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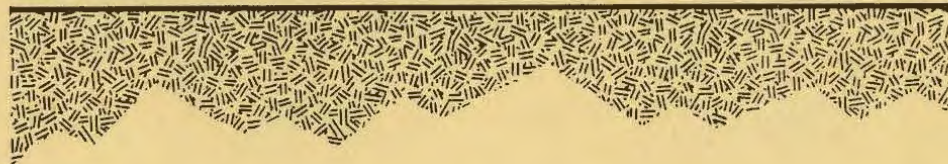
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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Tite Tiénou, from Burkina Faso, is currently professor of theology and missiology at Alliance Theological Seminary in the United States. Dr Tiénou has a masters from the Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Vaux-sur-Seine in Paris, and a PhD in intercultural studies from Fuller Theological Seminary in USA. He has been chairman of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) since 1981. Dr Tiénou has authored numerous articles on African theology and contextualization. Last year Africa Christian Press of Ghana issued a revised 2nd edition of his book, *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa*.

Dr Ernst Wendland has been an associate consultant with the United Bible Societies in Zambia since 1977, and a lecturer at the Lutheran Bible Seminary in Lusaka since 1968. He holds an MA in linguistics, and a PhD in African languages and literature, both from the University of Wisconsin, USA. His most recent publication is *Bridging the Gap: African Traditional Religion and Bible Translation* (New York: UBS, 1990), which he co-edited.

Dr Victor Babajide Cole, from Nigeria, is currently a lecturer in Christian education at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya. Previously he was deputy provost of the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary in Nigeria. Dr Cole holds a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a PhD in curricular theory from Michigan State University, USA. Dr Cole's study on "Concepts of Pastoral Leadership in Africa" appeared earlier in AJET 9.2 (1990) pp. 3-12.

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WHICH WAY FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY: WESTERNISATION OR INDIGENOUS AUTHENTICITY?

Tite Tiénou

Introduction

Christianity is alive and well in Africa – at least in that section of the continent called Black Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa. One even detects a note of triumphalism on the part of some who write on the present and the future of Christianity in Africa. They prognosticate a generally Christian Africa by the next century.[1]

Justification of Inquiry

The present study is motivated by the belief that African Christianity is currently experiencing the same crisis which is sweeping across the continent. It is a crisis of identity. While recognising that the world's peoples seem to have embarked on a new quest for their identities (as evidenced by the rise of ethnic nationalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union), in Africa the problem of identity is particularly acute. Edem Kodjo has observed that, of all the continents of our planet, Africa is the one "which is on the quest for its identity and which inquires about its future" in a pathetic way (1985: 89).[2] It is well-known that the question of identity for Africans is often posed in terms of an alternative between westernisation and authentic Africanness. Christianity usually comes under vitriolic attack for having promoted the cultural and religious alienation of Africans. Christians, especially in countries evangelised in the wake of European penetration, are repeatedly challenged to choose between westernisation or a revival of African cultures, as if these were the only choices possible. Too many people simply assume that "the most important cultural conflict occurring in Africa is between Western civilisation and indigenous forces" (Mazrui, 1986a: 21). Mazrui's axiom must be scrutinised on its merits by all interested in Africa. For African Christians it demands a response.

Statement of Thesis

I submit that the most appropriate response to the question whether African Christianity's choice is between westernisation and indigenous authenticity should be two-fold. First, the validity of Mazrui's axiomatic statement must be questioned. Secondly, as it will be argued, African Christianity is doomed in the long term if it allows itself to be imprisoned either in westernisation or in indigenous cultures and religions. Both of these roads lead to irrelevance. The former will make Christianity irrelevant through foreignness, and the latter will cause it to be superfluous and thereby irrelevant. Consequently the way forward for African Christianity lies in its ability to provide a thorough-going critique both of westernisation and of cultural authenticity, while developing creative solutions to the continent's staggering and multi-faceted problems.

I propose that we examine the question before us first by looking at the lingering effects of a missiological tradition which equated Europe and the West with Christianity and civilisation, and which 'missionised' peoples (especially Africans) with the lack of both. This will then lead us to an evaluation of the claim that in Africa the "ancestral is authentic" (Mazrui, 1986a: 295).

Ideas Die Hard

I realise that one must be careful not to identify the modern missionary movement too closely with European colonialism and the western expansionist spirit.[3] But on the other hand one can certainly not paint missionaries *en bloc* as defenders of African cultural particularisms either. In reality, missionary approaches to African cultures included "toleration, translation, assimilation, Christianisation, acculturation and incorporation" (Kaplan, 1986: 167).

The ethnocentrism and cultural arrogance of Western missionaries is not the most important link between them and other Europeans and Westerners, particularly the colonialists. Rather, I wish to point to the direct epistemological foundation of both missions and colonialism as evidenced in the literature,[4] in order to show why westernisation and Christianity are often viewed in Africa as two sides of the same coin.

When one looks for an epistemological linkage between missions and colonialism, one should examine the literature on mission theory and strategy. It is here that one finds that both colonial doctrine and Christian rationale for mission involve "a sense of mission, of spreading a nation's vision of society and culture to an alien, subjected people" (Beidelman, 1982: 4). Indeed it is undeniable that much missiological strategy, as evidenced in the literature, was (and is?) based on the "obvious" differences between Christian Westerners and "barbarous pagans." Recall, for instance, William Carey's description of the unevangelised peoples of his day:

> Four hundred and twenty millions ... are still in pagan darkness
> .... They have no written language, consequently no Bible, and are
> led by the most childish customs and traditions . . . . They are in
> ·general poor, barbarous, naked pagans, as destitute of civilisation as
> they are of true religion (Carey, 1792: 62-63).

Even if Carey did believe that "they appear to be as capable of knowledge as
we are" (ibid.), he accepted the prevailing notions of his day. No surprise here,
and I do not mean to denigrate the great Carey. Something else is at stake. It
is this: Carey and other eighteenth and nineteenth century visionaries of
missions set the tone for recruiting missionaries on the basis of pity for poor
savages living in situations of material, moral and spiritual decay. As hard to
believe as it may seem, the foregoing ideas are still being propagated by some
missiologists today, especially in regard to Africa.

J. Herbert Kane, one of the senior figures of recent missiology in the United
States, is a clear example that the evaluative terms of the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries linger on. The fourth edition of his *Understanding Chris-
tian Missions* (1986), a book widely used by North American evangelicals, is
instructive on this point. He sees Africans moving away from animism, "which
has nothing to offer to the educated person" (ibid.: 214). Moreover, in the
seven factors which, according to him, explain the growth of Christianity in
Africa, we note the following:

> (i) "Colonialism ... was a blessing in disguise in Africa." The prestige
> of the colonial officials "rubbed off on the missionaries for they too
> belonged to the white race."

> (ii) Missionaries in Africa had more power than they would have had
> in their own countries because of the African "tribal" social structure
> which required blind obedience to "chiefs."

> (iii) Since Africa had no religious systems, missionaries encountered
> no resistance. "Africa is the heartland of animism and the people
> there knew nothing else until the coming of Islam and Christianity."
> Animism, Kane says, cannot stand up to the insights of Western
> learning.

> (iv) "The missionary was held in high esteem" because "he was
> regarded as belonging to a superior race" (ibid. 219-221).

One can be forgiven if, after reading Kane, one concludes that for him
Christianity and the White man's civilisation were identical. Onward, then,
Christianise, colonise and civilise! I know that Kane was not an expert on
Africa. Yet, the fact that his publishers let his assertions about the continent
stand for twelve printings is evidence enough that ideas do indeed die hard!

Whether we like it or not, the similarity between the Carey-Kane missiological tradition and the mythology of colonialism is disturbing. In both cases, one begins with the assumption that the world is divided into camps, generally two: Europe/West depicted as white, civilised, rational and Christian; and the rest of the world (particularly Africa) viewed as non-white, primitive, irrational and pagan. This binary division of the world does not disappear when non-Europeans and non-Westerners become missionisers. They do, of course, abandon the racial and/or colour distinctions; but they still tend to associate redemption of the non-Christian world with its "improvement" or advancement. A case in point is the history of the African-Americans' involvement in missions to Africa.

These evaluative concepts, taken as facts, serve as the foundation for what may be called the bulldozer ethos of both western missions and colonialism in Africa. Like a bulldozer, missions tended to level other traditions so that the construction workers might erect buildings in "international style" on the new sites.

Historically, of course, and long before the rise of European imperialism, Christian missionising has sought to convert "pagans" from idol worship to that of the only true and living God (cf. 1 Thess 1:9). The legitimacy of desiring conversion is not questioned here. Rather, the matter under scrutiny is the means by which this conversion was achieved. Many participants in the modern missionary movement seem to have accepted Ninian Smart's depiction of the religious world of the so-called small-scale peoples as a jungle where the many trees represent various gods and spirits. With this assumption in their minds, they promote Christianity in such a way that "the jungle is leveled, so that One Tree can be planted, that Tree which represents the One God" (Smart, 1983: 57). When the levelling is done by people who are convinced that western ways and Christianity are identical, it has a net result of portraying the Christian God as a Euro-American tribal deity.

This is how Eugene Hillman highlights the Euro-American captivity of Christianity: in Africa it is presented in a "dazzling garb of foreign wealth and power . . . [making it appear] as a superior tribal religion" (1980: 347). It should be no surprise, then, that Africans, novelists, playwrights, politicians, academicians and even churchmen saw missions as a form of western imperialism.[5]

Curiously enough, even as Africa was going through a period of major political changes in the early 1960s, some mission theoreticians were openly advocating westernisation as a prerequisite for authentic Christianity. L. Elders, for example, argued that Christianity cannot subsist in a fully developed form unless it is rooted in a civilisation which has "the same essential characteristics as western Christian civilization" (1962: 5-6). Fortunately, such opinions are now clearly in the minority. Nevertheless, they are part of the history of missions in Africa and their widespread acceptance in the not-too-distant past

reminds us that resistance to westernisation will always call us, African Christians, to ask: which way should we go? Should we propagate westernisation (of which we are accused) or should we join the "freedom fighters" in their cultural and religious resistance to westernisation?

The Slogan of Resistance: The "Ancestral is Authentic"

Contrary to what J. Herbert Kane affirms, Africans from the start were never convinced of the superiority of the White man or of his ways. Like any people would, Africans fought the foreign intruders. The process of resistance is documented in studies such as Nazi Boni's *Histoire synthetique de l'Afrique resistante* (1971) and P. M. Mutibwa's *African Heritage and the new Africa* (1977). The record shows that they were vanquished and European rule was established in most of the continent. But the fact remains that resistance to westernisation is not a new phenomenon in Africa.

And as European colonialism continued to entrench itself on the continent, Africans began noticing glaring contradictions in its programme. For example, the perceived that the goal of westernisation could only lead to alienation. For, as the Bambara proverb says, "Even if a log remains in a river for one hundred years, it will not become a crocodile." The French colonial philosophy of assimilation, with its intention of making the Africans into "French people with a black skin" only succeeded in creating resentment in those who internalised much of French culture (see L. S. Senghor, 1988: 22-23, 137). Similarly, the British policy also created a situation of conflict between cultures (see J. Brooke, 1987: A4). In a sense, cultural and religious resistance to westernisation in Africa is based on the double realisation that complete westernisation is impossible and that structural changes (that is, changes at the level of material culture) need not entail the rejection of the souls of our cultures. But how can we recover our cultural identity?

The solution proposed by Ali Mazrui, and others, is simple and winsome. First, let us realise that "the ancestors of Africa are angry" and that they have "pronounced the curse of cultural sabotage" (Mazrui, 1986a 11). Secondly, let us reject the foreign influence called westernisation and believe that the "ancestral is authentic" (ibid.: 211, 295). These are the arguments behind the attempts to revive African traditional cultures and religions. They have had a measure of success because, as some claim, "since independence in many areas there has been a great resurgence and renaissance in African Traditional Religion" (Onwurah, 1987: 190).

We should be careful not to misunderstand Mazrui and those who reject westernisation. They are not calling for a return to pre- colonial African cultures. Indeed, Mazrui clearly asserts that "contemporary Africa cannot be understood simply by reference to its history" (1990: 137). Rather they advocate the development of modernity without westernisation. As Mazrui

puts it, the two imperatives for Africa's redemption are "looking inward towards Africa's ancestors . . . [and] looking outwards towards the wider world" (Mazrui, 1986a: 295). Elsewhere Mazrui makes the case for what may be called the Yoruba model of the triple cultural heritage, where the indigenous culture absorbs the foreign ones: "Yoruba culture has absorbed both Westernization and Islam — and still insisted on the supremacy of the indigenous" (Mazrui, 1986b: 14). Such then is the meaning of the axiom: the ancestral is authentic. It is a call for cultural (and religious) synthesis grounded in Africa's past. How acceptable is this to African Christians?

African Christians are generally not opposed to reconciling themselves with their cultural traditions. They are not the Trojan horses of westernisation. Many of them seek to preserve their cultures. The real question is: what exactly does the Yoruba model of the triple heritage mean? Is it possible to keep one's indigenous culture triumphant and, say, be fully Christian?

We note further that Mazrui's call for a synthesis between the three major cultural forces present in the continent (Islam, Western Christianity and indigenous culture) is not entirely new. Mazrui's "triple heritage" or "trinity of cultures" is actually a revival of Kwame Nkrumah's ideas contained in his book *Consciencism* (1970; see especially 78-106, chap. 4). Mazrui seems to have departed only slightly from Nkrumah who argued that materialism was the basis from which African traditional society would "digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements" (ibid.: 79). Mazrui, for his part, argues against both materialism and westernisation and views indigenous culture with its religious ethos as the best remedy to these corrosive ingredients.

Before we consider the Christian response to Mazrui's triple heritage, we do well to pause and ask: is the ancestral *the* authentic? I agree with L. Keita who has taken issue with the position that only cultural traits which are considered "traditional within Africa society are regarded as authentically African" (1987: 92). In that sense the ancestral cannot be accepted as *the* authentic, except in that it provides the general vantage point fro our present outlook on life. Even ordinary Africans realise that one's ability to change will enhance one's future. For, as a proverb has it, "if the rhythm of the drum changes, the dancer must change his dance step as well." That is the reason why

> the idea of a triple cultural heritage as it relates to contemporary Africa is a trivial one since there is no modern society of any importance whose sociological structure is not the result of the fusion of technical and cultural inputs from alien sources" (Keita, 1987: 92).

Armed with such rebuttals, we are now ready to address ourselves to the opening question: which way for African Christianity? Will it be westernisation or indigenous authenticity?

