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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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Publisher: Scott Theological College, the publisher of *AJET*, has been accredited by ACTEA since 1979 and has been chartered as a private university by the Commission for Higher Education in November 1997. Scott offers university level theological education with concentrations in Pastoral Studies, Christian Education and Missiology. A Master of Education is being launched in 2002.

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Africa:
The Developing Continent

An AJET Editorial

During the last few months I have been sorting through papers that have accumulated over 36 years of ministry in Kenya. Many have been thrown away, some given to friends and others packed to be taken back to the United States for our retirement which is planned within a few months. This process has led to many reflections over the development that has taken place in Kenya (and Africa) during the span of 36 years.

What has impressed me is the extent to which education has developed, including theological education. While one may read depressing reports of abject poverty, disease, corruption, war and civil strife, theological education has developed dramatically.

In 1963, when Kenya became an independent nation, there was only a handful of secondary schools in the whole nation. No Kenyan university existed. When Scott was founded in 1962 one aspiration was to have a degree level course offered through London Bible College in England. But this failed to materialise due to lack of qualified students. In fact, the entrance level for Scott until 1974 was completion of Primary School plus two years of secondary, or the equivalent. In practice, we accepted numerous students who only completed Primary School and then went on to a Bible School before entering Scott.

This low level of education throughout the nation was reflected in the inability of Scott to recruit any qualified Kenyans to teach for the first sixteen years. Though the desire to recruit Kenyans was not lacking, the availability of qualified teachers was not there.

With independence came the formation of hundreds of secondary schools with thousands of students aspiring for university education. These numbers have grown dramatically over the years.

Today we not only have in Kenya *five* state universities but an additional *five* chartered private universities and nearly *ten* institutions striving to attain that status. Not only is Scott training 103 students for the Bachelor of Theology degree today, ten other institutions also offer a B.Th. Neither is theological education in Kenya restricted to the first degree but various institutions offer master's degrees, including the Nairobi International School of Theology and the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. *The Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa* (ACTEA), formed by the Association of Evangelicals of Africa in 1976, is accrediting more and more institutions throughout Africa with 170 institutions affiliated with ACTEA. The growing number of university qualified students emerging from our secondary schools is providing a growing pool of prospective students for higher theological institutions.

Hence, we approach retirement with a deep sense of gratitude and praise to God because He is raising up Africans to assume leadership in all areas of the church and society. The landscape of leadership in Africa has been transformed completely.

A careful reading of this issue of AJET will demonstrate once again the development of theological reflection taking place.

Check the first article on *African Theology: Its History, Dynamics, Scope and Future* by Paul Bowers which demonstrates the rapid growth of theological reflection in Africa. *Witchcraft* by Samuel Waje Kunhiyop is a penetrating analysis of this persistent problem from an evangelical perspective. *Contextualizing Jesus: "The Only Mediator" for the Sukuma People of Tanzania* is a reflection by Fabian Maganda on his own peoples' religious beliefs in the light of biblical teaching. *Elisha's Unbearable Curse* is a biblical study of the Hebrew text by Mark Mercer with application to the African beliefs in the power of the curse. In addition to book reviews we provide a Review Article by Andrew Wildsmith on *Cultural Exegesis*

May God continue to build his Church in Africa and strengthen all efforts, including *AJET*, to teach and apply the Word of God to his people. May God send a great revival upon his Church.

Even so come Lord Jesus. Maranatha.

AFRICAN THEOLOGY:
Its History, Dynamics, Scope and Future

Paul Bowers

AFRICAN THEOLOGY

The term "African Theology" commonly refers to the lively conversation within the African Christian community that, beginning early in the 1960s and increasing unabated to the present, seeks to address the intellectual and theological issues which concern that community. This conversation has attracted interest and significance owing not least to the rapid growth of the Christian community in Africa, which is now the majority faith in large portions of the continent and is apparently set to become a principal centre of world Christianity.

The diversity of the Christian community in Africa, and of its theological practitioners, has produced numerous divergent

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approaches to African Theology. This in turn makes the description and assessment that much more challenging. Thus Africa's influential university departments of religion have usually approached the theme in terms of establishing correlations between Christianity and Africa's traditional religions. Missiologists have worked more broadly on a correlation of Christianity with African culture as a whole, speaking in terms of an ethnotheology. Roman Catholic contributions have frequently introduced a philosophical note, seeking correlation with the implicit world views of traditional Africa. Ecumenists have pursued not a correlation of Christianity with Africa's past so much as an activation of the Christian community in shaping Africa's future, towards greater liberation and humanisation. Church leaders and theological educators as often as not have assumed that African Theology denotes little more than providing traditional Christian theology with an African face, furnishing Christian truth with contextually-sensitive illustrations and applications.

While all of these approaches doubtless have a measure of relevance, and together serve to enrich and enliven the common dialogue, perhaps none offers an adequate frame in which to assess the whole. The ongoing phenomenon of African Theology in the present day is probably best interpreted not in terms of one or more of these approaches but in terms of the patterns of modern African intellectual life. It is from within such a frame of reference that the history, dynamics, scope, and future direction of African Theology can perhaps best be recognised and assessed.

1. History

The distinguishable roots of the modern-day movement reach back more than a century to Henry Venn and others who, attempting to establish appropriate objectives for the 19th century European missionary movement, called influentially for an indigenization of the Christian faith in mission lands. However poorly this was actualised in missionary endeavours in Africa, it nevertheless set in motion those values and prospects which rendered the core questions of African Theology inevitable. Thus the proto-Africanist Edward Blyden of Liberia utilised the very

phrase "African theology" in 1897 in expressing his vision for Africa's future; the mission statesman Edwin Smith in 1936 produced a theological handbook with intentions entirely congruent with what is now designated as African Theology; and the Catholic father Placide Tempels set off a discussion of the implications of Africa's traditional religious "ontology" for Christian faith, with publication of his *classic La Philosophie Bantoue* in 1945.

The values of Venn, appropriated within 19th century West African consciousness, have also been recognised as an essential strand in the emergence at the beginning of the 20th century of the political and cultural movement called Pan-Africanism, in which the expectations of Africa's educated elite increasingly merged with those of Africa's Diaspora; in pursuit of the liberation of the continent from colonial rule and the emancipation of the African spirit from the domination of the colonial mindset. By mid-century, as the prospects for imminent independence seized the imagination of the continent, the movement was functioning vigorously on two fronts, the political and the cultural. The latter found expression especially in two consequential congresses, in Paris in 1956 and in Rome in 1959, through which it undertook to identify the scope of its intellectual agenda for Africa. Reflections published by a group of African Catholic priests attending the first congress attracted keen interest among their peers, and the second congress then incorporated into its program a subsection for African theologians. Stimulated by such events, a public debate was organised the following year at the influential Faculté de Théologie Catholique in Kinshasa, expressly on the validity of developing an "African Theology." The spirited debate, between the dean of the Faculté Alfred Vanneste and a leading student Tharcisse Tshibangu, was published that same year, 1960.

Meanwhile Protestant missionary thinking in the early decades of the 20th Century, still influenced by the vision of an indigenous African church, began to reflect more deliberately on the relevance of African culture. The positive valuation of African culture at the first Africa-wide conference of missions, held in 1926 in Le Zoute, Belgium, led in due course to a greater emphasis on training African clergy. This resulted in turn in an evaluative survey of

Protestant theological education in Africa, and the missionary scholar Bengt Sundkler was tasked to summarise its findings. When his pioneering study, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, appeared in 1960, it moved the reader beyond the issues of clergy formation, and included an entire chapter entitled "Christian Theology in Africa."

When one traces back through the interactive links in the earliest phase of the African Theology movement, it becomes apparent that the conversation emerged as an articulate entity largely from these two precipitative events in 1960, the one from within Catholic francophone Africa and derivative of the principal mid-century events of Africa's intellectual life, and the other from within Protestant anglophone Africa and functioning at the cutting edge of the century-old quest for an effective indigenization of African Christianity.

In the years immediately following the Kinshasa debate and Sundkler's seminal publication, the streams of reflection generated by these two events quickly coalesced. Especially through papers read at consultations and through articles published in journals, but also through several foundational monographs, the movement began to grope towards identity and definition. Among representative contributors in the earliest years were Harry Sawyerr of Sierra Leone, who in an article in 1963 first addressed the issues raised by Sundkler; Vincent Mulago of Congo/Zaire, the first African lecturer appointed to the Kinshasa faculty, who published his *Un visage africain du christianisme* in 1965; and Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria, whose *Towards an Indigenous Church* also appeared in 1965. In 1966 a pioneering conference for African theologians held at Ibadan, Nigeria, resulted in the publication of one of the formative books of the movement, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (1969). Among the participants were Sawyerr, Mulago, and Idowu; and also the Kenyan scholar John Mbiti. Mbiti soon achieved a special status in the early movement with publication in successive years of: *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970) and *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (1971). In subsequent years Mbiti

continued to maintain a singularly distinguished, articulate, and prolific output.

In the 1970s the discussion rapidly expanded into multiple venues and divergent emphases, and by the 1980s a succession of monographs had begun to appear. Among the more prominent contributors from this period have been: Kato, Nyamiti, Pobee, Dickson, Tiénou, Ela, Ukpong, Eboussi Boulaga, Oduyoye, and Mugambi. In addition, the essential literature of African Theology now includes annotated bibliographies, collections of conference papers, readers in principal sources, and surveys of the literature.

As the diffuse outpourings continued, the conversation in the 1990s seemed if anything to gain in sophistication and depth, a fact perhaps most readily represented by two publications. In 1992 the Ghanaian scholar Kwame Bediako published his magistral *Theology and Identity*, in which he compared the role of culture within second century Christian thinking and within modern African Christian thinking, especially in the latter's quest for theological self-understanding. And in 1993 the British scholar Gordon Molyneux published his remarkable study, *African Christian Theology*, which traced out in fascinating detail and critically assessed three very different manifestations of Christian "theologizing" in Africa. With such publications the African Theology movement has clearly reached a vigorous maturity. The highly varied conversations are now best tracked through ongoing bibliographic surveys such as those found in the *Revue Africaine de Théologie* (Congo/Zaire) and the *International Review of Mission* (Switzerland), and through the abstracts and reviews offered in journals such as *Missionalia* (South Africa) and *BookNotes for Africa* (Zambia).

2. Dynamics

While African Theology has significant links with earlier missionary thinking on "indigenization", in its essential characteristics and dynamics the movement is best construed as a phenomenon of modern African intellectual life. Studies of modern Africa concur that the central motifs of its intellectual life have revolved for more than a century around the one formative

experience common to almost all parts of the continent, namely Africa's traumatic encounter with the West and its multifaceted response/reaction to that encounter. The imposition of colonial rule over most of the continent by the end of the 19th century meant for Africa a deprivation not only in political control but also in fundamental self-understanding. The old regime of political leadership and intelligentsia in traditional Africa was swept aside. The new intelligentsia emerging during the colonial period attained that status largely through superior achievement in western education. It was principally this class. Africa's new educated elite, who then effectively organised the overthrow of western colonial domination and assumed the political and intellectual direction of the continent.

The modern Africa that resulted was therefore shaped to the needs and intentions of Africa's new educated elite. and Africa's intellectual life in the post-independence period has been representative of the preoccupations. commitments. anxieties, and values of this new class. Having superseded the old order of traditional Africa. and in open and successful conflict with a domineering West, they effectively evolved the new order of modern Africa. At the material level the new order sought above all for African "development." for a rapid modernisation conceived largely along western lines. in order to withstand and supersede western economic and political dominance on the continent. At the ideological level the new order sought by every means to assert an African identity over against the West, while affirming its own identification with Africa's traditional heritage. in order to contest and overcome western intellectual hegemony in Africa.

And thus the issue of African authenticity and self-reliance, the issue of African identity and selfhood, in combination with a comprehensive critique of the West and its role in Africa, has functioned as the principal dynamic of Africa's intellectual life in almost all fields of learning and expression in the latter part of the 20th century. This has been true not only for literature and sociology. political science and anthropology. philosophy and history, but for theology as well. The characteristic preoccupations of African Theology. the implicit agenda. the necessary themes,

even the rooted conflicts and discontinuities, have almost exactly matched the dynamics of the larger intellectual life of Africa.

This can be usefully recognised not least in the debate of a past generation between Négritude and African Marxism. Founded by Leopold Senghor and others in the 1930s. Négritude was a literary, cultural, and philosophical movement especially influential in the francophone world, which attempted to address the "dilemma of the spirit" of Africa's westernised intelligentsia, their sense of inner alienation, dislocation, and loss of identity, by means of a sustained evocation and affirmation of African traditional values and culture. The two Pan-African congresses on African culture in the 1950s were direct derivatives of this movement. The most trenchant critiques of Négritude came from African Marxists (such as Franz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth*), who charged that the vision of Négritude would lead Africa up a dead-end alley. To accent traditional culture might satisfy the hunger of the modern African's soul, but it could not bring effective change within the oppressive realities of colonial Africa. Only an ideology for the political liberation and radical social restructuring of the continent could serve the needs of Africa's future.

This particular conflict in African intellectual life helps illuminate the development of African Theology. If a critical identity question functions at the heart of modern African intellectual life, then African Christianity has found itself faced with a doubly-critical identity question. African political nationalism refused to differentiate between the coming of colonialism and the coming of Christianity to the continent; it became axiomatic to treat the two as one. Modern African consciousness therefore readily perceived African Christianity as an alien western importation. Thus educated African Christians at the commencement of the independence era found themselves encumbered with a problematic identity. What could it possibly mean to be an African Christian? In what sense at all could "African Christianity" be construed as legitimately African?

Thus the agenda of the educated African Christian came to embrace not only Africa's political and intellectual release from western dominance, but also African Christianity's release from

western missionary dominance. And if an affirmation of Africa's traditional heritage had become a central function of African intellectual life, then a fresh appraisal of Africa's religious heritage was also essential. Only by these means could the pressing demands of African Christian identity begin to be addressed, an authentically African Christianity be justified, and an acceptably authentic African Theology be achieved. Thus evolved, at first hesitantly but increasingly with assertive confidence, the twin foci of the earliest movement, namely (i) the attempt at a more responsible theological apprehension of African traditional culture--and especially of Africa's indigenous religions, combined with (ii) a sustained critique of the western impact on Africa--and not least of the western missionary role in Africa.

By the early 1970s a separate theological movement had made its appearance on the continent. The "Black Theology" movement of South Africa (distinct from the North America movement of the same name), sought theological resources for investing South African blacks with a sense of human dignity in the face of apartheid, and for empowering them to achieve social justice and liberation. Among the most prominent early spokesmen were Manus Buthelezi, Allan Boesak, and Desmond Tutu. Almost immediately the relationship between Black Theology and African Theology became a point of vigorous debate. To read the variant viewpoints is to read a theological replay of parts of the earlier debate between Négritude and Marxism. In effect Black Theology contended that African Theology, immersed in its devotion to Africa's cultural past, had no effective word for Africa's future. African Theology responded that Black Theology seemed to lack any effective word for Africa's heart. Because the South African movement accorded much more readily with theological trends in the larger ecumenical movement after Uppsala (1968), and in particular with Liberation Theology in Latin America and Black Theology in North America, the venues of ecumenical action in the 1970s became a principal locus of efforts to "manage" the debate and to coopt African Theology into a larger global agenda, principally achieved by asserting the complementarity of Black and African theologies.

While these assimilative efforts met with spirited resistance from some, including Mbiti, African theologians in general did not find it difficult to embrace the language of liberation theology if specifically referencing the ongoing western economic and political exploitation of Africa. Whereas by the 1990s "Black Theology" scarcely remained a functioning movement, by then African Theology had largely accommodated a third fundamental focus, derived from its encounter with Black Theology but adjusted to its own inner dynamic, namely a political theology in support of the liberation of Africa from ongoing western oppression. Generally speaking, the further south the theological discussion is in Africa the more this dimension is evident, and the further west the discussion occurs in Africa the less it is evident.

3. Scope

The multiplicity of perspectives, agendas, and venues now represented in African Theology makes any thematic description problematic. Indeed most typologies of the movement thus far proposed tend to prove inadequate when tested against a sufficiently broad range of relevant contributions. Nevertheless certain dominant or recurrent themes do appear, and help clarify something of the inner demands and momentum of the movement.

Led by the university departments of religion, African Theology has generated considerable attention to African traditional religion, resulting in significant advances in that field. Not least a mindless western denigration of African religion has been reversed, and the possibilities of a more responsible theological assessment implanted. Indeed some prominent theologians, including Mbiti and Bediako, have proposed that the acceptance of traditional religion as an effective *praeparateo evangelica* for African Christianity, and of African Christianity as an appropriate fulfilment of traditional religion, should be considered central to the enterprise of African Theology.

One potential shortcoming of such an approach which has been noted almost from the beginning, especially by evangelical Africans, has been the persisting inclination both to disregard appropriate theological questions relating to syncretism, and to

neglect the theological task of affirming an identity for African Christianity that is not only African but also in some way distinguishably Christian. Similarly, although the normative character of scriptural revelation for any Christian theology has on occasion been affirmed by some African theologians, any sustained application of such a standard has been only rarely pursued within the literature. A second potential shortcoming of this approach has been highlighted by secular scholarship, which has increasingly charged African theologians with fundamentally misrepresenting African religion, by a habit of screening and "baptising" the data in order to project a traditional religion that is compatible with Christianity. These two lines of critical challenge, placing in question central tendencies within the movement, will merit more responsible consideration if African Theology is to prove itself intellectually sustainable for the future.

African theologians serving in church leadership roles have been in the forefront, along with missiologists, of those tending to focus on African culture as a whole, not just on African religion, reflecting theologically on the necessary "contextualization" of Christianity within African culture. Catholic reflection has vigorously debated whether adaptation or incarnation is the more appropriate theological methodology, while one strand of Catholic reflection has also probed usefully into the underlying world views or "implicit philosophies" of traditional Africa. Protestant reflection has often led the way in looking for points of contact between standard themes of Christian theology (such as revelation, sin, Christology, or eschatology) and those values, institutions, concepts, and symbols which underlie African culture. Church leadership participating in the theological discussion has tended to frame its reflection much more directly in terms of the pastoral and catechetical needs of the believing Christian community in Africa, especially as it is affected by traditional culture, for example with respect to rites of passage, polygamy, liturgical custom, divination, traditional healing, or the role of ancestors. The range and calibre of contributions called forth by African Theology as it has explored the interface between Christianity and African culture has been exceptionally fruitful.

Reflecting a rooted need to disentangle African Christianity from its immediate antecedents in order to achieve a separate indigenous identity, and echoing the standard perceptions of African nationalist ideology, African Theology has almost from the beginning also felt impelled to deploy a set critique of the missionary movement in Africa, and of its destructive impact on traditional values and culture. The charges have not been without cause; so much in the western missionary effort in Africa has been demonstrably wrong, and deserves to be exposed. Yet it must also be granted that a balanced judgement has not always been achieved, so that it has often fallen to the professional historians rather than the theologians to provide a more reliably nuanced appraisal of this complexly diverse movement (e.g. in the work of Adrian Hastings or of Lamin Sanneh). Nevertheless, African Theology has here been working from assumptions that are very widely shared within African consciousness, and if it has tended to echo rather than interrogate such assumptions, it is nevertheless reliably reflecting powerfully-felt concerns which cannot be summarily side-stepped by academic findings.

From a similar impulse the earlier concern for indigenization became transmuted into an insistent call for the independence of African churches from their sponsoring mission agencies, and even for a "moratorium" on continuing missionary presence. The requirements of autonomy have also directed much useful attention to that large body of African church groups founded solely by African initiative, the African Independent Churches, among whom African Theology has been eager to discover beliefs and practices representing a more authentically African sensitivity.

From the mid-1970s onward African Theology increasingly included a political theology of liberation as part of its agenda. Unlike Black Theology in South Africa, for the most part this has not attended to forces of oppression within Africa, but has rather addressed the western political and economic exploitation of Africa. While African church leadership, especially in eastern and southern Africa and not least within Roman Catholic circles, has often found it necessary to speak against the injustice and repression practised

by various African governments since independence, little of this has been reflected in the theological discussion.

Evangelical participation within the African Theology movement began with Byang Kato of Nigeria, the first African to head the Association of Evangelicals in Africa. In his *Theological Pitfalls* in Africa (1975) Kato offered a critique of the incipient syncretism and universalism which he detected in the African Theology movement at that time. Kato called vigorously for a contextual theology attuned to the cultural realities of Africa, but he also affirmed the normative role of Scripture for authentic Christian theology in every context. He also taught that traditional African belief contains authentic truth about God and prepares the African heart for the Gospel, but he staunchly denied a salvific function for Africa's traditional religion. Regrettably, Kato's untimely death in 1975 prevented him from ever developing a positive theological expression in keeping with his call for an African Christianity that would be "both truly African and truly biblical."

Tokunboh Adeyemo of Nigeria subsequently contributed an important study on *Salvation in African Tradition* (1979, 1997); Richard Gehman's *Doing African Christian Theology* (1987) offers stimulating reflection on the task; and the textbook *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (1992, 1995) by Wilbur O'Donovan is now in wide use. Tite Tiénou of Burkina Faso would be a principal example of an African evangelical who has been regularly participating within the larger theological discussion, with a still growing corpus of articles and papers. His doctoral dissertation (1984), assessing methodologies in African Theology, argued plausibly that any appropriately contextual theology for Africa must find its defining matrix in the local African Christian community; and his *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (1982, 1990) is a popular text in many African evangelical theological schools. Most other evangelical reflection on African Theology is to be found in journal articles, with *the Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (Kenya) serving as the principal forum.

African evangelicalism has managed to deploy a range of effective continental initiatives in theological education; but, with notable exceptions, the intention of Kato to foster a constructive

critical evangelical participation within the larger discussion of African Theology has not been sustained. Only in the theological colleges does one discover a continuing interactive familiarity. Yet the average educated African evangelical would probably resonate with many of the themes and preoccupations of African Theology, even if he would expect to modify the answers given on these issues. On the whole it would seem that theological expression within African evangelicalism has yet to achieve an effective interaction with the intellectual and theological needs within its own community. and especially among its educated classes.

