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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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CHALLENGES TO AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

An AJET Editorial

Africa is a land of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, starvation and disease. In its cities there is an unemployment, overcrowding and fragmentation of families. This fragmentation of life is greatly reinforced by globalization and religious pluralism. However, these cities are vibrating with opportunities for the gospel. People in the city need to be loved and touched. The primary source of identity for urban people is their jobs. The church needs to be relevant to the problems of life in the city and expose the realities of African urbanization. Both the city and the rural areas must have its biblical place in our theologies.

The whole church needs to seize this opportunity because it might be short lived. Strong churches are needed that herald the truth and not compromise with the essentials of the Word of God. There is need for theologians and Bible expositors who are men and women of character and integrity as well as deeply rooted in biblical truth. Time is long past for the few African theologians to quarrel over words. They should get to the issues and grapple with them. Not only should the church deal with day-to-day problems but also biblical doctrines.

The African church has received a worldwide reputation as far as numerical growth is concerned. Statements like,

- "The largest churches in the world will be in Africa south of the Sahara,"
- "The fastest growing church is in Africa,"
- "The numerical centre has shifted from North to South,"
- "60-70% of world's Christianity is in the two-thirds world,"

and so forth, could easily make the church complacent.

As noted by one of the contributors, African Christianity should be aware that the centre of gravity still remains a Western and Northern phenomenon. Europe and North America still determine the theological

agenda for the church in Africa (Samuel Olarewaju). In addition, "for decades the image the world has had of the African Church is that of a fat baby, growing fatter every day but never growing up! A baby forever on milk, not on solid food, which is prepared in Africa and fit for international consumption" (Yemi Ladipo, AJET 1989). The spiritual depth and commitment on the part of the believers is still wanting. The following problems are still evident: lack of pastoral concern on the part of church leadership; lack of financial accountability; lack of emphasis on discipleship and training of holistic lifestyle; lack of discipline in attitude to work; lack of love among brethren; lack of biblical teaching on tithing, lack of trained leadership, and lack of theological depth.

Lack of theological training makes the church prone to heresies. The church is called upon to contextualize and grapple with issues of importance. Theology must maintain its distinctiveness in the midst of what is taking place in the world. The Northerners and Southerners need to combine their efforts. The work of missions demands all of our efforts. We must enter into the world of the lost both in the cities and rural areas. We need a whole generation of young people who have a passion for God and a heart for the lost world.

SECULARISATION IN AFRICA: A CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCHES[1]

Benno van den Toren

Evangelicals have not reflected on the question of secularisation in Africa. Dr. Benno van den Toren opens up this category of Christian reflection. The author notes that in modern cities large spheres of life have no link with personal religious values. Religious convictions are relegated to private sphere. The urban rich, those who think of themselves as intellectuals, successful or "educated," live most of their lives without their religion except when sickness or disaster strikes. Some turn to traditional healers or diviners. Consumerism and capitalism is readily accepted which leads to a form of idolatry. For some, religious practices serve secular goals. This article addresses ways the church should respond to this pervading process of secularism.

Introduction: The Problem and the Definition

At first sight the title of this article may seem inappropriate. Is secularisation not a problem characteristic of Europe and North America rather than Africa? Isn't the African "notoriously religious", as John Mbiti

Dr Benno van den Toren is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Bangui Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (BEST) in the Central African Republic; and was Scholar-in-Residence at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, during 2002.

[1] This article has grown out of an interdisciplinary course on "La sécularisation en Afrique comme défi pour l'église" for graduate students at the Bangui Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (BEST or Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui - FATEB) in the Central African Republic. I want to thank both my colleagues and the students who participated in this course for their many contributions. I equally want to express my thanks to the administration of Regent College in Vancouver (Canada), who kindly received me as a Scholar-in-Residence during the academic year, thus offering the conditions to write this article. I am thankful to Geoffrey Chapman from Johannesburg who helped me to write in his mother tongue and who was able to share his experiences of secularisation in South Africa, which confirmed the urgency of these issues.

said some decades ago and as Laurenti Magesa repeated only recently?[2] Isn't the problem for the African churches predominantly the tendency towards syncretism, the mixing of African Traditional Religion (ATR) with the Christian faith? The main thesis of this article is that disregarding the secularising forces in contemporary Africa greatly weakens the witness and presence of its churches, and that a balanced theological appreciation of these forces is greatly needed to determine in what direction to look for healthy responses and action. This is the case not only because the pervasive assumption that "*the* African [who is he or she?] is incurably religious" has an ethnicist bias, and presupposes too close a link between religion and ethnic identity; it is also the case because this perspective neglects the realities of contemporary Africa.

According to a 1986-survey in the low-income area of Eastleigh in Nairobi, on an average Sunday only 2,5% of the population attend a worship service.[3] This of course does not mean that the others never go to church or do not consider themselves Christian. Yet it does mean that at least on average their Christian faith is not so important that they feel the need to express it in worship, to seek Christian community and to be comforted and challenged through the preaching of the Word of God on a regular basis. "Eastleigh, for its many churches and worship centres, is a secular place and organized religion is superfluous to the lives of many of the self-employed."[4] In Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, complaints that I hear from students and pastors show that here it is not so much the poor as the rich who tend to push their faith to the margins of their lives. Although I do not have any precise statistics on the matter, it seems that many go to church when they are in need, but when they enter into the more affluent constituencies of society they no longer feel the need for church attendance. Pastoral visits then show that this is part of a more general process pushing their faith to the margins of their lives.

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[2] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London e.a.: Heinemann, 1969), p. 1; Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), pp. 25f.

[3] Aylward Shorter & Edwin Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1997), p. 58.

[4] Ibid., p. 59.

However, the diminishing impact of the Christian faith in individual lives and in society is not necessarily secularisation, for this decreasing influence could also be the result of a radical or partial return to ATR or of a growing influence of other religions like Islam. To be able to speak validly about secularisation, we need to see "impersonal and gradual processes whereby religion or the church played a diminishing role, or vanished entirely, from spheres of life where previously they had been influential."[5] For the moment this will do as a definition of secularisation as a sociological category. A conversion from one religion to another or the diminishing influence of one religion because of the growing impact of another religion does not count as secularisation. The broad tendency in both African Christianity and African Islam to syncretism does not count as secularisation. To speak about secularisation we need to see a diminishing influence of religion in general. This of course raises major theological questions. Can a human being really do without religion or is there always something that takes the place of God, be it our money (Matthew 6:24),[6] our stomach (Philippians 3:19) or an ideology, like Marxism? Maybe not, and I therefore suggest that we define secularisation not as a movement towards the absence of any "gods" or "idols", but in a more limited sense as the tendency to live all of life or parts of life without reference to a "transcendent" or "supernatural reality".[7]

In what follows we will make some observations and reflections about the challenge of secularisation for the church in Africa in four parts. In the following section (§2), we want to look into the varied forms of secularisation in Africa, in which we limit ourselves to Africa south of the Sahara. We will see how secularisation in Africa is part of the wider

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[5] Hugh McLeod, "Secularization", in: Adrian Hastings e.a. (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford e.a.: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 653.

[6] All Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (International Bible Society/ Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984).

[7] For the moment we need to overlook that "transcendent" and "supernatural" are very difficult to define, for they presuppose an understanding of what is "natural" and of a reality which is transcendent. It seems to me that for a traditional African his relationship to his departed forefathers is perfectly natural and that the general tendency to call this "supernatural" shows that we look at it from a Western point of view. For the sake of the discussion we will stick to a vague understanding of "transcendent" and "supernatural" with Western scientific overtones.

process of Westernisation and globalisation, but how at the same time it has its own flavour and characteristics. In the third section (§3), we will look at some of the main causes of secularisation in Africa, in order to understand its roots and also some positive aspects of the process. In the fourth section (§4), we will try to assess the process of secularisation. This is particularly important because we might think at first sight that Christianity, ATR and Islam need to join hands in fighting secularisation as a common enemy to religions. Yet, a closer look shows that some aspects of the process of secularisation are actually provoked by, and concordant with, the Christian faith and understanding of reality. All of this will lay the basis for the last section (§5), in which we will suggest some ways the church should react to this challenge. How can we faithfully witness in our secularising and fragmented world to Christ who is Lord over all of society and over all of our lives?

Through the whole I will be making one generalising and sweeping statement after another, often overlooking details, complexities, variations, and exceptions for the sake of the big picture. The only excuse I can make for this is that on so crucial a subject it is better to remain in generalities than to remain silent, and that all this should be read as an invitation for debate and further research and reflection. In Roman Catholic circles some important work has been done on the question of secularisation in Africa and we will gratefully use what is available.[8] From an evangelical theological perspective the reflection has yet to start, and if this article can instigate such reflection, it has achieved its main objective.

§2 Phenomena and Forms of Secularisation in Africa

In Europe and North America significant studies have been done to collect precise sociological data on the character and scope of secularisation. For

[8] Next to the study of Shorter and Onyancha mentioned in note 3, we need to mention particularly the proceedings of two conferences, one in English and one in French, assembled by the Roman Catholic Secretariat for witness among unbelievers: *Sécularisation en Afrique? Secularisation in Africa?* (Rome: Secretariatus pro non credentibus, 1973) with reports and reflections from many African countries, and: Eloi Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris: Karthala; Yaoundé: Presses de L'UCAC, 1997).

Africa very little data is available. This sparseness is itself a sign of the lack of interest in this phenomenon, which is one reason that it goes largely undetected. Yet the limited sociological data that is available[9] and some more general observations will be sufficient to help us understand both the manifold character of secularisation in sub-Saharan Africa and the seriousness of the challenge. The tentativeness of this sketch is at the same time an incentive to further research. We can see its manifold character especially when we note that "the diminishing role of religion" can show itself in different forms. It can be first of all a diminishing influence on individual lives, secondly a diminishing influence on society, and thirdly religious practices being made subservient to secular goals and therefore the secularisation of religion itself. We will also consider two phenomena that are closely related to secularisation: the desacralisation of certain domains of life, and the influence of secularism as an ideology, but we will attend to these phenomena in the next section on the multiple causes of secularisation. Let us here consider the first three forms of secularisation in turn.

2.1 Individuals. The diminishing influence of the Christian religion on the life of *individuals* shows itself first of all in the disaffiliation or the very loose ties of certain sections of society with the church. We already noted the very low church-attendance in certain poor neighbourhoods in Nairobi and the loose ties of the urban rich in other major cities. Low church attendance in urban areas can easily be hidden from view, because the cities in Africa grow so fast that churches may be filled to the brim, even if the growth of the church does not keep pace with the booming cities.[10] My impression is that, in comparison with Nairobi, in Bangui (which I know best) only smaller numbers are disaffiliating from the church, but that this process is most significant among crucial layers of society: among the politicians, the intellectuals and the affluent. This shows that there are

[9] The data used by Messi-Metogo concerns mainly French-speaking countries in West and Central Africa, yet are older and date from the end of the sixties and from the seventies. It may be that important changes have occurred through the continual evangelistic and educational activities of the churches and through the renaissance of Islam in West Africa. The information collected by Shorter and Onyancha is much more recent, yet covers only Nairobi. I have furthermore used personal observations from our students from different French-speaking countries in Central and West Africa.

[10] Shorter & Onyancha, p. 33.

considerable variations across the continent and may be across denominations. For example, it might be that where French culture is the dominant Western influence those who like to think of themselves as intellectuals, successful or "educated" are more prone to secularisation than where the British influence is stronger.[11] Our students from some parts of French-speaking Africa also pointed to pastors' children or those who lived closest to traditional mission stations as groups which are prone to secularisation.

Low church-attendance is in itself of course not necessarily a sign of secularisation, for the Christian faith may play a very significant role, even when the church does not. However, in general this seems to be a more theoretical than practical option, for pastoral experience suggests that those who do not attend church also tend to neglect their faith in other areas of life. Many of these people may turn to the church in case of sickness or disaster, but even then secularisation remains a reality, for they still live most of their lives without their religion. In their daily struggle for life, faith is not a major factor and secularisation can still be a reality in terms of a diminishing influence of religion on their lives. In case of sickness, danger or death, they could of course prefer to take recourse to a marabout, traditional healer or diviner and this is another reason why low church attendance and even disaffiliation of the church does not necessarily imply secularisation. Yet, notwithstanding the syncretism so common to religious life in Africa, there are important indicators that when the influence of the Christian faith or of ATR on life diminishes, these areas may well become more or less secular. One indicator is the religious indifference, which, as Messi Metogo showed, can be widely detected in sociological data concerning West and Central Africa. Many people interviewed believe that the religion they belong to is not a major issue: it need not be a major factor in the education of their children, and for many it is of little irrelevance to their social and professional life and to the development of their countries.[12] Another indicator that, not only syncretism but also secularism, is a major

[11] Shorter & Onyancha note that churches in Nairobi are associated with affluence (pp. 43ff).

[12] Messi Metogo, pp. 87-119. New sociological research is, however, needed to see how the renaissance of Islam and the heightening of the tensions between Muslims and Christians since this data was collected have influenced religious indifference.

force in Africa relates to morality. It is often noted that African Christians may live morally in syncretistic ways, combining moral values from a Christian with those from a traditional perspective.[13] Yet, when we look particularly at the great urban centres of Africa, we see that moral values are crumbling, even those shared by Africa's three major religions: Christianity, Islam and ATR. The diminishing respect for the older generation, the proliferation of casual sexual relationships, which have dramatically fed the spread of HIV, and the crumbling of stable family structures show this. These phenomena are not condoned by any of the three main religions and thus indicate the diminishing influence of religion on key areas of personal life, and thus also indicate secularisation.

2.2 Society. The diminishing influence of religion on individuals does not stand by itself, but is closely related to the diminishing influence of religion on *society*. Here we refer to the fact that more and more areas of social life are taken away from direct or indirect religious influence. In the West this has been a gradual process that started in the Middle Ages and was intensified since the beginning of the modern era. This was the original sense in which the concept of "secularisation" was used. In a treaty in Westphalia in the seventeenth century, "secularisation" meant first of all the withdrawal of church lands for the benefit of lay owners.[14] The same process, of course, repeated itself in other areas of society, when the "secular" universities were established and when hospitals, welfare and many other areas of life gradually came under "secular" authority. I use "secular" here between inverted commas, for those who governed and populated universities, hospitals and welfare institutions were mainly Christians, working with Christian values. Yet the Church as an institution no longer had direct influence in these areas and, though the process is not a necessary one, in due time their value-systems gradually became more and more secular.

In sub-Saharan Africa this type of secularisation often did not replace a Christian influence and value-system, but directly replaced the traditional

[13] For example in Tite Tiénou, *The Theological Task for the Church in Africa*, 2nd edition, revised and expanded (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1990), p. 22.

[14] Bryan Wilson, "Secularization", in: Alan Richardson & John Bowden (eds.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1983), p. 534.

value-system. It also happened at a much higher speed, because it did not happen as a result of factors internal to the African society and culture, but as a result of external influences. It therefore also created greater and much more immediate upheaval. Colonialism, in most cases, introduced secular states and governments to replace traditional authorities, in which religious and political authority were closely related. Africa was opened up to a global financial and economic market, in which neither traditional nor Christian values played a role, as it used to be when all aspects of life were part of a unified world in which religion was all-pervasive. Even if the schools were originally often mission-led, the skills and science they taught would not strike many as specifically Christian, but they nonetheless undermined many traditional values and beliefs. Thus in a few generations Africa became a society in which many crucial sectors like politics, economy, banking, education and so on operate on predominantly secular values, leaving the leftovers to both ATR and Christianity. As in the West, the degree to which individuals are secularised depends in an important way on their position in such a society. Do they tend to consider either the "public" (and secular) or the "private" (and possibly religious) sphere of life as "real life" and as most important?

2.3 Religion. It might be argued that even in the public spheres Africans remain profoundly religious. How many examples are there of politicians who try to guarantee their success by going to their home villages, invoking their ancestors and ensuring for themselves the strongest fetishes they can obtain? How many university students pray to the God of the Bible or carry an amulet when entering their exam, even if it is an exam in natural science? Isn't this true for all areas of life in Africa, from lovemaking to business and from health to travel? Maybe this is why secularisation in Africa is so difficult to assess, both because of the possibility that certain practices are interpreted differently, and because of the difference between the understanding of secularisation from a traditional religious perspective and from a Christian perspective. Let me clarify this.

Prayer can be used and interpreted in different ways. For Christian, it is supposed to be a sign of living all of our lives before God, realising that there is nothing we can do without his grace and guidance. As such, prayer is an essential part of Christian life. Yet both Christian prayer and traditional incantations and fetishes can also be just another tool to obtain

our secular goals, like health or success in politics, business or love. Success in all of these areas is of course not necessarily a secularised goal, because God created them and we may desire to excel in them in God's service. But in many cases these goals are not understood in any particularly religious way and all the religious practices—Christian, traditional or Islamic—are made subservient to these secular goals. The tendency to put religious practices in the service of our human goals is probably a common human vice. Much Western civil religion and the use of Christianity as a tool for self-fulfilment and self-realisation testify to it. African Christianity and African religion in general are prone to it, because of the often-noted anthropocentrism of ATR In ATR all religious practices are used to serve the harmony and flourishing of the human being, or better of the human community, the clan.[15] Many students of African religion have noted that the approach of many African Christians to the Christian faith is the same: they change to Christian religious practices, because these seem to offer better means to achieve the same goals they had before.[16]

In this respect we do not speak of the secularisation of individuals, nor of areas of society, but the secularisation of religion itself. In the West we can also note a secularisation of religion and of the Christian faith, but in another way. The Christian faith is secularised by many of its adherents in that supernatural reference is becoming less and less significant. As such, many theologians and individual Christians have developed a faith without heaven or hell, without a divine Jesus, without miracles or resurrection and sometimes even without God. To many Africans this type of secularisation of religion itself is almost inconceivable, but they may have their own way of secularising the Christian faith. This might be the form of secularisation that is more specific for Africa: the secularisation of religion by making religious practices—traditional, Christian or Islamic—serve secular goals.

At this point we see why it is in part a question of definition if we consider this use of religious practices to serve secular goals as "secularisation". Our understanding of secularisation depends on our understanding of what religion should be. So from a Christian perspective it would count as secularisation, for true religion is not putting our own

[15] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London e.a.: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 37-39; Messi Metogo, pp. 47-65.

[16] Messi Metogo, p. 81.

interests first, but loving God above everything and our neighbours as ourselves, trusting that in this way our own deepest needs will be met. From an ATR perspective, however, it might not count as clearly as secularisation, for this religion was anthropocentric from the very start. Yet I want to suggest that the way in which religious practices are used to serve secular goals in contemporary society also counts as secularisation from the perspective of ATR Traditional religion is anthropocentric, but it is not just any human goal that would count as worthy to be pursued. The goal itself is religiously determined. The proper goal is a life in harmony with the living and the dead, with the non-human spirits and with the whole creation. In modern-day urbanised religious practices, this context of the clan and the living and the dead becomes less and less important. When people have moved away from their village and have lived for a few generations in one of the main urban centres of Africa, initiation and other religious practices relating one to the clan and ancestors are in many cases the first practices to erode. The stronger and more resistant practices are the more magical ones[17] and these can be used to pursue more individual and secular goals, concerning which the ancestors may not be properly consulted and of which they might not approve at all. This is to say that we need to consider a form of secularisation which might be particularly strong in Africa (and maybe in similar societies) and is different from secularisation as it has occurred in Europe and North America. It is the tendency to use highly supernatural practices to pursue secular goals. We could validly call this a form of secularisation. Next to the secularisation of individual lives and of certain main sectors of society, it is a reality we need to consider in Christian witness, education and ministry. Before we can see how we should appreciate this triple secularisation, we need first of all to look into their principle causes.

§3 Multiple Causes

Understanding the causes of secularisation is an important task if we are to have a balanced appreciation of this process and be able to assess what stand and what action the church should take. At the same time, understanding the causes of such a long-term, broad, and complex process as secularisation is extremely difficult. It is easy to exchange causes and

[17] **Messi Metogo**, p. 61.

effects and to overlook hidden factors. This is particularly true of the African context where in the last one hundred years many different cultural and social influences and changes have intertwined, and where little research has been done concerning this phenomenon. We will limit ourselves to a number of key causes, which suggest themselves because they run parallel to developments within the Western world, or which suggest themselves because of the intrinsic force certain conceptions have in the history of ideas. Altogether we can distinguish: (a) factors related to the Christian faith, (b) factors related to ATR, (c) the role of modern science and education, (d) ideological influences, and (e) social change.

