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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

Higher, Deeper, Wider, Together

The first two articles in this issue are about forgiveness in Matthew. They arrived on my desktop within a few weeks of each other, and practically begged to be published together. In *The Paradox of the New Testament Concept of Unmerited Divine Grace and Conditional Forgiveness in Matthew's Gospel* Cephas Tushima delves deeply into Matthew to discover the tension between the concepts of grace and merit. He then casts his theological net wider to gather evidence of tension between other concepts in Scripture. In so doing he links exegesis to Biblical theology and concludes that it is necessary for us to live with the tensions. *The Jewish Background to Interpersonal Forgiveness in Matthew* by Isaac Mbabazi is also an exegetical work, relating Matthew's depiction of forgiveness to its Jewish background in Sirach. This essay, heavy on Greek analysis, remains focused on the passages and their Jewish background. In Africa, Christians are expected to forgive their enemies, just as in every other era and area of the world because God has forgiven us. Both these exegetical articles contribute to Biblical scholarship in the wider world so that together their readers may become mature in Christ.

Onesimus Ngundu's article, *Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage,* is subtitled, "A History of Church Marriages and a Case for an African Christian Customary Marriage Ceremony". This is an example of African theology as contextualisation. Ngundu not only examines his own culture regarding marriage customs, but also that of the cultures of the West. He puts the conflict between church weddings and customary marriage traditions in historical and theological perspective. The article concludes with an actual ceremony that points the way forward in solving this difficult conflict. In this article, Ngundu is both scholarly and practical.

Pastoral education institutions in Africa generally design their training of church leaders with the assumption that each graduate will pastor one church. We all realize, however, that most graduates will be multi-church pastors because Africa's swiftly growing church simply hasn't enough leaders, especially trained pastors. Philip Morrison's article, *Implications of Paul's Model for Leadership Training in Light of Church Growth in Africa*, provides a biblically radical way forward. Many Bible colleges and seminaries in Africa are deeply concerned about institutional survival due to the financial pressure of keeping such expensive facilities functioning. Taking Biblical patterns, methods and goals of leadership training seriously means our institutions will need to change, but in changing they will also survive, thrive, and serve the church. This article is among the most important ever printed in AJET.

In two Afterwords, Ernst Wendland and Jim Harries carry forward AJET's recent discussion on Mother Tongue Theological Education (MTTE). Wendland's wealth of experience shows in his well-researched article. Harries uses a story to reply to Gehman's initial Afterword in our last issue. But what do multi-lingual African lecturers make of all this missionary palaver about MTTE? AJET invites more responses, especially by African readers.

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Rev. James Reynolds in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada was my volunteer co-editor for this issue of AJET at a time when I was more than usually over-committed. Without his help, it would have been further delayed. Once again, and in a new way, his friendship has been a blessing to me. His skill and wisdom have gone a long way to putting this issue in your hands. Thanks, Jim.

The Paradox of the New Testament Concept of Unmerited Divine Grace and Conditional Forgiveness in Matthew's Gospel

by Cephas T. A. Tushima

Introduction

Since the Reformation, the doctrine of unmerited divine grace has been central in Protestant soteriology. Millard J. Erickson, in highlighting the importance of this concept in the divine–human relationship in general, describes how Karl Barth captures the Protestant stance on grace: "*Scripture teaches that what unites man with God is, from God's side, his grace.*"[1] Specifically, with respect to salvation, after citing Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8–9, Erickson insists, "*Justification is something completely undeserved. It is not an achievement. It is an obtainment, not an attainment. Even faith is not some good work which God must reward with salvation. It is God's gift. It is not the cause of our salvation, but the means by which we receive it.*"[2]

This manner of construing salvation, in the Reformed Tradition of *Sola Gracia*, does not seem to be as clear cut in the Gospels (especially Matthew) as it sometimes appears to be in the Pauline epistles. This study seeks to address the following questions: Is there an antithesis between grace and merit (works) in Matthew? Is this seeming paradox uniquely Matthean in the biblical context? How are we to deal with it?

The Paradox of Merit and Grace in Matthew

There is an incongruous co-existence of the themes of grace and merit in Matthew. Examples of grace passages include the parable of the Servants in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–16), and the Father's prerogative to assign positions in heaven (Matt 20:21–23). A number of the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 fit into this group as well. Examples of merit-based teachings include the Sermon on the Mount passages (Matt 6:12, 14-15; cf. 5:48; 7:1), and the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:15–35). Eduard Schweizer underscores the tension between these groups as he cautions with regard to Matthew 6:12, "*Any misunderstanding that God's forgiveness can be earned by our actions is exploded by the parable of the workers paid the same for unequal work (20:1–16).*"[3]

The merit passages in Matthew are hotly debated. One important question

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[1] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 164.

[2] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 959. For a fuller discussion of grace, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1941), 427–431.

[3] Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Trans. David E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 155.

associated with them relates to whether their implications are temporal or eschatological in nature. The scholarly responses to the first passage (Matt 6:12, 14–15) are much more varied than the responses to the other passages. 1) When God refuses to forgive those who would not forgive others, he refers to the inhibition of their progress in sanctification and the divine denial of blessings to them.[4] 2) The divine begrudging of forgiveness is limited to fettered fellowship and the lack of capacity on the part of the one failing to forgive to receive forgiveness from God.[5] 3) God's withholding of forgiveness for the unforgiving is eschatological in nature, i.e., it has implications for ultimate destiny in that the people God refuses to forgive were not saved in the first instance.[6] 4) John Nolland sees the passage in temporal, not eschatological, terms. He comments on Matt 6:12 thus, "*The aorist tense in the correlated clause ('as we have released') relates better with a day-to-day 'clearing of debts' with God than with the prospect of a once-for-all, final eschatological forgiveness (a present tense would suit that better).*"[7] Prominent amongst the challenges these texts pose to commentators is the possible ascription of non-forgiveness to God. How can God not forgive? A careful reading of many commentators betrays a desire to avoid charging the all-loving God with the unseemly evil of failing to forgive.

A similar problem, perhaps a worse one, attends the passage in Matthew 18:15–35. Here is a parable set out to address the issue of an unforgiving attitude, namely, to show that one needs to forgive without limit. In Peter's question as to whether he should forgive up to the seventh time, he raised the bar beyond that which was conventional. Donald Senior cites Amos 2:4, 6 and Job 33:29 to show that the traditionally accepted limit for forbearing repeated injury in Peter's heritage was four times. Yet, in his response to Peter, Jesus points out that setting a limit itself misses the mark.[8] The reader, therefore, experiences some cognitive dissonance, as he expects to see repeated forgiveness in the parable being used to demonstrate the Lord's teaching but instead finds that the master (who in the parable represents God) forgives only

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[4] John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1–7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 397.

[5] Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew" in *The New American Commentary*, Vol.22 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 120-121.

[6] D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5–7,* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 69–70.

[7] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 290–291. For more on eschatological forgiveness, see also Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 116-117.

[8] Donald Senior, C.P., "Matthew 18:21–35," *Interpretation* 41:4 (1987): 403–407. Senior further observes with regards to Peter's question, "*Yet even posing the question about limits for forgiveness is to miss the mark … Jesus' reply expands the limits beyond any horizon. It seems to reverse the pledge of blood vengeance 'seventy-seven fold' made by Lamech, descendent of Cain and inheritor of his rage (Gen. 4:24)*" (404).

once but even withdraws the forgiveness due to his servant's failure to forgive. Bernard Scott correctly links this parable with the forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer when he notes that it is a narrative imitation of the forgiveness petition of the Lord's Prayer.[9] Indeed, he keenly observes,

> *The reader's expectations about the kingdom conflict with those of the story. The conflict between expectations and story blocks the normal transference of metaphor, that is, in this parable the transference is not on the basis of similarity but dissimilarity of juxtaposition. There is then a 'gap' between story and kingdom.[10]*

The efforts at drawing the connecting lines from the story to the kingdom have often been so focused on such minutiae as attempting to enumerate and explicate the repertoire of Matthew and his first readers, and historical critical issues, that insufficient attention is paid to the more substantive matter addressed in the text.[11] Other approaches barely scratch the surface of the issues involved. A case in point is R.T. France's analysis of the Matthew 18 parable. Commenting on verse 35, he writes, *"Jesus' application picks up specifically the last scene of the parable, but it is based on the parable as a whole. Those who will not forgive cannot expect to be forgiven."[12]*

The parable addresses not just those who expect to be forgiven, but even much more so those who have been forgiven but fail to forgive others. At the end of the parable, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying "οὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ποιήσει ὑμῖν" ("Even thus shall my heavenly Father do to you . . ." Matt 18:35, author's translation). That is to say, the heavenly Father will treat the one that does not forgive in the same way the master in the parable treated the unforgiving servant - by withdrawing the already bestowed forgiveness. This then creates tension in Christian (especially Reformed) soteriology, which teaches irrevocable redemption (once saved, saved forever – with no prospect of losing one's salvation). Suffice it to say that this tension in Matthew, namely, the uneasy relationship between grace and merit, is found in the other Gospel traditions as well. In Luke, for example, merit seems to be upheld in passages such as 6:31–38, which consists of a series of injunctions that make up the concluding part of the Luke's Sermon on the Plain, while grace is taught in 15:11–32, the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Loving

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[9] Bernard Brandon Scott, "The King's Accounting: Matthew 18:23–34," *JBL* 104:3 (1985): 429–42. Martinus C. De Boer likewise recognizes the link between the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:12, 14–15) and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:35) and goes further to point out that the former adumbrates the latter in his "Ten Thousand Talents? Matthew's Interpretation and Redaction of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23–35)," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 221.

[10] Scott, "The King's Accounting", 441.

[11] Cf. De Boer, "Ten Thousand Talents?"

[12] R.T. France, *Matthew* (TNTC, Leicester: IVP, 1985), 278.

Father and in 18:10–14, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple.

Grace Versus Merit in the New Testament

The common reactions to the apparent tensions in Scripture, like the one at hand, usually either pit one section of the canon against another and somehow show one to be superior to the other or adopt a harmonistic approach. For example, Thomas Brodie, in trying to unravel the origins of the New Testament, has attempted to demonstrate Matthean literary dependence on Paul's teaching in Romans. He writes at the beginning of chapter 20:

> *In the entire New Testament, there are only two books which begin by speaking of Jesus as a descendant of David: Romans and Matthew … . The purpose of this chapter is to indicate that this Davidic detail is the tip of an iceberg: Romans is one of Matthew's sources. Matthew has taken the difficult text of Romans and in varying ways has rendered it into a form that is vivid, positive and practical.*[13]

Michael Goulder likewise argues for some dependence of Matthew on Pauline teaching.[14]

Contrary to the last two works, in his study of the intertextual connection between Matthew and Romans, David Sim comes to the conclusion that Matthew did not only contradict Paul, but was actively anti-Pauline. Specifically, he writes, "*As I indicated at the beginning of this study, there is a good deal of evidence in the Gospel that Matthew was more than simply non-Pauline; he was in fact anti-Pauline.*"[15] His outlined approach to the issue is not to look simply for verbal and thematic echoes of Paul in Matthew on the assumption of Matthean deference to Pauline authoritative doctrinal priority, but to listen for Matthean responses to or corrections of Paul. What Sim fails to tell the reader is that his suggested approach is based on the *assumption* of conflict between Matthew and Paul, for there is no *a priori* demonstration of such opposition between the evangelist and the apostle in Sim's work. At this point, it becomes important to inquire whether this seeming paradox is uniquely Matthean.

Towards a Biblical Understanding of the Grace–Merit Paradox

In discussing the Bible, we must always keep in perspective its Hebrew (and later, Jewish) roots. In his treatment of these mercy and judgment passages in Matthew, Senior draws his readers' attention to Matthew's Jewish

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[13] Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings* (New Testament Monographs 1: Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004), 206.

[14] Michael Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 156-170.

[15] Davd C. Sim, "Matthew and the Pauline Corpus: A Preliminary Intertextual Study," *JSNT* 31.4 (2009): 410.

heritage. He writes,

> *Matthew insists, therefore, on responsible action. Christian life is not a matter of mere aspiration or good intentions; faith must be translated into just and compassionate acts. This emphasis on responsibility may reflect Matthew's strong Jewish heritage in which obedience to the Torah was always the touchstone of authentic faith. His concern with judgment is the corollary of the concern for responsible action.*[16]

Senior, in my view, has got it right in this quote. The New Testament authors were Jews of the Second Temple period, and, without prejudice to their inspiration, were also products of their historical moment. As such they held similar presuppositions and employed similar exegetical approaches as their Second Temple contemporaries. Thus, they were no armchair doctrinaires, but men who brought into sharp focus the ethical implications of their pedagogy for daily life. In other words, germane to Second Temple theology was striving to hold in tension both divine grace and human responsibility. This pattern is evident in other Second Temple literature as well (cf. Sir 28:1–5; 51:29–30; *m. Yoma* 8.6).

1. Justification in Tension in Paul and James

Within the New Testament, the recognition of this pattern in the Epistle of James has long caused some to construe it as being anti-Pauline.[17] Others have sought to show that James does not contradict Paul because they use δικαιοω ("justify") in two different senses.[18] Maxwell argues persuasively that δικαιοω in Paul has a forensic sense (i.e., "imputed righteousness"), while in James it is used in demonstrative reference (i.e., "to show to be righteous"). He explains further, "δικαιοω *carries its forensic meaning when the contrast is between works and faith, while it carries its demonstrative meaning when the contrast is between works and words*."[19] Maxwell illustrates these two uses of δικαιοω in a single Apostolic Father, Clement of Rome. Clement's use of δικαιοω in the illustrative manner is found in 1 Clement 30:3, while his use of it in the forensic sense is found in 1 Clement 38:2.[20] That these two streams of thought could flow seamlessly within the writing of one author, who was most likely influenced by both Paul and James (i.e., informed by the biblical mindset) at points where he was placing differing accents, demonstrates how feasible it is for two different authors with these two divergent concerns to

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[16] Senior, "Matthew18:21–35," 407.

[17] In this view, Sim observes, "The epistle of James, with its emphasis on justification by works as well as by faith, has long been considered a corrective on Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone" ("Matthew and the Pauline Corpus," 411).

[18] David R. Maxwell, "Justified by Works, not by Faith alone: Reconciling Paul and James", *Concordia Journal* 33:4 (October 2007): 375.

[19] Maxwell, "Justified by Works," 376.

[20] Maxwell, "Justified by Works," 378.

employ differing emphases. Seen in this way, then, James, like Matthew, should not be viewed as gainsaying or even correcting Paul, but as concerned, in a typical Second Temple fashion, with the ethical outworking of one's faith commitments. Ebbie Smith similarly recognizes that James' teaching stresses the need for genuine faith to flow into responsible action. On this, he comments, "*For James, faith and works are simply inseparable. Genuine faith is no empty claim (2:14-17), not mere acceptance of a creed or body of teaching (2:18-20), but that which produces obedient life (2:21-26).*"[21] Put differently, then, the seeming contradiction between James and Paul (on the issue of works and grace) is merely a difference of emphasis that can be confusing due to the use of the same terms with different denotations.

2. Justification in Tension in Pauline Thinking

This discussion, then, leads us to this same seeming contradiction that is also present in Paul. Paul is known to be the apostle of justification by faith alone (apart from works) per excellence. Yet, his writings are not without a stringent requirement of works. Rather than construe these differing emphases in Paul in the same dialectic of grace and works, contemporary scholarship has chosen to talk about them using the grammatical category of the "indicative and imperative." Herman Ridderbos furnishes a succinct definition of this dialectic thus,

"*What is meant is that the new life in its moral manifestation is at one time proclaimed and posited as the fruit of the redemptive work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit—the indicative; elsewhere, however, it is put with no less force as a categorical demand—the imperative.*"[22]

Ridderbos is aware of the apparent tension in Pauline thought in this regard. In reference to the frequency of occurrence of the indicative and the imperative in Pauline discourse, he observes, "*[T]he one as well as the other occurs with such force and consistency that some have indeed spoken of a 'dialectical paradox' and of an 'antinomy.'*"[23]

Paul Wernle, well ahead of his time, had correctly perceived this structure

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[21] Ebbie Smith, "Unraveling the Untangled: Perspectives on the Lingering Debate Concerning Grace and Works in James and Paul," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 52. Indeed, in terms very similar to those of Maxwell, Smith explains the apparent divergences between Paul and James thus, *"Paul begins with the Christian life at its commencement and declares salvation comes by faith alone with no reliance on works of the law (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). James, on the other hand, begins from the standpoint of one professing the faith who needs to be reminded that genuine faith must issue in good works (James 2:14-26). James does not declare faith unnecessary but only teaches that the alternative of faith without works is unthinkable"* (p. 53).

[22] Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (tr. John Richard DeWitt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 253.

[23] Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 253. Here with reference to E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (Trans. John Marsh. New York: Macmillian 1955), 181.

of Pauline ethics to be a contradiction. Within this tensive complexity,[24] Wernle understood the indicative in terms of the Holy Spirit as the dynamic that translates the believer to a higher world, and the imperative in terms of the Holy Spirit as the potentiality resident in the believer empowering him for transformation. This is what Wernle describes as the abrupt merging of "*an ethic of miracle and an ethic of will.*"[25] The ethic of sovereign miracle is found in the doctrinal portions of Paul's epistles, where he dwells on matters of the believers' ἐν Χριστῷ ("in Christ") relationship. The ethic of the human will is found in the ethical portions of the epistles where right living flows from the redemptive miracle of the "in Christ" relationship.

While this structure of Pauline ethics is found in all his epistles (especially those written to churches), Russell Pregeant demonstrates how it is even more accentuated in the book of Romans.[26] Taking his case study from Romans 2, Pregeant shows that verses 6, 13 stand on the logic of recompense, which is in an apparent antithesis with the more commonly appreciated Pauline logic of grace (cf. Rom 3:21–28). After a careful discussion of these passages, Pregeant concludes,

Thus when Paul speaks of recompense he shows that his justification theory cannot be abstracted from the background within which it arises: to forfeit the moral nature of God or human responsibility for ethical actions would be to undercut the whole point of grace itself.[27]

Passages suffused with warnings of judgment based on earthly life patterns (the very kind that if coming from the pen of another biblical author would have been viewed by Christian theologians as being Law or work-oriented) are strewn across the terrain of the Pauline corpus (cf. Rom 8:12–17; 1 Cor 3:8–15; 4:3–5; 6:9; 9:24–27; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 6:7, 8).

All this goes to demonstrate that the paradoxical juxtaposition of grace and merit within the same canonical space is not uniquely Matthean; it is present throughout the New Testament (including the Pauline corpus). Indeed, it can be said to be a biblical pattern. The matter of Law–Gospel antithesis is derived from the question of the nature of the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants: whether there is continuity or discontinuity, i.e., whether there is works in the former and grace in the latter. Our foregoing discussion evinces that even within the New Testament, the matter cannot be

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[24] A term adapted from Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory*. 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), xv.
[25] Paul Wernle, *Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus* (Freiburg i. B. und Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, 1897), 89; as quoted in William D. Dennison, "Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics," *CTJ* 14:1 (1979): 55–78 [57].
[26] Russell Pregeant, "Grace and Recompense: Reflections on a Pauline Paradox," *JAAR* 47:1 (March 1979): 73–96.
[27] Pregeant, "Grace and Recompense," 77.

reduced to an "either/or" approach but has to be taken in a "both/and" way. The same can be said to be true of the Old Testament as well. A few examples will serve to illustrate the point.

3. Grace and Works in Tension in the Old Testament

Early in Genesis we are confronted with the paradox of grace and works. At the declaration of the coming deluge, a redemptive hint is also dropped - that Noah had obtained grace with God (Gen 6:8). Yet, in the very next verse, we are told clearly that Noah was a righteous man in his generation; he was blameless; and that he walked with God (Gen 6:9). But in the MT, Genesis 6:8 is the end of one section, and the phrase אלה תולדת ("These are the generations of") in Genesis 6:9 marks the beginning of a new section. So, was it that divine favor gave Noah enabling grace to walk with God, or is his election due to divine foreknowledge, or is he selected in view of his uprightness? It is hard to say from the text. The goal here is not to exegete this passage but to point out that the incongruous co-existence of grace and work is germane to the entire biblical text.

Abraham's call by God and his walk with God is another example. There is nothing in his call narrative (Gen 12:1–3) that would suggest the basis of God's dealings with him, hence the intense interpretative activity of Second Temple exegetes in these sections of the Abraham narrative as is seen in the re-told Bible.[28] Grace seems to be the only reasonable grounds for it. Yet subsequently, YHWH laid demands on Abraham. YHWH's numerous demands on Abraham are summed up in the words התהלך לפני והיה תמים ("walk before me and be blameless," Gen 17:1). It is only by this faithful walk that Abraham could receive the full benefits of his covenant relationship with YHWH (Gen 17:2).

This pattern can be extended to other parts of the Old Testament as well. The election of the Davidic house (2 Sam 7:5-16) did not remove the requirement of an ethical walk with YHWH (cf. 1 Kgs 2:1-4). The same interweaving of grace and merit runs like a thread through the prophets. In Isaiah (1:2–4), YHWH presents his act of grace as he says, בנים גדלתי ורוממתי ("children have I raised and brought up," 1:2). Rearing children is not a choice that the children make, but they do make the choice between submission and obedience or rebellion and disobedience (1:3–4). Warnings of judgment according to deeds dominate the rest of the chapter (cf. Isa 1:16–20), and, indeed, the rest of the book as well.

Perspectives on the Paradox

Our study thus far has shown that there is a palpable tensive relationship of grace and merit in Matthew. We have also seen that this phenomenon is not

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[28] Cf. *Jub* 11–12; *Ps-J Targum* Gen 11:28.

uniquely Matthean, but is germane to the Second Temple milieu of Matthew and other New Testament authors (and the OT cloth from which it was cut). We can make four suggestions for living with the complexity.

1. Paradox is inescapable in the biblical frame or mindset. This is reflected in such pivotal Christian theological concepts as Trinitarianism (the question of the one-and-the-many), the incarnation (Christ as the God-Man), divine sovereignty and human freewill, election and faith in Christ, being seated hidden in Christ in the heavenlies but living on earth, being in the world but not of the world, the already-but-not-yet *eschaton*, the two-covenants-one-Scripture, and such like. None of these issues can be perfectly resolved or satisfactorily explained beyond all doubt.[29] We simply have to live with them, as faith communities have done through millennia. The search for perfect non-contradictory theological systems in the biblical text is a modernist enlightenment development that has no roots in biblical faith.[30]

2. The foregoing notwithstanding, it has to be kept in mind that biblical faith operates in the mode of action informed by knowledge. It is not just affirmations of a set of doctrines; neither is it purely about doing things (important as both of these are). It is an outflow of life - it is about being. In this sense it includes cognition (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy), both of which stream from the transformative encounter with the living Saviour. Encountering the Son of God brings liberating knowledge of the truth; and the truth frees us to love and serve God and neighbor (John 8:32; 15:3; 17:17; Rom 6:14, 18–22; 8:1–6; Gal 5:6). As pointed out above, the New Testament authors were products of Second Temple Judaism, in which Torah obedience was central to life. Thus, for all of them (Paul included), obedience to the ethical demands of the Torah (and all of YHWH's revealed truth) was non-negotiable. While they affirmed salvation by grace through faith, nevertheless, they neither discounted obedience to revealed truth nor sacrificed moral integrity on the altar of faith.

3. Not infrequently, grace and judgment are juxtaposed in biblical literature.

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[29] This is not to say that plausible attempts cannot be made to address all reasonable doubts.

