

The Reformation’s “Macedonian Call” to Africa—the Long Way Around

After the church and the New Covenant was inaugurated in Acts 2, the next big kingdom activity was growth. The Lord saw fit to take this infant bride and grow it to maturity by spreading first through Jerusalem, and then to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. In essence, the next big event was missions.

In Scripture we can identify two major mission events involving the Apostle Paul; the Macedonia call to not go North but West, and Paul’s trip to Rome. Both of these had a significant impact on the spread of the Gospel, and it was clearly the Lord who directed the flow of the Gospel to specific people groups. Rather than go north to Asia (Acts 16:6-10), Paul concluded that God had called him to preach the Gospel in Macedonia first. The missionary team was pushing for Bithynia (v. 7), but the Spirit of Jesus closed the door. As the team was forced to go West, God provided a vision to direct Paul to Troas, Philippi, and Macedonia. Regarding Paul’s trip to Rome, we know from Scripture that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he would have been set free while in prison in Caesarea (Acts 26:32). Instead, it was God’s plan not to streamline Paul to Rome on a well-funded missionary journey, but rather through a shipwreck and a snakebite. We can say that both of these important missionary endeavors took the long way around from what Paul would have planned.

Since those early mission moments in the 1st century, perhaps the most impactful event in the spreading of the true Gospel was the Protestant Reformation which began in the early part of the 16th century with Martin Luther and others. The theological transformation brought by the Reformation had its beginnings in various cities in Europe championed by various leaders and spread quickly. With cities of great theological heritage in North Africa like Alexandria and Carthage, one would think that the Reformation would accelerate through the continent of Africa—just like Europe. But analogous to the missions endeavors of the Apostle Paul, God had another plan. God’s plan for Africa was the long way around.

This paper will seek to highlight the path of the Reformation in Africa. The focus of the paper will be two-fold. First, we will explore how the Lord “shut the door” for the Reformation in North Africa before the Reformation took place. Secondly, we will survey the effect of the Reformation on Africa through the country of South Africa, and in particular the work of the German Reformed Baptists.¹ Finally, after discussing the methods and principles employed both in the region of North Africa and the country of South Africa, we will draw some applications with a recommended “Way Forward” for continued missions work in Africa.

The Closing of the Door to North Africa

¹ It is acknowledged up front that there have been many commendable people and denominations that labored to bring the Gospel to South Africa over the past four centuries. The focus of this paper is on the work of Hugo Gutsche, a German Reformed Baptist that followed a strong biblical approach to missions and church planting. The result of Gutsche’s work has not only produced much fruit, but it has produced fruit that remains.

The Church in North Africa rose quickly from the first two centuries. In particular, we can track the growth and demise of the church from two ancient cities; Alexandria and Carthage.

The Coptic Church—Indigenization Lacking Doctrine

In Acts 2:10 we see many Egyptian Jews in Jerusalem celebrating Pentecost. In all probability these Greek speaking Hellenized Jews returned from Jerusalem back to Alexandria in Egypt and they planted the Church in North Africa. During this time, the city of Alexandria played a prominent role in the development of the Church's theology. The theological mindset in Alexandria centered around two main lines of thinking: The first is that of Clement, Origen, and Arius, who were influenced by Neo-Platonistic Greek philosophy, which prioritized the allegorical use of Scripture in almost every sense in discerning spiritual truth. The second line of theological thinking was that of Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. This resulted in the formation of two distinct Christian churches in Egypt; Hellenized "urban" churches in cities like Alexandria, and more indigenous churches in rural Egypt—like the Coptic Church.

The word "Copt" is derived from the ancient Egyptian words "HAK KA PTAH," which translates to "the spirit of Ptah,"—the Egyptian god of creation. Coptic would then refer to anything Egyptian.² As persecution arose in Egypt,³ Christians fled to the interior of the country. During this exodus, they spread the Gospel in the Coptic language and planted churches wherever they went.⁴ This resulted in a rapid growth of Christians from the non-Greek speaking segments of the population, which created a strong market for Bible translations in the vernacular.⁵

The Scriptures were available by 300 A.D. in all the Coptic dialects of this region⁶ and in the fourth century Coptic became the language used by the monks. Within a short span it became the liturgical language of the Coptic Church. The growth of the Coptic Church created a hunger for Bible translations and from the third to the eighth century a large number of Bible translations appeared in the Coptic dialects of this region; Sahidic, Bohairic and Bashmuri. As a result the Church grew fast and the Christian faith gained a stronghold in Egypt.⁷

After a century of growth, in the middle of the 5th century, a major dispute about the exact nature of Jesus Christ arose which involved the Coptic Church. Nestorius (bishop of Constantinople from 428 A.D.) supported the view that Jesus Christ had two distinct natures, and that Mary, the mother of Jesus must be *theotokos*—the bearer of God. Cyril of Alexandria strongly refuted this view at the Council of Chalcedon resulting in the Chalcedonian Definition of "two natures and one person" of Christ. In part due to political and ecclesiastical differences,

² G. J. Pillay and J. W. Hofmeyr, *Perspectives on Church History, an Introduction for South African readers*. (Pretoria: Haum Publishers, 1991), 42.

