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The late Dr. David Bosch was professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. [p. 452](#)

African Bible Guides: Preliminary findings of an experiment with African Christianity in Microcosm

Stan Nussbaum

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This article outlines the vision plan and process of a very significant development across Africa—preparing Bible Study guides for the grass root leadership of churches in Africa. They are designed for people who preach or teach every week without any formal Bible training. These include elderly pastors, village church leaders and women and people with limited reading skills. The guides are not ‘commentaries for the sophisticated’ but ‘sparks for the common people’. As with Jesus, profound truths can be taught in simple ways. The guide for [Colossians 1](#) is an example. In Africa they are printed in the vernacular languages.

Editor

A paper presented to the ‘Conference on Christianity in Africa in the 1990s’, for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, 27–28 May 1992.

Since May 1987 I have been designing and coordinating an experiment upon which I would now like to reflect in the presence of such an august company of Africans and lovers of Africa. Because it has intensively involved twenty-two Africans deliberately selected as a fairly representative cross-section of the entire spectrum of African church leaders, I believe it is of considerable significance as an indicator of what African Christianity is, can be and may be in the 1990s. The experiment is still going on, so the findings reported here must be taken as preliminary. Suggestions for refining the experiment or interpreting the findings differently are therefore welcome.

The experiment brought twelve Africans together at INTERACT Research Centre from April to July 1990 and another ten from April to [p. 453](#) July this year.¹ The team members worked in groups of five or six to write ‘guides’ to selected books of the Bible which would be appropriate for the average African lay preacher or women’s leader who has no formal Bible training but nevertheless functions as the preacher/teacher in a group of Christians who meet weekly.

The experiment was designed so that its structure, process and results would address a number of the major problems besetting African Christians in this decade. We will consider these problems according to their sources-missionaries, African culture and the

¹ See appendix for listing and description of the participants.

current African situation. In each case we will note what the experiment was trying to do and what discoveries were made along the way, whether planned or otherwise.

I. INHERITED IMPORTED PROBLEMS

The major problem for African Christians which is left over from the colonial era may well be *the division between the mission-founded churches and the African-founded or independent churches*.² The gap between the two kinds of churches seems to be narrowing in a number of countries but the work of reconciliation is far from over. In West Africa particularly the expansion of American-style Pentecostalism is leading to a revival of the old missionary accusation that the independent churches are demon-inspired.

A growing number of mission agencies are trying to undo this division which is part of the missionary legacy in Africa³ and the current experiment can be seen as one aspect of this effort. Because of its long-standing interest in independent churches and in promoting contact with them, INTERACT set up this experiment to include half its members from the independent churches and half from the mission churches. In this sense the experimental sample was not a true representation of African Christianity, which is perhaps only 10–15% p. 454 independent.⁴ However, the independent churches have more of the untrained lay leaders whom the experiment was intended to help and the mission-independent relationship was one of the main things which we wished to explore, so the balance was weighted toward the independents.

A further part of the plan was to bring the team members in pairs from a given country. For example, the 1990 team included a lecturer in New Testament from the Kimbanguist seminary in Kinshasa and a lecturer in religious studies from the Catholic Faculté, also in Kinshasa. The two men had never met each other in Kinshasa, but in Birmingham they spent eleven intensive weeks discussing how the Gospel of Luke should be preached at the grassroots level in Zaire.

The recruiting of the two team members from a given country was usually done through a contact with the independent church, who would then invite the participation of mission church leaders. For example, Pastor Charles Kudzerema of the Zion Apostolic Church, who had been involved in designing the concept of the experiment during his 1988–89 study on a different course in Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, contacted various churches in Zimbabwe in 1992. They eventually sent a total of six candidates to the interview day at Gweru. The Methodist woman from Bulawayo who was selected did not know the independent church woman from Gweru who was to be her partner, but they were selected on the same day by the same people, Pastor Kudzerema and Mr John

² Harold Turner, 'New mission task: worldwide and waiting,' *Missiology* 13 (1) Jan 1985, see especially p. 7 on the 'history of thinking about Prinerms'.