[30] J. Leslie Houlden points out that redaction critics (operating with modernist presuppositions) assume that the biblical authors had a high capacity for achieving intellectual consistency and lived through life situations that made it possible for them to sustain such consistency. He however calls such assumptions reckless and suggests they should be attended with greater skepticism than is usually the case. In general, Houlden states, *"It is possible, indeed more common than not, for a person to hold views that are formally inconsistent or at least tend in different directions, and to be either ignorant of the fact or unconcerned about it, or else incapable, because of practical pressures, of remedying it. Nevertheless, he functions as a unity: he is, in that sense, all of a piece."* See "The Puzzle of Matthew and the Law," in Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton (eds.), *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, 117.

Grace unveils the ethic of miracle which is what God does, while the judgment texts urge the ethic of the will, pointing believers towards right choices. The judgment texts, in other words, serve didactic purposes and furnish a basis for ethical motivation, and should be understood in this way.

4. Paradox is God's default way of acting. True to the nature of the divine-human interactions, all of the dialogue partners involved in the communication event have divinely sanctioned roles to play. Often the one side of the paradox relates to God's gracious provision, while the other has provisions for human appropriation of the divine bestowal. In salvation, for instance, we are saved by the sovereign gracious redemptive act in the Christ-event, but faith is the hand that receives this offered grace (Eph 2:8; 2 Thess 2:13). Similarly, sanctification is the gracious work of the divine Spirit in the believer's life, but human obedience is the hand that extends to appropriate it (Rom 6:11–13, 19; Phil 2:12–16; 1 Thess 4:3–7).

Conclusion

In addressing the apparent paradox of unmerited redemption and conditional forgiveness, we agree that the paradox does exist in Matthew. We have also seen that it not a uniquely Matthean perspective, but one found throughout the Bible. Our conclusion is not to resolve it but to live with it as communities of faith have historically done. The hymn writer says, "God works in a mysterious way." Part of that mystery is that God chooses to be paradoxical in his dealings with his people, as we have seen in many other respects. We are not called to know God exhaustively, and we never will. Similarly, it is an exercise in futility to attempt to resolve his divine paradoxes; we need to learn to live with them. Thus, even with regard to forgiveness, God forgives us unconditionally, but the way to appropriate and make it ours is by forgiving others unconditionally as well, (Eph 4:32; 1 Pet 2:21; 3:8–9). This is in perfect agreement with the Matthean golden rule: Do to others what you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12; cf. Luke 6:31).

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The Jewish Background to Interpersonal Forgiveness in Matthew

By Isaac Kahwa Mbabazi

This essay seeks to contribute to Matthean scholarship by reconsidering the debate on the Jewish background to interpersonal forgiveness in Matthew. It proposes that Sirach 28:1-7 is not only a possible Jewish background to the parable of the unmerciful debtor of Matthew 18:23-35, as has been argued, but also to the teaching in Matthew 6:12, 14-15. This claim rests on five underlying concepts shared by both the Matthean and Sirach passages: conditionality (ie, a condition to be met before we can be forgiven); reciprocity (ie, our forgiveness is related to our willingness to forgive); the link between mercy and forgiveness; reluctance to practise mercy and forgiveness; and God's judgement on those who refuse to practise mercy and forgiveness. There is also a link that exists between these first two concepts in both the Matthean and Sirach passages. And there is a further, complex link that exists between the final three concepts listed above, a link that can be seen in both Matthew and Sirach.

Framing the Inquiry

The context of Matthew's teaching about interpersonal forgiveness has been studied extensively. As has become well known, Matthew is set in the first-century CE, when some of Christianity's fundamental claims about forgiveness came to be articulated and perhaps slowly differentiated from those of Judaism.[1] As a Jew and someone raised within a Jewish culture, Jesus knew that God is gracious and forgiving, notions which are plain in the Old Testament. Controversy, however, surrounds the description of the rhetoric of forgiveness in the Old Testament and its rhetoric in the New Testament, and particularly in Matthew's Gospel. Some scholars have claimed that the first Gospel presents essentially the same understanding of forgiveness as the Old Testament.[2] David J. Reimer, however, has argued for the possibility of a gap between the idea of forgiveness in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Having studied carefully Jesus' statements on forgiveness in Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and 18:21-35, he notices that, unlike Matthew's Gospel where Jesus' statements on forgiveness place pivotal importance on interpersonal forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness is virtually

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[1] Cf. for example the Pauline tradition (Rom 4:7; Eph 1:7; 4:32; Col 1:14; 2 Cor 2:7, 10), the Markan tradition (Mark 11:25-26) and the Lukan tradition (Luke 11:2-4; 17:3-4).
[2] E.g., F.C. Fensham, "The Legal Background of Mt. vi 12", *NovT* 4 (1960), 1-2; W. A. Quanbeck, "Forgiveness", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. George A. Buttrick, Nashville: Abingdon, (1962), 319.

absent from the Old Testament.[3] He examines carefully the relevant forgiveness texts in the LXX: the stories of Jacob and Esau (Gen 32–33), Joseph and his brothers (Gen 45; 50:15-21), Saul and Samuel (1 Sam 15:24-31), David and Abigail-Nabal (1 Sam 25), Shimei and David (2 Sam 16:5-14; 19:16-23; 1 Kings 2:8-9, 36-46), together with the narrative in Sirach 28:1-7. [4]

To answer the question of how to bridge the gap between the Old Testament and New Testament (Matthew's Gospel in particular) on the teaching about interpersonal forgiveness, Reimer proposes the so-called "intertestamental period" (Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha) as a possible place where theological sense could be made of the two Testaments.[5] Most relevant in these materials to the subject under enquiry is Sirach (28:1-7, cp. 5:4-7; 17:25-32; 18:8-14). In his treatment of the Sirach text, Reimer makes a reasonable connection between Sirach 28:1-4[6] and other Sirach texts. He shows, for example, how in Sirach 5:4-7; 17:25-32; 18:8-14, notions of death and judgement sharpen the consideration of divine forgiveness. He points out that in Sirach 28:1-2, this combination of traditional Jewish concepts (death as punishment for sin, obedience to the commandments of the law and loyalty to the covenant) produces the conclusion that divine judgement can be influenced by human activity. Those who lack mercy, he argues, obstruct forgiveness from God when they seek it.[7] Aspects of the teaching about forgiveness contained in Sirach 28:1-7 are similar to its teaching in Matthew 6:12, 14-15; 18:23-35 (cp. Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; Jas 2:13). Matthew 18:23-35 particularly links forgiving to judgement. On the ground of this thematic connection between 18:23-35 and 6:12, 14-15, one may think that the idea of "not being forgiven by the Father" in 6:15 implies punishment. Roger Mohrlang has the same feeling. Matthew 6:14-15 is listed among the texts in which he thinks judgement is implicit.[8] The parallelism between Sirach 28:1-7 and Matthew 18:23-35 has made Reimer think of Sirach 28:4 as a possible basis for the parable of the unmerciful debtor (18:23-35).[9] He suggests this from the conceptual structure of the two texts. This proposal is persuasive enough, and I endorse it. As an additional comment, because of the underlying idea of conditionality in them, a possibility that Reimer fails to notice, one may also

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[3] David J. Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology: The Case of Interpersonal Forgiveness", in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (eds John Barton and David J. Reimer, Macon: Mercer University Press, (1996), 271-272.

[4] David J. Reimer, "Stories of Forgiveness: Narrative Ethics and the Old Testament", in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (eds. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim and W. Brian Aucker, Leiden: Brill, 2007), 359-378.

[5] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 276-277.

[6] The content of this text is provided later in this essay where it is discussed at length.

[7] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 279.

[8] Roger Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: a Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (SNTSMS 48, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 51.

[9] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 277-279.

think of Sirach 28:1-4 as a possible basis for the teaching in Matthew 6:12, 14-15; cp. Matthew 5:7; 7:1-2.

> Reimer concludes his reflection as follows:
> In the world of early Judaism and nascent Christianity, notions of interpersonal forgiveness overlap almost entirely. Despite the claims that have been made for the radical nature of Jesus' teaching on this subject, he was heir to an interpretative tradition which had already linked the love command to the idea of forgiveness and had begun to draw out some of the implications of this move. When Jesus' teaching is seen side by side with the Hebrew Bible, the distance between them is great. However, the *noncanonical* literature I have cited reflects the process of interpreting authoritative texts for their communities. And the range of concerns displayed by *these* communities – Jews and Christians around the turn of the era – on this issue are very similar (we might even say, the same).[10]

Reimer's careful analysis of the theme of interpersonal forgiveness in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is a valuable enterprise. His handling of the data in an attempt to establish the place where theological sense could be made of the two Testaments is quite reasonable. With regard to the interpersonal forgiveness theme in the Gospel of Matthew, Reimer's handling of the Matthean text is generally fair. He states the responsibilities of each party in the forgiveness process; that is, responsibility of granting forgiveness and that of seeking forgiveness. He notes, for example, the fact that in Matthew 5:23-24, it is the offender's obligations that are in view. He contrasts this text with its parallel in Mark 11:25, and points to the fact that in Mark it is the offended party's obligations that are in view. He then stresses that this teaching in Mark 11:25 is very much of a piece with that concluding the Matthean Prayer (6:14-15), with the exception that here the onus is placed on the offended person to freely forgive so as not to impede divine forgiveness.[11]

Regarding Matthew 18:23-35, Reimer accurately locates the story of the unmerciful debtor in its immediate context of Peter's question (18:21) and of its wider context of Jesus' teaching on reconciliation between the community members (18:15-20) in the framework of Jesus' teaching on the maintenance of relationships in the community (Matt 18). He then notes that the picture given is of an offended party going to the offending party to point out the fault, returning with one or two others in the case of a negative response by the offending party, and ostracising (as he conceives it) the offending party who refuses to repent.[12]

There is, however, a point of uncertainty with Reimer's reading of the Matthean material: his interpretation of the fate of the potential unrepentant offender of 18:15-17. He seems to think that here forgiveness can be denied.

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[10] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 281 (italics original).
[11] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 269.
[12] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 270-71.

He imagines that given a potential unrepentant offender, Jesus positively recommends forgiveness denial, although he also recognises that this appears to be in tension with the subsequent counsel to Peter (18:22) that forgiveness knows no limits.[13] One wonders whether in 18:15-17 the focus of the Matthean Jesus' teaching is on the denial of forgiveness. This would contradict not only Jesus' subsequent counsel to Peter, as Reimer himself also recognises, but also the teaching in Matthew 18 as a whole, in which the emphasis is clearly on the responsibility of the offended person.

Conditionality: The Matthean Evidence

The idea of conditionality can be observed in the Gospel of Matthew. It is expressed through the concept of reciprocity and the link between mercy and forgiveness. In the fifth beatitude (Matt 5:7), for example, this idea is embodied in the "mercy for mercy" axiom: "Blessed are the merciful (οἱ ἐλεήμονες), for they will receive mercy (ἐλεηθήσονται)". The "mercy for mercy" principle is used in this verse to describe divine-human and interpersonal relationships: the disciples are to show mercy to their fellow humans if they are to expect to receive mercy from God. This principle comes to fuller expression in Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and in 18:23-35, as the structure below shows:

5:7   μακάριοι **οἱ ἐλεήμονες**… **ἐλεηθήσονται**
      Blessed are **the merciful**… they **will receive mercy**

6:12   <u>ἄφες</u>… **ὡς** καὶ ἡμεῖς <u>ἀφήκαμεν</u>
      <u>Forgive</u>… *as* we also <u>have forgiven</u>

6:14   Ἐὰν γὰρ <u>ἀφῆτε</u>… <u>ἀφήσει</u> καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος
      For if you <u>forgive</u>… your heavenly Father will also <u>forgive</u> you

6:15   ἐὰν δὲ *μὴ* <u>ἀφῆτε</u>… *οὐδὲ* ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν <u>ἀφήσει</u>
      But if you *do not* <u>forgive</u>… *neither* will your Father <u>forgive</u>

18:32b   πᾶσαν τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην <u>ἀφῆκά</u> σοι, ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεσάς με·
      All that debt I <u>forgave</u> you, because you pleaded with me;

18:33   *οὐκ ἔδει* καὶ σὲ **ἐλεῆσαι** τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, **ὡς κἀγὼ** σὲ **ἠλέησα;**
      Should you not also have had **mercy** on fellow slave, *in the same way that I* had **mercy** on you?

This structure highlights the key terminology in the relationship between the conditioned mercy and the conditioned forgiveness in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Community Discourse. From the structure, it is possible to equate the conditioned mercy of Matthew 5:7 with the conditioned forgiveness of Matthew 6:12, 14-15. The idea of conditioned mercy embodied in Matthew 5:7 is apparently echoed in 6:12 (<u>ἄφες</u>… *ὡς* καὶ ἡμεῖς <u>ἀφήκαμεν</u>), in Matthew 6:14 (Ἐὰν γὰρ <u>ἀφῆτε</u>… <u>ἀφήσει</u> καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος) and in 6:15 (ἐὰν δὲ μὴ <u>ἀφῆτε</u>… *οὐδὲ* ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν <u>ἀφήσει</u>). Most interestingly, both ideas of conditioned mercy and conditioned forgiveness are juxtaposed in Matthew

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[13] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 271.

18:23-35 (v. 32b: πᾶσαν τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην <u>ἀφῆκά</u> σοι, ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεσάς με; v. 33: οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ **ἐλεῆσαι** τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, ***ὡς κἀγὼ*** σὲ ***ἠλέησα***; v. 35: Οὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου… ποιήσει ὑμῖν ἐὰν μὴ <u>ἀφῆτε</u>…).

On this basis, one can strongly suggest a thematic connection between the Beatitudes and the Prayer (plus 6:14-15), and between the Beatitudes and the parable in Matthew 18:23-35, and vice versa. David Hill was probably right when he suggested that Matthew 5:7 ("Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy)" echoes the approach of Jesus in the Prayer ("Forgive… as we have forgiven") which the first Evangelist makes explicit in the comment on the Prayer in Matthew 6:14-15.[14] R.T. France has gone further to include three texts: first, Matthew 7:1-2 in which the reciprocal judgement principle is stated directly and indirectly using the metaphor of measuring out commodities in the market;[15] second, Matthew 7:12 where the reciprocal principle, broadly conceived, seems to be established; third, Matthew 18:21-35 where mercy and forgiveness are juxtaposed.[16] The call to be perfect (τέλειός) as the heavenly Father is perfect (5:48) also supports this proposal. But France, Hill and Gore do not see the link between mercy and forgiveness as one of possible strategies of the first Evangelist to stress the importance of the interpersonal forgiveness theme in the Gospel. These passages may now be considered more closely. The discussion of them is not organised chronologically but thematically, with the purpose of helping the reader follow the flow of thought of the present author.

1. Conditionality in Matthew 5:7

The first statement about the theme of interpersonal forgiveness in the first Gospel can be discerned from Matthew 5:7. In this text, the idea of interpersonal forgiveness is stated indirectly by way of the reciprocal principle of "mercy for mercy". Davies and Allison have aptly brought to our attention how significant the idea of mercy is to Matthew and to his first readers and hearers:

> Matthew's Jesus … gives the demand for mercy renewed emphasis and vividness by placing it at the centre of his proclamation (9.13; 12.7; 23.23; 25.31-46) and by making it plain that mercy should be shown to all…, including not only those on the fringes of society but even enemies (5.43-8; cf. Luke 10.29-37).[17]

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[14] David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (New Century Bible; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972), 108; so also C. Gore, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Exposition* (London, 1896), 38-39.

[15] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 168, 275. So also Bernard Couroyer, "'De la mesure dont vous mesurez il vous sera mesuré'" *Revue Biblique* 77 (1970), 366-370.

[16] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 707-708.

[17] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (vol. 1; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 455.

The Matthean call to practise mercy, as suggested by the literary frame of the Sermon on the Mount, is based upon God's nature and character. In the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the first Gospel, God is depicted as a merciful, loving and forgiving king and father.[18] God's mercy is linked with his perfection, a perfection which the disciple is called to practise; this is stated indirectly in Matthew 5:7 using the divine passive and more directly in Matthew 5:48 (cp. Luke 6:36). This is a clear example of the *imitatio Dei* ('imitating God') in Matthew. In Matthew 5:7 this idea includes being merciful: as God is merciful to all, including his adversaries and enemies (Matt 5:47), so must his children and people be to one another.

2. Conditionality in Matthew 7:1-2

In Matthew 7:1-2, the measure for measure language is used to convey and highlight the idea of interpersonal forgiveness. This passage contains a warning addressed to the disciples. The warning in question is a prohibition against passing judgement on others at any time, and it is given in the context of interpersonal relationships. It is stated by means of a general moral maxim: Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged" (v. 1). The reason for the maxim is given (γὰρ…, "for" [v. 2a]), and is stated by means of a double sentence: ἐν ᾧ γὰρ κρίματι κρίνετε κριθήσεσθε, καὶ ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν, "for with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (v. 2). Matthew 7:1-2 has no connection in thought with what immediately precedes. The literary structure of this text in Luke (6:37-42ff) indicates that these verses logically follow from 5:48 ("Be perfect… as your heavenly Father is perfect." NRSV), the point at which Matthew departed from his source to introduce the material gathered in Matthew 6. Matthew 7:2 is not simply a recommendation to be moderate in judgement on others. The meaning is rather that, if you condemn, you surely exclude yourself from God's forgiveness. The "measure" saying in verse 2 is also found in Mark 4:24b, where it refers to the spirit in which a person receives teaching. A possible meaning of Matthew 7:1-2 is thus: "If you want to be mercifully dealt with, show mercy as well". This is parallel to the meaning suggested for the preceding clause in verse 1.

3. Conditionality in Matthew 6:12, 14-15

A textual problem occurs in Matthew 6:12. There are three major readings of verse 12b; some manuscripts have the aorist ἀφήκαμεν ("we have forgiven",[19] but others have the present ἀφίομεν ("we forgive")[20] or ἀφίεμεν ("we

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[18] The evidence for this is discussed in Isaac K. Mbabazi, "The Significance of Interpersonal Forgiveness in Matthew's Gospel" (PhD Thesis; The University of Manchester, 2011), 227-231.

[19] This is the reading of the original hand of Codex Sinaiticus, as well as of B, Z and Family 1. Two early versions (Stuttgart edition of the Vulgate and Philoxenian Syriac version) translate this form of the verb; see Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (3rd rev. ed; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985), 86.

forgive").[21] I prefer ἀφήκαμεν ("we have forgiven") because the aorist reading is attested in the most important and earliest Greek manuscripts, namely, codices Sinaiticus (ℵ) and Vaticanus (B).[22]

Matthew 6:12, 14-15 belongs to the section Matthew 6:9-15 to do with prayer. Verses 12, 14-15 discuss conditionality in divine-human forgiveness explicitly using ἀφίημι to describe the divine-human interrelationships. In the petition in Matthew 6:12b, the disciples are instructed to ask their heavenly Father to forgive them ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν ("as we also have forgiven our debtors"). At least two most important exegetical issues relating to the subject of interpersonal forgiveness can be identified in this text: first is the reading of ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ("as we also"); second is the aorist tense ἀφήκαμεν ("we have forgiven").

To begin with the first point, the reading of the phrase ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ("as we also") is subject to much controversy. There are two alternatives: the first is the conditional reading of the connective, and the second, the non-conditional reading of it. The non-conditional reading has been endorsed by W. Hendricksen and F.D. Bruner, among others. Uncomfortable with the conditional reading of verse 12, they have argued against this reading for theological reasons. Hendricksen thinks that if the conditional interpretation is accepted, this would mean that our forgiving disposition earns God's forgiveness.[23] This argument is biased; it is not true that the conditional reading of Matthew 6:12 (so also 6:14-15) necessarily entails the interpretation that forgiving earns God's forgiveness. Bruner, on the other hand, in an attempt to avoid the expression "condition" for the clause ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ("as we also") ends up with a confusing statement:

> In particular, the privilege of praying for the *Father*'s forgiveness – the meaning of the first part of the Fifth Petition – is placed by Jesus *before* the rider of *our* forgiveness of others. This means that Jesus reminds us of our standing privilege of access to the Father *before* he reminds us of our

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[20] This is the reading of uncial codices D, L, W, Δ and Θ, as well as of a few other minuscules and possibly a Coptic manuscript; see Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 86.

[21] This reading is supported by the first corrector of Codex Sinaiticus, as well as by Family 13. This is also the reading supported by the Majority text, by a *Didache* manuscript and possibly by a Coptic manuscript; see Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 86.

[22] There is a good discussion on this problem in Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed; Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 13. Metzger and the Committee that worked on the UBS/Nestle-Aland text also prefer the aorist reading; see also Joel Delobel, "The Lord's Prayer in the Textual tradition", in *The New Testament in Early Christianity* (ed. Jean-Marie Sevrin; Louvain, 1989), 293-309.

[23] William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (New Testament Commentary; Edinburgh: Banner, 1976), 334 (italics original).

standing responsibility of forgiving neighbours. This order, this sequence, makes me prefer the expression *"consequence"* to "condition" for the clause "as we, too, forgave those who failed us," though the consequence is close to being a condition.[24]

Bruner's argument is not persuasive and lacks consistency. It is grounded in the visible aspect of the syntax; the underlying idea of the syntax itself seems not to be heeded. The non-conditional reading of Matthew 6:12 (cp. Matt 6:14-15) is on shaky ground because of the intrinsic motives of its defenders and the kind of evidence they use to secure it.

There are sound reasons to prefer the conditional reading of verse 12: the grammar of the text demands it and the co-text of the passage supports it. This reading is decisively substantiated by the explanatory comment in Matthew 6:14-15 which follows immediately the Prayer and is particularly related to the petition in verse 12. While it is implicit in verse 12, the conditional element becomes more explicit in verses 14-15, where an antithetical parallelism is used. This rhetorical device makes our reading both clearer and emphatic by being stated both positively and negatively. Jean Carmignac's comment below on this conditional reading is to the point:

> [I]l faut reconnaître que cette présentation est en accord profond avec la pensée évangélique: … Matthieu 6,14-15 reproduit sous une autre forme la même antériorité… à la fin de la parabole du débiteur impitoyable, Jésus en dégage lui-même la leçon…; enfin Matthieu 5,23-24 insiste plus clairement encore… Cette antériorité est une donnée ferme et constante de l'Évangile de Matthieu.[25]

This statement recognises the straightforward conditional reading of the text and highlights the precedence of the human act of forgiving over the divine act of it in Matthew 6:12 and beyond.

Related to the discussion above is the issue of the tense ἀφήκαμεν ("we have forgiven") of verse 12b, and this leads us to our second point. As was indicated earlier in this essay, there are three readings of ἀφίημι ("forgive") in this verse. The aorist reading is to be preferred because it is attested in two most reliable uncial codices (א and B). The Matthean version of the account, using the aorist tense (ἀφήκαμεν, "we have forgiven") gives the impression that God's forgiveness depends upon human's initiative, for the one praying seems

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[24] Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew: a Commentary* (vol. 1; rev. and exp. edn; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 311.

[25] My translation: "We must recognise that this presentation is in deeper accord with evangelical thought: … Matthew 6, 14-15 reproduces in another form the same anteriority … at the end of the parable of unmerciful debtor, Jesus in drawing himself the lesson … ; finally Matthew 5, 23-24 again insists more clearly … . This anteriority is a firm and constant datum of the Gospel of Matthew." Jean Carmignac, *Recherches sur le "Notre Père"* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1969), 231.

to request forgiveness to the extent that they themselves ἀφήκαμεν ("have forgiven") their debtors.

