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Volume 19.1 2000

# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology



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ISSN 1026-2946

# Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

## **Consulting Editors:**

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**Subscription Services:** Flo Gehman

**Subscription Information:** Subscription rates and ordering procedures are published on the inside back cover.

**Purpose:** *AJET* is published twice a year by the staff of Scott Theological College, a chartered private university in Kenya, in order to provide African evangelical theological educators and students with articles and book reviews related to theology and ministry.

**Publisher:** Scott Theological College, the publisher of *AJET*, has been accredited by ACTEA since 1979 and has been awarded a Charter in November 1997 by the Commission for Higher Education in Kenya to become a private university recognised by the Kenyan government. Scott offers university level theological education with concentrations in Pastoral Studies, Christian Education and Missiology.

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

*AJET* is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, published by the American Theological Library Association, Chicago, available on line in the ATLA Religion Database through BRS Information Technologies (Latham NY), and *DIALOG Abstracts* (Cambridge MA). *AJET* is also indexed in *Christian Periodical Index* and in *New Testament Abstracts* (Cambridge MA).

## THE NEW MILLENNIUM

### *An AJET Editorial*

With the dawn of the *new* millennium, we may question what the future holds for the human race? Will it be more of the same: wars, famine, corruption, violence, immorality and struggles for power? Or will it be a *new* world order?

For those who believe in biblical revelation, we can have no illusion. The new millennium will be like the old, apart from God's grace transforming sinners through the new birth.

For the Christian our ultimate hope is the return of our Lord Jesus Christ who will usher in a *new* era of righteousness and peace on earth. Not until then does God say, "*I am making everything new*" (Rev 21:5). Only then will "the earth be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9). This is the "blessed hope" for which we all long.

But until the blessed appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are commanded to "occupy until he comes." We have the privilege and responsibility of making things *new* by being the salt and light in this dark world.

As we enter the *new* millennium, we need to think more deeply on our Christian faith and apply God's Word more diligently to the questions raised by our cultures. Our Christian faith in Africa needs to make a greater impact on society than in the past century.

We are committed to making the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* a vital tool for your theological reflection in the African context. In order to serve you better we are offering you, beginning with this issue, a larger journal with more pages and an improved appearance.

The lead article, *The African Renaissance as a New Context for African Evangelical Theology* by James Kombo is a wake up call to evangelicals in Africa to engage in theological reflection within the public arena. A growing number of Africans are trained and equipped to dialogue with the intelligentsia in university and government who shape public policies. What is needed now is a

commitment on the part of theological institutions to develop thinkers who are capable of applying biblical principles to issues facing the African nations.

*The Sharing of Goods with the Poor* by Paul Mumo Kisau is a practical example of the exegesis of Scripture with application to the contemporary situation. What is needed in African Christian Theology is not something new and unique to Africa but something true to Scripture and applied to the African context as is found in this biblical study.

*The Power of Prayer* by Jacob Kibor is a practical reminder that the work of God is not done with the intellect alone but through the power of prayer. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain that build it." The evangelical must not neglect his intellect for that would lead to a mindless Christian faith. But neither should the evangelical depend on the intellect to solve the problems of Africa. Only God can make things *new* through the power of the Holy Spirit operating through the Word of God and with much prayer.

*Leadership of the Church* by Norman Helpers is a helpful study of New Testament teaching on elders and deacons. Unless African Evangelical Theology is grounded on the infallible written Word of God, there can be no spiritual African Renaissance. The African Renaissance is grounded on reason and experience. God's Church is grounded on divine revelation graciously provided for us in the Holy Scriptures.

*The Human Soul in Yoruba/Igbo Tradition and the Bible* by A.O. Peter Ogunboye with Lois Fuller is another effort to reflect on traditional beliefs from a biblical perspective. African Evangelical Theology will remain evangelical only if it is shaped by the clear teaching of Scripture.

## THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AS A NEW CONTEXT FOR AFRICAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

*James Owino Kombo*

*These days we are hearing much of the African Renaissance. This article wrestles with the implications of an African Renaissance for African Evangelical Theology. Rev. James Kombo read a paper in June 1999 at the International Reformed Theological Institute (IRTI) entitled, "Creativity and Critical Thinking: Some Suggestions for African Theology." That paper will be published as part of a book. The following article is a significant revision of that paper, greatly reworked and changed, in order to be published in AJET. The author challenges African evangelicals to engage the intelligentsia in the public arena instead of remaining in the confines of theological institutions.*

### THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE – WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Renaissance as a concept is not new. The concept of the Renaissance is historically linked to the new direction that the European heritage took in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and which became the basis for the general civilisation of the modern Western world. Essentially, the European Renaissance was a cultural issue. Those who made the Renaissance happen were committed to a search for what was authentically European. Thus as Erwin Panofsky says: "The Renaissance was linked to the middle ages by a thousand ties; that the heritage of the antiquity, even though the thread had

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**James Owino Kombo** is an ordained minister of the Church of Christ in Africa. He earned his B.Th. from Scott Theological College in 1988, an M.Div. from the Nairobi International School of Theology in 1991, a M.Th. in Systematic Theology (1997) and is a candidate for a D.Th. in Systematic Theology, both from the University of Stellenbosch. He served as a Teaching Assistant at NIST (1991-1995). He is on a study leave from Daystar University in Kenya since 1998 where he served as lecturer since 1995.

#### 4 Kombo *The African Renaissance*

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become very thin at times, had never been lost beyond recuperation".<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the Europeans rediscovered their own art (poetry, literature, music, painting) as well as distinct areas of knowledge that were hitherto covered in rubbles of history. These rediscoveries provided the necessary resources for advances in science and technology. As these areas developed, there arose the need for expansion and dissemination of information. The needs brought about voyages of discoveries across oceans as well as revolution in printing.

The African Renaissance, however, is a new concept. The African Renaissance has not happened yet. Nevertheless, the African intelligentsia have in the past few years mooted it as a theoretical framework for dealing with the question of the African heritage, the multi-faceted problems crippling Africa as well as the challenges of globalisation. Because of the influence of Thabo Mbeki, the man generally credited with the founding and formulation of the concept of the African Renaissance in Africa and beyond, the African Renaissance is set to acquire a formidable status in the context of Africa in the near future. In a way, the concept takes its motivation from the European Renaissance. Thabo Mbeki indicates this line of thinking in the following words:

How do we hope to emulate the great human achievements of the Earlier Renaissance of the Europe of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries?

One of our answers to this question is that, as Africans, we recall the fact that as the European Renaissance burst into history in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, there was a royal court in the African city of Timbuktu which, in the same centuries, was as learned as its European counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Panofsky, E. *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art*. London: Granada Publishing Ltd, 1960, 6

<sup>2</sup> Mbeki, T. *Africa: The Time Has Come*. Johannesburg: Tafelberg Publishers, 1998, 241.

In addition to taking its motivation from the European Renaissance, Mbeki makes it clear also that the historical situation of Africa as well as her achievements long before the encounter of the continent with the West has a lot to do with the African Renaissance:

I speak of the African work of art in South Africa that are a thousand years old. I speak of the continuum of the fine arts that encompasses the various artistic creations of the Nubians and the Egyptians, the Benin Bronzes of Nigeria and the intricate sculptures of the Makonde of Tanzania and Mozambique.

I speak of the centuries-old contributions to the evolution of religious thought made by the Christians of Ethiopia and the Moslems of Nigeria.

I refer also to the architectural monuments represented by the giant sculptured stones of Aksum in Ethiopia, the Egyptian sphinxes and pyramids, the Tunisian city of Carthage and the Zimbabwe Ruins, as well as the lagacy of the ancient universities of Alexandria of Egypt, Fez of Morroco and once more, Timbuktu of Mali<sup>3</sup>

Why does Mbeki offer us such a long catalogue of the achievements of Africa long before her encounter with the West? Again Mbeki's own answer is appropriate here: "When I survey these and much more besides, I find nothing to sustain the long-held dogma of African exceptionalism, according to which the colour black becomes a symbol of fear, evil, and death."<sup>4</sup> The sons and daughters of Africa who were behind these achievements are as human beings as the Europeans, the Americans and the Asians. They have not lost the creative power and mental strength necessary for undertakings such as these. Today they are great architects, engineers, geographers, political leaders, financiers and artists – they do it all the time!

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 241,242

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 242.

Since the Europeans were involved in their own Renaissance, the Africans too are being challenged to make use of their strengths as they address their own problems and the challenges of globalisation. The areas where the African Renaissance is calling the Africans to urgently address include poverty, hunger, backwardness, good governance, disease, racial-tribal-national tensions and the need for a firm establishment of the humane existence of all that is human. A book published in 1997 powerfully depicts the seriousness of these problems:

I am an American, but a black man, a descendant of slaves brought from Africa. . . . If things had been different, I might have been one of them . . . -or might have met some. . . . anonymous fate in one of the countless on-going civil wars or tribal clashes on this brutal continent. And so I thank God my ancestors survived the voyage. . . . Talk to me about Africa and my black roots and my kinship with my African brothers and I'll throw it back into your face, and then I'll rub your nose in the images of the rotting flesh. . . . Sorry, but I've been there. I've had an AK-47...rammed up my nose, I've talked to matchet wielding Hutu militiamen with the blood of their latest victims splattered across their T-shirts. I've seen a cholera epidamic in Zaire, a famine in Somali, a civil war in Liberia. I've seen cities bombed to near rubble, and other cities reduced to rubble, because their leaders let them rot and decay while they spirited away billions of dollars - yes, billions - inot overseas bank accounts. . . . Thank God my ancestors got out, because, now, I am not one of of them.<sup>5</sup>

The African Renaissance emphasises that Africa must as a matter of urgency clear this mess. We should not wait for foreign intervention.

It is understandable that Mbeki in his book, *Africa: The Time Has Come* (1998), should link the African Renaissance with globalisation. Globalisation assumes that the local situation has something to contribute to the global context. The Africa that shall participate as

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<sup>5</sup> Richbug, KB. *Out of Africa: A Black man Confronts Africa*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

an equal partner in the global situation is that Africa that will bring something, something tangible to the global context. The researchers of the African Renaissance are already indicating that there are countries on this continent where the spirit of self reliance is clearly evident. The child soldiers of Mozambique have been absorbed back into the society, Eritrea carries little debt and accepts virtually no foreign assistance, new life in Mali is beginning to show the power of *ubuntu* – everyone works for the community, and the Ashanti Goldfields of Ghana, the only black-African-operated mining company on the New York and London stock exchanges, is up and mimicking the fortunes of Ghana itself<sup>6</sup>

### THEOLOGY AND THE AFRICA OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

The question that must face the evangelical Christian thinkers is: How is Evangelical Theology to proceed in a situation like this? What does hope for Evangelical Theology mean in a context where the engineers, architects, financiers, and so on are being asked to take their seats around the table and formulate the future of Africa? Somehow Evangelical Theology has to cope with this new mood if it has to contribute to the building of Africa and to the global stage. It can not simply resign.

Traditionally, most of Africa does not regard theology as a discipline that can in its own right contribute to the solution of the problems of Africa. This disregard has a history to it. One of the problems was theological and cultural. Christianity presented the gospel as a message to be believed and not to be reflected upon, as in some way, belief was thought to guarantee liberation and civilisation

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed explanation of the seed of political peace that is now germinating everywhere in Africa, see J McGeary and M Michaels, 'Africa Rising' in: *Time*, vol. 151 No. 13, 30 March 1998. In this article they have analyzed what they see as new spirit of self-reliance that is taking root in the new Africa. The countries they studied are Mozambique, Mali, Eritrea, and Ghana.

that the African soul badly needed<sup>7</sup>. According to this line of thought, the African was viewed as a clear model of the fallen person<sup>8</sup>. One of the tasks of the missionary was, therefore, to 'covert the Africans to Christianity' and besides, the missionary also needed to 'make them give up and forget their past entirely and live up to their new dignity'<sup>9</sup>. Another problem was the rise of extreme nationalism. The nationalists have generally seen no good at all in the church and they have generally grouped the church with the other forces of domination. To the nationalists and the doyens of African literature, the gospel and with it, theology is a figment of Western domination incapable of addressing the fundamental contextual questions, and has a place only within the boundaries of the church which in any case is a legacy from the colonial past<sup>10</sup>.

These problems have made theological reflection for the African context such a daunting task. We do not expect the situation to be any better in the context of the African Renaissance. Theology as a whole is still not part of the mainstream disciplines in the African universities, it is in theological colleges and universities of the church. The Christian theologian, whether evangelical or liberal, is still regarded to be an expert within the boundaries of the church and

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<sup>7</sup> The missionary enterprise of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries viewed Africa as the dark continent and saw evangelisation in its traditional form as something to be done with absolute urgency as it was one of the ways by which the Africans could be elevated to '... assume their place among civilized and Christian nations' (see TF Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*, London, 1840, 458; cf. the observations of A Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, London, 1967, 60. On the inseparability of Christianity and true civilization, see the statement of the then secretary of LMS, the Reverend William Ellis quoted in Buxton, 507).

<sup>8</sup> R. Oliver, *The Missionary factor in East Africa*, London, 1952, 9.

<sup>9</sup> B Idowu, 'The Predicament of the Church in Africa', in: CG Baeta (ed.), *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, 1968, 426.

<sup>10</sup> African nationalists and novelists normally portray Christianity as the flip side of the colonial project. The works of Okot p'Bitek and the novels of Ngugi Wathiongo are particularly clear on this.

may have nothing whatsoever to say to the wider society<sup>11</sup>. Of course the marginalisation of theology is not unique to Africa. It is experienced elsewhere as well<sup>12</sup>.

The irony of this situation in the African scene is that Christianity is in fact a major influence here and it clearly is a part of the heritage of contemporary Africa<sup>13</sup>. The statistics of David Barrett indicate that at the turn of the century, Africa will become largely Christian<sup>14</sup>. Barrett is not alone in this observation. Roland Oliver had in 1956 noted the geometric progression of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1912. In his conclusion, Oliver stated that 'If things were to go at the same rate, there would be no pagans left in Africa after the year 1992'.<sup>15</sup> Of course with observations such as these,

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<sup>11</sup> Whenever the church attempts to challenge political, social and economic decisions affecting the well being of the wider public, the response everywhere is quite predictable: leave politics to the politicians.