In the discussion so far, I have shown that we should resist such attempts to oversimplification. African Christianity must choose neither westernisation nor indigenous authenticity. Africans, like other peoples, must realise that the era for slogans is past, and African Christians must realise that "the first freedom is the right to be different" (Ki-Zerbo, 1989: 11).

In particular, I am calling African Christians, especially the Protestants among them, to live by the Reformation ideals of allegiance to God alone as he has revealed himself through Jesus Christ and Scripture. We cannot accept any historical manifestation of the Christian faith as normative. We recognise no centre of the Christian faith except Christ himself. We should therefore continue to resist westernisation which disguises itself as Christianity.

And as African Christians exert their right to be different, they should also have the courage to stand firmly for the fact that their allegiance to "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" will necessarily entail a distancing from some elements of indigenous cultures. Rejecting aspects of the traditional heritage certainly does not in itself make them un- African, any more than those Africans who propose to live by the triple heritage are thereby less African. Modern Africa may to varying degrees affirm its heritage, but (wittingly or unwittingly) this is always a selective affirmation; no modern African can or does endorse the traditional heritage *en toto*. Too much has changed. If modern Africans have a "right to be different" in relation to the West, they also have such a right with respect to Africa's traditional culture. And so do African Christians. If choosing to become a Christian necessarily involves detaching oneself in some respects from one's traditional culture and religion, that is a legitimately African stance to take in modern Africa. Otherwise, why bother to change at all?

Conclusion

Discussion on the relationship between westernisation, modernity, Christianity and indigenous authenticity will no doubt continue in Africa. This is so because our continent has experienced modernity and Christianity as part of the package called "the colonial situation", whereby a minority of occupants managed to change the minds of a majority and made them doubt their own humanity. African Christians have a contribution to make by refusing to be trapped in the sterile debate which argues for either westernisation or indigenous authenticity. How? By focusing the discussion on Africa's current problems and opportunities as it faces the future.

In Africa the debate on modernity is often viewed as an examination of Africa's present in light of Europe's past and present (Mushete 1989: 6). We need to change that and examine Africa's present in light of its own past (both near and distant), with a view to the continent's future. Whereas advocates of indigenous authenticity argue for Africa's transformation without abandoning

her ancestors and gods, African Christians seek Africa's transformation on the basis of commitment to God, maker of all things and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This commitment strengthens them in their resolve to assume an essential role as part of a vigorous movement for the continent's moral, material and spiritual redemption. With other Africans, African Christians are proud of accomplishments in Africa's past: in that sense, African Christians are fully and authentically African. African Christians focus on the continent's future where Jesus Christ, the hope of the world, will bring peace, justice and love. Beginning now.

ENDNOTES

[1]The name of David Barrett has become linked to the prediction that Africa will become generally Christian by the year AD 2000. It is instructive to note that, as far back as 1956, Roland Oliver, calling attention to the geometrical progression of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1912, conjectured: "If things were to go at the same rate, there would be no pagans left in Africa after the year 1992" (*How Christian is Africa?* London: The Highway Press, 1956, p. 8).

[2]A sampling of the recent literature shows that Edem Kodjo is not alone in his assessment of the African predicament. See, for example, Kwame Bediako "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions" in *Sharing Jesus in the Two-Thirds World*, V. Samuel and C. Sugden, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 87-88; Mubabinge Bilolo "African Religion Face to Face with the Challenge of Christianity and Techno-Science" *Inter-Culture* xvi.1, Cah. 78 (1983) pp. 16-31; Robert J. Cummings "Africa between the Ages" *African Studies Review* 29.3 (1986) pp. 1-25; Ali A. Mazrui *The Africans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1986) pp. 11-12, 21, 295; Constantine M. Mwikamba "A Search for an African Identity" *African Ecclesial Review* 31.2 (1988) pp. 91- 107; and Emeka Onwurah "Remaking of African Tradi-tional Religions under the Influence of Modernity" *Journal of Dharma* 12 (1987) pp. 180-91.

[3]I agree with Lamin Sanneh's assessment that the missionaries' emphasis on translating Scripture into vernacular languages "undercuts the alleged con-nection often drawn between missions and colonialism" and that "missionaries in the field have helped to promote indigenous self-awareness as a counterface to Western cultural importation" ("Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex" *The Christian Century* 104.11 [1987] pp. 331-32; see also his "Plura-lism and Christian Commitment" *Theology Today* 45.1 [1988] pp. 21-33). While we should heed Sanneh's corrective to the one- sided vilification of missions, we must not completely whitewash the western missionary enter-prise. That would be irresponsible since there is too much evidence to the contrary. Also, René Maunier, in his *Sociologie Coloniale* (T. I., p. 85), argues

that the main effect of colonisation is to provide the colonised people with a sense of identity and unity which, in turn, will be sued against the colonial masters. So even here Sanneh's position does not completely erase a link between missions and colonialism. Colonialism produces a counterforce against itself.

[4]We should not forget that some of the apologists for European colonial intervention argued for an important role which religious missions could fulfil in securing Europe's dominance in the subjugated lands. See for example Paul Leroy-Beaulieu *De la colonisation chez les peuples* (T. II, 5 ed. Paris: Guillaumin et cie, 1902) pp. 654, 656. The conscious witness of such apologists is incontrovertible.

[5]The disruptive nature of European colonialism and missions has long been a favourite of African novelists. One thinks of the writings of Nigerian Chinua Achebe, Cameroonian Mongo Beti, and Guinean Camara Laye in earlier times. More recently, the Ivorian J. M. Adiaffi has taken up the theme in his *La carte d'identité* (1980). See especially where the French *Commandant de Cercle*, Kakatika, declares that France, in her generosity, has bestowed everything on the Africans, things they were lacking: culture, art, science, technology, medicine, religion and language (p. 33). Note the similarity with religious language when Kakatika says that France has guided the Africans on their black path with her white light (ibid.). V. Y. Mudimbe of Zaire has done the most thoroughgoing theoretical critique of missions, colonialism and the social sciences from an African perspective in books such as *L'autre face du Royaume* (1974), *L'odeur du pére* (1982), and *The Invention of Africa* (1988). On the effects of colonialism on Africans, consult the work of Nigerian Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us* (1987) and *Decolonizing the African Mind* (1987).

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"WHO DO PEOPLE SAY I AM?" CONTEXTUALIZING CHRISTOLOGY IN AFRICA

Ernst Wendland

African Traditional Religion and Christianity

In 1 Corinthians 1:22, the Apostle Paul categorises all Christological heresy into two basic types:

> Jews demand miraculous signs,
> and Greeks look for wisdom (NIV).

One might expect that this wonder-wisdom dichotomy might not be quite as evident in Africa due to the relatively short history of Christianity on the continent. However, the Word of the Lord did not enter a theological vacuum in Africa. On the contrary, it immediately came into contact with long-established religious traditions. For most if not all Africans, the religious heritage forms an essential part – many would say, the heart and core – of their culture as it is expressed in the people's everyday existence. And this natural religion, which is so much a part of life that it needs no written 'scripture', displays the familiar universal affinity for all sorts of wondrous signs and wise sayings.

As in the case of the Jewish legalists of Christ's time, so also in Africa the component of 'wisdom' is directed towards the past and the revered teachings of the fathers. These ancestors, however, are believed to continue to exert their conservative influence as personal spirits in various ways on the present generation, particularly by inflicting fitting punishments upon those who violate the established customs, values, mores, and norms of society. The 'wonders', too, as performed by a diverse assortment of religious specialists (from the witch-finder to the rain-caller), are very practically oriented – so much so that they are not really regarded as miracles at all. Indeed, there is no sharp dividing line between what the Westerner would regard as the natural and supernatural, the sacred and secular, or the physical and spiritual realms. In essence then, one's existence becomes a continual struggle for survival, for life, in the local sense of a dynamic personal potency or vital-force which may be augmented or diminished from day to day depending on the quality of one's specific relationship to a complex association of beings in the hierarchy of interpersonal power within the cosmos.

It is into this highly 'spiritualised' setting that Christianity has intruded, and it has been contextualized from the beginning due to the very nature of traditional African religion. Although African religion is, like any natural human philosophy, implicitly antithetical to the Gospel, it is more accommodative and innovative than most. To some extent this may be due to the relatively large number of correspondences, both formal and functional, real and apparent, that exist between African religion and the Bible, especially the Old Testament narrative accounts. Thus there is a ready-made framework of belief and behaviour into which traditional elements can be fitted (or vice-versa).

In certain important respects, then, the 'Christianity' that results from this encounter is often syncretistic to varying degrees, depending on the situation (time, place, sociocultural circumstances, etc.) On the one hand, we find 'Christianised tradition', where certain compatible elements of biblical faith and practice (largely the latter) are superimposed upon a fundamentally traditional base — in this case mainly the ancestral belief system. This is characteristic of the many indigenous independent churches which are springing up all over the continent. The deficient Christology in this instance is not due to *too much* of the wrong kind of education (i.e. rationalistic relativism — as is the case for many prominent theologians in Africa), but to *too little* of the right instruction, that is, in the very basics of Scriptural truth.

At the other end of the spectrum of syncretism we have 'traditionalised Christianity', where the core of the biblical faith is present, at least in the official doctrinal position of the church body concerned. However, it is under continual pressure from the advocates of tradition who wish to compromise to an ever greater extent with the 'wisdom' of customary beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and the 'wonders' of various measures of 'life'-enhancement on the other. All such contextualizing procedures are intended to make Christ more 'meaningful' to the present day, especially in matters pertaining to protection, healing, and deliverance from oppression. These latter concerns form the basis for the following survey of various instances of 'over-contextualized' Christology in contemporary African religious thought (cf. Kraft, 1989: 131). We will focus upon some particularly important examples of this tendency, namely, a triad of setting-specific, anthropological analogies which portray Christ as 'Ancestor', as 'Witchdoctor', and as 'Liberator' (or 'Freedom Fighter'). The three fall along a gradient ranging from the most traditional and spiritualised (the first) to the most modern and secularised (the third).

The Illusion of Analogy

The problem with comparative analogies, whether used for description or exposition, is that they are only partial. They manifest some important similarities of form, function, or significance with respect to their referent, but they do not correspond in every detail. And often we even find some noteworthy

contradictory characteristics between the topic and its image which are tolerable only because they do not happen to be in focus in a given context. For this reason analogies can often be misunderstood, namely when people perceive a relationship between the topic and image that is not really there, or one which was not intended by the one making the analogy. A more serious problem occurs when the analogy is not recognised at all, and people either interpret it literally or begin to identify the image and the topic. In either case, the result is confusion, whether it is recognised or not, and a serious breakdown in understanding and/or communication ensues.

This is also true to a certain extent with some of the analogies that are applied to Christ in the Scriptures. Our Lord himself found that at times his own parables, metaphors, and similes were either not perceived (e.g. by the Jewish masses, cf. "the Bread from heaven", (Jn. 6:41) or they were misinterpreted (e.g. by the disciples, cf. his Kingship, Ac. 1:6). This was due of course to the erroneous preconceived notions that most people, including those who were most closely associated with him, had about the promised divine Messiah. Thus his oft-used Messianic titles, which were analogical in a traditional formulaic sense, usually failed to make the correct, if any, impression upon listeners, i.e. Son of God, stressing his deity, and Son of Man, stressing his humanity. Christ's earthly demeanour and outward circumstances were so contrary to their material hopes and aspirations that their minds simply could not bridge the gap between conventional expectation and apparent reality. While closely conforming to popular opinion and religious tradition, their faith was so far removed from the essential Messianic implication of the Old Testament writings (as viewed from the perspective of the New Testament) that only the miracle of Pentecost could restore it to its proper foundation. And the same thing occurs nowadays when overly-contextualized theologies transform the Christ of Scripture into what amounts to a glorified, but essentially human (even if heroic), 'salvation' cult figure.

There is certainly a communicative risk then whenever the language of theology, whether directly biblical or derived, employs familiar comparisons to present divine revelation. The worldly resemblance becomes the reality, as it were, and this in turn begins to serve in place of its spiritual referent as the primary object of people's faith and concern. However, this threat of conceptual transposition did not prevent either Christ or the apostolic writers (e.g. Hebrews in particular) from using analogies and figurative language in their religious discourse. Such a manner of speaking was, and still is, an effective — sometimes the only — way to convey infinite, eternal truths to finite and mortal minds.

Thus it is only to be expected that the process of theological analogising would be extended also to missiological contextualization in a cross-cultural setting The obvious purpose is to present the basics of the Gospel message in linguistic terms that people can immediately grasp and in cognitive categories which

their ethnic background has already in certain respects prepared them to receive. Tiénou rightly calls attention to the possible danger here, that is, in adopting a "mnemic hermeneutics" — a theology of "remembrance" based upon cultural correspondences:

> Mnemic hermeneutics is allowing one's own natural analogy to become the crucial key in understanding Scripture. In this case, the African understanding . . . is read back into Scripture without prior questioning. This in turn makes the biblical message go beyond its intended meaning (Tiénou, 1984: 160).

Alternatively, we might add, the "intended meaning" of the Scriptures is actually *replaced* by an alien sense, one which issues from the world-view of a present-day sociocultural environment. Two crucial questions must therefore be raised with regard to the essential endeavour to contextualize the Gospel. How far can one legitimately go in such an exercise of comparative adaptation? And secondly, how is one able to lessen the danger of possible misunderstanding, misapplication, and hence also a mistaken approach to the development of Christian theology? The three African case-studies to follow may be instructive in this respect.

Our "Advocate with the Father": Christ — the Great Ancestral Mediator

The ancestors, especially the recently departed or 'living- dead' who remain in the conscious memory of their survivors, play an indispensable role in the ontology and phenomenology of African traditional religion (for details, see Wendland, 1987: chapter 3). One's personal ancestral spirit (*mzimu*-Chewa) serves to preserve life, mainly by protecting its ward from the attacks of witches and sorcerers, in return for periodic rites of sacred 'remembrance' in the form of prayers, offerings, and appellation (i.e. giving its name to a child or initiate). The same thing occurs on a communal level with regard to prominent family, clan, and tribal spirits. Where such recognition is not forthcoming or is rendered in an unsatisfactory manner, however, the offended ancestor may chastise the negligent person(s) by allowing some sickness or accident to befall. Similar punitive measures will also be effected if one violates traditional custom, especially the important taboos which govern interpersonal relations (e.g. a case of incest).