This aorist ἀφήκαμεν, "we have forgiven" (against the Lukan present ἀφίεμεν, "we forgive") clearly underpins the idea behind the conditional phrase ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ("as we also"). As Todd Pokrifka-Joe has also noted, with this past tense the petition places significant responsibility on those praying to make sure they have *already* forgiven their fellow humans if they desire to be forgiven by God.[26]

The juxtaposition of the aorist ἀφήκαμεν, "we have forgiven" (v. 12b) and the conditional phrase ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς, "as we also" (v. 12b), as well as the antithetical parallelism in verses 14-15 indicate the precedence of human forgiveness over divine forgiveness. In reality, verse 14 takes up the petition for forgiving debts in verse 12, whereas verse 15 considers what would happen to potential unforgiving disciples: "[N]either will your Father forgive your trespasses" (v. 15b). It is thus reasonable to think that for Matthew, the refusal of forgiveness towards others leads to God's refusal to forgive the unforgiving person.

This trend is an example of the notion of reciprocity in forgiveness and the link between reluctance in forgiving and the idea of judgement in Matthew 6:12, 14-15. In this text, this idea is stated in three ways: firstly, by means of the phrase ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς, "as we also" (v. 12); secondly, by the use of an antithetical parallelism in verses 14-15, a rhetorical device which serves to stress the consequences awaiting the potential unforgiving person; and thirdly, by the way in which conditional forgiveness is used in Matthew 6:12, 14-15 to characterise divine-human and interpersonal relationships. These last verses express the conditional mercy of Matthew 5:7, where showing mercy is said to be expected of the disciples if they are to expect to receive mercy from God.

4. Conditionality in Matthew 18:23-35

Matthew 18:23-35 belongs to the section to do with forgiving - Matthew 18:21-23. This section can be divided into three parts: the first part is about Peter's question and Jesus' answer (18:21-22), and focuses on the frequency of forgiving; the second part concentrates on failure in showing readiness to forgive (18:23-34); and the third part focuses on what will befall the unforgiving person (18:35). In this third part, the idea of punishment, which was implicit in Matthew 6:15, becomes explicit; the saying in it parallels the one in Matthew 6:15: *not being forgiven*. Matthew 18:23-35 contains teaching about reluctance to forgive and God's response to the unforgiving person. A parable is used to

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[26] Todd Pokrifka-Joe, "Probing the Relationship between Divine and Human Forgiveness in Matthew", in *Forgiveness and Truth: Explorations in Contemporary Theology* (eds Alistair I. McFadyen, Marcel Sarot and Anthony Thiselton; Edinburgh/New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 166.

convey and stress this teaching. Apart from an introduction (v. 23), the parable consists of three clear scenes: the first scene takes place between the king and his slave (vv. 24-27), the second between the slave and his fellow slave (vv. 28-30), and the third once again between the king and his slave (vv. 31-34). Each scene has almost the same form, beginning with a narrative introduction (vv. 24-25, 28, 31) and closing with a description of what the creditor does with the debtor (vv. 27, 30, 34). The third scene is most relevant for the purposes of this study.

The third scene (vv. 31-34) takes place between the king and his slave. The other slaves, having seen how their fellow slave (the creditor) had behaved towards one of them, are greatly distressed. Because of their sympathy for their fellow slave in trouble, they go to their lord and tell him what has happened. On hearing this report, the lord is so shocked that he immediately takes appropriate action against this unmerciful slave.

All that has taken place in scene two (vv. 28-30) is narrated to the lord by the σύνδουλοι "fellow slaves"), who recognise the terrible hypocrisy of a man who received kindness but could not give it. What they felt over the fate of their fellow slave is described ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα ("they were exceedingly grieved"). This phrase also occurs elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel, where it describes the disciples' feeling on hearing from their Lord what was to happen to him (17:23); it also occurs in LXX (Neh 5:6; Jon 4:4, 9). This description expresses a combination of feelings that Ceslas Spicq has aptly described as "tristesse, indignation et dégoût"[27] (i.e., "sadness, indignation and disgust"). Whether anger is also to be read in the fellow slaves' feeling is, however, not certain. It is reasonable to think that the hearers of this parable would also naturally have the same kind of feelings.

Not only did these slaves have feelings (v. 31a); they also took action: καὶ ἐλθόντες διεσάφησαν τῷ κυρίῳ ἑαυτῶν πάντα τὰ γενόμενα, "and coming, they reported to their lord all that had happened" (v. 31b). They went to their lord to inform him of what had happened. The expression διεσάφησαν... πάντα is used to describe the action of informing. Διασαφέω ("to report"), which is used here, occurs in only one other place in the New Testament, where it is used to describe the disciples' request to Jesus (Matt 13:36). Although this verb is used in a different context, in both cases it means something like *to say point-blank*, or *make clear*. Here in verse 31, these slaves made everything (πάντα) plain to the lord. That is, they explained exactly what had happened, providing any detail they deemed useful. They knew of the cancellation of this unmerciful slave's colossal debt. Although the text does not say that they used a spokesperson, it is not unreasonable to think that they did, supplying him with the any details he might have forgotten. It would be strange for a crowd of slaves to come to the king and just begin to speak.

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[27] Ceslas Spicq, *Dieu et l'homme* (Lectio Divina 29; Paris: Cerf, 1961), 59, n. 2.

The feelings and the action of these slaves on behalf of their fellow in trouble raise two important questions. First: What kind of relationship existed among δοῦλοι/σύνδουλοι ("slaves"/"fellow slaves") of the same κύριος ("lord"), and what was the extent of such relationship. Second: What is the extent to which a grasp of this is most likely to shed light on the audience's understanding of the unity, sympathy and action of the other slaves towards the fellow slave in trouble? It is significant that compassionate humanity underlies both their motivation and action. Perhaps through this, Matthew wanted to encourage his readers and hearers to remain united as one family for their survival, no matter the circumstances in which they may find themselves.

The reaction of the lord now follows, and does two things: it reminds the slave of the mercy he had received and the reason for granting it; it also describes the imminent action that the lord is now going to take against this unmerciful slave. The lord does not require any explanation from this slave. Having summoned him, he immediately addresses him thus: Δοῦλε πονηρέ, πᾶσαν τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην ἀφῆκά σοι, ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεσάς με· οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ ἐλεῆσαι τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, ὡς κἀγὼ σὲ ἠλέησα, "You wicked slave, all that debt I forgave you because you pleaded with me! Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave as I had mercy on you?" (vv. 32-33).

A social *deixis*[28] (here a vocative) is used to introduce the lord's address to his debtor. The lord uses a rhetorical question, a question that does not expect an answer. This rhetorical question can be divided in two main parts. To begin with, in the first part the lord addresses the slave as a δοῦλος πονηρός ("wicked slave"). This same expression appears elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel to describe the master's response to one of his slaves (25:26). This remark of the lord here in verses 32-33 comprises two parts: in the first part the lord reminds the slave that he has cancelled his entire debt, and in the second, the reason for this previous act of generosity is recalled. To begin with the first item, the reminder reads as follows: πᾶσαν τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην ἀφῆκά σοι, "all that debt I forgave you" (v. 32). Here πᾶσαν ("all") is a discourse *deixis*. It is emphatic given its syntactical position in the clause; the lord reminds this slave of all that debt (πᾶσαν τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην, "all that debt"), which he cancelled for him (ἀφῆκά σοι, "I forgave you"). The word πᾶσαν ("all"), to be sure, echoes the slave's previous promise in verse 26 (πάντα ἀποδώσω σοι, "*everything* I will repay you"). The lord also adds the reason why he did so: ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεσάς με ("because you pleaded with me"). The conjunction ἐπεὶ ("because") is probably a causal *deixis*. It seems to suggest that the lord cancelled the debt of the unmerciful slave because this slave pleaded for

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[28] *Social deixis* is reference to the social characteristics of, or distinctions between, the participants or referents in a speech event.
http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsSocialDeixis.htm

patience. In reality, however, the lord cancelled the debt out of pure merciful generosity, rather than because of the plea itself.

In the second part of the rhetorical question above, the lord goes on to take back the forgiveness he generously granted, as he now demands that the debt be paid in full: οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ ἐλεῆσαι τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, ὡς κἀγὼ σὲ ἠλέησα, "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave as I had mercy on you?" (v. 33). This is a good example of conditionality, and shows the link between reluctance in showing mercy (or forgiving) and the resultant judgement. The lord's own behaviour is based on the behaviour of the slave towards his fellow slave; the lord treats him as he himself has treated his fellow slave. In so doing, Matthew restates explicitly the *conditioned* forgiveness and *conditioned* mercy. This echoes the fifth beatitude in Matthew 5:7, where the concept is embodied in the "mercy for mercy" saying: "Blessed are the merciful (οἱ ἐλεήμονες), for they will receive mercy (ἐλεηθήσονται)". The disciples are to show mercy to their fellow humans if they are to expect to receive mercy from God. This principle comes to fuller expression in Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and 18:32b-35. In Matthew 7:1-2, the reciprocal principle is stated both directly with regard to judgement, and indirectly using the metaphor of measuring out commodities in the market.[29] In Matthew 7:12, this reciprocal principle seems to be established; and in Matthew 18:21-35 mercy and forgiveness are juxtaposed.[30] The call to be perfect (τέλειός) in Matthew 5:48, as the heavenly Father is perfect, also adds to the evidence.

In this vein, Davies and Allison have suggested the *imitatio Dei* ("imitating God") motif. For them, beneath Jesus' saying in Matthew 5:7 is the idea that God, the king of all, must be imitated in his goodness: the one forgiven should have acted in kind, the one act of mercy should have begotten another.[31] Logically, because of what he had received from his lord, this slave was expected to act similarly towards his fellow slave. Sadly, he did not act as expected. Eta Linnemann's comment on the character of mercy is pertinent: "Clearly mercy is essentially not something which we can accept with a feeling of relief at having got away with it once more, only to let things go on again just as we used to. It appears to have the character of an ordinance, just as justice is an ordinance".[32]

The lord is filled with anger and revokes his earlier cancellation of the slave's exorbitant debt. His verdict this time is severe as he hands this slave over to the βασανισταῖς ("torturers") for a suitable punishment. The term βασανισταῖς ("torturers") is a New Testament *hapax legomenon*. Its use here serves to stress the severity of the punishment, as Davies and Allison have

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[29] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 168, 275. Also Couroyer, *Revue Biblique,* 366-70.

[30] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 707-8.

[31] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew,* 2.802.

[32] Eta Linnemann, *The Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition* (London: SPCK, 1966), 111.

also suggested.[33] It has been observed that torturers, though disallowed by the Jews, were common in Roman prisons. In the case of unpaid debt, friends and relations would have accordingly been more urgent in raising money.[34] According to Josephus, Herod the Great did employ torture.[35] This slave is to be tortured until the debt was fully paid. The expression used to describe this fact is πᾶν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον (i.e., "everything owed"). A similar expression occurs elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel (5:26) and is used of a potential brother or sister who has wronged another. It is easy to see that verse 34 is the close counterpart of verse 30, which describes in similar language this forgiven slave putting his fellow slave in prison until his debt was paid. It teaches that as one treats others, so also will one be treated. This point is made explicit in the application of the parable in verse 35.

The enormity of the debt has led some to think that this imprisonment would have been permanent. They also think that this, together with the reference to the torturers, hints at eschatological punishment.[36] It is interesting that this wicked slave does not dare to ask for patience as he did before (Matt 18:26, 29), perhaps because he has realised how wicked he was. In Davies and Allison's words, "He knows he stands condemned."[37] Would this lord once again have mercy on him if he had asked for it? It would be strange if this slave had asked for the lord's mercy once more and was granted it. As one would have expected, the third scene closes with a terrible ending. The story-teller adds to it a comment to serve as the moral of the story (v. 35).

Building upon verse 34, in verse 35 Matthew presents his own view about God's appropriate response to the disciples' unwillingness to forgive; punishment is this response. Kyle Snodgrass has argued that "[t]he focus on judgment in this parable should be compared to other parables of judgment, specially the parables of the Wheat and the Weeds and of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the parables of future eschatology."[38] This is not quite right because the judgement in this parable is not just a general judgement, as is the case with these parables, but a specific one. It takes the form of punishment and applies to the unmerciful and unforgiving person. It can be linked to the situation described in other texts dealing with interpersonal forgiveness and related topics in Matthew (5:7; 6:15; 7:1-2).

Matthew 18:35 poses the fundamental question of whether the believer can still experience the judging Father as the same Father who ever forgives

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[33] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew,* 2.802.
[34] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (vol. 33B; ed. Ralph P. Martin; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1995), 540.
[35] Josephus, *War* 1.548.
[36] Hagner, *Matthew*, 540, Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2.803, among others.
[37] Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 2.802.
[38] Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: a Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 61.

humans in interminable love. Related questions include the following: Can God, who has forgiven all human sins, withdraw his act of grace? Does the idea of judgement negate grace's reliability? What follows is an attempt to answer some of these questions or aspects of them.

The phrase οὕτως καὶ ("and so" [v. 35]) is a discourse *deixis*. Its function and the rendering of it are not obvious. It points back to verse 34, where it is reported that filled with anger the lord not only revokes his earlier cancellation of the unmerciful slave's exorbitant debt, but also hands him over to the torturers. But οὕτως καὶ also points to other Matthean interpersonal forgiveness texts and related texts because of the underlying concept of reciprocity in them, and the idea of a judgement that results from a refusal to forgive. Because 18:35 ("So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive… from your heart.") is an expansion of Matthew 6:14-15 ("For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."), which is related to Matthew 5:7 ("Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.") and Matthew 7:1-2, 12 ("Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."), the *logion* in Matthew 18:35 also refers to these other interpersonal forgiveness and related texts.

As to the rendering of οὕτως καὶ ("and so"), the meaning Schottroff has assigned to these two words is interesting. She has translated οὕτως καὶ by a full sentence: "How is this, then, to be compared to the kingdom of God?"[39] The question is not whether it is reasonable to translate two terms by a whole sentence, but rather whether the translation provided is plausible. The translation above by Schottroff is problematic. Her approach to the parable itself may perhaps be the cause of the difficulty. The unpleasantness of the king's actions in the parable, refusing to consider further forgiveness, together with her desire to counter this impression, has led Schottroff to argue that this king is intended to portray what God is *not* like.[40] Schottroff's approach to this parable, and particularly her reading of οὕτως καὶ in verse 35, is an attempt to avoid the straightfoward reading of the parable and the verse, and are altogether invalid. In Matthew 18:35 οὕτως καὶ means "so also".

It is interesting that the judgement in this text comes from the πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος ("my heavenly Father"). The language of the fatherhood of God abounds in the Sermon and in the Community Discourse from which our two forgiveness texts are taken. As Robert H. Gundry has said, the manner in

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[39] Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 196.
[40] A similar observation is made by Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 70.

which the heavenly Father will deal with the unforgiving disciple leaves no room for misunderstanding the parable, and therefore no excuse for failure to forgive. The expression ἀπὸ τῶν καρδιῶν ὑμῶν ("from your heart") is important for the discussion. It also occurs in *T. Gad* 6:7: ἄφες αὐτῷ ἀπὸ καρδίας ("I forgive you from the heart"). In Matthew 18:35, it expresses sincerity and excludes all casuistry and legalism, as France has also suggested.[41] The phrase ἀπὸ καρδίας ("from the heart") shows that hypocrisy has no part in the kind of forgiveness that God demands. But the warning character of the parable shows that forgiving out of obedience need not kill sincerity, for a true disciple wants to obey his master.[42] Commenting on the statement ἀπὸ καρδίας ("from the heart"), Luz says that forgiveness of sins involves both outward reconciliation with one's brothers and sisters and complete affirmation of them.[43] Sincerity is thus at the core. As Luz also notes, brotherly forgiveness is no incidental matter, and unkindness among persons is a serious sin. Both of them lie at the heart of one's relationship to God.[44]

The concept of reciprocity, the link between mercy and forgiveness, and the punishment of those who fail to show mercy are all evident in Matthew 18:23-35. The idea of *conditional* forgiveness is employed to characterise divine-human and interpersonal relationships. The ideas of *conditional* forgiveness and *conditional* mercy are juxtaposed (πᾶσαν τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἐκείνην ἀφῆκά σοι, ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεσάς με, "all that debt I *forgave* because you leaded with me!" [v. 32b]; οὐκ ἔδει καὶ σὲ *ἐλεῆσαι* τὸν σύνδουλόν σου, ὡς κἀγὼ σὲ *ἠλέησα* "Should you not also have had *mercy* on your fellow slave as I had *mercy* on you?" [v. 33]). Finally, there is an express link between reluctance in exercising mercy and forgiveness, and the idea of punishment (οὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου… ποιήσει ὑμῖν ἐὰν μὴ ἀφῆτε…, "So also my heavenly Father… will do to you if you do not forgive…", [v. 35]). From this, it is not unreasonable to equate the *conditional* mercy of Matthew 5:7 with the *conditional* forgiveness of Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Matthew 18:23-35, as well as with Matthew 5:48 and 7:1-2, 12.

Summarising the Argument Thus Far

In Matthew's Gospel we see the idea of reciprocity, the idea of conditionality, the link between mercy and forgiveness and the punishment that comes for reluctance to practise mercy/forgiveness. For the first Evangelist, refusing to show mercy to or to forgive others leads to God's refusal to do the same to the unmerciful or unforgiving person. More than that,

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[41] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 278.

[42] Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: a Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 375.

[43] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: a Commentary* (vol. 2; Hermeneia; ed. Helmut Koester; trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, 476.

[44] Luz, *Matthew 8–20,* 2.476.

it calls for punishment upon them. This is powerfully stated in the parable of the unmerciful debtor in Matthew 18:23-35 and implicitly in Matthew 6:15. Demands to be merciful (Matt 5:7), not to retaliate (Matt 5:21-23), and not to judge (Matt 7:1-2) are also implied in this reading.[45] This brings about the notion of accountability in forgiving.

Sirach 28:1-7 and Matthew 6:12, 14-15

The idea of accountability as related to mercy and forgiveness is very rare in biblical Judaism. Sirach 28:1-7 is the only very close early Jewish parallel. Verses 1-4 are most relevant for the purposes of this study; it reads as follows:

> [1]The vengeful person will face the Lord's vengeance, for he keeps an exacting account of their sins. [2]Remit your neighbour the wrong they have done (ἄφες ἀδίκημα τῷ πλησίον[46] σου), and then your sins will be remitted when you pray (δεηθέντος σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου λυθήσονται). [3]Does anyone harbour anger against another and expect healing from the Lord? [4]If one has no mercy towards another like themselves, can they then seek forgiveness for their own sin? (καὶ περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτοῦ δεῖται;)

The co-text of this passage, Sirach 27:30–28:11, addresses various related issues. It is part of a larger literary unit Sirach 27:22–28:26 in which we have a series of poems on various topics: first is malice (Sir 27:22-27); second are anger and vengeance (Sir 27:28–28:1); third is forgiveness (Sir 28:2-7); fourth is quarrelling (Sir 28:8-11); and fifth, evils of the tongue (Sir 28:12-16; 28:17-26). As to the poem in Sirach 28:2-7, it addresses the duty of forgiving and not holding grudges, as P.W. Skehan has also noted.[47] Two verbs are used in the passage cited above to convey the idea of forgiveness: ἀφίημι ("forgive") and λύω ("loose"). As noted earlier, this is the sole explicit LXX text in which forgiving is shown as a condition for both seeking and receiving God's forgiveness. In this text, πλησίος (the "person", "neighbour") and ἀδίκημα or ἁμαρτίαι ("sin(s)") are direct objects of the verbs. As to λύω, its range of meanings includes to "loose", "untie", "set free", "release" and "deliver".[48] The co-text of Sirach 28:2, to do with God's vengeance hanging over the vengeful and unforgiving person, demands that both ἀφίημι and λύω be understood to mean something like to "forgive" in the sense of remit.

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[45] Note that the ideas of retaliation and punishment are closely related in Greek thinking, as is clear in the word ἀντιτίνω; cf. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed revised and augmented by Henry S. Jones; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 164.
[46] Note grammatical oddity of τῷ πλησίον, thanks to Dr Peter Oakes and Prof. George Brooke for having brought to my attention that this word is used widely in its adverbial (accusative) form as an indeclinable noun.
[47] P. W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 362.
[48] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* 1068-1069.

The concept of reciprocity and the link between mercy and forgiveness is plain in Sirach 28:1-7. The petitioner forgiving others is linked with the Lord forgiving them. Stated rhetorically, it is unthinkable that the unmerciful person should dare to seek God's forgiveness and expect to receive it; for, as Reimer has stated, "Those who lack mercy obstruct forgiveness from God when they seek it."[49] As J.L. Crenshaw has also observed, verses 2-5 insist that anyone who desires forgiveness from the Lord must first exercise that compassion towards their fellow humans, including their enemies.[50] This desire for God's forgiveness is here interestingly set in the context of prayer.

The teaching about forgiveness contained in Sirach 28:1-7 (esp. 2-4) is similar to the teaching about forgiveness in Matthew 6:12, 14-15; 18:32-35 (so also Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; James 2:13). Two observations in this respect are worth noting. Firstly, in both Sirach 28:1-7 and Matthew 6:12, 14-15, the concept of conditionality in forgiveness emerges in the context of prayer, a phenomenon which can also be observed in Mark 11:25[-26] and in Luke 11:2-4. The situation described in Sirach 28:1-7 is closer to the one in Matthew 6:9-15. In both texts, the connection between forgiveness and prayer seems to stress the importance of the horizontal and vertical relationships. Secondly, both Sirach 28:1-7 and Matthew 6:9-15 connect the notion of reluctance in forgiveness to that of judgement. In Sirach 28:1-7, anger and wrath are directed at unforgiving people. This has a parallel in Matthew 5:22 where anger with an ἀδελφός ("brother") makes one liable to judgement. The emphasis here is on God's vengeance on those who eventually fail to forgive others. This same emphasis underlies the teaching in Matthew 18:23-35 (cp. Matt 7:1-2) and is alluded to in 6:15 through the statement "not being forgiven by the Father".

Because of the similarity between the Matthean material and the Sirach material, Sirach 28:4 has been proposed as a possible basis for the parable of the unmerciful debtor of Matthew 18:23-35. Reimer, for example, in his treatment of Sirach 28, has made a connection between Sirach 28:1-7 and other texts within Sirach. To repeat aspects of what was said earlier, Reimer has shown how in Sirach 5:4-7; 17:25-32; 18:8-14, notions of death and judgement sharpen the consideration of divine forgiveness. He notes that in Sirach 28:1-2, this combination of traditional Jewish concepts (death as punishment for sin, obedience to the commandments of the law and loyalty to the covenant) produces the conclusion that divine judgement is controlled by human activity. Most particularly, Reimer suggests that Sirach 28:4 is a possible basis for the parable of Matthew 18:23-35.[51] Matthew 6:15 may also be based on Sirach 28, as both share the concept of reciprocity, a link between mercy and forgiveness, and the concept of punishment for not

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[49] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 276-277.
[50] J. L. Crenshaw, "The Book of Sirach", 5.772.
[51] Reimer, "The Apocrypha and Biblical Theology", 277-279.

forgiving/being merciful (cf. the idea of "*not being forgiven* by the heavenly Father"). For Matthew, the refusal of forgiveness towards others leads to God's refusal to forgive the unforgiving person.