³ A network of these missionaries was organized in 1986 and is held together by a triennial publication, *The Review of AICS*, published by INTERACT Research Centre in Birmingham, which also keeps files of the prayer letters and newsletters written by such missionaries. The network has held conferences at Abidjan in 1986 and Kinshasa in 1989 from which the papers were published in volumes edited by David Shank: *Ministry of Missions to African Independent Churches*, 1987, and *Ministry of Missions in Partnership with African Independent Churches*, 1990 (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Board of Missions).

⁴ Barrett estimates about 27 million independent church members in the mid-1980s. See the relevant country descriptions in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Oxford University Press, 1982. About half these members are in Nigeria and South Africa. The growth of independent churches is striking in some countries such as Ghana, where a recent survey projects that by the year 2000 over half of Ghana's Christians will be members of independent churches.

N'gandu, a member of the United Church of Zambia and of the 1990 writing team. The two women travelled together from Harare and are now working together and living in the same building in Birmingham.

With each such link between two people in an African country and with each visit by people from a neighbouring country, new lines of communication and cooperation are opened between churches. New bridges are being built across the gap between the mission and independent church camps, as well as among the mission churches themselves (Roman Catholic, ecumenical, evangelical, Pentecostal).

A *second* imported problem addressed by the experiment is the problem of contextualization or rather, *lack of contextualization*. p. 455 There is wide agreement among African Christians at the theoretical level that African Christianity needs to contextualize in the 1990s.⁵ One can name some very encouraging examples where the grand theories of contextualization are actually being put into practice in religious educational material⁶ yet one must also admit that a great deal of the Christian literature on offer in Africa today still has a foreign ring about it, and not a little is a direct translation from something written by and for Western Christians.

The experiment began its process of contextualization by selection of books. James was the first one done. Luther might have turned over in his grave if he had heard that James was at the top of the list and Romans was not among the seven books done in either 1990 or 1992, but James was found to be the book most frequently preached on by a large sample of Nigerian independent church leaders.⁷ The other two books done in 1990 were Hebrews, which Kwame Bediako has written of as the 'African book' in the New Testament⁸ and Luke, the gospel which shows the greatest concern for foreigners, as independent church people often feel themselves to be when confronted with an alien form of the Christian faith.

The books selected by the leaders of the 1992 team after long discussion were Nehemiah, Amos, Acts and Colossians. Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Proverbs and I and II Corinthians were seriously considered. These choices will sound strange to many Westerners, which is as it should be. Western choices of books to teach in Africa Bible institutes have sounded strange to Africans for a long time.

Once a book is selected, the team of African writers is trained to use the 'two-column' method as a basis for writing about it. The method is quite simple. Each writer is given a galley proof style copy of the text. In the left margin or column he or she notes which verses an untrained p. 456 leader will probably select from this passage as the basis for sermons, how the selected texts will be interpreted and applied, and which parts of the passage the leader will overlook, misunderstand or have questions about. In the right column the writer lists points which he or she would like to highlight or explain to an untrained preacher from the passage.

⁵ To name just one of the better-known examples, Jean-Marc Ela, *Ma foi d'africain*, Paris: Karthala, 1985.

⁶ For example, the LUMKO Institute in Johannesburg has produced an extensive series of pioneering work of this type, a 'PREACH' series was done by Asempa Press in Ghana already in the mid-70s, a new series of genuinely African Sunday school material is being produced by the National Council of Churches of Kenya, and a deliberate shift toward contextualization is evident in many of the materials produced by Scripture Union offices across the continent.

⁷ Harold Turner, *Profile through Preaching* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965), p. 19. From a sample of 8000 sermon texts, Turner calculated the frequency each book was used in proportion to its length.

⁸ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: a Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), p. 33f.

