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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

Changes and Choices

Interactions with African people have always had a profound influence on Western missionaries, changing them, requiring them to re-evaluate how they think, speak, and act in relationships, making them face choices about right and wrong on issues they've never encountered before. Like Christians everywhere, missionaries haven't always re-evaluated correctly or made good choices, but the former and active missionaries who contributed to this issue look for ways to overcome some of these past problems. They ask profound questions about biblical approaches to hermeneutics, baptizing polygamous converts, paying taxes to less than perfect governments, and the possibility of connecting God, theology and African doxology to church, community and national development. So while these articles are not related to one another through a specific theme, they all share certain things in common, besides being written by thoughtful Westerners with significant African experience.

Firstly, as indicated above, they recommend improvements on the past. Stephanie Black shows how Western methods of biblical interpretation have generally been unable to help African Bible college graduates preach in a way that captures the attention of the people, and she suggests changes. Stefan Höschele discusses the history of his denomination's struggle to deal biblically and compassionately with polygamous converts and suggests that one solution does not necessarily fit all situations. Rodney Reed addresses the perennial and universal question of paying taxes and applies biblical and Western traditional thinking to suggest how Christians, including African Christians, should approach this difficult issue. Gregg Okesson explains why Westerners, including evangelical Christians, with a worldview plagued by the material/spiritual dichotomy, have not harnessed the spiritual potential for material development whereas the experiences of African doxologies points towards a possible profitable link between doxology and development.

Secondly, the solutions suggested are influenced by the authors' African experiences and research, and so are more or less different from past Western evangelical thinking. Okesson's suggestions for change are more towards the African cultural end of the spectrum while Reed's is much more towards the Western side, probably because of the nature of the issue.

Thirdly, readers are asked to make a choice between the ways they are used to thinking, and new ways of: 1) thinking about hermeneutics; 2) applying the Bible to cultural issues such as baptizing polygamous converts; 3) suggesting how Western approaches to universal issues, such as paying taxes, might also apply in different cultures; 4) linking sociological realities to theological/doxological realities as Okesson tries to do.

Fourthly, the authors base their suggestions on their understanding of how the Bible should be interpreted to deal with the issues they address. These are challenging articles because the authors were challenged by their African experiences. Reading them may help change you or not, but it's your choice.

Contributors to AJET 34.1 2015

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Key Hermeneutical Questions for African Evangelicals Today

by Stephanie L. Black

Abstract

Responding to a perceived gap between 'academic' and 'spiritual' study of the Bible, this article explores assumptions behind hermeneutical approaches taught in evangelical African theological colleges. Using an author-text-reader model of communication, four foundational and programmatic questions for evangelical African hermeneutics are discussed: (1) Where is biblical meaning created? (2) What is the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation? (3) Can a passage of Scripture have more than one meaning? (4) If we allow the possibility of multiple meanings, how do we choose among differing interpretations? The article discusses differences between 'inspiration-illumination' and 'two-point inspiration' hermeneutical paradigms and concludes that historical author meaning serves as a constraint on, but allows for a variety of, contemporary reader meanings within God's 'communicative intention.' A set of criteria for evaluating and validating differing interpretations of Scripture is suggested.

Introduction

I suspect I'm not the first biblical studies instructor in an African theological college to notice the vast gap between what we discuss in class and what our students experience when they return to their home churches. After we spend hours talking about how to understand and use the Bible, honing skills in grammatical-historical exegesis, seeking to produce a careful, reasoned understanding of the meaning a biblical author intended to communicate to his original audience, my students too often find that their churches have little interest in this sort of biblical interpretation. The students' academic contributions sometimes receive a cool welcome when what their congregations long for is a fresh word from God through the Bible, speaking directly to their situation today. In fact, our students sometimes find that they are labeled as 'unspiritual' because their reading of the Bible lacks spontaneity and immediacy.

After observing this for some time, I began to ask myself, 'Is it them? Or is it us?' Where does the problem lie? Does it lie with the churches for being unwilling to welcome the fruit of academic study? Or is the problem with our theological curriculum, which provides answers to questions no one is asking? A desire to understand and help close the gap between 'academic' and 'spiritual' study of the Bible, between the theological college and the church, led me to ponder the assumptions behind the hermeneutical approaches we evangelicals teach in African theological colleges. I asked myself where these hermeneutical approaches came from, what presuppositions underlie them,

and whether these approaches are simply imported from western tradition or truly 'fit' African evangelicalism today.[1]

One noticeable characteristic of contemporary African Christianity is that as a whole it is increasingly charismatic or Pentecostal.[2] This has significant implications for the way that African believers understand and make use of the Bible. In his book *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins writes, "For Southern [hemisphere] Christians, and not only for Pentecostals, the apostolic world as described in the New Testament is not just a historical account of the ancient [Middle East], but an ever-present reality open to any modern believer, and that includes the whole culture of signs and wonders. Passages that seem mildly embarrassing for a Western audience read completely differently, and relevantly, in the new churches of Africa or Latin America."[3] Emmanuel Obeng observes that in Ghana, for example, Charismatic students have failed university examinations because they did not prepare for them, expecting direct aid from the Holy Spirit instead. He adds, "It is commonplace to hear statements that there is no need to prepare for sermons, the Holy Spirit will give utterance to the anointed people of God at the time of delivery."[4]

By contrast, many (perhaps most) evangelical theological colleges in Africa were originally established with the help of western missionaries who had little experience with charismatic or Pentecostal Christianity. In fact, some of these missionaries were decidedly anti-charismatic in their experience and

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[1] I am using the term 'evangelical' to refer to those who view the Bible in its entirety as God's uniquely authoritative self-revelation. As Nthamburi and Waruta observe, "We have to contend with the fact that the Bible is an inspired book and as such it has its own authority" (Zablon Nthamburi and Douglas Waruta, "Biblical Hermeneutics in African Instituted Churches," in *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, eds. Hannah W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (Nairobi: Acton, 1997), 42). In Noll's words, "[W]hat it means to be an evangelical ... still has more to do with beliefs about the Bible than with the practice of scholarship. Evangelical self-definition, that is, hinges on a specific conception of Scripture more than upon a specific approach to research… The most important conviction of evangelical scholars is that the Bible is true..." (Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible*, 2nd edn (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 142-43). For my purposes here, this understanding of 'evangelical' embraces both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal expressions of commitment to scriptural authority.

[2] For an informative brief overview of the rise of Pentecostalism in Africa and a survey of its present characteristics, see J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Born of Water and the Spirit': Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Pretoria: Department of Church History, University of Pretoria, 2005).

[3] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 161.

[4] Emmanuel A. Obeng, "Emerging Concerns for Biblical Scholarship in Ghana," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, eds. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke, and Justin Ukpong (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001), 38-39.

attitude. Mission-founded theological colleges may continue to reflect the theological convictions of these founding fathers even years after the nationalization of leadership and of much of the teaching staff. There are benefits from this, in that such colleges tend to retain a commitment to core evangelical doctrines such as the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. But in many colleges the specific approaches to Scripture inherited from non-charismatic 20th century missionary teachers continue to be passed on to succeeding generations of 21st century African students. When confronted with the reality that today's African Christianity is decidedly Pentecostal in style, and that even mainline Protestant or conservative evangelical churches can be strongly influenced by members' Pentecostal beliefs and practices, one can begin to appreciate the gap between the hermeneutics taught in class and the expectations of people in local churches. Little is taught at the theological college about 'good' Spirit-centered hermeneutics, so students are left to fend for themselves in responding to whatever 'bad' examples of Pentecostal-style biblical interpretation they may encounter when they return home. Too often students emerge from our theological colleges poorly equipped to help their congregations discern between valid and invalid 'Spirit-led' interpretations of the Bible, or to explain how the Holy Spirit does speak through the Bible in fresh ways today, when such questions are the heart cry of contemporary African believers.[5]

As a western missionary myself, it is clear that I'm not in a position to provide definitive answers to these questions for African evangelicals, nor would I want to do so. An Ethiopian friend reading an earlier draft of this article politely commented, "the African voice is very thin in your paper." I think this is inevitably true. The purpose of this article is to stimulate a discussion of its topic by African voices, particularly among evangelical biblical scholars and theological students. However, my own church background has left me in a position to help frame the questions under discussion in what I hope are useful ways. I grew up in a charismatic Presbyterian church - a combination that some western evangelicals may be surprised to find exists. I like to tell people that we spoke in tongues, but only for fifteen minutes before the sermon, 'decently and in order'! The combination of Pentecostal worship style and a Reformed theological framework produced a spiritual vitality for which I continue to thank God. That is not to say that my church was perfect or that we didn't go through periods of spiritual excess and questionable practices. We certainly had our share of each. But both the positive and negative

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[5] This can be a challenge elsewhere than Africa, as well. Speaking of the situation in western Pentecostalism, Ellington states his concern that "Pentecostal scholars have in many cases been trained in conservative Evangelical institutions, working within a methodology that is, in some ways, fundamentally at odds with a Pentecostal worldview and understanding of Scripture", Scott A. Ellington, "History, Story, and Testimony: Locating Truth in a Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *PNEUMA* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 249.

experiences have left me interested in offering a sympathetic insider's critique when it comes to evaluating approaches to biblical interpretation that focus on the role of the Holy Spirit.

In this article I will outline what I consider to be four key hermeneutical questions for African evangelicals today, as we seek to address the questions our Christian brothers and sisters are asking about biblical interpretation. These questions are:

1. Where is biblical meaning created - in the author, the text or the reader?
2. What is the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation?
3. Can a passage of Scripture have more than one meaning?
4. How do we choose among different interpretations?

I don't pretend to have fully formed answers to these questions. I strongly believe that it's the role of the rising generation of African theologians and biblical scholars to seek out answers to these questions that fit the contexts of their own churches in various parts of the continent. And in fact, with the growing influence of African Christianity in the global church, I suspect that the answers they craft will then reverberate northward and westward to aid the churches of Europe and North America as they confront similar issues.

Question #1: Where is Biblical Meaning Created: Author, Text or Reader?

A widely used model of communication states that in every act of communication there is a sender, a message, and a receiver. In terms of the Bible, one can speak of the biblical author (the sender), the biblical text itself (the message), and each of us as we read the Bible (the receiver):

$$\boxed{\text{AUTHOR}} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \boxed{\text{TEXT}} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \boxed{\text{READER}}$$

This raises the question, where is biblical meaning created? By that I mean, how does God communicate through Scripture? Where do we encounter God and his truth in the Bible?

A first step is to explain what I mean here by 'meaning.' In recent years Western evangelical scholars have begun talking in terms of 'divine discourse' or 'communication' rather than 'revelation' as a paradigm for Scripture.[6] This emphasizes that God's purpose in the Bible is not just to reveal facts (propositions, or truth statements), but to engage his people in a relationship with himself and to call for a response of faith and obedience. N.T. Wright, for example, observes, "Scripture is there to be a means of God's action in and through us - which will include, but go far beyond, the mere conveying of information."[7] Vanhoozer speaks of Scripture in terms of a 'missional' model of

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[6] See, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), which has had a significant influence on evangelical scholars.

[7] N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 30.

communication, and points out that as his own thinking on biblical interpretation has developed, in his more recent writings "perhaps most surprisingly, there is an almost complete absence of the term *meaning*!"[8] Vanhoozer prefers to speak of biblical communication in terms of divine 'speech acts', which he feels has the value of helping us understand Scripture as more than merely facts or propositional content. In applying communication theories to biblical hermeneutics, evangelicals have depended heavily on speech-act theory, which describes how people 'do things' with words beyond simply making truth statements. Vanhoozer affirms this "opens up possibilities for transformative reading that the modern obsession with information has eclipsed."[9] Jeannine Brown states her central focus as the affirmation that "Scripture's meaning can be understood as the communicative act of the author that has been inscribed in the text and addressed to the intended audience for purposes of engagement."[10] She summarizes, "Meaning can be helpfully understood as communicative intention."[11] Discussion of biblical meaning as 'discourse' or 'communication' has largely supplanted previous attempts among evangelical scholars to distinguish between 'meaning' and 'significance' or between 'meaning' and 'application' in interpreting the Bible, since in such distinctions the term 'meaning' was almost entirely equated with historical author meaning and/or propositional content. This reframing of the hermeneutical enterprise in terms of what God is 'doing' in biblical language, his communicative intentions toward us today, offers good news for African believers who are actively seeking God's Word to them in the daily challenges they face. It reaffirms that the focus of our reading and interpretation of the Bible is to hear what God is saying to us in the ongoing relationship he establishes with us, and to respond obediently.

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[8] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 163n.

[9] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 163-64. See John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), and J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). For an example of a speech-act approach to biblical discourse, see Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*; also Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 162-88. Porter critiques the imprecision with which the theory has sometimes been applied in biblical studies and delineates reasons researchers in linguistics have largely abandoned speech-act theory in favor of other approaches, Stanley E. Porter, "Hermeneutics, Biblical Interpretation, and Theology: Hunch, Holy Spirit, or Hard Work?" in *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 112-18. However, in my view the foundational insight into language functions that biblical scholars glean from speech-act theory is productive in spite of the theory's inherent limitations for research in linguistic pragmatics.

[10] Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 14.

[11] Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 80. Brown notes that the term 'communicative intention' in her work is taken from Mark Brett, "Motives and Intentions in Genesis 1," *Journal of Theological Studies* 42 (1991): 1-16.

But if we say that it is God himself who creates meaning in the Bible in his intent to communicate with his people to call forth a response, it then pushes the question back one step further: '*Where* does God create meaning?' At what points in, or in what dimensions of, the process of biblical revelation does God speak to us today? Using the model below, we can ask whether the 'locus' (the main source or location) of biblical meaning is found primarily in the author, the text or the reader:

$$\boxed{\text{GOD}}$$
$$? \qquad ? \qquad ?$$
$$\swarrow \qquad \downarrow \qquad \searrow$$
$$\boxed{\text{AUTHOR}} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \boxed{\text{TEXT}} \quad \Leftrightarrow \quad \boxed{\text{READER}}$$
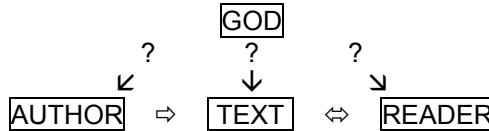
Is meaning found 'behind' the biblical text? That is, are we looking for the historical author's intended meaning which the text represents, to be *recovered* by the reader? Is God's message to the original audience the whole of God's message to us? Or, a second possibility, is meaning found 'in' the biblical text? That is, does the biblical text have a life of its own once the historic author finishes writing? Is there sometimes a deeper, hidden 'spiritual' meaning in a passage of Scripture that the human author may not have been aware of, to be *discovered* by the reader? Does God have more to say to us today than the original author might have realized? Or finally, is meaning found 'in front of' the biblical text? That is, is meaning *created* by or in the reader, as we as readers interact with the biblical text under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our own contexts today? Does God speak to us directly as we read the Bible? And if so, what if anything does the meaning the historical author understood have to do with what God is saying to us now?

Of course, most of us are unaware of distinct components of author, text and reader when we interpret the Bible. We encounter the Bible as a living book, in which we (rightly) expect to hear from God himself through his written word. As we read a passage of Scripture, we assume that what we understand it to mean is exactly what God both intended and intends to say. "God said it, I believe it, that settles it!" is our rallying cry. Yet very few of us are aware of our own role as readers. What we bring to each reading of the biblical text - our personal experiences, theological assumptions and cultural worldview - act as unseen filters affecting what we notice when we read and how we perceive it. Fee and Stuart point out that "whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that *our understanding* is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's *intent*." But as Fee and Stuart warn, "we invariably bring to the text all that we are… Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray…"[12] Since as

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[12] Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

readers we are inevitably interpreters, we can benefit by becoming more aware of how we read the Bible. That awareness - the ability to recognize our own reading practices and how they influence our interpretation of Scripture - and then using that awareness in the decisions we make about how we *will* read the Bible, is what hermeneutics is all about.

And in reality, the three parts of the communicative process described above are not completely distinct. For one thing, we don't have direct access to the historical author. (He's dead.) The only tangible 'artifact' we have is the text produced by the author. At the other end of the process, as I've just explained, all readers bring to the biblical text their own perspectives, which strongly color how they read, so there is a constant interaction between reader and text even if we assume that our focus is on the historical author's own meaning. But the three-part model of author, text and reader can help us understanding varying approaches to biblical hermeneutics.

It is important for us to be aware of how our own historical and theological context has influenced the way we search for meaning in Scripture. Through most of the 19th and 20th Centuries, western evangelicals studying the Bible in academic settings found those settings dominated by historical criticism. Historical criticism is an approach to the Bible which aims to get 'behind' the biblical text to discover the historical world of the author and the author's community, and/or the experiences and feelings of the author, whether or not the modern-day person undertaking this study is committed to faith in the God of which the biblical author speaks. At the time, this historical approach satisfied the modernist drive for a 'scientific' approach to the study of the Bible that didn't make assumptions about the text based on Christian beliefs. Confronted with historical criticism and the skepticism about God's role in producing biblical texts that often accompanied it, evangelical biblical scholars began to use what has been called the grammatical-historical method in interpreting the Bible. Grammatical-historical exegesis is a more text-centered subset of historical criticism, which makes room for the belief that the human authors who wrote the biblical texts were divinely inspired. Such evangelical biblical scholars use tools similar to the tools historical critics use to study the text, but their aim is to discover the inspired meaning the historic author intended to communicate in the text. This primarily historical approach had the benefit of allowing evangelical scholars to operate successfully in the late 19th and 20th century western academic environment.[13] But the dominance of

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[13] For discussion of evangelicals' use of grammatical-historical exegesis in relation to the historical paradigm dominating academic biblical studies see, for example, Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 354-56; Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 16. However it is important to note, as Noll observes, that the situation of evangelicals in academic biblical studies in Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not as polarized as tended to be the case in the United States. This was largely due to the prominence of Anglicans among British evangelicals. In the nineteenth century, Noll explains, "As members of the

historical criticism in that environment seems to have had the effect of focusing the attention of evangelical biblical scholars on the author-text side of the hermeneutical equation, rather than the text-reader side. Even today, evangelical hermeneutics tends to have a great deal to say about recovering author meaning in the biblical text, but much less to say about the relationship between the text and contemporary readers.

At the risk of greatly oversimplifying the process, we can say that the rise of historical criticism in the West and evangelicals' response to and engagement in historical studies, strongly shaped evangelical hermeneutics in the 20th century. Although African Christians tended not to be directly involved in these events, they have inherited many of these concerns and outcomes through the influence of western missionaries and the educational systems they established. In addition, African biblical scholars who received their theological training in the West may have explicitly or implicitly adopted the historical approaches they learned there. Peter Nyende observes that the affinities between academic interpretations of the Bible in Africa and those in the US and Europe, "should not come as a surprise, in view of the fact that education systems which Africa inherited were from the North Atlantic," and that "as a result… the Bible in theological institutions in Africa is interpreted by means of historical criticism." Nyende notes, however, that in African academic settings there tends to be more concern for the contemporary "relevance, applicability or usefulness" of biblical texts in African contexts.[14] Ukpong affirms that current biblical scholarship in Africa is "to some extent a child of these modern [historical-critical] methods of western biblical scholarship." He adds, "In spite of this, however, biblical scholars in Africa have been able to develop a parallel method of their own. The particular characteristic of this method is the concern to create an encounter between the biblical text and the African context." Ukpong further explains, "To be sure, there are two currents of academic readings of the Bible in Africa: one follows

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establishment as well as often of the lesser aristocracy, these Anglicans enjoyed access to Oxford and Cambridge, and they occasionally received preferment in the state church. In sum, their participation in the establishment encouraged both a traditional conservatism and a pragmatic tolerance for others." In the early twentieth century, Noll continues, Britain did not experience the Fundamentalist-modernist controversy on a scale similar to that in America, with its focus on disputes over Scripture. British Christians were more concerned about the destruction caused by World War I, controversy surrounding the revision of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, and a general weakening of the influence of Christianity in Britain. Noll summarizes, "The most significant conservative Bible scholarship in Great Britain was being done by Christians working in the university world; their convictions, while not strictly evangelical, were reasonably traditional. From this setting a more distinctly evangelical scholarship emerged more easily than was the case in the United States" (Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 63-64, 78, 85).

[14] Peter Nyende, "Institutional and Popular Interpretations of the Bible in Africa: Towards an Integration," *Expository Times* 119, no. 2 (2007): 60-61.

the western pattern, while the other follows the African pattern of linking the text with the African context. Many African authors publish in both patterns."[15]

In more than a hundred years of academic study, western evangelicals have gotten fairly good at historical approaches to Scripture. But most people in African churches (and contemporary western churches as well), especially those with a Spirit-centered sense of immediacy about the way God communicates with his people, are more interested in what they themselves as readers encounter in and feel about the text. Regrettably, given this legitimate desire for a contemporary personal encounter with God in the Bible, grammatical-historical exegesis as it is usually practiced focuses almost entirely on discovering the historical meaning of the human author. Too often it has little to say about the dual authorship of the Bible - divine and human - and offers little in terms of discovering what fuller aspects of meaning God may intend to communicate through Scripture. Grammatical-historical exegesis lacks a specific theological method of connecting the 'then and there' of the biblical revelation with the 'here and now', although various interpreters have come up with their own systems. As we will see below, the grammatical-historical method is an essential element in the task of biblical hermeneutics, because God has chosen to inculturate his authoritative word through human authors in specific historical contexts. But an exclusive use of grammatical-historical exegesis as it is often taught in biblical studies courses in evangelical theological colleges too often results in giving answers to the questions that church people today aren't asking. Too often the focus and results of such study remain in the past, without adequately exploring the ways God continues to speak through the Bible today.