3.1 Christian Faith. Many Christian theologians who reflected on secularisation, such as the missiologist Arend Th. Van Leeuwen, have noted that it is not only, and not even in the first instance, a danger to the Christian faith, but that it is the Jewish-Christian world-view itself which provoked a certain form of secularisation.[18] For the sake of clarity we will call this form of secularisation *desacralisation.* Many areas of life, such as fertility and death, and many offices, such as political authority and the medical profession, which were treated as sacred by the peoples around Israel and the Early Church, were no longer so for Israel and the Church. These areas and offices were considered created by God and therefore under the authority of humanity. Thus for the Israelites the king was not sacred, as for the Babylonians and Egyptians; nor was fertility and sexuality, as with the Canaanites; nor was illness, which was not so much sacralised as completely demonised in surrounding cultures. The desacralisation and de-demonisation of these spheres of life, and of creation in general, did not mean that they had nothing to do with God. As God's creation they were under God, and the human creature was responsible for how he served as a king, how he lived out his sexuality and how he addressed illness. It was in fact because of the desacralisation of these areas that they could effectively come under the commandments of God. A divine king cannot be criticised; an Israelite king, being a creature like all of us, could be and often was criticised by the prophets. All the commandments in the area of sexuality show that it was an area in which God was to be served, and that it was considered an area which could be

[18] Arend Th. Vand Leeuwen, *Christianity and World History: The Meeting of the Faiths of East and West* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).

mastered, because it was under the authority of the human being as God's steward.

The desacralisation of the world is thus implied in the belief of a radical distinction (which is not necessarily a distance) between God and creation. It is furthermore implied in the understanding of the human being as created in the image of God and called to be the steward and lord of the rest of creation. These beliefs were foundational to the development of modern science, for it is only as creation is considered as being organised by its own natural laws and the human being as capable of uncovering and using these, that scientific discovery becomes a sensible and noble undertaking.[19] This Christian understanding of creation and of the human being as God's image has gradually desacralised the African understanding of reality since the introduction of the Christian faith in sub-Saharan Africa in the modern era. No longer are all illnesses conceived in terms of spiritual influences, but bacteria, parasites and hospitals have a growing place in people's imaginations, even if different and often opposed understandings of illness and healing continue to exist together. When considering how a certain soil can best be used, one no longer (only) consults the ancestors and spirits of the area, but may equally refer to an agronomist, who in his profession expresses the idea that the human being is called to stewardship of the earth. This already shows how secularisation—secularisation as desacralisation—is not only negative and to be feared, but is at least in part a consequence of the Jewish-Christian understanding of the world. As such it is liberating, for it frees the human being from subservience to spiritual powers and puts him under only one authority, the authority of the Creator Himself who created him in his image as the lord of creation.

3.2 ATR. The Cameroonian Roman Catholic theologian Éloi Messi Metogo, who has written one of the most important studies on secularisation and religious indifference in Africa, defends the thesis that secularisation and religious indifference also have roots in ATR This may at first sight seem strange, for the traditional African worldview is mystical or spiritual all through. All reality is a unified whole woven through by all

[19] Christopher B. Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/London: Marshall Pickering, 1991); Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), pp. 23-34.

types of spiritual forces and there are no events that have no spiritual causes and that are without spiritual significance. Yet Messi Metogo points to two characteristics which are common to ATR that make the religion prone to secularisation or religious indifference, and which can be triggered when through modern science and education the mystical understanding of reality is played down. The first is the anthropocentrism of ATR, which we noted already. This anthropocentrism leads to a very pragmatic attitude to religion: if this healer or diviner cannot effectively heal or protect, we will look for another. This is illustrated in the way a Christian group promotes itself in Kinshasa: "If your god is dead, try the God of the Church of Christ in Mission!"[20] This attitude resulted in many conversions to Christianity. Yet it can equally easily lead to the abandonment of Christianity or of religion in general, if it does not prove effective or if its effect might not be in the line with what we hope for or if it takes too long to be effective.

A second factor which Messi-Metogo mentions that makes ATR and Christians who are deeply rooted in this tradition sensitive to secularising forces is the often noted characteristic that the Creator-God according to many traditional myths is considered to be distant. He is in fact so far away that his existence is of little import for our day-to-day lives, and such a God can be easily pushed to the margins of life.[21] We saw that that is exactly what secularisation is: it is not necessarily a negation of God, but more his gradual retreat from many wider spheres of our personal and social lives.

3.3 Science and Education. Science and the scientific worldview as spread through modern education have of course been another major factor in the development of secularisation. The modern school-system did not only break down traditional structures of authority; it implicitly or explicitly promoted a worldview in which the world is understood in terms of natural causes and effects, and in which spiritual forces have no role to play. This understanding remained and remains of course often at the outskirts of people's perception of reality. Yet it does have at least some influence, and more so in those areas on which the traditional worldview

[20] Quoted in Jean Masamba Ma Mpolo, *Le Saint-Esprit interroge les esprits: essai de relecture deet pistes psychopastorales de la spiritualité en Afrique: Cas de la République Démocratique du Congo* (Yaoundé: CLE, 2002), p. 23 (our translation).

[21] Messi Metogo, pp. 33-45.

does not seem to have much bearing, like the world of banking and economics, to which we referred already. The secularising influence of education was of course the strongest when education was not only promoting a scientific understanding of reality, but also promoting a secular value system, as in the government schools, be it under the colonial or post-colonial powers. Here the aim was to succeed in the world-order of colonial or postcolonial powers, to become an "évolué", as they were called in the Belgian Congo: to succeed in the evolving secular structures of government, production and trade.

When we consider education, it is one of the ironies of history that the *Christian mission* can be called "the great instrument of secularisation in the midst of the ancient religious societies of Asia and Africa."[22] Through their schools and hospitals the missions brought the modern scientific understanding to the most remote villages in Africa and to the ends of the earth. In part this was the education of the Jewish-Christian understanding of a desacralised world, in which the human being can take up responsibility for his life and start fighting to make this life into a liveable world. He is no longer at the mercy of ancestors or other spirits, but can start using his creativity and authority over creation, which he has received as the image of God. On the other hand missionaries were also children of their own time and culture. They often promoted through their schools and lives in some respects a more Western secular worldview than a Christian one. It has often been noted that this lead to a practical syncretism, for many young African Christians could not enter the Christian faith with their own experience of the spirit-world, which was so real to them. They therefore ended up living in two worlds in continuous tension: a Christian and a traditional one. At the same time it made the most missionised families, who for different reasons took a greater step away from ATR, receive a form of faith which was most of all a preparation for heaven and not easily related to everyday life. This may be one of the reasons for the phenomenon that pastors' children and those living in the vicinity of mission stations seem to be more prone to secularisation than others.

[22] Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998; originally Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1963), p. 58; cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (London: SCM, 1966), p. 18.

3.4 Ideology. As a specific secularising factor we need also to refer to ideological influences which made a direct attack on religion and belief in God. These influences were however very unevenly distributed across the continent and were in general not overly influential in large sections of the population. We need however to take account of them in some circles, such as in the influence of atheistic Marxism, which for example used to be rather aggressively promoted in the school system in communist Congo-Brazzaville.[23] A more subtle widespread influence may be the consciously irreligious and often openly atheist understanding of science that was propagated through government higher education in the some fourteen former French colonies south of the Sahara. In Europe the Enlightenment in France was much more hostile to the Christian faith than in Britain and Germany, and African education according to the French system still has a tendency to be quite openly secularist and anti-religious. This is even more prominent because of the central place philosophy—philosophy according to secular French standards—has in the French curriculum in secondary schools. In this respect the common distinction between *secularisation* and *secularism* is helpful. These ideologies are not just secular but secularist, for they do not only propose or provoke a separation between secular and religious areas of life; they further claim that all of life should be lived according to secular values and that all influence of religions and religious ideas is to be resisted and despised.[24]

3.5 Social Change. Among the main forces that fuel the process of secularisation we also need to point to the social changes Africa is going through, mainly those related to urbanisation, the fragmentation of life and society, globalisation and religious pluralism. *Urbanisation*, the movement of more and more people to great urban centres, is a world-wide process, and on an international scale Africa remains the least urbanised continent. Yet over the past fifty years urbanisation has been a major social factor, and cities such as Nairobi, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Lagos and Abidjan have been growing at an incredible rate and will in all probability continue to do so for the coming decades.[25] When people move from a village setting to an urban centre, they are first of all uprooted. The old securities and values no longer seem to apply and life needs new structures. This in itself could

[23] Messi Metogo, pp. 150-158.
[24] Wilson, pp. 533f.
[25] Shorter & Onyancha, p. 32.

equally lead to a more profound Christian commitment rather than to a withdrawal. It can open people to conversion or to a deeper commitment, when people are well received by Christians in the city who offer them a form of faith that helps them to survive and structure their new life, which they experience as simultaneously promising and upsetting. In this respect urbanisation offers great opportunities for Christian witness.

More often however, rather than being a trigger for conversion or for a deeper conviction, moving to the city and the life in the city itself is a cause for backsliding and secularisation. This is due to some social characteristics of life in the city, most of all its *fragmentation* and the multiplicity of relationships, many of which have an impersonal character.[26] In a village setting life is generally lived as a unity, shared with a single group holding the same values. Furthermore, all aspects of village life relate to the closely integrated structures of family, higher authorities and religion. This is true in a traditional African village, but equally in a Christianised African village. There are only one or two churches, which also operate the school and the clinic. The elders of the village church discuss all aspects of the life of their parishioners, more or less as much as they used to do when they gathered as elders under the traditional chief. In the city, however, the people lived with in the family are not the same as those met on the street, in the church and when trying to earn a living in the market or elsewhere. All these social groups furthermore have their own value system, and their life in church will mostly have nothing to do with what they do in the marketplace, and may not be shared by the rest of their extended family or even their family unit. It is particularly in the modern cities that large spheres of life have no link with personal religious values. There is therefore in urban societies an enormous pressure to relegate religious convictions to specific areas of life, most often to the private sphere. This shrinking scope of where personal religion counts can in the first place lead to a tension between conflicting value systems in which one participates. It can secondly easily make religion of such minor importance that it becomes redundant. This may be one of the main causes of religious indifference. It is not so much that people consciously withdraw from their Christian or other religious allegiance. It is more that their religion seems to be of no

[26] See on this characteristic of urban life Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London, SCM. 1965), pp. 41ff.

significance for most spheres of life, and that they therefore do not any longer give it serious consideration. As Harvey Cox notes: "The gods of traditional religions live on as private fetishes or the patrons of congenial groups. But they play no role whatever in the public life of the secular city."[27]

This fragmentation of life in the city (or in rural settings influenced by urban mindsets) is greatly reinforced by two other social factors: globalisation and religious pluralism. *Globalisation* is the ongoing process whereby life in more and more of even the remotest corners of the world is heavily influenced by global developments. The economic interests and values of the Western world dominate more and more of life throughout the world. It is those secularised values that are spread by the publicity of Coca-Cola and other multinational corporations dominating the world-market. Some countries, like North Korea, try to resist, and the Arab world still tries to offer a major alternative. Yet since the beginning of the 1990s the African countries south of the Sahara by and large tie in with this development and consciously seek to become part of this globalised world with its secular values. Particularly in the cities the media promotes these values and the "freedom" to tie into the world of capitalism and consumer culture.[28]

This global economy is spreading over a religiously *pluralist* world and therefore presupposes that it cannot follow any particular religious value systems. It forgets that thereby consumerism and capitalism become the principle values. From a Christian perspective we cannot just see this secularisation as the limitation of religious influence. It becomes in fact a form of idolatry, in which the false god of capitalism contests with the one true God of Israel.[29]

These social forces promoting secularisation—urbanisation, fragmentation and globalisation—can be the most discomforting of all, because they have the appearance of necessary processes over which we have no influence at all. We may believe in the possibility of witnessing against the

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[27] Cox, p. 2.

[28] On the media see Shorter & Onyancha, pp. 71-85.

[29] Cf. Vinoth Ramachandra, *God's that Fail: Modern Idolatry & Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), pp. 106-126.

ideologies and an anthropocentric understanding of reality, and in the possibility of helping Christians towards a better understanding of science and of how to live with God in a desacralised world. Yet the idea of fighting urbanisation and globalisation seems to be ridiculous, and the tendency of some missions to prefer working in rural contexts compared to urban contexts has if anything left these fast growing centres of public life devoid of sufficient Christian witness and presence. Yet before we ask how we should respond to this pervading process of secularisation, we need to take a closer look at the question of how, in fact, we as Christians should evaluate this seemingly irreversible process of secularisation.

§4 A Christian Assessment of Secularisation

In both the understanding and the assessment of the process of secularisation the collaboration between Christians from different continents takes on a new urgency and carries new promises. Christians from North America and Europe have been struggling for generations with the pervasiveness of secularisation and the destructive influence it has had on these formerly predominantly Christian societies. Christians from Africa can help European and North-American Christians see where they have accommodated too easily to their secularised worlds. At the same time Christians from the western secularised countries can help African Christians to reflect on and react to the fast-growing reality of secularisation, with which the western Christian communities have been dealing for so long and from which they have learnt by trial and error.

The debate over secularisation in the West was particularly vibrant during the 1960s and 1970s. At that time church leaders and theologians were confronted with its enormous impact as they lost their influence on huge sectors of society. Many Christians were so impressed with the forces of secularisation that they disengaged themselves radically or gradually from the church. In these countries the debate has now calmed down, both because secularisation is more of a given than a surprise and because in some measure in the private sphere religion is again becoming acceptable, be it in a vague, highly pluralist and privatised format. Yet in view of the impact of secularisation on other parts of the world, it is worthwhile to return to this discussion once again.

As with many theological debates, the theological appreciation of secularisation moves between two extremes. On the one hand there are those who feel that secularisation is basically a good thing, that it is a natural consequence of humanity's coming of age. The enlightened person is no longer scared of nor in need of religious forces in every step he takes, but takes his own responsibility for organising his life and world. Christianity should be lived "without religion". In the most extreme case this even means that we should do away with the idea of God, as in the so-called "Death-of God" theology. At the other extreme there are those who wish that all secularisation could be undone. They hope for a return to what is often called "Christendom", a unified society in which all aspects of life are organised religiously and in which there is a close link between the church and every area of society. Roman Catholic restorationism and Reformed "Reconstructionism" can count as examples.

As with many theological debates the truth is somewhere between these two extremes. It is not that we should look for compromise, but rather that the question demands a more detailed evaluation, asking which aspects of secularisation are good or bad, and in which respect secularisation is to be welcomed and in which respect it is rather to be resisted. We need to appreciate the *desacralisation* of reality as a liberating result of the discovery that the world in which we live is God's creation.[30] As creatures like us, political authorities do not have absolute power over us, but they are accountable to God for their use of their authority, which He has entrusted to them.[31] As human beings we are not simply at the mercy of good and evil spiritual forces, which play their games with us. These forces are part of the created order, as are we, and are under the power of Christ (cf. Colossians 1:15-20), and we as beings in the image of God are called to

[30] It is worth pondering the interesting idea of Newbigin: "The preaching of Jesus as the sole Redeemer, liberating men from the hitherto unbreakable grip of the old sacral order in family and tribe, has been itself the great revolutionary force. At this point the experience of Asian and African Christians, for whom secularization means first off a kind of liberation, can be a help to the Christians of Europe for whom secularization appears as a wholly menacing reality." (*Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, pp. 58f.)

[31] Cf. Kwame Bediako, "Christian Religion and African Social Norms: Authority, Desacralisation and Democracy", in: idem, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 234-251; cf. Romans 13:1-7.

have dominion over the world in which He has placed us. The world therefore is our home and not our enemy.

But if desacralisation is a good thing, this does not mean that these areas of life are to be lived godlessly or without any reference to God. As the whole world is God's creation, it is the Creator who knows how they are used to his glory, for our wellbeing and according to his intention. If the risen Christ is Lord over all creation, we need to serve Him in all the areas of our lives, be it the "public" world of politics, economics and science, or the "private" world of our family life and personal interests. *Secularism*, which says that our whole life should be lived without any reference to God, should therefore be criticised, firstly because it is dishonouring God and disobedient to Him, and secondly because it brings us under the service of other masters. There is only one God whose service truly liberates, and if we live our life in the service of another masters, be it consumerism or some other secular ideology, we will always end up being enslaved.[32]

For the same reason we cannot accept the secular idea that certain areas of life are religiously *neutral*, and that we should live them in our religiously pluralist world according to neutral or secular principles. There is no place for neutrality, neither in our personal lives nor in the public spheres of finance and politics: Jesus claims every square inch of this world as his, not as a usurper but because it is only in Him that there is freedom and life.

This does not mean that Christians are bound to fight every form of separation between the church and other structures of society. In this respect the Christian faith is different from ATR and Islam, where political and religious authority are one and where both reside in the chief, or in Mohammed and his followers. Even if in Moses political and religious authority went together, they were separated from the time of the Israelite kings onward, and the search for a proper separation of "religious" and "secular" authority has been a characteristic of mainstream Christianity. This, however, does not mean that the so-called secular authorities have nothing to do with God. The Israelite prophets constantly called the kings to use their authority under God according to his will and for the wellbeing of his people. Both political and religious authorities are considered to be

[32] Cf. Ramachandra, p. 112.

under God, yet they both have their proper sphere of action. Through separating these powers it is easier for the religious authorities to avoid being compromised by too direct an involvement in political government, but exactly because of that they can continue to call the government to obedience to God. For the prophets, who are part of the court, this is of course much more difficult (cf. 1 Kings 22:5-28).[33]

This shows how delicate it is to find a balanced Christian view of secularisation. The Christian faith can appreciate the need for a diversification of different domains in which institutions work and not only between church and state, but we could extrapolate this with respect to the economic sphere, the sphere of education, the sphere of law, etc. A so-called "cecaero-papism", in which all authority is joined in one person or institution is bound to be unhealthy, because of the corruptive character of power and even more so of absolutist and totalitarian power.[34] Yet the spheres of life that in this sense could be called "secular" are not "secular" in the sense that they can be lived separate from God. These are all parts of the life created by God, and we are therefore called to proclaim and serve Christ as Lord over our families, schools, tribunals, governments and money, as much as over our churches.

One final remark in connection with the appreciation of the secularisation process shows how important it is that Christians in different continents learn from each other's weaknesses. It is too easy to say, as it is sometimes suggested, that we should not be too concerned about people drifting away from the church, because for many of them their religious affiliation remains a latent reality. In times of crisis they will therefore often come back to the church for help. This may be true, but first of all we should note that this type of religious bond is far removed from the biblical concept of faith. If we are called to have faith in Jesus, we are called to be his disciples, to be his followers from day to day in all aspects of our life.

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[33] Cf. Benno van den Toren, "The Christian God and Human Authority: A Theological Inquiry with Reference to Africa's Principal World-Views", *Exchange* 30 (2001), pp. 235-255.

[34] The necessity of a diversification in different spheres, particularly as societies grow bigger, more complex, and therefore less personal, has received much attention in the neo-Calvinist philosophy. See for example James W. Skillen, "From the Covenant of Grace to Equitable Public Pluralism: The Dutch Calvinist Contribution", *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (1996), pp. 67-96.

This is what we referred to above when talking about Christ as Lord over all aspects of our life and society. But the development of the church in Europe and North America has also shown another weakness to this argument that we do not need to be concerned about these secularised people. The fact is that even if these people themselves have a latent "faith", which in times of crisis is activated, they will not be able to pass this faith on to the next generation. Exactly because it is hidden, their children will only see and come to share their lived values, which are more apparent, and not the ones that are not lived out. It will equally not do to say that we should respect the right and liberty of our children to choose their religious affiliation when they are grown up and can choose for themselves. The secularising powers in our world are so strong, that if the parents do not choose to bring up their children with a strong alternative way of life, society will make this choice for them. Society will ingrain their children so profoundly that it will become very hard for them later to choose another life than their culture proposes for them. Not to choose for your children is also a choice. This consideration, that latent religious affiliation may be an important reality in one generation, but be lost in the next, is particularly relevant for Africa, where the different generations follow each other so rapidly.