The group of five or six writers who are discussing a passage all prepare their left-column and right-column notes ahead of time. While doing this, they each picture an untrained preacher or women's leader whom they know well and imagine what that person will do with the passage. The group will begin its discussion by spending one to two hours on each chapter, noting what is already happening to it in African sermons. Only after that step (the left-column) do they go across the text to the right column and decide what they want to write about that chapter. The introduction of that special step promotes contextualization in a way which is not possible if one moves straight from the text into the writer's own thoughts about it. Examples of the fruits of this method are given later in this paper.

A *third* inherited problem which Africans are struggling to escape from at present is the *abstract form of theological education* which has become the standard one in Africa as in the West. Anyone observing one of these experimental writing groups as they discuss a passage will soon be convinced that a very effective form of theological education is taking place. The focus of the discussion is Scripture, the agenda is being set by grassroots (left-column) considerations, and the mix of denominations, countries, backgrounds and sexes is guaranteed both to broaden the outlook of each participant and to force them all to articulate their own positions more clearly. The writing assignment demands that the group discuss until reaching a consensus, which may need to be carefully worded and yet which cannot use any theological or academic jargon.

From what I have seen happening in the experiment, I am tempted to claim that the Africans involved have profited more from this type of 'education' focused on producing something for publication than Africans do who spend a comparable time in Britain on any standard Christian education course with its more theoretical written work, usually completed by individual students. But I resist that temptation because it would be such a theoretical debate, just the kind I wish to avoid.

What I do not resist is the temptation to challenge people involved in Bible training in Africa to consider whether this method might not be a better one for their classes than the standard lecture-and-paper [p. 457](#) method. Would seminary or Bible institute education not be revolutionized if, for example, the lecturer set a term project of team-writing a local preaching guide to a biblical book (or editing one of the seven guides produced in our experiment), marked each student according to the quality of the section he or she contributed, and published (mimeograph or photocopy) a limited edition of the result?

Let me also suggest a simpler alternative. A lecturer might use a chapter from one of our experimental guides as a final examination before graduation, requiring each student to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the draft and to suggest improvements which would make that chapter of the guide more useful for the average untrained lay-leader in his region. I submit that any student who can pass such an examination has been well prepared for church ministry and any student who fails it has not been. Note that an expatriate lecturer will have considerable trouble marking such an examination because he will not have the necessary depth of knowledge about the local culture. This is a clear signal that the education has moved from the abstract to the practical, where the foreigner is more likely to be off his territory and out of his depth.

II. INHERITED AFRICAN PROBLEMS

Not all problems facing African Christianity in the 1990s were imported by the missionaries, of course. African traditional culture, despite its often underestimated

strengths, has also contributed its fair share to the current unhappy situation in the continent.

The *first* problem area is *male dominance*. In most traditional cultures women have been relegated to inferior status and this has been carried over unquestioned into the life of the Church. No one doubts that women are the majority attenders, the most faithful contributors and the centre of spiritual vitality of African churches, but neither does anyone doubt that women are under-represented in church leadership, theological education and literature production. At the theoretical level one can find a few signs that this problem is being addressed by African women.⁹

As we set out to address this problem in our experiment, we discovered immediately that it was not only an African problem. At p. 458 Selly Oak Colleges where the issue of women's roles has a very high profile, we managed to find only one staff member for our committee of eight. Nevertheless we committed ourselves to try to get an equal balance of men and women in our writing teams.

We determined ahead of time whether we would be asking for male or female nominees from a given country in order to ensure that the total team was balanced and that each country was represented by two people of the same sex. Very interesting things happened as we tried to implement this policy. One independent church leader, very well placed in a highly literate country with many independent churches, was unable to identify any independent church woman whom he considered right for the work and able to go to England and for three months, so he nominated a woman from a mission church in the pentecostal family whom he knew was sympathetic with many of the independent church people and views. In another case a group which was asked to nominate women sent in four names, of which three were men. In another a group of independent church leaders refused to nominate women at all, arguing that in their culture every pioneer must be a man. They claimed that no one would take the literature seriously if it were brought back to their country and introduced by a woman.