In other words, evangelical theological colleges have become quite adept at exploring this part of the hermeneutical equation:

$$\boxed{\text{AUTHOR}} \Rightarrow \boxed{\text{TEXT}} \Leftrightarrow \boxed{\text{READER}}$$
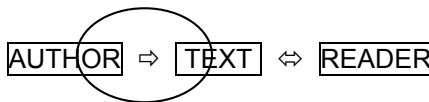
when what most church people are interested in today (whether they can articulate it or not) is this part of the equation:

$$\boxed{\text{AUTHOR}} \Rightarrow \boxed{\text{TEXT}} \Leftrightarrow \boxed{\text{READER}}$$
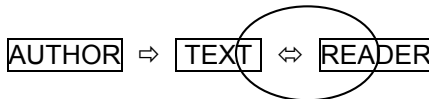
As evangelical biblical scholars we often insist that our side of the equation is the most important aspect ('author meaning is determinative!'), but it may be that part of the reason we're motivated to make this claim is that it's the aspect we theologically trained scholars are particularly good at. In practice, however,
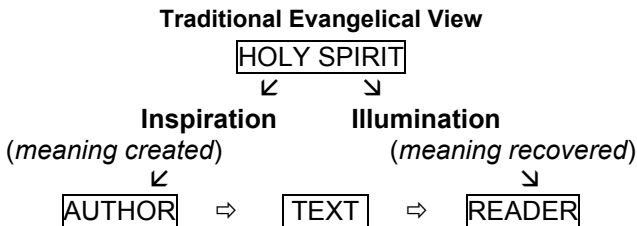
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[15] Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and hermeneutical directions," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108 (2000): 4.

and in our own devotional lives, most of us would acknowledge that both aspects (author-text and text-reader) as well as a sensitivity to both 'authors' (divine and human), are essential in bringing scriptural truth to light in our lives. This exploration of the text-reader relationship and the dual authorship of Scripture, especially the role of the Holy Spirit as we read and seek to understand the Bible, is too often lacking in our theological curriculum.

Our current challenge as evangelicals is to develop an approach to biblical interpretation which takes seriously the Holy Spirit vibrantly speaking God's message to believers through the Bible today, but which does not ignore the inspired understanding of the original author, or the canonical text that is the result of God speaking through his Spirit in many times and places. The complementary roles of author, text and reader must each play their part in our hermeneutics. To my knowledge, little has been published thus far addressing specifically evangelical African hermeneutics beyond an author-centered historical-grammatical approach.[16] Particularly in Africa, where people long to find in Scripture answers to the great needs of their lives for identity, security, health, prosperity, and defense against demonic spiritual forces, the relationship between the biblical text and the reader needs to be more thoroughly explored in a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the way God speaks to us through Scripture.

Question #2: What Is the Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation?

A traditional evangelical view of the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation says the Spirit plays two different but complementary roles. First, the Holy Spirit *inspires* the biblical author to record faithfully the message God wants to communicate. Then, the Holy Spirit *illuminates* the mind of the reader in order to understand that message. This view can be understood as follows:

Traditional Evangelical View

HOLY SPIRIT

Inspiration   **Illumination**
(*meaning created*)   (*meaning recovered*)

AUTHOR   ⇨   TEXT   ⇨   READER

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[16] See, for example, Samuel Ngewa, "The Validity of Meaning and African Christian Theology," in *Issues in African Christian Theology*, eds. Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw, and Tite Tienou, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), 49-55. The one-volume *African Bible Commentary* is a valuable attempt to show more clearly the relevance of biblical texts for African readers, but is not (as far as I observe) an attempt to develop unique evangelical approaches to biblical hermeneutics for Africa; see Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *African Bible Commentary* Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006). The innovative and sometimes controversial work of the late Kwame Bediako perhaps went furthest in this area, although his interests lay primarily in the area of African Theology rather than biblical hermeneutics.

In this understanding, the process of illumination involves the Holy Spirit's work in regenerating the unbelieving person so that he or she has the spiritual capacity to hear and receive God's truth. The classical Protestant evangelical view of illumination is often limited to this role. In practice most evangelicals would say that in some way the Holy Spirit also helps the reader understand what God wants to say through the biblical author in a specific passage. However, for most traditional evangelicals the Holy Spirit does not reveal new content to the reader; instead, the Spirit enables and helps the reader to recover the content preserved in the biblical text.

By contrast, in a classic Pentecostal understanding of biblical revelation, there are two points of inspiration. First the Holy Spirit *inspires* the biblical author to record faithfully the message God communicates to him or her. Then the Holy Spirit *inspires* the reader to hear God's voice afresh through reading the Bible. This Pentecostal understanding can be understood as follows:

Classic Pentecostal View

HOLY SPIRIT

↙   ↘

Inspiration   **Inspiration**
(*meaning created*)   (*new meaning created*)

↙   ↘

AUTHOR ⇨ TEXT ⇔ READER
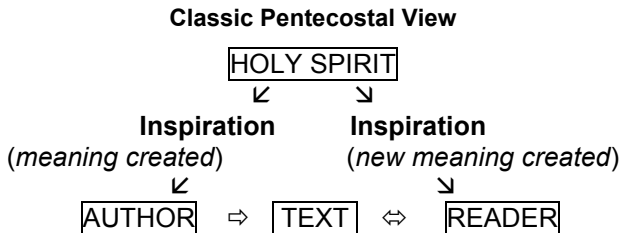
In this approach the second aspect of inspiration tends to take the place of or supersede the traditional evangelical understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in illumination, and can (for many Pentecostals) involve new content communicated by the Holy Spirit at that point. One contemporary Pentecostal scholar observes that the "sharp distinction between 'inspiration' and 'illumination' is increasingly being glossed over by Pentecostals."[17]

It is important for evangelicals working in a context where people come from both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal experiences to recognize this significant difference in assumptions about the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation. Kenneth Archer explains that from the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement, "the Holiness tradition and Pentecostals located the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit in both the past written document (Scripture) and in their present experience with Scripture. Inspiration was not limited to the Scripture in the sense that it was a past document containing no errors, but it also included the present ability of the Scripture to speak to the community." As Archer points out, "Fundamentalists, on the other hand, located the inspirational work of the Spirit in the past written document

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[17] Timothy B Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *PNEUMA* 15 (1993): 176.

(Scripture) only."[18] The 'Fundamentalists' to whom he refers would include many among the 20th century missionaries who helped bring the Gospel to Africa. But those from a broader stream of evangelicalism also tend to share this approach. The spiritual inheritance passed down from such missionaries and institutionalized in the curricula of theological colleges may incorporate beliefs about inspiration and illumination that are at odds with the two-point understanding of inspiration that implicitly informs much of contemporary African Christian experience.

In fact, evangelical biblical scholars have offered very little in terms of explaining their doctrine of illumination, leaving a conceptual vacuum for ordinary Christians to fill from their own experience. Clark Pinnock observes, "I challenge you to open the standard books on biblical interpretation and see whether you can find a serious discussion of the illuminating work of the Spirit in them. They all mention it in passing but seldom offer a proper discussion of it."[19] Pinnock asserts that as a result of the influence of rationalism in Western culture, "the only thing we leave for the Spirit to do in interpretation is to rubber-stamp what our scholarly exegesis concludes."[20] But Pinnock claims, that "earlier Christian theologians, not caught up in our polemical situation and less nervous about the status of original inspiration, did not feel the need to differentiate the two kinds of inspiration so sharply. John Wesley could write in his notes on 2 Tim. 3.16, 'The spirit of God not only once *inspired* those who wrote the Bible but continually *inspires* those who read it with earnest prayer.'"[21] However Wesley meant to use the term 'inspire' in this context, Pinnock's point, that the 'polemical situation' in which contemporary evangelicals often find themselves tends to make them uncomfortable with issues of illumination versus inspiration, is well taken.

The conviction of a present, active role of the Holy Spirit in reading and understanding the Bible remains a central tenet of contemporary Pentecostalism, even if Pentecostal scholars themselves have not come to a consensus as to how to describe it. French Arrington writes, "The real issue in Pentecostalism has become hermeneutics, that is, the distinctive nature and function of Scripture and the role of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community, grammatical-historical research, and personal experience in the interpretive process."[22] Note that as a Pentecostal scholar himself, Arrington includes in this statement grammatical-historical research (i.e., historical author meaning), but sets it alongside other factors such as the roles of the Holy Spirit, the

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[18] Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 40.
[19] Clark Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993): 7.
[20] Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," 8.
[21] Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," 4.
[22] French Arrington, "The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals," *PNEUMA* 16, no.1 (1994): 107.

Christian community and personal experience. In terms of a Pentecostal theory of hermeneutics, Archer affirms, "The important role of the Holy Spirit and the impact of personal experience upon hermeneutics are the most frequently discussed dimensions."[23]

This discussion of hermeneutics among Pentecostal biblical scholars has become quite lively in recent years.[24] In stark contrast to earlier generations of Pentecostals who distanced themselves from institutions of high learning, there is now a generation of Pentecostal scholars actively engaged in academic biblical studies and in conversation with others across the theological spectrum.[25] Discussion about Pentecostal hermeneutics in (predominantly western) academic journals includes questions concerning the extent to which to Pentecostals practice a biblical hermeneutics distinct from that of evangelicals, and whether they ought to; what the relative roles of Pentecostal experience and historical author meaning should be in Pentecostal hermeneutics (i.e., should Pentecostal experience validate an understanding of author meaning, or should such experience precede and determine the understanding of author meaning); the extent to which biblical narrative (specifically Luke-Acts) should be treated as normative in constructing Pentecostal theology; and potential affinities between Pentecostalism and postmodernism, and whether or not this is beneficial.[26]

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[23] Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century*, 142.

[24] Recent discussion of this topic among Pentecostal scholars, with responses from noted evangelical scholars, is summarized in Kevin L. Spawn and Archie T. Wright, eds., *Spirit and Scripture: Exploring a Pneumatic Hermeneutic* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012).

[25] Kenneth Archer, cited above, a Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) bishop who completed his PhD studies under the supervision of Richard Bauckham at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, would be only one such example in the West. Journals such as *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* and the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* disseminate much of this discussion.

[26] See Brubaker's summary of various positions Pentecostal scholars have taken on the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics vis-à-vis evangelicalism: Malcolm R. Brubaker, "Postmodernism and Pentecostals: A Case Study of Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Journal* 15 (Spring 1997): 39-44. See also Bradley Truman Noel, "Gordon Fee and the Challenge to Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Thirty Years Later," *PNEUMA* 26, no. 1 (2004): 60-80. Although evangelicals tend to look to Fee as emblematic of Pentecostal biblical scholarship, for the most part Pentecostal scholars see Fee and his work as more 'evangelical' than 'Pentecostal,' largely because of Fee's denial of a baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion and of the necessity of speaking in tongues as initial evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit, in addition to Fee's emphasis on the priority of historical author meaning in biblical interpretation. Arrington, "The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals," 105-106, addresses the concern for the 'subjectivity' of experience among Pentecostals and their critics. See also Archer's summary of Pentecostal scholarly interaction concerning the role of experience in biblical interpretation: Kenneth J. Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996): 76-77. For a defense of the

African Pentecostals also share the growing interest in theological studies. As Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu observes, "A number of African Pentecostals … are now pursing higher degrees in theology, subjecting their own movements to critical academic study as insiders." Asamoah-Gyadu asserts, "Such an approach, if it is maintained in the future will help bridge the gap between the academy and experiential faith that exposed the deficiencies in the training of historic mission pastors in the face of African religio-cultural realities."[27]

Among the diversity within Pentecostal approaches to biblical studies there is a consistent affirmation that the Pentecostal community's experience of the Holy Spirit does and should shape their reading of Scripture. And there is a corresponding assumption among Pentecostals that any Spirit-filled believer can understand the Bible's spiritual meaning. A.O. Nkwoka affirms, "The Nigeria Pentecostal stance is that any literate Christian who has been regenerated and filled or baptised by the Holy Spirit has the capacity to read and interpret the Bible having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit."[28] Yet, as Archer laments at one point, "Many Pentecostals would argue for a prominent role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process but I have found only one in my research thus far who has articulated *how* the interpreter would rely upon the Holy Spirit."[29] In preparing graduates to serve effectively in Pentecostal or Pentecostal-influenced ministry contexts, evangelical theological colleges have much to gain by listening to the ways these issues are being addressed and by taking into consideration the thoughtful insights of Pentecostal scholars as they seek to explain the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation. Biblical scholars in Africa - Pentecostals and others - have much to add to the international discussion from their own experiences and reflection, given that they tend to participate in churches and communities where the authority of the Bible is affirmed and daily experience of the Holy Spirit is also assumed.

The question evangelicals will want to raise is, to what extent can a contemporary reader trust his or her own experience of the Holy Spirit as a reliable guide to interpreting the Bible? The Reformation watchword of *sola*

Pentecostal use of biblical narrative see Kenneth J. Archer, "Pentecostal Story: The Hermeneutical Filter for the Making of Meaning," *PNEUMA* 26, no. 1 (2004): 36-59. With respect to Pentecostal hermeneutics vis-à-vis postmodernism, Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy," has been influential, engendering both positive and negative responses from other Pentecostal scholars. In this article Cargal strongly affirms the value of postmodernist insights for Pentecostal hermeneutics. Robert Menzies, "Jumping Off the Postmodern Bandwagon," *PNEUMA* 16 (1994): 115-20, offers a critique of Cargal's position.
[27] Asamoah-Gyadu, "Born of Water and the Spirit," 405.
[28] A. O. Nkwoka, "The Challenge of Nigerian Pentecostal Theology and the Perspicuity of Scripture", in *Study of Religion in Africa: Essays in Honour of G. C. Oosthuizen*, eds. Johannes A. Smit and Pratap Kumar (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 118-19.
[29] Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect," 77 (my emphasis). He is referring to Arrington, "The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals."

scriptura defended the authority of the Bible against the authority of church tradition. But both the Reformers and their modern day descendants then found that different interpreters can promote differing interpretations of Scripture, all appealing to Scripture itself as the source of authority. Attempts to replace *sola scriptura* with *sola spiritus* break down at the same point. Different believers may point to their own experience of the Holy Spirit as validating their differing interpretations of a biblical passage. How do we know which if any of them are reliable? As Wright warns,

> "the 'experience' of Christians, and of everyone else for that matter, always and inevitably comes up with several simultaneous and incompatible stories. 'Experience' is far too slippery for the concept to stand any chance of providing a stable basis sufficient to serve as an 'authority,' unless what is meant is that, as the book of Judges wryly puts it, everyone should simply do that which is right in their own eyes. And that, of course, means that there is no authority at all… But there is a more profound problem to be addressed, indeed a logical problem. The 'experience' of Christians, and of churches, is itself *that over which and in the context of which the reading of scripture exercises its authority…* If 'experience' is itself a source of authority we can no longer be *addressed* by a word which comes from beyond ourselves."[30]

If we accept that the Holy Spirit speaks to the Christian believer through the Bible today, we must also accept that, given the limits of our sin-darkened minds in perceiving divine truth, we may sometimes get that message wrong. Our ability to hear the Holy Spirit speaking God's truth in Scripture may be flawed by our own creaturely fallenness. For this reason, a Spirit-centered hermeneutic should allow a role for validation by other criteria in the hermeneutical process.[31] We will return to this issue in Question #4 below.

Question #3: Can a Passage of Scripture Have More than One Meaning?

Students tell me that in their local churches the Bible is sometimes understood to be like an onion - there is always another layer that can be peeled away to reveal new layers of meaning. The role of the preacher is then understood to be just that: peeling away the layers in a passage to reveal a fresh meaning (revealed by the Holy Spirit) that the listeners have never heard before. In fact, a truly inspiring and 'inspired' preacher is thought to be one who can discover and expound in an exciting way some new, spiritually revealed, layer of meaning in a biblical passage. In this sense the idea that a single passage of Scripture can have multiple meanings is simply assumed by the congregation.

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[30] Wright, *The Last Word*, 102-103 (his emphasis).
[31] This is not unrecognized by Pentecostal biblical scholars. Arrington, for example, warns that "to guard against personal experience displacing Scripture as the norm or against excesses in interpretation, active participation is vital in the Pentecostal community of faith… The Jerusalem Council exemplifies community and provides a biblical model for interpretation that includes Scripture, experience, tradition and reason (Acts 15)" (Arrington, "The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals," 106).

In contrast, traditional evangelical hermeneutics tends to place a strong emphasis on a biblical passage having just one meaning, specifically the historical author's meaning. Sam Oleka reflects this classical evangelical view when he states, "After the intended meaning of the original author has been determined and the interpretation done, the interpreter is left with the contemporary application. It behooves the African contemporary interpreter to know that there is only one interpretation to every given Scripture text, but that there could be several applications to it."[32] Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard affirm, "The meaning of a text is *that which the words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of its author/editor and the probable understanding of that text by its intended readers.* It is the meaning those words would have conveyed to the readers at the time they were written by the author or editor."[33] Thus, traditional evangelical hermeneutics is focused on the author-text end of the hermeneutical paradigm. The text is treated as a window through which the author's intention can (at least to some extent) be viewed.

However, it is interesting to observe that more recent evangelical thinking has begun to question this focus on singular author meaning. For example, Vanhoozer states: "I have spent a disproportionate amount of time elsewhere trying to establish and protect the rights of authors. While I am not yet ready to recant…, I now see the need to supplement my normative account with a more descriptive treatment of what actually happens in understanding."[34] In another essay, Vanhoozer writes:

> How has my mind changed since writing *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* Let me count the ways!... I have come to see that biblical discourse is caught up in the very subject matter that it is about: the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, for that matter, is the attempt to interpret it… What remains constant … between earlier and later Vanhoozer is the emphasis on the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. However, I now recognize the equal importance of dealing with the other dimensions of biblical discourse ('*to* someone *about* something'). I also recognize how important it is … to sort out the relative standing (status) of authors, text, reading, and subject matter… I now want to insist that the

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[32] Sam Oleka, "Interpreting and Applying the Bible in an African Context," in *Issues in African Christian Theology*, eds. Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw, and Tite Tienou (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), 108.

[33] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd edn (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 186 (their emphasis). See, similarly, Duvall and Hays: "In biblical interpretation, the reader does not control the meaning; the author controls the meaning. This conclusion leads us to one of the most basic principles of our interpretive approach: *We do not create the meaning. Rather, we seek to discover the meaning that has been placed there by the author*" (J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 195; their emphasis).

[34] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the 'Miracle' of Understanding," in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads*, eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. A. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4.

theological interpretation of Scripture involves both reading the Bible like any other book - in doing justice to the authorial discourse - *and* reading the Bible *unlike* any other book…[35]

Although in the past the focus of evangelical hermeneutics has been primarily on the author-text relationship:

AUTHOR ⇨ TEXT ⇔ READER
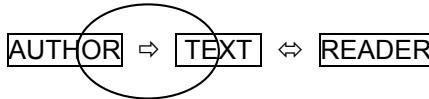
evangelical scholars such as Vanhoozer and others are beginning to explore more fully the relationship between text and reader and the role of the Holy Spirit in that relationship, even if they are not yet sure how they want to incorporate the reader's role into their hermeneutical theory:

? ? ?

AUTHOR ⇨ TEXT ⇔ READER

Why is this change taking place? It is happening at least in part because evangelical scholars are taking account of postmodernism's critique of modernism and applying postmodern insights to their understanding of how God communicates biblical truth. At the risk of oversimplification, some basic contrasts between modernist and postmodern worldviews can be illustrated as follows:

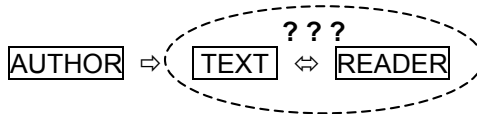| Modernism		Postmodernism
Truth is objective. It can be objectively perceived by the rational mind.	⇒	Truth is subjective. It is constructed through individual and community experience.

In the modernist worldview, truth is objective. It is 'out there' to be discovered by rational inquiry. This belief in the external stability of truth and in human ability to perceive it had the benefit of fueling scientific and technological revolutions that transformed societies. However, the idea that human minds are completely objective is misleading. In fact, as postmodern critics point out, our minds and our ways of understanding are strongly colored by our own subjective experience, our philosophical worldview, our cultural background

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[35] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, A.K.M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 73-75.

and a host of other factors. This is the 'myth of objectivity' for which modernism is justly criticized. Postmodernism asserts that truth (especially in the spiritual, moral and ethical realms) does not exist 'out there', but is a product of the individuals and communities who construct it through their own experiences and perceptions. A corollary of this is the assumption that the experiences of many different people produce many different truths.