§5 Contextual Theology for Secularising Africa

We are now at the point where we can enter into the question of how to begin responding to the enormous challenge of secularisation in Africa. We will not enter into the practicalities of "how to" approaches: how to evangelise secularised Africans and how to disciple them to become followers of Christ, who are salt in a secularised society and who in their turn can attract others. These questions need to be addressed in due time. Yet I think that we often enter too soon into this type of practicality. We have seen that secularisation in Africa is related to the way Christians understand the world and how ATR understands religion and God. We have seen how secularisation is related to a modern understanding of science and society and to the processes of urbanisation and the fragmentation of life. If we do not address the profound alterations in the understanding of the Christian faith that secularisation wants to force on us, we run the risk of incorrectly adapting our message to the secularised understanding of what religion may be. We might give away the glory and strength of our Gospel

before we actually start addressing the world. Our globalised and secular world is in general not totally opposed to religion; it just wants religion to remain in its proper place of personal and church life, of inner motivation and of comforting in time of need. What it must not do is get involved in the world of government and economics, for that is where the "neutral" secular values should reign uncontested. A theological reflection is necessary on the question of what the Gospel message actually boils down to in a secularised world and what message this world actually needs. When we take our mission seriously, we need to reflect on our message. Missiology and practical theology need sound doctrine and systematic theological reflection. I want to propose that secularisation can only be addressed if we put a number of theological truths at the centre of our proclamation and life:

5.1 Contextual theology should address the context in which we live. This is of course not so much a doctrine, but rather a *meta*-doctrine, a statement *about* doctrine. This is not necessarily what the church should teach all the time explicitly, but more a rule that should guide the church in how it goes about its ministry of teaching.[35] This remark about contextual theology may sound all too obvious, yet it isn't. All too often contextual theology tries to relate Christian doctrine to the experiences and convictions of Africa's past, not of Africa's present. It will for example study traditional conceptions of God, of sacrifice and prayer in certain tribes, and then contextualise the Gospel with regards to these conceptions. The problem, however, is that these traditional ideas no longer exist in any pure form except in remote areas and particularly not in the fast growing urban centres. These traditional ideas are indeed very much a part of Africa's present, but not in an unmitigated form. They have entered into the mix of cultural influences, which make up Africa's present: ATR, Christianity, Islam and western secularised thought. The reason that theology in Africa and everywhere should be contextual is that the liberating Gospel should address people were they are. Contextual theology should therefore not tie Africans nor any others to their traditions and past, but should address them in their present. Of this present their past is obviously a major part, but many other factors play a role, including those related to secularisation, urbanisation, fragmentation etc.

[35] I take it that the most basic task of the formulation of "doctrine" (from "*doctrina*", which means teaching) is to guide the church in its teaching ministry.

5.2. Our faith and Christian life should be radically theocentric. God should be at the centre of our life and worship. He should be the one we love above all else. Biblically speaking this is not in any way an anti-human message. It is necessary to put the stress on God, because according to Scriptures it is only when we direct our lives radically to God and Christ that we will flourish. It is only when we radically depend on Him and seek Him above anything else that our lives will be fulfilled and attain their goal (f. ex. Matthew 16:25). African Christianity is vulnerable to secularisation when it does not liberate itself from the anthropocentrism that often spilled over from its background in ATR. The Christian faith is often evaluated from the point of view of the way God responds to our needs. In many prayer group meetings I have attended, attention is focused primarily on petitionary prayer for specific needs of group members or of people they are related to. It is easy for people in this environment to go from one healer to another. They may try a Christian healer if the traditional one is not able to help, but may finally return to the traditional healer when even the newest charismatic Christian healer in town does not deliver what they expect from him or her. Such an attitude could easily turn into materialism when science proves more promising or into religious indifference when Christianity or any other religion does not give what is sought for. John V. Taylor perceptively noted as early as in the 1960s: "If God remains 'outside' much longer, Africa's this-worldliness will turn to materialism."[36] It is precisely at this point that we find one of the flaws of the charismatic movement in Africa. It often borders on preaching a health and wealth Gospel with a theology that sees financial and physical prosperity as a direct consequence of a life lived according to God's will. Their strength is that they relate much better to the felt needs than many of the traditional churches do. Their spiritual weakness is that their teaching is often not sufficiently clear about seeking God not primarily for what He gives to us, but because we love Him for who He is. Faith should be concentrated on the Giver more than on the gifts, and our spiritual lives should be theocentric rather than anthropocentric. We should learn that it is worth serving God even if it means following the One, who took up his cross and who asks us to do the same, to make God known to his world.

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[36] John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM, 1963), p.82.

5.3 We should accept the desacralisation of the world and our responsibility that comes with it. Our response to the desacralisation of the world should not be an attempt to re-sacralise or re-demonise it. The tendency in certain brands of African Christianity (often imported from elsewhere) is to see demons everywhere and to address all problems by chasing away the specific demons causing it, be it a spirit of poverty, of illness, etc. In this sense we see in many areas a movement contrary to secularisation and an inflation of demons and spirits. This is spiritually unhealthy, both because it centres spiritual life not on God but on our problems, and because it makes human beings helpless victims of spiritual powers. It does not challenge people to use the gifts granted to them as people made in the image of God in order to address their problems. It also easily estranges from the church those people who have been more successful in life and who have discovered that you can address many problems in other ways: by diligent work and foreseeing the risks that life entails. Sometimes the most important spirit to be chased are spirits of irresponsible action and of laziness, and those spirits are not always demonic, but human—all too human. Furthermore, this approach can easily disappoint people who have been attracted into the church by promises of healing and quick solutions. If they turn their back on the church for being disappointed by cheap promises, they may turn back to ATR or be easy prey for secularisation. In both cases they will be more difficult to evangelise and disciple than they were before this bad experience. But some tough theological and pastoral reflection is required in this area, for demon-possession and spiritual warfare are a reality. If we do not recognise them, secularism has blinded us to an important part of reality. The reality of spiritual powers has too long gone unrecognised by Western and Westernised theologians. By falling to the opposite extreme of denying these powers, such theology certainly does not help the African churches, for which spiritual powers are so real. We need spiritual discernment both to see where demons go unrecognised, and at the same time to see were realities are demonised too quickly. We need to work and pray also for insight to know when we need to pray for strength to work diligently and patiently, rather than expecting too much from isolated prayers for deliverance.[37]

[37] See for a critical analysis of the charismatic movements in Africa along these lines Masamba ma Mpolo, *Le Saint-Esprit interroge les esprits*.

5.4. Christ should be proclaimed and served as Lord over our entire lives. One possible reaction to secularisation can be to privatise religion or to isolate Christian communities from the rest of the hostile world. *Privatisation* is the tendency to limit our religion to our private world and simply to accept that the world at large runs according to secular values. Such privatisation has become a particularity of the Christian faith in North America and it has been quite successful, considering the power of Christian organisations and the vibrant life of many churches on this continent. They seem to have resisted secularisation much better than in Western Europe. They teach us that a strong personal faith is necessary to survive as a Christian in a secular culture. Yet, while we may need to accept this privatisation as a practical necessity for a certain time, it cannot be the ideal. We confess Christ as Lord over all of our lives and over all the world. We need to accept the desacralisation of the world, yet without cutting it loose from its Creator and Redeemer. Therefore, *isolation* will equally not do. Isolating Christian groups from the rest of the world - be it according to the model of certain rural Mennonite communities the model of orthodox Chassidic Jews in New York - may help religious groups to survive. Yet, such communities leave the world without a living proclamation of its real Lord. The alternative to isolation and privatisation is the search for a *penetration* of the world in all its domains with the proclamation of the claims of the liberating Lordship of Christ.[38] This needs to be heard in Africa too, where there are serious misunderstandings on this issue. Regularly you hear references to the idea that we need to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's". This is generally understood to mean that there are two different domains of life and that Christians and the Church should leave the government (and the police and the legislation and so on) to do their own job according to their own principles. We already saw that Christians can agree that the government has its own sphere of responsibility, but this does not mean that governments can do what as they please and have no accountability to God. The "render Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's" is actually a provocative remark of Jesus after He has been shown the image of Caesar on Roman coins. (Matthew 22:21) It is because the image of Caesar is on

[38] See on this choice against privatisation and isolation and for penetration: Os Guinness, "Mission and Modernity: Seven Checkpoints on Mission in the Modern World", in: Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (eds.), *Faith and Modernity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), pp. 322-352.

the coin, that the emperor can claim it for him. Yet, we need to give God what is God's. Where do we find the the image of God? It is the human being on whom God has put his imprint (Genesis 1:26f). There is therefore no part of our lives on which God has no claim, and if the government has a role to play it is only as a servant of God (Romans 13:4). The implication is also that we need to obey God before any human authority, when the two are in conflict (Acts 4:19).

There are not only theological reasons not to leave the world to its own devices, but to place it all under the Lordship of Christ. As we saw in §3, when our faith is seen to have no importance in public life, it can easily become irrelevant to those who are successful in the public domain or who are called to serve there and for whom that is "the real world". We should show that Christ is also Lord of this real world out there, and that his Lordship is highly relevant and liberating to a world subservient to the idols of consumerism, international trade and the striving for power.

5.5. Christ should be proclaimed both as the Redeemer and as the Goal of our entire beings and of the whole of creation. Lastly we need to understand that Christ is not only the Redeemer of a lost humanity, but also the goal of creation. "All things were created by him and for him." (Colossians 1:16). This is particularly relevant when we consider the fact that secularisation is most of all a problem for "humanity come of age", for people who feel that they are not in need of a divine Redeemer, but who feel that they can handle their own affairs. This is not to say that we do not need a Redeemer. We all do. Yet, most of us do not realise the profoundness of this need and the radical nature of our lostness. Therefore, both in Scriptural times and today, those who experience from day to day that they cannot save themselves are the ones most open to receive the message of salvation. In that sense the church is a place heralding a great "welcome for losers". Yet, it is a tragedy that the Gospel is often proclaimed in a way, that makes it appear as if God has nothing to offer to those whose life is going on well. This may be one of the reasons that in a city like Bangui it is particularly the affluent and the successful, who disengage from the church. And when we want to reach them with the Gospel we often take pains to tell them that their life is much worse than they believe, and that their situation is actually most miserable. Even if people realise this themselves deep down, it is not a message they like to hear. Yet, they may be open to hear the rich positive biblical truth that they

are created for Christ and that everything they are and do finds its goal and fulfilment in Him. He is the Goal, which makes our life worth living and surpassing everything we could previously imagine that life had to offer. So Christ is not only the answer to our needs but also the One to offer our successes. The church is indeed a place for losers (Matthew 5:31f; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28), but also the place where we can bring all the gifts our Creator has given us, so that He can crown them with his grace. It is maybe only when we see the great purpose for which God has created us, that the more successful among us start to realise our wretchedness and lostness. We are indeed far from this goal of living in a loving relationship with God, in harmony with our neighbours and of taking care, developing and enjoying creation. From this perspective of the purpose of our life, the whole of our lives, even those parts which we might have considered the most secular, are shown to be profoundly religious, because they are intended to flourish in a loving relationship with our Creator. It is thus that they fall under God's judgement for being so far off their God intended goal and under the grace of Him who send Christ to be the Reconciler, Goal and Head of all creation (Colossians 1:20).

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Samuel Olarewaju

The African Church grapples with practical issues relating o its ability to survive rather than abstract theological matters. Most of the Africans feel more prone to be attacked by evil forces than to commit evil acts. The solution is found in the protective force of the blood of Jesus. This popular theology is sweeping like wild fire across denominational lines in our land. People pray and cover various objects with the blood of Christ as protection against demonic attacks, epidemics, natural disasters, accidents and other suchlike experiences. Does the blood of Christ have a physical and material protection? Does Scripture support prayer for the blood of Christ to protect against perceived enemies and dangers? In whose authority do we challenge is it in the blood or in the name of Jesus? Dr. Olarewaju in this article addresses these questions.

INTRODUCTION

In the light of the numerical growth of Christianity in Africa, not only has Africa ceased to be the dark continent as far as the gospel is concerned, it is increasingly being recognised as one of the areas to which Christianity's centre of gravity is shifting in this new millennium.[1] Given its sheer size, Christianity in Africa has become a potent force to reckon with politically, socially, religiously, and educationally on the continent. But while the church is growing numerically, the same cannot be said of the spiritual depth of the

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Dr. Samuel Olarewaju holds a PhD in New Testament from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA. He is also a graduate of ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja in Nigeria, and of Houghton College in the States. Most recently he has been serving as the Academic Dean at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary in Nigeria, and previously he held the same position at ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja. At the moment he is on sabbatical as a visiting lecturer at Houghton College.

church. The horizontal growth of Christianity in Africa is to be measured in mileage; its vertical growth can only be measured in inches! So in reality it is the numerical centre of Christianity that can be said to have shifted from the West and North to the East and South. The theological centre of gravity of Christianity still remains a Western and Northern phenomenon. It is in Europe and North America that the theological agenda of Christianity are still being determined, even for the church in Africa.

The church in Africa is far too busy grappling with practical issues relating to its ability to survive in an environment diametrically hostile to its physical well-being, so that it does not worry about purely abstract theological matters. Thus the popular theologising that is done, especially by the mostly lay leaders of the church, often has to do with matters of physical survival. While the average life-expectancy in the rest of the world is on the increase, that of the African is rapidly on the decline. The need to enhance his longevity in the face of various threats such as earthquakes, famines, floods, epidemics, road accidents and suchlike has therefore made the issue of physical well-being an urgent matter in Africa.

Faced with such an important question of safety of life and property, the church had to come up with some solution, and this has been found in the blood of Jesus. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with this method of theologising. In his epochal inaugural address delivered at the University of Altdorf in 1787, Johann Gabler, while distinguishing Biblical Theology from Dogmatic Theology, defines the latter as bearing a didactic character, so that every theologian through use of his reason philosophises about divine things in accordance with his understanding, in keeping with the circumstances of the time, the age, the place, the school, and similar matters of this sort.[2]

Therefore, what is unfolding before our very eyes in Africa today is a popular attempt to theologise about the blood of Jesus in a way that addresses the common felt-need of safety among the believers. After all, any theology that does not address the need of a people is not worthy of their acceptance. So, it is not uncommon to hear across denominational lines various appeals being made through prayer to the protective force of the blood of Jesus.

For example, it is commonplace in Nigeria to hear Christians pray using the blood of Jesus for an apotropaic effect (that is, having power to avert evil influence or bad luck). On several occasions when I have travelled by public transport, some minutes into the trip some passengers would pray aloud

symbolically covering various objects with the blood of Jesus and thereby ensuring themselves of safety on the trip. In such prayers usually the driver and passengers are said to be "covered with the blood of Jesus"; then the vehicle itself is said to be "covered with the blood." Not even the pavement is left unprotected with the blood of Jesus! Other objects protected with the symbolic covering of the blood of Jesus include buildings, tools, food items, jobs, family, etc. The list is endless. Anything that is perceived as amenable to personal or demonic attacks is coverable with the blood of Jesus.

There is no doubt that this popular protective theology of the blood of Jesus may be meeting the needs of the African Christian subjectively. Whether the felt need for protection is being met in actuality as a result of such a liturgical use of the sacrificial blood of Christ is seriously open to question.

At this point, we must ask the crucial question whether, apart from its primary cleansing effect on sin, the sacrificial blood of Christ has any direct bearing warranted by Scripture on physical and material protection? In other words, does the biblical understanding of the efficacy of the sacrificial blood of Christ include physical protection of life and property as suggested by the popular theology now sweeping like a wildfire across denominational lines in our land?

Before we address this question, we would like to look at some instances of the apotropaic function of sacrificial blood in extra-biblical sources.

TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND APOTROPAISM

Among the nomadic Arabs, ante-dating the time of Moses, it has been observed that protective powers were attributed to sacrificial blood employed to protect the herds from demonic influences.[3] It is not clear how the sacrificial blood was applied to effect the desired protection of the animals. Being a nomadic group at this point, it is not likely that the Arabs required any sacerdotal officials to make this sacrifice. Every shepherd most likely offered an apotropaic blood sacrifice whenever a demonic threat to the herd was perceived. An epidemic could possibly have been perceived as a demonic attack too.

Apotropaic sacrifices are very common in Africa. Even when a sacrifice is offered with the primary intent to appease a deity or to expiate a sin, a secondary intent is usually not absent to ward off evil forces by means of the same sacrifice. A.O. Mojola writes about the scapegoat purification ritual

among the Chagga of Tanzania, that the scapegoat is sacrificed "to take away sin or some serious violation of a taboo, or some serious disease or calamity in the family or community."[4] For the Chagga, we can see, a sacrifice can have the dual function of expiating the sin of the offerer on the one hand, while also protecting the offerer from harm.

This perception of the dual function of sacrifices is not unique to the Chagga in Africa. J.O. Awolalu notes that among the Yoruba of Nigeria it is strongly held that not only are sacrifices believed to *remove* evils from individuals and/or communities, but sacrifices are also taken as possessing the efficacy to *prevent* evils, such as preventing an epidemic from coming upon a person or into a village.[5] Awolalu's emphasis on how strongly the Yoruba hold to the dual function of sacrifices to remove and prevent evil is very noteworthy. The ascription of a dual function to sacrifices makes them more affordable to the average offerer. By one sacrifice the offerer is given both a curative and a preventive assurance that evil, whether physical or spiritual, is taken care of.

The protective intent is obviously more dominant than the expiatory intent among Africans in general. This is so due to the African worldview that is much more perceptive of the evil forces (physical and spiritual) that are constantly seeking to destroy him than it is perceptive of its own evil acts. The African mind-set is more susceptible to the evils that militate against it than to the evils it commits and which require atonement. Because the African feels more prone to be attacked by evil forces than to commit evil acts, he finds himself offering more protective sacrifices than expiatory ones.

Before embarking on any major project, a sacrifice or libation for protection would usually be made. For instance, at the beginning of the farming season, to avert any accident while using the farming implements, a Yoruba *Ogun* devotee would pour a libation of palm-wine and cold water on his implements. Next, he would break the pointed tip of a snail and allow the fluid to drip on the implements.[6] Such a blood baptism of the farming implements is believed to have the efficacy of protecting the farmer from any harmful accident, resulting from the use of the implements. The sacrifice is not so much to consecrate the implements as to protect the farmer.

In his book, *The Prayers of African Religion*, J.S. Mbiti discusses an apotropaic prayer to the living dead. It is a prayer by the Acholi people of Uganda; and it goes thus:

Your food is here, here it is,
Let the children have good health,
Their wives, let them have children
So that your names may not be obliterated,
Your chicken is here;
Today we give you blood, here it is.
Let us have good health.[7]

The prayer was actually occasioned by the offering of sacrificial blood to the dead ancestors. The purpose of the sacrifice is two-fold: for the women to be fertile and for general protection from ill health. The Dinka of Sudan have similar prayers which accompany sacrifices for protection. One such sacrifice is offered to the Earth, which is regarded as a divinity. The sacrifice is offered with these words:

O nurturing Earth, we offer thee this chicken; accept it, we beseech thee, and in exchange give us bountiful harvest, numerous herds and flocks, and many children.
Keep us free from sickness, epidemics and all evils.[8]

And to yet another divinity the Dinka would sacrifice a cow and pray specifically for the protection of the homestead:

You Divinity (God), protect the homestead.
Shall I not propitiate you with a cow?
Divinity, Father, you protect the home.
Husband of the cows,
Husband of the women,
It is you who protects the home.[9]

Even though propitiation is mentioned in this second prayer, the salient thrust of it, is protection of the homestead. Geoffrey Parrinder rightly notes that even when propitiatory sacrifices are made in Africa, they are, nevertheless, "directed against misfortune, sickness, barrenness, quarrels, drought, and any disruption of normal life."[10] Animals were not the only victims previously sacrificed for the purpose of protection. Even human beings were sometimes sacrificed to ward off physical evils! The last of such sacrifices known to Parrinder was in Abeokuta in 1891 when, at the instance of Ifa oracle a slave was sacrificed to ward off evils such as "warfare, death of chiefs, slavery, drought, [and] a plague of locust." Parrinder notes further that

at other times sacrifices were offered in order "to strengthen the foundation of a town or protect it from enemies . . .."[11]

Among the Jaba people of Nigeria blood sacrifice is employed predominantly for purposes of protection against demonic attacks. Byang Kato states that for the Jaba in central Nigeria,

> Blood sacrifice is used at different occasions. It is usually for deliverance from the power of the evil spirits. If a woman is troubled by evil spirits, she is told the type of rooster to offer for sacrifice . . .. When the rooster is ceremonially killed, the blood is applied on each side of and on top of the door post. The feather is dipped in the blood and pasted on the forehead of the patient.[12]

Certain aspects of this obviously is reminiscent of the inauguration of the Jewish Passover in Exodus 12. The Jaba believed that the blood stained on door posts would keep evil spirits from entering the house to torment its inhabitant. Such apotropaic uses of the sacrificial blood, as we have considered thus far, is not unique to Africa. F. Laubach observes that, in classical Greek, the Greeks were known to use different blood sacrifices for various purposes including the search for welfare. The blood was usually drunk or sprinkled "especially in magical rites to bring rain, welfare, love and harm."[13] The point is clear, sacrificial blood can be manipulated magically either to harm somebody or to secure protection from evil.

The foregoing provide striking parallels to contemporary prayer calling on the blood of Christ among Christians in Nigeria. In the traditional religions literal blood is used for protective purposes, while in popular Christianity many Christians mentioning the blood of Christ in prayer symbolically for protection. The fact remains, however, that both concepts believe in the protective efficacy of blood, either the blood of animals in traditional religions or the blood of Christ. The crucial question at this point is whether or not the Bible supports prayer for the blood of Christ to protect against perceived enemies and dangers. This will be the focus of the next section.

SCRIPTURE AND APOTROPAISM

The prayer for the blood of Christ to symbolically cover persons and other material objects for protection against demonic physical attacks is a popular theology today that is espoused by Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and indigenous church members. However, orthodoxy is not

determined by popular opinion but by faithfulness to Scripture. Proponents of the protective application of the blood of Jesus have based their theology on certain texts of the Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. We shall look at these passages critically to see whether they provide the warrant allegedly ascribed to them.

