Changes in African American Mission: Rediscovering African Roots

Mark Ellingsen

The African American church has a rich but often neglected heritage of foreign missionary work. In this article I explore how this heritage changed in the twentieth century, especially with reference to the missionary focus of the major historic denominations of the black church, with special attention given to its premier accredited seminary, the Interdenominational Theological Center, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Before 1910 and for decades later, as in most segments of American Christianity, Protestant missions in the black church were carried on with relatively little cultural sensitivity and tolerance for existing indigenous religions on the mission field (especially those of Africa). But a combination of new mission trends with roots in the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, subsequent calls for a moratorium on missions, and the turbulence of the years after the Second World War affected all of American Protestantism (especially the so-called mainline churches) in ways that changed its approach to missions. Although developments in the African American churches share some of these trends, the cultural revolutions of the 1960s (especially the civil rights and black power movements) helped to create a new approach to foreign missions, especially missions in Africa and among the African diaspora.

Nineteenth-Century African American Missions

African American foreign missionaries have a rich history.[1] From 1833 to 1875 the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church enlisted ninety-seven American-born missionaries for the Liberia Mission, and in the mid-1850s they stopped sending white missionaries. Francis Burns (1808–63) was the first of the ninety-seven. Other early missionaries who, like Burns, were well educated included George S. Brown, John L. Morris, Philip Coker, and Lucinda Harris, as well as Eunice Sharpe, the first Methodist female missionary to Liberia.[2] The focus of these missionaries was on the immigrants to Liberia.[3]

Several predominantly white denominations had a black presence on the mission fields in Africa, largely because they assumed that African Americans had a stronger resistance to the climate and diseases of Africa. The Protestant Episcopal Church used black missionaries James Thompson and his wife to start a mission school in Liberia in 1836. In 1843 the Presbyterian Church sent black missionary James M. Priest to Liberia, and in 1853 the British Anglican Church sent out African American Alexander Crummell, also to Liberia.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (an organization largely sponsored by New England Congregationalists) sent blacks to Africa: Samuel Miller to Angola in 1880, and Benjamin and Henrietta Ousley to Mozambique in 1884. And in 1890 the Southern Presbyterians sponsored the "Black Livingstone," William H. Sheppard, with his wife, Lucy, in the Belgian Congo. Besides the fame he gained for his mission in both black and white circles back in America, Sheppard was notably more concerned than the average nineteenth-century missionary with aiding Africans materially, with raising their standard of living.[4]

Historic African American denominations began to undertake their own missions in the nineteenth century. Under the influence of Henry McNeal Turner and his support of emigration to Africa, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) established conferences in Sierra Leone and in South Africa (Pretoria, Orange River, and Cape Town) before the First World War. Its first mission efforts began in 1820, with Daniel Coker departing for Liberia.

The first venture in foreign missions for AME Zion was when Andrew (and his wife, Rosanna) Cartwright, a New England minister, went to Africa in 1876 to organize the church in Liberia. This was the denomination's first work on foreign soil. And in 1896 Bishop John Bryan Small went to West Africa, where he established a church in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana and Nigeria).

Black Baptists also began to get involved in foreign missions in this era. Lott Carey, the first black Baptist foreign missionary, was commissioned by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in 1821 and was active in mission work in Liberia by 1824. He was joined by Collin Teague. Earlier, black Baptist Prince Williams began missionary work in the Bahamas, and in 1782 George Liele, the first ordained black Baptist minister in America, began work in Jamaica.

In 1886 the Women's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society appointed Louise (Lula) Celestia Fleming (1862–99) to serve as a missionary to the Congo. She was the first black woman appointed for full-time service by that organization, serving as a nurse and then medical doctor in the Congo until 1899. And black Baptists in the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention of the United States sent William Colley and other missionaries to Liberia in 1883.