Evangelicals, committed to the objective reality and authority of God, don't accept the postmodernist belief that truth is merely subjective and relative. But evangelical scholars increasingly recognize the validity of post-modernism's critique of modernism's claim to objectivity in *perceiving* God's truth:

Modernism		Postmodernism
☑ Truth is objective.	⇒	~~Truth is subjective.~~
~~It can be objectively perceived by the rational mind.~~		*Our perception of truth* is constructed through individual and community experience.
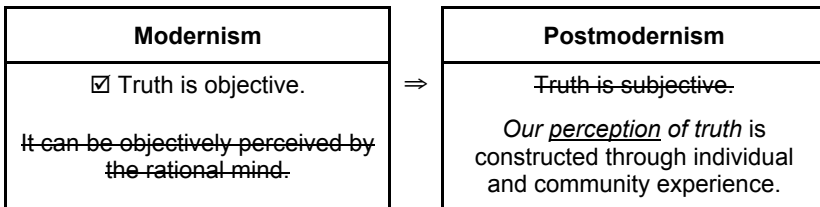
As Christianity becomes more globalized and Christians from many cultures and backgrounds read the Bible with differing eyes, it becomes apparent how much our own background and experience - what some scholars have termed our 'pre-understandings' - affect what we understand God to be saying in Scripture. This recognition is especially important in Africa, where evangelical biblical interpretation has been strongly colored by western cultural pre-understandings. The postmodern critique reminds us that it is essential that African readers add their voices to the discussion of God's authoritative revelation in Scripture, so that the understanding of all may be deepened.

The recognition of the reader's role in the attempt to recover historical author meaning also fosters new thinking about the role of the reader in constructing meaning as the Holy Spirit speaks to each individual and community through Scripture in their own contemporary context. As Klein, Hubbard and Blomberg summarize, "Clearly postmodernism offers evangelicals a mixed bag of bane and blessing. We should welcome the rejection of modernism's dependence on human autonomy, reason, and science and technology as the be-all and end-all of life." Speaking of the value of postmodern perspectives concerning the ways truth is conveyed, they continue, "Christians in general (and the Bible in particular) have historically valued narrative, symbolism, the aesthetic, a value-laden interpretation, and the importance of community. Christians once too enamored with modernism are increasingly recapturing many of these dimensions thanks to postmodernism. On the other hand," they affirm, "we must dispute the postmodernists' denial of absolute truth…"[36] The willingness to accept

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[36] Klein, Hubbard, Blomberg, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 72.

postmodernist insights about human dimensions of interpretation, without buying into postmodernism's rejection of absolute truth, allows scholars such as A.K.M. Adam, Stephen Fowl, Francis Watson and Vanhoozer to speak of "the possibility of a theological criticism informed, but not governed, by postmodern arguments."[37]

In short, evangelical scholars are beginning to acknowledge that multiple readers reading from differing perspectives may recognize multiple meanings that God intends to communicate through a biblical passage. God may have more than one 'communicative intention' in a passage of Scripture. And once the possibility of something more than a singular historical author meaning has been acknowledged, such scholars have also begun to think about how God himself, as the divine author of Scripture, may have placed, or 'encoded', multiple meanings in the biblical text itself. In considering this, scholars interested in hermeneutics recognize that they are revisiting issues of the multidimensional approaches to biblical interpretation that characterized 'pre-modern' or 'pre-critical' interpreters of the Bible (before approximately 1700 AD). Scholars are beginning to look again at the hermeneutical thought of such writers as Augustine (4th century) and Thomas Aquinas (13th century), among others, to explore possibilities for hermeneutics today.[38]

Pre-modern approaches invite the interpreter to consider the Bible specifically in terms of its character as God's authoritative divine revelation. A comparison between pre-modern and modern worldviews may be roughly summarized in this way:

Pre-Modernism		Modernism
All truth originates from God. It is revealed by God in the context of faith.	$\Rightarrow$	Truth is objective. It can be objectively perceived by the rational mind.
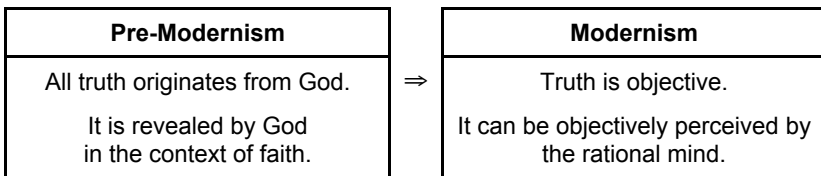
As evangelicals, we can affirm that God's truth is objective, that is, that truth originates from God (as in the pre-modern view), but has a real and objective existence (as in the modern view) given that God himself is the creator of a world which itself has objective existence. But if we cannot always perceive

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[37] Adam et al., *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 10.

[38] See, for example, David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 26-38; Stephen E. Fowl, "The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, A.K.M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 35-50. For Augustine's approach to Scripture, see my "Augustine's Hermeneutics: Back to the Future for 'Spiritual' Bible Interpretation?," *AJET* 27, no. 1 (2008): 3-33.

that truth rationally, and can never perceive it completely objectively, perhaps (such scholars might ask) we should reaffirm the nature of Scripture as divine revelation, showing us truth in God's own way:

Pre-Modernism		Modernism
☑ All truth originates from God. It is revealed by God in the context of faith.	⇒	☑ Truth is objective. ~~It can be objectively perceived by the rational mind.~~
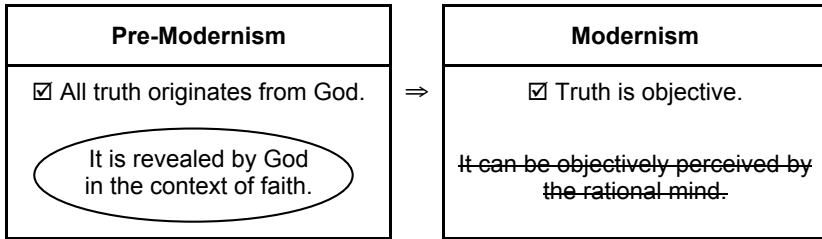
Evangelical scholars appreciate the emphasis on Scripture as divinely revealed communication, rather than simply as historical texts, that they find in pre-modern approaches to interpreting the Bible. This renewed interest in biblical interpretation as an explicitly theological rather than historical task, found not just among evangelicals but across the theological spectrum, is encapsulated in the emphasis on 'theological hermeneutics' which dominates the current academic discussion.[39]

For African evangelicals, who on the whole did not pass through the modernist paradigm at a popular level (and for whom the language of 'pre-' and 'post-' modernity may be an irrelevant western construct), a renewed appreciation of pre-modern interpretative approaches could offer a significant point of contact between academic and popular approaches to the Bible. One practical example is that while western evangelical scholars are often uncomfortable with allegory as the dominant model of pre-modern hermeneutics (given that allegory depends on multiple 'spiritual' senses of Scripture purportedly hidden in the text, usually unrelated to the historical author's meaning), it is clear that allegorizing plays a prominent role in biblical interpretation and preaching in Africa. As R. S. Sugirtharajah observes with respect to trends in Christianity throughout the global South, "People's

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[39] See, for example, Adam *et al.*, *Reading Scripture with the Church*; Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman, eds., *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig Bartholomew, and Daniel Treier, eds., *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

exegesis could be described as pre-critical, and perceived to be taking as their point of departure the Pauline dictum - 'the letter kills but the spirit makes alive'. People as exegetes unconsciously nurture pre-critical reading practices such as those which are literal, typological and allegorical… The purpose of the interpretation is not to seek historical information about the biblical record but to deal with the issues that face them."[40] The strengths and weaknesses of allegory as a hermeneutical method merit further study by African biblical scholars, and a fuller awareness of its use by pre-modern biblical interpreters may be of use in this process.

However, at the same time that interest in the theological or 'spiritual' dimensions of biblical interpretation is growing, both African and western evangelicals remain concerned that a focus on reader-centered and multidimensional meaning ('what the Spirit is saying to me') undisciplined by a grammatical-historical focus on author meaning can result in unlimited subjectivity in biblical interpretation. Evangelical scholars worry that if historical author meaning is no longer the only criterion for interpreting a biblical passage it will lead to interpretational anarchy and potentially to actual heresy. As Vanhoozer observes, "All of us want to say that a *little* plurality [of meaning] need not be a dangerous thing, yet we diverge in our attempts to explain how such plurality can be delimited and principled rather than merely infinite and arbitrary."[41]

We return to the question introduced above in discussing the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation: If different believers equally committed to biblical authority claim different interpretations for a Scripture passage, how do we know which interpretation (or *interpretations*) should be accepted as valid?

Question #4: How Do We Choose Among Different Interpretations?

This question regarding the evaluation of multiple *interpretations* of a biblical passage is a slightly different one from the question above regarding multiple *meanings*. Whether or not we believe there is only one possible meaning of a passage of Scripture, we inevitably find ourselves confronted with competing claims about what that meaning - or legitimate range of meanings - might be.

In evaluating differing interpretations, discerning the historical author meaning through grammatical-historical exegesis is a significant component in understanding God's communicative intent. But in contrast to traditional evangelical hermeneutical assumptions, let us consider that it forms only one component (although still, I would claim, the foundational component) of the hermeneutical enterprise. A number of criteria can be proposed for evaluating

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[40] R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 221.
[41] Vanhoozer, "Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation," 132.

readings of Scripture, of which historical study (for evangelicals, grammatical-historical exegesis) is only one. The matrix of possible criteria includes:

   a. Grammatical-historical exegesis (author meaning)
   b. The context of the whole Bible (also called canonical context or biblical theology)
   c. Church tradition (history of interpretation)
   d. Confirmation by faith community (church)
   e. Intellectual reason
   f. The 'inner witness' of the Holy Spirit
   g. Personal and/or community experience

Although none of these criteria may lay claim to be an independent or absolute confirmation of 'the' correct understanding of biblical truth, our confidence that an interpreter has indeed heard the Holy Spirit speaking through God's word is increased by the extent to which a cluster of these criteria coalesce as mutually reinforcing affirmations. If some combination of understanding the historical author's meaning through grammatical-historical exegesis and/or seeing how the passage fits into the whole context of biblical teaching, and/or the support of fellow believers and/or church tradition, and/or a sense of the Holy Spirit's guidance, and/or my personal experience with God, and/or my own God-given good sense, line up in my understanding of what God is trying to say through a particular passage of Scripture, I will have more confidence that I am hearing the Spirit correctly.[42] This process also assumes, of course, that I participate in a faith community - i.e., a church - and that my private reading of the Bible is constantly shaped by reading the Bible with brothers and sisters in Christ. The more of the viewpoints listed above that fit together in a matrix of perceptions of biblical truth, the more confident we will feel that we are hearing God's message together. In this way one can speak of a level of 'interpretational probability' even if we may not (as the postmodern critique reminds us) have complete certainty that our sin-darkened and culturally influenced minds perceive God's message perfectly.[43]

Each of these criteria could be explored in much more depth, and should be, as African evangelicals seek to develop appropriate hermeneutical models. But I want to offer just a few brief comments about how two of them, grammatical-historical exegesis and church tradition, might be understood to work alongside the others. I feel that an exploration of the roles of these two

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[42] On the role of intellectual reason in validating biblical interpretation, Wright notes, "Reason provides a check on unrestrained imaginative readings of texts… It will include the need to make sense. Of course, the question of what counts as 'making sense,' and the question of 'whose rationality?' will remain contested, but not so as to render all discussion futile" (Wright, *Last Word*, 119)

[43] Vanhoozer speaks of the need for a 'hermeneutics of humility and conviction'— humility as "the virtue that constantly reminds interpreters that we can get it *wrong*," and conviction as the assurance that "while absolute knowledge is not a present possession, adequate knowledge is" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 463-465).

parameters in our interpretation of the Bible may be of particular significance in the ministry contexts in which evangelical African theological graduates are likely to find themselves.

1. The role of author meaning

If the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us directly through the Bible today - especially in light of the possibility of new inspiration (as in the Pentecostal view) - why should we be concerned about the original author or audience?[44] What difference does that past event make to us today? I suggest that specifically in its focus on historical author meaning, grammatical-historical investigation is essential. I say this from two theological convictions. First, for his own purposes, throughout history God has chosen an incarnational model in the way he relates to his human creatures. As in Jesus Christ divine and human natures are combined (but not co-mingled), so similarly in his written Word, God chose to speak to and through human agents. By ignoring the historic author in the process of revelation, in favor of a purely 'spiritual' means of direct revelation by the Holy Spirit, we ignore God's own choice to work incarnationally. Most importantly, we underestimate the significance of God's intervention in human history, and his act of salvation and redemption in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical event. Christianity is an irreducibly historical religion, focused on God's engagement with his human creatures in time and space.[45]

Thus, in speaking to us God chooses to work through people, including the human authors of Scripture. Nicholas Wolterstorff describes Scripture as 'divinely appropriated human discourse', that is, words spoken and/or written by human beings, which God inspires and then uses to carry out his own

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[44] When confronted with the challenge to author meaning presented by 'radical' reader-centered interpretations of the Bible, evangelicals have tended to argue for the right of the human author to be heard. This is, for example, essentially the premise of Vanhoozer's *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (a position that Vanhoozer himself modified slightly in later writings, as noted above). However, to someone operating with a Pentecostal two-point understanding of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, such an argument is unlikely to be persuasive. If the message of the divine author - conveyed to the reader by the Holy Spirit - is ultimately the most important dynamic in biblical revelation, then why should historic author meaning be given priority? Rather than argue for 'rights' of human authors, it may be more expedient to demonstrate the 'theological value' of authors. That is what I attempt to develop in this section.

[45] A number of Pentecostal scholars also affirm the essential historicity of Christian faith, and the need to respect historical author meaning. Autry, for example, writes, "Christianity is … based on events, divine acts in time, and revelations concerning meaning of those events in time … Biblically informed faith and hermeneutics cannot be ahistorical. To say that the historical-critical method is by itself inadequate is not to say that it is inappropriate or unnecessary. Faith and hermeneutics demand a vital concern for history - the history to which the text refers and out of which the text arises." (Arden C. Autry, "Dimensions of Hermeneutics in Pentecostal Focus," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3, 1993, 33).

'speech acts' such as asserting, promising, prohibiting or commanding.[46] Augustine points out that throughout the Bible there is evidence of God's habit of combining human and divine agents in revelation. Paul had a vision of Christ on the Damascus road, but received baptism and teaching from Ananias (Acts 9:3-8); an angel speaking to Cornelius told him to ask Peter for further help (Acts 10:3-6); similarly, it was an angel who sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, rather than the angel himself interpreting Isaiah's prophecy (Acts 8:26-35); Moses spoke with God face to face, but accepted spiritual advice from his father-in-law (Exodus 18).[47] In Augustine's opinion, God does this to strengthen the bonds of love human beings have with one another: "Moreover, there would be no way for love, which ties people together in the bonds of unity, to make souls overflow and as it were intermingle with each other, if human beings learned nothing from other humans."[48]

Just as significantly, if we overlook the historic dimensions of biblical revelation we may also ignore the continuity of God's character and purpose throughout time and eternity - a second important theological conviction. God does not change, and the Holy Spirit will not contradict today what God spoke yesterday. The more we understand what God said and did in the past, the more profoundly we are likely to understand who he is, what he is saying to us today, and what his ultimate objective is in communicating with us. God's story continues, with God's character and purpose unchanging, and we must discover our place in it. Under divine inspiration the human authors of Scripture faithfully recorded for us the words and actions of God in history. The result of ignoring them is our own poverty in knowing God.

For these reasons (among others which are beyond the scope of this discussion), author meaning in its historical context should serve as the primary parameter or constraint for any other meaning(s) we understand a passage to have. Whatever the Holy Spirit communicates to the reader through a biblical text today, it will be consistent with and confirmed by what God spoke through the historical author to the original audience:

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[46] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 53ff.

[47] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* preface (6-7) [12-15]. Augustine makes a point of noting that Moses' father-in-law was from a different ethnic group. This and the following quotation are from Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* (trans. R. H. Green; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The initial paragraph numbering, i.e. preface (6-7), is that traditionally used. The additional paragraph numbers [12-15] are those of a different historical system adopted by Green in this edition.

[48] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* preface (6) [13].

Grammatical-Historical Exegesis
(Historic author meaning as parameter or constraint)

GOD

AUTHOR ⇨ TEXT ⇔ READER
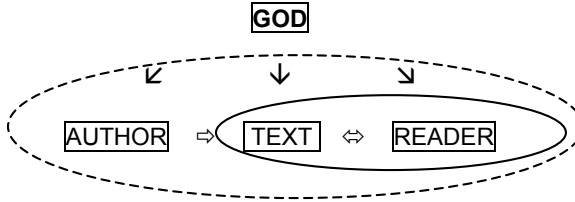
Fee and Stuart write, "A text cannot mean what it never meant. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken. *This is the starting point*" (my emphasis).[49] While I affirm Fee and Stuart's statement that "a text cannot mean what it never meant," I would prefer to restate their position by saying that the true meaning of the biblical text for us is *consistent with* what the human author originally understood it to mean when it was first spoken. This allows for canonical (text-centered) dimensions that the biblical author might not have anticipated, as well as additional insights which the Holy Spirit might show a reader that are relevant to his or her contemporary situation.

Building on Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard's affirmation that historical author meaning "provides a fixed core of meaning"[50] - although admittedly understanding the notion of 'core' more flexibly than they are likely to have intended - we can also say that commitment to author meaning as the primary parameter or constraint for interpretation does not rule out the possibility of a text having more than one legitimate meaning (more than one divine communicative intent) for more than one reader. It simply means that each of these readings can be validated by their consistency with author meaning:

Grammatical-Historical Exegesis
(Historic author meaning as parameter or constraint)

GOD

AUTHOR ⇨ TEXT ⇔ READER #1
⇔ READER #2
⇔ READER #3

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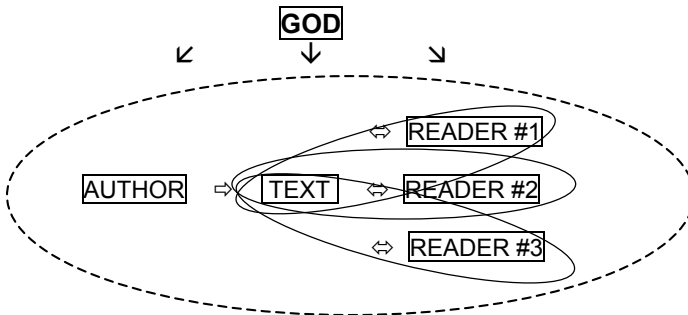
[49] Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 30.
[50] Klein, Hubbard, Blomberg, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 189.

As biblical scholars who have had opportunities to study the historical and cultural contexts in which the biblical revelation was given, it is our joyful privilege to introduce contemporary readers to the biblical authors to whom God first spoke. And as we and our fellow readers search for meaning in a biblical passage and what God might be communicating to us today, it is also important for us to know how other believers, other readers throughout the history of the church, have understood God to be speaking to and through these biblical authors. This is the role of church tradition in biblical interpretation.

2. The Role of Church Tradition

Contemporary evangelicals tend to be ahistorical in their approach to Scripture, and to Christian faith in general. One reason for this may be a suspicion of Catholic or Orthodox practices that combine the Bible with church tradition (that is, with traditional interpretations of Scripture explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by the church) as a two-part authority. In their attempt to be faithful to the Protestant commitment to *sola scriptura*, evangelicals tend to reject ecclesial claims to interpretive authority and to ignore the specific biblical interpretations that those claims promote. But as Wright suggests,

> Paying attention to tradition means listening carefully (humbly but not uncritically) to how the church has read and lived scripture in the past. We must be constantly aware of our responsibility in the Communion of Saints, without giving our honored predecessors the final say or making them an 'alternative source,' independent of scripture itself. When they speak with one voice, we should listen very carefully. They may be wrong. They sometimes are. But we ignore them at our peril.[51]

We are not the first to grapple with a difficult passage of the Bible, nor the first to search out the relevance of Scripture in our own context, what God is saying to us in the 'here and now'. For African evangelicals especially, a re-engagement with ancient readings of Scripture offers a way back and around the western modernist paradigm of interpretation inherited with the missionary movement, to discover other readings that may resonate with their own sense of how the Spirit speaks through the Bible. African Christians interested in Spirit-centered readings of the Bible can find examples of biblical interpretation not shaped by western Enlightenment rationalism, but which rely on a more intuitive, subjective understanding of the way the Holy Spirit communicates God's truth through Scripture. In early readings of Scripture African evangelicals may also find examples of biblical interpretation directed to communities much like those that still exist in many parts of Africa today: rural or in the process of urbanizing, communitarian rather than individualistic, non-industrial, threatened by political and economic oppression from expansive empires, potentially facing persecution, dealing with poverty and plague, and permeated by an awareness of the God of the Bible even in contexts of competing religious systems. In more recent stages of church history, African

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[51] Wright, *Last Word*, 117.

evangelicals can compare their understandings of biblical passages with those of other evangelical interpreters in Latin America and Asia, which along with Africa form Christianity's emerging global center of gravity.