<sup>12</sup> In the United States, theology is entirely separate from the established universities and is supported only by churches. In Germany, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, the Mediterranean countries as well as South Africa have theology in the Universities.

<sup>13</sup> See JS Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, 1969, 262. Whereas Prof. Mbiti recognizes Christianity, Islam and the Traditional Religions as the three religious systems that continue to be dominant in Africa, it is AA Mazrui *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, Boston, Mass., 1986 which sees all the three religions as a significant part of what properly constitutes the contemporary African heritage. One may think that to include the African Religions in the heritage of the modern Africa is to be anachronistic. This it must be said is not the case. There is vast literature that indicates that many Africans actually live at 'two levels'. The most prominent Christian sources on this problem are SG Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, Accra, 1965, 82, 145; KA Busia, *Report on a Social Survey – Sekondi-Takoradi*, London, 1950, 79 & 117; KA Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*, London 1967, 14; K Little, 'The Mende in Sierra Leone' in: *African Worlds*, edit. D Forde, London, 1963, 134-7; and GM Satiloane, 'How the Traditional World-View Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana' in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. E Fashole-Luke, Bloomington, Ind. : Indiana University, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> DB Barrett, 'AD 200: 350 million Christians in Africa' in: *International Review of Mission*, 59(1970), 39-54.

<sup>15</sup> R Oliver, *How Christian is Africa?* London, 1965, 8.

one easily believes Walls when he says that in our own time there is a complete change in the center of gravity of Christianity from Europe and North America to Africa.<sup>16</sup> This change is not a mere statistical reality, it has far reaching consequences for the entire Christian faith. The African Christians, as Barrett wrote in 1970, might as well 'transform Christianity permanently into a primarily non-Western religion'<sup>17</sup> Consequently, as Walls argues

... what happens within the African Churches in the next generation will determine the whole shape of church history for centuries to come. Whether and, in what way, world evangelization is carried on may well be determined by what goes on in Africa; what sort of theology is most characteristic of the Christianity of the twenty-first century may well depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians in the interim.<sup>18</sup>

The basis of Prof. Walls' argument is his conviction that theology worth talking about is that which has '... some noticeable effect in the lives and minds of a significant number of people'<sup>19</sup>. The population of the evangelicals in the context of Africa must be significant. Consequently, how the African evangelical thinkers respond to the rise of the African Renaissance as the new identity of Africa may as well give the African evangelicals a new agenda in the global theological situation.

#### **ISSUES WHICH EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY NEEDS TO CONSIDER**

There are in the meantime at least four issues that theology in the context of the Africa of the African Renaissance will urgently need to

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<sup>16</sup> AF Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History' in: *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, Leiden, 1976,180.

<sup>17</sup> D Barrett, 'AD 2000: 350 million Christians in Africa', 39-54.

<sup>18</sup> AF Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History', 183.

<sup>19</sup> AF Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History', 183.

address. There is *first of all* the issue of African Christianity having to generate its own point of view. Since the 1970s theologians have consistently written about the significance of contextualization. However, there is little evidence that contextualization has been taken seriously by African Christian thought. But today more than ever before, we have to go to work and from there bring both to the new Africa and to the global context tangible content.<sup>20</sup> Historically, theology in the African context has focused so much on methodology<sup>21</sup>. Today, the situation on the ground needs content – what can theology, Evangelical Theology for that matter, offer? Professor George Kinoti has powerfully described the current situation of African Christianity and with it the African Christian thought in the following words:

there is a sense in which Christianity in Africa is the White man's religion. The denominations we belong to, the liturgies we use, the hymns we sing, the theologies that govern our beliefs and conduct, be they liberal or evangelical, are all made in the West. Most of the Christian books we read originate from the West and usually written for the Western readers. This is not to blame the Western church: it time to say to the African Christians to begin to think and do things for themselves<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> John Mbiti on 26 May 1985, over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, stated that, 'the Christians in Africa have a faith but not a theology'.

<sup>21</sup> Recent literature on the methodology of African theology is immense. The following is a very small sample of some works in this regard: JS Pobee, *Toward African Theology*. Nashville, 1979; A Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* New York, 1977; A Shorter, *Towards a theology of Inculturation*. New York, 1988; C Nyamiti, *African Christian Theology: Its Nature, Problems and Methods*. Kampala, 1969; C Nyamiti, *The way to Christian Theology for Africa*. Eldoret, 1975; JS Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*. Eldoret, 1984; R. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology*. Nairobi, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> G Kinoti, *Vision for a Bright Africa*. Kampala, 1997, 74,75.

Kinoti's observation is obviously an embarrassment to the 351 million of Christians in Africa today<sup>23</sup> because he has said it as it is. Dick France clearly agrees with Kinoti when he suggests that the African Church ' . . . needs more teaching and direction from within, not from without. It needs theology, its own African Christian theology. Until this is achieved, . . . it will not grow in influence on the new Africa, and it will be increasingly dismissed as a legacy from the colonial past'<sup>24</sup>. The Africa of the African Renaissance is first of all about self-reliance and contribution to the global stage. How can theology in Africa urge for self-reliance in other areas of existence and make tangible theological contribution to the global situation when it clearly has not learnt how to think?

*The second problem* touches on what David Tracy calls the 'publics' of theology. Tracy argues that there are at least three publics of theology-- the university, the believing community and the public arena<sup>25</sup>. The task of theology in each of these publics differ significantly. If theology has not understood its own public, there is likely going to be 'internal confusion and external chaos'<sup>26</sup>. Individual African theologians such as Mbiti, Fashole-Luke, Tshibangu, Pobee, to name but a few have one foot in the academy and the other in the church and sometimes it is not clear which public they really are addressing. This is true also of the evangelical

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<sup>23</sup> D Barrett, 'AD 2000: 350 million Christians in Africa' is of the conviction that the Christian population in the African context has previously been underestimated. Consequently in 1970, Barrett estimated the growth of Christian adhesion in Africa at twice the rate of population increase; this allowed him to give 351 million as the number of Christians in Africa by the year 2000 (see his 'AD 2000:350 million Christians in Africa', 1970). This concern that the Christian population has previously been underestimated had earlier on been expressed by CG Baeta who in 1968 wrote that the "figures, derived from official Church sources, represent far less than the actual numbers of professing Christians" (*Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, 1968, xii).

<sup>24</sup> Dick France quoted in T Adeyemo, *Reflections on the State of Christianity in Africa*, Potchefstroom, 1995, 5.

<sup>25</sup> D Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York, 1981,5.

<sup>26</sup> D Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination*, 3.

theologians. Tite Tienou confesses that his own works and those of Byang Kato in actual fact belong to the academy.<sup>27</sup> The Bible schools and theological colleges focus on the community of faith.

It seems clear therefore that neither the African theologians nor the Bible schools and theological colleges have noticed the public arena where laws and policies are formulated and their implementation enforced as the third constituency of theology. This neglect has meant that theology in the African situation is understood to be a preserve of the seminary, the church related university, and the pastoral setting and is therefore completely disengaged from the affairs of the wider society. Can this mentality persist into the era of the African Renaissance without dire consequences for theology? I believe that the evangelicals have an opportunity to make significant contributions to the wider public of the African society. In any case, as Tienou once asked, 'who in Africa is more interested in applying biblical truths to emergency situations than the local evangelical pastor!'<sup>28</sup>

*The third issue* is a direct result of the first problem and the second one. It is the question of the nature of preparation taking place in our theological institutions. How ready are our theological institutions for the Africa that is being born in our midst? Talk about poverty, disease, peace, racial-tribal tensions and so on – what is the evangelical faith saying about these issues? Of course there is a lot that the church, the evangelicals included, is doing in the rather delicate process of rebuilding Africa. The services and the actions themselves testify to mastery of intricate and specialised skills seasoned with focused vision for humanity and the larger society. Where do the evangelical Christians involved in such problem-solving situations get such skills from? Do the African evangelical theological institutions prepare their students with such creativity and critical thinking skills as fluency, problem-solving and problem-finding and evaluation desperately needed in the process of engaging with other disciplines in the construction of the new Africa? We worry that this is not happening as the African institutions of

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<sup>27</sup> T Tienou. *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa*. Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1982, 49.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 50.

theological formation, whether evangelical or liberal, have neither seized control of their destiny nor have they given serious thought to tangible contributions they can make to the reconstruction of Africa.

Then there is *the problem of paradigm*. Justin Ukpong has identified at least three major theological paradigms operational in the African context. They are African Inculturation Theology (focusing on theology and the problem of cultural identity), Black Theology (dealing with the question of colour), and the Liberation Theology (addressing the problem of poverty and injustice in Africa)<sup>29</sup>. To these three we could also add the African women theology (handling the issue of gender in Africa).<sup>30</sup> Evangelical Theology in the context of Africa has not had a unique paradigm as it sees itself as standing in the line of traditional theology. However the theological paradigms mentioned arose in various sociopolitical and religio-cultural contexts.

The question that we must ask now is whether any one of these paradigms has the structural capacity to address the Africa of the African Renaissance. Does South Africa for example still need Black Theology five years after the formal death of apartheid? How can the traditionally anti-political oppression Liberation Theology bring healing to Nigeria, Eritrea, and Mozambique while the governments in these countries are clearly committed to moral high grounds and are genuinely pursuing avenues that will make the respective countries work? Could one give prominence to the identity problem while only an insignificant population in the West still regard Africa as unworthy of participating in the global stage? What will the African Evangelical Theology do to ensure that its own pattern of theological reflection is adequate for the demands of the new situation? An examination of these questions reveal that the Africa of the African Renaissance is clearly confronting theology with an emergency situation, a situation where the issue is construction and

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<sup>29</sup> JS Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*. Eldoret, 1984.

<sup>30</sup> MA Oduyoye, 'The Roots of African Christian Feminism' in: *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, Nairobi, 1986, 36.

not race, culture, gender or poverty. A situation as this should help produce a different and a good theology<sup>31</sup>.

These conditions need some sort of remedy. The Africa of the African Renaissance expects theology to participate along with other academic disciplines in locating solutions to the African problems. While there is this pressure urging theology to be involved, there is also the contradictory feeling within the world of academia which views theology as a prodigal discipline. Of course theology from the very outset knows that its claim to truth as well as its methodology finds no recognition outside the community of faith. But regardless of this initial setback, theology has to put its house in order and to do everything in its power to ensure that she is not justly ridiculed and that she finds some sort of acceptance within her cultural environment.

#### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE CONTEXT OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

Already the new Africa has put theology in its self defense. The response of theology to this challenge should not be that of pessimism even though there could be reasons for that; neither should the response be mere optimism as if theology is so complete that it can no longer incorporate any constructive criticism. With or without a situation like this, theology as Adeyemo advises, should always take a realistic point of view<sup>32</sup>. No one can undo the fact that the gospel brought light to Africa, neither can anyone deny that Christianity is the religion of the majority of the Africans.

The African Christians however need to understand and be able to express their faith in light of the questions raised by their ever changing situation. Even if the African Renaissance never came into existence, what the Christian faith means in our ever changing world would still require rigorous reflection. Saint Anselm underscored the

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<sup>31</sup> David Bosch in the article 'Missionary theology in Africa' in: *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 49 (1984) 15 explains that good theology always arises out of emergency situations.

<sup>32</sup> T Adeyemo, *Reflections on the State of Christianity in Africa*, 4,5.

significance of understanding what one believes in his famous *fides quarens intellectum*. Professor Daniel Migliore resuscitated this line of thought in his recent book *Faith Seeking Understanding* (1991). It is not possible to adequately understand the meaning of faith<sup>33</sup> without engaging problem-finding and problem-solving mechanisms. In order for me to understand what 'my' faith means to me, I must be willing to have and exercise certain attitudes and sets of skills that problem-finding and problem-solving researchers have summarized in the twin phenomena of creativity and critical thinking.

Creativity and critical thinking are related. In order to be creative one has to have the skill of critical thinking<sup>34</sup>. Both creativity and critical thinking require the application of the right attitude as well as such largely accepted cognitive skills as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. Creativity researchers have found out that these skills are applied through at least five steps; none of which is adequate in and of itself and all of them are necessary. The steps are: (1) recognising or selecting the problem, (2) clarifying and representing the elements of the problem as an extended effort to solving it, (3) proposing solutions to the problem, (4) testing and evaluating or restructuring the solutions, and (5) revising, restating, and re-evaluation or simply verification and elaboration<sup>35</sup>.

The African theologians should begin to take seriously the Africa being born by the African Renaissance. This is the field where questions for African theology at the beginning of the twenty first century are being raised. We should be able to identify what the central questions in this context are. Theology should recognise in the situation of reception everything that is mean, ugly, brutish and degrading. The purpose of recognising these aspects of the context is

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<sup>33</sup> Faith at the end of the day, as Cantwell Smith has well explained is truly personal: 'My faith is an act that I make, myself, naked before God' (C Smith, *The Meaning and end of Religion*, London, 1978, 191)

<sup>34</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 98

<sup>35</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 96-99; see also RT Brown, 'Creativity: What are we to measure,' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*, New York 1989, 5&6.

so that they may be explained and their nature thoroughly understood. Theology needs for example to understand and explain Africa's perennial famine, unemployment, crime, disease, racial and tribal tensions, corruption, and so on as they are, if it is to explain the Good News in this situation. These explanations should make sense to the other experts taking part in the problem-solving mission.

But theology must be fluent with the universal Christian story – the gospel. The gospel according to Lamin D Sanneh can be expressed in the conceptual forms of every culture<sup>36</sup>. Kwame Bediako also argues strongly for the significance of the capacity to transpose the Christian message from its biblical matrix into the categories of understanding available in the indigenous cultures<sup>37</sup>. But as would be expected, the process of rethinking the Gospel message for another intellectual culture involves a functioning within and a good grasp of the universal Christian story. To function within the universal Christian story or as Vincent of Lerins emphasised, 'what has been believed everywhere, always by all' (*Commonitorium* II, 1-3), is not to fall into a Eurocentric formation<sup>38</sup>. The African church is a part of the universal church, it does not have another story. It is this same universal story that the African theology must identify, listen to, and clarify for the Africa of the African Renaissance.