The concept of reciprocity found in Matthew 18:23-35 and Matthew 6:12 may allow one to suggest that Matthew 18:23-35 is the parabolic equivalent of Matthew 6:12.[52] It is worth adding that, although Matthew 18:23-35 and Matthew 6:12 share between them the concept of reciprocity in forgiveness, they also have in common the notion of judgement on the potential unforgiving person – a fact which is not always highlighted in scholarship.

Warranting mention is punishment as the outcome of reluctance in forgiving; this is one of distinctive elements of the Matthean teaching about the concept of reciprocity and the link between mercy and forgiveness. In the Gospel of Matthew, the sense of accountability in showing mercy or in forgiving is stronger than in any other New Testament writings.

Conclusion

The present investigation has contributed to Matthean studies by considering the debate on the Jewish background to the theme of interpersonal forgiveness in the first Gospel. It has argued that Sirach 28:1-7 is not only a possible Jewish background to the parable of the unmerciful debtor of Matthew 18:23-35, but also to the teaching found in Matthew 6:12, 14-15. This claim is justified by the underlying idea of conditionality, the shared notion of reciprocity, the link between mercy and forgiveness, the reluctance in practising them and the judgement that follows. All these are evident in the Sirach text, the Matthean texts and elsewhere in the Gospel.

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[52] E.g., Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1.610, among others.

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Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage

A History of Church Marriages and a Case for an African Christian Customary Marriage Ceremony

by Onesimus A. Ngundu

Abstract

This article traces the historical and theological development, discussion and practice of the European-oriented tradition of Church marriages in Africa. Mission organisations imposed this tradition on African Christians in the name of Christianity, resulting in social and moral dilemmas because of the co-existence of customary and civil systems of marriage-making in African society. If an African Christian couple consummate their marriage after a customary marriage celebration but before a church 'marriage' ceremony, church leaders are too ready to publicly pronounce stern discipline on them. The question is: whose marriage law would they have broken, since the Bible does not sanction church marriages? This paper, a theological and pastoral response to the dilemmas surrounding African Christian marriage-making, offers a practical paradigm shift in establishing valid and legitimate African Christian unions whilst meeting all the essential requirements for a customary and civil (church) marriage. This approach would also reduce the incidents of moral confusion and conflict that presently confront African Christians at marriage.

Introduction

At marriage, every African Christian couple, especially in mission-founded churches, is confronted with three 'worlds' - the world of the traditional culture to which most parents of marrying-age children belong; the world of the civil or legal system under which the couple, like other citizens, live; and the world of the predominantly westernised culture that prevails in the church, especially in urban areas, within which the couple generally worship. The question is: which of these three 'worlds' has a right to declare an African Christian couple married? Is it the traditional world, when upon initiating *lobolo*[1] transactions, the woman is led to and handed over to the man in the presence of key family

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[1] *Lobolo*, a Zulu or Ndebele noun from the verb *lobola*, was a form of payment by the bride-receiving family to the bride-giving family in appreciation of their daughter. It may be called by different terms in the different languages of sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Shona, it is *rooro* an equivalent noun of the Zulu term *lobolo*. This is because there is no letter l in the Shona language, hence the noun *rooro*. In Sotho or Tswana the word is *bogali*. *Lobolo* is the opposite of the dowry practice which is payment by the bride-giving family to the son-in-law.

members and relatives? Is it the legal world, when a magistrate or other marriage officer signs a marriage certificate in the presence of a stipulated number of witnesses as required by the state law? Or is it the religious world, when at the end of a church marriage service, a bride dressed in white, and a man dressed in a suit are pronounced by a church minister, pastor, or priest to be married? Such ambiguity has resulted in legal, social and moral problems for nearly all African Christian couples. For example, how should African Christian couples respond when their traditional relatives in good conscience assign them a single bedroom and expect them to have their first sexual intercourse as husband and wife immediately after the customary ceremony but before a church ceremony which usually takes place several months or even years after the customary marriage? This perplexing situation has confronted every African Christian couple in the wake of church marriage rules and discipline. Lack of recognition of customary marriage by the mission churches for church and government purposes has resulted in numerous Christian dilemmas over marriage. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say that at marriage, African Christian couples end up with a particular sense of being torn at the three corners of a triangle: the claims of African tradition, the claims of a new-found faith, Christianity, and the claims of the state.[2]

Customary marriage

Civil marriage   Church marriage
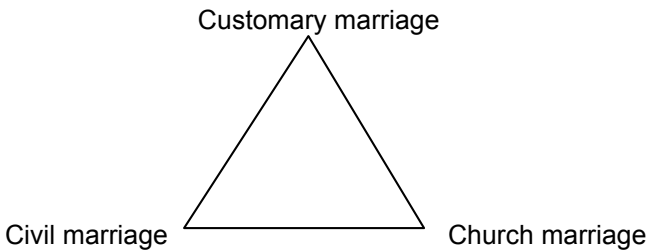
At what point should a couple married by African custom be recognised as married in the sight of God who created marriage? Or if an African Christian couple consummate their marriage *after* a customary marriage but *before* a church wedding[3] have they committed sin in the eyes of God? Since the Bible does not sanction church marriages, on what grounds do Church leaders publicly discipline African Christian couples who consummate their traditionally contracted and celebrated marriage *before* a church wedding takes place? These questions have not yet been fully answered for contemporary African Christian couples in African society, where customary marriage-making

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[2] Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa,* London: SPCK, 1973, 45.
[3] The English word 'wedding' comes from a German term *beweddung* which means the pledge or surety. It came to use when the two parts of a customary marriage celebration (betrothal and nuptials) were combined and used in Church marriage ceremonies. Cf. George H. Joyce, *Christian Marriage: An Historical and Doctrinal Study*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948, original edition, 1933, 50.

practice and procedures are still viewed and valued as the *sine qua non* of establishing valid, legitimate and lasting marriage relationships.

In all societies, before the introduction of church marriages in the thirteenth century, and of state marriage law later in the sixteenth century, the criteria for the validity of marriage were originally determined by customary practice rather than by statute law. But with the introduction of the statutory marriage law, what was valid and legitimate in each society, customary marriage began to be viewed as invalid and illegal. The definitions of the validity of marriage changed and developed over the centuries of European history. The outcome of such historical and theological debates on marriage was what mission organisations and colonial authorities imposed on Africans.

The introduction and enforcement of statutory marriage law in Africa resulted not only in confusion and conflict, but also in social, legal and moral dilemmas, especially for African Christian couples, because of the co-existence of customary marriage and civil marriage practices and procedures. The main source of confusion and conflict in African society was that, although there was nothing explicit in the legislation to prevent the incidence and practice of traditional marriages from existing side by side with a civil marriage contract, whenever a marriage was celebrated according to civil rites, the principles of African tradition were deemed no longer to apply to it, and legally and ecclesiastically, aspects of traditional marriage norms became irrelevant from the civil or church authority's point of view. On the other hand, despite the introduction of the European tradition of marriage-making, Africans have continued to look upon traditional marriage as a full, valid and legitimate marriage, and the required registration at the magistrates' court or the subsequent solemnisation of marriage in Church, as just the means of satisfying the civil or church law. In other words, to Africans traditional marriage constituted a genuine marriage contract according to their custom even though Western missionaries and colonial authorities refused to recognize it. Unfortunately, the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century official missionary attitude towards African customary marriage still remains within the mainline Christian churches in Africa despite the change in leadership from foreign missionaries to African Christians.

If we are to work out a practical solution to the ongoing moral, social and legal dilemmas that confront African Christians at marriage, we have first to evaluate the current practice of European-oriented church marriage-making within its historical and theological context. Then we can perhaps propose a paradigm shift for African Christians who still view and value their customary marriages as valid and legitimate marriage unions in the sight of God.

Development of the European Tradition of Church Marriage

In the Ancient Near East where Christianity had its roots, marriage ceremonies and celebrations were never conducted in a religious building nor

officiated by a religious leader, priest or rabbi. Traditionally, marriage-making was more of a social undertaking than either a religious or a civil responsibility. All the same, the Old Testament narrators present God as being involved in such non-religious social marriage ceremonies and celebrations,[4] just as Jesus socialised with people at the marriage celebration of Cana (John 2:1-12). Edward Schillebeeckx, a prominent Roman Catholic theologian, argues that the presence of Jesus at the home-based marriage reception at Cana should not be seen as a sign of the Christianisation of customary marriage.[5] Whatever arguments Christian proponents for Church weddings, symbols and rituals may want to generate, they cannot legitimately claim the Bible as their heritage because matrimony, being a private affair of the parties and of their respective families, required no public ceremony, religious or otherwise, for its legalisation and validity. To the Jews, whose religion was at the centre of their social life, God was involved with their tradition of marriage-making, and that tradition did not belong to temple worship. In their view, every marriage, Jewish or non-Jewish, was contracted before God. There seems to be no evidence that Jews viewed their customary marriage as a universal pattern of contracting marriage to be imposed on non-Jewish converts. Unfortunately, European missionaries to Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries viewed their Christianized customary marriage - commonly referred to as the Christian marriage ceremony - as a necessary consequence of genuine African conversion to Christianity.

1. Early Church on Customary Marriage

The Apostle Paul's treatment both of illicit sex outside of marriage (*porneia* 1 Cor. 6:16-20) and of marital sex itself partially echoed Roman law on sex and marital ethics.[6] The early Church, along with the Roman Empire under which it existed, considered that customary marriage ceremonies were private and family festivals. For example, Tertullian, a Christian writer who trained in jurisprudence at Rome before returning to his native Carthage, like Bishop John Chrysostom, did not find any fault with the customary marriage ceremony itself as the only way of entering into a valid and legitimate marriage union. He had no problem with marriages validly contracted as "ceremonies at private and family festivals."[7] Tertullian objected, however, to any Christian bishop participating in or performing any pagan sacrifices at customary marriage

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[4] In Genesis 2, God provides a wife for Adam, in Genesis 24 God leads Abraham's delegation in search for a wife for Isaac to Rebecca, one of the daughters of Laban. In the book of Ruth, God (through "chance" and Naomi) directs Ruth to Boaz, etc. OT and NT marriages were contracted according to people's custom.

[5] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1965, 109.

[6] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe,* Chicago: The University Press, 1987, 60-61.

[7] Stanley L. Greenslade, (trans.), *Early Latin Fathers: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*, London: SCM Press Ltd. 1956, volume V, 101.

ceremonies of baptised Christians,[8] while Chrysostom encouraged Christian couples to celebrate their customary marriages in God-honouring ways by excluding such things as drinking, dancing, and overeating from family home-based marriage festivals.[9] Tertullian, who used the phrase *Christian marriage* in reference to the Christian experience of marriage-making itself (brought about by a Christian man and a Christian woman), suggested that Christians should sing praises, psalms and hymns to God at the celebration of their customary marriage.[10] At this point in the history of the Church, the bishops did not even contemplate solemnising any marriages of Christians at church.[11]

It is only in the fourth century that evidence of a priestly prayer or blessing is found in connection with the customary marriage of baptised Christians. A priestly marriage blessing, based on an allusion that God blessed the marriage of Adam and Eve, was probably developed from the practice of a bishop when he went to congratulate the Christian couple at their home when a marriage feast was celebrated. The domestic prayer was intended for the groom and bride, asking that they would have offspring. Hence, it was always offered in the couple's bedroom. Although Christian couples may have appreciated the presence and participation of a bishop as a guest at the end of their marriage feasts, the validity of marriage was still wholly vested in the performance of the customary ceremony and not in a priestly blessing. By the fifth century, a priestly Christian benediction was conducted *in front of the church* instead of in the home (*away from church*). However, the validity of marriage was still determined by conforming to established custom, and not by priestly participation.[12] As late as the ninth century, Pope Nicholas I referred in his *Responsum ad Bulgaros* (A.D. 866), to the validity of marriage by customary mutual consent, even if an ecclesiastical marriage blessing was lacking.

2. Medieval Roman Catholic Theology of Marriage

Politically and theologically, with its gradual establishment and influence in the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church claimed jurisdiction over the areas of doctrine, liturgy, patronage, education, charity, inheritance, oral promises, oaths, moral crimes, and marriage. It was this church's new legal and political prominence in the West that rendered the alliance of theology and law so powerful during the medieval centuries. Through its canon law, the Roman Catholic Church began to regulate marriages in Western Europe,

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[8] Greenslade, *Early Latin Fathers: Selections*, 101, 102.

[9] Talbot W. Chambers, (trans), *The Homilies of St Chrysostom on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* in Vol. 12 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969, 69.

[10] Alexander Roberts (trans.), *The Writings of Tertullian I: Ante Nicene Christian Library Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969, 279-303.

[11] Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, 254-5.

[12] Joyce, *Christian Marriage: An Historical and Doctrinal Study*, 90; Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, 251.

hence marriage began to be regarded in ecclesiastical rather than simply social terms. In Roman Catholic tradition, canon law refers to the assemblage of rules or laws relating to faith, morals and discipline. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Catholic Church issued a steady stream of papal *decretals*[13] that were to prevail throughout Christendom. Most of the papal *decretals* which became part of the codified canon law were taken from the answers given by the different popes over the centuries to questions that had been put to them, usually by bishops from around the Western church. The papal *decretals* as authoritative statements provided the starting point for the theology and the regulation of marriage in the Western medieval church.

The twelfth century writings of Peter Abelard, Hugo of St Victor, Peter Lombard, and of St Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, marked a new step in Catholic theology of the sacraments. These theologians distinguished the sacraments of the Church from her other ceremonies, and defined a sacrament as a cause of grace. Even though marriage was included as one of the sacraments in the twelfth century, not all the Roman Catholic theologians agreed at first as to whether or how the sacrament of matrimony conferred grace. For example, Abelard whose list of five sacraments included baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, extreme unction and marriage objected to the idea that marriage (as a sacrament) would effect one's spiritual salvation.[14] Peter Lombard, the most influential Catholic theologian before Aquinas, was the first one to list the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders and matrimony) as they have since been reckoned by the Roman Catholic Church. For Lombard, a sacrament is given as a sign of God's grace; not only as a symbol of the invisible grace, but also as a cause of what it symbolizes. When dealing with the sacrament of marriage Lombard denied this sacramental grace. In his listing of the sacraments he differentiated between those he believed supplied grace, such as baptism and Eucharist, and others which he believed were only remedial, such as marriage.[15]

It was St Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, as contemporaries of the thirteenth century, who both agreed and argued for the sacramental nature of marriage. Thomas Aquinas in his effort to stress the holiness and goodness of marriage appealed to Ephesians 5:32 where the Latin Vulgate translates the Greek word *musterion* (mystery) as *sacramentum*. Hence, where the English

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[13] A papal *decratal* was "a pope's letter containing a decision regarding a matter of discipline written in response to a specific question or appeal." from *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, edited by Daniel Patte, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 314.

[14] Friedrich Heinrich Rheinwald (trans.), *Epitome theologiae christianae: ex codicibus Monasterii S. Emmeramni Ratisbonensis, in bibliotheca aulica monacensi asservatis,* 28: *Patrologia Latina, 178*, col. 1738. Berlin: F.A. Herbig, 1835.

[15] Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Sententiarum,* IV (2), 1, *Patrologia Latina,* CXCII, column 842, Paris, 1844-1864.

translation reads: "it [marriage] is a great mystery", the Latin reads: "s*acramentum hoc magnum est"*. The answer to the question: 'Is marriage a sacrament?'[16] depended on how Roman Catholic theologians like Aquinas understood the term *sacramentum* as incorrectly translated by Jerome in the Latin Vulgate version of Ephesians 5:32, and its occurrences in patristic writings with indeterminate sense.[17] Excluding Ephesians 5:32, which Jerome applied to marriage, in not one of the other fifteen cases can *sacramentum* possibly mean a sacrament in any sense employed by Thomas Aquinas. To him, and subsequently to the Roman Catholic Church tradition, the sacred things signified by the sacraments (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders and matrimony) are the spiritual and intelligible goods by means of which man is sanctified. A person, according to Aquinas, is incorporated with Christ through these sacraments.[18] Is this the same understanding of some evangelical writers and pastors when they refer to the Lord's Supper or Communion as 'a sacrament'?

Roman Catholic Medieval canonists and theologians explained that marriage was a spiritual matter and a holy thing, which only the Church was entitled to conduct, so it was only fitting that the Roman Catholic Church as the custodian of spiritual things (as it believed) should handle it.[19] In Catholic tradition, because of its understanding of marriage as a sacrament, the church can and must regulate it, according to the mind of the church and the role of marriage in the church. What Aquinas thus taught became the perfect exposition of the doctrine of marriage within the Roman Catholic Church, and four centuries later the Council of Trent 1563-4 endorsed and confirmed it to be an absolute truth of faith. Since the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize customary and civil forms of marriage.

3. Reformation on Marriage-making

In response to the medieval Catholic theology of marriage, there was a resounding rejection of its sacramental nature by the Protestant Reformers of

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[16] *Sacrament* is sometimes narrowly used to speak of all the ordinances in which an inward and spiritual energy is connected with an outward and spiritual sign or the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Here grace speaks of the grace of the Holy Spirit accorded to Christians. It can also be used broadly to refer to things like the tree of life and the bronze serpent of the Old Testament. In the Vulgate and in the writings of the early Fathers the word sacrament is also used in a loose sense to include any mystery of Faith. Cf. O.D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony: A Treatise on The Divine Laws of Marriage,* London: Rivington, Percival and Co. 1895, 137-142.

[17] For example, we read in the Vulgate (where the term *sacramentum* occurs sixteen times) of the sacramentum of godliness (1 Tim 3:16), the sacramentum of the seven stars (Rev 1:20), the sacramentum of the woman and the beast (Rev 17:7).

[18] Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans). *The Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, Part III (QQQ LX-LXXXIII) - Sacraments. London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1914, 30.

[19] James T. Hammick, *The Marriage Law of England*, London: Shaw & Sons, 1887, 3.

the sixteenth century (e.g. Martin Luther, John Calvin, etc.). The Protestant challenge to and rejection of the sacramental theology of marriage inevitably created a legal vacuum which made developing a new court system a matter of urgency. Continental and English Protestant theologians produced many ideas that eventually contributed to the development of civil marriage in the Western world. This presented reformed territories and states with the opportunity to develop and produce "a new code of marriage laws."[20]

Although Reformation theologians spoke with one voice against the Catholic doctrine of marriage, they did not have a uniform policy on models of marriage and practice among themselves. Because of his view of the state, Luther taught that marriage was a social estate of the earthly kingdom of creation, not a sacred estate of the heavenly kingdom of redemption. He argued that since matrimony had existed from the beginning of the world, and still continues even among unbelievers, there were no reasons why it should be called a sacrament of 'a new law' and of the church alone.[21] In his view, although marriage as an institution was divinely ordained, the marriage-making itself as a social activity was subject to the state, rather than to the church.[22] As far as he was concerned, marriage was directed primarily to human ends - "the fulfilling of uses in the lives of the individual and of society"[23] and the restriction of prostitution, promiscuity, and other public sexual sins.[24]

Today in Lutheran Germany and other continental European countries like the Netherlands, it is the civil marriage ceremony that is recognized as an acceptable method of establishing a valid and legal marriage union, and not a church marriage ceremony.

On the other hand, John Calvin, the French Reformer who had been trained in law, developed a covenantal model of marriage that, in fact, confirmed many of the Lutheran theological and legal reforms but cast them in a new ensemble. In the first place, Calvin, like Luther, taught that marriage was not a sacramental institution of the church. However, he argued that marriage-making was *a covenantal association* of the entire community. In Calvin's view, a variety of parties participated in the formation of this covenant. The groom and the bride[25] themselves made their vows to each other and

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[20] Donald Logan, "The Henrician Canons," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 48 (1974), 99-103.

[21] Henry Wace (trans.), *Luther's Primary Works: Together with his Shorter and Larger Catechisms,* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904, 377.

[22] Wace, *Luther's Primary Works,* 377-387.

[23] Wace, *Luther's Primary Works*, 387.

[24] Wace, *Luther's Primary Works*, 387.

[25] In ancient Rome, the friends of both the groom and the bride would meet at the home of the woman's father to settle the marriage contract. This contract was called a '*sponsalia*', that is, an espousal which was either a marriage or betrothal. The groom

before God, rendering all marriages tripartite agreements, with God as third-party witness, participant and judge. The couple's parents, as God's lieutenants for children, gave their consent to the union. Two friends, as God's priests to their peers, served as witnesses to the marriage. The minister, holding God's spiritual power of the Word, blessed the couple and admonished them in their spiritual duties. The civil magistrate, holding God's temporal power as a government official, registered the couple and protected them in their person and property.[26] Each of these parties was considered essential to the legitimacy of the marriage, for they each represented a different dimension of God's involvement in the covenant. To omit any such party was, in effect, to omit God from the marriage covenant.[27] According to Calvin, the marriage courts of the state learned and administered "a new marriage law, scrupulously based on Scriptural texts".[28] In theory, Calvin denounced the sacramentality of marriage, but in practice he embraced the medieval Catholic form of Church marriages.

One can conclude that the medieval canon law on marriage was a watershed in the history of Western marriage law. The main argument for the Roman Catholic theologians for church marriages was that marriage was considered to be a sacrament which could only be conducted in church by church leaders, whereas for the Protestant churches, contracting and conducting marriage in church was purely an effort to stop clandestine unions by promoting public unions. Clandestine unions prevailed generally in Holland, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and England.[29] A puzzling and disastrous antagonism between *legality* and *validity* was thus created. The Catholic and Protestant views of marriage-making would become distinctive attitudes and doctrines of Western Christianity which missionaries imposed on Africans who converted to Christianity but still lived in African society. Instead of reflecting the cultures of respective African communities among whom they planted churches, missionaries insisted on the Western model of Christian marriage ceremony, practice, and procedures in the name of biblical Christianity. What we question here is whether ecclesiastical and civil marriage legislation passed in Europe to meet specific European marital and social problems in different cultural generations can justifiably be extended to African Christians in Africa (and the rest of the non-Western world).

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was known as the *sponsus*, and the bride as the *sponsa*. The English word spouse, which means the one who has promised, comes from the Latin *sponsus*.
[26] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1961, 4.20.1-8.
[27] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.19.34-36.
[28] Thomas A. Lacey, *Marriage in Church and State*, London: SPCK, 1947, 148.
[29] Harold C.N. Williams, *20th Century Cathedral*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964:13f.

If the approach to Christian marriage-making that was initially brought to sub-Saharan Africa was almost wholly Western,[30] then the need for an evaluation of the missionary tradition of Christian marriage-making in Africa is not simply an intellectual quest,[31] but a matter of urgency in African pastoral praxis.[32] The outcome of the pursuit of a culturally meaningful and relevant approach to an African Christian marriage ceremony "will almost certainly be, in many respects, very different indeed from what European Christians know in the West"[33] in terms of how it is contracted and celebrated.[34] Hastings made the sensible recommendation that the African Church should *recognise* and *register* customary marriage for the purposes of government.[35] However, he did not tell us *how* African churches should go about it. Here we propose a paradigm shift in African Christian marriage-making which meets all the essential requirements for a customary and church (civil) marriage in sub-Saharan African nation-states. The proposed approach will also be an answer to the current social and moral dilemmas that confront African Christians at marriage.

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[30] Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa: being a report commissioned by the Archbishops of Cape Town, Central Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.* London: SPCK, 1973, 66-72.

[31] Andrew F. Walls, "Africa and Christian Identity", *Mission Focus,* 7 (November 1978), 13.

[32] P. Gundani, 'Teaching Christian History from an African Perspective,' *Journal of African Christian Thought,* Vol. 6, No.2, December 2003, 45.

