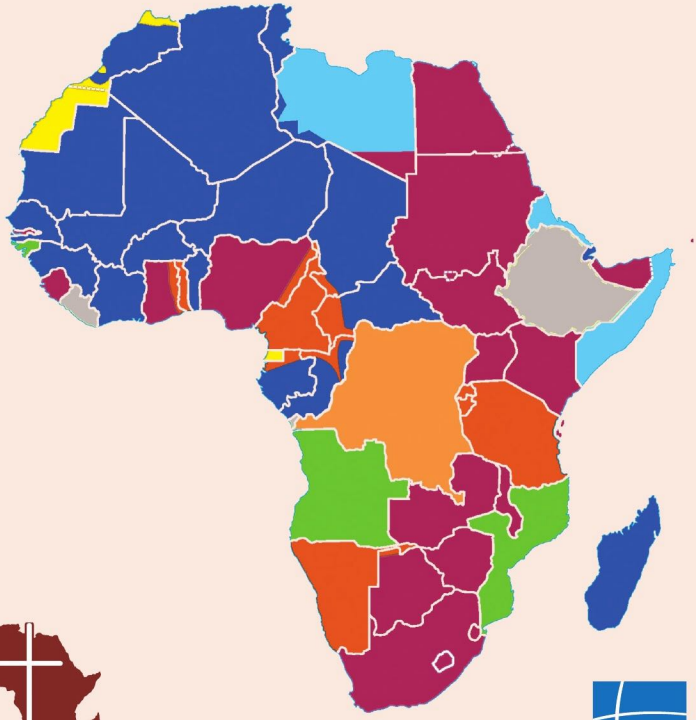
African Theological Impulses

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Global Decolonization and Reparation Debates

African Christian Perspectives



AACC-CETA

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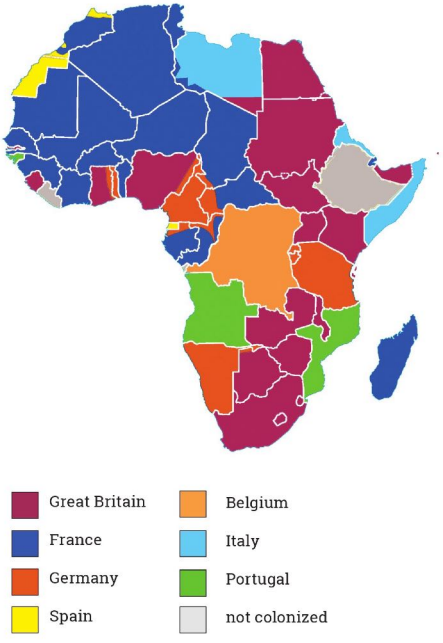
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Africa in 1914: Under Colonial Rule



All Africa Conference of Churches (Ed.)

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African Theological Impulses

VOL. 1

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Introduction

JOHN NGIGE NJOROGE

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), through its Theology and Interfaith Relations Unit, held a theological consultation with the theme: "African Perspective on Decolonization and Reparations Debates in Global Christianity" at the Desmond Tutu Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya on 03rd to 06th June 2025. The consultation aimed to provide a platform where AACC, as a moral voice with significant presence across the continent can contribute to the current debates on decolonization and reparations discourses. This is to the courtesy of its ongoing theological accompaniment to the member churches and other stakeholders through addressing contextual theologies. In addition to its Contextual Misleading Theology Series, AACC made a deliberate decision to have articles presented during the consultation edited and published into this book.

This publication is a collection of articles presented during the consultation that brought together theologians, church leaders, and scholars, to constructively contribute to the ongoing global debates. Actually, the issues of decolonization and reparations have raised questions among African churches as well as their ecumenical partners. One of the pertinent questions that required critical consultation is: is the whole idea of decolonization or decoloniality an African agenda, driven by African voices and priorities? This kind of crucial question underscores the need for church leaders and theologians to grapple with the complexities of decolonization, ensuring the answer is both authentically African and globally relevant, rooted in faith and informed by African lived experiences.

The call for decolonization and reparations is gaining momentum globally, prompting a critical examination of the origins of the decolonization agenda, how deep it cuts into the African aspiration and how African churches can even start that conversation. The Churches in Africa, and in their moral and spiritual leadership need to discern and reflect on this crucial debate and demand reparative justice for historical injustices. In this framework, the AACC through the consultation joined the African Union which designated the theme of the year 2025 as: Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations. In enriching the debates on reparations, this book articulates various perspectives including; a). Issued apologies made by several countries, mission agencies and/or other organizations, b). Theology of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, and

c). How to deal with internal reparations and geopolitical interests in handling the return of (some stolen, some gifted) African artifacts now in the West. These perspectives have raised questions such as: are churches really interested and keen on receiving these artifacts in archives of mission agencies? And where should they be returned to and kept? These questions keep the conversations ongoing beyond this publication.

