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Great Commission: Evangelism in Africa From the Perspective of the African Renaissance

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Nowadays it is commonly accepted that Africa is the cradle of humanity. This assertion is grounded on the scientific research which, among other things, argues that human beings have occupied Africa longer than any other area on the planet. It is also asserted that the earliest ancestors of the homo sapiens originated in Africa round about seven million years ago. One of the fascinating findings has to do with the question of population diversity that is characteristic of Africa. Hence Africa is home to five of the world's six major divisions of humanity. Therefore it is important to note that Africa accounts for the use of almost 1500 languages which are the offshoot of the families of languages; among them are Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Austronesian, and the Khoisan languages. The implication is that Africa "gave birth to the languages spoken by the authors of the Old and New Testament and the Koran, the moral pillars of Western civilization" (Diamonds: 1997).

It must also be pointed out that Africa is regarded as the cradle of human civilization. Africa is credited, along with China, Sumerian, and Mexican Indians, for the invention of writing that date as far back as 3000 BC. It is in Africa where hieroglyphic writing was invented, a system that later influenced the beginnings of Western civilization. In Genesis 2:13; 10:8-12 and 1 Chronicles 1:8-10 the Scripture states that the Cushites of Ethiopia were the compatriots of Nimrod, the Cushite who was the founder of the Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations. Such texts accentuate the fact that the Sumerians and Africans were related and most importantly it acknowledges that the origin of the Sumerian civilization (the bedrock of Western civilizations) is Africa (Adamo: 1998).

I believe that such a consciousness and deeper understanding of African history and its contribution to world civilization needs to be tapped into, to be appropriated and used as a point of entry not only in affirming the

dignity of the African people, but also in using it as a tool to concretize the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the collective consciousness of the African people. I hold the opinion that the question of sin and salvation as it relates to the African people is compounded by the fact that as Africans, we are ignorant of our contribution to the advancement of humanity. Our African-ness has always been perceived as representing backwardness, barbarism, and superstition. I think as Africans we can attain a sense of personal integrity through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also by consciously accepting and celebrating the fact that Africa is the source of the religious consciousness of humanity. Indeed it was the religious belief system of Africa that promoted the practice of circumcision and propounded the notion of the remission of sin through animal sacrifice and this was almost 2000 BC. In fact, that practice preceded the first animal sacrifice to God by Abraham which sealed the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham.

The Church must acknowledge that it is the ancient African religion that laid the foundation of science, art, learning, engineering, and architecture as reflected in the splendid construction of the pyramids (Williams: 1987). I think the Church, both in its theology and praxis, needs to articulate a spirituality of the African renaissance. This will act as a frame of reference for an evangelization of Africa that acknowledges the African contribution in the formation of biblical religious tradition. The challenge facing the evangelization of Africa is to reconnect the present generation of Africans with the ancient ancestors, the role they played, and their contribution to the development of biblical faith. To evangelize successfully as Africans we must cite the role of our predecessors such as the exemplary role of the wife of Moses the Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1-9) as well as the role of the military man in David's army in 2 Samuel 18:21-22, 32-33. Furthermore we need to examine the role of Africa in the defence of Judah against her enemies (Isaiah 20:1-6, 18:1,7, 2 Kings 19:9), the story of Jehudi the African princess who read Jeremiah's scroll (Jeremiah 36:1, 21, 23), the role of Ebed-Melek the Cushite diplomat who rescued Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38:7-10, 12-13, 39:16-17) and most importantly, the role of Zephaniah the African Prophet (Zephaniah 1:1-2, 10).

I think that the Church must apply its mind to how to tap into some of the few citings of the Africans within the biblical tradition and utilize such sources as a means of creating space for the Africans to reclaim their rightful place as active participants in salvation history. Therefore as

Christians in Africa we need to broaden the concept of the African renaissance from the narrow paradigm of the democratisation and neo-liberalization process that is unfolding within the political and economic sphere of African life. Evangelization from the perspective of Africa's initiative must demand repentance from sin and a deliberate consciousness-raising of the collective African consciousness that has shaped and has been shaped by the biblical tradition which acts as an affirmation of the imago Dei of the sons and daughters of Africa. Afrika Mayibuye!