The gospel will sure disturb the solutions other disciplines are offering within the African Renaissance debate. Our attitude when

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<sup>36</sup> LD Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, New York, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> K Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, Oxford, 1992. 426-441; see also his other book *Christianity in Africa*, Edinburgh, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> As we search for the 'kernel of the universal Christian story', it is important that we note that Western theology as would be expected has reformulated what we have received in Africa as 'the universal Christian story' to conform to their own situation. Western theologians for example define the modern person in terms of the modern industrial affluence where time and space rule supreme. Some Western theologians deny the reality of the spirit world, and apply the gospel to a non pluralistic society. In Africa, I am not because of time and space, but because I am a member of my community; the spirit world is real, and the gospel is applied to a religiously plural context. Knowing shifts in meaning in areas such as this motivates us to a serious search for 'the kernel of the universal story'.

this happens should be that we let the gospel be the judge, and not the other way. When the gospel disturbs the solutions offered by other disciplines, theology must be ready to explain the nature of what has taken place since a problem properly understood is half solved. The skill needed for this kind of task is the capacity to clarify a problem. Annis suggests the relevant questions that could help here: 'What are the elements of the problem? What are the relevant issues involving it? How is the problem to be represented so that it can be explored and solved?'<sup>39</sup>. The theologian should be in a position to offer a greater elaboration of the problem. Creativity researchers believe that when problems are properly defined then it is easier to see how they relate with other experiences<sup>40</sup>.

Once the theologian has clarified the problem, he/she should be in a position to propose theological solutions. At this stage the theologian should be in a position to propose many alternative solutions. This brings flexibility into theology. He/she must however be able to narrow down to the one proposal that is most plausible. Weisburg believes that new solutions should keep in mind the solutions of old themes<sup>41</sup>. 'Keeping in mind the old themes' referred to here is in theology what Professor Brummer calls the test of "consonance with tradition"<sup>42</sup>. In other words, is the solution offered consonant with clear teaching of the Christian faith?

The solutions suggested must be tested, evaluated and restructured. This is the domain of critical thinking. According to Annis the skills required here are interpretation (the ability to

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<sup>39</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 97.

<sup>40</sup> B Stein, 'Memory and Creativity' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*. New York 1989, 163-176.

<sup>41</sup> RW Weisberg, 'Problem solving and Creativity' in: RJ Sternberg (ed.), *The Nature of Creativity*. Cambridge, 1988, 148-176.

<sup>42</sup> Professor V Brummer in his paper 'Metaphorical Thinking and Systematic Theology' read in 1998 at the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, argues that there are at least two significances of 'consonance with tradition'. First, it confines the solution(s) within the boundaries of cumulative tradition thereby allowing the solution(s) to be recognisable for the community of believers, and in the second place it helps the theologian to learn from the mistakes of the predecessors.

comprehend and express the meaning or significance of data), analysis (the capacity to define terms, compare ideas, identify problems and analyze arguments), evaluation (assessing the logic of a proposal), inference (drawing justified conclusions), explanation and self-regulation<sup>43</sup>. These steps ensure that the solutions suggested are relevant, adequate, intelligible, and credible<sup>44</sup>. The resultant proposal should be original but it should also have the capacity to stand both internal investigation and external scrutiny. If any of these standards is not met, the theologian must go back to work.

Even after the solutions have been tested in light of the criteria suggested, it must be emphasised that they in a sense still remain tentative. They are not the final word. They may still have to be revised, restated, and re-evaluated in light of new discoveries, new questions and new contexts. Perhaps this factor would help the African theologians not to despair in their search for truth in a context where theological suggestions will increasingly be challenged by the other disciplines participating in offering solutions for the construction of the new Africa.

#### **FOSTERING CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING**

If creativity and critical thinking are the skills that theology needs in order for it to participate along with other academic disciplines in search for the solutions of the African problems, then we have to think through how these skills may be fostered. The suggestions we have made here apply particularly to the institutions of theological formation. We have here given three distinct suggestions.

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<sup>43</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 98.

<sup>44</sup> V Brummer, 'The Identity of the Christian tradition', a paper read at the faculty of theology, University of Stellenbosch, 1998, 1-5. In this paper he develops a criterion of judging theological adequacy.

**Focus on Elaborative Learning.**

Let the student think about the information in question, let them ask questions. The Luo of Kenya have the saying: *penjo e ng'eyo* (asking is knowing). Create an atmosphere that allows for questions and prompts the memory to go back to its own bank. Research indicates that elaborative rehearsal is the way information enters long term memory (LTM)<sup>45</sup>. When dealing theologically with a problem like poverty for example, the student needs to ask questions about poverty, to think through the meaning and significance of poverty, to relate the information he/she has on poverty with what he/she already knows. This means that the student has to participate, and to formulate his/ her own argument. Such participation enables the students to locate within their own experiences relevant evidence that might either buttress or attack the new information.

Two problems traditionally inhibit elaborative learning; the problems are the tendency of the mentor to do it all for the student, this tendency has also been called 'spoon feeding'. The lecture method commonly used in the African theological institutions for various reasons is largely responsible for this problem. The other problem is the tendency to present too many details about a problem. Theology courses taught in the African theological institutions tend to focus on the informational content and the result of such a focus is that the knowledge base is never given time to be fluent. Theology faculties should work on removing these problems in order to allow the students to develop their own solutions.

**Help the Theology Student to be Better  
Problem Finders and Problem Solvers**

The Africa of the African Renaissance is now talking of solving her own problems. The theology students need to address and therefore have opinion on a number of uniquely African issues especially given the urgent demands of the new Africa. This however is feasible if the students are trained to be better problem-finders and better problem-solvers. There are at least four issues here.

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<sup>45</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 100.

*First of all* the theology lecturers might have to be more self-conscious about their own problem-finding and problem-solving techniques and to share them with their students. *Secondly*, the theological institutions might have to introduce courses about problem solving. Such courses would then deal with such issues as seeking adequate explanation and justification, looking for inconsistencies, tracing out the consequences of positions, identifying coherence and mutual support, and considering the question of comprehensiveness<sup>46</sup>. Research indicates that a student's capacity to think creatively and critically is vastly improved if he/she takes courses that deal directly with creativity and critical thinking<sup>47</sup>.

*Thirdly*, there is the question of evaluation. The way the theology mentors evaluate students at the end of the courses for example should genuinely indicate that they want the students to develop creativity and critical thinking skills. This empowers the students and enables them to be independent thinkers. Then *lastly*, there is the need for practice. In order for one to be creative they need lots of practice. The opportunities to practice are numerous in Africa. They need, as they practice, to formulate problems and ask numerous questions related to the problems and the appropriateness of the suggested methods. Brainstorming has been found to be a helpful activity where one is in the process of both formulating a problem and proposing solutions<sup>48</sup>.

#### **Attend to the Students' Attitude Towards Theology**

The attitude towards theology here as has been stated elsewhere has generally been negatively affected by the history of African Christianity and the rise of extreme nationalism in the newly independent African countries. An attitude like this is bad for theology as a discipline and for its inner development. Our students should be encouraged to know that some of the best contemporary African theologians such as JS Mbiti, K Bediako, JS Pobee, B Kato,

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<sup>46</sup> DB Annis, 'Fostering Creativity in Philosophy', 102.

<sup>47</sup> DB Annis & L Annis, 'Does Philosophy Improve Critical Thinking?' in: *Teaching Philosophy* 3 (1979), 145-152.

<sup>48</sup> An elaborate discussion on this is available in JS Dacey, *Fundamentals of Creative Thinking*, Lexington, 1989.

do not just see Christian scholarship as a luxury but to the contrary they view it as a necessity in the rough terrain of scholarship. Their works reveal that there are African theologians who have taken theology as a discipline that is no less demanding, no less strenuous and no less academically rigorous. Creativity research has revealed that creative individuals tend to be motivated by the challenge of work<sup>49</sup>. Let the students sweat their way through. Let them use the best of logic to come to their own positions but let them also see examples of Christian thinkers from their own context who have strived to remain true to the Christian tradition, indicated high drive to produce and displayed great heights of perseverance. This is a way of offering the students incite into how to be intrinsically motivated for the tough task ahead. Let the students do these not only because ready made solutions reduces the students' capacity to be creative<sup>50</sup>, but more so because at the end of the day theology deals with faith, 'my own subjective' faith. I should have the capacity to generate questions to help me to better understand the place in which I am before my God.

### CONCLUSION

The new spirit of self-reliance that is taking root in Africa as the continent seizes control of her destiny and seeks a place in the global stage is a reality that can not be denied. But equally true is that the destiny of Africa can not just be left in the hands of the engineers, the doctors, the financiers and other experts. Placide Tempels stated that the African live more by being than by following their own ideas<sup>51</sup>. Mbiti in a way corroborated Tempels on this point when he declared that the African is incurably religious. Religion, Mbiti explains,

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<sup>49</sup> The readings that are useful in this regard are C Martindale, 'Personality, Situation, and Creativity' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*, New York 1989, 211-232; and RW Woodman & LF Schoenfeldt, 'Individual Differences in Creativity' in: JA Glover, RR Ronning, CR Reynolds (eds.), *Handbook of Creativity*, New York 1989, 77-91.

<sup>50</sup> T Amabile, *The Social Psychology of Creativity*, New York, 1983.

<sup>51</sup> P Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris, 1959, 23.

'permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it'<sup>52</sup>. The other theological thinkers who believe that in African traditional societies, nothing falls outside religion are JB Danquah and Bolaji Idowu<sup>53</sup>. These thinkers could have overstated themselves. Kudadjie has helped us to recognise that besides religion, the African society has other morality determiners such as language, education, social and geographical environments, tradition and custom, conscience and intuition<sup>54</sup>. But overstated as the point may be, one message has been passed across; namely that the part played by religion in the existence of the African is significant. Africa's major religions –Christianity, Islam, and the African traditional religions – must be recognised as formidable players in displaying the nature of modern Africa.

How Islam and the African traditional religions are to participate in the direction the new Africa is taking is their decision. Christianity however has the biblical obligation to plant the seed of the Kingdom of God wherever it is at all times. In the middle of war, famine, pestilence, poverty, corruption, and chronic political instability, the rule of God is being felt everywhere in Africa. The African church knows that God is at work in that context because of its function as a sign of the Kingdom of God. Since theology is about *fides quarens intellectum*, it is imperative that Christianity should use all the resources available to tell the new Africa how it understands God's rule here and now. Such a statement should not just be directed to the African audience, it has to find space also in the global theological situation since Africa is today recognized as the center of

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<sup>52</sup> JS Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1, 262.

<sup>53</sup> JB Danquah contribution in this regard is his *Akan Doctrine of God*, (1968). In this book, Danquah argues that religion and particularly the concept of God influences significantly the moral attitude of the African (ibid.: 2, 3, 16). Whereas Danquah tends to be ambiguous, Bolaji Idowu is forthright. In his *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief* (1963), he makes it clear that the African does not make an attempt to separate morality and religion, ' . . . and it is impossible for them to do so without disastrous consequences' (*Ibid.* :145, 146).

<sup>54</sup> JN Kudadjie, 'Does Religion determine morality in African societies?' in: JS Pobee(ed.), *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, Leiden, 1976. 75.

gravity of the world's Christianity. The task is obviously daunting but since it is done to the glory of God and since the Gospel is the light of our path at all times, we believe that theology will not get lost in the thick of search for the meaning of the rule of God in the new Africa and in its determination to contribute to the global theological situation.

## THE SHARING OF GOODS WITH THE POOR IS A CHRISTIAN IMPERATIVE

*Paul Mumo Kisau*

*Paul Kisau touches on two ever present realities among our churches: the prevalence of the poor and the need for generous contributions. The Christian church should not depend on generous foundations to help the poor for she has a mandate from Christ himself to share her goods with the poor. What a revolution would take place in our societies if the principles laid out in this article were applied to our churches! As we enter this new century let us pray that this biblical truth will motivate our churches to build a new society founded on obedience to Jesus Christ.*

### INTRODUCTION

The saying of the Lord found in Acts 20:35 has been widely used to motivate people to give money in churches in Africa. As far as I can remember, many a pastor would quote this saying to their congregations, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'. Nevertheless, not many people have bothered to understand its context within the purpose of Luke-Acts, in particular as it relates to the sharing of the material goods with the needy (poor). The motivation to give to those in need has not found a particular interest in the Bible; rather it has been the parading of those who are deemed to be poor. The apostle Paul does not seem to use the means that are commonly used today to motivate the Ephesian elders to share their material wealth with those in need. The saying of the Lord becomes

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**Paul Mumo Kisau** earned his B.Th. (Hons) from Scott Theological College in 1991 and his M.Div. from the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in 1994. He is on study leave from Scott Theological College and is presently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. For six years he served as pastor in the Africa Inland Church, Kenya. He lectured in Mulango Bible Institute for one year and served as the Dean of Students at Scott Theological College, 1995-96.

the focal point for those who would like to serve in giving to those less privileged. This saying comes at time that Paul is about to quit active missionary work since the focus of Lukan story will turn to his imprisonment. The saying thus completes the description of how the church ought to share the material goods with those in need (see the summaries of Ac 2:44ff.; 4:32ff.).<sup>1</sup>

**THE OVERRIDING MOTIVATION:**

***"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35***

This principle sets the sharing of goods within the community of believers apart from all the other groups in the first century. The picture's focus becomes sharp when seen against a good background. This background is the other groups or ideologies before the primitive community of believers which seem to have held the same ideas. A fuller exegesis of 20:35 will now be done in order to bring out the impact the teaching of Jesus had upon the early community of believers. After the exegesis of 20:35 the feeding episode recorded in Luke's gospel will be discussed in order to provide one specific event that might have been of great influence to early community of believers.

Paul's speech at Miletus to the Ephesian elders ends with a solemn exhortation recorded in Acts 20:35. In this exhortation, Paul intertwines his role model with the saying of the Lord Jesus. The elders are urged to remember both Paul's lifestyle among them and the teaching of Jesus in the matters of working and sharing their material goods with the needy. There are several important words and phrases within this short passage, which are of help in its interpretation. These words will now be discussed in an attempt to shed light on the sharing impact of Luke's story in Acts.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a small part of Paul Kisau's research work into the community in Acts of the Apostles in relation to the social sharing of goods. Paul argues that the sharing of goods in the Acts of the Apostles is not limited to the Jerusalem community, as it has been traditionally held, but transcends the whole description of the community. The 'saying of the Lord' proves this point beyond any reasonable doubt.

