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Africa
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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

Purpose: *AJET* is published twice a year by Scott Theological College, a chartered private university in Kenya, in order to provide theological educators and students with evangelical articles and book reviews related to Christian ministry in Africa.

Publisher: Scott Theological College, the publisher of *AJET*, has been accredited by ACTEA since 1979 and was chartered as a private university by the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) Kenya in November 1997. Scott offers university level theological education with concentrations in Pastoral Studies, Christian Education and Missiology.

Wrestling With Foundational Issues

Though the articles in this issue deal with widely differing topics, each one challenges Christians in Africa to wrestle with foundational issues. One such issue is training tomorrow's church leaders in the use of the Bible's original languages. Enoch Okode lays the theoretical foundation for the need to do so, and this points us towards practical questions of implementation. Should such training start at the degree level or only at the Master's level? How do students find and afford the grammar books, lexicons and other tools? How does any pastor in Africa carve out time for continued study of the biblical languages?

Judith Hill points out that some Africans are adopting aspects of a secular worldview. She defines what secularism is and isn't before walking us through several New Testament examples of the tendency towards secularization, including the church in Ephesus. Hill then gleans some advice about how to avoid secularizing influences from Jesus and Paul. Her conclusion briefly suggests how African Christians should respond when God and His word are increasingly left out of daily life and out of national decisions.

Conflict resolution, like worldview beliefs, is about as foundational as you can get in Africa. Whether the conflict is between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, or between ethnic-political groupings in Kenya, or between one nation and another, peaceful solutions seem few and far between. Lubunga w'Ehusa's article provides some critical insights into violence and peaceful resolutions to violence drawn from a familiar Old Testament story.

Conflict arises partly out of ignorance about and misinformed hatred of other people. Nowhere is this more evident than between two of Africa's older religions – Islam and Christianity. Phyllis Ndoro provides a brief foundation for informing Christian theology students about Islam and then launches the discussion about why we need dialogue between people of different religions. Her article helps beginning students start down this complex and difficult path.

The only people who can see the need to study biblical languages, who can recognize and resist dangerous secularizing tendencies, who want to embrace a biblical approach to conflict resolution, who can learn to see people of other religions as Jesus sees them, are His disciples. And the world, including Africa, needs many more serious disciples of Jesus Christ. With the help of useful personal examples, Mark Olander outlines an accessible plan for multiplying disciples in Christian colleges and universities in Africa. If this was adopted and diligently implemented by all such institutions, it would help change the face of the entire continent. We can all make a difference.

Richard Gehman responds to Jim Harries' article in AJET 29.1 on *Mother Tongue Theological Education* in a new section of AJET called **Afterword**. This section will print readers' responses to AJET articles in an effort to carry the discussion forward, as Gehman's response does. So read, and write!

Contributors to AJET 29.2 2010

Articles

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A Case for Biblical Languages
Are Hebrew and Greek Optional or Indispensable?

by Enoch Okode

Introduction

Many of us have heard the expression, "It's all Greek to me!" People use this expression when they face a puzzle, something they find too difficult to navigate through. It also means that Greek is no child's toy. I have seen students who give up on Hebrew and/or Greek even before they learn the first letter of the alphabet because of their attitude towards biblical languages. Perhaps, without disregarding the unrelenting labour that these languages demand, we need a change of attitude as well as a clear articulation of the necessity of these languages. We need an attitude that asserts that we can learn Hebrew without harm; we can study Greek without grief. These languages are essential to our interpretative task. The pertinent question is: What interpretative difference does it make to know Hebrew and Greek?[1] This question may be asked in support of or in opposition to the need for the knowledge of the original languages of the Bible. Our conviction throughout this article is that there are treasures that a minister of the Word of God can extract only if he is competent in Hebrew and Greek. Therefore knowing biblical languages is essential for exegetical accuracy and theological depth. We will first evaluate some of the objections or excuses people give for failure to seek competence in biblical languages.

Objections to Studying Biblical Languages

1. We have many good English and mother tongue translations.

Why study biblical languages when we have translations in many mother tongues in addition to excellent commentaries? On the surface this appears to be a pragmatic and valid reason for avoiding Hebrew and Greek. There are more than fifty English translations of the Bible. Many people have the Bible in their mother tongue. Thousands of good commentaries are published. So why should one spend time and money learning Hebrew and Greek? Although we will respond to this later, "It is precisely because there are so many excellent commentaries available today that the use of the biblical languages in preaching becomes more important, not less."[2] No translation or commentary can eliminate the need to study the Bible in the original languages.

2. Bible college teachers need biblical languages, pastors don't.

Second, many people claim that Hebrew and Greek are for college professors, not church ministers. Some claim that spending so much time

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[1] There are Aramaic portions of the Bible but this article focuses on Hebrew and Greek.
[2] S. Hafemann, "Why Use Biblical Languages in Preaching?" in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Vol. 3 (1999), pp. 86-89.

studying these languages renders a minister irrelevant to his congregation since he will hardly have time to keep in touch with the needs surrounding him. This objection contends that seeking to master biblical languages and applying them in one's ministry produces an exegete of the Word who has no time to exegete the culture. The argument is at best self-defeating. In the first place, it implies that college professors are detached from the realities on the ground; they inhabit the abstract world of the intricacies of the otherwise dead languages of the Bible. But if for the sake of argument we grant that the life of a professor is to some extent irrelevant to the workaday life of the parishioner, why would you allow such a professor to study biblical languages in order to teach Bible college students? Second, cultural exegesis cannot be divorced from the exegesis of the Word. In other words, competence in biblical languages should in the end produce an exegete with one foot in the Word and the other in the world as he seeks to carefully divide the timeless Word of God. The needs surrounding a preacher and teacher of the Word can be adequately addressed only if he is a faithful, obedient and diligent student of Scripture, which is the source of heavenly wisdom.

3. Those who study biblical languages don't use them after graduation.

It is true that the majority of graduates from Bible schools never use Hebrew and Greek Bibles in their sermon preparation.[3] So why teach or take a course that seems irrelevant upon graduation? Moreover, one may argue that it does not take biblical languages in order to address the concerns and practical needs of the congregation. People are looking for something with immediate gratification, application, and relevance. This is one of the demands that modernity and post-modernity places on us. If the 'tools' at our disposal produce the desired results for the preacher, why invest in biblical languages? But learning biblical languages is a worthwhile long-term investment that requires diligence and discipline. The benefits accrued in this endeavor are immense and impact lives for God's kingdom. It is hard to maintain the centrality of the Word if we view biblical languages as a non-essential and optional extra. Similarly, if preachers don't invest in Hebrew and Greek, their hearers will be deprived of some of the treasures of the Word as well as the informed and informative exposition that they deserve.

3.1 Graduates don't use biblical languages due to their lack of discipline.

Graduates of theological education often fail to use biblical languages in their ministries for at least three reasons. First, they may lack discipline and diligence. Biblical languages, like other languages, are like flowers with a sweet scent, but in a drought they dry up and the scent disappears. It takes diligent and on-going study for one to gain competence and find delight in

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[3] Some might object that knowledge of biblical languages does not make a preacher or teacher of the Word. This objection has some weight since a preacher or teacher is called, not merely trained. But a minister without such knowledge faces limitations and disadvantages. Mastery of these languages makes a minister more effective.

using biblical languages in the ministry. Any lapse after the end of a course in Greek or Hebrew is disastrous and regrettable. When I was in college I took more than twelve credit hours of Greek and six hours of Hebrew. However, for about three years after I graduated, I never consistently studied either of these languages. As would be expected, my Hebrew and Greek became shamefully rusty! When I went back to school I was required to take competency exams to demonstrate that I qualified for exegetical courses without necessarily beginning with elementary Hebrew and Greek. I did not need to wait for the results to find out that I had to repeat grammar courses. I paid dearly for failing to keep up my Hebrew and Greek. From that painful yet insightful experience, I vowed to always keep my languages fresh.

A.T. Robertson says that, "the chief reason why preachers do not get and do not keep up a fair and needful knowledge of the Greek New Testament is nothing less than carelessness, and even laziness in many cases. They can get along somehow without it, and so let it pass or let it drop."[4] The same holds true for Hebrew. It takes commitment and consistency for one to be competent in biblical languages. Only a disciplined and diligent student of the Word and disciple of Christ can uncover the treasures of biblical languages.

3.2 Graduates don't use biblical languages because they don't know them.
Many graduates never learned the languages well enough to use them in ministry.[5] This problem is mainly due to curricula that fail to underscore the necessity of biblical languages. Many Evangelical and Protestant colleges and seminaries do not require biblical languages for graduation.[6] Some make these languages optional while others do not have them at all. In some situations students are required to take only a single course in one or both languages.[7] But one semester is not sufficient for practical use of biblical languages after graduation. In such cases the students get the impression that it does not take biblical languages for one to be an accurate exegete and a thorough textual expositor. We cannot delete Hebrew and Greek from our curricula if our goal is to train men and women who can faithfully divide the Word of God. H.G. Richardson is right to conclude that, "Hebrew [and Greek]

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[4] A.T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (New York: Doran, 1923), p. 16.
[5] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Credibility, Competence, and Confidence: The Necessity of Using Your Hebrew" in *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 8.
[6] See John D. Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), p. 79.
[7] It is a mistake to introduce students to 'tools-approach' after one semester of Hebrew and/or Greek. Tools are for experts who have gone through the required training. Without adequate training tools can be dangerous.

should, therefore, not only be a part of every seminary curriculum, but should be required for graduation."[8]

3.3 Graduates don't see biblical languages as worth the work.

Graduates fail to use biblical languages in sermon preparation because of the ugly chasm that sometimes exists between requirements to learn biblical languages and the vocational goals of the students. This occurs when biblical languages are taught without demonstrating to the students how these languages contribute to making a student into an effective minister of the Word. The student memorizes the vocabulary, learns paradigms, morphology, and syntax among others, but she has not been trained on how to use all this in her contextual preaching and teaching engagements. The question, "What is the payoff in learning biblical languages?" has not been properly addressed. This question must be answered so students can passionately embrace biblical languages. Robert Chisholm says this "involves learning how to do exegesis and then transforming one's exegetical conclusions and observations into a relevant theological exposition of the text that is the backbone of a biblical, text-based sermon or lesson."[9]

3.4 Graduates think biblical languages are for exceptionally gifted people.

Another objection that I have often heard is that these languages are for the exceptionally gifted. It would be naïve for me to ignore the fact that we have linguists, people for whom learning languages seems as easy as breathing. Similarly, we have different gifts within the body of Christ; ergo, if my gifts have nothing to do with biblical languages, why bother? In response we need to note two points. First, gifts such as giving, administration, and encouragement among others do not necessarily require the knowledge of biblical languages in order for them to edify the body of Christ. Second, whoever raises this excuse should remember that our focus in this article is on those who have been called to preach and/or teach the Word. To argue that preaching and teaching the Word is for the exceptionally gifted saints is another way of saying that church ministry is for the exceptionally gifted and extraordinary men and women. Nothing can be further from the truth! The truth is that these languages are for the saints who are committed to thorough exegesis, who delight in informative and transformative exposition, and who are convinced that it takes hard work to be a successful minister of the Word.

Why are Hebrew and Greek Indispensable Rather than Optional?

Let us now face our overriding question: Why are Hebrew and Greek indispensable rather than optional? In the next section we will discuss five ways in which the original languages contribute to accurate exegesis, informed exposition, and in-depth theology. The first point concerns meaning.

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[8] H. G. Richardson, "The Use of Hebrew to a Minister" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 2:1, (Jan., 1909), p. 73.
[9] Robert B. Chisholm, "Credibility, Competence, and Confidence", p. 9.

1. Meaning

We use language in order to convey meaning to others. Every speaker chooses particular words because they will best convey his intended message to the target audience. We, however, were not the primary target audience of the authors of the Bible; it is therefore our duty to seek to understand what they meant. Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic have different idioms and structures from our own languages. This means that we have to recognize that words are contextual, conventional and historically particular. Language grows and changes with time; today's translation may not be fit for the next generation of readers. In addition, what a person says in Hebrew may not be exhaustively expressed in another language since no language can provide a perfect rendering of the thoughts and ideas expressed in a that biblical language. In the words of Richardson, "No man can discover the real idea in the mind of the writer of a Hebrew [and Greek] sentence unless he has access to the language."[10]

Translations of Prov. 12:16 - *'ewîl bayyôm yiwwāḏa'* (אֱוִיל בַּיּוֹם יִוָּדַע כַּעְסוֹ) - clearly illustrate this point. KJV renders it, "A fool's wrath is presently known"; LXX[11] says, "A fool declares his wrath the same day"; NAS says, "A fool's vexation is known at once"; NET says, "A fool's annoyance is known at once"; while RSV has, "The vexation of a fool is known at once." The word in contention in these translations is *bayyôm* – literally "in the day". KJV's rendering misses the immediacy of a fool's reaction. This translation may imply that a fool can hide his anger for a little while and vent it later or that his anger is something happening currently without reference to whatever and whenever it was triggered. Thus it is inaccurate to depend on KJV's rendering given how we use 'presently' today. While the other translations capture the suddenness of a fool's anger, they are all modified and less literal.

Similarly, words in different languages that may have a general correspondence to each other usually will not correspond in all respects. For instance, the word *yâda* (to know, יָדַע)[12] has different meanings in Hebrew, some of which correspond to the English meanings while others are alien to the latter. In Genesis 3:7, Adam and Eve 'knew' that they were naked after they had eaten from the forbidden tree. 'Know' as used in this verse means 'to realize, recognize, or observe', all of which correspond to the English usage. However, in Genesis 4:1 (see also 1 Kings 1:4) the same word is used to refer to sexual intercourse. Unless a reader understands that in Hebrew 'to know' also means having sexual intercourse, such passages as 1 Kings 1:4 may easily be misunderstood. Another common word in the Hebrew Bible is 'torah'

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[10] H. G. Richardson, "The Use of Hebrew to a Minister", p. 77.

[11] LXX or The Septuagint is the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible.

[12] See F. Brown, et al, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), p. 393.

(תּוֹרָה), which is generally rendered 'law' in English. However, 'law' and 'torah' have different origins and even connotations so that what 'law' means to an English speaker is not necessarily what it means to a Hebrew speaker. In short, since the meaning of words is dynamic, conventional and historically particular, we cannot have a thorough understanding of a text unless we study it in the original language. Apart from meaning, another reason why we need to know the original languages is the availability of translations.

2. Translations

We have noted above that some people object to studying biblical languages because we have translations in English and in various mother tongues. It is argued that one can sufficiently understand the Bible by reading the available translations so studying the original languages is optional. But every translation is also an interpretation since in the translation process a translator has to make interpretive decisions. One's agenda, perspective, context, and presuppositions factor into the kind of translation he ends up with. We may have an excellent translation, but it is still just that: a translation! There is no translation that accurately retains the best and finest sense of the original language; something is always lost in the process of making translational or interpretative decisions. There is no language that can render the unique touches of another. An Italian proverb says, "*Traduttore traditore*" meaning "*translators are traitors!*"[13] or "*translations are treacherous*."[14]

The plurality of readings and translations attest to the fact that there is no perfect translation. Translators are fallen human beings who do not enjoy the apostolic (and prophetic) privilege of inspiration and infallibility. Consequently, they are liable to err and sometimes even miss the sense of an author due to human frailty. It necessarily follows that any exegete unacquainted with the original languages cannot have sufficient certainty with any text because he will be compelled to rely on another person's interpretive decisions instead of making his own.[15]

Our argument here is not intended to erode or undermine confidence in the translations in our hands. Bible translators are committed to preserving the sacredness of the divine revelation so that they are very careful in their work. We can say with confidence that there is no faithful translator who intentionally distorts the intended meaning of any verse. Translators engage in painstaking effort. Kenneth Wuest aptly comments, "... to handle the Greek language and produce a translation which is expressive and yet strictly true to the original, is

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[13] Moises Silva, *God, Language and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 134.
[14] Bruce. K. Waltke, "How I Changed My Mind About Teaching Hebrew (or Retained It)" in *Crux* 29:4 (1993), pp. 10-15.
[15] This does not imply that biblical interpretation is individualistic; we still have to interpret the Bible within and for the community of believers. We also need the wisdom and skills of others in this process.

no child's play."[16] However, anyone who knows more than one language and has interacted with people of different cultures and backgrounds will acknowledge the limitation of one language in rendering another. In other words, there is never an error-free translation. Moreover, translators are often presented with many possible ways of rendering a text, yet at the end of the day they have to settle for one option that seems best to them.[17] Most of the English translations do not provide us with all the possible ways of translating a particular word, phrase or clause.[18]

For the sake of illustration we will cite two texts. Consider how 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is rendered in different English translations:

vs.	NIV	NASB	RSV	KJV	JB
11	A woman should learn in **quietness** and full submission.	Let a woman **quietly** receive instruction with entire sub-missiveness.	Let a woman learn in *silence* with all sub-missiveness.	Let the woman learn in *silence* with all subjection.	During instruction, a woman should be **quiet** and respectful.
12	I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be *silent*.	But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain **quiet**.	I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep *silent*.	But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in *silence*.	I am not giving permission for a woman to teach or to tell a man what to do. A woman *ought not to speak.*

The Greek phrase in dispute here is *en hesuchia,* (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ), "in quietness". The word *hesuchia* may be translated as 'silent, quiet, still, tranquil, and rest' among others. What sense does Paul have here? According to JB (especially v. 12) a woman is not permitted to speak. KJV and RSV follow the same rendering in both verses, while NIV follows it in v. 12. The word *hesuchia* occurs three times in 1 Timothy. There is no doubt that the first

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[16] S. Kenneth Wuest, *Untranslatable Riches from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), p. 23.

[17] For further details on Bible translation, see John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1974), pp. 19-313.