Are the interpretations of Scripture found in historic and global manifestations of the Church more authoritative than what any African evangelical believer reading the Bible today might produce? No. Are they instructive and spiritually helpful, as a way of placing ourselves in God's story as it continues to unfold through human history? Certainly. And in many cases those interpretations have the advantage of having been examined, tested and used by centuries of brothers and sisters in Christ in various cultural contexts. If we believe that our God is the God of all humankind, and that his Church consists of his faithful people in all times and in all places, with whom we will one day worship him in heaven, then we can be enriched and constructively guided by paying attention to what believers in a variety of times and places have understood the Spirit to be saying to them through Scripture.

Conclusion

How should African evangelicals prepare their theological college graduates to interpret and use the Bible in contemporary African churches? How do we respond to the genuine questions and concerns from the people among whom our graduates will minister, communities of believers who are increasingly Pentecostal or influenced by Pentecostalism? How do we forge a biblical hermeneutics that affirms Scripture as God's authoritative self-revelation and also recognizes the ongoing reality of the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture to African Christians today?

There are few resources available for the classroom that offer context-appropriate biblical hermeneutics from an African and evangelical perspective. In my experience many of the published resources come from South Africa where, as Maluleke acknowledges, the misuse of the Bible to justify apartheid has led to a situation in which "the Bible is regarded as a problematic document to be handled with care and to be read from the point of view of the struggles of poor Black people."[52] The resulting suspicion of the biblical text is not the starting point from which most evangelicals in the rest of the continent prefer to begin reading the Bible.[53] Nyende laments the scarcity of useful information concerning the way the Bible is popularly interpreted and used

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[52] Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "The Bible and African Theologies," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, eds. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke, and Justin Ukpong (Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 174.

[53] West contrasts *"*the liberation hermeneutical perspective of South Africa (where the predominant hermeneutic disposition is one of suspicion toward the Bible)" with "the inculturation hermeneutical perspective of West, East, North, and Central Africa (where the predominant hermeneutic disposition is one of trust towards the Bible)", Gerald O. West, "Mapping African Biblical Interpretation," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, eds. Getui, Maluleke, and Ukpong, 95.

throughout Africa "by men and women in the churches, in open spaces (i.e. in streets, markets, fields, etc.) and homes," and urges that more study of this sort be undertaken by African biblical scholars so that biblical interpretation in theological institutions and in the church can be brought closer together.[54] The challenge now before evangelical authors in Africa is to produce materials that can be used in theological colleges to train the next generation of African church leaders and biblical scholars.

In this article I have outlined four questions that I believe are foundational and programmatic for the further development of evangelical African hermeneutics. These questions are:
1. Where is biblical meaning created - in the author, the text or the reader?
2. What is the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation?
3. Can a passage of Scripture have more than one meaning?
4. How do we choose among different interpretations?

Regarding the locus of meaning in Scripture - meaning which I've defined in terms of God's ongoing 'communicative intention' - I have outlined the relative roles of author, text and reader, and described how historical concerns regarding author and text came to the fore in 20th century evangelical biblical scholarship. In response, I've indicated the value of a hermeneutical approach in which historical author meaning serves as a constraint on, but allows for a variety of, contemporary reader meanings. With respect to the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation, I've pointed out the difference between the 'inspiration-illumination' and 'two-point inspiration' paradigms of evangelicals and Pentecostals respectively, and shown that Pentecostal scholars themselves are actively discussing and critiquing various approaches to Pentecostal hermeneutics. Regarding the potential for multiple meanings in a biblical passage, I've indicated that this is an issue evangelical theological scholars are currently revisiting, as they take on board the postmodern critique of modernist hermeneutical assumptions and rediscover the unapologetically spiritual and theological focus of pre-modern biblical interpretation. And in terms of evaluating and validating differing interpretations of Scripture, I have suggested a set of criteria that African evangelicals may explore further in the attempt to affirm a disciplined multiplicity in biblical interpretation.

As evangelical biblical scholars in Africa consider these key hermeneutical questions and develop various responses and models, the vast gap between the theological curriculum commonly offered in evangelical institutions and the realities those institutions' students and graduates encounter when they return to their home churches may begin to be addressed. In the face of the potential irrelevance of academic theological studies, given the heart cry of African believers for a spiritual encounter with the Bible, we can begin to answer the question, "How does God speak to us through the Bible today?"

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[54] Nyende, "Institutional and Popular Interpretations of the Bible in Africa," 59.

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To Baptize or Not to Baptize?
Adventists and Polygamous Converts

by Stefan Höschele

Abstract

The theological questions connected with the baptism of polygamous converts have been answered in divergent ways. This article gives an overview of perspectives that Seventh-day Adventists have taken on this issue and analyzes the factors that have led to several turns in the stance of the denomination toward this problem. The multiplicity of factors involved in the discourse on baptizing polygamists repeatedly eclipsed the need of appropriate theological reasoning. It is suggested, therefore, that a missiological hermeneutic, in which local cultural meanings are taken seriously, is crucial in such complex issues.

Introduction

Polygamy, a marriage model common in many societies both in Africa and on other continents, has elicited much debate both within and outside Christian communities.[1] Its most widespread mode, polygyny - the marriage of a man with more than one woman - in some cases constituted a formidable hindrance to the expansion of Christianity due to differing views on the acceptability of such marriages for church members. Until the present, the theological discussion on polygamy and polygamous converts continues to reveal grave disagreements.

This article gives an overview of Adventist views and reasoning regarding polygamy and thus provides a case study of the way in which a denomination as a whole has struggled with the issue. At the same time, the discourse on polygamy as a missionary problem and the question as to whether polygamous converts may be baptized is a test case for the complex manner in which missiological ethics needs to be discussed. In this context, the Adventist debate shows that most of the aspects to be taken into consideration raise more general questions about theological hermeneutics.

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[1] Among the many works on polygamy, see, e.g., the classic of Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Bible and Polygamy: A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching* (London: SPCK, 1950); four articles in *Polygyny and the Church in Africa*, special issue of *Africa Theological Journal*, no. 2 (1969); the defence of polygamy by David G. Maillu, *Our Kind of Polygamy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988); and, for a recent discussion focusing on a specific Christian tradition, Timothy W. Jones, "The Missionaries' Position: Polygamy and Divorce in the Anglican Communion, 1888–1988." *Journal of Religious History* 35.3 (2011), 393–408.

The Differing Positions Regarding Polygamy and Baptism

Christians have taken rather divergent positions regarding polygamy: that it is (1) intrinsically sinful, similar to adultery, and is therefore to be rejected in all circumstances; (2) an unacceptable inferior form of marriage; (3) a practice to be tolerated in some cases though not God's ideal; or (4) an acceptable alternative to monogamy.[2] Many followers of Christ view polygamy as such a great evil that it can only fall into the first category. Some, however, have taken the position that polygamy is actually an adequate type of marriage based on either an explicit biblical permission or on toleration of the practice in the scriptural record. Eugene Hillman made this case in 1975 with his book *Polygamy Reconsidered*.[3] Other scholars have rejected his exegetical and anthropological arguments, and although they would not necessarily call polygamy an outright sin in every single instance given the cultural contexts in which it is generally practiced, they maintain the second position that this mode of marriage is still unacceptable for a Christian since it falls short of God's ideal. Blum's 1989 response to Hillman, *Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered*, is a fine example of this position.[4]

Polygamy and Seventh-day Adventists

Seventh-day Adventists encountered the issue of African polygamy in a somewhat unprepared manner. After their beginnings as an evangelical apocalyptic-oriented mid-19th century revival and a subsequent development into a Protestant denomination, the Adventist movement gained significant missionary impetus in the early 20th century.[5] Missionary success was especially visible in Africa, where denominational operations soon resembled the outreach and church life of other ecclesiastical bodies.[6] At the same time, Adventists tried to remain true to their initially rigid ethics and biblicist hermeneutics, which, however, did not lead to automatic agreement on a course of action regarding the polygamy issue.

In one respect, the denomination's missionaries, theologians, and African church leaders were always united: they rejected the fourth concept

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[2] These four options are listed by Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1973), 73.

[3] Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1975).

[4] William C. Blum, *Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered* (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba, 1989).

[5] For an overview of the development of Adventist mission thinking and the dynamics of this denomination's worldwide expansion, see Stefan Höschele, *From the End of the World to the Ends of the Earth: The Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Missiology* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2004).

[6] Cf. Stefan Höschele, *Christian Remnant - African Folk Church: Seventh-Day Adventism in Tanzania, 1903–1980*, Studies in Christian Mission 34 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

mentioned above - that polygamy is an acceptable alternative to monogamy. In other words, they all agreed that polygamy is neither God's ideal nor part of it, that the creation of a first human couple implies monogamy as a standard for all humans, and that a Christian cannot marry more than one wife or husband. Given the strong Adventist theological emphases on creation, family, and sanctification,[7] this is hardly surprising. Consequently, no theologian belonging to the Adventist tradition has ever advocated that adding second wives or husbands is a tolerable option for those who have been baptized into the body of Christ. Adventist scholars and church leaders have thus stood in continuity with the denomination's 19th century prophet, Ellen G. White,[8] who clearly rejected the practice in several statements.[9] Nevertheless, there have been different views among them as to how else polygamy should be regarded. All of the other positions (1: sin, to be rejected; 2: inferior, unacceptable; and 3: problematic reality, at times to be tolerated) have been found among the denomination's biblical scholars, ethicists, and missiologists.

Thus, while there has been unanimous agreement on the concept that choosing a polygamous lifestyle is no acceptable alternative to monogamous marriages for *all who are Christians already*, the history of the discourse in the denomination reveals considerable debate on the manner of *dealing with polygamous converts*. This discourse was fuelled by several controversial questions: (1) Who among them may be baptized if the polygamous union continues: no one, husband, one wife, and/or all wives? (2) Under which conditions may these persons be baptized: no divorce, divorce of added wives, or divorce of all wives except one? (3) What constitutes the basis for such actions: biblical commandments, biblical examples, theological principles, traditions, administrative "necessities," or missiological reasoning?

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[7] "Creation" and "Marriage and Family" are no. 6 and no. 23 of the denomination's 28 "Fundamental Beliefs," respectively; sanctification appears in several units such as "Law of God" (18), "Experience of Salvation" (10), "Growing in Christ" (11), "Stewardship" (21), and "Christian Behavior" (22). See the related chapters in SDA., *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe …: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005).

[8] Until the present, Seventh-day Adventists continue to regard Ellen G. White's writings (1827–1915) as a prophetic voice; at the same time, a body of critical scholarship on Ellen White has developed since the 1960s. See, e.g., Ronald Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (New York: Lang, 1985); Alden Thompson, *Escape the Flames: How Ellen White Grew from Fear to Joy - and Helped Me to Do It Too* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2005).

[9] Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864), 67, 100, 104, 126; cf. also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890), 81, 91, 145, 208, 338.

A History of the Adventist Positions on the Baptism of Polygamist Converts

At a first glance, it may be surprising that Adventists reached conflicting conclusions on each of these questions given the very strong agreement on doctrinal matters in this denomination. However, I argue that such a variety of answers was actually unavoidable. Because of the diversity in biblical materials related to the issue, the polygamy case defied a biblicist approach if this approach was to be combined with conservative ethical convictions derived from 19th century Protestantism. What is more, both the Adventists' missionary drive and their common view of the Bible, which gives more prominence to the Old Testament than many other Christian traditions, potentially enhanced a more generous perspective, which led to a situation in which a unified view could not be reached as easily as in doctrinal matters.

Changing Positions until the 1940s

The first two questions (whom to baptize, and under which circumstances) were the focus of the discussion until the 1940s. The Seventh-day Adventist discourse on polygamy in the 19th century was closely linked to a rejection of Mormon practices in the United States, and when Western missionaries reached out to peoples of radically different cultures in the early 20th century, this heritage evidently played a significant role.[10]

The first Adventist statement on polygamy was produced in 1913.[11] A missionaries' meeting during a session of the General Conference, the executive assembly of the worldwide denomination, revealed that different local modes of handling polygamy existed. So divergent were the views at the Round Table meeting - ranging from a cautious permission for baptizing some polygamists to complete rejection of this approach - that it was the unanimous feeling that the General Conference should not design any definite ruling on the matter but simply formulate some advice to help missionaries in the field. Consequently, the final recommendation was not a consensus of the participants, which could not be found, but a semi-informal and cautious counsel. It stated that a polygamist should dissolve polygamous unions and support his former wives; the baptism of plural wives was advised against. Thus the 1913 meeting recommended a stricter course of action than all the

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[10] Clifton R. Maberly, "The Polygamous Marriage Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1975), 5–9. This thesis provides a good overview of the discussions at the missionary meetings mentioned in the following paragraphs. However, at Maberly's time other archival items such as the letters mentioned in this article were not yet accessible to researchers.

[11] SDA. Informal Discussion on Dealing with Converts from Polygamous Families at Missionary Round Table, Takoma Park, June 1913 (Minutes, General Conference Archives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, MD [hereafter GCA], RG 21/Documents/1913).

later resolutions, but implicitly recognized the importance of local circumstances.[12]

The strength of the 1913 resolution was also its weakness. As a recommendation without binding force, it did not solve the matter for those who desired a uniform Adventist practice. The African and South Asian regions subsequently introduced "probationary" membership for polygamists while others, including the denomination's "European Division," to which part of Africa belonged, completely barred them from baptism.[13] Soon these different practices made administrators feel that the matter had to be debated again. Therefore, polygamy once more appeared on an agenda at a missions round table during the General Conference Session of 1926.

In this meeting, some denominational leaders advocated a firm stand against polygamy. William T. Bartlett, for instance, the superintendent of the East Africa Union Mission, considered it "the stronghold of heathenism" in his field, which he felt Adventists had to "fight ... to the bitter end".[14] By way of contrast, Ernst Kotz, one of the most gifted missionaries that Adventism has brought forth and a later General Conference secretary,[15] admitted he had refused baptism to some polygamists who were "very earnestly seeking after the Lord" only because "we did not want to go against the organization of the denomination, and we thought there was an agreement." Kotz felt that declining to baptize such persons had been one of his "saddest experiences" in Africa.[16] Yet different from 1913, the desire for a uniform practice prevailed this time,[17] which led to an official church policy that ruled out any baptism for

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[12] The texts of the 1913, 1926, 1930, and 1941 resolutions, but none of the Round Table minute texts, are also found in an appendix of an article by Russell Staples, "Evangelism among Resistant Peoples with Deeply Entrenched Polygamy," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2.1, (2006), 4–28 (here 23–26).

[13] SDA. William H. Branson - B.E. Beddoe and Ernst Kotz, February 7, 1927 (Letter, GCA, African Division Correspondence); cf. Maberly, "The Polygamous Marriage Variant," 40–44.

[14] SDA. Missions Round Table, June 6 (Minutes, GCA, RG 21/Documents/1926 Mission Round Table Discussions), 2.

[15] Cf. Stefan Höschele, "Ernst Kotz," in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, 2007, http://www.dacb.org/stories/tanzania/kotz_ernst.html (accessed May 10, 2013).

[16] SDA. Missions Round Table [1926], 3.

[17] Cf. the parallel in the discussion among Moravians: Gustav Warneck, the leading Protestant missiologist in Germany, asked Moravians to refrain from baptizing polygamists in 1909 until other missions had reached the same persuasion; see Klaus Fiedler, *Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 62.

polygamous men but allowed for the baptism of wives in polygamous marriages.[18]

The fact that a one-for-all policy did not satisfy everyone is evidenced in the variety of responses to a 1928 survey of missionary opinions on whether converted polygamous Africans should keep their first wife while dismissing the others and whether multiple wives should be baptized.[19] Evidently the resolution was also still being debated, for only two years after the survey, at the General Conference Autumn Council in 1930, William H. Branson, the leader of the denomination's African region and later General Conference president, was the main promoter of an alternative solution. Drafted by a three-man committee, the new policy allowed that in areas "where tribal customs subject a cast-off wife to lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property," polygamists of both sexes "upon recommendation of responsible field committees be admitted to baptism and the ordinances of the church" while being classified as "probationary members."[20] Essentially the same policy had been drafted in the early 1920s and followed until 1926 in the African Division.[21] The strength of the 1930 resolution was certainly its missiological hermeneutic; its weakness was the lack of support by those engaged in missionary service, except some leaders. Interestingly, the text did not refer to any biblical material either - presumably because this would have raised too many other questions.

This more liberal regulation was received in very divergent ways. In some regions of Africa and in India, probationary membership had already existed anyway. In Kenya the missionary workforce strongly opposed it, while in Tanzania the church leadership adopted the 1930 policy in 1939. Although the new rule was apparently never applied in actual cases in Tanzania, it soon paved the way for another revision of the policy. British missionaries in Kenya complained that a change of direction in the neighbouring country would certainly become known among Kenyan Adventists. They feared that thirty years "without making any concession to polygamists" could thus be invalidated and demanded that the Tanzanian side comply with their mode of handling the issue.[22] Because of this conflict, the more liberal mode was again rejected by the denomination's General Conference in 1941 with the argument

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[18] SDA. Polygamy and Marriage Relationships (Minutes, General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists, June 13, 1926, GCA).

[19] SDA. Polygamy Subject File, n. d. (GCA, RG 25/Subject Files/Polygamy).

[20] SDA. "Polygamous Marriages in Heathen Lands" (Minutes, General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists, November 3, 1930, GCA).

[21] SDA. Branson - Beddoe and Kotz, February 7, 1927.

[22] SDA. J.I. Robison - E.D. Dick, May 16, 1940 (Letter, GCA, RG 21/Miscellaneous Documents 1920s–1950s/Polygamy); SDA. "Polygamy: Statement to the General Conference Committee", [1940] (Statement by the Northern European Division, GCA, 21/Miscellaneous Documents 1920s–1950s/Polygamy).

that the difference between the 1926 and 1930 actions "created confusion, embarrassment, and perplexity".[23] The 1926 policy was reaffirmed in principle and was made a directive for all Adventists through incorporation in the denomination's General Conference *Working Policy*, where it is found until today.[24] With this approach to the intricate problem of polygamy, Adventists followed a trend in those churches that arose from classical missions and also those initiated by faith missions.[25] It is noteworthy that neither missionaries nor indigenous Christians were involved in the 1941 discussion, and that in essence the decision was based on an administrative perspective on uniformity in a global denominational organization rather than on biblical, theological, or missiological reasoning.

Thus came to an end the debate of a whole missionary generation in which an initial response of cautious counsel, local flexibility and varying practices finally gave way to a uniform and binding rule. The content of the 1941 resolution represented a more lenient stand than the original 1913 counsel but as an official policy, implementation was less adaptable. This debate and its result may be understood as resulting from sociological dynamics in a church that spread geographically, grew numerically and yet sought to ensure unity by establishing universal regulations. At the same time, the Adventist debate exemplifies the friction that almost necessarily arises when aspects of traditional African cultures, traditions of Western Christianity, different interpretations of the Christian scriptures, and various "non-theological factors" such as administrative power and the tendency towards imposing uniformity collide.

The Debate since the 1970s

Being settled by an authoritative committee action, the polygamy issue ceased to be a matter of serious discussion in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for several decades. Only in the late 1970s was the problem of converts with a polygamous background discussed again by Adventist academics and church administrators, and ever since it has revealed how scholars whose basic theological persuasions are identical, or at least closely resemble one another, can come to different conclusions on particular issues. While scriptural, theological, and missiological arguments continued to be produced for the various positions and solutions, the debate since the 1970s has shown in an increasingly unambiguous manner that the third question mentioned above - what constitutes the basis for decisions on dealing with polygamous converts - must be considered on a meta level as well. Already

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[23] SDA. "Proceedings of the General Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 10, 1941, 235.

[24] SDA. *Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 2005–2006* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 122–123.

[25] Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions* (Oxford: Regnum, 1994), 258.

Maberly's 1975 thesis on the topic came to the conclusion that denominational resolutions in the first half of the 20th century had lacked a thorough biblical foundation and were prompted mainly by administrative concerns.[26]

A surprisingly tolerant position was taken in 1979 by John A. Kisaka, the first Tanzanian Adventist to earn a doctorate in the field of theology, who devoted part of his dissertation to the polygamy question.[27] Kisaka's reasoning constitutes a significant departure from both earlier Adventists' reasoning and the official denominational position, which is particularly significant as he is the first major African Adventist voice on polygamy. After conceding that God instituted monogamous marriage as an ideal according to the Bible and that it is set forth as a principle even in the writings of Ellen G. White, the major body of the argument tries to defend the cultural validity of polygamous marriages once they have been contracted and suggests the acceptance of polygamists into the church on the basis of the meanings attributed to such marriages in the respective cultures. Kisaka thus became the first Adventist theologian to emphasize the necessity of an anthropological-missiological reasoning in responding to the polygamy issue.

Shortly afterwards, the denomination's global leadership commissioned an extensive study on the topic. Its author, the leading Adventist missiologist Russell L. Staples, followed the line of Kisaka by advocating "cautiously admitting some polygamous families to membership."[28] Referring to incidences of polygamous patriarchs in the Old Testament and arguing with the biblical silence on barring polygamists from baptism as well as an anthropological perspective, Staples suggested a stance that combined the Adventist tradition of biblical theologizing and the missiological hermeneutic [which is] needed particularly when several cultures are involved in reasoning on ethical issues. Yet voices such as those of Kisaka and Staples, like a similar proposal from South Asia,[29] did not lead to a reversal of church policy,[30] partly due to strong opposition from West Africa.[31] What these voices

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[26] Maberly, "The Polygamous Marriage Variant," 91–92.