4. Future

The achievements of African intellectual endeavour in the decades since independence have been extraordinary. In multiple fields of inquiry and expression Africa has thrown off alien dominance and asserted its own energetic perspectives. Yet as a new century commences, the continent is increasingly gripped by a sense of disillusionment, of failed dreams and lost opportunities. As the African novelist Chinua Achebe has eloquently put it: "We have lost the 20th century; are we bent on seeing that our children also lose the 21st?" The urgent question now emerging among Africa's educated elite is whether the ideological underpinnings of Africa's post-independence era are sufficient for securing Africa's future. The collapse of a bipolar world order and the almost simultaneous collapse of South Africa's apartheid regime have marked a shift in basic circumstances for the continent, with a corresponding alteration in intellectual requirements. And the notion has begun to take form. that whereas authenticity and self-reliance were essential in securing Africa's political and cultural independence in the 20th century. these emphases are now proving themselves insufficient for preventing the marginalization of Africa within the emerging world order of the 21st century.

This intellectual transition accents one of the principal challenges facing African Theology. The constructive contributions of the movement in its first four decades have been immense. But as the credibility of Africa's post-independence ideology begins to erode. how will this movement fare which till now has so

effectively tracked with the intellectual trends of its context? Can it surmount the limitations that have been inherent in that affinity, and restructure for the requirements of a new era? Africa did indeed need to reclaim its past and affirm its cultural heritage; but the Marxist critique was also not without point. Africa has also urgently needed the aid of critical reflection in coping with a modernity already pervasive within contemporary Africa, and in negotiating its future within the increasing interdependency of the world community. For these needs African Theology for the most part has had little to say. The affirmation and defence of the "otherness" of Africa has been essential, but it will likely prove insufficient for addressing either Africa's present crises or its future expectations.

And if African Theology is to have a sustainable future, it will also need to give greater heed to responsible criticism of its more characteristic limitations. Such criticism may be resolved into two substantive judgements: (i) that African Theology has tended to misconstrue its foundational question; and (ii) that African Theology has then generally attended to answering only half of the question it has framed.

In the nature of the case the defining matrix out of which a valid African Christian theology is to be constructed, and against which its achievements should be measured, is neither Africa's modern intellectual quest, nor Africa's cultural context, nor Africa's traditional religions, important as each of these may be. As Tiénou and others have proposed, the nature of the enterprise requires that the defining matrix should be the present Christian community of Africa, with the full range of its needs and expectations, its requirements and preoccupations. This allows for all the issues raised by the agenda of African Theology to date, but it suggests others as well, some of considerable consequence, including Africa's present and its future. To the extent that African Theology has formulated its fundamental task in terms of correlations with African culture, or with Africa's religious heritage, or with the preoccupations of the educated African, it has functioned from an inadequate axis. Its parameters should be construed to encompass the theological reflection required by the life of the contemporary

African Christian community. as that community seeks to fulfil its calling under God within its context.

Within such a construal of the task. the issue of Christianity's correlation with its African context has been rightly taken as cardinal. But this ought to have been simultaneously recognised as only half of the foundational theological question of African Christian existence. As African evangelicals and others have argued. the equally essential issue for theological reflection is the correlation of African Christianity with its Christian heritage. For this purpose it is not enough to ask, as African Theology has rightly and insistently done, how may African Christianity become more authentically African? It must also insistently be asked how African Christianity may become ever more authentically Christian. Without the maintenance of such a double-frame for defining appropriate theological reflection. both the realities of human nature and the history of Christianity suggest that theological reflection can arrive all too readily at an over-realised contextualization. where the essential identity, purpose. and value of African Christianity for Africa—and for God's good will in Africa—has been lost.

Does then the remarkable movement of African Theology begun in the 1960s have a future? Yes. And also possibly no. The Christian community in Africa is so vibrant and prolific that an ongoing life. including theological reflection. is inevitable. Will that ongoing reflection be a continuation of the movement begun in the 1960s? Perhaps. But perhaps only if the movement now finds within itself a capacity to transcend the role it formulated for itself and the limitations which have characterised it during Africa's post-independence period. The lived realities of Africa's vigorous Christian community in the decades ahead will implicitly require this, and if the present movement does not adjust to meet these requirements. a new movement of African Christian reflection may supersede it. with inner dynamics more authentically tuned to contemporary African Christian realities and expectations.

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ABSTRACT

Kisau, Paul Mumo. *"As Many as the Lord our God shall Call to Himself": A Study of the Theme of Inclusiveness in the Acts of the Apostles.* Aberdeen University: Thesis, PhD. 2000.[1]

This study investigates the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles in relation to its description of the earliest community of the followers of Jesus Christ.

The first chapter discusses literary terms used by the author of Acts that reflect inclusiveness. The identification terms used either by the community itself or those outside it, such as Jews and Gentiles, are analysed in an attempt to see if there is any inclusiveness in their usage. The theme of inclusiveness is also investigated in terms of persons mentioned as inviting or enabling others to become part of the Christian community; these are labelled in this study "personal links." The exclusive tendency of the Christian community as described in Acts is also investigated.

The next five chapters provide examples of incidences of inclusiveness in the narrative of Acts.

Chapters two and three investigate the racial inclusiveness of the community of believers. The inclusion of the Gentiles forms a significant part of this investigation, since their inclusion posed a real threat to the Jewish exclusive community. After the Gentile inclusion, the narrative of Acts seems to suggest a total rejection of the Jewish people, and therefore warrants a discussion of the inclusion of Jews in the Christian community.

The fourth chapter investigates regional (geographical) inclusiveness. The multitude of regional and city names is investigated. The narrative hints at geographical inclusiveness by use of terms/phrases that indicate that the gospel was for the whole world.

The fifth and sixth chapters investigate social inclusiveness. In chapter five people mentioned in the narrative are studied and their social level identified. In the sixth chapter, the sharing of goods is investigated as an example of social inclusiveness.

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[1] Copies of this thesis can be obtained from Scott Theological College Library and Queen Mother Library in University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Contact the author: mumo@maf.or.ke

WITCHCRAFT: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Samuel Waje Kunhiyop

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The thorny issue of witchcraft among many Christian communities in Africa today is not unconnected with the serious problem of evil. The problem of evil is perhaps the greatest philosophical issue that faces all human beings irrespective of their religious persuasion. This is man's greatest problem because every human being born on the face of the earth is always confronted with some form of evil. As Michael Peterson states,

> The perennial problem of evil haunts those areas of inquiry which deal primarily with the nature and destiny of man: philosophy, theology, literature, art and history. Neither is it surprising that every major worldview, whether religious, ethical or political proposes insight into this vexing problem.[1]

Evil is here understood in terms of human crises of pain, sickness, death and anything that causes discomfort to the human

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[1]   Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982, p. 11.

being. When confronted with pain or sorrow, one is forced to square his experience with his religious belief and understanding. Harold Kushner, a Jewish writer, dealing with this problem said,

> None of us can avoid the problem of why bad things happen to good people. Sooner or later each of us finds himself playing one of the roles in the story of Job, whether as a victim of tragedy, as a member of the family, or as a friend/comforter. The questions never change, the search for a satisfying answer continues.[2]

The real question that faces the religious devotee is whether or not his ultimate focus of devotion gives a satisfactory explanation to the evil he is experiencing. John Hick, who has written extensively on the topic, expands on the problem as it affects the three major religions observes that,

> Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, is committed to a monotheistic doctrine of God as absolute in goodness and power and as the creator of the universe *ex nihilo*. If God is all-powerful, then he must be able to prevent evil. If he is all good, he must want to prevent evil. But evil exists. Therefore, God is either not all-powerful, or not all-good.[3]

Another version of this problem is well stated by David Hume.

> Is he [God] willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?[4]

He goes on to elaborate on the problem by asking,

> Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely from another cause. Is it from the intention of the deity? But he is perfectly

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[2]   Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Avon Publishers, 1981, p. 143.

[3]   John Hick, "The Problem of Evil" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 3 & 4. New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1967, p. 136.

[4]   David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pt. X, p. 88.

benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive.[5]

The understanding of what kind of God one believes in will affect how he understands evil. For example, a loving God but not a powerful God. though he wants to help cannot help his children. Evil, therefore, comes upon his children because God cannot protect them from it. Kushner states this position very succinctly.

> I believe in God. But I do not believe the same things about Him that I did years ago when I was a theological student. I can worship a God who hates suffering *but cannot* (emphasis mine) eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die for whatever exalted reason.[6]

Many Africans have embraced Christianity as their religion. They hold to the belief that God is almighty and that Jesus is the Son of God who provides salvation through His shed blood. At the same time they also hold to the strong belief that evil forces such as witchcraft. secret societies and evil spirits are ultimately responsible for all the suffering, sickness and death that afflict God's children. At the conceptual level, Africans believe in a supreme God. At the practical level, they are very dualistic. almost to the extent of a Manichean or Gnostic view of ultimate reality. in which there are two equal competing realities in the form of good and evil. I agree with Peterson that,

> What a religious system says about evil reveals a great deal about what it takes ultimate reality, and man's relation to it, to be. Hence the credibility of a religion is closely linked to its ability to explain evil.[7]

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[5]   *Ibid.* p. 91.

[6]   Kushner, p. 134. He gives the title of chapter 7 of his book as, "God can't do everything but can do some important things" (p. 113). This demonstrates his profound belief that though God is loving and caring, He is limited as to what He can do, especially in the prevention of evil and suffering for his children.

[7]   Peterson, p. 16.

The aim of this paper is to offer a philosophical and theological perspective on witchcraft as it affects Christians in the African context.

MEANING OF WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft is believed in almost all African societies. The belief in witchcraft is the traditional way of explaining the ultimate cause of evil, misfortune or death. Carol McKinney, who studied this phenomenon among the Bajju of Kaduna State of Nigeria, notes that witchcraft is:

> an inherent capacity to exert supernatural influence over another person. This influence frequently causes harm, and it explains phenomena such as breaches in social relations, anti-social behavior, unexpected occurrences, sickness and death.[8]

Belief in witchcraft is a serious philosophical attempt to deal with the thorny question of evil. This belief in witchcraft explains that there is a primary or ultimate cause of evil. Evans-Pritchard captures the logic of witchcraft when he writes,

> It is a system with its own natural logic. This explanatory system provides answers to questions of why particular occurrences happen to specific individuals at the time they do. It does not invalidate their understanding of empirical cause and effect of an occurrence. Rather it deals with its ultimate cause.[9]

Thus one sees that natural causes and witchcraft are not mutually exclusive but supplementary. The one supplements the other, accounts for what the other does not account. Pritchard explains further by example.

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[8]   Carol V. McKinney, "The Bajju of Central Nigeria: A Case Study of Religious and Social Change." PhD Dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1985, p. 59.

[9]   Evans Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, 1976, p. 71.

Fire is hot, but it is not hot owing to witchcraft for that is its nature. It is a universal quality. It is the particular variable conditions of an event and not the general universal conditions that witchcraft explains.[10]

One sees that the belief in witchcraft serves a very practical purpose in explaining events and occasions and the causes behind them. Death is thus not a natural phenomenon. The death of young men and women is very unnatural. The witches would always be the cause of such a death. Even old people are sometimes said to be killed by witchcraft. Young people die not from natural causes but always from the powers of witchcraft. In some societies death from dysentery, falling off a tree and any violent death were considered such a serious misfortune that the deceased had to be buried in the backyard. This is not to say that people do not recognise natural causes, for example that the death of a young man in a motor accident was directly caused by a vehicle is not denied. The critical observation of Pritchard just cited indicates that there is a recognition of natural causes, but at the same time there is the acknowledgment of the fact that things do not "just happen".

In concluding this section on the meaning of witchcraft, one must state that in essence Africans see witchcraft as "the enemy of life."[11]

PROOFS OF WITCHCRAFT

The African believes that witchcraft is proven by the scores of stories of the activities and confessions of the perpetrators and victims alike.

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[10]   *Ibid.*

[11]   Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. New York: Orbis Books, p. 187. He goes on to explain that "Harmony, order, good neighbourliness or good company, co-operation and sharing, propriety and equitableness, honesty and transparency – all of which constitute signs of how human and created order should be – are denied in the most fundamental way by witchcraft.....A witch is a person who does control the impulses that good members of society must keep in check. Insatiable desires and hatreds account, separately or together, for the deaths witches cause. Witches are morose, unsociable people" p. 87.

What do we make of the countless stories of the activities of witchcraft, confessions of witches and wizards? What do we say of the mass hysteria of witchcraft and secret societies? Doesn't this add up to the indisputable idea that there is witchcraft as we hear it from these stories and confessions? There are thousands and thousands of stories about witchcraft activities, confessions of old men and women, young boys and girls, children, rich, and poor, educated and uneducated, even infants and toddlers. Let me mention a few. Basil Davidson states,

> Countless women, mostly of advanced years, confessed to being witches and to having committed fearful crimes. . . A mid-wife confessed that she had killed as many as 170 children, twenty-two of whom were related to her. An old man confessed to having said that if he had not been arrested three days before he would have destroyed everything for twenty-five leagues round with hail and gravel-stones... The seventy-five year old woman, Anna Ottlin of Zeilitzheim, confessed that, as she was old and feeble, she might be allowed three days' respite, when she would tax her memory and tell of each separate crime in detail... Another witch, who had been several times tortured but had always recanted everything after being set free, was finally, after severer torture, brought to confess that she had dug up the bodies of sixteen children, boiled them and made witch salve out of them.[12]

A Nigerian writer writing about the Ibibio also enumerates the activities of witchcraft.

> Barren women, people whose children die at birth, women with irregular menstrual flow, accident victims, traders who suffer losses, office workers who fail to get promotions, a political candidate who fails to get elected, a student who fails examinations, a person who notices scratches on his or her body, a hunter or fisherman who fails to bring home meat, a farmer with bad crop yields, a football team that consistently loses matches—all suspect witches as the cause of their misfortune Even those who are most successful in their business or

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[12] Davidson, p. 124-125.

profession constantly fear being bewitched by envious relatives or friends.[13]

If you were asked about this, you would have your own stories. I have mine too. My grandfather who contracted small-pox was denied medication until he confessed about those he had killed with his witchcraft. The young Kunhiyop confessed that he had killed those that had recently died in the community and even some that died before his mother got married. My uncle's wife confessed last year that she was responsible for her husband's poverty. She also confessed that she would also kill him using witchcraft.

My 17 year old son, Babangida, was also accused of being an elder in a secret society. He, it was alleged by the accuser [also a member], was in charge of administering human blood. The point is that these stories *boku* (abound). What are we to make of them?

Let me begin by saying that it would be idle and foolhardy to deny the existence and reality of the belief in witchcraft. This belief must be taken seriously. "It is very real in the minds of those who believe in witchcraft."[14] People who believe in witchcraft attribute to it almost every social and personal evil. "There is no kind of illness or hardship at all that may not be attributed to witchcraft... When natural or religious explanations fail to satisfy, the social explanation—witchcraft—is invariably invoked"[15]

African Christians who are trying to be relevant to their culture must begin by accepting that there is something such as witchcraft, by which I mean generally the power of Satan and his evil cohorts that bring suffering and misery to humanity.

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[13]   Daniel A. Offiong, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Magic and Social Order among the Ibibio of Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1991, 78, quoted in Hiebert etc., p. 155. Pritchard notes that there is "no aspect of culture, however small or insignificant, where the power and influence of witchcraft is absent." P. 63.

[14]   Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999, p. 173.

[15]   Magesa, p. 182.

However, my belief in witchcraft does not exonerate me from asking serious philosophical questions on this issue. The two critical philosophical questions that face us with regards to witchcraft are metaphysics and epistemology.

At the metaphysical level, I must ask myself for example, if one confesses to the eating of the flesh and drinking of human blood, is it to be taken metaphorically or physically. Indeed both Christians and non-Christians have been asked this question, and they indicate serious doubt about the real eating of the flesh of the human being. The Nupe people of Nigeria believe that the eating is spiritual not physical. That still does not settle the metaphysical problems associated with the "eating and drinking of human flesh and blood."

At the epistemological level, we have to ask ourselves how do we know that the stories are true or false? Again, I am aware that as Africans we believe that if someone has confessed to being a witch, why should we not believe him or her? However, if one were to put these stories together and ask himself of the truthfulness or lack of, would he not conclude that "while they by no means prove that the actions confessed were actually committed, they certainly point to vivid and profound belief in witchcraft."[16] In my mind, these stories demonstrate clearly that "what is known about witchcraft is what is believed about them. But what is believed about them is that they embody the workings of evil."[17]

As we all know.

A principal way in which traditional religions accredit, justify and propagate ideas about the supernatural is through the telling and retelling of stories of the supernatural. These stories are told to accredit an incredible range of beliefs about spirits, beliefs, which vary according to the culture and religion of the teller. . . We are expected to

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[16]   Basil Davidson, *The African Genius*. Little Brown and Company, 1969, p. 121.

[17]   *Ibid.*, p. 127

assent to the validity of the stories and of the inferences drawn from them.[18]

The authors go on to conclude rightly that "if we proceed on the mistaken assumption that we can infer truth about spirits from people's beliefs about spirits, we will invariably end up syncretistically incorporating animistic and magical notion of spirit power into our doctrinal understanding of the demonic world."[19] Stories and confessions about witchcraft do not prove the reality and certainty of witchcraft but simply affirm the belief in the existence of witchcraft. Though the belief in witchcraft attempts to provide a solution to the existence of evil in the world, it does not provide an adequate and an acceptable solution to the problem of evil.

BIBLICAL PERCEPTIONS ON WITCHCRAFT

Another crucial question about the issue of witchcraft concerns the Biblical teaching on witchcraft. We must ask ourselves the question, "What does the Bible have to say about witchcraft?" People of God in both the Old and New Testaments have been warned to have nothing to do with demonic activity and anything related with it. Leviticus 19:31 states, "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them" (cf. 20:26; Ex. 22:18; Deut. 18:14). Deuteronomy 18:14 makes it very explicit: "Let no one be found among you..... who engages in witchcraft or cast spells. These are detestable practices." It is very clear that *witchcraft or any demonic activity* in all its ramifications *is detestable* to God. In the New Testament, man is said to be bewitched when he replaces God for another (Gal. 3:1). There is a clear prohibition of involvement in witchcraft, whether in actual

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[18]   Priest, Robert J., Thomas Campbell, and Bradford Mullen, "Missiological Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm." In *Spiritual Power and Missions: Raising the Issues.* Edited by Edward Rommen. Evangelical Missiological Society Series, Number 3. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995, pp. 9-87.

[19]   *Ibid.*, p. 13.

involvement in demonic activity or giving verbal support of the activity.

Believers who have dabbled in demonic activities have been hurt and injured. Disobedience to the clear teaching of Scripture concerning witchcraft leads to catastrophic consequences e.g. defeat, injury, and death. The story of Saul in Samuel 28 and the sons of Sceva in Acts 19 demonstrate some problems encountered when people dabble in demonic activities of any kind. In fact, witchcraft has nothing good to offer. Witchcraft encourages disrespect against parents, children, disunity and hatred among families, and murder. Recently, a young man hacked his father to death because he suspected his father of killing his son in witchcraft. It is almost incredible the atrocities that have been committed because of witch-hunting even among Christian communities.

The testimony of Scripture is that the child of God has complete power over demonic power. Look at the New Testament. There it is the devil that flees, not the child of God. If there is the power of witchcraft, then the power of the child of God overshadows it. "Jesus' power is super power and Satan's power is powerless power" according to a current children's chorus in Nigeria. The theological basis of this assertion is that the cross disarmed demonic control of the believer in Christ when Christ had stripped evil forces of their power. "He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them" (Col. 2:14). According to Fred Dickason,

> Satan and demons are no match for Christ, the God-man. In face of satanic opposition, the cross accomplished God's self-glorification, released the devil's prisoners, publicly routed evil spirits, and sealed their judgment so that men would never have to fear or follow them again.[20]

This has been a brief survey of the biblical material on witchcraft. Does the biblical material prove that the African belief

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[20]   C. Fred Dickason. *Angels. Elect and Evil*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1975, p. 215.

in witchcraft is basically the same doctrine that the Scriptures present? I believe not. Confessions, stories and experiences of witchcraft are a clear demonstration of what a person believes according to his cultural belief. Many times the Bible is used as a proof text for our already established opinions and beliefs. Certainly, our culturally postulated reality of witchcraft needs to be adjusted to and addressed pastorally with seriousness, sensitivity and respect. The Bible properly interpreted would not support the kind of doctrines of demons, evil spirits and witchcraft which are supported, nursed and propagated by our traditional beliefs and transmitted through stories, confessions and experiences. Though experiences and stories are relevant and should be interacted with, the epistemological formulation and certainty of doctrines on this matter should be based on Scripture alone.

RESURGENCE OF THE BELIEF AND PRACTICE OF WITCHCRAFT

In spite of the fact that Christians have been warned not to have anything to do with witchcraft, the evidence is that,

> there is widespread belief in the power of witchcraft and the fear of being bewitched. Christian rituals are often seen as new and more powerful protection against the attacks of one's enemies and those who may be jealous.[21]

It is not uncommon to hear mothers covering the beds of their children with the blood of Jesus to ward off witches and evil spirits before putting them to bed. The blood of Jesus is also poured on the road to provide security against witches who cause accidents on the road.

We are plagued with the resurgence of witchcraft in such proportions that we are forced to ask ourselves what has precipitated this mass hysteria? Why is there such a resurgence of belief in the powers of witches and wizards among Christians

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[21]   Hiebert, p. 173.

today? Why have the demons and witches resurfaced in such numbers? I think several factors are responsible for this almost epidemic situation in the African context.

First, I think that church leaders, especially expatriate missionaries, have presented evil inadequately. The main problem is this: "What is the ultimate cause of misfortune, sickness and death?" As far as the African is concerned God is our Father and we are His children, He does not cause evil, sickness or death. It is a known fact that missionaries, the early church leaders and some contemporary leaders dismissed witchcraft as mere superstition. At this point, though we acknowledge with deep appreciation the role missionaries played in transforming the African society through the gospel, we must also add that missionaries and early African Church leaders failed in understanding the world view of the African. In this regard, Professor Yusufu Turaki notes.

