

## THE CHURCH-FAMILY IN AFRICA THAT WITNESS THE GOSPEL TO EVERYONE: PERSPECTIVES FROM LUKE 3:4-6 AND ISAIAH 40:4-5.

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DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.2.25001.77923](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25001.77923)

### **Abstract**

*Scriptures portray God's saving activity in the world in many ways, including the fact that God is shaping a people, an inclusive Church-Family for himself. This boundless love of God becomes clearer in Luke's Gospel and in its Isaiah's-mosaic- precursor that says, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:5-6; Isaiah 40: 4-5). Recognizing the pastoral challenges facing the Church-family in Africa today and using Luke's Gospel as its textual point of departure, this paper intertextually explores the various theological, metaphorical and missionary dimensions of this Isaianic-Lukan saying. It illustrates the unity and the prophetic mission demanded of contemporary Church-Family in Africa, especially in this era of the Pontificate of Pope Francis.*

**Keywords:** Church-Family, Africa, Witnessing, Gospel, Inclusiveness, Prophetic.

### **Introduction**

Scriptures portray God's saving activity in the world in many ways.<sup>1</sup> Even though it is impossible to state comprehensively all that biblical literature claim God is doing, it is clear that God is inclusively and without boundaries shaping a people, the Church, God's family for himself, in Christ. Several studies (Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 2003,, 469-651; Cazelles, "The Unity of the Bible and the People of God,"1966, 1-10; Deutsch, "The Biblical Concept of the "People of God,"1972, 4-12 and Martens, "The People of God,"2011), have noted this message of unlimited mercy of God throughout the OT and NT. It is more pronounced in Luke 3:5-6, and in its mosaic-precursor, Isaiah 40:4-5, that says, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the

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<sup>1</sup> By "Scriptures" I am referring to both the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (OT) and the New Testament (NT).

rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (NRSV).

This study, "The Church-Family in Africa that Witness the Gospel to Everyone: Perspectives from Luke 3:4-6 and Isaiah 40:4-5," identifies "Church-Family" as the people distinguished from all other human communities by faith, hope, and love that derive from, and center around Jesus Christ and his redemptive work (Udoekpo, *Obadiah*, 2022, 69).<sup>2</sup> Its mission according to Komonchack (1993, 35) derives immediately from this identity, for even by its very existence the church, as the social and historical sign of Christ's redemptive work, exists in order, as its instrument, to evangelize, and to keep alive the memory of Jesus of Nazareth, to communicate his offer of salvation to everyone.

Some of her challenges, blessings and prospects have been addressed in the *Ecclesia in Africa* (EIA), in *Africae Munus* (AM), by the Synod Fathers as well as in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), who is currently marking her Golden Jubilee. Specific challenges listed in these documents include; poverty, political instability, social disorientation, war, misery, despair, lack of peace, justice, reconciliation and constructive dialogue. Others captured in Nwachukwu (*One Faith Many Tongues*, 2017, Udoekpo, *Ecumenical*, 2023)) and in the *Lineamenta, Family of God on Mission* (1999) are; division, ethnocentrism, mismanagement of ethnicity and diversity, tribalism, selfishness, kidnapping, violence and terrorism. The Church-Family in Africa is equally counting her many blessings such as the sacramental life of the Church, a deep sense of the sacred, of the existence of God, lively liturgy, and a cherished sense of family values. These blessings and values are blessings and values we hope will remain assets to the mission the Church-Family in Africa who, as noted in by John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Africa* (nos.42-43), is aspiring to accomplish a faithful, committed, united, selfless and obedient Church-Family, with a renewed zeal of bearing witness to Christ, and of reaching out to everyone. Echoes of such aspiration and yearnings are heard in recent interventions and hopeful responses of several African scholars, diligently documented in Orobator (*Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, 2011; Orobator, *The Church We Want*, 2016; Udoekpo, *Worship in Amos 5*, 2017; Udoekpo, *Limits of a Divided Nation*, 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> In this category belongs the Catholic "Church" as well as other "church" denominations."

In line with Pope Francis' spirit, these African scholars and theologians are hoping for a prophetic church that goes forth to the margins; a church that is biblical, pastoral, and not self-referential, and a church that leads the way. They are hoping for a church that engages in constructive dialogue, a church that is inclusive, selfless, and peaceful, just and charitable. African scholars would also like to see a church that cares, protects members, manages her ethnicity well, loves and trusts them as a loving family. They desire a church that is a servant to all, male and female, a voice to the voiceless, to the rich and the poor, as well as a voice to children and adults.

