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CONTEXTUALIZING INDIGENOUS CHURCH PRINCIPLES: AN AFRICAN MODEL

Warren B. Newberry

1. Introduction

In spite of overexposure and considerations of being outdated, indigenous church principles, as espoused in one form or another since the mid-1800s, continue to be a popular mission strategy for many sending agencies or churches. The concept has persisted and remains a viable tool in spite of having often been discarded as archaic, outmoded and abandoned in favor of partnership, or other newer strategies. It resulted as a reaction to the missionary paternalism that prevailed within the church and mission circles during that period and has carried forward to this present time.

Being a concept formulated and defined by western missioners, it is now used both as a strategy for missions and as a measuring device for the purpose of determining the maturation level and progress of any non-western church established or planted by them. It is argued that these are New Testament principles and thus are mission strategy models that we would do well to follow. After all, if the apostle Paul used them, then they should be good enough for us.

Within missiology, the social sciences such as applied anthropology, cultural anthropology, and intercultural communications are studied and utilized with the expectation of being able to better understand the host culture and to avoid both communicational and relational problems. We apply these models and theories to our mission work and applaud ourselves for being better missionaries. Yet, when it comes to applying the concept of the indigenous church to a non-western situation, a “foreign” western model is always utilized instead of one that is relevant. A contextualized model that functions within the framework of the social and spiritual morés of the host country is better suited for the job. We have not allowed the social science disciplines to influence this area of our missionary praxis.

This essay will briefly trace the history of indigenous church principles in the Assemblies of God and then attempt to contextualize them in order to make them more palatable to the African context. I will argue that these principles are not limited to the original Three-Selfs and that the incorporating of additional "selfs" into the formula will only enhance them. The concepts indicated will apply to Africa in general, and to Malawi in particular, where my wife and I served as missionary educators from 1968-1994.

2. The Development of Indigenous Church Principles[1]

During "the heyday of nondenominational mission societies, mission had been understood predominantly as *conversio gentilium*—a conversion of individual persons."[2] These societies had been preaching a "gospel without a church." Their concern was individual conversion rather than church planting. A reaction and remedy against this notion resulted in what missiologists now call "Indigenous Church Principles" or the "Three-Selfs." This approach was explained as planting churches that would become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.[3]

In Pentecostal missions, it is often thought that indigenous church principles are the original work of the late Melvin Hodges, an Assemblies of God missiologist. While he certainly was not the first to espouse them, he, standing on the shoulders of others, took a major step forward with pen in hand and gave to the church world a very practical version. I will attempt to trace the antecedents leading up to Hodges to indicate the proper Three-Selfs ancestry and pedigree.[4] The earliest proponents of this school of thought were Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn.

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[1] Portions of this section are edited excerpts from Warren B. Newberry, "Major Missiological Motifs in North American Classical Pentecostal Missions" (D.Th. Thesis, University of South Africa, 1999).

[2] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), p. 331.

[3] Paul A. Pomerville, *Introduction to Missions: An Independent-Study Textbook*, 2nd ed. (Irving, TX: ICI University Press, [1987] 1995), p. 189.

[4] The continental missiologists such as Gustav Warneck and Bruno Gutmann, who were involved in the indigenous church debate, are purposely excluded. Peter Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever, *The Responsible Church and the Foreign Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) have given an excellent overview and synopsis of their contributions.

2.1 Rufus Anderson (1796-1880)

Born in a Congregationalist parsonage in the State of Maine in 1796, he was immersed in concern for mission from his earliest days.[5] He later studied at Andover Seminary and, while studying, worked at the office of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). After graduation, he applied for missionary work in India, but the ABCFM decided that he could make a greater contribution to missions in the home office and he was selected as the assistant secretary. In 1832 he was appointed as the general secretary and remained in that position until 1866.[6]

Anderson was often considered to be "a tyrant who ruled the American Board, the Prudential Committee, and the missionaries with an iron hand."[7] This was the obvious result of his new-found mission strategy of indigenous principles that he was endeavouring to impose on missionaries who were already set in their ways of paternalism.

Anderson's main thesis was that missions existed for the spread of a scriptural, self-propagating Christianity. His thesis included these factors: 1) the conversion of lost humanity, 2) organizing the converts into churches, 3) providing these churches with competent national leadership, and 4) guiding them to the stage of independence and self-propagation.[8] While espousing the total package of the Three-Selfs, Anderson's main emphasis centred upon the developing of indigenous leadership. This contrasted with Henry Venn's preoccupation with financial self-support. Later, in his ministry, he would describe "the mission structure as 'scaffolding' while the indigenous church was the 'edifice.'"[9]

2.2 Henry Venn (1796-1873)

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[5] R. Pierce Beaver, "The Legacy of Rufus Anderson," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3:3 (July 1979), pp. 94-97 (94).