> The major pitfall of the pioneering and early missionaries was the way they berated African culture. Their attitude was in the main the basic negation of African culture, custom, religious and social life.[22]

It is not an exaggeration that church leaders are now painfully aware that the mere dismissal of witchcraft as superstition no longer carries weight with many of their members. In fact many Christians in our churches confess to the existence and practice of witchcraft. I doubt seriously that the church has responded to the nagging problem of witchcraft from a Scriptural and a theological perspective. As Merrill Unger observes,

> every spirit-anointed minister should echo the words of the Great Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ whose wonderful ministry of liberation was so gloriously foretold "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim freedom for the captive and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Is. 61:1,2, and Lk. 4:18-19).[23]

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[22] Yusufu Turaki, "The Minority Ethnic Group and Christian Missions." Boston: Typewritten, 1982, p. 27.

[23] Merrill Unger. *Demons in the World Today.* Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971, p. 188.

But the minister must know what he is fighting against so as to be able to proclaim a message of victory.

Secondly, as a consequence of ecclesiastical leadership failure, Christians generally are prone to provide worldly standards and demonic explanations to the question of evil rather than biblical and theological explanations. Consequently, though we claim to be Christians, we are quick to suspect witchcraft when someone's children are getting sick or have died. We are prone to give suggestions which favour witchcraft rather than to recognise Christ's power over our lives. We therefore cling to witchcraft which satisfies our desire to find answers to our questions. Many young Christians can hardly give one story of deliverance from demonic power, but can give countless stories of the confessions and power of witches and wizards. As long as Christians have more stories (true or false) of witchcraft, they will always feel that witchcraft has power over the child of God.

Thirdly, nominal Christianity has also contributed to the resurgence of witchcraft. External change without an internal transformation does not affect the whole person. Many Christians that I have talked to have accepted the fact that they became Christians because it was the normal thing to do. In the southern area of Kaduna State of Nigeria and most former mission stations, it is normal to be church-goers. This is exactly where the danger lies. Though at the external level they claimed to be Christians, they are unbelieving and unchanged and of course cling tenaciously to those deep-seated traditional beliefs and values.

Stephen Neil makes the significant observation that,

> On a deeper level than conduct, and in the end more menacing, is the persistent underground of non-Christian structures and patterns of thought. Those patterns are far more instinctive than rational. They persist in all of us, racially as well as individually... such deep conviction can remain unspoken and can apparently, in Europe no less than in Africa, be transmitted from generation to generation. This explains the distressing emergence in the third and forth generation

Christians of old and evil practices such as one would imagine to have long disappeared from the Christian consciousness.[24]

John Mbiti, a noted African theologian equally remarks that,

a careful scrutiny of the religious situation shows clearly that in their encounter with traditional religions, Christianity and Islam have made only an astonishingly shallow penetration in converting the whole man of Africa, with all his historical-cultural roots, social dimension, self-consciousness and expectations."[25]

Alyward Shorter similarly notes that,

at baptism, the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook. What remains above the surface is, in fact, the tip of an iceberg. The African Christian is not asked to recant a religious philosophy. Consequently, he returns to the forbidden practices as occasion arises with remarkable ease.[26]

Witchcraft, sorcery and witch hunting among Christian communities are a classical case of Shorter's significant observation.

Fourthly, ignorance of Scriptural truths and theology has also contributed to the resurgence of witchcraft beliefs and practices among Nigerian Christians. A quick survey of an average Christian would indicate that generally many professing Christians have no knowledge of Scriptures, and specifically they are unaware of what the Bible really teaches on many of the issues about witchcraft. Pastors and evangelists are more prone to superficial condemnations, rather than giving a systematic teaching on philosophical, religious and theological beliefs and values in the

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[24]   Stephen Neil, *The Unfinished Task*. London: Edinburgh House Press, London, 1957, pp. 117-118.

[25]   John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969, p. 263.

[26]   Alyward Shorter, *African Theology. Adaptation or Incarnation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977, p. 10.

context of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Again, Stephen Neil puts his finger on the problem.

> Almost everywhere there has been grave failure in the giving of systematic instruction to the members of Christian faith. There has been plenty of preaching—almost all simple sermons—but the intellectual content has been small, and the aim is all too often moralistic edification rather than serious instruction. The Bible is a more difficult book than is often realised by those who have been brought up on it.[27]

Another scholar in Africa also states,

> One is forced to ask the question: why does the African, in times of human crises, revert back to non-Christian practices? This appears to be the rule rather than the exception when because the African's past has been ignored and no attempt has been made to penetrate it with the regeneration power of the gospel message, the converted African lives in two levels.[28]

This explains, in part, that although they are Christians, their worldview has not been transformed.

Fifth, the lack of "social restraints and other in-built mechanisms" have contributed to the retention of these beliefs which are negative to the Christian faith. In modern African Christian societies there has been a steady disintegration of traditional structures and values. For instance, the practice of witchcraft in traditional African societies had controls and restraints. Not everyone could claim to be a witch or wizard. The elders provided controls and were the interpreters and judges of those who practised witchcraft. The situation is completely different today where you have children and young people claiming to be experts in witchcraft. Young people and children have become authorities on witchcraft. The collapse of the authority of the elders has contributed immensely to the breakdown of law and order.

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[27]   Neil, 1957: 130.

[28]   G.C. Oosthuizen, *Post Christianity. A Theological and Anthropological Study.* 1964, p. 4.

There are no checks and controls in the modern mass hysteria of belief and practice of witchcraft. This has provided a fertile ground for the resurgence of the notorious belief and practice of witchcraft.

DEALING WITH WITCHCRAFT: THEOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS

In order to deal with the problem of evil properly, one must approach it from concepts that properly root in Scripture. I will discuss them briefly.

First, the attributes of God will enable the Christian to an adequate understanding of evil.

Sovereignty. James Montgomery Boise states it very well,

> So the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is no mere philosophical dogma devoid of practical value. The sovereignty of God is the foundation of Christian faith... the centre of gravity in the system of Christian truth. It is also the Christians' strength and comfort amid the storms of this life.

There is clear teaching in the Scripture that Satan and evil spirits act only when they have been given permission by God. The story of Job in chapters 1,2 clearly demonstrate this truth. Romans 8:31, 35, 37-39 provide the assurance that the knowledge of the sovereignty of God will afford a deep sense of security in a world which is full of misery and trouble.

The Goodness and Love of God. In a real and practical way, God is involved in the world through the goodness He demonstrates to all his creatures. Goodness here means the outgoing of God's grace and love and mercy towards his creatures. John Wenham also notes that God's goodness is in a manner quite outside our experience.

> God's goodness is a blazing, consuming, awe-inspiring thing, unlike the best that we know among men. It is when we see the creator standing

over against creation, loving his children with infinite love; yet hating evil with infinite hatred that we see theism in all its glory.[29]

One writer exclaims: "Oh the goodness of God, the goodness of God." In any human crisis the Christian must resort to this Biblical truth in order to succeed for indeed God is good (Lam. 3:21-25). The love of God is still evident in allowing his children to suffer for His glory and the goodness of the suffering Christian (Rom. 8:38-39). Evil is temporal but God's love for his children is everlasting.

The Presence of God is another attribute of God that will transform the Christian worldview. God is always present with him. To Moses, God said "My presence will go with you." To Elisha's servant, "those who are with us are greater than those you see around us." It is clear that though one affirms the existence of demons and evil spirits, the presence of God and his angels is enough to provide adequate security against demons and any human fear. The fact is that our God who is always with us is greater, mightier and stronger than the devil. In this regard John said, "He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world." (1 Jn 4:4). For the Christian in particular, Christ promised us that He will be with us to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20). The point is not denying the existence and power of Satan and his agents through demons/witches but that we affirm the power of God over those who oppose us.

Second are the causes of evil. The believer needs to understand the source of evil. There is the need to understand that the origin of evil is sin. The consequences of the fall on the human race is death (Gen. 3:19), pain, domination of the wife by the husband, cursed ground, and hard labour. In other words, evil in whatever form is a result of our sin for which we are personally responsible (Rom. 5:12).

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[29]   John Wenham, *The Goodness of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974, p. 45.

Evil springs from the **moral choices** of men. Man is free to act. He makes his own decisions. If you decide to jump from a tree, the law of gravitation will cause you to fall, not upwards but down to your injury or death. Moral choices set in motion laws of cause and effect which God has established. The man or woman who lives a promiscuous life and gets the deadly AIDS virus cannot blame any witch or evil forces but has opened himself or herself to getting this deadly disease.

Evil forces may cause evil. Evil spirits or demons not only exist but also afflict human beings. The story of Job indicate that the demonic world can be involved in causing disease and even death. But note again that, evil is permitted by God's will and for special purposes (Gen. 50:20, Ac. 2:23). These causes are not unrelated but interrelated.

Physical causes may also be there. That man is in the flesh makes physical death a necessity (Ps. 90:10). **Also moral causes** exist, for example sin is also a cause. The wages of sin is death. In addition, **divine causes** (Job 1). Lastly, **the goodness of God must be seen from God's perspective** not from man's point of view. When God allows evil, it is not because he desires to see his children suffer, but because he intends to achieve his goal. When he allowed Satan, it was not because he could not stop him, but he only allowed him.

***Third*,** we must realise that God controls evil and He will eventually do away with it. He sets limits on the extent of evil upon his children. The case of Job is a good example. The Bible makes it clear that God has a boundary or limit over everyone's life (Job 14:4, Heb. 9:27). The child of God must realise that he is touched by the devil only as God almighty allows the devil or evil forces to do so, and even in this case God has placed a limit over demonic power. The devil does not compete with God's power; he seeks God's permission to inflict injury or harm God's people.

Job demonstrates this confidence in the death of his children and the personal destruction of his property. Even when we cannot

fully understand God's permission of evil which causes so much pain (as the story Job clearly states), the child of God must say along with Job, "though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." This is an avowed confidence of the believer in God. The believer in such crises does not yield to Satan and evil spirits. He also does not deny the existence and potency of these demonic spirits, but he affirms his commitment to the Sovereign Lord. In addition to this radical commitment, the problem of evil in all its form should also motivate the Christian to live a life as if he were to die any moment. It is in this regard that the Psalmist says "teach me to number my days" (Ps. 90:10-12). God has not promised any person a non-violent death. That man is to die is certain; that he will die while sleeping is no where guaranteed. A Christian may become mentally deranged, drown or be killed in a car accident. Job 21:22-25 states, "Will any teach God knowledge, seeing that he judges those that are on high. One dies in full prosperity, being wholly at ease and secure, his body of fat and the marrow of his bones moist. Another dies in bitterness of soul never having tasted of good."

The Christian does not live as if there are no evil spirits and witches, but he lives with the full conviction that God is in control. He believes wholeheartedly that the Devil and his forces have been conquered and that as a believer he has no need to fear demonic forces. The fact is, without this affirmation from the Scripture in our ears, it would not be worth being a Christian. The joy of being a Christian is that our God in Jesus Christ is sovereign over all evil forces, and the child of God can proclaim that without fear. This is the clear teaching of the Scriptures which should provide great comfort and strength in these times of the resurgence of demonic activities which cause so much fear and terror. The Christian has victory in Christ over witchcraft and all its divergent forces.

CONTEXTULIZING JESUS "THE ONLY MEDIATOR" FOR THE SUKUMA PEOPLE OF TANZANIA

Fabian F. Maganda

INTRODUCTION

African Christians and missionaries, who have a desire to contextualize the biblical message for people to whom they minister in Africa, are confronted with several theological issues. It is common in Tanzania and in other African countries to find Christians mixing their traditional beliefs with the biblical truth. This syncretism has affected the kind and quality of their Christian life. Janet Lundblad has similar concern about the problem of syncretism in the church of Africa. She says that most African Christians still resort to the practices and beliefs of the traditional religions in time of crisis.[1]   Paul Kalanda also makes a similar observation,

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[1]   Janet Lundblad, "Toward an Authentic African Theology," *Covenant Quarterly* 36 (August 1978): 37.

> There is a phenomenon in Africa that is paradoxical. Many people have embraced Christianity and the prospects are that in 30 to 50 years from now, Africa may have the largest number of Christians in the world. But the paradox is that many of these Christians still practice their tradition. In fact, any pastor will tell you that many Christians live two lives: one Christian and the other traditional.[2]

Some African Christians not only have resorted to the practice and beliefs of the African Traditional Religion, but they have also tried to equate the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ with that of the ancestors in Africa Traditional Religion. François Kabaséle comments on how Christ relates to ancestors to some extent. He says,

> Just as Christ, the one priest, does not abolish human mediation, but fulfils them in himself, so does he consummate in himself the mediation exercised by our ancestor, a mediation that he does not abolish but which in him, is revealed to be henceforward a subordinate mediation.[3]

The above quotation raises questions such as, Who is the mediator between God and man? Is there any difference or similarity between the New Testament concept of mediator with that held by African Traditional Religions? Is the person and role of Christ as mediator similar to the mediators of African Traditional Religions? These questions require careful attention of both African Christians and missionaries. And it is essential that we deal with them in the light of the Bible.

This essay will focus on the evaluation of five passages: Galatians 3:19-20, 1 Timothy 2:5-6 and Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, with special attention given to the use of μεσιτης in the New Testament. These exegetical studies will form the foundation by

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[2] Paul Kalanda, "Consolidating Christianity in Africa," *Missiology* 4 (Cotber 1976): 400.

[3] Francois Kabasele, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother" in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*. ed. Robert Schretter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991): 126.

which missionaries and African theologians will contextualize the *concept of a mediator* for the *Sukuma* people of Tanzania.[4]

THE SUKUMA UNDERSTANDING OF MEDIATOR

Development of the Concept

The understanding of the concept of mediator among the Sukuma people arises from their understanding of the universe. They view the universe as existing in levels: The Supreme Being (*Liwelelo*)[5], the spirits of ancestors (*bakulugenji*), man himself, and in the last category are animals, plants and minerals.[6] As the universe is in various levels, there are intermediaries between levels. The Sukuma people believe that God is not imminent but transcendent. He is considered as an inactive guarantor for the existing conditions. He does not in any way change from good to evil like man. His benevolence is always seen in a negative fashion. He refrains from doing both evil and good, and His withdrawal from the affairs of man is deemed good. There is no trace among the Sukuma that God has revealed Himself to them in a special way.[7]

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[4] *Sukuma* is the name of a tribe in Tanzania. The majority of the Sukuma are situated to the south of Lake Victoria (Nyanza), mainly in Mwanza and Shinyanga regions.

[5] There are a number of different names for the Supreme Being, each one indicating a specific attribute, but all refer to the one High God. For a complete discussion on the name of God, read Berta Millroth, *Lyuba: Traditional Religion of the Sukuma* (Uppsala, Studie Ethnographic Upsaleensia XXII: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckert AB, 1965), 95-106; and Ray Hatfield, "The *nfumu* in tradition and change: A study of the position of religious practitioners among the Sukuma of Tanzania, East Africa" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1968), 47,48.

[6] For a complete discussion on Basukuma view of the universe, see Charles S. Salalah, "The place of Ancestral Spirit in African Theology" (MA Thesis, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, 1981), 34f

[7] Salalah, "The place of ancestral spirits in African Theology", p. 61.

The Sukuma tradition has given different reasons why *Liwelelo* (Supreme Being) decided to remove himself from his people. But all the reasons given have one thing in common – that man disobeyed God's commands, and because of such disobedience death came to all men. Although the tragedy happened between *Liwelelo* and men, the Sukuma still believe that God has an influence in their affairs.

There have been disagreements among scholars whether the Sukuma people approach God directly or indirectly. Rev. Warren J. Roth summarises the various ideas advanced regarding the influence of *Liwelelo* over men. He stressed that man communicates directly to God (*Liwelelo*) through prayer, ritual, and man's belief in God's ever-present concern.[8] Millroth, together with other writers of this persuasion, claims that most ritual was addressed to *Liwelelo* alone. It was only later that communication with God through ancestors (*bakulungeji*) was added and became dominant. As evidence of her claim, Millroth cites the survival of the "earlier" religion in the invocation to *Liwelelo* which now forms only one part of long litanies in honour of the ancestors.[9] The other view is exemplified by Tanner who claims that *Liwelelo* is little known and unrecognised in ritual and prayers.[10]

In our view, western writers struggle in their writing about communication between God and men due to the complexity of Sukuma belief system. Even the Sukuma differ greatly on the same issue. But Sukuma people have the similar understanding on the ultimate supremacy of *Liwelelo*. They do not exclude the influence

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[8] Warren J. Roth, "Three co-operative and credit unions as examples of culture change among the Sukuma of Tanzania" (PhD dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1966), p. 110.

[9] Berta Millroth, *Lyuba: Traditional Religion of the Sukuma*, p. 203-204.

[10] Warren J. Roth, "Three co-operative and credit unions as examples of culture change among the Sukuma of Tanzania," p. 110. Tanner, however, is not consistent in his view. In his article, "An introduction to the spirit beings of the Northern Basukuma", *Anthropological Quarterly* 29 (1956b) 79, he indicates a number of direct appeals made by men to both God and ancestors.

of *Liwelelo* in the affairs of men, but what is circumscribed is the manner of His influence. Men do not experience the influence of *Liwelelo* with immediate effect as they do the power of ancestors (*bakulugenji*). There are some occasions when a Sukuma could pray directly to God but in most cases prayers are offered to the ancestors.

Based on the above argument, ancestors (*bakulugenji*) have a prominent role in the Sukuma religion, and they are the centre of worship in people's daily life. *Bakulugenji* are regarded as intermediaries between God and man. It is not clear among the Sukuma how ancestors communicate with God.[11] Who then are the mediators according to the Sukuma? What is their role in the community?

THE PERSONALITY AND ROLE OF A MEDIATOR IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Sukuma people are convinced of the link between God and the living. The link is possible because of the ministry of the mediator. Sukuma people are among the tribes in Africa who believe in multiple mediators. According to the Sukuma, intermediaries are in at least two categories: spiritual beings and human beings.

The first category is the generic class of those who have died and have now become an undifferentiated group called *batale biswe bakale* ("our great ones of the past"), or *bakulugenji* ("founders"). These are commonly known as ancestral spirits. They are not differentiated by names but are addressed collectively at every commemorative rite.[12] The Sukuma view their *bakulugenji* as mediators. They are believed to be protectors of their families who appear to them, notifying them of imminent peril and reproving those who failed to follow their directives. *Bakulugenji* are believed

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[11]   Kabasele, "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother," p. 123.

[12]   Ray Hatfield, "The *nfumu* in tradition and change: A study of the position of religious practitioners among the Sukuma of Tanzania, East Africa" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1968), 47,48.

to have power to destroy the harvest through thunderstorms, and to cause sickness or even death. The whole range of human success and misfortune is subject to *bakulugenji*.[13] This belief causes the Sukuma to manipulate their ancestors through worship and rituals so as to be assured of their good will. The relationship between the *bakulugenji* and the living is reciprocal. The latter can only survive as entities if their offspring remembers them and the former can only prosper if the *bakulugenji* are pacified and thus bestow their blessing.

Apart from the *bakulugenji* there are other ancestors who are called *masamva* (singular- *isamva*). The Sukuma's contact with them is often tangible, personal, and direct. The experience of contact is called *kuding'wa isamva*, "to be grabbed or seized by *isamva*". *Masamva*[14] contacts the living because they are angry at being neglected and they want to remind the living that they are still wielding some influence in the lineage. The presence of mediators is vital for the well being of Sukuma societies. They constitute the highest link between man and God.

The second category of mediator is that of the living. John Mbiti calls them "religious specialists". He says,

"Specialists" are in effect the repositories in knowledge, practice and symbolically, of the religious life of their communities. They are the ones who make history of African traditional societies both sacred and religious. "Specialists" are the symbolic points of contact between the historical and spiritual worlds. In them are the continuity and essence of African religious thought and life.[15]

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[13] Ralph Tanner, *Transition in African Beliefs* (NY: Maryknoll Pub., 1967) 17.

[14] Children who die, young boys and girls, or men and women without offspring do not become *masamva*. Dead persons who are not grandparents or members of their families are not *masamva* toward their children, but they might be *masamva* towards others. For a complete study of *masamva* read Berta Millroth, *Lyuba: Traditional Religion of the Sukuma*, p. 117-124.

[15] John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 5.

For the Sukuma people the religious specialists are called *bafumu*.   A religious specialist engaged in the enterprise of *bufumu*[16] is usually called generically *nfumu* (plural *bafumu*).   The *nfumu* is the traditional doctor.

The word *nfumu* relates to two verbs: *kufuma*, meaning "to emerge", and *kufumbula*, meaning "to discover".   *Nfumu* is also a generic name for a diviner or magician. *Nfumu* has been translated in a variety of unsatisfactory ways. The most common translations are "witch doctor" and "medicine man". In this paper I will use the term *nfumu* to mean an individual who engages in purveying medicines and divination.   The practice of *nfumu* includes the performance of rituals directed toward divinities for the preparation and sale of medicine with curative, assertive, protective and aggressive properties; and divination (mediatorship). This paper will only discuss the role of *nfumu* as mediator.

As I have mentioned, the Sukuma people believe that calamities and troubles in the family or society are sent by God or sometimes by offended ancestors.   *Nfumu* is consulted in order that he/she might perform his magic to find out what is the reason for the calamity or trouble. It is therefore urgently necessary to establish a good relationship with the spiritual being in order to preserve the state of *mhola* (peace) which has been disturbed. In this situation a sacrifice is demanded. The Sukuma believe that God Himself established the institution of sacrifice.[17]

The central concern of the Sukuma is to understand why an event, particularly a misfortune, has occurred. If there is sickness or death in the family, the Sukuma believe that there has to be a spiritual cause. Most Sukuma attribute sickness or death to the displeasure of his/her ancestor or perhaps to a sorcerer. To know

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[16]   *Bafumu* is a secret religious society of the Sukuma. This is also used to refer to a magic bond which links a person with his ancestor (*bakulugenji*), or the knowledge of any procedure which contains or is based on a magic element.

[17]   There is a myth among the Sukuma which explains how God came with a white goat to a troubled family because their child was ill. The people were advised to sacrifice the goat and look to the east and utter the name of deity. When this was done, the child got well again.

which is the cause between the two, or some times, three alternatives, a person goes to a *nfumu* who does divination.