[33] Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *The Secular Promise; Christian presence and contemporary humanism,* London: SCM, 1964, 8-9.

[34] The Pope, in his closing speech, referred to the form of Christianity in Africa as having its African identity: "The expression, that is, the language and mode of manifesting this one Faith may be manifold, hence it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of the one who professes this one Faith. From this point of view, certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favoured by the Church...And in this sense you may, and you must, have an African Christianity. Indeed you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection so as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fullness and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all its own, and genuinely African". See Pope Paul VI, 1969, "Closing Discourse to All-Africa Symposium", Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* London: Chapman, 1975, 20. The following year, at the Second All-African Episcopal Symposium in Ivory Coast, the Hall of the University of Abidjan was decorated with a huge banner bearing the words: "YOU MAY, AND YOU MUST, HAVE AN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY". That showed how Africa had taken the phrase to heart. Cf. Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* 1975, 20.

[35] Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa,* 72, and footnote 1.

A Practical Approach to African Christian Marriage-making

If Africans consider customary marriage as the *sine qua non* of a valid and legitimate life union between a man and a woman even in contemporary African society, then I suggest that an explicit invocation of divine blessing should form an integral part of customary marriage for African Christians just as it should do in any culture that acknowledges God as the source of life. At present, for any African couple to receive a blessing upon their husband-wife union, they either have to qualify for a church wedding or go for a church blessing subsequent to a civil marriage ceremony.

In Matthew 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12 Jesus gives us principles of the biblical theology of marriage-making that are essential for any (Christian) marriage anywhere in the world today. In his teaching on the ideal marriage, Jesus often referred his audiences to the Hebrew Scriptures on marriage. In the first place, Jesus pointed out that in the one-man and one-woman marriage relationship that God first designed as the ideal marriage, the man takes the initiative in creating a marriage relationship, and the woman must give her free consent to the proposal. Second, according to Jesus quoting Genesis 2:24, marriage-making is to be viewed and respected first and foremost as a life binding covenant in which one man and one woman become one flesh. At marriage, 'a man leaves, cleaves, and he and his wife become one flesh.' Such a union of one man and one woman in marriage was not to be broken apart by human beings, even by the spouses themselves. Christian marriage-making, which should reflect and maintain all those universal essentials, can be entered into culturally while acknowledging and honouring God through a customary marriage ceremony. African Christians too can enter into a Christian marriage that acknowledges and honours God through culturally meaningful marriage artefacts, just as the established ecclesiastical marriage laws in the European tradition of church marriages endorsed the customary practices of the pre-Christian Greek, Roman, and later the German, Frankish and Celtic cultures (e.g. the engagement ring, the wedding ring, bridal white gown, bridal veil, marriage vows,[36] inclusion of children in a bridal party, candle lighting, etc.).

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[36] Before the invention of coins, an Egyptian man would carry and display his wealth by having gold rings on his fingers. On the wedding day, he would give one of the gold rings to his bride. While putting the gold ring on her finger he would be making a promise (vow) saying, "With this ring all my worldly goods I thee endow." By so doing, the husband was symbolically conferring his worldly goods upon her. When the Romans came on the scene as the dominant world power, they adopted the use of the Egyptian ring as a marriage pledge. To them the ring became a symbol of the cycle of life. Unlike the Egyptians, they would give an engagement ring instead of a wedding ring as a token of a pledge or commitment for a future marriage. It was the Germanic tribes, during the Middle Ages, who resumed the ancient Egyptian use of the wedding ring. A groom would give his bride a marriage ring on the wedding day itself. Later, the

1. An African Christian Customary Marriage Ceremony

If most of the moral difficulties encountered by African Christian couples at marriage arise from lack of the recognition of customary marriages by mission-founded churches in African society, then the modern church in sub-Saharan Africa needs to reconcile the two marriage systems. A consequence of the current approach to either civil or church marriage is that the wedding is regarded by most African participants as a duplication of an earlier marriage ceremony. The suggested paradigm shift in African Christian marriage-making, which we may call an *African Christian customary marriage ceremony*, has the following features: 1) the recognition and registration of customary marriage; 2) expressing covenantal faithfulness in marriage; and 3) invoking God's blessing on marriage.

One feature of the African Christian customary marriage ceremony should be the recognition and registration of customary marriage. As a public recognition of the African customary marriage ceremony, marriage banns[37] leading to the customary marriage day should be read or published in church

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Western culture started to make use of both the engagement ring (like the ancient Romans) and wedding ring (like ancient Egyptians and Germanic tribes). At an engagement ceremony, a fiancé would give his fiancée an engagement ring as a pledge for a potential marriage. Then, on the actual wedding day, the bridegroom would give his bride a wedding ring as a pledge to a life-time commitment. Historically, the wedding ring became part of the Church marriage ceremony pledge in 1549. Initially, only the groom would give his bride a wedding ring while pledging, "With this ring I do thee wed." And the wearing of wedding rings especially by married women gradually became almost a universal expectation and practice. Married couples would wear it on the third finger of the left hand since it was believed that a nerve in that finger went straight to the heart. It was the English who first referred to the ring-finger as the *gold finger* because of the gold value in the ring. Hence, the modern use of marriage vows, cakes, and marriage rings in Church marriage ceremonies and celebrations can be traced back to pre-Christian Egyptian, Roman and Celtic cultures. Cf. Dunstan Davies, *Why Do We … At Weddings?* Nuneaton, Warwickshire, England: M.D. & P. Davies Book Services, 1996.

[37] 'Banns' comes from the Latin '*bannum*' meaning edict or proclamation. Hence the calling of banns is a proclamation of intent that certain people intend to get married. In England, either banns or a licence are the necessary formality before the wedding can take place, and are indicative of society's approval by no objections being received. By law a marriage ceremony can only take place after the calling of the banns (any three Sundays in the three-month period prior to the wedding) in either of the parish churches of the parishes where the couple reside, and between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. (Marriage Act 1949 s.4) - or in the church on whose Electoral Roll one or other belongs if the banns have been called there. There was a time when the Anglican Church was the only place where a marriage could take place, but this is no longer true. People can now get married in other licensed buildings. However, wherever the ceremony is to take place the legal formalities have to be observed. Cf. Charles Hutchins, *Liturgy For Marriage: Some Guidelines With Reference to the Series 3 Service*. The Grove Worship Series, No. 47. Nottingham: Grove Books, 1976, 9.

for three consecutive Sundays[38] before the *lobolo* transactions take place in accordance with the current laws of the land. The church pastor should regularly meet with the couple for pre-marital counselling, and with family representatives of the couple to be married. During these sessions, the pastor, who would need to be a marriage officer, would explain his role and responsibility in the marriage ceremony if such a marriage union is to be recognised and registered by the church and state. On the day arranged for the customary marriage contract, the pastor and some of his church leaders should accompany the groom and some of his relatives to the bride's village home, where *lobolo* transactions normally take place. The editors of *African Christian Marriage*[39] are right in suggesting that, at a marriage, the church in Africa should go and participate in the celebration of the African Christian marriage-making, for church and government purposes, within the community of the people instead of inviting the couple and their parents to a church building.[40] The day of *lobolo* transactions is the focal point of African marriage. An African valid customary marriage is contracted and considered legitimate only when the *lobolo* negotiations and transactions between the members of the *lobolo*-giving family and the *lobolo*-receiving family are entered into or completed.[41] Studies of African marriage agree that *lobolo* is the central piece of customary marriage.[42] Unfortunately, due to human greed in the cash economies of modern Africa, *lobolo* has been commercialised.

Another feature of the *African Christian customary marriage* ceremony should be the expression of covenantal faithfulness in marriage. After the *lobolo* transactions and other related customary marriage ceremony rituals, the pastor should ask both sets of families and the couple themselves to make

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[38] According to the Marriage Act, patterned after the Marriage Act of England, found in all former colonies.

[39] This is a final report of a five year programme of research into sociology and theology of marriage in Africa from a Roman Catholic perspective. Most of the findings of the Churches' Research on Marriage in Africa (CROMA) are similar to those of the Hastings' Report, *Christian Marriage in Africa*.

[40] B. Kisembo, L. Magesa, & A. Shorter, *African Christian Marriage,* Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1977, 45.

[41] G.L. Chavhunduka, "Social change in a Shona Ward", *Occasional Paper 4*, Salisbury, Rhodesia: University of Rhodesia, (1970), 5.

[42] Joan May, *Changing People, Changing Laws.* Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987, 41; M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples: an ethnography of the contemporary Shona, with special reference to their religion,* Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1982; A.K.H. Weinrich, *African Marriage in Zimbabwe and the Impact of Christianity.* Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1982; Michael Gelfand, *African Background: the traditional culture of the Shona-speaking people* Juta, 1965; J.F. Holleman, *Shona Customary Law: With Reference to Kinship, Marriage, the Family and the Estate,* Manchester University Press, 1952; G.L. Chavhunduka, "Social change in a Shona Ward", *Occasional paper 4*, Salisbury, Rhodesia: University of Rhodesia, 1970; Aeneas S. Chigwedere, *Lobolo - Pros and Cons,* Harare: Books for Africa, 1982.

a public declaration. Because the principles of marriage expounded in Genesis 2:18-24 indicate that the unity of husband and wife is somehow stronger than that of a man and his kindred, it will be essential for the parents or representatives of the groom's family to make a public declaration releasing their son (the man) to a new relationship with his wife, the bride. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the Bible to an African society lies just here, but it has once again to be said that it lay here too in regard to European society in the past. For many Christians of every age the husband-wife relationship has in many ways continued to take second place to that of the man and his lineage group.[43] We believe that the marriage ceremony service does more for 'public relations' on behalf of the Christian church than any other. Not only are the two people themselves very much concerned over the words that are used, but all those present are confronted by the teaching of the church on marriage.[44]

> A suggested statement of declaration by the groom's parents is as follows:
> We, as parents (family) of A.B. (groom), publicly declare in your presence (bride and her relatives, groom and his relatives, church representatives, etc.) as witnesses that in recognition of our son's new relationship with his bride, we joyfully release him to enter into a husband-wife relationship with our daughter-in-law. That unique and special relationship requires him "to leave his father and mother and join himself to his wife, and become one flesh." Therefore, we now publicly release him to that exclusive husband-wife relationship. It is our desire not to interfere with the new marriage relationship of these two. We publicly accept, C.D, the bride, as our daughter-in-law.
>
> Son, we publicly wish you well as you go into this husband-wife relationship with your bride. Through your marriage to your bride, C.D., we have gained a wonderful daughter-in-law. We welcome her into our family.

This will also be a public assurance to the bride that she is being accepted into the groom's family as the couple start their own life as husband and wife. In response to the parents' public declaration, the pastor may ask the groom and bride to make their personal and public declarations that could read something like this:

> I, A. B. (groom) would like you witnesses present to know that when I approached C.D. (according to African courtship procedures) for marriage she accepted my proposal after seeking God's guidance and family advice. I am also grateful to my in-laws for allowing me to enter into an exclusive marriage relationship with their daughter, C.D. By their acceptance of the *lobolo* transactions as a token of my deep appreciation for their part and role in the upbringing of C.D., they gave me permission to marry their daughter. I would like to also publicly thank my parents for their support and consent to my marriage to C.D. As a Christian groom, I would like to make a public commitment in your presence as witnesses to the exclusive covenantal faithfulness relationship that I am entering with C.D.

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[43] Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa,* 63-4.
[44] Hutchins, *Liturgy for Marriage: Some Guidelines,* 4.

Now to you, C.D: Our courtship was a private matter, though it was in full view of God and our key respective relatives were aware of it. Today, I, A.B. publicly take you to be my lawful wedded wife, to live together according to divine instruction on marriage within our cultural context. My loyal love and companionship will be to you, forsaking all others. It is my commitment to be faithful to you so long as we both shall live. So, help me God!

Then, the bride, at the invitation of the pastor, would also make a public declaration:

I, C. D. (bride) would like you witnesses present to know that when A.B. first approached me (according to African courtship procedures) for marriage, I sought God's guidance and family advice on the matter. I would like to publicly thank my parents for their support since my birth, and for their consent to my marriage to A.B. My parents' acceptance of A.B.'s token of appreciation in the form of the *lobolo* transactions is an indication that the two families are in agreement to this union. As a Christian bride, I would like to make a public commitment in your presence as witnesses to the exclusive covenantal faithfulness relationship that I am entering with A.B.

Now to you, A.B, today, I, C.D. publicly take you to be my lawful wedded husband, to live together according to divine instruction on marriage within our cultural context. My loyal love and companionship will be to you, forsaking all others. It is my commitment to be faithful to you so long as we both shall live. So, help me God!

Then the groom and bride would make a joint statement to members of the community present. The statement could take the following form:

We, A.B. and C.D, ask you all present, as witnesses to our marriage commitment, to pray for us. As we start our new home, we are both thankful to our parents who brought us up and groomed us for adulthood. As a young couple, there will be times when we need your wise advice and counsel on issues of life. As a Christian couple, we submit ourselves to God's instruction on marriage, through our leaders of the church and family members. So, help us God!"

At the end of a *Christian customary* marriage ceremony, the groom and bride would sign an official marriage certificate. According to the expressed wish of our female questionnaire informants, the couple would like to see their parents or relatives and pastor sign the marriage certificate as witnesses. The date on the marriage certificate would reflect the exact date of the couple's marriage. Up to now, marriage certificates issued at civil (church) marriage ceremonies in independent African nation-states do not reflect the actual date of the customary marriage. It is well acknowledged that in pre-colonial Africa, traditional marriages were never registered.

Another feature of an African Christian customary marriage ceremony should be that of seeking God's blessing on a marriage, either for offspring, as the main motive in the early church, or on a couple as in modern times. This would provide a practical recognition that marriage is a divine institution established by God. It was a common practice from the beginning of the early

history of Israel to acknowledge God as the one who bestows blessings. In an African context, a church blessing on a customary marriage should be more than a pastoral prayer on the couple and their marriage. It should be preceded by a brief address from the Bible on Christian marriage and the importance of covenantal faithfulness in Christian marriage. In modern pastoral theology and practice, a marriage blessing refers to a private service whereby a minister or priest prays for the couple who have contracted their marriage *elsewhere* (at the civil court) where no Christian prayer is offered. It is important that the pastor pray God's blessings on the couple and their marriage as a public testimony and recognition that marriage is a divine institution.

At the end of the *Christian customary marriage ceremony*, the relatives and couple can proceed with some of the cultural rituals (for example, the cultural handing over of the bride) towards the consummation of their marriage before returning to their urban local church. In some ways, the handing over proceedings are like the beginning of a honeymoon in Western society. Upon returning to their urban local church after the celebration of customary marriage (which usually includes days or weeks at the groom's village), the pastor should introduce the couple to the rest of the congregation as Mr. and Mrs. If the couple want to have a marriage reception, which is often the case, weeks or even months after their *Christian customary* marriage ceremony, it should be made clear to the church and all concerned that it will be a *marriage reception* for friends, relatives and the church members (John 2:1-12) and **not** a marriage ceremony. It is hoped African Christian couples will seek to honour God in how they go about their marriage receptions. The couple may decide to put on their wedding attire at the wedding reception. Nearly all African women respondents in our marriage questionnaire indicated that they would like to put on a white wedding gown at their marriage. Since it is easier to wear a white wedding gown in an urban building than in rural mostly undeveloped areas, it is suggested here that a bride can put on her wedding dress for the reception. The pastor should, in light of the already conducted *Christian customary marriage ceremony*, make a clear distinction between a *marriage ceremony* and a *marriage reception*.

Concluding Remarks

Before the introduction of church marriage each ethnic group determined the requirements for a valid and legitimate marriage union. In African society, where people consider customary marriage-making the *sine qua non* of establishing a valid and legitimate union between a man and a woman, the introduction and enforcement of statutory marriage which did not recognise African customary marriage-making practice and procedures resulted in social and moral dilemmas.

The *Christian customary marriage ceremony* approach to African Christian marriage-making in African society has several advantages. First, while maintaining customary marriage as the essence of a valid and legitimate

marriage in African society, it also takes seriously the centrality and significance of divine blessing, and the state's laws on marriage by involving the church minister in the village context where most customary marriages are contracted. Second, the date which appears on the marriage certificate will be the same as the actual date of marriage, and names of witnesses on the marriage certificate will be those of the couple's parents and relatives and their pastor as our survey respondents indicated. Third, there will be no need for the church to discipline African Christian couples who consummate their marriage after the customary ceremonies but before a church wedding. In the current system of the European-oriented Christian marriage practice in Africa, many an African Christian couple has been subjected to unnecessary and humiliating public discipline for having consummated their marriage after the customary marriage celebration but before a church wedding. Since Central Baptist Church in Harare, Zimbabwe, has adopted this approach to marriage-making, there have not been any incidents of church discipline related to the time of marriage consummation. Fourth, this approach places less economic pressure on the couple than the current system that was introduced to African Christian churches by missionaries when they first established Christian churches in sub-Saharan Africa. Expensive and elaborate weddings and celebrations resulted not only from watching and imitating the Europeans, but also from the input of missionaries, who would often bake cakes, provide expensive wedding clothes and help their African Christian workers financially, in order to make it possible for such attractive weddings to take place for all to see.[45] The *Christian customary marriage ceremony* will reduce the social pressure for expensive marriage ceremonies and celebrations.

Therefore, from a biblical, theological, cultural, legal and pastoral perspective, this proposed approach to Christian marriage-making in modern Africa provides a much-needed answer to the current moral challenges facing African Christians at marriage.

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[45] TAG (Theological Advisory Group). *A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa,* Machakos, Kenya: Scott Theological College, 1994, 110.

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Implications of Paul's Model for Leadership Training in Light of Church Growth in Africa

By Philip E. Morrison

Introduction

"I have three churches and I am planting a fourth", an African pastor told me. When I asked him where he had received his training his answer was significant, "I went to a seminar on the 'Life and Letters of Paul' once and received a certificate." This conversation crystallizes the condition of the church in Africa - it is growing quickly and much of the leadership is untrained or undertrained. Reflecting on this rapid growth Edgar Elliston wrote in 1988:

> It appears that we are falling further behind in the preparation of church leaders for the number of new churches which are now being established. Now in Africa there are more than 500 ministry training institutions and yet the continual plea is for more leaders.[1]

The situation today seems to be the same as it was in 1988. We are still experiencing rapid church growth in Africa and must ask what this means for the church on the continent.

First, it means that pastors cannot be trained fast enough to match this pace. There is simply not enough capacity in our institutions to produce pastors for all of the churches being planted.[2] For example, Fernando writes:

> Theological education has suffered from serious neglect across the African continent. There has undoubtedly been a massive response to the gospel, even after allowing for statistical exaggeration. However, one informed observer has estimated that if every person in leadership training - of every theological persuasion and at every level - were immediately put in a position of pastoral responsibility, every one of them would have to pastor ten churches of 600 members to cover the existing Christian population on the continent. There is a vast deficit of trained leadership in Africa.[3]

And secondly, as a result, it means most churches will be led by untrained and undertrained leaders on any given Sunday.[4] David Livingmore observes that eighty-five percent of the churches of the world are led by people who

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[1] Edgar J. Elliston, "Designing Leadership Education"*, (Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, April 1988), p. 205.

[2] Not to mention the fact that not all graduates will become pastors in local churches.

[3] Keith Fernando, *Strategic Principles for Formal Theological Education in Sub-Saharan Africa,* (unpublished paper, August 2009).

[4] This is proof that the Church must be a divine institution. No business or government could survive with this level of untrained leadership! But this is not an excuse to perpetuate the situation.

have no formal training in theology or ministry.[5] In regards to the situation in Africa Steve Van Horn puts this rate even higher: "Up to 90% of the pastors in any given country have never received even one day of training."[6]

This was brought home to me when a colleague told me about his home area where in one DCC (District Church Council) there are fourteen churches of which eight are led by pastors who have had no training. One of those has been leading the church for fifteen years. Situations like this could easily explain why the African church is often described as being like a lake that is "a mile wide and an inch deep". While this may seem like an apt description, it isn't a helpful metaphor when thinking about how we can address the "shallowness" that it implies. How do you make a shallow lake deeper? And how can we apply that metaphor, in practical terms, to the church?

Perhaps thinking of the church in Africa as a building with a weak foundation would be better.[7] An inadequate foundation cannot bear the weight that is built upon it. The more super-structure that is built, the more the cracks in the foundation will become visible. A weak foundation is a disaster waiting to happen.

If leadership is the church's foundation, then it seems obvious that if we have weak leaders our churches will be weak. Weak leaders will not produce strong churches. Although we need strong denominational leadership, our focus should really be on training the leaders at the local level if we want to develop a mature and healthy church. These local leaders are the ones we expect will provide pastoral care, preach the Word and give spiritual guidance and counsel to the members of the church. However, they often are serving with little or no training and as a result the churches suffer.

Does God Have A Plan?

In light of this I raise the question that since God is causing the growth of the church world-wide, would He not also have a plan and methodology in place for providing leaders and pastoral care for His people? If so, why do we have such a shortage of trained leaders? Surely we cannot lay this state of affairs at His feet! Could we conclude then that the result is either a problem of our own making or a neglect of implementing His plan, which I argue is the methodology used by Paul in the early church?

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[5] David A. Livermore, *Serving With Eyes Wide Open*: *Doing Short-term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), p. 41.

[6] As quoted by Timothy Cantrell, "Launching Church-Strengthening Movements in Africa", (*Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Volume 24.1, 2005), p. 84.

[7] It must be stated that the biblical analogy of the church as a building "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20) is not in view here.

What is the solution for this difficult situation? It is not necessarily more training institutions. Elliston observes: "Western missionaries and westernized church leaders need ... to back away from the rush to build more Western training programs."[8] Instead we need to rethink how we train and prepare leaders for the church at the local level. This does not mean that we do away with formal education and training but that we need to think in broader terms to prepare church leaders. We need to embrace the idea that church leaders can also be validly trained by non-formal means outside of the formal academy. And further, we must look at what biblically constitutes a leader in the church.

Perhaps one of the biggest hindrances to providing leaders for the growing church is the traditional clergy-lay distinction which has long characterized the Western church and been adopted in Africa and around the world. This was definitely the case that Paul Gupta confronted as leader of the Hindustan Bible Institute in Chennai, India. He describes the leadership challenge they faced as a result of their goal to plant one million churches in India. The traditional formal method of training church leaders could not fill the need occasioned by India's rapid church growth. However, part of the challenge they faced was the clergy-lay distinction which had a limiting effect on the church's view of who could be a leader. Gupta writes:

> Finally, we understood that the largest pool of untrained leaders were the people in our local congregations who had been taught that only ordained pastors do the ministry. Our biggest challenge lay in "the mobilization of the national church to do the work…"[9]

How did the church come to this place? George Cladis observes, "We exchanged Paul's notion of the church as the body of Christ for a clergy-centered *'parish model'* of ministry that usurped the role of the laity." This Western model has been imported to Africa with the resulting misconception among the membership of the churches that ministry is exclusively the work of the pastor. The average person in the church does not feel that they can or should be involved in ministry.[10]

To my way of thinking we need to do away with the clergy-lay distinction as much as possible, as well as the idea that only the ordained leader can serve. We need to emphasize the body of believers being involved in ministry and service. Following Ephesians 4:11-13, Gupta writes:

> "…The pastor must understand the urgency to equip his people to participate with him in ministry. Rather than create dependency, he must mentor individuals in the congregation to be about the work of the kingdom. He

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[8] Elliston, "Designing Leadership Education", p. 205.

[9] Paul R. Gupta and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision,* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 2006), pp. 139-140.