[6] Willem A. Saayman, "Mission—What?: Goal and Content of Mission," in *On Being Witnesses*, eds. J. J. Kritzinger, P. G. J. Meiring, and W. A. Saayman (Johannesburg: Orion Publishers, 1994), pp. 1-39 (7).

[7] Beaver, "The Legacy of Rufus Anderson," p. 94.

[8] Beaver, "The Legacy of Rufus Anderson," p. 95.

[9] Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Origins and Evolution of the Three-Selfs in Relation to China," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 14:1 (January 1990), pp. 28-35 (29).

Henry Venn was born on the other side of the Atlantic in London in the same year as Anderson, 1796. He became the general secretary of the Church Missionary Society in 1841 and served until 1872. Seeking to find the principles of missions, he posed this question, "What gave a church integrity?" He concluded that it was necessary for a church to feel self-worth. Over a period of fifteen years he identified three aspects of that self-worth. They would eventually be stated as self-government, self-propagation and self-supporting, with the latter receiving the most emphasis.[10] Venn also felt that with the emergence of national churches, the policy of the society should be one of "working oneself out of a job." He called it "the euthanasia of a mission."[11]

2.3 Anderson's and Venn's Mutual Contribution

In an essay on the subject, Wilbert Shenk notes the similarities of Anderson and Venn. Both were born in the same year, howbeit, one on the west and the other on the east side of the Atlantic Ocean.[12] Each lost his mother at the age of seven and father at the age of seventeen. Each was the eldest son and they both graduated from college in 1818. Both served as senior secretaries in mission administration and achieved eminence as leading administrators in their respective countries. And last, but certainly not least, both are given credit for formulating the so-called indigenous church principles: self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.

Yet, each came independently to the Three-Self formula without any apparent collusion. Together, they provided a guiding principle for world missions, as too few others held all three terms in proper tension and unity. Mission executives usually stressed self-support; national church leaders emphasized self-government; and too few put self-propagation as the priority that Anderson did.[13] While their emphasis was different, their principles were the same. They used the Three-Selfs as pointers toward the

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[10] Shenk, "The Origins and Evolution of the Three-Selfs in Relation to China," p. 29.

[11] A. F. Walls, "Venn, Henry," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 1015.

[12] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5:4 (Oct 1981), pp. 168-72.

[13] Beaver, "The Legacy of Rufus Anderson," p. 96.

missionary goal of planting churches that would themselves become the means of missionary advance in the world.[14]

2.4 John Nevius (1829-1893)

John L. Nevius was an American missionary to China. He received his education at Princeton Seminary and was sent to China in 1854 under the Presbyterian Mission Board. Picking up on Anderson's and Venn's theme, Nevius began to espouse the same principles while visiting Korea in 1890. In developing his version of the principles, he says: "The plans and methods made use of in bringing the truth to bear upon the minds of the heathen are various and many and should be changed and modified according to the different conditions and circumstances."[15]

Nevius called for the discarding of the "old plan," paternalism, and for the adoption of his "new plan." In summary, he stated that the old plan could be distinguished by the fact that it depended largely on paid national workers, while the new plan seeks to minimize their use. The old system used foreign funds to foster and stimulate the growth of the national churches in the first stage of their development, while the new system introduced the application of principles of independence and self-reliance from the beginning.[16]

Though his own colleagues in China were not enthusiastic about the "new plan," it was implemented in Korea by Presbyterian missionaries.[17] A vigorous church rapidly developed which was virtually unmatched in the non-Western world."[18]

2.5 Roland Allen (1868-1947)

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[14] Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?" p. 171.

[15] Everett N. Hunt, "The Legacy of John Livingston Nevius," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15:3 (July 1991), pp. 120-24 (122).

[16] John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, ed. Harvie Conn, 4th ed., Studies in the World Church and Missions 4 (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, [1885] 1958), p. 8.

[17] Floyd E. Hamilton, "The Self-Support System in Korea," in *The "Nevius Method" in Korea*, ed. Thomas Cochrane, Indigenous Church Series (London: World Dominion Press, 1930), pp. 3-9.

[18] Pierard, "Nevius, John Livingston," p. 700.

