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# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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# CHRISTIANITY AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA

## *An AJET Editorial*

Missionary efforts have played a great role in introducing Christianity and education into the African soil despite difficult times. In the following articles the authors describe these experiences. The discussion touches on aspects of growth and development, theology, higher education, contemporary books to reflect and contextualization.

In the lead article, Dr. Jacob Kibor narrates *the growth and development of Africa Inland Mission and Africa Inland Church in Marakwet, Kenya* in which the first missionaries to the area experienced difficult beginnings. Despite these difficulties, for example, opposition from the local people and sickness, the ministry of the church expanded through medical work, education and Sunday school for children. This Sunday school served as link between the missionaries and the families. With time, there was a phenomenal growth in the church, which came as a result of trained ministers and construction of new church buildings, which attracted many.

The next article by Dr. Timothy Palmer attempts to relate Martin Luther's *theology of the cross* to theology of glory that is observed in the African continent especially the Northern part of Nigeria where the author served for many years. This theology of glory is depicted in symbols and pictures of the cross, misuse of resources for personal gain and glory and prosperity gospel. His discussion on the theology of the glory reflects failures in the history of the church during the Medieval and Reformation period.

Dr. Paul Bowers, in the third article provides a list of *twelve notable books for Christian reflection in Africa*. Each book title is followed by an evaluative summary on what the book is about. Dr. Bowers challenges reader to be current on what is published in and about Africa, concluding emphatically that "very much being written and published about Africa and about African Christianity these days that deserves thoughtful awareness" (152).

Following the survey on books about Africa, Dr. John B. Laba looks at the history of *Christian Higher education in Africa* in as far as Baptist missionary movement is concerned. In the midst of formal education in which both boys and girls were accorded equal education, the missionaries helped provide more training of those who would be teachers. There were many opportunities of growth, but these did not come without difficulties such as anti-intellectualism, declining influence of the church, finances, problem of brain drain and a few advocates for the cause of higher education.

Dr. Timothy D. Stabell takes us into *rethinking contextualization and the gospel in Africa*. In this article the author argues that evangelical approaches to contextualization have often focused too exclusively on subjective culture, while tending to ignore questions of social justice. He then surveys the various models of contextualization suggested by Stephen Bevans, looking at some of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these general approaches. Finally he proposes an alternative evangelical “synthetic” model.

# **THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICA INLAND MISSION AND AFRICA INLAND CHURCH IN MARAKWET, KENYA**

Jacob Z. Kibor

## **Arrival and Setting Up of the Mission**

In the year 1929, the AIM created a new District in the northern area of their field and designated it the Eldoret District. This area comprised all the Kalenjin speaking people group. Other than Keiyo, Marakwet and Pokot, the groups had received the Gospel earlier.

As late as 1930, the District Commissioner in his Annual Report indicated that there were no Missions working in the District. Towards the close of the year two Catholic Fathers, Hartmann and Bergman, visited the Government School at Tambach (the District Headquarters) and conferred with the Principal regarding the possibility of attaching to the school a Christian (Roman Catholic) native who might give religious instruction to those who desired it.<sup>1</sup> A native Catechist was sent from the Roman Catholic Mission at Eldoret in 1931.

In that same year, Rev. Reg Reynolds of AIM Kapsabet accompanied by Abraham Rurie of Githumu visited Tamabach and Marakwet with a view to inaugurating Mission work in this field. In October 1931, the mission sent two native adherents from Kapsabet on a short trip to Marakwet ..... 'to spy out the land'. Meanwhile the Government was moving its out-post station from Kapsowar (Marakwet) to Tambach (Keiyo). The Mission, therefore, made arrangements with the District Commissioner to purchase Old Government 'boma' at Kapsowar. In addition, thirty acres were surveyed and granted for Mission purposes.

The Government consented to the Mission's request under certain conditions, "the chief being that a resident trained medical practitioner or

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nursing sister be in continuous residence on the plot and that adequate medical equipment be provided.”<sup>2</sup> The Mission Completed the purchase in 1933. In handing over the property to the Mission the following agreement was reached with the elders:

We the undersigned elders of Talai, Marakwet so agree to hand over to AIM the portion of land as pointed out to us by the District officer for the purpose of building a hospital mission and housing for staff provided only such land is confined to the top of the edge.

- |                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Kiptum Arap Cheptiot           | 2. Chepkuyeng Arap Chemurmet |
| 3. Kipsewa Arap Keture            | 4. Chepkochoi Arap Kimetet   |
| 5. Chepto Arap Kaino              | 6. Murongwet Arap Kiror, and |
| 7. Moyot Arap Kiptoi <sup>3</sup> |                              |

The Mission was wise in involving the local elders because in the late fifties and early sixties when the sons of these elders demanded their land back, the surviving elders cited the agreement.

As soon as the property was purchased, Rev. and Mrs. Reynolds took residence and as well a nursing sister, Miss Bessie Mildernhall, S.R.N., F.R.N. arrived in December, but no hospital buildings had been erected.

In 1934, a dispensary was erected and opened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October. Brick Rondevels – formerly the police lines –were purchased and used as hospital wards. Dr. Lee Ashton had arrived in September and later joined by Mrs. Ashton also a medical doctor. Towards the end of the year the first Marakwet woman came in for the birth of a child. Serious operations were successfully performed which won the hearts of some of the Marakwets who learned of it.

The supervisor of the Technical Station in the year 1935 noted: “These Missionaries impressed me as keen, and efficient. The work at present includes itinerating in the villages, and minor medical treatment of out-patients so far as it can be done without a hospital. Fees for medical treatment are being paid by the villages in potatoes. A sack of potatoes cost Kshs. 5/=.”<sup>4</sup>

In concurring with this, Mr. W. Slade Hawkins, the District Officer in his report wrote “... the activities of the Missionaries at Kapsowar included Evangelical, Medical and Educational, and it would be hard to find an area offering more scope in both directions.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Difficult Beginnings**

The beginning of Missionary work in Marakwet did not go without difficulties. One major problem came from Ibrahim Ali, a Somali Muslim who owned a shop next to the station. One of my informants said that Ibrahim staged considerable amount of opposition to the Missionaries and told the Local people that, if they allowed the Missionaries to settle, they would be deprived of their sons by them. This created some suspicion in the minds of the people.<sup>6</sup>

Ibrahim's opposition though, was not lasting. He died and in the long run Rev. Reynolds bought his buildings from a Mr. Guled.<sup>7</sup> The shop was converted to be the first worship place and school.

Another problem encountered was sickness on the part of the Missionaries. Between the years 1936 and 1939 Rev. Reynolds had to return to England due to sickness. Most of the work fell on Dr. Ashton. Apart from medical services, he administered sacraments, served as superintendent of the Mission station, and was also responsible for supervising Africa Inland Missions Schools in the District.

In April 1938 Dr. Ashton and his wife went on leave. Mr. and Mrs. Powley took charge of the Kapsowar Station and, with occasional visits fro a visiting doctor, carried on the medical and educational work.

During the war years of 1939 to 1945 some of the Missionaries were instructed by the colonial Government to render their services. Mr. Powley had to join an ambulance service in Nairobi.<sup>8</sup>

Rev. and Mrs. Richardson who were assigned to Kapsowar arrived on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1940.<sup>9</sup> Rev. Richardson valiantly tried to carry on both the medical and educational activities of the mission, but was not too successful. He seemed not to have gotten along very well with the people. Needless to say, "his strength was in expository preaching."<sup>10</sup>

At the end of 1940, the District Commissioners Assessment of the AIM Missionaries was as follows:

The resident missionaries at these places (Kapsowar and Kessup) do practically no touring in the district to gain the confidence of the people by visiting them in their homes and such respect as they do command is entirely negated by their anti-circumcision attitude. These AIM folk seem wrapped up in their families to the neglect of the work.<sup>11</sup>

In February 1941 Dr. Ashton joined the military service and a year later Rev. and Mrs. Richardson went on leave to South Africa. The station was thus left without a European.

Because of the irregularities of the Missionaries the Field Superintendent of the AIM suggested that "the Local Native Council take over at least the out-Dispensaries in Marakwet, i.e. Mokorro (Ngejer); Kobuswa (Katkook); and Sengwer (Kapcherop)."<sup>12</sup> This was not acted upon because the Lord honoured the work of missions by providing more workers.

In June 1943, Dr. W. B. Young and Mrs. Young arrived at Kapsowar. "Dr. Young was keen and energetic, thus bringing his work added qualities."<sup>13</sup> In March 1945 Miss Banks, a nursing sister joined them and four years later, Dr. Phillip Morris F.R.C.S. whose skill in surgery attracted many from near and far arrived.

Through the ministry of these two doctors, by the end of 1949 about seven African women were in training for nursing and there were five male dressers. Unfortunately, none of the nurses were Marakwet.

As far as maternity work was concerned, the women were dissatisfied when they were not treated according to indigenous custom, and when attended by uncircumcised women. A missionary nurse at Kapsowar in later years expressed this fear when she wrote:

Before I came here one of the leading thoughts impressed upon me was to get near the people, learn to live as they live, think as they think, do as they do. Yet now I could not help thinking to myself, what have I in common with them? .....Circumcision and marriage are the marks of an adult. I am but a child in their estimation.

Many of the Marakwet women, therefore, resented coming to the hospital for delivery because of this traditional custom which is deeply rooted in them.

There is no way the Mission could provide needed workers for them because there were no trained Marakwet women or men. With time, this resentment died as Christians increased.

## **Expansion of the Church through Medical Work**

Church development in Marakwet cannot be spoken of without the mention of medical work. The following principles suggested by the British Home Council as pertaining to medical policy helped to advance the Africa Inland Church in Marakwet. The policy stated:

Jesus went about .... Preaching the Gospel ..... and healing the sickness. (Matt. 9:35).

- (a) In obedience to our Lord's command to heal the sick as well as to preach the Gospel, medical work was instituted within the framework of the Africa Inland Mission as an integral part of its mission.
- (b) The purpose of this branch of the mission's activities is to propagate the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to demonstrate the love of God by healing the sick and relieving suffering and to disseminate the knowledge of hygiene throughout villages.
- (c) The spiritual contribution, an opportunity for Christian witness which medical work affords, cannot be too strongly emphasized and must never be lost sight of. This is assumed as a predominant factor in the mission's policy for its medical work.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Ashton , and later Dr. Morris, saw Marakwet as "an ideal setting for a community health programme with a well established hospital base and wide contacts with the populace through a strategically placed chain of dispensaries."<sup>15</sup> These dispensaries would serve as centres of witness to the Gospel. This dream was realized. Presently, Kapsowar hospital is the established base with over ten dispensaries scattered all over Marakwet. The Gospel is shared in all these centres before the people are treated.

Dr. Richard Stanley Lindsay, who took over the Mission hospital at Kapsowar in November 1953 when Dr. Morris went on furlough, extended the work even further. He traveled far and wide, ate with the people, slept in their homes and spoke the language fluently.

The District Commissioner in his Annual Report commented: "The AIM medical officer, Dr. Lindsay, continued to do sterling work in the Northern areas. Due to lack of adequate roads (and a natural predilection for walking) most of his safaris are carried out on foot and his energy is most commendable."<sup>16</sup> In the following year he wrote: "Tribute must be paid to

Dr. Lindsay who is obviously a most efficient and hardworking medical missionary."<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Lindsay would travel from Kapsowar to Ngejer, a distance of about twenty five miles, minister to the sick, and preach the Word, then, stay overnight., The following day he would walk on foot to Kisigiria, then Baroko and finally Liter (a distance of about 42 miles from Kapsowar). From Liter he would go to Tot, Kabetwo, Chepkum, Koitilial, Kapseu, Chebara and finally Kapsowar.<sup>18</sup>

Rev. A. R. Checkley did some of their trips with Dr. Lindsay especially in the early months of 1954 to encourage the few believers and witness to non-believers.

Other than medical work, Dr. Lindsay was also a gifted preacher. He administered both baptism and Holy Communion.

Mrs. Lindsay was a gifted Bible teacher. She taught and disciplined most of the Marakwet Christian ladies who lived around Kapsowar. Other notable characters who combined both medical skills with church ministerial skills included Miss Ruth Buckingham who excelled in Sunday School teaching and serving as a pianist at AIC Kapsowar. Miss Kileen Manhood was remembered for her ability in training the nurses. Her warm personality won the hearts of many nurses. Miss Grace Saunders had great capacity for organization and getting the hospital neat, tidy, and running smoothly. Marakwet women still remember her services in their fellowships.

It is evident that wherever a dispensary was built, a school was also built and one of the classrooms was used as a place of worship.

In conclusion, the primary object in medical work was the spread of the Gospel to those not easily reached by other means. Medical work provided contacts and opportunities. However, for this to be achieved the professional side of the medical work needed the backing of the organized church, and the support of lively evangelists in team effort. Kapsowar lacked this because there was no organized church nor trained evangelists. [Yet, on one hand the early converts with their limitations were used by the Spirit of God to witness to those who came for Medical treatment.]

In his report to the AIM medical committee Dr. Morris noted:

An African Christian who has received training at Kapsowar Hospital is in charge of the dispensary. He is encouraged to have his wife and family with him and living in the midst of the heathen people of his tribe; he has the opportunity daily of preaching the word and healing the sick. The success of these very isolated areas depends upon the individual African – his spirituality and his ability. For the most part the dispensers have been a very low standard educationally and in training and whilst they have all been Christians, prolonged isolation and lack of fellowship with other Christians have often resulted in ineffectiveness.<sup>19</sup>

He advised on having refresher courses and periods of special Bible studies for them.

### **Expansion of the Church through Education**

Before the arrival of the AIM Missionaries, there were no education facilities available in Marakwet. The District Commissioner's annual report of 1924 makes this clear: "There are no educational facilities whatever provided for the Marakwet, a deplorable state of affairs in a tribe which is being fully taxed and showing signs of wishing to advance."<sup>20</sup> It was only in the year 1927 that the first school in Elgeyo/Marakwet District (Government African School Tambach), was built. It is reported that this demand came from small boys who forced the elders to agree to it. They stated that all other tribes had schools but that Elgeyo/Marakwet had none and was thus at a disadvantage. This request was not granted by the Hon. The director of Education. Later, when accepted, the following objectives were set:

The objects of the school are to provide technical education for 30 Elgeyo and Marakwet pupils a year. Reading and writing are to be looked on as necessary evils and natives are to be educated with a view not to their being learned clerks capable of signing work tickets but artisans useful both in their own reserves and to the colony generally.

It is purposed to try to use and improve first the materials and methods at present existing in the Reserve. For instance as the natives all keep bees it is hoped to introduce through the school better and more economic bee hives, to foster the bees wax industry and to obtain a sale for good honey.<sup>21</sup>

This view was later changed because E. B. Hosking in the year 1931 reported that the school provided the "three Rs" and in addition a five year course

in masonry and carpentry, the final year being spent at Kabete (Native Industrial Training Depot).<sup>22</sup>

In the year 1934 the AIM proposed to set up an elementary boarding school at Kapsowar, to feed Tambach (G.A.S.), and Kapsabet (AIM) where they proposed to specialize in training teacher evangelists.<sup>23</sup> The mission succeeded in launching this department. They began with a boys' school and later a girls' boarding school. The teachers included Mr. Joel Arap Chemibei together with his wife Jane, who had been sent by the Nandi District Church Council to open up work in Marakwet. He engaged in evangelistic work and held a small school in his house. His support came from the Nandi Church. As outreach ministry took most of his time, Reuben Arap Seronei and his wife Rebecca also from Nandi took over the education work.

The time table ran from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.. The subjects taught were reading and writing. A little history, geography and gardening were introduced by Reuben.<sup>24</sup> Reuben later developed some problems and misunderstandings with the Missionaries at Kapsowar. The Nandi elders discontinued him from working with the Mission because of "fighting with all missionaries at Kapsowar and refusing to say sorry. Secondly for supporting those who wanted to break away from AIM. The elders used the following Kalenjin idiom: 'Kimwa chi kole magiume sasurwet ye maen kebet'. (It literally means, 'one cannot take a shelter under a banana plant, when the rain stops he cuts it down).'" They lamented that AIM had helped Reuben in many things but now has turned against her.<sup>25</sup>

When Reuben left, the first Marakwet young man, Samuel Chepkarmit took over. He taught until 1942 being replaced in turn by Daudi Kisang and George Kendagor. Daudi left Kapsowar for Ngejer and later opened Kamogo School. In 1937 Miss Halliday was appointed to Kapsowar in connection with the girls' work on the station.<sup>26</sup> By the year 1939 the school numbers in Marakwet were about 50 which included 8 girls, some of whom attended daily from their homes.<sup>27</sup> The District Commissioner commended the Mission for spearheading female education.