The *bafumu* are important to the Sukuma society. Their role is to interpret the events of life. They communicate with the ancestors (*bakulugenji)* and tell the victim what is required of him/her. The power involved in divination is believed to come from the ancestors. The *nfumu* appeals to the whole community of *bakulugenji*. There is no singling out of one ancestor in divination. All ancestors are recognised as needed supporters.[18]

It is clear from these facts that the Sukuma people do not have a biblical understanding of the personality and the role of mediators. We see that on the one hand, mediators bring good health and prosperity to their family, but on the other hand, they bring evil. And we have seen also that mediators range from a *bakulugenji* ("ancestral spirits") to *bafumu* ("traditional doctor"). Our task as ministers of the gospel is to find the way which can be used to contextualize the truth of the Scripture that "Jesus is the only mediator between man and God". Having understood the concept of mediator in the Sukuma tradition, now it is essential to understand the biblical concept of mediator

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MEDIATOR

In this essay, our study is limited to the New Testament, with special emphasis on the passages in the Pauline epistles and the book of Hebrews where mediator (Greek μεσιτης) is used.[19]

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[18] Ralph Tanner, "The Theory and Practice of Sukuma Spirit Mediumship" in *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, eds. J. Beattie and J. Middleton (NY: Africana Pub. Corp., 1969), 275.

[19] For a study of Christ as mediator see Emil Brunner's Book, *The Mediator: a study of the central doctrine of the Christian faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934); and Archer E. Anderson's dissertation which deals comprehensively with the study of *Christ as mediator* ("The Mediator", Th.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1956).

The Word, μεσιτης

Background: The Greek word, μεσιτης, occurs six times in the New Testament as a noun.[20] The word appears once in the LXX in Job 9:33. Becker comments on the occurrence of the term μεσιτης in Job that the rendering of the term is inaccurate.[21]

The word is found occasionally in Hellenistic writers from Polybius onwards, and is common in the papyri from the third century B.C. Twice it is used in connection with Moses being the mediator of the law (Gal. 3:19-20). Several times it is used in the book of 1 Timothy and the book of Hebrews.

It is very important to know the meaning of μεσος in order to understand the meaning of the word, μεσιτης, and how it is used in the New Testament. μεσος is translated, "in the middle, between or in the midst." A. Oepke translates the word, μεσος, 'between contestant of parties,' 'neutral'; το μεσον 'no man's land'."[22] Louw and Nida suggest that μεσος is used to refer to "a position in the middle of an area (either an object in the midst of other objects or an area in the middle of a larger area)."[23] The literal meaning of μεσιτης then is *a go-between* or *mediator*.

The Greek word, μεσιτης, has a range of meanings. *First*, μεσιτης is used to describe a person who is involved in the process of causing agreement between the parties in disagreement; or a person who intervenes to bring peace; or a person who stands in a neutral ground. In this category Oepke translates the word, μεσιτης, to refer to "a person who acts as an umpire", or "a peace

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[20]   For the occurrence see Gal. 3:19, 20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24.

[21]   Archer E. Anderson, "The Mediator" (Th.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1956).

[22]   A. Oepke, "μεσιτης", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Gerhard Kittel, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-1974), 599

[23]   Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *A Greek-Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), 2:714.

maker".[24]   Philo brings out this idea also in his writing as he reports a case of King David and his son Absalom, in which Joab acts as μεσιτης to bring about reconciliation.[25]   In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* the word is defined as "one who mediates between two parties to remove a disagreement or reach a common goal."[26]

Secondly, μεσιτης refers to one who causes or helps parties to come to an agreement, with the implication of guaranteeing the certainty of the arrangement. In this sense μεσιτης means "surety, security or guarantor." In Ant. 20. 62 Izates acted as μεσιτης in a sense of guarantor of an agreement, when he wrote to the Parthians and urged them to welcome Artabanus. One may understand this as implying not only a guarantor of the agreement but also the guarantee of its validity. For the similar usage see Philo.[27]   Oepke translates it as a person who establishes a relationship between two hitherto unrelated entities, 'mediate' their coming together.[28]

Third, μεσιτης refers to an intermediary (Mos 2, 166). Luow and Nida call this person, "one who stands in the middle, one who speaks to both, one who cuts palavers, or one who causes arguments to cease."[29]

New Testament Usage of Mediator: The use of the word, μεσιτης, in Galatians 3: 19-20 is very important even though it does not refer to Jesus Christ. It is used in connection with Moses, the mediator of the law. It is plain in the Pentateuch that Moses served as a go-between, receiving the law from God to give to the

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[24]   Oepke "μεσιτης". *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4: 601.

[25]   Ant 7, 193.

[26]   Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature.* Revised and translated from W. Bauer's 5th ed. of *Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbush.* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1979), 505-507.

[27]   Som 1, 142.

[28]   Oepke, 4:601.

[29]   Louw and Nida, *Greek-Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2: 503.

people, as the Bible says in Deuteronomy 5:5. "At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD. . ."[30] Other scholars view the mediator in Galatians 3:19-20 as closely associated with the angels.[31]

In 1 Timothy 2:5, we read, εις και μεσιτες θεου και ανθρωπος Χριστος Ιησους. Paul places εις with μεσιτης. He uses εις as an adjective to refer "to one in contrast to more than one".[32] In this verse he indicates that there is *one* "mediator" or "go-between" between God and man. John Norman Davidson Kelly suggests that the phrase, *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,"* excludes on the one hand, the Jewish ideas of Moses (Gal. iii. 19), or angels (Heb.ii. 6 ff.: Tes. Xii Patr., Dan. vi) acting as intermediaries. and on the other hand, all the intermediary deities, Gnostic aeons, etc., accepted in pagan circles."[33]

The idea of a single mediator is brought forcibly by the addition of the word ανθρωπος (without the article) at the end. It not only excludes all Sukuma mediators but also all other African traditional religious mediators. Bernard believes that the absence of an article before the word, ανθρωπος. suggests the universal bounty of Christ's incarnation.[34] This qualifies Jesus Christ to fulfil this unique role of a mediator between man and God precisely because he is himself man.

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[30] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the *New International Version*, copyright 1984 by the International Bible Society.

[31] For more discussion on the interpretation problem of Galatians 3:19,20 passage, see Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 178-179, and Walter F. Adeney, Mediator, Mediation." in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 3: 318.

[32] Louw and Nida. 605.

[33] John Norman Davidson Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 63.

[34] John Henry Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 42.

In verse 6 Paul proceeds to define the work of Christ as mediator between God and man. This Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all men." The word, "ransom" (Greek αντιλυτρον), means "that which is given in exchange for another as the price of redemption". So Christ paid the ransom to free us from the slavery of sin. It is very interesting to find two elements of representation in this verse. The compound word, αντιλυτρον, precedes ʼυπερ παντων. This suggests that both αντι, meaning "instead of", and ʼυπερ, meaning "on behalf of" emphatically affirms the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross as an "exchange price". Donald Guthrie says,

> The addition of the proposition *anti*, ʼinstead ofʼ, is significant in view of proposition *huper*, ʼon behalf ofʼ, used after it. Christ is conceived of as an ʼexchange priceʼ *on behalf of* and *in the place of* all, on the ground of which freedom may be granted. Yet not all enjoy that freedom. [35]

Christ as μεσιτης is the one who represents God to men and men to God, and brings them together. Oepke says, "He (Christ) is the attorney and negotiator. .. That He makes peace between God and man."[36]

The other usage of μεσιτης is in the book of Hebrews. The term is used in connection with the *covenant* in 8:6; 9:15, and 12:24. The author of the book of Hebrews contrasts the mediator of the Old Covenant (Moses), with the mediator of the New Covenant (Christ).

In Hebrews 8:6 Jesus is the mediator of a "superior covenant". μεσιτης is used as a legal term for one who arbitrates between two parties. Christ mediates between people and God; it is he who establishes the new covenant. This new covenant is better than the old because it is "founded on better promises" – it concentrates on spiritual things (e.g., the forgiveness of sins) and is unconditional

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[35] Donald Guthrie, "Pastoral Epistles" in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 56, R.V.G. Tasker ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, 72.

[36] Oepke, 4: 619.

in nature. Paul Ellingworth reminds us that " He (Christ) is an intermediary for God to humanity; his action is on behalf of humanity in relation to God.[37]

In Hebrews 9:15, 16 there is again a contrast of ideas between the "New Covenant" and the "Last Will and Testament". The second phrase in vs. 15b is introduced by 'οπως, meaning, "in order that", which sets the purpose of a New Covenant whose mediator is Jesus Christ. The purpose is "that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance". The contrast includes the idea that the covenant is new in time and kind. In 12:24 μεσιτης is used in the contrast between Moses and Jesus.

Another usage of μεσιτης is alluded in 7:22 where εγγυος, meaning, "guarantee, guarantor", a synonym of μεσιτης ("mediator") is used. Nash gives a comment on the relationship of μεσιτης and εγγυος, he finds εγγυος a stronger term than μεσιτης since εγγυος was not a mere "go-between", but one who undertook legal obligation in connection with a bond.[38] In this sense then, Jesus becomes the guarantee, or pledge of what God has promised, and mediator stresses the actual accomplishment by mediatorial death.

In summary, the word mediator (Greek μεσιτης) is used to mean, *first*, "a neutral and a trusted person, one who mediates" between two parties with a view to producing peace as in 1 Timothy 2:5. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man who is trusted by both sides, because He has a true representation of God and man. He is true man and true God. *Second*, one who acts as a "guarantee" so as to secure something which otherwise could not be obtained. Thus in Hebrews 8:6; 9:15. Hebrews 12:24 portrays Jesus Christ's mediatorial death as the guarantee of the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.

The story of the whole Bible is the story of redemption. And as we have seen in our study, the redemption of human beings rests on

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[37]   Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 410.

[38]   Ronald H. Nash, "The Notion of Mediator in Alexandrian Judaism and the Epistle of the Hebrews." *WTJ* 40 (1978), 114-115.

the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ. He is the mediator of the New Covenant, the arrangement by which God and man are one at last. He is the only way through which man can reach God and have fellowship with him.

Having established the biblical concept of mediator, we are in a position to evaluate the Sukuma concept of mediator.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF MEDIATOR FOR THE SUKUMA PEOPLE OF AFRICA

There are many contrasts between Christ's mediation and Sukuma mediation. The Sukuma believe that God is far away from man and left man in the care of ancestral spirits (*bakulugenji*). These spirits are believed to have power to punish and reward the living people. With that note, the worship and care of the intermediary spirits becomes more important than seeking God. The role of the Sukuma mediator is not similar to that of Christ. He is not a go-between, he is not one who mediates" between two parties with a view to producing peace. For example, the *nfumu's* duty is not to bring reconciliation between man and God but rather to find what is the reason for the calamity or trouble which has been brought either by God or ancestral spirits. Our study also suggests that reconciliation among the Sukuma people is possible through man's effort.

The Sukuma people do not say clearly whether *Liwelelo* (the Supreme Being) is loving and caring. The Sukuma people believe in myth and not in the Bible. It is our responsibility to reject those concepts which are un-biblical and prayerfully substitute what is biblical.

It is our duty to affirm the similarities which are there between the Sukuma understanding of a mediator and the biblical understanding. The Sukuma people believe that there is a need for a mediator between man and God. They also believe that man broke his relationship with God and that is why God was displeased and moved away.

As we minister to the Sukuma people or other African traditional religious believers, *first,* it is appropriate to start from the book of

Genesis by telling the creation story, and then move on to the fall of man in Genesis 3. Our people need to hear why the relationship between man and God was broken from the biblical perspective, not from their mythology. We should help them to understand that it is the disobedience of man that wounded the relationship. *Secondly*, they need to hear about the authority of the Bible instead of myth or other traditional beliefs. We should tell them why God decided to put down his story in writing. They need to know that oral preservation of any story is not reliable. We should affirm that the Bible is the only reliable revelation of God

Thirdly, we should ask God to convict them to believe that the Bible reveals a God of love who makes known His loving intention through his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only Mediator who gave his life to restore the broken relationship between God and man (1 Tim 2:5, 6). We should tell them that Jesus is qualified to be a mediator because those who come to God through Him have access to God the Father. The direction of mediation is descent from God to man, and then from man to God and only through Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, we need to teach them that the revelation mediated by Jesus Christ directly conflicts with the Sukuma way of approaching God. It is common among the Sukuma to approach their ancestral spirits, because when they are not appeased, ancestral spirit can bring bad fortune. Therefore, Basukuma worshipers manipulate their ancestors through worship and rituals so as to be assured of their good will. This approach to worship is quite contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ. He says, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4: 24). We do not manipulate God in our worship. We are to worship him with sincerity and truth. God is not unjust. The Bible says "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Ac. 14:17).

Fifthly, we should help them to understand that their *bakulugenji* (ancestral spirits) have no ability either to communicate with the living or act as mediators between man and God. We must make it clear to them that the Bible forbids any kind of communication with the dead.

> Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead (Deut 18:10-11).

We need to teach them that in Deuteronomy 18:10-11, not only was adherence to the false gods of Canaan restricted, but also the means by which the Canaanites attempted to communicate with them were to be totally abhorred and rejected completely. Israelites were told to free themselves from such practices.

The *bafumu* are mere men. They have no ability to act as mediators between man and God. There are many incidences in the life of the Sukuma people where a person has to see more than one *nfumu* to hear the second opinion of the cause of either sickness or the death in the family. We need to show them that the *bafumu* are not trusted. They need to know the superiority of Jesus, who qualifies to be our Mediator because of His relationship to man (He is fully man, Romans 1:3) and to God (He is fully God; Colossians 1:15; 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4). He can be trusted.

They need to know that their tradition does not tell them how the relationship between man and God can be re-established. It is our task to show them that there is hope as well as good news in the Bible. It teaches that the work of Jesus as our Mediator is to redeem us from the power of death (Lk. 19:10; 1 Jn. 3:7,8). He is the mediator of redemption, and His personality and role puts Him in an entirely different category from the *bakulugenji* (ancestors), *bafumu* (tradition doctors), and *batemi* (kings). The function of Jesus is to impart eternal life to those who believe in Him. He says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10b).

In conclusion, Christ's mediatorship is superior to that of the Sukuma as well as all other traditions. Christ is the answer to all human needs, whether physical or spiritual, emotional or psychological. He qualifies to be the Mediator because of His relationship to man (He is fully man) and to God (He is fully God). He is also qualified as the mediator because His work is to reconcile God and man by means of his death on the cross (Eph 2:13; Col 1:19-22).

The recognition of the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ will exclude syncretistic practices from the African Christian life. The Scripture, as we have seen in other places, condemns any kind of divination. In 1 Samuel 28: 7-20, King Saul attempted to have contact with the dead and lost his kingship because of disobedience to God in this matter and others. The Sukuma and Africans in general need the liberating message of Christ's power to flee from this distorted traditional view of a mediator. The fact that a number of Africans still follow traditional religious belief is a challenge to the church leaders and theologians of Africa to teach the Word of God faithfully. We need to hold onto the Bible as the only source of truth without mixing traditional beliefs and the biblical truth. We need to examine all traditional beliefs and practices in light of the Bible.

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ELISHA'S UNBEARABLE CURSE: A STUDY OF 2 KINGS 2:23-25

MARK MERCER

INTRODUCTION

The idea of "to curse" or that of a "curse" is found in most African societies.[1] Curses might be pronounced by a parent, by sorcerers or

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[1] Charles Dundas, "History of Kitui," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 43 (1913): 528-9; Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe, Kenya: Kesho Publications, 1989), 63; C. W. Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic: With Particular Reference to the Kikuyu and Kamba Tribes of Kenya Colony together with Some Reflections on East Africa after the War* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1938), 103-4, 145; Gerhard Lindblom, *The Akamba in British East Africa: An Ethnological Monograph*, 2d ed., enl. (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktoyckeri, Aktiebolag, 1920; reprint ed., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 171, 182-5, 280, 336, 519, 540; John Middleton, *The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa: East Central Africa, part v, ed. Daryll Forde (London: International African Institute, 1953), 94; A. Scott Moreau, *The World of the Spirits: A Biblical Study in the African Context* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1990), 12, 112; J. H. Blackwood Murphy, "The Kitui Akamba: Further Investigation on Certain Matters," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 56 (1926): 195; Joseph Muthiani, *Akamba from Within: Egalitarianism in Social Relations* (Jericho, NY: Exposition Press, 1973), 99; Peter Mutisya, conversation with author, 27 October, 2001.

witches, by any wronged or injured party (including the community or relatives of the accursed), or for the violation of some taboo. A strong curse is sometimes thought to be the cause of death.[2] Often people may go to a traditional healer to remove curses.[3] Mbiti observes,

> There is one form of justice administered through the use of the curse. The basic principle here is that if a person is guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in cursing him. By the use of good magic, it is believed, a person can curse an unknown thief or other offender. But most of the curses are within family circles. The operative principle is that only a person of a higher status can effectively curse one of a lower status, but not vice versa. The most feared curses are those pronounced by parents, uncles, aunts, or other close relatives against their 'juniors' in the family. The worst is the curse uttered at the death-bed, for once the pronouncer of the curse has died, it is practically impossible to revoke it. If the guilty person repents and asks for the curse to be lifted, the person who uttered it can revoke it automatically or ritually if it is a very serious one. There are many stories in African villages, telling about the fulfillment of curses where a person is guilty. If one is not guilty, then the curse does not function. Formal curses are feared much in African societies, and this fear, like that of witchcraft, helps to check bad relationships especially in family circles.[4]

Likewise, the curse is also found many times in the Old Testament. Gordon defines a curse as "the invoking of a particular fate upon someone in the event of the contravention of expected standards of behavior or, as in the case of the covenant curse, if an undertaking solemnized under oath (curse) is not fulfilled."[5] The concept of "curse" takes on various forms. In some passages the

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[2] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 155.

[3] *Ibid.,* 170.

[4] *Ibid.,* 211.

[5] Robert P. Gordon, "Curse, Malediction," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis,* ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 4:491.

curse is God's judgment of someone or something, or the act thereof.[6] In many places the curse is God's specific judgment of Israel or individual Israelites for not keeping the Mosaic covenant.[7] In interpersonal relationships a curse is sometimes merely an expression of anger or a verbal reproach.[8] Sometimes the curse is used in the contexts of oaths.[9] Finally the curse is mentioned in relationships between individuals, where several passages describe the act of placing a curse on someone, the curse itself, or the state of being under such a curse.[10]

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[6] Gen. 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 8:21; 12:3; 27:29; Ps. 119:21; Prov. 3:33; Jer. 10:10; 48:10; 50:25; Lam. 3:65; Dan. 8:19; 11:36; Mic. 6:10; Nah. 1:6; Hab. 3:12; Mal. 1:4.

[7] Deut. 11:26, 28-29; 21:23; 27:13, 15-26; 28:15-68; 29:20-21, 27-28; 30:1, 7, 19; Josh. 8:34; 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 34:24; Neh. 10:28-29; 13:25; Ps. 37:22; 78:49; Isa. 10:5, 25; 26:20; 30:27; Jer. 11:3; 17:5; 23:10; Lam. 2:6; Ezek. 21:31; 22:24, 31; Dan. 9:11; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 1:12; 5:3; Mal. 1:14; 2:2; 3:9; 4:6.

[8] Exod. 22:28; Lev. 24:11, 14-16, 23; 2 Sam. 16:5, 7, 9-13; 19:21; 1 Kings 2:8; 21:10, 13; Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; 3:1, 8; Ps. 38:3; 69:24; 102:10; Prov. 24:24; Isa. 8:21; 13:5; Jer. 15:17; 29:18; 42:18; 44:12; Dan. 11:30; Hos. 7:16.

[9] Deut. 29:12, 14, 19; Judg. 21:18; 1 Sam. 14:24, 28; 1 Kings 8:31; 2 Chron. 6:22; Prov. 29:24; Ezek. 16:59; 17:13, 16, 18, 19; Hos. 10:4.

[10] Gen. 9:25; 12:3; 27:12-13; 49:7; Exod. 21:17; 22:28b; Lev. 19:14; 20:9; 24:11, 14-16, 23; Num. 5:18-19, 21-24, 27; 22:6, 11, 17; 23:7-8, 11, 13, 25, 27; 24:9-10; Deut. 23:4-5; Josh. 6:26; 9:23; 24:9; Judg. 9:27, 57; 17:2; 1 Sam. 14:24, 28; 17:43; 26:19; Neh. 13:2; Job 5:3; 24:18; 31:30; Ps. 12:3; 35:4-8, 26; 58:6-8; 59:11-13; 62:4; 69:22-28; 70:2-3; 83:9-18; 109:6-15, 17-20, 28; 140:9-11; Prov. 11:26; 20:20; 24:24; 26:2; 27:14; 30:10-11; Isa. 65:20; Jer. 15:10; 20:14-15; 29:22; Hos. 4:2 Anderson calls these "punitive curses" (Jeffrey Scott Anderson, "The Nature and Function of Curses in the Narrative Literature of the Hebrew Bible" [Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1992], 125-8).

   There are several passages that are difficult to classify under any one of the above categories. These are: Lev. 5:1; Num. 23:7-8; Judg. 5:23; 1 Sam. 3:13; 26:19; 2 Kings 9:34; Ps. 10:3, 7; 59:12; 102:8; Prov. 22:14; 28:27;

I have chosen 2 Kings 2:23-25 as a text from which to discuss this concept in the Old Testament. Although it affords us one of the clearest examples of one individual placing a curse on another person, it has often been misunderstood. Messner notes:

> A casual reading of the passage has often left an impression somewhat like this: An old bald-headed prophet was trudging slowly up the main street of Bethel when he chanced upon some innocent little children merrily playing together. In the midst of their merriment they spy him and shout, more playfully than tauntingly, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head!" Instantly the old prophet becomes enraged with their childish banter, and with eyes flashing in anger he whirls around and curses them in the name of the Lord. Suddenly, as if in direct accordance with his curse, two she bears rush out of the nearby forest and "devour" forty-two of the little children. But, is this the correct picture of the situation?[11]

I hope to clarify the many misunderstandings of the passage and in the process, to understand more fully the teaching of the Old Testament on maledictive curses.