[27] John Aza Kisaka, "The Adventist Church's Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa" (D.Min. diss., Andrews University, 1979). Kisaka's career included work among the Maasai as an Adventist pioneer missionary, 1963–1964, and principal of the Ministerial Course at Ikizu, 1972–1973, and at Tanzania Adventist College and Seminary, 1979–1982.

[28] Staples, Russell L., "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Working Paper Produced at the Request of the General Conference," unpublished manuscript, 1981 [48 pp.]; a much shorter version of the findings is Russell L. Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?," *Spectrum* 13.1 (1982), 44–53.

[29] SDA. "Admission of Members of Polygamous Marriages into Church Membership" (Minutes, Southern Asian Division Administrative Committee, February 20, 1985, GCA, RG 25/Subject Files/Polygamy).

[30] SDA. "Plural Marriages (Polygamy) - Report "(Minutes, General Conference Committee of Seventh-day Adventists, October 13, 1987, GCA).

were able to do, however, was to initiate a renewed discussion, which continued into the 21st century. In 2003 the denomination's Global Mission Issues Committee prepared another recommendation for an amended policy. It proposed to accommodate polygamists in the contexts of some cultures with "deeply entrenched" polygamy,[32] a recommendation yet to be discussed by committees with an executive function.

As in the early decades of the 20th century, there was unity among Adventist theologians during this whole period regarding the conviction that God instituted monogamy as the model for marriage and that he generally requires believers to adhere to this ideal. Thus, it is not surprising that the *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* and the more popular book *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe*, the two major General Conference sponsored doctrinal works, briefly refer to polygamy as being incompatible with the biblical witness.[33]

However, when it comes to the question of interpreting the way God deals with actual polygamists, interpretations have differed. *Flame of Yahweh*, a *tour de force* on sexual ethics in the Old Testament by Richard Davidson, a leading Adventist biblical scholar, includes a chapter on polygamy[34] that comes to the conclusion that the Old Testament data should not be construed to mean that God commanded, permitted, or condoned polygamy in any instance. Davidson even maintains that polygamy is expressly forbidden in texts such as Lev

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[31] Jacob J. Nortey, "Africa-Indian Ocean Division: Comments on the Church Policy on Admission of New Members in Societies Where Plural Marriage Is the Accepted Family Structure," [1986] (Unpublished report, GCA, 25/Subject Files/Polygamy).

[32] SDA. "Polygamy" [2003 statement by the Global Mission Issues Committee], in *Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission: Global Mission Issues Committee Papers*, vol. 2: *2002–2005*, ed. Bruce Bauer (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2007), 175–176. The Global Mission Issues Committee serves the denominational leadership by making recommendations and includes several of the leading Adventist missiologists.

[33] Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 728; SDA. *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe*, 335. These reference works do not discuss, however, the question of how polygamous converts should be treated. Other Adventist standard works such as the *Seventh-Day Adventist Encyclopedia* (ed. by Don F. Neufeld; Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966) and major Adventist books on ethics (e.g. Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-Day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]; and Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* [Nashville, TN: Review and Herald, 1980]), do not mention the issue, presumably because they were written with a western audience in mind.

[34] Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 177–212.

18:18, albeit without an associated punishment.[35] In a larger study dealing specifically with plural marriages, Ronald A. G. du Preez[36] comes to the same conclusion. Both suggest that none of the texts that are generally used to support divine sanction or tolerance of polygamy actually describe support of the practice among the people of God. Rather, they should be interpreted in the light of the pattern visible in Genesis 1 and 2. Even though laws regulating polygamy exist, according to Davidson and du Preez they indicate as little theological backing for its practice by believers as laws regarding theft provide divine support for stealing.

By way of contrast, a dissertation by Jean-Jacques Bouit[37] and a biblical study by another leading Adventist biblical scholar, Roy Gane[38] evaluate the biblical data with a focus on how God *interacted with polygamists*, not only on how to *view polygamy*. Thus they merge a biblical-theological point of view with a pastoral-missiological perspective. Bouit concludes that no single biblical verse entirely rejects polygamous practice; Gane tries to establish biblical principles for making decisions regarding the baptism of polygamous converts. A major outcome of his study is that God "tolerates polygamy" in the Old Testament "but regulates it, mainly for the benefit of the women involved, in order to mitigate evil consequences."[39] In other words, while polygamy is not God's will, according to Gane at times he leaves people in the condition in which they are in order to avoid greater harm.

Naturally the two basic positions in interpreting the scriptural record lead to two different views on dealing with polygamous converts when reaching an actual missiological application. Du Preez comes to the conclusion that polygamists must not be baptized in any instance.[40] Even though he does not discuss ecclesiology, presumably a particular view of what the church is and what baptism entails play an important role in his reasoning. Bouit and Kisaka, on the other hand, consider the issue a dilemma, for the church and converts generally have to choose between two evils: tolerating plural marriage or forcing divorce upon a couple with consequences that in some instances are not acceptable from a Christian point of view. Thus, their advice was to proceed extremely carefully in separating existing polygamous marriages since this often leads to enormous upheaval - e.g., former wives being

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[35] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 193–198.

[36] Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993). This study is the published version of a D.Min. dissertation.

[37] Jean-Jacques Bouit, "A Christian Consideration of Polygamy" (D.Min. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1981).

[38] Roy Gane, "Some Biblical Principles Relevant to Evangelism Among Polygamous Peoples," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2.1 (2006), 29–43.

[39] Gane, "Some Biblical Principles Relevant to Evangelism Among Polygamous Peoples," 31.

[40] du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, 316.

considered free-of-charge prostitutes in certain societies. For this very reason, it was Russell L. Staples' advice to identify specific people groups among whom divorce should not be suggested for polygamous families and where polygamists may be baptized under certain circumstances, even if they should not be given church offices.[41]

Although Adventist authors dealing with the polygamy question have not explicitly lifted the discussion to a theological hermeneutical level, some clearly do incorporate into their reasoning an interpretative brake that helps us to avoid reading issues and meanings into scriptural texts that do not belong there. What would be called for in the whole discussion on polygamous converts is the application of a well-constructed missiological hermeneutic, in which both the biblical record and cultural meanings are taken seriously.[42] Moreover, the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with its worldwide administrative structure and strong theological unity illustrates the problem of transcultural ecclesiastical guidelines in a particularly forceful way; issues such as desired degrees of uniformity, power issues, and the significance ascribed to policy traditions were hardly addressed in the entire Adventist polygamy discussion even in its recent phase.

The 2003 Global Mission Issues Committee recommendation - the only instance in which women played a significant role in discussing the topic[43] - to allow for decentralized solutions to the question of baptizing polygamous converts also applies the logic that prompted the Anglican bishops to reverse their century-old position in 1988.[44] This same reasoning led to the Lutheran

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[41] Russell Staples, "Evangelism among Resistant Peoples with Deeply Entrenched Polygamy," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2.1 (2006), 4–28; cf. (with a similar thrust) Josephat R. Siron, "Polygamy: An Enduring Problem," *Ministry*, April 1991, 23–24, and the case studies of Stefan Höschele, "Polygamy among the Tanzanian Maasai and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Reflections on a Missiological and Theological Problem," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2.1 (2006), 44–56; and Kwame Annor-Boahen, "Cultural Practices Challenging the Adventist Church: A Case Study of Polygamy in Ghana" (D.Min. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, 2010).

[42] A fine Adventist approach to such a missiological hermeneutic is found in Jon L. Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part 1," *Ministry*, November 2005, 19–22, and "Doing Theology in Mission: Part 2," *Ministry*, January 2006, 19–23. Dybdahl's thinking is indebted to evangelical classics of inculturation theory such as Charles Kraft's *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

[43] Patricia Gustin, at that time Director of the denomination's Institute of World Mission, chaired the committee ex officio.

[44] Lambeth Conference. "Resolution 5 [on Polygamy]," 1888, http://www.lambeth conference.org/resolutions/1888/1888-5.cfm (accessed November 10, 2012); "Resolution 26: Church and Polygamy," 1988, http://www.lambethconference.org /resolutions/1988/1988-26.cfm (Nov. 10, 2012); cf. Jones, "The Missionaries' Position."

practice among the Maasai in Tanzania, where polygamists can be baptized if they promise not to marry any more wives after baptism.[45] In a way, such a course of action would take the denomination back to the situation in 1913, when it was deemed inadvisable to establish a once-and-for-all law on a custom that has varying meanings, importance, and consequences in different contexts.

Altogether, the discussion suggests Christians need to strongly uphold both of the two scriptural ideals: the creation institution of monogamous marriage and God's unfailing mercy for people who live in situations that do not conform with his plan. Even if the question as to how these should be applied continues to be debated, Davidson points to these very principles when he argues, "The fact that there is no explicit legal sanction attached to the prohibition of polygamy in Lev 18:18 reveals a God of grace, expressing his disapproval of polygamous relationships but at the same time condescending to meet his people where they were."[46] The title of a 1986 editorial on polygamy in the major denominational magazine not only describes the complexity of this particular issue but also appropriately characterizes the whole of Christian existence as "Between the Ideal and the Actual." The final words of the reflections presented there[47] correctly portray humans as *simul iusti et peccatores* (at the same time righteous and a sinner) and put the issue into a framework of salvific intent:

> Adventists are idealists; may we ever remain so! But the world isn't ideal: men and women have been broken by sin. Faced with the situation, we could opt for one of two extremes - make the church the exclusive province of those who measure up to the ideal, or capitulate to the norms of the world. But the Master calls us to a different course. It is more difficult than either of these, because it lacks the simplistic approach of "either-or" and is fraught with dangers. He challenges us to uphold the ideal but also to minister to people in their brokenness. If we would do His work, through compassion, courage, and conviction we must act to draw all people in all circumstances into His kingdom.

Conclusion

When dealing with an issue as multi-faceted as polygamy, it would be surprising if a religious community found a solution that satisfies all of its leaders, members, mission practitioners, and theologians. Therefore, an end to the Adventist debate and the contradicting perspectives of its protagonists is

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[45] Leonard A. Mtaita, *The Wandering Shepherds and the Good Shepherd: Contextualization as the Way of Doing Mission with the Maasai in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania - Pare Diocese* (Erlangen, Germany: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 1998), 211–231.

[46] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 212.

[47] William J. Johnsson, "Between the Ideal and the Actual," *Adventist Review*, May 29, 1986, 4–5.

not in sight. After all, women's voices and some alternative positions have not been given due attention at the level of authority where policies are made. This especially includes the position that an answer to the question, "Can Christians who were already in pre-existing polygamous marriages before their conversion may be accepted for baptismal candidates?" is possible only with specific societies in view. In spite of decades of discussion, it is understandable that Adventists were not able to provide a global solution to the problem. Probably only a certain variety of contextual responses can translate the gospel into societies where polygamy exists. The few studies on the topic done by Adventist Africans so far[48] point in this direction as well.

Beyond the polygamy debate as such, this case study of a denominational discourse also demonstrates the complexity of ethical issues in the context of Christian mission. As local meanings and universal claims meet, at times the salvific purpose of the mission enterprise can be pushed to the background. Cherished but narrow interpretations of biblical texts, traditions of doing theology, inherited ethical conventions, peculiar ecclesiological assumptions translating into missiologically disputable baptismal practices, administrative pressures toward uniformity, and even conflicting missionary approaches can all create situations in which appropriate theological reasoning is eclipsed. What is needed for such cases is theologizing informed by a thoroughly missiological hermeneutic.

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[48] Kisaka, "The Adventist Church's Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa," and Annor-Boahen, "Cultural Practices Challenging the Adventist Church."

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Giving to Caesar What is Caesar's:
The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective
Part Two: Tradition, Reason and Experience

by Rodney Reed

Abstract

This research investigates the question, "When is it a moral obligation for a Christian to pay taxes and when is it not?" from a Christian perspective. It is the second part of a two-part study of the moral obligations surrounding taxation. Part One examined what the Bible has to say on the topic. This part looks at tradition (or human history), reason and experience as additional sources of authority for Christian moral reflection. Preliminary conclusions are offered for this part. A general conclusion for both parts of this research is offered in which it is argued that it is a general duty of Christians to pay taxes, but under exceptional circumstances when a government is so oppressive, resistance - including tax resistance - may be warranted.

Review and Introduction

This research is the second part of a two-part study of the ethics of paying taxes from a Christian perspective. The two parts taken together are meant to address the key question, "When is it a moral obligation for a Christian to pay taxes and when is it not?" The problem was highlighted by the fact that down through history some persons have been condemned for not paying their taxes (e.g., former television evangelist Jim Bakker) while others have been praised for not paying their taxes (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi). The first part, published in the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*[1] addressed the issue of what the Bible has to say about paying taxes. For the sake of continuity, I reproduce here the conclusions of Part One.

> It is now time to summarize and draw general conclusions from our study of the Bible in regard to the ethics of paying taxes. First of all, it is clear that the Bible is no stranger to the issue of taxes. Nearly all forms of taxation that are used today were already in use during the periods of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible assumes a prima facie moral obligation of every citizen to pay his or her rightful taxes. Unlike in the modern world, the payment of taxes is seen not as an unhappy burden but as an expression of devotion to God and concern for one's fellow human beings. As such, Christians today in most settings in the world have no excuses if they are found guilty of evading taxes.

> Regarding tax policy, the witness of Scripture supports the idea that while there may be some taxes that are uniform across society, generally taxes

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[1] Rodney L. Reed, "Giving to Caesar What is Caesar's: The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective - Part One: The Bible," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 33.2 (2014), 123-145.

should be proportionate to income or wealth; that is, those who are the wealthiest should pay the most taxes. The Bible also supports the idea that taxes can be used to care for the most vulnerable and marginalized of society.

The Scriptures provide examples of taxes that were used properly for the sake of the development of society and also examples of when they were symbols of oppression and injustice. It is clear from Scripture that God has given a mandate to governing authorities to exercise their duties and powers (e.g., collection and disbursement of taxes) for the benefit of their citizens. When this is not done and instead the government is oppressing its people, the moral legitimacy of that government to claim the allegiance of its people is called into question. Nevertheless, the prima facie moral obligation of the citizenry to pay taxes is not easily jettisoned. The Scriptures seem to support that even ruling authorities whose legitimacy or moral uprightness is questionable should be given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to payment of taxes. This is in keeping with the eschatological motif of the "already but not yet" of the Kingdom of God.

However, when a certain threshold is crossed and the oppression of the people is too great (e.g., foreign nations tyrannizing Israel and Rehoboam's response), the Bible also records instances when God's people rebelled to bring change, apparently with the approval and even action of God. And where rebellion was not possible (e.g., Roman rule), God's people were challenged to remember where their ultimate allegiance lay - with God and his kingdom - and as much as possible to refuse to participate in the structures of oppression. Though not mentioning taxes specifically, it is clear that withholding of taxes could be one strategy of "resisting the beast".

The general objective of this research is to give guidance on when it is a moral obligation for the Christian to pay taxes and when it is not. Based on this study of what the Bible has to say on the topic, it can be preliminarily concluded that the Christian should assume that taxes should be paid. That assumption remains valid until such time as it is manifestly clear that the governing authorities are exercising their powers in ways that directly challenge the primary allegiance of the Christian to God or when the authorities are so excessively oppressive or unjust that a posture of non-cooperation or resistance, including in regard to the payment of taxes, is the only way to maintain pursue justice and love for others and righteousness before God.

It is important to note that the above conclusions were preliminary in nature. It is my conviction as a Christian ethicist that while the Bible is clearly the primary source of authority for Christian theological and moral reflection, it is not the *only* source of authority. Thus, as mentioned in part one, the moral framework guiding this over-all study calls for a further investigation into the other sources of authority for the Christian life, namely, Tradition, Reason and Experience.[2] These additional sources of authority will hopefully help to confirm, clarify, and exemplify the conclusions arrived at from our study of the Bible.

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[2] As noted in Part One, this is making use of what some scholars have called the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" of Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience.

Tradition and Paying Taxes

What does the long history of humanity, especially that of the Christian church, say about paying taxes? A Western proverb says, "If we don't learn from our past mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them". History is full of examples of taxes, tax resistance, and tax rebellions. David F. Burg in *A World History of Tax Rebellions: An Encyclopedia of Tax Rebels, Revolts and Riots from Antiquity to Present*, identifies 392 separate tax protests in human history but admits that this number is not all-inclusive. Burg makes a convincing case that taxes and the responses of people to them have been a key factor in the development of human civilization over the centuries.[3] From the great dynasties of China, to the Roman Empire, to the present, the list of significant historical events that were sparked by a tax protest is noteworthy.[4]

It is beyond the scope of this research to delve into that long history and mine it completely for the lessons that could be learned so we will sample a few of the gems from history, representing some of the most significant lessons it offers us.

The Negative Side of Tradition: Tax Abuse, Protests and Revolts
1. Buddhist Clergy in China (A.D. 460)

While putting down a rebellion in the Ch'ang-an area of China, Emperor T'ai-wu-ti discovered a cache of weapons in a Buddhist monastery. Buddhist monks were known to be fomenters of rebellion at that time. This led to an edict to execute all Buddhist monks in the area and destroy all their buildings, icons and books. This edict was not significantly enforced and was repealed within a short period of time. In fact, within 15 years of the edict, imperial policy was favoring the monks and their monasteries. Among these were tax exemption policies. Buddhist lands and households were exempt from taxes and military service. This favor created "a rush of evildoers and ne're-dowells to join the households of the [Buddhist] Sangha and even the regular clergy." One estimate noted that the number of monasteries in the empire grew from over 6,400 in A.D. 477 to 30,000 in A.D 534 and the number of clergy grew to over 2 million. Corruption and usury, and a whole cadre of "pseudo-monks" plagued the monasteries and society in general. All of this was in an effort to avoid taxation and military service.[5]

2. The Ride of Lady Godiva (A.D. 1057 approximately)

Though historians debate whether Lady Godiva's unusual anti-tax demonstration is legend or history, the story itself has, from at least the thirteenth century, shaped moral opinions about taxation in Europe and beyond. The existence of Lady Godiva is not in doubt. She was the wife of the

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[3] David F. Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions: An Encylopedia of Tax Rebels, Revolts and Riots from Antiquity to Present* (London: Routledge, 2004), Appendix.
[4] Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 1-432.
[5] Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 51-52.

Earl of Mercia, Leofric. According to the story, Lady Godiva was taken by the plight of the subjects of Coventry who suffered under the taxes of her husband. She repeatedly requested him to ease their tax burden but to no avail. But she persisted until finally, in a moment of exasperation, the Earl declared that he would lower taxes on the day that Lady Godiva rode naked on a horse through the streets of Coventry. She took him at his word and did just that! Leofric was compelled to fulfill his promise. The power of this story lies in its example of compassion for the poor and downtrodden of society and with regard to taxation, it speaks of the need for tax policy to take into consideration the ability of the people to pay those taxes.

3. The Magna Charta (A.D. 1215)

In A.D. 1215 the famous Magna Charta was signed between King John of England and his barons. This historic document was the result of the feudal barons protest against King John's demands for more soldiers and more taxes to wage war in France. In fact, it was customary for the king to consult the barons before calling for taxes to be collected or raised. The barons who provided the soldiers and collected the taxes grew frustrated with John's demands and forced him to agree to their terms. The provisions in the Magna Charta became some of the foundation stones for democracy in Europe and elsewhere. Key among these provisions were that even kings were answerable to the people and that those being taxed have a right to a voice in the shaping of tax policy.[6]

4. Martin Luther and the German Peasants' Revolt (A.D. 1524-25)

Partially taking their cue both theologically from Martin Luther's emphasis on Christian freedom and politically from the German nobility's rejection of Catholic (and to a lesser extent Imperial) rule in much of Germany, a revolt of the peasants of southern Germany arose in 1524 and 1525 which spread as far as Switzerland and France. "The rebellion originally centered in Upper Swabia and its imperial free city Memmingen. Here the so-called Memmingen Peasant Parliament met on March 6 and 7, 1525, and drafted the rebellion's program, the Twelve Articles of the Peasantry of Swabia. Of the twelve articles, four focused on taxes or related issues."[7] At first, Luther was sympathetic to the peasants' cause and pleaded with the German nobility to deal justly with them. But as the revolt grew in size and severity, and their claims became more radical and their lack of discipline more evident, Luther's social conservatism came to the fore and he issued his well-known tract, entitled, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants" which encouraged the nobles to put down the rebellion by force. He wrote, "Thus rebellion brings with it a land full of murder and bloodshed, makes widows and orphans, and turns everything upside down, like the greatest disaster.

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[6] "Magna Charta" History Learning Site, accessed at http://www.historylearningsite. co.uk/magna_carta.htm; Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 85.
[7] Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 152.

Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him, he will strike you, and a whole land with you."[8] Clearly, for Luther, an oppressive tax burden and their other grievances was not enough to tilt the balance between social order and justice toward revolution. The German princes took Luther's encouragement to heart and by the time the revolt was fully crushed as many as 100,000 peasants had died in battle or by execution.[9]

5. American Revolution (A.D. 1776)

Taxes played a leading role in the struggle of the original thirteen American colonies for independence from England. Ironically, it was the debts accrued by the British Crown during the Seven Years' War (aka. the French and Indian War, 1756-1763) one of the objectives of which was to defend the American colonies that led the British to impose new and strict taxes on the Americans. The Sugar Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Act (1767), and the Tea Act (1770) were among the new pieces of legislation passed by the British Parliament that authorized collection of taxes in the American colonies. All of these were met with increasing resentment and resistance. The primary justification given for this resistance was that the colonists were permitted no say in the issuance of those taxes. The colonists had no representatives in the government back in the motherland. It was as though they were citizens enough to be taxed but not citizens enough to be represented in government. The rallying cry of the American liberationists became, "No taxation without representation!" A seminal moment of rebellion took place when three ships docked in Boston harbor in 1773 loaded with East India tea. According to British law, upon arrival a tax was to be levied on that tea which was to be paid by the consumer (the colonists). After a dispute with the British-appointed governor led nowhere, the night before the tea was to be unloaded, 50 men dressed as American Indians boarded the ships and broke open the tea chests and dumped them into Boston harbor. This act of defiance became a symbolic event of great import on both sides of the Atlantic. Three years later the American Declaration of Independence was signed and the revolution was on, eventually resulting in the promulgation of the United States Constitution, a landmark document in the establishment of government (by consent of the governed) according to democratic principles and protection of human rights.

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[8] Martin Luther, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," in E.G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, *Martin Luther, Documents of Modern History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), 121-6, accessed online 22 February 2014 at https://umdrive.memphis.edu/jjsledge/public/1102%20%20Fall%202011/Week%201/Martin%20Luther%20Against%20the%20Robbing%20and%20Murdering%20Hordes%20of%20Peasants%20(1525).pdf

[9] Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 153.

6. Issue-Based Tax Resistance

"On January 28,1982, U.S. Catholic Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen announced his decision to withhold one half of his federal income tax as a protest against the involvement of the U.S. in the nuclear arms race." He further stated that the money he would have paid in taxes would be put into a fund to be used for charitable and peaceful purposes.[10] This was obviously an act that violated the law. Yet he intentionally did this in order to protest what he felt was an immoral act on the part of the U.S. government. Tax resistance can be a form of civil disobedience as in the case of Archbishop Hunthausen, meant to draw attention to a social evil with the hope of correcting it.

Others refuse to pay war taxes not so much as a strategy of social reform (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr.) but simply out of conscience. In 1755, John Woolman, a Quaker in the American colony of Pennsylvania led many Quakers of that colony to refuse to pay taxes to support the so-called (by Americans) French and Indian War (1754-1763).[11] In encouraging other Quakers to join this effort, Woolman and his companions wrote, "An Epistle of Tender Love and Caution" in which he says,

> And being painfully apprehensive that the large sum granted by the late Act of Assembly for the king's use is principally intended for purposes inconsistent with our peaceable testimony, we therefore think that as we cannot be concerned in wars and fightings, so neither ought we to contribute thereto by paying the tax directed by the said Act, though suffering be the consequence of our refusal, which we hope to be enabled to bear with patience.[12]

Conscientious objection to war has been the most commonly cited issue prompting tax resistance, though this principle could apply to any issue which was felt to be at odds with one's Christian or moral convictions.[13]

7. Tax Protests in Africa

Africa's colonial and post-colonial history also has its share of tax protest and rebellion. In 1905 British colonial authorities in South Africa, aware of the need for more laborers to work in the mines and on the White-owned farms, introduced a poll tax that had to be paid in colonial currency. This effectively forced the African population to sell their labor in order to get cash to pay the tax. "Chiefs and their subjects were required to report to the offices of their respective resident magistrates to pay the Poll Tax on 1 January 1906. However, while some chiefs ordered their subjects to pay, many people opted

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[10] Gerald D. Coleman, "Civil Disobedience: A Moral Critique," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 36.

[11] Also known by European historians as the Seven Years War, the French and Indian War was actually a war being fought between France and England and their allied colonies and Native American peoples in North America.

[12] John Woolman, "An Epistle of Tender Love and Caution", *We Won't Pay!: A Tax Resistance Reader*, 24.

[13] See Gross's long list of entries of those who have refused to pay taxes for one reason or another.

for passive resistance and simply refused."[14] This prompted a British colonial reaction, which in turn, precipitated an armed rebellion led by Chief Bambatha that same year. The rebellion lasted about two months with the end result being the death of between 3,000 and 4,000 Zulus and many more imprisoned and/or flogged.[15]

Nelson Mandela in his famous statement made at the trial that led to his imprisonment in 1964 cited a dog tax levied in 1924 that prompted a rebellion which in turn led to the death of over 200 South Africans as one of the incidences of violence that resulted in the formation of the militant wing of the African National Congress, known as Umkhonto we Sizwe.[16]

Isaac Kipsang Tarus, in his Ph.D. dissertation, demonstrates the key role that direct taxation played in colonial Kenya and on into the post-colonial era, systematically transforming Kenya from a barter economy to a cash economy. He notes how taxation played a major role in forcing Africans into the migrant labor market, how Africans resisted the payment of taxes and how it was a significant factor leading to the Mau Mau uprising and a tool used by the colonial administration to counter the uprising.[17] Noteworthy are the first and last of six regulations issued in 1953 by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, headed by Dedan Kimathi:

> *No African shall pay taxes to the White man and his government.*
> *Taxation Act: From January 1954 onwards, Africans shall start paying taxes for the development of their country to the Kenya Defence Council. Only women and children are exempted. This act also applies to all Europeans, Asians and Arabs who reside in the country. The tax payments will be as follows: (i) Africans shs 15 per year. ii) Asians and Arabs, shs 30 per year. (iii) Europeans, shs 120 per year.*[18]

Space does not permit an examination of the fact that tax resentment and unrest have not only been a factor in colonial Africa, but they have been

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[14] "Bambatha Rebellion of 1906" in *South African History Online*, accessed 22 February 2014 at http://www.sahistory.org.za/events-leading-bambatha-rebellion. See Matthew Forstater, "Taxation: a Secret Of Colonial Capitalist (So-Called) Primitive Accumulation," Working Paper #25 University of Missouri - Kansas City, accessed 22 February 2014 at http://www.cfeps.org/pubs/wp-pdf/wp25-forstater.pdf who argues using Marxist social analysis that taxation was a key tool in the hands of Africa's colonial masters to subdue the local population and make it productive for the colonialists.

[15] "Bambatha Rebellion of 1906" and Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 375-67.

[16] Nelson Mandela, "Nelson Mandela`s statement from the dock at the opening of the defence case in the Rivonia Trial, Pretoria Supreme Court, 20 April 1964," Accessed on 22 February 2014 at: http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3430.

[17] Isaac Kisang Tarus, *A History of the Direct Taxation of the African People in Kenya, 1895-1973* unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Rhodes University (February 2004), ii.

[18] Tarus, *A History of the Direct Taxation of the African People in Kenya,* 222.

present in post-colonial Africa.[19] Nevertheless, it is clear just from these few examples that taxes and the resentment they spawned played a significant role in the history of Africa.

The Positive Side of Tradition: Taxes and Human Development

Objectivity requires that we look at the other side of the coin. Down through the centuries, taxes - not just the protest and rebellion against them - have been crucial in the development of human civilization. Unfortunately, history does not favor the taxman. Taxes only seem to make news (and the pages of history books) when someone is revolting against them. But without taxes there would be no revenue to provide the most essential services that human societies are built upon. Without taxes there would be no Solomon's Temple, no Egyptian pyramids, no Suez Canal, no Great Wall of China, no Roman roads or legions, no humans having set foot on the moon, no Aswan Dam across the Nile River. Most of the key infrastructure that the economy of the world rides on daily has been created through the collection and expenditure of tax money. Truly, during every tax revolt in one part of the world, the rest of the world has gone on paying taxes. And for every day, month or year in which that tax revolt was taking place, the members of that same society were probably paying their taxes dutifully for decades before and after. Clearly, history teaches us that taxes are an essential and unavoidable part of collective human existence and that much of the positive economic and social development that humans have experienced throughout their collective existence was accomplished through the use of taxes.

Conclusions from the Study of Tradition and Paying Taxes

To summarize what we have uncovered from this brief survey of human history, let the following points suffice:

- Despite the hundreds of tax protests, revolts and rebellions throughout history, the majority of the time people have paid taxes.
- Paying taxes has been a cornerstone of economic development the world over.
- Humans, being the fallen creatures they are, will often avoid paying taxes through almost any means possible.
- Taxes should not be excessive, especially for the poor.
- Christians and non-Christians alike have at times found it justified and expedient to protest, even violently, against oppression in the form of unjust taxation policies.
- Unjust or excessive taxation has been the spark of many social reform movements or revolutions, some of which have resulted in major democratic and human rights advances. The world is a better place because of some tax revolts of the past.

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[19] For an example of post-colonial taxation in Africa see, Theodore U. Dickson and Appolos N. Nwaobia, "Impact of Heavy Taxation on Israel During Solomonic Era: Implications for Nigerian Tax System", *Asian Economic and Financial Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (June 15, 2012): 339-342.

Reason and Experience and Paying Taxes

The Function of Reason and Experience in Moral Decision-Making

How do we clarify and test what the Bible and Tradition have said about paying taxes? God has endowed humans with capacity to think and reason critically. Even more so, God has given us the ability to reason about our own selves - to be "self-aware" and to reflect on our past and present experiences. In moral decision-making these capacities are vital. Indeed, without them, the whole discipline of ethics would not be possible. Hence, reason and experience play important roles in confirming or disconfirming any interpretation of Scripture or tradition or any actions derived from them.

Ethical Theory: Deontology, Consequentialism and Absolutism

One of the major traditions of moral reasoning is Consequentialism. Consequentialism asserts that the "rightness" or "wrongness" of any particular action is based solely on the consequences of performing that action. Actions are justified if they produce the most positive overall set of consequences. They are considered wrong or unjustified if they do not. In our study of tradition (above), for example, noting that if we did not have taxes, we would have no Great Wall of China, no space exploration, and no Egyptian Pyramids is an example of consequentialist reasoning. Indeed, questions such as "What would be the consequences if no one paid taxes?" or "What would have happened if Gandhi had not refused to pay the salt tax or Americans the tea tax?" are very relevant and necessary. They help us to clarify the significance and weightiness of our decisions.

But there is another form of moral reasoning that in my estimation is more foundational - Deontology. Deontology comes from the Greek word, "*deon*" meaning duty or obligation. Deontological ethics is a form of reasoning that focuses on the fulfillment of one's duty. These duties stem from intrinsic moral obligations inherent in certain actions. For example, there is something intrinsically right about truth-telling. Its "rightness" is inherent in the act itself. From a Christian standpoint, these intrinsic moral obligations and inherent values originate in the nature and character of God. Truth-telling is intrinsically right because honesty is part of God's nature and God calls us to be like Him.

Deontology is commonly contrasted with Consequentialism. For the deontologist, moral obligation goes beyond mere calculation of consequences. Certain actions are right not because of the consequences they produce but because there is something in the act itself that is right, regardless of the consequences. This is the reasoning "behind" the conclusion from our study of the Bible quoted above that, "The Bible assumes a prima facie moral obligation of every citizen to pay his or her rightful taxes." This is the "default moral assumption" of the Bible when it comes to paying taxes because it is grounded in a moral obligation that is intrinsically right: obeying one's government. Any exceptions to this default moral assumption must be justified through appeal to a deeper or more fundamental moral obligation.

This is where we can make use of another moral tradition: Absolutism. Moral Absolutism claims that there are some moral principles that are true and valid for everyone, everywhere and always. They are not relative to time and place nor dependent on the circumstances. They are "absolute" moral obligations. Nevertheless, most absolutists will admit that there are "conflicting situations" in this fallen world when one moral absolute may conflict with another - that is, they may make competing claims on our behavior and to obey one means to disobey another. For example, in World War II, some Christians in German-occupied territories hid Jews and helped them escape from the Nazi forces that were bent on destroying them. In some cases they deliberately lied to the Nazi authorities about what they were doing. These persons were forced to choose between two moral obligations both of which can claim to be inherently right: telling the truth versus protecting the innocent. A very similar scenario is found in Exodus 1 where the Hebrew midwives lied to Pharaoh about why they did not kill the male Hebrew babies at birth.

Similarly, Jesus' disregarding the Sabbath regulations in the New Testament can be understood in this way. Jesus was in a "conflicting situation" in which to obey the Sabbath regulation meant to not do good to his fellow human (heal the sick or permitting grain to be picked). Jesus' actions demonstrate that there existed a "greater good" or as I would prefer to say, a "righter right" than a strict adherence to Sabbath regulations.

Thus, when such a conflict of moral absolutes occurs, what is called for is the discernment to know which moral absolute makes a more fundamental claim on one's action at that time. Fortunately, we are not left without guidance as to how to make that judgment. As discussed in Part One, when Jesus was asked (Matt. 22) what was the greatest commandment, he replied, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." At the risk of over-simplification, we must take the course of action that expresses our primary allegiance to God and secondly that expresses our deepest love for our fellow human beings. Obviously, that begs the question of how we know what best expresses our allegiance to God or best expresses our love for our fellow humans. But that is the target that we must aim for in all situations.

How does all of this relate to our discussion of paying taxes? We can say the following:

- In a relatively just and legitimately governed society, it is a duty to pay one's taxes.
- It is also a duty to seek justice in the midst of oppression.
- In both cases these actions are intrinsically right regardless of the consequences.

- If there is no oppression of the people and the governing authority levying the taxes is legitimate, then there is no conflict of absolutes. There is only one moral absolute in play: Be a responsible person in your society and pay your taxes.

- If the tax burden or some other practice or policy of the governing authority is truly oppressive, then a second moral absolute comes into play: Seek justice or defend the innocent and less fortunate.

- As to which of these absolutes takes priority, it likely depends on the extent of the oppression. This is where consequentialism may have a legitimate role to play in helping to measure or assess the extent to which the two moral absolutes are being violated. To put it another way, it can measure whether paying or withholding taxes levied by an oppressive government best expresses allegiance to God and love for one's neighbor.

- Lest we be tempted to go straight to consequentialism and skip entirely our deontological and absolutist analysis of the issue, it is important to note the inescapability of these inherent moral obligations. We cannot run from them by a simple calculation of consequences. If I decide that my government is truly oppressive or is using my tax money in radically evil ways, it may be my highest moral obligation to refuse to pay taxes to such a government, but I should still acknowledge that I am breaking the laws of the land and even engaging in an act of rebellion.

Experience: Testing through Case Studies

1. The Case of Tax Evasion: Beanie Baby CEO

Ty Warner, creator of the very popular 1990's stuffed animal toys called "Beanie Babies", with an estimated net worth of 2.6 billion USD, was convicted of tax evasion in January 2014. He pled guilty to hiding a gross income of 24 million USD. He paid a civil penalty of 53 million USD and back taxes of 27 million USD. He was given a paroled sentence with 500 hours of community service.[20] Warner's case is straightforward to analyze. Warner was not protesting anything. He was simply trying to avoid paying his taxes. Society has a right to expect that such a rich man pay his fair share of taxes and be appropriately punished for not doing so. It was his moral duty to pay taxes. Therefore, he should be punished for not doing so. His actions were illegal and unethical.

2. The Case of Legal, but Unethical Tax Avoidance: ABF in Zambia

Associated British Foods (ABF) through its Zambian subsidiary used legal tax codes to avoid paying taxes in Zambia. Through shifting money around to "off-shore" subsidiaries and tax havens, the multinational corporation reportedly paid less than 0.5% of its 123 million USD pre-tax profits in taxes between 2007-2013. "It is estimated that the tax haven transactions of this one

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[20] Catherine E Sholchet, "Beanie Babies creator Ty Warner won't serve prison time for tax evasion" CNN Report (January 15, 2014).

British headquartered multinational deprived Zambia of a sum 14 times larger than the UK aid provided to the country to combat hunger and food insecurity."[21]

This is a case where ABF is apparently not doing anything illegal but it clearly seems to be unethical. ABF is not demonstrating "love for its neighbor", the people of Zambia. No amount of calculating the consequences can justify this behavior. To think that if this one multinational corporation just paid its taxes it would be worth many times more than the food-aid Zambia received during that same period! This is where the tradition of Virtue and Character Ethics must come in to play whereby people will chose to do the right thing, even when there is not a law compelling them to do it.

3. The Case of Tax Resistance: Mahatma Gandhi

As discussed earlier, Mahatma Gandhi defied a British colonial law that prohibited anyone but the government-sponsored company from producing salt and enforced a sales tax on it. Naturally, this law negatively affected poor Indians the most. Gandhi led the March to the Sea and engaged in acts that led to the production of salt, thereby intentionally breaking the law. This is an example of civil disobedience at its best.

Analyzing this decision according to the reasoning above, it could be argued that Gandhi had a "default moral obligation" to obey the governing authorities and yet he saw the injustice of doing so. In this way, he may have found himself in a conflicting situation in that, if he obeyed the law he was complicit in the oppression of his people, and if he disobeyed the law he was guilty of rebellion against the government. To justify his defiance of colonial authorities, Gandhi must have concluded that either the British colonial government had no true legitimacy in India and hence he was not compelled to obey its laws or that the laws were so unjust that they did not deserve to be obeyed (or both). The first option sets aside one moral absolute so that there is no moral conflict. The second seems to assess which of the two moral obligations making claims upon him is greater (which is a better expression of love of neighbor). Gandhi apparently believed that it was a "righter right" to march to the sea and collect salt than to pay the tax. Without question Ghandi chose a path (non-violent resistance) that allows us to easily see the moral credibility of his cause. But what if the situation is such that tax resistance through non-violent means is insufficient? Is there justification for stronger use of force? In our final case study, let's look briefly at the logic of the American War for Independence.

4. The Case of Tax Rebellion: United States War for Independence

Promulgated in 1776, the United States Declaration of Independence is a useful tool for our purposes of moral analysis. To what did the framers of the

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[21] Daniel Boffey, "British sugar giant caught in global tax scandal" *The Observer* (09 February 2013).

Declaration appeal to justify their rebellion? Their first argument was that "certain inalienable rights" were being denied them by the King of England, among those rights were "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".[22] As evidence of this, the Declaration lists 27 grievances or tangible ways in which the King's actions were denying them those inalienable rights, including (as mentioned earlier) the taxation policies of Britain, particularly when the colonists had no representation in Parliament where those tax policies were being formulated.

The Declaration acknowledges that dissolving the political bonds of one people to another and establishing a new state with a new government is not something that should be done lightly. This actually meant war between the colonies and Britain and there was by no means any guarantee that they would win. But the signers were convinced in the justice of their cause because of the extremity of the situation. Some of phrases they used to convey this extremity were: a British government which was "destructive of these ends" of life, liberty and happiness; which had a committed "a long train of abuses"; and was characterized by "absolute Despotism"; which had "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States". The signers closed their case by "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions".

Of course, whether one agrees with the signers of the Declaration that these issues constituted a just cause for their rebellion is open for debate. But, they understood fully the conflicting situation they were in and chose a course of action that seemed to them to best protect their inalienable rights.

To conclude this section on reason and experience, through the use of deontology and moral absolutism we conclude that for most of us the only moral duty we have with regard to taxes is to pay them. However, in some (conflicting) situations, it may be justified to withhold taxes or to go even further in protest against an oppressive government or particular policy of that government. We have briefly sampled four case studies to exemplify this range of responses, including a case of illegal tax evasion, legal but unethical tax avoidance, a case of ethical but illegal tax resistance, and a case of illegal but ethical tax rebellion. In the first two cases (Ty Warner and ABF), there were no conflicting moral absolutes. There was only the moral imperative to fulfill one's duty as a (corporate) citizen and pay a fair share of taxes. Consequently we judge these two moral agents as having behaved unethically in their failure to pay their taxes. In the final two examples (Gandhi and the US War of Independence), there is evidence of conflicting absolutes. In both cases there is the "default moral obligation" to pay one's taxes, but that must

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[22] United States *Declaration of Independence* (July 4, 1776), accessed at:
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

be balanced against the injustice of those tax laws coupled with other policies of those governments. Though the use of violence in the case of the US War for Independence places the threshold of justification much higher, there was given in the Declaration of Independence a clear rationale for why the authors felt that was necessary. One can see, then, from these case studies the range of moral responses that can be generated from the call to pay taxes. Further, we can see how those responses can be judged as ethical or unethical using the tools moral reasoning provided.

General Conclusions of the Entire Two-Part Study

It is now time to summarize and draw general conclusions from both parts of this study. We began with the primary source of authority for the Christian life, the Bible (in Part One). There, we reported that nearly all forms of taxation in use today were being used in Bible times and we have seen how taxes and the payment (or lack thereof) played a large role in the unfolding of biblical history and God's plan of salvation. We have identified principles of taxation found in the scriptures that can be critically applied to our contexts. In our examination of Tradition or human history at the beginning of this second part, we have noted the hundreds of documented incidences of tax resistance, protests and revolts down through human history and have looked more carefully at some of prominent ones and have concluded along with David Burg that taxes and the response of people to them have been a key factor in the development of human civilization over the centuries.[23] From the great dynasties of China, to the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, to African Independence movements, to the present, the list of significant historical events that were sparked by a tax protest is noteworthy.[24] We reviewed some major ethical theories and used them as tools to help us sharpen our logic in assessing whether to pay or not to pay taxes. And we have undertaken some brief case studies to test our thinking regarding payment of taxes.