Thus when calamity strikes, whether on an individual or corporate scale (e.g. a drought or plague), then upon the advice of a diviner or an obvious act of revelation from the spirits (e.g. a dream, omen, or case of possession), people will seek to make amends through the stipulated sacrifices of appeasement and expiation. Similarly, when earthly blessings have been received (e.g. a new child or a good harvest), the appropriate offerings of thanksgiving have to be made. Though it is said that in such venerative ritual action the spirits act only as 'mediators' to present their descendants' supplications or oblations (as the

case may be) to the High God (e.g. *Leza* [Tonga], *Mulungu* [Chewa], *Kalunga* [Luvale]), it often appears that the latter is only a remote divine figurehead and that the real worship is directed towards his semi-deified representatives. These intermediaries have for all practical purposes supplanted the Supreme Being in the hearts and lives of his people. A danger of similar displacement exists then in Christian theology when the ancestral analogy is contextually applied to Christ.

The case for viewing Christ as our great 'Ancestor' is eloquently presented by Moyo as follows:

> Since religion is an integral part of the African's culture, a rejection of one's [traditional] family religious practices can only lead to a crisis of identity, . . . since one's identity can only be expressed through relationships in the community of the living and the living-dead, and through them with the Supreme Being. An African community without the living-dead, the ancestor shades, is deprived of life in the present, in the future, and of a life with God . . . . [Therefore], until Christ is brought right into our fellowship with the living-dead, most of our African Christians will continue to suffer from . . . 'religious schizophrenia' . . . (Moyo, 1988: 82-83).

It may be true to say that such an accommodation to the religious world view of African peoples makes it easier for them to 'accept' Christ. But what sort of 'Christ' are they thus led to put their trust in? Yes, he is their special brother (relative) and can serve as their mediator before God; he can also protect them from physical and mystical (i.e. sorcerous) danger; he can even suffer and die for them as the supreme example of selfless self-giving on behalf of the community at large. But the predominant emphasis in the performance of such a role remains firmly fixed upon worldly cares and concerns and thus upon Christ's humanity. One does not need *God* to function in this capacity, only a divinely endowed, wonder- working ancestor, indeed, the greatest of these. And certainly it is not too difficult to read (wrongly), and to derive proof from, the gospels (excepting John perhaps) in a way that would support such a reductionistic and syncretistic perspective.

The problem when Christ is cast in the role of the traditional African intermediary is, as Harold Turner observes, that he "is far removed from the Christian concept of the mediator, who not only provides communication but also removes the barriers of *sin and guilt* that separate men from God" (Sawyerr, 1987: 18; emphasis added). Along these same lines, Appiah-Kubi adds that "the African does not see the mediatory functions of Christ as being that of pleading for him before God for the forgiveness of sin" (1987: 71). The difficulty here is related to that of having an inadequate, indigenised conception of both sin and salvation (see below). In keeping with such a perspective, some of the most central teachings of Scripture may be temporalised, even

trivialised, to reflect a mere current, situational relevance. For example, the theology of the cross may be likened to the authority associated with royal staffs and stools as symbols of the "presence of the ever-living ancestors" (Dickson, 1987: 91).

A rationalistic approach guided by traditional notions regarding the ancestral spirits is also able to solve the (admittedly) difficult problem concerning the eternal fate of those who died having no knowledge of Jesus Christ:

> We believe that the death of Christ is for the whole world and no one either living or dead is outside the scope of the merits of Christ's death. Thus both Christians and non- Christians receive salvation through Christ's death and are linked with him through the sacrament which he himself instituted . . . . The African ancestors could also be included in the Communion of Saints in this way (Fasholé-Luke, 1974: 157).

Western liberal universalism has thus assumed African garb! The point here is not to make a blanket condemnation of all non- Christian ancestors; it is simply to assert that New Testament Christianity cannot be applied, retroactively as it were, to their present state and eternal relationship with God. Such problems arise when certain biblical metaphors (e.g. the 'body of Christ') or doctrinal concepts (e.g. the 'communion of saints') are detached from their original theological and cultural moorings and reinterpreted within a local setting, one which may have quite different presuppositions and implications.

Such an overly anthropocentric perspective on Christ's mission is often accompanied by a similar opinion regarding his person. As in the ancient Adoptionistic heresy (cf. Brown, 1984: 93-98), one discerns in many current theological writings emanating from Africa a disturbing tendency to view Christ almost exclusively in terms of his humanity, while his work on behalf of mankind is correspondingly reduced to its 'practical' applicability to the present-day and this-world:

> He is the authentic man bearing the *imagio Dei*. It was as a man that he achieved sinlessness and thus came to be seen as divine . . . . The authority he exhibited over nature and sickness was his by virtue of his perfected humanity (Pobee, 1979: 86).

It is no doubt for this reason that scholars such as Appiah-Kubi come to the pessimistic conclusion that: "[the] major titles of Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Man have no relevance to traditional African concepts . . . . This does not fit into the thought-form of African peoples" (Appiah-Kubi, 1987: 78).

The biblical ignorance of common Christian laypersons in this matter might possibly be excused, but not the rationalistic skepticism of those who should

have been their instructors. Besides, one wonders whether there might not be more relevance to at least some of these 'praise-names' (if well translated) than the authorities may have recognised—for example, in the notion of 'anointing' (i.e. Messiah), which is practised in the royal induction ceremonies of some Central African peoples.

One of the most extensive and scholarly expositions of the ancestor analogy as applied to Christ has been produced by the Tanzanian Catholic theologian, Charles Nyamiti. In a book entitled, *Christ as Our Ancestor* (1984), Nyamiti makes an admirable effort to give a systematic presentation of "Christology from an African perspective." However, this work is unfortunately marred in many respects due to the influence of conceptual interference from the tradition of his own church, as is apparent already in the following statement from the book's preface:

> Theological inquiry revealed that not only African ancestors who died in a state of friendship with God but all the saints in heaven and purgatory can be regarded as our true Christian ancestors (ibid.: 7).

Nyamiti bases his Christological analogy on five major points of similarity which emerge from his definition of a 'brother- ancestor':

> A brother-ancestor is [a] a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and [b] of whom he is a mediator to God, [c] archetype of behaviour and with whom—[d] thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death—[e] he is entitled to have regular sacred communication (ibid.: 23).

While one recognises here certain general correspondences with the biblical teaching of Christ, to attempt (as Nyamiti does) to force these into a systematic theological framework can only result in some examples of the worst excesses of contextualization. For instance, in his discussion of "our regular sacred communion with [Christ]", the author makes an application that is not only contra-Scriptural, but is also patently anthropocentric in the extreme, a manifestation of universal *do ut des* natural religion:

> By punishing those who fail in this regard, Christ's action is similar to that of African ancestors who punish their negligent descendants. On the other hand the Saviour rewards plentifully His faithful members. Here again His attitude corresponds to that of the African ancestors who are supposed to reward their faithful descendants (ibid.: 39).

Quotations such as these clearly indicate that what some theologians regard as "a true 'praeparatio evangelica'" (ibid.: 70), namely key religious concepts from the traditional belief system, have been analogically pushed to the point where they blur and sometimes completely blot out the uncompromising Christology of the Scriptures. Indeed, "if we do not let the biblical paradigm

control our interpretation, then the danger of distortion of the biblical message is great" (Tiénou, 1984: 159).

"Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness"

The title of our second case-study in Christological contextualization is taken from a book by the same name, written by a Catholic White Father who has been teaching for many years in East Africa (Shorter, 1985). In this extensive study the author seeks to apply biblical principles to the widespread physical, social, psychological, emotional, and spiritual ills of contemporary Africa through the analogy of Christ as a *Sing'anga* par excellence. It is difficult to find a suitable one word equivalent for the term *sing'anga* [Chewa, but the root is common to many Bantu languages], for the function of this important traditional specialist in medicine, psychiatry, and religion varies according to the particular situation in which he happens to be carrying out his practice.

The translation 'witchdoctor' is somewhat misleading since it suggests to many that this individual is himself guilty of the evil of 'witchcraft'. On the contrary, a *sing'anga* is the person that most people, including many Christians, turn to when they believe that they are being, or have been, attacked by witches or sorcerers (the distinction between these two nefarious beings is blurred, but the first is essentially a mystical cannibal, a necrophile, while the sorcerer is someone who is thought to physically harm or rob others through magical means). Some *bang'anga* (pl) also operate as healers by utilising traditionally sanctioned concoctions of roots, herbs, leaves, bark, and other natural substances. Most 'doctors' are also diviners (of various types), for they rely on such mantic means to make their diagnoses. Certain *bang'anga* specialise in predictive prophecy, especially those who are controlled by an ancestral spirit of possession, and others in rain-calling or witch-finding activities according to the need. It is obvious that the role of *ung'anga* ('doctor-ship') is an extremely vital one in African society, whether in a traditional or modern environment, particularly as it relates to the all- embracing indigenous religious system (cf. Wendland, 1992).

It is tempting to forge an analogical relationship between the pivotal personages of Christianity and traditional religion, that is, between Christ and the *sing'anga* respectively. This is what Shorter has attempted to do in his book, and in certain respects he is successful, especially in dealing with the psychospiritual aspects of witchcraft beliefs, which he characterises as "a form of auto-salvation" (Shorter, 1985: 96). Particularly helpful are his suggestions concerning the power of prayer (ibid.: 135-6) and a "sacramental approach" to such problems (ibid.: chapter 16), though the latter is flawed by an overly rigid Catholic perspective. African Christians need to realise their *complete* dependence upon Christ, the holistic Healer, to overcome their deep-seated fears of the ubiquitous evil spiritual forces that populate their traditional universe (cf. Imasogie, 1983: 79-81). However, they should not do this at the

expense of a belief in the objective personal reality of Satan, as Shorter seems to suggest (Shorter, 1985: 114-5), or by coming to the disturbing conclusion that "evil remains always a mystery, but ultimately it is located in God as ultimate cause" (ibid.: 116). Such thinking is neither biblical (cf. Job 34:10; Ps. 5:4; Prov. 8:13) nor traditional African!

There are a number of other problems pertaining to biblical Christology in Shorter's presentation with respect to both the source and the receptor contexts. With regard to the former, he tends to place undue emphasis on the use and function of miracles in Christ's ministry. Indeed, it is going too far to claim that:

> Jesus of Nazareth certainly conformed to the type of itinerant healer-exorcist of his own day in rural Palestine, . . . [and thus we] see him imitating the 'mumbo- jumbo' of contemporary healers (ibid.: 10).

There were certain correspondences in procedure, of course, but Christ's primary role was that of *rabbi*, or 'teacher', and this was how he was usually addressed formally, even though "he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Mt. 7:29, NIV). To be sure, his healing ministry was important, for it served to bear witness and lend credence to his Messianic claim and saving purpose, but this was always kept secondary to his primarily prophetic and priestly mission. However, there is perhaps an ulterior motive in Shorter for this emphasis on miraculous signs because he returns to the subject much later in the book in an ingenious effort to validate miracles of healing in the Catholic tradition and at the same time to discount those alleged to occur in the practice of African traditional religion:

> Although they are associated with holy places where miracles once happened and may happen again, [Catholic] pilgrimages are not a pragmatic or manipulative process like the affliction rituals of contemporary Africa, the spirit mediumship and therapeutic communities of people like Maji-ya-Soda [i.e. a famous spirit-medium living in southwestern Tanzania] (ibid.: 217).

Do we not have here a case of the pot calling the kettle black?

Despite its limitations, Shorter's provocative study does in general retain a proper focus upon both the spiritual aspect of the human predicament and the divinity of Christ in this contextualized use of the traditional-healer analogy. The same cannot always be said, however, of some contemporary African theologians who have written on the subject. Pobee, for example, discusses the Lord's healing signs in strongly Adoptionistic terms:

> Miracles were a sign of God's power with Jesus to heal and save . . . .
> Jesus was in a perpetual state of holiness, perpetually ensouled with
> God so much so that the divine power was like a continuously flowing

electric power in him, unlike the traditional healer, who has the
occasional experience of it .... He is superior to the other ancestors
by virtue of being closest to God and as God (Pobee, 1979: 87, 93, 94).

One has to wonder why the author chose to add "and as God" in the final line
since it is clear that he views Christ as some sort of glorified, or deified,
medicine-man. He differs essentially only in degree, that is, in the "continu-
ously flowing" quantity of his therapeutic power, not really in kind from human
healers, except that he was "ensouled", or possessed, by God rather than some
ancestral spirit.

Then, as far as the significance of Christ's healing work is concerned, there are
many scholars who depreciate such activity as having a bearing on purely
physical matters and worldly affairs. Appiah-Kubi, for example, calls attention
to the traditional African belief in the ever-present reality of mystical, but
humanly manipulatable, evil forces which are at the disposal of those bent on
enhancing themselves at the expense of others. These witches and sorcerers,
not Satan, are the cause of all misfortune, disease, and finally death, while
Christ is the ultimate, but not necessarily the only, solution:

> Jesus Christ is thus conceived by many African Christians as the great
> physician, healer and victor over worldly powers *par excellence*. To
> many, Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly
> (Appiah-Kubi, 1987: 76).

The problem for many in Africa is that this "abundant life" has not yet been
fully or even partially realised according to expectation. The great obstacle
here has been widely identified as "the missionary churches" who "have not
been able to meet the deep-seated needs of the African convert in health as
did the traditional religion" (ibid.). Unflatteringly describing the members of
such churches as "EuroSemitic bastards," Appiah-Kubi looks instead to the
example of indigenous African Christian churches for guidance in how to
correct the alleged errors of the past. The "missionary-dominated" churches,
on the other hand, mislead the people theologically as well as practically, for:

> Salvation ... to the African is a matter of here and now. Eschatology
> as understood in the western world does not form part of the African
> thought-form (ibid.: 76).

One wonders whether biblical soteriology or eschatology is any more compat-
ible with a secular Western world-view than it is with a traditional African one.
In any case, although the author supports a holistic approach, that is, one
involving the "total personal healing of spiritual, psychological and physical
man" (ibid. 78), he gives the first dimension almost no consideration at all in
his rush to direct people's attention to Jesus as "the power by which they can
overcome their daily worries, concerns and fears." And he goes on to exhort
them (in language typical of an African 'Christian' prophet):

> Bring all your worries of unemployment, poverty, witch-troubles, ill-luck, enemy, barrenness, sorrow, blindness, etc. Jesus is ready to save [sic] all who come to Him in belief and faith. *We treat, and God or Jesus heals* (ibid.).

