

Unlike the other regional groups, Africans went to Bangkok with no reports or formal studies on the salvation theme. The explanation for this silence was twofold:

Some delegates said the ecclesiastical and ecumenical structures in Africa are still basically action-oriented, there is little time for reflection. Unlike the older churches of the West, now concerned primarily with their internal life, the African Church is still reaching out excitingly to the world around it.

'Salvation', said Bena-Silu of the Kimbanguist Church in Zaire, 'is not a matter of reflection and definition. It is a reality that changes your life and the world around you.'

'Here in Bangkok we can reflect on and discuss salvation; but in Zaire, we celebrate, and proclaim it—not the other way around.'

Africans therefore came to Bangkok with open minds and their contributions to the Salvation Today debate were original and spontaneous.

### Call to Action

Culturally, Africans are relatively free of the guilt complexes of the Eastern and Western cultures. For us, therefore, salvation is not static liberation from guilt but a call for action. The salvation of Christ means a war against evil.

As Solomon Lediga of the South African Council of Churches put it, 'Come to South Africa and see my people. See if you can tell them that God has forgiven them. For my people forgiveness is a constant battle and love at times may be against the law'.

But it was not only in situations of racial conflict where salvation had a different meaning. There were also situations of political oppression, of utter material poverty, of debilitating diseases, where salvation must also involve the attempt to make and keep man's life human.

This is not a new message for Africa, but the African churches will receive it with greater confidence than before. Christian churches helped to develop and humanise life in tropical Africa. The difference this time is that they are involved in humanisation uniquely and consciously as Christians.

The Church came to Africa as part of a foreign history and as an agent of that history. It shared, not only the tremendous achievements, power and glory of Western civilization, but also in its shortcomings—colonialism, oppression and white racism. It helped to destroy the African cultural heritage and identity.

To be an effective agent of Christ's salvation today, the African Church must this time live beyond history. African churchmen are obsessed with a sense of history and purpose. They see themselves standing precariously on the brink of a tremendous Christian age.

As the All Africa Conference of Churches (A.A.C.C.) General Secretary Burgess Carr explained in Bangkok, the pendulum is swinging 'from the North Atlantic world, from the Western, the white, the rich world, to Africa, where we have today a Christian population explosion. We are about to become the centre of Christianity'.

Most of the African delegates viewed with suspicion the dialogue approach to evangelism. 'To work for church growth

and renewal is', according to Pastor Seth Nomenyo, 'the chief abiding and irreplaceable task of Christian mission'.

The second message from Bangkok to Africa was the call that the Church in Africa must now become a full partner with others in Christ's total mission in our world today—a world characterised by profound closeness and oneness through sophisticated communication systems and yet equally profoundly divided politically, economically, culturally and racially.

The CWME Assembly in Mexico City in 1963 called for 'mission in six continents'. Bangkok went beyond this to mission in one world.

Africans pleaded passionately for this new concept, but they found themselves in the ambiguous position of having to affirm their self-hood and identity more vigorously. 'We refuse merely to be raw materials used by other people to achieve their own salvation', declared Burgess Carr.

John Gatu, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and Vice-Chairman of AACC, proposed a moratorium on the sending of missionary personnel and funds 'to allow us to develop our own resources, define our own priorities, fully and creatively utilize our own genius in witnessing for Christ in our own country, in our own situation, among our own people'.

Bethuel Kiplagat, Kenya's most celebrated missionary who is now working for the Sudan Council of Churches as director of a mammoth rehabilitation and resettlement programme, spoke of the problems of the transfer of power and scathingly criticized the power elites and structures of the Third World.

'These are often very bad imitations of the power elites and structures of the colonial powers', he said.

Of the African delegates, only Bena-Silu of the Kimbanguist Church welcomed whole-heartedly the call for world mission. 'I came here from the depths of isolation to seek our common Christian identity', he said.

Bena-Silu was speaking from a different background from all the other delegates. He represented an independent church which had gone through an identity crisis, had been forced (by government) into accepting a 'moratorium' on foreign missionaries and funds, and lived for nearly half a century on Black theology—the only African church, perhaps, now ready to join the World Council of Churches and speak there with an authentic African voice.

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### RELEVANCE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

For South African churches in particular, Bangkok is of special importance. This is so even though no plenary debate was devoted to South African problems in isolation from world problems.

1. The need for a reinterpretation of the Gospel is a matter of extreme urgency. The majority of white Christians, who are at the same time architects of a social and political system that, to say the least, betrays the heart of the Gospel, have yet to learn the implications of the Gospel in matters of race relations, for instance. The whites in so far as they have