In the year 1941 the Local Native Council granted a site at Sinon near Kapsowar to the Roman Catholic Mission for a new out-school despite protests of the AIM at Kapsowar. The District Commissioner "considered that a little competition would be a healthy thing especially as the surrounding population cannot muster even 1% of literate Christians."<sup>28</sup>

By the year 1944 the District Commissioner stated, "the people of the District are certainly becoming much more desirous of education, but the position

By the year 1944 the District Commissioner stated, "the people of the District are certainly becoming much more desirous of education, but the position has been gravely prejudiced by the cessation of any teacher training by Government throughout the year."<sup>29</sup>

Two years later, a teacher Mr. Job Birech who witnessed to several students at Government African School Tambach, left for Kapsabet after 16 years of faithful service at Tambach. The first Marakwet converts, Mr. Samson Chelanga and Mr. Joshua Chebobei, who were baptized in 1932, were his students and fruits of his witness.<sup>30</sup>

AIM Kapsowar by this year had eight out-schools most of them attached to a dispensary. All these schools were lower primary except one full primary School at Kapsowar. Ismael Koimur, a first class Marakwet teacher, introduced English at Kapsowar Primary School.

Education of girls at Kapsowar was basically to prepare them for marriage. The mission felt that "the Christian African home is the corner stone of Christian civilization in Africa."<sup>31</sup> Because of this the Mission sought to teach and train the girls so that they could found Christian homes as the wives of their evangelists and Christian men.

R.V. Reynolds emphasized the importance of the home. He quoted Abraham Lincoln who said, "all that I am or hope to be I owe to my mother." Napoleon also when asked what France most needed, replied, "mother." Africa therefore stands in great need of Christian mothers and Christian homes, for she will not rise above the level of her mothers.<sup>32</sup> The mission took this challenge and paid special attention to the winning and training of women and girls through village work and girls schools.

The girls' school, the courses taught other than the Government approved course of studies included "mothercraft, dressmaking, spinning, weaving, and home management."<sup>33</sup> These courses among other things brought many girls to the Mission Station. Mrs. Richardson gives another major reason that brought girls to the station:

In Marakwet the girls found that they could not live pure Christian lives in their home and they came to us for protection from the cruel and filthy initiation rites. Often when they come on the station it is very hard for them to resist the angry threats and curses and other forms of persuasion adopted by their parents and relatives in order to make them undergo the rites.<sup>34</sup>

In interviewing two mothers and especially one who ran to the station because of the above traditional rite, I found that they concurred with what Mrs. Richardson has written. This particular lady went through terrific persecution. Her father and relatives came with bows and arrows to threaten the Missionaries if they would not allow their daughter to accompany them back home. Her mother also came to persuade her and when she refused, threatened to go and curse her by wrapping ashes on her breasts which she sucked and her thighs which she sat on. Because of her strong faith she told her mother that "such curses have no power over her again. The one who is in her is stronger even than the curses."<sup>35</sup> She was later married to a Christian young man and has since been one of the key women leaders in the Marakwet Church.

As late as 1958, it was difficult for the Marakwet girls to receive parental consent to go to school. Mrs. McMinn said of those in the school:

The majority of these girls cannot go home for holidays as their parents are against their coming to school. Three girls had to hide in our home while angry relations stormed around outside trying firstly by persuasion and then by pleading and finally by threats to make them return home. One succeeded on the second visit.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of persecutions faced by the girls, solid and sure Christian foundations were laid in them for the upbuilding of Christian character and the establishment of the Christian home. The Mission succeeded in this training but not to the extent of achieving their objective of establishing Christian home. Mrs. McMinn noted this problem:

One factor is that there are fewer Christian men than girls in this tribe, so if the girl has had no offer of marriage, she can see no alternative but to accept the one who her parents favour ..... In the ten years that I have been acquainted with the work at Kapsowar, ten girls have had a Christian wedding out of a possible three hundred or so who have been in the home for varying lengths of stay.<sup>37</sup>

A good number of those who went through the girls' school did not have it easy especially when married to nominal believers or non-believers. Two examples would suffice here.

One young woman married in the church started her married life with fair prospects but after a year or so her husband started backsliding and

going back to the older way of life, and recently he has threatened to kill her because she protested at his taking a second wife.

Another woman was mistreated by her husband; the chief fault he had to find with her was that she had only given birth to girls and no boys!<sup>38</sup>

Such marriages would deprive the home of love, purity and joy. I feel that the Mission and the church should have emphasized the training of the boys as they did for the girls. Their outreach ministries should have been directed towards the men and boys because often women are easily reached. To date, there are a number of local churches in Marakwet without male leadership. Some older folk see the church as being for young children and women. It would take time to erase this from their minds.

Needless to say, the Marakwet Church is blessed with strong Christian women, attribute to the Mission.

In the year 1962 the Marakwet Church Leaders felt that it was time for a Boys' Secondary School to be opened in the division. One of my informants said that some of the missionaries were against it. He quoted one who said "Marakwet children have no need for further education, they should be satisfied with the primary education they are receiving and the manual jobs they are doing."<sup>39</sup>

Other Missionaries, for example Mr. McMinn and Mr. Pinaar helped to promote the School.

Chebara was chosen as the site. The ground had literally been prepared by the foresight of the church leaders. Members of the Christian community moved away from the original settlement to leave the site clear. With the discontinuance of the Primary Boarding School at Kapsowar there were buildings available in which the High School could be accommodated for the first two years of its existence, 1965-1967, until new buildings were erected at Chebara.

Similarly, in 1972 the same buildings at Kapsowar were again used for the beginning of a Girls' High School. It was the wish of the Church that when the Girls' School was vacated, perhaps the next use for it would be as a Church Conference/teaching center. This never materialised because Kapsowar Hospital occupied them.

Out of the AIM Schools came our first traders, teachers, chiefs, members of Parliament, doctors (recently), etc. Most of these people were nurtured and

trained in the Mission Schools. The most saddening thing however is that, quite a number of them are out of fellowship. The greatest problem especially among the men is marrying a second wife.

The first converts especially those baptized prior to 1945 seem to have withstood the above temptation. Out of the twenty one baptized members, three yielded to the temptation.<sup>40</sup> The number of those who left the fellowship increased later.

Other than the issue of the undisciplined believers, several members of the Church came out of the classroom, for example the first baptized Marakwets Samson Chelanga and Joshua Chebobei, were students at Tambach Government African school in 1932. As stated earlier, Job arap Birch an AIM product who was teaching at Tambach, led them to the Lord. Two years later, Elijah Kilimo and Daudi Kisang students at Kapsabet Mission School were baptized and they brought the message back to Marakwet with the first Missionaries.

### **Bible Training**

Bible training was not implemented to go hand in hand with schools' education.

In 1937, "the Eldoret Field Council approved the suggestion of training boys who are not suitable for school teachers but who would make good evangelists. They recommended that, should anyone apply to the Mission who had no other qualification (teaching, medical, etc), that there is not only scope for such a person to train evangelists, but also the urgent need that such a work be started. In due course, he might open up a Bible School for this area."<sup>41</sup>

This did not take off the ground until the year 1950, when the Mission took the challenge seriously to start a Bible school. The Rev. Kenneth Phillips wrote:

The school will provide courses of intensive Bible study and practical evangelism for representatives for the five tribes in this part of Kenya, numbering about half a million people, all of whom speak the same language. These tribes are, Kipsigis, Nandi, Marakwet, Elgeyo and Tugen."<sup>42</sup>

The Bible School was begun at Kabartonjo. There were six or seven students in 1952 and all were Tugen. The academic standard for the 1952 class was Standard I and II, some of the students being taught the elements of reading and writing. This is quite startling because of the effort expended by the Church

and the Mission alike in Church work against that put by them into Schools. The Church leaders of the immediate future were not taken into consideration. The Church had no men who could cope with the new young learned Africans, especially those teaching or training to teach in Church related Schools. These teachers who were more advanced academically, looked down upon the Pastors, partly because a Pastor received a much lower allowance than a young T4, the bottom grade of a trained teacher.

Some individual Missionaries saw the need for Church leaders of depth and ability. They challenged the Church and the Mission to concentrate on building up training for Pastors and elders.

In February, 1954 Mr. And Mrs. E.J. Andersen were assigned to the newly opened Nandi/Kipsigis Bible School at Kapsabet. Mr. Andersen was to be the Principal.<sup>43</sup> The Bible School at Kabartonjo was closed down.

The first Marakwet ministers were sent to Kapsabet Bible School in the late fifties and early sixties. These were Loyei arap Talai, Esra, Samuel arap Yego and a lady by the name of Edith Jelimo. This first group did not last long in the ministry especially the first two. The lady did not complete her studies. Samuel arap Yego served the Marakwet Church until the year 1975 when he fell into sin and finally married a second wife. He was the first ordained minister in Marakwet.

The second group of Pastors who have served Marakwet faithfully to date includes Rev. Samuel Cheserek, Rev. Paulo Chepkieny, Rev. Edward Cheboi, Pastor Musa Chelanga and Pastor Stanley Misoi. Some lady workers included Irene Chesum (deceased), Rhoda Musa and Nancy Kendagor.

The third group included Mr. Joshua Kwambai (Sub-Chief), Rev. Joseph Cheserek, Pastor Joel Cherono, Pastor Daniel Clement, Grace Mariko (Mrs), Mary Chelanga (Mrs) and Truphena Chepkwony (Mrs).

The majority of the above workers completed primary education before joining Kapsabet Bible School.

In the year 1974 the Lord called the writer of this paper after completing High School to join Scott Theological College. being the first Marakwet to join the College. Since then the Lord has called other men and women.

The scope of this paper will not allow the mention of many others who have graduated from Bible Institutes/Colleges and are serving the Marakwet Church.

In brief, I would say that at present, there are over twenty workers serving more than seventy Churches in Marakwet.

Due to the shortage of workers, the Marakwet leaders are seriously considering opening an evangelist training centre. I was recently made to understand that an area of thirty acres has been acquired for this evangelists school.

### **Early Converts**

The rate of conversion in Marakwet was quite minimal. This discouraged a number of Missionaries to the extent that they referred to the tribe as "degraded". In twelve years, only fifteen Marakwets had been baptized. In 1944 Dr. W.B. Young wrote:

Mrs. Young and I both have felt for a long time that the Marakwet don't deserve the title "degraded". They are backward, certainly, but no more degraded than any other tribe in Kenya so far as we with out very limited knowledge can see....They are cheerful friendly and show real care for their children.<sup>44</sup>

He requested that the word "degraded" be erased from the annals of the Kapsowar work.

For the few converts, the step from traditional culture to Christianity was such a tremendous one that the young Christians had to go through a period of indoctrination.

Kapsowar Mission Station helped train the young converts in a spiritual environment. The Christians learned a new way of life (Christian culture) and education. In an annual report of 1945, Kapsowar was still likened to a little island of light in a sea of darkness. Nearly all the souls won for Christ were still congregated there. Over one hundred attended regularly on Sunday mornings. Regular preaching journeys were the order of the day. Two evangelists supported by the Church constantly traveled through the tribe, preaching the Word.<sup>45</sup>

For the new believers, the catechetical classes afforded a period of observation during which the Missionary could see whether the convert was completely divorced from evil traditional practices.

The next step was baptism and being received into Church fellowship. The first baptized Marakwets were two schoolboys, Samson Chelanga and Joshua Chebobei both of Government African School, Tambach in 1932. Two years later, Daudi Kisang and Elijah Kilimo of Kapsabet Mission Schol received their baptism at Kapsowar. Their wives received theirs a year later. Other notable characters were Abraham Ngelech, Isaiah Cheptoo, Solomon Cheptoo, Joseph Kipkore, Philip Chepkong'a, Zechariah Kimosop, and Job Kibor (1937); Ezekiel Chebet (1944).

In the early stages of the Church, the Missionary was the prominent figure. Later he appointed elders. The first recognized elders of the Marakwet Church were Mr. Daudi Kisang, Mr. Joshua Chebobei and Mr. Job Kibor.<sup>46</sup> As these elders and others grew in grace and the knowledge of the Lord, they began to share with the Missionary the responsibility of governing the Church.

Preachers, teachers and dressers (dispensers) were chosen from among the elders. Mr. Job Kibor and Zechariah Kimosop. were paid by the Church to minister in Kapsowar Local Church and visit the surrounding villages to share the Gospel.

Mr. Job Kibor heard the Gospel message for the first time while serving a jail term at Eldoret Government Prison, but never responded to it. A year or so later after his release, he came to Kapsowar with a small herd of goats to seek a permit from the Missionary who was responsible for issuing passes to those who wished to journey from one district to another to sell or move goats or sheep. The Missionary requested him to stay at Kapsowar for a little while to learn how to read. He further promised him work to do and pasture for his goats. Mr. Kibor agreed and thus began learning how to read. It did not take him long to know the alphabet and join the letters together. As soon as he mastered these he requested the Missionary to allow him to continue his journey. He took with him the book of Genesis and the new Testament text in the Nandi language. Mr. S.M. Bryson writes that:

Night by night he lit his crude lamp, a small piece of wool for a wick floating in oil in a half gourd, which gave just enough light for him to read by. He read of Abel, the good man, and of Cain, the murderer, and conviction came to his heart. As he read the New Testament especially Matthew 11:28-30; he believed and surrendered his life to the Lord.<sup>47</sup>

No sooner did he surrender his life to the Lord than he began moving around preaching the things which God had revealed to him. The Missionaries saw the potential in him and thus enlisted him both as a preacher and an evangelist. He had a good reputation as a man of faith, a man of the word and a man of prayer.

He imitated the Lord Jesus Christ in his loving spirit; he thought, spoke, and acted in a kindly manner.

As a preacher, Mr. Kibor gave very powerful messages full of illustrations and idiomatic expressions. He rebuked those who claimed to be Christians but did not show it by their actions.

His home became a place of refuge for those young Christians who fled from their homes because of being forced to undergo traditional initiation rites.

Though Mr. Kibor and his wife had no children of their own, their home was always full of young people. The testimonies which were given at his funeral by those who passed through their home bore witness to this.

The temptation to marry a second wife because of not having children by the first one never moved him from his faith.

The Marakwet Christians are grateful for having a church father that they can emulate. Mr. Kibor is not the only Marakwet elder that we can talk of. Others included Elijah Kilimo a dispenser and a preacher; Ezekiel Chebet, a teacher and a preacher; Daudi Kisang, a teacher; Samson Chelanga and Joshua Chebobei, carpenters and preachers; Abraham Ngelech, a dispenser and preacher, and a few others who are still faithfully serving the Lord in spite of their old age.

In these early days the Missionaries did all the baptizing of converts and presiding over the communion table. It was not until the mid sixties that this ministry began to be shared by the Marakwet pastors.

As earlier stated, the council of elders was born in 1939 but it took the Mission about twenty years to transfer the offices of Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer to the Marakwet leaders. It was in the year 1958, that Mr. Joshua Chebobei was elected the Chairman, Daudi Kisang, the Treasurer, and Henry Cheboi, the Secretary of the Africa Inland Church. Marakwet District Church Council.

### **Church Extension**

The development of outreach work was a feature of the work based on Kapsowar. All Marakwet Christians as stated earlier congregated at Kapsowar Mission Station. Several of the early believers interviewed, praised the Calibre of the fellowship enjoyed. They ate together, visited one another, helped one another and worked as children of one parent. Their unity helped quell opposition from non-Christians. These early believers met in the Church

building every morning at 6:00 a.m. for prayers. On Sundays some went to surrounding villages to share the Gospel. Sunday afternoons were used for sharing prayer requests, testimonies and praying for other Mission stations using the AIM prayer letter.

As far as Church extension is concerned, the policy in Marakwet seemed to have been – build first a dispensary, or a school and run the Christian work from these. Teachers and dispensers (dressers) were to do their regular work of teaching or healing and then serve also as evangelists and preachers during the weekends.

A Missionary with a vision (Mr. Maxwell) told the congregated believers, “It is good for you to separate or disperse because the number of believers was growing large and the Talai people who lived around the Mission station feared that their land might be taken. They constantly fought the Christians.”<sup>48</sup>

The believers positively responded to it. Some of them e.g. Samuel Koilege, Kimuron Arap Tolkos, Ezekiel Chebet, Josiah Kipsarno Arap Yego and Marko Meng’ich moved to Chebara. A site for a school was granted to them. All Christians from Kapsowar went for a week to build the classrooms and a teacher’s house. They slept in the open under a bush at night. The ladies slept in a nearby home.

