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## **Beyond Constantine and Edinburgh 1910: Engaging Issues for Effective Mission Practice in Contemporary Africa**

By

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### **Abstract**

Interfaith issues in mission praxis was bound to be important since the legalization of Christianity during Constantine's era and beyond through the traditions of Edinburgh 1910 and after led to many scholars in contemporary Africa. Studies of world Christian mission shows that Christ extends beyond the visible boundaries of the church to all contexts of human beings rather than stagnation in one location. Accounts from a worldwide ecumenical conference of Protestant established to continue work beyond the Edinburgh conference. Thus, Christian mission beyond Constantine and Edinburgh encountered both sadness and joy through generations. This has implication for engaging effective mission practice in contemporary Africa. This article therefore, examines the history of Christian missions from beyond Constantine and Edinburgh 1910 through present-day and engages key theological issues in mission practice in contemporary Africa. Key missiological and theological concepts are discussed to provide healthy perspectives for missionary praxis as a solution to the challenges at the closure of missions in this century. The research identified some areas that mission enterprise had suffered setback as result of so many stumbling blocks from the early church to modern day; setbacks on theological ground – the Trinitarian formula in missions' practice, and the uniqueness of Jesus, which are still being questioned to date. In order to vividly understand these theological issues, an overview on the phases of the history of Christian mission practice, the impact of religious toleration on mission work, the storms through which mission has advance in, missiology as academic discipline; situational assessment, and the delightful heritage for better mission practice in Africa context were discussed. These were precisely the subjects that this paper examines.

**Key works:** History, Missions, theology, Africa, Christianity, missiology, closure

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### **1. Background and Introduction**

#### **1.1 Early Church**

Christian mission has passed through several phases in its historical development following Pentecost. The light of the gospel burned brightly and spread far as Christians believed the resurrection message and lived the resurrection life. (Stark1996:5, 13) gives account that the “early Christian missionaries were so empowered by the divine Spirit towards the Creator of the universe”. The early Christians were mission-minded such that every Christian was a witness to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8). Hurlbut (1979:37) adds that “everywhere the church was strong, aggressive growing and rising to dominance throughout the world of Roman empire”, Latourette (1975:234) affirms that “the Christian gospel had worked moral and spiritual transformation in the lives of individuals”. By third century the gospel had permeated all parts of the Roman Empire. Neil (1990:25-43), reports that “believers were noted for their uprightness and unselfishness in a world of moral degradation.” Fox (1987:95) describes that “amidst contemporary denunciations the early church was so attractive that emperor Valentinian issued a written order to Pope Damascus requiring that Christian missionaries cease calling at the home of pagan women”. Cairns (1981:99) remarks that “even during the periods of heaviest persecution, proved that indeed the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church”. Thus, the early years of the church was no doubt a mixture of sweetness and bitterness. It experienced exponential growth, and like wide fire it spread to the different parts of the world. The situated did remain the same after Constantine’s Edict.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Why Christian mission continues to be advocated globally and especially in contemporary Africa today is simple. In Africa, there are as many wars, conflicts, high level of adverse poverty, corruption and so many disease have ravaged the continent for long. This article therefore, draws attention of scholars and readers generally to know that witnessing the truth of Christ, bringing peace to vulnerable and suffering people, and a living love among people of other faith requires the spread of Christian missions to address severally of such ills.

#### **1.2 Mission after toleration Edict of Constantine**

The events of the early century determined the course of Christian mission in many ways. For instance, Noll (2000:50) notes that “when Constantine issued a decree legalizing the Christian faith and making toleration of all peaceful religions.” However, from that era the light of Christian mission began to dim under him. Hulbert opines that “the dogma of the church often was accepted without true conversion and faith became superficial. Corruption and carnal values became a way of life,” (Hulbert1997:17, 18). Hulbert reiterates the “time of spiritual life was slow than it had been in the early apostolic days” (Hurlbut 1979:37).

Neil (1990:44, 45, 46) notes that “the need for a military defense of Christians against Islam together with the political emphasis of the church paralyzed missionary activity.” Kane (1980:40, 41) notes that “there was a thirty years war that left Germany in economic and

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social chaos that affected the church's involvement in evangelism and missions". By the dark ages the light in the church almost went out as ceremonial religion tended to suffocate it rather than spread the flames. Thus, even the reformation with its rediscovery of basic truths, did not spark evangelism. Cairns (1981:171) notes that this was because the "middle ages is often thought to be a period in which society was static." Cairns (1981:171) concludes that "the work of missions was put on a professional basis during this period", and this affected the mission practice significantly.