***In Everything I Showed You*** Πας (Παντα) ὑποδεικνυμι<sup>2</sup>  
(υπεδειξ)

This means 'in everything',<sup>3</sup> in other words, all that has constituted Paul's life has been a form of modelling process, to show the way, teaching, to make known, to warn. Paul has been in the course of teaching the Ephesian Christians by his own example.<sup>4</sup>

***To You*** - ὑμιν ὅτι οὗτος

The purpose is further strengthened by the use of the phrase ὑμιν ὅτι οὗτος which points to the audience so that there is no doubt in their mind as to whom Paul is addressing. It may be translated as follows: 'you that thus', 'in this way', 'thus', 'so', 'in the same manner'. The purpose of Paul's life has been for imparting the same kind of lifestyle to the Ephesian elders. He requires them to remember how he has lived among them and realise that they should live in the same way.

***Hard Work - Κοπιᾶο***

What are they to imitate? Paul's κοπιᾶο, that is, 'hard work'.<sup>5</sup> They are to work hard with their own hands as Paul did in tent making. This formula of Paul encouraging others to imitate his life is found elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. I Co 11:1). In case they were not sure why they should work, Paul gives them the reason thus, δει, "it is necessary" to work in order to support (αντιλαμβαναι) those who are in need, the weak (των

<sup>2</sup> This term gives a sense of drawing a pattern for others to follow, that is, providing an example. So Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* 365.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. every kind, all, full, absolute, greatest.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 336. Marshall agrees with our point of view here thus, "in this way Paul sought to be an example of helping the poor (1 Th 5:14)..."

<sup>5</sup> Harrison puts it succinctly thus, "He wanted the elders to be hard-working men of integrity and could think of no better way to impress his desire upon them than to cite his own disinterested labor in their midst." Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*, 317.

ασθενουτων – ασθενω).<sup>6</sup> To reinforce this teaching Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to remember (μνεμονευω – “remember”, “keep in mind”, “think of”, “make mention of”, cf. Heb 11: 22) the saying of the Lord Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The Saying of the Lord Jesus***

Before we discuss this saying, it is worthy to note the usage of the title, 'Lord', in referring to Jesus. The term, 'Lord', appears 102 times in Acts and 92 times in Luke's gospel. The formula of the title is used to show reverence for Jesus as expressed in the Old Testament, 'Lord God'. Both God and Jesus are addressed in Acts as the 'Lord'. Perhaps it would be true to say that a lord demands obedience from those who recognise such a person as being worthy to be the lord. God in the Old Testament demanded no less than total allegiance to his Law. Jesus here, being spoken of as the Lord, gives the motif of one who deserves obedience from his subjects. The saying that is given here has strong bearing towards ethical teaching on sharing possessions to those in need of such help. Paul's life model is derived from the teaching of Jesus and the Ephesians will do well to listen to the why and how of sharing their goods with others. Paul elsewhere calls upon the Corinthian Christians to follow him because he is following Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

The Lord provides salvation to those who call upon his name (2:21) and Paul has had a personal encounter with the Lord on his

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<sup>6</sup> F.F. Bruce is of the opinion that the reference is on those who were sick and unable to work. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* 436. However, Paul elsewhere quotes the teaching of Jesus in an appeal for the support of God's servants (I Co 9:14), so that we should not see Paul limiting those to be supported as only the sick and weak. Paul talks of his hard work for his own needs and of those with him. These ones with Paul cannot only be the sick and the weak.

<sup>7</sup> This saying has been used at the end of the speech in accordance with Pauline practice, where, the most important point is placed after a solemn exhortation. So Harrison, *Acts: the Expanding Church* 317. Harrison points to the first Corinthian letter, where the matter of sharing is placed immediately after the important discussion of death and resurrection (cf. I Co 15:58 and 16: 1 ff).

<sup>8</sup> See I Co 4:16; 11:1; Php 2:5ff, 3:17; 4:9; cf. 1 Pe 5:3

way to Damascus (9:5f). This same Lord had added believers to the Church (3:19) and had given his Spirit to the Church (5:9). The disciples and all the believers belonged to the Lord (9:1,6,10). Therefore, the believers were under obligation to obey all the sayings of the Lord. For that reason, Paul, calls upon the Ephesians to remember one of the sayings of the Lord.

Now, concerning the words of the Lord Jesus expressed here. We do not find them elsewhere in the New Testament. Nevertheless, their spirit is evident in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Lk 6: 38).<sup>9</sup> The implication of Paul's speech here is that the Ephesian elders were familiar with the saying already.<sup>10</sup>

The saying contains two contrasting elements, that of giving and receiving.<sup>11</sup> Marshall helpfully points out the possibility of this saying being misunderstood by implying that those who are helped are less blessed, when he writes that:

But clearly this is not what is meant, and the point is rather that it is better for a person who can do so to give to help others rather than to amass further wealth for himself (Marshall, *Acts*, 336).

It is perhaps better following Marshall's comment to translate λαμβανειν as 'take hold of', meaning 'it is better<sup>12</sup> to give<sup>13</sup> than to

<sup>9</sup> So Richard N. Longnecker, *The Expositor's 's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Acts*, 310. So also F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 437. Cf. the same language in Sir. 4:31; Did, 1:5, 1 Clem. 2 1. Seneca, Ep. 81:17.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *ibid*, comments here that "it is implied that they already knew this and presumably other sayings of the Lord, Collections of his sayings were probably in circulation by this time." See the discussion by D.L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul*, (Oxford: 1971), 3-40, 76-80. Cf. I Cor. 7:10,12,25; 9:14; 11:24f; I Tim. 5: 18, 6:3.

<sup>11</sup> μακαριον εστιν μαλλον διδοναι η λαμβανειν.

<sup>12</sup> See R. Roberts, "The Beatitude of Giving and Receiving," *ExpTim* im 48 (1936-37): 439, where he stresses the fact that wealth unshared brings sorrow. He puts it thus: "Generosity brings more happiness than acquisitiveness" because "wealth unshared becomes a soul-destroying obsession."

take<sup>14</sup> hold of property.<sup>15</sup> This echoes the Jerusalem spirit of sharing, where possessions and goods were sold freely to relieve the needs of others. We are to assume here that, for the Jerusalem church to continue sharing, someone must be ready to work to keep this flow. In the same manner, if the Ephesian church was to share with those who were in need, they must be ready to work. To give, means that there is something to be given, and this something has to come from somewhere. This *somewhere* is 'hard' labour.<sup>16</sup>

This saying does not give the mandate for God's servants to be self-supporting<sup>17</sup> but rather urges them not to be takers only.<sup>18</sup> The receiving which is described here is not that of the needy, since they

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<sup>13</sup> See R. Roberts, 438, who comments that "there cannot be givers without receivers. Giving and receiving are the obverse and reverse sides of one and the same transaction, and there is no reason why both should not be equally blessed-" Haenchen while not disagreeing with Roberts senses a discontinuity in Paul's train of thought. This is because few lines up he was advocating a giving to others, but now quotes a saying that seems to block receivers with shame- This tension is removed if we use 'holding' instead of 'receiving'.

<sup>14</sup> R. Roberts, 439, agrees with this translation here that "probably the word take represents St. Paul's mind better than 'receive.' The word λαμβανειν can mean either."

<sup>15</sup> Roberts is of the opinion that Paul is here comparing generosity and covetousness when he cleared himself of ever having coveted any man's silver, or gold, or cloths. See Roberts, 439.

<sup>16</sup> Compare the quote by Harrison of B. F. Westcott's comments on Ephesians 4:28 thus; "Our faith constrains us to serve one another. Stealing is the typical form of using the labour of another to supply our wishes, while it is our duty to make our own labour minister to the needs of others. The inspiration of labour is not personal gain but fullness of service." Harrison, *Acts*, 318. See B. F. Westcott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 73.

<sup>17</sup> So Haenchen, *Acts*, 594. Haenchen comments on verse 33f, that "so Luke gives the reader to understand that Paul supported himself through his own labour, a trait for which the earlier description of the Pauline mission allowed only occasional space. It is thus made a duty for Christian church leaders not to live at the expense of the community."

<sup>18</sup> John B. Polhill has captured the idea in his statement that "the minister is to be a servant, a giver and not a taker." Polhill, *Acts*, 430.

are to be supported anyway and it would seem contradictory to turn around and say that they were either cursed or less blessed.<sup>19</sup>

Our proposal here is that Luke has purposely allowed space to this saying of the Lord Jesus by Paul for its importance in reinforcing the sharing<sup>20</sup> spirit of both the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church. As Marshall rightly points out, Paul does not quote the words of Jesus often unless he has an ethical point to drive home (Marshall, *Acts*, 336). Polhill corresponds with what we are suggesting here when he writes that:

Paul had begun his address by listing the qualities of his own ministry as an example for the Ephesian leaders to follow. He concluded with a final quality he had sought to model. Perhaps he held it off to the end because he saw it as the most essential of all for a legitimate ministry (Polhill, *Acts*, 430).

Therefore, we can conclude that Luke has powerfully brought us to the position of not only admiring the sharing spirit of the Jerusalem church, but also to see the base of sharing liberally, namely, the saying of the Lord: "What they received they did not take hold of, but gave to such ones as had need. For this giving to continue, it was necessary for some to labour hard to provide. Wealth was not to be stored away (cf. the parable of the rich fool Lk 12:16ff) and neither was it to be shared among the rich (Lk 14:12). However, it was to be shared among all, including the poor of the community (Lk 14:13). Here is the danger of not sharing wealth with the poor of the community, since this amounts to not having an account in heaven (Lk 16:19ff). In the parable of the rich man and

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<sup>19</sup> To use Polhill again, here is a fitting word from him, "the saying should not be seen as a judgment against gracious receiving but rather against acquisitiveness, against actively 'taking' for oneself a common meaning for λαμβανω." (Polhill, *Acts*, 430 footnote). Haenchen does see contradiction of this saying with the example of Paul- See his discussion *Acts*, 594-5 footnote.

<sup>20</sup> Roberts rightly asserts that "whatever we have gathered, whether of wealth or of knowledge or of grace, we are required to share" (439). 21 Marshall, *Acts*, 336. 22 Polhill, *Acts*, 430.

the poor man, Lazarus, Abraham gives the reason for the rich man being in torment, because of his having received plenty while on earth (Lk 16:25). The rich find it very hard to share with those in need (Lk 18:23) and Jesus predicted that it is hard for them to enter the kingdom of heaven, perhaps due to the false security of wealth (Lk 18:25). Nevertheless, there are positive examples such as Zacchaeus (Lk 19:2ff) who was willing to share his riches with the poor.

### THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Although we do not intend going into details of the teaching of Jesus on property and the poor, his teaching must have had of great influence on the primitive church.<sup>21</sup> The birth of Jesus was introduced by a strong note of liberation for the poor and the chastising of the rich.<sup>22</sup> In the same way, his ministry was also inaugurated by a declaration of the release of the oppressed and the blind. Jesus read a portion of Isaiah thus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives... To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18f). This interest in the poor is continued in the preaching of Jesus, where the poor are praised and the rich rebuked.<sup>23</sup> Yet as several scholars have noted, Jesus' attitude seems to have been ambivalent towards riches.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *Apostolic Church*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 181. Harrison rightly sees the teaching of Jesus as having provided a 'powerful motivation' for the sharing of goods the Jerusalem Church.

<sup>22</sup> The song of Mary introduces the liberation motif for the poor thus: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who are humble. He has filled the hungry with good things: and sent away the rich empty-handed" (Lk 1:52,53). The poor here are seen to be Israel, while the rich could be the foreign rulers.

<sup>23</sup> cf. The woes pronounced on the rich (Lk 6:24,25) and the blessings upon the poor (Lk. 6:20,21).

<sup>24</sup> Jesus accepted invitation to dinners hosted by the rich (Lk 11:37ff; 14:1ff. 19:1ff.). This does not mean that Jesus compromised his stand on the rich sharing the material goods with the needy. One example is fitting here,

We shall not examine the question of how Jesus viewed the whole question of property and poverty, but rather would ask if Jesus taught his disciples what to do with those in need. This line of thought could yield fruit to our enquiry of why the community of believers was open to sharing their goods freely.

Our beginning point then is that occasion when Jesus was confronted by the need of a large crowd of five thousand out in a desolate place.<sup>25</sup> This event must have been very significant to have appeared in all four Gospels. Although each Gospel has some slight difference of presentation of the event, they all agree on the main part of the story. We shall examine the story found in Luke's Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Seven things can be observed in the feeding of the more than five thousand people.

1. It was a large crowd, so overwhelming that the disciples were short of words when their Lord suggested they feed it.
2. The crowd was in a desolate place, meaning there were no shops to buy food.
3. Jesus commanded his disciples to give the crowd something to eat.
4. There were only five loaves and two fish, very little food for such a crowd.
5. When it came to feeding them, there was some organisation.
6. They all ate and were satisfied.

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where Jesus used the opportunity to challenge the rich to invite people without expecting a recompense (Lk 14:12,13).

<sup>25</sup> Lk 9:10-17; Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:32-44; 1 Jn 6:5-13.

<sup>26</sup> It is possible that this story provides a revelation to the disciples as Marshall (*The Gospel of Luke* 357-8) points out. Nevertheless, there should be something beyond a parallel of either the manna of Moses or the barley bread of Elisha, since the disciples are the ones being taught a lesson of caring for the crowd. This question of providing for those who followed them, must have continued to dwell in their minds. The effect on the crowd is shown in John's Gospel, where the next day the crowd is seen by Jesus as seeking him for another feeding (Jn 6:26).

7. There were twelve baskets full of what remained.

This observation leads us to draw several points: firstly, Jesus was the first to mandate community sharing. He could not listen to the suggestion of the disciples that the people be sent away to buy food in the nearby villages. Instead, the disciples are challenged to provide something for the crowd. If they were to provide something for the crowd then, why should they not do so at the day of Pentecost? Why should the crowd on the day of Pentecost be sent away?