THE USE OF BLOOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The strongest argument in defence of this theology derives from Exodus 12 which narrates the establishment of the Jewish Passover feast. The Israelites were instructed by God that each household was to sacrifice a lamb and "Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs" (Ex. 12:7). They were further told in verse 13 that "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (Ex 12:13). The blood smeared on the door posts, it is argued, was what protected all the firstborn of Israel from destruction. And since the lamb here foreshadows Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God, it is concluded that the blood of Christ cannot but have the same protective effect over those on whom it is symbolically applied.

Roland de Vaux, in his *Ancient Israel,* sees a parallel between the Passover sacrifice in Exodus 12 and the rite practiced by nomadic Arab shepherds whereby blood was sprinkled on the door post "to drive away evil powers." According to de Vaux, the Passover "was, in a more general way, an offering for the welfare of the flock, like the old Arab feast which fell in the month of Rajab."[14] Obviously depending on de Vaux, G. von Rad also concludes that:

> In the Passover of the keepers of flocks and herds, a festival which seems to have been observed long before the time of Moses, the significance of the manipulation of the blood is to some extent clear—it had an apotropaic function, and was intended to protect the herds from the influence of demons.[15]

Buchanan Gray expressed the same view much earlier. He is quoted as saying that, "What the ancient Hebrews endeavoured to repel from their houses were spirits, demons of plague, or sickness and the like, much as the modern Beduin or Syrian peasant."[16]

While the manipulation of the sacrificial blood might be similar between the Jewish Passover and other religious rites observed by nomadic shepherds

in the region, that is far from being a conclusive evidence that the Jewish Passover shared the apotropaic purpose of the others, namely to protect against demons. Similarity in practice does not necessarily suggest an identical intent. Therefore, caution must be taken so that we do not jump too quickly to a conclusion.

G. D. Kilpatrick's view on the Jewish Passover in Exodus 12 smacks of a magical rite. He opines that the Passover sacrifice served to release power to reinforce the doorway. The sprinkling of the blood reinforced the doorway thereby preventing the destroyer from entering the houses.[17] Unfortunately, Kilpatrick fails to realize that, according to Exodus 12:24b, it was the Lord, not the blood on the door post, that prevented the destroyer from entering the houses: "And he [the Lord] will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down." R. J. Daly observes that blood sacrifices have two basic functions in the Old Testament: one is positive, to make persons or objects eligible to participate in Israel's religious life; the other, which is negative, is said to have an "apotropaic function of interrupting or averting the course of evil set in motion by sin or transgression . . .."[18] In my opinion Daly confuses the expiatory effect of sacrificial blood in the Old Testament with the apotropaic function of blood in other religions. Sacrificial blood in the Old Testament does not serve an apotropaic function, but rather expiates sin symbolically.[19]

Daly also seems to confuse God's punishment of sin with evil demonic forces against whom people seek protection. God's punishment comes as a result of sin, whereas demonic attacks result from refusal to do the bidding of the devil. Scripture nowhere states that God requires blood sacrifice to protect His own against the onslaught of the devil; but it states categorically that God requires sacrificial blood without which there can be no forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22). One crucial aspect that proponents of the apotropaic function of the Passover blood fail to reckon with, is the statement in Exodus 12:13 which describes the function of the blood as ". . . a sign for you on the houses where you are." This verse makes clear that the function of the blood was not apotropaic, but rather it functioned as a "sign". That means, it pointed to something other than itself. What it pointed to could not have been protection, otherwise how does one explain the previous protections that Israel enjoyed from the plague of flies, the deadly plagues on livestock and the one of hail? God protected Israel from these three plagues without any sacrificial blood until the final plague on the firstborn, at which time, He then required the

sacrifice. J. Jeremias seems to suggest that the blood represents the Israelites' obedience to God's command which was handsomely rewarded by the destroyer "passing over" their houses.[20] While the obedience motif is not totally absent from the Passover in Exodus 12, it is nevertheless not the dominant idea signified by the blood. Keil and Delitzsch argue that the blood was "a sign and pledge that Jehovah would spare them, and no plague should fall upon them to destroy . . .."[21] If Keil and Delitzsch are right, we wonder why the same sign was not required before the Israelites were delivered from previous plagues. We submit, therefore, that the blood of Exodus 12 was symbolic of Israel's cleansing and consecration to God.

When the destroyer got to the houses with blood on their door posts, God did not permit him to enter those houses because the blood indicated that the inhabitants had been cleansed from the disobedience of the land of Egypt, and were therefore consecrated to God.[22] As W. O'Donovan rightly notes, "In the Old Testament, blood and anointing oil were used to set apart (sanctify) objects (Lev. 8:15), clothes (Lev. 8:30), and people (Lev. 8:23-24, Num. 8:17) for God."[23] T.D. Alexander on his own part sees a parallel between the description of the Passover meal and the consecration of the Aaronic priests in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. He concludes, therefore, by pointing out that "the slaughter of the animal atoned for the sin of the people and that the blood smeared on the door post purified those within the house."[24]

The purification motif, which re-echoes in subsequent observances of the Passover, attests to the cogency of our position. Anyone deemed ceremonially unclean could not eat the Passover meal or participate in the celebration. Israel celebrated her first Passover after leaving Egypt in the desert of Sinai. According to Numbers 9:6-7 some of the Israelites were unable to participate in the celebration or eat the meal due to ceremonial uncleanness, resulting from contact with a dead body. At the re-establishment of the Passover during Hezekiah's reign (2 Ch. 30:13-20) many who came to Jerusalem could not kill the Passover lambs themselves because they were ceremonially unclean. The Levites had to kill the lambs on behalf of those that were unconsecrated. But, contrary to the provision of the Passover, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun ate the Passover meal without having consecrated themselves. Hezekiah had to offer a special prayer to God on behalf of the unclean partakers of the meal. The Lord, we are told, "Heard Hezekiah and healed the people" (v. 20). That means the people were already stricken with illness for their unlawful eating of the meal.

When Ezra dedicated the temple (Ezr. 6:19-22), the Levites and priests had to be ceremonially clean to kill and offer the lambs respectively. In Exodus 12, there were then no priests and Levites to officiate, so the heads of the families and the entire members who inhabited the houses had to be purified as symbolised by the blood-stained door post before they could eat the Passover meal. In Ezra 6, the source of uncleanness was involvement in the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours (v. 21). The same sentiment was echoed in John 18:28 when the Jews refused to enter Pilate's palace so that they might not be defiled and thereby be disqualified from celebrating the Passover. If, as we have seen from these references, involvement with Gentiles could defile and inhibit one from participating in the Passover, then the Israelites must have had a lot to be purified from having mixed freely with the Egyptians prior to the establishment of the Passover in Exodus 12. Again the Gospel of John informs us that "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover" (11:55).

These references from both the Old and New Testaments show conclusively that ceremonial cleansing was an absolute requirement for anyone wishing to participate in the Jewish Passover Feast. It makes perfect sense, therefore, to conclude that the blood on the door post in Exodus 12 functioned as a sign pointing to the ceremonial cleansing and consecration of the Israelites before they actually ate the Passover meal.[25] The centrality of purification to sacrificial blood in the Old Testament was so compelling that A.F. Rainey asserts that "even with non-expiatory offerings, the principle of blood atonement was not entirely absent."[26] And just as subsequent Passover feasts served Israel as reminders of "one of the ways in which the covenant between God and Israel was maintained in being,"[27] it could also be said that the original Passover formally inaugurated the covenant between God and Israel.

It is interesting to note the length to which certain proponents of the apotropaic view are willing to go in defence of their position. Oesterley and Theodore, for instance, compare the Passover blood to the *Mezuzah*, i.e. a small tube made of wood, metal, or glass, in which is rolled up a piece of parchment containing the *Shema'* (Deut. vi. 4-9 and xi. 13-21). "The Rabbis in Talmudic times attributed to it a protective power against demons . . .. The Mohammedans have a similar custom of inscribing verses from the Koran on their doors . . .."[28]

The Rabbinic and Islamic practices thus described are nothing short of magic; and to compare them to the sacrificial function of blood in the Old Testament is absolutely unjustifiable. We also strongly take issue with the speculation of T.H. Gaster to the effect that, apart from the provision of purity, biblical sacrifices also served to avert noxious and untoward demonic influences. He cites the use of salt with offerings (Lev. 2:13), the blowing of ram's horn over sacrifices (Num. 10:10), and circumambulation of the altar (Ps. 26:6) as other instances of apotropaic practices in the Old Testament.[29]

A careful investigation of these references by Gaster shows that they cannot bear the weight he puts on them. In Leviticus 2:13, salt was recommended to season the grain offerings and possibly to symbolize the enduring character of the covenant. There is nothing apotropaic in the trumpet blast of Numbers 10:10; rather the trumpet blast served a commemorative purpose as made clear by Leviticus 23:24. Concerning the Psalmist "going about the altar" (Ps. 26:6), it was an expression of the Psalmist's sense of innocence as he offered his sacrifice to God. If Gaster's view with respect to these three alleged instances of apotropaism do not stand critical scrutiny, does that not open to question his conclusion concerning the function of blood as well?

Before we leave the Old Testament, a look at another germane point from Exodus 12 is in order. In verse 22, Moses instructs the people to "Take a bunch of hyssop , dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe." The use of hyssop, here, is probably paradigmatic for the rest of the Old Testament.[30] Hyssop is a plant that, due to its close association with ceremonial cleansing in the Old Testament, has come to be used synonymously with the cleansing motif in the Old Testament. The ceremonial cleansing for anyone healed of an infectious skin disease requires *inter alia* the use of hyssop to sprinkle blood on such a person (Lev. 14:4-7). G.J. Wenham is, in my opinion, correct in seeing here an echo of the Passover ritual purification in Exodus 12.[31] Of particular relevance is verse 49ff, which deals with the ceremonial cleansing of a house rendered unclean by mildew. Hyssop with other paraphernalia were used to sprinkle and purify such a house from defilement. This is the closest parallel to Exodus 12 we can find in Scripture where blood is used to purify a habitation. By the time we get to the Psalms, we hear David, in penitence, asking God to "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean," (Ps. 51:7a). The use of hyssop here is metonymic, i.e., though "hyssop" was used, yet, "blood"

was actually meant, due to the close ceremonial association between both words. Commenting on "cleanse me with hyssop," W.E. Shewell-Cooper says it "obviously refers to the application of the blood of the lamb, for it is only . . . with the shedding of blood that there can be remission of sin."[32]

Against those represented by Leon Morris who maintain that, "In the original Passover . . . there is mention of the blood as a means of averting destruction,"[33] we say there is no mention of such a function of blood in the text. What was mentioned, rather, was the symbolic function of blood, which, as we have argued, pointed to the purification of the Israelites. It was essential for the Israelites to be thus purified before they could eat the first Passover meal, and thereby set the standard of purity required of all subsequent celebrants of the Passover.

During the previous plagues, God delivered Israel without the use of blood, but now that the Passover meal was envisaged, blood was necessary to purify the people ceremonially so that they could partake of the meal. Having thus cleansed Israel, God then used the blood (which represented the fact of their purification) to identify those destined for deliverance.[34] We cannot agree more with Clippinger's conclusion that "there is no trace of superstitious use of blood in the OT, unless perchance in I K 22:38 . . . but everywhere it is vested with cleansing, expiatory, and reverently symbolic qualities."[35] And it must be noted that the superstitious instance in I Kings 22:38 was not reported approvingly. It probably refers to washing with royal blood which "was supposed to be beneficial to the complexia."[36] In that case, even this single instance of superstitious use of blood in the Old Testament still relates to the purificatory motif, albeit a non-ceremonial one.

THE USE OF BLOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We now focus our attention on the New Testament. There is overwhelming evidence in the New Testament attesting to the fact that the sacrificial blood of Christ is expiatory and redemptive in its efficacy. While eating the Lord's Supper with His disciples, Jesus took the cup which represents His blood and said: "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). One of the best known passages in the New Testament on this issue is Hebrews 9:22, which says, "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." M. J. Erickson rightly observes that New Testament "references to Christ's blood are not to His actual physical blood *per se*, but to

His death as a sacrificial provision for our sins."[37]

The text most commonly used in the New Testament as an anchorage by proponents of the apotropaic function of the blood of Christ is Revelation 12:11, which reads: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." When isolated from its context, it would seem this verse is addressing, *inter allia*, victory over the physical assaults of the Devil. But a careful look at the verse in context makes clear that such an interpretation of verse 11 does violence to the text. There are two pertinent questions that we believe will help us unravel the correct meaning of this verse. The first question has to do with the identity of the overcomers: who really were they? The second question relates to the vanquished: how was the vanquished one identified?

First who were the overcomers? According to verse 10c, the overcomers were the brothers of those speaking with a loud voice in heaven (vv. 10-12). And in all probability, the group speaking in verses 10-12 is the same as the innumerable multitude of Revelation 7:14, who were described as those "who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Our reason for arriving at this conclusion is three-fold: both groups were presented using their voices in a loud manner (7:10, cf. 12:10); both groups were located in the same place, namely, at heaven (7:9[38]; cf. 12:10), and finally, both groups started by addressing virtually the same subject matters: 7:10 addresses salvation, God, His throne and the Lamb; while 12:10 addresses salvation, God, His power and kingdom, and His Christ. We believe this evidence is compelling enough to warrant our conclusion that the brothers of the overcomers (Rev. 12:10) were not on earth, but in heaven, through martyrdom. And, contrary to the suggestions that the overcomers were martyrs of the tribulation,[39] they were alive on earth, though persecuted by Satan (12:17). If the overcomers were martyrs, they would have been with their brothers (12:10) in heaven.

That the overcomers were on earth and "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (12:11b) suggests that to overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb does not mean protection from satanic attacks on us and our effects. If overcoming the accuser by the blood of the Lamb here means immunity from satanic attacks, sicknesses and accidents, then it is redundant, almost to the point of absurdity, to talk about the overcomers not loving their lives so much as to shrink from death. But if despite their victory through the

blood of the Lamb, the overcomers were still liable to satanic attacks, diseases and other hazards, then it makes perfect sense to talk of their readiness to die like their martyred brothers already in heaven on account of their testimony for Christ (12:17). So, the blood of the Lamb here does not protect us from physical attacks by the devil, but it grants us victory over our accuser, even when we have to die for our loyalty to Christ. Yes, there is victory on account of the blood of the Lamb even in death.

The second question regards how the vanquished was identified. The vanquished was identified by two names: the devil, and Satan (Rev. 12:9). It is significant to note that the name, "devil" is the Greek for "accuser, or malicious slanderer," while "Satan" is Hebrew for "accuser." That these two different names, with the same meaning of "accuser", are used by John to identify the evil one is no mere coincidence; rather it was deliberate. The names are not meaningless designations but are reflective of the slanderous character of the enemy, as vividly depicted by his verbal assaults against the saints before God in heaven day and night (12:10c). The term used for Satan's verbal assault is *kategoreo*, which is a legal technical term meaning to bring charges in a human court against someone. While presenting their case before Felix, the Jews, we are told, "brought their charges against Paul before the governor," (Ac 24:1b). In verse 8 they concluded thus: "By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him," (cf. Mat. 12:10; Mk. 3:2; Ac. 24:8 and 28:19). The term is used twice in the New Testament with respect to bringing charges against someone before God's tribunal. Jesus told the Jews, "Do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses," (Jn. 5:45a); the other passage, of course, is Revelation 12:10.[40]

Usually when the evil one appears before God in heaven it was to accuse the saints of their sins and not to attack them physically or materially. Compare the case of Job, when Satan appeared before God and accused Job of being upright only for the sake of the material blessings and protection he got from God (Job 1:6-12). Another case in point was when, in a vision, Zechariah saw Satan accusing Joshua the high priest before the angel of the Lord (Zec. 3:1-2).

Therefore, what Satan was actually doing in heaven when he was vanquished by the blood of the Lamb was accusing the saints on earth before God's tribunal. It was in this legal battle that he suffered his decisive defeat. On account of the blood of Lamb, Satan's accusations against the saints on earth

were nullified and thrown out along with the accuser from the heavenly court (Col 2:11-15). Therefore, to quote Rev 12:11 in support of apotropaic function of the blood of the Lamb is to miss the real point at issue. G. R. Beasley-Murray is right on target when he comments on Revelation 12:11 to the effect that, "The blood . . . that had done such wonderful things in heaven . . . in blotting out sin, and bringing it to naught, had a similar power over Satan. He has now no longer any right to accuse." On the strength of Revelation 12:11, ". . . there is no possibility of Satan lodging an accusation against the people of God. *The blood of the Lamb has prevailed"* (emphasis original).[41]

The battle between the saints and Satan, as depicted in Revelation 12, is therefore not physical but spiritual and legal. And thanks be to the blood of the Lamb that the saints have been acquitted of the malicious slanders brought against them by Satan (Col 2:14-15). Caird has been quoted as putting it thus: "Although John depicts the battle between Michael and Satan in military terms, it is essentially a legal battle between opposing council in which the loser is disbarred."[42] That is the end of Satan's malicious legal practice as far as God's tribunal is concerned. Having thus been vanquished before God's heavenly tribunal, Satan, like a wounded lion, is all out to attack the saints physically, materially and otherwise. If anything, on account of their victory, Satan is going to be more vicious in persecuting the saints.

CONCLUSION

To pray and cover various objects with the blood of Christ as protection against demonic attacks, epidemics, natural disasters, accidents, and other such experiences is, in my opinion, without scriptural warrant. The practice is paralleled in various traditional religions where, as we have demonstrated, there is strong belief in the magical use of sacrificial blood to avert evil. Therefore, we should consider it syncretistic for Christians to ascribe the same efficacy to the blood of Christ. This is not to deny the reality of demonic activities today, even though some Christians have inadvertently promoted the presence of demonic activities today far beyond the reality by finding a demon under every bush! Rather, this is a corrective measure to what we consider a popular, but a dangerously syncretistic theology of the blood of Christ. The biblical way to challenge demonic assault is in the authority of the name of Jesus, at which every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11).

END NOTES

[1] A.F. Walls, "Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History," in J.S. Pobee, ed., *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 180-9.

[2] J. F. Gabler cited by W.G. Kummel, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems, New York: Abingdon Press, 1970; pp. 98-9.

[3] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* vol I, London: CMS Press, 1973; p. 253:1. Cf. also Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel II: Religious Institutions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1965) p. 489:2.

[4] A. O. Majola, "The Chagga Scapegoat Purification Ritual and another re-Reading of the Goat of Azazel in Leviticus 16", *Melita Theologica*, 50, 1999) pp. 156-8.

[5] J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, (London: Longman, 1979), pp. 156-8.

[6] Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs*, p. 139.

[7] J.S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion*, (London: SPCK, 1975).

[8] Ibid., p. 85.

[9] Ibid., p. 60. Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa*, (New York, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 104.

[10] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, (London, Sheldon Press, 1976) p. 73.

[11] G. Parrinder, *West Africa Religion*, (London: Epworth Press, 1978), pp. 71-2.

[12] B.H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), 42.

[13] F. Laubach, "Blood", *DNTT* vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 221:1.

[14] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel vol. 2: Religious Institutions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 9165), p. 489.

[15] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* vol. I, (London: CMS Press, 1973), p. 253:1.

[16] Cited by W.O.E. Oesterly and T.H. Robinson, in *Hebrew Religion,* (London: Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944), 132.

[17] G.D. Kilpatrick, *The Eucharist of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 27.

[18] Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 27.

[19] Compare Walther Eichrodt thesis that the expiatory effect of OT sacrifices were dependent "on the gracious willingness of Yahweh to accept this gift as expiatory, and no exact correspondence with the punishment incurred is in mind . . .. And the offering of a pure, innocent life for the one which has become guilty serves to drive home afresh again and again the life-destroying power of sin, which, were it not for atonement, would inevitably deliver the sinner into the annihilating wrath of God," in *Theology of the Old Testament, vol. II, trans.* J.A. Baker, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967): 447:2.

[20] J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p.226.

[21] C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., (n.d.), p. 19:2.

[22] This is a somewhat different position than that held by J.H. Kurtz to the effect that "the blood was to be a sign and pledge to the inhabitants of the house, that when Jehovah saw it He would pass by and spare them from the plague . . .. Israel needed an expiation, for it could not stand in its sin when God arose to judgment. But God desired to rescue and spare the Israelites for the sake of their calling, and because of their faith," *Sacrificial worship of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, n.d.); p. 367. Kurtz seems to hold that the blood symbolizes both protection from harm and cleansing of sin.

[23] W. O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, (Carlisle:

Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 114. Cf. Oesterley and Robinson who emphatically assert that "*All* sacrifices, whether bloodless or bloody, effect reconciliation (cp. Ezek. xlv. 15, 17); i.e. they are the means of obtaining divine forgiveness. The term *le - kapper*, 'to effect atonement,' expresses the basic idea, and the sin-cleansing power of blood becomes very marked (see, e.g., Lev. iv. 5, 7, 16-18)," *Hebrew Religion*, p. 335.