Here we have additional evidence of a theologically liberal overemphasis upon the humanity of Christ and his predominantly worldly mission, a focus which definitely encourages a syncretistic approach to religion in general. Accordingly, indigenous African faith and praxis is accepted on equal terms with the Scriptures, and the resultant hodge-podge of belief manifests a serious detraction from biblical Christology in particular.

Jesus Christ, Liberator of the Oppressed Masses

> We declare that in Jesus Christ, God has rescued us as a race of man from all the principalities and powers of the African world . . . . And so we have hope: a hope that we wish to share with our people — those tormented by poverty, racism, tribalism, economic, political and elitist exploitation. We are convinced that God is on their side in the struggle. In Jesus Christ, he has taken his place among the poor, the oppressed, the powerless — the black people of Africa.

So proclaims the "Kinshasa Declaration," a communique released by the All Africa Conference of Churches at the close of their Executive Committee Meeting of October 28-31, 1971. That was two decades ago, and the call has not abated. If anything, it has grown stronger and more strident over the years as theologians and politicians alike try to capitalise on the analogy of Christ as a modern-day saviour for the common man, reincarnated so to speak within the new ideological mythology which has developed in his name.

There is no real traditional antecedent for the notion of 'Liberator', such as we found in the case of Christ as 'Ancestor' or 'Doctor-Healer'. To an outsider, the paramount chief of a tribe or kingdom-nation might seem at first admirably suited to fit the situation. But generally speaking, at least for Central Africa, hereditary rulers were either not known for their outstanding military prowess or they were actually oppressors of their people, rather than liberators. Furthermore, in a traditional setting the chief tended to be more of a religious than a political functionary (cf. Kofi Busia, cited by Pobee, 1979: 94). Thus as the 'high-priest' of his people, an African chief falls more into the framework of the 'ancestor' analogy discussed above. He represented his subjects as a mediator — some claiming for themselves (semi-) divine status in this regard — one who stood within the human community, yet at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of mystical power, just below the great ancestors.

It has become fashionable for religious scholars who want their voice to be heard nowadays to castigate the impotence and irrelevance of what they term

"Western theology" in Africa. The present state of affairs is naturally blamed on the "very pietistic" early missionaries who paid too much attention to "the salvation of the soul, creating very negative attitudes toward the world, and advocating no involvement in socioeconomic and political issues" (Moyo, 1988: 87). "Missionary" or "Western" doctrine is a disparaging epithet that is readily ascribed to any church which proclaims a more conservative, evangelically-oriented and biblically-based brand of Christianity than they are comfortable or even conversant with. Obviously, familiar teachings, which in Johannine fashion emphasise the other-worldliness of the believer's present life as he prepares for the life to come, cannot grab the headlines of the national press, nor invite interviews on public television and radio, nor generate offers of sponsorship for the publication of a book.

Mbiti, for example, criticises the "false spirituality" of those who seek, as he puts it, "to escape into the Christian world of the hereafter at the expense of being a Christian in the here and now" (1971: 60). Rather, the Church in Africa should actively address the pressing social, political, and economic concerns of its people, which he enumerates as follows:

> National Survival (liberation, revolution, African culture, racism), Community survival (tribe, clan, age groups, drought, famine, pestilence, calamities), and Personal survival (health, healing, slums, housing, school, fees, clothes, witchcraft, magic, and sorcery) (cited by Gehman, 1987: 61).

Could anything of earthly concern possibly be missing from this list? If so, one may simply tack it on, for curing social sickness and public deprivation is seen as the primary business of Christ and his Church today. The root spiritual cause of all these problems, namely human depravity and failure in relation to a sovereign righteous God, rarely enters into the discussion at all. And if it does, it is treated in such vague and general—almost apologetic—terms that the eternally vital Word about sin and grace, Law and Gospel, is hardly audible due to the din raised by seemingly urgent contemporary concerns. "Doing theology", therefore, becomes a matter of setting project priorities and formulating corresponding proposals for action. Nowadays many people simply take it for granted that it is primarily to temporal problems and issues that the church should be devoting its resources of time, talents, and treasure.

Furthermore, if it is accepted that "Salvation as a theological concept cannot be complete without Liberation as a socio-political concept" (Mugambi, cited by Tutu, 1987: 49), then there is little doubt where the overriding emphasis will be placed. Advocates fail to recognise, however, that the latter is an endless, impossible task, for: "Liberation here must be understood in its totality, as removal of all that which keeps the African in bondage, all that makes him less than God intended him to be" (Appiah-Kubi, 1987: 74). It is this sort of all-inclusive assumption, in turn, which makes way for crassly materialistic and

millennialistic notions that transform the heavenly hope into a worldly wonderland:

> The experience of salvation is a sign that with the coming of Jesus, suffering and death are eliminated, and these will have no room in the Kingdom of God established here on earth (ibid.: 76).

A valid question that could, and should, be raised here is this: what need of Christ at all? How does he fit into this scheme of things — in this re-drawn picture of the role and function of the church which bears his name? It would certainly seem that for many, not least those in leadership positions, the adverse present secular situation has superseded the original motivating spiritual condition as defined by the Scriptures — an instance of 'de-contextualization', as it were. Of course it is not right to divorce the secular from the spiritual, but a definite and predominant commitment in favour of the latter concern needs to be maintained. However, this is what many supporters of radical contextualization in Africa and elsewhere have failed to do. For them the priority is reversed, and to such an extent that one has to wonder sometimes whether the spiritual dimension is even retained anymore.

This type of 'revolutionary' thinking is particularly prominent in so-called liberation theology, which is often identified with Roman Catholic priests of South America, but which has been proclaimed just about as long and hard by prominent Protestants of Southern Africa (where it is sometimes termed "Black Theology", cf. Tutu, 1987). In a 1980 address to the World Council of Churches for example, Rev. Canaàn Banana, at the time also a high ranking official in the government of Zimbabwe, pointed out what he (among many others) saw as the main problem with the conventional message of Christianity:

> The common understanding of Jesus and his message errs on the side of spirituality. Interpreters wish to keep clear of temporal connotations 'to preserve Jesus from becoming a political leader' . . . . The reality of the historical Jesus in the world must be accepted so that one discovers in him the plenitude promised to the poor, [for] 'the hungry he has filled with good things' (as summarised by Shedd, 1984: 221).

Another well-known spokesman for the liberation cause puts the position this way:

> Christians should be engaged in historical action. They should, to the best of their ability, be doing the will of God, i.e. liberating the oppressed . . . . Because Christ's liberation has come, total human liberation can no longer be denied . . . . Not only must a Christian ethic be a social ethic, it must be a decidedly *political* ethic . . . leading to the transformation of oppressing and inhuman structures . . . .

> Righteousness is that side of God's love which expresses itself
> through black liberation (Boesak, 1987: 131-134).

One must notice the lack of options or flexibility in the above quotation: the
categorical "must-should' approach is typical of such pseudo-religious pro-
nouncements. References to the New Testament Scriptures are also conspic-
uously absent in writings on liberation theology. This is inevitable, since Christ
never preached it. Instead he taught his followers to submit to what would
today be regarded as an oppressive military regime (Mt. 22:21). The Apostle
Paul is even more explicit on the subject (Rom. 13:1-7). Almost the only
passage that ever gets cited (monotonously so) is Luke 4:18-21, but then the
textual context is completely ignored, i.e. with its focus upon Christ's primary
spiritual mission of liberating people from the power of sin and Satan (e.g. Lk.
4:2-8, 23-27, 33-36, 41, 43).

The difficulty of identifying just exactly "Who is Christ?" for the African
Christian is summarised by Taylor in the following terms:

> Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white Man
> would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the
> Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of
> adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to
> appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what
> would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology
> to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognisable
> to the rest of the Church Universal? And if Africa offered him the
> praises and petitions of her total uninhibited humanity, would they be
> acceptable? (Waliggo ct al, 1986; 75).

If the "questions being asked" by Africans (or anyone else in the world) are
misinformed or wrongly motivated to begin with – if their concept of "redemp-
tion" or their picture of the Redeemer does not correspond to that of the
Bible – or if they seek to praise or petition him in their "uninhibited humanity"
without first being regenerated by the Spirit of God, then they are definitely
bound to be disappointed by the answers which they receive from the
Scriptures.

One tends to become less than optimistic about future developments within
the Christian Church in Africa, despite the strong outward evidence of its
rapid and extensive growth on the continent, when one hears leaders issue
statements as sympathetic to the traditional religious beliefs of the past and to
modern political philosophies of the present as the following:

> If we concede that the African Trinity [i.e. 'a Trinity of spirits: the
> Father, the Mother, and the Son'] implies the presence of Christ
> within African culture, one may say that salvation is a built-in concept
> there as well (Muzorewa, 1985: 85).

> Any outright rejection of violence is an untenable alternative for
> African Christians .... In accepting the *violence of the cross*, God, in
> Jesus Christ, sanctified violence into a redemptive instrument for
> bringing into being a fuller human life (Canon Burgess Carr, cited in
> Kato, 1973: 164).

It is indeed discouraging to observe how the supreme example of selfless
suffering and non-violence (cf. Is. 53) on the part of One who provides the *only*
way to salvation in heaven (Jn. 14:6-7) can be so casually and carnally trans-
formed into its polar opposite. What appears to be evident here is a case of
ideological inversion, motivated by a rationalistic theological bias and a cor-
responding preoccupation with current socio- political and economic condi-
tions.

Is it any wonder then that many Christians in Africa are perplexed — whether
as a result of the harsh living conditions which they are often forced to endure,
their own ignorance of the chief teachings of Scripture, or the misleading
instruction of leaders who have already facilitated the displacement of the
Christ of the Bible? As one foreign commentator characterises the situation:

> African churches have not yet developed a consensus about African
> theology. Instead . . . there is a major dispute on the most central
> question — namely, who is Christ in Africa and what is African Chris-
> tianity? (Professor Lee E. Snook, from a Religious News Service
> report quoted in *Christian News* 28:5 [29/1/90] 24).

The dilemma may be stated as follows — according to this same observer:

> Now who is Christ in that situation . . . ? Is Christ to be found in the
> religion of the white men who have all the political and economic
> power? Or is Christ among their African brothers who have taken up
> arms in a war of liberation? (ibid.).

With advisers like Professor Snook to rely on for guidance as to how to
contextualize the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Africa, is it at all surprising that
there is uncertainty and outright confusion in many quarters?

On the Christologizing of Context

In this study we have only been able to touch upon several of the important
issues that concern the contextualization of Christology in contemporary
Africa, particularly in relation to three analogies which have been commonly
used to present Christ to people in a more relevant and culturally meaningful
way (cf. the various studies in Carson, 1984, and Gilliland, 1989). We have seen
that, in the process, a proper balance has not always been maintained, and this
has often resulted in an 'over- contextualization' in the direction of the local

indigenous religion or a secular sociopolitical setting. We notice also a corresponding 'under-contextualization', or de-valuation, with respect to the original historical setting, namely, that delineated by the content and purpose of the Scriptures themselves. As Carson observes:

> To appeal to the demands of the interpreter's cultural context is legitimate, provided that the intent is to facilitate the understanding and proclamation of the Bible within that context, not to transfer the authority of the Bible to conceptions and mandates not demonstrably emerging from the horizon of understanding of the biblical writers themselves (Carson, 1984: 17-18).

As we have seen from the several examples cited, over- contextualization and under-contextualization may reinforce each other to place undue emphasis on the humanity of Christ at the expense of his deity. This inevitably leads to a reductionistic approach, which promotes syncretism in relation to traditional theology and promotes adoptionism in relation to biblical theology. The doctrinal distortion that results is clearly evident in the following quotation, taken from one of the leading advocates of African theology:

> These claims [i.e. about Christ's deity] have not been difficult to accept because the idea of Divinity being capable of taking 'possession' of a human being, . . . the coming of Divinity into the human person . . . to make it blossom to a higher level of sensitivity, . . . is not foreign. [African theology] accepts unequivocally that in the man of Nazareth can be found the fulfilment also of its teachings about man's relationship with Divinity and its hopes for humanity (Setiloane, 1986: 35).

The preceding manifests an obvious failure to recognise and enunciate the unique and unfathomable mystery of the incarnation, the God-Man Christ Jesus. In addition, we also observe the inability to distinguish correctly between the natural (but partial) knowledge of God, which is made available to all people through creation, their conscience, and the moral code established by their society on the one hand, and on the other hand the only sufficient and reliable revelation of the Word of God as inspired in the Holy Scriptures. This further results in an apparent total lack of appreciation for that crucial divine paradox which integrally links together the eternal and universal lordship of Christ with his mediatorial role as a suffering Servant and the spiritual Redeemer of all humanity.

As has been noted, some modern African scholars like to fix the blame for the supposedly backward spiritual state which they see around them upon the early colonialist missionaries and their "Western systematic, intellectual, arid and philosophical theology born out of the belief in 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die'" (Appiah-Kubi, 1987: 79). To be sure, these pioneers often did make

mistakes in their ministries in not contextualizing enough certain biblical forms, whether in preaching, teaching, organising, or administering. Many conservative church bodies are still paying the price of that failure to evaluate and utilise correctly the rich spiritual resources of African cultures.

But it may be argued, on the other hand, that the real source of the current problems in determining the relevance of Christianity on the continent is to be found rather in the subsequent generations of their colleagues who, from the ivory towers of European and American seminaries and university schools of religion, filled visiting African students with the liberal brand of Western theology, one characterised by an assortment of '- isms': humanism, rationalism, skepticism, secularism, and universalism.

Thus it comes as no surprise that one of the first African scholars to make a significant contribution to world Christian literature, John S. Mbiti, the "father" of African Theology (Gehman, 1987: 54), has this to say about some of the central teachings of Christianity:

> Thus, Gehenna is a christological symbol, the negation of incorporation into Christ . . . . In the Christian context it is a symbolic imagery and has no independent reality . . . . The New Testament is explicit that Jesus never promised us a heavenly utopia, but only His ownself and His own companionship both in Time and beyond, both in space and beyond . . . . The Scriptures emphasise a spiritual rather than a physical Resurrection body . . . . The N.T. is silent on whether or not physical death closes the door for the salvation of those who die *without or apart from Christ* . . . . One finds it almost impossible to imagine that their punishment [i.e. that of non-Christians] will last for all eternity in the same way that Redemption is for eternity . . . . The very being of God will so flood our separate beings that we will be resurrected into His own corporate and eternal being (Mbiti, 1971: 67, 89, 173, 175, 179).