We suggest that the lessons learnt at the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus must have had a tremendous influence on what the disciples did for the primitive community in Jerusalem. If they were to discover what was available during the feeding of the five thousand, why should they not be able to mobilise the crowd of the first believers to provide for the needs of the poor. Note that Luke has avoided the use of the word 'poor' or 'rich' in his description of the community of believers in Acts. There were no needy people among them. This may have its parallel in the fact that at the feeding of the five thousand, 'all ate and were satisfied' (Lk 9-17). The act of Jesus here had influenced greatly the action of the first believers in Jerusalem and other early communities described in Acts, perhaps more than what Jesus actually taught on the subject of the rich and the poor.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Not that we are minimising its impact on the rich of Luke's community, but this does not determine what took place after the day of Pentecost. In other words, what happens in the early church does not depend on what Luke has written. Instead, Luke's community may benefit positively from it. However, it is likely that Jesus' attitude to the crowd of five thousand has affected the attitude of his followers. The story of feeding the five thousand shows Jesus feeding others instead of him charismatically begging from them.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH

What implication does the foregoing discussion have for the African church? To this implication we now turn. It is worthy to mention here that only a brief implication will be provided below.

Therefore, all people are called upon to give, whether they are rich or poor. What is of first importance is the attitude of the giver as is portrayed by the rich and the poor widow (Lk 21:1ff). The model presented here raises some questions for the African church. Questions of whether the church in Africa has followed the saying of the Lord or the saying of the world. By the saying of the world here, we mean any motivation that is not Bible based. Such motivations as are depicted by the worldly fund raising agencies, whereby the poor are exploited in the name of raising funds for their cause. On the other hand, has the church failed any motivation, choosing rather not to give at all?

There are several principles that can be gleaned from the foregoing discussion for application in the African church and any church of Christ.

- There is need for people to work hard, since without hard work there would be nothing to share. The implication for the African church is to set up an effective mechanism for production of wealth. We are thinking here of ventures that can be productive. The church members are to engage in ventures that will provide enough goods for their daily needs with meaningful surplus.

- The giving should be in accordance with the need (Ac 2:45). Moreover, the Lord does not ask us to give what we do not have (cf. 2 Co 8:12). The believers in Antioch gave according to what they could give for the relief of the believers in Jerusalem (Ac 11:29). This is a big challenge for the church in Africa, since the Antioch church was like a missionary church, yet it was able to help the sending church. When shall the church in Africa send relief to the church in the West? The church in Africa should learn that it is more blessed to give than to amass wealth. The amassment should not be supposed to be in millions. The churches in Macedonia serve as a good example here (2 Co 8:1-7).

- Like the Corinthian church, the church in Africa should abound in this 'gracious work' (2 Co 8:7).

•Those who are given are to receive graciously. There cannot be a giver without the given. The given should not just receive, otherwise the same cycle of amassing wealth will be repeated. Paul in the Corinthian letter has given a wonderful balance, where the given becomes the giver, so that none is misused (2 Co 8:13-14).

There is room to give our goods to relieve the need of others, for by so doing we gain eternal values. To grab goods for selfish gain does not give us eternal blessedness, but a temporary joy that fades away like grass. This point cannot be laboured when seeing the great needs of people as the new millennium has been ushered in. The conclusion of the matter is that the sharing of goods with the poor is a Christian imperative.

## THE POWER OF PRAYER: A Case Study of Hudson Taylor

*Jacob Z. Kibor*

*Lessons from the past are not always remembered. As we look into the unknown of the new century and new millennium we would do well to remember some of the spiritual lessons learned by the giants of the faith in the past. The Rev. J. Hudson Taylor (1853-1905) was one such giant. Used by God to found the China Inland Mission in 1865, Hudson Taylor became a pioneer in the development of "faith missions." The C.I.M. became the largest Christian missionary agency in China and until 1950 was the largest of a number of missionary agencies known as "faith missions." Hudson Taylor and the C.I.M. have become "one of the strongest witnesses to the faithfulness of God in supplying the needs of so great a company of His workers over many years, in answer to simple faith and prayer." This lesson from the past is surely one that is needed by our churches in Africa in this new century as missionary boards spring up all over the continent, seldom lacking in volunteers but frequently lacking in the necessary funds to support them. The life of Hudson Taylor reminds us that "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).*

### INTRODUCTION

There is need in the Christian ministry these days for men and women who can give themselves unreservedly to God, those who are hungry for the Word of God and desire to be together with him.

**Jacob K. Kibor** graduated from Scott Theological College in 1978 with a Diploma in Theology. He has earned a B.Th. (1981) and M.Div. (1983) from Ontario Bible College and Seminary, a Th.M. from Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in 1992 and a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1998. Dr. Kibor serves at Scott Theological College as the Deputy Principal for Academic Affairs and as the Chairman of the TAG Steering Committee for Prayer Renewal.

There is need for men and women with intense passion for those who have not heard the gospel and can say with Hudson Taylor as in a letter to his mother: "I cannot tell, I cannot describe how I long to be a missionary, to carry the Glad Tidings to poor, perishing sinners. For this I could give up everything, every idol, however dear. I feel as if I could not live if something is not done for China" (Taylor 1935:28). Thus are the men and women who can depend on God alone for everything.

In the present day when better methods are sought after by churches, it is worth noting that God is primarily looking for men and women who are filled with the Holy Spirit, those who are mighty in prayer. Quoting E. M. Bounds in the context of the China Inland Mission, Dr & Mrs. Howard Taylor express it well,

It is not great talents or great learning or great preachers that God needs, but men great in holiness, great in faith, great in love, great in fidelity, great for God – men always preaching by holy sermons in the pulpit, by holy lives out of it. These can mold a generation for God (Taylor 1935:8).

Examples of such men and women abound. In this paper, Hudson Taylor will be discussed, a man who depended upon the living God alone for protection, supplies, and help of every kind. He boldly said, "I shall have no claim on anyone for anything. My only claim will be on God. How important to learn, before leaving England, to move man, through God, by prayer alone" (Taylor 1935:23).

Hudson Taylor is a man whose story, as Ruth Tucker puts it, is "a story of love, adventure, and unswerving faith in God, though not the story of the flawless saint that his early biographers created" (Tucker 1983:173; cf. Neill 1986:282). This will be seen later.

With the rise of Third World Christians going out to minister out of their own need, there is no greater human example to learn from than Hudson Taylor's. His love for Christ, sacrifice, and perseverance is to be emulated. In spite of all the problems, difficulties, and mistakes made, God honoured the faith of his weak servant. It is my desire that such great men of faith will be multiplied in our churches in Africa today.

**PRAYER FOR  
SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL SUPPLIES**

Hudson Taylor learned to economise in order to help the poor. He wrote to his sister Amelia,

the less I spend on myself, the more I can give to others. I cannot describe how I long to be a missionary and carry the Glad Tidings. Think, Amelia, every year twelve million souls in China die without God, without hope. I must leave as soon as possible. I feel as if I cannot live if something is not done for China (Stocker 1986:36).

He immediately began putting to test the promises of God. Ruth Tucker points out that "he began a rigorous programme of self-denial as an additional preparation for missionary work. It was an effort to live entirely by faith .... He even refused to remind his employer of his long overdue wages." The rationale as Tucker quotes Pollock being:

... when I get out to China I shall have no claim on anyone for anything; my only claim will be on God. How important, therefore, to learn before leaving England to move man through God, by prayer alone" (Tucker 1983:174).

God and God alone became Hudson Taylor's hope, and he needed no other. From the very start, he wrote, "I must live by faith, hang on by faith, simple faith, and He will do all things well" (Taylor 1965:18).

He deliberately cut himself off from possible sources of supply. It was God, the living God he needed .... comfort or discomfort in London, means or the lack of means, seemed a small matter compared with deeper knowledge of the One on whom everything depends (Taylor 1932:32).

God led him step by step and eventually the door opened for him to go to China with Chinese Evangelisation Society. While in China he wrote to his sister,

I have been puzzling my brain again about a house, etc., but to no effect. So I have made it a matter of prayer, and have given it entirely to the Lord's hands, and now I feel quite at peace about it. He will provide and be my guide in this land every other perplexing step (Taylor 1935:39).

The Lord guided him to Ningpo, a place where he later found his partner. On one occasion when he learned that his salary was from borrowed money because the Chinese Evangelisation Society was in debt, he wrote,

To me it seemed that the teaching of God's Word was unmistakably clear: 'Owe no man anything.' To borrow money implied to my mind a contradiction of Scripture – a confession that God had withheld some good thing, and a determination to get for ourselves what he had not given. Could that which was wrong for one Christian be right for an association of Christians? Or could any amount of precedents make a wrong course justifiable? If the Word taught me anything, it taught me to have no connection with debt. I could not think that God was poor, that He was short of resources, or unwilling to supply any want of whatever work was really His. It seemed to me that if there were lack of funds to carry the work, then to that degree, in that special development, or at that time, it could not be the work of God (Taylor 1935:58).

Hudson Taylor had embraced George Muller's attitude to debt as a denial of God's faithfulness in keeping his promises. In one of his documents quoted by A. J. Broomhall (1982:56) he decided to owe no man anything or borrow no more of anyone under any circumstances whatever. He had believed that God would supply all his needs. As he founded the China Inland Mission later, one of the requirements of the recruits was their willingness to prove their faith by going to Inland China with only the guarantee they carried in their Bibles. They had to seek God's will, believe that He owns all the gold and silver in the world, and the cattle on a thousand hills. Hudson Taylor challenged them to 'Depend upon it, God's work, done in

God's way, will never lack God's supplies' (Broomhall 1982:85-86; 1984:417).

There was no set salary for these missionaries. They depended entirely on God for their needs. To them donors were a poor substitute for the living God. They never collected money nor took collections. In some of their meetings, Hudson Taylor read out letters from George Muller especially at a particular time when Muller was caring for three hundred orphans and planning to receive a thousand, without any visible means of support. Yet, all he needed, premises, clothing and daily food was coming in answer to prayers. And in addition he was contributing to the support of forty-five missionaries overseas (Broomhall 1982:33). These letters served as practical confirmation of God's provision for Hudson Taylor and his mission. They inspired him to put his own faith into practice from day to day.

Hudson Taylor's attitudes to money and to 'faith in God' changed considerably through different periods of his developing years. His faith and understanding were growing all the time. Broomhall states that in later years Hudson Taylor burned with zeal to awaken the church to China's spiritual need and claims upon Christendom (Broomhall 1984:10). He goes on to say,

He well knew that this publicity by word of mouth and by his pen could not but bring financial returns. And he held strongly that the church at large and local churches in particular ought with conviction to send and support their missionaries to the world. If he had indulged in deliberate oblique solicitation he would soon have reaped the bitter fruits of hypocrisy. When the Christian public forgot China and the Great Commission they also forgot Hudson Taylor and the C. I. M.; and when he inspired them again, or new hearers, both China and Missions benefited through more lives dedicated to serve in them, and more prayer and funds to make it possible (Broomhall 1984:10).

The missionaries shared their income together because they never knew from where funds might be coming or how much. They never allowed any debts to be incurred. Hudson Taylor wrote with regard to debts,

It is really just as easy for God to give beforehand ... and what does going into debt really mean? It means that God has not supplied your need. You trusted Him, but He has not supplied your need. You trusted Him, but He has not given you the money; so you supply yourself, and borrow. That would be to put the blame on God when the fault had lain in your running ahead of His will (Broomhall 1984:69).

They kept the principle of 'no personal solicitation,' 'no collections' and 'no debt' literally. They stated the anticipated costs and nothing else done in raising the sums needed. The team placed their faith for its success in the Lord alone. They saw money as one small element in the Mission's needs.

Hudson Taylor's favourite verses, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes .... Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men who cannot save" (Ps. 118:9; 146:3). These verses encouraged them to see God alone as their hope whether in England or in China.

Through much prayer, God moved men and women to give to C.I.M. One such donor was John Houghton who wrote the following note to Hudson Taylor.

It is my intention to contribute to the China Inland Mission and shall endeavour to interest my friends in the work .... In the meantime I have sent £25 to the London and County Bank ... when you come to Liverpool, I shall be glad to see you and give you a prophet's chamber (Broomhall 1984:115).

At another meeting where Hudson Taylor shared concerning the extent of the population of China and its deep spiritual needs the people were moved to take a collection but Hudson Taylor objected. He begged "each one to go home burdened with the deep need of China, and ask God what He would have them to do." To him,

what God wanted was not a money contribution, but personal consecration to His service abroad, or the giving up of a son or daughter -- more precious than silver or gold -- to His service .... no

amount of money could convert a single soul; that what was needed was that men and women filled with the Holy Ghost should give themselves to the work for the support of such there would never be a lack of funds. As my wish was evidently very strong, the chairman kindly yielded to it, and closed the meeting (Broomhall 1984:153).

The following morning Colonel Puget, the chairman of the meeting, had told Hudson Taylor that he believed the previous evening that Taylor was mistaken. Hudson Taylor, quoted by Broomhall, writes,

after breakfast he asked me to his study and giving me the contributions handed to him the night before, said 'I thought last night, Mr. Taylor, that you were in the wrong about collection; I am now convinced you were quite right. As I thought in the night of that ocean of souls in China ever passing onward into the dark, I could only cry as you suggested, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' I think I have obtained the guidance I sought, and there it is.' He handed me a cheque for £500, adding that if there had been a collection he would have given a few pounds to it (Broomhall 1984:154).

The outcome of these meetings strengthened Hudson Taylor's conviction that it was always best to carry out exactly any undertakings once they had been given. To him a little thing is a little thing but faithfulness in little things is a great thing.

When finances were very low, for example in 1881, Hudson Taylor extended his habitual hours of prayer and fasted more than usual. Broomhall quoted him saying, "I am in great straits for funds. I am happy about it. The Lord may take away all our troublesome people through it and give us 'true-hearted ones instead' – those who would look, as most did, to God instead of to 'the mission' to supply their needs (Broomhall 1988: 296).

In answer to their prayers, he wrote,

"we had to win from Him by daily prayer and trust the funds to make remittances (to individuals). We did not ask in vain, for four-

fifths of the last month's income for general purposes was received in China (instead of from Europe), including sizable gifts from a consul and the parents of a non-C.I.M child in the Chefoo School (Broomhall 1988:296).

We see here that their trust in the Lord paid in the end. Their support did not depend on their home councils but on the Word of God. God had proved true to his promises and unerring in his faithfulness. Once again, Hudson Taylor's saying in reference to faith stands, "Depend upon it, God's work done in God's way will never lack supplies" (Anderson. 1994:32). Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor puts it well, "the secret of faith that is ready for emergencies is the quiet, practical dependence upon God day by day which makes Him real to the believing heart (Taylor 1935:71).

Other than prayer, there was Hudson Taylor's charisma, as well as the compelling power of his message about China's spiritual need and claims of results from those he influenced (Broomhall 1984:166).