### **1.3. Mission Practice from 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

Mission practice from 17<sup>th</sup> century emerged with its own uniqueness and model. Hulbert (1997:23) describes that by seventeenth century missionary minded people began to apply biblical truths personally thereby lightening the path to mission in to the century and succeeding centuries. Worldwide evangelism fulfilled the prediction of Christ and demonstrated that the power evident at Pentecost continued. Hulbert (1997:23), reports that "as religious wars were about to end in Europe relative world peace was conducive for outward look. Steam mechanical engine and steaming opened ways for world missions." Africa was no exception. Koschorke, (2007:234), notes that "the multitude of missionaries sent out south of the Sahara, help account for this encouraging result." This led to development of mission agencies.

### **1.4. Early Mission Agencies**

Developments showed that the first mission sending agencies were interdenominational. Hulbert, (1997:27), notes that; "as the missionary thrust developed, denominations began to extend their organization internationally by establishing their own mission boards." Koschorke (2007:58) explains that William Carey had "a proposal for a world missionary conference but did not happened until years later". Hulbert (1997:27) affirms that "it was until hundred years after when mission agencies around the world gathered for the Edinburgh mission conference." This propelled an era of great mission impact in the nineteenth century.

#### **1.4.1. A Great Mission Impact**

The nineteenth century "Great Century for missions" came with significant impact on mission practices globally. Latourette (1975:1313, 1334) notes that the great century for mission in the nineteenth century resulted in flame that produced several international and technological factors combined together to make possible expansion of frontiers of missions. The expansion was exponential such that the cooperative spirit and ecumenical emphasis which grew out of the nineteenth century missionary movement but sadly translated into a mission advance through the storm in the twentieth century.

## **2. Mission Advance through the Storm**

The history of mission in the twentieth century has been characterized as an advancement through storm. Hulbert says the first storm was World War I, and the second came as a theological controversy (Hulbert 1997:27). At the Edinburgh 1910 conference, it was assumed that biblical Christianity had no peer among world religions. By the time of the second missionary conference of 1928, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ was being questioned and some theologians began to accept other religions as equal to Christianity. Hulbert (1997:28) notes that "the subsequent formation in 1931 of the International Missionary Council began to alter the presuppositions of missions". Since then, many scholarly missiologists and theologians have reflected about mission, for instance, Karl Barth's re-

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emphasizes the action of God, and Flett (2010:2, 3,4) explains that Karl Barth's usage of the Trinitarian model seemed to imply "that the church has ceased to be a necessary organ of God's activity since all human races had been sanctified at creation; there is no need for mission". Barth was not concerned about Christian mission because Barth's comparable principles showed that "mission takes its origin not from human beings, and not from the church, but from God" (Felt 2010:3, 4). Thus, the coinage of the word, "*Missio Dei*." Schulz (2009:87) notes that "in 1934, Hartenstein coined the phrase *missio Dei* in response to Barth's use of *action Dei*, the action of God". The mission of God tied to the Trinitarian Model in Christian Mission remained a subject of debate.

### **2.1. Trinitarian Model in Christian Mission**

The Trinitarian model in Christian mission continues to be an issue of debate. Let's examine briefly this model. The Trinitarian approach coined as "*mission Dei*" was unclear as to how it related to fallen humanity (*missio hominum*) in Barth's theological perspective though, Erickson (2013:73) acknowledges that "it is God who brings about understanding and conviction", however, "this may be accompanied by a strong emphasis on human depravity, such that the un-regenerated person cannot comprehend the truth" (Erickson 2013:73). Within this argument. Schulz affirms the role of the triune God in noting that "the 1952 International missionary Conference held at Willingen, Germany laid the foundation that has its source in the Triune God" (Schulz2009:87,89). On the one hand, Hoekendijk sees the fulfilment of the kingdom promise in history in the world as God actively involved personal and social transformation. Yates (1994:43) further affirms that "strong emphasis on God's work in the world is being used in the term *missio Dei* to denote the totality of God's activity. Reporting that it bypassed the church and stressed the God-world movement as opposed to God-church-world."

Bosch (2003:16) emphasizes his concept of *missio Dei* saying, "There are no mission paradigms in the Old Testament because you do not find mission in the Old Testament". Bosch (2003:17) observes that there is, in the Old Testament, no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent out by God to cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers in order to win others to faith in Yahweh. Bavinck adds that "at first sight the Old Testament appears to offer little basis for the idea of mission. It appears to have very little room for mercy; nor does it seem ready to grant the blessings of the gospel to the heathen (Bavinck1960:11). Bavinck adds a unique voice to the conversation stating that "yet, if we investigate the Old Testament more thoroughly, it becomes clear that the future of the nation is a point of the greater concern. For from the first page to the last the Bible has the whole world in view and its divine plan of salvation is unfolded as pertaining to the whole world (Bavinck1960:11). Kaiser observes that "the blessings of God given to Abraham was intended to reach smaller people groups as well as the political groupings of nations" (Kaiser 2009:19).

