

ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN SOCIETY

Conference in Trondheim, Norway, 25th-29th July 2022

SESSION SIX : 'Where is Hope for the People of Africa? What part does the Church play in bringing that Hope about?'

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A VOTE OF THANKS

Many thanks to our Loving God. He has put such an amazing vision into the hearts and minds of the Leaders of the Anglican–Lutheran Society, and brought us all together for this conference. I am also grateful to Him because of His care and tender mercy to us all. God gives us many blessings each day including the life we have, the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the beauty of Trondheim City, the sea and sky and all His gifts. We thank Him most of all for

Christ Jesus, through whose life, death and resurrection we have become His children. May God help us to show our gratitude by the way we pilgrim together in the hope of eternal life.

Secondly I am humbled so much by God for being invited by the Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave, the Anglican Moderator of the Anglican–Lutheran Society, to come here and to join with you in this study conference. It is a great honour for me and I am delighted to receive this privilege of speaking to you. *Asante sana Askofu kwa ukarimu wako* (Thank you so much, Bishop, for your generosity). Thank you all who have played a part in making this event a reality.

INTRODUCING MYSELF

Before defining the terms 'HOPE' and 'PIRGRIMAGE' kindly allow me to introduce myself to you. I am the Rev Canon Hilda K. Kabia, an Anglican Priest ordained as deacon in 2003 and priest in 2004, and in 2015 made a Canon. I am working with the Anglican Church of Tanzania, Diocese of Central Tanganyika, and since 2015 I have been Principal or Dean of Msalato Theological College. I am the first African Woman to hold that position after 54 years since the college was established in 1961 as a Bible School. Prior to that, I worked as a Bible College Tutor, Dean of Students, Assistant Lecturer of St John's University of Tanzania (SJUT) and its Msalato Centre, and as Chairperson of the House of Clergy in the Diocesan Synod. For the last two Synods I was Secretary to the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Central Tanganyika, the first woman to hold that position.

The African Church is part of the World-Wide Church including the world-wide Anglican Communion. Therefore we as a Church of Africa share most of the beliefs and practices of other members of the church world-wide. The African Church plays a very important role in the mission of the Church from the grassroots level to national level. We also play significant roles in fostering relations with other members of the Church world-wide. However specific cultural and cross-cultural awareness is always at the heart of the African Church. What I am trying to explain here is that specific cultural needs are taken seriously according to the place and situation.

WHAT DOES THE WORD "HOPE" MEAN?

Hope can be explained in many simple or ordinary ways including: Expectations for something good in the future, the positive change in the future that we want e.g. we want a holistic improvement in

life, development, growth, progress or transformed life in the church and community. It is the opposite of despair, loss of interest in life, giving up etc. A life without hope can be very distressing. Therefore hope is to trust, to rely on or to wish for and expect something. Isaiah 40:31 says “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.”

WHAT DOES THE WORD “PILGRIMAGE” MEAN?

A pilgrimage is a journey in life. The Christian Dictionary defines pilgrimage as a journey a person makes to holy place or a long journey or search. In our context here we can say is a long journey in life.

Our task today is to look at where hope is found in Africa and what part is the Church is playing in bringing that hope about. Let us briefly look at Africa and its people and what word hope means to them. We will not go into details but just glance a little bit at where the African places his or her hope in life.

THE STORY OF AFRICA

Africa is one among the seven continents of the World, the others being Asia, North America, South America, Antarctica, Europe and Australia. Each of the 54 countries of Africa comprises various ethnic groups. This means that Africa has a big diversity culturally and traditionally.



Geographically God located Africa on a part of the World that is full of potential. Thus Africa is known as a continent of hope and promise for a good future, sustainability and transformation.

Religiously Africa is recognized as a religious continent. The African is a religious person. Africa has families where Christians, Muslims, and followers of African Traditional Religions live together irrespective of their religious differences.

WHAT HOPE MEANS FOR PEOPLES OF AFRICA

Hope, as we have already defined it, is expectation of something good or better in the future, a positive change in the future that we want, a holistic improvement, development, growth, progress and a transformed life in church and community.

The African person is a God fearing person who puts his or her hope on God for provision, protection and sustenance. The African believes that God is the answer to all human problems. God is the answer to climatic, social, cultural and economic needs.