"Roland Allen is currently the most influential deceased mission writer whose career began in the last [19th] century," wrote John Branner.[19] He believed profoundly in the leadership of the Holy Spirit and had a deep love for the Bible. Like the apostle Paul, he could be called a "task" theologian. In regards to both theology and methodology, he called the missionary enterprise back to its Biblical roots.[20] Deciding that the Three-Selfs principles were worthwhile, but yet did not go far enough, Allen emphasized a new dimension of maturity. This concept stressed the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in the development of the indigenous church.[21] This additional emphasis on the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers was something which was to govern Allen's entire concept of missions, particularly that of the indigenous church.[22] In viewing the missionary work of his era and church, he lamented that while they had accomplished many good and wonderful things,

> Nevertheless, there is everywhere three very disquieting symptoms: (1) *Everywhere Christianity is still an exotic*. We have not yet succeeded in so planting it in any heathen land that it has become indigenous.... (2) *Everywhere our missions are dependent*. They look to us for leaders, for instructors, for rulers. They have as yet shown little sign of being able to supply their own needs....(3) *Everywhere we see the same types*....There has been no new revelation. There has been no new discovery of new aspects of the Gospel, no new unfolding of new forms of Christian life.[23]

Allen argued for a return to New Testament principles and a radical dependence on the Holy Spirit.[24] He pondered the question of utilizing Paul's methods in his day without totally destroying the very foundations of all they had accomplished or established. They are outlined in detail in his first book, *Missionary Methods,* and included the following:

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[19] John E. Branner, "Roland Allen: Pioneer in a Spirit-Centered Theology of Mission," *Missiology* 5:2 (April 1977), pp. 175-84 (176).

[20] Francis M. DuBose, *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1979), p. 268.

[21] Pomerville, *Introduction to Missions*, p. 192.

[22] Branner, "Roland Allen," p. 181.

[23] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St Paul's or Ours?* 5th ed. (London: World Dominion, 1962), pp. 141-42.

[24] Shenk, "The Origins and Evolution of the Three-Selfs in Relation to China," p. 30.

1) All teaching to be permanent must be intelligible and so capable of being grasped and understood that those who have once received it can retain it, use it, and hand it on.
2) All organization in like manner must be of such a character that it can be understood and maintained. It must be an organization of which the people see the necessity. It must be an organization which they can and will support.
3) All financial arrangements made for the ordinary life and existence of the church should be such that the people themselves can and will control and manage their own business independently of any foreign subsidies.
4) A sense of mutual responsibility of all the Christians one for another should be carefully inculcated and practised. The whole community is responsible for the proper administration of baptism, ordination and discipline.
5) Authority to exercise spiritual gifts should be given freely and at once. Nothing should be withheld which may strengthen the life of the church, still less should anything be withheld which is necessary for its spiritual substance.[25]

Years later, when he wrote his other famous book, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church,*[26] he retained his main concern with indigeneity. His opening statements ring, "If the church is to be indigenous it must spring up in the soil from the very first seeds planted. One or two little groups of Christians organized as churches, with their bishops and priests, could spread all over the empire. They would be obviously and without question native churches."[27]

Later on, Allen was quick to criticise Nevius's methods as focussing on only one point of the Three-Selfs. He pointed out that self-support is the foundation stone in the Nevius plan and was the main point emphasized. Furthermore, Allen felt that by over-emphasizing the material (self-support), the spiritual dimension was lost.[28]

He was a voice ahead of his time, as his message was largely ignored in his own lifetime; but subsequent generations have rediscovered the legacy of his writings. He himself understood this and once predicted that

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[25] Allen, *Missionary Methods, St Paul's or Ours?* pp. 151-52.

[26] Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes That Hinder It*, 4th ed. (London: World Dominion, 1960).

[27] Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, p. 2.

[28] Roland Allen, *The 'Nevius Method' in Korea*, ed. Thomas Cochrane (London: World Dominion, 1930), pp. 11-12.

his work would not be taken seriously until about 1960.[29] From the very first, Pentecostals, some of whom were associated with the Survey Application Trust, claimed him; though he was neither a Pentecostal nor a radical Protestant.[30] Gary McGee, a noted Pentecostal historian, penned, "Pentecostals were among Allen's best students. Neither Anglicans nor Pentecostals could have envisioned a more unlikely scenario—an Anglo-Catholic impacting the Pentecostal mission enterprise, helping it become one of the twentieth century's most vibrant missionary movements."[31]

3. Indigenous Church Principles from a Pentecostal Perspective

3.1 Alice E. Luce (1873-1955)

While early Pentecostals were not noted for their academic scholarship and literary skills (they preferred "doing" instead of "writing"), a budding mission theology began to crystallize with the help of Alice Luce. She had come into the Assemblies of God because of a personal experience of glossolalia while serving as an Anglican missionary in India.[32] During her service in India, the Pentecostal message and experience impacted the missionaries as well as indigenous Christian missions.[33] Later, she would find herself ministering to Hispanics in Texas after having left India due to health reasons.

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[29] Charles H. Long and Anne Rowthorn, "The Legacy of Roland Allen," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13:2 (April 1989), pp. 65-70 (65-66).