This work therefore intertextually and theologically studies Luke 3:4-6 and Isaiah 40:4-5. It aims to highlight those theological metaphors, hidden pastoral motifs, prophetic symbols and missionary values of these texts, especially the ones that would serve the needs of Africa and the church she longs to become. The intertextual approach adopted in this study presupposes among other things and as noted by Martens ("People of God," 226) "that texts are a mosaic of earlier texts...texts reuse and adapt earlier texts." If I may observe, additional essays illustrating intertextuality as a method of biblical exegesis, include Martens ('Reaching for a Biblical Theology of the Whole Bible,' 2001, 83-101; House, "Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture, 2001, 267-279; Fewell, *Reading Texts*, 1992; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul*, 1989; Brawley, *Text in Pours Forth Speech*, 1995; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 1998, 40-66). According to Robbins (*Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1996, 40), it is "a text's representation of, reference to, and use of phenomena in the "world" outside the text being interpreted." In other words, "the intertexture of a text is the interaction of the language in the text with "outside" material ...historical events, texts, customs, values roles, institutions, and systems" Robbins, 40, Soulen, *Handbook*, 2001, 87-88).

This approach offers a perspective of continuity in faith and serves as reminder to contemporary church in Africa of the corrective value of the biblical image and theology of the church as a family, servant, herald, prophet, wilderness, the voice and the way to all Africans. It attempts an illustration of biblical and theological unity of the prophetic and salvific missions of evangelization the Church-Family in Africa has received from Christ. Reading it in today's era of the Pontificate of Pope Francis is also refreshing and unique. It hopes to meet the primary goal of emphasizing the role and mission of the contemporary Church in

Africa in the light of lessons drawn from Luke 3:4-6 and Deutero-Isaiah 40:4-5.

### **Working Images of the Church- Family in Africa**

Images of the church found in various ecclesiastical documents, theological commentaries and literature, *include*: the Church as the mystical body, paradox a mystery, people of God, temple of the Holy Spirit, flock and sheepfold, the house in which God dwells, the bride of Christ, our mother, the holy city and the first fruits of the coming kingdom(cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* 1967/1969); *Lumen Gentium*,196; *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965).

This paper, as earlier noted, closely and complementarily follows the Church as a family, the way, the wilderness, prophet, herald and servant. In his Apostolic Exhortation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no.71), Paul VI calls the family a “domestic church.” The Family, in John Paul the II’s view (*Familiaris Consortio*, no.15), points the “way of the Church.” The Church-Family, John Paul II and Pope Francis (*Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 63-64; *Lumen Fidei*, no. 52; *Evangelii Gaudium*, no.66), insist, must remain the guiding principle for evangelization, or witnessing of the gospel to everyone in Africa. This family mystery, Benedict XVI agrees with John Paul II (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 63; *Africae Munus*, nos. 7-9) must continue to reflect the church in Africa that “emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationship, acceptance, dialogue and trust.” Benedict XVI (*Africae Munus*, no.42) goes on to note that the family that the church in Africa should emulate is the “sanctuary of life.” According to him (*Africae Munus*, no 43) It is a place that propagates the “fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters.”

In his awareness of this ecclesial mission, firmly rooted in scriptures (OT and NT), Gerhard Lohfink (*Jesus and Community*, 1982/84), points out that critical ecclesiology “has long asked if the historical Jesus really founded a Church.” To Lohfink (xi), this question must have been asked in a wrong way “since it is not so much of an exaggeration to say that Jesus could not have found a church since there had long been one-God’s people, Israel.” In his view, Jesus, rather directed his effort to Israel and sought to gather it in view of the coming of the reign of God and to make it into the true people of God, sanctified by his death. Echoes of Lohfink’s remarks are heard in Scobie’s work, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (2003).

Scobie (2003, 469) observes that “recognition of “the people of God” as a major biblical theme does not depend in any narrow sense on the use of a particular terminology, but rather in the broadest possible way on

the fact that the “story line” of salvation history (*heilsgeshichte*), is largely the account of relations between God and Israel in the OT and God and the church in the NT.” In the OT, Israel is known as a “people” (*'am*, in the MT; and *Laos* in the LXX), chosen by God from among the nations (*gôyî m*; and *ethnē* in the LXX). The actual phrase, “people of God” occurs only eleven times, but phrases such as “my people,” “your people,” and “his people” are frequent (about 300 times).