This book is divided into three parts including Decolonization, Reparations as well as Models and Approaches to Decolonization and Reparations respectively.

Part I presents articles on Decolonization. Decolonization in Africa is understood from the context of colonialism and its effects on the African church and society at large. It clarifies colonialism as a system of political, economic, social-cultural, and spiritual control by the colonialists, mostly European powers which introduced new structures and ideas that reshaped African people's identity and uniqueness. The effects of colonialism are stated to have been far-reaching, affecting every aspect of the colonized societies, including their governance, education, religion, language, and culture. Economically, culturally, socially, and spiritually, the legacy of colonialism is still tied to colonial ideologies, institutions, and cultures. Decolonization as a concept is enunciated to involve political liberation, the reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and histories that were marginalized or erased under colonial regimes. This concept also expresses itself in decoloniality, whose emphasis is on recovering and revitalizing indigenous identity, culture, and spirituality. However, genuine decolonization requires critical engagement, not rejection in totality.

Decolonization and reparations in African Churches contexts started taking place hand in hand with the struggle for political independence of African countries, for example the emerging of some of the African Independent (Initiated) Churches (AICS). It is noted that decolonization was not merely the departure from colonial effects, but missions did not leave after the political independence; some did not release church leadership positions to Africans. This has also made the discussion on decolonization not only a political agenda but also one that is to be discussed in churches. Efforts were made by the churches during and even after the attainment of independence by African nations to gain church independence. Despite the attempts to decolonize, the effects of coloniality have made it difficult for ex-colonized people to climb up the ladder of the global powers' hierarchy. Africans have remained at the bottom, where norms and rules are imposed upon them from the capitals of the North. Although for years, Euro-Amer-

icans have been blamed for Africa's development crisis, there are internal factors that affect the critical aspects of development.

This part notes that one specific attempt to decolonize churches and make them truly independent was the pronouncement of the Moratorium[1]. This was one of the first African church attempts to declare that African church needed independence. To change the relationship and modes of interaction from master–servant, superior–inferior, it was good to stop the inflow of missionaries and donor funds to the African churches for them to be free. Despite this attempt African churches continued to depend on its "mother churches" financially and consequently asked for their financial assistance. The ties between the "mother churches" and the churches introduced in Africa still exist even in the present day.

This part concludes by articulating how dialogues on decolonization have continued to take place, mostly focusing on theology and church structures, theological framework on decolonial approaches to the church involvement in today's colonialism, neocolonialism and mission. It has been asserted that different contextual situations determine particular mission reactions to colonialism. For example, during the struggle for political independence, in some parts of Africa, the missions stood in the middle, supporting both the colonists as well as their African Christians. Over the years of independence of churches in Africa, there are evident changes made in liturgy and theology, ecclesiastical structures and leadership, as well as decolonization of theological education, which speak to the broader decolonization agenda.

Part II presents articles on Reparations. This part starts with an article on the biblical perspective and theological understanding of reparations. Under this session, the concept of reparation is linked to principles of justice, restoration, forgiveness, and healing of the community. The Old Testament and New Testament shed light on these issues and the theological significance of reparations in the framework of Christianity. Furthermore, the concept of reparation, also referred to as restitution is tied to notions of justice and of bringing communities back to a place of healing. The Old and New Testaments discuss these themes and their theological implications of recompense in the sense of forgiveness and restoration.

Apart from the biblical perspective and understanding of reparations, this part articulates the Mission of African Churches and the Question

1 Moratorium was a call by African churches to stop receiving missionaries and money from the North in order to engender true self-reliance and governance of the African churches.

of Post-Colonial Reparations. This is presented in the context of historical injustice where the continent was fragmented into colonies established primarily for economic exploitation. Without seeking to replace the indigenous populations, the colonial powers imposed their political and economic domination in order to enrich the economies of their respective states. This was through systematic looting of the natural and mineral resources of the colonized territories. The colonial enterprise also led to the dehumanization of colonized peoples, the destruction of indigenous civilizations, and the disruption of the natural course of development of African societies. All these colonial injustices call for reparative justice.

Further, this part presents an interesting contemporary understanding of reparations from economic and ecological perspectives. These perspectives are mainly under restorative justice directly informed by the United Nations (UN) 2006 Resolution as well as by the Organization of African Unity and later the African Union (AU) focusing its 2025 annual theme on Reparative Justice. The contemporary focused injustices are not only limited to colonialism, slavery and apartheid, but also include debt crisis and climate change affecting Africa today.

Interestingly, this part concludes by resurfacing the call for internal reparations as a complexity resulting from interwoven relationship between churches and colonialism in Africa. This section presents an oversight, if not amnesia, regarding the harm Africans inflicted on one another by fighting and/or collaborating with the colonial governments, and how these Africans benefited from colonial systems. Equally, some European Christian missionaries in Kenya were implicated in the effects of colonialism and coloniality, while their successive churches benefited and inherited from them, and these aspects are similarly unattended to in the ongoing African Union reparation debates. Despite the continued call for reparations by the African governments to the former colonizing nations, there is no call made for missionary organizations and the African churches that inherited resources taken from marginalized communities by their predecessors for reparations. This section advocates for the use of social reconstruction model and legal frameworks to address internal reparations through church-targeted legislation.

