

Theological Issues in Africa

Byang H. Kato

[Byang H. Kato, The Late General Secretary, Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, Nairobi, Kenya.]

[EDITOR'S NOTE: When the manuscript of this article was being typeset for publication, the *Bibliotheca Sacra* staff received word of Dr. Byang H. Kato's accidental death by drowning on December 19, 1975. The evangelical world has lost an outstanding African leader. Mr. Kato was an alumnus of Dallas Theological Seminary, having earned the Master of Sacred Theology degree in 1971 and the Doctor of Theology degree in 1974.]

The political wind of change has resulted in the rise of forty-five independent countries in Africa instead of only Liberia and Ethiopia as in 1957. Economic and social winds of change have urbanized Africa in a spectacular way. About 25 percent of Africa's 360 million persons live in cities with populations of 100,000 or more. These phenomenal changes are bound to affect people's mentality. A search for identity becomes a leading factor. The identity crisis expresses itself in various experiences of life including religion.

The winds of change have not left out the church. Statistics are not easy to accumulate in Africa. Few countries in this continent have had a careful scientific census. For example, a figure as low as 37 million Christians was suggested for 1971.¹ But in 1968 the *World Christian Handbook* indicated that there were 50,708,000.² However, a Roman Catholic author in 1963 gave a figure of 65,672,000.³ David Barrett, in a report yet to be published, has indicated that there are 149,641,200 "Christians" in Africa. Whatever the true

number of Christians in Africa may be, without question millions of people are now willing to identify themselves with Christianity as a movement. In the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), it is estimated that about 10 million Africans are evangelical believers.

Apart from this phenomenal growth, new patterns of church relationships have emerged. With Africans assuming leadership, the search for identity ecclesiastically and theologically has increased.

The past decade has seen the rapid rise of some significant movements. The ecumenically minded All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which boasts of having some 40 million Christians in its fold, was officially launched in 1963, three years before the birth of AEAM in 1966. External forces from both ecumenical and evangelical movements outside of Africa ...

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