What do we conclude from all of this? Perhaps no better conclusion can be given than the words of the early American statesman, Benjamin Franklin, "In the world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."[25] Indeed, no one should doubt the critical role that taxes have played in history and the necessity of developing a properly formulated moral response to the claims of governing authorities to pay those taxes. So, what can we say about that moral response to the claims of governments to pay taxes? Can we develop a moral framework that can help guide us on when to pay and when not to pay? To do so has been the general objective of this study. Drawing together all the arguments in these two parts let me provide such a moral framework.

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[23] Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, Appendix.
[24] Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 1-432.
[25] Benjamin Franklin, *Letter to Jean Baptiste Le Roy*, November 13, 1789. Found at http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/quotable/quote73.htm - 2014.10.16, 10:27 PM.

A Moral Framework for Discerning the Payment of Taxes
from a Christian Perspective

1. *Affirm the positive role of taxes in human history.* The payment of taxes down through the centuries has permitted the development of human civilization. Any sizeable group of people must have some reliable way to raise funds for community or public projects. Taxes are necessary!

2. *Beware of the negative role of taxes in human history.* Taxes have often been used as instruments of oppression by tyrannical governments. Thus, while taxes cannot be done away with, neither should they be blindly paid without critical reflection on the justice of the policies behind them.

3. *Recognize the biblical mandate for paying taxes.*
   a. Paying taxes is not a "necessary evil", but a sacred duty to God. It is a way of expressing one's devotion to God.
   b. Paying taxes is a way to love one's neighbor.
   c. Paying taxes is a way to care about one's community and the world of which God has made us His stewards.

4. *Take note of some key principles of tax policy found in our four sources of authority.*
   a. Legitimacy of Governing Authority: Levying taxes should be done only by a legitimate governing authority. In this age of democracy, that would imply a government that has been put in place with the free and informed consent of the governed. Any taxes levied by an illegitimate government lack moral authority.
   b. Fairness or Proportionality: In general, those who earn more money or use more services or facilities of the society should pay more in taxes.
   c. Concern for the Poor: Taxes can and should be used to express the community's concern to uplift the less fortunate of society and to some extent redistribute wealth.
   d. Welfare of the General Community: The general objective of every tax regime should be the development of the society as a whole, and not the enrichment of only a few. Christians have a moral obligation to ensure their governments are responsible in the framing of their tax policies. In other words, Christians should be pro-active in ensuring that those who are framing their tax policies are doing so with these principles in mind.

5. *Accept the reality of moral ambiguity in paying taxes.* We need to accept the fact that there is no "perfect government" in this world and if we want to find something to fault our governments about, we likely can. But that does not mean that we should refuse to pay our taxes because of a few issues. And if we accept this fact then the implication is that, at times, we will be paying taxes that will be used to implement policies and practices

that we disagree with or may find morally offensive. This is nothing new. Any controversial issue in society that is adopted by a particular government may be opposed by many of the governed in that society. Abortion, homosexuality, war, female circumcision, state actions to combat terrorism, and many others are hotly contested issues, and we should not expect that we will all agree. I must be prepared to accept that in some cases "my view" will not be the "majority view". And even when my view is the majority and is the policy of the government, I should be humble enough to understand that there are probably good reasons why so many of my fellow citizens oppose it. For example, I may fully support my government's policy to make most abortions illegal. Nevertheless, I should be aware that such a policy indirectly contributes to the death and injury of women who then resort to so-called "backstreet abortions". As noted in Part One, as much as possible we are to live as a redeemed community in this fallen world, but sometimes our best efforts fall short of "the Kingdom of God".

6. *Embrace the demand for moral integrity in paying taxes.* Christians are called to be holy, to be disciples of Jesus Christ and to set an example for others in moral purity. Christians embarrass their God and the Christian community when they fail to pay their justly levied taxes. Christians should be known as morally upright in regard to their taxes. The moral ambiguity described in principle #5 above should never leave the Christian in a state of moral apathy about taxes or any other issue. We are called to moral excellence and to give our best efforts to God and our community.

7. *Assume that Christians should be fully tax compliant.* In the vast majority of cases, Christians should pay their taxes. It is only in those difficult "conflicting situations" that we are trying to identify that Christians should withhold their taxes. Consequently, the "default assumption" should be full tax compliance.

8. *Recognize that withholding taxes has rarely been THE tool that has toppled governments and brought positive change.* Generally tax protests have only been the initial spark to ignite the flame of a more forceful form of social change. Selective tax non-compliance by itself generally doesn't change things (e.g., war-tax resistance).

9. *Carefully apply the following criteria for refusing to pay taxes.*

   a. When refusing to do so can be an effective means of civil disobedience.

   b. When government ceases to be "God's servant to do you good" (Romans 13) and is dehumanizingly oppressing the people.

   c. When government is directly challenges our primary allegiance to God.

   d. When justice can be achieved through no other legal means.

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God and Development:
Doxology in African Christianity

by Gregg Okesson

Abstract

This article draws connections between doxology in the churches and development in Africa. It argues that while Western scholars often hesitate in making direct linkages between theology and development activity, the same is not the case within African Christianity, where the churches possess ample resources in the form of "praise poetry" for navigating the vicissitudes of life. The article suggests that more research is needed to study the kind of doxology generated by the churches for strengthening development activity on the continent.

Introduction

What does "God" have to do with development? This essay explores how doxological affirmations about the divine help shape the cosmology of a people with regard to progress. In one sense, the field of development studies has slowly begun acknowledging such things, with a growing number of scholars examining the importance of religion related to development concerns.[1] Some of this might be in reaction to earlier epochs that saw spirituality in direct contrast to enlightened rationality, or else driven by a growing awareness of religiosity in the lives of people in the Majority World. But despite any optimism with regard to religion, most scholars still hesitate on more overt theological matters, perhaps believing that theology carries with it incontrovertible partisan bias.

But if religion makes a difference in our world, why not theology? Does belief in God make any difference in how people view the world? Or the nature of God for how they seek to improve their lives? Western modernity has borne an ambiguous history with regard to belief about God; at once dependent upon the Judeo-Christian heritage for much of its implicit sub-structure and values, while suspicious of spiritual forces impeding human agency. Meanwhile disagreements between religions have sadly fueled violent conflicts, leading development scholars to opt for a neutral perspective on religion, almost positing a theology-less stance with regard to religion. But this begs the

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[1] See Barbara Bompani and Maria Frahm-Arp (eds.) *Development and Politics from Below: Exploring Religious Spaces in the African State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Erica Bornstein, *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGO's, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Gerrie Ter Haar, *Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World* (Columbia University Press, 2011); or, Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall, *Spiritual Capital: Wealth We Can Live By* (London: Berrett-Kohler, 2004).

question: is it possible to posit religious belief without confessional bias? All around the world, religious adherents finger prayer beads, recounting the names of God for everyday life. Meanwhile, churches, mosques, and temples provide sacred space for supplications and teachings with regard to God.

Admittedly, confessional beliefs have nursed a host of conflict around the world. A recent Pew Forum study chronicles the rise in religiously motivated violence to 33% within the 198 countries studied.[2] Sometimes people kill each other in the name of God; whereas at other times sacred speech sanctions oppressive regimes.[3] Without a doubt, theological resources can be both problem and solution. But none of this discounts the importance of God. While scholars in the West think of God as a restricted category, the divine provides people around the world with valuable resources to function as fruitful agents in society.

Where is God in Development?

As Christianity expands around the world at a meteoric rate, theological topics will increasingly be important for examining global problems. From the proliferation of Pentecostalism in the Global South to the emergence of transnational churches in the Northern Hemisphere, people source what is important to them via religious domains. This is especially true for Africa, where the invisible realm touches upon all facets of life.[4]

While secular scholars struggle with the role of God with regard to development, the situation is only slightly different for Christian scholars. From the rise of evangelicalism[5] to later discussions prompted by the Latin American contingent at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, to collaborative efforts within the Wheaton consultation in 1983,[6] and culminating,

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[2] Pew Research: Religion and Public Life Project, "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High," http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/ accessed on February 26, 2014.

[3] See Achille Mbembe, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony," Translated by Janet Roitman. *Public Culture* 4:2 (1992), 1–30; Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst, 2009); and Celistin Monga, *The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa*. Translated by Linda L. Fleck and Celistin Monga (London: Lynne Reinner, 1996.

[4] See Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[5] From its beginnings, evangelicalism contained seeds of social action; see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989); or, Donald D. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. Reprint Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988).

[6] "Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need," Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, June 1983. See, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/all/consultation-statements/423-transformation-the-church-in-response-to-human-need.html. Accessed March 22, 2013.

at least in the eyes of many, with Bryant Myers' book, *Walking with the Poor*,[7] the focus for evangelicals has revolved around God's purposes for the world. Scholars of "transformational development" or "integral mission" repeatedly refer to God's intentions. They talk about "Shalom" as a state of affairs in the world, or they mention divine intent. Some even refer to a "biblical basis for holistic ministry," but fail to go into detail about the One who began it all. They speak of humans as the "image of God," but overlook the One they image. Some of the writings do refer to God's character. The Wheaton affirmation states, "He is the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5), King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16)," or refers to Christ taking up God's purposes in redemption, or the Holy Spirit as "the Transformer, *par excellence*." Myers' book expands upon these themes. He states up front, "Who is God? must be the first question,"[8] and briefly talks about the importance of a Trinitarian understanding.[9] But despite his desire to situate transformational development upon such a foundation, Myers says very little about God's nature and devotes the majority of his book to any implications for development.

At one level, none of this should come as much surprise. It may be argued that Western societies have witnessed a weakening of the concept of the divine over the last millennium. Thomas Jenkins notes that contrary to earlier epochs, late nineteenth century Protestant theology lost much of its ability to master the complexity of God's nature, lapsing into reductionistic views of the divine that saw "God as an emotionally singular character, having one predominant feeling, such as serene benevolence, holiness, or tender sympathy."[10] Whether Jenkins accurately reads the situation may be open for debate, but certainly the paucity of material dealing with God in the writings of Christian development lends some credence to his thesis. He later explores the social gospel movement in the middle of the twentieth century and berates liberals and conservatives alike for deficiencies in dealing with God's nature. Regarding the latter, Jenkins says, "Conservatives tried to look beyond the earthly God and 'desire … God himself.' There was a problem with this, however. The desire might be there, but the object of this desire had become vague."[11]

If one compares the contemporary scene with previous eras (like those of Luther, Calvin, Edwards, or Wesley), one could certainly make the case that

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[7] Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Revised and Expanded Edition. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011). For a helpful overview of the historical period just discussed, see Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Regnum Studies in Mission, 2008).
[8] Myers, *Walking with the Poor,* p. 58.
[9] Myers, *Walking with the Poor,* pp. 59ff., 84ff.
[10] Thomas Jenkins, *The Character of God: Recovering the Lost Literary Power of American Protestantism*. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 3.
[11] Jenkins, *The Character of God,* p. 79.

Western societies have lost their ability to talk about God with a textured richness. Could it be that years of defending God against liberals, or laboring amidst forces of modernity, have somehow stripped evangelicals of their theological resources, forcing "God" into a distinct, rationalistic realm, or else stunted their theological imagination? Or have Christians implicitly accepted doxology as a thing of no worldly significance, ignoring the confessional resources of billions of people around the world without a second glance?

While Western societies labor under an anemic view of God, the case is strikingly different for African Christianity, where ironically much development work takes place. In the churches, one finds a litany of titles for the divine flooding the content of every service. People pray, sing, dance, and proclaim the names of God. Parishioners shout ascriptions or generate "praise poetry" to move in and out of contact with the divine. God is lauded as King, Savior, Lord, Friend of Sinners, Alpha and Omega, Jehovah, or Almighty. Songs attest to the indisputable uniqueness of God (*hakuna Mungu kama wewe*, "there is no God like you"), interweaving praise throughout the entire service in order to locate God in the midst of life. Thus, confessed beliefs bid the parishioner enter an imaginative realm where God pervades all "spaces" of the cosmos, helping connect doxology with everyday life.

In this essay, I take up linkages between God and the world. The paper begins with some theological foundations to underscore the importance of God for the world, and then explores the sociological significance of "God." Next, I delve into various aspects of doxology within African Christianity where parishioners boast imaginative resources for conceptualizing the divine in the face of societal decay. This article argues that what you believe about God directly impacts how you function in society. Or, stated in another way, if humans are the "image of God," this says something significant for the One they image, with direct implications for how they engage the world.

God and Development: Biblical Foundations

In the beginning, God. The opening words of Scripture immediately direct us toward all that is important in the world and hint at the impetus for Creation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dance to the music of inward song. A laugh, and the heavens come into being; a smile, and the earth takes form. The inexhaustible creativity of the Triune Community spills over into matter, making visible that which only glimmered in the eye of divine intent. God speaks and the heavens pulsate with joy. Under the faint whisper of his breath, the earth blossoms into life.

Into such an arena of imaginative, world-defining acclaim, God fashions humans as the "image of God," charged with responsibility (and commensurate powers) for nurturing life. Hence, God is never far from human

identity. The gaze of humans beholds the face of God.[12] Therein they find themselves, not as replacements of God, nor as pre-fabricated molds, but as living beings who function in the world by faithful "imaging."

When sin enters the story, it does more than affect the individual properties of creation. It also distorts the cohesion, the dignity, and most strategically (for our purposes here), the fundamental "imaging" of God. In wanting to become like God, humans become less than they were intended to be, scorning the gift and abusing the power. They turn inward, esteeming the creation rather than the Creator. Praise warps into idolatry. Creative acts destroy. Domination, exploitation, sacralization, and marginalization become common themes in human communities, affecting how people interact with the rest of the world. Fear, insecurity, and self-abasement follow, where humanity twists and contorts at the distortion of God's nature.[13]

However, the world remains inextricably linked with the knowledge of God. At one moment, "I am that I am" speaks to Moses from a burning bush, leading to the overthrow of Pharaoh's empire and giving rise to the slow and gradual formation of the People of God, while at the next, "the Word becomes flesh" where history shifts upon its axis, resulting in the emergence of a new humanity. In the Old Testament, heaven and earth serve as witnesses of the covenant (Deut 30:19-20; c.f. 31:28) and in the New, all creation groans, waiting in "eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (Rom 8:19). Thus, direct linkages exist between creation, humans, and recreation, through the character of God.[14] Development work, at least in part, pertains to faithfulness in human "imaging," requiring greater attention to the source of the image: God.

Biblical writers describe with elaborate language and dramatize with vivid imagination the many facets of God's infinite character. He is the Almighty, Ancient of Days, Eternal God, Fountain of Living Waters, Judge, King, and Sun of Righteousness. What is more, these characteristics remain open to the world, never restricted to the dim lighting of a quiet, comfortable study, but serve as beacons that light up the sky at night (or a city on a hill).[15] Yahweh

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[12] Or as Calvin states, "man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself." *Institutes* I, 1, 2.

[13] G. Okesson, *Re-Imaging Modernity: a contextualized theological study of power and humanity within Akamba Christianity in Kenya* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), p. 188.

[14] For more on the importance of creation in God's purposes, see Howard Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Creation Means Salvation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

[15] John Wesley says, "God is in all things, and … we are to see the Creator in the [mirror] of every creature; … we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical atheism; but with a true magnificence of thought survey heaven and earth and all that is therein as contained by God in the

reveals himself. Such was the prophets' delight. Jeremiah feasts upon God's nature (15:16), while Ezekiel swallows the Law (3:1ff). Yet lest humans try to control this deity, God reveals and God hides. At one moment, he has no name, and at the next, he reveals himself through the incarnation.

None of this should reduce God to revolutionary intent, hijacking the divine for political gain, or positing some kind of Prosperity Gospel, but neither ought we sing praises to the One who rules the heavens, and continue with our privatized, compartmentalized existence, as if assuming that God's attributes remain restricted to the walls of the church, or are emasculated in the face of sociological significance. Ascriptions do not sit idle, hanging lifeless like little ornaments on a tree: beautiful to behold, but fragile to the touch, lacking anything but comeliness. Rather God shares his nature with the world and receives back through doxology. In the process, the heavens and earth lean forward to the praise of the One who sustains "all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:3).

God and Development: From Theology to Sociology

Throughout history, deviant beliefs about God have fed a variety of views on human agency, whether Gnosticism, with its privileging of the spiritual over the material, providing motivation for human responsiveness, albeit by taking short cuts around the created order, or Deism, which begins with God but then pushes him to the edges of the known universe, positing a cosmos free from divine interference. These deviant beliefs (and many others) lend humans agency in relation to an ambiguous world. However, they are but shadows of the true reality. The knowledge of God provides the necessary structure and order for creation, but humans have for centuries manipulated the divine for their own purposes.

Western evangelicalism arose from an ambiguous heritage. In part, it was sourced from the Enlightenment and "disenchanted" views of the world. While evangelicals have rarely held these beliefs overtly, they have at times demythologized the world with regard to spiritual powers, opting for a more causal view of cosmology that seeks solutions to human problems based solely upon science or agriculture. Furthermore, the Enlightenment project tended to carve up the world into categories, bifurcating spiritual and material elements into carefully compartmentalized boxes with limited access between the two. One result of this has been that "God" remains cloistered from the material aspects of life. But evangelicals have likewise been influenced by

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hollow of his hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is in a true sense the soul of the universe." John Wesley, Sermon on the Mount 23, "Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse III, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-23-upon-our-lords-sermon-on-the-mount-discourse-three/, accessed on March 3, 2014.

pietism, coming out of the Protestant Reformation. This at times has led to subtle, neo-gnostic views, where the entire goal of human life is to leave the world and escape to a future, spiritual state. What matters is the spiritual, not the material. And so, evangelicals have historically engaged in development with a combination of pietistic spirituality and Enlightenment materiality, but are often uncertain how to connect the two. Caught in the webs of its historical and cultural traditions, Western agents have often struggled to see the viability of theology for everyday life.

Yet there is hope. Walter Brueggemann's study on the *Prophetic Imagination* provides a bold connection between theological and sociological realities, re-establishing the importance of God for society. He explains the central importance of Yahweh in the Old Testament, saying: "We are indeed made in the image of some God. And perhaps we have no more important theological investigation than to discern in whose image we have been made."[16] Such an affirmation frames much of this article. If humans are created in the "image of God," then we must consider the One we image. Or, as Brueggemann puts it: "Our sociology is predictably derived from, legitimated by, and reflective of our theology."[17]

In order to show this to be the case, Brueggemann brings together several elements alluded to earlier in this paper: God, doxology, and a theological imagination. He narrates the beginning of Israel. With God's self-disclosure ("I am who I am") Israel commences the slow and gradual steps toward nationhood. As they reflect upon Yahweh, they become a people. And through the process of being set free from the Egyptians, they sing and dance.[18] The doxology of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15 shows this to be the case. The song begins with various ascriptions to Yahweh, lauding Him as "strength and defense" (v. 2), "warrior" (v. 3), "majestic in power" (v. 6) and "awesome in glory" (v. 11) and then proceeds to look toward the future: "the nations will hear and tremble," and "You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance— the place, Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established" (v. 17). Doxology provides the means for the Israelites to imagine a new life, far away from Pharaoh's dominion. But song and dance also allow Israel to re-imagine the world around God's character. As they move to Mount Sinai, Yahweh becomes crystallized into sociological realities. Yahweh is sung. Yahweh is imagined. As these things take place, the nation of Israel comes into being.

Jürgen Moltmann provides another perspective on the matter. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, he devotes an entire chapter to tracing the social importance of the Trinity. He explains that what you believe about God has

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[16] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*. Second Edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 8.
[17] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* p. 8.
[18] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* p. 18.

direct bearing upon how you order your world.[19] In order to show this to be the case, Moltmann begins with two contrasting views of God, one that maintains God as a singular, monarchial ruler, and another where the Trinity is embraced within unity (what he calls "triunity"). He then articulates the sociological significance of these two positions, especially in the context of doxology. In regard to the former, Moltmann argues that a predilection toward a singular, monarchial God "provides the justification for earthly domination – religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination – and makes it a hierarchy, a 'holy rule.'"[20] Kingship sanctions kingship. But Moltmann offers another option, within a more communal, generative picture of the Godhead, where the Persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – share freely amongst themselves in eternal love, with implications for a fundamentally different kind of sociological reality: a "community of men and women without supremacy and without subjection."[21]

By espousing this view of Triunity, Moltmann is not arguing against God's kingship, but asking deeper questions about how humans understand divine sovereignty and what this might mean for the ordering of human societies. Surrounded by a multiplicity of gods, early apologists asserted God's monarchy as the basis for opposing the pantheon of deities.[22] Unfortunately, such visions of monarchy, Moltmann explains, sacrifice diversity for unity, freedom for convenience, and dynamic interaction for hierarchy. What is needed is not less God, but a view of the divine that frames all of life within the eternal freedom of Triune love.

The work of these scholars underscores the importance of the divine for social construction. This is especially important in Africa, where God and doxology matter to everyday life, providing essential ingredients by which humans remake the world. In the remainder of this article, I will draw implications for development from various resources found within African Christianity, revealing the strength of doxology in the churches and underscoring its usefulness (while hinting at some dangers) for shaping human societies.

