reciprocity and mutuality. Because, as it is now, it is only one side that knows the other side fairly well, while the other side either does not know or does not want to know the first side. Mbiti concludes, thus that "there cannot be theological conversation or dialogue between North and South, East and West, until we can embrace each other's concerns and stretch to each other's horizons. Theologians from the southern continents believe that they know about most of the constantly changing concerns of older Christendom. They would also like their

counterparts from the older Christendom to come to know about their concerns of human survival” (Mbiti 1976: 17).

While Mbiti discusses theological pilgrimage as a viable step in confronting the dichotomy between the older and the younger churches, Kwame Bediako returns to the original concept of Christianity’s universality in the new centers of the faith in southern continents. For Bediako: “By becoming a non-Western religion ... Christianity has also become a true world faith” (Bediako 1995: 265). Wherever the faith has been transmitted and assimilated are equally “centers of Christianity’s universality.” This is not to deny that there have been (and the modern Western world is not the first of these) instances of Christian recession. Bediako argues further that the new shift does not mean that the old centers of Christianity are no longer functioning or that the church has become sterile there. No. Rather what is being emphasized is that it is important that a shift in the center of gravity of Christianity is precisely what it is supposed to. It is a pointer to the nature of the faith and much less to the significance of human agencies of its transmission. “Any absolutisation of the pattern of Christianity’s transmission should consequently be avoided and the nature of Christian history itself be re-examined ... Since it is on the basis of the experience of faith in the living Christ in the Christian communities of the South that we speak of the present shift, it also signifies that there is no one center from which Christianity radiates, and that it was never intended to be so” (Bediako 1995: 163-164). The universal relevance of the church’s missionary experience in the Christian communities of the southern communities comes, then, to consist in this – “the great things that God has done.” This view is also the answer to those scholars who have doubted whether the cross-cultural learning that Christian communities of the southern continent projects, can assist in mission to the modern secularized societies.

Engelbert Mveng (a Camerounian theologian) sees the southward shift as a sign that Christianity is fulfilling one of its missions, namely that of allowing itself to be enriched by other peoples and cultures. According to Mveng, our confession of faith in Jesus Christ invites us to overcome the dichotomy and the crisis which we spoke earlier. Here, he argues that the fact that Africa has met Christianity for centuries is a historical data. But the question today is to know if the history of Christianity in Africa is, as some authors believe, successful or a mortal conflict between two interlocutors (African reality and Christianity). However, Mveng opines that many scholars refuse to accept gloomy vision for African Christianity. This is because, majority of African Christians believe, that by becoming Christian, Africa progresses in its own religious experience, bearing in mind its historical fulfillment and self-transcendence (cf. Mveng 1990: 82). Moreover, Christianity, by becoming African, continues in its religious experience in the horizon of its missionary journey and self-transcendence. This implies that in the meeting of Christianity and Africa, each of the two is an important interlocutor in dialogue. Where any of the two entities is missing, the dialogue is elusive. If we do not collocate, the true African identity in Christianity today, the whole continent is in danger of being excluded from a possible true dialogue. The cause of the poverty of our style of dialoguing is the absence of one of the interlocutors (cf. Oborji 2007: 72ff.).

Lamin Sanneh presents an argument about limitations of the concept of Christendom advanced at the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference. He makes the case most forcefully in

connection with African experience: “African Christianity has not been a bitterly fought religion: there have been no ecclesiastical courts condemning unbelievers, heretics, and witches to death, no bloody battles of doctrine and polity, no territorial aggrandizement by churches; no jihads against infidels, no *fatwas* against women, no amputations, lynchings, ostracism, penalties, or public condemnation of doctrinal differences or dissent. The lines of Christian profession have not been etched in the blood of enemies. To that extent, at least African Christianity has diverged strikingly from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Christendom” (Sanneh 2003: 39).

