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A table of contents for the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ajet-02.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ajet-02.php)

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# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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## CONTENTS

<b>Educating for Servant Leadership in Africa</b> <i>Isaac Zokoué</i> .....	3
<b>Achebe's Novels and Their Implications for Christians in Africa</b> <i>John Anonby</i> .....	14
<b>The Right to Difference: The Common Roots of African Theology and African Philosophy</b> <i>Tite Tiénou</i> .....	24
<b>The Role of Music in Theological Education</b> <i>Roberta King</i> .....	35
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	42



Volume 9, No. 1

1990

## AFRICA JOURNAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

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### Purpose:

AJET is published twice a year by the staff of Scott Theological College, Machakos, Kenya, on behalf of the ACTEA Consortium of Theological Colleges, in order to provide African evangelical theological educators and students with articles and book reviews related to theology and ministry.

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### Cover:

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

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The opinions expressed in the articles and reviews are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or sponsors.

#### CHANGE OF NAME

Beginning in 1990 with its ninth year of publication, this journal – until now known as the *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (EAJET) – will from now onward appear under the new name: the **AFRICA JOURNAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY** (AJET). AJET will continue to be published by Scott Theological College, Kenya, but now as a continental journal under the sponsorship of the ACTEA Consortium of Theological Colleges, an association which links 42 theological colleges and graduate schools throughout Africa.

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### **CORRECTION**

Recent issues of this journal have incorrectly listed the position of the AJET consulting editor Dr Josephat Yego. Dr Yego was previously University Secretary at Kenyatta University. He is now Deputy Principal (Administration), Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology. AJET apologizes for any inconvenience the earlier error may have caused.

### **BOOK REVIEWS**

Alan Nichols, ed, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Story of Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelization*

Stephen Githumbi

Stan Downes, Robert Oehrig, and John Shane, *Summary of the Nairobi Church Survey*

Harvie Conn

Emi M Gichinga, *Nairobi Baptist Church: Through 30 Years of Worship*

Stephen Talitwala

Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*

Rollin Grams

Philip M Steyne, *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists*

Scott Moreau

Alister McGrath, *Justification By Faith: What it Means to Us Today*

Mark Shaw

William J Larkin Jr, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*

Steve Strauss

## EDUCATING FOR SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

Isaac Zokoué

Before addressing the theme of educating for servant leadership in the church in Africa, let me consider two preliminary questions. The first is, are we here addressing questions that people are not asking? Are we spending time on an issue of pastoral theology that is not really a preoccupation of our churches? I raise the question in regard to the changes in perspective that our African churches are in the process of experiencing. In the socio-economic area, all our churches are increasingly interested in development programmes to the extent that foreign observers are beginning to fear that the pendulum is swinging toward an exclusive focus on social action. After having criticized the ecumenicals for many years for propagating a social gospel to the detriment of evangelization, evangelicals are in the process of catching up in this area, while at the same time seeking to maintain a proper emphasis on verbal evangelism. For the All Africa Conference of Churches, "the socio-economic crisis in Africa" was recently the subject of a meeting in Angola, which resulted in a document entitled: "The Declaration of Luanda — Christians facing the 'War Against the Dispossessed.'" In many ecclesiastical situations in Africa, that is the agenda. In the theological arena, there is growing confrontation between the West and the Third World; and Africa is certainly engaged in it. You are acquainted with liberation theology in Latin America, a form of liberation theology in Asia, and black theology in the United States. On the African continent things are moving too. Everywhere voices are being raised to say that Africa should not continue any longer to do "borrowed theology." People are firmly claiming the right not only to contextualize the Gospel but also to do theological reflection and theological production that are authentically African. That is where we are now. Evangelical African theologians, such as Byang Kato, have not been closed to this kind of change, even if they use somewhat different terminology from others, remaining faithful to the heritage of the evangelical world. In view of these preoccupations, have we chosen the wrong theme? Certainly not, as I hope to show shortly.

The second question that I would like to raise briefly is more subjective, I might say existential: does my ministry as an educator really reflect what I am going to talk about? I would like to avoid treating a subject like this in a detached

way. Those of us who are theological educators must be personally challenged by this theme. Before we talk about training others to have a servant attitude, let us ask ourselves whether we have learned to manifest the same spirit. Let us avoid being theoretical and instead let us be weighed in the balance so that, where necessary, the Lord might transform us for the task. I say this in earnest. If we want to remain on our pedestal and train others as servants, we will do it poorly, and worse still, we will be nothing better than tyrants.

### 1. Titles and Honours

Preparing servants of God with a servant attitude is a continuing task because one cannot get permanent results in this area. This means that, faced with the false models that society offers, we must maintain a constantly renewed vision of service which reflects Biblical values. We are called to discern the values of our societies in order to see which ones are compatible with our calling as servants.

First of all, let us put the problem in context. The majority of our theologians cite pride as the original sin committed by Adam. Augustine sees in original sin many sins including sacrilege, murder, spiritual adultery, theft, and greed; but he places pride at the head of the list. Nearer to us, Tillich refers to pride by its Greek name "hubris," and he finds that "hubris manifested itself most clearly when the snake promised Eve that to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would make man equal with God." Pride is to want to be more than one is in reality.

One of the manifestations of pride is the desire to have titles and honours, the constant temptation to elevate oneself above others, which is contrary to the principle of service. "Hubris" exists in every person. It cannot be overcome except by the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life. In Africa also, people desire titles and honours. I would like to give a few reasons for this adulation in our African churches: it involves our traditional values, the political model, and elitism.

a) Certain aspects of African culture tend toward domination. The priority due to the oldest person, the fear of the sorcerer, the servile submission to the chief, and the power of the healer are values that are projected onto the pastor or leader. In the majority of our churches the pastor is considered to be the one who simultaneously plays the roles of elder, chief, healer, etc.

In his presentation at PACLA, Tom Houston commented on this situation saying, "People will try to make you bigger than you are. They will project on to you an image of leadership that is not true. They will blow you up like a balloon . . . People will project on to the pastor an image of omnipotence. You are the man who can do everything. 'Do you have a legal case? Go to the pastor. Are you sick? Go to the pastor. Have you something that needs

attention? Go to the pastor.” Cultural uprooting has also led Christian Africans to search for a model. They find it in the person of the pastor.

An off-shoot of this problem is what Tite Tiénou denounces as “clericalism.” The African enjoys celebration, which is a time to exhibit titles and receive honours. “This aspect of traditional religion,” Tiénou observes, “makes the majority of African Christianity clerical – including the evangelical movement. In this evangelical clericalism, the pastor directs, and the people follow all that he says, often accepting everything uncritically.”

So, there exists a traditional context that does not favour the spirit of service, and that instead promotes the exaltation of “Me.” We all carry titles. Some of our former students are promoted to the position of president of their associations of churches only a little while after the completion of their studies. But let us ask ourselves the question with Tom Houston, “What is my attitude with respect to my title? Are we always conscious of the constant pressure that is put on us to elevate ourselves higher than we are?” Our work as educators consists of drawing the attention of our students to this subtle danger that lies in wait for the servant of God on every occasion, so that our students may prepare themselves to act differently.

b) African political models often attract church leaders. It is not rare to find in the churches the same structures as one finds in political life, even with the same titles. There has not yet been any debate in the evangelical African world on the position of the churches regarding political realities. All our institutions are apolitical. Nevertheless, we note that political life with its ceremonies and honours exerts a great attraction on church leaders.

Sometimes we are happy to remind ourselves that the pastor is also a “minister.” Of course we mean a minister of God. But if one wants to play on the Latin etymology of “minister” and translate “minister” by the word “servant,” we find ourselves faced with a contradiction, because a minister in the government is not treated as a servant; he is the first to be served. Society has here accomplished a reversal of meaning so that being a “minister” has little to do with service, but implies power and authority. This being true, why does the pastor compare himself with a minister and ask to be given the same respect? It is because the pastor himself is also hungry for power. It is not that he aspires to political power – even though that is occasionally the case – but that he is hungry to have authority and to be seen as important in society.

Jesus condemned such an attitude in the Pharisees; they “love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’” And the Lord concluded, “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers” (Matt. 23:6-8). Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians complements this truth. He writes, “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and



who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Notice that Paul does not ask the Thessalonians to place their leaders on pedestals, but to recognize their ministry and to surround them with esteem and affection. Elsewhere Paul indicates that leaders must be cared for materially (Gal. 6:6). These passages do not allow us to use the reaction of Jesus to humble unduly the servant of God, nor to use Paul's exhortation to unduly elevate him. Jesus' word, "You are all brothers," is the norm.

c) Elitism is one of the traps for the servant of God in Africa. This problem does not exist in the same measure in the developed countries, because university degrees impress practically no one, and the Church is no longer the center for the dissemination of knowledge. It is the opposite in Africa where, in many countries, the literacy rate is still very low. Elitism is often a handicap to service in two ways. In the first place, Christians themselves discriminate between the poorly educated servant and the one with a higher level of education. They copy this from the world around them, where a degree is equivalent to social promotion.

But this discrimination also has its roots in the early missionary era. For example, in some African countries the Christians consider an evangelist as inferior to a pastor. This comes from the fact that the first missionaries, needing African co-workers, trained individuals for just a few months who then carried the title of "Evangelist." Later, schools were created where men were trained for at least two years to become "Pastor." After their training, they started ministering in the churches. But the pastor was on a lower level than the missionary. Several decades later, the same hierarchy continues to prevail, not on paper, but in the mentality of the Christians, which is more deep-rooted: the evangelist is inferior to the pastor and the pastor is inferior to the missionary. I know of a case where a national who works in his own church is called "Missionary," because the title of pastor would lower him, in view of his high level of education. Those whom the Lord entrusts to us for training will enter the hierarchy at various levels, even if it is not by their own choice. The problem that we encounter here is that some Christians "dare not" go to see a certain servant of God because they do not consider themselves to be high enough up in the hierarchy to approach him. How often have you seen a farmer making an appointment with the top leaders of the church? Let us teach our leaders to find ways to break free from this hierarchy in order to serve God's people.

The second handicap in elitism affects the servant of God himself. If the farmer does not make an appointment with top church leaders, it is also because these leaders do not necessarily look for contacts with him. One of the criteria to know if a servant of God has been well trained for Africa is if he can put himself on the same level as the person to whom he is talking, whether that person is an intellectual or a farmer. I remember a woman who said to me, "My pastor's

messages are over my head because I don't understand what he says. Once he suggested a book for us to read . . ." You see! This pastor was not able to communicate the Gospel in a language adapted to his audience. He recommended a book to read, which made things even more difficult.

The Church of the twentieth century in Africa resembles in many respects the church in the first centuries of the Christian era. The early Church Fathers are, for the most part, examples for us. They were capable of defending their faith against philosophers and gnostics and at the same time they fed the flock of God. Talking with an eminent theological professor in France, I remarked to him that the churches of that country are becoming empty because their theology has failed. His response was, "No, it is because there is a lack of popularizers between the theologians and the mass of Christians," a lack of people gifted in making theology understandable to the Christian public. By saying that, he incriminated elitism. Are we ourselves going to continue to create a group of the elite, so that one day we too will need "popularizers"?

## 2. Jesus Christ – Master and Servant

In choosing to explore the theme of servant leadership, we do not set aside the preoccupations of our day and context; rather we touch upon a fundamental point in the life of the churches in Africa. Before turning to the holy Scriptures where Christ is given to us as an example of a servant, I would like to clarify what I understand by "service" or "to serve." I am not using these terms simply to designate "social service," a ministry to temporal needs, but I include in it all Christian ministry. It is true that the apostles made a distinction between *ministry of the Word* and *ministry to practical needs*. But we know that it is a question here of two complementary ways of "serving" God. The many uses of the word in the two Testaments show that "to serve" or "service" designate all that man thinks, says and does for God. It is in this way that Christ was the model of a servant.

There is something paradoxical in the example of Jesus: during his earthly ministry he acted both as Master and as servant, depending on the circumstances. He kept in harmony two functions which, especially in the society of his time, could not be exercised by the same person.

a) Jesus as master. To his disciples, Jesus was the Master. In fact, they were an ambulatory school with a curriculum. To begin with, disciples had to be recruited, but not just in any way. After his baptism, Jesus did some evangelism. Many disciples followed him, and from this number he chose twelve. On the evening before his death, he revealed to them the reason for this choice, and we see in his explanation the unfolding of the divine plan for the church (I have emphasized the salient words): "You did not choose me, but I *chose* you and *appointed* you to *go* and *bear* fruit – fruit that will *last*. Then the Father will *give* you whatever you *ask in my name*" (John 15:16). Once he had chosen them,

Jesus spent his time training them. He had come to fulfill a mission and he did everything possible to ensure the success and the continuation of that mission.

In this Master-trainer we see qualities that Chandapila of India enumerates as follows: 1) the quality of selectiveness; 2) the quality of concentration; 3) the quality of communicativeness; 4) the quality of transparency; 5) the quality of availability; 6) the quality of practicality; 7) the quality of appreciation; 8) the quality of steadfastness. These qualities, which appear in all the Gospel accounts, show the strong link which united the Master to his disciples. Their relations were full of gentleness and humanness. His objective was to build them up, to edify them. To achieve this, he taught them night and day. His teaching started from the events of daily life, that is, from a concrete base and not from theory, and he led them toward the discovery of the things of the Kingdom of God. Jesus never tried to attract attention to himself, but always to the Father who had sent him and in whose name he did everything. The disciples were struck by his teaching and amazed by his works. But Jesus himself did not get the glory.

The fact that his teaching leaned on daily experience allowed the disciples to understand that the realities of the Kingdom of God are not only for the future, but can already be lived out in this life. The disciples could see the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the present world. Thus they could understand the meaning of the Master's words, "You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14). In these conditions they were prepared to exercise a ministry which could not be disincarnated. Jesus was not Master in order to command, nor to dominate, nor to have his own way, but to train his disciples to serve. He himself did the will of the Father, and even in the face of death, he said again, "Not my will but Thine be done".

In the following statements we see the two roles of master and of servant come together: "I am the good shepherd," the one who leads the flock; but he adds, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn. 10:11). The leader of the sheep assures at the same time their salvation by his sacrifice. In this metaphor we are brought to understand that there is no discrepancy between the fact that he is master and the fact that he is servant.

b) Jesus as Servant. The Son of Man wanted to be considered as a servant and to train his disciples in the spirit of service. The request of Zebedee's sons for the place of honour near Jesus in heaven made the Master indignant and he declared, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you." Jesus' reaction is surprising. The request of two brothers was not for now but for the future reign of Christ. Jesus brought them back to the present because their request reveals their state of mind here and now: they wanted to command. The fact of having made this request shows that they already considered themselves superior to the other disciples. They were already aspiring to the first place. Jesus is going

to break their pride and confuse them by this unexpected declaration, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). The sacrifice of Jesus is the foundation of service. In the incarnation, there is a dimension of service. The epistle to the Hebrews underlines this: “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 2.16-17).

Every Christic event unfolds in the sense of “serving”: serving God and serving men, or, more precisely, serving God by serving men. Just as loving God and loving your neighbour go together, so it is with Christian service. There is this double plan. Let us look again at the passages where Jesus declares that the works that he does are the works of his Father, ordered by his Father, willed by his Father, and that he did nothing on his own (for example: Jn. 5:36; 9:4; 10:25, 32, 37; 14:10). But notice that all the works in question were actions for the benefit of man. For Christ, to heal the sick was to serve God; to feed the hungry was to serve God; to deliver the demon-possessed was to serve God; to comfort the afflicted in raising their dead to life was to serve God; to announce the Good News to the poor was to serve God. His coming was a mission of salvation “for us,” and he demonstrated this abundantly during his earthly ministry, as the Gospels testify. His resurrection is a victory over death; but the Son of God did not need this for himself; in his humanity it is a victory for our benefit. Now that he is seated at the right hand of the Father and has been glorified with the glory that he had before the foundation of the world, he is interceding “for us.” And he will come back “for us,” so that, where he is, we may be also. This is how God shows his love toward us. “That is why,” writes Paul, “I bow before the Father . . . that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being . . . that you . . . may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3.14-19). This is where the secret of being a good servant of God is found; it is when we are so touched inwardly by the love of God for us in Jesus Christ that we are driven to serve God in return.