[24] T.D. Alexander, "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds. R.T. Beckwith and M.J. Selman, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, 1995), p. 8.

[25] Cf. Keil and Delitzsch in what apparently contradicts their earlier view of the blood (see page 12), "The smearing of the houses of the Israelites with the atoning blood of the sacrifices set forth the reconciliation of Israel and its God, through the forgiveness and expiation of its sins," *Pentateuch*, p. 20.

[26] A.F. Rainey, "Sacrifices and Offerings," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 201:5.

[27] I.H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, (Carlisle, U.K.: Patternoster Press, 1993), p. 77.

[28] Oesterley and Theodore, *Hebrew Religion*, p. 132

[29] T.H. Gaster, "Sacrifice," *IDB, R-Z*, ed. G.A. Buttrick, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 157.

[30] Cf. J.C. Trever, "Hyssop," *IDB*, ed. G.A. Buttrick, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 669; and E.W.G. Masterman, "Hyssop," *ISBE*, gen. ed. James Orr, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986; p. 3.

[31] G.J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 27.

[32] W.E. Shewell-Cooper, "Hyssop," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, III, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 235:3.

[33] Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, p. 117.

[34] Cf. Alexander's conclusion to the effect that the smearing of the blood of the

Passover victim on the door posts sets the Israelites apart as holy and "consequently, they are delivered from the destructive power of the Destroyer . . .," "The Passover Sacrifice," p. 18.

[35] W. G. Clippinger, "Blood," p. 489:1.

[36] G.B. Eager, "Bath," *ISBE,* gen. ed. James Orr, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 414:1.

[37] M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 809.

[38] According to Revelation 4:2 the throne before which John was standing was in heaven; and it is the same throne that is mentioned in 7:9, before which the multitude was also standing.

[39] So E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, 1968), 168; D. Guthrie refers to the overcomers as "martyrs" in his *New Testament Theology,* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 186; and C. S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary,* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 795.

[40] W.F. Arnt and F.W. Gingrich, "kategoreo," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* trans. W. Bauer, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 423.

[41] G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation,* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1974), p. 203.

[42] Caird, quoted by Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 243.

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The Incarnation of Jesus Christ as a Hermeneutic for Understanding the Providence of God in an African Perspective

Gregg A. Okesson

Gregg Okesson's experience in the African village has driven him to theological pursuit. He seeks to develop a hermeneutic for understanding God's involvement in the world, which rests upon the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and arises from within the African perspective. Mr. Okesson notes that in the Incarnation we see vividly the "nearness" of God. We witness his own calloused hands, the sweat dripping from his forehead, and intensive interactions with the poor, the lame, the diseased, and the oppressed. God-man lives in community, cares for his family and opens his soul to others (livable theology). The essential character of the incarnation demands that truth (God's truth) be lived. Incarnation signifies that the quality and substance of life was livable with meaning and value. The truths of the providence of God are lived in the person of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

The weary orb of the sun was slowly retreating behind the distant hills and waving a reddish farewell. The surrounding Tanzanian countryside pause to say, "goodnight," and basked for a final moment amidst the glimmering sky. I sat quietly amidst this wonder, drinking strong coffee with a few good friends. They were Rangi by tribe and I, American; they were born Muslim and I, Christian: we were as different as the fading sun is to the rising moon, but joined by circumstance, encounter, and life.

Our subject that evening was the Providence of God, though we could hardly have called it such. We spoke about life: simple pleasures and harsh

Mr. Gregg A. Okesson holds a BA and an MA both in Intercultural Studies, and an MA in Theological Studies (NT emphasis), all from Wheaton Graduate School in the US. He presently teaches theology courses at Scott Theological College, Kenya.

realities. "Where will Kidyela find the proper wife and dowry?" "Why do people die of treatable diseases?" and "Where are the rains?" I had few answers that night, but mostly listened to these "bush theologians" wrestle with issues that have confounded generations.

It is impossible, or at least unrespectable, to live in community, walking in the footsteps of humanity – feeling her sorrows and joys – and to experience antipathy or indifference. My years in Africa have yoked me to the needs, the plight, and even the resiliency of the African. I have been moved to tears as well as to inspiration. Yet above all else, it has driven me to theological pursuit.

Theology, in its most rudimentary form, is the human quest for the "livable-ness" of the character of God within the world. As I sat that evening among my Rangi friends they were not concerned with mere theological speculation, but real life: truly, whom should Kidyela marry and where would he find the money for a dowry; what can be done to offset the epidemic of senseless deaths in our village; and what can actually be done to bring the rains. The emphasis is always upon life (action, pursuit, routine, and ritual) as it relates to the involvement of God in the world. This is likewise the content of the Providence of God.

There is an urgent need within our contemporary day for constructive African theologizing regarding the Providence of God. Specifically, we need a hermeneutic for understanding God's relationship to the world that brings with it a "livable" interpretation to match the African spirit. The answers need to be tangible, felt, and real. In this article, I would like to begin a personal pilgrimage on the relationship between the Providence of God and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. I hope to show that a proper understanding of the Incarnation, complete with an honest Christological perspective, brings a hermeneutic[1] for understanding God's Providence within this continent, and then, perhaps, even to the rest of the world.

[1] I am not implying that the Incarnation is synonymous with the Providence of God; merely that it is a needed and essential hermeneutic for understanding God's continued activity within our world. The strength of the hermeneutic, as I seek to demonstrate, is that it is understood within flesh and bones, and livable in the same manner.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Can life make sense? Is life meaningful? How are we to live in light of God's involvement in the world? These are the questions of the Providence of God. The *Shorter Catechism* states, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own free will freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass."[2] Yet the doctrine of Providence is so much more than "foreknowledge," but involves God's active and directive involvement in the total history of humankind (involving creation, nation, community, and individuals) unto His purposes. Jean Calvin likewise agrees and states, "Let my readers grasp that providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events."[3]

Creation is the first act of providence. God created the world with His character and it is therefore saturated with His purposes. Providence is the ongoing manifestation and governance of the creation act, leading to His eschatological aims. Creation states that the world is "good" (Gen. 1:3, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31); while providence states that this "goodness" is moving somewhere; specifically, God has not forgotten the essential character of creation, but is guiding the world to Himself and His glory.

The traditional doctrine of Providence[4] elaborates on the "How" of God's purposes in creation. It states that God's providence is manifested in His: (1) preservation of creation, (2) its governance, and (3) concurrence with humankind. Geoffrey W. Bromiley summarizes it as follows:

> Providence, then, is the preservation, superintendence, and teleological direction of all things to God. It is divine governance whereby all possible

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[2] Chapter 3, section 1.

[3] *Institutes*, 1.16.4. Furthermore, against the "practical deism" of our day, Calvin states that the nature of this governance is "a watchful, effective, active sort engaged in ceaseless activity." *Institutes*, 1.16.3.

[4] There is no authoritative definition of Providence, but that which has arisen through the pages of Christian tradition. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.22.1.

> events are woven into a coherent pattern and all possible developments are shaped to accomplish the divinely instituted goal.[5]

First of all, preservation illustrates that God's creation act is continued and sustained by His Presence and character. If God were to remove His presence or spirit from the world all would cease to exist (Job 34:14). Yet modern post-enlightened developments in science have undermined this traditional position. They no longer look to the author of creation for its sustaining character, even as they no longer look to God for the cause of creation. Everything is explained in rational "enlightened" terms. G. C. Berkouwer states,

> The enlightened scientific mind has come to look on the Providence doctrine more or less as a bromide convenient for pre-scientific naivete, but not rendered unpalatable by the 'deeper insights' of the scientific method.[6]

Providence is no longer necessary because God is no longer necessary. Yet when we say that God preserves His creation, we are thereby describing much more than a scientific ideology, we are stating that creation is pregnant with purpose. Stanley Grenz states that "when we confess God as the agent in preservation, we are providing the divine answer to the question, 'Is there meaning to life?'"[7]

Secondly, God's creation requires His governance. This second element of providence illustrates a deeper and more meaningful involvement in the history of the world. God is moving His creation somewhere and is actively involved in the ordinary acts of the world, as well as the extraordinary. While modern humanity has questioned the first act of providence, they have scoffed at this second act. How can God be good, when His creation is so littered with acts of aggression, evil, injustice, and oppression? Either God isn't good, or He is impotent against the forces set against His creation. Ultimately, modern humanity must either become atheists and

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[5] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 1020.

[6] G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 18.

[7] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 119.

deny God; become animists and by-pass God; or they must fashion another god in whom to worship.

As Christians, we must find those solutions unacceptable and work to explain our God who is indeed the governor of all creation. We must face difficult questions with intellectual honesty and candor as we worship – and therefore testify – to a God who works sovereignly within the world to accomplish his purposes. In no realm is this more essential than within African Theology.

Finally, the third act of providence takes God to the very deepest realms of humankind: to partnership with humans in life. There is an inherent mystery with concurrence, which baffles the most honest believer. Concurrence refers to "the cooperation of the divine power with creaturely powers allowing or causing them to act as they do."[8] The pages of Scripture are alive with illustrations of a God who "cooperates" or "walks" with humanity. This is the most difficult of the acts of providence for contemporary humans to acquiesce. In one sense, it seems to infringe upon their "freedoms" and so they rebel against it; yet on the other hand, it is permissive of interaction and involvement, and so acceptable (or should we say desirable) to our human yearnings. In the final outcome of contemporary society, however, God has become irreconcilably maimed or defaced by the first two acts of providence to leave this final aspect of providence as inevitably irrelevant.

Regardless of how the contemporary world views God, and therefore providence, we must not despair, but must seek to retrieve a foundational basis for our faith that worships God in all three facets of his involvement with creation.[9] Specifically, we need to develop a hermeneutic for understanding God's involvement in the world, which rests upon the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and arises from within the African experience.

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[8] Grenz, p. 122.

[9] Calvin says, "that ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it." *Institutes*, 1.17.11.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

In so far as we have described the providence of God in terms of His involvement in history, in no place is this doctrine more readily tested and needed than in Africa. First of all, it is a doctrine that comes with readied and proven assent from the Traditional African Religion. John Mbiti says about providence, "This is one of the most fundamental beliefs about God."[10] There is an irresistible link between the African and creation that seeks and needs the providence of God. "It is widely believed that God shows his providence through fertility and health of humans, cattle and fields, as well as through plentifulness of children, cattle, food and other goods."[11] It is based upon a concept of God whereby He is still involved in His creation; albeit sometimes from a distance.

Secondly, the African operates daily within the fundamental fabric of human life. In the West, we have become so "advanced" that we have often forgotten the very essence of human existence: rain, sun, food, health, work, play, children, and belonging. We attempt to circumvent the seasons and bypass the natural order of things; in a word, it has led to disfunctionality. In Africa, this is not only life, but also the very realm and theater of God's involvement and disclosure of Himself to humanity (1 Sam. 2:6-8; Mt. 5:45; Acts 14:17). The red, dusty soil is alive with the footprints of life; calloused hands testify to the doctrine of concurrence at its most basic level; family and belonging are spiritual institutions governed by the creator of all things.

Thirdly, Africans have suffered more than most other people in our contemporary day. They have experienced the ravages of sinful humanity against them in warfare, slavery, oppression, and exploitation; they endure the unpredictability of the seasons and its subsequent affect upon crops, cattle, and food; they are inflicted with disease, poverty, and rampant death. If the doctrine of providence can be revealed to disclose God's purposes and involvement within humanity in Africa, perhaps it can be proven anywhere.

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[10] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Publishing, 1969), 41.

[11] Ibid., 41.

Finally, there is a great need for the development of such a doctrine to arise from the substance of this hard, red soil. The Western world needs the theological offerings from this resilient land; in fact, even Africans need to tighten the reins of understanding between God's creation and His continued involvement in the world. The affects of Western modernism have washed upon the African beaches and brought a wave of questions foreign to this land; indigenous African beliefs have wrought their own havoc; and the growing tide of religious pluralism continues to push inland and bring competing ideologies. The fundamental character of God's providence is being tested in new and in old ways, leaving the lingering questions: "Is there meaning in this decaying world?" and, "How are we to live in light of the seeming disparity between God and His creation?" "Man either spends his years in orgy, continues his tedious way in boredom, or bows his head in submission to the tyranny of a pitiless fate."[12] Despair lead to doubt, doubt to fatalism, fatalism to nihilism, and nihilism gives birth to a lowered sense of human existence.

The Christian church needs to stand amidst this cycle of dread and proclaim the voice of a God who cares, who is involved, and who is sovereign in all ways – even (and especially) amidst the mundane of African life. Yet the problem is that we as Christians have forgotten, or dismissed, this most urgent of doctrines. We have our own hidden questions that lie festering under a cloak of cover. We have sacrificed the doctrine of providence upon the altar of intellectual agnosticism and retreated behind the façade of sweeping generalizations such as, "God is sovereign." While true, and voiced empassionately, they leave the world with the growing verdict that we are desperately naïve and our God is apparition of our deepest needs and desires.

Where does this leave us? Do we have the courage, as Africans, to stand amidst the confluence of internal and external forces and proclaim a God who continues to preserve, govern, and concur with humanity and His world? Do we have the intellectual curiosity and candor to seek a faithful God who does not conform to a super-sensible world?[13] And are we willing to live the results of our inquiry? Yes, we must. The church in Africa must accept the calling and mantle of the prophet of God to the nations. And, like

[12] Berkouwer, 22.
[13] Ibid., 23.

the classical prophets, the church must be willing to live the truth in observable, tangible, and sometimes, dramatic ways. The answer to our dilemma, as well as the "livableness" of this truth, is found within the person and incarnation of Jesus Christ. He is much more than a typology, but a hermeneutic that brings meaning and purpose within a world seemingly out of control.

INCARNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Much has been written regarding African Christologies in recent days.[14] The remainder of the article is not just another Christology, but rather a hermeneutic for understanding God's involvement in His world. Furthermore, it is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather an introduction to the viability and necessity of the Incarnation for understanding the doctrine of Divine Providence. Many more questions than answers will be submitted in hopes of soliciting interest and theological inquiry regarding the relationship between these doctrines of the faith.

There are few who have looked at the interplay between the Incarnation and the Providence of God. To many, it is a logical absurdity to answer a difficult and confusing doctrine with a more confusing one. A few, however, believe as I, that the doctrine of Providence cannot rest upon any other foundation. "We must resist the temptation to think about Providence generally and independently of Christ . . .. In Jesus Christ, God has set up the relationship between Himself and His creatures, promising to carry through His purpose in creation to its triumphal conclusion."[15] A hermeneutic is a lens by which we understand. If Christ is God's consummate revelation of Himself to a sinful world, we must endeavor to

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[14] To list a few: "The Figure of Jesus in African Theology," in *Christian Identy*, ed. Christian Duquoc Casiano Floristan Samanes, and James Aiteken Gardiner, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988): 73-79; Gwinyai Muzorewa, "Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective," in *Africa Theological Journal* 17:3 (1988): 255-64; and also Matthew Schoffeleers, "Folk Christology in Africa: The Dialectics of the Nganga Paradigm," in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19.2 (1989): 157-83.

[15] T. H. L. Parker, "Providence of God" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 890.

interpret this lens for all subsequent interactions of God and mankind. To do otherwise would be irresponsible.

Jesus Christ is involved in all three traditional acts of Divine Providence. First of all, in the act of preservation, New Testament writers not only describe the pre-existent Christ as the force behind creation, but also the sustaining Word that holds the creation together. He is always active, always involved. The Gospel of John as Him saying, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working (5:17)" Likewise, the author of Hebrews states, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by His powerful word (1:3)." In this case, the division between preservation and governance may be fluid, for the words used of Jesus' sustaining power are *'pheron te ta panta to remati tes dunameos autoun.'* Jean Calvin states that the use of pheron "to uphold or to bear" means here to preserve or to continue all that is created in its own state; for he intimates that all things would instantly come to nothing, were they not sustained by his power.[16] While other commentators cite that the meaning of *pheron* implies that the "Son's work of upholding involves not only support, but also movement. He is the one who carries all things forward on their appointed course."[17] In either case, the indication is that it is Jesus Christ who is involved in the ongoing work of God and His world.

In the same way, Paul speaks emphatically to the interconnection between Jesus Christ as creator, Jesus Christ as the purpose of creation, and Jesus Christ as the sustainer/governor of creation (Col. 1:15-20). This passage is perhaps the most involved in tying together the functions of Jesus Christ and the World: "For by him all things were created . . . all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church . . . and through him to reconcile to himself all things . . . by making peace through his blood shed on the cross." It is beyond the purposes of this article to delve into an intensive exegetical study of the meaning and syntax of this passage; merely to call to attention the clearly stated involvement of Jesus Christ in creation and history.

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[16] Jean Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 37.

[17] Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Library, 1980), 664.

Furthermore, the New Testament writers were eager to speak about the Christians' hope, meaning, and involvement in the world with the terms of union *"en Kristo."* If Jesus Christ is the preserver of creation, and the governor of the entire world, then it follows that Christians are to actively seek to find their fulfillment *"en Kristo."* "Such union entails not only mental assent to a set of doctrines, but also the embodying in our beliefs, attitudes, and actions the meaning and values that characterize Jesus' own life."[18] What therefore does it mean to "follow" Christ? What is the connection between the exalted Christ and the Holy Spirit? These are natural questions that surround the deeper implication of Jesus as preserver and governor of creation.

Finally, and perhaps most profoundly, Jesus Christ is the very personification of the doctrine of concurrence. If, in the Old Testament, God walked with humanity, cooperated with their endeavors, sent prophets, built up and tore down kingdoms, and otherwise interacted with humanity, then, in Jesus Christ we have the consummation of God's concurrence: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (Jn. 1:14)." The implications of the incarnation are unsettling, as well as transforming. What does it mean for the history of humanity that God became man? What does it mean for us that God has stooped to our level and emptied Himself for us? God lived fully within the garb of humanity and God gave Himself as a human sacrifice for our sins. We cannot hide such issues from the doctrine of Divine Providence. If the three-fold traditional doctrine of providence illustrates an increasingly deeper commitment and involvement of God in the lives of humanity, then, the Incarnation embodies that concept and gives it tangibility and "realness."

AFRICAN INCARNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Let us return to the practical "liveability" of the doctrine of Providence in the African context. We have already observed the fertile soil in Africa for a development of the doctrine of Divine Providence; in fact, the top soil already exists. Mbiti says that "the omnipresence of God is expressed as protective, sustaining, upholding, saving, and healing."[19] Yet, there is something lacking; something that is deficient and unproductive: God's

[18] Grenz, 121.
[19] Mbiti, 42-3.

Providence supersedes the entire world, but it is distant and largely independent of humanity. Mbiti proceeds to say, "His providence functions entirely independently of man, though man may and does at times solicit God's help."[20] In the Incarnation we see vividly the 'nearness' of God. We witness His own calloused hands, the sweat dripping from his forehead, and his intensive interactions with the poor, the lame, the diseased, and the oppressed. God-man lives in community, cares for his family, and opens his soul to others. This is not liberation theology, but livable theology. It is much more than a paradigm for God's Providence, it is in fact the very essence of His providential dealings with humanity.

The remaining part of the article will illustrate the practical nature, and implications of such a hermeneutic. The following are topics, which bid the reader to greater exploration; they are not intended to fully answer, but to entice.

CHRIST'S HUMANITY

The contemporary Christian world has suffered a slow and gradual movement toward docetism. It has happened not from intention but from reaction. Early twentieth century Christianity saw the rise of an aggressive form of liberalism. It arose from the enlightenment and was spurred by optimistic modernism that saw the benefits and success of the human mind and spirit. Despite its theological failings, this movement carried a strong emphasis toward social and political action. At the core of its theological underpinnings was a dismissal of the supernatural: Christ was elevated as a man, but only at the expense of his deity. He was a strong role model, the leader of a movement against the oppressed, the very paragon of goodness -- but not God.

In reaction, evangelicals championed His deity with a frantic and fervent spirit. They called themselves 'fundamentalists' as they sought to restore the interpretation of Scripture to its pre-enlightened condition. Above all else, Jesus is God and not to be tampered with.

We can applaud these defenders of the faith and even see within our modern theology their distinctive and formative impression. Yet, in the

[20] Ibid., 41.

flurry of defending Jesus' deity, perhaps, we have made Him a little less man. We would never question the hypostatic union, or our creedal statements, but in practical implementation of theology, he just now "seems" like a man.

If our understanding of God's Providence is inextricably tied to our hermeneutic of the Incarnation, then, we need to work to restore a proper understanding of Jesus' humanity. How would it affect subsequent African theology to see God as a man who lives like us? How might it affect our churches if we see that God intervened into the world in order to save the world "through his life" (Rom. 5:10)? As Irenaeus and Athanasius have taught us, God's humanity is essentially soteriological in nature. What implications does this have for how we view salvation? Eternity? and the Kingdom of God?