Worldview of the Early Black Missionaries

Almost all of the early missionaries considered their efforts to be aimed at "redemption of Africa,"[5] a viewpoint similar to that held by the predominantly white missionary establishment. George S. Brown, an early black missionary commissioned by the Methodist Episcopal Church, characterized the natives of Liberia as "indolent, poor, and ignorant."[6]

Alexander Crummell, a nineteenth-century black Episcopal missionary to Liberia, clearly held this common view. It was his opinion that the peoples of African descent required "civilization"—that is, an education like that received by refined Anglo-Saxons.[7] He argued that "Gospel Missions are the only hope of the heathen of Africa ever becoming civilized."[8]

Such views appear in a report of the General Conference Committee on Missions to the 1860 General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: "Looking over the world,

Mark Ellingsen is Professor of Church History, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia. His books include Lectionary Preaching Workbook *(3 vols.; CSS Publishing, 2011),* Sin Bravely: A Joyful Alternative to a Purpose-Driven Life *(Continuum, 2009), and* When Did Jesus Become Republican? *(Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).*

—markellingsen@aol.com

we see Africa and her teeming millions, still enshrouded in pagan night, with only here and there a gospel light illuminating the dense darkness; we recommend this field to the notice of the General Conference."[9] Crummell also wrote that if Africa "is ever regenerated, the influences and agencies to this end must come from *external* sources. Civilization . . . never springs up, spontaneously, in any new land. It must be transplanted." Furthermore, "The hand of God is on the black man, in all the lands of his distant sojourn, for the good of Africa. This continent is to be reclaimed for Christ. The faith of Jesus is to supersede all the abounding desolations of heathenism."[10]

Many in the missionary establishment in the first decades of the twentieth century were influenced by the educational and business approach of Tuskegee Institute and Booker T. Washington's philosophy of black advancement through American capitalist development. Washington and his private secretary initiated various agricultural training programs in German West Africa (now Togo) and Liberia prior to 1915. British colonial policies in Africa were notably shaped by these ventures. Under the leadership of Tuskegee president Robert R. Moaton, the institute emerged as a model for educational systems of British colonial Africa. The Tuskegee philosophy of American capitalist development, coupled with support from white philanthropy, exerted increasing influence on many African American missionaries to the motherland, a significant number of whom were trained on the campus or in this philosophy. This in turn had the impact of nurturing missionaries who were rather conservative in their challenges to the European colonial system, regarding it as a temporary stage necessary to unify Africans and "civilize" them.[11]

Related to these dynamics is the impact that American educational systems had on university education in Africa. This happened in two ways—by the generations of young Africans who came to the United States to study in black church-related colleges, and by the impact American educational models had on the educational institutions evolving in West Africa.[12]

Most of the African American Christian intelligentsia of this era held an attitude of disrespect for indigenous African culture and tended to link the missionary enterprise to Westernization. We see these values reflected in a student essay prize awarded by Wilberforce University to AME member Carrie Lee, who referred to Africa as "a barbarous piece of humanity, speaking an odd language and as wild as the beasts that make their abode there." Africans' only hope, she contended, was missionary operations by American blacks.[13] Even William Sheppard, for all his love of the Congolese people, still could write: "Seeing these awful customs practiced by these people for ages makes you indignant and depressed and also fills you with pity. Only by preaching God's word, having faith, patience and love will we eradicate the deep-rooted evil. Everything to them is run by chance, and there are evil spirits and witches everywhere."[14]

A hymn by Alexander P. Camphor, who in 1894 received a hymn-writing award from Gammon Theological Seminary (then the flagship of black theological education and a predecessor body of the Interdenominational Theological Center), well expresses such paternalistic sentiments. The lyrics refer to Africa as a "land of darkness" populated by "heathens" in "blindness."[15] Gammon graduate Camphor, later commissioned by Northern Methodists to serve in Liberia in 1897, wrote a book years later in which he claimed that the aboriginal religion of Africa represented "the darkness of fanaticism and superstition without the light of revelation!"[16]

Some African Americans from the mission field, including William Sheppard, avoided such criticisms of African culture and even managed to impress W. E. B. DuBois. The promotion of African missions by those like Sheppard and AME bishop Henry McNeal Turner helped plant seeds in the African American community of moving from regarding Africa as the "Dark Continent" to viewing it more as the spiritual heartland of the community.[17] Other African American missionaries whose ministry and writings helped plant seeds for today's Pan-Africanism included nineteenth-century AME missionary Alfred Ridgel. He identified Africa as the mother of civilization, as his "ancestral home . . . and best of all, the land of freedom."[18]

The Input of Edinburgh 1910

Given the generally critical portrayal in black church circles of Africa, its culture, and its spirituality, the conclusions drawn by the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh are hardly surprising. The most relevant segment of the literature produced by the conference is its Commission IV report, which pertains to the relation between Christianity and other religions, drawn up on the basis of responses to questionnaires sent to experts and missionaries in the field.