The relationship between love and service is made obvious when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. The Gospel writer does not start his report by describing the scene, but starts out by explaining the reason for Jesus’ action: his exceedingly great love. “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed the full extent of his love . . .” (John 13:1ff). The washing of the feet teaches a practical lesson of great importance. Jesus knew that “the Father had put all things under his power”; in other words, he was aware that he was exalted above all things. And it is in this consciousness of his universal sovereignty that he takes the position of the person who is at the very bottom of the social ladder, that is, the slave. In his exceedingly great love for his

disciples, he wanted to leave them this example (13:15). This tells us how important it was to Jesus that his disciples understand their calling to be servants. The message is as clear as can be: in Christian ministry there is no place for opportunists. We have been called to train servants.

### 3. Training Servants

The men and women that our churches need for leadership must be educated to have a servant spirit. The crucial question, therefore, is whether the curricula of our seminaries take this objective into account, and whether those curricula are adequate for this purpose. I have two criticisms to make.

My first criticism concerns the dichotomy so often established between theory and practice. Our traditional training method is often considered to be in two parts: the theoretical phase, and then the practical phase. More and more, the shortcomings of this system are being recognized. It is a model with which the Third World is not satisfied, resulting in numerous reforms of the educational system in African countries. We want to change the system inherited from the colonial era. This system also creates problems in the West. For example, when someone is recruited for a position, he is required to have had a number of years of experience, because (and rightly so) it is recognized that an academic degree indicates theoretical knowledge more than practical knowledge. Most of our schools operate on the same model: theoretical teaching is largely developed to the detriment of practice. In certain institutions, after a time of theoretical training, the student is required to go back to his church for a year of practical work, before returning to finish his studies. By this and other means, several institutions have tried to maintain a balance between theory and practice, but such a balance is not easy to attain.

The heart of the problem is that at one time the Church felt obliged to start creating institutions for training the servants of God. These institutions sometimes resemble a ghetto, isolating from society those who are being trained to help society. And this is contrary to the experience of Jesus and his disciples. As the disciples were confronted with everyday life, they had many opportunities to put into practice what they were learning. Our seminaries lack such opportunities, and this lack creates a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. The solution to this discrepancy consists in identifying all the opportunities for service that exist on the campus, in the churches and in the community at large, and then in helping the students to put into practice the theory they are learning. Seminary should not be a period in the Christian life that is in parentheses, so to speak, but rather a time during which the student develops his gifts and grows spiritually. Then, and only then, will we produce "servants" for our churches.

My second criticism stems from my first. Tiéno puts it as follows, "In the training of leaders, the curricula have been taken from elsewhere without

making any changes, as far as both content and form are concerned. As will be seen from studying the pedagogical principles in the Bible, a good curriculum . . . must be personalized, functional and balanced.” Today a good curriculum for theological training in Africa must meet the needs of the African churches. Many people think about that need, some are concerned about it, but only a few are working at it.

Just a short time ago, evangelicals of continents having historic links with Africa were scandalized when they heard of such a thing as “African Theology.” They were saying, “There is only one theology,” meaning implicitly the one being taught in Europe and North America. The same model had to be reproduced everywhere. Thus, the inviolability of the Biblical message was being confused with the form of communication of the message, which necessarily should vary from one country to another. It is now time to put an end to this unjustified conservatism. How is it possible to train servants of God for Africa without taking into consideration African life styles and ways of thinking? It is not just a question here of filling our libraries with books on Africa, nor even of writing into the curriculum several courses dealing with specifically African subjects. We need to rethink the entire curriculum, taking into account our cultural and socio-economic realities, in order in the best possible way to gear our theological training to fit our needs.

I am not dreaming. In the United States a very unconventional seminary has recently been founded. It has neither a campus nor dormitories and operates following a non-traditional model. Courses are taught only one day a week. This seminary is very original. Its aim is not to try to be different from other seminaries, but to try to meet the real needs of the churches in the area. This is a very daring attempt on the part of these people who have had the firm conviction that only a radical reform will be able to correct the prevailing imperfections in the traditional training of servants of the Lord. If we do not come up with and implement new ideas as to how pastors and theologians should be trained in Africa, we will no longer be equal to the task.

There are two phenomena that should be a warning for us. The first is the change that is taking place in the area of hymnology: our churches are abandoning imported tunes. Sometimes they keep the words of the hymns, but sing them to African melodies. We have reason to fear lest this phenomenon of rejection also spreads to our training institutions because our curricula are also considered contextually too insipid!

The second phenomenon is much more disturbing: the success of the cults. The churches provide the cults with most of their adherents. A certain number of cult members keep ties with their church of origin. This means that they attend both cult and church meetings. Why? Because the cults offer them what they do not find in the traditional churches. They love Christ and want to keep him wherever they go; but they find satisfaction for some of their aspirations

outside of the church. If our churches are what they are, it is partly due to our training schools. This is easy to understand, as the churches are the place where what is taught in the schools is put into practice. This phenomenon goes in both directions: the churches send students to our seminaries; in return, the seminaries provide our churches with leaders, and so the cycle continues. It follows from this that if our churches are not meeting the needs of their members, then the seminaries training the leaders for the church obviously share in the responsibility.

The difficulties of the churches should be a challenge for us, a serious summons to action. The theological institutions are meant to serve the church. For Christ did not say, "I will build my seminary," but, "I will build my church" (Mt. 16.18). We should constantly be looking at how our churches are functioning, check their "spiritual temperature" and listen to their criticisms. Here in Africa we want the ties between the churches and the school to be strong.

Given this, how can we train pastors to have a servant spirit? The answer can be found in the unique example that Christ left, the model that he gave us to follow. But we need to be more specific. Watchman Nee lists the qualities of the "genuine servant of God": he should be a hard worker, stable, love everybody, be a good listener, measure his words, he should not be subjective, he should be master of his body, be willing to suffer, faithful in money matters, uncompromising with respect to truth. All these qualities are biblically based, and we should help the students to develop them during their training period. However, these qualities are much more personal. They are internal qualities that the individual should possess in order to succeed in his Christian ministry. According to the New Testament, every Christian should have them. A complete profile of a servant of God can be found in Paul's first letter to Timothy (3:2-7). He should be "above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect." He must be spiritually mature and have a good reputation with everybody. These qualities are related to marriage, the family, society, professional life (able to teach others), to morals, to spiritual matters, to ethics, to the intellect, to pedagogy and so on. In one word, they include all areas of life. These qualities show up in interpersonal relationships. It is in personal encounters that they become reality. Thus they can rightly be called qualities of service. The qualities listed by the apostle Paul in this text can be used as the basis for a complete theological curriculum.

It deserves emphasis that among all the ministries that the New Testament mentions (e.g., apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers – Eph. 4:11) only the pastoral ministry is described in detail. It is just one step from that truth to the thought that the pastorate is a central ministry in the body of Christ. And I take this step by comparing the pastoral ministry with the role of a

shepherd. The shepherd guides the flock, takes care of the sheep twenty-four hours a day. The task of the shepherd, therefore, corresponds to the pastoral ministry. Now as we all know, the most common image that the Bible uses for a leader is that of a shepherd. Jesus, who is the Head over all things, calls himself the "good shepherd." We can thus consider the pastorate to be a foundational ministry, and therefore understand better why the apostle Paul gives it particular attention. If that is so, we should create training programs specially geared to the training of pastors. Moreover, we should make pastoral training compulsory for all of God's servants, and consider all other ministries as specialized branches of this pastoral ministry. Theological training must be diversified in order to take into account the diversity of ministries in the church. However, this diversification should be a natural outgrowth from the center, which is the pastoral training. This is how we can hope to educate servants of God who have a genuine spirit of service.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Given as the keynote address at the ACTEA All-Africa Conference of Theological Educators, held 30 May to 3 June 1990, at Limuru, Kenya.



## ACHEBE'S NOVELS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS IN AFRICA

JOHN A. ANONBY

No writer in twentieth century Africa has achieved wider fame than Chinua Achebe, the internationally acclaimed novelist of Nigeria. His meteoric rise on Africa's literary horizon began with the publication of his first (and best known) novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958, which was soon followed by *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966), and a variety of essays and poems. After an intervening period of over twenty years, Achebe's skills as a novelist have again resurfaced with his *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), a novel that displays a magnificent blend of satiric control and haunting pathos.

While Africa can be justifiably proud of having produced a writer of not only continental but also international stature (he has been recognized as "on of the master novelists of the twentieth century"),<sup>1</sup> our particular interest is to view some of Achebe's literary perspectives in the context of Christian concerns in contemporary Africa. Whether perceptive Christians agree or disagree with Achebe's insights is perhaps less important than making a sincere attempt to consider at least some of the implications suggested by his penetrating novels.

The first question that must be addressed is whether Achebe is sufficiently conversant with Christianity in Africa to offer credible opinions and assessments, particularly in the light of his unrelenting depictions of the intrusive and even disruptive impact of Christian beliefs and practices among ethnic groups throughout Nigeria. Fortunately, we have explicit autobiographical materials in Achebe's writings that indicate the extent of his early exposure to Christianity. He was born in eastern Nigeria of "devout Christian parents"; his father had even become an evangelist and church teacher.<sup>2</sup> He recalls that his family "sang hymns and read the Bible night and day," and that at the age of ten he considered himself a "thorough little Christian."<sup>3</sup> His encounters with Christianity were reinforced by his formal education in a mission school, a government college, and University College, Ibadan, where he took a degree in English, History and Religious Studies.<sup>4</sup>

Even as a child, however, Achebe's close encounters with Christianity were modified by his fascination for the traditional beliefs and practices of his uncle and other relatives. He recalls, with a touch of irony, that these close family members, "blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols" and that he and his sister would partake of these "heathen festival meals" without any sense of distress or trauma.<sup>5</sup> He also recollects his "fascination for the ritual and the life on the other arm of the crossroads."<sup>6</sup> This seemingly incidental remark, upon further scrutiny, can be seen to harbour momentous significance in relation to Achebe's novels. His fascination for the *rituals* and the *life* (italics mine) of his traditional heritage becomes, in fact, his major literary preoccupation in his early novels, particularly in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. The "crossroads" that image the convergence of the Christianity of his immediate family and the traditional practices of his close relatives also prefigure the personal divergence of Achebe from his early emotional attachment to Christianity. Having become firmly established as a novelist, he looked back on his writing of *Things Fall Apart* as "an act of atonement with [his] past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son" — a literary penance, as it were, for his "apostasy"<sup>7</sup> from the vibrant life of his traditional heritage. He can hardly suppress his irritation with "all that rubbish we hear of the spiritual void and mental stresses that Africans are supposed to have, or the evil forces and irrational passions prowling through Africa's heart of darkness."<sup>8</sup> This implicit attack on what he regards as prevalent attitudes among Christians toward traditional propensities is reinforced by his frontal diatribe on the "crazy theology"<sup>9</sup> of the early missionaries who had come to his village. While Achebe does not deign to explain his reasons for this blanket assessment in his autobiographical essay, it is a likely sequel to his disparaging reference to the "mad logic of the Trinity" in *Things Fall Apart* (p. 104). Apparently, Achebe had decided that Christian theology was intellectually untenable.

Achebe does not, however, categorically castigate every aspect of Christian sensibility and practice. He acknowledges that "in some ways and in certain circumstances [Christianity] stood firmly on the side of humane behaviour."<sup>10</sup> The Igbo traditional custom of abandoning twins to die in the forest in counteracted by Christians who persistently rescue them (*Things Fall Apart*, 110). The Christians are also noted for providing, in the haven of their churches, a refuge for outcasts such as the *osu*, whose socially-mandated dedication to the gods was not a mark of veneration but of execration in the eyes of the tribal community. Complexities surrounding this issue, as we will see later, are addressed more fully in *No Longer at Ease*.

Achebe's acknowledgement of some of the beneficial as well as the deleterious social manifestations of both Christianity and traditional perspectives has elicited a tribute from the widely-published critic of African literature, Professor David Cook, who feels that *Things Fall Apart* is not intended to

... pass judgements on social systems, nor to assert dogmatically that one is better or worse than another. . . . He [Achebe] does not romanticise Igbo society nor vilify Christian European behaviour as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Achebe would certainly have considered this to be a welcome assessment of his work, for he clearly admires literary objectivity and realism, as can be evidenced in his own tribute to the Canadian novelist, Margaret Laurence, who observed that perceptive African writers interpreted their own world as

... neither idyllic, as the views of some nationalists would have it, nor barbaric, as the missionaries and European administrators wished and needed to believe.<sup>12</sup>

A careful scrutiny of Achebe's novels indicates, however, that Achebe is not as objective or dispassionate as he would like us to think. His handling of incidental details and episodes demonstrates persistent, though not necessarily blatant, satiric thrusts against Christian theology and eschatology. Concerning the latter, for instance, a message of judgment is given by a white missionary who proclaims to the Igbo villagers that "evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone" would be "thrown into a fire that burned like palm-oil" (*Things Fall Apart*, p. 102). This solemn message, however, is conveyed by an Igbo interpreter from another village who habitually mispronounces the word "myself," which sounds like "my buttocks" to the ears of the crowd. The missionary gets into even further difficulty when he lamely attempts to explain how "there was only one God" who, however, had a son but not a wife (p. 103).

While Achebe is not at all reticent about having traditional leaders regard Christianity as a "lunatic religion" (*Things Fall Apart*, p. 126), he is very careful to ensure that traditional beliefs are not misunderstood by the Christian. For example, when a highly intelligent village leader named Akunna approaches Mr. Brown, a white missionary, to indicate that they both, after all, believe in one supreme God called Chukwu, who made heaven and earth, Mr. Brown points to a carved piece of wood on the rafters that is also called a god by the villagers. Akunna then attempts to explain that all of these "little gods" are simply regarded as intermediaries, much like the recognized head of the church in England. From this encounter, Mr. Brown begins to appreciate the need for careful listening and the value of accommodation.

Achebe also takes advantage of his prerogatives as a novelist to shape his characters according to his predilections. It can hardly be coincidental that most, if not all, of his most impressive and resonant characters are traditional leaders, elders or priests who are committed to preserving their heritage. The protagonist of *Things Fall Apart* is Okonkwo, whose fame throughout "nine villages and even beyond . . . rested on solid personal achievements" (p. 3). Similarly, the unforgettable priest of Umuaro, Ezeulu, in *Arrow of God*, remains a man of purpose and resolve in spite of ever-expanding numbers of detractors and opposers who make his position increasingly precarious.

In obvious contrast to these protagonists are the flawed, ineffectual, and even contemptible characters who are identified as Christians. Examples readily come to mind, such as Nwoye, Okonkwo's eldest son, whose immaturity and personal traumas made him particularly susceptible to "the poetry of the new religion" (p. 104). As the renamed Isaac of *No Longer at Ease*, his story is continued as he attempts to raise his son, Obi, in the nurture of the Christian faith. His efforts are however aborted, as all of Obi's religious training and academic successes fail to provide any real stability in his life. Obi is not only lost to his tribe, but becomes a Christian casualty as well. The missionaries also fail to thrive under the acidic ink of Achebe's sharp pen. For all his visible success in consolidating his mission, Mr. Brown is regarded as "foolish" by the nationals who tolerate and even like him, and his deteriorating health forces him to "leave his flock, sad and broken" (p. 128). His successor, the Reverend James Smith, proves to be bigoted, strident, and even vengeful, and he undoes much of the work accomplished by Mr. Brown; the church is burned to the ground before his eyes. In spite of the predominating shift from the religious and cultural issues of his earlier novels to the political focus of the last two novels (*A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*), Achebe finds room in his last novel for a pathetic servant girl, Agatha, who freely distributes "leaflets dripping with the saving blood of Jesus and yet had no single drop of charity in her own anaemic blood" (p. 183).<sup>13</sup> In the middle of a casual conversation between two of the main characters of the novel, a remark that is almost out of context emerges, "you know I detest all born-again people" (p. 96).