We also invited the African continental offices of the Bible Society and Scriptural Union as well as an African staff member of the World Council of Churches to suggest names for the positions of team leaders or 'scribes'. We stated criteria for the position but did not stipulate whether the nominees should be men or women. Four names were received, all men. Later when we specifically sought a woman scribe, three qualified women were suggested.¹⁰

Through the process of raising funds for the experiment from a very broad cross-section of donors, I have become aware of how widespread the concern with women's issues is among them. I have also heard an African man admit that whenever his agency prepares a p. 459 project proposal, they include women in it somehow in order to please the potential donors even if they doubt they will be able to implement the proposal in that respect. Someone's integrity is at stake here; and I mention the case because I do not believe Westerners realize it may be theirs.

Some Africans, excluding the friend I have just mentioned, may see the Western emphasis on women's issues as a modern form of Western imperialism. Western culture

⁹ Mercy Oduyoye, 'With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology,' in *Reflections of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians*, edited by V. Fabella and M. A. Oduyoye (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988).

¹⁰ These were suggested by staff members at the All Africa Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Kenya. There were complicated reasons including a reduction in the team size for 1992 which prevented us from including any women as 'Scribes' in the 1992 team. In 1990 the scribe duties were done by three expatriates (myself and two women).

has reached a conclusion about feminism which many Western Christians have taken on board, justified in theological terms and exported as a universal truth. Western missions, which ardently claim they have long ceased to dictate anything to African churches, are doing something not far removed from dictating when it comes to women's issues. What Africa does about women's issues and how it responds to Western suggestions, criticisms and pressures in this area will be a major part of the life of African Christianity in the 1990s.

A *second* problem in the African heritage is *tribalism*. The experiment tackled this by inviting wherever possible members of two different tribes in the same country, such as a Yoruba and an Igbo from Nigeria, and by bringing together a team from the various regions of Africa. In 1990 it was Ghana, Benin, Zaire, Kenya, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa; in 1992 Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. Often the two members from the same country found themselves identifying with each other by contrast with the rest of the countries.

Team members experienced their tribal differences in many ways. While learning greetings in Zulu or Bassa they found that other languages, though African, still contained sounds which were completely unfamiliar and laughably unreproducible. A Liberian member was shocked to learn that Zimbabweans do not traditionally believe in any river spirits or mountain spirits. The Swazis said that English food was too spicy; the Ghanaians said the English never use any spice at all. All these tribal differences could be affirmed and accepted; dislikes of cultural characteristics could be maintained, but at the end of the day, the team was a team of Christians who had learned to love each other while completing a common task which would benefit all their tribal groups. Their unity transcended tribal identity without negating it.

I was asked by a Tanzanian church leader whether this experiment was not moving against the tide of the times by affirming the local languages instead of national or regional languages such as Swahili. This may be true, and if it is, we will have to plead guilty. We are giving [p. 460](#) priority to the local languages from beginning to end in this experiment.

For example, in our two-column method the text in the centre is an English text but it is not the one the team members read as they prepare their comments. Each one reads his or her vernacular Bible and enters comments into the blank columns next to the English text so it can be discussed in English in the group. However, each member knows that the English guide which the team will eventually produce is not a finished product meant for pan-African distribution. It is not even meant for translation. It is to be taken as a rough draft by local editing committees who will discuss a vernacular draft of it and make whatever changes in content and style which they feel are appropriate, without having these changes authorized by anyone in England. The local language guides are therefore derived from a common source but they will not exactly match that source or each other.

A *third* problem is *illiteracy*. Because of the debt crisis which will probably be plaguing Africa right through the decade, educational budgets are being cut. The AIDS epidemic could also have severe effects on education by decimating the pool of trained teachers. The number of people who are illiterate or semi-literate is likely to increase. Therefore the need for materials on audio-cassettes and material designed for poor readers is also increasing.

The guides are deliberately intended for people who do not read well. Each paragraph or section in the guide is a self-contained unit so that a reader does not have to read several pages in order to benefit, nor does he or she need to have pages 1–16 in mind in order to understand page 17.