African (and Native American) religions are largely grouped together in the report under the category "animism." Such religions believe that humans, plants, and animals have souls and that some of these entities may be ranked as deities. They are religions based on fear, the report contends.[19] In contrast to the report's analysis of Islam and Eastern religions, pejorative assessments of this religious orientation and its associated cultural practices abound: animistic peoples usually stand on a low stage of human development.[20]

No combination of Christianity and indigenous religions was deemed possible.

Reference is made to the problems "created by the social character of tribal life" (p. 16). The religions of these cultures are said to offer no religious help, to be morally deficient (pp. 10, 12–13, 36). Those dissatisfied with such traditional religions are praised for being the most intelligent members of their communities (pp. 17–18), for in the view of some of the missionary respondents on which the report was based, these African religions are evil (p. 23). Granted, the report does refer to points of contact between these religions and the Gospel, but no combination of Christianity and indigenous religions is deemed possible, and no support is given to the thought that Christianity is only one religion among others or that all religions are simply different ways of seeking the one God (p. 24).

It may be significant in understanding this report that, though between six and eight of the delegates were African American, no Africans were present at the conference as delegates. (Besides African American delegates representing the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention and the Foreign Missionary Society of the AME Zion Church, two African Americans were present as part of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.) Though in some respects the Edinburgh report did sketch progressive directions reflected in the strate-

gies and techniques of today's missionary establishment, its largely critical view of African spirituality and culture embodies the old missionary paradigm that the African American church had to deal with before the civil rights era, if not still today.

Changing Times

It is interesting to note that just after the time of the Edinburgh conference and the First World War, a new appreciation of traditional African religions began to emerge among some African Christians as shown in the development of African Independent Churches.[21] The growth and significance of these trends, along with a growing sense of African pride, nurtured by the success of African independent movements after the Second World War, had an influence on the new scholarly vision of missions in American Protestantism. The seed planted at Edinburgh of the vision of some non-Christian religions serving as "points of contact" with the Word, especially as this insight was mediated to some African American missions scholars through the work of Rudolf Otto, also contributed to formation of a new ethos.[22]

At least some of the leaders in the development of a new view of missions and African culture in the African American church found Otto's view of religion especially useful in developing their own approach toward the religions of the world. Otto's understanding of the emotional character of religion, of the numinous, is a vision of religion that black scholars can own, insofar as the emotional component is typically very significant in their expression of Christianity.[23]

The civil rights era promoted freedom in many ways. Black pride and "black is beautiful" have been important sociocultural legacies of the Martin Luther King movement, and these legacies clearly inform African American Christian perspectives on missions today. Linked with this fresh sense of black pride has been the development of renewed appreciation of African roots (evidenced in "black" becoming "African American"). This in turn has significantly changed instructional practices in several

Noteworthy

Announcing

"Rooted in the Word—Engaged in the World" is the theme for the fifteenth **International Consultation for Theological Educators**, sponsored by the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), October 15–19, 2012, in Nairobi, Kenya. Christopher Wright of Langham Partnership, Douglas Birdsall of the Lausanne Movement, David Baer of Overseas Council, and Geoffrey Tunnicliffe of the World Evangelical Alliance will be the conference leaders. ICETE consultations gather leaders in evangelical theological education from around the world for professional interaction and reflection. For details, go to www.icete-edu.org or http://icetedu.wordpress.com.

The Institute of English Literature at Zhejiang University, the Institute of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen, and the Department of History at the University of Durham invite scholars to an international symposium, **Sinology and Sino-Foreign Cultural Relations and Exchanges**, to be held in Hangzhou, China, November 14–16, 2012. Lauren Pfister, director of the Centre for Sino-Christian Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, and Xiaoxin Wu, director of the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, University of San Francisco, will be keynote speakers. For details, e-mail sinoforeign2012@sina.com.

Sponsored by Mission Training International, Palmer Lake, Colorado (www.mti.org/mhm.htm), the 2012 **Mental Health and Missions Conference** will meet November 15–18 in Angola, Indiana. The annual gathering seeks to provide mutual encouragement and professional development for mental health professionals active in the care of Christian cross-cultural workers.

"Relations Between East Asia and the United States in the Nineteenth Century" is the theme of an international symposium to be held December 14–17, 2012, in memory of Samuel Wells Williams, an important figure in relations between East Asia and the United States in the nineteenth century. Williams, one of the earliest missionaries to China, was the first university professor of sinology in the United States. Hosted by the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), the symposium is sponsored by BFSU's Research Center of Overseas Sinology, by the Institute for Cultural Interaction Studies of Kansai University, Osaka, Japan, and by the Macau Foundation. For details, go to www.csrs.shu.edu.cn.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship will hold its twenty-third **Urbana Student Missions Conference** December 27–31, 2012, at the America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri. Thousands of college-age participants will be challenged by mission leaders and pastors, meet with hundreds of mission organization representatives, attend focused seminars, study the Bible inductively with other students, and consider mission as a career and a lifestyle. For details, go to http://urbana.org.