Similarly, Köstenberger and O'Brien state that "the notion of mission is intimately bound up with his saving plan which moves from creation to new creation and has to do with his salvation reaching the ends of the earth" (Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001:25, 26). Wright notes that "when the centrifugal dynamics of the early Christian missionary movement finally got underway it was indeed something remarkably new in practice but not in concept" (Wright 2006:501,502). Israel had a missionary task and should have engaged in mission as we understood it today goes beyond the evidence. There is no suggestion in the Old Testament that Israel should have engaged in cross-cultural or foreign missions (Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001:35). Köstenberger and Obrien are of the view "The nation

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Israel witnesses to the living purposes of God by experiencing and living according to them. They add examples such as the mixed multitude (Exodus 12:38), Rahab, foreigners in David's kingdom and Ruth incorporated into the tribe of Judah (Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001:35). Thus, the feature of Israel's missional approach to the nations in the Old Testament is the eschatological ingathering of the Gentiles expected as future action of God (Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001:36). It is obvious that the Old Testament paradigm of mission does not demonstrate the explicit sending movement, but was more common in its centripetal form as coming together or incorporation of people to the tribe (Schulz 2009:26). The centrifugal aspect of mission as an explicit sending or going out must be evaluated in the context of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24: 46-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8) (Schulz 2009:87). These divergent opinions sparked discussion among theologians and missiologists, and gave rise to missiological praxis as an academic discipline.

### **3. Missiological Praxis as Academic Discipline**

Mission practice integrates several disciplines over the years in enhancing its nature, practice and impact. This introduced a lot of academic conversations around it that further gave rise to controversies and debates. Wright (2009:25) notes that missiology includes biblical, theological, contemporary and practical reflection and research. Schulz explains that:

Missiology is an academic study that reflects critically on the mission of the church as the instrument of the salvation activity of the Triune God. It integrates various disciplines such as biblical and ecclesiastical theology, mission history, and empirical studies (Schulz 2009:33).

This suggests that missiology is understood as a multidisciplinary discipline that engages biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, practical theology, sociology, ethnology, psychology, pedagogies, statistics, geography, linguistics, philosophy (Schulz 2009:33,35). Thus, Olson argues that "it is important to be scientifically critical in interpretations and understanding of the elements of missiology" (Olson 2013:176). Furthermore, Woodberry (1996:134) notes that "today in missiological praxis the value of insights from the behavioural sciences is the conversation between text and context, between gospel and culture, between the universal and the particular."

Missiologists have attempted to integrate theological theories with missiological practices. For instance, Bavinck speaks of Elenctics, a division of practical theology, concerned with the conviction of sin. In Christian theology, elenctics takes humankind back to the Fall of Genesis 3, to the original sin, and calls us to repentance, to turn away from our sin to faith in Christ and to serve the only true God. Thus, it presumes the falsehood of all other religions against the truth of Christianity. It does not compare religions or enter into "dialogue" as if all religions were neutral and contained necessary religious truths to be discovered and believed. Rather, it is apologetic in nature in that it defends the Christian faith as the only true faith and accuses all other religions as rebellion against God. Bavinck asserts that "theology cannot practice elenctics without becoming more conscious of the past and present dangers which threatens the church. By practicing elenctics theology's grasp upon the gospel of grace is strengthened" (Bavinck 1960:245). Bavinck (1960:246) states "elenctics deserves a place within the framework of theology" because the fact that it is concerned with persuading people of other faiths (or no faith) of the truth of the Gospel message, and the success of mission in Africa lies in the ability of Christianity to persuade people of other faith to the truth claims of Christianity, thus demonstrating the exciting merger of missiology and theology.

Christian mission, because of its truth claims, advanced through storm. Hulbert (1997:27) notes that the twentieth century has been characterized as "advance through storm.



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The first advance through the storm was that of war. He notes that, there was optimism in missions plan as a result increasing numbers of mission recruitment and viable Bible conferences and training institutions. However, the world wars I and II shattered this confidence. The colonized peoples of the world began to doubt the values of those Christian countries which had fought such a destructive war. Many missionaries were interned in concentration camps during the wars (Hulbert 1997:27, 28).

By the twentieth century the second storm was a theological controversy. During the Edinburgh International Missionary Conference, a theological controversy based on the Trinitarian formula in missions and question of salvation erupted. Hulbert explains that “it was upheld at the Edinburgh conference that biblical Christianity had no peer. But by the time of the second missionary conference of 1928, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ was being questioned and some theologians were beginning to accept other religions as equal to Christianity” (Hulbert 1997:28).

This slippage was accentuated when in 1952, the influential layman’s foreign missionary inquiry attributed doubts about the uniqueness of the gospel. Fifteen laymen representing seven American mission Boards travelled to Asia and Africa. Their report concluded that the aim of Christian missions was to see the best of other religions and to help the adherents of those religions discover or rediscover all the best in their own tradition to cooperate with the most active and vigorous elements in social reforms and in the purification of religious expression. The report conclude that conversion should not be the aim of Christian mission (Neil 1990:456). Hulbert (1997:28) says that this position led to a decline of missionary involvement in many historic denominations.