In other words, Israel’s story as God’s people begins with the call of Abraham as an individual in Genesis 12:1-3. God brings Abraham and his descendants, “children of Israel” (*bə nêyisrā' ēl*) into a being. Related terms used to describe them are, *qāhāl* and *'ēdhāh*. While *qāhāl* translates “congregation” or “assembly” or a group of people gathered for a purpose such as battle (1 Sam 17:47), covenant at Mount Sinai or for worship (Ps 22:22), *'ēdhāh* translates idea of an assembly or gathering and stresses corporate unity. In the LXX *qāhāl* translates *ekklēsia*, while *'ēdhāh* translates *synagōgē*, and never as *ekklēsia* (Scobie, 470).

It is in the story of this assembly, Israel, that we find rooted, images of the church as the people of God, a chosen and elected people (*bā char*), a congregation of Israel, a covenant community (Gen 9:1-17; Gen 15; 17; Exod 19-24; 2 Sam 7; 23:5; Ps 89:3, 28; 1 Kgs 8:23-2; Jer 33:21), the faithful remnant, leading to the NT renewed Israel (cf. Scobie, 470-486). In other words, the Bible is concerned throughout with the relationship between God and people of all walks of life, including Africans. Notably, with the birth of Christ, that relationship continues in the NT and fulfils the promises made to Abraham and his descendants (Luke 1: 54-55).

Bender (*Nature of Church*, 1962, 14-66) speaks of this church as the Body of Christ, called to respond to God’s gracious acts. Okure (“Church-Family of God,” 2011, 13-24) in one place describes this church as the community of believers (including the Church), humanity and the entire creation (2 Cor 5:19; Col 1:20, Eph 1:10; John 12:32; John 11:52). In another place, Okure (“Becoming the Church of the New Testament,” 2016, 93-105) sees the NT church in the light of Pope Francis, as the church that comes alive when lived and witnessed by going forth (Matt 28:16-20) to the poor and the margins.

Several images of the church, in fact about ninety-six analogies, are listed in Minear (*Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 1960/2004), in addition to the one we find in Avery Dulles’s *Models of the Church*.

Most significant for us as noted earlier in Lohfink (*Jesus and Community*, 39-44), is the basic principle of the Synod and SECAM Fathers, namely, the Church as family of God's people. This principle is based, in part, in the ministry of Jesus who said in Matthew 12:50 "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." And in Mark 10:28-30 Christ's disciples have to make sacrifices, perhaps leaving their natural families; they gain a new family of 'brothers and sisters, mothers and children." Above all, in Galatians 6:10 believers are "those of the family of faith (*tous oikeious tēs pisteōs*)." They are children of God, their Father, and thus brothers and sisters of one another (Rom 16:1; 1 Cor7:15; Jas 2:15). This is God's family of faith, the church in Africa that Africans yearn to fully become. The role of this Church-Family, as a community without boundary, a community for all, a prophet, herald, way, wilderness and servant from the perspectives of Luke 3 4-6 and Isaiah 40:4-5 deserves our attention.

### **Becoming A Church-Family In Africa-Perspective From Luke 3:4-6**

As observed in Culpepper (*Luke*, 2015, 3), Luke's Gospel is one of the treasures of biblical literature. Christologically, it presents Jesus not only as the Son of God, a prophet, Lord of history, Messiah and Son of Man, but as redeemer and savior of the world. Luke 3:1-6 draws some prophetic allusions, symbols, motifs and images, from Mark and Deutero-Isaiah. With these borrowings, he offers the church in Africa something to think about as the way, wilderness, prophet and family to all people. Luke historically presents John the Baptist's activities as the eschatological prophets in the likes of Elijah (cf. Luke 1:16-17). In vv. 1-2a Luke fixes the date of John's calling. In v. 2b he describes the call of John and the place of John's ministry in verse 3.

In vv. 4-6 Luke presents John's ministry as a fulfilment of the Scripture, and remarkably writes:

As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. (v.5) Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, (6)and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God ( NRSV).