The 2012 **New Wilmington Mission Conference**, a multigenerational Presbyterian Church (USA)–related conference (nwmcmission.org) that attracts youth ages 12 to 24, will be held July 21–28 at Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania.

The Business as Mission Think Tank will host a **Global Congress on Business as Mission** (http://bamthinktank.org/congress) April 25–28, 2013, in Thailand. Founded a decade ago under the auspices of the Lausanne Movement's Forum for World Evangelization, the group produced the Lausanne Occasional Paper on Business as Mission (www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/875-lop-59.html) and seeks to help shape a growing global movement.

A Master of Arts in Christian Theology with a mission emphasis will be offered beginning in September 2012 through the **Cambridge Theological Federation**, Cambridge, England. The "mission pathway" is designed for those who "wish to reflect on a variety of mission practices in Britain and across the globe, informed by the disciplines of apologetics and biblical studies," according to Emma Wild-Wood, director of the Henry Martyn Centre, Westminster College, Cambridge. The "Mission in Context" module will provide an overview of contemporary mission studies, including inculturation, prophetic dialogue, and fresh expressions. The

historic African American seminaries. Courses in missions are today as much about sensitivity to African culture, about indigenous African religions, as they are about the history of missions and techniques of evangelism.

Missions at ITC

To understand black theological education for the last fifty years (or indeed since Reconstruction), we must give attention to the largest and (through its predecessor bodies) oldest accredited black theological seminary, the Interdenominational Theological Center.[24] Located in Atlanta, the Center is a cluster of six historic African American seminaries, three with roots in Reconstruction. The changes in its curricular approach to missions over the years provide excellent insight into trends in missions education in the black church. These curricular developments of course cannot be understood apart from noting their church-political and sociocultural contexts. The following case study offers rich, insider insights about the black church in America and its changing attitudes toward missionary work.

The largest founding constituent of the Interdenominational Theological Center was Gammon Theological Seminary, Atlanta, whose curriculum, including its mission courses, largely shaped the Center's first curriculum. At the Center, chartered in 1958, the first instructor of missions was Josephus Coan, eminent AME missionary to South Africa and graduate of Yale Divinity School. Coan was sensitive to the uniqueness of the African American perspective on church life and missions, and he also gave attention to other religions.[25] In teaching world religions, however, Coan and his colleague Darius Swann gave no special emphasis to traditional African religions.[26]

While serving as a missionary in South Africa, Coan displayed a liberation orientation. Being concerned with "development," he urged people not to become content with inequality but to set new standards. In his view, faith could lift one above

new degree is being accredited by Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and Chelmsford. For more information, e-mail Wild-Wood at ew273@cam.ac.uk.

Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 2012, available from www.bergpublishers.com), includes articles by Rosemary Seton ("Reconstructing the Museum of the London Missionary Society"), Martha Lund Smalley ("Missionary Museums in China"), and Richard Fox Young ("Princeton Theological Seminary's Museum of Religion and Missions").

Personalia

Appointed. Nancy D. Arnison as executive director of the Theological Book Network, Grand Rapids, Michigan, as of April 26, 2012. Arnison succeeds **Kurt Berends**, who founded the organization and led it for the past ten years. He will lead the Issachar Fund Initiative, a Christian foundation that provides grants and programming for scholars and church groups to engage in dialogue with leaders of today's scientific culture. Arnison served as interim vice president of programs and protection for the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Before that, she directed the World Hunger Program for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for five years. The network she leads (www.theologicalbookn etwork.org) helps underfunded institutions to develop theologically trained clergy, church leaders, and academics worldwide.

Appointed. Najeeb G. Awad, lecturer at Göttingen University, as associate professor of Christian theology, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, effective August 1, 2012. Born in Latakia, Syria, Awad is lecturer in systematic and contextual/intercultural theology at Göttingen University and at the Evangelisch-Lutherische Missionsseminar, Hermannsburg, Germany. Previously, he taught systematic theology and Christian doctrine at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon, and lectured on Protestant theology at Université La Sagesse, Faculté des Sciences Ecclésiales, Beirut. Awad also was director of youth ministry and chair of the Religious Work Committee for the Reformed Churches of Syria, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. In addition to books of poetry in Arabic, he has published three works in theology, including *God Without a Face? On the Personal Individuation of the Holy Spirit* (2011), and has completed a contextual theology manuscript on the Arab Spring and the role of Arab Christians in the future of the Near East.