[18] Such a task is beyond their mandate. But even if they were to do that no one would want to carry the resultant voluminous Bible with him!

usage (1 Tim 2:2) is in reference to a quiet and well-ordered life. The other two occurrences are in 2:11-12. The wider context here is that of worship but with particular reference to teaching and learning. Paul uses two *en hesuchia* phrases adverbially to indicate the manner in which a woman should learn. Does Paul say that a woman should learn in verbal silence or in quietness? The "in silence" interpretation implies that a woman should be speechless in the teaching/learning context.[19] However, a careful examination shows that it is highly probable that Paul uses *en hesuchia* in reference to quietness rather than speechlessness.[20] Our intention here is simply illustrative, hence we cannot go into greater detail. If one does not know Greek she will not understand the many possible ways of rendering *hesuchia,* and hence be limited to what the translations provide. Knowing how to translate Greek or Hebrew also enables a preacher/teacher to choose and even recommend the best translation of a text to his hearers.[21]

In Ps 32:5, the psalmist uses the phrase *'awōn ḥaṭṭā'ṯî* (עֲוֺן חַטָּאתִי) which may be literally translated 'the iniquity of my sin.' NIV translates it as 'the guilt of my sin'; KJV has 'the iniquity of my sin'; LXX has 'the ungodliness of my heart'; NAS has 'the guilt of my sin'; while NET simply translates it as 'my sins.' What translation would you prefer? Examples of this nature are inexhaustible; the bottom line is that a proper interpretation of any text demands the knowledge of the original languages so that the exegete can make proper interpretive decisions, rather than letting others decide for him. Apart from meaning and translations theology also necessitates the study of the original languages.

3. Theology

We have repeatedly noted that the task of doing theology requires competence in biblical languages. A thorough exegesis should form the foundation for any theological stance if our theology is to be biblical rooted. No doubt our theological presuppositions influence our exegesis and our exegesis

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[19] See also Colin Brown, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* Vol. 3. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 112 and Douglas J. Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance" in *Trinity Journal*, 1:1 (1980), pp. 62-83.

[20] Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament,* Vol. 2 (Peabody: Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 178-9; W. D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles,* Vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), pp. 117-130; Philip B. Payne "Libertarian women in Ephesus: Response to D. J. Moo's article, '1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance'" in *Trinity Journal*, 2:2 (1981), pp. 169-197.

[21] Another example is Ephesians 2:1-7. In the Greek text, these verses form one long sentence. (Notice that the main statement of this text is "you…made alive.") A literal translation of this text into English does not make sense; hence English translations break it down into several sentences. However, if one only has an English translation, he would be hardly able to identify the main statement. This is a case in which translators have to make necessary modifications in order to come up with a meaningful translation.

in turn informs and modifies our theology. But it is a lamentable mistake to study systematic or biblical theology without acquiring the skills and discipline necessary for understanding the source of that theology. Similarly, there are times when people subscribe to different theological declarations as a result of different interpretations of a text. When one is faced with a theological or doctrinal decision based on interpretation, one of the crucial tools is the knowledge of the original languages of Scripture.

For instance, Deut. 6:4 is traditionally rendered, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God; the LORD is one." This translation assumes that Yahweh is essentially unitary while missing the fact that the Old Testament does not talk about how many is God. Certainly the Hebrew word *'eḥāḏ* (אֶחָד) means 'one,' but it can also mean 'only' or 'alone.' In this text, linguistic and contextual evidence make a unitary interpretation doubtful. It should be understood as "a cry of allegiance ("Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone"), not ontology, and the statement is about Yahweh, who manifests himself to Israel as her covenant God, not God in the abstract or in a metaphysical sense."[22] Daniel Block concludes,

> The Shemaʻ should not be taken out of context and interpreted as a great monotheistic confession. Moses had made that point in 4:35, 39 … . Nor is the issue in the broader context the nature of God in general or his integrity in particular – though the nature and integrity of his people is a very important concern. This is a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment in response to the question, "Who is the God of Israel?" The language of the Shemaʻ is "sloganesque" rather than prosaic: "Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone!" or "Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!" This was to be the distinguishing mark of the Israelite people; they are those (and only those) who claim Yahweh alone as their God.[23]

Therefore, though this verse is often used to support arguments for the unity of the Godhead, it is probable that that is not its correct interpretation. One needs the knowledge of Hebrew in order to understand the Shemaʻ as a cry of allegiance rather than a proclamation of the Trinity.

A preacher and teacher cannot adequately refute false teachings without the knowledge of biblical languages. Take, for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses' interpretation of John 1:1. They deny the deity of the Word, arguing that the translation should be: "the Word was a god." The main reason that leads them to this translation is the absence of the Greek definite article (the) before the noun *theos* (θεός). But they fail to recognize that the absence of the

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[22] This quotation is taken from Dr. Daniel I. Block's *Old Testament Theology Lecture Notes*, Fall 2007, p. 55.

[23] Daniel I. Block, "How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5" in *JETS* 47:2 (June 2004), p. 211.

article does not mean that the Word is one god out of many other gods.[24] In a construction such as this the noun often lacks the article without losing definiteness. Inclusion of the article in this instance would contradict John's argument. It would read, "the Word was *the* God," meaning that all that we know as God is the Word; in other words, no other being could be God except the Word. Yet John did not misspeak when he said that the Word was with God, meaning that there is to God another being in addition to the Word. There is also God the Father (and God the Holy Spirit).

In short, it is hard to do sound theology and effective Christian apologetics without the original languages. Exegesis ought to be foundational in our theological and doctrinal stance. In addition to the above, culture also makes biblical languages essential.

4. Culture

Understanding how language and culture operate tells us how the original languages contribute to our interpretation of the Bible. Language and culture cannot be separated; in fact, it is through language that we understand any culture since language reflects culture. Every people group builds 'their world' based on their language habits. Aldous Huxley notes that in societies where there is no language behavior is nonhuman.[25] Language is important for both communication and identification. A certain word may be used differently in various cultures to connote a range of ideas. We sometimes translate two or more different words in the original languages with the same word in English due to language limitation. Yet we know that an author's choice of one word over another is never capricious.

The words *gā'ăl* (גָּאַל) and *pādāh* (פָּדָה) are both often translated as 'redeem' or 'deliver,' making it hard to notice any difference in their usage. The term *gā'ăl* literally means 'to redeem, to perform the duty of a close relative' (Lev 25:47-54; Ruth 2:20). It is a legal term used in the context of family law whereby a close male relative intervenes on behalf of another to maintain the family unit. *Pādāh* on the other hand means 'to ransom, buy, pay, redeem' and is commonly used in cultic contexts to describe how human beings and animals may be ransomed. In Exod. 13:1-2, 13, the LORD allows the firstborn of human beings and animals to be ransomed by the payment of a price. This is an instance where a word conveys a cultural practice that the English translation fails to show. It is therefore clear that by relying solely on translations one can easily miss the point that the author is seeking to highlight by his choice of certain words. Proper interpretation partly depends on how

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[24] When the definite article occurs with the subject and the predicate, both nouns are definite and interchangeable. But when the definite article is absent from the predicate, as here, the nouns are not interchangeable.

[25] Aldous Huxley, "Words and their Meaning" in *The Importance of Language* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1962), p. 4.

much we understand the culture of that text - a culture that is shared by both the author and the original readers. Thus to grasp the message of the biblical authors we need to investigate the meanings which the biblical authors attributed to the words in their respective languages and cultures.

5. Rhetorical Features

In the preceding argument we have already seen that meaning, translations, theology and culture make biblical languages indispensable. We can add rhetorical features to this list. Biblical languages help us to read and appreciate the Bible as literature. Writers employ various rhetorical features in the process of communication. Parallelism, wordplay, chiasm, rhyme, and repetition among others are literary devices that authors use to capture attention, highlight key points, enliven discourse and add aesthetic value and creativity to their composition. Understanding these devices is important in interpretation since every language has its own unique literary styles. We do not need to belabor the fact that there are aspects of Hebrew and Greek grammar and syntax that contain treasures of truth which cannot be brought over into the various translations in our possession.[26]

A play on words is very common in Hebrew and is often missed in translations. In Prov 12:16, the words "fool" *kǎʾsō* (כְּעֵסֹו) and "prudent man" *wᵉkoseh* (וְכֹסֶה) follow each other in order to emphasize the contrast between a fool and a prudent man. In Hebrew the similar sounds produced when each of these words is pronounced effectively captures attention. No translation can reproduce such artistry. Another example is Ruth 1:1 where Elimelech and his household leave Bethlehem (*bêth leḥem*) because of famine. The irony is that *bêth leḥem* is literally 'house of bread' which is now without bread. The use of acrostics is also worth mentioning. Acrostics occur when the first letter of successive phrases or sections begin with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet and serve as a mnemonic device to aid memory. The beauty of texts such as Psalms 25, 34, 111, 112, 119 and 145 can hardly be captured in a translation.[27] These are among the rhetorical features that can only be discerned from the Hebrew text.

Biblical Languages and Preaching

Preaching makes studying biblical languages essential. Chisholm asserts that in order to preach credibly and competently from the Old Testament one needs a working knowledge of Hebrew and basic exegetical skills.[28] The same thing can be said about Greek. Chishom's lament from a number of years ago is very pertinent today:

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[26] W. N. Donovan ("The Homiletical Worth of the Study of Hebrew" in *The Biblical World*, 32:1, [Jul., 1908], p. 56) says that English words sometimes fail to summon a picture as the original word may do.
[27] Also Proverbs 31.
[28] Robert B. Chisholm, "Credibility, Competence, and Confidence", p. 10.

> It's easy to "go with the flow," assume that Hebrew is a luxury, not an essential, and rely on the opinions of others when preaching and teaching the Old Testament…. God's people look to us [preachers and teachers of the Bible] for insight and direction, often assuming that our education and experience give us the credibility and competence needed for the task. But if we do not really possess that credibility and competence, are we not living a lie? Without credibility and competence, do we have the right to stand before God's people and proclaim his word in an authoritative tone?[29]

Confidence that flows from thorough preparation contributes to authoritative proclamation of God's Word. Preparing sermons from the original language enhances such confidence in ways that English translations cannot. For a beginner, this will be harder and consume more time, but nothing of true merit is ever produced without unrelenting hard work. The goal is to accurately divide the Word of God and proclaim it fearlessly. Perhaps Richardson's caution is apt here: "If a man is not willing to be, and to be regarded as, a specialist on the Bible, and to have men seek of him reliable opinions, he should resign from the ministry."[30]

A good preacher will not always want to rely on the opinions of others in the interpretation of the Bible. I once attended Sunday worship service at a church where the sermon was from 1 John. When the pastor came to 1 John 4:8 he said, "God is love, and as a certain scholar has commented, we cannot say that love is God." This is a case in which a preacher openly displays incompetence! It is true that we cannot say, "Love is God." The question is, why? I was sure that if faced with this question, this preacher would have nothing to say based on his understanding of the Greek text.[31] He depended on what a certain scholar said without being able to check it out for himself.

Another common mistake we hear from many preachers, teachers and a few authors[32] is that *agapē* (ἀγάπη) is divine and sacrificial love while *philia* (φιλία) is brotherly love.[33] This is a faulty assertion that cannot withstand even

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[29] Robert B. Chisholm, "Credibility, Competence, and Confidence", p. 10.

[30] H. G. Richardson, "The Use of Hebrew to a Minister", p. 80.

[31] In Greek, this has to do with determining the subject in a sentence with an equative verb (also known as a copula or linking verb). In this case a sentence contains two words linked by a 'to be' verb, which may be stated (as in 1 John 4:8) or implied, and both the subject and the predicate are in the same case, i.e. nominative case. How do we identify the subject and the predicate nominative? There are three basic rules. First, if one of the two words is a pronoun then the pronoun becomes the subject. Second, if one of the two words is articular then the articular word becomes the subject. Third, if one of the words is a proper name then the proper name is the subject. These rules can be further explained, but we don't have space for that here. According to these rules, especially number two, God has to be the subject of *ho theos agapē estin* (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν), 1 John 4:8b.

[32] See Joseph Webb, R. Kysar, *Greek for Preachers* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), p. 3.

[33] In English both words are translated with one word- 'love.'

a cursory reading of the Greek New Testament.[34] Without going into the details here, the point is that *agapē* and *philia* are used both when referring to divine love and to brotherly love. In order to preach credibly and competently a preacher must not be content with the opinions of others (some of which might be inaccurate); rather, he must engage the Word of God firsthand in the original languages then interact with his fellow commentators.

One repeated temptation that preachers need to overcome goes like this: "I have studied the Bible and preached from it many times so I know it pretty well. I can preach a good sermon even with minimal preparation, such as preparing on a Sunday morning." In order to overcome this temptation, among other things, a preacher needs to embrace a close reading of the text as well as employing the "defamiliarization principle". A close reading is an intentional engagement with the text that carefully follows and analyzes the linguistic techniques, literary context and the thought-flow of the writer. The "defamiliarization principle", on the other hand, is an attempt to make the familiar unfamiliar. This leads to a discovery of insights we have never seen in the text before, insights we cannot glean from an English text.[35] We are reading and re-reading the text for digestion and deep comprehension, not just to fulfill a pastoral obligation.

There is no better way of cultivating 'close reading' and 'defamiliarization' than to read from the Hebrew and Greek texts. This forces us to slow down in order to adequately digest the Word of God. Andrew J. Schmutzer notes,

> One of the greatest advantages in referring to biblical Hebrew [and Greek] in study is that it slows us down. Our problem is not that we preach too little. Rather, we preach too much without adequate passion or preparation. Analyzing the passage in the original language enables the preacher to be saturated with the text and dialogue with its message.[36]

When we are slowed down we are forced to obtain a clearer understanding of the text. Once we have a better understanding, we will be able to better explain it to others.[37] The dividends accrued from such efforts are unequaled.

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[34] See Lk 11:43; Jn 3:19; 5:20; 16:27, etc.

[35] Gerald W Peterman, "The Use and Abuse of Greek in Preaching" in *The Moody Handbook of Preaching,* Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008, p. 220, states, "Studying the Greek text can yield insights on various levels. These insights can be missed when reading the English text, even if this text is found alongside an interlinear Greek text. As preachers of the Word, it can be profitable for our hearers to hear what we have gained from study of the original language."

[36] Andrew J. Schmutzer, "Using Biblical Hebrew in Sermon Preparation" in *The Moody Handbook of Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), p. 203.

[37] See Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1946), p. 120.

At this point a word of caution is pertinent. A preacher does not need to use Hebrew or Greek words in his sermon in order to demonstrate that he has prepared adequately. I have listened to preachers who abuse original languages as they confuse their hearers and make them feel as though they are unlearned. Preaching time is not meant for displaying or parading linguistic arrogance in the name of good exegesis. We study the original languages in order to gain a better understanding of the text, which in turn ought to better equip us to explain it to our hearers in a language they can understand. I fully agree with Kenneth Wuest that,

> There is no place in the Christian pulpit for a display or affectation of learning. Nor should there be any undue emphasis placed upon *minutiae* in the presentation of one's knowledge when preaching the Word. The trained exegete will leave the technicalities connected with the grammar and syntax of the Greek language, back where they belong, in his study. He will bring only the finished product with him into the pulpit.[38]

So as much as we are encouraging preachers to saturate themselves with the Hebrew and Greek texts, we are also encouraging them to humbly offer the end product without condescension and without drawing attention to their linguistic prowess.

Conclusion

Are the original languages worthwhile? What difference does studying Hebrew and Greek make? Throughout this article we have argued that studying biblical languages is indispensable if we desire accurate exegesis, sound theology, and informed exposition. Andrew Schmutzer says that "…hard training in biblical languages has fallen on hard times."[39] But why is this so? Is it because of a movement toward professional training instead of academic achievement?[40] Does this reflect "a trade-school mentality, and a closet anti-intellectualism"?[41] Where are the 'John Calvins' of our day who are convinced that "we cannot understand the teaching of God unless we know his styles and languages"?[42] The excuses that some people give for failing to acquire competence in the original languages include the ready availability of good translations and arguing that these languages are for the college and seminary professors rather than church ministers. Others argue that most of the pastors who have had theological training never use Hebrew and Greek in sermon preparation, hence learning these languages is irrelevant. We have also observed that there are some people who are convinced that these languages are only for exceptionally gifted individuals.

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[38] Wuest, *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament*, p. 136.

[39] Schmutzer, "Using Biblical Hebrew in Sermon Preparation", p. 194.

[40] E. E. Ellis, "Language Skills and Christian Ministry" in *Reformed Review,* 24:3 (1971), pp. 162-163.

[41] Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages,* p. 80.

[42] Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, p. 13.

Our discussion from beginning to end has demonstrated that these excuses cannot hold water when subjected to close scrutiny. The reasons why we cannot regard biblical languages as optional extras are wide-ranging and weighty.[43] They include the fact that meaning is both conventional and historically particular; that every translation is an interpretation; that exegesis is foundational in doing theology and Christian apologetics; that culture and language are inextricably intertwined; that every language has unique rhetorical features that cannot be adequately captured in a translation; and that every preacher needs to study the Word of God firsthand as he practices close reading as well as the defamiliarization principle. If we regard the Word of God highly and are passionate about handling it properly, then we will do whatever it takes to understand and proclaim the divine revelation. Charles H. Spurgeon declared that, "a man to comment well should be able to read the Bible in the original."[44]

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[43] For additional literature on this subject see, D. Doriani, "A Pastor's Advice on Maintaining Original Language Skills" in *Presbyterion*, 19:2 (1993), pp. 103-15; and E.C. Brisson, "Let Down Your Nets! A Case for Biblical Languages" in *As I See It Today* (1995), pp. 1-4; and S. Hafemann, "Seminary, Subjectivity, and the Centrality of Scripture: Reflections on the Current Crisis in Evangelical Seminary Education" in *JETS*, Vol. 31 (1988), pp. 129-143.