Echoes of this Lukan passage is heard in the beginning of Mark's Gospel (1:1), which introduces John the Baptist as a prophet who came to prepare the way for the Lord. John successfully prepared the Lord's way by baptizing all people (Luke 3:21; Mark 1:5; Matt 1:5). Luke intertextually adapts and reuses Mark to make his theological points concerning John the Baptist. First, he creatively moves Mark 1:2, the quotation from Malachi 3:1, to another place in Luke 7:27, and then

positions Deutero-Isaiah's quotation of Mark 1:3 (Isa 40:3) after his introduction of John's ministry (3:4). Luke is then left with Mark 1:4, which he shifts to another place in Luke 3:3b, and then adds that "the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2b).

Clearly, Luke is interested in stressing three things: First, the prophetic dimension of John the Baptist, the prophet (*nābî*). Second, the theological significance of the place of his ministry as *en tē erēmōi* (in the wilderness), which he repeatedly use (Luke 1:80; 3:2b), including v. 4 "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness" (*phōnē boōvtos en tē erēmōi*). And third, the content of the ministry of John the Baptistas a tireless prophet. A prophet, as rightly noted by Udoekpo *Israel's Prophet*, 2018, 2-3) and Anderson (*Understanding the OT*, 196, 248) speaks on behalf of one another, especially the deity. Israel's prophets were divinely called to preach and interpret the covenant theology of God's people, of their time and culture (cf. Wifall, *Israel's Prophets*, 1974, 12; Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 2010, 276-77). While engaging in this mission, Udoekpo, (*Israel's Prophets*, 5), and Heschel (*Prophets*, 1962, 1-31) affirm, they remain sensitive to evil (Amos 8:4-8; Jer 2:12-13). A prophet recognizes the importance of trivialities is luminous, explosive, pursues the highest good, and practices austerity and compassion. He or she makes sure that few are guilty while all are responsible. A prophet is like a blast from heaven that faces a coalition of callousness and authority and embraces loneliness and misery. He is a messenger, God's partner and associate (Heschel, *Prophets*, 3-31, Udoekpo *Israel's Prophets*, 5; Udoekpo, "I shall Feed them").

From Lukan's perspective, John the Baptist is a prophet, God's messenger and his associate. The church in Africa like John must be prophetic in her mission. This same message is heard in *Ecclesia in Africa*, and *Africae Munus*. In these documents the Synod Fathers, like Evangelist Luke, invites the Church-Family in Africa to review her prophetic mission of justice and peace, dialogue and reconciliation, family values, and gospel inculturation, simplicity of life, caring for the planet, courage and compassion in evangelization, and selflessness in reaching out to the poor with a sense patriotism and common good.

In terms of the place of John's ministry, *en tē erēmōi* (in the wilderness), Luke has a message for the Church in Africa. He suggests that there is still room to work hard to become that Church-Family in the wilderness Christ expects of her. Wilderness is used here symbolically as common

motif in biblical tradition (cf. Acts 7:36-44; Talmon, "The Desert Motif," 1966, 31-63; Baker, "Wilderness, Desert," 2003, 893-97; Wright, "Wilderness," 2005, 848-854; Funk, "The Wilderness", 1959, 205-214). Additionally, in Schofield ("Wilderness," 2010, 1337), it is noted that "literarily and symbolically, wilderness has been an important backdrop for the development of Jewish identity. From early biblical narratives, frequently set in the wilderness, to Second Temple literature, the wilderness becomes a theologically charged image, (re)used and thematized by various Jewish groups."

Sometimes *midbār/erēmos* (wilderness) in the Torah is portrayed as a place of testing. According to Burnett (2013, "Eschatological," 1-24), it is a place where life necessities are not sufficient (Num 14:26-35; Deut 9:7). In the prophetic books, Hosea sees the desert (*midbār/erēmos* /wilderness) as the place of God's covenant renewal with his people, Israel (*HALOT*, 2:546-547). Africans in their own "deserts" of insufficiencies of food, water, light, good roads, stable democracy, rule of law, good leadership, freedom of worship and other fundamental human rights, hopes for a better tomorrow.

In Luke's Gospel "wilderness" has a positive connotation as a place where prophets are called (1:80; 3:2) for a deeper encounter with God (1:80; 4:42; 5:16). The prophetic-Church-Family in Africa and her agents of evangelization (Bishops, priests, religious, consecrated persons, catechists, and lay faithful), are invited into a deeper relationship with Christ (*Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 88-89).