Appointed. Grant LeMarquand, missiologist, professor of biblical studies and mission, Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, as the Anglican area bishop for the Horn of Africa. He was consecrated for the new post on April 25, 2012, at All Saints Cathedral, Cairo, Egypt, and will be installed on October 27, 2012, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Prior to joining the Trinity faculty fourteen years ago, he taught at St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya. A priest of the Anglican Church of Canada, LeMarquand is coeditor of *Theological Education in Contemporary Africa* (2004). He and his wife, Wendy, plan to move to Gambella, Ethiopia. Mouneer Hanna Anis, bishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa, and president bishop of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East (www.dioceseofegypt.org), announced LeMarquand's appointment in December.

Retiring. Daniel H. Bays, professor of history and director of the Asian Studies Program, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, in summer 2012. An *IBMR* contributing editor, Bays moved to Calvin in 2000 after twenty-nine years on the faculty of the University of Kansas, where he was twice chair of the History Department and was director of the Center for East Asian Studies. His research on the development of Christianity in China during the past 150 years helped to develop an entirely new subfield of modern Chinese history. A book Bays edited, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (1996), was considered a watershed volume in the field. He coedited *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home* (2003) and *China's Christian Colleges: Cross-Cultural Connections, 1900–1950* (2009) and is the author of *A New History of Christianity in China* (2011).

oppression.[27] The heart of his theology included the classic themes of evangelism and mission.[28]

Coan's successor as mission instructor was George Thomas, who came to the Interdenominational Theological Center in 1969, first to teach church and society, and later to teach world missions and evangelism. Thomas later changed his legal name to Ndugu T'Ofori-Atta, reflecting a personal focus on Afrocentrism. T'Ofori-Atta self-consciously related the Center's missions program to Pan-Africanism, not just in the classroom, but programmatically, with the establishment in 1969 of a new program called Religious Heritage of the African World. This program has functioned as a clearinghouse and communications center for conducting research and documenting meetings for the various religious heritages with roots in Africa.[29]

In the classroom, T'Ofori-Atta focused on African religions when teaching the course World Missions and Evangelism, though not to the exclusion of the classical approach to missions. During his tenure the course World Religions was mandated by a new curriculum, and this requirement continues to expose all students at the Center to the religions of Africa. Textbooks

We can talk about the evolution of a new model of mission in the African American church since Edinburgh.

T'Ofori-Atta used in this course were ones devoted to African religions rather than to missionary strategies per se.[30] He noted that major influences on his thought had been the scholarship of John Mbiti (through correspondence and Mbiti's visits to the Center) and his own studies of African Independent Churches.

In the classroom, T'Ofori-Atta's successors have largely followed his lead. His protégée Marsha Snulligan Haney affirms her continuity with his heritage, adding to his thinking more express attention to the role of religion in nurturing ethnic cohesion. She attributes her focus on the value and authenticity of African religions as a fundamental supposition for missions to her experience as T'Ofori-Atta's student and her own exposure to indigenous African religions.[31] The required courses she teaches thus focus on African religions, though not to the exclusion of what she terms "classical approaches" to mission and a preoccupation with Christ. In fact, Haney seeks a middle ground, one affirming the common good shared by all religions (including the communal nature of life, which the African ontology stresses), while still witnessing to Christ and creating opportunities for conversion to Christian faith. She is very concerned that, although she views Christianity as having a "fuller revelation" than other religions, we not negate the beliefs of African religions. In fact, she acknowledges her readiness to affirm the common good of religion more than Christianity's uniqueness. Affirming a statement of the international Reformed-Pentecostal dialogue, in which she participated, Haney contends that it is possible to accept the idea that salvation might be found outside Christ, that "though we cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ, at the same time we cannot set limits on God."

She adds that she does not insist that students accept her own view of the fuller revelation found in Christianity as a necessary outcome of her courses. She also recognizes that her approach to missions bears affinities with missionary scholarship since Edinburgh and its idea of points of contact between the Christian faith and other religions. In the tradition of her mentor, Haney urges the black church to stress such contact points, devoting more attention to African spiritual elements than the establishment does.