With these ideas, Mbiti is simply reflecting the worst of equivocal (and un-biblical) Western theology, which in the twenty years since he set forth this position has remained the dominant voice in most of Christendom, especially through such ecumenical organisations as the World Council of Churches.

The continued theological sterility of much of Western liberal Christianity (along with all whom it happens to influence) is reflected in a recent cover story of the *U.S. News and World Report* entitled, "The Last Days of Jesus", where we read:

> The Gospel narratives are a mix of legend and fact that attempt to describe a historical and mystical encounter with one who called himself the Son of Man . . . . Historians and theologians . . . through

the centuries have sought to answer the compelling, central question
of the Passion: "Why did Jesus die?" (April 16, 1990, pp. 46,49).

As for the actual answer to this question, one cannot expect anything better
from such theologians today, whether in America or Africa, than Christ
himself received from Pontius Pilate: "What is truth?" (Jn. 18:38). Indeed,
where these fundamental Christian questions go unanswered, or are answered
wrongly, it is not really a more serious contextualization of Christianity that we
need to worry about achieving, but a more basic 'Christologizing' of context.
By that we mean a sustained, inclusive instruction in and appropriate applica-
tion of the simple Gospel message of Jesus Christ within the total sociocultural
situation in which and wherever it is being presented. And the divine Source
of such guidance is the same for contemporary disciples of Christ, no matter
what their culture, as it was for his first recruits — namely, the Spirit of truth
working through the Word (Jn. 14:26, 16:13).

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THE TRAINING OF LEADERS FOR THE MINISTRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Victor Cole

One of the critical issues facing the church in Africa today is a dearth of leadership. As calls are heard to train competent leaders for the church, some pertinent questions are in order: What is leadership? Can leaders be trained? How does one go about training leaders for the church? Specifically, what types of training will make leaders out of the trainees? Are church leaders exhibiting the same characteristics the world over, or is leadership culturally-defined? If culturally-defined, do our theological schools have the resources to train culturally-attuned leaders?

However, before addressing what church leadership looks like, it is useful first to attempt to define leadership.

Leadership Defined

For the purpose of this paper, three broadly encompassing views will be presented.

The Trait Approach

The most widely held view of leadership falls under the category called "trait approach." Lay people in general conceive of leadership in terms of traits the leader possesses. Researchers therefore have sought to identify the leader traits. The variables become so broad and diversified that many theorists and researchers had to abandon this approach.

What then is a "trait" view of leadership? This view defines the leader as one uniquely endowed with abilities to meet group needs. The leader is, therefore, one endowed with superior qualities that differentiate him/her from the followers. Proponents of this view include Bernard (1926). Leadership is then defined in terms of personality and character. This approach may be called a personal focus.

The Situationist Approach

When theorists and researchers became disillusioned with the trait approach, they started to define leadership in operational terms, especially for the purpose of measurement in research. The focus then shifted to leader behaviours that may constitute leadership. The situationist approach defines leadership as a function of needs existing within a given situation and consists of a relationship between the individual leader and the group in context-specific situations. This approach then does at least two things: first, it focuses on behaviours that may characterise a leader, and second, it acknowledges variations in leadership styles as demanded by given situations. Merton (1969) represents this point of view.

The situationist approach may be called an inter-personal focus in which, according to Merton, people comply in group activities because they want to, not because they have to. Leadership therefore grows out of the interaction process of the group.

The Personal-Situationist Approach

Some other theorists such as Westburgh (1931) stress two factors that are important to the concept of leadership. They are: 1) effective, intellectual and action traits of an individual, and 2) the specific conditions under which the individual operates. This point of view combines the personal and interpersonal relationships within specific contexts. For our purpose, we will adopt the personal-situationist approach. We will therefore attempt to propose a conceptual framework for understanding leadership, taking into account the personal-situationist approach. We shall call this framework a "leadership network."

Leadership Network
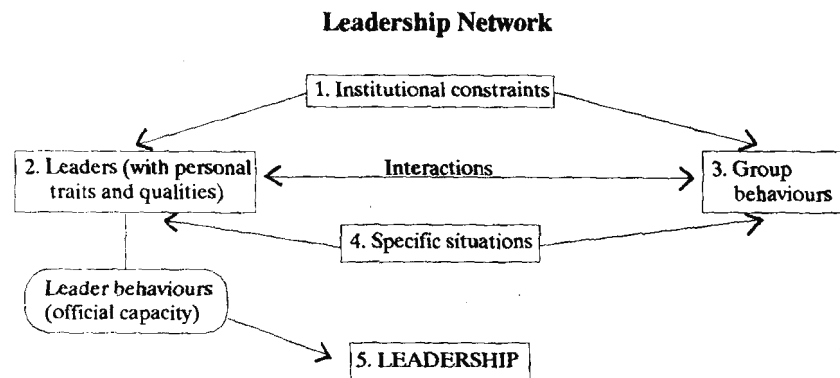
In the diagram above the assumption is that in any social group or organisation, whether secular or religious, the principles involved in this leadership network

will be the same. Items 1-4 used in the diagram do not imply a sequence. If anything the variables identified operate simultaneously to produce leadership as observable in the official behaviours of a leader.

The institutional constraints (1) include the norms, standards and values of an institution comprising individual members. These norms could be derived from unwritten tradition, bureaucratic rules and regulations, normatively codified documents such as a written Constitution, or the Bible, or a combination of at least two of these sources. These constraints impact on both group members and the identified leader in varying degrees.

The leader (2) has to meet certain laid down (written or unwritten) qualities demanded by the group, based on the constraints of the institution. These are qualities any group will be looking for in one who aspires to a leadership role. The potential leader then must possess the group-specified requirements or characteristics in form of personality traits, qualities or even credentials.

The group (3) need not necessarily be homogeneous. The word, "group" is here employed loosely. It could be diverse and scattered geographically. The group could also be in the form of "groups within a group". The model here set forth accommodates cases of spontaneously emerging, appointed or elected leaders. However, the rigour with which the group demands the specified qualities or traits in the potential leader will vary from case to case and from group to group.

The group and the leader engage, in varying degrees, in interpersonal interactions. The one has influence on the other's behaviours. Therefore a leader's style of leadership would be shaped by group behaviours, among other influences. The group behaviours — whether passive, active or indifferent, do contribute to observable leadership.

However, the resultant behaviours of the group and the leader are influenced by the demands of the particular, and specific situations (4). Situations tend to vary and as such are dynamic. A general but erroneous belief in the group is that situations are forced upon the leader and the group by uncontrollable and impersonal forces. The fact is, many times situations are manipulated by the leader or some members of a group. The effects of the institutional constraints, group behaviours and the demands of the context-specific situations all impact on the leader's behaviours. The resultant leader behaviours then constitute observable leadership (5).

Note that the behaviours that constitute leadership derive eventually from the leader (the connection from 2 to 5). Those who define leadership only as a function of group interactions will have to also make a connection from point 3 to 5, but that is not the view espoused here. To make the 3 to 5 connection will be to concede that leadership is a joint venture between the group and the

leader. One would then wonder, in that view, why the leader- group interaction does not result in leader-group behaviours!

As intimated above, this model of leadership is the same for any group or organisation. However, our concern is not global leadership, but context-specific leadership, namely, pastoral leadership. Within the church, the institutional constraints ought to come mainly from Biblical norms. Therefore, before one can begin to talk of the training of church leaders, one ought to cast the setting within a Biblical, normative perspective.

A Biblical Perspective of Church Leadership

The Bible seems to identify both personal characteristics as well as the situational dimensions of church leadership. The following are the concepts inherent in the Biblical description of the leader and leadership within the church.

Concepts Inherent in Church Leadership

Personal Characteristics. The Bible clearly sets forth personal requirements for aspirants to leadership positions. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 list among other qualities and requirements, the need for a candidate for leadership to be above reproach, a "one-woman man," temperate, respectable, not violent, managing his own home well, not a recent convert, and reputable before outsiders (i.e. unbelievers outside the church group). These are personal qualities that may serve as institutional constraints upon a leader.

Situational Dimensions. The Bible specifies the context in which the church leader operates. The leader operates in time- space relationship within the church group. The Pauline instructions to Timothy (1 Tim. 3) for appointing leaders for the church have their referent point in "the household of God." This is not a reference to buildings; rather "household" is a metaphor for "the people of God." Since people — believers — are in view, the implication then is the expectation of interpersonal relationships.

The situational dimensions also include behavioural indicators of leadership roles. We might identify four. First, the *kerygmatic/didactic* ministry of the church leader. The behaviours in leadership roles of a church leader include teaching and preaching, and public reading of Scripture (1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). The leader should also handle correctly the "Word of Truth"(2 Tim. 2), and should testify publicly of Jesus (2 Tim. 1). Second, the *counselling* ministry. The leader corrects, rebukes, encourages, counsels (2 Tim. 3), and admonishes members (1 Thess. 5). Third, the *pastoral* ministry. The leader protects his followers against error — using a shepherd metaphor — Acts 20; 1 Peter 5. The leader is deeply and emotionally concerned about the well-being of members, at times to the point of tears (Acts 20:19). The leader tends and feeds the "flock" — i.e. cares for and instructs (John 21:15-17). Fourth, the *service*

ministry of the leader. Undergirding the three ministries listed above — kerygmatic/didactic, counselling, and "pastoral" — is the concept of service or servanthood. Lording over members of the church is specifically forbidden of the leader (Mk. 9). The essence of Christian leadership is *diakonia* (Lk. 22). *Diakonia* (service) is not used here for the office of "deacon" as practised in certain Protestant circles, but used as a reference to service. The supreme example of Christ is cited. This service of the church leader must be done in humility (Mk. 9:33-37).

Official Dimension. Apart from the personal and situational dimensions mentioned above, the Bible acknowledges the official capacity in which an incumbent serves. For example, Paul instructs Timothy about the appointing leaders to the specific office of overseer. This "officialness" of the church leader's role is derived from the Jewish practice in the synagogues. For example, Jesus recognised in Matthew 23:1-2 that the Jewish leaders occupied an office. He talks of the Pharisees occupying "Moses' seat." This case is interesting for the concept of leadership in that it does not confuse leadership per se with good leadership. The tendency is to think only "good" leadership is leadership. In the case cited in Matthew 23, Jesus told the Jews to obey what the Pharisees command when they speak in their official capacity from the Torah, but not to do what they do! Apparently these leaders preached one thing and did another. What they said fell under their official capacity. What they did, they did in their own personal rights.

The implication of these Biblical perspectives for the training of leaders today is the need to account for the personal, situational and official variables when trainers of church leaders engage in their tasks. Later on we will try to identify the tasks of the trainers, but for now we must handle one other issue, namely ascension to church leadership from the Biblical perspective.

Ascension to a Leadership Position in the First Century Church

Our examples come from the Jewish Church of Jerusalem and the Gentiles/Hellenist Churches beyond Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that researchers such as Stogdill (1974) recognised that concepts of leadership are culturally defined. That is, people think of leadership expectations in terms of their cultural practices. It is of little wonder that the literature on leadership coming from the Western industrialised societies identifies leadership variables in bureaucratic terms. Most of the research that has been conducted has been in the military or the business world, using business executives and managers. Therefore, leadership roles and behaviours will differ from culture to culture. To the extent that two cultures are similar, by that much will the concepts agree on what a leader does.

In light of the above, it is interesting that the Bible, given in a definite, cultural and historical setting, does not prescribe a definitive organisational structure

for church practice everywhere. The Bible seems to allow for cultural diversities. However, suffice it to note that the New Testament practices of ascension to leadership roles within the church had local church emphases rather than a denominational one.

The Jewish Church of Jerusalem. At least three types of methods of ascension could be identified. The first is: rise to apostolic leadership following at least three years' internship of the disciples under Jesus' tutelage. The second is: recognition, or a seemingly spontaneous rise to leadership. This could be said of James "the brother of our Lord." The text is silent about how he rose to leadership status; one can only assume spontaneity. The third is: nomination and casting of lots. The case in point is that of Matthias (Acts 1) who filled the spot vacated by Judas Iscariot.

The Gentile-Hellenist Churches. The few recorded instances of ascension have to do with direct or indirect Apostolic involvement. First, we see direct Apostolic appointments made by Paul and Barnabas when they worked in the churches of South Galatia (Acts 14). Second are the cases of Apostolic legates doing the appointing under Apostolic directives. For example in Titus 1, Titus was given directives by Paul to appoint leaders in Crete. Also at Ephesus, Timothy was given Pauline directives on the appointing of leaders in the Church.

Basic Principles for Today. One can observe that the method for ascension to Church leadership positions in the first century involved appointments and selection/election. As to the agents in the ascension procedure, a "synergetic" principle was at work. There was a recognition of both the human and the Divine agents by the early Church.

The implication for the Church today is first to be able to say that the choice of leaders, by whatever culturally-relevant but Biblically tolerable means, has divine approval. This however is subjective, and so a personal matter. Today, human agents in the ascension of leaders to church office are not lacking; what is crucial is this subjective aspect.

The second implication is the allowance for cultural diversities. This writer assumes that the basic modes of ascension to leadership found in the New Testament Churches (direct Apostolic appointments, and Apostolic directives through legates) do not survive till today.

The third implication concerns trainers of leaders directly. For trainers to claim to be training leaders for the Church in theological institutions, one must ascertain whether the personal, situational, and official dimensions identified above are directly attended to in the curricula of theological institutions.

We have so far said that leadership is a function of personal qualities, group behaviours, and organisational constraints — all interacting within certain given contexts. For a context-specific leadership such as church leadership,

these interacting factors mentioned above have been demonstrated to be applicable, drawing the categories from Biblical norms to which many churches adhere. However, these Biblical norms allow for cultural diversities in organisational structures of the church.

It will be pertinent at this juncture to examine what theological institutions do or don't do in their attempts to train leadership for the church.

What Theological Institutions Do and Don't Do

Among other functions of theological institutions are four basic things.

Equip Candidates with Knowledge

All theological institutions will boast of dissemination of knowledge. Specifically, many equip their trainees with knowledge of the Bible. This function is a direct one. The curricula of many theological institutions bear testimony to this fact. Methods used in equipping candidates with knowledge include lectures, note taking, drills, etc.—vestiges from the Middle Ages scholastic practices. The effects of this impartation of knowledge include the quest for academic excellence. However, not without the "schooling effect." The schooling effect involves an emphasis on cognitive processes. This type of knowledge impartation potentially equips trainees for the didactic ministry required of church leaders. The schooling effect also involves emphases on credentials with prerequisites and requisites. How all these schooling effects are necessary to church leadership is however not clear.