³ This is the persecution of the Christian church during the 2nd and 3rd centuries from the time of Emperor Severus (193 – 211) to Emperor Diocletian (284 – 305).

⁴ Peter Falk, *The growth of the Church in Africa*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 57.

⁵ Mark Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 35.

⁶ J. H. Greenlee, "Versions of the Bible, Medieval and Modern" in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 875. Also see Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 79-81.

⁷ Shaw, 35-37.

the Coptic Church split from the Imperial Eastern Church and Cyril, which brought about an important development in Egyptian Christianity: *indigenization*.

The Coptic Church of Egypt became increasingly indigenized after the Church Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. They were proudly Coptic, and their theological controversies and disputes did not happen outside their political and ethnic convictions and origins. They were proudly Coptic and proud of their leaders, like Cyril of Alexandria, who was fluent in the Copt language.

By the strong presence of the Scriptures in the Coptic dialects, the Coptic Church was able to retain its independence and to continue a ministry to its members during the difficult centuries of Muslim invasion that would follow.⁸ Even though their numbers were heavily reduced because evangelism was forbidden, even now today 12% of Egyptians still belong to the Coptic Church. There are currently about fourteen million Coptic Christians in this region, and this is mainly due to the presence of Coptic leadership. Because of its local control, the Church had a legal status. Their own patriarchs directed the ministries of the church apart from external influence or control. The use of a Coptic Bible and the unity of the Church under Coptic leadership helped the Coptic Church to survive twelve centuries of Muslim domination. This resulted in Egyptian Christians nurturing a loyalty towards their Church—a loyalty admired even by their later Muslim rulers.⁹

Despite the onslaught of Islam in North Africa, the Coptic Church resisted the cultural, social, economic, and physical pressure of the Moors for over 12 centuries. In fact, the Coptic Church was highly influential in securing a permanent Christian foothold in other countries like Ethiopia, where until the 20th century, the head of the Ethiopian church was a Copt appointed by the Egyptian church.¹⁰ Essentially all other churches in North Africa succumbed to the Islamic invasion, and were either snuffed out or its nominal believers converted to Islam. It is the Coptic Church members who were grounded in their faith due to owning a translation of the Bible in their vernacular, and having established local indigenized Copt leadership.

As we have seen, the Coptic Church was strong in having its own Bible translation and its own indigenous leadership. But, the church was restricted from growth from both without and within. From without, the civil authorities forbade the practice of evangelism, so there was very limited sharing of the faith. From within, there was a failure to continue to train local leaders, and the church fell into a more ritualistic and liturgical religion.

This lack of theological training of young leaders caused Coptic Christianity to adopt a syncretistic practice of mingling the Gospel of the resurrected Savior with the local Egyptian legend of Osiris.¹¹ Part of this can be traced to theological decisions taken during the early years that caused them to veer from orthodoxy. The church had strong discipleship available from Athanasius of Alexandria, who spoke the Coptic language, yet after their turn towards Monasticism in the 5th century, they wrongly rejected the Council of Chalcedon thinking the

⁸ Falk, 70-71

⁹ Pillay and Hofmeyr, 46.

¹⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹¹ Falk, 35.

Council was opposed to their hero Cyril of Alexandria. This led to the acceptance of Monophysitism,¹² which grew strongly and led to the demise of Chalcedonian Christianity in the region, which held to Jesus Christ having two distinct natures in perfect union within one body.

The theological break was critical to the future of the Coptic Church because it alienated itself from the Western church and became totally inward looking. The Coptic Church only focused on the Coptic people, and did not reach out to the peoples of the West, North, and South. As a result, the church grew stale, ritualistic, and even nationalistic. Doctrine was not as important as tradition. Indigenization became an end rather than a means, and superseded doctrine as the chief pillar of the church. The result is a powerfully indigenized church that is decaying from the disease of self-reflection and diluted theology.

Roman North Africa—Doctrine Lacking Indigenization

During the early part of the fourth century Christianity was firmly rooted in North Africa, and by the fifth century Egypt was considered a Christian country. Yet, notwithstanding the rise of the Coptic Church, the church in North Africa at large had an inherent weakness. It was not a truly African Church because its members were from the Roman-Greek middle classes, who lived apart from the indigenous peoples.¹³ As a result the Punic and Berber speaking people of this region were superficially Christianized—they “became Christian only to the degree that they became Latinized and that the Latin language was the sole vehicle of Christian preaching.”¹⁴

The main theological leaders in this region were Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. Tertullian’s greatest impact on African Christianity was in his being a champion of holiness. He declared war against spiritual mediocrity, and taught the idea that Christians should live lives distinct from the world. Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage and a student of Tertullian advanced this thought and shifted the burden of holiness from people to priest.¹⁵ Augustine wrote *The City of God* in response to the fall of Rome, and presented the true hope for Christians which was in the coming City of God rather than the worn and doomed City of Man. Like Tertullian and Cyprian, he expanded the holiness tradition by showing that wherever God-centered love is shown, this demonstrates a witness to the true kingdom of God. Even today some consider Augustine “.between Paul the Apostle and Luther the Reformer, the greatest the Christian Church possessed.”¹⁶ Augustine’s theological influence changed the course of history. His teaching gave expression to monergism. And it was monergism that would identify the theology of John Calvin during the Reformation.