EXPOSITION OF 2 KINGS 2:23-25
AND MALEDICTIVE CURSES

The Context of the Passage

In 2 Kings 2:19—13:20 the author of the book discusses the ministry of the prophet Elisha. The first subsection in this portion

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Ecc. 7:21-22; 10:20; Isa. 24:6; 65:15; Jer. 24:9; 25:18; 26:6; 42:18; 44:8, 12, 22; 49:13; and Zech. 8:13.

[11] Richard G. Messner, "Elisha and the Bears: A Critical Monograph on 2 Kings 2:23-25," *Grace Journal* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1962): 16. In addition to Messner's article, specific studies on this passage include Jim West, "Beware the Angry Prophet: 2 Kings 2:23-25," *Journal of Biblical Studies* [http://journalofbiblicalstudies.org] 1:1 (2001): pars. 1-18; Fred E. Woods,"Elisha and the Children: The Question of Accepting Prophetic Succession." *Brigham Young University Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 47-58; and Eric J. Ziolkowski, "The Bad Boys of Bethel: Origin and Development of a Sacrilegious Type." *History of Religions* 30 (1991): 331-58.

deals with the miraculous signs performed by Elisha immediately
following the departure of Elijah. Two signs are recorded: the
healing of the water (2:19-22) and the implementation of a curse
against the s of Bethel (2:23-25). The section is followed by the
ministry of Elisha during the reign of King Joram of Israel (3:1—
9:3). From what is known about the prophet, he was anointed
sometime during the mid-ninth century and lived into the early
eighth.[12]

The Setting: A Journey to Samaria via Bethel (v. 23a)

The text begins by stating that "from there Elisha went up to
Bethel. . . ." (v. 23).[13]   Because Elisha had purified the water in
Jericho (cf. 2:18), some scholars hold that the youth were from that
city and that the mauling of the bears took place outside of Jericho
instead of Bethel.[14]   While it is true that the passage does not state
specifically what city the youth were from (v. 23), the repetition of
the prepositional phrase "from there" in verse 25a suggests that the
incident took place outside of Bethel rather than Jericho.   This
second occurrence of the prepositional phrase "from there" is not
translated in the NIV. Verse 25 reads "and he went on *from there* to
Mount Carmel, and *from there* he returned to Samaria (translation
and emphasis mine)." It would seem odd to report in verse 23 that
Elisha went "from there" (Jericho) to Bethel, and then turn around
and say in verse 25a that "from there" (i.e. Jericho) he went to
Mount Carmel. It would be better to interpret the second usage of

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[12]   Elisha began his ministry in the latter part of the reign of Ahab (1 Kings
19:21) and died shortly after the beginning of Jehoash's reign (2 Kings
13:14-20). Merrill dates his anointing to around 855 B. C. (Eugene H.
Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* [Grand
Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987], 380).

[13]   Unless stated otherwise, all Biblical quotations are from the *Holy Bible,
New International Version* (East Brunswick. NJ: International Bible
Society, 1973).

[14]   Woods. 49, and perhaps Gwilym H. Jones. *1 and 2 Kings* (Grand
Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. 1984; London: Marshall,
Morgan & Scott. 1984). 389.

"from there" in verse 25 as a reference to Bethel. In short, from there (Jericho) Elisha went up to Bethel,[15] and from there (Bethel) he went up on to Mount Carmel.

It is significant that the events in this pericope took place in the city of Bethel. In the Book of Kings, Bethel was notorious for being the place where Jeroboam set up a rival cult center some 80 years earlier.[16] The cult center that he founded consisted of a golden calf and perhaps a goat idol (2 Chron. 11:15)[17] that the people were encouraged to worship (1 Kings 12:28, 30, 32).[18] He also established

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[15] The site of Jericho is 825 meters below sea level (T. A. Holland, "Jericho," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 3:724) and that of Bethel about 900 meters above (James A. Kelso, et al., *The Excavation of Bethel (1934-60)*, the Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 39 [Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1968], 3).

[16] 1 Kings 12:29, 32-33; 13:1, 4, 10-11, 32; 2 Kings 10:29; 17:28; 23:4, 15, 17, 19.

[17] Some feel that the noun שְׂעִירִים should not be rendered as "goats," but rather as "phalluses" (Harris H. Hirschberg, "Arabic Etymologies," *Vetus Testamentum* 11 [1961]: 381-2) or as "rain gods" (N. H. Snaith, "The Meaning of שְׂעִירִים," *Vetus Testamentum* 25 [1975]: 118). Thompson says that they might have been demons (J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, New American Commentary, 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 255.

[18] Regardless of whether Jeroboam intended the calves to be idols or not, they eventually became that to the Israelites who worshiped there (Hos. 8:5-6; 13:2-3). House has noted that "surely the author's account of the scene makes sense. Jeroboam knew the prohibitions against idolatry in Israel because Ahijah told him Solomon's idolatry led to God's placing him in power (cf. 1 Kings 11:33). He also knew of the temple's importance as a central sanctuary. . . . It seems probable, then, that the compromises were deliberate. Finally, he had indeed lived in Egypt (1 Kgs. 11:40), where depictions of gods were common. Perhaps Jeroboam did not intend the harm he caused, but he should have foreseen that the only 'positive' by-product of the new cult was supposedly to help him stay in power by manipulating the people" (Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary, 8 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. 1995], 185).

his own priesthood (1 Kings 12:31; cf. 13:33) over which he may
have served as a high priest (1 Kings 12:33—13:1)[19] at both the cult
center in Bethel and its counterpart in Dan (1 Kings 12:31-32). He
also set up other sanctuaries (1 Kings 12:31; 13:32-33; 2 Chron.
11:15). Finally, he devised a distinct religious calendar to govern the
two cult centers (1 Kings 12:32-33). It stands to reason that the
presence of a rival cult center in Bethel would have attracted many
of those in the southern part of Israel who did not adhere to a strict
Yahwism advocated by the prophets. Even the story of the old
prophet in 1 Kings 13 reveals that some Yahwists in Bethel were not
as wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord as they ought to have been.
The Book of 2 Chronicles reveals that after the non-Levitical
priesthood was established in Bethel, many Levitical priests left the
country for Judah (11:13-17). Although there was a company of
faithful prophets there during the time of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings
2:1-3), in the time of the prophets Hosea and Amos it had the
reputation of being a wicked city (Hos. 10:15), of having idolatrous
altars and a major temple (Amos 3:14; 7:13), and being a major cult
center in Israel (Amos 4:4; 5:5-6; 7:13) whose prophets were
opposed to the followers of Yahweh (Amos 7:10-13).

The Covenant Violation (v. 23b)

When Elisha came near the city, "as he was walking along the
road, some young people came out of the town and jeered at him."
It was not unusual for the residents of Israel to know the
whereabouts of notable prophets. An example of this can be found
in 1 Samuel 9:12 where some people knew that the prophet Samuel
had arrived in their town. When Saul and his servant inquired into
the whereabouts of the prophet Samuel, they were told, "'He's just
ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today.'"
Likewise, the knowledge of Elisha's arrival at Bethel may have
become public knowledge from the local Yahwistic prophets who
would have been aware of the prophet's comings and goings. An

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[19] Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and
Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England:
Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 144.

example of this is recorded in 2 Kings 2: 3, where on their way from Gilgal to Bethel, Elijah and Elisha were met on their journey by a company of prophets from Bethel.

Aware of his presence near Bethel, a large group of young people came out of the town to meet the prophet. The author uses two expressions to refer to the young people in this passage. In the first reference (v. 23) the author uses a construction that consists of a noun and attributive adjective (וּנְעָרִים קְטַנִּים). The NASB translates it "young lads." The noun used in reference to the youth here, נַעַר, is itself very broad in usage and can refer to a person up to a marriageable age.[20] In this context the attributive adjective, קְטַנִּים, can mean "1) small; unimportant, insignificant; small, weak; 2) young, youngest."[21] Although the combination of these two words almost always refers to a young child (1 Sam. 20:35; 1 Kings 11:17; 2 Kings 5:14; Isa. 11:6), there is one passage where it cannot signify that. In 1 Kings 3:7 King Solomon asks for wisdom because "I am only a little child (נַעַר קָטֹן) and do not know how to carry out my duties."[22] At this point in his life Solomon was about twenty years old,[23] thus showing that the young people in 2 Kings 2 need

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[20] Victor P. Hamilton, "נַעַר," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 3:125.

[21] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994-2000), 3:1093.

[22] If the expression here is a metaphor, then it is not a good argument for seeing these individuals as young adults (Dale Ralph Davis, "The Kingdom of God in Transition: Interpreting 2 Kings 2," *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 [1984]: 392). There is no reason, however, why it must be interpreted figuratively.

[23] For a defense of this chronology, see Merrill, 243-8. At least two years before he became king Solomon was married to Naamah and his son Rehoboam was born one year after that (1 Kings 14:21; cf. 11:42). Although David described Solomon before his accession as "young and

not be young children as it is sometimes understood. In this light it is indeed possible that the denotation of the adjective is that of stature rather than age. It is used this way in 1 Samuel 15:17 where Samuel refers to Saul's former humility by saying, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel!" Another good parallel to the usage of the adjective in 2 Kings 2 is its usage in Jeremiah 49:17 (note the parallelism): "Now I will make you *small* among the nations, despised among men" (emphasis mine). In short, the collocation of this particular noun and adjective should be rendered "insignificant youth" in 2 Kings 2:23.

In addition to the reference to the young people in verse 23, there is also a reference to them in verse 24 where the author uses the term יְלָדִים. Like the noun נַעַר (v. 23), the noun יֶלֶד is equally broad in terms of the ages it can encompass.[24] Although the noun can refer to young children (e.g. 1 Sam. 4:21; Exod. 2:6), it is also used for adults. A good example is found in Ruth 1:5 where Naomi's married sons are referred to as יְלָדִים. Another example of the use of this noun in reference to adults is found in 1 Kings 12:8, 10, 14 where the noun is used in reference to the advisors of King Rehoboam. These men are described as "men who grew up with him" (1 Kings 12:8) and thus were in his same generation. At the time Rehoboam was forty-one years old (1 Kings 13:21).

In addition to the usage of the words describing the youth, two other observations would lead us to conclude that these youth were not children, but adolescents or young adults. The size of the group[25] and the fact that they came out to meet Elisha suggests that

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inexperienced" (1 Chron. 22:5; 29:1), he is not depicted as a child, particularly in his dealings with Adonijah and the others who attempted to wrest the throne from him (1 Kings 1:49-53; 2:19-35).

[24]   Victor P. Hamilton, "יֶלֶד," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 2:457.

[25]   Messner observes that forty-two need not be the total number who mocked the prophet, but only the number of youths that were mauled by the bears. He surmises that many more youth were on the scene and all escaped

they were specifically organized to harass the prophet.[26] This was not a group of children.

When the young people approached Elisha they "jeered at him." The verb which is translated "jeered" only occurs three times in the Old Testament (2 Kings 2:23; Ezek. 22:5; Hab. 1:10). In the usage in Ezekiel the prophet says that "Those who are near and those who are far away will *mock* you, O infamous city, full of turmoil." In speaking of the Babylonians, Habakkuk says "they *deride* kings and scoff at rulers." The paucity of usage prevents us from determining any specific connotation for this verb.

The content of their mocking was the exhortation, "'Go on up you baldhead! Go on up you baldhead!'" The verb עָלָה (go on up) could mean "go up, ascend"[27] or "go up, depart . . . withdraw, retreat."[28] These meanings could be interpreted in one of three ways. First, the idea of "going up" could refer to a "mocking caricature" of the ascent of Elijah into heaven[29] or a challenge to Elisha to ascend into heaven just like Elijah.[30] The idea of

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but the unfortunate forty-two (p. 21). This is correct and is implied by the use of the partitive מִן in v. 24. This idea is brought out clearer in the NASB which says that the bears "tore up forty-two *of their number*" (emphasis mine).

[26] Wiseman, 198. Some commentators feel that it is not a literal number, but merely expressing a large number (e.g. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 11 [New York: Doubleday & Co., 1988], 38). There is no evidence, however, to suggest that it is not the literal number of youth who came to taunt the prophet.

[27] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 748.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978-92), 4:178.

[30] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove,

"departing" could simply be an exhortation to leave the city. Neither of these suggestions is plausible because they do not explain why the prophet would bring down such a terrible judgment on the young people who uttered the phrase. Even Deuteronomy 18:19, where the Lord said that "If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account," does not call for such a severe punishment. A third and better explanation would be to understand the exhortation to "go up" as a challenge to Elisha to enter Bethel and worship at the cult site established by Jeroboam. There are a number of passages where this verb is used for approaching God, regardless of whether a physical ascent is involved or not.[31] Wehmeier observes that "when the location of a sanctuary is involved . . . , the spatial concept is not exclusively determinative; instead the notion of the encounter with the God who dwells 'on high' also plays a role."[32] One of the best examples of this usage is in Hosea 4:15 where the Israelites were exhorted, "Do not go to Gilgal, *Do not go up* to Beth Aven." The idea in this passage is not so much the actual visit of the city so much as it is the trip to these sites for the purpose of worship. A final example of the usage of the verb עָלָה where the nuance is not purely spatial is in Psalm 24:3, where it is asked: "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?" In this last passage the verb has become a term used for a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 233; Messner, 19; Wiseman, 198; Woods, 55.

[31] H. F. Fuhs, "עָלָה; 'ālâ; מַעַל maʻal; מֹעַל moʻal; מַעֲלָה maʻʻleh; מַעֲלָה maʻʻlâ,; תְּעָלָה tᵉʻālâ; עֲלִי ʻlî,; עֲלִי ʻillî; עֲלִיָּה ʻlîyâ" *in Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 11:89-90, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 11:89-90; Eugene H. Merrill, "עלה," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 3:403.

[32] G. Wehmeier, "עלה ʻlh "to go up," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 2:885-6.

In conclusion, this is what the youth were exhorting Elisha to do: to stop and make a religious pilgrimage to the cult site in Bethel.

Having directed their exhortation to Elisha, the young people addressed him as "baldhead." Some important questions at this juncture are as follows: Was he really bald or was the accusation a mere insult not grounded in fact?[33] If he wasn't bald, was the insult a figurative reference to their denial of his authority as a prophet, attested by the hairy mantle that he had received from Elijah?[34] If he was bald, what was the cause? Was his baldness hereditary, caused by a disease, or was his head shaven? If his head was shaven, what was the purpose behind it?[35] In regard to the first questions dealing with whether Elisha was bald or not, there is nothing that would indicate that he was not bald. The word used to describe his condition is the adjective קֵרֵחַ. It means "bald-head (bald on the back of the head . . .).[36] The only other place this term is used is in Leviticus 13:40-44. In this passage it refers to male pattern baldness:

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[33] Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953): 96.

[34] Woods, 51-3.

[35] Some of the reasons that Elisha might have shaved his head, if indeed this was what he had done, could be: 1) to indicate mourning over the loss of Elijah (Deut. 14:1; Isa. 15:2; 22:12; Jer. 16:6; 47:5 (cf. 48:37); Ezek. 7:18; 27:31 Amos 8:10); 2) as a sign of humiliation (Patterson and Austel, 4:178); or 3) as a sign that he was a prophet (John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 2d, fully rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970], 480; House, 260; Jones, 389-90; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951], 355; and perhaps Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, New International Biblical Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1995], 177).

[36] Koehler and Baumgartner, 3:1140. This word specifically refers to baldness "on the back of the head" because in Lev. 13:41 the word is used in contrast to the man who has lost hair "from the front of his scalp (פָּנָיו מִפְּאַת) and has a bald forehead (רֹאשׁוֹ גִּבֵּחַ)."

When a man has lost his hair and is bald (קֵרֵחַ), he is clean. If he has lost his hair from the front of his scalp and has a bald forehead, he is clean. But if he has a reddish-white sore on his bald head (קָרַחַת) or forehead, it is an infectious disease breaking out on his head (קָרַחְתּ) or forehead. The priest is to examine him, and if the swollen sore on his head (קָרַחַת) or forehead is reddish-white like an infectious skin disease, the man is diseased and unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean because of the sore on his head.

It is important to note the other word for baldness in this particular passage. It is the noun קָרַחַת which means "bald spot . . . on the back of the head."[37] The word is only found in Leviticus 13:42-43 and it refers to baldness caused by disease. The usage of both קֵרֵחַ and קָרַחַת in Leviticus 13:40-43 suggests that these two words are used for baldness not produced intentionally. To be specific, in discussing hereditary baldness the author uses the adjective קֵרֵחַ, but in referring to baldness resulting from disease, he uses קָרַחַת. The use of the term קֵרֵחַ strongly suggests that Elisha had male pattern baldness which is not disease-induced.[38]

Since 2 Kings 2 is the only passage where the word קֵרֵחַ is used as an insult, it is difficult to determine the connotation of the insult. In this regard it is worth noting that there does not seem to be any

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[37] *Ibid.*, 3:1141.

[38] It is worthy noting that both קֵרֵחַ and קָרַחַת are used in connection with the words גִּבֵּחַ and גַּבַּחַת. The adjective גִּבֵּחַ means "with receding hair-line, bald on the forehead" and the feminine noun גַּבַּחַת means "receding hair-line" (Koehler and Baumgartner, 1:173). It is interesting that the two adjectives קֵרֵחַ and גִּבֵּחַ are used for baldness not caused from disease, whereas the two feminine nouns קָרַחַת and גַּבַּחַת are used for baldness caused by disease. So Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 803.

particular stigma attached to baldness in Israelite culture. This is suggested by the fact that there are two proper nouns related to the adjective קֵרֵחַ. These are the names קָרֵחַ (Kareah) and קֹרַח (Korah). Had there been a specific shame associated with baldness it seems unlikely that names would have been constructed from the root קרח.

It has been suggested that Elisha was not bald and that the reference to him as "baldhead" was an illusion to the prophetic mantle that had been passed on to him by Elijah.[39] In other words, "they refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the hairy garment that Elisha now wore as a symbol of prophetic authority."[40] While it is true that most commentators say that Elijah wore a mantle, and no doubt Elisha subsequently came into possession of it when he succeeded Elijah (2 Kings 2:13),[41] the argument that "baldness" is a figurative reference to the absence of its authority is forced. As I have shown above, the noun קָרַחַ is not used for the absence of a particular garment on the body, but only for the absence of hair on the head. If the young people had wished to draw attention to the prophetic mantle, they could have used a more direct illusion by employing the adjective עֵירֹם "naked"[42] or עָרוֹם "naked, lightly clothed."[43] These adjectives would be more in line with a prophetic

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[39] Woods, 51-3.

[40] *Ibid.,* 53.

[41] Cogan and Tadmor, 26; Thomas L. Constable, "2 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary,* ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:538, 40; Gray, 464; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings,* Word Biblical Commentary, 13 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 22; House, 260; Jones, 378-9; C. F. Keil, "I & II Kings," in vol. 3: *I & II Kings, 1 & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* trans. James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (N.p.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 286; Patterson and Austel, 4:172; Wiseman, 193.

[42] Koehler and Baumgartner, 2:823.

[43] *Ibid.,* 2:882-3.

garment worn on the body than קָרַחַת which is only used for the head.

Is it possible that Elisha wore a tonsure, that his head was shaved as a sign of a prophet?[44] There is an episode in 1 Kings 20:35-43, however, that suggests that this was not the case in Israel. In this passage a prophet disguised himself by first having a man wound him on the head (v. 37) and secondly by wearing a "bandage over his eyes" (v. 38 NASB). Later, when the prophet "hastily took the bandage from his eyes . . . the king of Israel recognized that he was one of the prophets" (v. 41 NASB). Since the exact nature of the bandage is not known,[45] it is not possible to be too dogmatic. But this passage suggests that the tonsure was not a mark of a prophet. The passage makes the point in both verses that the bandage covered his eyes and that it was only when it was removed that he was recognized by the king of Israel. Secondly, the headband must not have covered his scalp otherwise there would have been no point in wounding himself for the sake of disguising himself as a soldier. If the prophet wore a tonsure, would not the king have recognized him immediately, if indeed he had one?[46]

Another factor figuring against the idea that Elisha's head was shaved was the fact that if the young people had wanted to be clear in addressing him as a prophet whose head was shaved, they would have used a construction utilizing the verb גָּלַח or קָרַח. Both of these verbs are used in the sense of "to shave"[47] and would have

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[44] See n. 35 above, point #3.

[45] The word is only used in this passage in the Old Testament (Koehler and Baumgartner, 1:80).

[46] In addition to the passage in 1 Kings 20, there is another passage in the book that might also suggest that the prophets did not wear a tonsure. In 2 Kings 1:8 it is recorded that when a certain man was described as being clothed "with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around the waist," Ahaziah knew from that description alone that the prophet was Elijah. If a tonsure was a distinguishing mark, it is odd that this would not be mentioned in the description of the man.

[47] Koehler and Baumgartner, 1:193, 3:1140.

been a better choice than the adjective קֵרֵחַ if the prophet were wearing a tonsure.

To summarize the discussion of the significance of the insult, I would conclude that Elisha suffered from male pattern baldness which is hereditary and not caused by a disease. Although the insult as a whole implied a denial of his authority, it was not an explicit denial as such. While calling him a "baldhead" was intended as an insult, it was only mildly offensive and the true thrust of the insult is to be found in the exhortation for the prophet to make a pilgrimage to the cult site at Bethel.

The Curse and Its Implementation (v. 24)

As a result of the youths' exhortation, "he turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord " (v. 24). Elisha had already passed by the young people when the curse was uttered. He undoubtedly did not wish to provoke trouble with them, but the gravity of the taunting was such that he could not withhold it. It is significant that Elisha's curse was uttered "in the name of the Lord." The preposition translated "in" is used instrumentally and "the name [is] being used or appealed to in the act."[48] Coupled with the word שֵׁם (name), it is used "as an empowerment formula,"[49] thus, "by the power of." In short, Elisha was not cursing the youth in and through himself, but through the agency of the Lord (cf. Deut. 18:18).

A helpful parallel usage in regard to cursing by the power of the Lord is found in 1 Samuel 17:43, where in the story of David and Goliath, it is said that "the Philistine cursed David by his gods." In David's response, however, it is very clear that Goliath's curse, to be brought into effect by his "gods," would have no effect on David because the Lord was more powerful than the "gods" of the Philistines (vv. 45-47).

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[48] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 90.

[49] A. S. van der Woude, "שֵׁם šem "name," *in Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament,* ed. Ernst Jenni, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 3:1357.