However, evangelicals through series of world congresses held sought to clarify the theological and strategic underpinnings of their commitment to worldwide evangelization. (Hulbert 1997:28). The document produced ecumenical confession on evangelism that supports Trinitarian formula in missions, affirming belief in the one eternal God, Creator and Lord of the world, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who governs all things according to the purpose of his will. The third storm was nationalism. Hulbert notes that “much energy was spent redefining the relationship of foreign missionaries to maturing national churches in former colonies of Africa and Asia (Hulbert 1997:28). Nationalism is closely related to the fourth storm – communism. Communism became an international force closing the door for western missionary activity. Johnstone notes that “not until the late 1980s did communism began to crumble (Johnstone 2005:467).

### **3.1. Implications for Mission Practice in Africa**

In the late 70s Walls drew attention to the reality that Christianity in the twentieth century was spreading and gaining converts rapidly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America when at the same time Europe and North America were experiencing stagnation and decline in numbers and favor. Walls (2002:85) categorically notes that “It is widely recognized that there has occurred within the present century a demographic shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world, which means that more than half of the world’s Christian live in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Pacific and that the proportion doing so annually”. Walls (2002:85) expatiates that this means that we have to regard African Christianity as potentially the representative Christianity of the twenty-first century. The Christianity typical of the twenty first century will be shaped by the events and processes that take place in the southern continents, and above all by those who take place in Africa.

The southern hemisphere where the majority of Christians dwell at a point in time was regarded during missionary era as receiving and titled young churches, and from Walls

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assertion, the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific with mission activities spread mostly through indigenous evangelists. However, challenges such as social ills and broken social systems continue to confront Africa despite the spread of Christianity, thus, how are missionaries in present-day Africa expected to practice mission? And what are the new resources for missionary practice in contemporary Africa?

#### **4. The Global Shift in World Mission**

It is a known fact that apart from the isolated ethnic peoples in yet unreached regions of Africa, the world has taken on more of a global behaviour of reaching the world especially in terms of contact to all ethnic groups, whether resulting from internally displaced persons from the north east of Nigeria to the north central, or warfare from Boko Haram and armed Fulani Herdsmen, is unprecedented. The changing face of mission is a reality and Africa still has more opportunities. This changing face of world missions presents unique challenges for doing mission in Africa, preparing missionaries for effective cross-cultural witness and viable church planting in Africa. Some daring questions that are begging for answer are: Considering the challenges and issues as well as the need for mission closure in this globalized world, how can missionaries communicate the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of changing contexts? How can theologians and missiologists prepare missionaries for cross-cultural missionary work in their own context and globally? If trained missiologists and those being trained are not non-Africans, what is needed for Christian mission in the twenty-first century, especially in Africa, to attain mission closure? There is a need to therefore analyse some critical areas that missionaries must take serious in order to push towards mission closure.

##### **4.1. Delightful Heritage**

It is of delight to know that Africans have diverse traditional heritage, and it is difficult to separate their form of Christianity from their cultural heritage. Yet, Christianity is a universal faith not bound by one traditional expression of it and global churches have a certain taste that reflects elements of traditional baggage. However, missionaries from global and African contexts should not expect that traditional taste of Christianity must be reproduced in churches planted among other peoples or ethnic groups, though all ungodly traditions, are in need of transformation socio-cultural to enable the gospel can take root. If this biblical sense is missed out in any missiological task, this might hold to cultural revival. Kraft (1996:88) affirms that although there is recognition of the baggage implied with cultural romanticism due to the usage of the concept in missionary task, yet there is the need to be more concerned with the practical implications of the concept rather than the fear of applying positive idea from any given custom without breaking the biblical norm. Kraft (1996:89) further observes that “allegiance to Christ should not necessarily entail disloyalty to all elements of cultural and religious structured form, but elements that are contradictory to Scriptural authority must be abandoned”. Sanneh (1995:61) adds, that the gospel was not tied to one preferred culture (Jewish). Rather, Christianity affects cultures by moving them to a position short of the absolute, and it does this by placing God at the center. Sanneh’s view aligns to the fact that Jesus and his disciples presented the gospel to various groups of people. The apostles’ usage of words was impacted with deep meaning and at times employed pagan religious backgrounds to communicate spiritual truths without promoting pagan practices (Acts 13; 14; 17; & 22:2-5, 12.).

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The early church struggled with similar cultural baggage. Fuller (1980:5) affirms that the “early church leaders were under pressure to insist that foreign (gentile) Christians observe the cultural and ritual traditions which Jewish Christians observed from their national background,” but “the apostles prayerfully considered the matter and wisely separated the cultural from the essentials of the gospel”. Fuller (1980:6) observes that the missionary experienced frustration when converts did not practice their new faith. Paul had to write strongly about their immaturity, lack of conviction and failure to condemn sin regardless of the pagan context which condoned it.