Without a personal commitment to Christianity, it is hardly surprising that Achebe tends to depict, in his novels, the interaction of traditional customs and beliefs with Christianity in predominantly sociological, economic, and political terms. The reception of Christianity in the Igbo village of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* was facilitated by the erection of a trading store; "palm-oil and kernel" became valuable commodities and "much money flowed into Umuofia" (p. 126). Along with the church, "the white men had also brought a government" and a court (p. 123). Schools were also established, and Mr. Brown eventually convinced the people that "the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write" (p. 128).

Although Achebe does not minimize the economic and educational benefits that seemed to accompany the spread of Christianity, there is an unmistakable sense of its disruptive influence in his early novels. Even the title, *Things Fall Apart*, clearly encapsulates what Achebe analyzes as the essence of the problem, which is primarily one of disunity, as a tribal elder, Obierika, recognizes:

... The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (pp. 124-5).

Similarly, Okonkwo, who returns to Umuofia after a seven year exile for an unpremeditated and inadvertent murder of a kinsman, is able to assess the great changes that have transpired in his absence; he “mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart” (p. 129). In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe concedes, with a sense of sadness, that the traditional way of life could not, in the long run, withstand the unrelenting onslaughts of European intrusions in Africa. Okonkwo’s futile attempts to repel government representatives by force result in his abandonment by his own tribesmen and in his lapse into utter disillusionment and consequent suicide. Ezeulu’s attempt, in *Arrow of God*, to accommodate and thereby nullify the ways of the white man by sending his son, Oduche, to be instructed by them, is also doomed to failure, with Ezeulu finding himself increasingly isolated by his own people, whose attachment to their traditional customs is gradually eroded by external influences. Even the elements seem to favour the timing of the harvests of some of the Christian converts who have dared to ignore the siren warnings of their traditional priests.

Achebe’s reluctant acknowledgement of the impact of Christianity and its attendant political and economic alliances is, however, accompanied by some penetrating caveats. Though the Galilean has cut a wide swath in the cultural fabric of traditional domains in Nigeria (and, by implication, many other parts of Africa), His domain has by no means been fully established, particularly in the hearts of men and women in these representative regions. This is particularly evident in the novel written between *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, namely *No Longer at Ease*. In his masterful allusion to T.S. Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi,” Achebe implies that an abandonment of the old gods does not necessarily lead to an unqualified embracing of a new religion. The protagonist of *No Longer at Ease*, Obi, is a character that disturbs and even repels the reader. As the son of Isaac (formerly Nwoye of *Things Fall Apart*, who suffered total rejection by his tribe and who devoted his life to the church), young Obi has enjoyed many educational advantages, including a large scholarship to study in a university in England. Obi’s mother, Hannah, was even more zealous in her Christian faith than her husband, if that were possible, and taught her children to reject food in their neighbours’ houses in case the food had been offered to idols.

This sanitized Christian environment, it might be supposed, certainly should have immunized Obi from the contamination of the world. This, however, does not happen. His glorious prospects abroad quickly become sullied by sexual affairs “– a Nigerian, a West Indian, English girls, and so on” (p. 63).<sup>14</sup> Nor does his thorough Christian training restrain him from accepting bribes – the issue that frames the novel as a whole. In all of this, however, there is nothing that startles the Christian reader, though it is always heart-rending to see the afflictions that prodigal sons (and daughters) bring upon themselves in spite of loving Christian nurture, in Africa or anywhere else.

There is, however, a sub-plot in *No Longer at Ease* that should profoundly disturb any Christian reader. Obi falls in love with a beautiful Nigerian nurse named Clara, from his own tribe, whom he first meets in London. Back in Nigeria, he affirms that he wants to marry her, but she states that this would be impossible, as she is an *osu*. Having been educated abroad, he has come to realize that it would be “scandalous” (p. 65) to permit a mere tribal taboo to interfere with their plans. She senses, however, that his powerful reassurances mask some weakness in his resolve. Even after sharing his determination to marry Clara with his parents, he fails to arrange the intended marriage, allows her to undergo a risky abortion, and finally abandons her.

Obi loses the sympathies of the reader by these actions, of course, but even more unsettling is the intractable disapproval of his parents when he tells them of his plan to marry Clara. Obi's father acknowledges that Clara's father is both “a good man and a great Christian,” but he nevertheless stubbornly refuses to listen to Obi's argument that the light of the Gospel should have dispelled such darkness and ignorance (pp. 120-21). His mother's reaction is even more vociferous. She warns him that “if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself” (p. 123). Achebe appears to give his approval, in *Things Fall Apart*, to the Christian church for welcoming the *osu* into their fellowship, but in *No Longer at Ease* he clearly implies that Christians set their limits far short of the New Testament declaration that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor two Greek . . . bond nor free . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The implications for tribal exclusiveness are obvious, and it is apparent that in some parts of Africa Christians have been slower than the political authorities in addressing this lingering issue in a constructive and dynamic manner.

While Achebe's first three novels can all be regarded as nostalgic requiems for the demise of the “old” traditional Africa, his last two novels can hardly be viewed as celebrations of post-colonial freedom. Both *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* depict – with unmistakable candour – Achebe's harshly satiric portrayals of nationalistic leaders turning into “party bosses” who, in turn, are chased out by “the bright military boys, new idols of the people.”<sup>15</sup> Had Achebe not already earned an international reputation as an African writer, these novels might have fallen by the wayside, or have been placed on some censor's index of prohibited readings. However, *A Man of the People*, an uninhibited fictionalized study of a suave but utterly unprincipled and ruthless M.P. whose vagaries precipitate a coup, elicited wide-spread interest when its “prophetic ending” coincided with an actual coup in Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> Achebe's literary preoccupation with political issues persists unabated in *Anthills of the Savannah*, a brilliant satiric analysis of a military dictator's consolidation, abuse and final loss of power.

The implications of these two political novels, for Christian readers, are more oblique than those found in the earlier novels, which focus on the collision

between entrenched tribal traditions and the intrusions of westernized Christianity. Nevertheless, there are three issues in these latter novels that cannot be ignored by Christians who are concerned for the spiritual health of Africa: declining moral standards, opportunism, and (for want of a better phrase) unbridled intellectual broad-mindedness.

We have briefly noted Achebe's depiction of Obi's moral deterioration in *No Longer at Ease*, but this can be plausibly attributed to Obi's deliberate loosening of his ties with his closely-knit tribal community as well as with his Christian parents while he studies overseas. In *A Man of the People*, however, it is at a party organized by the students' Christian movement at a Nigerian university that the protagonist of the novel, Odili, first meets Elsie, a co-ed who is engaged to a medical student who is taking studies abroad; Odili, speaking in the first person, divulges to the reader that "Elsie was, and for that matter still is, the only girl I met and slept with in the same day—in fact within an hour" (p. 24). This episode becomes a harbinger of further complications when the "Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P." (p. 1), upon whom Odili has placed his aspirations for sponsorship to take graduate studies overseas, manages to seduce Elsie while she and Odili are being accommodated at his mansion.

Odili's revenge takes the form of an attempted political challenge at the polls, which initially only makes him a victim of severe intimidation, harassment, and even violent physical beatings from Nanga's hired thugs masquerading as police officers. The ensuing unrest and bloodshed eventually lead to a military coup in which the government is overthrown and all of the ministers are incarcerated. Odili experiences a personal triumph in this turbulent scenario by winning the affections of the attractive young Edna, whom Nanga had hoped to marry as his second wife. Whether Achebe is simply striving for realism in this somewhat crude novel (I have ignored many lewd details interspersed throughout the story), or whether he is deliberately highlighting the failure of Christianity to permeate the morals of post-colonial Africa is not at all clear; what is apparent, however, is that moral decline is an ominous challenge to those who name the Name of Christ in various African countries, as well as throughout the Western world. Moral indiscretions among Christians can have devastating and far-reaching effects that nullify the otherwise positive witness of individuals, churches, and even entire communities.

At the heart of both *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* (Achebe's recent and, in my opinion, most brilliant novel) is their common theme, "the corroding effect of privilege" (*A Man of the People*, p. 109). Nanga's ruthless suppression of opposition finds its counterpart in Achebe's satiric portrait of "His Excellency," Sam, a military buffoon who adds the name, "President," to all his titles as he treacherously turns against his closest friends who have assisted him in his struggle for absolute power in the fictionalized West African state of Kangan. The tactics of this megalomaniac eventually result in a backlash of violence in which he himself perishes in

another inevitable coup. Bordering on comedy throughout much of the novel, Achebe also cleverly exposes the obsequiousness and self-abasement of "His Excellency's" attendant ministers who vie for his favour like the palace "leapers" and "creepers" among Jonathan Swift's Lilliputians (little put-ons?) in *Gulliver's Travels*:

Worshipping a dictator is such a pain . . . It wouldn't be so bad if it was merely a matter of dancing upside down on your head. With practice anyone could learn to do that. The real problem is having no way of knowing from one day to another, from one minute to the next, just what is up and what is down (*Anthills*, p. 45).

The ruthless political opportunism portrayed by Achebe in this novel offers an extreme example of the abuse of authority that has often characterized men in positions of power. Christ Himself notes in Mark 10:42 that "they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship" over their subjects. He offers, however, a superior paradigm for the church: "whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10.44). Christ's model of authority is, however, frequently jettisoned in favour of unsanctified personal ambition, even in ecclesiastical structures. The church, in fact, often provides opportunities for social and economic advancement that might otherwise never come to some of the eager and clever people living in struggling societies in various parts of Africa. Where does one draw the line between the divinely-mandated obligation to develop one's talents on the one hand, and yet fulfil Christ's requirement of humble servanthood on the other? Part of the answer, of course, lies in the motive. Everything done in the Name of God must be done for the glory of God, to whom alone belong the kingdom, the power, and the glory—as the far too easily recited Lord's prayer tells us.

Another part of the answer has to do with method. Preferment, position, and power for the Christian must be attained by legitimate and honourable means, as stipulated by Paul: "If a man . . . strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully" (II Tim. 2:5). This also includes the whole area of moral obligation. One of the more fascinating minor characters in *Anthills of the Savannah* is Professor Reginald Okong, a minister in President Sam's cabinet. His rise to power had come about by his "working secretly on schemes of his own" (p. 10) while being sponsored and groomed by American Baptist missionaries who were training him for ministry in their denomination. Variations on this scenario have been repeated many times by ambitious and bright young men who have been enticed away from their church sponsors for more lucrative and prestigious positions in para-church organizations or, as in Professor Okong's case, secular careers.

And what more needs to be said about the ubiquitous scourge of bribery, which is estimated as consuming 60% of the wealth of at least one West African nation?<sup>17</sup> What are the real costs in terms of trust or integrity? Or, what are the costs in terms of the denial of real merit, which Achebe perceptively recognizes as "a form of social injustice which can hurt not only the individuals



concerned but ultimately the whole society"?<sup>18</sup> The learned judge in *No Longer at Ease* who sentences Obi "could not comprehend how an educated young man" would jeopardize his entire future by accepting bribes (p. 54), and yet there are people who regard themselves as Christians who are placing their spiritual well-being as well as their testimony at risk by succumbing to bribery and other forms of monetary abuse, thereby allowing the salt of Christianity to lose its savour in their corrupt social environments.

The more than twenty years' gap between *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* appears to have crystallized some of Achebe's maturing insights. While Achebe would not likely agree with the unequivocal opinion of the graduate student from a small West African country who, though not himself a committed Christian, declared that missionary activity was the only bright spot in the entire sordid history of colonialism,<sup>19</sup> Achebe seems to have come to terms with the historical fact of the legacy of colonialism, with its positive as well as negative reverberations. His real concern in his final novels is the political and economic climate of post-colonial Africa, but only in his last novel can we detect the strength of his distrust of political cliches and simplistic ideologies of any kind, which so easily provide demagogues with pretexts for overthrowing corrupt governments with others that are no better. The perspectives of Ikem, the editor of "The Gazette" in *Anthills of the Savannah*, seem to reflect those of Achebe. Ikem distrusts "orthodoxy whether of the right or left" (p. 100), and insists in his final message to the university community that only responsible performance can produce the "moral authority" required for credible leadership (p. 160).

Achebe's conviction that integrity is more basic than orthodoxy is both attractive and compelling, especially on a continent as politically and ideologically fragmented as Africa. His plea for religious toleration fits into this, and is imaged beautifully in the spontaneous "holy" dance of a Moslem girl, Aina, when she hears Agatha's song of praise to Jehovah (p. 224); for Achebe, true worship transcends religion or creed, dissolving in an awareness that "this world belongs to the people of the world, not to any little caucus, no matter how talented" (p. 232).

When the devastation caused by political and religious conflicts is thoughtfully considered, Achebe's prescriptions of integrity and tolerance would appear to be Africa's only viable option. With the paramount importance of integrity Christians should have no quarrel whatsoever; many of the world's great religions converge on this point. Achebe's lofty humanism, however, also demands tolerance – except for orthodoxy, which is castigated by Achebe as "the graveyard of creativity" (p. 100). This poses a dilemma as well as an ongoing challenge for Christians, whose Biblical mandate requires an obedient love for God as the basis for loving one's fellow men. For the committed Christian, toleration is a relative rather than an absolute value. Christian love embraces toleration but it also transcends it, simultaneously

revealing the necessary distinction between the love of the sinner and the hatred of his sin. From a Biblical perspective, the communication of the inescapable realities of time and eternity, or salvation and damnation, takes precedence over toleration, which in this context is an existential variant of criminal negligence. The highest form of creativity is not enhanced by indiscriminating broad-mindedness (the most common form of pride among intellectuals) but by a yearning for ways to express — ever more resonantly — the wonders of the highest truths to this needy world.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Introductory editorial comment to "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration," by Chunia Achebe, in *New African*, March 1990, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>Chunia Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*, pp. 20-1. This selection was first published in *New Letters*, Vol. 40, Kansas City, October 1973.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23

<sup>4</sup>Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1958), vii, Biographical Note. The 1988 reprint is referred to throughout my essay. *No Longer at Ease* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1988 [1960]) is the edition used in this paper. *Arrow of God*, second edition (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988 [1964]) is the edition used here.

<sup>5</sup>*Hopes and Impediments* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 20, 25.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup>David Cook, "The Centre Holds" in Cook, *African Literature* (London: Longman Group, 1977), pp. 67-8.

<sup>12</sup>Margaret Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 9, cited in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup>All references to *Anthills of the Savannah* are to the Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1988 edition.

<sup>14</sup>Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1988 [1960]), p. 63.

<sup>15</sup>*Hopes and Impediments*, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1988 [1966]), note on back cover. This edition will be referred to throughout my essay.

<sup>17</sup>Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1983), p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup>This assessment by a West African fellow doctoral student at a large Canadian university emerged in a casual conversation we had a number of years ago.

# **THE RIGHT TO DIFFERENCE: THE COMMON ROOTS OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup>**

Tite Tiénou

The purpose of this paper is to consider the impact of historical developments on the quest for theological relevance in Africa. Specifically, the complex history inaugurated by the European factor in Africa is taken as the background for the present search for identity in the continent.

European presence in Africa has initiated what A. A. Mazrui calls a clash of cultures. This resulted in a paradoxical situation. Mazrui explains:

Clearly Africa is not the nearest in culture to the western world, yet the continent has indeed been experiencing perhaps the fastest pace of westernization this century of anywhere in the non-western world (Mazrui 1980:47).

The expressions "European factor," "European presence," "westernization" and "European colonialism" are somewhat synonymous. Yet the new situation created by Western influence in Africa was not due to a single source. It is convenient to summarize European intentions in Africa with formulas such as "Christianity, Commerce and Civilization" or "La Croix et le Drapeau." In reality these formulas cover a host of institutions, ideologies and motivations. Christianity in its varied forms, adventurers, empire builders, philanthropists and mercenaries were all part of the European factor in Africa. In time the interaction between Africans and the self-appointed masters had to lead to a new sense of African self-awareness. A. A. Mazrui describes the phenomena in these words:

Christianity, Western liberal democracy, urbanization, Western capitalism, the rules of Western science and the rules of Western art have jointly exerted an unparalleled influence on the emergence of personalized identity in Africa (1980:68).