[10] Philip E. Morrison, *The Multi-Church Pastor* (Allentown, Pennsylvania: Gratia Veritas Publishers, 2004), p. 43. The Cladis quote in this paragraph is also on page 43.

should help people recognize their gifts, point out open doors for ministry, and watch over and foster the progress of believers seeking to follow the Lord.[11]

I am not saying that we should not have trained pastors or those functioning in that role. Admittedly there is an ecology of training.[12] Those who have been educated in the Bible college or seminary need to pass their high level of training on down the line. Their biblical ministry within the body is vital but often not being fulfilled within the church. Often the educated pastor is not following the training model of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2. But the way to provide leadership for the African church is found in this model.

Paul's Training Model

To outline this idea we need to look at the training model of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2: "*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*" Examining this text we see a progression that is followed as information and skills are shared from one level to the next.

Paul→Timothy→Faithful Men→Others[13]

As we look at this progression we see that training gets passed from person to person and note that as one moves down the line the less "positional" the leaders become. It would seem that the emphasis of this non-formal training is on those who are the "lay" leaders at the grassroots level in the local churches. We could picture it this way:

*Apostle→Pastor→Elders→**People***

In light of this leadership training progression where has the church in general, and in Africa specifically, put its primary emphasis and the bulk of its resources in training? I believe it has gone into institutional pastoral training!

*Apostle→**Pastor**→Elders→People.*

Institutional pastoral training is important and I am not arguing against it. What I am concerned about is the imbalance of the Church's training priorities. Pastoral training does not seem to be Paul's main emphasis or end goal. His emphasis seems to be on those leaders who were to be raised up within the local congregation as seen below. (Then perhaps from those leaders one might rise to the "pastor" position.)

*Apostle→Pastor→**Elders**→People*

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[11] Gupta and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision,* p. 82.

[12] I am indebted to Mark Shaw who used this terminology in a conversation regarding church leadership training.

[13] Paul is actually following the methodology of Jesus. We could put Jesus' place in the model like this: *Jesus→Apostles→Faithful Men→Others*

Therefore, if the reality is that many, if not most, of our churches are being led by untrained elders and the socially powerful people in the local congregations, without the supervision of a trained pastor, are we not missing an important element of church leadership by not training those de facto leaders? Are we not, at least, unbalanced in our focus?

Secondly, as we look at these verses we ask where is the context of training? It is the local church. Where is the context of training located in the African church? Can we really say it is in the local church? I believe not. There are some examples, such as Theological Education by Extension (TEE), but generally little is being done locally to train church leaders. Most of it is done outside of the local church setting in Bible colleges and seminaries.

What is the type of training that we emphasize in the African church? I would say that it is formal and located in the training institutions. While in the early church there were no training institutions for the leaders to attend, in our contemporary church many of the leaders also cannot attend such institutions, either because of their lack of education or financial means. Thus, the net result is the same and therefore the type of training today should be the same as it was in Paul's time. What is this type of training? As I look at 2 Timothy 2:2, I see that Paul's model was non-formal training *immersed* in the local church. Much of our model has been formal training *isolated* from the local church and centered on the academic context. Gupta's and Lingenfelter's comments on this situation are very much to this point:

> Theological training institutions may better serve the larger body by adopting different methods to equip pastors to train others in their congregations to lead. Schools must not expect all leaders to come to them. Rather, they must go to the people, understand their need, and develop training that will serve the development of leadership in the region and in the context of the church and local culture.[14]

Paul's method emphasized "on the job training" as one man mentored the next. It was training and ministry in the local context. It was natural learning based on real life situations in the community where the leaders had grown up and lived. Any ministry that took place would be observed and received by people who knew them. There could be no hiding from the scrutiny of their neighbors and families. Ministry and character were formed in the crucible of their community, not in the isolated atmosphere of the academy. Kirsh writes:

> The biblical model is much more hands on, more of a mentorship and/or apprenticeship approach. A more biblical model could be utilized effectively across Africa, especially at the lay and diploma levels of training. This would effectively close the gap between theory and practice, offering the learner greater opportunity to reflect on the subject, while also applying it in practical ways. This apprenticeship or "in-service-training" model would temper our

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[14] Gupta and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision,* p. 209.

current methods of theological education with a more holistic and practical element, thus increasing capacity for training without removing the learner from the local context. It would also speed the rate at which training can take place, which addresses a great need on the continent.[15]

Although missions, churches and institutions state that their goal is to train pastors they seem to be missing the mark, and thus the situation of the local church remains the same: untrained or undertrained leadership. People concerned about training and developing leadership within the African church need to carefully re-evaluate their focus and methods. We need to ask ourselves some hard questions. Are we really accomplishing our stated goals? Bruce Nicholls puts it very clearly:

> Our programs of theological education must orient themselves pervasively in terms of the Christian community being served … At every level of design and operation our programs must be visibly determined by a close attentiveness to the needs and expectations of the Christian community we serve. To this end, we must establish multiple modes of ongoing interaction between program and church, both at grassroot and official level…our programs must become manifestly of the church, through the church and for the church.[16]

Practical Considerations in Focusing on More Church-Based Training

1. The Role of Training Institutions

Firstly, the training must be contextualized for Africa. Bible colleges and seminaries need to focus more on equipping their pastoral studies students in the area of training the church's leaders on the grassroots level. This means that the training provided must be closely linked with the student's ministry context. This is not a new idea and is just as pertinent to training church leaders whether in Asia, Latin America or in Africa. David M. Kasali writes:

> Any theology developed must be adequately *focused* [emphasis his] on the real-life needs of the African Christian. Any African theology must scratch where the Africans are itching. Often times our theologies in Africa scratch where the Americans and Europeans itch and leaving the African itching all over with nothing to scratch. In this light, theological education must be more focused and the theological agenda set by the realities of the African.[17]

If we substitute the word *methodology* for *theology* in Kasali's statement, we see that the first step training institutions must take is to examine the focus of their training model to see if it takes into account the burgeoning growth of

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[15] William Kirsh, "Missional Tensions in Africa" in *Globalizing Pentecostal Missions in Africa,* p. 152. http://www.decadeofpentecost.org/ebooks/globalizing-pentecostal-missions-ebook.pdf

[16] Bruce J. Nicholls as quoted by Mvula J. Mvula, *Is the Seminary the Servant of the Church?* http://theologicaleducation.org/2010/09/29/is-the-seminary-the-servant-of-the-church-mvula-j-mvula/

[17] David M. Kasali, *Doing Theology in Africa,* (Unpublished paper delivered at Wheaton Graduate School, Wheaton, Illinois, November 5, 2002), p. 5.

the African church. Are Pastoral Theology departments preparing pastors who will be able to meet the reality on the ground? This reality is that there are not enough trained pastors for a 1:1 ratio of pastors to churches. Therefore we must ask, "Is the training practical in its approach so that it equips the students in line with what they will encounter after they graduate and move into ministry? Will they be equipped to serve in a multi-church pastor setting? Will they be trained in the practical methodology of preparing local church leaders to provide pastoral care and lead the congregation when they are not on site?"

Some of my students raised this concern. "We are mostly trained to … teach a lesson, to preach. In very few incidences are we taught how to teach others." "The biggest challenge to the Bible schools is to enlighten the students to the real situation outside, and to help them make learning a life-long process. This is the process of training trainers to train others."[18]

Secondly, engaging with the reality on the ground may necessitate a re-evaluation of the curriculum and the perspective from which it is presently being taught. Victor Cole agrees with this when he says:

> [W]e cannot afford to train leaders out of the context in which they will function. To this end, church-school relationships must be strengthened. Theological schools must not serve as ivory towers removed from the real day-to-day situations in the churches for which candidates are being trained. Theological schools in Africa should serve as resource centres for the churches - finding ways to help answer questions raised in the churches.[19]

Thirdly, it would be a useful exercise for formal training institutions to do a self-analysis to determine exactly how many of their graduates are actually pastoring churches at the grassroots level. From my observation many graduates move on to become chaplains at hospitals, schools and prisons. Many take up positions in para-church groups and Christian NGOs. A fair number continue on in their education and others end up in teaching positions at formal training institutions. Even those who return to the field are often put into positions of leadership in the denominational hierarchy and thus do not settle into a pastoral role at the grassroots level. This being the case, the individual local church is still deprived of trained leadership. If this is true, can our formal training institutions accurately say they are preparing pastors for the church? It may be a stated goal, but is it an achieved reality?

In light of the answers to these questions, the institutions might have to retool their programmes so that they are not only providing workers for these other ministries but also focusing on meeting the needs of the church. The Church is the Bride of Christ. The Church is the object of his sacrificial love

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[18] John Mbugua, untitled. (Unpublished paper, Moffat College of Bible, July 2000).
[19] Victor Cole, "The Training of Leaders for the Ministry: Implications for Theological Education", (*Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Volume 10, 1991), p. 42.

and affection. And since that is true of Christ, it should be true of those of us in theological education. Jesus did not say, "I will build Bible Colleges and Seminaries." He did not say, "I will build para-Church groups and Christian NGO's." He said, "I will build my Church."

Those of us in theological education should not lose sight of this fact. Other goals and issues can distract us, including concerns to attract more students in order to survive so that we end up serving our institutions instead of serving the Church. If we have as our goal serving the Church by developing leadership that will care for the Bride of Christ, our service will be in line with what is dearest to the heart of Jesus. And if that is so, by faith we can trust and believe that He will provide for all of our needs for survival.

An additional self-evaluative question should be asked of those graduates who are pastoring churches: "Are you actively and intentionally involved in training your church leaders according to Paul's 2 Timothy 2:2 model?" This, in some sense will be a measure of how effectively the theological institution is ministering to the church on the grassroots level.

Patrick Johnstone speaks to the fact that seminaries, as part of the body of Christ, are accountable to the church and he makes these insightful comments about how the training institution should shift its thinking in relation to the preparation of church leaders:

> The whole curriculum, discipling and internship programme needs to be sensitive to the envisaged ministry of their students. This will mean radical changes from the old pattern of academia with an ivory tower seclusion during the time of study. It will be uncomfortable and untidy, but there needs to be more flexibility, wider transferability of credits academically and globally, a combination of periods of study interspersed with spans of ministry, with the subjects studied geared to the next stage of ministry. A new paradigm in theological education has arrived in which we move into a lifetime of study for a lifetime of ministries… Are we willing for the wrenching changes in our institutions to permit this? Are we willing to slaughter our sacred cows of tradition, academic freedom and pride for our own ways of doing things? For Christ's sake and for his expanding kingdom we should.[20]

The Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala is an example of what Johnstone advocates. This theological institution struggled to prepare their students to serve in a wide range of ministry needs. As a result they developed training focused on the student in his ministry context outside of the seminary setting. Their programme (Theological Education by Extension) was

> based on the belief that the seminary would need to go to the student rather than the student coming to the seminary. This enabled the context of the student to be taken into consideration and used as a part of his/her training.

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[20] Patrick Johnstone, *The Church is Bigger Than You Think,* (Bulstrode, Gerrards Cross, Bucks, UK: WEC International, 2005), p. 203.

> Many of the prospective seminary students were already running parishes and involved in various areas of ministry. Now, instead of abandoning ministry work and uprooting themselves and their families to attend a residential seminary, they remained at home.....remaining economically active and involved in their ministry. Instead of attending lectures they studied course material (especially written for education by extension) supplied to them by the seminary and they met regularly in groups with a tutor to discuss the academic work and how it related to the praxis; the actual practice of ministry among God's people. Thus TEE is not merely correspondence or distance education; it is supported by a tutorial structure which enables the study to become contextualised.[21]

This kind of training is a fine example of how a theological institution can follow the spirit of Paul's method as outlined above- local church leaders being equipped in their context. They then train their members so that they can become more than "a superficial community of people who lack understanding and obedience to the teachings of Jesus, and who have no understanding of how to engage their communities with the transforming power of the gospel".[22]

One very important service theological institutions can provide to the church is in relation to governmental requirements. For example, in one country, there is the possibility that the government will mandate that local church leaders have a certain level of formal education. If this is required, then it seems formal training institutions can solve that need in a strategic way and adapt their curriculum to fit the context.[23] In this way they can serve the church by doing for it something it cannot do for itself.

A final consideration is the possibility of developing on-line and distance learning possibilities. The African continent is slowly becoming "connected" and the younger generation is becoming computer literate. While this on-line learning is not an option for all potential leaders at present, it is one that theological educational institutions should explore and prepare for now by committing resources and personnel to develop a curriculum and infrastructure to deliver this type of training. If a theological institution has not begun to prepare for this, it is already behind the curve and missing a great opportunity to serve the Church with this method of equipping church leaders.

2. The Role of Denominations

Denominations must focus on non-formal training methods to train those pastors and church leaders who may never have the opportunity to attend formal educational training institutions. William Kirsh states:

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[21] I have edited and adapted this quotation from
http://globalministries.org/africa/partners/theological-education-by.html
[22] Gupta and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision,* pp. 209-210.
[23] I was asked by my source not to mention specific details about this possible requirement by the government of the country in which he is serving.

The key is not to lock our training programs into predetermined patterns that do not fit our needs on the continent. The African church needs to continually evaluate its theological training programs in light of both financial realities and the training needs of the church…The African church must ask itself, "Are our training programs based on western Enlightenment systems or on a more biblical model?" How was ministry formation done in Old Testament prophetic circles? What was Jesus' model in training His disciples? How did Paul mentor those whom he raised up for ministry? It seems that an examination of how ministry formation took place in biblical times can inform our current practice to greater effectiveness. *It is an area that is essentially unexplored in theological training today largely because the church is committed to its well-established educational intuitions* (sic)[24], *institutions that are struggling for survival in the West* (emphasis mine).[25]

This means that denominations should intentionally promote localized grassroots training. They must realign their priorities to make this type of training a reality. First, this calls for a commitment to provide personnel who will be dedicated to the hard and time-consuming task of training and mentoring. Secondly, this means a commitment to redirect financial resources to accomplish the task. Neglecting this will result in the continued weakness of the local churches and ultimately the demise of the denomination itself.

2.1 Theological Education by Extension (TEE)
One way for denominations to promote training at the grassroots level is to intentionally and fully support, both organizationally and financially, existing non-formal programmes such as Theological Education by Extension (T.E.E.).[26] This is already a proven curriculum that could be taken and put into place. I talked to a rural pastor who had been a policeman and had gone through the T.E.E. course. He enthusiastically spoke of the preparation it had given him for his ministry. However, without denominational endorsement or economic support some may not view it as desirable or financially feasible.

Pastors in ministry cannot fund such a programme. One pastor related to me how he tried to implement T.E.E. among the elders of the churches under his care. The elders agreed to the training but refused to pay for the books. After going through two books with them the pastor discontinued the training because he could not afford purchasing the materials from his own funds.

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[24] I believe the word should be "institutions."

[25] Kirsh, "Missional Tensions in Africa", pp. 151, 152.

[26] In my research I found that some T.E.E. programmes are run by denominations and others are overseen by Bible Colleges and Universities. For example in Kenya, The Presbyterian University of East Africa lists 27,000 in their TEE programme. (http://cio100.cio.co.ke/cio/the-presbyterian-university-of-east-africa/). A smaller college is TEE College in Johannesburg, South Africa which is a distance-learning institution with a current enrollment of 3,200 students from five Southern African countries (http://www.tee.co.za/).

However, if the denomination helped to subsidize this programme and viewed it as an essential part an ongoing strategy of providing trained leadership for all of its congregations, it could begin to make an impact. Various denominations might desire to supplement the curriculum to deal with their own doctrinal perspectives. In addition, modules relating to church leadership and administration could be added to give a more complete preparation. However, using the programme would give a path to follow without having to reinvent the course of study from the ground up.

2.2 Reading Courses and Ministerial Conventions

Another idea for non-formal education would be to develop a reading course. Those enrolled would be expected to read the books in a three year period. Each year would have specifically prescribed books (1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year), and would cover a span of subjects such as: theology, pastoral practice, spiritual formation, and church history. (Original languages could not be covered in this context.) At the end of each year those enrolled would be given an examination on the reading they had done. These scores would be reported to the denominational official in charge of the reading programme. Obviously, the books would have to be chosen carefully for appropriate educational levels. It would seem advisable that African authorship should be given priority if titles on these topics were available.[27]

A complement to the reading course would be an annual pastors and elders ministerial convention. Those in the reading course would be expected to attend each year. This convention would be a continuing education programme and its focus would be more on pastoral practice and less about theology and history. A theme could be chosen each year, three or four presentations could be given which would develop the topic and then a discussion could be moderated on practical issues related to it. If the denomination required all of the pastors to attend (and supported it organizationally and financially) it would demonstrate a clear commitment to personal and pastoral growth. It would also give those in the reading course the opportunity to rub shoulders with experienced pastors and to gain insights from them.

After completing the reading course and attending the ministerial conventions, pastors-in-training would be examined by the denominational leaders as to their call and readiness for ministry. If approved they would serve a two year probationary appointment under the mentoring of an experienced

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[27] A valuable resource for locating books for such a reading course would be Richard L. Starcher and Enosh A. Anguandia, *Textbooks For Theological Education In Africa: An Annotated Bibliography.* (Bukuru, Plauteau State, Nigeria: Africa Christian TextbookS (ACTS), 2007. Available at: http://www.ecwaevangel.org/textbiblio/biblio_all.pdf

pastor. Following this term of service they would be considered by the denomination for licensing and enter into the credentialing process.

Along with promoting the non-formal training of their church leaders, denominations need to elevate this type of training. Unfortunately, there is a certain elitism that can creep into our church structures and even infect members of the congregation, such that unless one has a higher degree his call and ministerial gifts may not be appreciated or affirmed. Those who receive non-formal training should be able to receive credentials and have their call recognized through ordination just as those who receive formal education. This means that certain levels and standards would have to be met by those who would follow this different path of training. Non-formal training, if it is done with quality, proper standards and assessment should not be viewed as second best, or only supplementary training, or as a lesser form of achieving credentials, but as an alternative plan.

3. The Role of Church Leaders

Current church and denominational leaders must embrace the ideal of passing on what they have learned to the younger generation. The church in Africa is a youthful church filled with a vibrant, energetic and increasingly educated population. There is great potential that is waiting to be tapped and channeled into building the kingdom. Yet, the present generation of established leaders may be overlooking or ignoring the responsibility they have to provide upcoming church leaders with the foundational knowledge and requisite skills for church leadership.

What is necessary if training and mentoring is going to take place? It means there has to be a change of attitude by church leaders who must be willing to share what they have learned with younger pastors and leaders within their churches. One of the reasons I have discovered pastors don't want to train others is that they feel threatened by those who may be more gifted than themselves. They are fearful that they may be supplanted by the younger men and so they refuse to train and pass on what they have learned and gained by experience to the next generation. The question then must be asked, "Whose kingdom are they building?" Church leadership should not be an elite club. Older pastors, if they are going to build the kingdom of God - and not their own - must break the tradition of hanging onto power and position and commit themselves to mentoring the upcoming generation of leadership for the church. They must become future driven instead of fear driven. If not, the growing church in Africa will be crippled due to lack of adequately trained and developed leaders.

When will the church in Africa develop enough adequately trained local church leaders? It will happen when Paul's model is implemented. In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul gives a practical example of the pastor-teacher's role in training: "*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare*

God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." Paul is saying the leaders should not simply pass on training to faithful men but to the whole church. This is because in God's plan for the Church everyone is involved in serving the Lord. Since that is the case everyone should be trained and discipled with the result that the body of Christ will be built up. Instead of holding on to power and his position by hindering others from growing and using their gifts or by neglecting to train them, the pastor empowers and equips them to do the work. Gupta and Lingenfeleter agree:

> Every pastor and church must take the responsibility to equip members to lead by making disciples of others. The professionally-led church is a distortion of God's plan and purpose. We return to the pattern of the church in Acts, where apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors, and teachers made disciples and empowered people in local churches to shepherd and disciple others. God gave gifts of leadership in the people He calls to the church; pastors must learn to identify, equip, and release them to serve the body interdependently in fulfilling the needs of the church...The strength of the church - and its ability to serve its people and fulfill its mission - is directly proportionate to its success at developing leaders for ministry to its people.[28]

Recently, in a seminar where I was training church leaders, I met a pastor from Uganda who was putting Paul's model (as outlined above) into practice. He graduated from Bible college with a diploma and planted four churches. Each time he was planting a new church, he was training those whom he called "associate pastors" who could take over the new ministry once it was established. It is in this manner that these new churches have been provided with pastoral care totally outside of the traditional path of formal training.

4. The Role of the Holy Spirit

What is another reason that church leaders or pastors in local church contexts fail to train and empower God's people? Why are we reluctant to allow church members to use their gifts and exercise leadership? May I suggest that it is because we don't trust the Holy Spirit? Do we trust Jesus through His Spirit to guide the Church and its members? Or do we think He only gifts and empowers the "clergy"? Do we allow Him to be the Head of the Church or do we usurp that role by our insistence on controlling access to ministry by reserving it for the clergy alone? How does our practice answer those questions? "What? Trust the Holy Spirit? We can't do that…!" (Of course we would never verbalize that! But do our actions prove it?)

Let us examine the relationship of the Holy Spirit and leadership selection in the early church. In Acts 6 a crisis over the feeding of the Hellenistic widows arose. As part of the solution the church was told to select leaders whose qualifications were that they men of good reputation, *full of the Spirit* (emphasis mine) and of wisdom. When we think of the chronology it

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[28] Gupta and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision*, p. 209.

seems these men would have been relatively new believers and yet the apostles had no problem of allowing them to assume positions of leadership. Isn't it reasonable to believe they trusted the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives and leadership of these men?

Paul's strategy seems to follow this pattern as we see him appointing men to be elders a relatively short time after their conversion (at least compared to many churches in Africa). Let's put this example in context. In Acts 13:52 we read, "*And the disciples were continually filled with joy and the Holy Spirit* (NASB)." We need to emphasize that these were new believers who had come to know the Lord under Paul's ministry in Pisidian Antioch (vs. 14). And yet on the return leg of his first missionary journey to visit the churches he had planted, Luke records that he appointed elders in every city (Acts 14:23). Who were in this pool of potential leaders which Paul could draw from? He only had these new Holy Spirit-filled believers.[29]

How could Paul do that? He had to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit in his choice and the work of the Holy Spirit in those elders who had no training at all and very little discipleship. I find it incredible that Paul did that. Wouldn't we say that a church planter was being very irresponsible if he did the same today? Paul's trust in the Holy Spirit in relation to church leadership is underscored in Acts 20:28 (NIV) where he addresses the Ephesian elders and says, "*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*." It is the Holy Spirit who was at work in a plurality of church leaders to provide pastoral care for the Ephesian church. It was not left to an elite clergy.