The task of theology of mission is to address such matters and provide biblical direction for the church’s fulfilment of its missionary mandate” (Ott and Strauss 2010:xii). And we must also acknowledge that trends in mission practice come and go; just as challenges keep evolving, and as new mission theories and strategies are aggressively marketed, as local congregations bypass traditional mission agencies, as conferences, workshops, and consultation abound, the practical need has perhaps never been greater for biblical and theological reflection on the nature of mission (Ott and Strauss 2010:xiii). Since the early church and through later ages vanguards in mission practices have adapted varieties of mission strategies. It is therefore important that there is a clear understanding of the plan for missions as explained in the Bible concerning the role of the Triune God accomplishing through generations.

Since World War II there has been an increasing emphasis on making believers autonomous through self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. Kato (1976:5) alleges that “when Africa was partitioned into colonies at the Berlin conference in 1885 to be ruled by European powers, the African was not there to protest”. Kato (1976:5) further enlightens that “those partitioning took no note of traditional or linguistic alignment. Thus, the traditional life was greatly disturbed”. Kato (1976:7) convincingly affirms that “Christianity which has taken root in the continent should also be examined in the light of the Scriptures to see how the sons of Africa can be Christian Africans”. Kato’s statement calls attention for a kind of discipleship that must be comprehensive.

#### **4.2. Compressive Discipleship**

While proclamation of the gospel is essential to the missionary tasks it is also important to build up believers and training them to have a spiritual impact on their neighbours. Engel and Norton (1975:45) highlight the progression from evangelization to disciple making. They affirm that “the one evangelizing must be aware of the progression in a person’s understanding of the gospel. The process of making a decision for Christ begins with an awareness of a supreme being and culminates with the new believer evangelizing and discipling others”. Discipleship is intended to mature converts and generate continues evangelism. As missionaries win people to Christ and disciple, they lead them into the formation of a group believers who share a common relationship with Christ. This will help produces indigenous believers that form churches that are indigenous in nature and will meaningfully impact their local context. Ott and Strauss (2010:266) observe that “organizations are often inadequate for meeting long-term needs when the gospel is given in ways that ignore the local context”, thus, the viability of the gospel depends so much on the its ability to be sown richly into the fabric of indigenous communities.

In order to reproducible fellowships of believers within local indigenous people, Willis argues that new converts should continue in their occupations and provide witness where they live. Church programs and methods should only be developed which could be supported financially by the nationals (Willis 1998:236). Willis (1998:236) proposes that



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gifted nationals should be developed for evangelistic work and should provide for their own church buildings without being dependent on outside resources. Hesselgrave (2001:22, 23) adds that when missionaries who are engaged in ministry that does not result in planting reproductive fellowships of saved baptized disciples, should do well to reevaluate the present situation, and redesign cross-cultural missionaries in Africa who are able to consider ministries that result from church planting without ignoring the local context and economic realities of the newly planted churches (Engel and William 2000:151).

One issue that cannot be ignored is the holistic nature of gospel. Palmer (2015:88) stresses that “salvation is holistic. It is salvation of both the body and the soul”. Palmer (2015:88) argues that “God saved the Israelites not only from a physical bondage but also a spiritual bondage. The purpose of the Exodus was not just socio-economic liberation but also spiritual salvation “(Palmer 2015:88). Understanding Palmer (2015:88) concept of salvation means the restoration of the original creation. It begins by renewal of the person, but includes the renewal of all of God’s creation. Similarly, Perkins (1995:21) opines that the gospel rightly understood, is holistic. It responds to people as a whole people; it doesn’t single out just spiritual or just physical needs. Perkins (1995:21) further buttresses that Christian community development begins with people transformed by the love of God, who then respond to God’s call to share the gospel with others through evangelism, social action, economic development and justice. Perkins (1995:21) affirms that these groups of Christians start both churches and community development corporations, evangelism outreaches and tutoring programs, discipleship groups and housing programs, prayer groups and businesses. Doing mission in African context needs all the above elements in the mission fields and in newly planted churches.

There is a great danger if a half-baked gospel is presented to a people. Escobar notes that the danger of evangelicalism is that it will present a saving work of Christ without the consequent ethical demand. It will present a saviour who delivers from the bondage of spiritual slavery but not a model of life that a Christian should live in the world (Escobar 1975:310). Escobar (1975:310) explains that “a spirituality without discipleship in the daily, social, economic, and political aspects of life is religiosity and not Christianity”. Therefore, in mission practice salvation is wholistic in nature. Wholistic mission practice transforms ungodly worldview, and that is what comprehensive discipleship attempts to do.