### **PRAYER FOR WORKERS**

The young China Inland Mission needed workers. Methodology used in recruiting them was not through elaborate appeals for help, but first earnest prayer to God to thrust forth labourers, and second the deepening of the spiritual life of the church, so that men should be unable to stay at home, when they were needed. Hudson Taylor and his mission trusted God's promise that said, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Taylor 1935:78).

Hudson Taylor was quite specific in his requests. In June 25, 1865 at Brington, he prayed for twenty-four willing, skillful labourers (Barr 1973:4; Broomhall 1984:47). A few years later while in China, he requested prayer for a hundred new recruits for China in one year. Dr. & Mrs. Taylor write,

The three-fold prayer they were praying in China was taken up by countless hearts; that God would send the hundred workers, those of His own choice; that He would supply the fifty thousand dollars of extra income needed, no appeal or collections being made; and that the money might come in large sums, to keep down

correspondence, a practical point with a small office staff (Taylor 1935:157).

Since prayer to God presupposes that he hears and answers, the C.I.M. missionaries in China under the direction of Hudson Taylor waited upon the Lord to answer their prayer.

In 1887 the Lord answered their prayer. One hundred and two were chosen, equipped and sent out (Taylor 1935:157). Dr & Mrs. Howard Taylor note, not 'fifty' but 'fifty-five' thousand dollars extra were actually received, without solicitation, so that every need was met. And how many letters had to be written and receipts made out to acknowledge this large sum? Just eleven gifts covered it all, scarcely adding appreciably to the work of the staff, taxed to the utmost in other ways. And best of all, faith was strengthened and hearts were stirred with new and deeper longings wherever the story of "The Hundred" became known (Taylor 1935:157).

Hudson Taylor therefore expected the workers to come in answer to prayer, not persuasion; to the call of God, not recruiting. He did not discriminate between men and women. His experience in China showed him how effective women missionaries could be. Maria his wife had been so fluent and at ease in Chinese homes that she was always in demand (Broomhall 1984:47). As to qualifications of the workers Hudson Taylor wrote,

There is ample scope for the highest talent ... for men filled with love for God, whose superior education would enable them to occupy spheres of influence into which others could not enter, (yet) the proposed field is so extensive, and the need of labourers of every class so great, that 'the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee'...therefore persons of moderate ability and limited attainments were welcomed (Taylor 1935:1984:67).

The qualification that was emphasised most was spiritual. These are men and women who believed that there is God, and that He is both intelligent and faithful, and who therefore trust Him; and whose love for Christ made them love people and exert themselves to bring them to him. Women would find different ways of working among the women of China, but would have no less valuable roles than men

(Taylor 1984:68). While prayer for the workers was answered, God moved men to provide the funds. For example in the year 1883 news reached Hudson Taylor that an anonymous donor had contributed £3,000. The following year, the same family donated £1,000. This was God's seal for the requested workers (Broomhall 1988:311).

In spite of these provisions, the faith of the workers must be in God and their expectation from Him. The mission might fail them, or it might cease to exist, but if they put their trust in Him, He will never fail nor disappoint them.

In his early ministry, Hudson Taylor had written, "if I had a thousand lives, China should have them." This dream was fulfilled towards the close of his ministry. In 1904, more than 1,300 men and women had joined the C.I.M. and a number of others had gone to China with other societies through his urging (Broomhall 1989:502). God truly answered their prayers.

### **PRAYER IN TIME OF DIFFICULTIES**

#### **Loneliness**

Prior to leaving for China, Hudson Taylor broke his engagement twice with Miss Vaugh because she had no vision for missions. China and the Lord came first to him. Tucker writes, Taylor's commitment to God proved more powerful than his love for a woman (Tucker 1983:174). When Hudson Taylor arrived in China, he was engulfed by loneliness. This is evidenced in letters written to family members. One such letter stated, "Oh I wish I could tell you how much I love you all. The love I have in my composition is nearly all pent up, and so it lets me feel its force. I never knew how much I loved you before" (Tucker 1983:174).

In another letter to his sister he poured his emotions thus,

I love you with a love so intense, that the very possibility of your love to the Saviour, or communion with God being in the slightest degree weakened causes me to pray and almost to weep ... No words can tell the intense fervency of my love to thee my sister. I love you more than life ... I long for your growth in grace and advancement in holiness more even than for my own ... (Broomhall 1982:290).

In spite of this loneliness, the Lord brought to him Maria who became a true helper and partner in ministry. They lived together in utmost simplicity, and they truly prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Ellis n.d.:73). Years later the couple sent their children to England under the care of Miss Blatchley because of the sanitary dangers of China. On the point of starting, one of them died. At this time Maria's health was not at its best. A few months later Hudson Taylor wrote to his mother that,

(Maria) has been failing for the past 4 months, and each time worse than the preceding ... I fear that if spared till her confinement, we shall have a very trying time. If she gets over that, it will be well if a tendency to phthisis is not established in the meantime. She has been confined to her room or bed for three weeks, so I have had very little help from her. God has sustained me or I should have broken down... (Ellis n.d.:90).

A few days later Dr. Barnes, a London Hospital Obstetrician who came to see Maria, advised on an immediate induction of labour because the risk of delaying was too great for her. Hudson Taylor carried out the procedure himself, and at two A.M. he wrote urgently to Mr Muller, Mr. Horne (of Clevedon), Mr. Berger, Amelia and his mother to pray for them and especially for Maria who was in a very precarious state. Their little boy Noel, who was born, died thirteen days later. He was buried next to his brother Samuel who had died earlier on. Hudson Taylor took the burial service himself. Broomhall notes that after the burial he turned to the grave-digger and said, 'I trust I may not have to trouble you again soon.' Then turning to Charles Fische he said, 'I think she is needed for the Lord's work; that is a comfort to me and leads me to hope for her' (Broomhall 1984:262).

That evening was not encouraging for Maria. Hudson feared that she would die and asked the Rudlands (and others) to pray God to keep his heart quiet and guide his judgement. The following morning showed Hudson Taylor unmistakably that Maria was dying. Quoting from Hudson Taylor's notes, Broomhall writes,

As soon as I felt sufficiently composed, I said to her, 'My darling, are you conscious that you are dying?' She replied with evident surprise, 'Dying! Do you think so? What makes you think so?' I said, 'I can see it darling .... your strength is giving way.' ... she continued conscious till about 7.30 ... after which she slept till Jesus took her home, to be forever with the Lord (Broomhall 1982:263).

In a note to American Presbyterian friends in Hangzhou Hudson writes, Mrs. Taylor died of consumption of the bowels; baby also of diarrhea. They are truly blessed! And I too. My heart wells up with joy and gratitude for their unutterable bliss, tho' nigh breaking. "Our Jesus hath done all things well" (Broomhall 1982:263).

With the loss of his wife Maria, loss of his children and the rest of the children in England, Hudson Taylor experienced great loneliness. Dr and Mrs Howard cite him saying, "How lonesome were the weary hours when confined to my room! How I missed my dear wife and the voices of the children far away in England!" (Taylor 1935:125). But as a man of prayer Hudson Taylor learned to rest and rejoice in the Lord under all circumstances as he dealt with both inward and outward difficulties that surrounded him. This spiritual renewal, as Tucker notes, came in time to sustain him through this period of severe personal testing (Tucker 1983:183).

Writing to Jennie, Hudson Taylor says,

... my poor heart would have been overwhelmed and broken, had I not been taught more of His fullness and indwelling .... I am not far from her whom I have loved so long and so well; and she is not far from me. Soon we shall be together .... Good night (Broomhall 1985:278).

Looking back over 1870, and all the difficulties and dangers, sickness and sorrows encountered, Hudson Taylor wrote, "wave after wave of trial rolled over us; but at the end of the year some of us were constrained to confess, that we had learned more of the loving-kindness of the Lord than in any previous year of our lives" (Broomhall 1985:285).

Hudson Taylor learned the secret of not running away from difficulties but facing them squarely. He learned to find God's will in the midst of such difficulties. He encourages us, 'fear them not; look them in the face; determine to overcome them in the strength of the Lord.' Prayer changes our difficulties into joy.

### **Criticism**

Hudson Taylor, like any other leader, faced criticisms from some of his colleagues like Lewis Nicol whose literature refers to as a thorn in the flesh and other variety of friends and critics. These encounters as Broomhall notes, "throw strong light on Hudson Taylor himself, providing what can now be recognised as indispensable training for his role as leader of such a heterogeneous international society" (Broomhall 1984:8). His control of the mission combined firmness with respect and affection. He wrote to the missionaries, and dealt with their difficulties and differences of opinion.

In spite of a multitude of problems coming to him, Hudson Taylor learned to meet them by 'living one day at a time rather than carry tomorrow's problems today.' Some of the colleagues resigned from the mission. Others lacked spiritual life and power especially in the year 1881. Hudson Taylor wrote, 1881 had been 'a year of trial' unlike any other (Broomhall 1988:299). J. J. Coulthard, quoted by Broomhall, says of Hudson Taylor,

It was his habit to rise before us, very early anytime before dawn, and by candlelight read his Bible .... He valued dispatch and prompt execution in correspondence, remittances, etc .... At some of the stations there were a great many difficulties to be met, but he never trusted to anyone's advice, he always prayed about everything. His way of living was simple. He would take such notice of (a little child) and win the mother's heart. Then (he would) read the Bible with (the missionary in difficulties or disaffected), and would give such helpful talks (about the passage), and invariably the difficulties were settled (Broomhall 1988:299).

Problems also came from without. The Yangshow controversy is a prime example. It suffices here to refer to what Ruth Tucker has written. At this difficult moment, "newspaper editors and private citizens railed against Hudson Taylor until he was bitten down." So great was his despair that he lost his will to go on, succumbing to "the awful temptation ... even to end his own life." Tucker goes on to say that, "while outside forces contributed to his dark depression, it was inner strife that afflicted him most: "I hated myself; I hated my sin; and yet I gained no strength against it." The more Hudson Taylor sought to attain spirituality, she writes, the less satisfaction he found. "Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of failure and sin oppressed me." Where was it to end? But for the concern of a friend, Taylor may have suffered a complete mental collapse. Aware of Taylor's problem the friend, in a letter, shared his own secret to spiritual living. "To let my loving Saviour work in me His will .... Abiding, not striving or struggling .... not a striving to have faith, or to increase our faith but a looking at the faithful one. A resting in the loved one entirely..." With that letter Taylor's life was changed. "God has made me a new man" (Tucker 1983:1830).

Such spiritual renewal that came to him through the sharpening of a brother sustained him. The Lord allows difficulties to come to us for a reason. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor wrote regarding Hudson Taylor,

He who was to encourage thousands in a life of childlike trust, must himself learn yet deeper lessons of a Father's loving care. So difficulties were permitted to gather about him, especially at first when impressions are deep and lasting, difficulties attended by many a deliverance which made then lifelong blessing (Taylor 1935:35).

In the area of finances, some people circulated false information that the C.I.M. missionaries were in sheer poverty. The following letter written to Hudson Taylor is a good example.

Dear sir, ... I heard from a friend who has been in China, that missionaries of your society are frequently reduced to such depths of poverty that they are induced to give up the work and take up

with secular pursuits ... and that even their children are sometimes so destitute that the heathen take pity on them ... For this cause I have not continued my support of your mission. Will you kindly let me know if what I have stated is really the case (Broomhall 1988:41).

In reply to this letter, a brief portion of Hudson Taylor's letter is quoted by Broomhall.

Dear Madam, I am much obliged for your letter of inquiry ... and shall be glad if you kindly show your informant this letter, as he has been entirely misled .... I do not believe that any child or member of the family of anyone connected with our mission has ever lacked food or raiment for a single hour, though in many cases the supply may not have come before it was needed (Broomhall 1985:40).

Mrs. Rich renewed her support after receiving Hudson Taylor's letter.

Though funds sometimes diminished because of the expansion of the work, Hudson and his colleagues relied on God whose supply never diminishes. As they waited upon the Lord at such difficult moments, the Lord provided for them in ways they did not understand.

### **PRAYER SUPPORTERS**

The salvation of Hudson Taylor came as an answer to the prayers of his sister who has written in her note book to the effect that she will give herself daily to prayer until God should answer in the conversion of her only brother. His parents also prayed for him.

In exposing the deep pain of parting with his family, Hudson wrote to his mother to pray for him. He recognized that it is easy to talk of leaving all for Christ, but when it comes to the proof, it is only as one stands 'Complete in Him' (Broomhall 1982:91).

Hudson Taylor learned from his early years the importance of requesting the prayers of other brethren. Examples abound in the

literature concerning his requests for prayer. Writing to his mother when he was undergoing trials, Hudson said,

Pray for us. At times I seem almost overwhelmed with the internal and external trials connected with our work. But He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and "My strength is made perfect in weakness," so be it (Broomhall 1982:90).

Although his consolation was his deep personal faith in God, Hudson Taylor requested, as we have seen, prayers from other brethren. Special daily prayers were offered by the team and those in the home land at crucial moments. For example at Ningboon January 7, 1882, Hudson Taylor drafted an appeal to the churches in Great Britain and Ireland, writing,

1. To unite with us in fervent, effectual prayer (for) more labourers in connection with every Protestant missionary society on both sides of the Atlantic. 2. ... for forty-two additional men and twenty-eight additional women, called and sent out by God... (Broomhall 1988:302).

As for the missionaries in the field, Hudson Taylor may requested for prayer so that God might keep them from temptation and evil that surrounded them.

### CONCLUSION

The life of Hudson Taylor serves as a challenge to all who live in the present day when Christianity is easy going, a time when the importance of counting the cost in Christian missions has been minimised. What does the church need other than the heroic motivation and sacrificial life style of men like Hudson Taylor to inspire them to endure hardships for Christ?

Men and women are needed who can trust God in time of difficulties, trials, and poverty. faithful men who can say we will go whether we get support or not. Men and women are needed who yield in faith to seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and letting matters of food and clothing be secondary.

We need those who are compelled by passion for obedience to the will of God. Hudson understood that faith rests on God's faithfulness. This caused him to trust in God as a child trusts his parent. He trusted Him for material and spiritual needs. He often said, God's work done God's way will never lack God's supplies.

The Psalmist also says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4). This promise is given to men and women who give God time to reveal Himself to them as they persevere in prayer.