In addition, Sanneh advances the basic argument of intercultural process in the history of Christian mission. In the first place, he acknowledges that the statistical weight has moved Africa firmly into the Christian orbit, and that happened only a few years ago, which is why the notion “Africa a Christian continent” is so novel and dramatic. But we should bear in mind that Christianity from its origins was marked by serial retreat and advance as an intercultural process. Bethlehem and Jerusalem were superseded by Antioch and Athens, while Egypt and Carthage soon gave place to Rome. Rival centers multiplied the chances of further contraction and expansion. Then it was the turn of the North Atlantic to inherit the mantle before the next momentous phase brought the religion to the Southern Hemisphere, with Africa representing the most recent continental shift. Sanneh writes that: “These developments went beyond merely adding more names to the books; they had to do with cultural shifts, with changing the books themselves. This serial feature of the history of Christianity is largely hidden from people in the West now living in a post-Christian culture. Even in Africa itself the churches were caught unprepared, and are scarcely able to cope with the elementary issue of absorbing new members, let alone with the deeper issues of formation and training” (Sanneh 2003: 36-37).

The point here is that the concept of Christendom imprisons the study of non-Western Christianity within a Western theological framework and thus impoverishes understanding of its nature and significance. It entrenches the notion of Christian missionary movement as one-way traffic, as a movement from the “Old Christendom” to the so-called “non Christian land.” The missionary significance as well as the real Christian identity of Christians from the former “non-Christian land” or (“mission land”) is thus suppressed by the concept of “Christendom.” Moreover, the experience of Christendom perhaps predisposes Westerners to think of religious phenomena in terms of permanent center and structures of unilateral control.

Arguing this point further, Jehu Hanciles brings into the debate the question of globalization and migration. According to him, the southward “shift” in the Christian landscape is not so much about the critique of the missionary outlook developed at Edinburgh 1910. Rather it is a realization that queries the widespread notion that processes of globalization perpetuate structures of Western hegemony. The fact is that the recent “shift” in Christian landscape with its southward movement has launched us into an age of “globalization from below”, a movement of non-Western cultures, both secular and religious, with a global reach that impact at the same time both the North Atlantic world and the Southern continents, in a subtle but also in a very profound manner. Western initiatives and projects appear to dominate the contemporary world order, the processes of globalization incorporate powerful trends and religious phenomena that originate in the non-Western world and will potentially impact the West in significant ways. Again, this point is often

ignored by most of modern commentators on the significance of the recent “shift” in Christian landscape. But neglecting this important perspective of African authors only succeeds in projecting a kind of polemic or rather north-south divide between Christians of North Atlantic countries and those of the southern continents. A polemic of this kind harms the purpose of Christian mission as well as the faith itself.

Consequently, among the African authors, there is a growing recognition of the role of migrations in Christian expansion and missionary activity. Missiologists from other zones of global Christianity are yet to engage in a serious reflection about the way in which recent transformation within global Christianity itself was aided by global migration. Between 1500s and 1900s, the global migration was from North to the South. That made the southern continents major centers of missionary engagement. But in recent times, the trend has shifted. The present migration from South to the North, points to the West as a major frontier of religious interactions and missionary engagement. The dynamic of international migrations in missionary enterprise is not new to the history of Christian mission. The Bible bears witness to the inextricable connection between migration and mission and sees such linkage as a prominent factor in the history of Christian expansion. The fact that this connection is largely overlooked in mission studies has something to do with the unwarranted distinction between “Christendom” and “non-Christian world” (or rather between “Christian land” and “mission land”) that inspired the Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook and which in turn has marked our theological reflection for the last two hundred years. Since 1970s, the number of African migrants has risen dramatically as escalating conflicts, brutal regimes and economic collapse (related to globalization) have induced colossal displacement of peoples. The possibility that the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa is as well impacted by such tremendous transfers of population need not be ignored. As an aspect of cultural globalization, nonwhite migration represents a significant example of global processes which originate outside the Western world and impact Western societies. The religiosity of the new immigrants potentially transforms the religious movements into missionary engagement. At the very least it implicates secular (largely post-Christian) Western societies as sites of new religious interactions. In this regard, the new modes of immigrants’ assimilation within Western societies will hardly leave the latter unchanged.

