

The Kingdom and Africa

Jack C. Whytock

Each issue of the Haddington House Journal includes one article highlighting foreign missions activity. These articles are written in a journalistic news fashion. In 2005, Dr. Whytock traveled twice to Africa – once to eastern Africa and once to southern Africa. This article will focus mainly on eastern Africa.

Jambo: The Land of Birds¹

For most of May, 2005, I taught at Grace Bible College, in Nakuru, Kenya. Nakuru, Kenya's third largest city, is north of Nairobi in the famous Rift Valley and is a place renowned for its flamingoes which live on the soda lake, Lake Nakuru. It was here that I entered a new world of discovery – the world of African ornithology (the study of birds). I thought of my hero of the faith, Dr. Thomas McCulloch of Pictou Academy, Nova Scotia, and the day I discovered several of his stuffed birds in a Liverpool, England museum. How much a small bit of ornithology can give one. I must have been asleep in school when we studied this! Yet, the Lord was gracious to me and awakened me here in Nakuru to His world of birds. The Principal of the Bible College was kind enough to lend me John Stott's exquisite book, *The Birds our Teachers: Essays on Orni-Theology*². Gradually I took up my ornithological studies and allowed the birds to become my teachers: Yellow Weavers, Tits, Marabou Storks, White Pelicans, Ringed Plovers, Lesser and Greater Flamingoes, Kites, Helmsted Guineafowl, and Hadadas.

¹ *Jambo* – the traditional Swahili greeting meaning “hello.”

² John Stott, *The Birds Our Teachers: Essays in Orni-Theology* (United Kingdom: Candle Books, 1999).

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Fathers feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matt. 6:26 NIV)

And then came the discovery of the wonderful comment by Martin Luther on that text:

You see, he is making the birds our schoolmasters and teachers. It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the Gospel a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men. We have as many teachers and preachers as there are little birds in the air. Their living example is an embarrassment to us.... Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher.... It is as if he were saying, 'I prefer to be in the Lord's kitchen. He has made heaven and earth and he feeds and nourishes innumerable little birds out of his hand.'³



Bird Stamps from Kenya

³ Martin Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," original 1521, trans. Jaroslaw Pelikan, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 21 (Concordia, 1956), 197-198.

Thank you, Luther. Though dead, you still speak! For some reason I had not thought very much about why a bird makes a call. Then I read Stott's succinct commentary on the six main purposes. So began my time in Nakuru with Stott's book close at hand. When I returned home, I delivered several children's talks from my African bird experiences.

Grace Bible College, Nakuru

Twenty-one years ago, Rev. John Chung (Kwang Ho Chung), now the principal of Grace Bible College, left his native Seoul, South Korea, as a young man to come to Kenya to help with church planting and education. The Korean Church has been actively involved across Africa over the last generation, and it is amazing how many Korean brothers and sisters I meet while in different places in Africa. Rev. Chung and his wife, Ruth, from Japan, have devoted their lives to service in this land. They have one son who is currently living in South Korea doing military service. Rev. Chung recently obtained his Th.D. from the University of Birmingham, England, in New Testament studies with a thesis entitled, "Paul's Prayer and Mission: A Study of the Significance of Prayer in Paul's Missionary Theology and Praxis, and its Contemporary Relevance." (See Dr. Chung's article on pages 97-139 of this *Journal*.)

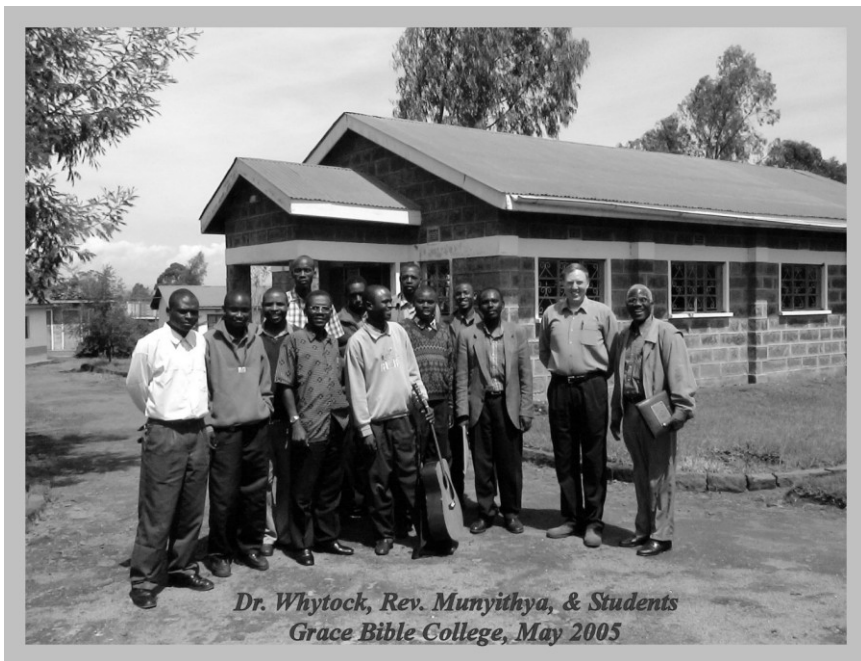


Dr. Chung with Students in Music Workshop at Grace Bible College

The Bible College, opened in 1986, is connected to the General Assembly of the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church and offers a post-secondary school Diploma of Theology. The College had originally begun with a Diploma in Church Ministry and then in 1997 advanced to offering the Diploma of Theology, a B.Th. equivalent. Like many institutions in Africa, as the college matures the level of