The Bigger Picture

Next we need to survey black theological education more broadly in order to determine whether the emphases of the Interdenominational Theological Center characterize other seminaries and the African American church in general.

Curricular developments in mission classes in other historic black seminaries largely parallel the trends in the Center's history. At Howard Divinity School (Washington, D.C.) and at Payne Theological Seminary (Wilberforce, Ohio), no course in world missions is required. The seminaries, however, seem to have different reasons for this curricular decision. At Howard, a required course in world religions seems to have replaced a course in missions. At Payne, neither a course in world religions nor courses about indigenous African religions have taken the place of missiological instruction. Evidently the failure to offer such courses (other than a single elective in Islam) stems from there being no one on the faculty for over a decade with an interest or expertise in these subjects.[32] It is not clear, however, whether Payne's failure to deal with this subject is related to the black church's breaking with older paradigms of missiology or whether other factors are involved.

Hood Theological Seminary (Salisbury, N.C.) has a required course in missiology, one with a stronger "how to" approach to the discipline than is true of courses at the Interdenominational Theological Center. Although assigned readings in the course do not deal with African religions, in the best traditions of the black church (and along with parallel courses at the Center), missions and evangelism are seen as including social justice and economic uplift.[33] In addition, the Hood faculty member teaching the course introduces students to what he calls the "new paradigm" in missions, which involves an appreciation of the need to conserve and acknowledge the culture in which mission is taking place. If Christ establishes roots, it must be in the culture in which people reside. Very much in line with the viewpoint of colleagues teaching the required missions courses at the Interdenominational Theological Center, mission courses at Hood Seminary aim to help students gain an appreciation that God is bigger than Christianity, that other religions (including those of Africa) can be ways of finding God and salvation.[34]

The model for the study of missions at the Interdenominational Theological Center clearly has parallels in other historic black seminaries. In that sense we can talk about the evolution of a new model of missions in the African American church since Edinburgh. We conclude our study with data indicating a tension on the mission fields between this newer model and the older model, as implemented by some African American denominations.

Tensions Between Missionary Visions

We begin our study of the black church's actual missionary agenda by considering the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first and oldest historic black denomination. Until recently, it seems that this denomination continued to follow the older model,

for it appointed only American bishops to serve in its overseas dioceses. Recently, however, it has appointed three indigenous bishops in Africa. AME's focus is not so much on seeking points of contact with the indigenous religions of Africa, viewing them as authentic expressions of faith, as it is on bringing people to Jesus. Yet echoes of the Edinburgh agenda of encouraging mission churches to become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating seem to be reflected in the AME vision of establishing self-sufficient, self-sustaining churches. George Flowers, executive director of the AME Global Witness and Ministry Department, notes that the AME constituency supports not only the establishing of self-sustaining churches but also the demonstrating of concern for the physical well-being of the Africans who receive this ministry.[35]

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) also seems to reflect many of the suppositions of the AME in its work in Africa. In fact, missionary work there occurs only insofar as existing Christian communities invite CME to begin working among them. As a result, CME missionaries rarely encounter people still living in indigenous cultures with their original religions. But when they do, their goal is to convert the indigenous people to Christianity, though in such a way that they can maintain their indigenous spirituality. It was also noted by W. C. Champion, general secretary of the CME Department of Evangelism and Missions, that the denomination's laity strongly supports these policies, especially when the church seeks to build schools.[36]

T'Ofori-Atta believed that at least in his own AME Zion Church there would be support in the pews for an approach to mission that appreciated traditional African religions, such as characterizes his seminary and the black academy in general. Institutional dynamics work, however, to keep the mission work of historic African American denominations locked into the more classical models of mission work (i.e., saving souls).[37] T'Ofori-Atta's intuition was supported by Kermit DeGraffenreidt, secretary of the denomination's Department of Overseas Missions and Missionary Seer. In a conversation he noted that the church presently had no American missionaries in Africa and that all support for missions went to indigenous leadership, who could more effectively do missions in their own context. He believed that the constituency supported his view and the department's practice of seeking common areas between Christianity and other African religions, that the issue is how one treats the other, since the differences between these religions and Christianity are perhaps not as great as one might think.[38] T'Ofori-Atta's assessment of the openness of his denomination to the approach to missions prevailing at the Interdenominational Theological Center and much of the black academy seems on target. It is interesting to note that this more progressive approach to missions is endorsed by one of the two historic denominations that participated formally in the 1910 Edinburgh conference.