Indeed, I wish to argue that "the emergence of personalized identity in Africa" permeates all forms of reflection in the continent, including not least the quests for African philosophy and for African theology.

## **1. Reflection, history and culture**

European colonialism in Africa created a crisis situation, particularly in relation to culture, which is the common denominator for both African

philosophy and African theology. The Africans' search for their past is the result of a reaction to Western domination and domestication. And this quest for an African past different from that of Europe is itself a form of reflection. It has ramifications in literature, philosophy, religion, art and culture. Hence the quests for African philosophy and African theology are historically related. In Africa, as elsewhere, reflection is always related to history and culture.

I wish to explore the impact of historical developments on the quest for African theology especially in conjunction with a study of a similar process in African philosophy. Before we get to the heart of the matter, the following three quotations may shed light on the problem before us.

In his last book, *The Guardian of the Word*, the late Guinean novelist Camara Laye writes:

When people live for years in freedom or within some sphere of influence, either in a feudal state or under colonial domination; and when their own lands—even if they become French-speaking, like the country of the colonizer—are nevertheless as different from France in their customs, nature and climate as Africa is from Europe: then it is natural that such people should return to their roots, should investigate their past, and, delving into that past, should enter upon a passionate quest for traces of those beings and those things that have guided their destiny (1975:24).

In his introduction to P. J. Hountondji's *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, the Nigerian scholar Abiola Irele states:

... the encounter between Africa and Europe has brought about a conflict of cultures, a situation that, in the specific historical context of colonization, has produced a tension in the heart of the African system of values. . . . There can be no form of reflection in Africa today that does not bear a direct relation to history and culture (1983:1,10).

Aylward Shorter, a British Catholic priest and missionary, writes:

With their neo-scholastic training Catholic [writers of sub-Saharan Africa] assumed that there could be no African Theology without the prior discovery of an African Philosophy (1975:24).

If the three authors are right, then one should not, and cannot, study the quest for African theology while ignoring colonial history and the quest for African philosophy. It is even possible to defend the thesis that the search for theological relevance in Africa passes through stages similar to those of the quest for an African philosophy.

## 2. African philosophy, history and culture

The quest for African philosophy reflects the tensions of political, economic, cultural, religious and ideological relationships between Africa and the West. In that sense, the quest for an African philosophy is a by-product of European colonial domination, particularly in its cultural and intellectual dimensions. L. Apostel notes that

the attitude taken by Western writers and Africans with reference to the problem of the existence of a genuine and specific African philosophy is . . . the expression of a stage in the struggle of Africa for emancipation and autonomy (1981:8).

Apostel then proceeds to distinguish four stages in this struggle as it relates to African philosophy. In Stage I, Westerners view African cultures as childlike; they are to be corrected and brought to the level of the West. This display of an attitude of superiority inevitably leads to reaction. The reaction takes place in Stage II. This second stage is properly the beginning point of the quest for an African philosophy. As Africans and some Westerners react against Western ethnocentrism, they tend to assert qualitative differences between African and Western philosophies. The goal is for Africans to achieve cultural autonomy. In this second stage, the search is for ethnic, tribal or traditional philosophies. In time Stage III is reached. Stage III, as a reaction against the assumptions of Stage II, is actually more of a critique than a formulation of philosophies. In Stage III, the critics claim that there is no philosophy that is proper to cultures or nations but only philosophies created by individuals. Stage IV in turn would be a synthesis between stage II and III. According to Apostel, Stage IV is yet to come (Apostel 1981:1-10). It may be worthwhile to examine Apostel's four stages in greater detail.

### *Stage I*

The first stage in the quest for African philosophy actually provides only the launching pad for stages two and three. Roughly, Apostel's first stage covers the period from the European conquest of Africa (particularly in the nineteenth century) to around 1930. This is the time when Westerners denied the Africans civilization and thought. This ethnocentrism was evidenced in L. Levy-Bruhl's depiction of primitive mentality as pre-logical. And, of course, Africa provided the modern laboratory for the study of such primitive mentality!

The missionary literature of the time reflects this Western sense of superiority vis-a-vis Africa. Witness the two volumes authored by Robert H. Milligan: *The Jungle Folk of West Africa* and *The Fetish Folk of West Africa*. They were published in 1910 and 1912, respectively, by Fleming H. Revell Company. A few lines from *The Fetish Folk of West Africa* will illustrate the extent of Mr. Milligan's ethnocentrism. This is, for instance, how he introduces the African to the reader in his *Preface*:

In the present volume the author essays the more difficult task of revealing the interior world of the African – his mental habits and beliefs . . . Fetishism . . . is the jungle of jungles, an aggregation of incoherent beliefs. The world of the African is as wild and strange as the weird world we often visit on the brink of sleep. . . . The degradation of the African is a fact (Milligan 1912:5,7).

In a later chapter, he compares America to Africa, that is civilized society and savagery. Of the six contrasts established by Milligan, I will mention only one,

the third. According to Milligan, civilized man has intellectual development, the savage does not. Milligan writes:

There is no increase of knowledge and no expanding of intelligence. The intellectual stagnation, the stifling mental torpor of an African community must be experienced in order to be realized (1912:273).

The remarkable thing in all of this is that Milligan honestly believed he was presenting facts, not theory. For he defends himself with these words:

In thus recording the successive contrasts between civilization and the savage state, I am not conscious of exploiting a theory but have rather recorded the differences that impressed me in the course of actual experience in Africa (Milligan 1912:275).

In a way, the excesses of stage two are in reverse proportion to the damage done by such Western ethnocentric attitudes toward Africans. Africans needed (and still need) to be rehabilitated! Moreover the ideas expressed by Milligan are still part of current missionary thought in relation to Africa. Milligan's books are read in the libraries of missionary training institutions. Words like "savage" have not yet disappeared from missionary hymns, even some of the more recent ones!

### *Stage II*

Since, by and large, Westerners justified colonialism and domination of Africa by the "fact" that Africans were incapable of thought and intellectual development, it is not surprising that, in stage two, the battle to rehabilitate the Africans is fought on the ground of philosophy. We Black Africans are also able to produce coherent systems of thought, was the battle cry. Historically, Apostel's second stage covers the years between 1930 and the early 1970's. The development of the concept of *Négritude* by A. Césaire and L. S. Senghor in 1932- 1934 and the publication in 1945 of *Bantu Philosophy* by P. Tempels are important milestones in the development of this second stage. Note, for the record, that the debate on African theology began in the 1950s during the second stage of the quest for African philosophy.

A. J. Smet (1975:1-2) notes that there are three trends or schools in current African philosophy. In the first trend he puts the writers of *Négritude* and African Personality. The second school is that of Bantu philosophies; this is the group of Tempels and his successors. The third trend includes writers and philosophers whose emphasis is on African cultural unity. Smet's distinctions may be a little artificial. They nevertheless point to the fact that the second stage of the search for African philosophy is a diversified reality. The reader should note, for the sake of clarity, that I have identified Smet's "current African philosophy" with Apostel's Stage II. The date of Smet's writing, 1975, marks the transition between Stages II and III.

The second stage of the development of African philosophy did not occur without antecedents. One such antecedent is the concept of African Per-

sonality, used for the first time in 1893 by E. W. Blyden in Freetown (Irele 1975:57). The twin concepts of African Personality and *Négritude* share at least three common characteristics. First, Irele contends that both African Personality and *Négritude* originate within the context of Black diaspora, particularly that of the United States (Irele 1975:57-58). Secondly, African Personality and *Négritude* are both movements and theories created by "westernized" Blacks and Africans in reaction to the domination of the West. L. S. Senghor acknowledges that the concept of *Négritude* was invented by Aimé Césaire, a Black man from French Antilles (1964:8). This explains why both concepts are expressed in the languages of the colonizers. *Négritude* was first "expressed, sung and danced" in French, admits Senghor (1964:316).

The third common characteristic of African Personality and *Négritude* brings us back to their origin. A. Irele notes that Blyden's concept of African Personality was in keeping with the nineteenth century definition of nationality. Consequently, for Blyden, African Personality included Blacks everywhere; it was a racial and ethnic concept (Irele 1975:66). Collective Black personality and identity are also the guiding principles of *Négritude*. Senghor, the well-known poet of *Négritude*, claims that Blacks everywhere have one and the same culture. This unitary and universal Black culture is marked by Black people's emotive sensibility. This Senghor summarizes in his famous statement: "L'émotion est nègre, comme la raison hellène" (Senghor 1964:22,24) ["Emotion is to the Black what reason is to the Greek"].

The poet and former President of Senegal has not significantly altered his thought over the years. In a more recent essay he maintains that Blacks in the Middle East, Africa, India and the Americas have the same culture. It was also the culture of North Africa during the time of the Berbers and the Pharaohs of Egypt. According to Senghor this global Black culture is based on the same philosophy and religion, the same art and the same rhythm (1982:89).

Blyden's African Personality and Senghor's *Négritude* clearly seek a pan-negro philosophy which will restore dignity and value to Black culture everywhere. That is the reason that both concepts are akin to K. Nkrumah's *Consciencism*.

Viewed against the background of Blyden's and Senghor's thought, the proponents of Bantu philosophy appear to be looking for more localized ethnic philosophies. Such a conclusion, however, would be rather hasty. Tempels himself had a more general goal. He conducted his study of Bantu philosophy on the assumption that primitive peoples' conception of the universe rested on a logically coherent ontology. He also concluded that the best description of Bantu philosophy is that of vital force. This vital force is the center of Bantu thought and behavior (Tempels 1959:15,30,33). Tempels also claims that Bantu philosophy, as he describes it, "is perhaps that common to all primitive peoples, to all clan societies" (1959:26). Throughout Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*, one gets the impression that "Bantu" is ill-defined. Bantu,

primitive, semi-primitive, Black, and African are terms used somewhat synonymously. Tempels and his followers are therefore not very different from the philosophers of African Personality and *Négritude*. Their concern is the same: to restore the Black person and the primitive into full human dignity. This is aptly summarized by Tempels in these words: "anyone who claims that primitive peoples possess no system of thought, excludes them thereby from the category of men" (1959:16).

The quest for African philosophy was then motivated by the desire to include Africans in the category of rational human beings. For this, the different writers appealed to the Africans' right to difference. Their thought, though not Western, was nevertheless rational. Their philosophy, though different and collective, was no less philosophical than the works of Western thinkers. The proponents of African Personality, *Négritude*, Bantu philosophy, and African cultural unity all seem to posit a general and collective African thought. Apostel clearly moves in that direction when he states that "the structure of a worldview may be called a collective philosophy" (1981:15). J. S. Mbiti, for his part, finds African philosophy in "religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics and morals" (Mbiti 1969:2). Such collective, unreasoned philosophy, as one can see, encompasses the totality of what anthropologists call culture. African philosophy, in that sense, becomes another synonym for African culture, religion or worldview. In time the term ethnophilosophy was coined to describe this kind of collective folk thought. This leads directly to Apostel's Stage III in the development of African Philosophy.

### *Stage III*

Quite naturally, the assumptions of Stage II have come under examination and challenge. The critics generally point to two weaknesses in the concept of a collective African philosophy. These weaknesses are: the definition of philosophy and the origination of philosophy.

The critics in Stage III contend that proponents of ethnophilosophy misuse the term philosophy. F. Crahay, for instance, points out that Tempels' book rests on a confusion of meanings of the word philosophy; the colloquial usage is not distinguished from the technical one (Crahay 1975:328). This mistake, according to Crahay, leads Tempels into assuming a naive, implicit, irrational and immediate philosophy (Crahay 1975:330). One may equate worldview with philosophy only when philosophy is given a non-technical definition. Otherwise, philosophy as a second order reflection occurs at a later stage. Consequently, worldview can only be a proto-philosophy, a prelude to philosophy (that is, philosophy is to world view what theology is to religion).

The critics also maintain that philosophy, defined as critical reflection, cannot be a collective enterprise. Only individuals produce philosophies. To be sure the individual philosopher is influenced by his culture and the worldviews of



his society, but ultimately philosophies are produced by individuals, not by societies. The critics in Stage III, both Africans and Westerners, agree that philosophy is an individual exercise. Crahay, Hountondji, Towa and Wiredu may disagree on what constitutes a philosophical production. They all assume a definition of philosophy as a type of reflection which is explicit, analytic, radically critical and autocritical, with the courage to think the absolute (Crahay 1975:329; Towa 1979:7).

What are the implications of the criticisms of Stage III thinkers? Should one reject completely the concept of African philosophy? What is the best way of relating African traditional worldviews with philosophical thought? These questions point to the contours of Apostel's Stage IV.

#### *Stage IV*

Apostel thinks that the fourth stage in the development of African philosophy should be a synthesis of Stages II and III. This stage, according to him, has not yet been reached (Apostel 1981:10). But there may be, despite Apostel's position, the beginnings of Stage IV in the writings of K. Wiredu, M. Towa and N. Tshimalenga. K. Wiredu sees no problem in the fact that "there is a traditional African philosophy and there is an emerging modern African philosophy" (1980:xi). He suggests that "it is a particular . . . responsibility of African philosophers to research into the traditional background of their philosophical thought" (Wiredu 1980:36). Contemporary African philosophies should therefore be built, in part, on traditional worldviews.

M. Towa and N. Tshimalenga express similar ideas. M. Towa states: "not all cultures have philosophy, but all are capable of producing one" (Towa 1979:19). In other words, the ingredients for African philosophies are already present in African societies and cultures. It is the job of African philosophers to bring this potential to its full fruition.

N. Tshimalenga contends that philosophies are molded by "the impact of the more or less pre-philosophical traditions they inherited from religious and popular beliefs" (Tshimalenga 1981a:72). African philosophies would therefore differ from Western or Asian philosophies because of the different religious and cultural backgrounds.

"The search for the correct conception of African philosophy is part of the post-colonial African quest for identity" (Wiredu 1980:xi). As we reviewed the various stages of this quest for identity, we discovered that the debate moved from generalities to specifics. A more irenic situation is now being reached. African philosophy is no longer defined in opposition to Western philosophy. Yet African thinkers take traditional worldviews seriously. Today, the question is not: How African is this or that philosophy? Rather the question is: How may Africans contribute to philosophy? This has implications for other disciplines. As K. Wiredu puts it, "the sensible African will . . . try to develop

a particular orientation not in the disciplines themselves but in their application" (Wiredu 1980:26). With this in mind we turn to the question of African theology.

### 3. African theology, history and culture

The problems which have generated and governed the quest for African philosophy are essentially the same for African theology. That explains why N. Tshimalenga can claim that the proponents of Black philosophy, Black Theology, Bantu philosophy, African philosophy, and African Theology all have the same preoccupation: the rediscovery of African identity and the recapture of historical initiative (1981b:173). Somehow Africans want to be free to participate in theology and philosophy without just repeating what they learned from the Western masters!

The common origin and development of African theology and African philosophy is suggested by the fact that many writers on philosophy in Africa are also churchmen. Such is the case for both P. Tempels and J. S. Mbiti, for instance. If one adds to this the opinion of some who think that "African theology will of necessity depend on a genuinely African conceptual framework" (Maurier 1979:12), it becomes quite clear that one should not be studied without the other.

In a general way the quest for African theology is a reflection on the fact that Christianity came to the continent in the garments of Western cultures. This Western imprint on Christianity has had a negative effect on the development of African theology. One observer notes that African churches suffer from a real theological underdevelopment due to the cultural weight of Latin Christianity (Ela 1980:129). The same could be said about Protestant Christianity in Africa. In one way or another, African churches are the by-products of the Christian West (Ela 1980:132).