Our view of salvation tends to mirror our view of Jesus' Character.[21] If he is divine, then, he came to be human in order to die on the cross and redeem our sins; if he is human, then, the cross-event is secondary to the fabric of the kind of life he lived. Yet, can we not strive to weave these truths together? Is not salvation past, present and future-tensed? And what does it mean to our humanity that the second Adam, our representative man, lived fully on our behalf?

Jesus became man and consummated Divine Providence within his flesh and bones. This truth needs to permeate our churches and affect our theology. It is truth that has been lived, fully. We need to develop an accurate (biblically and experientially) humanization of God, because truth must be lived.

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

If Christ's humanity teaches us anything it is that humanity is sacred. There is an enormous difference between saying that humanity is sacred and saying that humanity is divine. God became man not in order that man

[21] I am indebted to Nigel M. de S. Cameron and his book, *Are Christians Human: An Exploration of True Spirituality*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Cantilever Books, 1988).

could become God, but so that man could become truly man.[22] Yet, this humanity is not divorced from his death and resurrection: we must endeavour to see His life as a whole.[23] As humans, we have been deceived. We have become convinced that true humanity, as we know it in its fallen state, is the only humanity that exists. We have been duped and our confusion has turned to slumber. In Jesus Christ, the effects of the Fall have been reversed and Christ recreates humanity (Rom. 5:12-21). His life matters, and His death and resurrection affects those blessings onto us. Paul repeatedly refers to "eternal life" and the "reign of life" which arises from the second Adam: is this life only "not yet" or can we also say that it is realized eschatology? Irenaeus, in his treatise on "Redemption and the World to Come" says,

> As the blessed Paul says in the Epistle to the Ephesians, that we are members of his body, of his flesh and his bones. He does not say this about a [merely] spiritual and invisible man, for the spirit has neither bones nor flesh, but about [God's] dispensation for *the real man* (emphasis mine), [a dispensation] consisting of flesh and nerves and bones, which is nourished by his cup, which is his blood, and grows by his bread which is his body.[24]

If it is true that God in Christ redefines and restores humanity (the real man) to its intended state, why are we living as if we held no prospect for the "abundant life?" When we live without His purposes, that is to say, without the purposes of the Incarnation, then, we live as less than humans. The doctrine of Providence teaches us that life is important; the incarnation of Christ reveals the depth and extent of that value.

We are infinitely valuable and "being saved" by the life of Jesus Christ: not merely in imitation, but through the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal

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[22] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, (New York: Collier Books, 1949).

[23] Bonhoeffer proceeds to say, "Only in the cross of Christ, that is, as those upon whom sentence has been executed, do men achieve their true form." (78) And also, "The risen Christ bears the new humanity within Himself, the final glorious 'yes' which God addresses to the new man . . .. Only the form of Jesus Christ controns the world and defeats it. And it is from this form alone that there comes the formation of a new world, a world which is reconciled with God." (79)

[24] Irenaeus, "Redemption and the World to Come," Book V of *Against Heresies*, in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. by Cyril C. Richards, (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 102-106.

and glorify Christ within us. Yet, he is our teacher, our mentor, and even our healer. His life upon this earth is not to be discarded as a necessary "evil" but as a means for our salvation. "Our humanity is not something that comes between us and God, it is precisely in our humanity that we are called bearers of the divine glory, the means by which God is made known.[25] Therefore, humanity matters; human life is worth living. If God's Providence teaches us that the world (and specifically humanity) is moving somewhere, then, our humanity as Christians ought to be in the very centre of those purposes.

There is, of course, a tension inherent within humanity. While created as good, the effects of the Fall still wage against us and distort the true intention for which we were created. In the words of Martin Luther, we are *Simul iustus et peccator*: at once righteous and a sinner. C. S. Lewis gives us an insightful glimpse into this tension as Aslan, the Christ-figure lion, says to Caspian, "You come of Lord Adam and the Lady Eve . . . And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth. Be content."[26]

How might it affect the African church to view humanity in this light? The answers that matter must not come from me, a Westerner, but from you, the Africans. We must look at the rich African concepts of brotherhood and community and ask, "How does a renewed and redefined Christological humanity affect these traditional concepts? How might it affect the underlining inferiority by which, Africans view themselves in relation to the Western world? Or, how do we view humanity in relationship to spirits and the supernatural world? We must be vigilant to not repeat the same theological mistakes arising from the West, yet to interpret God's interaction and embodiment of humanity in such a way that truly elevates humanity to His purposes, and not to our own.

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[25] Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 252.

[26] C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, (New York: Collier Books, 1951), 211-12. (1969 reprint, p.218).

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL (THEODICY)

As previously stated, the world has discarded the doctrine of Divine Providence as completely irrelevant and as an indictment upon God Himself (should he exist). The primary piece of evidence used against God is reality. "Look around the world," they say, "and view the evil that has infested our land – can you still maintain that God is good, or powerful, or that his use of evil people is just?" "Everywhere profound doubts have risen as to the reality of God; men not only deny Providence over al things, but ridicule the idea by pointing to the reality around us."[27]

Even recently, as I was researching this topic, terrorists commandeered four commercial airlines in America and crashed themselves and their passengers into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a remote field in Pennsylvania. The entire world took a collective gasp at his horror. How could such evil happen? Where was God? Is there any hope left for humanity? Theodicy (the problem of evil) was the discussion one night on the popular call-in show, *Larry King Live*. There was a panel discussion between a Catholic Priest, a Jewish Rabbi, a Muslim Imam, and two Evangelical Christians. The dialogue was civil and respectful until one of the Evangelical Christians spoke about the person of Jesus Christ as the only answer for the evils of our day. Immediately he was accosted as intolerant and bigoted.

Why does the person of Jesus Christ solicit such a response? Is it the character of Christ, or is it the mechanics of his followers? I think, perhaps, it is both. The Providence of God has never before been more essential as the teetering wheel of humanity spins hopelessly out of control. In so far as the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is our hermeneutic for understanding Divine Providence, it is undeniably essential for our dialogue with theodicy.[28]

First of all, we must understand a God who creates the world and then answers the evils of the world with himself. It is providence in its most spectacular form. Yet because God answered it with Himself, He has left

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[27] Berkouwer, 12.

[28] Millard Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991).

little room for other models of redemption. To the world, this is arrogant.[29] We might plead with our accusers that they are missing the true point: that God Himself suffered and died for us, but our pleas have fallen on deaf ears, because Christ proclaims himself the answer.

We need to stand unswervingly to the truth of the Incarnation and the character of Christ Himself. Yet, this is not the sole reason behind the antagonism that exists in Jesus' Name, for we ourselves are often to blame. The essential character of the incarnation demands that truth (God's truth) be lived. In terms of Providence we might call it "Incarnated Concurrence." Following Jesus' death, His disciples were gathered by themselves within a locked room; for fear of their lives. Jesus walked amongst them, His hands deeply gashed, His brow visible with the imprint of thorns, and He said, "Peace be with you!" After this He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:19b-22)." In what way were the disciples sent? Is this sending only for them, or also for us who are filled with the Holy Spirit?

This is my point, in the same manner as God sent his son into the world to redeem the world, so also are we sent with the Good News. Perhaps the most essential aspect of understanding theodicy is that God's message in Jesus Christ must be lived, walked, and consumed into the entire landscape of humanity. Sometimes people reject the love and justice of God as represented by Christ because of the character of Christ Himself, but many times they reject Christ because His followers are not living even as He did. They are not suffering with humanity, their theology is sterile and confined to abstract arguments, they are not feeding the poor and clothing the naked, and there is little patience for the searchings of humankind. Contrary to the fundamental character of the Incarnation, we are not "dwelling amongst them" and so we are limiting the extent of Christ's exalted "sending" of humanity.

The answers to theodicy are not so simple, but much difficulty and confusion can be avoided if Christians simply lived the truth of God's

[29] I am indebted to Lesslie Newbigen for his book, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 27-38.

interaction in the world: concurrently, deeply, fully, and with purpose and reliance upon the Holy Spirit. God would not send us in His manner if he did not stand beside us in His mission. God's character in Jesus Christ is missiological and transformation into perfect *shalom.*

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

How do we balance the Providence of God and human responsibility? How do we live between the precipices of human trust and human fatalism? Recent history has painfully revealed the inherent dangers of Post-enlightened optimism, as well as Post-modern neglect. Providence, in the Person of Jesus Christ, stands boldly between the two and bids that humans live in quiet submission, yet, dutiful responsibility and care. Divine Concurrence does not state that we are invaluable to God's purposes, but it does involve us all the same. Calvin states,

> Now it is very clear what our duty is: thus, if the Lord has committed to us the protection of our life, our duty is to protect it; if he offers helps, to use them; if he forewarns us of dangers, not to plunge headlong; if he makes remedies available, not to neglect them.[30]

Yet Calvin can likewise say,

> Therefore, since God assumes to himself the right (unknown to us) to rule the universe, let our law of soberness and moderation be to assent to his supreme authority, that this will may be for us the sole rule of righteousness, and the truly just cause of all things.[31]

Therefore, our role in Divine Providence is, in this regard, different than Christ's role in the Incarnation. In Him, God fully and perfectly used Himself as essential to His end; in us He does the same, yet, without obligation or reliance. This should result in deep gratitude, mixed with fearful worship and reverence.

We need to develop this understanding even as the threats of human optimism, fatalism, and even animism continue to force inroads into our churches. God's Providence has suffered greatly from neglect, and with it

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[30] *Institutes*, 1.17.4.
[31] *Institutes*, 1.17.2.

we see the effects of theological abandonment. In Africa, it is evidenced by the rampant self-help and prosperity Gospel, which is sweeping across this land; theological determinism, which amounts to a spiritual version of fatalism; and perhaps mostly, agnosticism: in which we simply don't care.

The pressing needs of the Gospel in our churches must travel the precipitous pathway of God's Providence and human responsibility. The pages of Scripture are alive with vivid accounts of the interplay between the two and we must not cower before the difficult questions, which will arise along the path. Jesus Christ, the Incarnated God, walks alongside us and in His Spirit we are led into the very depths of God (1 Cor. 2).

CONCLUSION

Before I lived in Tanzania, I knew and understood that the Incarnation compelled me to be sent, and to live amongst humanity with the truth of the Gospel. Until I lived amongst the Rangi, I little understood the sweeping implications of what this lifestyle might mean. In the years that followed, our lives were consumed by the African landscape: we ate, slept, and walked amongst the Rangi with little or no barriers between our life and theirs. We grew to feel their feelings and to indwell their culture (in as much as it is possible for a Westerner to do). We suffered vicariously, and sometimes directly alongside them, and rejoiced in the same manner. We saw the fragility of human nature as well as their resilience and dignity. The Gospel became so much more to us than words communicated across a faulty language medium, but indwelled truth walking alongside them.

In this context, nothing was outside the scope of the Gospel. The very fabric of human existence came alive with meaning and implications: from the hardened, thorn-infested paths to the daily routine and ritual of life. The whole process or experience was more than spiritual, but incarnational, signifying that the quality and substance of life was livable with meaning and value. Kidyela's search for a wife, the tragedy of senseless death, and the issue of the rains came back to me as something much more than mere abstract theology, but daily existence lived purposely under the Providence of God.

What is more, I grew disheartened by the theological answers that arose from amongst Islam. They were cold, stale, and distant. In fact, the people

sub-consciously agreed by their insistence upon consulting the spirits for answers that arose when Allah was silent. Finally, the Muslim incantation *"En Shallah"* frightened me with similarities that I myself had noticed within mainstream evangelicalism in the West. What do we mean when we say, "As God wills?" or "God is sovereign, don't worry." I am not contesting the invaluable truth of God's sovereignty, just the way in which we understand and live it amidst everyday existence.

We need a new hermeneutic for understanding God's relationship with His creation. In the Incarnation of Jesus Christ we have much more than a methodology, we have a Person. The significance of this statement cannot be undermined. In a methodology, we have a human creation made to understand the divine. It can be manipulated and forced to fit our preconceptions and subconscious desires, yet is barely livable within the fabric of everyday human life. In the Incarnation, we have just the reverse: the divine living within humanity. As divine, He discloses to us through life the very character of God Himself; as human, He cannot be manipulated and forced into comfortable categories, and the truths that exist from His character cannot be understood apart from everyday life. The truths of the Providence of God are lived in the Person of Jesus Christ.

What does all of this mean for African Theology? I appeal to Christians, especially those involved in theological education, to help me answer this question, and, what is more, to implement it within the churches, communities, and houses that litter the African landscape. Paul asks that valuable Providential question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom. 8:35)" Then he answers his own question by appealing to the created order: " . . . neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present nor future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv.38-39). Perhaps let us indulge upon Paul and ask the complimentary question, "How shall we see the love of Christ?" Can we answer triumphantly within the doctrine of Providence, " . . . within death and life, within angels and demons, within the present and the future, and any powers, within height and depth, and anything else in creation, we will be able to live within the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This, my friends, is the providence of God.

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WITCHCRAFT: A LIVING VICE IN AFRICA

Kisilu Kombo

Witchcraft has been practised for centuries world-wide and it still deeply rooted in people's lives such that it is not ready to eradicate (Sebald, 1978). In spite of the many efforts to eradicate it, it continues to haunt the destiny or spells fear, death and destruction to its victims.

The voluntary and repeated confessions and lynching of witches prove that witchcraft exists in Africa. Even within the church, some adherents strongly believe in witchcraft. Consequently, the belief in this vice is a reality in Africa. Africans who do not openly admit its existence, do so in their hearts. It is against this background that this article attempts to discuss the fundamental question of the persistence of this vice.

The Definitions and Meaning of Witchcraft

Cambridge International Dictionary (1996) defines witchcraft as the use of sorcery or magic. Therefore, beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery are one way of explaining the inexplicable, controlling the uncontrollable, and accounting for the problem of evil (Nelson and Douglas, 1970). Anthropologists and sociologists have tended to distinguish between the witch and a sorcerer.

It is worth noting that the distinction between a witch and a sorcerer is not always clear. It is the witch, in this narrow sense, who is spoken of as the epitome of evil, the negation of the human being, the external enemy intent on destruction, whose image has been said to represent the standardized nightmares of the people (Wilson, 1982).

Middleton and Winter (1970:xv), define witchcraft as a "mystical and innate power which can be used by its possessor to harm other people." This definition excludes the use of external objects in the practice of

Dr. Donald Kisilu Kombo holds both an MA (Edu.) (1988) and a PhD from Kenyatta University (1998). He is presently the Assistant Deputy Director in the Institute of Open Learning, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.

witchcraft and expressly states that the intention of witchcraft is evil. Anthropologists view witchcraft as a psychic act which, in the words of Evan-Pritchard (1937:21) "has no rite, neither casts no spells nor uses medicine." It is a psychic act whose mysterious power permeates all aspects of human life, be it political, economic, social and psychological (Magesa, 1977; Field, 1958). Sorcery, as a form of witchcraft, is distinct from witchcraft and is defined as evil magic against others (Harwood, 1970). It involves the use of objects, formulas, incantations and casting of spells to harm people.

Although anthropologists and sociologists use the terms witchcraft and sorcery to mean different and specific things, the conventional use of the term witchcraft in Kenya today and in Africa in general, encompasses sorcery, the evil eye and all other means which people use to cause harm to others (Mbiti, 1969).

Witchcraft Acquisition

Ways of acquiring witchcraft may take various forms as cited by Omoyajowo in Adegbola (1983). The forms may be through inheritance, which is common among the Kamba people of Kenya and Ga people of Ghana. It is believed that children acquire the vice by inheriting it from their close relatives. In most cases, they may not know it. Some people may go out and purchase it at the designated areas. The poor witches sell the substance of witchcraft to the willing buyers. The person who has bought it would eventually, be able to possess the power of evil.

Others may acquire it intentionally from devils. Certain communities believe that demons force it upon people and compel them to bring destruction upon their target neighbours. While there are those who may get it by swallowing the substance of witchcraft.

Witchcraft in the Bible

Like most cultures of the world, the Israelite's culture acknowledges the belief and practice of witchcraft. For instance, when the Israelites were in Egypt, the lawgiver commanded that all sorcerers and witches be eliminated (Ex. 22:18). Leviticus 20:27 says that a man or woman who is a wizard should be killed by all means. The most comprehensive writing comes from Deutoronomy 18:10-12 where it is written that:

> There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits or a wizard . . .. (KJV)

The well-known accusation of Jesus by the Jews that he healed people by the power of Beelzebub (Mt. 12:24), the pagan prince of devils, shows that Jewish propensity to impute the use of witchcraft in the performance of spectacular acts like healing or causing harm to others (people). Such injunctions could not have been issued in vain. "God has forbidden believers from time to time not to sacrifice to devils or to idols. Therefore, God could not have commanded this if there were no devils.

There were other passages which, in the light of the pre-existent belief in witchcraft, could be interpreted as further evidence of its reality. In short, to doubt the existence of witches and their activities was to deny the very existence of God.

African Perspective

Africans believe in mystical powers existing in the universe which cannot be simply explained psychologically or ignored as mere superstitions or trickery. According to Mugambi and Kirima (1976), persons who can manipulate this power are sometimes also said to have a means of communicating with the spirits, ancestors and even God. In the words of Sebald (1978:38), a witch stands between the victim and the supernatural power. His supernatural mediation was considered harmful. Therefore, they communicated to supernatural powers to bring disaster, death or fear to their victims.

Evans-Pritchard (1997), Parrinder (1958) and Mbiti (1969) wrote about mystical power and concluded that such power exhibits itself in six ways, namely:

a) **Power of the curse.** In African tradition, cursing involves the use of words or actions against an individual or group. Words indicating the misfortune one will suffer for engaging in a particular action or saying certain words may be uttered. Certain actions, for instance, a mother exposing her nakedness to her son for something the son did,

constitutes a curse which negatively affects the person cursed. This negative effect reveals itself in disease, poverty or even death. The pronouncement of a curse is normally provoked by the words or actions of the person cursed. Curses are meant to cause harm to someone (Kenyatta, 1938). The fact that the person who curses has the ability to cause harm through the curse makes curses be viewed as witchcraft. However, not all who curse can be accused of witchcraft. Parents, grandparents, and other close relatives are known to curse persons within their families who may have done or said hurtful things against them, their families or the community in general. In most instances, the power of the curse is efficacious only in those persons who may be guilty of the offence.

b) **Power to change the self.** Some people have the mystical power to change themselves into other life forms. For instance, some people can change themselves into animal forms, or retain their human forms while exhibiting characteristics of animals. Among the Ibo of Nigeria, it is common during certain ceremonies for certain persons to take on the likeness of certain animals with the intention of terrorizing certain people or simply causing fear. This may have the benefit of causing people to stick to certain moral dictates for fear of suffering pain in the hands of the mystical power.

c) **Power to cause confusion among people.** Some people possess the power of causing confusion in people. This power when employed stupefies the victims to the extent that the witch or wizard can then take advantage of them. They can cause their victims to part with their wealth, or allow themselves to be used in doing something evil like killing someone while in a state of confusion. This power can also cause paralysis or even death.

d) **Power of identifying witches.** While medicine men are generally understood to be a positive force in society because they identify witches and sorcerers who engage in evil, nevertheless, they are held in awe and even fear. The general population does see them as potentially dangerous because they assume that people with these powers can use the same power to cause confusion, suffering and even death if they so choose. In Kenya, the late Kajiwe, the medicine man from the Coast, was framed for this ability to uncover witches and sorcerers. He would be invited to many parts of the country to identify practitioners of witchcraft and to cleanse persons and places of the destructive powers of witchcraft and sorcery. However, people feared him too because they felt he could use the same power to punish them.

e) **Contagious power.** Mbiti (1969) cites James Frazer who uses the term "contagious magic" to refer to evil magic which is used to harm people by using objects closely related to the person, for instance hair, foot prints or other articles belonging to the person. Among the Agikuyu of Kenya, answering the call of nature and leaving the faeces uncovered leaves one vulnerable to witches' powers. They can use the faeces to harm the individual who deposited it.

f) **Homeopathic magic.** According to Frazer (Mbiti, 1969), homeopathic magic is evil magic used by a witch against a doll or an article resembling the intended victim. The evil action against the doll is supposed to affect the intended victim.

In order to understand the hold which witchcraft has over Kenyans in spite of the loathing and fear they have of it, it is important to understand the African worldview within which witchcraft thrives and affects.

According to Evans-Pritchard (1961) and Magesa (1997), every human being is potentially a witch. It is therefore inherent in people to cause harm to others through these hidden mystical powers. This potential is only actualized in a few people. Since nobody can foretell who will be a witch, people have always to be on the lookout for persons who exhibit characteristics that are associated with witchcraft. For instance, eschewing other people's company and behaving in odd ways like running around naked at night, are behaviours associated with witchcraft. Such behaviour is common among the Luhyia people of Kenya.