Needless to say, the Roman cultured church in North Africa had excellent theological leadership. The question, then, is why did the Church not survive in Roman North Africa as it

¹² The main argument of Monophysitism is that Christ had one nature only. Many Coptic theologians today deny Monophysitism, but also reject Chalcedon. But it is clear from history that the rural churches of Egypt did accept Monophysitism due to their break from the “imperial” edicts of the Western Church. National and ecclesiastical politics played a large role in the theological decision by the Coptic Church.

¹³ G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post Christianity in Africa*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 1.

¹⁴ K. S. Latourette, *The First Five Centuries*. (New York: Harper, New York London, 1937), 93.

¹⁵ Shaw, 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

did in Egypt and its surroundings during the Muslim invasions of Africa? The answer is not lack of purity in doctrine, but lack of indigenization.

The population of North Africa was divided into three distinct cultural groups: the Berbers, Punic, and the Roman people. The aboriginal people were the Berbers (Lybians), and the Punic people were descendants of the Phoenicians, who had colonized the lands in the 9th century B.C..¹⁷ In 146 B.C. Rome conquered Carthage and colonized it as a Roman province, bringing many Latin speaking immigrants to make Africa their new home. Following the normal process of colonization, the Romans immediately established themselves as the upper class. As Rome poured into North Africa, Christianity was then introduced to the people of North Africa through the colonization process. Even with the expansion of Christianity, there was no economic or social impact on society. An indigenous person still had to become culturally integrated with the Romans to have social and financial status.

The three faces of Africa were in tumult, and especially in the city of Carthage. This great city of the Roman Empire was completely razed by the Roman army, yet it was raised from the dead and brought to life by the veterans of the Roman army. But the city had a divided soul. On one side, there was a strong desire for religion through the rise of Christianity, and on the other side was a society that exemplified man in his darkest moments.¹⁸ There were not only a multitude of Christian Churches but also many, many temples dedicated to the idol gods of the time with Punic and Latin names. It was this city in which young Augustine lived and developed his theology. And despite the existence of the Latin upper-class, the majority of the people spoke Berber or Punic.¹⁹

Because of class distinction (and often rejection), the Berbers hated the Romans especially for their heavy taxation and disregarded their social and cultural needs. Many did become Christians but they did not join the Catholic Church, but rather joined the Donatist movement.²⁰ They wanted their society to be free from the Roman Church and even turned against Augustine. The rich estate owners and even Catholic clergy were attacked and the state suppressed it with the sanction of Augustine.

The Church in North Africa failed to address the needs of the rural Berbers of this area by not producing an African liturgy or a Punic or Berber translation of the Bible. Furthermore, the Church failed to address the social needs of the rural Berbers by identifying with the Roman culture which the Berbers hated and resisted. To be truly Christian was to be Latin or “Western.” Finally, the Church not only failed to allow the indigenous rural Berbers to be part of the ecclesiastical structure, it also failed to penetrate the nomadic tribes of the mountains.²¹ The church had no concern to provide a Berber translation of the Bible and insisted that the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁹ Van Oort, Johannes, 2005. “Van Vergilius en Mani tot de Catholica: Augustinus’ oorspronkelijke Spirituaaliteit,” in *Augustiniana Neerlandica: Aspecten van Augustinus’ Spiritualiteit en haar doorwerking*, ed. P. Van Geest and J. Van Oort. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 13.

²⁰ The Donatist movement was Christian sect that had a strong focus on holiness. It was named after the Christian Berber bishop Donatus Magnus.

²¹ Pillay and Hofmeyr, 61.

Berber and Punic people adopt the new Roman culture as being “Christian.”²² The lack of Gospel penetration was always present, and was especially evident when the Vandals attacked Carthage, the Berbers sided with the attackers.

When Islam invaded North Africa in 697, Carthage fell to the Arabs. It was quite astonishing how many Berber “Christian” groups had remained transformationally untouched by the Gospel and embraced Islam without hesitation. The reason that Islam succeeded here where it failed to enslave the Coptic people is that the church failed to accept and implement indigenization. The lack of numerous Berbers in the Church seems to indicate that the leaders saw no need to use the Berber language. No passage of Scripture and no prayer has ever been found written in the Berber tongue or in the Punic language.²³ Even though the North African Church was blessed with tremendous thinkers and theologians, those men (like Augustine) saw no use in moving away from a Latin Bible to a Bible in the vernacular. In addition, since the Church began with almost all Latin speaking Italian immigrants, the church and its Patriarchs assumed Christianity was intertwined with Latin culture. With such an emphasis on holiness from Tertullian to Augustine, the misguided presupposition was that holiness “looked” Latin. The Berbers and the Punic needed to adjust from their “pagan” ways, practices, and speech to truly accept the Gospel and its transforming power.

The last straw that broke the back of the North African Church was the draining of its leadership. Without leaders the Church became rudderless. This was a critical mistake, and it might have been driven by nationalistic pride—especially when that nationalism was bound up in perceived Christianity, like the Roman Church and Roman government. Almost a millennia later, Calvin saw this problem during the Roman Catholic persecution, and encouraged the pastors to train up local leadership to tend the flock when the pastors were imprisoned or martyred.