Make Candidates into "Professionals"

This function of theological institutions is an indirect one. It falls under the "hidden curriculum." Professionalism as used here presupposes need for expertise knowledge, and a client-professional relationship. Professionals are the experts, while clients are those who depend on the experts' services. With "professionalism" comes elitism to the detriment of the Biblical roles of the members. What one observes today is a congregation sitting back to let the "professionals" who are paid for their services, do the job. Whereas Ephesians 4 stipulates that leaders of the church are "gifted people" or rather are "gifts" to the church, and they function in the equipping of the church members for the work of the ministry.

What one observes today is "professional" specialisations. There are counselling specialists trained by theological institutions, music specialists, Christian Education specialists, etc. Some of these specialisations may certainly equip the leader in certain pastoral ministries. However, these specialisations tend to train people for certain narrow aspects of the tasks essential for leadership

as outlined above. The pastor-leader role however, is meant to be a composite one.

Note also that there is a subtle difference between the "professionalism" mentioned here and the "officialness" discussed above. The church leader occupies an official capacity all right, but the type of "professionalism" here described is foreign to Biblical norms. There is room for cultural ingenuities, etc., but when the training offered narrows the equipping of potential leaders for leadership roles and limits the potential leaders, something is amiss.

Attempt to Train Men and Women of God

Many theological institutions have stipulated in their brochures their function in training "men and women of God." What is implied here is godly character. This aspect touches on the personal prerequisites for leadership listed above under the section on Biblical perspectives.

At best, theological institutions can only touch this area indirectly. It is a mere assumption that the type of information-oriented training we give candidates will somehow translate into godliness. Subject matter content only has indirect bearing on prayer, faith, truthfulness, patience, love, humility, etc. Research very well demonstrates that words and even statements of faith do not necessarily result in action. The Biblical demands on the personal requirements for leadership seem to hitherto elude curriculum planners of our theological institutions. Hence, one of the leading complaints expressed by lay members in the churches is the inability of many Seminary graduates to get along with people. Granted that attaining to these qualities in curriculum is a very tough task, one does not have to despair.

Claim to Train Leaders

One of the major and widely accepted notions of the function of theological institutions is that they train leaders. This is why people automatically look to theological institutions when they talk of the need for trained leaders within the Church.

The test of whether theological institutions train church leaders could lie in tracing where the graduates end up. Although some graduates do not end up in leadership roles within the church, many do. However, another test, which is in keeping with the thesis advanced here, is first to identify personal qualities and situational roles of church leadership as demanded by specific church situations, and second to check the institutions' curricula to see if they provide for these qualities. The qualities and behaviours of leadership within the church must be taught, modelled and simulated within the training pro- grammes of our theological institutions for one to claim that what goes on in the schools constitutes leadership training. The writer is inclined towards the second evaluative approach.

Ministerial Training in Cultural Perspectives: Relevance to Africa

We note right away that cultures are not static. Cultures interact and borrow values and ideas from one to the other. This borrowing is called acculturation. Therefore, when we state below the need for culturally-attuned training of leaders, we recognise the transitory nature of societies as they borrow from and imbibe other cultural values. The attempt at this point is to establish some basic and general principles salient to African cultures vis-a-vis training for church leadership. Ministerial training in Africa must take into account the following:

Local Cultural Concepts of Leadership

While Scripture should continue to be the standard of excellence, local cultural practices are allowable and encouraged. For instance, some generally valued concepts of leadership found in Africa include under personal qualities: age and seniority, marital status, respectability in the family and community, teachability, etc. Valued leader behaviours include: direction of group efforts in a consensual manner, moderation of opinions of group members, and the need of a leader to continually validate his right to leadership (See Fadipe, 1970). These local cultural concepts need to be taken into account in the selection of candidates for training, lest the theological schools in Africa train candidates who are culturally unacceptable.

Training Cost-Effectiveness

The ministerial form of training adopted in Africa is closely patterned after the Western style, hence the heavy emphasis placed on knowledge, credentials, etc. However, the cost of training along this Western line is enormous. When one puts this cost factor beside the fact that many trainees end up in other than church ministry, one realises the need for re-evaluation.

It has been pointed out above that part of the leader role includes the didactic ministry which presupposes a thorough knowledge of the Bible, the people and the socio-cultural needs. Theological institutions can and do train candidates in this role. However, what must not be assumed is that the present practice is the only way. We must realise that theological institutions as we know them today did not exist before the eighteenth century. What must also be taken into account is the cultural setting found in various African countries. Leadership in African traditional settings does not hinge solely on who knows the most, or who can recite the most. The knowledge emphasis is the overriding criterion of leadership as intimated directly or indirectly by our theological training. Can one therefore function as a church leader without ever stepping into the four walls of a theological institution? Our answer is yes. However, we also ask, can one serve effectively as a church leader without meeting the personal-situational demands set forth above? Maybe not.

Training Grounded in the Local Church Context

In the final analysis, we cannot afford to train leaders out of the context in which they will function. To this end, church-school relationships must be strengthened. Theological schools must not serve as ivory towers removed from the real day-to-day situations in the churches for which candidates are being trained. Theological schools in Africa should therefore serve as resource centres for the churches — finding ways to help answer questions raised in the churches.

Finally, emphasis should be placed on church-sponsored candidates for theological education. This is a crucial point. If the church contributes to the selection and training of a person, it will more likely value that person. Today, many who are unknown in the local churches come in for training, and when they graduate they expect to be placed in leadership roles in the churches. If the church and school work hand in hand, so that the church selects candidates in a healthy way and recommends them for training, an African distinctive would have been achieved. The churches will likely pick out and back those potential candidates who have either shown potential for leadership or have been serving in responsible roles within the church. This done, theological institutions will probably significantly rid themselves of the perennial problem of training local church rejects.

Conclusion

The training of leaders for the church must be conducted in light of the personal, situational and contextual demands of Biblical norms and the cultural dimensions. Trainers of potential leaders for the church cannot continue to assume that the status quo necessarily fulfils the leadership demands on candidates for leadership. Trainers also must not assume that training for leadership roles will necessarily be the same from culture to culture. Hence the need to focus on the training programme's culturally- relevant demands on potential leaders for the church. All of these pose as a challenge for theological educators towards achieving renewal in training for church leadership.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Integrative Theology:
Volume 1. Knowing Ultimate Reality and the Living God
by Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987)
394 pages; $19.95

Some people view theology books, especially systematic theologies, as an alternative to sleeping pills. To those who suffer from such a terrible misconception this book offers something new in it's methodology. Lewis and Demarest, both professors of systematic theology at Denver Seminary in the United States, have developed a new approach to studying theology. Gordon Lewis is the author of the well known book, *Decide for Yourself: A Theological Workbook*, and the conception of that small book is expanded and enriched in this volume.

This is the first volume of a projected three volumes series. I will first review the content of the book and then the methodology it uses. This initial volume covers the standard subjects of bibliology and theology proper. There are no unusual conclusions in these sections. The authors believe that general revelation is not salvific, and that special revelation was progressive but not bound by time, so that it speaks to all cultures and ages. They also hold that the Bible is verbally inspired and inerrant in all that it affirms. The second half of the book deals with the character of God, the Trinity and the providence of God. The chapter on the Trinity is exceptional for carefully defining the oneness of God and giving illustrations of oneness that included diversity, such as the nation Israel, the tabernacle and marriage. The authors believe that God has predestined some to salvation but they reject the view that others are predestined to eternal death. The reader would be advised, however, to have a good dictionary nearby, since words such as 'ectypal', 'aseity' or 'immanental' occur with regularity.

While the conclusions that the authors draw in each chapter are not revolutionary, their methodology is certainly unique. The first chapter of the book explains what they mean by 'integrative theology'. The three volumes are meant to draw together the disciplines of biblical theology, historical theology, apologetics and practical theology, and to apply them to each topic. The format for each chapter is as follows. First, the problem is identified and defined and its significance shown. Then various answers to the problem are

presented from historical theology and from views prevalent today, such as process theology or neo-orthodoxy. The third step is to examine the biblical evidence from Genesis to Revelation, and then to state an answer based upon the data of historical theology and biblical theology. This answer is then defended by interacting with contrasting viewpoints. And finally the answer is applied to life by showing its relevance in a variety of situations. Also included in each chapter are review questions and ministry projects which are intended to help apply what has been studied. Unfortunately these review questions and ministry projects are exactly the same for each chapter. It would be much more helpful to have specific questions and projects for each chapter.

These six steps constitute what the authors call the 'verificational' method of arriving at the truth. It differs from the inductive and deductive methods in that it presents several hypotheses from historical and contemporary theology and reviews the data to arrive at an answer. It does not presume to have a blank mind as it studies the data (as does the inductive method), nor does it begin with an assumed truth and study the data to prove or disprove it (as does the deductive method).

Lewis and Demarest admit that this approach to studying theology does have limitations. These three volumes will not replace systematic, biblical or historical theology books. It is impossible to draw together all of these disciplines and apply them in depth to each problem. Another disadvantage is that you must page through the book to find all of the authors' views on a particular topic. For example, to find what they say about the neo-orthodox view of Scripture you must read their summaries under revelation and under inspiration (which are two separate chapters), and then their conclusions in each chapter as they relate the biblical evidence to neo-orthodoxy. But this volume is certainly an excellent beginning and a model to consider both for future theology books and also for teaching theology.

But what value does it have for the African church? There are certainly enough theology books written by Western scholars, so that we cannot recommend it merely because it has a novel approach to presenting theology. Its value lies in displaying a *model* that African evangelicals may wish to emulate. The book's interaction with various viewpoints and theologies, while important and beneficial even here in Africa, functions in a decidedly Western milieu. What is needed is a book produced in similar fashion to this, but with discussion of African traditional religion, modern African thinking, Islam and the variety of cults in the African context. The attempt to help apply theology by means of questions and projects is excellent, but those questions and applications should be different for the situation here. For example, much more needs to be said about dealing with Muslims who deny the Trinity than this volume offers.

Having noted that, it should be understood that this book is worth the cost. Perhaps the systematic theology classes taught at most Bible schools and colleges should be patterned after this format, integrating historical and systematic theology with apologetics. This book should be bought by theological libraries, and should be carefully considered by teachers and students as an appropriate model for studying and teaching theology in Africa.

Dan Lowery, MTh
Scott Theological College
Machakos, Kenya

A Reader in African Christian Theology
TEF Study Guide 23
edited by John Parratt
London: SPCK, 1987
178 pages; £3.50

John Parratt, Professor and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana, calls this collection of articles from African theologians across the continent an introduction to *some* Christian theology in Africa, with a focus on major theological questions. He claims neither comprehensiveness nor definitiveness. African Christian theology, defined as "Christian theology as done by Africans," is represented by Parratt in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Reformed and Aladura contributions. There are many other Africans, and many other expressions of theology, not represented in this collection.

The readings are divided into three parts. The first part deals with theological method, which functions as foundation for the remaining two sections, respectively on aspects of doctrine, and on the church and the world. Parratt himself has written the introductory and concluding chapters.

The theological method set forth in this text points to African traditional culture and religion as important sources, and continuity as an important aim. Two methodologies are highlighted and illustrated, namely 'political theology' with its concern for Christian relationship to political power, and 'cultural theology' with its concern for Christian relationship to African culture. The former method is found primarily in South Africa, with 'black theology' being its most radical expression. It is lacking in the rest of the continent, according to Parratt, because most churches have been cooperative with African independent governments. Tutu provides an article in Part I that shows this

method's understanding of the theological task. 'Cultural theology' is more apparent in the rest of the continent, where theologians have shown interest in the past African heritage. 'Cultural theology,' says Parratt, "begins from the conviction that all cultures are God-given, and are part of the natural revelation of God to mankind" (p. 7). It provides a genuine but limited knowledge of God. Sawyerr, Pobee and Tshibangu contribute in Part I from this perspective. Parratt's own view is that 'political theology' and 'cultural theology' must be married and interwoven. Parts II and III show how theologians accomplish some of this interweaving.

Part II, with its attention to aspects of doctrine, is therefore composed of the contributions of both kinds of theologians. 'Political theology' is expressed by Buthelezi, for whom salvation is liberation not just of the soul but of the whole man. It is liberation from oppressive political and social forces. 'Cultural theology' is represented by Nyamiti on the subject of God, by Appiah-Kubi on Christology, and by Dickson on the Cross. Salvation is more understandable, they say, if related traditional concepts are viewed sympathetically. All agree that the old African concepts provide insights by which biblical ideas can be made more real to the African experience.

Part III is also representative of both kinds of theology. 'Political theology' is expressed in articles by Nyerere and Boesak. Nyerere, typical of those religious intellectuals north of the Limpopo who do speak out politically, calls upon the church to cooperate more fully with national governments. Boesak, out of his South African experience, calls for radical change in the structure of society and government. 'Cultural theology' is expressed in articles by Ntemtem and Aina. For them a sympathetic relating of liturgy and healing to traditional understandings of worship and personality are the issues that deserve attention.

Parratt's introduction and conclusion are helpful. In the introduction he attempts to give a brief overview of theology on the continent and to set the course for the volume. In the conclusion he reflects on the contributions, and attempts to show other trends. Parratt points out that not all theologians agree on the place of African traditional religion. For Idowu, ATR concepts are equal to Christian doctrines; for Setiloane, they are better; for Mbiti and Nyamiti, ATR concepts are preparations for Christian doctrine. General revelation, he asserts, is the main issue. He admits that those who accept God's activities in ATR cannot explain how God so acts, cannot agree on the criteria for recognising God's activity, and cannot determine the exact nature of the revelation. In regard to African independent churches, theological interest has been subordinated to historical and sociological studies. Speaking of the socio-political context of theology, Parratt repeats a previous point that, while there has been much criticism of South Africa's white government, criticism of other political systems has been fairly muted among African theologians.

In the conclusion Parratt offers a good section on methodology and the Bible, and ends by calling attention to the centrality of Christ in all the effort.

The principal contribution of this book has to do with its description and illustration of 'political theology' and 'cultural theology'. While we join Parratt in recognising that these are not the only expressions of theology on the continent, it is obvious that they are a very public expression with which evangelicals need to be familiar. Both Parratt and his contributors sometimes give the impression, however, that the theologians contributing to this exercise all speak as one and that they speak for all of Africa. Over-generalisation is one of the greatest errors of these writers. As is to be expected, the text basically ignores evangelical African theology. Byang Kato is the only evangelical theologian listed in the suggested readings, and he is dismissed as a "fundamentalist". This neglect is not altogether surprising since evangelical African self-assessment acknowledges the inadequacy of its academic contributions (cf. e.g. Tiénou, AJET 6.1 (1987) 3- 11).