[44] As found in Thomas Lyon, "A Plea for the Study of the Scriptures in the Original Languages" in *Banner of Truth*, Vol. 474 (2003), p. 4.

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Secularization: A New Testament Perspective

Judith L. Hill

Introduction

Traditionally, Africans have had a unified, holistic worldview, with "religion" being integral to every aspect of living. Life was not compartmentalized into "sacred" and "secular." Rather, the entire universe and all of daily life was infused with spiritual significance. Today one finds in Africa that the influences from secularized nations can present a real danger to Christian thinking.

For many in this day and age, secularization (or even secularism) is an absolute necessity; for others, it is anathema, an affront to Christianity or to whatever religion the person professes. Legislation in France in 1905 clearly separated the state from religious influences. American public schools cannot have prayers or post copies of the Ten Commandments. How should an evangelical Christian react to secularizing influences? One key to a solidly Christian perspective on life would be to explore and embrace what the New Testament teaches about secularization. Does the New Testament (NT) have any light to shed on the issue?

1. Secularization: What It Is

At the outset, we need to make a distinction between "secularization" and "secularism." The former refers to the *process* of moving from a worldview centered on religious realities to one that denies or ignores religious influence and significance in all aspects of life. The *end result* of the secularization process is known as "secularism," a state of affairs and a state of mind in which the realities of life are considered to be without spiritual significance. This mindset characterizes much of the Western world. For a cultural element to become "secularized," then, means that, in the minds of the group being described,[1] the element – whether a thing, an action, or an attitude – no longer has any spiritual or religious significance attached to it. One can speak of secularization as a movement away from a mindset that is Christian (or that is Islamic, or that is from any other religion). In all cases, the emphasis falls on the change taking place in the person's worldview.

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[1] Caveats need to be added, for the group experiencing secularization may not be an entire culture or religion but rather may comprise only a small subset of the larger society. One could also speak of secularization in terms of an individual's change in outlook over time. On a societal basis, one part of the society may feel comfortable secularizing certain activities formerly considered religious (such as food laws or marriage vows), whereas another group within the society may be shocked by such disregard for what they continue to consider religious. The latter group may inflict social (or other) penalties on those who (in their view) flout God's laws. The severity, public nature, and significance of such penalties is often to be measured in relation to the relative importance of each group.

This new mindset or worldview which excludes religion as a basis is called "secularism," or occasionally "humanism,"[2] for the supernatural no longer has a part.

2. Secularization: What It Is Not

It would be a confusion of categories to equate secularization with the fact of a person's making necessary accommodations to a secular or non-Christian culture.[3] Here I have in mind, for example, a first-century Jew paying his taxes to the Roman government. By that era, the Jews no longer lived under a theocracy; therefore, they had certain obligations to the ruling political authorities. To the extent that those obligations did not compromise their faith in the one true God (such as the practice of personally offering sacrifices to pagan deities or divinized emperors would have done), these actions were not necessarily a secularizing influence.[4] Otherwise, Jesus (Mk. 12:13-17) and Paul (Rom. 13:6,7) would not have counseled paying taxes to a corrupt government that could misuse that money.[5] In actual fact, both Jesus and Paul

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[2] Such a use of "humanism" is not, however, technically correct, for the emphasis of humanism is different. "Atheism" is not a good fit either, though a sort of practical atheism is experienced by those involved in secularization.

[3] It seems to me that this is where many Christians make a mistake in attempting to impose Christian values (such as prayer in the public schools) on a society that has no pretentions to being Christian or religious in any sense.

[4] One of the most telling examples of Jewish secularization is recounted in a specifically Jewish document. The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees underscore how far some were willing to go in order to fit into the Hellenistic culture. The story in 1 Maccabees indicates that the first wave of Hellenization preceded the imperial commands, and that in that first group were Jews who voluntarily reversed the very sign of the covenant, namely circumcision, in order to fit into the surrounding culture (1 Macc. 1:11-15). Presumably, the main purpose for such an action as surgically removing the evidence of circumcision was to enable the young men to participate freely in athletic events without being ridiculed by non-Jews, who considered circumcision a mutilation of the body. Since athletic events were carried out in the nude, whether or not the participant was circumcised was obvious. If the sole purpose was the athletic competition, this action on the part of Jewish males would be a prime example of secularization. Since, however, all athletic contests in the Greco-Roman world were dedicated to one deity or another, removing the marks of circumcision could rightfully be seen as renouncing the Jewish religion, which forbade all contact with foreign gods. Cf. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), vol. I, p. 74. For a perspective that does not find Jewish athletes participating in Hellenistic competition as being disloyal to Judaism, see Jonathon A. Goldstein, "Jewish Acceptance and Rejection of Hellenism," in E. P. Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 78.

[5] The text of these two admonitions is as follows: *And they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him, in order to trap Him in a statement. And they came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar,*

helped their audiences understand that all of life, even paying taxes, falls under God's sovereignty.[6]

For the thinking Christian, no action can be divorced from a worldview in which God reigns supreme. Secularization is *not* the mere fact of doing some of the same things that unbelievers do. It is rather the process of leaving one way of envisioning and understanding reality, in which God (and by implication, the supernatural) enters into all of life, and moving to another mindset in which God has no viable part. It is the process of leaving the supernatural as one's frame of reference toward relying solely on the possibilities inherent to the human being, to human society, and to human logic and its extension in what is considered "natural science." Because secularization is a process, it can take decades for an individual to become secularized. For an entire society, whose traditions are passed down from generation to generation, the process of secularization can take much longer.

New Testament Examples

1. Challenges for a New Testament Study

Having established the difference between secularization and secularism and also the difference between necessary accommodations and secularization, we now turn to the NT itself. In doing so, it is pertinent to remark that the very nature of the NT as a document written over a short period of time (50 years) precludes the possibility of noting great changes. The Old Testament, with its millennia of history, offers a far better opportunity to observe and trace such developments in a society. The time period for the NT evidence is simply too short.

Thus what we note in the following paragraphs are not so much "examples" of secularization (though I have labeled them as such) but rather hints or precursors of what might lead down the path of secularization. None of the examples is clear-cut, yet each is suggestive of conditions that could indicate the start of secularization.

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or not? "Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." And they brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him (Mark 12:13-17).
For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Romans 13:6-7). If no other indication is given, biblical texts are quoted from the New American Standard Bible.
[6] For this reason, Paul can be prescriptive about taxes in Romans 13, stating that the government officials are doing God's will. In verse 4, he terms the government as the "minister" (διάκονος) of God; in verse 6, the government officials are the "servants" (λειτουργοὶ) of God.

2. The Absence of Secularism as a Worldview

To begin with, we need to underscore the fact that no part of the first-century society, whether Jewish, Christian, or pagan, was actually secularized. With the possible exception of a very few philosophers, no one ever denied the reality of the supernatural. They may sometimes have lived as though the supernatural had, practically speaking, no part in their lives. Yet the concept of supernatural beings and events was an integral part of the first-century mindset. As for the Jews, they believed in the Creator-God who ruled the universe and who had angels as his servants. They believed that fallen angels and Satan opposed God on a cosmic scale. Prayer was efficacious, according to their beliefs, because there was a God who could control events in history. The regulations proposed at Mt Sinai (and later extended by the Pharisees) made the Jews constantly aware that their life was lived in relation to God.

As for the non-Jewish world, the sheer variety of religions in the Roman empire attested to the interest in the supernatural. Every city had its patron divinities, and sacrifices to these divinities and in favor of the emperor(s) were considered a civic duty. Many of the religions even actively propagated their beliefs.

Christians, of course, balked at such sacrifices (as had the Jews before them). But their refusal to offer pagan, civic, or imperial sacrifices of any kind was not based on rejection of the supernatural. Rather, Christians recognized only the one true God (in three Persons) as being worthy of worship.

The presence of Jews, Christians, and other and various forms of local and empire-wide religiosity all demonstrate that, in one sense, the NT is not a document that has examples of secularism, which would be a totally non-religious worldview.[7]

3. Tending toward Secularization: Some NT Examples

Yet, on the other hand, one can find examples of turning toward the attitudes that might *eventually* lead to secularism.[8] Here I have four examples

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[7] It is possible, however, to look at the metaphorical example of Babylon in Revelation 18 as a picture of a wholly secularized city. The inhabitants seem to have no thoughts for God at all at the moment of judgment. Indeed, the city seems to have eliminated Christian testimony earlier in its history ("And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints …" Rev. 18:24). The NT does not, however, provide material for understanding the city's path to secularism, for we see only the moment of judgment and not the process leading up to that destruction. By the time of the NT, "Babylon" as such did not exist but had become a code-name among Jews and Christians for that which is evil. It was often equated with Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13).

[8] Throughout this study, the question of separating overlapping terms and categories comes into view. In the examples that follow, several elements can be said to work alongside each other: secularization, pride, sin, unbelief, backsliding, and self-centeredness among them. In the most general terms, all actions and attitudes that

of varying gravity. The first three examples, which are treated briefly and in the order of their occurrence in the canon and history, involve individuals; the fourth example is that of a church. As mentioned previously, these examples are suggestive rather than definitive.

3.1 The Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-31 and parallels)

> And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and *began* asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property. (Mark 10:17-22)

The pericope as given in Mark sets forth an enthusiastic young man, ready to lay claim on eternal life, seeking to become a disciple of Jesus. He had already been living a life in accordance with the prescriptions of Judaism, according to his own testimony, but he sensed a desire for something more.[9] Yet when Jesus actually called him to discipleship ("Come, follow me"), the young man rejected the offer. His priority in life lay elsewhere, namely, it seems, in material benefits. On his personal scale of values, discipleship and eternal life ranked lower than possessions. His initial enthusiasm cooled quickly as he gave a "worldly" evaluation to what Jesus was demanding of him. Mark says that the young man was grieved (λυπούμενος) and left Jesus, for (γὰρ) he was attached to his many possessions.[10]

The Synoptics do not give us a follow-up pericope on the young man, but the implication is that he made no further effort to follow Jesus as a true disciple. His mind was set on other attractions. At least at first glance, we can propose this young man as a candidate who was not so very serious about his commitment to things spiritual and therefore might gradually fall into a way of thinking that would have little reference to God. But the Scriptures do not go that far. They merely give the example as a warning.

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deny, ignore, or resist God and his priority are sinful. The attribution of underlying reasons for such sin is subject to discussion. In speaking of secularization in the following examples, I am putting the emphasis on the direction of a lifestyle or mindset if a person or group should choose to persist in wrong choices. Those choices may have other factors, such as pride, unbelief, or self-centeredness at their root.

[9] Perhaps what he desired was more recognition of his admirable lifestyle, as he perceived it.

[10] Augustine describes the young man as being "trapped in his own earthly desires." Cf. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, *Mark* (coll. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. II; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 139.

3.2 The Apostle Thomas (John 20:24-31)

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:24-29)

My second NT example is Thomas, the apostle of Jesus. For three years, he had been following Jesus. In contrast to the rich young man, Thomas had not been afraid to leave behind whatever possessions and inheritance he had. He had lived with Jesus, learned from him, and even acclaimed him with the others on the day of the Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem. He seemingly thought that Jesus was, at the very least, doing God's will and was directed by the Almighty. Yet when "push" came to "shove," Thomas decided that he was not going to trust in anything supernatural. He would not accept the other apostles' declaration that Jesus had risen from the dead. How could he be sure that it was the very same person and not a substitute until he himself had physical verification of what the others had claimed?

Here we see a disciple who has been reduced to a dangerous mindset which, if not corrected, could have been the starting point for a journey toward secularism. Thomas did not deny that Jesus could rise from the dead; he still accepted the possibility of supernatural events. But he wanted to test the reality himself.[11]

The good news here is that, when confronted with the truth, Thomas recognized his error and acknowledged his true Master, the one whose authority should rule his life. Thus Thomas exclaimed: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

The rich young man of Mark 10 had turned away from the Lord Jesus, but Thomas turned toward his Master. At the critical moment, Thomas resisted the temptation of wanting to control and verify everything by his own means. He made the choice to be a true disciple of Jesus, letting that perspective guide all of his thinking.

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[11] Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. by Conrad H. Gempf (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 443, note 52: "If we hold a supranaturalist world-view, exemplified in the acceptance of a traditional understanding of resurrection of Jesus, we are immediately in a different ball-game. Within that framework we may still require reasonably rigorous testimony before admitting other miracles, but their possibility may be accepted in principle."

3.3 Demas (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:9-10)

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. (Colossians 4:14)

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. (2 Timothy 4:9-10)

The third NT example comes perhaps 30 years later and involves a Christian by the name of Demas. He is mentioned only twice in the NT. The earlier of the two references, which is found in Colossians, comes during the time of Paul's first imprisonment at Rome and speaks of Demas in positive terms as sending warm greetings to the believers living in Colosse. In that letter, Demas, along with Luke and others, seems to have been a helpful companion to Paul during that difficult period.

By the time of Paul's second Roman imprisonment, perhaps some five years later, Paul's second letter to Timothy gave a different evaluation of Demas. Demas had been in Rome, and Paul had had contact with him. Yet Demas had left (ἐγκατέλιπεν, abandoned) Paul in order to go to (or return to) Thessalonica. That fact in itself was not negative. Others, such as Crescens and Titus, had also left but not been accused of desertion. The problem, however, with Demas lay in his motivation for leaving Paul. According to 2 Tim. 4:9-10, Demas departed "… because he loved this present world" (ἀγαπήσας τὸν νῦν αἰῶνα). Demas' value system had changed; instead of putting Christian charity and spiritual values first, his new priority had become "the current age." He chose the present over the eternal, "this age" instead of "the age to come." His choices were influenced by something beyond his relationship with the Triune God. Thus he was in danger of increasing secularization in his life. Since the NT gives no further information, we are unaware of how far down that path Demas actually went.[12]

3.4 The Church at Ephesus (Acts 18:18-40; ch.19; 20:17-38; 1&2 Timothy; Rev. 2:1-7)

The fourth and final example which I will cite from the NT is that of the church of Ephesus.[13] In the first century AD, this city, which was the metropolis

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[12] The Church Father Chrysostom, in his sermons on 2 Timothy, gives his own evaluation of Demas' choices: "Demas, having loved his own ease and security away from danger, has chosen to live luxuriously at home, rather than suffer hardships with Paul and share his present dangers. Paul has indeed blamed him, not only in order to confirm us, that we may not sink to self-indulgent weakness in declining toils and dangers, for this would amount to 'having loved this present world.'" Cf. Peter Gorday (ed.), *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (coll. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. IX; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 277.

[13] On the basis of its Greek name, scholarly literature often refers to the city as "Ephesos," as in the title of the essays edited by Helmut Koester (ed.), *Ephesos:*

(or chief city) of Asia and which ranked fourth in importance in the Roman empire, may have passed the zenith of its glory, but it was still important and wealthy, as evidenced by the numerous public structures built during the two centuries around the birth of Christ.

By tracing the history of this church as given in the NT, we can see a definite change in the basic outlook of the church as a whole. First we will start with the founding of the church and its early days, then its struggles, and finally the severe warning it received from God. We will then finish with a look beyond the NT to see the outcome for this church.

3.4.1 The Good News Comes to Ephesus

When Paul first landed in Ephesus (Acts 18), he was unwilling to spend a lot of time there, but he evaluated the situation as a promising one from the point of view of Jewish interest in the gospel. Paul's deputies, Aquila and Priscilla, remained behind in Ephesus to act as conduits for the Good News. Here were people eager to understand the truth. Together with Apollos from Alexandria, this Jewish-Christian couple taught the people and had a good response.

3.4.2 Initial Impact of the Good News in Ephesus

And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. (Acts 19:17-20)

At his return to Ephesus, during the so-called Third Missionary Journey, Paul also encountered openness to the gospel message. Some who had known only of John the Baptist's ministry were introduced to the full story of salvation in Jesus Christ; and Paul, for a time, had easy access to the synagogue as a teaching base. When forced to leave there, he found other quarters for continuing his teaching. Luke says that he had his disciples (τοὺς μαθητὰς, Acts 19:9; cf. 19:30) with him. The presence of disciples indicates the strength of the ministry among the Ephesians.

Indeed, the response in the city of Ephesus was generally spectacular. Some non-Christians observed Paul and were so impressed that they tried to imitate his miracles of exorcism (Acts 19:13-16). Others believed in Jesus and openly confessed their sins (Acts 19:18). Those involved in sorcery were compelled by God's Spirit to burn, in public, their magical scrolls (Acts 19:19),

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Metropolis of Asia (coll. Harvard Theological Studies 41; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995).

a value of 50,000 drachmas, or the equivalent of 135 years' worth of work at the rate paid to a day laborer or a soldier.[14]

Luke gives two summary statements relative to the impact of the gospel in Ephesus. First, with respect to the general population, the author of Acts affirms that the effectiveness of the Christian ministry became known to the "Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified" (Acts 19:17). Second, with regard to the Christian conversions, Luke says: "So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing" (Acts 19:20).

Thus, there was a strong, vibrant, and testifying church in the city of Ephesus. Its impact was significant enough that the silversmiths feared that their trade in pagan idols of Artemis would be damaged.[15] They knew what Paul and the Christians felt about the situation. Demetrius, the leader of a revolt, exclaimed: "… not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all" (Acts 19:26).

The disturbance was such that the town clerk finally had to remind the population that the Roman government would not tolerate anything that resembled a breach of the peace (Acts 19:35-41). But prior to that climax, Luke gives his readers a further insight into just how influential these Christians were in Ephesus. Paul was protected not only by his own disciples but also by some of his highly placed government friends, Asiarchs (τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἀσιαρχῶν, Acts 19:31).