[30] Long & Rowthorn, "The Legacy of Roland Allen," p. 68.

[31] Gary B. McGee, "The Legacy of Melvin Hodges," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22:1 (January 1998), pp. 2-24 (21).

[32] McGee, "The Legacy of Melvin Hodges," p. 21.

[33] Edith L. Blumhofer, *"Pentecost in My Soul": Explorations in the Meaning of Pentecostal Experience in the Early Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), p. 134.

In January and February of 1921,[34] she published in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, a three part series entitled "Paul's Missionary Methods." These articles were the first major exposition of indigenous church principles in that publication.[35] Admitting to having read Allen's *Missionary Methods*, but could not remember his name, she noted: "We missionaries all read it, and thought the writer somewhat visionary and unpractical, but that book first opened my eyes to the diametrical distinction between our methods of working and those of the New Testament."[36] She became the first fledgling missiologist of stature in the Assemblies of God,[37] and for the classical Pentecostal groups who were in their formative stages during that era. While admitting dependence on Allen, Luce strongly advocated the development of the Three-Selfs principles in the foreign fields.[38]

Being a Pentecostal, Luce took Allen's indigenous concepts a step further than he had intended. She believed that utilizing apostolic methods would be accompanied by the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit.[39] Therefore, she was quick to ask, "When we go forth to preach the Full Gospel, are we going to expect an experience like that of the denominational missionaries, or shall we look for the signs to follow?"[40]

3.2 Melvin Hodges (1909-1988)

To the Pentecostal missionary, "Mr Indigenous Church" is none other than Melvin Hodges. His name is synonymous with the modern indigenous church concept and many Pentecostals believe that he is the sole author of

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[34] The General Council of the Assemblies of God adopted the indigenous church principles as a new required missionary policy at their meeting in September of this same year. While it is not known, it is highly probable that Alice Luce was instrumental in the writing or adoption of this policy.

[35] Gary B. McGee, "Pioneers of Pentecost: Alice E. Luce and Henry C. Ball," *Assemblies of God Heritage*, Summer 1985, pp. 12-15 (12).

[36] Alice E. Luce, "Paul's Missionary Methods," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, February 5, 1921, pp. 6-7 (6).

[37] McGee, "The Legacy of Melvin Hodges," p. 21.

[38] Gary B. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached: A History and Theology of Assemblies of God Foreign Missions to 1959* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1986), p. 97.

[39] McGee, "Pioneers of Pentecost: Alice E. Luce and Henry C. Ball," p. 12.

[40] Alice E. Luce, "Paul's Missionary Methods [Part One]," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, January 6, 1921, pp. 6-7.

it. His writings on the subject are often required reading for missionaries regardless of denominational affiliation.[41]

Hodges was ordained by the Rocky Mountain District of the Assemblies of God in 1929 and served as a pastor until his appointment to missionary service in Central America in 1935. Noel Perkin, who was the missionary secretary for the Assemblies of God at that time, encouraged Hodges to read Roland Allen's books.[42] Upon arrival in Central America, he became an understudy of Ralph Williams, a missionary who had learned the indigenous principles from Alice Luce. This set the context for Hodges to formulate his own version of the Three-Selfs principles.[43]

Melvin Hodges was a quick understudy. Ralph Williams was a practical person who applied indigenous church principles in El Salvador,[44] which in time became a showcase model of effective church planting. Hodges learned from Williams and, armed with Roland Allen's books, *Missionary Methods* and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church,* he began to apply the principles. After ten months in El Salvador, the Hodges moved to Nicaragua, which proved to be a difficult field. However, he was determined to persevere with his newly acquired indigenous strategy. To achieve this, he established a Bible institute that required the students to put their academic training to practical use in evangelism and church planting.[45]

While Hodges felt that indigenous church principles were the correct and New Testament methodology, he was quick to add that, "We must tailor our...program to fit the need."[46] Flexibility was important as long as certain principles and goals were kept in mind. He stated: "None of us is wise enough to chart the future course of missions. We don't have to be! The Holy Spirit will lead us on a better course than we could possibly plan.

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[41] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 373, 378.

[42] McGee, "The Legacy of Melvin Hodges," p. 21.

[43] Douglas Petersen, *Not By Might Nor By Spirit: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Irvine, CA: Regnum, 1996), p. 70.

[44] Gary B. McGee <GMcgee@agseminary.edu>, "More About Hodges," Personal E-Mail to Warren Newberry <wnewberry@cwjamaica.com>, March 5 1999.

[45] McGee, "The Legacy of Melvin Hodges," p. 21.

[46] Hodges, "Developing Basic Units of Indigenous Churches," p. 127. He felt that withholding training from the older, mature converts would set back the work. Thus, he was open to new ideas that would lead to the establishment of the indigenous church.