While the men cut the poles and built the houses, the ladies cut the grass to thatch the roofs. Mr. S. Chelang’a remarked. “because our fellowship was great, no one complained.”<sup>49</sup>

Mr. Solomon Ara Chemwal and Ezekiel Arap Chebet became the first teachers. Mzee Ezekiel taught until his retirement. In 1986 he went to be with the Lord. The Marakwets remember him as a good teacher and a good preacher.

As Christians increased in the out-stations, services began to be organized in the neighboring villages.

From Kapcherop services were held at Kamoi eight miles away and at Tenden the same distance in the opposite direction.

Kamogo and Ng’ejer combined and held services at Kapchebau and Tot. Chebara reached out to Kapseu and Chebiemit.

Kapsowar supplied speakers for Chesoi, thirteen miles away and Sowerwo, six miles away. They also began fortnightly services at Kapsumai six miles east of Kapsowar.

From Yemit, the Christians visited Chebororwa and sometimes Kimnai.

Sites for building these Churches were granted. The Mission helped with some corrugated iron sheets for roofing some of the Churches. The walls were smeared with mud. Mr. Joshua Chebobei who was a trained carpenter constructed many of the buildings. Dr. Young helped construct the Kapsowar Church.

The Marakwet Church had as yet no trained workers. Simple believers were ready to visit these places and lead the services. They held these people together. They read the Scripture, gave a simple message, led in singing and in prayer.

In her report of 1960, Mrs. McMinn said:

There was an increase of small and larger meetings all over Marakwet on a Sunday. Twenty gatherings were held week by week, some with only ten attending or larger ones with one hundred and fifty folk. The majority of these are led by our African Christians, some with very little teaching themselves.<sup>50</sup>

To achieve this growth, the Mission and the Church used Church services, catechetical instruction, school work, a hospital, itinerant evangelism and village visitation. Also the spontaneous extension of the Church from the Mission station was a feature. Several young couples moved to new out stations, to start new gardens, build new houses and invite their neighbors to little informal services.

### **Description of Growth Patterns**

Statistics for composite membership advocated by "Church Growth" are not available.

All the AIC Churches in Marakwet had people attending the catechumen classes. But, the average attendance of these classes does not seem to have any bearing on the actual number of baptisms each year. There were those who remained in the catechumen classes for a very long time because of their marital problems or other reasons that hindered them from baptism.

The growth of Church membership was slow but steady. This can be seen from the following figures.

Between 1932 and 1942, the Marakwet Church had seventeen baptized members. 1943 and 1952, forty one; 1953 and 1962, two hundred and twenty two. 1963 and 1972, eight hundred and eighty.<sup>51</sup>

We need to bear in mind that these baptized members belong to sixteen local Churches and few other Church centers. Also that not necessarily all baptized members are in fellowship. Some members reverted to old traditional customs by their consulting traditional religious specialists, marrying other wives or being enslaved by alcoholic drinks. Others never abandoned the custom of circumcising their children secretly by sending them to the grandparents, aunts or other relatives. Between the year 1932 and 1960, eighty six men were baptized and twenty two of these married other wives.<sup>52</sup> Christians of this kind cause others to stumble and constantly wound their own conscience. They are ever guilty and lack the fruit of the Spirit – peace and joy. One of my informants counted less than ten families who had completely abandoned these traditional rites.

The Church experienced phenomenal growth in the sixties when compared with earlier years. The reasons for this growth are several in number. It will suffice to mention a few here. The major reason was the Marakwet Pastors. The Marakwet Church received its first trained ministers during this period. They were quite active and aggressive in evangelism. They visited different surrounding homes and villages for one full week once a month, preaching the Gospel and inviting people to Church. Many people responded positively to the Gospel. Secondly, the newly constructed Church buildings attracted more people than when they met under shades of large trees. Thirdly, converted youth witnessed to their peers. Many responded to the Gospel. An indication of this was a youth camp of 1972 which was attended by approximately two thousand young people.<sup>53</sup>

The Church has grown steadily ever since. The main thing that puzzles one is the failure to fill the constructed Church buildings. Local Churches which were constructed in the fifties are still half full. Yet there has been a continuous population increase.

Several of those interviewed thought that many baptized Christians went back because of lack of teaching. Pulpit ministry too was not strong enough to hold the people together, thus causing some to leave the Church. Some of the other members moved to new districts e.g. Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu.

So, in spite of numerical growth, the expansion of the Marakwet Church was not really healthy. As earlier stated, the Mission majored on the youth and

women and failed to reach the heads of families, thus hampering the real growth of the Church. They failed to prioritize in reaching men. Coupled with this were the children of the Church members. Unlike healthy Churches that received more of their new members by biological growth, the Marakwet Church was different. It is sad to say that the majority of the children of our first believers are out of Church fellowship. Not one entered into Church ministry. Interviewing some of the believer's children made me understand that their parents emphasized secular education. They wanted them to be teachers, doctors, engineers, etc.

Church ministry was discouraged because those who entered into it were poorly paid. I remember when he received God's call to the pastoral ministry, some elders of my local Church AIC Kapsowar discouraged me a lot. Their argument was, "What shall we pay you when you return home from College? You could as well do something else and be used of God in the Church". I pleaded with them that the one who called me would provide for my needs. Mr. Job Kibor whom I earlier referred to in this paper supported me, encouraged me and daily prayed for me. He persuaded the Church elders to allow me to join Bible College. They finally agreed and sent him with their blessings. Many other Marakwet pastors can share the same experiences they faced and also end up praising God for Mr. Job Kibor.

Since Marakwet is basically a rural area, several of the learned young Christians leave their homes to look for jobs in towns. Not many survive the temptations of town life. Those who do, benefit the Church of Christ in these places and the Marakwet Church remains the poorer.

The present leadership of the Marakwet Church needs to think of ways and means of assuring constant and healthy growth of the Church.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> E.B. Hosking, Annual Report DC/ELGM/J/2 Nairobi: Kenya National Archives (KNA), 1928 - 32.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. Sylvester, Annual Report DC/ELGM/I/3 KNA, Nairobi, 1933-37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933

<sup>4</sup> Provincial Commissioner's Report Rift Valley Province, KNA, Nairobi, 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. J.M. Sylvester, Annual Report DC/ELGM/I/3 KNA, Nairobi, 1933-37.

<sup>6</sup> Mzee Amos Kech, Interview by the author, 10 December, 1991, Kapsowar

<sup>7</sup> Letter of Rev. Reynolds to DC Sylvester 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1933, Nairobi: AIM Archives.

- <sup>8</sup> Minutes of Field Council Meeting at Kapsabet, May 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>9</sup> Kapsowar Station Log Book, 1940. Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>10</sup> Mr. Samson Chelanga, Interview by author, 6 August 1991, Kapsowar.
- <sup>11</sup> Mr. W.H. Hale, Annual Report DC/ELGM/1/4 1940. Nairobi: KNA.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1941.
- <sup>13</sup> Miss Pauline Driskell, "My Impressions" *Inland Africa* June, 1960, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>14</sup> Medical Policy suggested by the British Home Council April, 1946, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>15</sup> Dr. Philip Morris, Memorandum August 24, 1953, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>16</sup> G. M. Bebb, Annual Report DC/ELGM.13, 1956, Nairobi: KNA, P. 24.
- <sup>17</sup> G. M. Bebb, Annual Report DC/ELGM/13, 1957 Nairobi: KNA
- <sup>18</sup> Collection of Dr. R. S. Lindsay, 1954, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>19</sup> Dr. Morris, Notes on medical policy September, 1953, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>20</sup> Mr. J.G. Hopkins, Annual Report DC/ELGM/1/1, 1924, Nairobi: KNA.
- <sup>21</sup> E.B. Hoskings, Ag. District Commissioner's Report DC/ELGM/1/1, 1927, P. 13, KNA.
- <sup>22</sup> Hoskings, 1931, Nairobi: KNA.
- <sup>23</sup> Provincial Commissioner's Report, Rift Valley province 6A/12/5, 1934, Nairobi: KNA.
- <sup>24</sup> A letter of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1936 written to Mr. Weston from Kapsowar.
- <sup>25</sup> A Letter of 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1940 from Elders of Nandi to Kapsowar Mission Station.
- <sup>26</sup> Field Council Minutes, Eldoret, Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> 1937, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> W. H. Hale, Annual report DC/ELGM/5/1941, Nairobi: KNA.
- <sup>29</sup> Mr. D. Stross Fox, DC/ELGM/13/1944, Nairobi: KNA
- <sup>30</sup> Mr. S. Chelanga and Mr. J. Chebobei, interview by author, August 1991, Kapsowar.
- <sup>31</sup> Mrs. K. Richardson, "Girls Work." *Inland Africa* 1947, p. 14.
- <sup>32</sup> R. V. Reynolds "Training Africa's future Homemakers," *Inland Africa* Oct-Dec 1949, p. 76-77.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- <sup>34</sup> Mrs. K. Richardson, p. 14.
- <sup>35</sup> Mama Hellen Stephen and Mama Rebecca Zekaria, interviews by author, August 1991, Kapsowar.
- <sup>36</sup> Mrs. Philip McMinn, "Plenty to do at Kapsowar," *Inland Africa* (June 1958), p. 3.
- <sup>37</sup> Mrs. P.W. McMinn. "Girls Education". *Inland Africa* (October 1960), p. 10.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.
- <sup>39</sup> Mr. Herman arap Yano, interview by author, August 1991, Chebara.
- <sup>40</sup> AIC Marakwet Membership Records: Kapsowar, 1934-1960.
- <sup>41</sup> Field Council Meeting at Eldoret, 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1937, Nairobi: AIM Archives,
- <sup>42</sup> The Rev. Kenneth Phillips. "Eldoret Bible School," *Inland Africa*, January, 1950. Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>43</sup> Eldoret District Committee Minutes, 1953, Nairobi: AIM Archives.
- <sup>44</sup> Dr. W. B. Young, "The Marakwet for Christ," *Inland Africa*, July – September, 1944, p. 38.
- <sup>45</sup> Dr. W. B. Young, "Annual Report for 1945," *Inland Africa*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the Field Council Meeting at Kapsabet, January 25 – 26, 1939.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart M. Bryson, Light in Darkness (London: Pary Jackman, Scripture Illustrations Ltd., 1959), p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> Mr. Samson Chelanga, interview by author, August 1991, Kapsowar.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Mrs. P. W. McMinn, "Church Work," Inland Africa (October, 1960), p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> AIC Marakwet Membership Book, Kapsowar, 1932ff.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Rev. Samuel Cheserek, interviewed by author, December, 1991.

Rev. Samuel Cheserek is the second Ordained Minister, the first Youth Camp Director, the second District Church Council Chairman, and the first Regional Church Council Chairman.

# LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS, AND AFRICA

Timothy Palmer

Three sets of experiences prompted the writing of this essay.

First are the colorful paintings on the back of Nigerian lorries. Amidst the many bright and vivid drawings of lions and jets are two common sets of religious symbols. On the one hand is the cross of Jesus, often painted red. On the other hand are pictures representing Islam, sometimes with a mosque and possibly some palm trees, but frequently with crossed swords at the top of the painting. Even though owners may have different motivations for putting symbols on their lorries, it remains true that both the cross and the sword can be instruments of execution. In the first case, the founder of Christianity died on a cross; in the second case, the founder of Islam is reputed to have used the sword in carrying out his mission.

Secondly, one observes in Nigeria, as well as elsewhere in the world, a persistent "big man complex." A "big man" is one who uses all the resources of the state or the institution to perpetuate his own rule and glory. Blaine Harden describes the big man: "His cult equates his personal well-being with the well-being of the state. His rule has one overriding goal: to perpetuate his reign as the Big Man."<sup>1</sup> The big man is one who puts his own well-being above that of his subjects. This pattern of behavior is common in political life, but is also not uncommon in other spheres of society including the church. The big man complex can hinder the development and well-being both of church and of society.

A third phenomenon is the Prosperity Gospel. Nigerian television regularly

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<sup>1</sup> Blaine Harden, *Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), p. 218.

carries sermons and religious services from prosperity preachers, and “prosperity” churches are springing up all the time. Peter Young remarks that “the main element of the prosperity teaching is that all Christians have the right, and even the responsibility, to be prosperous in all areas of life. This most notably includes the areas of financial prosperity and prosperity in the realm of physical health and well being.”<sup>2</sup> Paul Gifford notes that “wealth has become far more important than health, though not entirely displacing it.”<sup>3</sup> Prosperity theology has enormous implications for one’s view of God, Jesus and the Christian life.

This essay attempts to relate Martin Luther’s theology of the cross to some of the above phenomena. We maintain that this theology of the cross is useful for reflecting on the needs both of church and of society in Africa today.

### **Theology of Glory**

The Roman Catholic Church in Luther’s day was in a state of crisis. The great scholastic theological system of Thomas Aquinas was crumbling. The institutional church was promoting personal advancement and glory, but the glory of God was distant. In all of this, Jesus Christ was difficult to find.

Scholasticism was a great achievement of the medieval church. James Atkinson says that scholasticism “was a wholly credible attempt to understand Christianity and to integrate it with current thought. . . . Scholasticism sought to penetrate the meaning of revealed Christian truth by definition, analogy, logic and dialectic, and by means of these tools to systematize that knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, scholasticism used reason together with faith to understand the Gospel. “The inherent strength of scholasticism, a titanic strength that eventually became its own undoing, was its rationalism.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Young, “An Evaluation of Prosperity Teaching,” *TCNN Research Bulletin* 43 (March 2005): 5.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> James Atkinson, *Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism*, rev. ed. (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1982), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Despite its magnificence, scholastic theology failed to give a clear and certain answer to the way of salvation. The medieval church taught that salvation came through the church and its sacraments, but in the end there was great uncertainty as to one's own salvation.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, "traditional religious culture seemed no longer able to deal effectively with the religious anxiety and idealism of many people."<sup>7</sup> Thus the church failed in meeting the spiritual needs of its people.

Combined with this failure was a massive abuse of power by the clergy. The higher clergy at Rome and elsewhere were engaged in political intrigues to advance their positions. Bishops used their authority to extract money from the lower clergy and the laity; and the priests did the same to the laity.<sup>8</sup>

In this entire system, Jesus Christ was hard to find. For all the glory of scholasticism and the medieval church, the crucified Christ was suppressed and pushed aside. Luther calls the prevailing theological and ecclesiastical culture of his day a theology of glory. This theology stands in stark contrast to the theology of the cross.

Luther claimed that the whole indulgence scam of 1517 was evidence of a theology of glory. In his commentary on his 95 Theses, Luther wrote:

From this you can see how, ever since the scholastic theology—the deceiving theology...—began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned up-side-down. . . . A theologian of glory does not recognize . . . the crucified and hidden God alone.<sup>9</sup>

Gerhard Forde tells us that for Luther the theology of glory and the theology of the cross are "two ways of being a theologian."<sup>10</sup> These two theologies are

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform. 1250-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 29-31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-16.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, "Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses," *Luther's Works (LW)* 31:225, 227.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 10;

diametrically opposed: “the two theologies are always locked in mortal combat.”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, since every person is a theologian, these two theologies are about two different worldviews or life perspectives. The theology of glory, like the theology of the cross, encompasses all of theology. It is a way of life.

In this brief survey we will highlight three aspects of the theology of glory: its view of God, the Christian life and justification.

A theologian of glory, according to Luther, will look for God outside of Jesus Christ. But Luther maintains that “God can be found only in suffering and the cross.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, “seeking God outside of Jesus is [the work of] the devil.”<sup>13</sup>

Luther claims that the theologian of glory will look upon the “invisible things of God” like God’s “virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth.” But a true believer should focus on “the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.”<sup>14</sup>

The theologian of glory “does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls ‘enemies of the cross of Christ,’ for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus one’s view of God will impact one’s Christian life. If God is understood to be only transcendent, powerful and glorious, then we too will chase after power and glory. Luther says: “Because men do not know the cross and hate it, they

see also Walter von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. H. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976); and Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Forde., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” *LW* 31:53 (on thesis 21).

<sup>13</sup> Luther, WA 40(3), 337; cited by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. R. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 21, fn. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” *LW* 31:52-53 (on theses 19-20).