Here, then, was a church which was strong and influential, with trained local leadership (cf. Acts 20:17, 28), a church which Paul had faithfully nurtured on the individual level as well as in a larger group (Acts 20:20, 27,

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[14] Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 582: "The great difference in our account [from those detailing Augustus' burning of banned books] is that the owners here are voluntarily burning their books - these books were not seized. Inasmuch as the books were very expensive, and in view of the stress Luke places on the worth of these books, … we are presumably meant to think that those undertaking this act were of some social means. Perhaps v.18 [of Acts 19] refers to the actions of the lower-status and poorer Christians, and v.19 to the actions of the higher-status and more wealthy Christians."

[15] Artemis (Diana) was the major deity worshiped in Ephesus, but many other temples and altars have been identified, including the Egyptian divinities Sarapis and Isis. C. E. Arnold, "Ephesus," in G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 250, lists many others as well: "… Agathe Tyche, Aphrodite, Apollo, Asclepius, Athena, the Cabiri, Concord, Cybele (the Mother Goddess), Demeter, Dionysus, Enedra, Hecate, Hephaestus, Heracles, Hestia Boulaia, Kore, Nemesis, Pan, Pion (a mountain god), Pluto, Poseidon, Theos Hypsistos, Tyche Soteira, Zeus and several other deities."

31). Although he counseled vigilance against dangerous teachers whom he termed "wolves" (Acts 20:29-30), he was assured that God's grace would be sufficient for their situation (Acts 20:32).

3.4.3 The Comfortably Established Church

Ten years later, the church at Ephesus continued to function. Nevertheless, the indications in Ephesians[16] and 1 Timothy are that, instead of influencing its environment and having a positive testimony, the church was being assailed by problems. The Ephesian church was alive and had a variety of members[17] — rich, poor, those from a Jewish background, those from a pagan background, parents, children, masters, slaves, young men, young women, older men, and older women. They represented a cross-section of society. On the positive side, Paul expressed concern that the leaders not be new converts (1 Tim. 3:6), which indicates that the church continued to attract people to Christ.[18] Paul also mentioned the need for a good witness, a good reputation in the larger community (1 Tim. 3:7). The fact that the non-Christian community is called "the outsiders" (τῶν ἔξωθεν) indicates that the church had solidified into an identifiable group which saw itself as distinct from those not belonging to the church.

Thus at this stage, the church was firmly established, but it was also facing challenges. In particular, they had to confront false teachers (1 Tim. 1:3ff; 4:1ff) and internal divisions (rich/poor - 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Jew/Gentile - Eph. 2:11-22). Although persecution does not enter into Paul's discussion, the problems of false teaching and internal tensions indicate a church that which was no longer at the height of its positive influence in the community. It had begun to be focused inwardly, on itself.

This picture is confirmed a few years further on by Paul's second letter to Timothy, in which the apostle laid a strong accent on the purity of the teaching and the need to guard against false doctrines. He warned against future problems and those who would deem the *kerygma* passé and would seek something new to which to listen, something which (inevitably) would not be

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[16] The NT letter which is commonly known as "Ephesians" was probably not directed exclusively toward that church. More probably, it was a circular letter to a group of Asian churches (including the church at Ephesus). The problems highlighted in the letter can, however, by implication, be applied to the situation of the Ephesian church.

[17] Note the remarks by Koester concerning this variety in Helmut Koester, "Ephesos in Early Christian Literature,' in Koester, *Ephesos*, pp. 123-124, though the basis of his conclusions is faulty, since he claims that Rom. 16 is part of a letter addressed, not to Rome but to Ephesus. Thus he uses the names given there as indicative of the members of the Ephesian church. My remarks concerning the composition of the church are based, rather, on the contents of Paul's letter normally cited as "Ephesians."

[18] These may be, as Koester suggests in *Ephosos*, p.129, second-generation Christians. Nevertheless, his basis for such a statement is again untrustworthy, for he assumes the date for the writing of Acts to be about AD 100, whereas I put it prior to Paul's death in the AD 60's.

the truth of the gospel: "**…** wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Their desire to have "interesting" teachers had not yet, it appears, caused them to renounce the church at Ephesus. Instead, they wanted such (false) teachers to come and spread their so-called "enlightened" message in the church.

3.4.4 The Ephesian Church in Danger

> To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." (Rev. 2:1-7)

The final picture of the Ephesus church given in Scripture comes from John's writings, Rev. 2:1-7. In the letter to the angel/messenger (ἀγγέλῳ) of the church at Ephesus, the positive characteristics of the church were noted as its work for the Lord and its perseverance (Rev. 2:2). The "work" is defined as opposition to the assaults launched against the truth,[19] including opposition to the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6).[20] The mention of perseverance seems to indicate sufferings caused by external forces, whether religiously stimulated (Jews or pagans) or government-incited (civic or imperial cults).

The negative side of the ledger has this condemnation: "You have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4). The initial enthusiasm which had characterized the church as its founding, when Christians had voluntarily burned expensive manuscripts in order to make it clear that they were following Jesus wholeheartedly (Acts 19:18-19), had been lost along the way. The church

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[19] First John's concern with false teaching may mirror the conditions found in Ephesus, where the disciples John (to be equated with the Elder and with the Apostle) was said to live out his final years, overseeing the Asian churches, according to Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1: "Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." [Quotation taken from Schaff's edition of the Fathers]

[20] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (coll. NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 233 ff. and 248-251, on idolatry.

continued to exist, but its fervor was gone.[21] The church became, seemingly, more institutionalized and less a living and vibrant entity. Instead of positively influencing their community, the Christians had turned inward as a group and forgotten that the main point was their relationship, intimate and all-pervasive, with Jesus Christ.

The letter in Revelation 2 which is addressed to the church at Ephesus contains direct instructions which could be thus paraphrased: "Remember your origins, repent, go back to doing what you did at the beginning." Complacency and a diminished love for God and for his people, including those not yet in the fold, demanded their repentance. Repentance would take the Ephesian church back to its starting place: a vibrant love for the Lord. The letter continues by explaining the consequences of a failure to apply the instructions given. Simply put, the church at Ephesus would disappear[22] (Rev. 2:5).

3.4.5 Ephesus Beyond the New Testament

I have learned that some people have passed through on their way from there with an evil teaching. But you did not permit them to sow any seeds among you, plugging your ears so as not to receive anything sown by them. You are stones of the Father's temple, prepared for the building of God the Father. You are being carried up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, using as a cable the Holy Spirit; and for faith is your hoist, and love is the path that carries you up to God. And so you are all traveling companions bearing God, bearing the temple, bearing Christ, and bearing the holy things, adorned in every way with the commandments of Jesus Christ. I exult in you, since I have been deemed worthy through the things that I write to speak with you and to rejoice together with you; for you love nothing in human life but God alone. (Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 9:1-2)[23]

The city of Ephesus, which had been the focal point of all Asia Minor, a commercial hub and governmental seat,[24] attracted to itself some of the

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[21] This fervor has been variously defined by commentators as brotherly love within the Christian community, love for Jesus Christ, love for God, or zeal for witnessing to unbelievers. Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 230 f.

[22] The disappearance of the Ephesian church could be either with respect to that particular locale [the position favored by William Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, updated edition edited by Mark W. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 177], or a permanent dissolution of the church [the interpretation favored by George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 39 f.] This verse has been the subject of dispute for many centuries as to the exact meaning of the verb κινήσω. The major choices put forward for understanding the verse are to translate the verb as "move," with the implication of a change of location, or "remove," with the implication of a cessation. Cf. BDAG, κινέω.

[23] The letters of Ignatius have been edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 229.

[24] Note the comments of E.M. Blaiklock, "Ephesus," in Merrill Tenney (ed.), *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 2, p. 330.

ecclesiastical administration as well. As well as serving as the home for the bishop, Ephesus hosted church councils into the fifth century AD. The church may have been moribund in some respects, but at least externally it functioned.

Ignatius of Antioch, in fact, wrote positively of the church in the second century AD. Whether the church was as free from problems as Ignatius seems to indicate is not otherwise known.[25] But if so, it would indicate that the church must have taken seriously the warning found in the book of Revelation and had a period of strength once again. The secularization process is not necessarily irreversible, and the Ephesian church may well have changed the direction in which it had been heading, just as Thomas had done in his life.

Two sorts of crises, natural and human, brought to an end both the city and the church of Ephesus. The initial crisis was sparked by two natural phenomena: First, the delta of the river mouth silted over, forming a swamp infested by malarial mosquitoes. Without the river traffic to which Ephesus had been accustomed, commerce and tourism became more difficult, and the city dwindled in importance. Second, the area was subject to many earthquakes, which destroyed many of the stately and beautiful structures in the city.

In later centuries, a human-initiated crisis rang the death knell for the city and church of Ephesus when the Ottoman Turks overran the area, leaving destruction in their path. Today, Ephesus is completely abandoned as a habitation but has become an active site for many archeological digs, adding to our knowledge of those distant times of the early centuries of our era. Nevertheless, as far as the Ephesian church is concerned, it died out. Nothing indicates that it moved elsewhere; it simply died. And thus was fulfilled John's prophecy: Repent or I will remove your "candlestick" (Rev. 2:5).

The rich young man, the apostle Thomas, Demas and the church at Ephesus - four examples of varying intensity. They illustrate the fact that even in ancient times the danger of secularizing influences was present. Secularism was not yet a reality in the first-century world, but avoiding the secularizing process necessitated constant vigilance. How then did the writers of the New Testament attempt to help their readers deal with the challenge that secularization presented?

New Testament Advice

The first thing that can be noted is that the various writers of the NT included examples which were deemed negative. The rich young man of the Synoptics missed out on the blessing of a close association with Jesus, the

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[25] Note the comments of Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (coll. JSNT Supp Series 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), p. 54: "[Ignatius] sees the energy and devotion of this church but not the seeds of decline which a closer knowledge might have revealed."

Master, when he decided to turn away from discipleship. The apostle Thomas did not experience the benediction Jesus announced: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). Demas, by deserting Paul, lost an opportunity to serve and to learn from the great apostle. The entire Ephesian church was in danger of heresy and of losing their "candlestick." These negative examples were a warning to the readers.

But beyond those examples, there are some words of advice to help believers maintain a mindset in which God is central and involved in every aspect of life. In the paragraphs that follow, we will briefly note some advice given by Jesus and by the apostle Paul.

1. The Advice of Jesus

Early in his ministry, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained to his disciples that worry was useless because everything in life falls under God's sovereignty and providence.

> For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "With what shall we clothe ourselves?" For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt. 6:25-33)

The antidote to worry was to focus on God's priorities and let him provide: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33). Some years later, during a difficult period for the disciples, Jesus reminded them again of that truth, using different words: "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

The advice given by Jesus was that of keeping God in view at all times, not allowing the cares of the world around to mold one's thinking. God in his sovereignty would care for the believer.

2. The Advice of the Apostle Paul

Paul also gave advice that would help the Christians avoid secularizing influences. He encouraged the believers in Asia Minor with these words:

> Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph. 5:15-17).

Paul's value judgment, namely, that "the days are evil," gave the Christians a reference point. The days are "evil" (πονηραί) because they present temptations to ignore the supernatural (that is, to ignore God) and consider that he has no part in moment-by-moment living. Nothing is neutral; all is to be evaluated according to how God himself would examine the matter: Is it wise or unwise? Is it the will of the Lord, or is it evil?

Paul also underlined the concept of right-thinking when he addressed the problematic congregation in the city of Corinth:

> For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ … (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Paul's worldview is obviously organized around the religious dimension and his relationship to God through Jesus Christ. "Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" indicates that Christians might be tempted toward a non- or even anti-religious worldview. Their part as individual believers was to make a conscious choice to see the world as God sees it, with no part of life being unimportant or outside of God's care. The situations in which believers find themselves are ones in which very real enemies, namely: Satan and his agents (both human and celestial), attempt to sidetrack Christians, to secularize them.

For this reason, Paul outlined for the Ephesians the necessity of using spiritual weapons: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer (Eph. 6:14-18). All these weapons would help the Christian keep his/her mind centered on "obedience to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Conclusion

Although the NT does not directly address the subject of secularization, the issue is already in view. We have seen some examples of secularization - that is, moving away from a religious worldview - and some strategies suggested by Jesus and Paul for avoiding that very real temptation.

At least two of the examples given above indicate that repentance and a change of direction - a return to a worldview centered on God - are indeed possible. Thomas changed his perspective immediately and for the long term.[26] The fact that the church at Ephesus apparently improved[27] for a period after the warning given in Revelation 2 should similarly encourage Christians of our day that we have the possibility of returning to the Lord in repentance so as to be renewed by him.

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[26] Church history tells us that Thomas became the first Christian missionary to India.

[27] Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 177: "Surely in this milder denunciation [of Rev. 2] we may see a proof that the evil in Ephesus was curable … The failing can be corrected, the enthusiasm may be revived … "

We as believers have the same "weapons" as Paul himself had at his disposal and recommended to others. A lifestyle founded on the Word of God and prayer and lived in faith will be an integrated life. That person will be able, by God's grace, to withstand the assaults of a secular society and any temptations to secularize his or her own way of thinking and acting.

We have spoken here of the individual Christian. The way in which a church reacts to secularizing influences must be by working with individuals within the congregation. By unceasingly presenting God's truth, the church as a whole will be equipped to be a positive influence in the community and not be overwhelmed by the secularism that surrounds it.

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The Budding of Aaron's Staff:
An Ethic of Non-Violent Conflict Resolution in Numbers 17

by Lubunga w'Ehusha

Abstract

The story of Aaron's budding staff in Numbers 17 constitutes the last episode of a narrative filled with violence among the people of God, from both the human and divine participants. The revolt initiated by Korah in Numbers 16 opened the door to hostility between two rival parties, Moses and Aaron on the one side, and other Israelite leaders and the people on the other side. The brutal way in which the matter was dealt with at the beginning caused the death of thousands of Israelites. The point is that violence could not solve the problem but in the end, the conflict was solved through a non-violent procedure, the test of family staffs. The text raises a number of questions in the mind of the reader concerning God's association with violence in the Old Testament, especially in the Exodus narrative. This paper explores how the budding staff can help us understand the tension existing within the text, that the God who had sanctioned the death of thousands of Moses' opponents was also the initiator of a non-violent solution to Korah's revolt.

Introduction

Although God's intent for peace is fully developed in the Scripture, the Exodus narrative opens with violence as Pharaoh decides to oppress the Hebrew slaves and slaughter their baby boys (Ex. 1). It continues with the extermination of all first born living creatures in Egypt as a means to break Pharaoh's resistance to liberation (Ex. 12). The last act of the Exodus is the *Herem* ordered by Yahweh to wipe out all the inhabitants of the Promised Land (Deut. 7:15). This violence becomes disconcerting for modern readers when it involves the people of God and/or God Himself.

The book of Numbers is characterised by a spirit of murmuring and rebellion among the people of Israel as they face hardship in their journey to the Promised Land. The rebellion recorded in Numbers 16-17 is distinctive because it focuses on the rejection of the leadership of Moses and Aaron and the violence that ensues. Korah is described in this text as the instigator of a rebel movement that spreads among other tribal leaders and ends up involving the whole congregation. The narrative reports that the movement, which creates an internal conflict among the Levites about the priesthood, quickly finds support from 250 tribal leaders and then the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, before it finally permeates the whole congregation. To counter the movement, the narrative describes how the various opponents are condemned to death. The death toll of the rebellion is enormous as 250 tribal leaders are burnt while offering sacrifice (16:35); Dathan and Abiram and their households are swallowed up alive in the earth (16:32-34); 14,700 Israelites are stricken by a plague, and Korah himself perishes in this process. Raymond Brown remarks that, "What started out in one man's mind as an envious

thought reproduced itself until it became a human disaster."[1] In spite of the fear and sorrow that such a disaster brings on the congregation, its impact on the spirit of rebellion is minimal. It seems that at the end of the plague people are speechless and sorrowful but unrepentant. God breaks the silence by proposing a new test, which does not threaten human lives, but turns it into a non-lethal competition with family rods. The test of the budding rod is approved by the entire congregation and results in the acknowledgment of the Aaronic priesthood. Now the people are ready to continue paying their dues to the priests as they are reminded to do in chapter 18. This paper will attempt to show that the story begins with a violent approach to a problem and then ends with this non-violent solution to the problem. Subsequently, we shall relate this text and the place of biblical violence to the African context.

Violence at the Beginning of the Conflict

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines *violence* as "vehemence of personal feeling or action; great, excessive or extreme ardour or fervour; also, violent or passionate conduct or language." If one reads the text of Numbers 16-17 in the light of the above definition, it appears clearly that both parties engaged in this contest use violence. Let us first examine the violence on the side of Moses' opponents.

1. Violence from Korah and His Company

There are three major strands in the movement of rebellion reported in Numbers 16-17 and each of them displays some kind of violence towards Moses and Aaron. Korah and the 250 tribal leaders led the first movement.

1.1 Verbal Violence
The text in Numbers 16:1-3 reads:
> Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown.
> They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?

From the above text, signs of violence in speech and actions can be observed. Although in verse 1 the verb לקח (to take) does not have an object in Hebrew, the King James and other versions have opted to add *took men,* to show that there was an intention of raising people against Moses and Aaron. The recruitment of people called to oppose Moses and Aaron is presented before the exposition of the motivation behind the revolt. The intention of

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[1] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers, BST,* Leicester: IVP, 2002, p. 143.

violence becomes obvious as verse 3 states, ויקהלו על־משֶׁה ועל־אהרן "They gathered against Moses and Aaron." The charge laid against Moses by this group opens with a provocative expression "You take too much". George Gray suggests that רבלכם be translated as "Enough"[2], or we might say, "Enough is enough". Since Moses and Aaron are the two top leaders in the sight of God as well as among the people, to address them by "enough" reveals the disrespect and verbal violence used by Korah and his company. The argument reaches its climax when they question Moses and Aaron's legitimacy. Thus at the end of 16:3, they complain, ומדוע תתנשאו על־קהל יהוה "Why/on what account do you lift yourselves up above the assembly of Yahweh?"

