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Editorial: Of Empty Pockets and Empty Souls

Commenting on the current state of the former Soviet union, Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko chided western political observers for their fear that Russia's economic woes might return the communists to power. If the communists make a comeback, argued Yevtushenko, it would not be because of economic need but because of the ideological vacuum within Russian society. "We should know by now", wrote Yevtushenko, "that the empty soul is always more dangerous than the empty pocket."

In Africa, where poverty and its complications are so acute, Yevtushenko's observation still rings true. There are empty pockets everywhere and this is cause for concern and action. Far more dangerous, however, are the empty souls that fill African cities, crowd African schoolrooms and drift through African churches and mosques. Africans need something to believe in. Kwame Nkrumah knew this back in the

1950s and he put himself forward as the black messiah. His essential message to Ghanaians at home and other nationalists across Africa was "believe in me I am the way, the truth and the life." In his own familiar parody of Matthew 6:33 he called on Ghanaians to "seek first the political kingdom and all these other things will be added unto you." Empty souls put their faith in Nkrumah only to be sadly disillusioned.

Africa needs development but she also needs direction. Africa needs something to eat but she also needs someone to believe in. Africa needs Jesus Christ not just because he can give her bread but because he can fill her soul. The gospel of John tells the story of Christ meeting the woman at the well. If ever a woman was a candidate for AIDS it was she. She seemed to sleep around for sport and went through husbands the way some people go through candy bars. That she was poor is suggested by the fact that she had to fetch her own water—a weary and time consuming task all too familiar to rural Africans. She had empty pockets. But Christ saw a greater danger in her eyes than thirst or hunger. He saw an empty soul. "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst", declared Jesus. "Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

This issue of *AJET* is concerned about both empty pockets and empty souls. The opening article by Daystar university lecturer Bernard Boyo about pastoral salaries addresses an important practical problem facing our churches—the problem of underpaid clergy. Samuel Owen and Musa Gaiya address the issue of empty souls as they look at renewing evangelism on the one hand and renewing contextual theological reflection on the other.

These are issues addressing Africa's empty souls. Behind all three articles stands the Christ who met the woman at the well. Ideas alone cannot fill either pockets or hearts but the Christ of John 4 can take good ideas, like he once took water at a wedding, and turn them into a wine that renews both soul and body.

Editor's Note:

Though *AJET* has fallen behind in its publishing schedule the editors are confident that we will be up to date within the next six to eight months. Due to the several issues that will be forthcoming over those months and due to the need to move swiftly to get each issue to the press, the editors wish to inform our readers that indexes for volumes 13-15 will appear in issue 15.2 and not in the second issue of each volume as has been our past practice.

Contributors

Musa Gaiya is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria and a previous contributor to *AJET*.

Sam Owen has served at the Nairobi International School of Theology as a lecturer in theology.

Bernard Boyo teaches in Kenya in the Department of Biblical Studies at Daystar University.