

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF AFRICAN QUAKERISM

BY JOHN MUHANJI

DIRECTOR OF AFRICA MINISTRIES OF FRIENDS UNITED MEETING

A Brief Overview of the History and Challenges of Quakerism in Africa

Introduction

Quakerism is a Christian movement that originated in England in the 17th century. A belief in God's direct and personal experience, the equality of all people, the rejection of creeds and rituals, and the commitment to peace and social justice characterizes it. Quakers, also known as Friends, have spread to many parts of the world, including Africa, where they have a significant presence and influence.

However, Quakerism in Africa faces many challenges and opportunities in the 21st century. One of the main issues is contextualizing Quakerism to African culture, history, and realities while maintaining its core values and principles. This document will explore why there is a need to develop a contextualized African Quakerism church and what some of the benefits and challenges of doing so are.

History of Quakerism in Africa

Quakerism was introduced to Africa by missionaries from Britain and America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Americans established the first Quaker mission in Kenya in 1902, followed by others in Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and DR Congo. Quakerism also spread to other parts of Africa through migration, education, and ecumenical relations. The British established Quakerism in South Africa in 1828.

Various historical and social factors, such as colonialism, nationalism, independence, civil wars, poverty, development, human rights, and interfaith dialogue, have shaped Quakerism in Africa. African Quakers are involved in various service, witness, and advocacy forms, such as education, health, agriculture, peacebuilding, reconciliation, and democracy. African Quakers have also developed their forms of worship, organization, and theology, reflecting their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Need for Contextualization

Contextualization is making something relevant and meaningful to a particular context, culture, or situation. It is an essential task for any religious movement that seeks to communicate its message and values to different people and places. Contextualization is not a compromise or a dilution of the original message but rather a faithful and creative expression of it in new ways.

Quakerism in Africa needs to be contextualized for several reasons.

First, contextualization honors and affirms the African identity, culture, and heritage of Quakers in Africa. It acknowledges that God speaks and works in and through African realities and that Quakers in Africa have something unique and valuable to contribute to the global Quaker family and the wider society. This recognition of their exceptional contributions is a way of celebrating and embracing the

diversity and richness of Quakerism in Africa, which includes different languages, ethnicities, traditions, and expressions.

Second, contextualization addresses and responds to the challenges and opportunities that Quakers in Africa face in the 21st century. These include poverty, inequality, corruption, violence, conflict, disease, environmental degradation, and religious pluralism. Contextualization applies the Quaker testimonies of peace, equality, simplicity, integrity, and community to the African context and finds ways to witness and serve in relevant and effective ways. Contextualization engages and dialogues with other African religious and cultural groups and finds common ground and mutual understanding.

Benefits and Challenges of Contextualization

Contextualizing Quakerism in Africa has many benefits and challenges.

Some of the benefits are:

- It enhances the sense of ownership and belonging of Quakers in Africa and strengthens their identity and confidence.
- It fosters the growth and vitality of Quakerism in Africa, attracting more people to join and participate in the Quaker community and creating a sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the future.
- It enriches and deepens the spiritual and theological insights and experiences of Quakers in Africa, inspiring them to live out their faith authentically and meaningfully.
- It contributes to the diversity and unity of the global Quaker family and enables Quakers in Africa to share their gifts and perspectives with other Quakers worldwide.
- It empowers Quakers in Africa to be agents of change and transformation in their societies, inspiring them to witness and serve in the spirit of love and peace and to make a difference in their communities.

Some of the challenges are:

- It requires a careful and critical evaluation of the cultural and historical influences and assumptions that shape Quakerism in Africa and discern what is essential and adaptable.
- It demands a creative and faithful interpretation and application of the Quaker principles and practices to the African context. This requires a delicate balance between continuity and change, ensuring that while adapting to local needs, the core values of Quakerism remain intact.
- It involves respectful and honest dialogue, collaboration among Quakers in Africa, and recognition and appreciation of Quakerism's diversity and complexity. This open and respectful communication fosters understanding and unity among African Quakers.
- It calls for humble and open communication, cooperation with other Quakers worldwide, and a willingness to learn from and support each other.

- It challenges Quakers in Africa to be faithful and courageous in living out their Quaker testimonies in the face of difficulties and opposition and to be hopeful during challenges and opportunities.

Conclusion

Quakerism in Africa is a vibrant and dynamic movement with a long and rich history and a promising and bright future. There is a need to develop a contextualized African Quakerism church that is relevant and meaningful to the African culture, history, and realities while maintaining its core values and principles. This task requires vision and passion, wisdom and discernment, creativity and faithfulness, dialogue and collaboration, courage and hope. It is a task that can bring many benefits, challenges, joys, and blessings to Quakers in Africa and beyond.