He is already doing so!"[47] Hammered out on the anvil of many years of practical experience and observation, Hodges wrote his famous book, *The Indigenous Church,* in 1953.[48]

Hodges's final chapter is titled "Pentecost and Indigenous Methods." Emphasis is placed on the Pentecostal experience and indigenous church principles as being not only compatible, but working "hand-in-glove." "We have witnessed thousands of 'indigenous' churches spring into existence in the homeland as a result of Pentecostal outpourings since the turn of the century. Pentecostal outpourings, whether in the homeland or abroad, have always produced converts with flaming zeal and sacrificial spirit."[49] However, modern church history has shown that being filled with the Spirit does not necessarily produce indigenous churches in spite of "zeal and a sacrificial spirit." While he insisted on a New Testament model of indigenous church principles, it remained limited in its application in non-western cultures.

4. Contextualizing the Principles: "Fitting the Need"

Contextualizing has to do with making an idea or theology understandable, useful, and relevant within a given culture or society. While we readily admit that indigenous principles are New Testament strategies, one has to wonder if Venn or Anderson had been African or Asian if their conclusions and emphasis would have been the same. Perhaps not! What we do and how we see the world is related to our own worldview which, in fact, causes us to observe our external world with "tinted glasses."[50] Almost for certain, the preoccupation and emphasis on self-support would not be of the same intensity if they had been of

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[47] Gary B. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached: A History and Theology of Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Since 1959*, vol. 2 (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), p. 106.

[48] Petersen, *Not By Might*, p. 73 states that Hodges' book was "an analysis of its [El Salvador] development and operation." He implies that Hodges only reported and analyzed what he had observed rather than actually developing the theory of Pentecostal indigenous church principles.

[49] Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church.* (Springfield, MO.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), p. 132.

[50] Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), p. 19.

non-western extraction. In an African context it is likely that self-propagation would be the most emphasized of the Three-Selfs.

I have already stated that the western model of the indigenous church does not always comfortably fit a non-western society. It is a "one-size-fits-all" model that fits no one very well. It is "too small" for the large and "too large" for the small. Are the non-western churches to become clones of the West? Hodges's remarks about "fitting the need" should be heard loud and clear. We need to allow each church to contextualize their indigenous church model to fit their particular society and situation. Malawians have a proverb which says that a "forced bone will break the pot." A western version would be "you can't fit a square peg into a round hole." Don't force something that will not work. The following two models are good examples.

4.1 Paternalism

Both Venn and Anderson formulated their principles in a crisis situation reacting to the extreme paternalism propagated and enjoyed by their western counterparts. They were opposed to the making of "rice Christians," an approach that caused total dependence on the sending mission to sustain the work and employ the believing nationals. Formulating their version of the Three-Selfs was a western missionary reaction to a western missionary-created problem.

Morris Williams has pointed out that paternalism in itself is not bad. After all, in order for there to be children, there must be parents. Without parents, there would be no children; and children is what it is all about! The missionaries became the great benefactor. They were the parents! They bound the wounds of their "children," pulled their teeth, educated them, sheltered them on mission compounds, fed them, employed them, and loved them! The people were the "children" of the missionaries and the missionaries were looked upon as parents. Often, particularly in Africa, they were referred to as "Pa" and "Ma." However, missionaries expected to be paid in return. Loyalty and appreciation were required and dependency resulted. The "children" were put in the debt of the "parents" and were never allowed to forget it. In an Asian context they became "rice Christians." Little by little, missionaries fell into a life-style that became paternalistic: an "over-under" relationship, with the missionaries always in the superior role and the nationals under them. Consequently, the missionaries resisted any attempt to take away this "parenthood" status. They told themselves that the children were not mature enough, not

educated enough, not spiritual enough and opposed any turnover of responsibility, funds or authority to the indigenous people.[51]

Problems begin to surface when the "children" mature and become of age. As is often the case, maturing children want their independence and seek to extract themselves from being under parental authority. This has been handled by simply reversing the roles, so that now the "children" are in control and the "parents" are under the supervision and authority of the children. It is referred to as fusion.

4.2 Fusion[52]

The "fusion" strategy puts the national church in the dominant role due to numerical strength and political advantages. Now the nationals become the parent and the missionaries the children.[53] Naturally, this has met with a lot of opposition from western missionaries who feel that this is a ploy and an attempt to gain control of mission properties and finances. Properly understood, it is more an attempt of the national churches to free themselves from the colonial attitude of paternalism, and it appears to be an acceptable alternative.