It is naïve to think that the way to avoid problems in the church is to keep the control of ministry and leadership solely in the hands of the clergy. Formal training, ordination and installation into a pastoral position do not guarantee

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[29] Is there a tension between Paul's practice of appointing elders shortly after he planted the church and what he says about an overseer in 1 Timothy 3:6, "he must not be a recent convert". One possibility is that the appointing of elders did not take place until the second visit of Paul and Barnabas to these churches. Although admittedly short, this would have given the church time to identify those whom God had gifted in the areas of pastor-teacher and leadership. A second possibility may be found in the context of 1 Timothy itself as compared with Paul's instructions to Titus. The injunction that the elder "must not be a recent convert" is left out of Paul's directive to Titus to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). What is the difference? The church in Ephesus was well established while the work on Crete was young and all the converts were new. Therefore, in Ephesus there was no need for new converts to be put into leadership while in Crete (as well as the churches in Acts 14) there was no other option. For this insight I am indebted to Bob Utley, *Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey: I Timothy, Titus, and II Timothy, SGCSNT, Vol. 9,* Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, page 58. Accessed via http://www.ibiblio.org/freebiblecommentary/pdf/EN/VOL09.pdf.

spiritual maturity. There are enough cases of serious moral and spiritual failure by those in that class to disabuse anyone of that notion! Did Paul fear immaturity in the leaders, syncretism or other such dangers in the early church? I don't believe so. In Acts 20:29-30 Paul acknowledges that there would be external and internal attacks upon the Ephesian church and yet he was comfortable and confident to leave the leadership and future ministry of the flock in their Spirit-guided hands. As a result he could: "*commit [them] to God and to the word of his grace, which [could] build them up* (Acts 20:32)."

To allow our fears to be the reason we don't empower our church members for leadership and ministry is not consistent with the Pauline pattern, which was to trust the Holy Spirit to oversee and guide the Church.

If we are going to provide leadership for the growing church in Africa we must learn to trust Jesus as the Head of the Church to lead all of His Spirit-filled members to use their gifts to build the kingdom. Anything less is not biblical. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:16: "*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love,* as each part does its work" (emphasis mine).

Conclusion

We have raised a number of issues relating to the need for a reevaluation of our present day methodology of providing leadership for the African church. Leaders in denominations and theological educational institutions must be willing to evaluate the effectiveness of their present practice in providing pastoral leadership for the church. They must ask if they are truly meeting the needs of the church through the present traditional formal education model.

As we have said, it is not a matter of exclusively choosing formal or non-formal education. Instead we should be looking at both forms of training as complimentary methods of providing leadership for the church. Every church does not need a pastor who holds an advanced degree. However, every church should have a leader who has had training in basic theology and pastoral skills and, most importantly, in spiritual formation.

A.B. Bruce in his masterful work on the training of the twelve disciples summarizes the thinking behind the methodology Jesus used whereby he invested three years of personal intimate teaching and mentoring of those he had chosen for leadership. He writes:

> the great Founder of the faith desired not only to have disciples, but to have about Him men whom He might train to make disciples of others… Both from His words and from His actions we can see that He attached supreme importance to that part of His work which consisted in training the twelve… The careful painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher's influence on the world should be permanent; that His kingdom should be

founded on the rock of the deep and indestructible convictions in the minds of the few, not on the shifting sands of superficial evanescent impressions on the minds of the many.[30]

Ultimately, we need to come to grips with the way Jesus trained his disciples and the way it was implemented in the early church by Paul. It may not be easy to follow this methodology in our context and in our generation. It will take great courage to think in new and creative ways to provide proper pastoral care for the body of Christ, but the future strength and the health of the church depends upon it. Robert Coleman comments:

Let us begin where we are and train a few of the lowly to become great… Here is where we must begin, just like Jesus. It will be slow, tedious, painful and probably unnoticed by men at first, but the end result will be glorious, even if we don't live to see it. Seen this way …it becomes a big decision in the ministry. One must decide where he wants his ministry to count - in the momentary applause of popular recognition or in the reproduction of his life in a few chosen men who will carry on his work after he has gone. Really it is a question of which generation we are living for.[31]

What would happen in our training institutions if, along with pursuing a high level of biblical scholarship, we would make it a priority to serve the church by intentionally focusing on the grassroots leaders and equipping them? These will not necessarily be scholars but are the shepherds who in fact need support and training.

What would happen if our denominations intentionally invested in training their local congregational leaders and encouraged them in the work of shepherding the flock? What difference would we see in the health and strength of our churches if we had leaders who were trained in godliness and basic church leadership skills?

If Jesus was willing to focus on fisherman and tax collectors and entrust to them the great enterprise of building and shepherding the Church, should we not be willing to focus on the farmers, businessmen, tradesmen, school teachers and others who are the recognized and actual leaders in our local congregations? It is only by developing and training church leaders at this local level that we will be able to provide the spiritual care, nurture, discipline and biblical grounding that is needed for the multitudes of believers who make up the congregations of the African church.

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Book Reviews

The author of this important study, Scott Cunningham, is well known throughout the African continent because of his years as a lecturer in theological education in Nigeria, and his faithful labours on behalf of ACTEA, the association working to strengthen evangelical theological education in Africa. This publication represents an updated and slightly revised version of his PhD dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary. Although dissertations are often difficult to wade through and thus appeal only to specialists, Cunningham's revision has provided a very accessible study, with clearly written prose and good organization.

As a New Testament theologian, I am delighted to see a solidly evangelical and responsibly academic study published by Sheffield Academic Press. As a Christian who has lived in Africa for more than three decades, I rejoice to discover a study that touches an issue Western theologians often ignore, namely, suffering persecution as part of Christian discipleship. Twice the author indicates that his book is no ivory-tower investigation of a Lukan theme. Rather, he has in view the reality experienced by many Christians outside the Western world: proclaiming one's faith in Jesus Christ often leads to persecution. This study provides hope for the Church, hope as underlined in the two-volume work of Luke-Acts.

Cunningham has considered Luke's work as a whole, rather than merely concentrating on the Acts of the Apostles. The reasons for such a procedure are well stated, and the study demonstrates that the theme runs through both volumes of Luke's work, and that the Gospel prepares the reader for understanding the theme in Acts. This linking of the two books with regard to the theme of persecution has made an important contribution to New Testament studies.

Apart from the Introduction and Conclusion, the book is divided into five unequal chapters. The first chapter (19 pp.) reviews previous literature and approaches to the question, and then indicates that the study will proceed by

taking seriously the literary and narrative characteristics of Luke's work (though occasional redactional elements appear throughout the study of the Gospel). The second chapter (144 pp.) and the third chapter (109 pp.) are the heart of the study, examining respectively the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles with regard to the passages relevant to the theme of persecution. A summary of the findings is then presented in Chapter 4 (33 pp.), usefully combining the results of Chapters 2 and 3, and demonstrating how the theme of persecution runs across both the Gospel and Acts. The final chapter, Chapter 5 (9 pp.), attempts to show that the people of Luke's church (those whom Luke has in mind when writing) were themselves persecuted. Cunningham then indicates how he sees the persecution theme fitting with Luke's other concerns. The title for this final chapter, "The Theology of Persecution and the Purpose of Luke-Acts", may be somewhat more ambitious than this chapter itself, in light of the ongoing scholarly discussions of the purpose of Luke's work.

Cunningham arrives at six basic conclusions concerning the persecution theme in Luke-Acts, summarized in his conclusion:

1. Persecution is part of the plan of God.
2. Persecution is the rejection of God's agents by those who are supposedly God's people.
3. The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God's prophets.
4. Persecution is an integral consequence of following Jesus.
5. Persecution is the occasion of the Christian's perseverance.
6. Persecution is the occasion of divine triumph.

The bibliography has a good selection of modern authors, though I would suggest Dupont's book on the Miletus discourse as useful to the discussion. Surprisingly, one finds a notable lack of non-Western authors here. The bibliography would have been strengthened also by more reference as to how the Church Fathers understood and used some of these key Lukan texts. Any publication of this length is bound to have a few editorial and typographical flaws, but very few of either show up in this book. With regard to what Cunningham terms the "bloody sweat" passage of Luke 22.43-44, only those who accept the Majority Text reading are likely to find the point convincing. For the rest, the passage remains problematic from the perspective of textual criticism, and Cunningham's nuance indicates his awareness of this difficulty.

The strength of the dissertation lies in its consistent reliance on the biblical text and dependable, defensible exegesis of the passages in question. The link between the two volumes of Luke-Acts is underscored with respect to the theme of persecution. The abundance of the material Cunningham assembles in this regard is striking.

The noted missiologist Paul Hiebert has pointed out that in the book of Acts, miracles (power encounters) as a testimony to Jesus Christ often led not to great conversions but to great persecution. Cunningham has come at the same idea more generally and as a biblical scholar, showing that persecution

may indeed result from witnessing. Paul and Barnabas proclaimed: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14.21, NIV). Yet this study also shows that God's purposes will triumph and that the persecution itself can be seen as a validation of the believer's position as a true disciple of Jesus Christ, undergoing the same treatment as his Master (and the prophets of the Old Testament). The Lord himself allows the Christian to persevere to the end.

I personally hope that Cunningham - or someone inspired by his work - will now take what he has identified as biblical principles and demonstrate how to apply them in different contexts. For example, in relation to Luke 21:12-19, the author lists several observations:
    1. There is an expectation of violent opposition directed against the disciples.
    2. Persecution comes because of the disciples' association with Jesus … .
    3. Persecution provides the opportunity for further witness.
    4. Aid is promised in the midst of persecution.
    5. Persecution comes from both legal [or public] and personal [or private] sources.
    6. The disciples can expect to triumph in the midst of persecution.

How, then, can these principles be applied in Africa in a Muslim context, an African Traditional Religions context, and in a secular or university context? How can these truths be effectively communicated to the believers who need them? Scott Cunningham has done all of us a great service in providing an evangelical and biblical framework for understanding the relationship between Christian testimony and persecution. It remains for the Church to continue the discussion by disseminating the principles and finding applications.

Though the issue is important, the cost of this volume seriously limits its usefulness in Africa. Major institutions working at the graduate level in Africa would find it very useful. NT scholars in these institutions should consider the ebook version, if that is available in their area.

Approximate Prices:
New $190.00 or $78.00 on Amazon US, or $70.00 used. In the UK on Amazon £85.00, used £63.00. The ebook version at $42.35 US on the following URL is probably the best choice, unless a used copy can be found browsing online: http://ebooks.continuumbooks.com/BookStore/pagedisplay.do?genre=book&pub=continuum&id=9780567564009 (Accessed 2012.08.29)

Christopher J.H. Wright

The Mission of God:
Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative

Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006
ISBN 978-0-830-82571-4 $24.36 US

Reviewed by Enoch Okode, Scott Christian University

Christopher Wright's, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative,* proposes a new framework for reading the Bible. The question he wrestles with is about the validity of using a missiological framework as a hermeneutical approach to reading the Bible. His major concern is to "develop an approach to biblical hermeneutics that sees the mission of God (and the participation in it of God's people) as a framework within which we can read the whole Bible." (p. 17) In other words, Wright seeks to demonstrate that Christian mission is rooted in the scriptures and that a theology of the mission of God gives a hermeneutical framework for reading the Bible.

He defines the essential terms: mission, missionary, missional and missiological. Mission is a commitment to participate as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation. A missionary is someone involved in mission in a culture other than their own. Missional, as an adjective, describes something related to mission. Finally, he uses missiological with reference to theological or reflective aspects of mission.

In order to articulate his argument, Wright divides his work into four parts. In part one, which he entitles 'The Bible and Mission,' he unpacks what a missiological hermeneutic of scripture means, and whether or not such a framework is faithful to the biblical text. Basing his argument on Luke 24:45-47, Wright states that the proper way to read the scriptures is messianically and missionally. Thus Christ crucified and risen forms the bedrock for the hermeneutical coherence of the whole Bible. Among the points he makes include the fact that such a hermeneutic shows interest in the lives of God's people and that it espouses liberation. Furthermore, a missional hermeneutic operates on the basic assumption that the whole Bible is about the mission of God through his people in their participation with God's world on behalf of God's creation. The Bible provides the authority for such mission. This authority, given in the form of the Great Commission, is to be understood holistically, taking into account its indicatives and implied imperatives. Wright ends part one with a note that a missional hermeneutic embraces the biblical theocentric perspective that recognizes the mission of God as unfolded in the grand story.

In part two, Wright addresses the fundamental issue of the missiological implications of biblical monotheism. He discusses how Israel acknowledged the uniqueness of YHWH through his redemptive works as seen in the exodus, judgment, and the return from exile. God revealed himself to Israel in acts that showed them that there is no other god like YHWH. Israel in turn was a steward of this knowledge, since God's people encompassed all nations.

Wright also shows how the NT enriches our knowledge of God through the identity of Jesus as both Christ and Lord. He elaborates how Jesus shares the identity of YHWH and how certain major functions of YHWH are linked to Jesus in the NT. He also investigates the missional significance of the combination of identity and function between YHWH and Jesus. He tackles the question of the missiological significance of full, biblical, christocentric monotheism. Among the points he makes is that just like YHWH in the OT, the NT presents Jesus as Creator, Ruler, Judge and Savior.

The final chapter in this part is devoted to a discussion on the conflict with gods and idols. Wright shows the paradox regarding the gods and idols, that although they are *something* in the world, they are *nothing* in comparison to the living God. Moreover, idols and gods are the work of human hands and may have demonic associations. Consequently, idolatry clouds the distinction between the Creator and the creation and distorts the glory of God. A missional approach will therefore seek to understand different forms of idolatry, and confront them so that the creation may be restored to its original purpose of bringing glory to God.

In part three, the author focuses on the people of God as the agents of the mission of God. He begins by concentrating on God's election of Abraham and his descendants as the channel of blessing to the other nations. He views the call of Abraham as the beginning of God's answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of nations and the groaning brokenness of his whole creation. He also stresses that God's intention to bless the nations is combined with humanity's obedience to him. It is also this obedience and commitment to the ethical demands of the covenant that make God's people a blessing to the nations. Wright thus sees the Abrahamic covenant as a moral agenda for God's people as well as a mission statement by God.

From here Wright moves to the paradoxical duality of the covenant. He states that the covenant is universal since it is for the blessing of all nations, and it is also particular since it is by means of one nation. It follows then that the mission of God has a universal horizon as well as a particular historical method. Wright surveys various Old Testament texts from which he observes that the thrust toward universality is mostly a feature of the faith, worship, and expectation of Israel. When he comes to the New Testament, Wright shows that like the Old Testament, the New Testament presents the universal view of God with a universal mission which he announced to Abraham, accomplished in anticipation by Christ, and which is to be completed in the new creation. He

concludes this section by discussing the election of Israel as part of the logic of God's commitment to history, and as fundamentally missional and soteriological.

Wright then comes to the exodus story, which he views as God's model of redemption, providing one of the keys to understanding the meaning of the cross of Christ. He explains that the exodus was holistic in that God responded to all the dimensions of Israel's need - political, economic, social, and spiritual. As a model of redemption and mission, the exodus challenges the people of mission to be committed to the totality of concern for human need. This calls for applying the holistic exodus message and meaning to the church's engagement in mission. Thus, both evangelism and social action have to be kept in focus.

The author then moves on to a discussion of the jubilee as God's model of restoration. He argues that the jubilee, which is also holistic, is concerned with the whole range of a person's social and economic need, without neglecting the theological and spiritual principles that are integral to it. Wright also shows the economic, ethical, evangelistic and eschatological implications of the jubilee. For the people of the mission to apply the jubilee model they have to "obey the sovereignty of God, trust the providence of God, know the story of the redeeming action of God, experience personally the sacrificial atonement provided by God, practice God's justice, and put their hope in God's promise for the future." (p. 299)

The next topic is God's missional covenant. The question he asks is, how can we read the covenant tradition in the biblical text missiologically? As he attempts to answer this question, he gives a detailed survey that runs from Noah to Christ. In the end, he affirms the centrality of the mission of God to the sequence of the covenants.

The final chapter in this part talks about the life of God's missional people. Wright states that a people who have entered a covenant relationship with God are called to live a distinctive, holy, ethical life in the presence of God and in the sight of the nations. The primary Old Testament texts that he examines are Genesis 18, Exodus 19, and Deuteronomy 4. From all these texts, he concludes that there is no biblical mission without biblical ethics. When he comes to the New Testament he states that God's covenant people are to be a light to the world, a model of obedience, and a people showing love for one another. Thus, Christian ethics and Christian mission have to be integrated.

In the last part, Wright explores the arena of mission in terms of the earth, humanity, cultures and nations. He first concentrates on the missional implications of the goodness of creation and the connections between creation care and Christian mission. Wright sees ecological concern as a facet of the Christian mission that not only expresses our love and obedience toward the Creator, but also constitutes a contemporary prophetic opportunity for the

church. The author then turns to a discussion on humanity whereby he seeks to articulate the implications for Christian mission of what it means to be human. He touches on the image of God in man and the depravity of the human race. In addition, based on the biblical wisdom, he points out that our mission endeavor should be marked by openness to and careful discernment of God's word, respect for God's image in humanity, humility before God and modesty before men.

In chapter fourteen, the author focuses on God and the nations in the Old Testament vision. His main point here is that YHWH created all nations of the world; consequently, they are under his government in their historical affairs, and are accountable to him. Because of the fall, all nations have fallen short of God's glory and are under his judgment. However, there is hope as the remnants of the nations turn to YHWH for salvation.

Finally, Wright ends his book by examining what the New Testament says about God and the nations. He surveys Jesus and the Gospels, Luke's account of the early church, and the apostle Paul. God is leading all nations to a glorious end when Christ will triumph over all rebellion and wickedness. This is the mission of God about which he is the beginning, the center and the end. Wright asserts that a missional hermeneutical reading of the scriptures enables us to have a better perspective of God's mission.

There are many beneficial theological and methodological insights in Wright's book. First, Wright's holistic view of mission is commendable. He rightly points out that God's mission encompasses all facets of life - social, political, economic, and spiritual. Consequently, the evangelistic endeavors of the church should be redemptive and restorational, focused on social concerns and injustices in the land. God's mission unfolded in the grand narrative is concerned with every area of human existence.

Second, the author's argument regarding the christological focus of the Bible is outstanding. Throughout his writing, he seeks to demonstrate that God's mission is ultimately accomplished in and through Christ. He sees the Bible to be both missiological and messianic. When he notes that the Bible is all about Christ, Wright correctly clarifies that this does not mean finding Christ in every line of the scriptures. Instead, it entails reading the Bible through the lens of the person and work of Christ. Thus, Christ provides the hermeneutical key for reading the whole Bible.

Third, Wright provides an excellent discussion of the integration of divine and human synergy in mission. He observes that God is the initiator of mission and that he leads it to a climactic triumph. Yet God enters a covenant relationship with his elect humanity, and thereby invites them to participate in his mission. Human involvement means the conscious and committed participation of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation. Ultimately, God is the initiator, center, and end of this mission.

Fourth, Wright has a balanced view of mission and worship. He quotes John Piper who observes that, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't." Wright agrees because in mission we are seeking those who are not yet worshipping God. On the other hand, Wright notes that it can equally be argued that mission exists because praise or worship does. This is because worship energizes, motivates and re-awakens the passion for mission. Such a balanced approach ensures that there is no subordination of worship to mission and vice versa.

Fifth, the author has a high view of the cross of Christ as the core of biblical faith, the center of any theology of mission. As he observes, it is at the cross that sin is punished and sinners forgiven, that evil is defeated and humanity liberated, and that creation is restored and reconciled to its creator. The cross of Christ is central to any missional hermeneutic and activity.

Apart from its strengths and insights, there are a few points where the book gives inadequate coverage. While Wright has a passion for a holistic view of the Bible (not showing preference to a few texts), when he talks about God's elect, especially from the NT, he concentrates on Paul's writings. This gives a narrow picture of how God's people are chosen to be a blessing to the nations. Rather than solely focusing on Paul's theology of election, Wright could have surveyed every major section of the NT to give better coverage.

This problem of selective handling of texts is also evident when the author writes about the span of God's missional covenant. As he develops his argument concerning the New Covenant centrality of Christ, the author fails to point out what the Gospels say about Christ fulfilling the covenant demands. Furthermore, Wright fails to connect his discussion to Hebrews, an epistle significant to the covenant theme. As much as he discourages selective reading of the Bible at the onset of his writing, he is himself entangled by the strings of selectivity.

Last, when the author talks about God's elect people, he sees the story of redemption as commencing with Abraham in Genesis 12. He argues that believers should be challenged at the level of their deeper worldview by coming to know God in and through the story that is launched by Abraham. While it is true that Abraham is an important figure in the grand narrative, the story of redemption and God's mission can be traced back from Genesis 1. Genesis 3 where we see the fall of man and the promise of salvation is key to understanding God's mission. Moreover, without the first eleven chapters of Genesis, chapter 12 would have little meaning for us. It is therefore inaccurate for Wright to argue that salvation story is launched by Abraham. We must start from Genesis 1 if we desire to have a complete view of the redemptive story.

In conclusion, Wright's call for a missional hermeneutic is remarkable. It demonstrates a quest for and commitment to participation in the mission of God as it encourages reading the Bible both missionally and messianically.

"A Single Anklet Does Not Resound":[1]

A Response to Mother Tongue Theological Education in Africa
By Ernst Wendland

Introduction

This article offers a brief personal response to two insightful articles that recently appeared in *AJET* 29.1 (2010) on the subject of "mother tongue theological education" (MTTE), with special reference to pastoral training in sub-Saharan Africa.[2] I strongly endorse what both authors wrote on this important subject and will simply complement their thoughts with a few of my own observations that have developed over the years and with the experience of being a teacher as well as a learner at the theological institution where I have been privileged to serve. Although we may work in the same general region of the continent, our situations will not be exactly the same. Therefore, my reflections on the topic of MTTE will probably not be equally applicable everywhere; on the other hand, there may be something in my experience that might prove helpful to those who happen to be teaching in similar circumstances. In short, I wish to advocate a combined, complementary, comparative, and contextual approach with regard to language strategy (to the extent possible) when teaching theology and theologically-related subjects in Africa.

Background

I first came to Northern Rhodesia (soon-to-be "Zambia") as an MK in 1962. My father's assignment was to establish a worker-training programme for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA), so I got indirectly involved with this ministry at a relatively early (high-school) age. After graduating from a pre-seminary training college in America, I returned to Zambia to teach on an "emergency" (staff-shortage) basis in 1968 at the new Lutheran Bible Institute and Seminary in Lusaka. I also began my life-long vernacular language-learning process, depending mainly on students as my educators in both the Chewa (Nyanja) language and culture.[3] My particular teaching assignment

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[1] This is my English translation of the Chewa (Nyanja) proverb *Mkwita umodzi sulira m'mwendo*, a saying that promotes social harmony and cooperation in the community, especially in relation to a particular task that is too large or extensive for a single person to accomplish alone. The "anklet" (*mkwita*) is a metal bangle that requires at least one more to clash (literally, "cry out") together as a person dances; of course, the more anklets that a person wears, the more prominent the common sound resulting from the joint action.

[2] The two articles are: Jim Harries, "The Prospects for Mother Tongue Theological Education in Western Kenya" (pp. 3-16) and Andrew Wildsmith, "Mother Tongue Theological Education in Africa: A Response to Jim Harries" (pp. 17-26).

[3] *Chewa* (technically *Chichewa*, referred to as *Nyanja* in Zambia) is a major SE Bantu language spoken by some 12 million first- and second-language users in the countries of (in order of number of speakers) Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

was to introduce the study of biblical languages at the seminary level, beginning with NT Greek. But I soon realized that a similar emphasis needed to be given to using the abundant resources of Zambian languages in our theological training and publication ministries. With that goal in mind, as I simultaneously pursued a seminary degree on a part-time basis (during furloughs), I completed an MA in Linguistics and a PhD in African Languages & Literature at the University of Wisconsin (Madison). My dissertation[4] aimed at revealing the stylistic (oratorical & rhetorical) riches of a Bantu language, which should accordingly be utilized in the translation of Christian literature as well as in the teaching of theology.[5] This led naturally to the next step, involvement in Bible translation as a consultant for the United Bible Societies through secondment to the Bible Society of Zambia, and subsequently also to a staff appointment at the Centre for Bible Interpretation and Translation at the University of Stellenbosch.