### **4.3. Mission and Worldview**

The place of worldview is essential in examining the penetration of the gospel message. Ott and Strauss (2010:266) argue that “nominal responders to the gospel will accept Christianity on a superficial level, but their core worldview will remain unchanged and many of their old, unbiblical practices continue secretly”. Priest (1994:291) observes that “there are shared areas of conscience between the messenger of the gospel and the recipients through which the Spirit of God can begin his work of conviction”. Without deliberate consideration to the worldview of a people, mission practice will only be a surface approach and nothing more. Priest (1994:292-293) affirms that when “the missionary risks emphasizing certain areas of conscience informed by cultural variables which find no resonance in the conscience of the receptor then it may lead to change which may only be superficial conformity and which leads to believers having compartmentalized lives”. This will lead to a faith that “on the surface, the forms are foreign, but at the deeper level converts continue to attach meanings from their pre-Christian allegiances. The result can be called a Christo-pagan syncretism (Priest 1994:294).

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#### **4.4. Split-level Christianity**

The uniqueness of Christian missions is increasingly under attack. Today, Christianity is viewed as a religion that competes with other great religions of the world. The question is if all religions have some good in them as some think, why should Christianity be considered better than others? The danger of non-contextual theology is its departure from the uniqueness of God's means of salvation which alone redeems humankind. It can best be countered by intensive widespread contextualized teaching of biblical truth as well as communication, and application of that truth in ways appropriate to local context. Contextualization calls attention for a deep concern of mission personnel to communicate effectively so that they can disciple all nations (Matthew 28:20). Contextualization know how to express, transmit and apply biblical truth in language and forms which a receptor in another local context can accept. Walls affirms that an African had argues that "black theology is about how to stay Christian when you are a black" (Walls 1996:11).

For instance, Ott and Strauss (2010:266) report that new believers from animistic background may attend church on Sunday but if their Christian faith does not tell them how they can ensure a good harvest or bear children, they may also visit a local native doctor to meet these needs. Whiteman (1994:291) adds that when missionaries fail to seek to convert previous worldview to biblical worldview, they run greater risk of establishing weak and non-viable churches, whose members will turn to non-Christian syncretistic explanations and follow unbiblical lifestyles, and engage in magical rituals.

For missionaries to implement this process of conversion, Hiebert (1985:33, 34, 35) introduces critical contextualization as model to convert previous non-biblical worldview of any tradition Hiebert four step models outlines the following: (i) Exegesis of the culture by engaging phenomenological approach. (ii) Exegesis Scriptural and use of hermeneutical bridge. (iii) Critical evaluation of beliefs and practices in the light of new biblical understanding and (iv) Develop a new contextual practice. The critical contextualization model is very useful if properly applied, especially within animistic background.

The Bible documents human life and experience, a whole series of social worlds, and are interwoven with revelations of and witness to God. Though, it is hard to learn everything there is to know about mission from biblical texts or the teaching of the church. Woodberry (1996:5) notes that "legitimate reflection on mission will consist of a reading of the Bible that goes hand in hand with a reading of human history."

The reading of human history with understanding must be added and used as an interpretive dictionary. Ott and Strauss (2010:23) assert that "The centrifugal movement of mission in the New Testament marks a reversal with God's new people being sent out to the nations to be a witness among the nations". The nations are not to come to God's people in Jerusalem, but God's people are to go to the nations (Ott and Strauss 2010:23), and if God's people are to go to the nation, they must be willing to engage the context of the people. Context discloses the myriad shapes of human wants, the manifold dimensions of God's salvation, and the precise forms of missiology mediation required in a given situation. Woodberry (1996:69) notes that "careful exegetical reading of the context contributes to the hermeneutical understanding of the text". Woodberry (1996:69) believes that when we study the Bible from within a missionary context, it opens our horizons and unlocks envisioning possibilities to us. Contextual missiology also involves a correlation between mission theory and practice. Each act as corrective to the other. Theory is tested on the touchstone of praxis and praxis on that of theory.

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#### **4.5. Collaborative Efforts**

The call to accept the Gospel will always be the focus of Christian missionary task, and this task will only be achieved collaboratively. The church's mission and unity are related to each other. In context of Africa, there is now a pressing need than ever before, to find cooperation particularly between evangelicals and Pentecostals; and between Protestant churches and mission agencies such as New Life for All. There is no Christian church, mission agency, seminary, or anybody anywhere in the world that can properly carry out the task of mission in isolation. Adeyemo (2000:268) encourages that "The church in Africa needs to work shoulder to shoulder with the church in other parts of the world."