Since the Christianization of much of Africa took place during the nineteenth century and into the present century, the modern missionary movement in Africa is placed in an ambiguous position. Wittingly or unwittingly, missions in Africa contributed to the making of the Black man into the White man. That is why the quest for African theology is also a quest for selfhood and emancipation (Ela 1980:32-37; Hebga 1976:80; Tiénou 1984). Ela even adds that one cannot speak of local (or national) churches without granting them the right to difference (Ela 1980:134). We have seen that the same motivations explain the quest for African philosophy.

More specifically, Apostel's four-stage model can be used as a fruitful tool for understanding the phases of development in African theology. At first missionaries communicated what to them was clear universal Christian teaching, doctrine, and theology. At a later date, somewhere in the 1950's, a group of Westerners and Africans begin consciously to wrestle with the question of an

**African theology.** Note that this is roughly the time of Bantu philosophies, *Négritude* and political independence for many African countries. In this phase the emphasis is on the singular, African theology. At a still later date, people begin to express the idea that collective and general African theology is impossible to achieve. They suggest the plural, African theologies, to account for the cultural diversity of the continent. Polemics continue for some time. It seems that we are now reaching a more irenic stage, similar to that in the development in African philosophy, where general African characteristics are recognized without denying the need for specifics. In African theology, as in African philosophy, the stage is set for a new emphasis.

Whether it is African philosophy or African theology, one gets the feeling that we have just begun. The last thirty to forty years have laid the foundation, have established the legitimacy of the struggle for selfhood. It is now time to build and provide African contributions in these disciplines. K. Wiredu's comments appropriately sum up the present situation not only for African philosophy but also for African theology:

At present a lot of time is given by philosophers in Africa to talking about African philosophy as distinct from actually doing it . . . [It] is necessary at this stage to balance this concern with Meta-African philosophy with a readiness to get along with the task itself of modern philosophical thinking (Wiredu 1980:xi, italics in original).

The recent publication of full-length scholarly monographs in both disciplines is a sure sign of maturity. The right to difference, even for Africans, is now largely recognized. This is no small accomplishment.

#### 4. Conclusion

Most countries in Africa are now politically independent. Nearly all the continent's mission-related churches are led by Africans. Is there still need for a quest for selfhood and identity? The paradoxical situation of Africa is that the struggle for identity is now more acute than ever before. As long as Europe and the West continue to dominate the economy and educational systems of Africa, the quest for the right to difference will remain. That is why the question of identity is a central aspect of all types of reflection in Africa.

I have attempted to show here how the debates on African philosophy and African theology are rooted in the historical situation of Africa vis-a-vis Europe and the West. Essentially the debates have moved from the stage of complete rejection of things African to a more irenic situation where Africa and Africans are taken seriously in the symphony of nations and cultures. This more irenic situation in African philosophy and African theology came only after a period of majoring on the differences between the West and Africa.

The quest for the right to difference will likely continue in African theology for some time. Even today theological education in the continent is dominated

by Western funding and personnel. That in itself will fuel the impatience of a younger generation.

While African philosophy and African theology do indeed have common roots, they will in the future develop separately. In the past, churchmen were major contributors to the search for African philosophy. This is less and less true. Today the debate on African philosophy is increasingly secular, as it has moved to the universities. Already one hears that African philosophy in the future needs to be "freed from the Christian and classical Islamic falsifications that are deeply incompatible with it" (Apostel 1981:400). The claim is that traditional African worldviews are anthropocentric. Modern African philosophy, to be African, must return to this anthropocentrism! But whatever happens in the future will not alter the facts: modern philosophy in Africa shares a common pattern in origin and development with the search for *Theologia Africana*.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Based on a paper presented at the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College IL, USA, 16-19 June 1986.

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# THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Roberta R. King

Throughout the history of Christianity and God's interaction with the human race, music – mainly in the form of songs – has made a dynamic contribution in forwarding the work of the Kingdom of God. Martin Luther claimed that:

Next after theology, I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor. I would not exchange what little I know of music for something great (Bainton 1951:346).

Luther valued music immensely. The irony of his statement about possessing a limited knowledge of music is that Luther was very well-versed in music. He considered music a crucial element in theological education and ministry, emphasizing that “. . . before a youth is ordained into the ministry, he should practice music in school” (Plass 1959:980). For Luther, music went hand in hand with his theology. Not only did he honor music, but he employed music as the servant of his theology. Indeed, the Catholic Church recognized the power and efficacy of Luther's hymns; a Jesuit once testified that “the hymns of Luther killed more souls than his sermons” (ibid:346).

Music in theological education has an important role to play, especially on the African continent. As theological educators in Africa, we are concerned with the training of godly, knowledgeable, and practical men and women of God (see Adeyemo 1989). Servant leaders committed to building up the church and ministering in people's lives are urgently needed today. Music has two major contributions to make to the development of such leaders. First, when appropriately understood and applied, music has the potential to impact deeply the spiritual development of theological students by shaping them as godly, committed Christians. Second, training in music provides theological students with an indispensable tool for powerful ministry.

How does music fulfill this dual role in the shaping and training of church leadership? At least five major functions of music can contribute significantly in the training of effective church leadership. Music is able to serve as: 1) an effective ministry tool, 2) a worship facilitator, 3) a developer of theology, 4) a medium of Christian communication, and 5) an initiator of contextualization. Let us take a look at each of these functions.

### 1. Music Serves as an Effective Ministry Tool

First and foremost, music serves as an effective ministry tool. Church leaders often consider music to be outside of their domain. They rightly believe that they are trained to preach the Word of God. They do not consider, however, that music also plays a role in making God's Word known. Leaders in the Bible set a different example. They wisely included music in their theological preparation and ministry styles. Moses may well have been educated by the Egyptian priestly caste. Since such education included training in mathematics, music, and dance, one might say that Moses trained at the equivalent of a "Sacred Academy of Music" (Sendrey 1969:480).

Throughout his ministry, Moses used music as a major means to perform his leadership tasks. Following God's instructions to make two silver trumpets, Moses had these instruments used as signaling devices to call the Israelite community together and to sound battle cries, and for musical accompaniment at feasts and New Moon festivals as memorials to God (Num. 10:1-10,35-36).

Moses also employed song to provide a celebrative response of faith in the God who had delivered His people from the Egyptians. The "Song at the Red Sea" (Ex. 15:1-18), for example, takes on multiple approaches to ministry. It served initially as an immediate act of worship, then became a historical device quoted throughout Scripture, and ever since has functioned as a model for praise and victory songs.

On another occasion, again following the instructions of Yahweh, Moses taught the Israelites the song composed by God (Deut. 32), wisely using it as a teaching device. Thus Moses incorporated music into his leadership skills and ministry, integrating it within his total approach. In addition to his roles as priest, judge, and prophet, Moses is credited as the first music educator of the Hebrews (Sendrey and Norton 1964:4).

Other Biblical leaders also employed music in their leadership styles. Among them are Solomon with his literary output of 3,000 proverbs and 1005 songs (I Kings 4:32) and Hezekiah who restored the musical worship of Yahweh as the temple was reopened (2 Chron. 29).

David, however, is perhaps best known for musical prowess. Significant to David's development as a leader was his training as a prophet when he stayed with Samuel. Prophets such as Samuel had established brotherhoods that developed training schools. Included in their curriculum was apparently training in music— considered to be a necessary course in the "well-rounded education of religious leaders of the nation" (Sendrey 1969:531). If David trained in music at Samuel's school of prophecy, it had a major impact, for it was David who later established the essential musical organization entrusted to the Levites, and who composed numerous Psalms that contributed to the worship of God.

Music was not a separate aspect in the lives of these biblical leaders, isolated from their training and from their ministry styles. Rather, music formed an integral part of their personal spiritual development, their walk with God, and their leadership skills. And today also music can serve as an indispensable tool in effective ministry, when appropriately developed and utilized. Theological students need the opportunity to develop not only musical skills but also a working philosophy of music *in* ministry.

## 2. Music Serves as a Facilitator of Worship

Primary to effective ministry is meaningful worship; worship is at the heart of the Christian faith. Ultimately the Christian believer's greatest challenge is to worship the Father "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4.23, NIV), for God seeks those who worship in such a manner. Worship, as encounter with God, must be the main motivator for Christian living. Servant leaders must know how to lead God's people in genuine worship and praise.

An area of training that is sorely lacking in most theological institutions is the practical skill needed for leading in worship. Yet once theological students are in their field of ministry, they participate and lead in worship that most often uses singing.

Consider how often Christians meet for worship. Indeed, worship services are the most frequent and regular activity of the church. Now visualize those worship services without singing. Omitting music certainly would save time, but people would go away and perhaps not come back, commenting that they had not worshiped. Worshipful singing allows us to offer a meaningful "sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13:15) to our God, and to encounter God in a way that shapes how we live out our Christian lives during the week.

One reason for including music in theological education is to train men and women to participate in and lead in worship. We need to develop in godly men and women the regular habit of worship through music, and the ability to lead such worship corporately, recognizing that "God operates on the power of praise, sacrifice and humility of heart" (Hayford 1987:82). By equipping our students with such experience and such skills, we will powerfully affect the church as a whole, enabling music to serve its proper biblical role in our churches as a facilitator of worship.

## 3. Music Serves to Develop Theological Understanding

It is in the midst of worship that our theology is shaped at its deepest levels. And music, as worship, therefore participates in theological development. Song texts play a major part in establishing our theological opinions; what we sing most often becomes the essence of our theology. In analyzing the growth of Christianity in the Solomon Islands, for example, Alan Tippett points out that:



**In the absence of Bible, prayer-book and an adequate catechism, it was natural for the hymns to serve as the theological frame of reference for the belief and practice of the emerging church 1967:286).**

Tippett goes on to demonstrate the theological understandings of two differing church groups by measuring the frequency and theological content of songs sung in Sunday morning worship services. His findings show that one church had a strong emphasis on works, while the other church dwelt on faith and the worship of a high God. Neither group of believers had a balance of the two teachings, and this was reflected in the practical outworking of their village life. The theological content of the songs shaped their fleshing out of the Christian faith.

Similarly in Africa, the theological development and understanding of Senufo Christians in Cote d'Ivoire can be seen by comparing the texts of early Senufo Christian songs with those that have developed in more recent years (see King 1989:205-238). Senufo Christians have developed their own unique singing styles and created their own hymnody. And growth in their understanding of God is reflected in their songs. The early picture of Christianity was one of "displaying glimpses of the potential of freedom from slavery to the spirits," whereas "concepts of God and growth in relationship to Him have developed and are revealed in the later songs" (ibid:238). The songs encapsulate the essence of their Christian growth, both reflecting and developing it. The sermons they have heard, their own personal study of Scripture, and times of worship and prayer become the well-springs for their musical thoughts.

Understanding the influential role of songs in relationship to theological development calls for a change in our perception and understanding of music. Music and songs are not merely fillers or entertainment. Neither are they only a prelude to the sermon, although they may help to prepare for receiving a sermon. Rather, Christian songs function as sermons in their own right. The singing of songs allows participants to internalize the message of the songs and expressions of faith intimately related to the Word of God. Songs shape our understanding of God. It is crucial, therefore, for theological students to recognize the influence of music in shaping a people's theological understanding and to learn to employ it effectively for the Kingdom.

#### **4. Music Serves as a Medium of Christian Communication**

Not only does music effectively articulate a people's theology but it also serves as a medium of communication. Indeed, music is communication. This is a major assumption within African societies. Traditionally music has been used to communicate a great variety of messages. On the coast of Senegal a Wolof woman, with fruit piled high in her bowl balanced atop her head, sings her announcement of the type of fruit for sale and its price. Jomo Kenyatta used

music for political communication by setting his election platform to song. The songs traveled across the country informing the people of Kenyatta's position.

Theological institutions need to recognize the importance of music as a means for Christian communication. Music's capacity for Christian communication is not limited to worship services and occasional mass evangelistic meetings. Rather, it can be effectively employed for communicating the Gospel in evangelism, discipleship, prayer meetings, spiritual warfare, and leadership training.

Senugo believers, for example, claim that songs instruct them "like the word of God." They explain:

The songs help us as far as they teach us, showing us the path of truth and praising the Lord. Their teaching goes to the depths of our hearts, teaching your heart if you are good or bad. Then they tell you what you should do about it (King 1989:269).

As they are singing their songs, whether at an all-night evangelistic meeting or at a morning worship service, they are processing the content of the songs and applying them to their particular life situation. They find the songs helping them in their commitment to Christ, in calming their emotions, in participating in church life, and in applying Scripture to their lives.

Theological education in Africa has been functioning on a borrowed model that limits the use of music for effective Christian communication in Africa. Thankfully, this has not stopped the church in Africa, on a non-formal level, from successfully employing music as communication. Such an approach needs to be developed more fully and to be officially recognized. Africa, with her dynamic models of music communication, can offer the world new, bold, and creative approaches to employing music wisely for the advancement of the Kingdom. Such an approach needs to be developed at our theological institutions.

### **5. Music Serves as an Initiator of Contextualization**

Finally, the use of culturally appropriate music serves as a major means of bringing the gospel message home, of making it relevant and meaningful to people within their own worlds. The problem of making the Christian message relevant within various societies, including the African context, remains an on-going issue confronting the serious Christian communicator. Too often in church history the Gospel has been presented as a foreign religion. Too often it has been accompanied by the introduction of culturally unrecognizable musical instruments and forms. Suggestions for change abound. Indeed, Byang Kato recognized years ago that:

Musical instruments such as organ and piano can be replaced or supplemented with such indigenous and easily acquired instruments as drums, cymbals, and cornstalk instruments. . . . While the content of God's word should remain what it is, the expression of it in teaching, preaching, and singing should be made relevant (1985:24).

Beyond the mere substitution of musical instruments, however, music in culturally appropriate forms can serve as an initiator of meaningful contextualization. Appropriate musical forms must spring from the cultural heritage and musical vocabulary of a particular nation or ethnic group. At the same time, such musical expression must be regulated and evaluated by Christian guidelines and exigencies. Indeed, the content of God's word expressed through relevant singing stimulates a more genuine understanding of the Gospel message, resulting in creative contextualization.

Creative contextualization communicates by means of culturally relevant forms, but goes beyond the mere borrowing of previously existing forms. It is the process of developing new forms (i.e. songs), appropriate to the Christian faith, from within a cultural context. Again we can see how Senegalese Christians initiated such a course on their own. Their newly created song style, an adaptation from storytelling songs, allows them to present and reflect upon a large text load. As they compose songs based on Scripture, they are naturally processing theological concepts (see King 1989). This is done at a level that allows them to digest the content to such an extent that local Christians are nourished in satisfying ways and can make their own personal applications of the text. This song form also allows the people to express meaningfully the ways in which God is dealing in their lives, with the result that they are not just living vicariously on the experience of foreign Christian composers. Rather, God speaks to them as they interact with His Word through music in the midst of their own situation.

The composition of new Christian songs drawing from the repertoire of African musical idioms affords a new approach for meeting the need "to make Christianity culturally relevant while holding fast to its ever-abiding message" (Kato:31). Christianity must become relevant not only in outward forms but also in biblically-sound theological concepts and life-changing applications for the incarnation of Christianity in Africa. Through appropriate musical training, theological education needs to take up and facilitate meaningful, creative contextualization that says that God is at home in Africa, that He is for us.

### 6. A Concluding Challenge

Africa today faces a great challenge. Some years ago Kenneth Kaunda claimed that "Christianity is preached in Africa, but it is not practiced" (Desai 1962:2). The role of music in theological education offers an opportunity to go beyond well-intended yet often surface-level communication of the Gospel. Appropriately developed Christian music grooms godly men and women in the disciplines of holiness and prepares them for potentially powerful ministries. Such music helps Christians not only to acquire head-knowledge, but also to become committed people of God who live out their faith and express it in love (Gal. 5:6).

Music training in theological education needs to be based on a philosophy of music as an integral part of ministry. Our theological institutions need to recognize music as an essential, integral part of their curricula, for music holds in its grasp the ability to function as a servant in worship, in theological development, in effective communication of the Gospel, and in the meaningful contextualization of Christianity.