In our present day missionary movement, very little time is spent praying for our missionaries. The brochure, *Seven Ways to Pray for Your Missionary*, written by Bill Wilson of OMF, is very helpful as it directs to specific topics ranging from the missionary's relationship to God, physical and emotional needs, family relationships, and country of service. A wise missionary centres his prayer requests around these topics.

To all who are involved in missions, Paul's words to the Philippian church are sufficient. "My God will meet all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). We need to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unreached masses with this assurance. We need to rely on God fully for both physical and spiritual victory, depending on him for guidance and protection.

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## LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

*Norman H. Helfers*

*Church leadership is one of the most pressing issues confronting the Christian community. When Jesus observed his own disciples struggling for positions of prominence, he observed, "the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mt 20:25f). Church government as found in the New Testament reflects this basic principle: service, not lordship, ministry, not hierarchy. Norman Helfers presents a biblical study of the church government found in the New Testament, centring on elders and deacons, not a hierarchy of bishops and archbishops. If the contemporary church would seek to conform to the pattern of the New Testament church government, we would witness a transformed church, rich in service and ministry, rather than characterised by positions and power.*

As so goes the church's leadership, so goes the church. Just as in any other organisation, the church depends on its leadership. It is often appalling to see a church that is operating contrary to the Scriptures in its leadership. To see elders functioning as deacons, or deacons as elders, or as none of the above, makes one wonder whether or not that church has studied the Scriptures relating to this crucial matter. Or whether the church has left it to chance, or just let it evolve as various needs came about.

Obviously, there are some churches that are operating "politically," that is, not trying to offend anyone who may attend church services by functioning with a "community" type of approach

**Norman H. Helfers** is the Principal of the G.F.F. Bible Institute and College in Nairobi and the Field Secretary of the Gospel Furthering Fellowship. He earned a Bible Diploma (1966) and a Th.B. (1975) from the Appalachian Bible Institute, a B.A. from Bob Jones University in 1969, a M.Div. from Grace Theological Seminary in 1985 and is a candidate for a D.Min.

in their operation. One thing should be obvious from the Scriptures, and that is that Jesus said, "I will build my Church." He did not leave it to chance. If He has brought about His Church, do you not think that He has given us His plan for the government or the "organisation" of the church as well?

As the student of the Bible approaches this subject, one will soon notice that there are only two offices in the church mentioned in the Bible: elders and deacons.

Generally speaking, the elders are the "spiritual leaders" of the church, while the deacons the "physical, or material leaders" of the church. All matters in the church relating to spiritual needs are dealt with by the elders and all matters dealing with the physical are dealt with by the deacons. If this Scriptural "policy" is followed carefully the church will reap God's blessings in its operation.

### INTRODUCTION

The church, like every other dimension of God's Kingdom manifested upon earth, depends upon its leadership. The strength, health, productivity, and fruitfulness of a church directly reflect the quality of its leadership.

Under the plan which God has ordained for the church, leadership is a position of humble, loving service. Those who would lead God's people must exemplify purity, sacrifice, diligence, and devotion. And with the tremendous responsibility inherent in leading the flock of God comes potential for either great blessing or great judgement. Good leaders are doubly blessed; poor leaders are doubly chastened, for "from everyone who has been given much shall much be required" (Lk 12:48).<sup>1</sup> James 3:1 says, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgement."

Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. It is the elders who are charged with teaching, feeding, and protecting the church, and it is the elders who are accountable to God on behalf of the church. Yet many church elders do not understand either the gravity or the potential of their role.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Version.

Being uncertain of their function or their relationship to the Body, the Church, they are greatly hindered in their ability to minister effectively. With that in mind let us explore the key points fundamental to a proper understanding of the ministry of spiritual leadership for the church elder. Then we will take a look at what the Scriptures have to say about the office of the deacon and his leadership role in the local church.

### THE MEANING OF THE TERM, “ELDER”

#### Old Testament Jewish Origin.

The word, “elder”, is of Old Testament Jewish origin. The primary Hebrew word for elder, *zaqen*, was used, for example, in Numbers 11:16 and Deuteronomy 7:1, of the seventy tribal leaders who assisted Moses (Harris 1980:1,249). There it refers to a special category of men who were set apart for leadership – much like a senate – in Israel. Deuteronomy 1:9-18 indicates that these men were charged with the responsibility of judging the people. Moses communicated through them to the people (Ex 19:7; Dt 31:9). They led the Passover (Ex 12:21) and perhaps other elements of worship.

Later, the elders of Israel were specifically involved in the leadership of cities and local communities (1 Sa 11:3; 16:4; 30:26) (Wood 1970:192). Still, their function was decision making – applying wisdom to the lives of the people in resolving conflicts, giving direction, and generally overseeing the details of an orderly society.

The Old Testament refers to them as “elders of Israel” (1 Sa 4:3); “elders of the land” (1 Ki 20:7); “elders of Judah” (2 Ki 23:1); “elders ... of each city” (Ezr 10:14); and “elders of the congregation” (Jdg 21:16). They served in the capacity of local magistrates, judges, and as governors over the tribes (Dt 16:18; 19:12; 31:28) (Wood 1970:192).

Another Hebrew word for elder is *sab*, used only five times in the Old Testament, all in the book of Ezra (Harris 1980:II,615). There it refers to the group of Jewish leaders in charge of rebuilding the temple after the exile.

### **Greek Usage**

The Greek word for “elder” is *presbuteros*. *Presbuteros* is used about seventy times in the New Testament. The meaning of *presbuteros* in the New Testament is like *zaqen* in the Old Testament which means “aged,” or “bearded,” and like *sab*, which means “gray-headed.” As in our English word, “elder,” *presbuteros* has reference to mature age (Arndt 1979:699). For example, in Acts 2:17, Peter quotes Joel 2:28: “And your *old men* shall dream dreams.” The Hebrew word used for “old men” in Joel is *zaqen*, and the Greek word used in Acts is *presbuteros*. Used in that sense, elder does not constitute an official title; it simply means “an older man.”

In 1 Timothy 5:2, the feminine form of *presbuteros* is used to refer to older women. There, older women are contrasted with younger ones. In that contrast, the term again signifies only mature age, not an office in the church.

1 Peter 5:5 contains a similar usage. In such a context, *presbuteros* is generally understood to mean only “an older person,” not necessarily an officeholder of any kind. That is the primary meaning of the term in general.

In the time of Christ *presbuteros* was a familiar term. It is used twenty-eight times in the New Testament to refer to a group of ex-officio spiritual leaders of Israel (cf. Mt 27:3,41; Lk 22:52; Ac 4:8). In each of those instances and every similar usage, *presbuteros* refers to recognised spiritual leaders in Israel who aren’t defined as priests of any kind. These seem to be the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body in Judaism in Jesus’ time.

Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:3,5 use the phrase “tradition of the elders.” There *presbuteros* refers to an ancestry of spiritual fathers who passed down principles that governed religious practice. These were the teachers who determined Jewish tradition. In this sense, elder is equivalent to rabbi and may or may not signify official status.

There are twelve occurrences of *presbuteros* in the book of Revelation. All of them refer to the twenty-four elders who appear to be unique representatives of the redeemed people of God from all ages.

### THE TERM “ELDER” USED IN REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH

#### **Jewish Origins.**

The New Testament church was initially Jewish, so it would be natural that the concept of elder rule was adopted for use in the early church. Elder was the only commonly used Jewish term for leadership that was free from any connotation of either the monarchy or the priesthood. That is significant, because in the church, each believer is a co-regent with Christ, so there could be no earthly king. And unlike national Israel, the church has no specially designated earthly priesthood, for all believers are priests. So of all the Jewish concepts of leadership, the elder best transfers to the kind of leadership ordained for the church.

The elders of Israel were mature men, heads of families (Ex 12:21); able men of strong moral character, fearing God, men of truth and integrity (Ex 18:20,21); men full of the Holy Spirit (Nu 11:16-17); capable men of wisdom, discernment, and experience – impartial and courageous men who would intercede, teach, and judge righteously and fairly (Dt 1:13-17). All of those characteristics were involved in the Jewish understanding of the term *presbuteros*. The use of that term to describe church leaders emphasises the maturity of their spiritual experience, as shown in the strength and consistency of their moral character.

#### **Use in the Book of Acts.**

*Presbuteros* is used nearly twenty times in Acts and the Epistles in reference to a unique group of leaders in the church (Stott 1990:317). From the very earliest beginnings of the church it was clear that a group of mature spiritual leaders was identified to have responsibility for the church. The church at Antioch, for example, where believers were first called “Christians,” sent Barnabas and Saul to the elders at Jerusalem with a gift to be distributed to the needy brethren in Judea (Ac 11:29-30). That demonstrated both that elders existed in the church at that very early date, and that the believers at Antioch recognised their authority.

Since the church at Antioch grew out of the ministry at Jerusalem, elders probably existed there as well. In fact, it is likely that Paul

himself functioned as an elder at Antioch, before he stepped out in the role of an apostle. He is listed in Acts 13:1 as one of that church's teachers.

Elders played a dominant role in the Council of Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15. Obviously, they were very influential in the foundational life of the early church.

As Paul and Barnabas began to preach in new areas, and as the church began to extend itself, the process of identifying church leaders became more clearly defined. And throughout the New Testament, as the church developed, leaders were called elders.

As early in the biblical narrative as Acts 14, we see that one of the key steps in establishing a new church was to identify and appoint elders for church leadership. "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Ac 14:23).

Nearly every church we know of in the New Testament is specifically said to have had elders. For example, Acts 20:17 says, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." It is significant that the church at Ephesus had elders, because all the churches of Asia Minor – such as those listed in Revelation 1:11 – were extensions of the ministry at Ephesus. We can assume that those churches also identified their leadership by the same terms that were set as the pattern in Ephesus – a plurality of elders.

Peter wrote to the scattered believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, "I exhort the elders among you ...shepherd the flock of God" (1 Pe 5:1,2). Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia were not cities, but rather territories. Thus, Peter was writing to a number of churches scattered all over Asia. All of them had elders.

#### **THE ELDER RELATED TO THE BISHOP AND THE PASTOR**

**Bishop the *episkopos*, Pastor the *poimen*.**

Bishops and pastors are not distinct from elders. The terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people. The Greek

word for bishop is *episkopos*, from which the Episcopalian Church gets its name. The Greek word for pastor is *poimen* ( Arndt 1979:684).

The textual evidence indicates that all three terms refer to the same office. The qualifications for a bishop, listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and those for an elder, in Titus 1:6-9, are unmistakably parallel. In fact, in Titus, Paul uses both terms to refer to the same man (1:5,7).

All three terms are brought together in 1 Peter 5:1-2. Peter instructs the elders to be good bishops as they pastor: "Therefore, I exhort the elders (*presbuteros*) among you, as your fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (*poimaino*) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (*episkopeo*) not under compulsion, but voluntary, according to the will of God."

Acts 20 also uses all three terms interchangeably. In verse 17, Paul assembles all the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church to give them his farewell message. In verse 28, he says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*), to shepherd (*poimaino*) the church of God."

In general usage, I prefer the term elder, because it seems to be free of many of the connotations and nuances of meanings that have been imposed on both bishop and pastor by our culture.

*Episkopos*, the word for bishop, means "overseer," or "guardian" (Arndt 1979: 299). The New Testament uses *episkopos* five times. In 1 Peter 2:25, Jesus Christ is called the *episkopos* of our souls. That is, He is the One who has the clearest overview of us, who understands us best, and He is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. The other four uses of *episkopos* have reference to leaders in the church.

*Episkopos* is the secular Greek culture's equivalent to the historic Hebrew idea of elders. Bishops were those appointed by the emperors to lead captured or newly founded city-states. The bishop was responsible to the emperor, but oversight was delegated to him. He functioned as a commissioner, regulating the affairs of the new colony or acquisition.

Thus *episkopos* suggested two ideas to the first-century Greek mind: responsibility to a superior power, and an introduction to a

new order of things. Gentile converts would immediately understand those concepts in the term.

It is interesting to trace the biblical uses of *episkopos*. It appears in the book of Acts only once, near the end (Ac 20:28). Of course, at that time, there were relatively few Gentiles in the church, and so the term was not commonly used. But apparently as Gentiles were saved and the church began to lose its Jewish orientations, the Greek culture's word *episkopos* was used more frequently to describe those who functioned as elders (1 Ti 3:1).

The New Testament bishop, or overseer, is in a unique leadership role in the church, specifically responsible for teaching (1 Ti 3:2), feeding, protecting, and generally nurturing the flock (Ac 20:28). Biblically, there is no difference in the role of an elder and that of a bishop, the two terms refer to the same group of leaders. *Episkopos* emphasises the function; *presbuteros*, the character.

*Poimen*, the word for pastor, or shepherd, is used a number of times in the New Testament, but Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the King James Version where it is translated "pastor." Every other time it appears in the Greek texts, it is translated "shepherd" in the English version.

Two of the three times it appears in the Epistles, *poimen* refers to Christ. Hebrews 13:20,21 is a benediction. 1 Peter 2:25 says, "for you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd [*poimen*] and Guardian [*episkopos*] of your souls."

In Ephesians 4:11, pastor (*poimen*) is used with the word teacher. The Greek construction there indicates that the two terms go together – we might hyphenate them in English (pastor-teacher). The emphasis is on the pastor's ministry of teaching.

*Poimen*, then, emphasises the pastoral role of caring and feeding, although the concept of leadership is also inherent in the picture of a shepherd. The focus of the term *poimen* is on the man's attitude. To be qualified as a pastor, a man must have a shepherd's caring heart.

So the term elder emphasises who the man is. *Bishop* speaks of what he does. And *pastor* deals with how he feeds (MacArthur 1995b:11). All three terms are used of the same church leaders, and all three identify those who feed and lead the church, but each has a unique emphasis.

## THE ROLE OF AN ELDER

### The Office of Elder

As the apostolic era came to a close, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church leadership. Thus it carried a great amount of responsibility. The elders were charged with the care and feeding, as well as the spiritual guidance of the entire church. There was no higher court of appeal and no greater resource to know the mind and heart of God with regard to issues in the church.

1 Timothy 3:1 says, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer [*episkopos*], it is a fine work he desires to do." In verse 5, Paul says that the work of an *episkopos* is to "take care of the church of God." The clear implication is that a bishop's primary responsibility is that of being caretaker of the church.