The opposite of cursing someone in the name of the Lord would be blessing someone in the name of the Lord. These passages can be helpful in furthering the understanding of the phrase. Psalm 129:8 says,

> May those who pass by not say,
> "The blessing of the Lord be upon you,
> we bless you in the name of the Lord."

Note that in the second line the exhortation is that the "blessing of the Lord" be upon the reapers mentioned earlier in the psalm. In the third line the blessing is rephrased to come from the one passing by, but "in the name of the Lord." Just as God is the only One who can bring about the fulfillment of a curse, so also is He the source of blessing.

Elisha's response to the mocking exhortation was to call down a curse from heaven. How does his response compare with the way other Old Testament prophets dealt with ridicule and insults? The Old Testament records a number of examples of how prophets responded to verbal attacks like the one recorded in 2 Kings 2. In the many instances when Moses was confronted by the people in anger, his most common response was either to pray or receive communication from the Lord. For example, in Exodus 15:23-25 it is recorded that

> When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them.[50]

Similarly, the Book of 1 Kings records a comparable instance in the life of the prophet Elijah:

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[50] Other examples of Moses in communication with God in response to the verbal attacks of the people can be found in Exod. 5:20-23; 17:1-4; Num. 14:1-19; 16:1-4, 12-15, 41-45; and 20:2-6.

> She (the widow at Zarephath) said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"
> "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" (17:18-20)[51]

In some cases the prophet might respond by giving a revelation from God, such as in the following example from the life of the prophet Micaiah recorded in 1 Kings 22:24-28:

> Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked.
> Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room."
> The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'" Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"[52]

In other instances, however, the prayer voiced by the prophet might involve a request for God's judgment. Such is the case in the following example from the life of Jeremiah:

> They said, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says."
>
> Listen to me, O Lord

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[51] Another example involving the prophet Elijah is 2 Kings 1:13-14.

[52] Amos did the same when confronted by his detractors (Amos 7:10-17).

> hear what my accusers are saying!
> Should good be repaid with evil?
>> Yet they have dug a pit for me.
> Remember that I stood before you
>> and spoke in their behalf
>> to turn your wrath away from them.
> So give their children over to famine;
>> hand them over to the power of the sword.
> Let their wives be made childless and widows;
>> let their men be put to death,
>> their young men slain by the sword in battle.
> Let a cry be heard from their houses
>> when you suddenly bring invaders against them,
> for they have dug a pit to capture me
>> and have hidden snares for my feet.
> But you know, O Lord,
>> all their plots to kill me.
> Do not forgive their crimes
>> or blot out their sins from your sight.
> Let them be overthrown before you;
>> deal with them in the time of your anger (18:18-23).[53]

Although this passage is not stated to be a "curse," Jeremiah's response to his enemies' slander is a close parallel to Elisha's curse in 2 Kings 2. Just as Elisha cursed the youth for what they said, so also Jeremiah "curses" his enemies for their words.

At this juncture it would be helpful to review the nature of maledictive curses. The following observations can be noted from those passages which involve curses placed on individuals by individuals.

First, a curse was ineffective apart from the will of God. There are a number of passages that teach this. In Numbers 22:8 it is recorded that it was necessary for Balaam to consult God before he could go with Balak and curse Israel (22:8, 38; 23:3, 12, 26; 24:13). When God appeared to him He said, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed"

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[53] Another example dealing with Jeremiah's response to an enemy plot is found in Jer. 11:18-23. Note also how he reacted to the beating he received from Pashhur in Jer. 20:1-12 and his arrest in Jer. 26:7-15 (esp. v. 15).

(22:12). In the same story Balaam exclaims, "How can I curse those whom God has not cursed?" (23:8a). This implies that for the pronounced curse to be effective, the individual being cursed must already have been singled out by God for judgment.

An example of God's role in bringing about a curse is found in Judges 9. In this passage it is recorded that Abimelech (a son of Gideon) and his followers killed seventy of his brothers in Ophrah in an attempt to make himself the king of the city of Shechem (vv. 1-6). A brother by the name of Jotham escaped, however (vv. 5). Jotham in turn spoke to the people of Shechem and said, "But if you have not [acted honorably and in good faith toward Jerub-Baal (i.e. Gideon)],[54] let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!" (v. 20). In the end Jotham's wish came to pass as Abimelech killed all the inhabitants of the city (vv. 39-49) and Abimelech himself was killed in the city of Thebez (vv. 50-55). The text comments on God's work in the outworking of Jotham's words when the author notes that

> God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech. God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers (vv. 23-24).

At the end of the story the author of the Book of Judges notes that "God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done . . . [and] also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them" (Judg. 9:56-57). Thus, the author says that the words of Jotham quoted in verse 20 were a curse that was fulfilled against both Abimelech and the Shechemites. Like

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[54] Boogaart suggests that Abimelech's murder of his brothers violated a covenant between Jerub-Baal and the inhabitants of Shechem (T. A. Boogaart, "Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 [1985]: 54-55, n. 7).

·the passages cited above, Judges 9 illustrates the fact that a curse can only be implemented if it is the will of God in the first place.

A third example of the role of the Lord in curses is found in Judges 17:1-2 where it is recorded:

> Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it."
> Then his mother said, "The Lord bless you, my son!"

This passage gives very little detail on the content of the mother's curse, merely that she uttered one. But it is worthy to note that in her blessing the woman said "The Lord bless you." This may suggest that the Lord would also have been the instrumentality behind the cursing, had it been carried through.

Following Jonathan's defeat of the Philistines at Micmash (1 Sam. 13:23—14:15) and in an attempt to maximize the opportunity caused by the subsequent panic in the Philistine camp, Saul forbade the army from eating until the end of the day when presumably the fighting between the Philistines and Israelites would cease. To enforce the decree he bound the army to an oath such that anyone who ate prior to evening would be cursed (1 Sam. 14:24, 28). Unaware of the curse, Jonathan did eat (1 Sam. 14:16-17, 27-30). Although he was under the curse at this point, it was not until later that Saul realized that someone had violated the oath. He found out that the oath had been violated when he inquired of the Lord concerning the feasibility of a night attack on the Philistines. When the Lord did not respond to that particular inquiry, he knew that someone had not kept the fast (1 Sam. 14:36-39). When it was ascertained that Jonathan was the one who had eaten, he was condemned to die (1 Sam. 14:40-44). In the end, however, the people saved him from the penalty of the curse (1 Sam. 14:45).[55]

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[55] Gordon has suggested that the removal of this curse may have involved a monetary payment (Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988], 141; see also J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in*

This incident suggests that the mere declaration of a curse does not imply that it will come to pass even if the conditions of it have been fulfilled. In the period of time between the violation of the oath and the moment Jonathan was discovered to have violated it, nothing negative happened to him or to the Israelite soldiers with whom he was serving.   Yet the implication is that something might have happened because when Saul inquired on the feasibility of attacking the Philistines at night, the Lord did not respond. The Lord's silence suggests that the violation of the fasting oath had limited the degree to which the Lord would respond to their requests. The Lord did answer Saul's prayer to find out who it was that had violated the oath (1 Sam. 14:41-42). This shows that the oath taken was indeed a very serious matter. Because Jonathan was not punished for violating the oath, however, another implication is that the curse is not set in stone, so to speak. It was possible for the people to intercede on Jonathan's behalf so that the curse for violating the oath did not come to pass. As in the Numbers episode, although the imposition of an oath and curse was taken very seriously, the will of God was necessary before a curse could be put into effect.

Another example of the ineffectiveness of a curse severed from the will of God is found in 1 Samuel 17, a passage discussed briefly above. Goliath's curse, such that David would be killed through the instrumentality of his gods and that his body would be given "to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field" (17:44) did not come to pass because David's God was more powerful than those of the Philistines (17:46-47). Instead of David falling under the curse, it was Goliath himself who would fall under his own curse (14:46; cf. v. 52b). Thus, the mere utterance of a curse was not sufficient to put the curse into effect. Proverbs 26:2 says that "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest." In all of David's imprecatory psalms it is clear that the instrumentality behind the fulfillment of the curse was the Lord. In many cases it is made explicit (Ps. 12:3; 58:6; 69:24; 83:9, 13-16; 109:20). An innocent man or woman need not fear the curse.

the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses, vol. 2, *The Crossing Fates (1 Sam. 13-31 & 2 Sam. 1)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 76.

Not only was an effectual curse totally dependent on the will of God, but secondly, cursing certain types of individuals was also considered a serious breach of ethics. In Leviticus 19:14 the Israelites were forbidden to "curse[56] the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind." As with other passages, the implication of this passage is that a curse could in fact be effective. The Israelites were not to curse the deaf because the deaf would be helpless against it in light of their handicap. In Exodus 21:17, the Law proscribed the death penalty for cursing one's parents: "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death" (Lev. 20:9; Prov. 20:20).[57] This is a logical extension of the commands to honor one's parents (Exod. 20:12; Lev. 19:3). In Exodus 22:28b the Israelites were forbidden to "curse the ruler of your people" (cf. 2 Sam. 16:9; 19:21; 1 Kings 2:8-9).

Third, a curse was not to be uttered lightly. In Proverbs 26:2 (cited above) the citation occurs in the midst of a string of proverbs dealing with the behavior of a fool. The presence of 26:2 in that context implies that an undeserved curse is something that only a fool would utter.[58]

Fourth, cursing was practiced and not necessarily denounced in the Old Testament. Cursing is associated with Noah (Gen. 9:25), Isaac (Gen. 27:12-13), Joshua (Josh. 6:26, cf. Josh. 9:23; 1 Kings

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[56] One possible interpretation is that the verb does not denote a curse, but rather an insult (Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 128). If that were true, what would be the point? Since the efficacy of the insult lies in the ability of the recipient to hear it, what good would it do to simply insult the deaf?

[57] Some commentators feel that curse is too strong and render the verb as "dishonor" (e.g. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967], 271). The severity of the penalty, however, would suggest that the curse is what the author has in mind.

[58] Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary, 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 211; R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 371-2.

16:34), David (1 Sam. 26:19; 2 Sam. 3:29; Ps. 12:3; 35:4-8, 26; 58:6-8; 59:11-13; 69:22-28; 70:2-3; 83:9-18; 109:6-15, 19-20; 140:9-11), and Nehemiah (Neh. 10:28; 13:25). It is worth noting that in the passage from 1 Samuel 14 discussed above, that a curse, no matter how invalid, was a serious matter. In that passage the Lord even refused to answer the Urim and Thummim until the matter concerning Saul's curse was resolved (14:37). It should not be surmised, however, that a curse somehow has a life and power of its own that cannot be stopped once it has been uttered.[59]

Finally, the curse and the blessing were antithetical. A curse could not be put on someone who was blessed (Num. 22:12; 23:20). On the other hand, a blessing could be pronounced on someone who was cursed as a means of removing the curse (perhaps Judg. 17:2).[60]

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[59] For the idea that words do not have a power of their own, see Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words in Biblical Writings," *Journal of Theological Studies* ns 25 (1974): 283-99. He draws on Kidner's discussion of the "weakness of words" where he observes that "words are not substitute for deeds; for example, they cannot replace honest work (Prov. xiv. 23). Secondly, they cannot alter facts. . . . Thirdly, words alone cannot compel response. . . . The effectiveness of a verbal rebuke is by no means automatic, but depends on the wisdom of the one who receives it. . . ." (Thiselton, 298, quoting Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964], 47-8). For more recent discussions, see Rodney R. Hutton, "Magic or Street-Theater? The Power of the Prophetic Word," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 107 (1995): 247-60; Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "to bless" in the Old Testament*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 95 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 173-6.

[60] So Sheldon H. Blank, "The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23 (1950-51): 94-5; Daniel I. Block, "Judges, Ruth", *New American Commentary*, 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 478-9; Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 183; David Frankel, "The Deuteronomic Portrayal of Balaam," *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (1996): 34; Herbert Wolf, "Judges," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979-

In fact, in commenting on Balaam, Nehemiah notes that God turned Balaam's intended curse into a blessing (Neh. 13:2).[61]

Having outlined the nature of maledictive curses in the Old Testament, we now may return to the passage in 2 Kings 2. The implementation of the curse on the youth was immediate and divinely appointed: "Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled[62] forty-two of the youth." The Old Testament describes the bear as a very ferocious animal. One such example is Hosea 13:8a which says that "Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open." In Amos 5:19 it is suggested that the bear was equally as dangerous as the lion when it says "It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear." Although the bear is not mentioned very often in the Old Testament (especially when compared to the lion),[63] the usage of the bear as a figure in the Book of Proverbs (17:12; 28:15) shows, however, that this particular animal must have been common enough such that its behavior was well-known to the inhabitants of Israel.

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92), 3:480-1.

[61]   The account in Numbers does not mention Balaam uttering a curse. Early in the account, however, there is an implication that he intended to do so (Num. 22:32-34), despite the fact that the Lord had forbidden it (Num. 22:12).

[62]   Brichto holds that the verb does not mean "maul," but rather "dividing," thus he translates it "then two bears erupted from the woods, broke them up" (Herbert Chanan Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 198). This is unlikely, however, because the Piel stem of this verb is never used in this way, but always in the sense of "to tear to pieces" (Koehler and Baumgartner, 1:150). Moreover, the mention of a specific number suggests that the youths were mauled, not broken up. Parallel usages, in which the object is a person, are 2 Kings 8:12, 15:16, and Hosea 13:8.

[63]   There are nine terms used for lions (אֲרִי, אַרְיֵה, כְּפִיר, לֶבֶא, לָיִשׁ, לְבִיָּה, לָבִיא, לְבָאָה, and אַרְיֵה [Ara.]), whereas there is only one for bears (דֹּב). The bear is only mentioned four times in two nonfigurative passages, and eight times in figurative usages.

Of the eight species of bears known today,[64] these bears could have been either Asiatic brown or black bears. The last bear sighting in Palestine was in the early 20th century.[65] Studies of North American brown and black bears suggest that the aggression of these two bears against such a large group would be very unusual.[66]

Did the youths' mocking exhortation justify a curse whose implementation was so severe? If the insult was grounded in the command to go up and worship the false gods at the cult center set up by Jeroboam, then the curse imposed upon them was justified for the Law had very severe penalties for any attempt to lead the Israelites into idolatry. The death penalty was stipulated for anyone or any group that would lead the people astray in this way (Deut. 13:1-10, 12-16; 17:2-7; 18:20). Prior to the writing of Deuteronomy there are several examples of how these types of people were dealt with. In the incident of the golden calf the Levites slaughtered about three thousand of the perpetrators and in addition to that, the Lord struck the people with a plague (Exod. 32:25-29, 35). In Numbers 25 the Israelites again fell into idolatry and again many men were put to death and many others died as a result of a plague (vv. 1-5, 8-9). If this is viewed as the background to Elisha's curse, it helps one to see that the exhortation of the young people was not a simple request uttered by innocent little children.

Disobedience of the Law resulted in covenant curses and one of those curses was destruction from wild animals (Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 27:15-26; 28:15-68). Lev. 26:22 says, "I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy

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[64] "Bear Species Descriptions," At the International Association for Bear Research and Management Web Site, www.bearbiology.com.

[65] Edwin Firmage, "Zoology," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:1143.

[66] Stephen Herrero, *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance* (New York: Lyons Press, 1985), 13, 15, 125, 210. It must be noted, however, that Herrero's research dealt with North American bears and that aggressiveness varies among species. The species of bear that inhabited Israel in the 9th century BC may have been more aggressive than bears today.

your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted." The same idea is mentioned in the Book of Deuteronomy where the Lord says, "I will send against them the fangs of wild beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust" (32:24b), and

> You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. . . . Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and crops of your land (28:38-39, 42).

This curse is reiterated in the prophets. In response to the waywardness of Judah, Jeremiah concludes, "Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, for their rebellion is great and their backslidings many" (5:6; perhaps also 8:17). In the Book of Ezekiel the Lord says that "I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. . . ." (5:17; see also 14:15, 21; 33:27). In the Book of Joel God punishes the disobedience of the nation by means of a severe locust plague (Joel 1). Crop pests as covenant curses are also mentioned in Malachi 3:11. In short, the curse imposed upon the youth of Bethel was in accord with the type of punishment one would expect from the covenant curses found in the Law of Moses.

Conclusion: Continuation of Journey to Samaria (v. 25)

After the young people were mauled, the text concludes by saying that Elisha "went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria." Elisha went to Carmel because there was most likely an altar to Yahweh there (cf. 1 Kings 18:19) and it was a place of retreat (2 Kings 4:25). The text says that he "returned" to Samaria because it was the place in which Elisha did most of his ministry.[67]

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[67] In terms of his ministry, Elisha was to be found in the desert of Edom with the army of Israel (2 Kings 3:8; cf. v. 11), in Shunem (2 Kings 4:8), at Mount Carmel (2 Kings 4:25), in Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), in Dothan (2 Kings 6:13), in Jericho (2 Kings 6:1; cf. 2:4-6, 19-22), and in the city of Samaria (2 Kings 6:19-20, 32). A verse in the latter passage suggests that this might

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION
TO THE CHURCH

On his way from Jericho to Samaria the prophet Elisha was met near Bethel by a large mob of young adults intent on forcing him to worship the calf shrine of Bethel. As a result of their violation of the covenant laws regarding incitement to idolatry, he put them under a covenant curse and as a result forty-two members of the group were mauled by a pair of bears.

Although it has not been the purpose of this paper to give a detailed exposition of the concept of the malevolent curse in the Old Testament, nor to address thoroughly every issue related to curses in African traditional religion, it would be helpful to relate the findings to common pastoral concerns and to encourage further reflection in this area. How might this passage apply to the church today, particularly in the realm of curses? The New Testament is clear that Christians are not to curse others, no matter who they are or what they have done. Paul reminds the Romans to "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14; see also Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28; 1 Cor. 4:12; James 3:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:23). Similarly, there are many other passages that exhort a believer to be kind, such as 1 Thessalonians 5:15: "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else" (cf. Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12; 2 Pet. 1:5-7). So many times curses

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have been the base of his ministry as he had a house there (v. 32). In 2 Kings 5:3-4 Namaan's Israelite servant said that Elisha was "the prophet who is in Samaria." Furthermore, Elisha's main dealings seemed to be with the kings of Israel (2 Kings 3:11; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21, 31; 7:17-18; 9:1-3; 13:14-19).

1 Kings 19:16 says that Elisha was originally from Abel Meholah. If Edelman is correct, the best site of the ancient village of Abel Meholah is Tell Abu Sus in the Jordan valley 15 kilometers south of Bethshan (Diana V. Edelman, "Abel-Meholah," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 1:11).

are used to exact vengeance, and in this regard the Word of God is clear: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Even in Old Testament times personal revenge was limited and hatred of enemies was not taught (Exod. 23:4-5; Lev. 19:17-18, 34; Deut. 32:35; Prov. 20:22; 24:29). In fact, there is at least one passage that teaches kindness to enemies (Prov. 25:21). If God has commanded us not to curse, this would suggest that no curse could be pleasing to Him. It would also indicate that there is no reason for a believer to fear a curse. In this regard, it should be an encouragement for such an individual to know that not only are all Christians indwelt by the Spirit (John 14:16-17), but to conquer this fear they have the weapons for God's protection against Satan (John 17:15; Eph. 6:16), the power of prayer (Rom. 8:26-27; Eph. 6:18), and the Word of God (Matt. 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:2).

Granted, Christians should not curse or fear a curse from another, but could the Lord Himself place a person under a curse for severe disobedience as in the case with the youth in 2 Kings 2? The answer to this is also negative. The first reason why we cannot fall under a curse like the one in 2 Kings 2 is because it was a covenant curse. Covenant curses were specific judgments that would befall Israel should she fail to keep the stipulations found in the covenant. While the Mosaic law along with all Scripture is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17), Christians are not under the jurisdiction of the law like Israel (Acts 15:5 [cf. 10-11, 28-29]; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6-18; Gal. 3:3, 5, 10-13; 5:1-6, 16-18; Col. 2:6-23; Heb. 8:8-9, 13).[68] The covenant

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[68] The law was given to the Israelites and it was they who entered into covenant with God to obey it and suffer the consequences of disobedience (Exod. 19:5-8; 24:3-11; cf. Deut. 27:9). While the goodness of the law is not disputed (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8; James 1:25), the church has not entered into a legal contract with the Lord on the basis of the Mosaic covenant. Rather, the church is under the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) which replaces the Old. In commenting on Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34), the author of Hebrews observes, "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first obsolete;

curses certainly illustrate for us the consequences of disobeying God's word. Although the consequences of disobedience are often pointed out in the New Testament (1 Tim. 1:18-20; Rev. 2:14-16), the possibility of the covenant curses coming upon a believer, however, is not entertained. Paul says that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13).

In addition to not being under the Mosaic covenant and the covenant curses that have fallen on ancient Israel, the second reason that Christians cannot come under a curse from God is that there are no injunctions in the New Testament commanding us to curse others. If the covenant curses were still in force, we would expect to see commands in the New Testament urging church leaders to put the wayward under curses in order to discourage sin. This is not the case, however.

There are, however, some passages that imply that curses might be acceptable under certain circumstances. In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul says, "Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord" (NRSV) and in Galatians 1:8 he says, ". . . : If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!" (NRSV, see also v. 9).[69] I do not think that either of these passages would constitute an invitation to pronounce curses, because neither passage is a *command* to practice cursing. Nowhere does Paul or any other writer in the New Testament invite the reader to do the same. The curses cited above were not uttered because of personal injustices levied against the apostle or because these people were not walking in a honorable manner (although they indeed may have been), but for not loving the Lord and for preaching another gospel! Both of these curses were directed against the false teachers. The only way to eternal life is trusting in Jesus as Savior, and thus until a person believes, he is already under the wrath of God (John 3:36). Distortions of the Gospel, such as the background of the Galatians passage, would also fall under this kind of condemnation.

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and what is obsolete and aging with soon disappear" (8:13).

[69] Some other instances of curses are Matt. 25:41; 26:74; Mark 11:14 (cf. v. 21); 14:71; Acts 23:14; Rom. 9:3; and perhaps 2 Timothy 4:14.

The person who preaches another gospel is not only not trusting in Jesus himself, but is leading others away from the true way of salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17). In conclusion, in spite of the fact that there are some curses recorded in the New Testament, the absence of teaching on the practice of cursing would suggest that Christians should proceed very cautiously in this area.