<sup>15</sup> Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” *LW* 31:53 (on thesis 21).

necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded and hardened by such love, for desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires." Luther continues: "the desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise." Thus: "the remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it."<sup>16</sup>

The theology of glory is thus not only a view of God but also a way of life. This was clearly evident in the indulgence scam that sparked the Reformation. In his 95 Theses of 1517, Luther warns against "the lust and license of the indulgence preachers." "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?"<sup>17</sup>

For the indulgence sellers to use the symbol of the cross of Jesus to pursue their personal gain is pure blasphemy: "to say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers, is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy."<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the theology of glory is seen in the way of justification. The first 12 theses of the Heidelberg Disputation deal with this question. A theologian of glory relies on human works for salvation, not the works of God. The works of God, i.e., the cross, seem unattractive; but the works of man seem attractive. But the reality is the reverse. In reality, the works of men are a form of pride, since it is a trusting in one's own works for salvation. And: "where there is pride there are the wrath and judgment of God, for God opposes the haughty."<sup>19</sup> Those who believe in "works without Christ" are "haughty" for they deprive God of his glory.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:53-54 (on thesis 22).

<sup>17</sup> Luther, "Ninety-Five Theses," *LW* 31:31, 33 (theses 72, 86).

<sup>18</sup> Luther, "Ninety-Five Theses," *LW* 31:32 (thesis 79).

<sup>19</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:47 (on thesis 8).

<sup>20</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:47 (on thesis 9).

This brief summary of Luther's theology of glory depicts the lives of many who trust in their own goodness and strive after their own glory, neglecting the glory of God and the well-being of their neighbor. In stark contrast to this is the theology of the cross.

### **Theology of the Cross**

The theology of the cross is Luther's term for a radically different approach to God and to life. Again, three questions are addressed: how do we know God, how are we saved, and how should we live the Christian life?

A key text is John 14 where Philip asks: "Lord, show us the Father" and Jesus answers: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Luther concludes: "For this reason, true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ."<sup>21</sup>

Instead of focusing on God's invisible qualities, we should focus on the "visible things of God, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness." Again: "it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."<sup>22</sup>

God is thus "hidden in suffering." Luther states it boldly: "God can be found *only* in suffering and the cross."<sup>23</sup>

This is radical theology. It is somewhat analogous to Karl Barth's christocentric theology, even though African theology and missiology might argue that God can also be found in the world of nature. But Luther's main point stands: Jesus Christ reveals God. Traditional theology tends to stress the transcendence and power of God; but Christian theology recognizes that God is love since God came down and suffered and died for us. Jesus reveals the compassion of God.

God's work in us seems unattractive because he "humbles and frightens us

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<sup>21</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:53 (on thesis 20).

<sup>22</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:52-53 (on thesis 20).

<sup>23</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:53 (on thesis 21); italics added.

by means of the law"; he "humbles us thoroughly, making us despair, so that he may exalt us in his mercy."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the law of God shows us that we are worthless sinners and we can have worth or salvation only in Christ.

We become righteous only through faith. "The righteousness of God . . . is imparted by faith."<sup>25</sup> Through faith we are not only justified by also one with Christ: "Through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us."<sup>26</sup>

The consequence of our justification and union with Christ is a life of good works: "Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work." Thus, "deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which he has saved us."<sup>27</sup>

The radical demands of the Christian life are an implication of Luther's theology of the cross. We find this teaching throughout Luther's writings. But this is perhaps most forcefully set forth in the 1520 treatise "The Freedom of a Christian," where a Christian is called both "a perfectly free lord of all" and "a perfectly dutiful servant of all."<sup>28</sup> Even though we are lords through justification by faith, yet we should be servants to our neighbors. Luther frequently refers to the example of Christ in Philippians 2, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. Luther writes:

Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, . . . to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him.<sup>29</sup>

Towards the end of the treatise, Luther says:

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<sup>24</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:44 (on thesis 4).

<sup>25</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:55 (on thesis 25).

<sup>26</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:56 (on thesis 26).

<sup>27</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:56-57 (on thesis 27).

<sup>28</sup> Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* 31:344.

<sup>29</sup> Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* 31:366.

... a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.<sup>30</sup>

The theology of the cross will thus lead one into radical Christianity.

### **The Theology of the Cross and our World**

As suggested in the introduction, there is too much theology of glory in this world. By nature people pursue their own glory and not that of their neighbor.

This is not the place to make a definitive judgment on other religions. Yet the incarnation and crucifixion of God in the Christian religion make Christianity unique. Many religions see God as being purely transcendent and glorious; but the cross of Christ reveals the humility and love of God. The cross reveals the compassionate heart of God. This is significant because one's view of God's nature often determines our own nature. If God is compassionate, then we too should be compassionate.

The theology of the cross also helps us to understand who a big man really is. According to Luther, the big man *par excellence* is Jesus Christ, who, being in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-7). "Big men" today are only concerned about their own well-being; Jesus Christ, who was the biggest man, took the form of a servant.

Luther's theology of the cross is in the same line as the biblical principle of servant leadership. When Jesus' disciples were arguing about who should be first, Jesus said: "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant." Our lives should be patterned after that of Christ, for "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43, 45). A true big man will love and serve his neighbor.

The theology of the cross also helps us to reexamine the presuppositions of

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<sup>30</sup> Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* 31:371.

the prosperity gospel. Prosperity teaching focuses on material prosperity. The late Benson Idahosa of Benin City in Nigeria wrote: "We are saved. From what to what? Death to life! Sin to righteousness! Darkness to light! Poverty to prosperity! Fear to faith! Failure to success! And more and more."<sup>31</sup> He added: "No one in God's family was ever destined to exist in sickness, fear, ignorance, poverty, loneliness or mediocrity."<sup>32</sup> The prosperity gospel is focused on one's personal success and well-being. Paul Gifford summarizes the spirit of prosperity teaching in these words: "True Christianity necessarily means wealth: it inevitably *brings* wealth."<sup>33</sup>

In this context, Luther's words are still incredibly timely: "Because men do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on."<sup>34</sup> Luther's theology reflects the words of Jesus: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:35). Luther's theology has grasped a central aspect of Jesus' teaching.

One may not agree with every dimension of Luther's teaching, but his theology does reflect the radical nature of Christianity, and can help us to think biblically about the needs of church and society in Africa today.

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<sup>31</sup> Benson Idahosa, *I Choose to Change: The Scriptural Way to Success and Prosperity* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1987), p. 10; cited in Young, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Idahosa, p. 14; cited in Young, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 149.

<sup>34</sup> Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," *LW* 31:53-54 (on thesis 22).

*keeping up with contemporary Africa . . .*

## **BookNotes for Africa**

*BookNotes for Africa* is an occasional (usually twice-yearly) specialist journal offering reviews of recent Africa-related publications relevant for informed Christian reflection in and about Africa.

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# 12 NOTABLE BOOKS FOR CHRISTIAN REFLECTION IN AFRICA: A REVIEW ARTICLE

Paul Bowers

What books should one be reading these days if one wants to understand modern Africa from a Christian perspective? What should we be noticing if we would like to keep familiar with leading personalities and perspectives of contemporary African Christianity? Here I suggest a list of 12 important books that would likely suit such intentions.

These are by no means the only books that could serve such a reading project. Many more could be selected. But these do represent an excellent sampling of the sort of reading that would support informed Christian reflection in and about Africa. While many of these books may not be so well known outside Africa, all of them deserve to be familiar within Africa.

It will be evident at once that I have tried to come up with a list that illustrates a wide range of interests and issues, and also one that represents a wide variety of personalities and intellectual trends. I have also restricted the selection to books published since 1990, to keep the contributions relatively recent. In making up such a short-list one is immediately afflicted with a sense of consequential omissions, but such additional titles can always be included

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Dr. Paul Bowers has taught in theological education in Africa since 1968, in Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and most recently in Cape Town, South Africa. He has also been involved with the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) since its inception in 1976, with the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) since it was launched in 1980, with the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (AJET) since it began publication in 1982, and with the journal *BookNotes for Africa* since it began publication in 1996. He presently serves as ICETE's international administrator. Bowers holds a PhD in biblical studies from the University of Cambridge in England.

in some subsequent presentation. This set of selections is presented not in some order of priority, but merely alphabetically by author.<sup>1</sup>

Each of these titles has been reviewed in the specialist journal *BookNotes for Africa*, and the evaluative annotations offered below are derived, with permission, directly from its pages, although edited to fit the intentions of this presentation. The result is that whereas much of the wording of those reviews is retained, the evaluative opinions are my own, for better or worse. Many other books of similar significance relating to Africa are routinely reviewed in the pages of *BookNotes for Africa*, a journal dedicated to bringing to notice just these sorts of publications, and offering expert Christian assessment of their contributions. Those who find these annotated selections particularly interesting and useful might therefore want to take up reading a journal like *BookNotes for Africa* on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup>

1 **Azumah, John A.**

*The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-religious Dialogue*

Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001 (264 pages, paperback, c. \$26)

No reflection on Christian presence in Africa today is sufficient without consideration of African Christian understanding of and engagement with Islam. And here we have a guide with ample experience and learning for this so complex project. Azumah holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham, is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in Ghana, and until recently was a lecturer at the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, India. With publication of this important work he must now be considered one of Africa's leading Christian scholars on Islam. The book presents a lively and realistic review of how Islam spread through sub-Saharan Africa. Azumah's approach to dialogue possibilities is not neutral. He clearly wishes to correct attempts by both Muslim and western scholars to understate the problematics of Islamic presence in Africa. For example, he notes that Islam in its expansion in Africa has often assimilated features of traditional religion rather than displaced them, which at times has then become the justification of efforts to correct this rampant "pluralism" by military jihad. The author also treats at length the otherwise often neglected topic of slavery in African Islam, and the Arab slave trade. He concludes by calling for fresh dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Africa, in order to remove misunderstandings and enhance good relations. This book represents an important current example of African

Christian reflection on the legacy of Islam in Africa and on the prospects of inter-faith dialogue.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Westerlund, David, and Eva Evers Rosander, editors. *African Islam and Islam in Africa*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997 (357 pages, paperback, c. \$27)

Backeberg, Werner. *Fundamentalism—Muslims Differ Widely from Evangelicals*. Pretoria, South Africa: IMER, 2002 (160 pages, paperback, c. \$30)

2 **Bediako, Kwame**

*Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa.*

Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1992 (525 pages, paperback, c. £20)

This now classic text in African theology has an epochal quality about it, generous in its size and scope, impressive in its learning, articulate in its presentation, penetrating in its assessments, and even instructive in its limitations. Bediako holds a PhD from the University of Aberdeen, and currently heads a research study centre in his home country of Ghana. The impact of his book lies not least in its distinctive interpretive approach. Bediako first offers successive chapters on the variety of ways that second-century Christianity evolved its sense of identity in relation to Greco-Roman culture (Tatian, Tertullian, Justin, and Clement of Alexandria). He then uses this as an interpretive framework for addressing the recent quest for Christian identity in Africa in relation to Africa's traditional religious culture (Idowu, Mbiti, Mulago, and Kato). And the limitations? Bediako designates Christianity's correlation with the religious culture of traditional Africa as African Christian theology's defining question. Some will feel that this way of delimiting the task needlessly obscures the wide range of additional theological issues that thoughtful Christians encounter in modern Africa. Others may wonder whether Bediako sufficiently addresses the other half of this identity question, whether one must rightly ask not only how African Christianity may best relate to its African heritage, but also and insistently how African Christianity can best relate to and represent its Christian heritage? How is African Christianity to be both authentically African *and* authentically Christian? Still others may find curious Bediako's noticeably less generous handling of the evangelical leader Byang Kato. Nevertheless this

sophisticated and multi-faceted study will reward sustained engagement for everyone who takes seriously the theological task of African Christianity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Bediako, Kwame. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis: 1995 (276 pages, paperback, c. \$30)

Bediako, Kwame. *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000 (144 pages, paperback, c. £7)

3 **de Gruchy, John W.**

*Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*

London: SCM/Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002 (263 pages, paperback, c. \$24)

This is easily among the best available discussions of Christian responsibility in post-apartheid South Africa. De Gruchy, doyen of South African theologians, has devoted much of his academic life to addressing the relationship between politics and theology. A vocal critic of the apartheid government, de Gruchy was intimately involved in the reconciliation process in South Africa in the 1990s. In 2002 he gave the Hulsean Lectures in the UK, which allowed him the opportunity for further reflection on the process of reconciliation, the fruits of which are gathered in this book. De Gruchy is concerned with situating reconciliation within a particular context—in his case, post-apartheid South Africa—because there is no such thing as reconciliation in the abstract. De Gruchy is also concerned specifically with reconciliation within the Christian tradition. His discussion engages, amongst other, Anselm, Abelard and Barth, and draws especially on Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology. As the title of the book indicates, de Gruchy argues that reconciliation is ultimately about restoring justice, a theme not always prominent in such discussion. The reader may feel that the relationship between justice and reconciliation is complicated, and would have benefited from more space than de Gruchy is able to devote to it. The book provides a fine example of theological engagement and could be profitably read for that reason alone. Christians living within contexts of conflict, or needing to reflect on such circumstances, whether in Africa or overseas, will want to attend with care to what the author has to say about both reconciliation and justice.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

de Gruchy, John W. *Christianity and Democracy. A Theology for a Just World Order*. Cambridge: CUP, 1995 (308 pages, paperback, c. £18)

Graybill, Lyn S. *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model*. Lynne Rienner, 2002 (231 pages, paperback, c. \$20)

**Ferdinando, Keith**

The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective: A Study of Demonology and Redemption in the African Context. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999 (450 pages, paperback, c. £30)

This remarkable contribution seeks to address pastorally the theological and cultural challenges of African Christianity. It does so in a manner that displays the best of evangelical biblical scholarship for Africa. Ferdinando lived and worked for some years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), for part of that time as head of the distinguished Institut Superier Theologique de Bunia, and more recently has been a lecturer at the London School of Theology. Written from the perspective of Africa, the book's unifying theme is the all-encompassing "triumph of Christ" as a manifestation of the universal sovereignty of God. It seeks to transform the essentially pessimistic perspective of traditional religions by focusing on the significance of Christ's sacrificial work of redemption on the Cross. In light of the Lord's overwhelming victory over the forces of wickedness, both biblical demonology and African occult are revealed for what they are, and relegated to their temporary, subordinate and subdued place in this world, as they await their ultimate destiny in God's final judgement. Ferdinando supports this fundamentally optimistic message through a detailed study of the relevant materials of Scripture for the proper biblical response to an ever-threatening dominion of darkness. No controversial issues are ignored. Ferdinando shows that syncretism or accommodation to ancestral beliefs, practices, values, and perspectives are not the answer. Only an ever-deeper, personally applied understanding of what God has already done and will do for us in and through Jesus the Christ will do. This text is an absolute "must read" for anyone committed to practical theological reflection in the African context. Ferdinando's biblically-based optimism is as spiritually educative as it is personally contagious.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

O'Donovan, Wilbur. *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*. 2nd ed. Bukuru, Nigeria: ACTS, 1995 (374 pages, paperback, c. \$6)

Turaki, Yusufu. *Tribal Gods of Africa: Ethnicity, Racism, Tribalism and the Gospel of Christ*. Bukuru: ACTS, 1997 (176 pages, paperback, c. \$5)

5 **Molyneux, K. Gordon**

*African Christian Theology: The Quest for Selfhood*

Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993 (422 pages, paperback, c. £60)

This is one of the most fascinating books available on African theology. As Adrian Hastings himself says in a foreword, "No other work I know of has attempted to understand African theology in this way." Molyneux grew up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and served there for many years in theological education. His PhD is from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The originality of his project is his attempt to understand African theology as a contemporary living process, which he does by a detailed description and evaluation of three different models of "doing" theology in the African context. The first is the ongoing scholarly publications enterprise at the prestigious Faculté de Théologie Catholique in Kinshasa (where at a seminar in 1960 the very term "African theology" first came into public usage). The second example is the vibrant hymnology of the independent Kimbanguist Church, through which it consciously expresses (and evolves) its theological perspectives. The third example is a notable series of "Gospel and Culture" seminars by which the evangelical church community CECA in north-eastern Congo set itself to nourish contextually-sensitive theological reflection on the felt needs of its membership. As a framework for his three samples Molyneux also provides a masterful introductory chapter that traces the quest for African Christian theology during the past century (well worth reading on its own). The book is weighty with substantive insights, and is elegantly readable throughout. It is regrettable that the publisher has now priced this valuable contribution beyond ordinary reach.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Parratt, John. *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 (217 pages, paperback, c. \$15)

Ngewa, Samuel, Mark Shaw and Tite Tiénou, editors. *Issues in African Christian Theology*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998 (343 pages, paperback, c. \$9)

6 **Mugambi, Jesse N. K.**

*From Liberation to Reconstruction*

Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995 (258 pages, paperback, c. \$10)

