



An Ecclesiology for the Church in Africa?

A Catholic Perspective:
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Accountability, Accompaniment, Action

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- African Political History and African Christianity
- “The Church of Pope Francis: An Ecclesiology of Accountability, Accompaniment, and Action,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican II*. Agbonkianmenghe E. Orobator, Orbis, 2016.





Could Africa have Produced a Pope Francis?

- An African Cardinal would be less radical: more “centrist” in church governance; more “cautious about embracing changes dictated by Western social pressures”
- Might reject the need for urgent solutions to burning issues:
 - Celibacy
 - The role of women
 - Separation, divorce, remarriage
 - Polygamy
 - HIV/AIDS



More likely to

- Draw a clear line between “faithful Catholics and the rest”
- ... between “Church of Rome and other ecclesial communities”
- “emphasize a ... transcendental ecclesiology rather than embrace a historically sensitive, dynamic ecclesiology”
- View “contextual” approaches as “ecclesiological relativism or tribal Catholicism”
- Be wary of “Pentecostalism, Catholic charismatic spirituality, popular piety and devotions, and African initiatives” for inculturation

New center of gravity?

- “African Catholicism as it is today cannot produce a reforming and transforming pope who would courageously challenge the church to move away from self-referential assertions and triumphalist ecclesial claims”
- “Despite the claims in contemporary discussion of world Christianity that Africa is the new center for world Catholicism, I am calling for a more sober discernment ... “
- “move away from merely sociological analysis of the demographics ... to a theological interpretation and judgment.”



5 factors explain African Catholic ecclesiology

- Catholic education – remains very Roman, Western; Dominant role of Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; Catechetical instruction – still based on memorizing catechism
- Seminary formation – priests see themselves in Roman, Western terms; determines their pastoral priorities (not African priorities)
- Formation of laity “makes them spiritual clients and pastoral beneficiaries of the pastoral ministries of the clergy” (“largely a quiescent majority”)
- Protection of the *Propoganda Fidei*: little autonomy of local churches; stifles creativity and inculturation
- Formation of Africa’s bishops: more “legates of Rome” than “vicars of Christ”

Yet to become “truly African and truly Catholic”

- Pope Francis: socialized in a local church that “championed a theology of accompaniment of the poor” (theology of liberation); “pioneered grassroots evangelization and an activist faith formation of the people” (through bcc’s); “became a voice of the people ... by the credibility of the simple lifestyle of the Catholic clergy”
- “the church in Africa has all it needs to begin the journey to becoming the kind of church that will help provide answers to the pressing questions in the hearts of many Africans.”



The words and deeds of Pope Francis are “an exegesis of Vatican II”

- Church as “dynamic and diverse people of God called to communion of the Trinity with each other in the church and with the world and the cosmos”
- Nature of the church is to serve
- A church that points to God (more than to itself)
- Not bogged down in structures, systems, laws
- Emphasis on mission, mercy of Christ
- A church that cries out for the poor, for justice

The renewal
of African
ecclesiology
in the Spirit of
Pope Francis

An Ecclesiology of
Accountability

A Pastoral Theology of
Accompaniment

A Spirituality of Action

An Ecclesiology of Accountability

- “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15)
- The Lord is the owner of the vineyard; we are servants, not masters
- Invites gratitude, adoration, praise for the gifts, including cultural gifts of Africa; discern what is from God from what is not
- Decisiveness of human agency – collaboration, partnership
- “how is the church in Africa harvesting the rich gifts of faith” in her people – talents of laity, religious, clergy
- Concern for “what is lost”: wealth, resources, talent, the poor, the outcast; recognize the abuse of financial and other resources; outreach to those who are separated, divorced

A Pastoral Theology of Accompaniment

- Church as a ‘travelling companion’, in solidarity with others
 - Pastors are to be in the midst of the sheep
 - Pastoral leadership as “an office of love”; not above the people of God
 - Discern the “sense of the faithful”; attentive to *all*
 - “walking together”: acknowledging simply mistakes, limitations; creating structures of accountability (Healey: “becoming fully synodal”)
 - Enter into the life of the poor; move from “providing services” to empowerment for social transformation
- Reflects the African sense of community



“We create a path by walking” (Mercy Amba Oduyoye)

- Need for continued conversation, for a credible theology, reimagination
- Deeper reflection on meaning of the creed; meaningful liturgies
- More focus on local church; valuing ecclesial diversity
- Promote engagement with “the autochthonous religious imagination of Africa”; that shapes culture and spirituality
- “the church shall stand, because humanity needs its mission and ministry”

A Spirituality of Action

- To move from words to deeds; from ecclesial claims to witnessing
- From “glorying in growth” to “showing through authentic and credible ecclesial being and deeds that we are a living light of Christ”
- new realization: “the denominational boundaries and exclusions we inherited in Africa from the West will need to collapse as we walk to the future”