In the absence of a curse, would evildoers have nothing to fear and wickedness have the freedom to run rampant? Absolutely not! For unbelievers there is a judgment awaiting them in the future (2 Thess. 1:6-10). For backslidden Christians, the absence of a curse should be no comfort, for the Lord will discipline them with a view to their sanctification (Heb. 12:4-11; Rev. 3:19). In this process the Lord may also use the church. The church may practice spiritual restoration (Gal. 6:1), rebuke and instruction (2 Cor. 7:8-10; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 2:25), excommunication (1 Cor. 5:2, 7, 9, 11, 13; 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 3:9-11), and in some cases handing the individual over to Satan (1 Cor. 5:4-5). The goal in each case, however, would be that the person would be led to repentance and back to life of walking in the Spirit. In fact, these trials should actually be seen as blessings from a spiritual perspective because they are difficulties that God uses to bring the wayward back into the fellowship of the Lord and other believers.

In regard to the rearing of children, the Word of God is clear on the crucial role of parental discipline (e.g. Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:4). In the light of the injunctions on not cursing and the absence of injunctions for cursing, however, should parents resort to the curse as a tool in cases of severe disobedience? I will leave it up to the reader to decide.

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A Review Article

Cultural Exegesis:
The Bible Is Open To Everyone

Andrew Wildsmith

Daniel Smith-Christopher, ed.
Text and Experience:
Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible.
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

R. S. Sugirthrajah, ed.
Vernacular Hermeneutics.
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

"Christians in the past have not always used historical-grammatical exegesis so perhaps conservative Biblical scholars in Africa will eventually develop another hermeneutical method to replace it." This musing of mine provoked an intense denial from two British friends I worked with at a Bible college in Nigeria in the 1980s. They believed passionately that historical-grammatical exegesis was the only proper method for those who truly took the Bible as authoritative. "What other method would you use?", they challenged me. I did not (and do not) know what could replace historical-grammatical exegesis, but I argued that something could. I remain on excellent terms with those good friends even though we

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teach in different colleges, but the possibility of a new method of exegesis remains.

The essays in *Text and Experience*, edited by Daniel Smith-Christopher (1995), mostly theorizes about using insights from various cultures to add to the historical understanding of Biblical texts. The articles in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharjah (1999), demonstrate that people are doing hermeneutics without paying much attention to historically based exegesis. Both paperback books are published by Sheffield Academic Press, and both show that non-Western scholars are trying to approach the Bible from very different directions than Western scholars (either liberal or conservative) have done before.

Text and Experience consists of eighteen essays on "cultural exegesis" written from papers delivered at the Casassa Conference of 1992 held on the campus of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, USA. Hermeneutics may be defined as exegesis followed by application. Exegesis is understanding the Biblical text in its own historical context, and application is using that Biblical understanding in our own context. The question raised by "cultural" exegesis is, "Can the native American elder, the Indian or African student or scholar, give all of us new ideas about what the text *historically meant?*"[1] This does not replace historically based exegesis with something else, as I mused above might eventually happen in Africa. It does mean that African (and other non-Western) Christians could contribute, not only to the application of Biblical texts to their own setting, but also to everyone's understanding of the Bible itself in a way that Western scholars could not.

We should not be talking about the Bible meaning one thing to Westerners and another to Africans and another to Indians, though some of the essays in *Text and Experience* seem to lean that way sometimes. We can look to the twin principles of "indigenising" or "localising" the faith and the "pilgrim" or "universalising" aspect to

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[1]   Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *Text and Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, p. 16.

the faith for help here.[2]   Each Christian must feel at home in his faith. When God saves us. He accepts as we are, along our cultural perceptions. Just as Gentiles did not have to become Jews and stop eating pork in order to follow Jesus, so Africans do not have to adopt Western cultural norms in order to follow Him. *That is the localising principle.* But God did not leave us untouched when He saved us. He accepts us as we are in order to transform us into what He wants us to be. the image of Christ. This makes us pilgrims who have dual citizenship. and are destined for heaven. We have been adopted into a larger family where there is an essential unity in Christ. *This is the universalising aspect* to our faith. We are to be at home in our cultural setting, but not entirely of it where it conflicts with Christ's ways. In hermeneutics these twin principles operate as well. Our contribution to the exegesis of the Bible springs out of our culture. but it should contribute to everyone's understanding of the Bible. If our cultural exegesis is so indigenised that no one else can benefit from it, then it is not universalised enough.   The universalising factor guards our exegesis from becoming too relativistic and ending up as *eisegesis.*

Many contributors to *Text and Experience* have abandoned historical-critical methods of exegesis as too Western and too fruitless, but it seems that none of the contributors are evangelicals. They employ the hermeneutics of liberation theology. reader-response methods and other hermeneutical approaches. Most of the articles in *Text and Experience* largely theorise about cultural exegesis. Few of them actually do it successfully. Approaches to cultural exegesis come from Hispanic. African and native Americans. and from China. India. Japan. Brazil. Scandinavia. England, aboriginal Australia and Africa. and from the Quaker and Jewish points of view. I believe Temba L. J. Mafico's essay, "Were the 'Judges' of Israel like African Spirit Mediums?". comes closest to realising the potential of cultural exegesis, though I cannot agree with all his conclusions. But at least he attempts to compare actual

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[2]   The following discussion is based on Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History,* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp. 7-9.

Biblical texts and concepts with specific aspects of African culture. Most others fail to do this at all or try but fail to convince me that they have made significant cultural contributions to the meaning of the text in its own context by drawing on their own cultures. I did learn something from every article, and the book is worthy of consideration by all who have an interest in hermeneutics. It is just that many of the contributors are too theoretical in their efforts.

Conservative evangelicals, at least in Africa, can and do contribute through cultural exegesis, and more of it should happen. Let me give one example using one text. In Genesis 23:1-20 Abraham buys a cave to bury Sarah in, plus the field which contains the cave, and the trees in the field. From various Western sources and African cultural practices we can learn several exegetical details. First, Abraham asks to buy some property for a burial ground for Sarah, but the Hittites offer the use of any of their tombs that he might care to chose. Whether this indicates that they were unwilling to have Abraham gain a permanent foothold and were trying to induce him through flattery (they call him "mighty prince") to remain a landless dependent, as Kidner suggests,[3] or were simply being polite is open to question. Perhaps it was not to gain a permanent foothold, but rather the intense desire to have his family buried on his own land that made Abraham reject the idea of a borrowed tomb. This would be entirely understandable to the several ethnic groups in Nigeria and Kenya that I have worked with. The family dead are buried on the family land. This is especially true for Sarah as she was not only Abraham's wife, but also his half-sister. An Ibibio wife would normally be buried with her original family, but, in Sarah's case, her original family was also her marriage family, so she is doubly entitled to be buried on land owned by Abraham according to Ibibio custom. Since Abraham's family had given up their land in Ur and did not yet possess Canaan, buying was the only option. Africans can understand Abraham's rejection of a borrowed tomb in favour of a family burial ground. This exegetical position is as sound as

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[3]   As in Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC, Leicester: IVP Press, 1967, p. 145.

Kidner's, given our inability to read minds of Abraham and the Hittites involved on the issue of why they acted as they did.

Second, the Hebrew word for buy and sell or give (*natan*) used several times throughout the story, indicates intense bargaining.[4] Negotiating a price when buying or selling something is part of life in Africa so that part of the proceedings was self-evident to my students in south-eastern Nigeria, though the NIV's use of "give" for *natan* by Ephron in 23:11 was confusing to them. There is no pretense of "giving" here. Abraham knows that he is bargaining in earnest. "Sell" should be used in verse 11 for the scene to be clear. The mood of the Biblical passage, and the African sense of bargaining, argues for a consistent use of *natan* as "buy" or "sell", not "give", in this passage.

Third, in the negotiations with Ephron, Abraham starts by asking to buy only the cave, as that is all he needs. For some reason, Ephron wants to sell him the field as well.[5] Abraham accepts this (vss. 12-13). Ephron names his price (vs. 15), and the deal is closed (vs. 16). The possibility that some further bargaining went on that we are not informed of is suggested by the fact that Abraham ends up with the trees as well as the field and the cave. One of my Nigerian students told me that when selling or renting land in his area, the parties always specify whether or not the trees are included in the deal. These are usually palm trees which can produce palm wine, palm nuts for palm oil, or coconuts, all of which have economic value over and above the land, which is farmed. Someone buying or renting land cannot use the produce of the trees or cut the trees down unless these uses are specified in the deal. Perhaps Abraham, forced to buy the field as well as the cave,

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[4]   Eugene F. Roop, *Genesis*, Kitchener, Ontario: Harold Press, 1987, p. 154.

[5]   The NIV Study Bible says that Ephron was trying to do so because of various aspects of Hittite law, but *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edition, Leicester: IVP Press, 1982, p. 486 in an article on the Hittites and Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 145-146, points out that the Hittites in Canaan were far from the Hittite Empire and its laws, and that the idea remains speculative.

and forced to accept what might be a high price[6] in order to bury his wife quickly, specified that the trees be included in the deal. This would be consistent with the specifics of vs. 17 and African custom.

I hope I have shown that the use of cultural exegesis, specifically African cultural exegesis in addition to Western cultural exegesis, can illuminate the text better than Western cultural exegesis alone. In fact, sometimes the African point of view may be at least as accurate, perhaps even more accurate, than a Western point of view. Notice that, along with the writers in *Text and Experience,* I conclude that everyone's exegesis is culturally influenced and therefore all exegesis is cultural exegesis. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and culture can indeed be a help to hermeneutics if it truly can illuminate the historical meaning of the text.

This points us towards another question brought up by analysing the methods used in *Text and Experience,* "Where does the meaning of a text lie - in the author's intention, in the text itself or in the reader?" For Fernando Segovia,[7] the balance is definitely towards the reader because both the text and the reader are socially and culturally conditioned and interact with one another to produce meaning as constructed by the reader. Thus the reader determines the meaning. He does not even consider the author's intention for the text as historically oriented approaches in Western scholarship do.[8] This question of where the meaning of the text lies - author's intention, text itself, or reader - is a Western question, but in the

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[6] Both Roop, p. 155, and Kidner, 146, suggest Eprhon's price might have been high, and the NIV Study Bible describes it as exorbitant, but Kidner cautions against certainty using various prices for property mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. This is wise as the size of the field and the value of the tress is not mentioned in the text.

[7] Fernando Segovia, "The Text as Other: Towards a Hispanic American Hermeneutic" in *Text and Experience*, pp. 294-296.

[8] For a convenient discussion of some of the basics of similar issues in OT interpretation, see Tremper Longman III, "Literary Approaches to Old Testament Study" in David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold, *The Face of Old Testament Studies*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999, pp. 97-115.

other book under review, *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, some of the seven non-Western practitioners work from the reader's point of view to the neglect of the text and the author's intention.

For example, Laura E. Donaldson, in "The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth Through Native Eyes", concludes that by assimilating into Boaz' family, Ruth betrays her cultural roots in Moab and has made the wrong choice by choosing Israel's God while Orpah, in rejecting Yahweh, has remained true to her roots and culture and has made the right choice – from the perspective of native Americans.[9] This understanding, or reading, of Ruth is governed not by a reconstruction of the author's intention as seen in the text, but wholly by the reader's cultural background and her response to her history.   On the other hand, Dalila Nayap-Pot, in "Life in the Midst of Death: Naomi, Ruth and the Plight of Indigenous Women", draws on the parallels between her situation in Central America and Ruth's situation in ancient Israel to paint a positive picture of help for women today from the Ruth's example. Ruth is seen as a positive example in this text based interpretation.

The African reader dominates the use of Psalms in David Tuesday Adamo's "African Cultural Hermeneutics" in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*. Adamo examines the way some African indigenous churches have used the Psalms, with other natural materials, for protective, curative or therapeutic, or success purposes.[10] Protective Psalms (such as Pss. 5, 6, 28, 35, 37, 54, 55, 83, and 109) protect Christians against witches and other evil powers when they are recited while performing certain other ceremonies. For example, some Psalms, such as 55:15 and 23, contain curses against enemies and rejoice over their downfall. Adamo outlines the procedure for using this psalm as recommended by his source, "This Psalm should be read every day. The holy name of God, *Jah*, should be pronounced after each reading of the Psalm. The belief in God's

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[9]   Laura E. Donaldson, "The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth Through Native Eyes" in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, pp. 32-34.

[10]   David Tuesday Adamo, "African Cultural Hermeneutics" in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, p. 71.

saving grace is important as one reads this Psalm. It will protect a person against the plans of enemies. They will perish by their own evil deeds."[11] Other procedures for use with other psalms are specific times to read the psalms such as 1 PM; standing in the middle of a triangle of three lit candles; set prayers naming the enemies; reading while naked (this is a private, personal ceremony); making psalms into amulets for protection; and using various Hebrew forms of God's name rather than vernacular forms.

Psalms are also used in healing ceremonies by another African practitioner. "For a swollen stomach, he recommends Psalms 20 and 40. One should get water from a flowing river into a new pot. Put together a complete palm frond and three newly grown palm leaves in the pot. While reading Psalms 20 and 40, with the holy name *Eli Safatan* (62 times), one should light nine candles. The reader should bathe with the water for nine days."[12] An alternate method is also described to cure the same complaint. Another practitioner uses the same Psalms for the cure of toothache, headache, and backache.

Adamo also cites practitioners who promise success in various enterprises. For example, students in examinations can use the Psalms to ensure success. The *Saint Michael Prayer Book* says students should, "cut four candles into three each, light them round and be in the middle of the candles, put some salts under each candle, read Psalm 4 eight times. Call Holy Name ALATULA JA AJARAHLIAH 72 times. Pray for success. You will surely pass."[13] It is interesting to note that Psalms 6, 28 and 109 are recommended by some practitioners for protection while others recommend them for healing. Psalms 27 and 51 are recommended by some for healing, but by others for success.

In his evaluation of these practices, Adamo is mostly sympathetic. Adamo notes that the use of names as power is important, but that some are names of God, others are names of angels, other names are unknown elsewhere and some are names

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[11] Adamo, p. 75, quoting from an indigenous source.

[12] Adamo, p. 79, quoting from an indigenous source.

[13] Adamo, p. 82, quoting from an indigenous source.

which describe God's activities. He says that total condemnation of this practice should be avoided because, "African Christians are comfortable using these names that are believed to have abundant powers."[14] Herbs may be used for healing, as in Western medicine, and the use of non-living things is "a demonstration of faith in God's power to make these things potent", and of "His power over nature".[15] He cites a number of Old and New Testament passages which use similarly strange methods when viewed from a Western perspective (2 Ki 4:38-49; 5:14; 20:1-11; Mt. 8:3; Jn 9:6-7; Ac 28:8), and he could have picked several more actions which might be described as "miracles accompanied by means" as, for example, in the bronze serpent of Num. 21:8-9. I say this because as a Westerner I am uncomfortable with some of the Biblical passages above, yet I accept them by faith, even if I do not fully understand why God proceeds the way He does, for example, with the bronze snake. The way some indigenous African churches use of the Psalms strikes me as "paganistic, magical and syncretistic" as Adamo predicts.[16] Westerners can expect to feel suspicious of something so far outside their cultural comfort zone, but that does not necessarily push those practices beyond the pale of Christianity.[17] Origen was a true believer, but some of his theology did not stand the test of time and few modern Christians castrate themselves for religious reasons as he apparently did.[18] Perhaps we should be willing to withhold condemnation until Africans decide for themselves. And mission church members may be voting with

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[14] Adamo, pp. 85-87.

[15] Adamo, p. 87.

[16] Adamo, p. 88.

[17] Cf. Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", p. 11. "It is safe for a European to make only one prediction about the valid, authentic African Biblical theology we all talk about: that it is likely either to puzzle us or to disturb us."

[18] See the articles on "Origen" and "Origenism" pp. 733-734, in J. D. Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

their feet. Adamo states a common truth about churches which read the Psalms this way.

> "One important fact that must be mentioned is that the African indigenous churches in Nigeria, that are using this method, are growing very quickly compared with the mainline missionary churches. Ironically, while the authorities of the mainline churches have condemned these indigenous churches for approaching the Bible this way, many of their members join these churches. In fact, many outstanding church members of the mainline churches prefer to keep their membership intact with the missionary churches, but frequently visit the pastors and prophets of these African indigenous churches. Testimonies of members and non-members who visit these churches either at night or daytime provide powerful evidence of the effectiveness of the use of the Bible this way."

Adamo's statements are echoed from many other places, including my own students in both East and West Africa. There is a vast, felt need for this kind of ministry, whether or not the missionaries and mission-founded churches like it ,and whether or not the form of ministry and the method of interpretation are eventually proved wrong-headed if not heretical. Will this vast felt need help make this type of reader-response school of hermeneutics the successor to historical-grammatical exegesis in Africa? Perhaps, but I hope not, not because Africans do not feel at home with this method, for many obviously do. I hope such an extreme reader based form of hermeneutics does not sweep all Africa into its fold because the method ignores the author's intent for the Psalms and ignores the meaning of the text itself. I believe the universalising factors in hermeneutics are represented by the author's intention as reconstructed by the reader from the text, and that there is not enough of this factor in the way these churches read the Psalms.

The reader's culture obviously influence how he understands the text. For example, when Paul tells Timothy and Titus that an elder must be "the husband of but one wife". Africans assume he is forbidding polygamy, while Westerners assume he is forbidding

divorce and remarriage. These are the results of unexamined cultural exegesis, but what did PAUL have in mind in this text? That is what would settle the meaning of the text, not the reader's response. Our question above was, "Where does the meaning of a text lie - in the author's intention, in the text itself or in the reader?" I believe the answer lies in all three areas. They are interrelated and interdependent. There must be a tension between the "localising" factor (the reader) and the "universalising" factor (the text, as understood by the reader who reconstructs the author's intention), and without the tension between the two, there is not enough influence from the text or from the reader.

The book *Text and Experience* has convinced me that not only do we all do cultural exegesis, but that our cultures can be a help as well as a hindrance in our interpretation. They are more of a help the more the cultures are like the Biblical cultures, and we should note that African cultures have certain similarities to the Biblical cultures that other cultures lack. The book *Vernacular Hermeneutics* has convinced me that we can profitably use the Bible to help God's people become more like Christ *in the long run* only when we use a hermeneutical approach which makes proper use of the reader and his culture, the text itself, and the author's intention. I have yet to find a replacement for the historical-grammatical method, but I have found these books a great stimulation to my thinking on hermeneutics.

The words of Andrew Walls are an appropriate conclusion:

> Since none of us can read the Scriptures without cultural blinkers of some sort, the great advantage, the crowning excitement which our own era of Church history has over all others, is the possibility that we may be able to read them together. Never before has the Church looked so much like the great multitude whom no man can number out of every tribe and nation and people and tongue. Never before, therefore, has there been so much potentiality for mutual enrichment and self-criticism, as God causes yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.[19]

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[19] Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", p. 15.

Book Reviews

Del Tar
DOUBLE IMAGE: BIBLICAL INSIGHTS FROM AFRICAN PARABLES
Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1994, 219 pp. Pb
(Publisher's Address: 997 MacArthur Blvd.,
Mahwah, NJ 07430)

Del Tarr utilises a parabolic-narrative method of communication, based on the rich oral tradition of West African nations, to teach us a good many things about three important subject areas: (a) some crucial aspects of an African world-view and way of life; (b) corresponding features of a biblical perspective that may be illuminated by an in-depth knowledge of the African world-view; and (c) certain aspects of a Western cultural orientation that may hinder one's understanding and appreciation of either the African or the biblical perspectives.

Tarr has a PhD in cross-cultural communication, is a former long-term missionary to West Africa, and is former President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in the USA. He puts all of his rich scholarly and field-based experience to good use in this book, which provides an excellent anthropological and language-oriented introduction to the field of missiology in general and intercultural, inductive communication in particular.

Tarr's seven major theses of cross cultural communication are each developed and described in a corresponding number of chapters. These may be summarised as follows (based largely on the author's own words): (1) "the filter [or point of view] of an African culture can increase depth, perception and the [concrete] texture of Scripture understanding"; (2) "Western society [and culture], by [its very] nature, obscures certain biblical lessons"; (3) "individualism, [the desire for] equality, [a focus upon the] youth-cult, etc.—though perhaps good North American values—may keep

us from [seeing] some biblical truths"; (4) "[we need to] take a step back into the [pre-scientific] world of the Scriptures [in order to better understand the supernatural realm]"; (5) a proper appreciation of "family" and its manifold extended inter-relationships is necessary for a proper biblical hermeneutic; (6) Western "print literacy bias" can lead to a depreciation of the "oral/aural world" of biblical as well as African life-style and system of communication; and (7) the Scripture-preferred mode of presenting a "polarity of ideas helps teach via contrast." – also imagery, symbolism, life-experiences, folk literary forms, personal names, and certain dramatic rhetorical forms (e.g., irony, hyperbole, enigma, paradox).

In addition to the insights that these principles can give us in developing a more balanced, well-rounded strategy of communication and method of biblical interpretation, Tarr uses them also as a gentle means of calling attention to a number of blind spots that have hindered a past (and present?) Western communication of the gospel: an over-emphasis on deductive logic, either-or categorical thought and "systematic" theology, the top-down (clergy-dominated) approach to problem-solving, "success"-achievement orientation (as "confirmed" by statistics, i.e., quantity rather than quality), the ideal of openness and "democracy"; a desire to "control" nature and the environment; competition-driven capitalistic thinking and "goal"-centredness; and a general secularisation, and de-sacralization of life.

Tarr does not "preach" at the reader; he rather effectively teaches more indirectly through his African parables, stories, and anecdotes as these are applied to specific texts of Scripture and the universal problem of our sinful human nature. While it appears that Western missionaries are the primary readership intended for this book, the methods of instruction and Bible applications would also be most helpful to African readers. After reading this book, in fact, they will better understand where their Western colleagues are "coming from" in their various messages and behaviours so that the Africans can in turn shed some light on past and potential problem areas that even today prevent the Word from being properly understood and applied to daily life and thought on the continent.