Additionally, in both theological and missiological sense, mission practice approaches differ for many churches, and mission agencies. However, collaborative efforts in Africa will only be possible when the biblical principle is emphasized. A key biblical principle that constitutes part of the missionary calling of the church is to engage in the diaconal alleviation of human need. Woodberry (1996:71) affirms that "it is the duty of Christians in mission, to actively confront all forms of abuse of power and to work for the transformation of unjust social and economic relationships". Woodberry reiterates that "missional praxis will have to give much more serious attention to biblically informed social analysis. Missionaries in Africa are called to understand that a careful study of salvation in the Bible suggests that coming to Christ in faith is holistic (Woodberry 1996:71). Christian missionaries in African context must affirm the decisive significance of the totality of the deeds, words, and suffering of Jesus in the plan of salvation for the world.

Bosch (1987:12) warns, "The Christian faith would turn against itself, its origin, nature and history, if it ceases to challenge people of all persuasions to put their trust in Christ and join a community of his disciples". Christian missionaries in Africa need to take this counsel and warning seriously in order to jointly collaborate in fulfilling the mission of God. Thus, certain missiological skills are important in mission practice.

#### **4.6. Power Encounter in Missions**

Peters (1975:181,182) opines that as mission strategists struggled to identify and overcome the barriers to bringing closure to the task of world evangelism, spiritual power were primarily part of the problems. Missionaries must be aware of the reality of this phenomenon and the belief system of Africans. Schulz (2009:139) opines that "missionaries may encounter those who use magic and witchcraft very deceptively and persuasively as powers of God and the Holy Spirit". Kunhiyop (2012:53) notes that "African Traditional Religion asserts that the world is permeated with divinities and spirits who can have positive or negative effects on every aspect of life". Kunhiyop (2012:53) reiterates that "it is believed that bad spirits inflict injury and cause accidents and suffering."

This phenomenon differs in different parts of Africa, Danladi (2020:90) opines that "African cosmology may differ from one culture, locality and society to another; but they seem to share some commonalities." A typical example of this phenomenon is described by Danfulani and Maxey in these words "the evil eyes and the blood-letting piercing gaze, voodoo (referred to as *dojol* among the Mwaghavul, Mupun, Miship [the Miship calls it *dajal*], Goemai, Chakfem, Meryang, Mushere, Kofyar and Njak of the Jos Plateau in Nigeria and the application of so called (destructive black magic or bad medicine (Danfulani and Maxey 2019:31, 32).

Pocock (2005:184) observes that at International, local church and personal levels, "there has been a focused prayer, power encounter; mapping of territories deemed to be under the control of particular demonic entities, binding strong men and identificational repentance

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for societal sins” In order for mission practice to successful, Danladi (2020:125) opines that “...we must avoid ignoring the African Traditional worldview and rejecting the significant influence it has had on Africans.” Schulz (2009:139) adds that missionaries should be discerning and be quick to point out that powers are not used in the name of God, rather are of occult satanic origin that must be overthrown by the gospel.”

### **5. Role of Missiology in Mission Practice**

The gospel of salvation is what Christian mission is all about, and contemporary Africa society is in dire need of mission practice that understands the times and remains true to sound theology. There is sometimes a separation of mission and theology, particularly in terms of practice. Demarest and Lewis (1987:23) note that “theology originates with an understanding that God exists and evidence of which can be experiential and revealed in his nature and purposes, and additionally, Patterson (1999:5) adds that “missionally, theology is the investigation of all possible truth and his purposes in creation in order to discern all of creation’s appropriate response to God”. This shows the firm relationship of mission and theology. Erickson (2012:23) notes that theology “strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith and this is the heart of mission”. For mission practice to continue to be effective in Africa today, biblical theology and practical theology cannot afford to ignore the contributions of missiology.

However, without missional theology there is no salvation, because theology exist for mission. “Mission theology refers to the missional dimension of various theological disciplines (Ott and Strauss 2010: xviii). Ott and Strauss (2010: xix) explain that “missional theology is dependent on the other theological disciplines”. Mission practice devoid of well thoughtful methodology to apply theology, impacts the practice negatively. Woodberry (1996:67) stresses that “the missionary task needs a suitable epistemological model and responsible hermeneutic for mission practice”. Woodberry (1996:67) argues that “the most obvious and trustworthy methodological approach to mission is neither that of rationalistic deduction or positivistic induction but rather that of contextualization, which must involve the correlation of text and context-of theory and practice. Tippet (1987:xiii) opines that “Missiology applies data relating to the historical origin, the history, the anthropological principles and techniques and the theological base of the Christian mission”. The relevance of a methodology that remains faithful to the text (scripture), yet speaks to context cannot be overemphasized.

The fact remains that mission practice apart from a sound theology is a dangerous and speculative undertaking. Consequently, mission operates on open and unfamiliar borders of countries, ethnicities, genders, class of people and religions with crystal lenses of transforming them with the truth claims of the Gospel and not to undermine or ignore them. Thus, missionaries, as the etymologist must know the people they are reaching out. Baba (2009:55) observes that “the opportunities for mission outreach beyond the borders of Nigeria were many”, and for mission practice in contemporary Africa to be effective missionaries must have a thorough global trends such as liberation, and issues in other religions for them to remain current in the mission fields beyond their borders.