certification often also advances. The college itself is situated in what was once an old quarry, which has certainly allowed for a solid foundation. In the distance is the famous Menengai crater. Some of the students go there on occasion for outings.

The college has a wonderful group of students with warmth and enthusiasm, and it was an honour for me to be asked to teach two courses for their first term of the year, which commenced in May. We



covered “Ecclesiology” and “The Biblical Theology of Missions.” Between lectures one of the enjoyable experiences was joining with the students in singing times. Some of the singing was in Swahili and some in English. Many of the selections were familiar to me and, of course, many were new. I introduced one hymn chorus from Prince Edward Island, which we used wherever I traveled to preach. The students sang it well, and what a delight it was to hear it translated into Swahili!

English

Oh! the Lamb, the lovely Lamb!
The Lamb on Calvary!
The Lamb was slain and rose again
To intercede for me.

- George Bears

Swahili

Mwaha koondoo Ali ye mpendwa

Kondo wa Kalvari

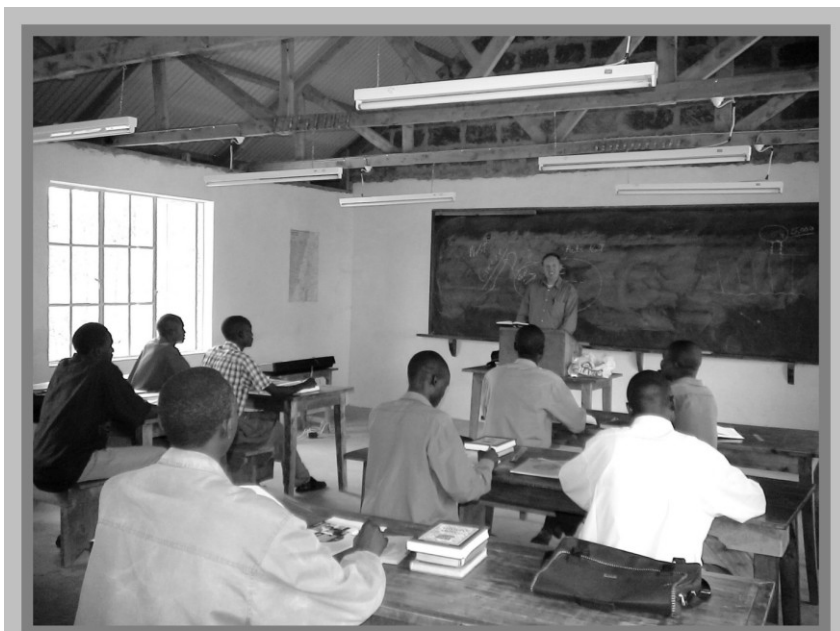
Ku a wambwa kafufukatena

Ku ni ombea mimi.

-Translator, Justus Chifuka (2005)

As in most colleges, there is a diversity of married and single students representing different ages, and in this case, different tribes as well. The students took turns leading chapel and did a fine job. Since on Saturdays there were no classes, one Saturday Dr. and Mrs. Chung and I set out on our own “mini-safari” to Lake Nakuru National Park. It was a seven hour trip that I will never forget, seeing the wonders of African wildlife.

Sundays were very special, as all the students “fanned out,” most to preach. One Sunday I was invited to preach at the church of a student I had taught in 2004 who is now ministering in a nearby rural area. Other Sundays the preaching opportunities were with more urban congregations. Additional opportunities interspersed with teaching at the College were times to meet other College lecturers and church leaders, such as the General Assembly Moderator and Stated Clerk.



Classroom at Grace Bible College

The two courses were completed before I left and the final examinations were returned to the students. Quizzes were also incorporated into the courses. The students showed such eagerness to learn. I know that much of what was taught will soon appear in their sermons and that the printed materials received will be treasured. I look forward with much anticipation to seeing these dear brothers and sisters again!

Nairobi Seminaries

One of the leaders we have relied upon with the Mobile Theological Training Team (MT3) is Ronald Muniyithya, formerly the principal of Grace Bible College and now the new principal of Commonground Theological Institute (CTI), Nairobi. Rev. Muniyithya pastored the Community Presbyterian Church in Nairobi before taking up this position. He is a graduate of Geneva College, Beaver Falls,



Nairobi International School of Theology

and Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and was very committed to returning to Africa to offer leadership. MT3 works intimately with such indigenous leaders. Rev. Muniyithya has been a true ambassador, acquainting MT3 with the leading seminaries in Africa; the two largest being the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and Nairobi International School of Theology (NIST).