This book is very well written and easy to read. One could easily go through an entire chapter in one sitting. There are also a number of interesting illustrations to provide pause points along the way, as well as several helpful appendices, namely: a selection of "African words," a general topical index, and a Scripture index. There are only a few endnotes to each chapter, consisting mainly of bibliographic entries. These, it seems to me, were rather too few and need to be supplemented with pertinent references to current works on the various subjects treated, whether anthropological, religious, or biblical in nature.

One could quibble with certain apparent omissions (especially the lack of reference to the actual African language of words cited) or assertions made in the text here and there (e.g., on "man's freedom to choose his own spiritual destiny" [32]; seeming over-tolerance of the practice of sorcery [60]; "animistic" view of African traditional religion [61, 98, 163-4]; the analogy of Christ as man's "elder brother"[120]; and a description of the "ideophone" as mere "onomatopoeia" [glossary]). On the whole, however, my question marks were relatively few and far between.

This fine book is a definite "must" for all missionaries serving (or preparing to serve) in Africa, even those who have been around for a while. There are some noteworthy things likely to be learned about biblical interpretation and intercultural communication. The text could also serve as an introduction to these subjects in theological schools and seminaries continent-wide. Even though the examples, stories, parables, etc. come from West Africa, they can easily be applied or ring a bell in the minds of those who live elsewhere. I can also recommend this book to English-speaking African lay-Christians who are interested in learning more about how an understanding of the basic principles of inductive communication can enhance their understanding of the Bible (especially the discourses of Christ) and can improve their own religious communication, especially where certain barriers are currently being faced (whether ethnic, economic, spiritual, or even political). Whether we are African or expatriate, there will be times in our life of Christian witness when we too, as Tarr puts it, must endeavour to "break through the expectations of the reader's

[hearer's] perceptual world, trying to move the participant into a world of another people and time frame" (196). His book supplies many handy tips along with a general strategy for doing just that. I highly recommend it.

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Christine A. Mallouhi
WAGING PEACE ON ISLAM
London UK: Monarch Books, 2000
(348 pages, paperback, ISBN: 1 85424 502 3)

If you are looking for a provocative book that challenges all our stereotypes on Islam and Muslims, you could hardly find a more stimulating reading than this book. Mallouhi's treatment of the subject comes across with great passion for Muslim peoples, and captures the reader with compelling language and a wealth of personal insight, based on historical research, devotional studies and lessons learned from life. This should not come as a complete surprise, since the author quite deliberately married into a Muslim family, lived in several Muslim countries in North Africa and the Middle East over extended periods of time, and has visited Muslims in many other countries.

In her book the author presents an empathetic approach to Christian—Muslim interaction throughout history and in today's world. Mallouhi uses Francis of Assisi as a classic example of how it is possible for Christians to relate to Muslims. Throughout the eleven chapters of the book the 'crusader mentality' is set in contrast to the approach of love towards Muslim people exemplified in the author's own life through numerous encounters. Surprisingly, she states: "In over twenty years I never once experienced personal hostility from Muslims over my Christian

faith"(29). Repeatedly, she stresses the importance of meeting Muslims face to face, pleading that "the only way most Muslims will experience Christ's love for them is through a Christian who cares enough to cross the barrier, and go over to the other side, no matter what the cost" (261). In our efforts to bring Muslims to Christ we should, however, be aware that "if a Muslim is asked to 'accept Christ' he does not understand the implication of that cliché. Muslims already accept Christ as an honoured prophet" (282). Therefore "ignorance is [not only] the breeding ground of fear" (75), but will defeat a meaningful communication of the gospel.

Mallouhi is not afraid of exposing Western antagonistic perceptions of Islam, whether they come from the secular media, from one-sided support of the state of Israel or even from evangelical quarters when Islam is 'targeted' as the last remaining giant to be defeated. She suggests that "there are a number of beliefs and practices hiding under the banner of spiritual warfare today that are closer to paganism than the Bible" (28).

Unfortunately, these very admirable views and convictions are weakened (in my view) by a number of points that are at best very debatable, if not also at times disturbing and even alarming. One wonders why Muhammad is being portrayed as a gentleman-like character who discussed his beliefs with Jews and Christians alike and respected them (78). Does the author not know, for example, that both *Hadith* and "The Life of the Prophet" (*Sirat-ul Rasul*) also mention dozens of assassinations, and the total expelling of Jewish tribes from Arabia on Muhammad's explicit directions? Has she deliberately compromised the truth to serve her purpose of presenting Islam in the brightest colours and have the reader "Captured by Islam" (Chapter 10)?

The same question must be raised about her treatment of the Palestinian – Israeli conflict. No doubt there is another side to the story than most of the dominant media would have us believe, but it surely goes beyond giving a fair balance when Mallouhi states: "Palestinians are currently being oppressed in the name of Israel's God and Christ" (149). Is this a religious conflict between Judaism and Christianity, versus Islam? Surely not. In my opinion this

highlights one of the most serious deficits of the book. Too often it leaves the reader confused by failing to maintain a clear distinction between a Christian response and the common attitude of the West. In another example of this mix-up, Mallouhi first states, that "Since the fall of Communism the West made Islam its new enemy," and then bemoans in the same paragraph that: "The current view of, Islam precludes any dialogue or exchange: what does darkness have to offer to light, error to truth, ignorance to knowledge, or Satan to Christ?" (182). This is surely not the sort of question that secular leaders in Europe are asking! Nor at the same time would it be fair to maintain that the Church is not having any dialogue or exchange with Islam.

Some sentiments expressed in the key chapter. "A Muslim Like Me", give such an idealistic picture of the Muslim faith and practice that one finds oneself asking: "Yes, that may be one experience you had, but it is surely not the full picture. Why don't you put it into perspective?" A few examples may illustrate this. During a conversation with some Muslim women in the Gulf states, Mallouhi concludes: "I listened to the women discussing their expectation that their lives lived for God would cause others to desire to follow God more closely. And I thought once again: There's a Muslim just like me." Really? Or in illustrating the impact of the Islamic creed she relates: "The two Catholic nuns living among the Bedouin Muslims [in Morocco], and sharing the same rugged life and fasting with them, turned on their small portable radio at full blast. The hills echoed 'There is no God but God' and abruptly died. Muslims and Catholics then ate together in harmony with what was expressed and in harmony because of what was not expressed." Is this an ideal meant to be emulated or why is it related in these words?

While at no point will one doubt the good intentions or the personal commitment of the author to see Muslims brought into the presence of Jesus Christ through a life and word testimony, many informed readers will find excessive the sentiments expressed on the cover of the book that "the diagnoses in this provocative and challenging book are accurate." The book may indeed be

provocative and challenging, but accuracy surely demands a commitment to a fuller, more broadly balanced assessment.

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T.D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner eds.
NEW DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
Leicester, England and Downers Grove, Illinois, USA:
Inter-Varsity Press, 2000

The 'New Dictionary of Biblical Theology' is the latest addition to IVP's continually growing ` list of theological and biblical reference tools. It is a substantial work of over 860 pages, with articles contributed by 125 scholars, mostly from Europe and north America, experts in the areas on which they write. It is divided into three sections. The first contains twelve general essays which look at central issues in biblical theology. In part two there are articles on the theology of the major biblical divisions and also the individual books, and the third and largest section contains articles on biblical themes. At the end of each article there is a bibliography, and the book concludes with an index of articles.

The tripartite division of the work is well conceived and will make it extremely useful to students, teachers and the general reader. The twelve essays in the first part of the book provide a stimulating and useful introduction to the subject of biblical theology as a whole. They cover such areas as the nature of the subject itself, its history and the challenges it faces, the relationship between biblical and systematic theology, unity and diversity in Scripture and relationships between the testaments. The authors interact throughout with contemporary scholarship, provide concise guides through a number of controversies, and defend the subject against those whose approach effectively undermines it. It is also particularly appropriate that there should be an article on preaching

and biblical theology in this section, underlining the fact that biblical theology is not just a subject for the academy but intimately and inseparably related to the proclamation of the church. The second section, Biblical Corpora and Books, helpfully brings together brief summaries of the theology of every major section and every book of the Bible. It is of course true that most commentaries summarise the theology of the book they are treating, sometimes at greater length than is found here. However, it is very helpful to have summaries on all the individual books and the principal literary divisions of the Bible within the compass of a single volume.

The conservative evangelical position is maintained throughout the work. Writing on 'Scripture', Schnabel rejects the view that the Bible may be true on questions of 'faith and practice' but err on historical and scientific matters: 'it is not possible to separate matters of faith from matters of history' (page 40). For the most part questions of authorship and the dating of particular books are not addressed, but traditional ascriptions of authorship are sometimes explicitly affirmed. In the article on the Pauline corpus, for example, the authenticity of all thirteen epistles traditionally attributed to Paul is assumed without equivocation. The article on the Pastoral epistles does, somewhat exceptionally, begin with a discussion of their authenticity, which concludes that 'they should not be removed from the orbit of the historical Paul' (page 330). The essential unity of Isaiah is apparently a given - 'recent studies of the book of Isaiah have rediscovered its thematic unity' (page 217) - although the dating of Daniel is not debated, nor the unity of the Pentateuch.

It is good to note the presence of articles on mission, 'an exceedingly important motif pervading virtually the entire course of biblical revelation' (page 663), on prayer and on worship. Turning to other issues, the doctrine of the wrath of God and the propitiatory nature of the work of Christ are both firmly maintained. Blocher insists on the historicity of Adam: 'the biblical view of evil and of salvation hangs upon it' (page 374). On anthropology Johnston argues for a 'holistic dualism' that understands the human person 'as a psychosomatic unity in life. while an immaterial element

continues after death' (page 565). In his articles on Romans and the Pauline letters Moo expresses serious reservations on 'the new perspective on Paul' and supports the traditional Protestant understanding of the doctrine of justification, which is more fully argued by Seifrid in 'Righteousness, justice and justification'. The discussion of gender, 'Man and woman', takes a more conservative approach than that found in some other recent IVP publications: 'Paul nuances the unmistakable equality of man and woman in Christ by preserving male and female sexual identity within the oneness of all in Christ' (page 653). More controversially, in his article on prophecy Wayne Grudem claims that in the New Testament it is the apostle who is equivalent to the Old Testament prophet; by contrast New Testament prophecy is not authoritative and infallible as it is in the Old, nor is it simply 'powerful preaching', but rather 'telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind' (page 707). Moreover, according to Grudem, prophecy in the New Testament has less authority than teaching and has to be tested. He refers readers to other works for an alternative, 'cessationist' view. Johnston's article on hell takes a somewhat equivocal position towards the traditional evangelical understanding of the Bible's teaching on eternal punishment, weighing the alternatives of 'eternal conscious punishment' and 'limited conscious punishment', and referring to a possible compromise solution (pages 543-544). Meanwhile, the discussion of the Sabbath argues that there is 'no theological connection between Sabbath and Sunday .. The Sabbath was a sign .. of this eschatological rest, whereas Sunday is not presented in the NT as a sign of anything, despite its connection to the resurrection' (pages 749-500).

Inevitably the quality of the articles in a dictionary of this sort will vary somewhat from one author to another, and there are some omissions.   Thus, for example, there is no article on the millennium, nor is there a cross-reference to indicate where it might be discussed: the article on eschatology contains only a very cursory reference to it, despite the heat generated by the issue over many years. In this connection, the absence of subject and scripture indexes is a significant weakness for a work of this type and does

diminish its usefulness as a research and reference tool. The publishers should consider rectifying this omission in any future edition. Nevertheless, it is a fine book, enormously helpful and stimulating, and containing a wealth of rich information and discussion. It would be of great profit to every thinking Christian who wants to know more of the Scriptures. It is most highly recommended.

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Daniel I. Block
THE GODS OF THE NATIONS
Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology
Grand Rapids, MI / Leicester, England:
Baker Academic and Apollos, 2000

'The Gods of the Nations' is a substantially revised edition of a work first published by Daniel Block in 1988. His object is 'to determine how the relationships that existed between deities and nations were perceived by ancient Near Easterners' (page 19). This in turn enables him to identify the points at which Israelite perceptions were identical with those of their neighbours, and those at which there were fundamental differences. The body of the discussion looks at the origin of deity-nation relations, their expression and termination, and the significance to them of the national territory. Block looks in some detail at the relevant biblical and extra-biblical texts in order to reach his conclusions, which are very helpfully summarised in the final chapter of the book.

Block points out that each of the ancient Near Eastern nations (and also lesser political entities) recognised one particular deity as having jurisdiction over it, including Israel. He makes a basic but key point in the conclusion: it has become apparent that the ancient Israelites' perception of the world, and in particular of political

realities. had much more in common with that of their neighbours, than with our own' (page 149). However, for a number of reasons Israel was also unique among the ancient Near Eastern peoples.

First, in biblical understanding Yahweh had established a relationship with them as a people and not simply as the occupants of a certain territory. Extrabiblical sources suggest that in all other cases deities were 'primarily attached to specific geographic territories and only secondarily concerned with the inhabitants of those areas' (page 32). Accordingly, other ancient Near Eastern nations believed that they were related to their respective deities simply because they happened to live in his/her land. However, the land that Israel occupied was given to them subsequent to their own election, and their relationship with Yahweh did not depend on it but on the fact that he had called them to be his people.

A second fundamental difference between Israel and other ancient Near Eastern peoples lay in the nature of their commitment to their deities. While neighbouring peoples believed they enjoyed a special relationship with a certain god, it was not of an exclusive nature: they felt free to offer worship to other deities in addition to their patrons. However, throughout the Old Testament Yahweh claimed the exclusive allegiance of Israel, which was a notion unique at the time, even though the Old Testament suggests that in practice that claim was constantly threatened by the attractions of alien gods and the syncretism that often resulted.

Third, there was for all nations the possibility that the anger of their deities would lead to catastrophic consequences. Block argues that in this respect ancient Near Eastern nations suffered from extreme insecurity, despite efforts to appease their deities and retain their good favour. The Old Testament shows that Israel similarly feared the consequences of Yahweh's leaving them, but that there were dramatic differences in this regard between them and their neighbours. Most important, they possessed a uniquely clear knowledge of his will and righteous demand, and similarly a unique sense of his presence, all the consequence of divine self-revelation. The gracious nature of his dealings with Israel also distinguished him from other gods: unlike them, he is not capricious, egotistical or self-indulgent.

Finally, while for other peoples national defeat and exile signified the humiliation of their deity and his/her expulsion from the land along with them, this was not so for Israel. Thus in, for example, his discussion of Ezekiel 8-11, Block points out that, even in the moment of catastrophe, Yahweh remains sovereign over his people and over his own destiny too. Nebuchadnezzar does not forcibly drag him from his residence, and his departure did not signify the supremacy of the Babylonian deity. On the contrary, Yahweh is the universal sovereign, and all that happens falls under his jurisdiction; Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were his agents even in bringing calamity on his own people. This is so because 'the Hebrews alone of all the peoples of the ancient Near East developed a doctrine of monotheism' (page 150). Moreover, given the constant Old Testament stress on the permanent nature of Yahweh's covenant with Israel, the prophets held out hope for the nation beyond the dissolution of the deity-nation-land association in 586.

Block's work is based on detailed and thorough research into the Old Testament and its ancient Near Eastern context. It is a model for students and scholars in its careful and scrupulous analysis, and clarifies a key area of Old Testament history and theology. While not perhaps a vital book on every pastor's or Christian worker's shelves, it certainly merits a place in the library of every theological institution.

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James C. Miller
The Obedience of Faith,
the Eschatological People of God,
and the Purpose of Romans
SBL Dissertation Series 177.
Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000

The enormous influence that Paul's letter to the Romans has had down through the history of Christian thought, on Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and countless others, has been well documented. And major commentaries and monographs continue to appear regularly from respected scholars. Given the attention that has been paid to this document, one might think that there would be nothing new left to say about Romans, that all its puzzles have been solved. But this is far from the truth. One of the prominent unsolved puzzles has even earned a name for itself in recent years. "The Romans Debate" refers to questions concerning Paul's purpose in writing Romans and cognate issues. and is represented by such publications as the well-known collection of essays edited by Karl P. Donfried, *The Romans Debate* (revised edition: Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

James Miller's *The Obedience of Faith, the Eschatological People of God, and the Purpose of Romans* is among the latest contributions to this Debate. Miller is a senior lecturer in biblical studies at Daystar University in Kenya, and has taught there since 1989. This is his PhD dissertation completed at Union Theological Seminary (Richmond, VA), and published in the Society of Biblical Literature's Dissertation Series. Miller suggests a coherent solution to the "Romans Debate", which attempts to explain the entire letter along with the historical context of the Roman Christians.

Those who work in NT studies will want to take note of this study, not only for the fresh solutions it offers, but also because Miller provides the uninitiated with handy orientation to the current debate on Romans. Since publication of his dissertation, Miller has also now contributed the authoritative update on the

Debate itself, in his "The Romans Debate: 1991-2001" Currents in Research: *Biblical Studies* 9 (2001) 306-49.

Miller's first chapter is given over to defining the problem: "How does one unite the information found in the frame of the letter with the particular contents of the body, in such a way that it provides a rationale for why Paul wrote about these specific issues (and not others) to these particular Christians at this time in his ministry?" (p. 5). Miller's contention is that previous solutions to this problem have failed because they either ignore the body and/or frame of the letter, or fail to account properly for its varied contents. A coherent solution to the purpose of Romans should take Paul's own assertions in the frame of his letter seriously, and should show how this ties in with what Paul writes in the body of the letter. It should also account for what we know about the Roman Christians and their relationship with Paul, as well as developments in Paul's ministry.

Miller's thesis is that Paul wrote this letter to shape "a community of the new age"-which Miller also terms the "eschatological people of God" (as in the title of the book). To achieve this, Paul attempts to "strengthen the Roman Christians' adherence to his interpretation of the gospel" by "describing how that gospel should work itself out in the life of the community" (p. 18). The book recognises that this aim is determined by a number of different factors-Paul's missionary plans, his impending visit to Jerusalem, potential division in the Roman church-but argues that these various factors do not necessarily mean that Paul had to have multiple aims in view when he wrote.

To demonstrate his thesis, Miller begins in Chapter 2 by examining the frame of the letter for clues. Passages such as 1:11-15 and 15:15 are viewed as important explanations from Paul on the purpose of his letter. Building on the idea of the "apostolic *parousia*" mediated through Paul's letters, Miller argues that Paul's "reminder" to the Roman believers serves to establish his apostolic authority amongst them. It is his apostolic calling that lies behind this thread that runs through the entire letter. Paul's statement in 1:5 is scrutinised (along with 15:18 and 16:6) to show how the parallel theme of "obedience" runs right through Romans and

provides the impetus for Paul's mission. As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul called the Roman Christians to an obedience that belonged to the *eschaton*. This obedience would manifest itself as Gentiles and Jews joined in the common worship of the one true God.

Next Miller expounds 15:7-13 (Chapter 3), arguing that this section functions as a summary and conclusion of everything that has come before. Paul returns to many of the key themes found in chs. 1-11: "the character of God expressed in saving action", the recipients of this action, the response to this action, and "the witness of Scripture to all the above" (p.79).

These themes serve to join 15:7-13 with chs. 1-11. Miller's argument for this section as a summary of chs. 12-13 does not convince, although he does return to this passage in Chapter 6. The connection between 15:7-13 and 14:1-15:6 is clear, but Miller shows that 15:7f. is more than a simple restatement of 14:1-15:6. Paul's exhortation for the Romans to "receive one another" is broadened to include not only the "strong" and the "weak", but the entire community. This is the "obedience of faith" that lies at the core of Paul's apostolic calling: the "eschatological people of God" consists of Jew and Gentile united in common worship and "receiving one another" in a manner that brings glory to God (p. 94). Chapters 2 and 3 successfully explain the frame of the letter as well as a large section of the body.

However, a successful solution to the Romans Debate must also account for the letter in the context of Paul's life and ministry, and that of the Christians in Rome.

Chapters 4 and 5 summarise what is known about Paul, his audience and potential opponents. In Chapter 4 the author rehearses the evidence that Romans was written from Corinth as Paul prepared to make his way to Jerusalem with the collection from the Gentile churches. After delivering the collection he hoped to travel to Spain via Rome. There are indications that, even though he had never visited Rome, Paul knew something of the Roman Christians and that they possibly knew something of him. The following chapter argues that "Paul's controversies in the East revolve[d] around what God had done in Christ for the people of God" (p. 150). Paul's defence of the gospel in chs. 1-11 follows

similar lines to those in Galatians and Philippians and indicates that the questions raised, e.g. 3:8, were not merely rhetorical devices, but were possible accusations from real opponents who, Paul expected, would arrive in Rome before he could. This reconstruction explains 15:31 and 16:17-20a, passages which seem almost paranoiac if there was no real opposition to Paul's gospel.

In keeping with the criterion of explaining that content of the letter in terms of Paul's purpose or aim, Miller argues in Chapter 6 that 12:1-15:6 focuses on relationships between members of the Christian community in Rome.

The flow of thought in this section is explained as moving from general principles to the specific application of those principles in the context of tension between the "weak" and the "strong." While 12:9-21 and 13:1-7 sit uncomfortably in this scheme Miller shows how these two sections might be read with reference to community relationships. As he himself acknowledges, there is insufficient evidence to maintain this position with any certainty, although it must be considered a possibility, especially if the coherence of the letter is taken as a starting point.

The book closes with a useful summary of Miller's conclusions and an appendix in which 16:25-27 is defended as authentic.

The Obedience of Faith, the Eschatological People of God, and the Purpose of Romans is a welcome contribution to the Romans Debate which succeeds in advancing the discussion along fruitful lines of enquiry. Miller's introduction and footnotes will also prove a useful guide to the Debate as a whole.

When faced with what seems to be a host of conflicting data and the need to reconstruct the background of a New Testament letter, some scholars are tempted to suggest that a variety of purposes and aims are present. While this possibility should not be ruled out a priori, it remains a dangerous approach. A complex set of data can always be described, given enough variables. Ockham reminds us, though, that the truth is often seen most clearly when we reduce the number of variables as far as possible.

The strength of Miller's work lies in its simple explanation of the "data" of Romans, without minimising the complex historical issues underlying it.

Even if future research might cause certain parts of this thesis to be re-examined, Miller has provided criteria which any solution needs to meet and has shown how the problem can be addressed coherently.

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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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