In other words, Korah and his company reject the authority of Moses and Aaron to lead the Exodus. After what happened in Egypt as Moses and Aaron laboured to free the people from the obstinate king of Egypt, all the miracles experienced at the crossing the Red Sea, and the provision of water and food in the wilderness, the question sounds like an insult. The point is, Korah and his company have chosen a violent confrontation. There is nothing like Ghandi's pacifism in their language. The second strand of rebellion, as we shall see, follows the same pattern. The reason could be that Korah is the leader behind this insurrection.

1.2 The Defiant Revolt of Dathan and Abiram; and the Reubenites

The test mentions three names Dathan, Abiram and On, but the third name is dropped in the course of the narrative and none of the cross references allude to him. We may consider Dathan and Abiram as the leaders of this second strand of revolt. Their complaint in vv. 16:12-14 goes thus:

> And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up! Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

The defiant revolt of Dathan and Abiram shifts the focus of the narrative from religious hegemony to political issues. Some scholars interpret the revolt of Dathan and Abiram, sons of Reuben, as a claim of privilege of their birth right in Israel. The reader should remember how Reuben, according to natural right, was entitled to the privilege of the first-born and the dignity of the leadership among his brethren. But Reuben forfeited his prerogative because of an immoral act when he lay with his father's concubine (Gen. 49:23). This revolt may then be considered as a way of claiming back their leadership. This interpretation is advocated by Jewish scholars:

> According to both medieval and modern commentaries, Dathan and Abiram thought that leadership role was rightfully theirs. Ancient Israel was a

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[2] George Gray, *Numbers*, ICC, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2003, p. 191.

society in which the first-born typically became the leader. Dathan and Abiram from the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's first-born, were upset that Moses and Aaron were leaders rather than themselves, and they felt jealous.[3]

There might be some pertinence to the claim of the Reubenites, but they have adopted the same verbal violence as the first group. In their response, Dathan and Abiram repeat the sentence, "we will not come up." The Hebrew root, עלה "to go up, ascend", bears a positive connotation, be it in its active Qal or passive Niphal, as opposed to ירד 'to descend, go down.' One goes up to Jerusalem, to meet Yahweh in his temple or on his mountain. Whereas 'descend' or 'go down' is linked with *sheol* or Egypt or other negatives. The sentence "we will not come up" can therefore mean their refusal to go to the Tabernacle where Moses sits to settle Korah's matters, or the rejection of appearing before Moses as the ruler of the community. But metaphorically, it may be interpreted as "we refuse the liberation, we want to go back to Egypt."

As a matter of fact, going back to Egypt is a possible option for Dathan and Abiram as they describe Egypt as "the land flowing with milk and honey" (v.14), a description often attributed to Canaan, the Promised Land.[4] The speech of Dathan and Abiram is aggressive and full of frustration. They call on Moses to consider his inability to carry out the promises given at the beginning of the Exodus and the possibility of stepping down. Moses is also accused of bringing up the people from a land of comfort in order to kill them in the desert. Finally, they join the first group in accusing Moses of usurping power. Without any doubt, all contenders have chosen hard language to vent their anger upon Moses and Aaron. This attitude can only stir up violence and inhibit peaceful talk. The result is that God eliminates the violent and unrepentant rebels (16:16-35).

1.3 The Revolt of the Congregation

The argument of the congregation is short and straightforward as Numbers 16:41 shows: "On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the LORD.'"

The accusation is very short but precise. Moses and Aaron are charged with the murder of God's people. The pronoun אתם "you" is used emphatically and may be rendered, "You are the ones." The suggestion is that Moses and

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[3] http://www.batkol.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/paras19062004.pdf This link is from the Bat Kol Institute, featuring Marie Andre Mitchell, *Shabbat Table Talk*: Parashat Korach- Erev Shabbat, 18 June 2004, dealing with Numbers 16:1-18:32.

[4] See "The Land Flowing with Milk and Honey", in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, gen. eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery,* Leicester: IVP, 1998, p. 488 which states that this phrase occurs 14 times in the Pentateuch, once in Joshua and several times in Jeremiah and Ezekiel within the contexts alluding to Israel's history. This passage is the only occurrence where the phrase is used for Egypt.

Aaron should not put the blame on any other person or reject their responsibility for this affair. To point to Moses and Aaron as responsible for the death of the leaders involved in the two previous revolts reveals how the congregation interprets the matter. The narrative attributes to God the supernatural means used to get rid of the rebels of the two previous revolts. But in the sight of the congregation, the use of supernatural forces does not exclude the implication of Moses and Aaron in the killing of other leaders. The fact that the whole congregation murmurs against Moses reminds the reader of what happened previously as the people murmured and talked about stoning Moses and Aaron (14:1, 2, 10). It is not difficult to imagine how far this congregation could go if Yahweh does not quickly intervene to protect and vindicate his chosen leaders.

In the people's statement it appears there is no room for negotiation or settling the matter in peace because the congregation has decided to address the issue with hostility. To the people, Moses and Aaron are murderers; therefore, any brutality against them could be tolerated. This was the possible outcome of this gathering, especially in the context of ancient Israel where an avenger of blood had the right to kill the murderer of his relative: "… and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood" (Num. 35:17). After considering the approach taken by the people involved in the three strands of revolt, one can conclude that each strand constitutes a threat to Moses and Aaron, as the rebels have recourse to violence as a means of changing the leadership. We now turn to the response of the accused.

2. A Violent Response to Revolt

This series of violent protests elicits more violence as it could be said that "if you sow violence, you harvest more violence", and as Hosea 8:7 implies, "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind". The rebel contenders have threatened Moses and Aaron by their words and attitudes, but the response includes the actual killing of their leaders. The first group of 250 tribal leaders recruited by Korah to contest the priesthood is burnt up during the process of offering their sacrifice at the tent of meeting (16:35). The narrative reports that Moses prays to God to show whom he has chosen for priestly duties during this test of burning incense. However, the fire that consumes the rebellious people does not come from Moses but from Yahweh.

As for the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, their fate is even more dramatic. The earth opens its mouth and swallows them up alive with all their households and possessions (16:31-33). To convince the audience that his commission comes from God, Moses pronounces the sentence that Yahweh confirms: "If these men die the death of all men and are visited according to the visitation of all men, then Yahweh has not sent me" (16:29). What Moses wishes is that his detractors suffer something that is not common. The proposal is that if the contenders die a normal death, or by any common

means that the people have already experienced or seen, then Moses should be considered a pretender. It is interesting to note that the sentence comes from Moses and not from God but God accepts Moses' proposal, providing convincing evidence of His support of Moses' leadership.

The third group also experiences physical death. A deadly disease that spreads quickly through the camp strikes the congregation for accusing Moses of killing God's people (16:41). God's intervention comes swiftly, so quickly that Moses and Aaron do not have time either to present their defence or to refer the case to Yahweh in prayer as in previous cases. The fact that the whole community gathers around the two leaders gives the idea of a mob about to riot. Experience shows that anything can happen in a mass protest because individuals are not likely to bear the responsibility for mass action. The Israelites pay a very high price as 14,700 persons fall before Aaron can make atonement and stop the plague (16:49). In this case, God seems to act alone without associating his human agents, Moses and Aaron.

After all this disaster has befallen the people, the narrative comes to a standstill. The episode ends with a report of the end of the plague followed by a total silence of all human actors: "Then Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped" (16:50)*.* Contrary to what one might expect after such a tragedy the people do not show regret or repent of the sins that caused the death of so many individuals. Moses and Aaron give instructions to the people concerning a way forward. At the end of chapter 16 it is as if each person meditates on the destruction that has taken place, but no one seems able to provide an adequate response. In essence, the violence brought no peace between the people and their leaders, nor did those who tried to usurp the leadership positions achieve their aim.

Modern writers are becoming aware that coercive measures, such as those described in the text, do not bring satisfactory results. Anstey argues:

> Coercion damages working relationships, inhibiting mutual understanding and trust as emotions of anger and frustration are evoked. Agreements emerging from coercive relations are likely to lack a commitment from the subjugated partner, as they will probably have ignored his interest and his capacity to contribute creatively to its content.[5]

This state of affairs prompts God to find a way forward using a new strategy.

A Non-Violent Solution at Last: The Budding Staff

The human actors in this narrative have exhausted their resources without settling the conflict. The revolts and their repression have failed to reconcile the two rival parties. Yahweh now proposes a totally different approach in

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[5] Mark Anstey, *Negotiating Conflict: Insights and Skills for Negotiators and Peacemakers.* Kenwyn, SA: Juta & Co. 1997, pp. 88-89.

order to provide a way out (17:1). The test is that the staffs of Israel's tribal leaders should be displayed before Yahweh overnight and the tribe whose dried stick blossoms and bears fruit would be God's elect who would hold the exclusive rights of priesthood. God instructs Moses to collect the staffs (or rods) from each tribe of Israel. There are twelve staffs according to the number of the tribes, each staff representing the head of the family. The name of Aaron is written on the staff of the house of Levi (17:3). The use of the metaphor of a rod to represent a tribe is striking because in Hebrew the two words have the same root. The Hebrew root מטה is used for "rod, staff, stick, branch and tribe."[6] The author of Numbers used this same word earlier to represent the word 'tribe' (Num. 1:4, 16). Each tribe is considered a branch of the entire congregation of Israel. God even anticipates the astonishing result of this new approach: "I will cause to cease from me the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you" (17:5). By this statement, God wants to assure Moses and Aaron that there is a solution to the crisis through a non-violent approach. Moses follows God's instructions and the result is success, that is, the satisfaction of all parties involved in the conflict.

There are a number of reasons that would encourage the reader to appreciate non-violent procedures in resolving even serious tribal conflicts.

1. Non-Violence Depersonalises the Conflict.

God proposes an alternative approach in which human lives are not threatened. The test using staffs deals with material things which are not harmful to human lives, but enable even the losers to continue to enjoy life: "Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes. Write the name of each man on his staff" (17:2). This proposal breaks away from previous tests in which the burning incense is turned into a blazing flame that consumed human lives and in which the living are swallowed up by the earthquake. Life is very precious and even rebels are created in God's image. They may be political opponents but that does not diminish their dignity and worth as human beings. God uses the metaphor of the tribal staff to tell His agents that it is better to settle the issue with the material staff than to put His people in jeopardy: "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone" (Ezekiel 18:31-32).

2. Non-Violence Restores Communication and Unity.

Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs (17:6).

At the end of chapter 16, there seems to be a breakdown in communication as a result of the tension raised by the death of Moses'

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[6] Francis Brown, F., S. R. Driver, Charles Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, p. 641.

opponents. Aggressive suppression has erected barriers that hinder communication between the different players. God's mediation and His proposal re-open the channel of communication, as Moses' role as spokesman and mediator of Israel is re-affirmed. In the place of resistance and disobedience, such as shown by Dathan and Abiram (16:12-14), the heads of families willingly accept the instructions given by God through Moses and yield their staffs to the test. The fact that each tribe must be represented in this exercise, suggests that the twelve tribes are considered as inseparable in the sight of God. He loves them all and they are His people. They all have an equal chance to be elected by God as they compete for leadership positions over Israel. All their staffs should be brought before the Lord without exception and God Himself will appoint to the priesthood the tribe of His choice. In this way, Moses and Aaron would be vindicated and the dignity of each individual would be respected in the process. Anstey remarks that; "effective conflict regulation and dispute settlement demand that parties accord each other legitimacy, and that they legitimate the procedures, institutions and forms they will use to resolve their differences."[7] In the account of the budding staff, all parties legitimated the procedure of solving the conflict in a peaceful way. They accept God's proposal of a non-violent solution to the unresolved issue.[8]

3. Non-Violence Resolves the Conflict.

> Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod… Then the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold we die, we are perishing, we are all perishing! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all completely die?" (17:8-9,12-13).

This passage stands as the conclusion to the whole series of rebellions. The cry of the crowd shows that finally, the Israelites have realised the danger of their protest. Death has taken not only those in the leadership struggle but also the 'ordinary people.' The people know that they are all vulnerable and Yahweh will not spare them if they keep on challenging His appointed leaders. They understand that the cause of the death of so many people lies in the conflict over control of the tabernacle, a privilege given only to priests. The Hebrew root "approach, draw near" (קרב) is used here, in a cultic context, with reference to the service in the tabernacle.[9]

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[7] Anstey, *Negotiating Conflict*, p. 199.
[8] For more about God's intention for non-violent solution see John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Non-Violence.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994.
[9] Bill T. Arnold, "קרב" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1977, Vol. 3:976-978.

The budding of Aaron's staff seems to achieve what violent suppression could not. If one takes the outcry of the people in the above passage as a sign of repentance - "Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all completely die?" - then the people blame themselves for trying to go in a wrong direction. They should keep their distance from the tabernacle and the priesthood in order to live in peace. The question that has to be answered is, "Why would God and His agents use violence in the first place?"

4. Why Does God Use Violence?

Biblical literature portrays God as a warrior and also a peace-maker. The two images are sometimes so intertwined in a single passage that it becomes difficult to disentangle them. The disturbing reality of attributing violence to the God of love has caused many biblical scholars to grapple with the interpretation of texts of violence. C.S. Cowles expresses the dilemma of such a duality by asking:

> How do we harmonize the warrior God of Israel with the God of love incarnate in Jesus? How can we reconcile God's instruction to "utterly destroy" the Canaanites in the Old Testament with Jesus' command to "love your enemies" in the New Testament? The short answer is: with great difficulty.[10]

Cowles is right in saying that biblical scholars have great difficulty harmonising the two opposing portrayals of God. In his study on non-violence in the Gospel of Mark, Robert Beck stresses the positive side of God's portrayal as he argues:

> The gospel story of nonviolent confrontation and conflict resolution is not simply shown for our admiration. It does indeed have a 'rhetorical' aspect that takes it beyond the interests of literary poetics to the arena of practice. It does invite us, calling us as well as showing us. It not only scripts a way of nonviolent resistance but engages us to go and do likewise.[11]

In his comments, Beck shows that Jesus' attitude in the gospel of Mark was of non-violence. He explains some texts of violence, such as the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree, as symbolism of a spiritual reality rooted in the prophetic tradition.[12]

However, violence in Old Testament narratives is so vivid that one cannot dismiss its reality by taking those stories as fictions, or interpreting them as spiritual symbols of things to come. It is necessary to engage with the fact of violence because these texts are used to legitimate religious violence or violent repression of wrongdoing. Collins surveys a number of Old Testaments texts in which killing is ordained by God - including the command to wipe out

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[10] C.S. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity" in C.S. Cowles, Daniel L. Gard, Stanley N. Gundry, Eugene H. Merrill, *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide,* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, p. 14.

[11] Robert R. Beck, *Non-Violent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark,* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996, p. 113.

[12] Beck, *Non-Violent Story*, pp. 159-162.

the Canaanites (Deut. 7).[13] He illustrates his argument, in part, on the story of Phineas who pierces Zimri and his Moabite girlfriend with his spear in the Israelite camp and that God approves this action.

> The LORD said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them (Num 25:10-11).

Collins contends that, "there is much in the Bible that is not worthy of the God of the philosophers. There is also much that is not worthy of humanity, certainly much that is not worthy to serve as model for imitation".[14] He concludes his argument thus:

> The Bible has contributed to violence in the world precisely because it has been taken to confer a degree of certitude that transcends human discussion and argumentation. Perhaps the most constructive thing a biblical critic can do toward lessening the contribution of the Bible in the world, is to show that the certitude is an illusion.[15]

One can understand the rationale behind Collins' conclusion but for evangelical Christians, amongst others, the question we must ask is: "How authoritative is the sacred book in the sight of the community of faith if the certitude of its message is just an allusion?" In other words, should the contribution of the Bible be reduced because of this one aspect of its message even though the Bible is extensively used to challenge violence and oppression? Other scholars view biblical violence otherwise.

For Terence Fretheim, biblical violence can be approached from the side of God's relationship with humanity:

> Because Israel understood that God is related to, and indeed deeply engaged in the affairs of this world, even the Creator will be affected by and caught up in every act of violence. Though there may be non-violent breakthroughs, an avoidance of interrelational violence is simply not possible for either Israel or God.[16]

Human violence affects our relationship with God. From the beginning, the reader of the Bible is exposed to how God was affected by the murder of Abel (Gen. 4), and the wickedness of the generation of Noah (Gen. 6). According to Fretheim, God enters into a relationship with humanity and he becomes self-limiting in the exercise of his power in order to honour and respect human power. In some cases, there is no "quick fix" to stop human violence as people continue to resist the will of God for non-violence. Fretheim pursues his

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[13] John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence" in *The Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 122, No. 1, 2003, pp. 3-21.

[14] Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas", p. 20.

[15] Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas", p. 21.

[16] Terence E. Fretheim, "I Was Only a Little Angry: Divine Violence in the Prophets", *Interpretation* Vol. 58 No. 4, October 2004, p. 367.

argument by showing that in certain circumstances God works through human agents to get things done; but these agents may exceed their mandate and God will become associated with their excessive violence because of His committed relationship to the world.[17] Fretheim concludes that violence is not the ultimate goal for God.