### **3) The enduring problems**

There are some enduring problems that must be addressed if we mean to challenge the Edinburgh missionary outlook in modern African Christianity. In his work which we cited above, Jehu Hanciles has an excellent presentation of these challenging issues in mission today (cf. Hanciles 2008: 382ff.). It suffices to mention here just a few. One of which is that in the African context, the recent growth of Christianity in the continent has shown that relative economic poverty and political powerlessness rule out structures of dominance or control and make critical accommodation (not to be understood as total assimilation) to the prevalent culture imperative. This necessarily stimulates faster patterns of indigenization. It is interesting to observe that the so called “African independent or initiated churches” (whether located at home or abroad) are self-supporting from the start, and some actually become sources of revenue for community projects. Self-propagation is a major preoccupation, while irrepressible religiosity and deep spirituality invariably

translate into evangelistic zeal (cf. Turner 1978: 44ff). Most also emphasize the importance of indigenous leadership and oversight. In cases where the individual church is part of a larger African movement, autonomy can be restricted. But African independent churches operate as self-supporting entities and found autonomous congregations. However, mainline churches in Africa are still heavily dependent economically and otherwise on mother churches in the West. This is the crux of the matter. The question is, as a dependent church, can African Christianity command respect worthy of the name in the community of global Christianity?

However, this fact gives us the picture of the nature of the emerging global Christianity: the complex interaction and interdependence between the global and the local, a dynamic process that renders the constructs of “margin” and “center” fluid and interchangeable. African Christianity typifies this central paradox. In its historical relationship with the North Atlantic world, African Christianity is showing how our global church is today marked by a complex interplay of domination and weakness, paternalism and marginalization. Its center or centers are also margin or margins. An example is the recent controversy within the worldwide Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion experience is recognition that, quite often, the tail is wagging the dog.

Another major challenge or rather problem is that Edinburgh 1910 missionary outlook will, for the foreseeable future, represent an important lens through which many people conceive mission and respond to it. The reasons for this are not hard to find. It is true that the global Christian landscape contemplated at the 1910 World Missionary Conference has altered radically and unrecognizably, but the global power structures (Christian and otherwise) that the Edinburgh meeting exemplified remain largely unchanged. The reshaping of global Christianity has rendered the Edinburgh 1910 Christendom a defunct and meaningless conception; but however marginalized the “Old Christendom” and its institutions are within Western society, they remain associated with Western economic and political dominance and retain some of the old primacy. Within global Christianity, therefore, long-standing attitudes and assumptions related to Western supremacy, control, and monopoly of ideas are still entrenched. In other words, while the emerging Christianity of the southern continents now represent the face and future of global Christianity, the churches in the non-Western world do not yet constitute Christianity’s main driving force (cf. Hanciles 2008: 385ff.).

Furthermore, the entrenched forms of economic dependency (associated with developing economic and the legacies of Western colonial domination) apply no less to global Christian interactions than other international relations. The fact that the new southern heartlands of Christianity are characterized by acute poverty and powerlessness translate into meager resources for direct global influence, at least in a structured sense. Geographical distance, disparate experiences and expectations, and perennial factionalism greatly hinder the ability of burgeoning Christian communities in the non-Western world to make common cause or else act concretely to bring their enormous spiritual and intellectual resources to bear on global Christianity. Despite internal fissures, the old heartlands benefited from geographical proximity, uniform ideals, and a shared heritage, all of which aided efforts at global expansion. “South-South” Christian partnerships are woefully lacking or difficult to sustain in part because poor telecommunications infrastructures within the new Christian heartlands remain a major impediment. Moreover, the myriads and

formidable challenges that various Christian communities face in their own local contexts exhaust resources and foster self-preoccupation; similarly, the spiritual vitality and the extraordinary numerical growth of non-Western Christianity fully consume the energies of its leaders. And, truth be told, the ingrained supernaturalism of non-Western Christianity can dampen attentiveness to initiatives that require earthly machination.

Another challenge is that for the moment, contemporary global Christianity is decidedly polycentric. The church in the southern continents can claim to have become only global Christianity's demographic, cultural, and spiritual center. Its intellectual and organizational center remains in the old heartlands – at least for now. To note this is not to minimize the profound historical significance of the recent shift. But it is of utmost importance that we recognize that new heartlands of the faith in non-West are radically different in character and function from the preceding heartlands in the West. The old heartlands exemplified domination and territorial control, national religion, cultural superiority, and a fixed universal vision. In acute contrast, the emerging heartlands of the faith embody vulnerability and risk, religious plurality, immense diversity of Christian experience and expression, and structures of dependency. These disparities necessarily translate into new forms and models of missionary function.