Illiterates and semi-literates can also play a valuable role as consultants in the writing process. For example, last August at a weekend Bible conference in Umtata, Transkei, about eighty independent church leaders edited the guide to the book of James in Xhosa. They were split into working groups, all containing at least one person who could read well. Even those who could not read were invited to join in the discussion and evaluation of the draft text. They could identify the parts which were not clear as well as contribute traditional proverbs or other comments which strengthened the guide. It was a celebration in the undoing of apartheid. People whose limited educational experience had been entirely shaped by the view that the student has nothing to contribute were now being asked to speak and to tap the resources of the traditional wisdom in which they are the best living experts. Literate, semi-literate and illiterate were teamed up in a cooperative effort. p. 461

I believe our experiment has confirmed John Mbiti's call for more effort to go into the recording of oral theology in Africa.¹¹ That is exactly what the guides could become if local editing groups accepted the challenge-repositories of the wisdom of traditional culture and of old preachers, whose insights will otherwise die with them. I say this because the age range of our participants was from 24 to 62, and it was quite clear that the generation between those two ages has lost a considerable amount of the insights of the traditional cultures. Also Western theological education has militated against the cultivation of those insights. I would venture that of the twenty-two Africans involved, the two who had the greatest difficulty getting integrated into the work were the two who took their Western theological education most seriously and who had the least knowledge of the traditional wisdom of their cultures.

III. CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

Some of the problems facing African Christians in the 1990s are part of the modern historical process and are not directly rooted in either the missionary era or the traditional culture. For example, there are problems of political and economic crisis, church leadership and finance, health, the relation with Islam and traditional religion, and regional issues including the changing scene in South Africa. Because of the nature of these problems, the structure of the experiment itself could not have much bearing on them. However, the product of the experiment could and did. A few examples will have to suffice here. Some sample copies of the guides are still available for those who wish to read more.¹²

a. *Poverty*. Concerning the 'giants' who frightened some of the Israelites from entering Canaan ([Heb. 4:11](#)), the group added, 'We are p. 462 not facing giants like the Israelites did, but there are other things which frighten us like the giants frightened them.... [For example] rich people frighten us like giants in our way. They drive their cars to church or they dress up to go to church in clothes we could never afford. They do not mean us any

¹¹ John Mbiti, 'Cattle are born with ears, their horns grow later—towards an appreciation of African oral theology' in *All Africa Lutheran Consultation on Christian Theology in the African Context* edited by Alison Bares (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1979).

¹² The guides are not for sale but for free distribution to church leaders who have some interest in examining them and possibly in promoting their use. Copies may be requested from INTERACT Research Centre, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham B29 6LQ. With your request please state your position in your church and the reason you wish to examine a copy. Also indicate which of the following you want: Luke, Hebrews, James, and whether you want them in English or French. You may suggest African church leaders or training institutions who should receive copies and we will check whether they were included in the earlier mailing list for free samples.

harm, but when we see them we feel embarrassed and afraid to be around them. We may even stay away from church because these big people are there'.¹³

b. *Concern for the national situation.* Concerning Nehemiah's weeping when he heard the news of the situation in Jerusalem, the group said, 'Whenever a big man sits down on the ground to cry, then it means that something that is unusual and very serious must have happened. Nehemiah was not just an ordinary big man in age, but he was also a big man in power. He worked very closely with the King of Persia. But when he learned the news about the destruction of his home town and the suffering of his people back home, he forgot his own self-importance and sat down on the ground and cried and prayed.... How is our homeland? How do we feel? What can we do for our dead churches and our destructive countries?'¹⁴

c. *Political oppression of Christians.* Concerning the statement in [Amos 2:12](#) that the prophets were not told not to speak God's message, a Liberian refugee reported a well-known case of a prophetess who about seven years ago had warned the nation through a vision which the Doe government did not want to hear. She was beaten severely and eventually flown to Britain, where she died of her injuries.¹⁵