The Synod of the Church of Scotland, the Nkhoma Synod and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission from South Africa were mission groups working within Malawi. In 1964 they merged to form "The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian," commonly known as the CCAP.[54] With the merger, the newly formed church assumed the ownership of all properties belonging to the three mission groups. The missionaries came under the direct authority of the church. Their housing, ministry, placement, funds, etc. were allocated and administered by the church. The missionaries lost their identity and function as a mission. The parents had become the children in this fusion model.

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[51] Morris O. Williams, *Partnership in Missions* (Springfield, MO: Division of Foreign Missions, 1979), p. 140.

[52] While the term "fusion" means to "blend together," it is used to indicate that the mission organization has "blended" with the national church to become one. However, in this scenario, the national church becomes the dominant authority.

[53] Williams, *Partnership in Missions*, 145.

[54] C. Martin Pauw, "Independency and Religious Change in Malawi," *Missionalia* 21:2 (August 1993), pp. 138-51 (143).

5. Towards a Solution for an African Model

5.1 The Social Science Contribution

In a familial analogy, the fusion concept is not a good kinship model. Certainly, within an African context, a mature child does not move from the "under" position of an "over-under" model to the "over" position at a moment's notice. In fact, in an African kinship model, it is quite possible that it will never happen except when the parent is too old and decrepit to care for him/herself. Only at this point does the child become the parent and the parent the child.

In order to understand the similarities and differences across cultures, social scientists refer to the following variables as dimensions of cultural variability: individualism—collectivism. [55] Individualism concerns personal achievement, while collectivists emphasize community, harmony, groupness and maintaining face.

Individualists emphasize: 1) concern for clarity and directness; 2) straight talk and truth telling; 3) self-referent messages, more "I" than "we"; 4) meeting personal needs and goals rather than group needs and goals; 5) more independence; and 6) linear pattern of conversation.

In contrast, collectivists emphasize: 1) indirect communication; 2) avoiding negative evaluation from a listener; 3) concern for others' feelings, avoiding hurting others, and saving face; 4) more interdependence and group are concerned; and 5) fewer linear patterns of conversation.[56] In short, it is the Western European and North American cultures that tend to be individualist, while most non-western cultures are collectivist.

In individualistic western society, the nuclear family (father, mother and children) is not connected to the extended family in the same manner as in collectivist societies. The western nuclear family is encouraged towards individuality, being on their own and not dependent upon the extended family. Often, upon marriage, the new family will remove itself a great distance from the extended family in order to become independent and remove any possible unwanted influence or interference from relatives and the extended family community. This is done purposefully. In most

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[55] William B. Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim, *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communications*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1984), p. 56.

[56] Carley H. Dodd, *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1995), pp. 92-93.

cases, the familial tie will remain, but, if at all possible, the nuclear family will desire to be free from constant familial input into their home life and decisions. In addition, the extended family understands that constant advice or input into their affairs will often be regarded as interference instead of assistance.

In contrast, the African family appreciates the communal and familial ties. The nuclear family will heavily depend upon the extended family for advice, input, leadership and assistance throughout their lives. There is no thought of divorce from the extended family, even if they are physically far removed from them. It is their life and community. Thus, it is natural to seek financial, as well as other assistance from them, and quite natural for the extended family to render assistance of all kinds. Colin Turnbull writes,

> In Africa, a family is something, much bigger than anything we [westerners] could call a family. Imagine throwing a stone into a still pool of water and watching the rings form, each one bigger than the one before. At the very center is the family, small and neat, just as we know it; parents and their children. The next ring includes aunts and uncles and first cousins, and grandparents. The next ring includes the brothers and sisters of the grandparents, or great-uncles and great-aunts, together with their children and grandchildren. And then come the great-grandparents, and so on.[57]

According to Malawian Lazarus Chakwera, community within the Malawian/African culture is of the highest importance.[58] Malawi social structure is such that everyone has ties to a home village somewhere. While nuclear families may live within a town or large city, one would never refer to the house within the city as being their "home." The city dwelling would be considered as their "house," but their "home" will be somewhere back in a village. This is referred to as "our home" (*kwathu*) where the extended family has its roots and where they belong and always feel "at home."

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[57] Colin M. Turnbull, *Tradition and Change in African Tribal Life* (New York: Avon Books, 1966), pp. 25-26.

[58] Lazarus M. Chakwera, "The Development of the Eleventh Hour Institute to Be Utilized as a Means of Mobilizing, Training, and Sending Missions Workers from Malawi and Nearby Countries to Unreached Peoples" (D.Min. project, Trinity International University, 2000), p. 96.

5.2 Adding More "Selfs" to the Formula

Neither paternalism nor fusion is a satisfactory solution in the natural maturation of the national church. Certainly, neither the mission nor national church desires paternalism to continue. Fusion has been accepted in many places of Africa, often only because of the alternative, paternalism. There should be better solutions and models!