The challenge for theological educators, then, is to go beyond the recognition of music's potential for shaping servant leaders and for building up the Church. Music is an indispensable tool for Christian leaders which should automatically be included in the theological student's total educational package. Such music training must include not only practical skills in music but also music leadership skills relevant to our African context. It is an exciting and imperative challenge that our institutions can no longer afford to overlook. We must act.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Whole Gospel for the Whole World:  
Story of Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelization, Manila 1989*  
editor, Alan Nichols  
Charlotte NC/Ventura CA: Lausanne Committee  
for World Evangelization/Regal Books, 1989  
144 pages; \$7.95

In a short 144 pages, this book captures the major highlights of the Lausanne II Congress, held in Manila in July 1989. The book is an excellent record, a "tell it as it happened" synopsis, of this historic event, which it places quite unapologetically in line with earlier, better-known church councils that have focused worldwide mission strategy. True to what has come to be known as the Lausanne spirit, the book concentrates on issues which define the mission of the church today. Under the themes "The Whole Church", "The Whole Gospel" and "The Whole World", an attempt has been made to synthesize for the reader the proceedings both in plenary sessions and in the workshops.

Lausanne II was a meeting of evangelicals from many parts of the world. Its avowed concern was to revisit, reevaluate and rekindle a concern for the 12,000 unreached people groups, or the 2.7 billion people that have yet to be evangelized. In the process of study, fellowship, debate and interchange, the meeting served as a stimulus for the church to proclaim Christ until He comes. One anticipates that, as with the Lausanne I, there will result some identifiable evangelistic initiatives generated directly from the Lausanne II Congress.

In this brief review I will concentrate on issues raised at Lausanne II, and referred to in this book, which are of special significance for Africa. Let me begin with the issue of evangelism and social responsibility. Adequate attention needed to be given to how evangelicals might better harmonize what is being said with what is being done in this area. There is an African saying that you can tell whether a chick will grow to be a hen or a cock by the way it stands. Because of widespread poverty and decreasing per capita incomes in many African countries, social concern will have to gain more prominence as an integral aspect of evangelism.

Also a theology and application of biblical justice can no longer be sidelined in Africa. The realities of Africa, with wars, famines, violation of human rights, dictatorships, coups and counter-coups, call for contextualization of the gospel as God's liberating force. The proclamation must be reinforced by the

incarnational aspect of the gospel. Throughout the proceedings of Lausanne II there was a very sobering emphasis on the credibility of the messenger. As the *Manila Manifesto* aptly puts it:

We are charged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ, for the watching world rightly seeks evidence to substantiate the claims which Christ's disciples make for him. A strong evidence is our integrity" (page 118).

It is of particular significance that Lausanne II laid much weight on the mandate of the laity. There is a growing awareness in many churches of the need to be free from the traditional bureaucratic domination that binds the laity, hand and foot, limiting that massive human and intellectual energy that could otherwise be mobilized for evangelism.

Lausanne II had a strong message for the African male-dominated church to appreciate the gifts with which God has endowed women. The proverbial theological conservatism of evangelicals will certainly be a blockage to any movement towards a positive view on the role of women in the church. This conservatism has led to ambiguity and contention in response to women's claims to equal leadership in the church. It is a well-established fact that whereas women are in the majority in many congregations, leadership is largely in the hands of men. The sheer number of women puts a large question mark over against the validity of this state of affairs.

Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo gave a comprehensive definition of the Gospel in his address to the Congress, which challenged the superficial individualistic popular understanding of the term. In his address he rejected syncretism, as among those practices that tend to place Christ not as Lord, but as "a lord", in a gallery among many others. His definition gave room, too, for social concern and socio-political involvement as necessary expressions of authentic evangelicalism. Africa is bedeviled by numerous socio-political woes and immense human suffering to which the Gospel has to respond. The whole gospel for Africa will therefore be redemptive of the whole person, body, mind and soul.

Several speakers addressed themselves to the impact on evangelism of other religions and of modernization. These are of great importance to Africa, where Islam has assumed tremendous militancy. Modernization and secularism too have taken their toll on the ranks of believers. Another growing problem, though by no means unique to Africa, is nominalism. The Congress also opened the eyes of participants to the looming crisis in many Third World cities. This is the problem of rural-urban migration, and the evolution of slum and squatter settlements. In Nairobi, for example, close to 75% of the residents live in slums.

Out of the Congress came the *Manila Manifesto*. The book contains the complete text of the Manifesto. Certainly this will become an essential document for churches to study, and where necessary take action. The two themes

of the Manifesto are totally applicable to the task of evangelism in Africa, namely: "Proclaim Christ until He comes" and "Calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world."

The question that remains unanswered is just how the spirit of Lausanne II will continue. Of course, it remains fervent in the hearts of the 4000 participants, as well as in the national voluntary committees that gather from time to time to consider their efforts for the evangelization of the unreached in each country. As article 14 of the earlier *Lausanne Covenant* renders it, world-wide evangelization will become a realistic possibility only when the Spirit renews the church in truth and wisdom, faith, holiness, love and power.

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*Summary of the Nairobi Church Survey*  
Stan Downes, Robert Oehrig, and John Shane  
(Nairobi: Daystar University College, 1989)  
100 pages; Ksh 40/

There is an Ashanti proverb in which the tortoise says, "Haste is a good thing and deliberation is also a good thing." Before us now in the little book we review, is an affirmation of the wisdom especially of the latter half of that proverb. Patient perseverance always rewards with rich dividends. And when those dividends promise enrichment for the life and evangelism of the church, we can be even more grateful.

For this book we can be especially grateful. As its title indicates, it is a summary written in easy English, not for the experts and theoreticians, but for church planters and gospel dreamers of Africa, who want to see God's church grow in the great cities increasingly dotting the African landscape. The focus of the book is on the city of Nairobi, and it should be in the home of every Nairobi Christian. But its approach, and the methodology by which it proceeds, in fact contain valuable lessons for churches around the world.

The book comes to us after years of painstaking and costly research under the auspices of Daystar University College. Behind it lies a comprehensive study project and report (available at the College) entitled, *Nairobi: Christian Outreach in a World-Class City*, which was coordinated by Larry Niemeyer, with editorial assistance from Robert Oehrig and Elizabeth Bassett. We can

only guess at the character of that study. The summary contains no description of the more elaborate study, and offers us only a few general suggestions as to how it was carried on. For the average Nairobi church leader, this probably is not necessary. For those of us outside of Nairobi and interested in doing surveys similar to this one, a few pages describing the history of the project, the methodology and the questions asked would have been valuable. Are there plans to put such materials into separate print? It could be most useful.

The summary divides itself easily into three parts – the context of the city, the briefest section in the book; an overview of the demographics of the church in Nairobi (approximately half of the book); and recommendations for implementing the data gathered in the study (14 pages). Simple graphs are abundant and key information is frequently repeated in boxes throughout the pages. It is as “user-friendly” a piece of research of this type as I have ever seen. An index might have made it even more so.

No one can leave this book without being challenged. What of the discrepancy between the 75-80% of Nairobi’s residents who claim to be Christians and the 8% who attend church each week? Why is it that this figure has remained constant over the past twenty years in the face of Nairobi’s rapid urbanization? Why should the 30% segment of Nairobi’s citizens who are unemployed and with the lowest income be significantly under-represented in the church? What is being done to reach the city’s unreached peoples: the Muslims who make up 10% of the city’s population, the 5-10% who are followers of Africa’s traditional religions, the social sub- cultures, and the international community of nearly 100,000 expatriates in the city? Why is it that ethnic people groups which are unreached in the rural areas continue to remain outside of the influence of the churches in Nairobi?

These selected questions, and many others like them, are not left unanswered. The final section of the book especially offers recommendations that speak in a general way to these issues. And implicit in those suggestions is some exciting pioneer work waiting to be done, as pastors and church leaders experiment with some new models on the streets and in the districts of Nairobi.

May I express the hope that in future editions there will be some significant expansion of the first part of the summary, the section on the city. As it is, it is almost anecdotal to the whole work. And yet, there are important clues for church growth in the study of urban sociology and demographics that need more attention.

Some suggestions, for example, on how migration takes place into the city might more effectively link church planting efforts in both Nairobi and the rural areas. Some discussion of social classes, and how they are defined in Kenyan culture, would open the church to searching with more sophistication for “unreached people groups” among more than ethnic communities. The impact of the city on family and kin relationships, the relative rise in sig-



nificance of "secondary social relationships" in the city (vocations, friends, etc.) are all urban clues for the church planter. One of the helpful challenges given in the last section of the book is a call for a "new understanding of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility" (pp79-80). Outlining in a practical way in the first part of the book how the social and political systems of the city work might underline that challenge and provide some concrete ideas for implementation.

Perhaps expanding this part of the book might also open another dimension to the growth of the church which I hope future editions of this fine work will give more attention to, namely the relation of the churches to the urban communities in which they are located, and the contribution the individual Christian is called to make as "salt and light" in the city's systems.

The nominalism that is a great concern of this survey will not be solved simply by more new congregations and better church attendance. That is surely crucial. But another important part of the answer will come when the church and its members see themselves as "a city on a hill" (Matt. 5:14) and behave as lights should in a city.

Over 600 Nairobi congregations were visited and nearly 400 church leaders interviewed to gather this data. Could the last section of the book offering recommendations have included some quotations and case studies to make the summary more concrete? Or can we encourage a follow-up volume that will reinforce this one?

The churches of Nairobi (and the rest of us as well) have now in their hands a valuable asset and a powerful challenge. May it stir us all to more than merely exciting reading.

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*Nairobi Baptist Church: Through 30 Years of Worship*  
 by Emi M Gichinga  
 (Nairobi: [Nairobi Baptist Church, 1989])  
 ix, 128 pages; Ksh 40/

For those interested in the growth and ministry of local congregations in Africa, this recent publication on Nairobi Baptist Church will offer stimulating

reading. Nairobi Baptist Church is in several ways a unusual church. It has pioneered in many areas of church ministry in one of Africa's leading urban centres. It has had a distinguished line of pastors, two of whom (Gottfried Osei-Mensah and Tom Houston) have gone on to become international directors of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Almost every Sunday the crowds of attenders overflow the church's three morning services. This church provides a challenging example for local churches elsewhere on the continent.

The book's ten chapters cover the history of the church from its founding in 1958, the church's membership, its governance, pastors, and ministries, including its spiritual and social outreach. The author, Emi Gichinga, is a member of Nairobi Baptist Church and the wife of one of its pastors. A graduate of the University of Nairobi, she also directs the Crisis Pregnancy Ministries of Kenya. Her book succinctly illustrates several basic qualities which have characterized Nairobi Baptist Church through the years and which commend it for wider attention.

1. The founding members of the church determined from the very start that the church was to be self-supporting. Over the whole period of thirty years, the church has been entirely responsible for its pastors' salaries. Three of the pastors have been British, one was Ghanaian, one Ugandan, and two Kenyan. The church has supported all of them throughout without any subsidy. Likewise the membership has paid for all physical facilities without assistance from overseas. The church's support of local outreach ministries has also been exemplary. It has always tithed its income to support other organizations and ministries outside its own activities; currently over 30% of its income is devoted to such ministries.
2. From the very beginning the church decided to be an international, multi-racial community. This was particularly challenging thirty years ago, when Kenya was a segregated colonial society. Of the twenty founding members, 2 were African, 5 were Asian, and 13 were European. Opposition to this multi-racial policy existed within the church, but the commitment of the leadership made the difference. Today the congregation has become predominantly African (more than 70%), but because Nairobi itself is very much an international community, the membership remains a rich mixture of many cultures and nationalities.
3. Nairobi Baptist Church decided at its beginning to become an open-membership church. The only criteria for membership was a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. While the church practices believers baptism by immersion, this was not made a condition of membership. This decision meant that the congregation could not be affiliated to the East African Baptist Union. The church chose to go it alone in order to serve all Christians. This commitment has been carried out to the limit. The present two pastors have Anglican

and Presbyterian beginnings, and the congregation is quite diverse within an evangelical frame of reference.

4. The church from the start also committed itself to the expository preaching of God's Word. It has always endeavoured to recruit pastors who had that gift, and through the years it has become widely known for the quality of biblical exposition from its pulpit. Undoubtedly this is a principal reason for the nearly 2000 who regularly attend Sunday morning services.

5. The founding members of Nairobi Baptist Church committed themselves to innovation as the Holy Spirit guided them. For example, the church pioneered outreach to the youth of Nairobi, establishing a very popular Sunday youth service, which is led by the church youth themselves, with the kind of music they prefer. These services continue to be crowded out. The church also pioneered in the use of guitars in church services in Nairobi. And Kenya Youth for Christ was started through the efforts of Nairobi Baptist Church.

*Nairobi Baptist Church: Through 30 Years of Worship* is a book informed Christians everywhere should read. It illustrates the urgent need to start new churches on right foundations. Such principles have not been easy to sustain, but owing to commitment by the leadership much good has come despite many difficult situations. I recommend this book for the attention of church leaders and theological colleges throughout Africa. [The book is available through Keswick Bookshop, PO Box 10242, Nairobi, Kenya.]

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*The Ethics of the New Testament*  
by Wolfgang Schrage  
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988)  
369 pages; \$29.95

If you are an evangelical and a student of the Christian faith, your primary authority, and your starting point for theology and for sermons and, indeed, for your whole life, is Scripture. This means that you should first read good introductions to the Old and New Testaments and then good theologies of the same. Then what? Turn to historical, systematic and applied theology? Not yet. You missed a genre of literature all too frequently ignored in biblical studies, namely biblical ethics.

Wolfgang Schrage, professor of New Testament at the University of Bonn in Germany, may easily be considered the dean of biblical ethics. He has published a considerable number of books and articles in the field for about thirty years, and recently some of this literature has been translated from German into English. This most recent book to be translated is what might be considered his crowning work. First published in German in 1982, it is easily one of the best of its kind, and for that reason needs to be a frequently consulted reference tool in our theological libraries. It is also a good resource for ideas for ethically-focused sermons. Acquaintance with the jargon, categories, and concerns of New Testament studies is assumed, but knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is not necessary for the reader.

*The Ethics of the New Testament* is divided into nine chapters: "Jesus' Eschatological Ethics;" "Ethical Beginnings in the Earliest Congregations;" "Ethical Accents in the Synoptic Gospels;" "The Christological Ethics of Paul;" "The Ethics of Responsibility in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles;" "Parenesis in the Epistle of James;" "The Commandment of Brotherly Love in the Johannine Writings;" "Exhortations Addressed to the Pilgrim People in the Epistle to the Hebrews;" and "Eschatological Exhortation in the Book of Revelation." Each chapter begins with a select biography (understandably weighted toward German literature), while the book concludes with a topical bibliography (4 pages). Also included are an introduction on the nature of New Testament ethics and a Scripture/primary source index.

What you do not get is much material on 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, or Jude. You do not get a history of interpretation of New Testament ethics, nor an analysis of the New Testament's ethical vocabulary. You do not get very much interaction with Christian moral thought through the centuries. You do not get hermeneutical reflection on how the Biblical material may be used today. And you do not get a summary or concluding chapter.

There are two reasons for this last omission: Schrage's introduction covers some of this ground, and also he asserts that there is no such thing as a New Testament ethic. Thus each author's voice must be heard separately (p. 3). Granted, but there are three reasons why Schrage should have included such a conclusion: (i) because he views each author through a consistently applied frame; (ii) because he sees interesting similarities and differences in the various NT authors, which are noted throughout the book but not gathered together in conclusion; and (iii) because a legitimate historical-critical concern to appreciate distinctions between authors should not overshadow canonical concerns, if one is to do New Testament ethics properly. That is, the discipline by its very nature invites reflection on the unity and diversity of the canon.

Schrage's methodological framework for analyzing New Testament ethics consists of the following categories: the theological foundation for ethics; the

nature and structure of the Christian life; substance and material criteria for ethics; concrete ethics. Any methodology has its limitations, but Schrage's is able to examine the various dimensions of the New Testament texts through this framework. Even so, I prefer a frame which not only includes the theological foundation, source, context, and substance of ethics (as Schrage's does), but which more systematically distinguishes guidance, motivation, and empowering in the moral life. These topics are not by any means ignored by Schrage; they are just not systematically investigated.