Part III presents articles on Models and Approaches to Decolonization and Reparations. It starts with examining how African churches can reclaim their theological voices in decolonizing Christianity. It is evident that, in decolonizing Christianity, theological reflections blended with historical and political analysis have been applied as a method of exam-

ining the legacies of colonialism. In applying this method, churches have attempted to decolonize various aspects of doctrines, leadership, and prophetic witness within given ecclesial frameworks. This section asserts that African theologians and church leaders have been reconstructing Christianity through African lenses, incorporating indigenous philosophies, languages, and values into theology, liturgy, and community life. For example, in Nigeria and across Africa, some churches have embraced indigenous knowledge and practices, challenged ecclesial dependency on the West or the "mother churches", and spoken out on issues of reparative justice. In addition, decolonizing Christianity involves both shedding imperial legacies and proactively shaping a faith that resonates with Africa's cultural dignity, pursuit of justice and healing.

This part continues to assert African Churches' prophetic advocacy and forgiveness in the context of reparations as an important approach to achieving reparative justice. Despite the historical injustices experienced in Africa, churches are called to be the light and salt for the nations (Matthew 5:13-16); the conscience of the nations, and the voice of the voiceless. The churches cannot get away from this nature of prophetic advocacy. This section affirms that if the churches are to be prophetic in any meaningful sense, they will need to be exemplary. The churches must set an example in living the high moral standard and other values consonant with the will of God. This has to go along with the aspect of forgiveness and healing. In the context of forgiveness, healing and justice it is importance to call for repentance in the context of reparative justice.

Furthermore, this part turns to African Liberation Theology as a principle of decolonizing theology in Africa. African Liberation Theology can be understood as integrating African philosophical, religious, and cultural ethos with theological themes emerging in the response to the needs of today. The attempts made are on inculturation, contextualization and reconstruction of theology by African theologians. Developing these paradigms proves to be shaping theological discourse in Africa and beyond. For example, the acceptance of contextualization as a tool within the postcolonial framework for understanding African realities has become a crucial strategy for decolonizing African Christianity. In addition, Reconstruction Theology, which calls for Africans to rebuild the destroyed and exploited resources in Africa and its spirit is a proven motion of deconstructing colonialism and neo-colonialism. Therefore, recalling the liberation theology paradigm is essential to enable the continent to foster a spirit of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth in the face of our distorted identities and the exploitation of our natural and human resources. This would result in

achieving a reconstruction that leads to the holistic well-being of African peoples.

Finally, Part III concludes by exhorting that reclaiming African spirituality is an ideal approach to decolonize Christian worship. This exhortation is based on the fact that Christianization in Africa was largely introduced through colonial channels with theological frameworks that demonized African spirituality. It is noted that some missionaries dismissed indigenous religious practices and beliefs as pagan or morally inferior, suppressing African worship symbols, rituals, and cosmologies in favor of Western liturgical forms. Yet African spirituality, rooted in communal identity, reverence for ancestors, and harmony with nature, remained a vital expression of divine encounter. For example, among the Chewa people of Zambia, practices like invoking the god of rain were deeply theological, reflecting a worldview where the divine was intimately involved in nature and society. Notably, many Africans actively resisted this cultural and religious imposition, preserving and defending their spiritual heritage against colonial and missionary pressures.

In conclusion, the possibilities of reclaiming African Spirituality as an approach to decolonize Christian worship gives an opportunity for seeking biblical truths compatible with contextual relevancy, expressed within peoples' cultural frameworks. This is possible in areas of decolonization including; a). liturgical reform (integrating African symbols, music, and rituals), b). epistemological shift (centering African hermeneutics and knowledge systems) c). institutional transformation (revising governance, curricula, and leadership) and d). reparative justice (addressing historical harms through truth-telling and resource equity).

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is Africa's largest ecumenical body, founded in 1963. Since 2019 the AACC promotes human dignity, peace and justice by helping African churches to develop contextual theologies against false doctrines and harmful practices.

In 2025 the AACC organized a conference to take part in the global debate on decolonization and reparations. This book is a summary of the conference with 14 different contributions. It contextualizes African Christian perspectives on and African Churches' involvement in various aspects of decolonization, reparations, and neo-colonialism including the concepts behind. Also, the related biblical perspectives as well as the needs for prophetic advocacy and forgiveness are analyzed.

Published with "Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene" this book is the first in a series on African contextual theologies. It aims to inform churches, theological institutions and mission agencies, and to spark further constructive debates on decolonization and reparations.

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