Not only are we suggesting that a contextualized African indigenous church model may contain five or more "selfs," it should be based on the African's understanding of kinship and the extended family's interdependence.

I have observed a very poor Malawian take his new bride in marriage with the meagerist of worldly possessions. In some cases, only a change of clothing, a couple of poorly made chairs and a table, a sleeping mat, and a very small stick and waddle hut. However, he is secure in the knowledge that he is not alone. He can depend on assistance from his extended family for food, money and other material requirements. After all, he belongs to them and they belong to him! There is an interdependence between himself and his extended family. This analogy speaks volumes to our contextualized model of indigenous church principles.

Chakwera notes, "Part of this growing in interdependence may mean learning to give up control on the part of those who give and learning to be accountable on the part of those who receive. But it is never a patron-client relationship, but one that recognizes that both are receivers of God's grace and should therefore be givers of the same. And because the agency of missions ought to be all who are redeemed, the contribution of any person or group is not important."[59]

In 1977 Bethany College of the Assemblies of God (USA) found itself in a financial crisis. There was talk of closing the school. When the Malawi Assemblies of God School of Theology faculty heard this, it was decided that during their spiritual emphasis week they would raise funds to send to Bethany. Five hundred US dollars were raised and sent. While this was a very small amount in terms of the need, it was a very large amount for Malawi. Bethany used the story with their fund raising and it became a catalyst which eventually resulted in about US $250,000.00 being donated. The college is still operating!

Lazarus Chakwera mentioned that he used his familial kinship ties as the metaphor to convince the Malawian students to give to a school in America. "At this time also, my dad was a student at Assemblies of God

[59] Chakwera, "The Development of the Eleventh Hour Institute," p. 32.

School of Theology. In his early 80s he was our oldest student. I used his presence there and mentioned how that there was a time I was dependent on him but now he was dependent on me to challenge the student body to bless the church in America that had blessed us in the first place."[60] True interdependence!

5.2.1 Self-Theologizing

In recent years there have been a few western voices calling for a "'fourth self' to be added to the classical 'Three-Selfs'— *self-theologizing*, about which the missionary theorists of the nineteenth century never thought."[61] Until recently national church leaders were not encouraged to develop their own theologies. Any theology that deviated from the standard theological texts from the West was considered suspect, perhaps syncretistic, and even heresy. To young nationalistically minded leaders this was theological colonialism. However, several forces have changed this situation: 1) Second and third generation church leaders are mature and seminary-trained theologians; 2) As colonialism and the trappings of the West were thrown off, young churches demanded self-rule and the right to interpret Scriptures for themselves; and 3) The rise of anthropological thought and the growing awareness among missionaries of the impact of cultural contexts on Bible translations and theology.[62]

Certainly the interest in contextualization during the past three decades has stimulated a whole new area of missiological thought. The subject has come into its own as a sub-discipline in missiology and numerous books and essays have been written about it. Scott Moreau has compiled a bibliography of over 2100 articles, chapters and books related to the subject.[63] Consequently, not only Africa but most of the continents have their contextualized theologies with, arguably, liberation theology within the Latin American context as being the best known.

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[60] Lazarus M. Chakwera <lazchakwera@globemw.net>, "Lighter Things," personal email to Warren Newberry <wnewberry@agst.edu>, January 11, 2003.

[61] Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, p. 452; Paul G. Hiebert, "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*, May-June 1985, pp. 12-18.

[62] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 48.

[63] See his website and course bibliography at http://www.wheaton.edu/Missions/Courses/532/biblio/biblio.htm (checked: Jan 2003).

This has led to many non-western theologians doing "self-theologizing." In Nigeria, for example, there was a desperate need for Nigerian theologians and biblical scholars. The European missionaries had contributed a great deal to the life of the church in Nigeria but it was recognized that their contribution was limited in what they could offer.[64] As well, their continued dominance hindered the self-expression of theology by Christian Nigerians. Bolaji Idowu states, "For over one hundred years they have done our theological thinking for us, and in ecclesiastical matters they have taken vital decisions for us. It is now overdue for Nigerians themselves to determine what is the will of God for His church in Nigeria."[65]

Within the framework of Africa in general and Malawi in particular, Lazarus Chakwera, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, has led the way in calling for a contextualized Pentecostal theology[66] that would speak to Malawians without the dualism and Greco-Roman influence of western theology. Eager that Malawians would understand and catch this vision, Scott Hanson instructed a group of potential missionaries, "As a missionary, who is an outsider to the host culture, you may not have the proper cultural understanding to properly address these issues. Therefore it is important that you develop a church which is able to come up with its own culturally applicable theology. This is a self-theologizing church."[67] As far as they are concerned, the fourth "self" of "self-theologizing" must be included in their indigenous church principles.