Luke's use of wilderness motif has also strengthened his prophetic portrait of John. He links John with Moses, Elijah who all received their calling in the desert (Exod 3; 1 Kgs 19:4-18). In Luke the seeming insufficiency of the hospitable region of desert is meant to highlight the hope, the sufficiency of a new exodus, the way of the Lord, the eschatological renewal of God's people occurring in the wilderness (Burnett, *Eschatological*, 9). Again in Luke's view John is an itinerant preacher of the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin (Luke 3:3b). Baptism for him is the outward sign of repentance (vv.8, 10-14). It is a sign of total surrendering to God and of the gathering of everyone into that universal family of God's children, including the Church-Family in Africa.

### **Luke's Use of 2 Isaiah 40:3-5 (LXX)**



In addition to Lukan portrayal of John as a prophet called to preach baptism of repentance in the wilderness, Luke appeals to Isaiah 40:3-5 that says;

(v.3) A voice crying out in the wilderness/desert, prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God. (v.4) every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. (v.5) Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people/flesh mankind shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken (NAB; LXX).<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Mark, Luke uses this text differently. Koet ("Isaiah in Luke-Acts" 2005, 79-100), notes Luke omits most of Mark's introduction and extends Isaiah's quotation (Isa 40:3) in Mark 1:2 to Isaiah 40:3-5 in Luke 3:4-6, which "anticipates and clarifies the activities of John." Such activities are close to the heart of the Church-Family in Africa throughout this paper. Deutero-Isaiah 40:1-11 bears the essence or the center piece of the prophet's universal message of salvation, reused by Luke. According to Webb (*Message of Isaiah*, 1996, 161), "this opening part of chapter 40 is like the overture to a great musical composition." Major themes found here include (v.1) comfort, (v.2) atonement, (v.3) the way of the Lord, (v.4) the glory of the Lord, (vv.5) the power of the Word of God, (v.8ff) the city of God, (9) and the might and tenderness of Zion's savior (vv.10-11). It reflects a human journey but the coming and presence of God dominates, which is relevant for the Church-Family in Africa.

Whybray (*Second Isaiah*, 2003)<sup>45</sup>, points out that Isaiah 40:1-11 highlights the fact that: (1) those exiled are to take heart because their sins have now been expiated and their term of punishment over (vv. 1-2); (2) the Lord is now about to come to the assistance of his people in such a decisive fashion that the whole world will be amazed at his revelation of his glory (vv. 3-5); (3) the guarantee of this message of hope, comfort and restoration is the word of the Lord spoken through the prophet, which is all powerful, and compared with all human activity is tremendously important (vv. 6-8).

Verses 3-5 in particular are filled with promises of covenant restoration with the people. Even though Israel has been exiled in Babylon (Isa 39),

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<sup>3</sup>(v.3) *Phōnē boōntos en tē erēmō hetoimasate ten hodon kuriou eutheias poieite tas tribous tou theou hemōn* (v.4) *pasa pharagxh plērōthēsetai kai pan oros kai bounos tapeinōthēsetai kai estai panta ta skolia eis eutheian kai hē tracheia eis pedia* (v.5) *kai ophthēsetai he doxa kuriou kai ophetai pasa sarx to sōtērion tou theou hoti kurios elalēsen.*

this ordeal will not last. Israel shall be redeemed and comforted (Isa 40:2). There will be another exodus beginning with a voice crying for a highway construction from Babylon to Judah in the West, through the impassable Arabian Desert (Branick, *Understanding the Prophets*, 2012, 192). This highway will not be like others; it will level the hills and mountains, reveal God's greatness, and bring salvation to people of all nations (vv. 3-5).

A point to note here also is that there is a difference in the location of the voice of Isaiah 40:3 in different texts. In the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Targumim of Isaiah the location Burnette ("Eschatological," 15), is in the wilderness, namely "a voice cries, in the wilderness." (*qōl qōrē' bamidbar*). While in the LXX of Isaiah closely followed by Luke, the voice is "crying out in the wilderness" (*Phōnē boōntos en tē erēmō*), prepare the way for the Lord (*hetoimasate ten hodon kuriou*).

Commenting on this, Joseph Fitzmyer (*Luke*, 1981-83, 461) suggests that since the new exodus did not materialize in the Second Temple Judaism as humanly expected, Luke the historian concluded that the wait was over and that John is "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness (v.3b). Lukan wilderness, a place of John's preaching (*en tē erēmō/midbār*), is significant for the Church-Family in Africa. As suggested by the SECAM Bishops, it is a place of repentance and conversion as well as a place of renewed commitment to bearing witness to Christ (SECAM, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 3-4). It is a place for learning on how to endure testing in the midst of poverty, deficient democracy, disunity, management of ethnicity and strife to cultivate genuine spirit of disposition in encountering a merciful God, with the hope for a better future.