The African also believes in life after death so for the Africans there is no dichotomy between the physical and spiritual or supernatural.

This view of a God-centred hope is commonly found across many African Cultures. Many Traditional Africans want to live a good and fulfilled life here on earth, doing good to both humans and God so that when they die they may be accepted in the ancestral realm and live eternally. However, there are many weaknesses in their theology and these can only be addressed by Christ through His mission in the world.

Poverty, poor health and ignorance remain the biggest threats to the African to date. The coming of Christian Missionaries and Christianity provided an answer in partially addressing these weaknesses and problems.

WHAT THE CHURCH HAS DONE AND IS DOING TO BRING THIS “HOPE” ABOUT’

The African Traditional Religions and other religions do not take into consideration the effects of the Fall and the loss of hope for humanity that followed it. Only the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the saving work of the Cross can do that. So when the Missionaries came preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the saving work of the Cross the change towards the true hope was made.

The Missionaries brought with them the Gospel in a holistic way, addressing educational needs as a response to the problem of ignorance, bringing hospitals and dispensaries as a response to the challenge of poor health, teaching trade and commerce as a response to the challenge of poverty, as well as improved farming tools and techniques.

Proper spiritual transformation was experienced, for example, in the East African Revival of the 1930s and its impact had far reaching results in East Africa and outside. Close relationships between believers were formed to include relationships outside family blood relationships. So hope of eternal life focused on the work of Christ, and that transformed many lives.

When gradually African countries became independent many of their leaders and government workers were the product of the missionary schools, so a shift was made from the traditional religions to the creator God of Christianity and the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS DOING NOW

The African Church is part of the World-Wide Church. Despite of some doctrinal differences we all focus our hope on Christ Jesus. The reason we are here today is part of that unity across denominations for both the Northern and the Southern Church.

The involvement of the African Church in advocacy for environmental protection and conservation, concern for the poor and marginalized, gender based violence and the child protection, and a concern for HIV/AIDS victims are all part of the Mission of the African Church in collaboration with our Northern Church Partners. Speaking as one voice, the African Church has stood up against oppressive world economic systems alongside our brothers and sisters across the world.

AN ACTIVE PILGRIM WITHIN THE CONTINENT

The African Churches are Holy Places for all people of all ages regardless their gender and origin. It is where people meet for worship, prayers, scripture study, mutual support and community organisation according to their particular country within the continent.

The African Church believes that all Christians, regardless of their age and gender, are given authority by virtue of their baptism to be ministers of the Church. Thus secular education and theological training are important to men and women called either to the ministry of laity or to the ministry of the ordained, so that they are well equipped servant leaders of God in their particular countries in the continent.

The African Church is also involved in holistic ministry. For instance, the Anglican Church of Tanzania, Diocese of Central Tanganyika, has introduced a Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP) as one of the subjects taught at Msalato Theological College. In April 2016 the college started to offer a Diploma in CCMP with the aim of empowering lay and ordained ministers and leaders of church groups, women and men, children and young people, to provide holistic ministry to church groups, church members and their surrounding community so that they can sustain themselves using their own locally available resources.

CHALLENGES TO THE CHURCH OF AFRICA FACING OUR PILGRIMAGE TOWARDS HOPE

There are many challenges facing the Churches in Africa as we make our pilgrimage towards Hope. Many cults and false prophecy are undermining the unity of the Church. Poverty is still a problem and the decline of world economy has led to donor fatigue and a decline in support for the African Church. Gender based violence and child abuse influenced by technology is a serious problem. Property ownership and inheritance issues are two of many others issues. In Africa technology is good when used appropriately but it is harmful when not used appropriately.

Globalization, technological advancement, corruption and bribery, the use of the Smartphone and internet are slowly destroying the African community. Chatting throughout the night by young people is also destroying community and family interactions in African Continent and probably world-wide.

War situations and conflicts in Africa and other parts of the world have dampened the spirit of unity in the Church worldwide, and right now there is the Russia-Ukraine war.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD

Our presence here today in this conference in this beautiful City of Trondheim means a lot as we move together in this 'Pilgrimage towards HOPE' in line with our various definitions of the phrase. Let us both, the Churches of Africa and the Churches across the rest of the world, focus our hopes on Christ Jesus as we pilgrim towards the hope of eternal life in the Kingdom to come.

Thank you for listening.