> That God would become involved in such human cruelties as war is finally not a matter of despair, but hope. God does not simply give people up to violence. God chooses to become involved in violence in order to bring about good purposes; thereby God may prevent an even greater evil. The tears of the people are fully recognized; their desperate situation is named for what it is. But because of the anguish of God, their tears will one day no longer flow. By participating in their messy stories, God's own self thereby takes the road of suffering and death. Through such involvement, God takes into the divine self the violent effects of sinful human activities and thereby makes a non-violent future for God's people.[18]

Taking into consideration Fretheim's argument, one can explain why the revolt of Korah starts with violence, but is solved by God's proposal of a non-violent approach. We have shown in this essay the determination to violent confrontation between the two parties, Moses and Aaron on the one side and their opponents on the other. God enters this scene of violence by adopting this fallen human method that he may transform it into a non-violent, lasting resolution and so prove the futility of a violent approach.

Although Fretheim's view does not exhaust the presence of violence in the Bible, it nevertheless opens up a possible explanation to the issue because God in the OT also promotes *shalom* (שלום). For example, the law concerning the protection of aliens in Exodus 23:9 is fully expanded in Deuteronomy 15 and 24 commanding the Israelites to be compassionate to aliens and slaves. The laws on Jubilee-Sabbath, with their special emphasis on debts cancellation and protection of the poor, are also examples of peace-making. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of *shalom*. Dale Brown observes that:

> Shalom is more than the absence of division, of war. It is a positive vision of mercy, justice, and righteousness … . Shalom is both the goal and the process of God's emerging kingdom. It is an expression of God's power bringing healing and wholeness to every part of our hurt and alienated lives: our inequitable and unjust socio-economic structures, our discordant community affairs, our broken interpersonal relationships, and our guilt-ridden interior lives.[19]

The kingdom of *shalom* does not start with the New Testament, but it is part of God's intention from creation. In an article on God's power in creation, Richard Middleton asserts: "If the portrayal of God's exercise of non-violent creative power in Gen. 1 is taken in conjunction with its claim that humanity is

[17] Fretheim, "I Was Only a Little Angry", pp. 372-373.
[18] Fretheim, "I Was Only a Little Angry", p. 375.
[19] Dale W. Brown, *Biblical Pacifism*. Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing, 2003, p. 138.

made in the image of *this* God, this has significant implications for contemporary ethics".[20]

The implication of this interpretation is that no one, based on biblical violence, should claim that the use of violence in the name of religion is normative. The cases of the attacks on America on 11th September 2001; the war against terrorism; jihad; violence against women; genocide in Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo; and the crisis in Kosovo cannot be justified by appealing to acts of violence in the Bible. The modern contexts of each case must be scrutinised for other causes of the violent means used because God's intention is to promote peace.

CONCLUSION

This paper has depicted the story of Aaron's budding staff as being precipitated by a series of violent acts that led to the death of thousands of Israelites. God substituted human confrontation for the test of the tribal staffs, and this brought peace, reconciliation and the acknowledgment of God's instituted leaders during the wilderness journey of the Israelites. We have examined the use of violence by both parties in the contest and its approval by God. According to Fretheim, God's involvement in violence was the only way of honouring his relationship with humanity, but it was also a way of entering the conflict in order to bring it to a non-violent solution.

We should admit that the use of violence in the Bible has raised ethical problems in the management of conflicts, especially violence done in the name and for the benefit of God. The point we would like to underscore in this paper is that God's intention for humanity from creation is peace and harmony. The corruption that our fallen nature has introduced into the world should not be taken as normative for human behaviour. The world was created in *shalom* and is heading toward an eschatological *shalom*. In His relationship to human beings, God participates in human violence with the sole intention of bringing salvation and redemption. Therefore, no one should give himself to abusive and excessive actions of religious terrorism and tribal cleansing on the basis of approved biblical violence. Violence elicits more violence but peaceful negotiation leads to lasting reconciliation. This is the lesson that could be learnt from the narrative of Aaron's budding staff.

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[20] J. Richard Middleton, "Created in the Image of a Violent God?: The Ethical Problem of the Conquest of Chaos in Biblical Creation Texts", *Interpretation* Vol. 58 No. 4, October 2004, pp. 355.

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What Do Theology Students Need to Know About Islam and Why?

by Phyllis Ndoro

Introduction

A good number of students enrolling in a College or University in Kenya to study Christian theology are surprised to find Islam among their required courses. Some students try to resist while others do not know what to think. In the end they all comply and study the stipulated courses as part of their graduation requirements.

Perhaps one of the biggest impediments to a willing acceptance of Islamic studies by beginning theology students is fear of the unknown. Perhaps some people do not know what Islam is all about and they are somewhat scared to find out for some reason. Sometimes Christians fear being 'evangelized' instead of they themselves being the ones to do the evangelizing. Another big stumbling block comes from believing the normally accepted generalizations, stereotypes and clichés concerning Muslims. A prime example of an inaccurate stereotype that leads to fear is the widely held view that a majority of Muslims are terrorists and are likely to carry out suicide bombings, or that most Muslims are hostile towards Christians and want to wage *jihad* (holy war) against them. But these generalizations *cannot* be applied to *all* Muslims.

It is also important to remember that Muslims have their own generalizations about Christians. For example, the majority of them compare their *jihad* to the medieval Crusades (a "Christian" form of fighting in the name of God). The Crusades from Christianized Europe were attempts to liberate Palestine and the ancient Christian holy places from Muslim control. What does a Muslim hear when he learns that a Christian evangelistic *crusade* is coming to his area? Can he truly disconnect evangelism from conquest? These fears can begin to be addressed when students are made of aware of other people's religious history, heroes of the faith, doctrines, and practices.

A course on Islam is meant to introduce the non-Muslim student to an understanding of this other major world religion in Africa. This includes Islam's religious and cultural dimensions, and also its history, especially how Islam came to East Africa. A course on Islam will also discuss the various Islamic sects found in the area, thus helping students understand their sometimes subtle differences. Like Christianity Islam is a missionary religion. Christians need to understand how Muslims propagate their religion, a process known as *da'wa*.[1] Only when Christian students have a good grasp of the different

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[1] See Egdunas Racius*, The Multiple Nature of the Islamic* Da'wa*,* Academic Dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2004.

aspects of the Islamic faith can they begin to build relationships with their Muslim neighbours. By the time they finish their studies and start working in different parts of the country and the world they should be equipped with that knowledge.

What Do Theology Students Need to Know About Islam?

The definition below captures the different aspects of Islam:

Islam is a religion with a transcendent God, Allah, with stated beliefs and creeds, with various rituals and ceremonies, with a system of law for all of life, and with ethical norms for governing behaviour. Islam includes a personal and devotional side to religion within and beyond the rituals of prayer and pilgrimage. It is a religion of revelation, reason, faith and faithfulness.[2]

1. The History of Islam and Its Prophet

A university or theological college course on Islam is usually introduced by putting Islam in the context of its origin in Arabia because students often don't realize there was a time even in Arabia that Islam was not present. The course introduces the student to Arabia's pre-Islamic cultural setting where traditional Arabic gods were worshiped. It includes the location of the various traditional religious sites in Arabia. This introduction to the cultural history of the pre-Islamic Arabs helps to set the scene for the life of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad. He was born in 570 AD, and the course covers his life up to the time he received his calling. "Muhammad preached this religion in Arabia between the years AD 610 and 632. He taught the Arabs to believe in one living God, and to live as the servants of God."[3] His entire life is worth studying because he is the main prophet of Islam; he is central in their theology; and he is also included in the Islamic statement of faith. Muslims revere him and try to live like he did – following in his example.

2. Islam's Most Important Holy Places

There are three cities that are very important to the beliefs and practices of Muslims. *Mecca* is the birthplace of the prophet of Islam and the main place of pilgrimage or the *hajj*. This pilgrimage is required of every able Muslim at least once in his life-time. *Medina*, to the north of Mecca, is where the mosque and the tomb of the prophet of Islam are found. It is important to Muslims because this is where the prophet established a theocratic community. *Jerusalem,* where the Dome of the Rock is found, is where Muslims believe that Muhammad visited heaven during his lifetime and returned to give a description of it to his followers. Tradition also links it to the son of Abraham, Ishmael, an ancestor of the Arabs (Gen.16; 17:20; 25:12-18).

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[2] George W. Braswell, *Islam – Its Prophet, People, Politics and Power*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996, p. 4.
[3] David A. Brown, *A Guide to Religions*, London: SPCK, ISG 12, 2001, p. 182.

3. The Holy Writings of Islam

The main holy writings of Islam are the *Qur'an* (or Koran) together with the *Hadith* (traditions – reported speech of the prophet) and the *Sunna* (the way the prophet lived). The Muslims believe that the *Qur'an* is the word of God verbatim. Though the *Qur'an* has been translated into other languages, according to Islam it is impossible to translate the beauty of Arabic so such translations are not the true *Qur'an*.[4] For Muslims the Arabic *Qur'an* is an exact copy of the mother book that God caused to be written in heaven. Muslims believe that God gave the words and the contents of the *Qur'an* to Muhammad.

> Qur'an: the Holy Book, the Living Miracle, revealed from Allah as a guidance to mankind via the angel Jibrìl to the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The Revelation began in 610 and continued until shortly before the death of the Prophet in 11/632.[5]

4. The Five Pillars of Islam

Muslims live out their faith as a way of life that revolves around the five pillars of Islam. The first, *Shahada* or "bearing witness", is the Muslim profession of faith. "There is no god but God (Allah) and Muhammad is the prophet of God" is recited when one converts to Islam, during daily prayers, and in the moments before death. It affirms Islam's two fundamental beliefs: that there is no other god but Allah, and that Muhammad is his messenger.

Salat (prayers) are the obligatory, ritual prayers observed five times a day: dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset, evening. For these prayers to be acceptable they must be preceded by ritual washing of the face, hands and feet, and recited while facing in the direction of the Ka'ba shrine in Mecca.

Sawm (also *saum* or *siyam* - fasting) is the practice of abstaining from food, drink and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset during the holy month of *Ramadhan*. Though there are exemptions (some of them temporary) made for certain people (such as those who are ill), it is a time of self-sacrifice. As Muslims embark on this spiritual journey, they expect special blessings from Allah – the one God. A major Islamic holiday known as *Eid al-Fitr* (Festival of the Breaking of the Fast) ends the fasting month of *Ramadhan*.

The *hajj* (pilgrimage) is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims who are financially and physically able to go are required to do so at least once in their lifetime. The rites last several days during the last month of the Islamic year, *Dhu al-Hijja*, and commemorate the Islamic versions of the stories of Abraham, Ishmael and Hagar. One of the duties on the tenth day (*Eid al-Adha*) is "The Feast of Sacrifice" held in the nearby city of Mina where each pilgrim sacrifices an animal to commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice

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[4] Brown, *A Guide to Religions*, p. 211.
[5] Aisha Bewley, *A Glossary of Islamic Terms*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1998, p.18.

Ishmael in response to God's command. After all the rites are completed Muslims are allowed to add the title *hajji* (meaning 'the pilgrim') to their names.

The fifth pillar is *zakat* (alms tax or offerings), a very important part of Islam. The *Qur'an, Surah* 2:77, has a stipulated way of calculating the *zakat* which is according to one's property, business etc. "The recipients of the tax are the poor, debtors, slaves seeking to buy their freedom, volunteers in *jihad*, pilgrims, and the collectors of the tax."[6] Muslims are expected to be generous, not greedy.

6. Shariah Law

It is on the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* (the sayings of Muhammad and his followers) that Islam bases its theology, practice and law. Getting a grasp of the basics of *Shariah* (or *Sharia*) *Law* helps the beginning student to demystify myths and generalizations presented in the media. For example, in countries like Nigeria[7] and others that use the *Shariah*, deaths and violence are reported frequently and some people get the idea that this is the result of *Shariah Law*. Yet this law is not meant to be imposed on people who are not Muslim so it is important to understand who *Shariah* is meant to apply to and in what areas of their lives so the student is able to engage with current issues. This can be helpful in creating pathways of understanding as people of different faiths engage in dialogue.

In Kenya, where the new constitution was passed recently, some Muslims in the coastal area have started to agitate for the application of *Shariah Law* within a ten-mile strip of the coast where many Muslims live. The Mombasa Republican Council, a Muslim group urging for the secession of the Coast Region, has been much in the news media since it became active in 2008 after its formation in the 1990s.[8] When Christians and people of other faiths have historical knowledge of what Muslims are referring to by "the ten-mile strip" and have an understanding of how *Shariah* affects Muslims and non-Muslims, they will be able to engage with Muslims in meaningful dialogue on the complex issues involved.

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[6] http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/practices/zakat-alms.htm

[7] Several states in northern Nigeria are under the *Shariah*, but not the whole country.

[8] See Paul Goldsmith, *The Mombasa Republican Council; Conflict Assessment: Threats and Opportunities for Engagement*. A report based on research commissioned by Kenya Civil Society Strengthening Programme. http://www.pactkenya.org. See also Daily Nation 21st November, 2011, page 4; *Kenya: Mombasa Republican Council - Liberators or Nascent Radical Fanatics?* http://allafrica.com/stories/201206270319.html and *'Crackpot' revolutionaries demand help from Queen* by Mike Pflanz. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/4195882/Crackpot-revolutionaries-demand-help-from-Queen.html and Noel Mwakugu, *Kenya's Coastal Rebels* Published: 2005/04/08 15:08:46 GMT http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4425083.stm

7. Islamic Sects in East Africa

Another important aspect of understanding Islam is to know the different groups, especially those found in the East African region. The largest of the Islamic sects is called the Sunni and the next largest sect is the Shia. Then there are other groups within these two main groups. The Sunni are generally regarded as the orthodox Muslims and they have groupings among them ranging from strict fundamentalists to moderates. The majority of Muslims followed Abu Bakr who was made first caliph (*kalifa* or deputy/successor) after the Prophet's death. Abu Bakr and the Sunni rulers who followed him were not directly related to the Prophet. The Shia however, believe that the succession should have followed the Prophet's bloodline through Ali, who was the prophet's first cousin and had married his daughter Fatima. For Shi'as, Ali was meant to be the rightful heir. Their leaders today are Imams who claim to trace their lineage back to Muhammad himself. The different doctrines and practices between the Sunni and Shi'a are important to know.

Other different groups are found in particular places because of their trades. They also differ in their religious practices. For example, the Daudi Bohra Muslims (who originated in India) have other holy books apart from the *Qur'an* and also have seven pillars instead of five.[9]

8. Propagation of Islam

Islam is a missionary religion like Christianity so it is important to know how Muslims propagate their faith. They use different methods of *da'wa* (an Arabic word meaning a "call, summon, invitation").[10] This practice of *da'wa* needs to be understood by students training for the Christian ministry so that when working in the field they are able to identify the methods being used and can inform the people they are working with. This would also make them vigilant as they are some of the people who are targeted through marriage.

One of the *da'wa* methods used is for Muslim men to marry Christian women, and they target church leaders, and the children of other prominent families. This is allowed in the *Qur'an* as Christians are referred to as the 'people of the book'. However, Christian men cannot marry Muslim girls unless they convert to Islam first. Christian girls married by Muslims are not required to convert, but the rules of the *Qur'an* will eventually wear them out and they frequently end up converting to Islam. For example, children will not be able to inherit property from their father if the wife is not Muslim. During *Ramadhan* tradition states that a Christian wife cannot cook food for her spouse as she is not fasting. Therefore the husband will be under pressure to marry a Muslim wife to cook for him. The *Qur'an* allows men to marry up to four wives.

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[9] South Asian Outreach, '*Love your Neighbor': Reaching out to your Asian Muslim Neighbour,* Nairobi: Joypet Services & Printers, 2003, pp. 32-70.

[10] Racius*, The Multiple Nature of the Islamic* Da'wa, p. 31.

Why Should Christian Theology Students Study Islam?

Having a good knowledge of all these practices and the reasons behind them, helps to bring about an understanding of and a healthy respect for people of other faiths. Students will realize that there are other people in this world who believe differently from Christians, but who are just as devout in their worship of their deity. Matters of faith are personal and very sensitive therefore it is important to build relational bridges based on accurate knowledge rather than on the assumption that everyone who does not believe the same way as us should be 'forced' or 'preached to' until they see the light. Christians have a responsibility to reach out to their Muslims neighbours, but it has to be done in a way that fosters a chance for good neighbourliness rather than invites antagonism. This includes not only witnessing to Muslims, but also allowing God the Holy Spirit to finish His work in people who hear His word for themselves.

Dialogue is very important because people of different faiths have to co-exist harmoniously to facilitate social stability. The only way this can happen is when people of faith are free to propagate their religions and then leave conversion to God. Therefore the opposing adherents should not try to force people to convert to one faith or the other. The differences between religions will remain but there will be an understanding of what exactly those differences are. All religions are not the same, and will never be. This is religious freedom - that one has the freedom to be able to propagate one's faith. The Christian should be able to evangelize and the Muslim to practice *da'wa* without undue interference from people of the opposite faith.

Christians need to understand the Muslim objections to Christianity. For example, the Trinity is an area where they have problems with because it sounds to Muslims like Christians worship three gods or that Christians associate the one God with others (idols). To a Muslim this association is *shirk* – the unforgivable sin!

There is a place for the study of the religions, and also wisdom in keeping abreast of current affairs. Another way to get a feel for other religions is through the media. Newspapers give us information about what is happening in the world and what people are thinking.[11] Despite its limitations, the media usually gives us a good feel of current events. Islam is one of the growing religions in Africa and therefore Christian students need to be knowledgeable about it and its progress. Being knowledgeable does not mean that we are attempting to make one universal religion out of the many existing religions with the objective of making them one in essence. It is not possible to put all religions into one theological basket. This knowledge of another's religion also should not be used to take undue advantage of people who may be in difficult

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[11] Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths*, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001, p. 86.

situations, such as famine, in order to coerce people into changing their religion in exchange for food and other aid.[12]

The current religious situation in Africa shows that there is an appropriate need to gain some knowledge of other religions, including Islam. Gaining this knowledge would help Christians in their human relations in their communities, countries and the world. Well-informed people of a particular faith would not allow themselves to be used by politicians or other lobby groups who take advantage of their fears of people from other religions. Also well-informed people would be able to interact critically with media stories about other religions. They would be able to identify biases and attacks on their faith and on the faith of others. Hopefully in the end the freedom of worship would also allow the different religions to propagate their faith and for people to convert without intimidation. In this sense, knowledge of another religion truly is power.