In particular, African Christians conceive of the whole world (including Africa itself) as a mission field. Additionally, modern African Christianity has a church-based initiative that promotes church-centered engagement. This emphasis diverges sharply from the European missionary movement which emerged outside the existing church structures, operated almost exclusively through extra-ecclesial missionary orders or voluntary societies, and produced an entrenched church/mission dichotomy in both missiology and mission praxis.

Finally, the newer movement also exemplifies New Testament patterns and models of mission far more closely, with accompany manifestations, such as emphasis on demonstrations of (spiritual) power rather than material abundance, use of house churches, tent-making ministries, lay apostolate, informal and invisible structures combined with clandestine activities, prominent charismatic leadership, a consciousness of weakness and marginality. It is also reflective of the biblical paradigm of God's people as pilgrims, migrants, and refugees.

Be that as it may, it would be a mistake to glorify the still-inchoate non-Western missionary movement, to suggest that its distinctiveness from the still far more celebrated Western missionary effort confers on it special grace of divine favor. No doubt, the emergence of the non-Western missionary movement in contemporary world represents a major turning-point in the history of Christianity. Yet much about this movement remains uncertain, and the assessment provided in this study is intended to be a preliminary, even provisional. What is not in doubt is that the future of global Christianity will be decided mainly by the outcome of such initiatives in the meeting of Christians of the North Atlantic world and those of the global South. This leads both the Christians of the "Old Christendom" and those of the new Christian communities of the southern continents into a meeting-point in uncharted waters.

#### **4) Conclusion**

The mystery of Christian faith is one. It is rooted and founded on the mystery of God revealed in Christ. There may be diverse peoples from the different socio-cultural contexts and human history that have been brought to the faith in Jesus Christ through our missionary enterprise. However, these other peoples have not been brought into the believing community in Christ to become *second class members* of the church's evangelizing mission or the world community. The common denominator is Christ and the mystery of God revealed in Him. The new missionary outlook is invited to avoid the use of expressions and missionary outlook that have behind them the seed of polemics or of setting up one cultural, geographical or religious tradition against the other. African Christians, for example, do not come into the field of mission as second class citizens but rather as full members of the believing community and equal participants in the church's missionary activity. It is the Spirit of the risen Lord that we have all received as Christians, and it is the same Spirit that is leading the local church in the pursuit of the one mission of Christ. Missionary outlook anywhere is called upon to recognize this work of the Spirit and bring it to bear in our way of conceiving missionary enterprise.

All this shows that our missionary outlook must reflect the missionary role of the new landscape of Christianity – which in recent times has moved from the Northern hemisphere to the South. It must also reflect the fact that today people do not want to be considered as objects of compassion. They want, instead, to be recognized as subjects in God's saving plan. Can our missionary outlook become the kind that will accommodate this new awareness and sensibilities of these new Christians from the Global South and bring them to bear in the way we do mission? It is in so doing that we will find the distinctive role and identity of the emerging global Christianity. This is the basic issue the presence of Africans in Christian mission today is inviting us to explore. So, it is clearly not a matter of revisiting or appending a new word to the traditional missionary outlook, but rather of allowing the new developments in the new zones of Christianity to reflect and transform our traditional way of conceiving and doing mission.

Finally, as we mark the centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 missionary conference, it is necessary that we take cognizance of the way our understanding of the present is determined by our past. If we are to have a viable understanding of our missionary outlook in this twenty-first century, we have to welcome, in the first place, the positive results of the past centuries' Christian missionary work that has in fact, strived at planting Christianity in virtually every corner of the globe. This also implies that if we are to meet the challenges of the new reality, we must accept the fact that the growth of Christianity embraces the past missionary efforts which Edinburgh 1910 typifies, and the new missionary initiatives and indigenous agency of the emerging churches of the southern continents.

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