The story of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention of America, the other black denomination with official representation at the 1910 Edinburgh conference, is somewhat different. Eric Brown, administrator of the board, notes that the primary function of his organization is to support indigenous leadership of independent Baptist churches.[39] In the best traditions of the African American church, this support frequently takes the form of economic and educational ventures. But in accord with older models of mission work, Brown notes that the aim of this work is to bring people to Christ. Though personally open to indigenization, Brown sees some of the teachings of indigenous religions as contradicting the Gospel and needing to be criticized.

Their goal is to convert the indigenous people to Christianity, though in such a way that they can maintain their indigenous spirituality.

He is confident that the average Baptist supporter of the Foreign Mission Board approves of the board's directions and policies. But this support, he suspects, may be a function of the fact that few members of the National Baptist Convention would want to take up missionary work in Africa, the Caribbean, or South America (where the denomination works). Indeed, the mission board would be open to sending Americans to these foreign sites (presumably as evangelists).

Such comments suggest that the National Baptist Convention leadership in fact embraces the old, even pre-Edinburgh model of black missionary work. This conclusion is further supported by another comment Brown made, as he indicated that the Convention's mission work might be enhanced with Americans because of what they could bring to the mission fields. Perhaps in some tension with the Interdenominational Theological Center model of missions (also clearly implied in the Howard curriculum), Brown wants seminaries to train Americans for mission who believe that we need to bring Christ to people who do not know him.[40] In Brown's mind, Christ is clearly not present in African religions.

This brief survey of what is happening in the mission field and in the missionary establishment of the black church makes it clear that the Afrocentric models of missions taught in the black academy (notably at the Interdenominational Theological Center) have not been unambiguously accepted by the bureaucracy of the black church (with the possible exception of AME Zion). In the final analysis, perhaps in the tension between older models of mission in the black church and the newer vision of its seminaries, we can speak today about a tension in African American churches between saving the world for Christ and preserving or honoring the ethnic cohesion of African cultural institutions which, at least since the colonial era if not before, may be interpreted as having always embodied the suffering Christ.[41]

Notes

1. For helpful surveys of this history, as well as a more detailed picture, see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 45–46, 74–75; Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 72–77; Vaughn J. Watson and Robert J Stevens, *African-American Experience in World Mission* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2003); Sylvia M. Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982); Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877–1900* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1982).
2. For this data I am indebted to Eunjin Park, *"White" Americans in "Black" Africa: Black and White American Methodist Missionaries in Liberia, 1820–1875* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 31, 44–47. The

author notes that most black missionaries acted mostly as assistants to whites (p. xvi).