Recent years have witnessed the call for a 'theology of reconstruction' to become the new paradigm for African Christian theology. Especially prominent within ecumenical circles, this fresh direction in African theological discourse is suggesting that Africa needs to go beyond a theology of liberation to sustained reflection on the contribution that the church and theology in Africa can make in addressing the many crises of the continent. Among the first publications to signal the emergence of this trend was this book by Mugambi, the prolific professor in religious studies at the University of Nairobi. Mugambi acknowledges the challenges posed for African Christianity by Africa's colonial and missionary inheritance, which form the focus of liberation theology. But he wishes to move on to consider the role that the church must now play in creating a new society suitable to modern Africa. In biblical phrasing the controlling metaphor thus shifts from the Exodus to Nehemiah. This change of accent has caught the imagination of many, and has also generated much debate. Mugambi himself has continued to write on the theme, not least proposing that liberation and reconstruction should be seen not as competing but as complementary themes, in the sense that liberation should naturally be followed by reconstruction. The new emphasis does not always avoid the core risk of its predecessor, namely the reduction of the gospel to a social agenda. This book is a useful place to begin familiarisation both with this much-published African theologian, and at the same time with this new trend in African theology.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Mugambi, J. N. K. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*. Nairobi: Acton, 2003 (235 pages, paperback, \$13)

Dedji, Valentin. *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*. Nairobi: Acton, 2003 (284 pages, paperback, c. \$5)

- 7 **Oduyoye, Mercy A.**  
*Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004 (114 pages, paperback, c. \$18)

Widely regarded as Africa's leading woman theologian, Oduyoye here offers a collection of eleven papers selected from her previous work. An introductory autobiography notes various influences on the author's thinking: a Christian family of several generations, a father in pastoral ministry, and her upbringing in a matrilineal society in Ghana. Her background further includes living in Europe, and participating widely in global ecumenical activities. In one paper the author also relates her personal experience when life in a patrilineal African culture outside Ghana deprived her of any decision-making role on the sole basis of her gender. Another essay looks at rituals for the various stages of a woman's life in Africa: birth, puberty, marriage, birthing, death, and mourning, within the framework of traditional beliefs and practices. In developing an African feminist theology Oduyoye has drawn what she wants from African culture and religion, and also what she wants from the Bible. "Any interpretation of the Bible is unacceptable if it does harm to women, the vulnerable and the voiceless." A frequent target is the hierarchical and patriarchal structures of most African cultures and of the African church. Oduyoye is not anti-male as some western feminists are, but men should respect the full humanity of women and not treat them as possessions, as "goats that have been taught to talk". This brilliantly evocative collection is an excellent place to begin acquaintance with this remarkable thinker, and with this important theme for Africa.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

- Mbugua, Judy, editor. *Our Time Has Come: African Christian Women Address the Issues of Today.* Carlisle UK: Paternoster, 1994 (151 pages, paperback, c. £8)
- Oduyoye, Mercy A. *Introducing African Women's Theology.* Sheffield: Continuum, 2001 (132 pages, paperback, c. £15)

- 8 **Sanneh, Lamin**  
*Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*  
 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003 (138 pages, paperback, c. \$12)

Sanneh is among the most seminal African Christian scholars writing today. Anyone expecting to keep current with contemporary African Christian

thinking will want to ensure acquaintance with his ever expanding corpus—and here is as good a place as any to start. Originally from the Gambia, and a convert from Islam, Sanneh previously taught at Harvard and is now Professor of Missions at Yale Divinity School. In this slender volume he examines the explosive growth of the gospel in the non-western world, accompanied by the rapid decline of Christianity in the West. The result, Sanneh contends, is “post-western Christianity,” involving the migration of the faith to a new context. Such a development is generating profound transformations in how the Christian faith becomes expressed, changes comparable to the Hellenisation of the gospel in the early church. The bulk of the book explores the relationship of these new embodiments of the faith to western expressions of Christianity, and to contemporary social, economic, and political developments. Sanneh’s observations regarding non-western Christianity relate in principal part to Africa, with immediate implications for assessing the significance, role and future of African Christianity. The breadth of Sanneh’s research, the fact that he is one of those rare individuals at home in multiple cultural and religious settings, and the evident operation of a penetrating mind, make this a book that will richly repay the careful reader.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989 (255 pages, paperback, c. \$25)

Sanneh, Lamin. *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993 (286 pages, hardcover, c. \$28)

9 **Shorter, Aylward and Joseph N. Njiru**

*New Religious Movements in Africa*

Nairobi: Paulines, 2001 (112 pages, paperback, c. \$5)

Shorter is a widely-published sociologist/theologian at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Njiru is a graduate of that institution, and has been on the staff of a community centre in Nairobi. Here using Nairobi as their case study, the authors provide a pioneering introduction to a consequential emerging trend in African Christianity, namely the “new religious movements” (NRMs). NRMs are defined as essentially urban movements, such as open-air rallies, crusades, revival meetings, miracle centres, healing ministries and similar phenomena. According to Shorter and Njiru, the NRMs are taking the place of African Instituted Churches (AICs). Whereas AICs helped their

constituencies negotiate a transition from traditional life to that of the modern world, NRMs in contrast are firmly located within modern urban Africa, and assist their adherents by presenting “a problem-solving religion, even a problem-solving God” for coping with the realities of that setting, thus offering a way beyond the frustrations and desperations of modern life towards affluency. NRMs thus appeal to the trends towards secularism and individualism occurring in Africa today. Deriving in part from Pentecostalism, and influenced by neo-pentecostalism and the health-and-wealth gospel, NRMs may be seen as “a religious short-cut to power, instant success and economic growth,” and represent “a step towards the secularization of Christianity”. Also treated are the influence of the NRMs on the Catholic church, what the Catholic church can learn from NRMs, and how NRMs may impact the future of Christianity in Africa. Thoughtful Christians of every theological tradition in Africa will want to ponder the findings and implications of this pace-setting study.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Shorter, Aylward. *The Church in the African City*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991 (152 pages, paperback, c. \$20)

Shorter, Aylward and Edwin Onyancha. *Secularism in Africa: A Case Study—Nairobi City*. Nairobi: Paulines, 1997 (144 pages, paperback, c. \$5)

10 **Sundkler, Bengt and Christopher Steed**

*A History of the Church in Africa*

Cambridge: CUP, 2000 (1251 pages, hardback, c. £95)

The distinguished Swedish missionary statesman Bengt Sundkler earlier served in South Africa and Tanzania, and afterward was professor of church history at the University of Uppsala. This vast magisterial account of the history of African Christianity, unfinished at the time of his death in 1995, was completed by his former research assistant, Christopher Steed. At the heart of their presentation is the thesis that the well-documented missionary enterprise in Africa, essential as it was, constitutes only a small part of the full story of the Church in Africa. The role of the missionaries is not denigrated; their considerable accomplishments are fully noted. But to understand African Christianity requires taking even more fully into account the vital, creative role that Africans themselves played in the dynamic process of the continent’s Christianisation. This particular focus, “not on Western partners but on African actors”, is what makes this an exceptionally worthwhile and indispensable contribution. The treatment is very complete and balanced.

more so than one might have thought possible for a project of such immense historical and geographical scope. This is not a tedious, fact-saturated historical report; rather the reader is readily engaged by the generally clear, interesting, and informative manner of writing. Sundkler and Steed's massive volume seems set now to become the established reference text on African church history. But alas, the pricing is likely to impose severe limitations on its availability, at least on the African continent. Most readers may be reduced to hoping that the budget of their nearest academic library has been sufficiently ample.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

- Hastings, Adrian. *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994 (720 pages, paperback, c. £50)
- Shaw, Mark. *The Kingdom of God in Africa. A Short History of African Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996 (328 pages, paperback, c. \$20)

11 **Tutu, Desmond**

*No Future without Forgiveness*

New York : Doubleday, 1999 (287 pages, hardback, c. \$15)

Upon his retirement as Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Tutu was appointed chairperson of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was set up to examine human rights abuses committed during the apartheid era and to effect a process of reconciliation. In this moving book we have Tutu's reflections on what he witnessed during the work of the Commission. The mandate given to the TRC was, in Tutu's words, to "balance the requirements of justice, accountability, stability, peace and reconciliation" in the new South Africa. Some said it would be an impossible task, and whilst debate continues about the Commission's effectiveness, what can never have been in doubt is the integrity and commitment of its chairperson. Tutu's book is profoundly disturbing, and yet he manages to convey a clear message of hope. It is disturbing in that it brings to light the terrible works of darkness perpetrated during the years of apartheid rule, exposing them for what they really were—evil. This in turn raises further questions, not least how someone who had committed gruesome atrocities can be granted free pardon simply by confessing what had been done? While refusing to offer trite answers, Tutu's conclusion is as the title of this book suggests. He gets there by telling stories: harrowing stories, hopeful stories, stories that will bring tears to your eyes, and stories that will make you smile,

but always stories told against the backdrop of the greatest story ever told. Here would be a good place to begin acquaintance with this ever gracious and courageous African, while also sensing something of South Africa's struggle with apartheid.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Tutu, Desmond. *The Rainbow People of God: South Africa's Victory over Apartheid*. London: Doubleday, 1994 (303 pages, paperback, c. £5)

Battle, Michael. *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1997 (287 pages, paperback, c. \$20)

- 12 **West, Gerald O., and Musa W. Dube, editors**  
*The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*  
 Leiden: Brill, 2000 (846 pages, hardback, c. £66)

This publication marks a major forward step in African Christian scholarship, highlighting as it does the role of the Bible in Africa by means of a massive, diverse, and informative collection of essays. The editors are two academics, Gerald West of the University of Natal, and Musa Dube of the University of Botswana. The stated aim of this interdisciplinary project is "to present...as wide a sense of the presence of the Bible in Africa as possible." This objective is admirably achieved. The 38 essays give attention to the history of biblical interpretation in Africa, hermeneutical perspectives, engagements with particular biblical texts, translation projects and issues, and cultural implications. The volume concludes with an extraordinary contribution in its own right, Grant LeMarquand's definitive "A Bibliography of the Bible in Africa", exceeding 160 pages! Generally speaking the essays are well written; some are rather more complex and technical than others, but most should be accessible to advanced-level readership. In combination they serve as an excellent entry point for surveying the expanse of biblically-related studies in Africa. Readers should certainly not expect to agree with every contribution, whether in terms of content, method, interpretation or conclusion, but they will surely find much that will illuminate and challenge to fresh thinking. Regrettably, the high price may put the volume beyond the means of most individuals, and even of many institutions.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

- Schaaf, Ype. *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994 (265 pages, paperback, c. £10)
- Wendland, Ernst R., and Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, editors. *Biblical Texts and African Audiences*. Nairobi: Acton, 2004 (211 pages, paperback, c. \$13)

### In Conclusion

What should one do after reading through an evaluative survey like this? How do we make such an experience useful? Reading all of these books would doubtless do any of us some good. But in reality very few of us will have either the time or the resources to do so. As an alternative, might I suggest that most of us could benefit from deciding to read at least *one* of these books during the coming year. For anyone wanting to keep engaged with Christian thinking in and about Africa, this could be an altogether undemanding and enriching step. One of the titles above may already have caught your interest, and you may already be planning how to beg, buy, or borrow a copy to read. But if not, if with so many options you aren't sure where to start, then let me suggest that either the book by Sanneh, or (if you can find it in a good library) the one by Molyneux, might prove a worthwhile place to begin.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, pause a moment to reflect on what you have already achieved just by reading this review article. Let us suppose that you would like to keep somewhat current on what is being published in and about Africa, that you wouldn't mind keeping familiar with leading writers and viewpoints, and that in the process you would welcome some thoughtful evaluation from a Christian perspective. But let us also suppose that under no circumstances could you afford to do all the reading that this might imply. That is where basic surveys like this one can become quite handy. They have a way of familiarising us with the landscape, broadening our awareness of what is available, and running out our horizons a bit, all within a manageable compass. Indeed, if you have read thus far, you have already accomplished something worthwhile of this sort. And if you would like to continue this kind of experience, whether or not you have time to read a lot of books, then arrange to take advantage of journals such as *BookNotes for Africa* on a regular basis. Such ongoing surveys of current literature exist for just this purpose. There is very much being written and published about Africa and

about African Christianity these days that well deserves our thoughtful awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> All pricing is approximate (the \$ mark indicates pricing in US\$). Most of the books mentioned can be ordered on the web from places like Amazon, sometimes at lower prices for used copies. A few of the books may be too costly or no longer easily available for purchase, so may need to be found in a good library. Contact information for most publishers can be quickly discovered on the internet, by e.g. Google search. Here is contact information for some of the less familiar publishers referenced in this article: **Acton Publishers**, PO Box 74419, Nairobi, Kenya ([www.acton.co.ke/](http://www.acton.co.ke/)); **ACTS**, PMB 2020, Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria ([www.africachristiantextbooks.com/](http://www.africachristiantextbooks.com/)); **East African Educational Publishers**, PO Box 45314, Nairobi, Kenya; **IMER** (Institute for Missiological Research, Faculty of Theology), University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, South Africa; **Paulines Publications**, PO Box 49026, Nairobi, Kenya ([www.paulinesafrica.org/](http://www.paulinesafrica.org/)).

<sup>2</sup> The journal *BookNotes for Africa* offers scholarly reviews of recent Africa-related publications relevant for informed Christian reflection in and about Africa. In doing so it is providing a service unique among available publications relating to Africa. Titles are selected especially for potential interest to thoughtful readers, theological educators, theological libraries, and academic researchers in Africa and overseas. The journal is in its eleventh year of publication, with issues released on an occasional basis, usually twice yearly. Each issue contains about 40 reviews, with more than 700 titles reviewed to date. An index of all titles reviewed in *BookNotes* since its inception is available on the web, at: [www.theoleafrica.org/BookNotes/Index/](http://www.theoleafrica.org/BookNotes/Index/) A simple mode of production is maintained to enable modest subscription rates. The rate for four issues (airmail posting included) is: US\$8 to addresses within Africa, and US\$12 to addresses overseas. Inquiries and orders should be addressed to: *BookNotes for Africa*, PO Box 250100, Ndola, Zambia.

<sup>3</sup> If Molyneux proves inaccessible, perhaps try Ferdinando.

# **CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

**John Balema LABA\***

## **Introduction**

Education plays a paramount role in the development of any country of the world. Through it, knowledge and skills are passed from generation to generation. History of education shows a division into three different stages: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The tertiary education has been commonly referred to as higher education. This level of education has been presented in different forms: classical and academic; technical and vocational. The practice of Christian higher education in Africa has respected these different forms. Three types of Christian higher education exist on the African continent: church-controlled higher learning of theological institutions; church-funded colleges and universities of higher learning; and finally Christian-perspective liberal Arts colleges. This third category is a challenge to Christian educators. The history of Christian higher education in Africa shows a predominance of the first category. Baptist missionaries contributed in each of these categories.

A careful look at the history of Baptist missionary work in Africa fully establishes the fact that creating schools, both Bible and secular schools, for educational purposes was intrinsically part of the philosophy of ministry. These educational institutions enrolled indigenous people from primary to high school level. The creation and managing of educational institutions slowed down towards the end of the last century and almost stopped at the beginning of the new. Factors explaining this situation are both external and internal. Within the environment of churches and theological education institutions, there is a vast demand for highly educated nationals to take up leadership positions at the denominational level and also staff an ever-growing number of post secondary schools of theology. What is the future of Christian higher education in Africa?

## **Christian Higher Education in Africa: Historical Facts**

The first contact of Baptists with the African continent was in 1821. Lott Carey and Collin Teague pioneering Baptist Work in Africa carried out their missionary work in Liberia. Africa became the focal point of the Foreign Mission Board at the first

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annual meeting of the newly organized Convention, in June 1846. A significant statement was made: "Another important position which the Board consider themselves as specially invited to occupy is Africa. They are only waiting to secure men of suitable qualifications to enter the field. Africa is doubtless to be evangelized" (Cauthen 1970, 136). An analysis of the report reveals that right from the beginning, Baptist missionaries integrated education in their philosophy of ministry. The Foreign Mission Board sent both ministers and teachers. These teachers labored both in "secular" and religious education.

### **1. In the Area of Secular Education**

Baptist Convention annual reports<sup>1</sup> steadily show that qualified human resource and money investments were directed towards opening schools as evangelism and church planting work was carried on. The primary reason for this enterprise was to meet both educational and developmental needs of the indigenous people. Missionaries were invited either by local kings or indigenous churches to start general education schools. Their solicitude caused them to sometimes take this initiative in order to participate in the development of their countries of mission. Undoubtedly Baptist schools served as venues for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. This enterprise was characterized by the fact that the school levels ranged from primary to high school; that equal chances of education were given to boys and girls; and finally that the program of education covered areas like agriculture, health, professional schools, domestic science, and handicrafts. All these three aspects of Baptist contribution to education in Africa need a close look.