5.2.2 Self-Missionizing

Pressing onward, the Eleventh Hour Institute, a school of missions for training Africans to become missionaries, is calling for a fifth "self"—self-missionizing. In the understanding of Chakwera and his associates, the

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[64] Ronald Allen, "Creating an Indigenous African Church," *The Christian Century*, March 6 1991, pp. 265-69 (265).

[65] Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 50.

[66] Chakwera, "The Development of the Eleventh Hour Institute"; Scott Hanson, "Passing It On: Creating Indigenous Missionary Churches," in *Eleventh Hour Mission Handbook: Lectures Presented at the Eleventh Hour Institute, July 26-August 18*, ed. Murriell McCulley (Lilongwe, Malawi: Eleventh Hour Institute, 1999), pp. 1-173 (15).

[67] The Eleventh Hour Institute Missions Training Seminar, Lilongwe, Malawi, July 26-August 18, 1999.

original "self-propagating" was limited to evangelism within one's own people or region. In contrast, he states that "self-missionizing" is reaching out to the nations beyond one's own country or perhaps to an entirely different culture and society within one's borders.[68]

To facilitate the missions programs not only of Malawi, but within Africa as a whole, the concept of *The Eleventh Hour Institute*, initiated by Chakwera,[69] was received with open arms and accepted by the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (AAGA) meeting in Iringa, Tanzania in 1998.

It must be understood that not only the Assemblies of God within Africa, but many non-western Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are involved or becoming involved in their own missionary enterprises within the continent and throughout the world. It is the day and time of the Two-Thirds world to reach out to its neighbors and around the globe with the good news of the kingdom of God.[70]

Peter Wagner argues that for mission work to be complete it must come "full circle." There are four stages in the process: 1) The mission plants the national church; 2) The national church develops; 3) The national church gains autonomy; and 4) The national church becomes a sender of missionaries to others. Thus, the process comes "full circle" and repeats itself.[71] This certainly is self-missionizing.

5.2.3 Self-Caring—Social Concern

Would we dare to suggest that perhaps there could be added a sixth "self" to a contextualized African model of indigenous principles? Ronald Allen notes, "African churches struggle with developing positions on contemporary concerns. The issues that seem to draw the strongest interest are neocolonialism, racism, economic justice, human rights and polygamy." [72] Added to these are concerns for the poor and disenfranchised. Within the circle of Assemblies of God missions, the AAGA leadership called for a social concern arm of their association at their first formative charter meeting in Lusaka, Zambia. They appreciated

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[68] Hanson, "Passing It On," p. 16.

[69] Chakwera, "The Development of the Eleventh Hour Institute."

[70] The story of missions by the Two-Thirds World is well known, documented, and beyond the scope of this essay.

[71] C. Peter Wagner, "Full Circle: Third World Missions," in *Readings in Third World Missions: A Collection of Essential Documents*, ed. Marlin L. Nelson (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1976), pp. 57-66.

[72] Allen, "Creating an Indigenous African Church," pp. 265-69.

the evangelistic thrust that the missionaries had made within Africa; and this mantle had been successfully passed to them, but it was felt that there needed to be a greater emphasis in the area of social concern.

While the Two-Thirds world will continue to look to the West for assistance with famine relief, natural disasters, and other catastrophic disasters, there is a contribution for those living within to make. It may be a minority part at this point in time, yet as Lazarus Chakwera has reminded us, "the [size of the] contribution of any person or group is not important,"[73] but that all are participating.

6. Conclusion

Being willing to think "outside the box" in terms of our traditional understanding of indigenous church principles is the first step forward in contextualizing them. We applaud the early pioneer thinkers and missiologists who thought creatively and went against the tide of popular missionary praxis of their day and formulated the "Three-Selfs." Wearing the blinders of ethnocentrism, western missionaries proclaimed and taught them as if they were Scripture themselves. All products of the enterprise were measured with the same standard, the Three-Selfs. In the western mindset, the principle of "self-supporting" is deemed to be the best indicator of indigeneity. Only when the national church can financially stand on their own two feet are missionaries satisfied and convinced that an indigenous church has been planted. These principles are methods and strategies utilized by the apostle Paul and thus are Biblical in that they are found within the sacred text. But were they meant to be normative for all time? Perhaps not! Methods and strategies must change with the changing times and contexts.

The purpose of this essay has been to propose that there are additional "selfs" that are just as valid as the original three and contextualizing them within the African and Malawian contexts provides additional validation. If it provokes further engagement with these issues, then it has served its purpose.

[73] Chakwera, "The Development of the Eleventh Hour Institute," p. 32.