African Christianity: From Praise Poetry to Development

As we turn toward the churches, we find bountiful resources for social construction through doxological flows generated by parishioners. Worship provides people a means by which to re-imagine their world. The nature of God lifts them from their daily struggles. Singing provides people an opportunity to praise, confess, and imagine new realities, while dance

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[19] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), p. 191.
[20] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God,* p. 192.
[21] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God,* p. 192.
[22] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God,* pp. 194-5.

deepens these practices, allowing bodies to reinforce what singing imagines. The nature of God makes this all possible.

Stepping back for a moment, some could argue that if Africa boasts such abundant resources, why all the economic hardships? How can a continent of almost 500 million believers experience such agonizing despair, from dire poverty to political oppression to ethnic conflict?[23] The answer to this question remains complex with some scholars arguing that it relates to a neo-patrimonial legacy infiltrating the churches,[24] while others contend that the colonial era imparted a despotic imagination into the minds of the people, with lingering effects to the present.[25] Without denying the importance of these two factors, I would like to suggest another possibility. Some of the problem has to do with how people envision God, offering both critique and hope for the churches.

To enter a church in Africa is to experience rich, textured ascription of God's character. Songs, prayers, choir performances, and preaching all saturate the service with a deeply imaginative construal of the divine nature with layer upon layer of doxology until it almost appears as if the building is going to burst. People sing God's nature and pray his attributes. They generate "praise poetry" which builds upon a longstanding heritage within African communities.

Names are important to Africans, identifying a person with father, mother, distant ancestor, or the circumstances in which they were born. Thus, names (or titles) provide rich cultural information. Speaking about the Ila of southwestern Zambia, Karin Barber describes how a person's name represents something both open and protected; a source of identity that is at once, "inhabitable space," while simultaneously deeply personal.[26] In many traditions, people generate "praise poetry" in order to link themselves with the identity behind the name. The Yoruba in Nigeria, for example, use names in order to craft linage and/or negotiate power within the cosmos. Barber explains,

> Chanting a person's oríkì is empowering. It opens a channel through which the accumulated attributes of the addressee's forebears are heaped upon him to swell his public presence – the basis of big men's greatness. Chanting a god's oríkì may provoke it to activity on the chanter's behalf, and or even to

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[23] Despite the ongoing concerns on the continent, we should not overstate the severity of the problem. Africa has experienced economic growth of 5% in the last few years, with commensurate progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals; see *Africa Development Indicators* (New York: The World Bank, 2011), vii.

[24] Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009).

[25] Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

[26] Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and written culture in Africa and beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.120-1.

descend to earth and possess the chanter, enabling her or him to perform feats normally out of reach.[27]

Meanwhile Dinka "ox songs" function in a similar way, connecting humans with cattle. People generate songs to particular oxen, calling out their names, and associating themselves with the praise of the song. Thus "praise poetry" provides a means for growth for all who participate in the song. By chanting ascriptions, singers come into contact with the object of the praise.

It is upon such a dense and creative backdrop that we must understand doxology in the churches as a form of "praise poetry." Through songs, prayers, and testimonials, people lavish God with ascriptions. Barber explains how praise poetry "involves the vigorous, intense heaping of fragments of reputations, narratives, names, deeds, upon the 'head' of the addressee in a sustained effort of instauration."[28] African Christianity builds upon these cultural traditions to employ hymns, choruses, and prayers for the purposes of participating in God's attributes. God does not just exist far off, but through doxology, he is brought near.

The names of the divine thus hold vital socio-political significance. Lamin Sanneh explains how Christianity expanded most vigorously where the indigenous name for God was maintained.[29] The name of God in Africa forms the central locus of society, around which agriculture, festivals, and other rites or ceremonies take place. Sanneh remarks, "It is therefore hard to think of viable social systems without the name of God, but easy to envision societies that have become vulnerable because they lost the name or sense of the transcendent."[30] Hence, God's names cannot be restricted to some "spiritual" category, distinct from life; but rather people draw upon God's attributes to see themselves as social actors.[31]

Before getting into specific examples of "praise poetry" in African congregations, I should first establish a few related points. Initially, African cosmology boasts fluid movement between divine and human realms, with many different "crossing points" between the domains.[32] Hence prayer, songs, and other ecclesiastical outputs allow Africans access to divine resources. Furthermore, worship draws upon the metaphorical nature of the body to act

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[27] Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics,* p. 133.

[28] Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics,* p. 133.

[29] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 18.

[30] Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?,* p. 31.

[31] Sanneh also says, "the name of God contained ideas of personhood, economic life, and social/cultural identity; the name of God represented the indigenous theological advantage vis-à-vis missionary initiative." Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?,* p. 31.

[32] Andrew Walls, "Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-First Century," *Transformation* 19(4): 2002: pp. 217-228; p. 224.

out, perform, and ritualize embodied beliefs. Parishioners use their bodies to imagine eschatological realities, or dramatize spiritual conflict. Dance becomes a vehicle for telling a story. Through corporate worship, parishioners link together into a larger "social body" for the purposes of dramatizing and ritualizing belief.[33]

Doxology and the Names of God:

As has been shown, African Christianity builds upon a longstanding heritage of doxology to flood supplications with divine ascription. While all prayers in the churches begin with reference to God, most continue to interweave a generous assortment of names throughout, with titles that include: "Father, in the mighty Name of Jesus;" "Jehovah: (or Jehovah God); "Lord of lords;" "King of kings;" "God of gods;" "Master of masters;" "Priests of Priest;" "Jehovah Jireh;" "God who is all-powerful;" "Mighty God;" "Christ Lord;" "Father and our God who is all-powerful;" "King of Glory;" "God of Truth;" "God of Wonders;" "God who sits on a high throne;" "Everlasting God;" "Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;" and "Alpha and Omega."

Based upon this modest list, the names of God most frequently heard in the churches often relate to divine supremacy (Lord of lords, King of kings, King of Glory),[34] power (mighty Name of Jesus, Mighty God, all-powerful), or with reference to patriarchs from the past (Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Meanwhile, Hebrew or Greek names often draw upon insider knowledge of God, whereby parishioners cry out, "Jehovah God," "Jehovah Jireh," or "Abba Father" to show intimacy. Other ascriptions carry allusions to God's eternality (like "Alpha and Omega" or "Everlasting God") and thus offer continuity with traditional titles such as "Aged One" or "Ancient" to move backward in time for the purpose of moving forward.[35] Below I list one example from a historic church in Kenya. The supplicant cries out,

> Father, we exalt your name, a name above all other names, redeemer we lift you, we cleanse you, we come in your presence to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, see us through, really, God, in the name of Jesus we exalt you, cleanse our hands in [the] name of Jesus, we love you, we need you, my Father, my God, we uplift you high, thank you for your coming in your splendor, we glorify you, we honor you, glorify yourself, you never share your glory with anyone. Lift us to your glory; we appreciate you, no one is like you, you enabled us to see another day, meet our needs, you know them, you know us well, you know our thoughts, we worship you. We pray all this in Jesus' name.

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[33] See the work of Gregory F. Barz, *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music of Tanzania* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2003).

[34] The repetition of a name heightens its strength or significance; thus, people frequently say "Lord of Lords," or "King of Kings," "Master of Masters," or "Priest of Priest."

[35] John Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976).

In this prayer, the supplicant moves in and out of divine attributes, referring to God as father, redeemer, my God, and Jesus, and then applies these titles to human needs. Parishioners come to God ("we come in your presence") so that God would carry them to his presence ("Lift us to your glory"). By exalting his attributes ("We want to acknowledge your power and majesty") or appealing to his universality ("Mighty Father, Jesus who is, was, and will be"), people expect to see change in their everyday existence ("meet our needs, you know them well, you know us well").

Songs and choir performances continue many of these themes, lavishing God with praise for the purpose of interacting with the object of praise. People sing: "How excellent is your Name, O Lord;" "Lord, you reign;" *Wacheni Mungu aitwe Mungu* (Let God be known as God); or, *Hakuna mungu kama wewe … nimetumbea kotekote, numetafuta kotekote, nimezunguka kotekote, hakuna na hatakuwepo* (There is no God like Him. I have walked or travelled in places searching and have gone around, but have never seen one like you). These lyrics (and the corresponding motions) elevate God for the purposes of making Him more accessible to human needs. By "lifting up" the divine, they position God as relevant to the circumstances of everyday life.

Finally, many of the songs focus upon God's power, singing: "The Lion of Judah has given us power, has given us power, hallelujah day by day;" *Anaweza, anaweza Bwana* (He is able, The Lord is able); *Yesu ni Ivia Ilumu* (Jesus is the strong stone) (Kikamba); or, *Mungu, unaweza, mkono wako ni mkuu sana* (God you are able, your arm is very great). In prayers, parishioners shout ascriptions to the divine's "powerful," "mighty," or monarchial nature, referring to Him as "King of kings," "Lord of lords," and "Almighty God." All of this underscores the importance of power within African cosmology. Since God is the source of all power, humans tap His power in order to grow. Allan Anderson comments, "To Africans, our life, or very existence is inextricably tied up with our power. To live is to have power; to be sick or to die is to have less of it."[36] Hence, while congregants feast upon an assortment of divine titles, the most conspicuous relate to articulations of power, by which parishioners sing, pray, or dance in order to participate with God's nature.

From "Praise Poetry" to Development:

We must now pause to reflect upon the viability of "praise poetry" for development matters. Do the names of God or "praise poetry" direct people to the streets, *shambas* (agricultural land), and other public spaces? Certainly, the material above suggests that African Christianity boasts abundant resources to traverse with God's attributes into socio-economic, or socio-political domains. The question is, does doxology make any difference beyond

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[36] Allan Anderson, "Pentecostal Pneumatology and African Power Concepts: Continuity or Change?" *Missionalia* 19 (1): 1990: 65-74; pp. 68-9.

the walls of the church? The ubiquity of "development committees" in churches throughout the continent suggests that they take such things seriously. Most congregations have ministries to orphans, widows, and other marginalized members of their communities, moving from worship into public realities. Meanwhile, their implicit theology proceeds from spiritual matters to material affairs with ample imaginative energies, while ritualized in embodied practices such as dance. Yet very few congregations delve into politics, despite rampant corruption in the regions. Paul Gifford contends that African Christianity has become co-opted by the neo-patrimonial system of governance by which rulers and the elite strive to keep the people subservient through a wide range of bribes, threats, and other coercive means.[37] Yet Gifford never unpacks the theology of the churches, other than to say that it lacks a prophetic nature and has become co-opted by the neo-patrimonial state.

Perhaps one concern lies with how churches envision God. Hierarchical conceptions within African cosmology suggest that elders or different authorities have more power by virtue of being closer to the source of power.[38] Nearness to the divine (whether spirits, ancestors, or God) aligns the rulers with the sacred, thus making it nearly impossible for anyone to argue against them.[39] The second concern relates with how parishioners view God's power. We may question whether congregants' focus on God as "King," along with His "powerful" and "mighty" nature may also contribute to the problem. Might kingship establish (and sanction) a standard by which political authorities share a similar status to God, similar to the argument expressed earlier by Moltmann?

Much has to do with a moral ontology of power. Is power a good, creational thing emanating from God's nature that all people share? Or does power become localized in specific humans with a tendency to prioritize their self-interests over others? For African Christianity to better tap these resources, human power needs to be based upon the self-giving love of the Triune God and the sacrificial *kenosis* of Jesus Christ. Likewise, more energy needs to be given to nurturing stronger connections between God's power and world construction. The heritage of Western missions left an ambiguous

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[37] See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); or *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (2009); See also Gregg Okesson, "'Drinking *Chai* with a Sociologist': Review Article for *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, by Paul Gifford," *Transformation*, 29:1 (Jan 2012), pp. 15-29.

[38] See Ruth Lucier, "Dynamics of Hierarchy in African Thought," *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 24:1 (1989): pp. 29-40.

[39] I argue elsewhere that such a "sacralized" status also affects their humanity, making it hard for clergy to work for the humanization of their communities; see G. Okesson, "Are Pastors Human? Sociological and Theological Implications for Ministerial Identity in Africa," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 25:2 (2008): pp. 19-39.

legacy of emphasizing both spirituality and materiality, but often without the resources to move nimbly between the two. Emmanuel Katongole bemoans how "spiritual" in Africa often takes the form of something like a time capsule, with "the latent capacity of cultural changes held in religious storage to emerge over time when circumstances are propitious."[40] However, this article has suggested that African Christianity has all the resources within its doxology to overcome these divides. Development activity needs to build upon the kind of imaginative "praise poetry" taking place in the churches for engaging the world.

Conclusion

There can be no question that doxology in the churches feasts upon a rich assortment of power and kingship images. The task for the churches is to convert "praise poetry" into stories, narratives, and underlying social imaginaries that underwrite social, economic, and political structures on the continent, making it a performed text. The one thing the continent has in rich abundance is praise, built upon dynamic, multifaceted views of God's nature, and ritualized through embodied practices such as dance. The churches need to tap their robust conceptions of God, moving with doxology out into the streets, where development work takes place.

In a similar way to how Yahweh calls Israel into existence, God's character continues to serve as the primary resource for social construction. Within a world where the religious domain has been carefully partitioned from ostensibly "secular" affairs of life, or where development scholars hesitate to move into theological categories, African Christianity offers hope. Within the churches, the names of God directly pertain to human affairs. Parishioners construct "praise poetry" for navigating through the travails of life. As God is "lifted up" He becomes more accessible to human need. Admittedly, many of these forms remain undeveloped. But African Christianity has the opportunity to underscore the importance of "God" for the world. In the churches, we find a compelling case study for exploring important linkages between doxology and development.

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[40] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, p. 35.

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Knut Holter

Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa

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Holter's *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* opens a window into the world of African Old Testament scholarship for typical westerners such as myself who have had little to no exposure to such work. He invites us to view Africa through two texts, a pair of glasses as it were. One lens is the story of Moses marrying the Cushite (Numbers 12) and the other lens is Jeremiah's question, "Can a Cushite change his skin …" (Jeremiah 13:23). Historically in the West, the prevailing attitude, either consciously or unconsciously, was that Moses "married down" and Jeremiah's rhetorical question assumes a "no" with an implicit rejection of black skin. Holter emphatically shows that within the context of the Old Testament itself, Moses' Cushite was beautiful in comparison to Miriam's snow-white leprosy, and that there is no reason at all why a Cushite should change his skin. With this set of lenses, Holter opens up to us African Old Testament scholarship in its own context, addressing its own concerns.

But what is the context of African Old Testament scholarship? Certainly it is an ecclesial context, a context that the West has largely abandoned since the Enlightenment (p. 12). For Africa, her ecclesial context has both positive and negative aspects. Positively, Old Testament scholarship has expanded with the dramatic growth of the church in the 20th Century. Negatively, the missionary movement injected colonialism into the culture, a colonialism that African scholars have been trying to extricate themselves from. Holter's book chronicles this distinctly African endeavor.

First of all, Holter describes how the Old Testament had been used in Africa to "interpret" Africa (Chapter 2). Originally, this was a negative enterprise in that the Old Testament became a "tool," so to speak, of the

colonists who sought vindication for their presence in Africa; they considered themselves the Israelites, and the indigenous population the Canaanites. However, Holter provides examples of contemporary African exegetes who utilize the Old Testament in their quest to understand post-colonial Africa. He categorizes these scholars under four heads: Inculturation, Liberation, Reconstruction, and Translation.

Inculturation is a term that is used to explore the mutual interaction between a certain culture and the Old Testament. Examples include scholars who compare Levitical and Nigerian (Ibibio) sacrifice, Old Testament prophetism and certain Bantu prophetical movements, Old Testament cosmology and the contemporary Kenyan ecological crisis, and Old Testament burial practices with Malagasy rites such as *famadihana* (turning of the dead). The hypothesis is that there is a fundamental mutuality between the Old Testament and African cultures so as to show how the Old Testament naturally speaks into and illuminates African culture. But Inculturation, it seems, can degenerate into a romantic longing for pre-colonial village "ideal" that no longer exists, at least not in the pristine form of the past.

Liberation refers to the use of the Old Testament texts for the purpose of undermining oppressive social and economic structures in play today in Africa. Holter cites South African scholar Itumeleng Mosala who has come to the conclusion that most of what we have in the Old Testament comes from the perspective of the ancient Israelite ruling class, and must be viewed with suspicion. Positively, he sees parallels with the struggles of the oppressed in biblical times with the contemporary African scene that work to expose oppressive systems.

The third category is "Reconstruction," a term "used to describe a theology or hermeneutics … that aims to contribute to the social reconstruction of post-colonial, post-apartheid and post-cold war Africa" (p. 26). The leading proponent of this perspective is the Kenyan Jesse N. K. Mugambi, who encourages Africa to go beyond "inculturation" and "liberation" in search of a new paradigm for the future. He proposes Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls to Moses and liberation, for it is now time for Africans to mobilize their resources and take into their own hands the reconstruction of their fallen infrastructures. Holter's last category is that of Translation. Much work is being done in translating the Old Testament into tribal languages and into critical analysis of this process so as to produce translations that are true to the Hebrew text but also sensitive to African cultures.

Musing over the above categories of text speaking into context, Holter concludes chapter two with three questions. First is the ethical question of whether this process is even "good"? So much of what has happened since the Europeans came with their Bibles is bad, and this raises the question of whether the texts are good for Africa. What are the ethical implications of one's hermeneutic? Second, to what academic discipline does this process

text and context belong, African studies or Old Testament studies? Finally, there is the question of whether it is possible to discern a chronological development of Old Testament scholarship in the African context. Holter agrees with Justin Ukpong (Nigeria) who outlines this development in three stages: 1) early reactive phase (1930s-1970s) which legitimatized African religion through comparative studies, 2) reactive-proactive phase (1970s-1990s) "which more clearly made use of the African context as a resource for biblical interpretation," and 3) proactive phase (1990s) "which makes the African context the explicit subject of biblical interpretation" (p. 33). This outline requires the further question of whether Old Testament studies can be done apart from context at all, whether it is the higher critical western context or the African context.

In chapter three Holter reverses the perspective of chapter two by placing the Old Testament as the object of investigation by Africans (seeing the text through African eyes), rather than placing Africa as the object of investigation by the text (seeing Africa through the lens of the text, p. 39). This perspective is relatively new, for it has only been recently that the academic community would even considered that Africa had something to contribute to biblical studies, with exceptions of W. R. Smith and J. G. Frazer (p. 36f.). Contemporary examples include Aloo O. Mojola who makes use of a Chagga (Tanzania) purification ritual to shed light on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), and Johnson M. Kimuhu who demonstrates how Kikuyu dietary laws can help us understand Leviticus 11. Various scholars have examined Hebrew Wisdom literature in light of African proverbs (Laurent Naré, Madipoane Masenya, and Lechion Peter Kimilike). Anastsia Boniface-Malle demonstrates how Tanzanian lament songs and prayers illuminate the laments of the Psalter. Holter concludes the chapter by stating that this perspective of seeing the text through African eyes "…seems less exposed to ideologically and politically biased interpretations…" (p. 50) from the colonial era, but is susceptible to questionable methodology "…based on [the scholar's] own memory or on rather unsystematic claims" (p. 51).

The most interesting part of the book is chapter four where Holter traces "Africa" in the Old Testament. (Of course the term "Africa" is problematic in that it is a modern cartographic and political idea that was foreign to ancient times.) Statistically, Egypt is referred to 680 times, and Cush (located between first and sixth cataracts of the Nile) 56 times, dominating biblical geographical references, but Put (Libya? Somalia?), Lubim (Libya?) and Pathros (Upper Egypt?) are most probably located in Africa. In a nutshell, the western world tends to be fascinated with Egypt, associating it more with the Middle East, and to marginalize Cush and with it all of black Africa. David Tuesday Adamo and Philip Lokel argue that if these biblical references are studied in their ancient contexts, we find that Africa naturally fits into the ancient biblical history from the very beginning. The truth about Egypt is that it was a "…

bridge - of people, goods, and cultural influence - between her southern and eastern neighbors in Old Testament times" (p. 80).

The last chapter concludes with a re-visit of the three stages of the development of the three stages of African Old Testament scholarship discussed above in chapter 2 with an emphasis on the "breakthrough" of the 1980s and 90s. This breakthrough is characterized by growth in educational institutions, dissertations, and publishing. There are many challenges, but Holter claims that "the general attitude among African scholars is not to reject traditional (that is western) Old Testament scholarship, but rather to enter this 'global' guild and participate in its scholarly discourse, conscious though, about its traditionally non-African contextuality" (p. 109).

It is obvious that Holter is intimate with Africa, its history, and its scholarship in the field of Old Testament. He incorporates a vast amount of material ranging across the whole spectrum of ecclesial affiliation throughout the countries and cultures of Africa. The book therefore is not written from a specifically evangelical point of view. Though short, the book is dense and not an easy read. However, he performs an invaluable, and perhaps a unique, service in bringing Africa to the attention of the traditionally western discipline of Old Testament scholarship.

If theological colleges, universities and specialists in the Old Testament can find a copy of this book (it is out of print and not yet among the publisher's digital publications) it would be a useful addition to their library.

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