Even though the theological representation is limited, this text has a valid usefulness to evangelicals. In most cases, Parratt has chosen articulate spokesmen, who are mostly well known in both religious and secular circles. He has chosen short, precisely written articles, making them very readable. To further enhance readability, the editor introduces each article with a brief description of the author and a brief explanation of the contents. In addition, Parratt offers a helpful glossary with definitions and explanations of selected words, which are highlighted by an asterisk (*) as they occur in the text.

Also at the end of each article Parratt has provided discerning and astute questions, as well as suggested readings. The questions are divided into three sections, addressing terminology, contents and application. Moreover, the questions for application often require the reader/student to look seriously into his own situation to relate it to the comments made by the author. For example: "What points of contact, direct or indirect, if any at all, are there between the rite of Baptism ... as practised in your own Church and traditional forms of initiation in your country?" (p. 109). Parratt also causes readers to compare specific issues as addressed by the different contributors. For example, he challenges them to compare the "total liberation" sought by Boesak with the "human wholeness" of Buthelezi. This helps readers to look with more discerning criticism at the authors. To stress further the importance of discernment in study, and perhaps also to indicate his own neutrality toward the views expressed, Parratt often requires readers to look at further biblical evidence to critique a comment or a usage by an author. For example, not satisfied with Appiah-Kubi's use of John 10:10, Parratt advises study of twelve other scriptures deemed likewise important. In fact, Parratt admits that one thing that is missing in much of the political and cultural theology is good biblical exegesis.

The Bible receives special attention in the editor's conclusions. There he points out that, though the Bible is acknowledged by his selected contributors, yet serious biblical studies are neglected by the same. He calls for more Greek and Hebrew scholars on the continent. More work is necessary, he says, "which takes intensive study of the Bible as a starting point" (p. 150). He calls for greater attention to problems of translation, the necessity of linguistic and critical tools, exploration of the relationship between the biblical world and African cultures, and right hermeneutical methods. Though Parratt and his contributors avoid inflammatory comments about evangelicals, it is significant that he puts some of the blame upon them for the indifferent attitude towards the Bible. The neglect of biblical studies by such theologians, he says, is due somewhat to a fundamentalist domination of mission. They are too literalist, reject the critical method, are divisive and are hostile toward ATR.

I would recommend this book for libraries and teaching staff. I would also commend it for classroom use, provided lecturers can also make available (otherwise missing) evangelical perspectives on the issues raised. The book usefully highlights the issues which demand attention and provides good background information for evangelical assessment. Is another such reader in African theology needed? Emphatically, yes! Not one to compete with this book, but one that supplements and extends it, not least by allowing evangelical African contributions to be heard as part of the wider discussion.

Larry Niemeyer, DMiss
Daystar University College
Nairobi, Kenya

African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity
by J. N. K. Mugambi
(Nairobi: Longman, 1989)
207 pages; Ksh 125/

Adopting a historical and sociological approach, Dr Mugambi argues for an authentic expression of Christianity in Africa, and seeks to motivate African Christians to undertake theological reflection on their faith in their own context. The cross- cultural missionary is also encouraged to understand the culture he has chosen to work in, to identify with it and to seek to present the Christian faith in forms and symbols familiar and understandable to the people of his adoptive culture.

The book is well-researched and contains useful notes and references at the end of each chapter. Those interested in further study in the areas covered will appreciate the extensive bibliography, as well as suggestions on what to

explore. Dr Mugambi is chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi. His experience in teaching comes through in the latter sections of the book as he presents ways for teaching the 'African heritage' not in propositional but in categorical terms. Theological students and staff, as well as those interested in African Christianity, will glean a wealth of information from the book, especially on the African heritage.

The author is not hesitant in pointing out some of the mistakes of the modern missionary enterprise in Africa, and examines some of the failures in the introduction of the Christian faith to East Africa, as well as some of the approaches and objectives adopted by various missionary groups. On a continent as extensive as Africa, it is not easy to address several issues with the same relevance and depth. This is acknowledged by the author, and the examples he cites from the East African context are instructive in this respect.

The weaker aspects of the book relate to biblical facts and theological issues. For example, referring to Luke 23:18 the author states that this Barabbas is one of the men crucified with Jesus, whereas of course the biblical account states that Barabbas was the one released instead of Jesus. In discussing the Trinity in relation to African thought, Dr Mugambi asserts that the "best and most relevant way to understand the Trinity . . . is in terms of modes of God's manifestation to Man." While acknowledging the author's genuine desire to make this uniquely Christian doctrine as understandable as possible, this conclusion of course cuts across the affirmations of historic Christianity on the Trinity. Historic Christianity affirms not only the deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but also the eternal existence of each, as well as their eternal distinctiveness.

The shortcomings aside, the book is a worthy addition to the literature of recent years calling on Africans to develop relevant theologies out of their own contexts. The author achieves his aim by looking at institutions, values and beliefs, and some practices as they relate to the Christian faith.

Juliana Senavoe, MA
Christian Service College
Kumasi, Ghana

The Ethiopian Tewahedo Church: An Integrally African Church
by Archbishop Yesehaq
(New York: Vantage Press, 1989)
xxiv, 244 pages

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) claims to be the oldest in Africa after the Coptic Church of Egypt. As such, its followers have a great sense of

heritage and uniqueness, often feeling that non-Orthodox believers have little to offer them. With the present large numbers of Ethiopian refugees in countries surrounding Ethiopia, there are significant ministry needs among EOC adherents outside the borders of Ethiopia. This book can help introduce the EOC to all those who are called to minister among EOC followers, both within and outside of Ethiopia. It should also serve as a basic reference on one important and ancient form of African Christianity.

Archbishop Yesehaq, a member of the EOC, has provided us with an insider's viewpoint. As such, it must be remembered that the questions that an outsider asks do not always touch on what an insider considers important. Thus the author raises many issues about which outsiders may not know even to ask, such as the theological controversy concerning Christ's "two births" or "three births", or the recommended schedule and practice of prayers. At the same time, outside scholars will be disappointed at the scanty coverage on issues that interest them, such as the EOC's practice of the veneration of saints, or the number and nature of books considered canonical or of special spiritual importance.

Given the insider's viewpoint, the types of evidence offered for various positions are also different from what an outsider would expect. For example, many points of doctrine and practice are given with a reference only to a church father, or no reference is given at all. From the EOC point of view, tradition and the authority of the church carry much more weight than they do for most outsiders. Therefore, points which the author thinks he has argued strongly will seem inadequately supported to outsiders.

The word *tewahedo* in the title means 'united' or 'unified', referring to the belief in Christ's single unified nature, 'monophysitism' (rather than a belief in Christ's two natures co-existing). It is common to refer to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) as 'Coptic', but this is no longer correct. The term 'Coptic' refers to the church of Egypt, under whose patriarch the EOC functioned until 1971, when it became 'autocephalic' (self-headed). The review of the EOC's history will contain little that is new to those who have studied it, but it is a good introduction for those not familiar with the topic. The history of the EOC's relations with the Coptic church of Egypt, and her eventual autonomy, are prominent topics. The author also provides a significant EOC clarification of monophysitism.

The book will help evangelicals better understand the deep-rooted suspicion which they face from EOC followers. The author tells of early Catholic mission efforts, with their temporarily successful attempt to convert the emperor to Catholicism, and of the efforts to coerce the EOC under the Fascists in the 1930s. The author also complains of foreign efforts to 'proselytise' people whom he considers to be already followers of Christ.

Of importance to students of EOC's history is the author's account of the growth of the EOC in other countries, including the establishment of congregations in Nairobi, Khartoum, Djibouti, Europe, North America, and most importantly in the Caribbean. The expansion of the EOC into the Caribbean is unique, in that it was not a mission outreach to 'unbelievers', but a church responding to a call from a large group of people (Rastafarians) who already felt (more or less) that they were a part of the church. Archbishop Yesehaq's coverage of the EOC's expansion is particularly valuable since much of it is a first-person account of his own early contacts and ministry in the Caribbean, among the Rastafarians, but also a clear disclaimer of some streams of their theology (p. 225).

The genre of this book (except the Caribbean sections) is more folk-history than the documented research of a historian. It presents the self-image of the EOC telling how the EOC understands its own history, without outside sources. As such, the union of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba producing the first in the long line of Ethiopian emperors is asserted rather than argued, as are the presence of the original Ark of the Covenant hidden in a church in Ethiopia to this day, and the location of the realm of Candace (Acts 8:27) within the modern borders of Ethiopia. Statements about the number of EOC adherents, the high degree of esteem in which the rest of Africa holds Ethiopia and the EOC, and the extent to which fasts are observed by ordinary believers are first of all statements of self-image.

The very brief discussion of Protestant missions in Ethiopia (p. 95-96) contains two errors of fact. First, Mekane Yesus is not a "mission" but an Ethiopian church. Secondly, the Presbyterian missionaries have not "maintained the name of their mission"; rather their personnel work under the Mekane Yesus church. There is a call for churches to work together, but no mention of the several Protestant groups that have worked closely and fruitfully with the EOC.

The book gives a few glimpses of the EOC's use of Scripture. To evangelicals these few glimpses are jolting, especially if one assumes they are typical of the EOC's approach to Scripture. Several times the author carefully distinguishes "the Bible teaches" and "the Church teaches". Other times he shifts from one to the other without pointing this out, e.g. he refers to Genesis 3:1-8 in saying that Adam and Eve left paradise, but then continues on with an account from an extra- biblical document of their bondage to Satan (p. 125-126). The author's use of Scripture varies significantly from most evangelical exegesis. For example, Biblical passages are cited that obliquely mention topics, but do not seem to give any support to the point under discussion, e.g. Psalm 114:3,5 (p. 125). Many teachings are simply given with no citation, such as the teaching that the apostles "decreed" Wednesday and Friday as days of fasting (p. 133). For outsiders looking for a serious explanation or defence of the EOC's

teachings, this book will only add to their impression that at many points these are based solely on tradition.

Many readers will be confounded by the repeated mixing of Julian (Ethiopian) and Gregorian (European) dates, e.g. "the sixteenth of September (September 27, European calendar)" (p.146). It would have been better to refer to the Ethiopian months by their proper names, rather than to try to equate them inaccurately to the Gregorian months.

The author lays great emphasis on the EOC's membership in the World Council of Churches and other broad ecclesiastical bodies. The author sees the recognition given by such groups as a strong confirmation of the EOC's legitimacy and importance, leaving him baffled and upset at those Christian groups who see EOC followers included among those in need of the Gospel. However, the book itself is unlikely to dissuade such groups from this perception. As an insider's view of the EOC, this book will prove helpfully revealing to the discerning reader, but a much better introduction for the outsider would be Timothy Ware's well-known book, *The Orthodox Church* (1963).

Peter Unseth, MA
Evangelical Theological College
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

No Stranger in the City
Ian Coffey, et al.
(Leicester: IVP, 1989)
159 pages; £2.95

In Africa the city is commonly seen as the place where people "get lost", a place where they can be strangers. Yet here is a book with a title that challenges such a notion — *No Stranger in the City: God's Concern for Urban People*. Although the city is a place where many people are strangers, they are not so to God and neither should they be to the church. Even so, reports from both East and West Africa indicate that city dwellers are largely strangers to the church. That, and the fact that cities on the continent are growing at a world-class pace, challenge the church to shake off any lethargy in her response to the city. They challenge her to prepare as best as she can for effective ministry in such a non-traditional setting. Books like *No Stranger* can help do just that.

In this small volume are collected nine short chapters written in a popular style by various well-qualified contributors (e.g. Harvie Conn, Ray Bakke, and

Floyd McClung). Since most chapters started out as presentations to student mission conventions in the United States, the resulting very readable English also makes it an attractive resource in places where many people work with English as a second or third language. Much of the material has been previously published.

Though small in size, the book touches on many of the important urban ministry concepts and issues being discussed today. The importance of Christian presence in the city, urban demographics, people groups, and the sociological complexity of the city are mentioned. Case studies and testimonies of ministry in city settings are also included.

One section challenges God's people to recapture their historical heritage in the city. It also tells us that in the period AD 500-1500 "we lost African urban churches and gained European rural ones" (p. 99). This historical dimension is a very relevant issue to Africa, and is further supported by a soon-to-be-published article by Jonathan Hildebrandt, that explains how African church history has been strategically related to urban areas on the continent. So African churches need to recover their urban heritage just as churches elsewhere do.

Another current topic developed in *No Strangers* is the biblical and theological dimension of urban ministry. A full 20% of the book is given to Ajith Fernando's exposition of Jonah's ministry in Nineveh, and topics like prayer and spiritual sensitivity are also key points throughout. Although the overwhelming theological emphasis is a concern for evangelising the lost, word and deed are not separated, since the emphasis on evangelisation is presented together with the need to minister to the whole man with the whole gospel.

The applicability of *No Strangers* to the African context is diminished by the book's orientation to the white North American context. The emphasis is understandable, since the original presentations were to a predominately white North American audience. However, the "white fright, white flight" syndrome has not been a relevant factor in Africa in the same way it has been in North America. On the other hand, the churches of Africa often see the city in a primarily negative light, so the message to white North Americans that God has not abandoned the city also applies to African churches.

Teachers will find this a useful class resource even if it requires adaptation to Africa, and others will find it an appetiser enticing them toward more thorough treatments of the subject.

John Shane, MDiv
Urban Ministries Support Group
Nairobi, Kenya

Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation
by Peter Cotterell and Max Turner
(London: SPCK, 1989)
348 pages; £9.95

In the preface of this new book the authors express their dissatisfaction that "our system of higher education seems designed to keep the disciplines of biblical studies and linguistics isolated from each other, and few theologians have been exposed even to those aspects of linguistics which are of most obvious relevance to them" (p. 9). Although the authors are speaking of higher education in Britain, the remark is just as relevant elsewhere, and certainly in Africa.

The book has been written to supply that lack. As the authors state:

> [Our book] introduces the interested student in a non-technical way to some aspects of linguistics which are relevant to biblical exegesis. We explain why some approaches to biblical texts may give misleading results, and how linguistics sometimes points the way to better methods (p. 9).