Certain presuppositions and conclusions in this book will be discomfiting for most evangelical readers. Some may feel a bit uncomfortable with Schrage's concern in the Gospels to distinguish which material goes back to Jesus and which is a product of the early church or the Gospel redactor (chapter two tends to the concerns of form and tradition criticisms and chapter three to redactional interests). One should remember, however, that these are legitimate exegetical questions, even if presuppositionally one is concerned with the text as it stands and not some probable reconstruction of stages preceding it. And most evangelicals will chafe under Schrage's determination that some letters from the Pauline corpus not only were not written by Paul but also in fact have an ethic at odds with Paul's. Schrage argues that ethics in the Pastorals are "much more prosaic, pedestrian, bourgeois, moralistic" than Paul's (p. 257). However, since such accusations are defended at length, Schrage's work provides an excellent bit of iron on which others may sharpen their tools for exegesis and ethical inquiry.

If the whole of Schrage's book were a negative polemic against the ethics of the New Testament (as is Jack Sanders, *Ethics of the New Testament*), I would be less enthusiastic about recommending it to the readers of this journal. In fact, the analyses offered by Schrage are generally favorable to the text's viewpoints and are often insightful, even profound. I found his analyses of the ethics of Jesus, Paul, 1 Peter, the Gospel of John, and Revelation (the bulk of the book) most interesting and generally convincing.

Some of the arguments might be noted here. With respect to the theological foundation for ethics, Schrage emphasizes the role of christology: the ethics of the NT share as their "criterion and basis . . . God's saving act in Jesus Christ" (p. 8). In Jesus' ethics this is more implicit, since ethics is grounded in the teaching that the Kingdom of God is already here and also impending, but Jesus is the One Who brings the Kingdom. This theological ground for ethics in the New Testament means that the indicative of God's salvation is the foundation for the imperative (ethical exhortation), that God's love and grace are the foundation, guidance, motivation, and empowering for ethics (my terms).

For Paul, ethics are grounded on Pauline christological, sacramental, pneumatologic-charismatic, and eschatological bases. According to Schrage,

the christological basis for ethics changes outside of Paul. In Ephesians and Colossians the emphasis is more on the risen exalted Lord than on the cross; in the Pastorals it is more on the incarnation. The sacramental basis for ethics—a changed person through baptism and the giving of the Spirit—is barely noted in the Pastorals. Instead, one finds that the pneumatologic-charismatic basis for ethics has been commandeered in service of ecclesiastical office and preservation of doctrine. The eschatological basis also changes outside Paul. While the fading of imminent eschatological hopes in the early church was not the reason for the beginning of ethical concerns, as some have argued (e.g., Dibelius), the fading of these hopes did nevertheless affect Christian theology and ethics. The eschatological basis for ethics, so crucial in Paul's undisputed letters, is fading in the Pastorals and in Luke, and John's Gospel has a radical realized eschatology.

With respect to the nature and structure of the Christian life, the NT writers and Jesus agree that the whole of life is claimed by God, and that works, not just right intent, are expected of the one who has received God's promise of salvation. Schrage does think, however, that James (ch. 2) flatly disagrees with Paul on this issue, when James argues that works are necessary for salvation. Two of Schrage's major points throughout the book place him over against existentialist and situational ethics (e.g., R. Bultmann). NT ethics are, to be sure, *situational and subjective* (e.g., relying on the changed nature and on the Spirit's guidance and empowering), but they are also, at times, *authoritative and external* (cf. especially pp. 187-195). Moreover, NT writers and Jesus repeatedly translate the love command (or other general ethical principles) into *concrete* activities.

With respect to the substance (content) and material criteria (sources and context) of ethics, Schrage traces the views of the various authors on, e.g., the use of the Old Testament, Jesus' words and conduct, the Jewish and Graeco-Roman context, etc. for ethics. Jesus himself, as well as the NT authors, accepted the OT as an authoritative source only selectively and critically. For example, Schrage writes that the "OT must first become the 'law of Christ' and be interpreted with respect to its true intention (Gal. 6.2); only then can it be the measure of Christian life" (p. 206; on Jesus, cf. pp. 55-68). James may affirm the authority of the entire OT, but he "silently discards" the cultic and ceremonial laws (p. 287). The words of Jesus become law for James, and they are authoritative for Paul too. But these and other criteria take second place to the command to love as a hermeneutical key to using the OT for ethics and as a heuristic key for the Christian life. This command is also subject to different applications by the NT writers, according to Schrage, but it is one of the major unifying factors for ethics in the NT.

These are the sort of issues and comments one finds in this book (along with their proof, of course). I have selected only some of the conclusions drawn throughout the book in order to show the type of discussion that the reader

will find. (And it is just this sort of assembling of conclusions that could have formed part of the missing conclusion chapter!)

I am reticent to offer criticism of one from whom I have learned so much, and to do so in so short a space. Yet my own thinking on New Testament ethics leads me to offer a few suggestions. I was especially displeased with Schrage's handling of the Pastoral epistles. The claim that soteriology is now primarily incarnational and not cross-focused seems, on the one hand, to make a distinction which does not always apply (e.g., Phil. 2.6ff; 1 Tim. 3.16; 2 Tim. 1.10) and, on the other, to be false for the Pastorals—Christ is the one who died for us, is the reigning Lord, and will come again as Judge (cf. 1 Tim. 2.5f; 6.13; 2 Tim. 2.8-13; 4.1; Tit. 2.13f; 3.4-7). With respect to the substance and material criteria of ethics in the Pastorals, Schrage says that there is no reference to conformity to Christ (p. 259). But in 1 Tim. 6.13 Paul gives the one and only clear reference in the epistles to being conformed to the pattern of the life of Jesus. Furthermore, no adequate accounting of the Pastoral's ethics is possible without reference to suffering and mission, and fair appraisal of the theology and ethics of the Pastorals is impossible without tracing supposedly new doctrinal and ecclesiastical themes in the undisputed letters (e.g., concern for ecclesiastical and doctrinal authority).

Undoubtedly some will wish for a different emphasis in the book, such as more attention to the sociological factors contributing to early Christian ethics (cf., e.g., Ralph Martin's commentary on James, which argues that much of Jacobian parenthesis results from the divisions between wealthy and poor priests just prior to the outbreak of war with the Romans in the 60's). My own work in Pauline ethics has led me to appreciate reading Paul's ethics from the perspective of a character-informing and community-producing Gospel "Story" (so-called "narrative ethics"). Such a perspective is by no means at odds with a strictly Biblical theological approach but certainly opens up new windows through which old problems might be viewed. I am also inclined to argue that this Gospel Story has a "missionary" dimension, calling us to make it our story not only in personal ethics but also in adopting God's mission as a "foundation" for ethics (and so not only eschatology but also a christologically defined mission for the interim time defines Christian conduct). At a few points Schrage comes close to saying that the Gospel as "Story" and God's mission are important for ethics, such as when he describes the ethics of Hebrews as for a pilgrim people, or says that 1 Peter speaks less of Jesus as a model for life than as showing the path to be taken, and that the author also calls for a missionary apologetic for conduct (p. 273; cf. also pp. 51, 309, 318). I believe that both themes, "Gospel Story" and "Mission", deserve more prominence in a study of New Testament ethics.

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*Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists*  
 by Philip M Steyne  
 (Houston TX: Touch Publications, 1989)  
 272 pages

In *Gods of Power*, Philip Steyne of Columbia Biblical Seminary in South Carolina, USA, has given us his reflections on an area that urgently needs solid biblical consideration in today's church. Steyne's core idea is worth pondering: animism, or some form of it, is at the heart of every non-Christian religion. Furthermore, even Christianity as actually practiced by many today has at its core remnants of an animistic outlook. Leaving aside for the moment the questionable use of the term "animism" and the evident tendency to reductionism, this thesis carries powerful implications in several areas, most notably for thinking about contextualization and about the role of traditional religions in providing entry points for the gospel.

Steyne defines the religion of the animist as "a system of beliefs, feelings, and behavior which issue in rites, rituals, and liturgies, by which familiar spirit-beings are manipulated to provide success, happiness and security in all of life" (p. 29). He also adds:

Animism is simultaneously pantheistic, polytheistic and deistic. The animist lives in a "spiritual" world as over against the techno-scientific world of the westerner. His world is humanistic and socialistic rather than individualistic and/or democratic. He strives for a world of balance and harmony rather than one of competition, although he is not free from competitive motives. His ultimate concerns relate to the "who" and "why" of the exigencies of life, rather than the "what" and "how" (p. 36).

Several positive contributions of the book may be noted. First, the book is well organized and very readable. The overview of the basic philosophy and practices of animists constitutes a reasonable survey of a broad spectrum of cultures. Steyne's introductory survey and definitions are concise and clear, and enable the reader to read the rest of the book knowing what Steyne means by the terminology used. A second strength is that his writing covers a broad (indeed a global) sweep of belief systems, and shows how apparently disparate examples from various religions may be essentially tied into a simple unifying explanation. Steyne does not say that all religions follow the same creeds or practices—rather he maintains that they all appear to be built on a common root philosophy (or world view) which is animistic in nature. A third strength is his recognition of the persistency of the "animistic core" of any religious world view (see p. 188). It is certainly helpful in explaining phenomena often noted in Christian literature on this continent (e.g. that in times of crisis Christians tend to revert to more traditional ways for help, such as diviners.) This is linked with a fourth strength of the book, namely the recognition that many Christians have imported an animistic core into their Christian faith and practice (pp. 48-52). Though the basic idea of a syncretistic approach among



many Christians is not new, Steyne's presentation of how we do it is clear and powerful, reminding us of the need to acknowledge that we have not "fully arrived". A fifth strength is Steyne's proposition that Christianity is the ultimate "power" religion, which does not separate "spirit" from "nature", and that we need to realise this if we are to make inroads in seeing the Gospel touch the core of the animistic adherent (pp. 19-20; 240).

In addition to these strengths, we must acknowledge several weaknesses. The first is a direct consequence of trying to unify many systems under a single heading, namely the problem of reductionism. The professional anthropologist would never accept the book's central thesis. I find it difficult at best to agree that any single "core" is at the root of *every* religion in the world, unless that core is defined so loosely that it is stripped of all possible significance. Steyne never really addresses this issue in the book, though at least he does give a brief apology for his use of "animism" (p. 16), a term now discredited among anthropologists and sociologists.

Unfortunately, to this reductionism is linked a tendency towards overstatement to prove the case. For example, Steyne writes, "While spirit-possession is *deviant* in western society, it is considered a *norm* in animistic society" (p. 136; emphasis mine). Both ends of this assertion may be debated, and it would certainly not apply across the full spectrum of either society. A second example is when Steyne equates the naming of children after departed ancestors with "reincarnation" (pp. 61 and 63); this may be true in some cultures, but certainly not in all of them! A third example is his caricature of the animist: "Thinking out something is wearisome and to be avoided. It is an exercise in futility" (p. 178). If this is true of all animists, how does Steyne explain, for example, the myriad of Hindu writings which reflect very deep thinking about the nature of the world?

Closely linked to this are several statements that border on paternalism— "Though animistic man is *self-centered, self-conceited and self-conscious*, he tends to do nothing without the group" (p. 182, emphasis mine), and "Although there may be some exceptions, a commonality . . . is the *fact* that there is no fundamental basis for moral action" (p. 191, emphasis mine). At the very least Steyne is undiplomatic, and such statements will be read by non-Westerners as the continued self-proclamation of Western "supremacy".

The last weakness of the book that we will mention are the numerous typographical errors, especially in the endnotes for the chapters (*every* chapter has at least one mistake in the reference notes). The proliferation of these errors made it easy to focus on the mistakes and not pay enough attention to the content— with the net result that I found reading the book to be a frustrating exercise.

In spite of these weaknesses, some important issues are raised by Steyne's study that are relevant for our context. First is the global perspective of Steyne.

If we can avoid a reductionistic tendency, theologians wrestling with important issues relative to African traditional religions can greatly benefit from recognizing how problems similar to their own are being addressed elsewhere in the world. For example, there is a wealth of literature on ancestral understandings in Asian Christian perspective, but very few authors writing in the African context show any awareness of this literature. The discussion on both continents could surely benefit from greater global awareness that many of the problems faced in one location are being addressed in another.

A second issue which the book usefully raises is the reality of the syncretising tendencies inherent in all cultures where the Church has been planted. While the syncretistic “core” may not always actually be “animist” in nature, there can be little doubt that people of every culture will bring their “roots” in with them when they come to faith in Christ, and that these roots will in some fashion distort the Gospel message. The fact that this distortion is least visible to those of the “home” culture shows the need for cross-cultural interaction in developing contextual theological approaches. A multi-cultural approach to contextualising theology can minimize the blinders of a mono-cultural approach, and Steyne’s global emphasis serves as a reminder of this.

A third issue usefully raised is the animist core which Steyne suggests is found even in Christianity (see especially pp. 51-2). Many will acknowledge this to be true of other churches, or of other people’s practice of the faith, but we do not as readily see it in our own case. Though Steyne does not specifically mention it, such a core may be found not only in developing areas of the world, but is also present in the “advanced” West. It will do *all* of us well to consider in what respects the core of our belief system has been at least influenced, if not infected, by an animist outlook. Such an insight should cause each of us to look inward rather than merely outward. It is an insight as relevant for the Independent Churches as it is for the mainline denominations.

Steyne’s book has both significant strengths and significant weaknesses. My overall impression is that the book is worth having for school libraries or in an instructor’s personal library for reference. But I could not recommend it as a textbook in the African context, unless the instructor is willing to spend a significant amount of time in class dealing with the deficiencies of the book.

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*Justification By Faith: What It Means to Us Today*  
 by Alister McGrath  
 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988)  
 160 pages; \$11.95

The discussion of contextualization as a theory never seems to end. But where, asks the impatient Christian, are actual examples of what good contextualized evangelical theology looks like? Alister McGrath, lecturer in Christian Theology and Ethics at Oxford University, has been listening to missiologists like David Shank and Harvie Conn. He has become convinced that contextualization is vital for the communication of the gospel, and particularly the experience of justification, in contemporary culture. "While cultural matters are relativized by the gospel's absolute claims," writes McGrath, "these claims must still be communicated and articulated in and to those specific life situations and contexts" (p. 15). Flowing from this conviction has come a fine restatement of the doctrine of justification by faith for a popular audience.

But contextualization for the purpose of mere intellectual understanding is not enough for McGrath. He believes that we need to know the doctrine of justification by faith in a culturally relevant way in order to pass on the experience of justification to men and women in our churches and in coming generations:

We need not only an encounter with God, we also need, if this encounter and experience is to be passed down to our children, an intellectual framework within which the redeeming and liberating encounter with and experience of the living God takes place. The doctrine of justification establishes this framework. But it is the **experience, the encounter**, rather than this framework the preacher is primarily concerned with! It is possible to misunderstand the doctrine of justification by faith as simply an obscure verbal formula – when it is in fact concerned with transmitting and preserving the experience of an encounter with none other than the living God (p. 14).

Hence the contemporary preacher, whether in Nairobi or New York, Lesotho or London, must engage in contextualization not just to pass on the idea of justification but in order to pass on "the possibility of encountering God" (p. 14). God will not be found outside the truth of the gospel. And the truth of the gospel is not understood outside of reverent contextualization.

What this commitment to evangelical contextualizing actually means for McGrath can be summarized as follows: Justification by faith can be renewed as both proclamation and experience if we rediscover the biblical and historic teaching of this doctrine and translate this teaching into the existential, personal and ethical categories of modern man in an evangelical way. This is what McGrath seeks to do. How well does he do it?