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[12] Dr. Johnson Mbillah, (General Adviser, PROCMURA) - presentation at a Christian-Muslim Forum, Nairobi.

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Multiplying Disciples in African Colleges and Universities

by Mark A. Olander

Introduction

As we all know, the Church in Africa is growing rapidly with the increase of the number of Christians and the establishment of new local churches throughout most of the continent. In his book entitled *Is Africa Cursed?*, Tukunboh Adeyemo points out that "God has blessed and continues to bless Africa spiritually … . Throughout the continent, with the exception of seven strongly Islamic countries, new churches are being established daily."[1] He goes on to cite the *World Christian Encylopaedia* which indicates that, "Africa records an average of 4,000 new converts every day and this puts the Christian population in Africa at more than 50 per cent of the overall population."[2] This is great news indeed!

Of course, not all of those who claim to be Christians have a personal relationship with Christ. A certain percentage of them may be nominal Christians and not fully committed disciples of Christ in the truest sense. Nevertheless, the Church in Africa is most certainly exploding in numerical growth. But the question we need to ask ourselves is, "Are we simply *winning converts* to the faith, or are we truly *making disciples?"*

All of us as Christian educators realize that Christ has called us to be involved in helping to fulfill the Great Commission that He gave to His disciples. Jesus told them to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). We all *know* we are supposed to be making disciples, but are we really *doing* that? Furthermore, do we actually know *how* to go about doing that?

The Disciple Making Methods Jesus Used

As we read the Gospels, we see how Jesus poured His life into the lives of twelve men knowing that they would be the ones to carry on the ministry after He left this earth to return to His Father's right hand in heaven. In his book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman makes the following insightful observation: "Though he [Jesus] did what he could to help the multitudes, he had to devote himself primarily to a few men, rather than the masses, so that the masses could at last be saved. This was the genius of his strategy."[3]

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[1] Tukunboh Adeyemo, *Is Africa Cursed?* Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers Limited, 2009, p. 27.

[2] Adeyemo, *Is Africa Cursed?*, p. 28.

[3] Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1963, p. 31.

It takes commitment and time to effectively disciple others. There is no short cut or mini-course in Christian discipleship. I've found that two of the best ways of discipling others are to work with a small group of young Christians, and to work one-on-one with individuals. Both approaches can be very effective and they work well together. Over the years, God has given me the privilege of discipling several Christian young men in here in Africa using a combination of both approaches. Small group Bible studies appeal to us here in Africa because we enjoy doing things with others in a group setting. But I've also found that many people respond well to individual discipleship because it enables them to experience the love and guidance of an older Christian who is willing to mentor them.

1. The Small Group Approach

Let's look first at the small group approach to disciple making. It seems this was Jesus' primary approach in training His apostles. So how do we go about working with a small group of Christians? First of all, we need to pray for the Lord to direct us to individuals who are eager to be a part of a small band of Christians who desire to help one another grow in Christlikeness. Second, we need to establish a regular time of meeting. I have found that meeting on a weekly basis usually works the best. Third, it is important to secure a firm commitment from each member to attend meetings faithfully and complete any assignments that are given. Fourth, we should select some method of studying God's Word or biblical topics. Fifth, our time together should consist of several components including: studying and discussing the meaning and application of God's Word to our lives, openly sharing our prayer concerns, and praying for one another's needs. Sixth, we should agree on assignments that are to be completed before our next meeting. Seventh, it is also important for the group to plan times for outreach and ministry to others.

So what would a small group approach look like in the context of a theological school here in Africa? Let me share two examples from personal experience. The first Bible college my wife and I were assigned to teach at here in Africa was in the country of Kenya. A few years after we began teaching there, my wife and I felt God was leading us to begin a discipleship group for students of the college. We announced to all the students in chapel that this discipleship group was open to any students who were willing to commit themselves to purchase their own Bible study materials, faithfully attend the weekly meetings, and complete all the weekly assignments. We made it clear that this was an optional activity which would offer no academic credit. We had ten students who indicated their desire to join the group and we stayed together for over two years meeting weekly on Sunday evenings in our home as we went through all six books of the Navigator's "2:7 Discipleship Series". None of the students dropped out.

A second personal example I can share was leading a group of students through some Bible study material at another Bible college we taught at later

on. At the time I was the faculty games advisor and my responsibility was to provide guidance and assistance to the captains of the various sports teams at the college. I would occasionally meet with these captains to discuss upcoming competitions with other colleges. One day I decided to ask these students if they would be interested in doing some Bible study together on a regular basis. They all agreed to do that, so we found a time (6:30 – 7:45 AM on Thursdays) when we could meet weekly in my office at the college. This study continued for the entire academic year. This time I used some Navigator Bible study material called "Growing in Discipleship" which is published in Kenya so it is relatively inexpensive. Students bought their own study books and were required to complete written assignments and memorize Bible verses every week. None of these students dropped out. Years later, I invited one of those sports captains (who was by that time a local church pastor) to be a guest speaker in one of my classes at the college. I was so encouraged to hear him begin his talk by saying that one of the main things he remembered about his four years as a student at this college was the weekly Bible study we had early on Thursday mornings with the sports captains. It was obvious that the Lord had greatly used that Bible study group in his life and in his growth toward spiritual maturity.

2. The Individual Approach

The individual approach is also very effective in making disciples. As we read through the Gospels, we certainly see Jesus working with His band of disciples as a group. But we also see numerous times where He discipled individuals. The most striking example of this is Jesus' individual discipleship training with Simon Peter. In the Book of Acts, we see how many of the first century Christians followed Jesus' example by discipling other believers. Two of the most obvious examples of these early disciple makers are Barnabas who discipled John Mark and Paul, who later discipled several other individuals including Silas, Titus, Onesimus, Philemon, and Timothy.

We can learn a lot about how to disciple new believers by looking at how Paul discipled this young man named Timothy. When we look closely at the New Testament writings we discover that Paul intentionally did quite a number of things including the following: he *wrote* to him (1 & 2 Timothy); he *prayed* for him (2 Tim. 1:3); he *loved* him (2 Tim. 1:4); he *encouraged* him (2 Tim. 1:5-7); he *instructed* him (2 Tim. 1:13); he *showed* him how a disciple lives (2 Tim. 3:10-11); he *exhorted* him to disciple others (2 Tim. 2:2); he *took* him with him in ministry (Acts 16:3-5); and he *sent* him to disciple other Christians (Phil. 2:19-24).

Based on Paul's example, let me suggest eight general guidelines that can help us as we disciple young Christians that God brings into our lives.
(1) Pray often for them.
(2) Meet together on a regular basis for Bible study and prayer.
(3) Do some things together just for fun and relaxation.

(4) Be observant and respond appropriately to their needs.
(5) Share your personal experiences.
(6) Have a plan but be flexible.
(7) Set a good example for them to follow.
(8) Participate in ministry together.

But what *does* a mentor do when he meets one-on-one with an individual? I have found the following five things to be particularly helpful. First, we share *progress* since last meeting. In other words, we talk together about how things are going in our lives and how we did on our last assignment. Second, we study a *passage* of Scripture. This can be done by either using some published discipleship materials like the Navigators' *Growing in Discipleship* Bible study books or examining some specific verses in God's Word. Third, we discuss *problems* and challenges, that is, specific areas of need in our lives. Fourth, we have a time of *prayer* together about the needs we've shared with each other. Fifth, we make *plans* for our next meeting, such as the time, place, and the assignments. Someone once wisely said, "From a distance you may be able to impress people, but only up close are you able to have an impact upon their lives." We need to intentionally spend time with individuals if we are to have a lasting influence upon their lives.

So what does this one-on-one approach to discipleship look like in a Bible college setting here in Africa? Again let me share two personal examples. At one of the colleges I taught at in Kenya, each faculty member was assigned a fourth year student to supervise. Most of us would meet only occasionally with the students assigned to us. But I noticed that one of my colleagues met frequently with his student. So I followed his example and asked my student if he would be willing to meet weekly with me during a class period when both of us were free. He showed great interest in doing this and so we met together virtually every week for the rest of that year. We shared together, studied God's word together, and prayed together. It was one of the highlights for me as a teacher that year. This former student is now the national director of a strategic youth ministry in Kenya. We remain very close friends.

The other example comes from when I was teaching at the second college here in Kenya. I was praying about what individual I could mentor when the Lord impressed upon me one of the staff members of the college who showed a keen interest in studying God's word. One day I asked this staff member if he'd like to get together regularly to share, study, and pray together with me. He was quite eager to do so and we developed a very close friendship which exists to this day. He is now a faculty member at the college. This Timothy is now a Paul!

Investing Our Lives in Things of Eternal Value

What kind of legacy will you and I leave behind when the Lord calls us home? In his book, *Eternal Impact*, Phil Downer writes, "At the end of my

life… I want to leave a legacy of trained, active spiritual soldiers of the cross, who will stand in the gap for the Lord Jesus Christ, winning and discipling others long after I'm gone."[4]

Have you ever thought about the fact that our lives are like money? We can either spend our money or we can invest it. The same is true with our lives. We can either spend our lives on trivial pursuits (e.g. accumulating more possessions and seeking to live a life of pleasure), or we can invest them in things of eternal value (e.g. helping people come to know Christ and helping them grow spiritually). I don't know about you, but I want to invest my life wisely so that when I come to the end of it I can say like William Borden did - "No reserve. No retreat. No regrets." William Borden was a Christian missionary who invested his twenty-five year life wisely. How about *you*? Are *you* investing *your* life wisely? Are *you* a disciple-making teacher?

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[4] Downer, Phil. *Eternal Impact: Investing in the Lives of Others*. Signal Mountain, TN: Eternal Impact Publishing, 2005, p. 11.

The Africa Society of Evangelical Theology (ASET)

A community of Evangelicals in Africa engaged in the full spectrum of theological scholarship for the benefit of the Church and society

ASET annual membership fees: Full, 1600 Ksh; Associate, 1200 Ksh; Student 400 Ksh

The Africa Society of Evangelical Theology is a fully registered society within Kenya.

The mission of ASET is to foster Evangelical theological scholarship and facilitate collegial relationships among its members by:

Encouraging research and providing a forum for disseminating that research among members and to the wider Christian and academic communities.

Creating a context where evangelical perspectives on issues facing the African church and society are addressed.

Creating a context for fellowship and networking.

Raising funds to finance the activities and events of the ASET.

Publishing the findings of research in books and journals.

Contacting other societies that are in accordance with this constitution and the Societies Act in the Laws of Kenya as may be stipulated in the society's by-laws.

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Book Reviews

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Johannes Rebmann: A Servant of God in Africa Before the Rise of Western Colonialism

by Steven Paas

[edition afem • mission academics 32]. Nürnberg and Bonn: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft (VTR/VKW), 2011 ISBN 978-3-941750-48-7/ 978-3-86269-029-9. Paperback. 274 pages. €19.80/ USD $23.76.

Reviewed by
Todd Statham and Erwin van der Meer

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Dr. Steven Paas (born 1942) has been active in Africa for many years. As a missionary in Malawi with the Reformed Mission League of the Netherlands he taught at Zomba Theological College and served as a minister of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). As a prolific author Steven Paas authored several books, including volumes on Western and African Church History. He also compiled the much needed dictionary of Chichewa/ Chinyanja. Studying the history of Chichewa lexicography stirred his interest in Johannes Rebmann (1820-1876), a German missionary in East Africa with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) who compiled the first Chichewa (Chinyanja) - English vocabulary in the 1850s. His lexicographical collection was published a year after his death as the Kiniassa dictionary in 1877. Paas provides an interesting, compelling and well-researched biography of Johannes Rebmann.

Johannes Rebmann (1820-1876) has not often been considered worthy of scholarly attention. A German missionary to East Africa during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Rebmann's career was long in years but short in converts. He spent a lifetime studying several African languages, specifically Chichewa, Nika, and Swahili - it was for others, after his death, to polish his lists of words and scraps of lexicography into publishable dictionaries and grammars. He devoted himself to the planting of the church in present day Kenya and Tanzania.

Chapters 4 to 7 describe Rebmann's missionary work in East Africa, initially with J. Ludwig Krapf and later with his wife. These chapters vividly describe the enormous obstacles pioneer missionaries in pre-colonial Africa faced, including warfare, hostile tribes, personal differences, criticism in the field and at home, political problems, lack of resources, lack of medical care

and personal tragedy, in Rebmann's the death of his wife. We also read of a fledgling church being established, successes in translation work and the progress of the Gospel against all odds.

Yet his sending organization, the British Church Missionary Society (CMS), considered a few times calling him home because of a lack of fruit in his field of labor. Some colleagues loudly complained that his style of mission was holding back the progress of the church in East Africa. Several British colonial officials pitied him as an eccentric. Where the name of Johannes Rebmann is remembered today, it is not as a missionary but rather an explorer: the first European to set eyes on the magnificence of Mt. Kilimanjaro in 1855. All in all, Rebmann's premature death in his German hometown, his fifty-six year old body broken and blind, would seem to have closed out a remarkably unsuccessful missionary life. The great value of Steven Paas' *Johannes Rebmann: A Servant of God in Africa before the Rise of Western Colonialism* is to recover Rebmann as a significant figure in the history of mission in East Africa - and a figure whose significance is by no means merely historical. Paas does this in two ways.

First, Paas convincingly demonstrates that the parallel career of Rebmann's far flashier friend and co-worker Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810-81) has obscured his rightful place in the history of East African Christianity. Krapf, who like Rebmann was trained at the Basel Mission in Switzerland, worked as a missionary in Ethiopia before joining his fellow Württemberg German in 1846 in the sultanate of Zanzibar under the auspices of the CMS. Shortly after their joint work came to an end in 1855, Krapf published self-aggrandizing accounts of their travels and missionary work that largely ignored Rebmann's contributions. Moreover, as Krapf's vision for the future of mission in Africa diverged considerably from Rebmann's own, he disparaged his former colleague for retarding the growth of the kingdom in Africa. The widespread dissemination of these publications, as well as Krapf's influence on contemporary missionary circles, argues Paas, blackened Rebmann's name among the official CMS leadership, and has ensured that his significance in the history of mission in East Africa remained in the dark. Most egregiously, Krapf robbed Rebmann of his due as a path-breaking student of several African languages. When both men were in retirement in Germany, Krapf (by all accounts an inferior lexicographer) took possession of the dying man's manuscripts in the Swahili language and published them under *his* name. Then Krapf published Rebmann's landmark Kiniassa (Chichewa) dictionary with a preface lamenting that Rebmann had contributed "nothing of any great value in regard to Philology." It is surprising, then, that Rebmann has not often been considered worthy of scholarly attention?

Paas is able to bring Rebmann's work out of the shadows through careful research in the archives of the CMS, the Basel Mission, and the Johannes Rebmann Foundation in Gerlingen, Germany. From the primary sources, an

engaging - and far more accurate - portrait of Rebmann comes to light. Against the dramatic backdrop of shifting British colonial policy toward the slave-trading sultanate of Zanzibar, Paas shows us a devout and humble missionary, who with his wife Emma and several dedicated African assistants, made slow but sure progress for the gospel among the tribes of coastal East Africa through steady pastoral work and evangelism, and whose lexicographical labor would be invaluable for future mission work from the coast to Lake Malawi.

If historians of mission and African Christianity will appreciate *Johannes Rebmann: A Servant of God in Africa before the Rise of Western Colonialism*, so too will missiologists. The second way in which the author recovers Rebmann from neglect is, interestingly, to value Rebmann's missionary labors precisely because he was "unsuccessful", i.e., he forsook the quick convert of a superficial evangelism for the tedium of learning African culture in order to plant the church deeply in a new soil, and patiently wait for its growth. Here, the contrast with Krapf could not be greater. Both were raised in the spiritual ethos of Württemberg pietism, and absorbed its emphasis on cross, conversion, Bible, and the coming kingdom of God. (As a point of criticism, Paas spends far too much time trying to connect Krapf to an odd variant of south German pietism that espoused universal salvation, even though it affected neither his fervor for mission nor the particulars of his missionary career). Yet Krapf held an essentially "itinerant" understanding of mission, advocating for the rapid establishment of a chain of mission stations stretching across the equatorial latitude. He publically condemned as complacent Rebmann's essentially "settled" understanding of mission that held that the missionary's immersion in local culture was necessary to contextualize the Christian message. This contrast was directly reflected in their respective approach to the study of African languages. Whereas Krapf started with English and sought to fit Swahili words to the sense of the foreign language, Rebmann took an opposite course:

> "We must learn from them and ascertain the true and exact meaning of every word they mention, and especially learn their way of expressing themselves with their interesting proverbs and proverbial sayings, in one word the genius of a language, and not try to teach them what they might possibly call this and that of things they never heard of and are not likely to get acquainted with" (160).

Their difference in translation method is symptomatic of their major difference in missionary method: namely, is the Christian message to be *imposed* or *inculturated* in an alien setting?

The life and ministry of Johannes Rebmann has been so defined by Johannes Krapf that historians of mission and missiologists have not recognized the true significance of this pioneer of Christianity in East Africa. Yet even in Paas' highly revisionist biography, Rebmann remains entwined

with Krapf in presenting the reader with two very different approaches to trans-cultural mission. It is clear which one Paas favors - and his stimulating study of Rebmann makes it hard to disagree.