In addition, the phrase *hetoimasate ten hodon kuriou* (prepare the way of the Lord) have relevant functions worth taking note of. First, it functions as a pointer to the infancy narrative of the gospel where the angel Gabriel prophesied that John will prepare (*etaoimasai*) a people for the Lord (Luke 1:17). Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit also said in Luke 1: 76 that John will "prepare his way" (*etomasai hodous autou*). Second, it looks forward through the gospel and projects into the Acts of the Apostle where we find the early Christians being referred to as the people of "the way," (Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22), *derek/hodos*. Commenting on this Blenkinsop (*Isaiah*, 2006, 181-184), suggests that "the use of *derek* as a group designation is admittedly not so clear in Qumran as *hodos* is in Acts, but usage in the various rules favours that

conclusion; the members are 'the elect of the way' (1QS IX 17-18) and 'the perfect way' (1QMXIV 7), while recidivists are those who 'deviate from the way' (CD 1 13; II 16)."

These functions project the very concept of evangelization familiar to us. For example, in the *Lineamenta for the First National Pastoral Congress* in Nigeria (1999, 19), it was stated that "evangelization was the task Jesus entrusted to his Church at the point of his departure from this world to return to his Father." He mandated his Apostles to "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands.... (Matt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15)."

Evangelization, Pope Paul VI stresses:

Means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within, and making it new; "Now I am making the whole of creation new." (Rev 21:5 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15)... The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of the people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18).

The Church in Africa, must lead the "Way" of Christ to people and people to Christ in various ways through various agents and in areas of peace, justice, reconciliation, dialogue, unity, communalism, moral teaching, media, and inculturation. *Africae Munus* (nos. 99-131) lists these agents to include: Bishops, priests, missionaries, permanent deacons, consecrated persons, seminarians, catechists and lay people. This is in addition to the Holy Spirit, the Church and Family listed in *Ecclesia in Africa* (no. 92), and in the *Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission* (nos. 34-39).

In this light, *Africae Munus* (no. 30) describes the Church in Africa as a "sentinel" or a "watchman." As the way, a watchman or a sentinel, the Church in Africa "feels the duty to be present wherever human suffering exists and to make heard the silent cry of the innocent who suffer persecution or of peoples whose government mortgage their present and the future for personal interests (*Africae Munus*, no. 30).

This vocation and mission of the Church-Family requires humility and docility in spirit. It requires the type of docility we see in the Suffering

Servant of God of Second Isaiah, closely reused by Luke. Like the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah, the Church-Family in Africa must see herself as a leader-servant. She must continue to sing the four songs of the suffering servant of Yahweh, individually and collectively (cf. Isaiah 42: 1-4; 49:1-16; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Such music is in line with the very concept of election we began this essay with. Election, as cited by Scobie (*Ways of our God*, 472) must come with a responsibility. According to Shaw, (*Pilgrim People*, 1990, 8), election as it relates to the “the notion of a people of God is never a claim to superiority but rather a call to service.” Abraham and his descendants, as we noted, were blessed in Genesis 12:2, so that they in turn could be a blessing to others. It is the Church-Family vocation to be of service to humanity. Avery Dulles (*Models of the Church*, 81-113) has commented extensively on this servant model of the Church. In one place he wrote:

The Church is the body of Christ, the suffering servant, and hence the servant of the Church. “So it is that the Church announces the coming of the Kingdom not only in word, through preaching and proclamation, but more particularly in work, in her ministry of reconciliation, of binding up wounds, of suffering service, of healing... And the Lord was the ‘man for others,’ so must the Church be ‘the community for others....’” (*Models of the Church*, 85).

In addition to all this, the Church in Africa must continue to pay closer attention to the universal story of salvation in Luke 3:5 and Isaiah 40. 4-5 directed to “all flesh,” (*pasa sarx, kol-bāśār*). Intertextually, one notices that starting in Luke 3:5 there is a departure from Mark. Luke prefers to lengthen Isaiah’s quotation from Isaiah 40:3 to Isaiah 40:5. He follows the LXX of Isaiah 40 closely with few changes (Burnett, “Eschatological,” 17). He skips *panta* (all) from his quotation and alters a singular noun *tracheia* (rough “way”, “country”) to plural *tracheiai* (roughs or “rough ways”). Luke also deletes *eis pedia* (plain) and inserts *eis hodous leias* (smooth ways) affirming his fondness of the way (Burnett, 18).