Dangers of Witchcraft in Society

The practice of witchcraft poses dangers in the society as it causes deaths of innocent people. This denies society the potential contribution that members who are so killed could have made to society. This action creates widows, widowers and orphans as people lose their partners and offspring due to this malicious practice. In communities where such deaths occur there is increasing fear and despondency among the population when people die mysteriously. This leads to a state of confusion and suspicion.

Witches are said to be jealous individuals who do not like to see others succeed in life. Consequently, people who appear economically progressive and successful are said to be prime candidates for witchcraft. Conversely, persons who do not stand out because they have not achieved anything

unique or outstanding are normally safe because the witches do not notice them. The consequence of this state of affairs in an area where the vice of witchcraft prevails is that people in the area will not want to do things that may suggest that they are doing well economically. Invariably, economic depression sets in as peoples' initiative is depressed. Moreover, it brings psychological fear to the people who believe in the vice. Such people are bound to be in a state of uncertainty for not knowing the next victim of witchcraft.

Since witchcraft is a vice that is loathed by all communities, those suspected of being witches or sorcerers may be harassed, beaten up and sometimes get killed by the communities. The hunt for witches may lead to deaths of innocent people who may fall victims due to suspicion. Such people may either be killed or ostracized. The practice of witchcraft among a given community stigmatizes members of the community in the eyes of the wider community. The vice of witchcraft is associated with backwardness and primitiveness. Members of such communities may suffer ridicule although they may not all be involved in the vice.

Positive Attributes of Witchcraft from the African Perspective

From African perspective, witchcraft has positive attributes given that fear of possible usage of mystical power by witches, sorcerers and diviners force the ordinary people to behave in socially accepted ways. These ordinary people do not want to attract the attention of witches by going out of the ordinary.

Areas where witchcraft beliefs and practices are common do not experience high rates of crimes and immorality. Incidentally, some people including nominal Christians argue that without witches, their social world would lack a social control mechanism. Therefore, the vice acts as a stabilizing agent. And since all people are believed to have access to witches, people do not underestimate the ability of their neighbours to revenge in case of social, political and economic misdeeds.

Christian Perspective of Witchcraft

The Christian church categorically condemns witchcraft and censures her members who may practice this vice. She condemns witchcraft since she believes that Christ has conquered Satan and all "powers of darkness"

(Lk. 11:14), therefore, witches cannot harm Christians. With Christ on their side, nothing can harm them. It therefore follows that believing in witchcraft is an indication that one has not truly believed in the salvation wrought through Christ's death and resurrection, as claimed by Christians.

The church views witchcraft as going against the fifth commandment of God, namely, "Thou shall not kill." Because witchcraft ultimately leads to death, it is immoral and therefore sinful to engage in it. The Bible expressly condemns witchcraft and places it among sins like murder, adultery, and idolatry. It admonishes Christians to refrain from it (Rev. 21:8, Gal. 5:20).

The Persistence of Witchcraft

The largest religious group in Kenya is Christianity. In spite of its avowed antagonism and opposition towards witchcraft due to its stated victory of Christ over the devil and by extension, witchcraft still influences many Africans, among them millions of Christians (Mbiti 1969, Magesa 1997, Ela 1988). The African view of morality could shed some light on why witchcraft persists in spite of its universal condemnation. According to Mbiti (1969), p'Bitek (1970), and Magesa (1990), God in the African moral worldview is the upholder of the moral order. However, he leaves the minute details of housekeeping in the universe to patriarchs, elders, priests, divinities, the living-dead and spirits who become the guardians of human morality. Every being, especially human is a potential witch (Evans-Pritchard 1961, Magesa 1997). In some people, witchcraft is active while in others it lies dormant. Morality in African cultures involves doing what one is supposed to do in his/her community and avoiding activities considered immoral by the community. Man is neither innately good nor bad. His conduct determines whether he is good or bad. An immoral act carried out in secrecy does not make one bad, but the overriding criterion for moral conduct is visible discernable behaviour.

Christianity, therefore, has to compete with this deeply rooted belief in the moral order among Africans. While it is true that many Christians do not believe in witchcraft anymore, there is still significant population of Christians who are still controlled by this moral worldview.

A sizeable number of Africans hold the view that an evil does not just occur. It must have a cause and if one is not obvious, blame must be placed

on one. Agents other than God cause misfortune by the use of medicine, incantations, and sending secondary agents like birds and animals to cause evil. Therefore, this is the part that is seen to be played by witches.

Ideally, Christianity is supposed to lead to conversion to Christ. This means believing in God's power to forgive sins and to safeguard one against the powers of evil, witchcraft being one of them. However, Christianity as brought from the West the so-called "mission Christianity" has not permeated deeply into the consciousness of a large number of Africans for it to become an integral part of African religiosity (Mbiti 1969). Many Africans continue to view Christianity, either consciously or unconsciously, as an amalgam of a "set of rules to be observed, promises about rewards for faithfulness in the next world, rhythmless hymns to be sung, rituals to be followed and a few other outward things (Mbiti 1969: 233). Africa's cultural substratum has not been effectively evangelized and converted. It is, therefore, common to find supposedly committed Christians who practice witchcraft, albeit secretly, or exhibit fear of being bewitched. This fear suggests that they are not sufficiently convinced that the protective power of the salvation wrought by Christ vanquishes the evil of witchcraft and its effects on believers.

During moments of crisis when people are looking for answers to vexing issues or experiencing intractable problems, falling back to the traditional way of explaining misfortunes becomes common especially when current religious and medicine do not seem to provide the answers. Neither civil and religious sanctions, nor the fear of hell have succeeded in eradicating witchcraft (Bahemuka 1982). Obviously, one must conclude that the fear of witchcraft and its consequences is more real and threatening, to a majority, than the threat of burning in the eternal fires of hell. According to Christian teaching, hell stands out as a destination for all unrepentant sinners, who include the practitioners and believers in witchcraft.

The belief system surrounding the practice of witchcraft discourages a logical scientific mentality among people in the explanation of phenomena. This is because the belief in witchcraft encourages people to lay blame for evil caused through witchcraft and sorcery on certain people although no scientific proof can be given to connect the accused persons with evil.

Reasons for the Persistence of Witchcraft

There are several reasons for the persistence of witchcraft in Africa and in Kenya in particular. These include punishments meted out to persons found guilty of witchcraft, which are not as severe as they were in African tradition. In many African countries, it is illegal for instance, to kill a confirmed witch. Churches punish confirmed witches in their congregations by asking them to repent and denying them participation at church functions. These alternative punishments for witchcraft, unlike the traditional ones, are milder and may therefore not make many potential or practising witches to desist from the vice due to fear of the consequences of being caught (Shorter 1973:142).

African cosmological perspective would have a vacuum if witchcraft beliefs and practices were eradicated. The other reason as to why witchcraft beliefs and practices persist is because of its secret nature of existence. This aspect of secrecy attempts to explain all mysterious social phenomena. Subsequently, it conforms to the African thinking pattern.

Witchcraft pays (Shorter 1973). There are people who pay large sums of money to witches so that they may inflict pain or death on their enemies. The lure of money will always entice practitioners to continue with it especially because in most cases, getting caught does not bring with it fearsome retribution.

The extreme poverty faced by many people will always drive them to use the relatively cheaper services of the witch to fulfil certain obligations, which would otherwise be too expensive to fulfil. For example, persons who feel wronged by others may find it difficult to pursue justice through legal means, which may involve hiring the services of a lawyer.

Christianity has not appreciated fully the hold witchcraft has over people in Africa. This has resulted in feeble efforts like condemning witchcraft from the pulpit, excommunications and other sanctions as the main ways of eradicating it. Other ways, which take into account the traditional ways of dealing with witchcraft, must be sought in order to address the underlying reasons for people engaging in witchcraft in spite of the present attempt to eradicate it.

Illiteracy, poverty and the lack of alternative means of explaining phenomena leave people with witchcraft as a way of explaining social reality, especially mysterious happenings. It is the poor and the illiterate who engage more in witchcraft compared to the literate and better economically endowed people. However, many learned and wealthy people have resorted to witchcraft when the means at their disposal does not produce a desired result (Shorter 1973).

For some communities, belief in witchcraft provides an outlet for repressed hostility, frustration and anxiety. The fact that witchcraft gives an explanation, whether justified or unjustified, for phenomena that cannot be logically and readily explained gives a psychological release to members of the community. It brings about semblance of order and meaning in times of confusion by providing needed answers to difficult circumstances, which unless explained could lead to chaos (Parrinder 1969).

Witchcraft reinforces social norms and structures. Fear of being accused of witchcraft can make people to adhere to social sanctions due to the perceived misfortunes that may befall those who ignore them (Evans-Pritchard 1961). Witches are people who flout certain communal expectations. For instance, witches are known to be loners who avoid socialisation with other members of the community. Members of the community, afraid to be branded witches, will be careful to play their communal role expectations.

The practice of witchcraft is, in many instances, inherited or passed on from one generation to another. Practitioners of witchcraft have been known to claim that they have no option but to follow family clan tradition, otherwise they would themselves suffer misfortunes (Mbiti 1969).

Giving logical scientific explanations does not and cannot be the adequate answer to people living with witchcraft. Although exposure to scientific thought and culture can weaken witchcraft's hold on people, it may not eradicate it entirely. This means that metaphysical solution must be sought in dealing with witchcraft.

Witchcraft is normally practised at night. This makes it difficult to identify persons who engage in it. Practitioners of witchcraft would be

afraid to be caught engaging in witchcraft because they would suffer at the hands of people who catch them, and even be jailed if they were found guilty of the offence. It is against the laws of natural justice to harm witches. In many communities, witches are not interfered with for fear of government reprisal.

It is believed that witches operate in unison. It is this aspect of togetherness that the witches get the motivation of hitting their victims at will. It is not easy to prove them (witches) guilty in court.

Possible Ways of Minimizing the Practice of Witchcraft

Some of the ways of minimizing or even eradicating witchcraft may include a concerted public awareness campaign which may be done with the aim of informing the public what the evils of witchcraft are. Persons who have had a personal experience of witchcraft can testify to its harmfulness.

It could be demonstrated that paraphernalia used in witchcraft have in themselves no power to cause misfortune or suffering. This could be done by destroying or using such paraphernalia to determine the ineffectiveness of a thing considered potent. Christianity and other faiths could deal with it more seriously by finding teachings and practices that could address this issue in ways that speak to people's experiences and also employ punitive sanctions against those who practice witchcraft. Churches could look for effective ways of presenting Christ as a redeemer capable of protecting believers from the power of witchcraft.

Where possible, methods used in witchcraft could be documented with the aim of looking for alternative ways of substituting witchcraft with other activities, and creating counter measures which would be more effective in combating the vice, and which would be more beneficial to the society. It must be understood that the belief and practice of witchcraft is retrogressive granted the fear and stifling of initiative that it engenders in communities that believe and practice it. It is important that it is accepted as a negative factor in society and it should not be shunted aside as mere superstition.

Knowledge of the African worldview and belief system is essential for all who would want to be at the forefront in the fight against witchcraft. Ignorance of African metaphysics is a lack, which has plagued past attempts to eradicate it. Efforts must be made to know how people continue to practice witchcraft in spite of the negative opinions expressed about it.

Christianity should make better use of its claim to have the power to liberate people from the world of evil spirits, a world that is similar to the world of witchcraft. Exorcisms, or casting out of evil spirits, a decidedly biblical practice could be useful in helping persons who operate in the realm of witchcraft to break free of this insidious belief and practice. Efforts should be made to find out the sources of the power of witchcraft. This should then be followed by concerted efforts not only to educate the masses on the true nature of witchcraft, but also zero down on the witches themselves in order to help them be free from the shackles of the belief in witchcraft.

Conclusion

The African remains on the threshold of unresolved dilemma. He strongly believes in the Western culture and everything that goes with it. On the other hand, he fully responds to his traditions, which guide his activities. This brings about a dichotomy and divided loyalty especially of the Christian believers who are supposed to embrace Christianity fully. However, such people in times of social problems resort to traditional practices and explanations. It is in this light that witchcraft is considered as a permanent feature in the lives of many. Consequently, witchcraft will continue to dominate the minds of many people for a long time unless a traditional alternative for the vice is found.

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ACTS 17:16-34 IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

(An Assessment from a N. Atlantic/Western Perspective)[1]

David A. Reed

The relevancy of a given text to contemporary life is the thrust of this article. The writer pays attention to the hermeneutical process by which Africans come to apply the Areopagus speech to everyday life. He shows how African scholars search for relevancy in a text while N. Atlantic/ Western scholars concern themselves with historical-critical questions. "Since Africans are much "religious" like those in Athens addressing the Gospel must start from wherever they happen to be. In modern Africa the educated must be reached with the Gospel. We must engage in top-down approach to missions and evangelism

INTRODUCTION

John Mbiti in his book, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity,* states, "The Bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ."[2] Furthermore, Mbiti adds, "No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from scripture."[3] Mbiti contends that, "The Bible is not simply an historical book about the people of Israel," because the Bible is capable of speaking to Africa and Africans, even, as he puts it, "in the midst of our [i.e. Africa's] troublesome situation."[4] Numerous African biblical scholars espouse a similar understanding of the biblical text. E. W. Fashole-Luke, for instance, relates,

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Mr. David Reed is completing his M.A.R. in New Testament at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, PA, USA. He has earned a BA in Judaic Studies from the University of Cincinnati and has done graduate work in Biblical Archaeology at Wheaton Graduate School of Theology.

[1] I graciously want to thank Kari Wheeler for taking the time to read this essay, offer suggestions, and make corrections to the body of text.

[2] John S. Mbiti, *Bible and theology in African Christianity.* (Nairobi: Oxford, 1986), 28.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

"Now it is universally accepted by all engaged in this quest [i.e. a quest for an authentic African theology] that the Bible is the primary and basic source for the development of African Christian theologies."[5] Justin Ukpong takes this all a step further in his article "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes" when he speaks of the importance of the interpretation of the Biblical text having practical relevancy to the everyday life of the African.[6] As any student of N. Atlantic/ Western[7] theology knows these views greatly contrast with prevalent N. Atlantic/Western ways of reading a text which have centred in the 20th century primarily around historical criticism and form criticism, and, more recently, around feminist as well as post-modern and literary readings of the text.[8] This essay will compare and contrast N. Atlantic/Western readings of the Areopagus speech in Acts 17 with African readings. Although this essay will not discuss in detail the N. Atlantic/Western historical-critical method largely developed in the 20th century, the thesis of this essay will assert that, by and large, N. Atlantic scholars are concerned only with historical questions regarding the speech in Acts 17:16-34, while African scholar's seek the practical meaning of the

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[5] E. W. Fashole-Luke, "The Quest for an Africa Christian Theology," *Ecumenical Review* 27 (1975): 265.

[6] Justin S. Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics," in *Journal of Theology for Southern* Africa 91 (June 1995): 3-14.

[7] I use the term 'N. Atlantic/Western' in a wide variety of ways—the term, to my mind, is multivalent in meaning. However, it is the most neutral and all inclusive term I can think of in order to distinguish between American, English, German, Canadian, W. European, etc. readings of a text and those readings originating from Latin America or various parts of Africa. Obviously, the term is defective and, perhaps, too inclusive. It does not, as one might have already guessed, distinguish between female and male theologians and their readings of a text, nor does it distinguish between evangelical and non-evangelical scholars, etc. Furthermore, it does not speak to the differences in approach to the text between Catholic and Protestant scholars. Yet, despite its deficiencies, it will be used throughout this essay to speak of a specific coterie of scholars who inhabit N. America and W. Europe, respectively.

[8] For information regarding these interpretive methods, see I. Howard Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992); Moises Silva, gen. Ed., *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); A. K. M. Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

text. This paper will end with a summary of African views regarding Paul's speech to the Athenians. First, however, a word or two about African Biblical hermeneutics is in order.

AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Numerous articles have been written on the subject of "African Approaches to Scripture."[9] Though such articles exist, Tite Tienou, an African evangelical, summarizes the situation best when he states, "African theology is impossible to define in such a way that all interested in the subject will be satisfied."[10] Tienou also questions whether or not an attempt to discern only *one* African theology is even wise.[11] Though Tienou is likely correct, various attempts have been made at defining an "African Approach to Scripture." The most systematic attempt, however, comes from Justin Ukpong.

Ukpong, an African Roman Catholic, has coined the phrase "African Inculturation Hermeneutic (AIH)."[12] Ukpong's AIH, like all systems, is not a panacea, for numerous problems exist within his system. For example, one finds conspicuously absent from AIH African-feminist interpretations of the biblical text.[13] However, in an attempt to synthesize the beliefs of the

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[9] Besides Ukpong's article, one should see, Emmanuel Adow Obeng, "The Use of Biblical Critical Methods in Rooting the Scriptures in Africa," in *The Bible in African Christianity*, (1997): 8-24; N. Onwu, "The Current State of Biblical Studies in Africa," in *The Journal of Religious Thought*; John S. Pobee, "Bible Study in Africa: A Passover Language," in *Semeia* 73 (1996): 161-179; John Riches, "Interpreting the Bible in African Contexts: Glasgow Consultation," in *Semeia* 73 (1996): 181-199; Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "New Ways of Reading the Bible in the Cultural Settings of the Third World," in *Concilium* 1 (1995): 73-84; J. N. K. Mugambi, "Foundations for an African approach to Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa* (eds. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke, and Justin Ukpong; Nairobi: Action, 2001), 9-29.

[10] Tite Tienou, "Indegenous African Christian Theologies: The Uphill Road," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 14/2 (1990): 74.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ukpong, 3-14.

[13] To encounter the lack of attention given by Ukpong to African-feminist interpretation, one should see Teresa Okure, "Feminist Interpretations in Africa," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, vol. 1 (ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza), New York: Crossroad, (1993), 76-85; idem., "Invitation to African

African worldview, Ukpong argues that four things are always prevalent. These include,

> First, the belief in the unitive view of reality whereby reality is seen not in dualistic but in unitive terms, thus, making reality a composite of the visible and the invisible; second, the belief in the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos; third, the belief in community and the fact that the life of the individual human person and also even of inanimate objects in the cosmos finds meaning and explanation in terms of the structure of relationships within the human community, as well as between human community and nature, and, finally, the belief in the concrete rather than the abstract, on the physical rather than the theoretical.[14]

With these four features of the African worldview in mind, Ukpong goes on to define the procedure of his AIH.[15] The first step in the AIH interpretation process is "identifying the interpreter's specific context that dynamically corresponds or approximates to the historical context of the text, and clarifying his/her perspective in relation to the text."[16] The second step is "analysis of the context of interpretation, that is the interpreter's context which is to form the background against which the text is to be read."[17] There are five levels to this second step. The first is the "level of phenomeno-logical analysis," which seeks to clarify, and the second is the "level of socio-anthropological analysis," which seeks to explicate the issue of a given text in terms of the people's worldview. The third is the "level of historical analysis," which seeks to investigate the issue brought about by the text in relation to the people's life history. The fourth is the "level of social analysis," which probes into the interconnectedness of the dynamics of the society in relation to the given issue of a text. Finally, the fifth is the "level of religious analysis," which seeks to show the religious dimension of the situation produced by the text in the life of the people. The third step

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Women's Hermeneutical Concerns," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa* (eds. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke, and Justin Ukpong; Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 42-67.

[14] Idem., 8-9. Similar points are made in chapter 12 of Bediako's work. See Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, (Edinburgh: Orbis, 1995), 210ff.

[15] Detailed information on the AIH procedure can be found in Ukpong, 10ff.

[16] Ukpong, 10.

[17] Ukpong, 11.

in AIH interpretation is "analysis of the historical context of the text."[18] The fourth step is "analysis of the text in the light of the already analyzed contemporary context."[19] Finally, the fifth step is "gathering together the fruits of the discussion and a commitment to actualizing the message of the text in [a] concrete life situation."[20] All of this points to the underlying thesis of AIH, which is: If Jesus is alive today, as indeed he is having risen from death, how do we [i.e. as Africans] make him and his message challenge contemporary society and the life of individuals?[21] Again, as stated previously in this paper, the importance of the relevancy/practicality of a text for the African comes through in Ukpong's AIH and is in fact, as seen above, the final step in the AIH process. However, one should note that Ukpong's AIH does, as seen in step three, include room for an historical analysis of a text—but it is not the end result of the analysis done on the Bible by an interpreter engaged in the hermeneutical process.

The reason for utilizing Ukpong is that he is one of the few African scholars to tackle the daunting task of creating an authentic, purely African, biblical hermeneutic (at least so far). In other words, Ukpon'g AIH, as previously stated, is one of the attempts by an African at systematizing an approach to Scripture from an African perspective. It is the hope of this writer that as this essay continues in its analysis of N. Atlantic/Western and African interpretations of the Areopagus speech in Acts 17, that the reader will grasp the main thesis of this essay (which is, once again, that N. Atlantic scholars—unlike Ukpong's AIH—hardly, if ever, ask the question of the relevancy of a given text to contemporary life [Ukpong's fifth step in AIH]. Before investigating N. Atlantic/Western readings of Acts 17:16-34, this paper will briefly out line the speech itself in order to better orient the reader toward N. Atlantic/Western and African interpretations of this text.