Cotterell and Turner have turned out a volume that ought to be in the library of every theological college, and on the bookshelf of every exegete who wishes to be taken seriously, including both lecturers and students. It is not the last word, but it does fulfil its claim: it helps to bridge the gap that prevents the interpreter of biblical texts from employing even the most basic insights of linguistics. And it should prevent biblical interpreters who are ignorant of basic linguistics from feeling comfortable in their work. From the viewpoint of this reviewer, these would be important achievements. Cotterell brings linguistics expertise and missionary experience gained in Ethiopia to bear on the problems addressed in this book, while Turner brings a professional theological and exegetical background.

The authors write in a fairly literary style, rather than in an informal, popular level of English. The text is generally clear, but they are sometimes guilty of cramming too much information into a sentence, especially by the use of heavy parentheses. They avoid introducing technical linguistic language without explanation, although occasionally a term slips through the net: for example, 'metalinguistic' (p. 22). They do tend to require a great deal from what they call the reader's 'presupposition pools' (see pp. 90-97); for example, they make unnecessary reference to Scylla and Charybdis (p. 165) for stylistic effect. I say unnecessary—but of course, if the reader does have the required presuppositions in his/her pool, the authors do achieve the effect they are after!

These problems will perhaps make the book a bit heavy going for undergraduate students, but it really does·repay any effort made.

The book is well-produced and well-organised. I noticed only two typing mistakes. Each chapter has useful section-headings and a plentiful supply of endnotes. This has the effect of keeping the page uncluttered, which will please many readers. And the book is reasonably priced.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 introduce basic linguistic concepts about 'meaning', as a foundation for the rest of the book. The next two chapters are devoted to the use and abuse of word studies in biblical exegesis. Various biblical scholars have recently addressed this problem area, but it has rarely been approached from the viewpoint of linguistics. Cotterell and Turner are remarkably successful in doing this. Using our knowledge of how human language works, they take time to explain both the faulty exegesis which is still too often employed in word studies (chapter 4), and the corrective that linguistics can offer (chapter 5). Readers who have already encountered the criticisms raised by James Barr (1961), or by Donald Carson (1984), will not find chapter 4 too difficult. Chapter 5 is the longest in the book, and requires a bit more attention, taking up ideas introduced in chapter 3. This is a very careful discussion, packed with information, and will repay the close attention it demands of the reader.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are given over to a consideration of *discourse*. Discourse study is concerned with stretches of language larger than a single sentence. Obviously, most human communication is of this kind, and therefore it is important to study how longer stretches of coherent speech communicate. Linguists who are involved in translating the Christian Scriptures into non-European languages have been prominent in research efforts into discourse. Their struggle in particular to unravel the complex, dense argumentation of the New Testament letters has concentrated on the relationship of each proposition to the others, and on clarifying the contribution each makes to the total argument (chapter 6). Plot (or argument) structure is dealt with in chapter 7. Chapter 8 introduces some of the fascinating insights that underlie human conversational exchanges.

Finally, chapter 9 discusses non-literal, or figurative, language. Chiasmus, parable and allegory are included here, and will be familiar to most theological students. The discussions on parable and allegory especially provide good, concise reviews of the major interpretive issues. Indeed, for that reason, chapter 9 could be read first on picking up the book, and is even worth reading alone. The affective (that is, emotive or evocative) value of non-literal language is discussed, and there is a short but useful introduction to metaphor.

The fact that English and French play a dominant role in the higher levels of education across Africa (including theological education), and in the more prominent urban pulpits, could betray us into over-confidence. The reality is

of course that the linguistic diversity on the continent is great. Who can doubt that African languages provide the major means of communicating the Christian gospel in both urban and rural areas, from Sierra Leone to Somalia, from Cape Town to Cairo? If that is a correct assessment, then the sooner our Christian centres of learning begin to take account of the place of linguistics in biblical interpretation and proclamation, the better it will be for the Church of Christ in Africa.

A final warning is in order. This book is not designed to teach either linguistics or interpretation. Nor is it even designed to teach one how to apply linguistic insights to interpretation. The art of exegesis requires expertise in various disciplines, maturity of thought, the careful weighing of alternative opinions, and the skill that comes only from engaging in the struggle for truth. Linguistics has a contribution to make in this quest, a contribution till now largely unrecognised in traditional theological education. To teach how the biblical text may be approached with sound insight from linguistics will require more attention to linguistics in the school curriculum than is commonly practised. The real contribution of Cotterell and Turner is that they demonstrate the kind of assistance linguistics can offer us. If the book is successful, it should encourage many theological colleges to reconsider the place of semantics (and other aspects of linguistics) in their curriculum. The book should also make student readers eager for a better knowledge of linguistics as they prepare for Christian ministry.

Ronald Sim, PhD
SIL/Wycliffe
Nairobi, Kenya

God, Language and Scripture
Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation vol 4
by Moisés Silva
(Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1990)
160 pages; £7.95

It is not very often that one thinks of a book on hermeneutics as "delightful", but that is the first word that came into my mind as I read *God, Language and Scripture* by Moises Silva. Silva is professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, and a frequent writer on the relationship of linguistics to hermeneutics. This is the fourth volume in the new hermeneutical series "Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation", also edited by Silva. The purpose of this new series is to explore the contributions of seven different

academic disciplines to biblical hermeneutics. Three previous volumes in this series have already been reviewed in AJET (9.2 [1990] pp. 56-61). This latest volume discusses the contribution of general linguistics to interpreting the Bible.

Silva begins his book with an imaginary story of the discovery in the twenty-eighth century of a twentieth-century English language text. In this imaginary story, an exegetical commentary (which looks much like a typical, present-day commentary on the Bible) is published to analyse the text. The illustration vividly and humorously shows how much modern exegesis is an over- interpretation of the text, based on a false idea of how language works. Anyone who has used a commentary or heard a preacher refer to "the original Greek" will identify with Silva's introduction and will be anxious to read the rest of the book.

Chapters two through four each introduce a different perspective on language. Chapter two presents a brief but balanced biblical theology of language, though Silva is careful to note that "we should not expect the Scriptures to provide a complete and well-defined philosophical framework for every intellectual discipline". Chapter three overviews some basic principles of linguistics. Chapter four gives the reader a historical perspective on the biblical languages. Each of these chapters is simply written with abundant illustrations, providing an excellent introduction for the reader with little background. For example, chapter three gives clear explanations of synchronic and diachronic description of language, and argues persuasively for the priority of synchronic description. By the end of the chapter even the beginner will understand what these terms mean and why the synchronic description of language is more important for proper hermeneutics. However, the chapters do end abruptly. They would have been even more clear and useful if they had concluded with a summary of the relevant principles for actually interpreting the Bible.

Chapters five and six are the heart of the book. Hear Silva introduces the reader to how sounds, words, sentences and paragraphs work together to communicate meaning in the biblical languages. Frequent illustrations drive home Silva's basic message: Scripture must be interpreted in its historical and literary context. Far too often students misuse language by ignoring a plain reading of the text in favour of building exegetical arguments that hang on a questionable word study or a misunderstanding of verbal tense and aspect. Instead, "the biblical books were meant to be read as wholes and that is the way we should read them" (page 125).

Silva's last chapter is a brief look at the transmission and translation of the biblical text. This section seems even more brief and simple than the rest of the book, and rather weakly integrated into the larger themes of the book. As with some of the earlier chapters, the book as a whole ends abruptly. It needs

a concluding chapter that clarifies and summarises the practical suggestions for hermeneutics touched on earlier in the book.

Overall this book is strongly recommended as a simple introduction to the role of linguistics in hermeneutics. Its overall message – that people communicate through unified, whole propositions and that the Bible should be read that way – is badly needed in current biblical exegesis. Teachers of biblical introduction, Old and New Testament, exegesis, and hermeneutics will find it full of fresh ideas and illustrations for their courses. Its readability would make it good supplementary reading for a course in hermeneutics on the first degree level. As with other books of this series, its price makes it accessible for the libraries of African theological schools. It is a worthy addition to this useful series on interpretation.

Steve Strauss, MTh
Evangelical Theological College
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Galatians
Word Biblical Commentary
by Richard N. Longenecker
(Dallas: Word, 1990)
cxix + 323 pages; $24.99

Scholars and pastors have been well-served by commentaries on Galatians over the last century and more. The older works of Lightfoot (1865) and Burton (1921) continue to reward careful study, while the recent volumes by Betz (1979) and Bruce (1982) provide thorough, more up-to-date analyses.

Despite such riches of scholarship, yet another commentary on Galatians is justified for two reasons. First, Betz's analysis of Galatians in light of ancient rhetorical practices marked a significant advance in New Testament studies and awakened the scholarly community to a method of study long ignored to their own detriment. However, while Betz's application of rhetorical criticism to Galatians broke new ground, it proved only partially satisfactory. Longenecker, taking advantage of study since Betz's commentary appeared, applies the tools of rhetorical and literary criticism with renewed profit for understanding Galatians.

Second, Galatians lies at the centre of a swirl of studies instigated primarily by E.P. Sanders' book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977). Sanders called into question the traditional understanding of first century Judaism as a legalistic

religion seeking justification through accumulating good works. While
Sanders' views have been criticised, they have nevertheless sparked a reassess-
ment of the traditional understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification by
faith. That understanding has long been viewed by Protestant Christianity as
the heart of Paul's message — a message finding its clearest expression in
Galatians. As a result, a number of crucial questions have resurfaced. Who
exactly are Paul's opponents in Galatians? What is their false 'gospel' which
Paul so venomously attacks? What is Paul's view of the 'Law' in light of all of
this? The issues are many, as are the journal articles, books, and dissertations
rolling off the presses in an attempt to resolve them. But these issues also lie
at the heart of our understanding of the very essence of the Christian faith.
Though Bruce and Betz appeared after the publication of Sanders' volume,
Longenecker's work marks the first evangelical commentary on Galatians to
take seriously this important debate (in contrast for example to the recent NIC
volume by R. Fung).

Longenecker writes as one well-acquainted with Pauline and New Testament
studies. He has published several volumes, notably *Paul: Apostle of Liberty*
(1964), *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (1975), the section on Acts in
the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (1981), and *New Testament Social Ethics for
Today* (1984). He currently serves as professor of New Testament at Wycliffe
College, University of Toronto, Canada.

The introduction of the commentary will serve marvelously as preliminary
reading for first-time students. Longenecker provides a fair overview of the
history of interpretation, epistolary and rhetorical structures, date, address-
ees, opponents and situation. Longenecker argues both for an early date for
the letter (before the Jerusalem Council) and for a south Galatian destination.
He sees a two-fold problem in the Galatian churches — difficulty with outsiders
who preach another gospel, plus ethical problems within the churches them-
selves. The author understands these outsiders in the context of escalating
Jewish nationalism in Palestine during the time Galatians was written. Jose-
phus tells us that during this period nationalists in Palestine were persecuting
Jews with any hint of Gentile sympathy, forcing them to follow Jewish customs
more closely. Following the lead of R. Jewett, Longenecker posits that Paul's
opponents were Christian Jews from Palestine who were undergoing such
difficulties. They came to Galatia in order to stress "the need for Gentiles to
be circumcised and to keep the rudiments of the cultic calendar, both for full
acceptance by God and as a proper Christian lifestyle" (xcv). If these Gentile
believers would submit to the Jewish law, the Jewish Christians from Palestine
would therefore cease to be persecuted for leniency toward Gentile adherents
of a group that many still perceived as a Jewish sect. Paul's statement in
6:12-13 that his opponents wanted the Galatians to be circumcised in order
that they themselves may "avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ"

therefore provides an essential clue for understanding these opponents and their message.

While Paul had no theological difficulties with "covenantal nomism" (Sanders' phrase meaning submitting to the Law as an *expression* of one's relationship with God rather than as a *means* to establish such a relationship) when that concept concerned an appropriate lifestyle for Jewish Christian believers, any attempt to force *Gentile* believers to submit to the *Jewish* law as part of their Christian lifestyle would result in legalism. For Paul such legalism violated the very foundations of the new covenant. In this way, the author attempts to accommodate the contention that first century Judaism was not *characterised* by legalism, while at the same time maintaining that Paul does argue against legalism. While this reconstruction remains hypothetical (as much of our reconstruction of early Christianity must), this is a positive attempt to work all of the evidence into a coherent whole. At the same time, one could ask for a more thorough explanation regarding *how* the position of the "Judaizers" constitutes legalism. Paul employs some of the most vitriolic language in the New Testament against his opponents' position. Longenecker's description of that position seems too mild to warrant such a response. Here we must admit that while Longenecker helps us along the way toward understanding the situation in Galatia, more work remains to be done.

Regarding the internal ethical problems, Longenecker cites evidence in Galatians which indicates these churches endured ethical problems from the beginning (5:21). Paul's opponents may have felt submission to the details of the Law would resolve such troubles, while viewing Paul's disregard of the Law as part of an antinomian cause of the trouble. Paul develops his own response to these ethical issues in 5:13-6:10.

Several additional points of strength merit comment. With the exception noted above, Longenecker coherently develops a unified understanding of this epistle on the holistic basis of literary, theological, and historical considerations. He persuasively argues that Paul moves to exhortation beginning at 4:12, rather that at 5:1 or 5:13 as most commentators propose. He views Galatians as consisting of multiple rhetorical conventions rather than purely the forensic model proposed by Betz. He also provides the reader with many of the best insights from the commentaries of Betz, Bruce, Mussner, Burton and (to a lesser extent) Lightfoot.

On the negative side, the pastor or teacher in the local church will find little application here. While Longenecker concludes each explanation section with a sentence or two in the general direction of application, the reader is largely left alone in this task. In addition, although the bibliographies are ample, they are not as thorough as in other volumes in this series. For example, though Longenecker emphasises literary and rhetorical analysis, he makes no reference either in the text or in the bibliographies to D. Aune's *The New*

Testament in Its Literary Environment. Several recent journal articles relevant to issues under study also escape notice. Four indexes include Ancient Sources, Modern Authors, Principal Subjects, and Biblical Texts. A partial sampling of only three modern authors uncovered two errors!

Nevertheless, this is a helpful commentary on what may be our earliest Christian writing. Longenecker grapples with current issues and provides a lucid understanding from an evangelical perspective. As such, well-worn copies of this work certainly belong in theological libraries and on the shelves of NT lecturers.

Jim Miller, MDiv
Daystar University College
Nairobi, Kenya

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Notes and Corrections:
(i) The first issue, vol 1.1-2, was a double issue for 1982.
(ii) Vol 6.2 (1987) was mis-labeled on the cover as "9.2".
(iii) Vol 7.2 (1988) was mis-dated on the cover as "April 1989".
(iv) Commencing with vol 9.1 (1990), the journal's name was changed from EAST AFRICA JOURNAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY to **Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology.**

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