Rebmann's life and work as a missionary as described by Paas bears remarkable resemblance to what missionaries wrestle with in the present - the struggle of language study, the problem of cultural differences, the tension between traditional and modern Africa, disease, death, hardships, political problems, social injustices, petty rivalries, tensions between workers on the field, and communication problems and misunderstandings between the field and the home front. In conclusion the book is an interesting biography and monograph for both historians of the church, missiologists and all who labour in the mission field.

Mark Shaw

Global Awakening:
How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010
221 pp. pb ISBN 978-0-8308-3877-6 USD $20.00

Reviewed by Jason Bruner

The explosive growth of Christianity in the twentieth century is both a remarkable and well-established fact. The scholarship on Christians and Christianity in Africa, Asia and Latin America has illuminated important and fascinating dimensions of the diverse character of the world Christian church. It is Mark Shaw's contention in *Global Awakening* that the role of revivals in the development of non-western Christianity has been underrepresented in existing scholarship. Shaw argues that global revivals are at the heart of Christianity's shift to Africa, Asia and Latin America, acting as the "delivery system for a variety of forces and factors that account for global Christian growth, vitality and diversity" (29).

Mark Shaw is currently the director of the Centre for World Christianity at Africa International University in Nairobi, Kenya. His previous scholarship includes *The Kingdom of God in Africa* (1997) and studies in the history of Christianity and world Christianity. In *Global Awakening*, Shaw expands upon these interests to produce a work that is expansive in breadth without losing attention to local contexts.

Shaw positions his work with a concise definition: "Global revivals are charismatic people movements that transform their world by translating Christian truth and transferring power" (16). While Shaw understands these movements to be the work of the Holy Spirit, he also understands them to be contextual and conditioned by unique circumstances that allow for distinct Christian expressions. The model Shaw develops for global revivals contains five dynamics: spiritual, cultural, historical, global, and group (16). Thus, Shaw's analysis is markedly multifaceted and rejects mono-causal origins of revivals. The diversity of these revivals, therefore, is as important as their commonalities. These differences are related to another important characteristic of Shaw's revival model. Within "cultural dynamics" Shaw distinguishes between indigenization, inculturation, and contextualization. Shaw uses these terms to describe specific dimensions of cultural dynamics present in global revivals. Indigenization refers to the transfer of power to "new people" who had been marginalized. Inculturation is the dynamic between the revival message and the deep world view of a people. Contextualization is that

element of the revival that motivates a people to change their world, in a spiritual or political sense (20-24).

Shaw then presents case studies that focus upon one figure in a global revival, describing an identifying characteristic of that revival as it relates to his global revival model. Therefore, none of the chapters provides a comprehensive overview of any revival, which is certainly beyond the scope of any single volume. Rather, he seeks to illuminate one dimension of a global revival in a distinct context. These studies cover the Americas, Africa, Europe, India, and East Asia. While most of these revivals are known to the student of World Christianity, Shaw occasionally offers a unique revision of them. For example, his treatment of the North American evangelical revival led by Billy Graham draws out global dynamics that are often overlooked in American historical analyses of the movement. At the same time, specialists of any of the particular revivals might not necessarily find new historical or theological material about the revival. Specialists will also find each revival placed within a sophisticated analytical model that allows for comparison and contextualization with similar movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Non-specialists will also find the book quite accessible and useful as an introduction to revival studies or to a particular movement.

Global Awakening is based largely upon prior research on these revivals, though it stands as a valuable contribution in light of other revival scholarship. The historical or theological material from which Shaw draws in constructing each revival is often quite recent, and includes many solid and up-to-date sources. Those interested in further reading of any of the revivals can find reliable resources in the footnotes of each chapter, though the book lacks a bibliography. Shaw's work also stands out among comparable projects on revivals. Shaw distinguishes his work from J.E. Orr's work on revivals. Orr's work lacks Shaw's analytical depth and is less historically sophisticated. Comparatively, Orr presents a rather monolithic picture of global revivals with less concern for unique local expressions. *Global Awakening* differs from Allan Anderson's *Spreading Fires* (2007) in that Shaw considers revivals that are global but not necessarily "Pentecostal". Shaw is less concerned with tracing the intricate missionary and literary connections that connect revivals than he is with expositing their distinctive elements as they relate to his broader project of describing these remarkable movements.

Shaw condenses a vast range of material in each chapter, providing contextual information, issues raised in the revival, and an assessment of one of those issues as it relates to his global revival model. As a result, description and exposition of revival movements are sacrificed for analytical considerations. This means that some chapters lack a clear sense of cohesion. Chapter four on V.S. Azariah and the Dornakal revival is probably the best example of this, as it was quite complex in its content. While Shaw consistently focuses upon national/indigenous actors in each revival, women

remain quite peripheral or entirely absent from much of the work. Additionally, Shaw's work includes revivals that are not explicitly Pentecostal in nature, but still focuses upon revivals that are from the evangelical spectrum of Protestantism. Catholicism, therefore, only receives a passing mention in a footnote (141).

Global Awakening offers a multifaceted analysis of eight global revivals in the twentieth century. The work evidences analytical depth and attention to historical context with a focus upon the important work of non-western Christians in developing indigenous, contextual expressions of Christianity. It is often personal in tone, interesting throughout, and applicable as a comparative study with other revivals. The work flows out of commitments to the Christian faith and has relevance to the church leader, the historian, the missiologist and the theologian who seek to take seriously the extraordinary developments of the global church in the twentieth century. As such, the work is highly recommended.

E. Paul Balisky

Wolaitta Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovation in Southern Ethiopia, 1935-1975

PICKWICK Pub., A Division of Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.
ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-157-0 $35.54 US on Amazon.com
Paperback, 390 pages
American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 6, 2009

Reviewed by Tibebe Eshete

Paul Balisky is a Canadian missionary from SIM who spent more than forty years in Ethiopia. He is an author and scholar. He has also taught courses at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology.

Evangelicalism is one of the most vibrant and growing expressions of Christianity in Africa. It is also one of the largest and most geographically diverse religious movements in Ethiopia. Paul Balisky joins a rapidly developing literature about the history of the evangelical movement in southern Ethiopia by providing a compelling story of the Wolaitta indigenous missionary enterprise. The Christians among the Wolaitta people make up one of the most important sections of the SIM-founded Kale Heywet Church (Word of Life Evangelical Church).

The *Wolaitta Evangelists* is about how the Wolaitta evangelists announced their newfound faith enthusiastically not only to their own Ometic language group but also to the surrounding ethnic people (xvii). It is the first ever detailed account on the remarkable contribution of entrepreneurial Wolaitta evangelists to the growth and expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia. It offers a fascinating and engaging account of the epic adventures of ordinary people who have largely been written out of political ecclesiastical history. Paul Balisky's presentation of the story of the "founding fathers" of the Wolaitta Church namely, Biru Dubale, Wandaro Dabaro, and Dana Maja, highlights the power of individual commitment, the rise and prominence of ordinary but mission-minded people, and the inspirational significance of the message of a higher calling, which may be defined as the transmission of the gospel as stipulated in the Great Commission. In a way, the book lays down the foundational edifice of the Kale Heywet Church, which has the largest evangelical Christian community in Ethiopia.

The author approaches this important subject by carefully crafting the narrative into eight chapters and an epilogue section. In so doing, he ably dwells on topics that are crucially pertinent and vitally connected to the larger story of Wolaitta evangelists such as: the historical background of Wolaitta before and after its incorporation into imperial Ethiopia; the landscape of the indigenous religions of southern Ethiopia; encounters between primal religions and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; the rise of prophetic movements like that of Essa Lale; the Italian occupation and its socio-political and religious impacts; the Wolaitta evangelists' outreach activities in southern Ethiopia within their ethnically affiliated communities and far beyond in places like Kafa, Bale, and Arsi; and modalities of partnership with the SIM missionaries.

Wolaitta Evangelists, which is a product of a Ph D dissertation, draws from research and firsthand experience and is based on rich sources, interviews, archival materials and extensive field research with copious footnotes identifying key issues to help unfamiliar readers. It is a finely textured and well written masterpiece fuelled by the author's strong desire to spell out the distinct contribution of the Wolaitta evangelists in the epic expansion of Christianity in southern Ethiopia by incorporating his lived experience and insights as a missionary. With an evident appreciation for history and the subject of his field, Balisky explores a range of themes of cultural, political, and missiological relevance that are essential to an adequate understanding of the contexts of the growth of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia.

The book makes a distinct contribution to the study of religious and social movements. For instance, the author's investigation into the realm of primal religion (primal world views, primal consciousness, and imagination) is of crucial importance. It is a subject whose significance has been highlighted by Kwame Bediako, the late Ghanaian theologian, but not sufficiently treated in the Ethiopian context. His brief but insightful description of ancestral spirits (pp. 231-232) is a new addition to a growing interest in the study of primal religions in Africa. Though the impact of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on primal religion awaits further scrutiny, Balisky shows that the rise of prophetic movements expressed through the voices of men like Esa Lale represent indigenously inspired religious initiatives that arise within an Orthodox Christian tradition whose potency had declined over the years. In the contexts of center-periphery relations in Ethiopia, such movements can also epitomize voices from the margin.

Another significant contribution of the book is the author's investigation of the Italian period and how the discontinuity of the historical momentum

ironically generated a default atmosphere for the expansion of Christianity. This has been discussed by other authors, including Raymond Davis (*Fire on the Mountain*), but Balisky's nuanced approach reveals his rich insight and understanding of the local contexts. Another merit of Balisky's work is his inclusion of indigenous gospel songs (pp. 157-159) as articulations of "folk theology" and their significance in transmitting the gospel in a largely "illiterate" society, thus stressing the importance of songs in the evangelization process.

No doubt a major significance of the book is Balisky's probing and provocative accounts of the Wolaitta evangelists in their evangelization of a large segment of the people of the southern Ethiopia, the indomitable zeal with which they accomplished it, the sacrifices they made and the success that was achieved against great odds. Balisky also emphasizes the mission-sending congregations that served as their home support base, and he notes the partnership of the SIM. Balisky is quick to admit that Wolaitta evangelists bore the brunt of the work and consequently grants them the credit they deserve by noting, "the evangelists are able to accomplish what expatriate missionaries could not do on their own" (p. 279).

The book is a unique contribution to the understanding of what can be termed as inter-zonal cross-cultural evangelization. It is a book which demonstrates that the evangelical faith has fulfilled its promise as an inspirational and liberating power in the lives of the many millions it has influenced by empowering them to reconfigure their identity in the context of the socio-political reality of imperial Ethiopia.

This book is more than mission studies or church history. It is a work that contributes new insight to understanding the history of the peoples of Ethiopia from the perspective of the periphery**.** It also vitally demonstrates the fresh angles the study of religion can provide to the field of socio-political and cultural studies in Ethiopia.

Overall, *Wolaitta Evangelists* is a veritable storehouse of information on the history of Christianity in Ethiopia, and a timely and relevant one for that matter. It is an invaluable resource for understanding the phenomenal expansion of the evangelical faith in Ethiopia and the role of local agency. It serves as a key point of reference for all those in the academy, the church and the wider society who want to have a fuller understanding of the evolutionary dynamics and social significance of a religious movement.

Having said that, it is important to note that Christian scholars should be wary of the implications of an overly sympathetic treatment of the subject they

study. Out of his deep compassion for the people who constitute the subject of his study, Balisky exhibits a tendency to not being fully sensitive to the complexity of the Ethiopian experience. I call his attention to the plea of the late Professor Kalu, "It is impossible to do any academics in the African context, at the edge of the twenty-first century without a concern for the ashes on our faces," (*Power, Poverty, and Prayer*, p.199). Kalu urges us to view our scholarly endeavor as a moral discourse and thereby he directs us to treat the subjects we study with modesty and care. From this perspective, Balisky's use of certain emotive terms in some parts of the book does not seem to have redemptive significance. For instance, to insert the quote on p. 29 "the Amhara is to rule, not to obey" without sufficiently exploring the cultural context of its usage, the use of words like, "Amhara colonizers " (p. 100), "hegemony of the Amhara" (p. 214), "Ethiopian imperialism", "myth of evangelization" (p. 50) to cite but few, do not promote healing. Applying the notion of the "myth of evangelization" to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is particularly offensive and demeans its legacy, which is admittedly uneven, in southern Ethiopia. Balisky himself admits the role and evangelistic enterprises of the national church through the 14th to the 17th centuries (pp. 87, 307).

If part of a Christian scholar's calling is to bring healing as best he can, then Ethiopia's "problematic" past should be approached cautiously so we do not cause people to remember it in a way that haunts them. This is especially true given the current volatile ethnic situation in Ethiopia and the need for unity among Christians. We need alternative viewpoints that help people move beyond the issues that divided them in the past by building a middle ground for the nation's collective future.

Balisky also needs to pay careful attention to the time of Menelik's expansion. Menelik's political project was to unify Ethiopia in the midst of the challenge of European imperialism, surely a laudable goal no matter how faulty his methodology was. To explain his national project in terms of a quest for rich sources of both "food and labor" (p. 67) is to provide an overly simplistic version of a complex process. Our leaders and those doing their bidding were ignorant of the future and they did not have the benefit of hindsight that we enjoy. What some perceive as failures need to be weighed in light of their situation, namely their existential challenges, opportunities, and limitations.

Despite these minor imperfections, theological institutions, historians and missiologists will find this a valuable volume to add to their library.

Books Received

T. Desmond Alexander
From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth
Nottingham: IVP, 2008
ISBN 978 1 84474 285 1   pb 208 pgs

Thomas C. Oden
The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition
Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2011
ISBN 978 0 8308 3933 9   pb 279 pgs

Gerald H. Anderson (with John Roxborogh; John M. Prior; Christoffer H. Grundmann)
Witness to World Christianity: The International Association for Mission Studies, 1972-2012
New Haven, Connecticut: OMSC Publications, 2012
ISBN 978 0 9762205 9 6   pb 227 pgs

Afterword: More on Mother Tongue Theological Education

by Richard J. Gehman

The recent issue of AJET I found fascinating, especially the first two articles by Drs. Harries and Wildsmith. I would like to respond to Dr. Harries' article in particular, *The Prospects for Mother Tongue Theological Education in Western Kenya*.

Harries strenuously pushes for the use of the Mother Tongue (MT) in theological education because of the deep cultural meanings contained in the MT which cannot be translated into another language. Because Bible colleges teach in English or French, students are unable to wrestle with the deeply cultural meanings of traditional African life; hence, the need to use MT in Bible and theological colleges.

This of course is not a newly discovered concept. The reason students of the Bible since the Protestant Reformation are urged to learn Greek and Hebrew is that only through the knowledge of the original languages can the depths of meaning of the original biblical text be understood.

In 1928 the Africa Inland Mission established their first Bible school (Ukamba Bible College) in Kenya in Machakos where Mr. Guilding taught the students in Kikamba until he retired in the 1950s, much of the time being the only teacher. (Think of the incredible legacy he left to the Africa Inland Church in Kenya with hundreds of pastors taught.) The following year in 1929 they established Moffat Bible College (originally the W.Y. Moffat Memorial Bible Training Institute) in Kijabe in order to train pastoral students among the Gikuyu, Masai, Kalenjin and Luo, so Mr. Teasdale taught in Kiswahili, the lingua franca of Kenya. For whatever reason, the A.I.C. in Ukambani grew larger in numbers, stronger in stewardship and evangelization, and deeper in their commitment to biblical truth than other branches of the Africa Inland Church, according to the A.I.M. missionaries in Ukambani. Their explanation was that all the pastors in Ukambani were taught in the MT and the others in the lingua franca. Therefore, Akamba understanding of the truth went deeper.

However, to conclude from this that our theological institutions should change course and begin once again to teach in the MT is a stretch. In America we would say, "You are whistling in the dark;" you are dreaming "pie in the sky." It will never happen, and for good reason.

Of all the injustices and travesty which colonial governments wracked upon the Africans, their greatest contribution was the English or French languages together with classroom education. English and French are

windows to the world. A Kenyan educated in English has access to thousands and tens of thousands of books. How many books are available in the MT? To focus on MT in theological education is to impoverish the minds of the students. Very few books are found even in Kiswahili. Although Kiswahili is a Bantu language, no vernacular language is fully transferrable to any other language. Learning in Kiswahili is no substitute for learning the depths of cultural meaning found in the vernacular language.

English is the official language of Kenya and the medium of instruction in all schools, beginning with Standard IV. It would be an insult to ask theological students to study in their MT while their peers are using English. Who will minister to the educated elite in our urban centers? To pine for a return to MT in theological education is a non-starter.

The students that I have known over the years have succeeded rather well in ministry after four years of theological studies in English (preceded by five to seven years of English in Primary and Secondary).

Yet Jim Harries has a point. Students immersed in their English studies for four years not only fail to wrestle with the deep meanings of their cultural beliefs, and fail to apply biblical teaching to their cultural setting; they begin to forget their Mother Tongue. Before graduation from theological college, students I have known began reading their vernacular Bibles in order to reacquaint themselves with biblical vocabulary in their MT.

What is the solution? Continuing education and refresher courses are desperately needed for pastors. The notion that four years of biblical studies renders the graduate a master of the Bible and theology is ludicrous. They need further training - an on-going refreshing that comes from the study of God's Word together with their peers. Denominations that fail to promote in-service training are failing their own pastors. They need it.

What better way of deepening their understanding of Scriptural truth than to do it in their Mother Tongue? In most Bible schools we find a mixture of communities represented by the students. It would be virtually impossible to teach them in their Mother Tongues. It is unrealistic and impractical. But to gather all the Wakamba pastors together, the Gikuyu, Masai, Luo and Kalenjin in their respective communities, would be a rich opportunity for a knowledgeable teacher to lead them through theological and biblical studies in their MT.

For decades I have advocated and promoted that our churches provide continuing education for their ministers. If they would only catch this vision, and see the value of doing it in their MT, what a great boon that would be!

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