[18] Ukpong, 12.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ukpong, 4

AN OUTLINE OF THE AREOPAGUS SPEECH (ACTS 17:16-34)

One can easily grasp the basic gist of what Luke records Paul as saying in Acts 17:16-34. The text itself can be subdivided into three parts: First, the introduction (17:16-21), second, the address (17:22-31), and finally, third, the impact of the address (17:32-34).[22] According to the text itself, the fact that the city of Athens contained so many idols (kateido„lon[23]) exasperated Paul (v.16ff.). The presence of the numerous idols apparently contradicted his perception of Athens as the cultural and intellectual center of the ancient world.[24] The intellectual inhabitan's of Athens were likely too self-conceited and pretentious of knowledge and truth, and contemptuous of other people's viewpoints (v.18). Likely, the Epicureans form the part of Paul's audience that mocked him—especially his teaching about the resurrection of the dead.[25] Furthermore, it is they who called Paul a "babbler."

Despite such criticism, Paul expounded his Jewish monotheism in terms of Jesus and *anastasis*, which is a name and a concept both so foreign to his interlocutors that they mistook Paul for espousing belief in a foreign deity.[26] Furthermore, Luke presents Paul as challenging all that the Athenians stood for—including their religion and their philosophy, their

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[22] For other possible ways of understanding this speech as well as different ways of dividing it, see Concrad Gempf, "Athens, Paul at," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid; Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1993), 51-54.

[23] For a fuller discussion of this word see Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids: zondervan, 200), 374-375.

[24] For more on the city of Athens at this time see John McRay, *Archaelogy and the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 513-518.

[25] For more on the Epicureans and their beliefs, see Elizabeth Asmis, "Epicureans," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 550-561.

[26] See the entry in Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third edition, BDAG (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 71-72.

temples and their schools. The setting of the Areopagus is also of great importance to the story. Regardless of whether this setting is a literary device utilized by Luke or is an actual historical fact, the placement of Paul on the Areopagus (or Mars Hill) puts him in the center of Athens' intellectual and cultural scene.[27]

Assuming, as this writer does, that the story actually took place in some form comparable to its rendering in Luke-Acts, Paul begins his preaching on the Areopagus (17:22-31) by acknowledging the Athenians' religiosity (v.22). The point here seems to be that even though the Athenians were idolaters, they were, for better or for worse, searching—and this should, at the very least, be honoured (vv.22-23). Thus Paul's message included the following elements: first, God is the creator of all things (Is. 42:5) who neither dwells in shrines made by human hands (I Kings 8-27 and II Sam. 7) nor do human beings provide for His wants, but rather He provides for all their needs (Ps. 50:2). Second, He made all the nations, fixed their seasons and boundaries (Deut. 32:8). And finally, third, He desired that all humanity should seek and find Him (Is.55:6). During the speech, Paul utilized both Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy to convey his point.[28] In fact, Paul makes use of a quotation from the Stoie poet Epimenides, and follows this with one from Aratus, who, like Paul, hailed from Gilicia.[29]

As the speech progressed, Paul stressed the immanence of God (v.27b), a doctrine of prodigious importance to both Stoics and Christians, and Paul insisted that human beings should have more sense than to worship human-made images (Rom. 1:23). Upon saying this, Paul began to expound the gospel, indicating that in the past God overlooked humanity's ignorance, but now He commands all to repent and turn back to Himself (v.30). This is then followed by the last words of Paul to the Athenian intelligentsia which

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[27] It is not the intention of this paper to discuss the historical valididty of this speech as recorded by Luke in Acts 17. However, for an overview of the issues involved, see C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (ICC, Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1998), 824ff.

[28] See the important discussion in Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (AB Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 168ff.

[29] C. S. C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1975), 207-209; A. M. Hunter, *Gospel and Apostle*, (Londong: SCM Press, 1975), 123-127.

concern the aforementioned *anastasis*, something Paul elsewhere refers to as "folly to the Greeks" (1 Cor. 1:23). According to the text, many scoffed, but others joined him and became believers, though they did not join in droves (17:32-34). Thus, in the words of N. Onwu, "What Paul achieved in Athens was to re-establish the faith that God is still on the throne."[30]
With this brief sketch of the speech in mind, this essay will now summarize the important N. Atlantic/Western readings of the Areopagus speech in the 20th century.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF N. ATLANTIC READINGS OF ACTS 17:16-34 IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Chidi Denis Isizoh states, "Scholars have shown great interest in the [Areopagus] speech."[31] This statement rings true, especially if one takes into account the copious amount of material written on the passage from a N. Atlantic perspective in the 20th century alone.[32] A summary of N. Atlantic/Western scholastic views starting in 1955 will now ensue.

1955-1956

Both B. Gartner and M. Dibelius discovered a multitude of parallel ideas between those in the Areopagus speech and those found in other Hellenistic literature.[33] Based on these parallels, both Gartner and Dibelius

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[30] N. Onwu, "Ministry to the Educated: Reinterpreting Acts 17:16-34 in Africa," in *African Christian Studies*, C.H.I.E.A 4:4 (Dec. 1988): 66.

[31] Chidi Denis Isizoh, "African Traditional Religious Perspective of 'Areopagus Speech'." Online: http//security-one.com/isizoh/areopagus.htm.

[32] For detailed bibliographic references, see *Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Tools and Studies, 1966; Chidi Denis Isizoh, *The Resurrected Jesus Preached in Athens: The Areopagus Speech*, (Rome: Tipografica Leberit, 1997); J.-C. Lebram, "Der Aufbau der Areopagrede," *Zeitschrift fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 55 (1964): 221-243.

[33] B. Gartner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, (ASNU 21), Upsala-Lund, 1955; M. Dibelius, "Paul on the Areopagus," in *Studies in Acts of the Apostles*, ed. M. Dibelius, (London: n.p., 1956), 26-77.

claimed that the speech is more Lucan than Pauline, and is created to function in the perspectives of Luke's tendency in Acts.[34]

1964

C. S. Williams opines that the address is in its entirety a Lukan creation.[35] Though he essentially agrees with Dibelius, he further advances the argument by asserting that Luke uses the speech to localize Christianity in the setting of Hellenistic contemporary culture. Williams claims that Luke received his information about Paul's speech to the Athenians from an Areopagite disciple of Paul.

1965

In his Magnum opus, Die Apostelgeschichte, Ernst Haenchen averred that Luke was in fact the author of the address in Acts 17:16ff.[36] Unlike his predecessors, Haenchen unearths a specific literary technique, namely the "motif technique," which he claims Luke employed in the composition of the address. With such a device, Luke drives his reader headlong to the penultimate point: the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus. Against those who espouse Pauline authorship for the speech, Haenchen points out the absence of the Pauline "curse" on the Gentiles as is attested to in Romans 1:21-24, 25-27, 28-31. Furthermore, he argues that Pauline theology stresses that Natural Law is to the Gentiles what the Torah is to Israel. The fact that this seminal Pauline theology is absent in the Areopagus speech leads Haenchen to conclude that the speech is non-Pauline. Thus, for him, Acts 17:16-34 is at best Jewish-Hellenistic missionary propaganda that Luke utilizes for his theological purposes.

1966

Hans Conzelmann rejects the speech as an extract from a Heelenistic-Jewish missionary address.[37] Instead, Conzelmann asserts that the address arises from Luke's own literary imaginativeness and is not an actual

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[34] Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 73-75.

[35] See note 27.

[36] E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, (ET by B. Noble and G. Shin; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

[37] H. Conzelmann, "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*; eds. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966).

sermon delivered directly or indirectly by Paul. Thus, according to Conzelmann, Luke's Paul says in this speech what he judges relevant given the circumstances.

1974

C. K. Barrett takes the Lukan tendentious purpose in Acts for granted and, consequently, states that Luke's principal intention is to portray the triumphant advancement of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.[38] According to him, Peter and Paul became the vehicles of the Gospel, and they must be allowed to tower above all the other characters in the narrative. Barrett takes this as a peculiarity of Luke's writing style. However, the main concern of Luke-Acts is the spread of the Gospel.

1977

F. F. Bruce maintains that Luke presents a vivid account of Paul's apostolic witness in Athens.[39] Bruce is of the opinion that according to 1 Thess. 3:1, the apostle Paul spent time in the city of Athens during which he delivered the address that Luke faithfully documents.

1980s-1990s

V. Gatti sought to show the relevancy of the inter-testamental literature to the speech.[40] He utilized the religious and Hellenistic sapiential works to better understand the meaning of the pericope in question. In 1990 and 1995, respectively, P. de Meester and P. Bossuyt with J. Radermakers made a move toward biblical context-ualization, thus moving toward the idea of inculturation biblical study in order to better comprehend Acts 17:16-34.[41]

What this brief survey shows is that in the 20th century, the major questions regarding the speech were literary and historical-critical ones. That is to say that for N. Atlantic/Western scholars, the concern was whether or not Paul actually said what is recorded in Acts 17:16-34 or

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[38] C. K. Barrett, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," in *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World: Essays in Honour of Harry Sawyerr*, eds. M. E. Glasswell and E. W. Fashole-Luke; (London: SPCK, 1974).

[39] F. F. Bruce, *Paul Apostle of the Free Spirit*, (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 236-247; Idem., *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text*, (London: Tyndale, 1951), 335.

[40] See note 29.

[41] Ibid.

whether Luke entirely fabricated the speech, basing it on some previous knowledge of the incident in Paul's life. As this essay turns to Africa and its scholars, one will see that these literary and historical questions are not the main concern of African biblical scholars.

AFRICAN INTERPRETATIONS OF ACTS 17:16-34

Africans have written many studies on the subject of the Areopagus speech. The most recent and most complete comes from Chidi Denis Isizoh. His doctoral dissertation, published in 1997, focuses entirely on this text.[42] As this essay progresses, it will be necessary to state some limitations. First, this essay, as with N. Atlantic/Western interpretations of Acts 17:16-34, cannot fully cover the entire gamut of African books and articles published on the subject. Furthermore, this essay will not focus on the African exegesis of Acts 17:16-34. Instead, this essay will pay attention to the hermeneutical process by which Africans come to apply the Areopagus speech to everyday African life. Again, the purpose of this will be to show how African scholars search for relevancy in a text while N. Atlantic/Western scholars concern themselves with historical-critical questions.

N. Onwu

N. Onwu, in his article, "Ministry to the Educated: Reinterpreting Acts 17:16-34 in Africa," argues that the Areopagus speech is a "lesson in realism, showing how to effect genuine and lasting social and religious change by dealing with the root cause of sin, not mere symptoms of the problem."[43] He takes note of the fact that Paul in the Areopagus speech reaches out to the elite of society (the cultural elite as well as the intelligentsia). Onwu argues that this needs to be appropriated in modern day missionary contexts.[44] He notes that missionary activities often focus on trying to convert the poor and the needy in society. Though there is ample scriptural precedent for such, Onwu argues that the oppression of the poor is caused by the elite; especially in places like S. Africa. Thus, Onwu believes that the text of Acts 17:16-34, "Challenges the Church in Africa to focus its ministry on the educated through whom modern Africa has been

[42] Isizoh, *The Resurrected Jesus.*

[43] Onwu, "Ministry to the Educated," 68.

[44] Onwu, "Ministry to the Educated," 67.

ruined."[45] This, then, is a top-down approach to missions and evangelism. The elite and educated in a society are to be targeted because, as Onwu notes, it is they who hold the most sway and influence.[46]

Chris Ukachukwu Manus

In Manus' article, "The Areopagus Speech (Acts 17:16-34): A Study of Luke's Approach to Evangelism and its Significance in the African Context," he discusses some of the historical-critical questions applicable to the text. Then proceeds to state that his main concern with regard to the Areopagus speech is, "What approach does Luke's Paul adopt in evangelizing sophisticated Athens?"[47] He argues that "Luke's text has . . . a special appeal for developing churches of Africa and beyond."[48] He avers such, because the Areopagus speech, "presents us [i.e. Africa] with a model worthy of emulation for mission in Africa where the inhabitants are still as much 'religious' as the Athenians of antiquity."[49]

From the speech itself Manus derives six motifs. They are: first, the fact that Luke does not allow Paul to quote many O.T. proof-texts from prophecies, which would be unfamiliar to the heathens. Thus, if he uses any at all, he subsumes it in his arguments on natural revelation, opting instead for direct quotations from local poets and wise men. Second, the fact that Paul does not argue from "first principles," but instead from the point of view of biblical revelation. Third, the fact that the Paul of Acts preaches from the "known" to the "unknown." Fourth, the fact that from the realm of God and his knowability as creator of all things Luke's Paul comes to a theological anthropology. Fifth, the fact that Paul's next step, after coming to a theological anthropology is to show the Athenians that God's ultimate purpose in giving human beings the earth is that they might seek and find him because they are his offspring. And, finally, the fact that the climax of the speech is an invitation to surrender to God who has overlooked

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[45] Op. cit., 68.

[46] Op. cit., 66ff.

[47] Chris Ukachukwu Manus, "The Areopagus Speech (Acts 17: 16-34): A Study of Luke's Approach to Evangelism and its Significance in the African Context," *ATJ* 14:1 (1985): 13.

[48] Manus, 14.

[49] Ibid.

humanity's past ignorance.[50] Thus, with these six points in mind, Manus can say, "Throughout the length and breath of Africa especially prior to the advent of Christianity and even now in many remote villages there existed and still exists several shrines (altars) and idols kept and patronized by devotees of Traditional Religion."[51] It is, then, the task of the missionary—whether Western or African—to address the Gospel to these people starting from wherever they happen to be.[52]

As Manus notes, "Luke's address enjoins us [i.e. Africans] to preach the Gospel to the contemporary African from his 'known,' namely, from his native religious culture to the Lordship of our Lord, Jesus Christ."[53] Furthermore, Christian missionaries should glean from the Areopagus speech the fact that "'the employment of 'quotable quotes' from folk literature proves that heathen wisdom supports Christian interpretation and contextualization."[54] Thus, Manus concludes, "From Luke's approach, we must come to a realization that the Gospel of Christ liberates man [sic] and assists him to express his faith within his local ambiance."[55]

M.-L. Martin

M.-L. Martin in her article, "Acts 17:16-34: Paul's Approach to Greek Intellectuals," makes one very practical, yet, salient point. Citing verse 26 of Acts 17, "He has appointed boundaries of their habitation," Martin argues that this phrase notes the fact that God "directs the history of each nation."[56] However, Martin also points out the abuses of this phrase at the hands of human beings. She relates, "No justification for theories of separation of races or nations or of the expulsion of whites from Africa should be introduced into this verse, as is sometimes done."[57]

Chidi Denis Isizoh

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[50] All of these points are expanded upon in Manus, 13-14.

[51] Manus, 14.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Manus, 15.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Manus, 16.

[56] M.-L. Martin, "Acts 17:16-34: Paul's Approach to Greek Intellectuals," *Ministry* 3/1 (62):23.

[57] Ibid.

In Chidi Denis Isizoh's article, "African Traditional Religious Perspective of the Areopagus Speech," Isizoh utilizes Acts 17:16-34 to conceive of how Paul might have interacted with African Traditional Religion (ATR). ATR is difficult to define because, as John Karanja has noted, there is always a question as to whether or not ATR has defined itself based on its reaction to the faiths of Islam and Christianity.[58] However, as shown above, Ukpong has discerned four things that are common to ATR and the overall African worldview. Whatever the case may be with ATR, Isizoh, after examining Acts 17, concludes that the vocabulary found in the Areopagus speech would not be foreign to ATR and that Africans should utilize Paul's missionary strategy in Acts 17 as a way of reaching fellow Africans who still participate in ATR.[59] Thus, he relates, "If the speech had been addressed originally to the Africans, it would have well received by an appreciative audience."[60]

Furthermore, Isizoh argues that despite early missionary rejection of ATR as well as traditional African culture, Africans have received the Gospel. Therefore, the only question that remains for Isizoh is: If the foreigners misunderstood many of the positive values of ATR and culture, have the Africans really made them understandable today?

CONCLUSION

David Tracy has said, "There is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter, no innocent text,"[61] Given this, no matter whether one interprets the biblical text from an African perspective or a N. Atlantic/Western perspective, every interpreter is ethically responsible for her/his interpretation of the text and the impact it has upon its readers. Even if no practical or relevant point is made, even if the interpreter stays strictly

[58] This statement was made by John Karanja at a guest lecture given at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA, on Friday, May 10, 2002

[59] See note 29 for the online information regarding this article.

[60] Ibid.

[61] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 79.

within the realm of the historical-critical method, every interpreter is responsible for what he/she says and does not say.

With this in mind, the reader should note that this essay has not sought to make a judgment call on whether or not N. Atlantic/Western interpretations are superior or inferior to African interpretations. Nor has this essay sought to do the reverse. If the reader has, with the evidence submitted, made a judgement call regarding which method is better, then, this is the sole responsibility of the reader; for, as Tracy noted above, "there is no innocent interpretation (i.e. reader)." Every reader, and every interpreter, brings his/her own cultural baggage to a text—and no one is truly bias-free. However, what this essay has tried to do is show that, by and large, N. Atlantic/Western interpreters of the Areopagus speech approach the text from an historical-critical point of view. Their main concern is whether or not this speech is authentically Pauline or a creation from the imagination of Luke. In contrast to this, the brief survey of African interpretations of the same speech shows that African biblical scholars have a practical concern that is often lacking in the West. African scholars are not as much concerned with the historical-critical questions brought about by exegeting the text as much as they are concerned with how the text applies to current missionary efforts in present day Africa.

Regardless of how one might feel about each of the perspectives presented here, it is important to keep in mind the words of Justin Ukpong. He writes, "Different cultures are today considered to have contributions to make to our understanding of the biblical message, and such contributions are considered as not only legitimate but necessary for a fuller appreciation of the gospel message."[62] Whether one speaks of N. Atlantic/Western or African hermeneutics, one must realize the need of each perspective to embrace the other. Each must realize, in great humility, that everyone has something to take from the text as well as to contribute to it.

[62] Ukpong, 13.

Book Review

McDowell, Bruce & Anees Zaka
Muslims and Christians at the Table – Promoting Biblical Understanding among North American Muslims
Philipsburg: PR Publishing, 1999.
(326 pages, paperback)

Why review a book for AJET that unmistakably targets North America in its title rather than Africa? Because this book provides a remarkably comprehensive presentation that is in many ways quite exceptional, and not at all irrelevant for our own African context. McDowell and Zaka combine solid biblical convictions with a wealth of experience and practical, reproducible ideas on how to reach out to Muslims. In the process the reader is equipped step-by-step in essential awareness and motivation, historical and cultural understanding, theological reflections about the concepts of revelation, salvation, Christology and faith, and through attention to the practical side of reaching Muslims (almost half the book!). In the end it seems rather unnecessary that the authors have limited the scope of their workbook to North America. Indeed the title may prove misleading in another respect as well; whereas the book is designed to assist believers in outreach to Muslims, it is certainly not suitable to be placed in the hands of Muslims!

The main method of reaching Muslims is given a detailed description in chapter 12: Meetings for Better Understanding. This particular approach may work better in a Western setting than in the heartlands of Africa. But there are still scores of other useful methods offered for testing. Probably the wealth of ideas presented in various lists throughout the book is its most outstanding feature: e.g. 24 Methods for Reaching Muslims (pp 173-186), 21 Principles of Conduct for Visiting a Mosque (pp 186-192), 36 Theological and Social Topics for Discussions and Meetings with Muslims (pp 221-222) and 19 Muslim Beliefs and Practices in the Light of Scripture

(pp 247-254). Unfortunately the authors have not taken the time to give outlines of at least a few of these listed topics, such as "Allah's condescension" or "Human nature and sin" or "The mission of Yesua el-Masih." Topics like these will be rather difficult to develop for any beginner in ministry to Muslims. Also it is the case that some excellent summaries occur in the earlier part of the book on theological differences and worldview contrasts between Christians and Muslims, but one does not find the same sensitive critical reflection under the section on Contextualized Discipleship (pp 247-254). It is rather naïve to expect a Muslim's view about Holy Water from Mecca (*zamzam well*) to change merely by explaining Genesis 21:19; Isaiah 12:3 and John 4:13-14.

But apart from such minor reservations, this book makes fascinating, inspiring reading, offers much worthwhile practical assistance, and gives the "theological basis for Muslim Evangelism" more room than most other books on this crucial issue. Despite the title, it could serve well in assisting Christians in Africa as they seek to promote biblical understanding among their Muslim neighbours.

Walter Eric
Nairobi, Kenya

Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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