#### **From Primary to High School**

The first primary school was opened in 1850 in Liberia. The encouraging results both for educational and evangelistic purposes pushed missionaries for more exploration and investment in that area. Secondary and high school needs were naturally met in order to continue the process of education. At the start, teachers at these different levels were sent from the United States of America. Some distinguished and gifted students who finished these levels were recruited into the teaching task. They were given training in schools created in order to prepare them to teach their fellow country people. The curriculum taught in these educational institutions at the beginning, were, to a high percentage, American-oriented. However, an effort of adjusting the curriculum to integrate some local realities was successfully carried on. This trend continued until the time the program drew extensively its component from the local context. Most of these educational

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<sup>1</sup> Consult Southern Baptist Convention, Annual, 1846 p. 24; 1876 p. 35; 1939 pp. 204 ff, etc.

institutions are still in use today. Educational institutions created by Baptist missionaries were among the first schools to generate the very first educated people for these countries.

Language limitation did not allow missionaries to develop "secular" educational institutions in French speaking countries of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Documentation consulted in the course of writing this paper corroborates that reality. Sending missionaries to African speaking countries demanded much more investment. It is obvious that learning French in order to teach, even in primary school, was and still is a challenging undertaking.

### **Equal Chances of Education for Boys and Girls**

It is remarkable that girls were taken into account for educational purposes right at the beginning of this formal education venture. This enterprise was a major breakthrough in the African cultural setting as women had no other role in the society but bearing children and taking care of the home. The following citation from Goerner's article in *Advance: A History of Southern Baptist Foreign Missions* is more eloquent in showing how daring this was:

In the face of opposition of some who did not think that African girls should be educated, Mrs. Carrie G. Lumbley opened a girls' school at Abeokuta in 1910, after a similar effort at Oyo had ended in failure. The school at Abeokuta, latter called 'Idi Aba,' eventually attained secondary level and then developed into a teacher training-college. (Cauthen 1970:147)

Nothing is said about women attending Bible schools. The cultural setting in those days could not allow any woman to become an ordained minister. Religious/theological education prepared people mostly for pastoral ministries. The needs of the ever-growing church imposed that orientation in religious/theological education. There is a need to address this issue even today in churches in Africa.

### **A Wide Range of Educational Programs**

The educational program consisted of general and professional education. In the area of professional education, schools such as industrial schools, teacher training

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Victor B. Cole notices that "Educational development in general were comparatively slower in Francophone West Africa" (Cole p.46). Mounouni reports that only two secondary level schools were available for Francophone speakers in 1958 (Mounouni 1968:80).

schools, medical schools (training of nurses), domestic science for women, handicrafts schools, and agriculture projects were established.

## **2. In the Area of Religious Education**

The need to train ministers for the growing church in Africa led The Baptist Foreign Mission Board to establish theological education institutions. Here again some levels of training facilities were provided for. Missionaries started by creating classes for ministerial students. In these classes the core of Christian message and beliefs were taught. As the levels of understanding of the student increased they were sent to pastors' training schools and then into much more structured institutions such as Bible seminaries where they could study for a diploma in theology.

The Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary started in 1897 was adequately staffed and equipped to become the "high place" of theological education in Africa. Indeed, students from other English speaking countries were sent there to further their education. Plans were even made for sending carefully selected young men to the U.S. for advanced training. Besides this, there was a partnership between the Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Goerner describes this partnership in the following lines:

In order to strengthen the academic standing of the seminary at Ogbomoso, an affiliation was established with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, effective in 1948. Under this arrangement, full graduates of the Nigerian Baptist Seminary received the bachelor degree from the Louisville institution so long as certain standards were met and the quality of instruction was maintained (Cauthen 1970:152)

The Nigeria Theological Seminary (NTS) is still a reference in Africa in the consortium of theological seminaries. It is now offering a Master Degree in various tracks, and recently embarked on a thorough work towards starting a Doctoral program. This is the only higher educational institute available for Baptists in Africa. French students are admitted as long as their level of English meets the requirements. NTS faces the common problems of any higher educational institute in Africa. The major ones are: 1) Lack of finance; 2) Declining standards; 3) Lack of qualified teaching staff; 4) Lack of appropriate text books; 5) Lack of adequate infrastructure.

### **Resume**

This section on historical facts shows that formal education was at the heart of missionary work since its inception. The contribution of these learning institutions both for churches and nations is enormous. These church leaders and educated people were

valuable resources for their countries in matters of development. The following report was given at the centennial celebration in 1950:

Nearly every church sponsored a primary school, with a total of 23,000 pupils enrolled and over a thousand Baptist teachers, all under Convention administration. The mission concentrated upon secondary schools, teachers training colleges, and theological education. The medical program included one hospital, three one-doctor clinics, three dispensaries attended by trained nurses, and eleven leper colonies. Baptists faced the future with confidence. (Cauthen 1970: 153)

This future was curtailed because missionaries did not promote tertiary education. There was a need for further education that was not met. This was true for all the missionary groups working in Africa. Walt explains this lack of promotion by the "anti-intellectualism" of the missionaries.<sup>3</sup> This explanation is not fully satisfactory. There are other reasons such as financial crisis, and strategic reasons. He rightly notices that African governments took control of the primary and secondary schools created by Christian missionaries after independence. Universities flourished during this time. The need for higher education was picked up by African governments.

### **Christian Higher Education in Africa: Threats and Opportunities**

#### **1. The Present State of Higher Education in the Secular World**

The situation of higher education in Africa is alarming. Specialists in education send signals of hopelessness and urge African governments to take quick action. In his paper "Destruction of Higher Education in Sub-Sahara Africa," Adonis Hoffman criticizes African governments for the "shift in fiscal priorities" from higher education to other needs. This shift in the context of the government having the monopoly of higher education is disastrous. Until recently private universities were allowed, in some African countries, to operate. There is a long list of signs of illness characterizing higher education in Africa. The following adjusted list is borrowed from Walt:

- Academic mediocrity
- Declining standards

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<sup>3</sup> He writes "Their primary and secondary education was mostly narrowed down to the popular three r's (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic) and Bible College. Because of their anti-intellectual stance, anything beyond that was labeled as "worldly."" (Van Der Walt 2002: 198)

- Lack of finance
- Frustration among lecturers and students because of chronic lack of textbooks and other teaching materials, journals, equipment, and infrastructure in general
- Lack of job opportunities after completion of studies
- Lack of properly qualified teaching staff
- Overpopulation because of explosion in student's numbers
- Strikes leading to close-down of universities or suspension of academic activities
- Poverty among students
- Malpractice in the admission of students, plagiarism, dishonesty, corruption, and immorality
- Curriculum more or less relevant to the African situation
- Politicization of universities, poor planning, and arbitrary changes in academic programs and politics

Africa is not the only continent facing major challenges and crises in higher education. Proposals have been made by specialists in education to address these severe shortcomings. The most appealing, to me, are those suggested by Hoffmans: 1) privatize African universities; 2) decrease enrollments; 3) involve multilateral and bilateral donors in higher education; 4) allow complete state authority and responsibility for higher education. The increase of financial resources to the sector of higher education is the first step to be taken. As governments seek to implement this, there must be a clear answer to 1) the aim of higher education; 2) the practical values of higher education; and 3) how to lower the cost of higher education.

## **2. The Present State of Higher Education in the Religious World**

Crises facing higher education in general raise some threats and provide opportunities as well. Christian higher education has an important role to play. It is a historical fact that Christian missionaries started this venture of formal training. Redeeming higher education in Africa is the primary task the church of God is called to accomplish. In order to do so, there is a need to assess the real threat and make the best use of the existing opportunities.

### **Threats**

The first major threat facing Christian higher education is the "anti-intellectualism" in the churches today. Most of the leaders in African churches do not see the need for higher education. A common misunderstanding circulates among church members that to carry on pastoral duties, there is no need for further studies. There is even a saying in my country that "Higher theological learning does not produce a good pastor; it is rather the Holy Spirit on the field!" This view not only reveals an inappropriate reading of the Bible, but also the limited understanding of pastoral ministry/church ministry. Churches and

denominational budgets reflect this anti-intellectualism. Most of the churches and Christian denominational leaders would not see the need for dedicating a part of the income to higher education. Vikner puts it better: "Rather than seeing Christian colleges and universities as partners and settings where the Christian faith can be nurtured, these colleges and universities are considered to be uninvolved in proclaiming the faith and are often more likely considered to be antithetical to the faith" (Vikner 2003: 4-5).

The second main threat in higher education is the declining influence of the church. African governments became suspicious of educational activities of missionaries after the years of independence. Most of them saw in the schools tools for Western imperialism. They took over schools created by Christian missionaries. Regulation for creating and running a private school were so tightened, in some countries, that it became almost impossible for the very few daring churches to invest in that area. The principle of separation between Church and State has been interpreted by some careless politicians to exclude churches in the task of education. The saying goes: "The Church is for worshipping God and the Government for educating citizens!"

The third chief threat is financial. Running a credible academic institution is extremely expensive. The existing schools on the continent have always been crying out for financial help from churches. Christian organizations and institutions in the West. These institutions are operating in a context of poverty. The following grim statistics, borrowed from Walt, tells a lot about the situation:

- Thirty-three (of approximately 50) African countries are described by the recent United Nations Annual Human Development Index as the poorest of the world's poor: They lack basic social services, such as health and educational facilities.
- Of the about 543 million people in Africa, as many as 184 million have no access to safe water, 436 million lack the most basic health services, and 510 million are without sanitation.
- While in developed Western countries like the United States and Switzerland there are more than 600 telephone lines per 1,000 people, sub-Saharan Africa has an average of 12 lines per 1,000 people – in some countries only 1 telephone per 1,000 people!
- While industrial nations have an average of 405 cars per 1,000 people, in sub-

Saharan Africa the statistics are one car per 1,000 people!

- Add to this bleak picture the deadly AIDS disease. Its impact is calculated to be even more devastating than incessant warfare on the continent.

It is very common in Africa to graduate students who still owe money to the school. They are given a chance to work and pay back. This, unfortunately, does not happen. Institutions run with unpaid debts threatening to exterminate them.

The "brain drain" is another major threat for higher education in Africa. According to World Bank figures, 23,000 academics emigrate from Africa annually; more than 30 percent of Africa's skilled professionals live abroad; about 70,000 Africans trained in Europe remain. My fear is that this trend which has become normal and accepted is here to last for God knows until when. Very little is practically done by African governments to stop it. Secular schools as well as seminaries face the same problem.

The final major threat is the very few advocates for the cause of higher education in Africa. Whether in church or society at large, there are very few articulate and well-placed advocates. Their voices are usually not heard. They are even ridiculed in convention meetings or other gatherings. Praise God that there are still some bold enough to speak. There are observable opportunities for higher education in Africa.

### **Opportunities**

The first and foremost need for higher education in Africa is the great demand for highly educated nationals to take up key leadership roles in churches, and staff the ever growing number of post secondary schools. Anti-intellectualism is losing its standing in Africa as church leaders are dealing with more and more "sophisticated" societies and peoples. Even though the decisive step is yet to be made, there is an observable openness to the idea of higher education. Students coming from these Bible schools demand for more education after some years of ministry. Their number is growing larger and larger each year, and yet there are very limited institutions of higher education where they can go. Most of the Bible schools and secular schools created by missionaries are unable to meet these needs. We hear suggestions for multiplying the number of schools, upgrading them to institutions of higher education coming more and more. Something more stimulating is happening in the societies at large: search for moral values in educational institutions.

There is an increasing preference for Christian learning institutions because of moral values upheld in them. Parents are disappointed by the negative influence the public

schools are having on their children. This age of scientific materialism, technological destructiveness, religious nihilism, and spiritual impoverishment has rendered life meaningless. This leads to an unbalanced life which expresses itself in naughtiness, sadness and madness observed in the world today. Religious courses are taught in secular universities. This desire to better understand religions presents an exceptional opportunity for Christian colleges and universities. The third opportunity is the response of some Christian organization to the cry of help from Africa.

Overseas Council does outstanding work in helping Christian theological higher learning. Overseas Council offers scholarships for leaders and theologians for advanced studies and provides limited assistance for them as a stipend of encouragement to continue working in their context. Overseas Council is sponsoring 59 candidates from 27 partner schools in 21 nations. They are undertaking masters and doctoral theological training. The focus of Overseas Council is theological education. More and more Christian institutions are considering helping Africa for higher education.

### **Modes of Higher Education in Africa**

Higher Education is the urgent need in Africa today. This is true for secular education as well as religious education. Across Africa we see different modes of meeting the need for higher education. So far we can identify: partnership mode; virtual universities mode; and correspondence learning mode.

#### **Partnership Mode**

The partnership mode consists of educational institutions agreeing to work together on the basis of established clauses. This partnership could be guaranteeing the credibility of a degree: exchanging lecturers and students; providing materials and funds etc. Some theological higher learning institutions become secular universities. This has been possible because of the Religion Departments most of the universities are operating.<sup>4</sup> These universities admit students coming from Christian institutions and give them further training in religious studies. There are partnerships developed between Christian institutions.

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<sup>4</sup> Very few Universities in Francophone Africa have this department. Some Universities offer a quick look at religion in Social Sciences Departments. The Lutheran Church in Togo has an ongoing discussion with the University of Lome to that effect. Nothing tangible has yet been achieved.

In 1948 Nigeria Theological Seminary (NTS) was "affiliated" to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SET). The agreement was that NTS students received the bachelor degree guaranteed by SET. There is another kind of partnership developed between Spurgeon College and Kumasi Baptist Theological Seminary (KBTS) which is appealing. Spurgeon College is actually running an M.Th in applied theology together with Kumasi Baptist Theological Seminary. The M.Th program is normally not offered by KBTS because of the many limitations characterizing theological seminaries in Africa. An effort is made to keep the curriculum relevant to African realities. The expenses are affordable to African students. An African qualified staff is hired to manage the program. African as well as European lecturers are carefully selected to teach in this program. To make this program possible, SC invested in upgrading the library and by so doing made relevant textbooks available for the different courses offered in that M.Th in applied theology. There are many advantages in this type of partnership. This might be the best way to help in higher education in Africa. Another mode developing today is the distance learning or virtual universities.

### **Virtual Mode**

With the advent of the new communications revolution, some educational institutions offer their programs through the use of new information technologies such as telecommunications, computers, satellites, and fiber optic technologies. The delivery platform in Africa has, up until now, been text and correspondences based, supported by printed material. The use of Internet, video conferencing, and other forms of multimedia is barely coming in. There are some challenges in implementing this distance learning mode: 1) technological constraints (telephone density and supply inadequate); 2) lack of trained cadre of professional; 3) the absence of clearly defined national distance education policies; 4) lack of access to connectivity (computers, web browsers, easy internet services); 5) lack of recognition of distance learning by public services.

### **Correspondence Mode**

Higher learning is also achieved today through correspondence means. In this mode, the student is sent all the materials needed for given course. This material includes all the reading matter required and the exams. The student works on his own and sends his exams to the institution. He is marked and given a feedback on the score and improvements to be made. The interaction with his lecturers and the institution's administration is made only by correspondences. He graduates *in absentia* and his degree is sent to him. This mode has many disadvantages and is not the best.

## CONCLUSION

The history of Christian missions testifies of the institution of formal education in Africa. This education covered the three classical divisions of education - primary, secondary, and tertiary. This third level is at stake today. African governments inheriting the schools created by Christian missionaries are faced with many challenges. The least that could be said is that there is a great need for redeeming this level of education so that the process of development continues. Christian higher education is the hope for Africa. A virile Christian higher education should integrate faith and learning in every aspect.

George N. Nguru, expressing a very optimistic view on the future of Christian higher education in Africa, wrote, "The future of both theological institutions and Christian universities in East Africa is promising" (1983: 63). There are, however, urgent issues to address: 1) contextualized curriculum; 2) accredited programs; 3) Christian distinctive-oriented programs; and 4) governance of higher learning institutions.