It is true that the Western Church owes much to Africa. The ancient Church of North Africa still captures our imagination. We wonder about the rapid growth and expansion, but we cannot help being amazed as to how quickly it almost disappeared. Statistics have revealed that the number of Christians in North Africa decreased from 8 million in 500 AD to 5 million by 1000 AD. This near 50% reduction was then compounded by further reductions to 2.5 million by 1200 AD, and then again to only 1.5 million by the time of the Reformation.

Even with the great theologians Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine—men who were Africans, the North African Church could not stand against the rise of Islam. They had very strong theological doctrine, yet their practice—one could almost say how they should practice love and unity—was almost nonexistent. In the early Church in North Africa the traditions of Europe and Africa met one another,²⁴ yet it was the traditions of Europe that rejected the people of Africa while at the same time offering a Gospel of transformation—as long as that transformation looked and sounded European and Latin.

²² Falk, 85.

²³ Baur, John., *2000 Thousand Years of Christianity in Africa*. (Paulines Publications, 2009), 29-30.

²⁴ Paas, Steven., *Christianity in Eurafrika – A History of the Church in Europe and Africa*. (Wellington, South Africa: Christian Literature Fund, 2016), 292.

The Open Door to Africa—through the Work of the Reformed Baptists in South Africa

Rough Beginnings

The Protestant Reformation hit the shores of South Africa on April 6, 1652 with the arrival of three ships at the Cape in Table Bay commanded by Jan van Riebeeck, whose mission was to set up a resupply station for the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compajnie (Dutch East India Company—VOIC). From the start, van Riebeeck was recognized as the father of the nation of South Africa, and his image has appeared on stamps and currency from the 1940's until 1980.²⁵ On this assignment was William Wylant, who was the spiritual comforter of the people (about 90 people who lived in tents). Although there was no ordained minister in the group, and the sailors and soldiers were of various nationalities, van Riebeeck ruled with an iron fist. He demanded strict observance of a single service on Sundays (two services were not allowed because of the demanding nature of the weekly work). Some seven years later, the first permanent minister arrived at the Cape and began baptizing the children.

The religious environment at the Cape was hardly one of missionary work, much less true spiritual transformation. One of the main reasons for this was the soporific theology that was transported from the Netherlands. The slowly numbing theology of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands was effected by three main factors:²⁶

1. Cartesianism (from the Roman Catholic René Descartes) had significant negative influence on their theology through the introduction of rationalism.
2. A strong brand of Covenant Theology, taught by Johannes Cocceius, which embraced an allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
3. An extreme loyalty to Reformed confessions of faith, which developed into doctrinal orthodoxy—which moved the people away from the authority of Scripture.

With this “corporate” theology exported from the home country, and a mission of extracting profits from Africa and colonizing its vast and arable land, it is apparent why there would be little interest in missions work. Yet, all was not lost. The writings of the pietistic “oude schrijvers” (old authors) of the Second Reformation spoke of human depravity, the sovereignty of God, and the predestining grace of God in the work of man. They preached about a personal commitment to Christ, and like the prophets of old—lamented the unspiritual state of the nation. This had a profound effect on the thinking of the Afrikaner population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁷

Help Arrives

²⁵ Hammond, P. *Sketches from South African History*. (Cape Town: The Reformation Society, 2016), 3.

²⁶ Hofmeyer, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

The establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa might give the false impression that they were the dominant religious and missional group in South Africa. As God saw fit, there were many others who were led to reach the African people, such as; the French Huguenots, the Moravians, and the Baptists. And, before there could be a true missional effort in this land that was new to the Reformation, there must first be doctrinal clarity and sincerity in devotion.

In a similar fashion of how He moved Israel to Egypt for protection, God providentially cared for the French Calvinists by sending them to South Africa. In October 1685, the Edict of Nantes, which provided some religious freedom for Protestants in a mostly Roman Catholic France was revoked by King Louis XIV. This led to an exodus of sorts of the true Christians out of France,²⁸ where some emigrated to the Netherlands, and many fled to South Africa. These French Christians were all of the Reformed faith, and staunchly Calvinists. And, unlike their Dutch predecessor, their influence did not remain limited to the Cape, but was important for the whole of South Africa.²⁹

The Huguenots assimilated well with the Dutch settlers, and even though they were poor, they were excellent farmers and artisans and helped create the newly formed nation through the hard work and good will that came with their Calvinism and Reformed faith.³⁰ By 1730, they were singled out as the hardest working congregation in the country, and were very focused on their spiritual growth. The Huguenot minister, Pierre Simond re-rhymed the Psalms of David and published *Les Veilles Afriquaines ou les Pseaumes de David Mis en Verse Francois*, which was published in Amsterdam in 1704, and is possible the first book written in South Africa.³¹ This work was a very important contribution to the Reformed Theology of South Africa, which influenced the versified Psalms of Clement Marot and Theodore de B  ze.³² In particular, his re-rhyming of Psalm 8:4 was critical in keeping the words “Son of Man” in the French translation (which had been lost).³³

After almost a half-century of a near-comatose Reformed faith in South Africa that was bound by cultural and economic pressures, the Huguenots were a shot of adrenaline to the Dutch Reformed Church. Overall, the Dutch Reformed Church would have been much poorer in sound principles, and completely devoid of practical application had it not been for these brave yet confident sojourners in the faith.³⁴ Even though there was not much effort to evangelize the indigenous people, the core doctrine of the faith was revitalized among the small colony that was forming.