d. *Racism and tribalism.* Concerning the thankful Samaritan ([Luke 17:16](#)), the group cited an example in which the hero was an Asian: 'A Kenyan mother had a child who was very ill with meningitis. She did not have the money to pay the deposit so her child could enter the hospital. An Asian doctor paid the deposit so the child could be admitted to the hospital immediately. The doctors worked to save the life of the child. The mother was deeply grateful and thanked the p. 463 doctor who had paid the deposit in spite of being of a different nationality and tradition.'¹⁶

e. *The generation gap in Africa.* Concerning the wisdom from above mentioned in [James 3:17](#), the group noted, 'Some people say the wisdom from above has nothing to do with education. They say, "We are called to preach while we were still tending the cattle, and we still preach better than you young people who have spent your whole lives in school." There is some truth in this. There seem to be more and more educated people in our country but fewer and fewer wise people who understand life and can give the right advice for the problems people face today. For example, a young African often lives in two worlds. He is one person with his classmates at school or university and a completely different person at home in his village with his family....'¹⁷

IV DIGNITY, COMMUNITY AND SERVICE

The paper up to this point has been problem-oriented. Will African Christianity in the 1990s be problem-oriented? Will this be one long decade of coping with everything that has gone wrong and is going wrong? Or can African Christians in the midst of everything

¹³ African Bible Guides. *Hebrews: an Inter-church Guide for African Preachers and Teachers* (Birmingham: INTERACT Research Centre, 1990), p. 15.

¹⁴ Unpublished second draft of the forthcoming booklet on Nehemiah (Birmingham: INTERACT Research Centre, 1992).

¹⁵ Unpublished second draft of the forthcoming booklet on Amos (Birmingham: INTERACT Research Centre, 1992).

¹⁶ African Bible Guides. *Luke: an Inter-church Guide for African Preacher and Teachers* (Birmingham: INTERACT Research Centre, 1990), p. 64.

¹⁷ African Bible Guides. *James: an Inter-church Guide for African Teachers and Preachers* (Birmingham: INTERACT Research Centre, 1990), p. 13.

that is caving in on them still find space to experience positive things such as dignity, community and service? Our hope is that this experiment will help them both to cope and to get beyond mere coping.

On the matter of dignity, the experiment has produced encouraging evidence that the Africans involved have felt dignity. We have sometimes explained this by analogy with a movie production. We who have run the experiment are like the producer, director, sound engineer, etc., but the Africans are the actors and actresses. They can be coached a bit, but basically it is their natural ability and their application of their talents which makes or breaks the enterprise. They are the stars. We are behind the scenes playing essential but supportive roles. Perhaps this is a model of one form that partnership in mission may take in the 1990s.

The Africans in this experiment have sometimes found it hard to believe they are being given this starring role. For example, one of the [p. 464](#) women doubted she had very much to contribute to the writing team because she was not theologically trained. 'All she had done' was to translate sermons of expatriate clergy for many years for her village congregation. She had never been invited to express an opinion during a service much less give a sermon herself, but her experience in translation meant that she had thoroughly thought through the process of putting foreign concepts into sensible vernacular terms. This was a superb qualification for contributing to the writing of a guide, as she came to realize through the process.

The 1990 team members have also had some difficulty convincing local editing groups that they are really allowed to change the meaning of the English text. In fact local groups are supposed to change and improve it according to their own judgment rather than aim at a 'faithful' translation. Since they are the experts on their own culture and the interchurch relations in their countries, they are the ones who should decide what the guides actually say in the local editions. Furthermore, the guides are supposed to help people preach from a vernacular Bible, not an English one, so there may be things which have to be added to clarify weaknesses in the vernacular translation. Only a local committee can identify these points. Clear as that may seem in this paragraph, it has been very difficult to communicate. I can only conclude that it is such a radically new way for most Africans to look at literature in a European language that they cannot believe it. We are making believers out of some of them, and this means a new experience of dignity for them because they are believing in themselves. They see they are being trusted with ultimate editorial power.