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# RETHINKING CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THE GOSPEL IN AFRICA

Timothy D. Stabell

*Abstract*

*The following article argues that evangelical approaches to contextualization have often focused too exclusively on subjective culture, while tending to ignore questions of social justice. It then surveys the various models of contextualization suggested by Stephen Bevans (1992, 1995), looking at some of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these general approaches, and then proposes an alternative evangelical "synthetic" model.*

One of the key concepts in missiological circles in recent years has been that of contextualization. Darrel Whiteman (1997) argues that the ideas and strategies represented by this term are no passing "fad." Contextualization offers exciting possibilities and real challenges for church leaders around the globe who labor to represent Jesus Christ as faithfully and effectively as possible in a multitude of very different socio-cultural situations. Whiteman suggests that contextualization can perform three important functions in the mission of the church. First, it can help those who are receiving the gospel to see it as their own, as addressed specifically and powerfully to them in their own concrete circumstances. Tite Tienou (1993, 246) speaks in this regard of the gospel becoming rooted in the different social and cultural contexts to which it comes. Second, proper contextualizing of the gospel enables its message to confront what is wrong and sinful in the socio-cultural context, which is being addressed. Whiteman refers to this as an "offensive" function, while Stephen Bevans (1995, 117-124) speaks of a model of contextualization that he describes as "countercultural." Third, Whiteman suggests, efforts made to contextualize the message can potentially help the whole people of God—the church universal—come to a deeper corporate understanding of the nature and power of the gospel. Andrew Walls (1996, xvii) similarly argues that as the gospel has crossed different cultural and linguistic barriers down through the centuries, the church's overall understanding of Christ

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has grown. As believers have proclaimed the gospel in new contexts, they have faced new challenges, new sets of problems, new forms of bondage and new questions. But as they have brought the gospel into such situations, they have found that the Christ of the gospel, his work on the cross and his resurrection from the dead have proved more than sufficient for the new challenges. What started as a proclamation of salvation in a new cultural context has thus often become a discovery of previously unrecognized spiritual riches.<sup>1</sup>

So contextualization offers exciting possibilities. This is as true for Africa as anywhere. To a very real extent, missionaries, pastors and lay people have been contextualizing the gospel ever since it was first preached on African soil. In my own personal experience, working as an expatriate missionary in northeastern Congo from 1983-1996, this fact has perhaps been demonstrated most powerfully through what goes on during Christian funeral services. Anywhere in the world, the death of a loved one—whether child, young person, or adult—is always a tremendously difficult time for the bereaved family. In Congo, however, this sorrow is often compounded by pressures from non-believing relatives and friends who insist that they should try to determine *who* was responsible—in the mystical world of “witchcraft”—for that death. The conviction that death generally “has a (human, occult) cause” is a prominent part of the belief system in Congo, as it is in much of contemporary Africa (Stabell 2005) (cf. Kombo 2003; Kunhiyop 2002; Mbuva 1992; Mukundi 1988).

In this context, aid and comfort from other members of the body of Christ can be critically important, and it is here as much as anywhere that the glory of the gospel shines through. As soon as a bereaved family’s Christian friends learn of their loss, they begin to gather around. In virtually every such case friends and neighbors will stay with the family through the night in a public wake. Church choirs sing songs of comfort, pastors and lay leaders preach the biblical message of hope, and friends bring encouragement both by their presence and by material assistance where that is needed. Preachers underscore the biblical truth of God’s sovereign and loving control over all that happens in a Christian’s life (implied subtext: “This is *not* the work of witches”). They emphasize as well the assurance that believers have of one day seeing their loved ones again in God’s kingdom. Christian friends remain with the family throughout the following day until the body has been buried. Then, in the weeks that follow, they continue to visit, bringing more words of comfort and hope from the Scriptures. I have seen God work miracles of consolation in families that were devastated by the sudden death

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<sup>1</sup> See also William Dyrness’s argument that the time has come for theologians of the first world to learn from those of the Third World (Dyrness 1990).

of a child, a father, a mother, a wife, a husband, a brother or a sister, as members of the body of Christ have faithfully given of themselves in this manner.

But while the example just given shows some of the real advantages of contextualized ministry in the gospel, it also, to my mind, opens a window on a very real weakness in evangelical formulations on the goal and practice of contextualization. While the contextualized message of the gospel just described addresses the matter of belief in witchcraft, for example, it says nothing about the tragic reality that death comes so much more frequently in Africa than in more "developed" countries. Why is it that although I have never personally had to attend a funeral for a child in North America, doing so while living in Congo was, tragically, not at all an unusual occurrence?

What I want to argue in what follows is that evangelical approaches to contextualization have tended to focus too narrowly on issues of "culture" while tending to ignore questions of social injustice and political power. Most evangelical definitions of contextualization (see for example Gilliland 1989; Hesselgrave 1999; Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989; Kraft 1999; Whiteman 1997) describe it as the process of relating the gospel to the world's various *cultures*. This is important and critically significant. But there is more to the social contexts in which people live than "culture."

In general terms, definitions of "culture" focus on the *subjective* side of human experience—on what "goes on in people's heads;" on the different "sets of ideas" (Taber 1991, 3, 8) that shape how they live in the world, what they claim to know, how they respond to life's challenges, and what they believe to be good, true, valuable or noble. Culture is the full repertoire of what is learned from and shared with others in a given society. There is, however, more to life than this subjective side. There are also the historically determined *objective* social, economic and political realities in which people live. In some parts of the world, for example, a man in uniform is seen as a friend to be approached for help when one is in need. In other places, the same kind of uniform elicits emotions of fear. These different responses are not just due to different *subjective cultural* orientations toward men in uniforms. In the first context, the uniformed policeman is indeed very likely to offer the help needed. If he abuses his powers, he is quite likely to be held accountable. In many other contexts, however, the uniformed man's salary may be so woefully insufficient that he feels obliged to extort bribes so that he can provide for his family, and he is therefore feared rather than respected. To give another example, for some people coffee is a consumer product that one buys in the store to drink with cream and sugar. For the people we lived among in northeastern Congo, however, coffee is a cash crop sold to exporters at extremely low prices in the frequently unsuccessful struggle to provide for the most basic of needs. At the same time, for exporters living in that

same community, coffee is a product that makes it possible for them to live in large houses supplied with all the modern conveniences, and to drive Range Rovers to and from the office.

Does the gospel, and the call for repentance, have anything to say about these objective social, political and economic realities? Have we done enough when we have related the gospel successfully to “culture?” A number of voices would join me in arguing that contextualization needs to address on more than cultural issues. As a matter of fact, when this term was first used in theological circles, the intention was that it encompass more than matters of adapting the gospel to subjective culture. In meetings of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) in the early 1970s, the need was expressed for a word that would go beyond what missiologists were calling “indigenization” or “inculturation” (Theological Education Fund Staff 1972; cf. Sanchez 1998; Coc 1976). These terms already spoke to the issues raised by proclaiming the gospel in different cultural settings. The word contextualization was coined precisely in an effort to move beyond what was expressed by these earlier words. The TEF argued that the gospel must address not only culture, but also issues arising out of rapid social change, social injustice, the global but uneven spread of technology, and so forth. From the TEF perspective, the illustration of Christian funeral services given above would be an example of indigenization or inculturation, but not really of contextualization in the fullest sense as they defined it.

Charles Taber, in his book, *The World Is Too Much With Us* (1991), argues that evangelical missions have worked with an incomplete and distorted understanding of socio-cultural context. We have, he maintains, been too heavily influenced by “idealist” understandings of society. Briefly, idealist views argue that the primary source of the character of socio-cultural reality is to be found in the *ideas* that people have about the world in which they live. If you want to understand why people do what they do, if you want to understand the nature of society and social processes, then you must examine what people *believe*. Explore their value systems and worldviews. In other words, study *culture*.<sup>2</sup>

From this idealist perspective, social problems are “in people’s heads.” In other words, if we want to solve the deep issues with which people struggle, we simply need to help them think rightly about those issues. The gospel then is *primarily a message* that we need to *communicate* as effectively as possible (see for example, comments by Hesselgrave (1999, 156, 161) and critique by Shedd (1985, 199)). Certainly, the gospel is nothing if it is not a message, and it is our

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<sup>2</sup> Taber also criticizes missionary anthropology for its reliance on “functionalist” models of society. That is a separate issue with its own set of implications and problems.

responsibility to communicate the content of that message with all the clarity and power we can muster, and in terms that can be understood at the deepest levels of a people's thought world and belief system. But Taber argues that the Bible calls for more than this. It speaks as well to the objective social, economic and political realities in which people live, work and die. It speaks to questions of injustice, exploitation, domination, and oppression. It calls on the powerful to repent of their treatment of the disadvantaged (e.g., James 5:1-6). Taber recalls that during the Willowbank consultation on Gospel and Culture (cf. Stott and Coote 1979), some of the participants wanted to initiate discussion about the relationship between the gospel and these objective structural questions. They were told, "But that is not culture" (Taber 1991, 107).

Achille Mbembe is an African voice speaking powerfully to these issues, especially in his critique of the methodology of African Theology in recent years (1988). Beginning from the observation that Christianity has come to Africa as a foreign import, and has often been offered by people representing greater economic and political power (agents of colonialism), he focuses on the African response to the gospel. From his perspective, that response has often been one of subtle resistance (what he calls "*indocilité*"). Sometimes, where people in Africa have "converted" to Christianity, they have done so for utilitarian, instrumental reasons—for the perceived benefits that the church has to offer. They have seen the church as one resource among many, to be accessed as needed for the advantages it makes available. Availing themselves of these resources has not meant, however, that they have necessarily given up resorting to the resources of their "traditions" (including "traditional" "medicine men" or "witch doctors," or various forms of magic), all in the effort to survive, to earn a living, in a world of economic, political, and social oppression.

In this context, the methods of African theology, he argues, have often been inadequate. Theologians have too often sought to relate the gospel to traditional African *cultures*. This has involved focusing attention on a remote past (often as described by Western ethnographers) rather than on the contemporary realities with which Africans struggle on a daily basis. He contends that theologians have generally failed to do adequate historical analysis of the present forms of economic and political power. With this politically inoffensive approach to contextualization, he warns, Africa's resistance to a foreign religious presence—its *indocilité*—will not be tamed. People will continue to access the resources of "tradition" (things like magic, "witch doctors," or "witchcraft," as well as "ethnic" or "tribal" support networks), in part because the church is not addressing the basic causes of economic and political insecurity as it could. He calls on church leaders to have done with a Pilate-like washing of the hands, to clearly denounce the ideologies and practices of oppression, to offer the possibility of other forms

of solidarity and political community and to demonstrate that the God of Christianity is ready and willing to associate himself (through his servants) with Africa's suffering and humiliation (1988, 104-105, 180, 191).<sup>3</sup>

In the remainder of this article, I would like to suggest a way forward for evangelical contextualization that would help us avoid the "cultural reductionism" that has too often characterized evangelical missiology. The approach offered here is an adaptation of the different approaches described by Stephen Bevans (1992, 1995).<sup>4</sup> Bevans describes six different "models" of contextualization: translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental and countercultural. My suggestion is that a modified synthetic approach, combining the strengths (and avoiding the weaknesses) of the translation, anthropological, countercultural and praxis models (this article will not deal with the transcendental model) could offer us a more complete set of tools for tackling the challenge of contextualizing the gospel. In what follows, then, we will look first at strengths and weaknesses of each of these four approaches, and then think through how the strengths of each help to address weaknesses of the others.

As already suggested, evangelical contextualizers have most often defined the task as one of *translating the message* of the gospel with as much clarity as possible in the terms and cognitive categories of the culture being addressed. The strength of translation models, Bevans argues, is in their insistence on the givenness of the gospel message. The gospel, in this approach, is understood to be in its essence a universal message, applicable to all peoples, transcending particular cultures (see e.g., Stackhouse 1988). It is a message that has been successfully translated again and again, and can in principle be conveyed in the terms or categories of any of the world's cultures (Sanneh 1989; Bediako 1995). There is no culture in which the gospel cannot be understood.

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<sup>3</sup> John Parratt's analysis of theological currents in Africa is relevant here (1995). He describes two main perspectives that have dominated the African theological scene, one north and the other south of the Limpopo. Theologians in central African countries, he argues, have been primarily concerned with the relationship of the gospel to issues arising from traditional culture. This is understandable, he argues, in the light of the colonial experience, and its tendency to belittle African cultures as backward, primitive and inferior. South African theologians, on the other hand, have focused on matters of social justice, reflecting more the concerns of South American liberation theologians. Again, this can be understood in the light of their experience of the injustices of apartheid society. Neither "school" has totally ignored the concerns of the other, but nevertheless each has had its distinct emphasis, and could profitably learn from its neighbor.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Schreiter (1985) offers a somewhat different classification of models, but there is a great deal of overlap between the two. Bevans' is the simpler, and is therefore easier to adapt for our purposes.

There have been some weaknesses, however, in applying the translation models into practice. Donald Carson has criticized the tendency of some evangelicals to differentiate what is "cultural" in Scripture from a universal, trans-cultural "core"—the "essence" of the gospel message. From this perspective, what contextualizers need to do is to identify those parts of the Bible that do not reflect the particular culture of the Old and New Testament peoples, and "translate" that "trans-cultural core." Sometimes this idea is communicated with the image of a kernel and its shell or husk. What is essential is the kernel, yet the shell or husk can be discarded. Furthermore, the shell is important in order to understand the "core." But, says Carson (1985b), this is an impossible task. There is no supra-cultural core or kernel. Every word of Scripture in some sense reflects the "culture" of the day in which it was written. It is, moreover, dangerous to seek to minimize the importance of some parts of Scripture as mere cultural (and by implication discardable) "shell."<sup>5</sup> What we need to communicate is the whole Biblical message. As evangelicals, we hold all of Scripture to be "God-breathed"—the words of God's mouth (1 Tim 3:16). This is not to say that we should not seek to understand the ancient Biblical cultures, or wrestle with the question of how the teaching given in those ancient contexts applies to life in the very different socio-cultural situations of our own day. The point here is simply that this particular way of formulating the problem ("kernel" and "shell") can too easily lead us astray, implying that some parts of Scripture are unnecessary baggage that we can discard once we have distilled the true core message. In lieu of the "kernel" and "shell" image, Carson proposes that we think of three different socio-cultural "horizons" that need to be bridged—the horizon of Scripture, that of the cross-cultural worker, and that of those to whom that worker ministers. He insists that such bridge building is not at all an impossible task where cross-cultural workers adopt an attitude of loving empathy and real desire to communicate and live the truth of the gospel (1985b, 18).

Another weakness of translation models is their tendency to fall into the kind of cultural reductionism described above, seeing culture as the most important aspect of social existence. From this perspective, as mentioned above, the task of sharing the gospel is seen primarily as one of communicating a message. Truer to the outlook of the biblical authors, it seems to me, would be to assert that our mission is *equally* to communicate a message *and* to seek to live out the reality to which this message points by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, "We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess

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<sup>5</sup> Bevans suggests that the more accurate image is of an onion. Peeling away the layers of an onion will never succeed in revealing a kernel more valuable or true than the other layers (1992, 36).

2:8 RSV). Without a transformed life—one characterized by a growing desire for biblically defined righteousness and justice—the gospel can become a matter of words without power (1 Corinthians 4:20). The task of translating the message must never become separated in our minds from that of living its truth (cf. Gal 2:14) and “seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness/justice” (Matt 6:33; cf. Matt 5:6; Bosch 1991, 70-72).

As argued above, cultural reductionism may tend to blind us to the more objective realities of economic or political oppression and injustice—realities about which the Scriptures are not silent. If we narrow our vision to issues of cultural outlook, we will see our task as primarily one of seeking to change the way people think about the world around them. While this is a tremendously important aspect of our mission, the Bible also gives evidence of a responsibility to “seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa 1:17). The prophets addressed not only the false worldview and cultural assumptions involved in the worship of idol gods; they also confronted those in positions of power about the specific ways in which they were abusing that power (e.g., Isa 3:14-15; Amos 5:7-12; cf. Birch 1991, 259-269).

“Anthropological models” of contextualization, as described by Bevans, have serious weaknesses from an evangelical perspective. These approaches emphasize that contextualizers need to take local cultures seriously. Many practitioners of this kind of approach, however, would argue that “taking culture seriously” means seeing culture as a medium through which God reveals himself to people. Culture, from this perspective, can for some be virtually on a par (sic) with Scripture. Hesselgrave is right here to remind us that all of the world’s cultures are heavily impacted by sin, and therefore are not reliable sources of revelation.

There are other dangers in anthropological models with their focus on culture. “Taking culture seriously” can lead to relativism if we are not firmly grounded in the Biblical truth about God and his will (cf. Hiebert 1987, 108). Robert Schreiter and Bevans both warn us against romanticizing culture (Bevans 1992, 53; Schreiter 1985, 14). We must be ready and willing to see the lies and satanic deception that is often taught through human cultures.

Nevertheless, while being careful to avoid “taking culture seriously” in *this* sense, it has become increasingly clear that we ignore culture only at the risk of discovering that our efforts at communicating the message have been less than fully effective. The study of culture is imperative if we are to address people comprehensibly and on the matters of gravest concern to them—if we are to “scratch where it itches.”