His chapter on the biblical teaching on justification is brief but perceptive. Central to the biblical concept of justification is the Old Testament perspective of being in a covenant relationship with God. McGrath quite rightly emphasizes the importance of Genesis 15:6 for both the Old Testament and New Testament concept of justification. He argues persuasively that the central idea of justification in Abraham's experience and subsequently in the life of the believer is not "to be declared morally upright" so much as "to be declared in right relationship to God." To be justified is to be regarded as in a covenant relationship with God and entitled to all the blessings of covenant keeping. What is radical about the biblical concept of justification is that someone else has kept the covenant relationship with God for us, the mediator Jesus Christ who put us in right relationship with God through his death. Faith is our only appropriate response to this gracious act of God. McGrath extols the beauty of faith:

While there will always be elements of "understanding" and "assent" in any Christian definition of faith, the element of "trust" (relationship!) must never be minimized. Faith is understood as a humble, obedient, and trusting response of the individual to the promises of God. Faith is, in its passivity, an active readiness to receive from God. Grace gives and faith receives (p. 28).

The biblical teaching on faith and justification comes to sharper focus for McGrath in two historical confrontations on the doctrine: Augustine and Pelagius in the fourth century and Martin Luther and Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. His discussion of Augustine and Pelagius is very competent. Yet it is excelled by his powerful discussion of Luther's evangelical breakthrough in the sixteenth century. The first step towards that breakthrough occurred when he discovered that "the righteousness of God" was not a synonym for God's righteous judgment and wrath (as medieval theology had taught) but rather was "a gift of God given to sinners":

Luther develops this understanding of the "righteousness of God" in terms of a "wonderful exchange" between Christ and the believer. Using the analogy of a human marriage, Luther argues that Christ and the believer are united through faith: Christ bestows his righteousness upon the believer, and the believer's sin is transferred to Christ. Luther thus speaks of a "grasping faith" (*fides apprehensiva*) a faith that grasps Christ and unites him to the individual believer, in order that this wonderful exchange of attributes may take place. Luther insists that justification involves a change in the individual's status before God, rather than a fundamental change in his nature . . . . It is this insight that underlies Luther's famous assertion that the believer is "righteous and a sinner at one and the same time" (*simul iustus et peccator*) (p. 52).

Subsequent debate down through the centuries since Luther has centered around the Lutheran/Reformed approach to justification which sees faith as a passive instrument in receiving justification ("justification *per fidem propter Christum*" – by means of faith but based on the work of Christ) and a more humanistic/arminian approach where faith is conceived of as the grounds of our justification (*propter fidem per Christum*) – on the basis of faith through Christ). These formulations are actually worlds apart theologically and the

evangelical understanding of God's gracious salvation can easily be lost if the more humanistic approach is taken.

How does this biblical and historical doctrine make an impact on modern man who is convinced that he has outgrown his need for Christianity? McGrath sees in the contemporary philosophies of existentialism and personalism, as well as in the current interest in social ethics, some effective points of contact for communicating justification by faith to the modern world. One example of this method of contextualizing justification, that of existentialism, will have to suffice.

Existentialism finds its point of departure in the concept of alienation. Albert Camus, the French existentialist philosopher, linked this alienation to a sense of lost innocence, "that we have been expelled from a homeland and are now unhappily wandering through history, trying to find a way to return" (p. 93). Existentialism warns against the unauthentic life that does not deal honestly with this alienation and the related dread of death and non-being that flows from it. Thus the person who spends his life steeped in materialism or hedonism or superficial thinking is an unauthentic person. Justification by faith speaks to the dilemma of alienation. As McGrath explains:

The gospel proclamation is addressed to those who want their existence to be fulfilled and meaningful. It analyzes the existential situation of humanity, and then proceeds to describe the means by which the individual's situation may be transformed. Not very far from the surface of an individual's existence lie deep and dark fears about the threat of death and extinction and about the seeming meaninglessness of life. The gospel exposes these, bringing them to the surface in order that they may be faced and dealt with. For the gospel confronts the human fear of death and meaninglessness by speaking of someone who faced and conquered death, lending dignity and meaning to it. More importantly, the gospel treats the natural human desire to avoid dying and death and to seek refuge in the world as the symptom of human alienation from an authentic way of existence—in other words, fear of death and its corollaries are regarded as an aspect of the fundamental and global human alienation from God (p. 93).

McGrath has written a stimulating and helpful book. Though he provides a detailed appendix giving a more in-depth theological description of justification, one is left wanting more. McGrath may be of help in satisfying that desire; he is the author of an authoritative two volume history of the doctrine of justification by faith published by Cambridge University Press, as well as a probing study of Luther's theology of the cross. And while this present book is a fine example of contextualizing historic doctrine for a modern *western* audience, it leaves much to be desired as a contextualized discussion of the doctrine for an *African* context. Yet it must be said that Africa has participated sufficiently in modern cultural trends world-wide to have absorbed some of the existential and personalist concerns identified by McGrath. The African preacher who is proclaiming the word of God to an urban and educated audience will find help here in McGrath's discussion. McGrath's lucid prose and model of contextual theologizing may well inspire an African evangelical

theologian to do his or her own investigation of this crucial doctrine and translate it into the richness of African culture and thought patterns so that this most liberating of evangelical doctrines may live again for a new generation of Africans.

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*Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics:  
Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age*  
by William J Larkin Jr  
(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988)  
401 pages; \$16.95

All over the world evangelicals are wrestling with how to do theology in a way that is culturally relevant and biblically based. Leading African theologians have identified this as one of the most important tasks facing the church in Africa. Dr Tite Tiénou has written, "One cannot, therefore, take a 'Biblical Theology' and apply it anywhere! A contextual approach is needed. . . . We must not spare any effort to reach that goal!" (*The Theological Task of the Church in Africa*, p. 28). Many writers have offered helpful suggestions for this task, but few have attempted to bring together the many diverse threads involved and to weave them into a complete hermeneutical method. William Larkin's *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* is just such an effort. Larkin is professor of Bible and Greek at Columbia Biblical Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, USA. The task he has set for himself is an immense one. He seeks nothing less than 1) to summarize the most recent thinking that is relevant to the hermeneutics of contextualization, and 2) to offer his own comprehensive guidelines for contextualization, based on a biblical theology of hermeneutics and culture.

The first half of the book is divided into four parts and traces the roots of the current debate over hermeneutics and biblical authority. After an introductory chapter raising the key issues, Larkin identifies the philosophical roots of current relativistic thinking. He then summarizes the contributions made toward a theology of contextualization, both by evangelicals and by non-evangelicals, from within the language sciences, the behavioral sciences, and the fields of theology, hermeneutics, exegesis and missiology.

Throughout this part of the book Larkin demonstrates a good understanding of the relevant material, and the section can be useful for getting a general

grasp of what different people are saying. Some of Larkin's summaries are excellent, and offer an adequate introduction into the thought of the writers under consideration. This is especially true when Larkin deals with other evangelicals. However, some of the remaining summaries of current thinking are not altogether clear. Sometimes Larkin does not give enough background information; at other times his overview seems to be a collection of individual thoughts without a coherent summary of the ideas of the person or movement being explained. And although there is a controlling theme to this first part of the book, it is not presented as clearly as it might have been. People, conferences and movements are explained individually with only a minimum attempt to show the relationship between them. Nevertheless, this section is useful overall as a convenient reference to the hermeneutical thinking of many of today's scholars, especially for someone who has already done reading and thinking in this area.

Many of the ideas for interpreting Scripture that Larkin surveys in the first part of the book are widely divergent and even in conflict with one another. Larkin's solution in the latter part of the book is to examine the Scriptures and to build a biblical theology of hermeneutics that will consider the key cultural questions. This biblical theology is divided into three parts: "Culture the Context," "God Who Communicates," and "Man the Interpreter."

In his discussion of "Culture the Context," Larkin observes that "the unity of humankind derived from their first parents is more basic than the diversity of cultural expression" (199). Because of this, the Scriptures, written in one time and place, can communicate with people in every culture. However, the fall of man (Genesis 3) has led to each culture setting up a "religious power center" opposed to God, which makes all cultures "unclean in themselves" (221). As a result, God judges "both the ethnocentrism they foster and the religious power center which energizes them. He calls his people to replace the false religious center with Jesus as Lord and to live as God's model culture, the church, in the midst of their culture" (222). Larkin's analysis of the Bible's teaching on culture is perceptive (though his unqualified characterization of all cultures as "unclean" may strike some as simplistic).

Larkin then spends three chapters discussing the "God Who Communicates." The Bible assumes that, though God reveals himself in events and people, he also reveals himself truly in human language; human language is able to communicate divine revelation. Language is "not assumed to be historically conditioned, but is unhesitatingly enlisted to communicate meaning over time" (228). Therefore, meaning is not found in "the sociolinguistic context" but "in the author's intended sense in regard to an extralinguistic referent, a sense conveyed by . . . words" (243, 244). Larkin's proof of this is Adam's use of language apart from any sociolinguistic context. This meaning "remains single and fixed according to God's intention as he first gave it" (252). What then is the role of culture in contributing to the meaning of the text? It provides

“vocabulary stock, but such a contribution serves rather than controls the divinely intended meaning” (261). Larkin closes his section on “God Who Communicates” with an excellent chapter reviewing the Bible’s own witness to its inspiration, inerrancy, and authority and explaining the work of the Spirit in illuminating the text for today.

In his two chapters on “Man the Interpreter” Larkin maintains that, by submitting to the authority of Scripture and seeking to understand its intended meaning, the interpreter can understand God’s single, fixed message in spite of his own preunderstanding. Interpreters must simply “set aside their cultural preunderstanding” and continually expose themselves to God’s Word to “find the plain and definite meaning of the text” (301) and to bring their own preunderstanding in line with the truths of the Bible. After the interpreter has “fully entered into the horizon of the text” (301) and has understood the Bible’s message, he can re-enter his own world to interpret and apply the text (309). First he must find the best words to express the meaning of the text in his world. Then he must reflect on the significance of the text and determine what is “bad news” and “good news” for his culture. Using Paul’s confrontation with the Epicureans and Stoics in Athens as a model (Acts 17), Larkin applies these steps to contextualization. Paul’s primary concern was the integrity of his message and the avoidance of syncretism, but he also constructively engaged the world-view of the Greeks and challenged them to change their religious power center.

In the last two chapters of the book, Larkin uses his biblical theology to “frame hermeneutical guidelines” for interpretation and application. He gives four steps: 1) *Overview*, which includes both an overview of the text and an overview of the interpreter’s own cultural preunderstanding; 2) *analysis* of the text’s grammar, literary forms, and historical-cultural background; 3) *interpretation*, by stating the message of the passage so that it fits the biblical context and so that it clearly speaks to the current culture, correcting it and meeting its needs; and 4) *application* of the teaching to particular contemporary situations through a change of attitudes, thought and behavior. He illustrates each step from several biblical passages and from different cultural contexts. This section was extremely valuable and showed the practicality of Larkin’s biblical theology.

Larkin has made a valuable contribution towards an evangelical hermeneutic of contextualization. It is clear that his greatest concern is to preserve biblical authority. He does this admirably by pointing out many often-ignored assumptions that the Bible makes about hermeneutics. But Larkin could have considerably strengthened his contribution by more thorough development at several key points.

For example, his strong emphasis on language not being historically conditioned seems to oversimplify the issue. Larkin has vigorously and correctly



contended that 1) the author does control the intended meaning and 2) meaning can be communicated over linguistic and cultural barriers. But in so doing he seems to have understated the degree to which the author's forms of communication are at least partially shaped by his culture and by historical circumstances. Consequently, he gives only limited attention to how the interpreter understands the cultural thought patterns of the biblical writer and how he evaluates his own cultural preunderstandings in order to adopt a biblical preunderstanding. Are there questions that the interpreter can ask himself to determine how well he has entered into the world view and preunderstanding of the biblical author? Is it possible that interpreters from different cultural backgrounds could both understand a text truly without understanding it in exactly the same way? These key questions are unanswered.

Larkin's lack of emphasis on the degree to which culture shapes thought can be seen when he explains that "extra-biblical background information should not be used to set aside Scripture's authoritative claims" (342). It seems that Larkin's desire to emphasize biblical authority may here have led to an oversimplification of a complex issue. The interpreter may not understand what the authoritative claims of the Bible really are without understanding certain extra-biblical information. A more complete presentation would have been for Larkin to demonstrate how to use background material to determine what the authoritative claims of a passage really are.

Larkin's principles for contextualization also need further development. The principles he gives in his chapter on "Interpretation and Application" and in the section on "Contextualization" in his biblical theology (319-321) contain many valuable ideas for the contextualization of theology. However, these pages are brief and left me feeling a need for further elaboration. For example, I would have liked to see him correlate his three principles for contextualization with the interpretation/application process and show how they would be applied to some of the cross-cultural examples of interpretation he lists later in the book.

Occasionally Larkin seems to make hermeneutical conclusions that force his biblical data into an already existing model of hermeneutics. For example, based on the use of the Old Testament by New Testament authors, he demonstrates that Scripture can have a meaning that is "single and fixed according to God's intention as he first gave it" and still be "alive with meaning for every age" (251-252). He maintains that this is true because the New Testament authors maintain a sharp distinction "between interpretation and application, between the meaning of a passage and its significance" (258). However, many of the examples he gives of the Scriptures preserving the distinction between interpretation/meaning and application/significance (262) actually seem to blur the distinction! I was left feeling that the New Testament's use of the Old Testament had been squeezed into an over-

simplified model of interpretation. While New Testament writers *do* seem to preserve some distinction between interpretation and application, they do not seem to have the same clear-cut categories that modern interpreters often use. In this respect Larkin has only scratched the surface of an issue on which evangelicals need to do more work: the use of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers as a model for a hermeneutic that is both relevant to the modern reader and true to God's intended meaning.

Another area where Larkin may have pushed his own hermeneutic beyond that established by the Bible itself is in the literary forms that might be found in the Bible. Larkin believes that certain literary forms, such as midrash, could not be found in an inerrant Bible because by their very nature they violate the biblical understanding of truth; they claim to be something they are not. Larkin is correct that the Bible's view of truth excludes any form of literature that would seek to deceive the reader. However, it may be possible to affirm this correspondence theory of truth and still see the Bible using forms of literature which were characterized by a non-Western subtlety that was fully understood in the original historical and cultural context.<sup>1</sup> In any case, in this area I did not find Larkin's brief discussion to be convincing.

In a later edition the book could be definitely strengthened by a clearer integration between the historical overview (chapters 2-12), the biblical theology (chapters 13-18) and the hermeneutical guidelines (chapters 19-20). The opening historical overview, for example, would be far more valuable if later in the book Larkin were to interact more specifically with the different persons and ideas there presented. Also the biblical theology discussion lays important groundwork for the hermeneutical guidelines, but the reader is often left to make the connections himself. Many of Larkin's arguments would be even more powerful if he were to make these connections more explicit.

However, these limitations only demonstrate that the subject of the hermeneutics of contextualization is extremely large, perhaps too large to be comprehensively studied in one book. Indeed, overall Larkin has attempted a formidable task and has done a good job. Anyone in Africa teaching hermeneutics or theology should closely study this book for its contributions to the contextualization of theology. The overview of the hermeneutical process in the last two chapters is especially useful, but will be fully appreciated only if the reader has first digested the biblical theology in chapters 13-18. In assigning readings from this book, teachers need to note that the complexity of Larkin's thought, vocabulary and sentence structure will make the reading difficult for students at the first degree level or lower.

If this is not the last word on the hermeneutics of contextualization, it is certainly a very helpful step forward. Larkin points the way towards how to do theology that is both biblically based and culturally relevant. The places where the presentation is underdeveloped demonstrate that there is still work

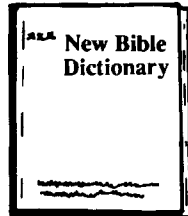
to be done in elaborating a hermeneutic for doing contextualized theology. African evangelical theologians will profit both from Larkin's positive contributions and from thinking through a fuller presentation of those areas where his treatment could have been strengthened.

Steve Strauss, MTh  
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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the biblical understanding of truth and the different literary forms that might be found in the Bible, see Kevin J Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, edited by D A Carson and John D Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), especially pages 73-75.

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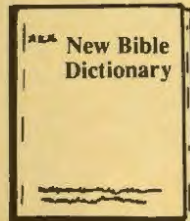
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