The process of editing the text locally also promotes dignity by building self-confidence, since there is no central funding or central planning for the local groups. The members of the experimental writing groups and any other interested persons try to organize local editing groups wherever they can. Each group decides which churches will be involved, which books will be edited, what funds are needed and which donor agencies it will approach. Each establishes its own committee and writes its own project proposal. The experiment has shown that this is not easy but it is possible, and most of the members of the 1990 team who have encountered difficulties along the way are still persevering.

For example, the first guide produced in an African language was the Swahili edition of the guide to James. It was produced by the National Council of Churches of Kenya in August 1991. I had no contact with Pastor Obed Ochwanyi, who directed the work, between the time he [p. 465](#) left Birmingham in July 1990 and the time the guide arrived just over a year later. It just came in the post as a wonderful surprise. A second version of the guide was produced this April by a group of independent churches in western Kenya (Kenya United Independent Churches) in a partnership arrangement with the National Council of Churches of Kenya. A guide to Luke in a third Kenyan language has been

through the inter-church editing process and is ready for publication. Funding has been approved and local editing is under way on three guides in each of three languages in Benin. The Luke guide is ready in Lingala and awaits funding. Some progress is being made on the James guide in Botswana and in South Africa the Xhosa version is nearly ready to go to press.

Much has been learned from the struggles of the 1990 group in organizing local editing teams. They were so busy in 1990 inventing the guides and doing everything for the first time that inadequate time was left to prepare them for this part of the work. In addition I as coordinator was not able to give as much on-site supervision in Africa as I had hoped, and this created severe problems particularly in Ghana where I had specifically promised help for a conference. In 1992 we are providing the new team with more training and fewer promises. We try to provide a little support from afar and perhaps a short visit in a few cases, but no one is being pressured from Birmingham or hired with INTERACT money to lead the editing process.¹⁸ Any African group which produces a guide knows that it is their own vision, initiative, skill and commitment which has done it.

I have described how the process of writing a guide contributes to a sense of community, but what is being done at the experimental level in Birmingham is only the tip of the iceberg, it will take more than a decade of work across Africa to build a comparable sense of community there, and it will take Africa's choicest peacemakers to see to it that the local editing process resolves more problems than it aggravates. But if African Christians in the 1990s could more effectively capitalize on their African sense of community to resolve some of the imported conflicts among Christian denominations, the rest of the world's Christians would be greatly in their debt. Which continent p. 466 currently leads the world in resolving inter-Christian conflicts? It seems that chair is vacant. Perhaps Africa will sit in it in this decade, but not unless the barriers between mission churches and independent churches come down to a greater extent.

The experiment is now near its conclusion. It was originally planned to bring three groups of twelve Africans to Birmingham, one each year from 1990 to 1992 but was scaled down because we did not have the staff time to manage the follow-up of 1990 and the recruitment and fundraising for 1991 at the same time. We also hoped to involve a group of five Africans working in French in 1992 but because of a shortage of funds we had to cancel that plan. We are now discussing with our Benin contacts a tentative plan for them to host a French writing team next year, following through on our recruitment explorations this year in Ivory Coast and Madagascar. That writing team will not be editing an existing guide but rather writing a guide to a book or books of the Bible which the Birmingham end of the experiment did not use.

If that group goes ahead, it will do so on the initiative of the people in Benin. The same will be true of other local editing groups or other writing groups which want to write on additional books of the Bible. Africans will decide what shape the work should take and what structures will be needed at national or international levels. The committee in Birmingham plans to cease operating in 1993 after the distribution of the samples from 1992 is completed. A suggestion has recently been made by a member of the 1992 team that the two teams (1990 and 1992) should meet together in Africa at an appropriate time after the 1992 group has had opportunity to try to promote the work in their home

¹⁸ The Bible Guides Committee has adopted a policy under which it makes a nominal contribution to a church or Christian agency for each working day that they release a staff member for Bible Guides promotional work. The primary use of this so far has been for members of the 1990 team who helped recruit people for 1992. The policy limits the contribution for the services of any individual to five days in any month or twenty days in any year.

countries. They could then compare notes on the African end of the experiment and make plans for carrying it forward in appropriate ways.

