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*Africa, Homeland and Diaspora:
Currents and Cross-currents in
Christian History and Thought*

Journal of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre
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Journal of African Christian Thought

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Tel/Fax: +233-27-556718
E-mail: akrofi@africaonline.com.gh

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Editor
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Africa, Homeland and Diaspora - Currents and Cross-currents in Christian History and Thought

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Themes of future issues:

Vol. 6, No. 1 (June 2003)

Biblical Exegesis in African Perspective
(This issue will include an index of vols. 1-5)

Vol. 6, No. 2 (December 2003)

The Impact of the African Renaissance on Theological Education in Africa - a Perspective from Zimbabwe.



Editorial

With this issue of the journal, we initiate within its pages a conversation and an interaction that are of vital importance for the growth and maturing of African Christian thought, namely, a conversation and interaction with African Christians of the diaspora. It is envisaged that *JACT* can provide a forum for a sharing of the lessons of history and the theological insights that arise from a story that is both common and diverse. In the process, we hope to discover new perspectives and depths of understanding and interpretation that will edify and enhance the Christian life and witness of Africans in the homeland and in the diaspora, as well as of non-Africans with African sympathies.

The need for such dialogue was crystallised at the Regional Conference of the African Theological Fellowship, held in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, in September 2001, with the participation of two persons from the diaspora and their significant contribution to the conference. (The papers were published in *JACT*, Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2001.) Following that conference, the idea that *JACT* might provide one forum for this engagement was conceived. Peter Paris of Princeton Theological Seminary (one of the participants at Grand Bassam) was invited to serve on the Editorial Board.

This issue, then, is the first-fruits of this new initiative in crossing the divides – not merely geographical – that have conspired to keep Africans of the homeland and the diaspora from appreciating their commonalities and from being mutually inspired and encouraged by their diverse stories of faith and courageous witness.

The writers represent a variety of locations and traditions. The diaspora writers come from Jamaica (Barry A. Wade and Las G. Newman) and from the United States (Richard L. Gray); the homeland writers come from Ghana (Kwame Bediako) and Cameroun (Isaac Makarios Kamta) in West Africa, while Andrew F. Walls is a non-African with long experience in Africa and deep African sympathies. (In recognition of his service to African Christian scholarship, the Board of Akrofi-Christaller Centre recently appointed Andrew Walls as Professor Emeritus of the Centre.)

Several other persons (homeland and diaspora) who were approached, were unable to contribute to this issue because of other commitments. Nevertheless, the range of representation makes for a good variety of perspectives, sometimes focusing on the same theme from different standpoints, sometimes exhibiting a convergence in interpretation of different facets of a common story.

Andrew Walls sets the scene for the more focused studies by providing a panoramic sweep of biblical history and world Christian history, following through the

theme of migration and mission, and showing the impact of the former on the latter. He thus offers an original and helpful framework for interpreting the modern African Christian story in the interaction between homeland and diaspora. By broadening the horizons in which the African story is set, Walls opens up possibilities for fresh insights and fruitful understanding.

What is particularly refreshing about the subsequent articles is the personal dimension: the personal reflections on the African experience, homeland or diaspora, and the personal journeys in the discovery of other Africans, homeland or diaspora. The felt need for more and deeper interaction is clearly evident.

Barry Wade and Las Newman trace the melancholy yet courageous story of the involvement of black Christians in the fight against slavery and in the emancipation of the Caribbean. They consider the social and cultural impact of these developments on Africans in the Caribbean and, as a consequence, they suggest the need for the recovery of their African identity as the way forward for Caribbean Christians.

Isaac Makarios Kamta, in a biographical vignette of George Liele, provides a preview of one side of the story being told in his forthcoming PhD thesis on the contribution of African Americans to the nineteenth century mission in Cameroun. He draws lessons from the remarkable achievement of the former slave, who founded churches in America and Jamaica and was a pioneer promoter of mission to Africa. Kamta thus picks up, quite independently, one aspect of the story told by Barry Wade and Las Newman, and draws conclusions from a francophone perspective. One particular merit of this contribution, therefore, is its concern to participate in the cross-currents of the African story.

Richard L. Gray considers North American black Christian history in its interaction with Africa, from a biblical and theological perspective. He focuses particularly on the meaning and purpose of African American suffering in the providence of God, and in the light of the present configuration of Christian history and mission, in which the responsibility for sharing the gospel now lies largely with people of colour.

Quite independently, Kwame Bediako meditates on the same theme of an African theodicy from a West African perspective. He sees Africa's historical racial humiliation and suffering as a theological challenge that needs to be faced and internalised by Africans in the perspective of the humiliations of Christ, and for the benefit of the world church. 'What shall we do with the humiliated Christ?' This is a question not merely for the humiliated peoples of African descent, but for Western