²⁸ The Huguenots were especially motivated to leave France in the light of the earlier St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in August of 1572, where over 30,000 Protestants were murdered, and over 5,000 in Paris alone.

²⁹ Coertzen, P. “The Contribution of the French Huguenots to Calvinism in South Africa” in *Our Reformation Tradition*. (Potchefstroom: IFR, 1984). 424.

³⁰ Coertzen, P. “The Huguenots of South Africa in History and Religious Identity.,” *NGTT* 52, no. 1 (Jan-Feb, 2011), 45.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

³² Coertzen, “Contribution”, 429-430.

³³ Coertzen, “Huguenots”, 52.

³⁴ Coertzen, “Contribution”, 430.

The First Reformational Missionaries

The first serious missionary work for the Gospel and the effects of the Reformation in the Cape was through the Moravians, who arrived some 200 years after Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door at the church in Wittenberg. Before the formation of various mission societies in the late 1700's like the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), a German missionary from the Herrnhutters (or Moravians) established the first mission station in Genadendal in 1737. Perhaps the largest challenge for Schmidt and his co-workers was the fact that the VOIC was taken up with profit making, and the Moravian mission was to spread the Gospel to all—outside of the jurisdiction of the DRC. The challenge was expected, as the DRC Council from the beginning regarded Schmidt with suspicion and had subjected him to a strenuous examination that lasted almost 18 months.

The main focus of Schmidt and the Moravian mission was the evangelization of the indigenous people called the Hottentots (or Khoi-Khoi), and not the settlers in the Cape. The Khoi-Khoi people (who were called “Bushmen”) were religious, yet pagan in nature. They were dualistic (the clash of good vs. evil) in their thinking, and mystical and even demonic in their approach to worship.

After almost a century of having Reformed doctrine in the Cape, finally the truth of salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone was now permeating the indigenous people. Even though the citizens of Cape Town ridiculed his efforts, Schmidt was undeterred. He noted in his journal:

“Every evening I visited the Hottentots; sat down among them. I told them that, moved by sincere love, I had come to them to make them acquainted with their Saviour and to assist them to work.”³⁵

The young Moravian lasted seven years in his work, teaching the Khoi-Khoi about the doctrines of the Reformed Christian Faith as well as practical skills in planting and cultivating. He was a true missionary to the indigenous people that did not require the adopting of Dutch or European culture to be converted.

The work was difficult, yet rewarding. Through perseverance, five Khoi-Khoi committed their lives to Christ, and after intense discipleship, they were baptized in a believer's baptism by immersion. But as the work of the Gospel was bearing fruit, it was not the rigorous lifestyle of living indigenously that smothered Schmidt's enthusiasm. From the beginning, the DRC Council stated that there had been no evidence of a Khoi-Khoi being converted. And since the policy of the VOC stated that only ordained ministers of the DRC were permitted to baptize, Schmidt's ordination was in question—especially since he baptized by immersion. Schmidt's official letter of ordination sent by Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf was summarily rejected, and he was summoned back to Holland, where he failed to gain authorization from the DRC.

³⁵ Hammond, 19.

Undeterred regarding his passion for preaching the Gospel, Schmidt ministered the rest of his life in Moravia.

Commensurate with how the advance of the Gospel has persevered in history, those difficult seven years that Schmidt experienced were not in vain. Almost 50 years later, in 1792, the Cape was open again to Moravian missionaries. This paved the way for increased conversions among the indigenous people, and the development of closed settlements, or mission stations. The Moravian mission stations were one of the most outstanding ecclesiastical contributions to South Africa.³⁶ The Moravian's approach was to actually settle among the people. In order to teach, they had to “tabernacle” among them. And what was highly unusual was that their settlement was a means rather than an ends. They were not colonizing, and they were not interested in making a new life. Their focus was to give the Protestant Gospel to a lost people. Reformation mission work was now a reality.

Doctrine and Indigenization—the German Reformed Baptists

As more European people spread to South Africa through the Cape, ethnic tensions increased. Most immigrants turned to the DRC at the Cape for ministers, and local missionaries were scrutinized quite closely. The Boers³⁷ even acted against the work of noted missionary David Livingstone, who ministered among the colored and black people. Overall, the immigrants generally viewed missions work as “pitiful” and were not supportive of LMS missionaries who promoted the “equalization” of whites and colored people in the colony.³⁸

Some 200 years after van Riebeeck landed at the Cape, during the latter half of the nineteenth century the Cape had morphed into a plethora of Christian congregations; Anglican, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians—not to mention the well-established DRC. But most of these (if not all) denominations were focused on ministering to their specific denominational immigrants.