Commonground Theological Institute

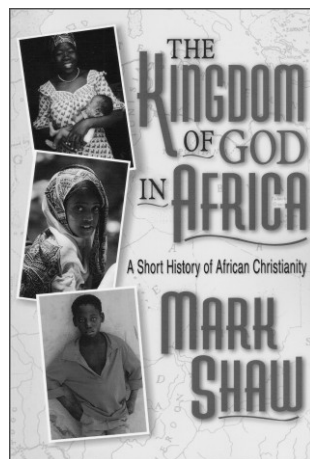
CTI has a fabulous campus in Nairobi and this year has twenty-seven students. Rev. Muniyithya stands in an excellent position with all three of these Nairobi institutions, having taught previously at NIST also.

Bwana Asifiwe: The Kingdom and Africa⁴

I want to introduce our readers to a man's writings which have truly blessed me in working in Africa. The author is Mark Shaw, currently a lecturer at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST). He taught first at Scott Theological College before going to NEGST. Shaw has lived for about twenty-five years in East Africa and has interacted with African students from across the continent. He was the founder of one of Africa's leading journals, *The Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (founded in 1982).

His 1996 book, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity*, has received great interest and has become a standard text for African Church history survey courses.⁵ Shaw has done what very few have been able to do; namely he has gone beyond the "missionary historiography" approach, the "nationalist historiography" camp, and the "ecumenical historiography" angle and has undertaken the writing of African Church history from a Kingdom of God perspective.⁶ Expressing his exciting approach, Shaw spells out, "We need to find an alternative approach that has

a higher reference point than church growth, ecumenism, nationalism, or cultural authenticity. We need an approach that can tell the whole story in a way that does justice to missionary contributions, nationalistic responses, and ecumenical fairness, but then moves beyond the limitations of vision that cling to these approaches."⁷ Shaw helps us not just to learn about the missionaries who went to Africa, but to go inside the African churches and their history. His work reveals a mature writer who has attempted to take time to develop his knowledge and understanding of the African Church. Listen to his opening paragraph:



Books, like trees, begin from small seeds. The first seeds of this book were planted in the chalkdust of classroom

⁴ *Bwana Asifiwe* – "Let the Lord be praised" or "Praise the Lord" in Swahili.

⁵ Mark R. Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁶ Shaw, *Kingdom of God*, 12-14.

⁷ Shaw, *Kingdom of God*, 14.

teaching. Patient and perceptive students at Scott Theological College and Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology watched the first seeds fall into the ground and germinate. This book is dedicated to these brothers and sisters and the love for the African Christian story that they shared with me.⁸

I like that opening image – from seeds to a tree – as it seems so well suited to our work with the Mobile Theological Training Team (MT3) in Africa over these last two years. The “ground work” has now been established and a knowledge base begun to allow us to come alongside our African brothers and offer help in theological education, all with a goal to bless and build up the leadership within the national, indigenous Christian community. I encourage you to read several entries in the Book Reviews and Book Notices which enlarge upon this African theme. Particularly, see the review on the Lingenfelter book, *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, and the notices on Dale le Vack’s *God’s Golden Acre: A Biography of Heather Reynolds* and Long’s *Health, Healing and God’s Kingdom: New Pathways to Christian Health Ministry in Africa*. How good it is to see the McKenzie Collection in the Haddington House Library expanding with all of these works, offering an invaluable resource for materials relating to missiology and Africa.

Finally, I want to introduce our readers to another significant author in Africa, Yusufu Turaki in Jos, Nigeria. Turaki is perhaps one of the most published and knowledgeable individuals in Africa on theological education. Some of his noteworthy books include: *The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria*, *Tribal Gods of Africa*, *Christianity and African Gods*, *Foundation of African Traditional Religions and Worldview*, and *The Unique Christ For Salvation: The Challenge of the Non-Christian Religions and Cultures*.

Dr. Turaki is one of Africa’s leading writers contributing to an exciting new commentary, planned to be released in July, 2006 – *African Bible Commentary*. There are seventy contributors to this work, and it will be a milestone in African Christianity. It speaks to us today that the “locus” of the Church is shifting from the Western to the Two-Thirds world. Some would say the shift is in the past tense. My purpose here is not to split the tenses, but to show, through African writers like Turaki, that there are authors in Africa that we in the Western Church must begin to read.

⁸ Shaw, *Kingdom of God*, 7.

Africa is only one of the places where MT3 works, but a critical one. I remain convinced that teaching partnerships with institutions currently in existence in Africa could well be one of the most important missiological paradigms we can engage upon at this time from the Western Church.

“A hasty person misses the sweet things.”
– Swahili proverb