CONCLUSION

When this experiment started, no one knew whether it would be possible to get the cooperation of such a wide range of churches, to write a guide jointly for use in all churches, to follow through with local editing and publishing without central funding, and to sell the end product to the intended readership. The experiment has produced considerable evidence that all these things are possible for African Christians, though it is too soon to make great claims about the last and most crucial step, distribution. The preliminary findings strongly suggest that the prospects are bright for a polycentric, African-controlled **P. 467** programme that will bring the entire spectrum of African churches together to prepare materials (print and/or other media) to help untrained leaders preach and teach the Bible better. If that happens, average church members will be better equipped to survive the turbulent Africa of the 1990s with increased dignity and a stronger sense of community.

APPENDIX: PARTICIPANTS IN THE AFRICAN BIBLE GUIDES EXPERIMENT

YEAR	SEX	COUNTRY	NAME AND CHURCH
1990	F	Ghana	Miss Grace Adjel, Ghana Baptist Convention
1990	M	Benin	Rev. Samson Assani, Apostolic Church of Benin
1990	M	Zaire	Dr. Mwene-Batende, Roman Catholic Church
1992	M	Swaziland	Rev. Isaac Dlamini, Pentecost East Star Jerusalem Church in Sabbath
1992	M	Swaziland	Mr Charles Dlamini, Roman Catholic Church
1990	F	Botswana	Miss Florence Ferguson, Roman Catholic Church

1992	M	Rwanda	Mr Tharcisse Gatwa, Presbyterian Church
1990	M	Benin	Pastor Coffi Gbankpan, Church of Pentecost
1992	F	Liberia	Mrs Ester Mark-Gbeh, Liberia Interdenominational Assembly
1992	M	Liberia	Rev. Abba Karnga, Worldwide Mission of Liberia
1990	M	Kenya	Archbishop Manoah Keverenge, Lyahuka Church of Africa
1992	M	Ghana	Rev. Joshua Kudadjie, Methodist Church of Ghana
1992	F	Zimbabwe	Mrs Brigit Munguri, Zion Apostolic Church
1992	F	Zimbabwe	Mrs Sithembile Ncumbe, Methodist Church of Zimbabwe
1990	M	Zambia	Mr John Ng'andu, United Church of Zambia
1992	F	Nigeria	Mrs Chikwe Njoku, Evangelical Church of West Africa
1990	F	South Africa	Miss Bernice Ntuli, Apostolic Faith Mission
1990	M	Kenya	Pastor Obed Ochwany, Church of God

1992	F	Nigeria	Mrs Rebecca Owanikin, Cherubim and Seraphim Ayo ni. O.
1990	F	Kenya	Mrs Rosalie Oyweka, Church of Christ in Africa
1990	F	Ghana	Miss Esther Tawiah, Pentecostal Association of Ghana
1990	M	Zaire	Dr Owanga Welo, Kimbanguist Church

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African Bible Guides Series—Booklet 8: Colossians

Editor: Joshua Kudadjie

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COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 1

1:2 MAY GOD OUR FATHER GIVE YOU GRACE AND PEACE

Greetings are very important to Africans. When one person meets another or there is a family gathering, they exchange greetings, they ask about the welfare of the family members and wish each other well. This is exactly what Paul was doing at the beginning of this letter which he wrote to the church in a city called Colossae, which was in a region then known as Asia Minor, now Turkey. Paul had no relatives at Colossae but, because the Colossians had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, Paul regarded them as his brothers and he wished them God's grace and peace.

The greeting: 'May God our Father give you grace and peace', is the usual way in which Paul greeted Christians to whom he wrote. These 'greetings' are not mere words of greetings such as people commonly use these days when they say, 'Good Morning', for