The Strategy

In his article Wildsmith makes several recommendations that I would like to follow up on. The first is this, which pertains to the didactic procedure that I also wish to recommend from my teaching experience: "Is there any wisdom in including Mother Tongue Theological Education (MTTE) as well as English in training students in this college?" (p. 23). This is posed as a hypothetical question that arises from his "fictional story." But I have made a concerted effort to apply this principle in the various seminary classes that I teach (ATR/AICs, exegetical studies of selected OT and NT books, and introduction to biblical Hebrew and NT Greek).[6] My approach is combined, complementary, comparative, and contextual in nature - four "C"s. Let me explain:

My teaching method is first of all "combined" in that I do not teach any class either entirely in English or solely in a representative MT. Rather, I will use both during the same class - mostly English, the official language of our seminary (as in Zambia as a whole), but periodically and more or less spontaneously, whenever the need arises, in Nyanja. The two languages, in operation virtually together, serve as the figurative "anklets" referred to in the

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[4] *Stylistic Form and Communicative Function in the Nyanja Radio Narratives of Julius Chongo* (1979).
[5] I present and exemplify this approach in *Translating the Literature of Scripture: A Literary-Rhetorical Approach to Bible Translation* (Dallas: SIL International, 2004).
[6] I might summarize our current theological worker-training programme as follows: 2 years of TEE (we aim to have students with at least a secondary school certificate and to be involved in congregational lay teaching or preaching activities) followed by a "selection exam"; selected students attend the *Lutheran Bible Institute* in Malawi for 3 years; LBI grads attend the *Lutheran Seminary* in Zambia for 3 years, followed by a vicar pastoral service year before ordination; annual continuing education courses at two academic levels (on the importance of this last component, see Richard J. Gehman, "Afterword: More on Mother Tongue Theological Education," *AJET* 29:2, 2012, p. 164).

title of this article. Thus, they both are necessary in order to articulate the desired "sound" - that is, communication which is at the same time more widely connected with the world at large and yet also more firmly grounded in the local cultural milieu.

This conjoined procedure is also "complementary" in relation to need, that is, whenever we (the students and I) get into discussing certain difficult concepts that arise in English, perhaps in the printed text that we happen to be following, I will break off to repeat or paraphrase the issue in Nyanja, which the students in turn may respond to, either in English or Nyanja. This is an instructive process for me too as a teacher, for if I find that if I encounter some difficulties in expressing the concept in the vernacular - for example, the nature of the "days" in Genesis 1 in relation to the theory of evolution - then I realize that I must take more time to develop the subject by way of explanation and/or expansion and exemplification in dialogue with the students.

The "comparative" aspect of this approach comes to the fore especially when making reference to the biblical languages. We often find that a certain Hebrew term or way of saying things turns out to be rather close to the corresponding Nyanja expression, much more so than the way it is stated or understood in English. Take the word "create," for example, in Hebrew (*bara'*); the corresponding verb in Nyanja (*-lenga*) likewise refers to an action that only God can perform, not human beings. Even certain aspects of morphology and syntax become clearer to students when these are related directly to and in a Bantu language like Nyanja (which all students speak, either as a mother-tongue or a second language).[7] For example, the verb *bara'* in Hebrew includes a 3rd person, sg. subject pronoun, unlike English morphological structure, but very like the Nyanja *a-da-lenga* "he-[past]-created." Similarly in Genesis 1:2 the syntactically front-shifted noun in focus "and-the-earth" (*w-ha'aretz*) can be more easily and naturally duplicated in the rhetorically flexible word order of Nyanja as opposed to the more rigid arrangement of English.

Finally, the qualifier "contextual" refers to the need not only to relate biblical concepts linguistically in a Bantu language, but also to link them

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[7] In recent years there have been various initiatives aimed at learning the biblical languages by means of an *oral immersion* approach—in short, using biblical Hebrew (or Greek) to teach these languages (e.g., Paul Overland, "Orientation to Communicative Language Teaching for Biblical Hebrew," The Cohelet Project, 2008, accessed online on 18/10/2012 at http://seminary.ashland.edu/cohelet/Orientation CLT.pdf). While recognizing the benefits of such a "source language" focused approach to language learning, in the limited time available, I prefer a more "target (MT) language" oriented method—that is, one that proceeds *comparatively* (noting the major similarities and differences) between Hebrew/Greek forms in actual biblical texts (as soon as possible) and their Bantu (Nyanja) language functional, including idiomatic and pragmatic equivalents. The *oral* component thus materializes as the biblical text and its significant linguistic forms or literary features are discussed directly in the natural MT, rather than in broken Hebrew/Greek.

closely with an African sociocultural setting, rather than to risk possible misunderstanding through conceptual interference from a Western (English) perspective. This is much more easily done in a MT. For example, the balanced division of a day into "daytime" and "nighttime" (Gen. 1:4-5) is more readily grasped in a geographical environment where the two general periods of time do not vary all that much over the course of a year, such as in subtropical Zambia. In Nyanja there is even a lexical correspondence that highlights this balance—*usana* (day) and *usiku* (night). It then becomes easier to explain the Jewish concept where a new day (*tsiku*) begins in the evening ("And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day," v. 5c).

Why English—Nyanja?

In their *AJET* articles, Harries and Wildsmith list a number of the reasons why English appears to be the language of choice as a medium of instruction in a number of African countries. Indeed, there are some significant political and economic issues involved, such as the importance of linguistic unity as a tool for nation-building, and operating in a world language for generating more opportunities for social and financial advancement. However, I might mention several other, immediately practical reasons why *English* was chosen for use in our Lutheran Seminary:[8]

- We normally have students who speak several different MTs (on average, at least five different languages in any given three-year class).
- For several reasons relating to church (LCCA) history and development, only rarely do any of our students speak Bemba, the major language of Zambia, as a MT.
- English is the primary language of education in the three countries from which our students come—Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
- English is widely spoken in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, where our seminary is located.
- Therefore, English is used, to a greater or lesser extent, in most if not all of the local congregations that students serve on Sundays as part of their practical training while they are at the seminary.

Why *Nyanja* then, from among the several Bantu languages available? There are several practical reasons:

- Nyanja is the most widely-spoken language, generally speaking, in the three countries being served by the LCCA.
- Studies have shown that Nyanja is also the language most readily learned as a "second language" by speakers in this region.
- Nyanja is the primary Bantu language spoken in the Lusaka area, and almost all local congregations offer worship services and conduct other congregational functions in Nyanja.
- The most important reason is this: Some 15 years ago the three-year Lutheran Bible Institute training programme was transferred from Lusaka

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[8] See also Gehman, "Afterword," pp. 163-164.

to Lilongwe. Nyanja (Chewa) is the principal African language of Malawi, and so all non-Malawian students learn it (on average, quite well) while studying in that country.

Therefore, a dual linguistic procedure of theological education using both Nyanja and English in a combined, complementary, comparative, and contextual manner is an effective way of capitalizing upon the relative advantages of both languages in the overall educational process.

A Vital Link with Bible Translation

Several times in his essay, Wildsmith makes an important reference to the crucial work of Bible translation and its significance for theological training in Africa (e.g. pp. 24-25). I wish to underscore this emphasis in relation to the pedagogical method that I have suggested above. As part of my exegetical courses, for example, students are encouraged to compare certain key theological passages as well as critical Hebrew and Greek terms with various English versions, on the one hand, and the vernacular translations that may be available in their language on the other.[9] Where do the main differences in terms of form occur, and what is the significance of these with regard to semantic content and functional intent? Such comparative work inevitably provokes much discussion, usually in Nyanja (with the speakers of other languages referring to their own translations as well). Do the more idiomatic versions, whether in English or a Bantu language, distort the intended sense of the original text in any way? On the other hand, how badly are the more literal translations mis-understood and in which respects? How can any of the renderings be improved, with reference to the Hebrew or Greek text?[10] Such exegetical and translational discussions often lead to considerations of contemporary application as well. How might a new translation affect people's deeper (heart) understanding of the Scripture at that point and how this relates in turn to their daily lives?

Furthermore, Wildsmith asks, "Is there any benefit to including in our new curriculum a course on how to apply key Biblical and theological truths in African Mother Tongues?" (p. 22). I found this to be a very profitable exercise for students some years ago when I used to teach a series of dogmatics (church doctrine) courses. I called this component of the course "Vernacular

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[9] Every student language represented usually has at least one translation and often two - an older, more literal "missionary" version plus a more recent "popular language" version. These two translations may be helpfully compared - the first generally representing the linguistic *form* of the biblical text, the second its *meaning* as stated in a more natural, even idiomatic target-language mode of expression.

[10] On the importance of including a thorough instruction in the biblical languages as part of any theological education programme, with an application also to Bible translation, see the article by Enoch Okode, "A Case for Biblical Languages: Are Hebrew and Greek Optional or Indispensable?" *AJET* 29:2, 2012, 91-106. Okode makes a significant case for answering this question with the latter option - most indispensable!

Theological Terms," in which students were asked to compile a little dictionary of key expressions that we encountered in the doctrinal textbook that we were using, including those that were also found in the Scriptures. We would evaluate the translation of these terms, comparing the expression of one Bantu language with that of another as well as with that found in the original English text (or the Hebrew/Greek biblical text). How clearly were these theological expressions conveyed in the vernacular, and which language might instruct or improve another in this regard? How well would average lay-people understand these concepts, and in cases of special difficulty, what sort of paraphrases ("inventing the necessary words" – p. 24) might be created to clarify them in Nyanja (using this as our base language)? The varied discussions that we used to have on these issues made this a very popular aspect of the doctrinal course as a whole. Students began to appreciate ("regain appropriate pride in" – p. 23) their own MT more as they progressively discovered that complex doctrinal terminology could also be expressed in their language, at times more clearly (if somewhat less concisely) than in English!

To briefly illustrate: one of the most difficult, but crucial theological expressions that we must deal with is that of "justification by faith", as in Romans 8:28: "For we maintain that a man (sic) is justified by faith apart from observing the law (NIV)" (λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου). The old Chewa (Nyanja) translation renders the Greek (presumably) quite literally (and almost incomprehensibly) as follows, in back-translation: "For we consider (think, whether correctly or not!) a person righteous because of faith, without works of a law." The new Chewa version is much more creative and dynamic, theologically as well as stylistically: "As you know, we see that a person is found that he is righteous in the eyes of God by believing, not by following the Laws, not at all." I can attest to the fact that a great deal of exegetical, hermeneutical, and linguistic effort was expended on this and similar passages over a considerable amount of time as the translation team and their closely associated reviewers labored back-and-forth over this wording to get it to express the desired meaning idiomatically in the vernacular. They also had to work against established biblical usage and traditional church terminology in order to forge a compromise that all were satisfied with in the end. This was communal MTTE in practice at its most essential level—with reference to the sacred Scriptures.

Taking this "vernacular connection" with Bible translation significantly further, Wildsmith makes the following suggestion: "…Bible translation and retranslation is usually an academic specialty beyond the resources of a single Bible college, but MT theological lecturers could be resource persons for a revised translation project initiated by the national Bible Society or other organizations doing Bible translation as their primary ministry" (p. 25). I could write a whole paper on this important point, but I will limit myself to several observations. It was rather easier for me, as I was also serving as the UBS Translation Consultant for Zambia (occasionally, as the need arose, also for

Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Botswana) to get MT speakers (plus one fellow instructor) in my seminary classes involved in any Bible translation that was currently being carried out in their language (or a closely related one). Over the years this included producing new or revised versions in the Nyanja (Chewa), Tonga, Bemba, Luvale, Nkoya, Lala, Mambwe-Lungu, Mbunda, Tumbuka, Lenje, and Lozi languages. A certain student's participation might be very limited (reviewing a draft translation) or extensive (actually preparing the first draft), but this experience always turned out to be most beneficial academically and rewarding spiritually: having the privilege of applying what one had learned in exegesis and biblical language classes to the actual translation of Scripture in one's MT! In many cases, this participation in a national Bible translation project would continue, to a greater or lesser extent as time allowed, once the student had graduated from the seminary and was serving as the pastor of a local parish.

One major disappointment, however, that I experienced over the years was this: I found it very difficult to get other theological training institutions involved in these translation programmes on behalf of the Bible Society of Zambia. I gave a number of promotional lectures and seminars at various schools in an effort to encourage one or more of their teaching staff to engage in this work, especially when we embarked upon the first major "study Bible" projects in the Chewa and Tonga languages (providing explanatory or descriptive notes for foreign or difficult portions of the vernacular text).[11] But after initial enthusiasm (during my presentations), interest soon waned for one reason or another, and I was left with the human resources of my own theological school where I was in a much better position to keep the flame burning. I pray that my national successor as TC for Zambia will have more success in this vital venture, which really puts MTs at the forefront, not only of theological education and development,[12] but more broadly, of "biblical communication" in the country!

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[11] Study Bible notes (and other paratextual aids such as section headings, illustrations, a glossary or topical index) are needed to deal with cross-cultural mismatches that result in what Harries terms "interlinguistic incompatability, i.e., untranslatability" (p. 9). The world-view that underlies a Bantu language is often closer than English conceptualization to the biblical, ancient near eastern perspective on reality, but certain significant incongruities do occur. For example, the Genesis marriage principle that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife…" (2:24) sounds quite natural to the matrilocal Chewa people, but not to the patrilocal Tonga of southern Zambia (both are matrilineal ethnic groups).

[12] Theological "development" occurs as indigenous African perspectives are stimulated and the appropriate terminology generated during encounters with crucial, but often challenging biblical concepts—one of the most difficult (in my experience) occurring in the very beginning with "[the] Spirit of God" (*ruach elohim*) (Gen. 1:2).

Further Class Applications

My efforts to integrate MT teaching with regard to class usage and congregational application reflect on two more of Wildsmith's suggestions. The first pertains to general usage. I often noted when attending a worship service in a local vernacular (whether Nyanja or any other Zambian language) how poorly Scripture portions were publicly read. Admittedly, in some cases this was the result of a rather poor, dated, or literal translation. But there is no excuse for reading even a difficult translation badly—not if one makes the effort to practice reading the text aloud, well ahead of time. I therefore encouraged my students to do this—"to read their MT Bibles aloud with passion and clarity in church services so the audience can more easily grasp the meaning of the passage" (p. 25). This is not only a principle of good communication, it is more importantly a vital aspect of our respect for the Word of God and for the One who inspired it!

More specifically then, how can we work on "transposing theology learned in English into a series of sermons or Bible studies in a church that uses the local mother tongue" (p. 25)? As discussed earlier, one place to begin such an effort is when actually teaching a course on theology, or in my case, biblical exegesis (we focus together during three years of study on the books of Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, and Revelation). When important passages and terms occur in class, after considering their meaning in the original text and in English, we discuss their vernacular equivalents in Nyanja, moving back and forth from English as the need arises. Major assignments then focus on some congregational application of what has been learned and discussed in class. For example, students must prepare a Bible study (or less often, a sermon) that is appropriate for presentation in the local Lusaka-area church that they happen to be serving at the time, whether in English or in Nyanja. Special attention should be given to those problematic communicational issues that arose in class discussion, and the presentation ought to reflect one or more of the solutions, clarifications, or explanations that we discovered together. The instructor, too, might take up an assignment with the assistance of one or more of his students, namely, research into some aspect of a MT (and its culture) which would prove helpful in improving his capacity to understand and communicate in the vernacular—whether teaching (proverbs, for example), preaching,[13] or even dramatic performance.[14]

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[13] I made an effort to learn more about an indigenous, inductive manner of preaching when researching and writing the book *Preaching That Grabs the Heart: A Rhetorical-Stylistic Study of the Chichewa Revival Sermons of Shadrack Wame* (Kachere Monograph, Blantyre: CLAIM, 2000).

[14] I too learned to "recognize and express the value of African languages" (p. 24) and related cultural forms of expression when exploring Christian radio drama in Chichewa: *Sewero! Christian Drama and the Drama of Christianity in Africa* (Zomba: Kachere Series, 2005).

Taking this MT enrichment process a step further, it becomes the focus of the "final exam" of our Psalms course. Each student is asked to choose a favorite psalm and first of all write up for oral class presentation an exegesis of that pericope, with periodic reference to the Hebrew text on the one hand, and to the student's MT on the other (here not limited to Nyanja). The second part of the assignment is to prepare a poetic translation of that same psalm in the student's MT, demonstrating some of the stylistic resources of that language in this vernacular rendition. For those with a musical inclination (and for extra credit!), students will actually compose a song version of their translation, adapted as necessary to fit the rhythm or melody chosen. Some students include their wives and children in this compositional exercise, thus making it a family project also during its presentation in class. The students are encouraged then to try their versions out in a local congregation in order to generate wider feedback and also to stimulate similar Scripture-based musical composition among local choirs.

Conclusion

I was very encouraged to read the articles promoting MTTE in *AJET* 29.1. Both authors stated the case well, and in this reflection I have merely underscored some of their major concerns and recommendations. This includes doing everything feasible to make it possible (e.g. through a reduced workload – p. 23) for expatriate instructors to function effectively in the local vernacular as well as "the local world-view and culture based on it" (p. 19). I strongly support a "both-and" didactic approach - teaching theology, biblical exegesis, and related courses (homiletics, isagogics, symbolics, etc.) in English (or some other LWC) *as well as* in a major local MT - not separately, in one or the other language, but *simultaneously*, employing both languages in continual alternation (verbal "dialogue") as needed. This practice relates to passages from Acts and Revelation Wildsmith used to conclude his article. "What if Babel's curse is removed when we sing God's praises in a multitude of MTs that together form the heavenly language?" (p. 26). Given the uniqueness and particular expressive "genius" of each MT,[15] what better way to demonstrate the universal fellowship of believers than in continuous, concurrent joint choral acclamation to the eternal King, our Triune Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier, *en masse* before his heavenly throne (Rev. 7:15)!

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[15] "Each language has its own genius. That is to say, each language possesses certain distinctive features which give it a special character…" (Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969, pp. 3-4).

Afterword

The Top Shelf in the Bible College Library:
More on MTTE after reading Richard Gehman's Afterword in AJET 29.2

by Jim Harries

I attended a Bible college. There were books on the top shelf in the library. When I say 'top shelf', I mean really 'top'. You had to use steps to reach them. No one ever seemed to use them. I asked a librarian about them. "Nowadays no one ever reads those books," I was told. "We don't use those books. They are from last (i.e. the 19th) Century." I started to think; 'You mean, all those people put all that effort into writing all those books about the Bible and about the church in the 19th Century, and nowadays we are told, "no one ever reads them"!' I thought about it. I was a little sad for those enthusiastic authors of a bygone era whose work was later condemned, for a reason that I did not at the time grasp. Once I gingerly climbed a ladder and picked one of those dusty books. The English used was somehow old, but it seemed OK. The book was about the Bible. That seemed good.

How could all the scholars of the 19th Century later be considered 'wrong', I asked myself? Someone told me to read a certain book. On the front of the book was a picture of three White men with their arms around African women. It seems they were their girlfriends. The book was about *desire*. It seemed the wrong kind of book for a Christian to read. I read it anyway. It blew my mind![1]

"It is arguable that race became the common principle of academic knowledge in the nineteenth century" I read.[2] Later I read another book; "[all] is race … there is no other truth", it said, quoting someone writing over 120 years ago.[3] Wow. Imagine, as recently as the 19th Century people in the UK and America thought that race, i.e. people's skin colour, was the basis for their intelligence. I discovered that even Theodore Roosevelt, one-time US president, said that "superior races" had a right to exterminate "inferior races".[4]

My mind was reeling. The only people standing up for the 'inferior' races were, apparently, the church and the crown.[5] Great scholars of the time thought that you could only be intelligent and important if you were White and British or American. Everyone else was like a savage. This kind of thinking

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[1] Robert, C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London: Routledge, 1995.
[2] Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 93.
[3] Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter History*, Translated by Gregory Elliot, London: Verso, 2011, p. 270.
[4] Losurdo, *Liberalism,* pp. 330-331.
[5] Losurdo, *Liberalism,* pp. 34.

was one of the "organizing axioms of knowledge in general".[6] I was astounded. No wonder people no longer read the books written in the 19th Century. Many of those books were RACIST. That kind of racism was affecting even some books written about the Bible!

'How could so many great men be so wrong', I asked myself again and again. Today we say they were wrong. But in that time, they were the heroes, the brainy ones, the academics, the professors, the lecturers, the people writing the books. They got one thing wrong. They thought that people were different because of their blood and not because of their culture. That 'wrong thing' means that everything they wrote is now gathering dust on the top shelf!

I realised that very intelligent men and women can write about things, but if they have got one important thing wrong, then all that they have written can be wrong as a result. I still often think about that. I think about it especially when I think about people writing about Africa.

Lots of people are writing about Africa, about the church in Africa, and how to help the church in Africa. Lots of those people who are writing are not born in Africa and do not live in Africa. They do not know Africans very well. But they write anyway, because they want to help. But I am worried; what if these people have got something wrong? I don't mean about race. Thankfully those days are past. I mean, what if there is something else that they don't know about? Maybe that thing they might have wrong could mean that in a few years we will have to put their books onto the top shelf and stop reading them? What if in the meantime all of us in Africa who are Africans or who know Africa well are writing in the same way that they are writing, because we just assume that they are right, but no-one actually knows?

English is the mother tongue of UK, America and a few other countries. Those people who use English as mother tongue came from England a few hundred years ago to the USA, Canada, Australia, etc. When we write in English we in Africa have to write in the way that they write. We have to, because we are using their language, so they are telling us how to use it. In fact, when we use their language, it is hard to know what we are actually referring to in our own communities because in our communities we have different 'categories' for things. Because of the language we use, British and American people are leading, and Africans are following.

It is good to follow people. Often we can learn a lot from them. But I wonder whether we should be following them in everything? If we spend all our time thinking in their language and saying things in the way that they say them; could it be that we will be putting much less effort into thinking about our own lives, people, and contexts? While we are reading all the books in English to help us pass our exams, are we forgetting to learn how to help people in our

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[6] Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 93.

own communities solve the problems that they have in the way that they understand them? Can we actually help people in our communities to solve their problems better using a language that comes from thousands of miles away from a foreign people whose culture is so different from ours?

The Bible is uniquely God's word, yes. English is uniquely God's language, no. Yes, we must follow the Bible, and it is important to translate it correctly. Yes, English-speaking people can help us. But, they can also be wrong – especially when they are trying to explain what they do not know about how things work in Africa. Will we just follow them, or are we going to do some of our own thinking in our own languages?

In summary I would like to respond to Gehman by saying; the adoption of African languages in formal theological education on the African continent is really essential for the future health of the church. What we as foreign missionaries can best do is to take African languages very seriously in our own ministries. (Please see many more much more detailed articles about this issue here: http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/index.html and elsewhere.)

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[Editor's Note: Speaking with his feet solidly rooted in African soil, Jim Harries repeats his passionately held conviction that teaching theology in Africa in English or any other European language can be unhelpful. And he believes that this unhelpfulness will become obvious to everyone sooner or later, just as white European racial superiority is so obviously wrong to all right-thinking Christians today. We may think we are stuck with colonial languages in theological education for various reasons, but that doesn't make it the right direction! Have we ever seriously considered the possible outcomes of ignoring mother tongue theological education?]

Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

Cover: The emblem of Scott Christian University, shown on the cover, features the Mumbu Tree, a historic and cultural landmark on the University grounds. The Mumbu Tree is used by *AJET* as a symbol of the gospel in Africa. The good news of Christ, like the Mumbu Tree, is ageless, enduring and firmly rooted in African soil.

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