“Countercultural models” provide a good foil with which to address the weaknesses just mentioned of anthropological approaches. Bevans argues that like translation models, efforts to contextualize Scripture in a countercultural mode often give evidence of greater respect for the authority of Scripture than do some of the other models he describes. Moreover, the message of Scripture is seen as standing over against the values of sinful human cultures. The countercultural approach, consistently applied, is thus much less likely to fall into cultural romanticism and relativism. Bevans writes: “What this model realizes more than any other model is how some contexts are simply antithetical to the gospel and need to be challenged by the gospel’s liberating and healing power” (1995, 118).

Praxis models (Schreiter (1985) refers to these as “liberation” approaches) have their set of strengths and weaknesses as well. Nuñez (1985) argues that there is much that evangelicals can and should learn from theologians speaking from this perspective. Liberation theologians have been insistent that the Scriptures address not only matters of culture, but also of social exclusion, economic injustice and political oppression. One of the main strengths of these models is thus their avoidance of cultural reductionism. Praxis models remind us to analyze social reality critically, with an eye open for the kinds of injustice that the biblical prophets railed against. They teach us to look at the world from the perspective of the poor, the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and to side with them against the oppressors, calling for the kinds of radical social and political change that will allow people to live their lives in security and peace.

Praxis models also emphasize a particular approach to epistemology. They argue that a purely theoretical knowledge is not true understanding. We only truly *know* the truth as we *live* the truth. It is not enough to know *about* the Biblical God of love and justice without living a life that reflects his love and justice, and his love for justice. In calling king Jehoiakim to repentance, Jeremiah reminds him that his father, king Josiah, did what was right and just, defending the cause of the poor and the needy. Then he adds, “*Is this not what it means to know me?*” (Jeremiah 22:16; cf. 1 John 3:16,17). One cannot claim to know God, in other words, without actively sharing his concern for social justice.

Praxis models of course have their weaknesses as well. They have, for example, been criticized for an insufficiently critical reliance on Marxist social theory and ideology, and for a tendency to absolutize the context of the oppressed (Stackhouse 1988). From this perspective, to be poor is to be automatically part of God’s people, without reference to repentance and faith in Christ.

Is it possible to learn from the strengths of the above models, allowing their strengths to correct the weaknesses that have been described, and thus develop an evangelical synthetic model? The strength of translation approaches, again, is their insistence on the content of the gospel message. Maintaining this emphasis should keep us from minimizing the centrality of Scripture, or of placing culture on a par with the Bible as a source of revelation, as anthropological models do. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) are correct in their contention that one's view of Scripture will set certain limits on the kind of contextualization undertaken. If Scripture is seen as containing a significant proportion of mythological material, or if it is simply the wise sayings of enlightened men, contextualization can proceed without great concern for maintaining a focus on its propositional truth content. If the Bible is what they refer to as "divine writing," dictated by God with no human element whatsoever (as in Islam's view of the Qu'ran), contextualization is impossible. All we can do is transmit those Words verbatim. But because the Bible is both fully the Word of God and words written by men living at particular historical moments in particular socio-cultural settings, contextualization means respecting both the divine and the human aspects of Scripture.

Anthropological models, complemented and balanced by countercultural models, urge us to examine the culture of the people to whom we seek to bring the message of Christ's salvation. What is important to them? What are their struggles? What are the central issues of their lives? What satanic lies have infected their worldview? What in their belief system is consistent with biblical truth? Are there particular cultural motifs or images that offer opportunities for illustrating the biblical message in powerful ways (cf. Richardson 1974)? As Christ is proclaimed in ways that speak to these kinds of questions, both the missionary and his audience learn more of the living truth of God's Word.

Finally, praxis models can help us avoid the kind of cultural reductionism referred to in this article. They can remind us to look at society critically; pay attention to abuses of power; listen to the God-breathed words of Israel's prophets as they rage against injustices that "grind the face of the poor" (Isaiah 3:15); speak against and pray urgently regarding these things, and work toward forms of human community that embody God's love for justice biblically defined. Praxis models can call our attention to the very Biblical theme that knowing and doing are inseparable; that knowledge is not somehow artificially prior to doing; and that we only truly grow in understanding as we grow in obedience (including obedience to the call of God to pursue justice). They can help us balance proclamation of the kingdom of God with a humble realization that we also need to pray that God would demonstrate the reality of his rule in our lives. As has been argued

here, evangelicals have often argued for the primacy of proclamation (Shedd 1985). I, for one, do not want to diminish the importance of preaching the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. But at the same time, I believe that René Padilla was right that we should refuse to “drive a wedge” between proclamation of the kingdom and demonstration of its reality in our lives in matters of social justice as well as of personal righteousness. We too easily fall into semi-obedience if we see the one as primary and the other as secondary (Padilla 1985, 42). The two go hand in hand, neither is more important than the other. Obedience, as Padilla argues, is never secondary.

In conclusion, I want to return briefly to the illustration with which we began—Christian funeral services in Congo. My sense is that it is relatively easy to address the questions raised by the death of a loved one in terms of local subjective *cultural* understandings. I would emphasize the word “relatively” in that last sentence. There are still tremendous challenges that need to be faced at this level, as church leaders seek to help believers respond biblically, for example, to local beliefs about witchcraft. But the other kind of question—that of understanding why the tragedy of death is experienced so much more frequently in some contexts than in others—seems to me much more difficult to address. It is not for that reason any less urgent that evangelical leaders carefully analyze and speak biblically, in the manner of the prophets, to the economic and political realities that are so often responsible for this state of affairs.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Tim Bulkeley**

*Amos: Hypertext Bible Commentary.*

Auckland: Hypertext Bible, 2005.

ISBN 0-473-10714-7.

US\$ 25.00 for individuals, US\$ 40.00 for institutions.

But also available – free – on the web: <http://hypertextbible.org/amos>

This is not a book it is a CD. But it is a CD which functions like a book, or rather like a library. Imagine a Bible commentary where you have the text (Hebrew and English) and comments in front of you, and where you at the same time are only a click away from relevant entries in exegetical and theological dictionaries, or where another click will enable you to listen to the text being read in Hebrew or English. This is the kind of commentary Dr Tim Bulkeley and the Hypertext Bible Project provides for us.

Dr Bulkeley is a British Old Testament scholar now teaching in Auckland, New Zealand. It is also of interest to notice that for nearly a decade (in the 1980s) he taught in Kinshasa, DRC, at the Faculté de Théologie Protestante au Zaïre. In spite of this the commentary has no traces of African Old Testament scholarship. Still, a few more general references to Africa can be found: geographical (the entry on *earthquake* relates the earthquake in 1:1 to the African 'rift'; the entry on *trade and commerce* notices that the Phoenicians claimed to have sailed right round Africa) as well as cultural (the entry on *monarchy* compares the state development with African experiences; the entry on *genre* compares greetings in Democratic Republic of Congo and the West). Cf. also below, the discussion of Amos 9:7.

The mission of the Hypertext Bible Project is to disseminate – in an electronic format – current biblical scholarship to a wide audience. This mission should indeed be within reach, as the commentary not only can be purchased as a CD, but is also available free (currently, it is said) on the web (cf. the address above). The project has here set an excellent example for other researchers. One of the major difficulties of doing biblical studies today is a publishing boom of

books and journals that hold prices which effectively prevent most of us from reading them. For some years it has been argued that 'the web is the solution'. But the problem is that most of what is available – free – on the web is either very old or very biased. In this respect the Hypertext Bible Project – and its Amos commentary – is an exception, and indeed a very welcome one.

The strength of this hypertext commentary is found in all the material that is linked up to the verse-by-verse commentary. The reader/user can easily jump from (Hebrew or English) text to comments, or from introductory problems to the beautiful sound of the (Hebrew or English) text being read. An illustrative example can be the famous disputation speech in Amos 3:3-8. One entry gives a survey of the whole chapter, and the interaction between vv. 3-8 and the surrounding text is here emphasized. Another entry approaches vv. 3-8 in more details, and then with further entries on rhetorical questions, the function of repeated words, monotheism, etc. And these entries again have new entries: from 'monotheism' there are for example links to texts and archaeology on pre-exilic popular religion. This is simply exciting, and an excellent way to get an overview.

But all the material that is linked up to the verse-by-verse hypertext commentary is also its weakness. It includes such a wide spectrum of material (isagogics, exegesis, history of Israel) and is aimed at such a wide audience (the 'thinking but untrained, as well as tertiary-trained students of the Bible' and 'various Christian and Jewish communities as well as secular readers') that the final result inevitably becomes somewhat superficial. The CD is more than a commentary, it is a whole library, but as such it lacks the more heavy volumes of the library.

An illustrative example of this problem can be the interpretation of Amos 9:7, the text comparing Israel and the African nation of Cush. First, one is (and some of us positively) surprised to find that the Hebrew *b<sup>e</sup>ne cushiyim*, which traditionally is rendered 'children of Cush/Ethiopia/Nubia/Sudan', here is rendered 'Africans': 'Are you not like the Africans to me, children of Israel?' This interesting interpretation is, however, not further substantiated; neither in the exegetical entry on *Cush*, nor in the commentary, which only paraphrases the text. And this lack of exegetical and hermeneutic interest is disappointing; one gets the impression that the author took the first step, but then changed his mind. Second, the same verse shows that the English text that can be listened to is another text than the translation given in the commentary. And in this case the commentary renders the *b<sup>e</sup>ne cushiyim* as 'Africans', whereas the voice version not that politically correct renders it 'negroes'.

In conclusion, though, it should be acknowledged that this is a good commentary. Good in the sense that it brings together a whole library of information, but also good in the sense that this material is organized in a structured and understandable way. And it is certainly also good in the sense that everyone with access to internet can go right into it, without costs.

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**Bennie van der Walt & Rita Swanepoel (eds.)**  
***Christianity and Democracy in South Africa,***  
***Christian Responsibility for***  
***Political Reflection and Service***

Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformed Studies, 1996

What is democracy? In the ever-changing political arena, what role should Christians play in relation to the democracy of their countries? Are we to be satisfied with the existing articles in our constitutions or are we expected to review them in day-by-day political life?

According to the authors, a promise to adhere to democracy whether verbal or written is one thing, but to fulfill those promises is another. All sectors whether political, judicial, economic and religious should be used as indicators to audit our commitment to democracy. The church has a responsibility to do just that because God has ordained it to be the conscience of the society. That is what is called a **PROPHETIC CALL**.

This is a practical book aimed at both Christian leaders and practicing Christians. If in our quarters as Christians of any capacity fail to practice democratic values, we lack the audacity and moral authority to point a finger to others. Democracy is to be lived in any context of the ever-changing political scenario. Commitment to democracy does not make any sense if it is only shelved in our books (constitutions), it must be lived.

Christians are to be in the fore front to live democratic values as an example of good citizenship and continually review the existing nationalistic ideology in the light of the Christian – nationalistic values (read gospel values). Where elements of compromise or negation are traced, quick spiritual about-turn is necessary to maintain Christian credibility, faith and the Word of God itself. This is the only way we can safeguard the dignity of the citizens in any political environment. The sovereignty of God should be proclaimed in any given political arena: this checks the perpetuation of corrupt regimes, which preach human sovereignty and autonomy.

In the exercise of a true democracy, Christians have no choice but to protest

against any undemocratic practice and governance. Their protests will be in a varied manner: some will do it through the press, preaching or even holding public demonstrations. These are some of the themes clearly mooted by the editors. In the end of it all, the editors have produced a book which is an invaluable account of the true nature of democracy and a clear cut role of the Christian fraternity to any people of any place in the world.

The book has nine major sections (chapters). The first section deals with the main theme of the conference, which is based on the original theme of Potchefstroom University (the host). Although Potchefstroom University had given herself to the perpetuation of democracy from a Christian perspective, over the years this was compromised and thus lost her focus plugging herself into un-biblical and nationalistic ideology of the day: apartheid. Institute for Reformation Studies chips in to offer an inclusive voice; a Christian voice in the area of politics to strengthen Potchefstroom University's bid even as it struggles to rid herself of the apartheid values and heritage. Other challenges mentioned in this section are: emergence of the new pluralistic civil society; the maintaining of constitutional checks and balances; power reversal in the structure of the relationship between the state and the society in the New South Africa; and the role of Christianity in democratization.

People from varied background and political parties share their experiences of the new democracy in South Africa: this includes parties like ANC, NP, IFP, FF, DP and PAC. Such approach as captured by the editors presents healthy, coherent, holistic and camper- active democratic experiences in the New South Africa.

The other sections address themes like 'evaluation of the New South African Constitutional dispensation' and dynamics from a Christian perspective.' The editors accurately assert that true democracy should be based on freedom and equal protection of the citizens by government which is open, just, accountable, that values human dignity, practices tolerance and justice. The two institutions (government and church) however must stay separate, distinct and unique. Whenever one is assimilated by the other as history and experience show, the results are nefarious. It is upon the church to continually enrich and protect our fledgling democracy. A good constitution and democracy should also address property rights starting with land, security and freedom.

One of the richest sections in this book is the fourth one, 'International experiences of democracy from a Christian perspective.' Here experiences are drawn from Korea, Europe, America and some African countries, for example,

Kenya. In the African perspective, the authors show that many countries have ushered in a new dispensation by adopting new constitutions, which have allowed the practice of multi-party systems. Through the whole process, the church is shown to have been active for it has,

- Identified itself with the goals and intentions of the state.
- Engaged in critical and constructive collaboration with the power of the state in the light of what the Bible teaches.
- Resisted any disservice by the government to the people.

Internationally, the church (Christians) should not develop a view, which is only domestic oriented, but one that has an international face. Collaboration with institutions like European Economic Community is essential, these have the potential to grow and transcend their regional domain.

The church has the responsibility to nurture the New South African democracy from infancy to maturity. It is called upon to play two divine roles, namely, being the conscience of the society, and assuming the prophetic role.

The final section is on the topic, 'The Political Strategies.' During political campaigns, a lot of violence is witnessed. The authors rightly state that one of the key elements of political strategy should be reconciliation in order to promote peace and unity. To fathom reconciliation, there is need for training programmes to empower people for reconciliation so as to bring about development (delivering housing, education, health, transport, safety and security); thus serving the interest of others.

The sections (chapters) provide sufficient information for the topics discussed. The book is a good introduction to the issues of Christianity, Christian responsibility and service in a democratic society. The supporting references will help the reader to explore issues further. It is a well-structured book and easy to read by anyone even those without a good background in politics. Evidently, the different contributors have read widely as it is evidenced by the wealth of references they provide. The book can be used as a textbook for anyone pursuing politics and the church or teachers teaching political sociology.

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*The Historical Critical Method in  
Catholic Exegesis.*

Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana (Tesi Gregoriana:  
Serie Teologica, 50). 346 pp.  
ISBN: 88-7652-825-3. US\$ 22.50.

The book is a revised version of a Th.D. dissertation accepted by the Gregorian University in Rome, and the author is an American Catholic priest, who at present teaches at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia. The book analyzes the place of historical-critical concerns in Catholic exegesis in two periods: (i) exegetical literature from patristic and medieval times, and (ii) ecclesial documents from modern times, 1893-1943, 1943-1965, 1965-the present. The major perspective of the book is that the hermeneutical basis of the modern historical-critical approach, as well as several of its more practical-exegetical procedures, to some extent go back to the biblical interpretation of the early church. The book concludes that in spite of certain limitations, the historical-critical method is needed in Catholic exegesis, (i) to determine the literal sense of the text, (ii) to promote reading and translation of the original texts, (iii) to determine the original reading from the numerous textual witnesses, (iv) to address problems due to the historical setting of the text, (v) to deal with issues of interpretation raised by the biblical text, and (vi) to facilitate ecumenical discussion.

The book provides an interesting case study of how Catholic exegesis throughout the last century built its way in constant tension between dogma and tradition on the one hand and an increasing historical awareness on the other. From an evangelical perspective it is interesting to notice how church tradition actually protected Catholic exegesis from following some of the more radical tendencies of the historical-critical method during its height in the 19th and 20th centuries. As for the major perspective of the book, that the hermeneutical basis of the historical-critical approach to some extent go

back to the biblical interpretation of the early church, I would argue that it deserves further attention, also from an evangelical perspective. One should of course not neglect the obvious epistemological presuppositions of the historical-critical method in post-reformation rationalism. Still, its emphasis on the historical and literal meaning of the biblical texts should not too easily be brushed aside as a rationalistic legacy, as it indeed echoes a central aspect of the theology of the reformation, an aspect that must be taken seriously also in circles, African as well as western, that do not share all the epistemological presuppositions of what counts as the historical-critical method.

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