Rhetorically the levelling of the roughness or the crookedness of ways, the valleys filled, and mountain brought low, are the challenges facing the Church-Family in Africa. These “roughness” and “valleys,” are neutralized and eliminated not only by the presence of God in her midst, but in the humble evangelizing and prophetic missions of the Church. David Balch (“Luke”, 2003,1110) suggests that these valley and mountain imageries be viewed as a fulfilment of the *Magnificat*, where the Lord “scattered the proud,” “brought down the powerful,” “filled

the hungry with good things,” and “sent away the rich empty handed” (Luke 1:51-53).

However, as Luke sums up his use of Isaiah 40:3-5, he skips the phrase *kaiophthēsetai hē doxa kuriou* (the glory of the Lord shall appear) from Isaiah 40:5, perhaps in his view, the glory of the Lord is near. For him, with the prophetic role of John, the glory of the long awaited savior is near. Luke, as affirmed in Burnett (“Eschatological,” 18) therefore uses the remaining section of Isaiah word-for word: *kai ophtai pasa sarx to sotērion tou theou* (and all flesh shall see the salvation of God). For Isaiah, the oppressed, whether in Babylon exile or scattered throughout ravished Judah, are not just part of all flesh, they are a covenant people. Many, including Meek (*Gentile Mission*, 2008, 200 and Nolland (*Luke*, 1989-93, 138) have observed that “one of the clearest rationales for Luke’s extension of the Isaiah quotation is visible with Isaiah’s universal emphasis on divine salvation to all flesh and mankind, whose preaching is entrusted as well to the Church-Family in Africa. It’s a reminder of Simeon, who, when taking the baby Jesus proclaims him as *to sotērion* (the salvation) of God that according to Mallan (*Reading*, 2008, 71) has been prepared for “all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:30-32).” In fact, it is only as the narrative of Luke-Acts unfolds that this promise comes to fruition as the gospel is taken to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles ( Acts 1:8; Acts 2-7; Acts 8; Acts 10-11; 15).

This has led to Culpepper’s (“Luke” 16) evaluation that “Luke’s most dramatic insight is his perception that Jesus announced salvation for all people alike.” In Luke, God sent Elisha and Elijah to a widow in Sidon and to a leper from Syria (Luke 4:24-30), territories outside Israel. In Luke, inclusiveness of God’s mercy knows no bounds. It reaches to those from the East, West, North and South (Luke 13:29). God’s Son, the Christ of Luke sent his disciples to inclusively preach to all nations (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). He gives the Church-Family in Africa a template for out-reach to sinners, Samaritans, tax collectors, men, women, the outcast, the poor and the rich. And a template to upset “through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thoughts, sources of inspiration and models of life which are contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 19). Christ also gives the Church-Family in Africa a template for dialogue and listening skills to everyone, “and not simply those who would tell him what he would like to hear” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 31). Of course, this is the church

Pope Francis prefers. He also prefers a church that is “living in the midst of the homes of the sons and daughters” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no.28). He prefers a church that is “in contact with the homes and lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 28). He prefers a Church-Family in Africa which ‘goes forth’ and whose doors are open to everyone” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 43-47; Udoekpo, *Israel’s Prophets*, 81-86).

### Conclusion

In the preceding discussion on “The Church-Family in Africa that witness the Gospel to everyone” with “perspective from Luke 3:4-6 and Isaiah 40:4-5,” the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) The Church-Family in Africa are not only faced with many challenges and blessings and prospects as discussed thus far, but is still growing into becoming that which Christ commanded. (2) The Church-Family in Africa is invited to become the way, the sentinel, the watchman, a prophet and a servant leader in the likes of the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah and John the Baptist. She is invited to become an agent of evangelization who witness the gospel to everyone, poor and rich alike, irrespective of gender, culture, socio-political class and geographical boundaries.(3) Above all, the Church-Family in Africa must reread and relate Isaiah 40: 4-5 and Luke 3:4-6 in such a way that she can draw lessons from its rich metaphors, symbols, images and theology of the church as family, servant, herald, prophets, wilderness, the voice and the way to salvation for all Africans.

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