During these frustrating years, the Lord was busy raising up a young herald from Germany. Johannes Gerhard Oncken, whom Charles Spurgeon called “The Apostle Paul of Europe” was a man of international experience. He was born a Lutheran, and was confirmed as a full member of the Lutheran State Church. However, during a visit to a Methodist meeting in England, Oncken was converted. And after being convinced of believer's baptism through personal study of the Scriptures, Oncken was baptized in Germany by an American Baptist despite laws in Hamburg outlawing baptism by immersion. No doubt, Oncken's association with Christians of varying denominations (including even the Mennonites) enflamed his missionary zeal. While travelling across Europe preaching and handing out Bibles, Oncken lived out his famous missions dictum, “Every Christian a missionary” or “Every Baptist a missionary.”

³⁶ Hofmeyer, 23.

³⁷ The word “Boer” is the Afrikaans word for farmer. This is a common term describing an Afrikaner.

³⁸ Hofmeyer, 116.

The Germans in the Cape Colony³⁹ in South Africa had applied to the Rhenish Mission Society for a missionary but were rejected. They sent several written letters to Oncken for help, but Oncken's response was firm:

*I must ask you to be patient. You want an extraordinary man for South Africa, one who can preach in German and English, can establish schools and deal with Government authorities, lead the flock and build up the churches. . . . Such men are far and between, and as yet we cannot produce them ourselves as the baker bakes his bread, we just have to ask the Lord to supply one for us in His good time. . . ."*⁴⁰

In time, Oncken had found such a man. In October 1867, Carl Hugo Gutsche arrived in South Africa as a young German Baptist pastor.

Gutsche's years with Oncken drove him to concentrate on church history, Spurgeon's sermons, and pastoral theology. And he came to South Africa with a burning desire to cultivate every Christian to be a "vocational missionary." Immediately upon arriving in South Africa, Gutsche began to advance his purpose—he came to serve all peoples. He preached to many multicultural groups and began to organize a process to secure an indigenous missionary for further missions work. So, the earliest work of indigenous missions was through the German Baptist Hugo Gutsche.⁴¹

Simultaneous with the transformation of Oncken and Gutsche in Germany, a similar change was taking place in the life of Jacobus Daniel Odendaal—the great-great grandfather of the writer of this article. Odendaal was not an immigrant, but was born an African just three years before Gutsche. Being an Afrikaner (not Dutch or European), he was sent to Stellenbosch to study theology to become a DRC minister.⁴² But, after only one year of study, he left because he could not see infant baptism in the Scriptures. With much dismay to him and his family, Odendaal returned home only to be expelled from the DRC.⁴³

One evening, a travelling horse dealer stopped at Odendaal's farm and was received for the night. During devotions, right after Odendaal had explained the Scriptures, the salesman asked, "Are you a Baptist?" This was surprising as Odendaal had never heard of the term. The salesman told him that he prayed and acted just like the German Baptists. After inquiring where he might find such like-minded people, Odendaal took the instructions and a few days later embarked on the 350KM journey by cart to find these Baptists. As he sat under a tree while resting his horses, two passing Stutterheim Baptists saw him reading his Bible and after some conversation got quite excited to find a like-minded believer in deep meditation. They learned of

³⁹ This territory was called "British Kaffraria."

⁴⁰ Whytock, J. 2014. "Rev. Carl Hugo Gutsche: German Baptist Missionary to South Africa," *Haddington House Journal* 16 (2014), 23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴² This is actually an ordained pastor or minister. The Afrikaans term is *Dominee*.

⁴³ Haus, Fritz H. "Carl Hugo Gutsche (1843 – 1926): The Significance of His Life and Ministry for the Baptist Churches and Missions in Southern Africa." (PhD diss., University of Stellenbosch. July 1999), 135. The actual branch of the DRC was the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* [NGK] of Burgersdorp.

Odendaal's quest for truth, and led him to Hugo Gutsche, the young German Baptist pastor who had just arrived in South Africa.

In his ministry of sixty years, Hugo Gutsche baptized hundreds of converts from different ethnic backgrounds in South Africa. But, on his very first big Sunday in Grahamstown, the sermon was not in German, but in English! And in King William's Town in Dec. 1867, Jacobus Daniel Odendaal was the first person that Gutsche baptized. The German Baptists were totally amazed that someone from the Boer (Afrikaner) farmers would be in perfect harmony with them in matters of doctrine and worship. From this, Odendaal and Gutsche became lifelong friends, and Odendaal was ordained by the Baptist pastor in Berlin (South Africa). Jacobus Odendaal then went on to preach, gained a few dozen converts, and founded the *Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk* (ABK) in South Africa. Gutsche went on to establish the Baptist Union of South Africa in 1877, whose objective was "to maintain the right of all men everywhere to freedom from legal disadvantage in matters purely religious".⁴⁴