Since missionaries are pathfinders in Christian faith and help theologians to theologize on new discoveries, missionaries should be adequately trained and equipped with linguistic and cross-cultural skill. Hesselgrave (2000:97) comments that “Without cross-cultural training, missionaries may unconsciously confound their cultural expression of Christianity with biblical absolutes or supra-cultural truth”. Hesselgrave (2000:89) reiterates that the complexities of cross-cultural ministry in Africa requires not only a solid theological



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foundation and strong convictions, but also a relational and analytical competence by which missionaries can enter a new context by developing an effective strategy for witness. The result of sending of untrained missionaries to accomplish a task which is ill defined and in which they have not had much experience can be counterproductive. This can be applied more generally to pre-field equipping of missionary candidates. Bakoshi (2016:138) puts it straight that “engendering inclusiveness requires skills and deliberateness. It is a measure of the community’s competence when all of its members are equipped”. Therefore, theologians and missiologists all would do well to insist on raising the bar for missionary training and should expect deeper exposure to the disciplines of a biblical theology of missions, history of missions, studies in world religions, and exposure to anthropology.

## 6. Conclusion

There are vital closing remarks to ensure the continuity and sustainability of mission practice and serving missionaries in Africa. First, the discipline of missiology and missional practice requires the recruiting of sound missionaries for field work who are highly trained from theological seminaries. There is a need for field missionaries to hold on to sound biblical theology to remain faithful to the task of spreading the gospel and true witnesses.

Second, theological seminaries’ curriculum and academic scholarship of church history and missiology should not be dichotomized. Holmes ably articulates the Christian perspective to integration in learning. Holmes (1987:77) notes that “the integration of faith and learning simply implies that all undertakings in education, social, intellectual, or cultural are guided by Christian values and learning is applied holistically as act that sees life as a whole from Christian perspective”. Vanzanten (2011:16) notes that “Faith and learning integration in Christian understanding insists on the redemption of all aspects of the good God, created order distorted by the fall of man.”

Third, the doctrine of the oneness in essence of the Trinity and Christology can be contextualized and explained by expressing it in a language that is faithful to Scripture without compromising biblical standard. The history of mission has been characterised by consistent dispute on the role and the uniqueness of the Trinity and Christology in mission. This began during the early church through Constantine, Edinburgh international conference and beyond. This place of the Trinity is what makes Christian mission distinct and this truth must be affirmed at all times. The New Testament contains Trinitarian statements that put the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as equally significant in mission practice and the universal church baptizes in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

The uniqueness of Christ and His essence as God remains another area of dispute. Athanasius and his theological cohorts used a familiar word from Greek philosophy *homooousios*, meaning “of the same substance” to represent their understanding on the Scriptural teaching on the essential oneness of God the Father and God the Son. Athanasius insisted on biblical ground that the Son was begotten from all eternity and not made. He stressed the exactness of essence between the Father and the Son. Dadang (2018:75, 76, 77, 78) notes that “the Nicaea council adopted “*homooousios*” as the best Scriptural expression of the relationship between the Father and the Son.”

Fourth, history of missionary practice should not be tied around denominational demarcation, rather it should be broadened and commitment on discipleship should be the emphasis. Many are guilty of emphasizing quantitative growth, rather than on the basis of qualitative witnessing. Though number has its place in mission practice, yet efforts should be geared towards Christian commitment to discipleship. Mission practice is characterized in mutual witnessing for transformation of the total person, society and in peoples’ own local

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contexts. The aim should be to mature Christians that can hold roots and own Christian heritage in their own mother tongue. Shenk (1993:133,134, 135,136) observes that the reason why churches in Egypt and Ethiopia did not go extinct was because theology was contextualized; Catechise, hymns, and bible study materials. Shenk (1993:136) laments that” it was lack of contextualization that led to the demise of Churches in North Africa and Nubia.”

Fifth, the goal of every missionary Africa context is to ensure that the gospel takes root by penetrating peoples’ worldview to allow indigenous hearers and receivers retain the message in their own local languages. Biblical theologian and missiologists should bear in mind that indigenization helps to freely wrestle with inculcating Christian values to the mind. Indeed, solution to these issues raised may not be easily forthcoming; however, it is time to raise the bar in order to meet the immense mission challenges of our day. There is therefore the need for right language of expression. As mission strategists struggle to identify and overcome barriers by bringing closure to the task of global evangelism all efforts are to be employed, guided, and revisited with renewed innovations to avoid the loss of biblical mandate for global mission (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 13:1-4). This requires an enduring sacrifice from global and local missionaries in contemporary Africa.

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