3. Willis J. King, "History of the Methodist Church Mission in Liberia," typewritten MS, n.d., General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, Madison, N.J.
4. For this assessment, see Williams, *Black Americans*, p. 29.
5. For this assessment, see Lawrence N. Jones, "The Black Churches: A New Agenda," *Christian Century*, April 18, 1979, p. 434; Alexander Crummell, *Africa and America* (Springfield, Mass.: Wiley, 1891), p. 442. Josephus Coan, "The Expansion of Missions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa, 1896–1908" (Ph.D. diss., Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1961), pp. 43–44, contends that this was the compelling reason for AME to take up the missionary agenda in Africa.
6. George S. Brown, "Letter to John Seys," *Christian Advocate*, October 5, 1842, p. 30.
7. Alexander Crummell, *Civilization and the Primal Need of the Race* (Washington, D.C.: American Negro Academy, 1898).
8. Alexander Crummell, sermon in his Washington, D.C., church, ca. 1878, in Alexander Crummell Papers, Schomberg Collection of the New York Public Library, MS C.363, no. 755.
9. The General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes, 1860, p. 26; available in Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Ga. Note Daniel Payne's objection to such "African Methodist Imperialism," that is, the spiritual domination of Africa, reported in Coan, "The Expansion of Missions," pp. 39–40.
10. Crummell, *Africa and America*, pp. v, 421.
11. For these insights I am indebted to Manning Marable, "Ambiguous Legacy: Tuskegee's 'Missionary' Impulse and Africa During the Moton Administration, 1915–1935," in *Black Americans*, ed. Jacobs, pp. 77–78; Walter L. Williams, "The Missionary: Introduction," in ibid., p. 133.
12. I was helped to understand this point by Thomas C. Howard, "Black American Missionary Influence on the Origins of University Education in West Africa," in *Black Americans*, ed. Jacobs, p. 95.
13. Carrie Lee, "The Future of Africa," *Voice of Missions*, July 1, 1899, p. 4.
14. William H. Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, [1917]), pp. 149, 135, 137.
15. Williams, *Black Americans*, p. 179.
16. Alexander Camphor, *Missionary Story Sketches: Folklore from Africa* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1909), pp. 43–46, 56–58, 111.
17. For these sources, see Donald F. Roth, "The 'Black Man's Burden': The Racial Background of Afro-American Missionaries and Africa," in *Black Americans*, ed. Jacobs, pp. 37, 34.
18. Alfred Lee Ridgel, *Africa and African Methodism* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing, 1896), pp. 42–43.
19. World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission IV: The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), pp. 6–37. My appreciation of the critical approach to African religions by the conference was heightened by Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 235–45.
20. World Missionary Conference, 1910, p. 13. (Subsequent page numbers in the text refer to this report.)
21. The emergence of this movement largely coincided with the First World War; see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 58–59.
22. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923), pp. 1–7, 12, 28.
23. For this assessment I am indebted to my late emeritus colleague Ndugu T'Ofori-Atta, personal interview, November 6, 2009.
24. For a history of the seminary, see Kenneth Henry and Mark Ellingsen, *Making Black Ecumenism Happen: The History of the Interdenominational Theological Center as a Paradigm for Christian Unity* (Atlanta: ITC Press, 2008); Harry V. Richardson, *Walk Together, Children: The Story of the Birth and Growth of the Interdenominational Theological Center* (Atlanta: ITC Press, 1981).
25. Ndugu T'Ofori-Atta, telephone conversation, October 13, 2009.
26. Henry and Ellingsen, *Making Black Ecumenism Happen*, p. 60; T'Ofori-Atta, personal interview.
27. Josephus Coan, interviews with Mercedes C. Brown, March 4, 1992, June 13, 1993, and September 11, 1992; in Mercedes C. Brown, *The Unconquered Mountain* (Nashville: AME Publishing House, 1995), pp. 27, 46, 104.
28. Brown, *The Unconquered Mountain*, pp. 45–47.
29. For details on the program, see Henry and Ellingsen, *Making Black Ecumenism Happen*, p. 80.
30. T'Ofori-Atta, personal interview; John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).
31. Marsha Snulligan Haney, telephone interview, December 4, 2009.
32. William Augmen, telephone interview, January 5, 2010.
33. Samuel Dansokho, private correspondence, 2009; Samuel Dansokho, telephone interview, January 5, 2010.
34. Dansokho, telephone interview.
35. George Flowers, telephone interview, October 28, 2009. On the Edinburgh vision, see Stanley, *World Missionary Conference*, p. 140.
36. W. C. Champion, telephone interview, November 6, 2009.
37. T'Ofori-Atta, personal interview.
38. Kermit DeGraffenreidt, telephone conversation, January 7, 2010.
39. Eric Brown, telephone interview, November 20, 2009.
40. Ibid.
41. This article benefited from the numerous opportunities I had to converse with colleagues Marsha Snulligan Haney and the late Ndugu T'Offori-Atta. They along with the missions faculty or administrators of the other institutions analyzed as well as the numerous denominational directors of global mission work whom I interviewed approved its content.

Six Thousand Koreans Expected in Chicago Area for Global Mission Conferences

At least six thousand Koreans from around the world are expected July 20–27 in the Chicago area for the quadrennial **Korean World Mission Conference** (KWMC, www.kwmc.com). The event commences with a three-day conference exclusively for missionaries, continues July 23 with a Korean-language conference that is open to everyone, and includes the 2012 **Global Korean Young Adult Mission Festival** (GKYM, gkym.org/xe/?mid=Chicago), an English-language movement that encourages second-generation North American Korean young adults to "finish the missional task to reach the unreached, unengaged people groups of the world."

The KWMC and GKYM participants will join together for a closing celebration of God's mission. Most of the events will be held at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. Members and pastors of the estimated 3,500 Korean churches in the United States are being invited to attend KWMC and GKYM.

The speakers for these combined conferences include Douglas Birdsall, The Lausanne Movement; Seung Sam Kang, Korean World Mission Association; Todd M. Johnson, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Jung-Hyun Oh, SaRang Community Church, Seoul; Loren Cunningham, Youth With A Mission; Ha Joong Kim, former ambassador of South Korea to China; author and pastor John Piper; and Yong Ye Kim, World Mobile Mission.