During his ministry, Hugo Gutsche helped establish thirty-eight schools, and formed a mission school in the town of Tshabo. This mission school was the main focus for Gutsche, and through this he introduced the first black evangelist into the service of the Baptist Union of South Africa—John Adams (1861-1893). Even though Gutsche's first church was in King William's Town, almost all of his members did not live there. His diary states that these "[blacks]⁴⁵ and their friends" were actually the first congregation. So, Gutsche was true to the "every Baptist a missionary" motto and worked with the indigenous people to help them grow in Christ, as well as to continue to invest in their lives helping supply them with useful employment. Through his efforts in influencing many German Baptist immigrants, Gutsche was able to bring Carl and Louise Pape to join him in the mission work, who were both fluent in the Xhosa language. Thus many songs were translated into Xhosa and the first Baptist church and school for the Xhosa people was established at Tshabo. With this inspiration, Hugo Gutsche's work led to the establishment of the Bantu Baptist Church in 1927, the year following his death. Because of his vision in true cross-cultural missions work, Hugo Gutsche was pivotal in the establishment of an indigenized church based on the doctrines of the Reformation.

Finally, there must be one more observation about the missional principles of Hugo Gutsche. Like his mentor Johannes Oncken, Gutsche was a firm believer in preparation. During his time in South Africa, Gutsche oversaw the building of over twenty church buildings. His guiding principle was "not to consecrate a single place of worship until it had been paid for."⁴⁶ He believed strongly in patiently waiting for the preparation of the qualities and skills of the servant, preparation of the solvency and longevity of the infrastructure, and preparation of the hearts of the indigenous people. Hugo Gutsche was about the Lord's timing. As these

⁴⁴ Hofmeyer, 125.

⁴⁵ This is the writer's translation. Gutsche used a word that was common and not offensive in the 19th century that meant "indigenous person" much like the word "aboriginal," but since the Apartheid government was installed in the middle of the 20th century that word is highly offensive to the indigenous people of South Africa. The term "black" is acceptable.

⁴⁶ Whytock, 24.

conditions were met by the Lord, only then would he see the Lord's hand and move on to another work.

The work of the German Reformed Baptists was somewhat unique in that their philosophy was truly “to win an African, one must become an African.” The bulk of Christian expansion in Africa has followed the fallacy and failures of the North African Church. Typically, African Christians were given new European names. The Africans living at the mission station were in effect, living in a foreign land. And the common complaint that has resounded all over Africa is that African Christians are forced to adapt to a foreignness in approach, worship, life, and way of living resulting in a persistent attachment to non-African patterns and institutions.⁴⁷ The warning of this truth was provided by G. C. Oosthuizen in his indictment of the 20th century Western missions philosophy in Africa, which looks strangely familiar to the approach of Augustine and the North African Church.

*This fallacy in the Western approach has been due to the development of Western Christianity itself. Hemmed in by Islam, the Gospel had been accommodated to the social and personal life of the European peoples to such a degree that the false idea developed that a nation can be conceived of as corpus Christianum. This fallacy is alive in the concept of Western Christian civilisation. The synthesis that has taken place between Gospel and culture in the West has not only affected the expansion of Christianity but distorted its very depth and vitality. Henry Venn's three-self formula of self-support, self-government, and self-expansion was changed by others into 'to make the African civilised in his ways, Christian in his beliefs and English in his language.'*⁴⁸

South Africa can be greatly thankful not only to the work, but also the philosophy of Hugo Gutsche and his mentor Johann Oncken. Regardless of the how colonization affected the transfer the Gospel to South Africa through the centuries, these pioneers were used by God (among others) to correct the course and be a “light to the Gentiles.”

The Way Forward

While God shut the front door of Africa, we can be very thankful that the back door was wide open. Yet, there is much to be gleaned from learning the history of early churches in the region of North Africa and the country of South Africa. The lessons learned will have a profound impact on missions philosophy. A common denominator found in all of this history is that before mission work can have a chance to succeed, there must be strength and soundness in doctrine. Without doctrine, there is no message. But inseparably coupled with purity of doctrine is a requisite passion and devotion for the indigenous people of the country, and their need be independent of outside interference. Achieving and maintaining both of these goals is not only admirable—it is a requisite task. Without both, the North African scenario will ultimately play out and the church will either die from lack of doctrine or mutate into a syncretistic mess.

⁴⁷ Oosthuizen, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

Achieving and sustaining the twin pillars of purity of doctrine and indigenized leadership requires a plan. Based on the lessons just learned, and an understanding of the sub-Saharan African people, the following is a 21st century strategy for continuing to empower the Reformation's advance in this complex multi-ethnic environment.

First, every major tribal group must have a Bible in their own language—like the Coptic Church. The African people on the whole neither invented nor implemented an alphabet for the art of reading and writing, which prevented them from recording their own histories. Instead, all necessary information was passed on from person to person, generation to generation, by word of mouth.⁴⁹ For an African to embrace written truth, it must be in the language in which they think and conceptualize. Otherwise, they are speaking another man's language, and learning another man's religion.

Second, there must be significant effort by the missionary or pastor to challenge the African view of spiritual authority. Prior to the 20th century Africans did not rely on written historical truth, but rather mediated through individuals.⁵⁰ The lack of a written law and history has led to challenges in establishing effective communication—especially in the area of biblical authority. The missionary must continue to emphasize submission to God's written truth in all matters of life.

Third, every foreign missionary or pastor must admit to a blindness to their own worldview. One of the greatest impediments to missions in South Africa is the picture that is constantly portrayed to the indigenous people by the missionary. Like the picture painted by the North African immigrant Christians, that picture can be one of endowed supremacy, or imperialism. This was the problem with the church in North Africa, as well as problem of the DRC and other in the 17th – 18th centuries. It can be discomfoting to mix and worship with the indigenous people due to differences in language, customs, and lack of “sophistication.” This can cause the people to be unintentionally treated as second class citizens. Because of this, modern day 21st century missionaries need to be very mindful of bringing their own mindsets of “correct” ideas of corporate worship, prayer, fellowship, and fighting culture. Enforcing “Western” ways only exacerbate the pains of the people to which one is ministering—especially in South Africa with its checkered political past and present.

Fourth, besides understanding the role their own worldview plays, all missionaries in Africa need to continually seek to understand the African worldview. In sub-Saharan Africa, the people mediate all authority (including spiritual authority) through individuals, such as the chief,

⁴⁹ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd Ed. (Great Britain: Heinemann Educational Book, 1975), 4.

⁵⁰ In South Africa, Xhosa literature began a bit earlier in the 19th century, and that mostly by foreign (Western) missionaries (like those mentioned under Hugo Gutsche), who were concerned more with moral edification and the propagation of Christianity. This was largely due to the efforts of Western Protestant missionaries who reduced the local language to a written form, and then translated biblical passages and works like *The Pilgrim's Progress*. See Albert S. Gérard, ed. *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 17, 168.

enduna,⁵¹ spiritual shaman, uncle, or direct family.⁵² The lack of a written law and history has led to challenges in establishing effective communication—especially in the area of biblical authority. Even though Africans might be able to process biblical information properly, the missionary will still not know how they think. If the missionary does not probe, they will never be able to understand how the African prioritizes authority, especially biblical authority. This will only be seen as one walks with an African through trials, difficult situations, and times when culture is directly confronted. Africans are communal by nature, and it is a greater sin to “break community” than to confront error with truth—thus they will always tell the missionary what they want to hear. Taking tests on Bible knowledge and literacy are helpful, but could be misleading. Missionaries and people involved in the training of national pastors must understand what Ichabod Spencer said in the mid-nineteenth century:

*We do a far better office for men when we lead them to think, than when we think for them. A man's own thoughts are the most powerful of all preaching. The Holy Spirit operates very much by leading men to **reflection**—to employ their own mind. I should hesitate to interrupt the religious reflections of any man in the world, by the most important thing I could say to him. If I am sure **he** will **think**, I will content to be still. But men are prone to be thoughtless, and we must speak to them to lead them to reflection.*⁵³

Our biggest challenge is not to pour theological content into eager and empty receptacles of the mind. The challenge is to spend every moment cleaning, scrubbing, scouring, re-inspecting, scrutinizing, and challenging every worldview that sets itself up as a stronghold against the mind (2 Cor. 10:5), and only then trust the Holy Spirit to take the biblical information that is provided to the indigenous African and convict him to **think**.

Fifth, the churches, mission agencies, and missionaries must be willing to spend the time and investment to prepare for a life-long endeavor. We have seen the success due to the patience and determination by men like Hugo Gutsche and Johann Oncken. Are we willing to take time to prepare? Is the missionary prepared to deal with the flaws of their own personal worldview and their own misunderstanding of the African worldview? Are they prepared to spend time with the Word of God (critiquing and solidifying their own points of view), and spend much time living and socializing with Africans to better understand their true fears and points of authority? Do they desire to understand where theology meets with practical living for the African? This preparation is just as important as preparing for financial support and theological training.

⁵¹ An *enduna* is basically the “headman” who job is to assist the chief in all functions. He is essentially the “Chief of Staff.”

⁵² In South Africa, Xhosa literature began a bit earlier in the 19th century, and that mostly by foreign (Western) missionaries (like those mentioned under Hugo Gutsche), who were concerned more with moral edification and the propagation of Christianity. This was largely due to the efforts of Western Protestant missionaries who reduced the local language to a written form, and then translated biblical passages and works like *The Pilgrim's Progress*. See Albert S. Gérard, ed. *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 17, 168.

⁵³ Spencer, I. “No Escape,” in *A Pastor's Sketches or, Conversions with Anxious Inquirers Respecting the Way of Salvation*. (London, 2010), 347.

Finally, the missionary must be prepared to give up his tight-fisted control of the ministry. Is he or she prepared to live and operate continuously in the local vernacular? Can the missionary develop a spirit of trust with the indigenous people? Will the missionary allow the indigenous leaders to make mistakes and then lovingly disciple them to see the errors? Is the missionary prepared to submit to nationals—people whom they have trained from infancy?

In Africa, as we look to the future these questions have yet to be answered. The way forward is still unclear as Christian denominations and mission agencies struggle with doctrinal issues and a desire for “quick fix” mission work resulting in the sending of untrained and ill-equipped missionaries. But these are the questions which mission agencies and churches must continually raise, and scrutinize their missionaries and hold them accountable if the Reformation train will continue its journey through time in Africa—albeit from the long way around.

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