### Ruling the Body

That involves a number of more specific duties. Perhaps the most obvious is the function of overseeing the affairs of the local church. 1 Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor." The Greek word translated "rule" in that verse is *proistemi*, used to speak of the elders' responsibility four times in 1 Timothy (3:4,5,12; 5:17), once in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (where it is translated, "have charge over"), and once in Romans 12:8, where ruling is listed as a spiritual gift. *Proistemi* literally means "to stand first," and it speaks of the duty of general oversight common to all elders.

As those who rule in the church, elders are not subject to any higher earthly authority outside the local assembly. Their authority over the church is not by force or dictatorial power, but by precept and example (Heb 13:7).

Nor are the elders to operate by majority rule or vote. If all the elders are guided by the same Spirit and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make (1 Co 1:10, Eph 4:3, Php 1:27; 2:2). If there is division, all the elders should study, pray and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Unity and harmony in the church begin with this principle.

### **Teaching the Body**

With the elders lies the responsibility to preach and teach (1 Ti 5:17). They are to determine doctrinal issues for the church and have the responsibility of proclaiming the truth to the congregation. 1 Timothy 3:2-7, listing the spiritual qualifications of the overseer, gives only one qualification that relates to a specific function: he must be “able to teach.” All the other qualifications are personal character qualities.

Titus 1:7-9 also emphasises the significance of the elder’s responsibility as a teacher. Already in the church, the threat of false teachers was so great that a key qualification for leadership was an understanding of sound doctrine and the ability to teach it.

### **Exhorting the Body**

“Exhort” in Titus 1:9 is the Greek word, *parakaleo*, which literally means “to call near” (Aland ed. 1966:132). From its use in the New Testament, we see that the ministry of exhortation has several elements. It involves persuasion (Ac 2:14, 14:22; Tit 1:9), pleading (2 Co 8:17), comfort (1 Th 2:11), encouragement (1 Th 4:1), and patient reiterating of important doctrine (2 Ti 4:2).

### **Prayer with and for the Body**

The elders are a resource for those who seek partnership in prayer. James wrote, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (Ja 5:14).

### **Shepherding the Body**

Acts 20:28 says that another function of an elder is shepherding. Involved in the concept of shepherding are the twin responsibilities of *feeding* and *protecting* the flock. Verses 29-30 re-emphasise the fact that the protecting ministry of the overseer is essential to counter the threat of false teachers.

The elder acts as a caring and loving shepherd over the flock, but never in Scripture is it spoken of as “his flock,” or “your flock.” It is the “flock of God” (1 Pe 5:2), and he is merely a steward – a caretaker for the possession of God.

**The Core of the Body**

Elders, as the spiritual overseers of the flock, are to determine church policy (Ac 15:22); oversee (Ac 20:28); ordain others (1 Ti 4:14); rule, teach, and preach (1 Ti 5:17); exhort and refute (Tit 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Pe 5:1-3). Those responsibilities put elders at the core of the work of the New Testament church.

**Selection of Deacons for the Body**

Understandably, elders cannot afford to allow themselves to be consumed with business details, public relations, minor financial matters, and other particulars of the day-to-day operation of the church. They are to devote themselves first of all to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, and select deacons to handle the lesser matters, or physical matters of the church (cf. Ac 6:1-4).

**THE QUALIFICATIONS**

The key passages are 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1: 5-9.14. These two passages give us the qualifications of an elder. The single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is *to be above reproach*. That is, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful. All the other qualifications, except perhaps teaching and management skills, only amplify that idea.

**Above Reproach**

An elder must be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his family life, his business life, and his spiritual life.

*“The husband of one wife”* (literally, “a one-woman man”) does not mean simply that he is married to one woman – that would not be a spiritual qualification (MacArthur 1995a:104). Rather, it means an elder is to be a man who is utterly single-minded in his devotion to his wife. If he is not married, he is not to be the type who is flirtatious.

*“Temperate”* seems to imply the idea of a balanced, moderate life. *“Prudent”* is another word for “wise.” *“Respectable”* means that he has dignity and the respect of his peers.

“*Hospitable*” means that he loves strangers – not necessarily that he has a lot of dinner parties, but rather that he is not cliquish. “*Able to teach*” is *didaktikos*, or “skilled in teaching.” Other characteristics are that he be “*not addicted to wine*”; not “*pugnacious*” (not one who picks fights or is physically abusive); “*gentle*”; “*uncontentious*”, and “*free from the love of money*.”

All those must be proven, demonstrated qualities and abilities, and the first place he must manifest them is in his home. He must manage his own household well, and keep his children under control with dignity. “Household” in verse 5 probably refers to an extended household, including servants, lands, possessions, and many in-laws and other relatives. All those were elements of a household in the first century, and a great deal of leadership skills and spiritual character were required to manage them well. If a man could not manage his household, how could he be charged with managing the church?

The qualifications of an elder, then, go far beyond good moral characteristics. An elder must be demonstrably skilled as a teacher and manager. If anything in his life signifies a weakness in those areas, he is disqualified. If he is in debt, if his children are rebellious, if anything in his handling of business affairs is not above reproach, he cannot be an elder.

Understandably, he cannot be a new convert, for it takes time for him to mature, as well as time to examine his life and evaluate his qualifications.

To wrap all that up, he must have an impeccable reputation with those outside the church. His business and social activities in the community must also be above reproach.

### **Women as Elders**

No provision is made for women to serve as elders. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 says, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Women are to be under the authority of elders, excluded from teaching men or holding positions of authority over them.

The reasons women must submit to the leadership of men are not cultural, nor do they reflect a Pauline prejudice, as some claim.

Rather, the reason is rooted in the order of creation: "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve" (v. 13). The Fall of Man confirmed the order: "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (v.14)

The balance of influence comes through the woman's responsibility of bearing and nurturing children (v.15).

## **ELDERS ORDAINED**

### **Uniquely Set Apart.**

The New Testament clearly indicates that elders were uniquely set apart or appointed to their office. The term normally used for the appointing of elders in the New Testament is *kathistemi*, which means "to ordain" (Arndt 1979:390). The concept of ordination implies official recognition by the leadership of the church and a public announcement setting men aside for special ministry.

### **The Laying on of Hands**

In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul says to Timothy, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

### **Period of Testing**

A man should be considered for ordination only after he has proved himself suitable for a ministry of leadership through a period during which he is tested, possibly when he serves as a deacon. Then he may be tempered with time.

### **A Godly Desire**

Those who would be elders must desire to serve in this capacity (1Ti 3:1). The starting point in identifying a potential elder is the desire in the heart of the individual (cf 1 Pe 5:2). In other words we are not to go out and recruit men to become leaders in the church. One who is qualified to be an elder will be eager to give his life totally to the teaching of the Word of God and the leading of the flock of God, without any thought of gain at all.

### **ELDERS SUPPORTED BY THE CHURCH**

#### **Elders Support**

Some were supported, some were not, depending on the situation. Note the following: 1 Timothy 5:17,18; 1 Corinthians 9:1, 3-9. But the “tent making” role is also an option. If an elder chooses to gain income in another way, that is within the latitude of Scripture. Elders may choose to support themselves by working outside the church, as did Paul, for a number of reasons. They may not wish to put the burden of their support on the church. They may feel their testimony has a greater impact if they do not seek support. In a church with a plurality of elders, it is likely that some will support themselves, and others will be supported by the church. This is determined by the group. Either way, it does not affect the man’s status as an elder. There would be a lot less stress on the finances and the pastors of our churches if they followed these principles.

### **THE PASTORATE, A TEAM EFFORT**

Clearly, all the biblical data indicates that the pastorate is a team effort. It is significant that every place in the New Testament where the term *prebuteros* is used, it is plural, except where the apostles John and Peter speak of themselves individually. The norm in the New Testament church was a plurality of elders. There is no reference in all the New Testament to a one-pastor congregation. It is significant that Paul addresses his epistle to the Philippians, “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers [pl. *episkopots*] and deacons” (1:1).

### **ELDER GOVERNMENT AND THE ROLE OF A SPECIAL LEADER**

A plurality does not eliminate the unique role of a special leader from among those elders. Within the framework of elders’ ministries there will be great diversity as each exercises his unique gifts. Some will demonstrate special giftedness in the areas of administration or service; others will evidence stronger gifts of teaching, exhortation,

or other abilities. Some will be highly visible; others will function in the background. All are within the plan of God for the church.

### **THE ELDER'S RELATION TO THE CONGREGATION**

Nothing in Scripture indicates that anyone at a lower level of leadership, such as deacon, should be involved in decision making as it relates to church polity or doctrine.

The word "appreciate" in 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, implies a close relationship involving appreciation, respect, love and cooperation.

An accusation of sin against an elder is not to be received lightly. Nor is it to be overlooked. As often seen in our churches the moving of a sinning elder (pastor) to another church is totally unbiblical, and will only lead to the spreading of that sin to other parts of the body of Christ in another location. Such a practice cannot be blessed of God.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE OFFICE OF DEACON**

Having discussed such spiritual qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul then turns to those of deacons in 3:8-13. The standards for deacons is in no way inferior to that required of elders. Elders who lead and deacons who serve perform different functions, but the spiritual qualifications required for both are essentially identical. There is no drop-off in spiritual quality or maturity from overseers to deacons. The only difference is that overseers are "able to teach" (3:2).

#### **The Meaning of the Term**

*Diakonos* (deacon) and the related terms *diakoneo* (to serve), and *diakonia* (service) appear approximately 100 times in the New Testament (Arndt 1979:184). Only in 1 Timothy 3 and in Philippians 1:1 are they translated "deacon" or "deacons." The rest of the time they are translated by various English words. Only in those two passages is the deacon elevated to official status. The rest of the time the terms are used in a general, nonspecific sense.

The original meaning of this word group had to do with performing menial tasks such as waiting on tables (MacArthur

1995a:124). That definition gradually broadened until it came to include any kind of service in the church. The word group's versatility can be seen in its divergent usage in the New Testament. *Diakonos*, *diakoneo*, and *diakonia* are variously translated "administration," "cared for," "minister," "servant," "serve," "service," "preparations," "relief," "support," and "deacon," among others (MacArthur 1995a:124). The root idea of serving food comes across in John 2:5, where *diakonos* is used of the waiters at the wedding. *Diakoneo* is used in the same sense in Luke 4:39, where Peter's mother-in-law served a meal. Luke 10:40; 17:8; and John 12:2 also use this word group to refer to serving food.

### **Various Ministries**

*Diakonos* is used to refer to soldiers and policemen who enforce justice (Ro 13:4). In John 12:26, Jesus equated following Him with serving Him. Anything done in obedience to Him is spiritual service. In the general sense of the term, all Christians are deacons, for all are to be actively serving Christ and his church.

That is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12:5, where he writes that "there are varieties of ministries" (*diakonia*). Every Christian is to be involved in some form of spiritual service. Leaders, through both teaching and modeling, are to equip believers to perform that service (Eph 4:12).

But *diakonos*, *diakonia*, and *diakoneo* are also used in a second, more specific sense (MacArthur 1995a:125). The list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8 includes a gift for service. Those with that gift are specially equipped for service, though they may not hold the office of deacon. Stephanas and his family were so gifted. Paul wrote of them, "they have devoted themselves for ministry (*diakonia*) to the saints" (1 Co16:15).

### **The Office**

The third use of this word group refers to the officially recognised responsibility of deacons. Everyone is deacon in the general sense, some are specially gifted by the Holy Spirit for service, but still others hold the office of deacon. They model spiritual service for everyone else. They work alongside the elders, implementing their preaching, teaching, and oversight in the practical life of the church.

The only discussion of the office of deacon is in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, though there is a possible reference to it in Philippians 1:1. Some hold that Paul was officially identified as a deacon. While Paul was a servant in the general sense of the word, he held the office of apostle (Ro 11:13; cf. 2 Co 10-12). Others have argued, based on 1 Timothy 4:6, that Timothy was a deacon. In 2 Timothy 4:5, however, Paul seems to identify Timothy as an Evangelist. Others have proposed Tychicus (cf. Eph 6:21), but Paul's use of *diakonos* (Eph 3:7) and *diakonia* (Eph 4:12) in a general, nonrestrictive sense makes doubtful the use of *diakonos* in Ephesians 6:21 as a strict reference to the office. There is likewise no reason to assume that the use of *diakonos* in reference to Epaphras (Col 1:7) is limited to the specific office.

#### **Looking at Acts 6**

Many hold that the seven men chosen to oversee the distribution of food in Acts 6 were the first official deacons. The text, however, nowhere calls them deacons. In fact, the only use of *diakonia* in Acts 6 is in reference to the apostles (v.4), and to the serving of food (v.1). That again emphasises its general usage. These men were chosen for a specific task. They did not hold the office of deacon, though their function of serving certainly foreshadowed that of the later deacons.

### **QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS AND DEACONESSES**

In 1 Timothy 3:8 we are introduced to the personal character of the deacon, verse 9 to his spiritual life, verse 10a to his service, verse 10b and 12a to his moral purity, and 12b to his home life.

Whether verse 11 refers to the women as deacons' wives or a separate order of female deacons has been much disputed. The following points show that women in general, not necessarily deacon's wives are in view.

First, the use of the word, "Likewise" (cf. 1 Ti 2:9, 3:8 and Tit 2:3,6), argues strongly for seeing a third and distinct group here in addition to elders and deacons.

Second, there is the use of the possessive pronoun. No possessive pronoun or definite article connects these women with deacons.

Third, there are no qualifications for elders' wives. Paul gave no qualifications for elders' wives. Why would he do so for deacons' wives?

Fourth, is the usage in Greek language. Paul did not use the word "deaconesses" because there was no such word in the Greek language; the masculine form of *diakonos* was used of both men and women (cf. Ro 16:1).

Note the deaconess must be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

### **THE REWARDS OF FAITHFUL SERVICE**

Two rewards await those men and women who have served well as deacons. First, they obtain for themselves a high standing (*bathmos*), literally referring to an elevated standing. Here it is used metaphorically to speak of those who are a step above everyone else. Secondly, they will gain great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. Successful service breeds confidence and assurance among the people served.

It is surprising to find this office lacking "officially" in most of our local churches, although one may find individuals functioning in the capacity. The recognition of this office may help bring more churches into proper biblical perspective.

### **CONCLUSION**

The local churches in Africa could benefit greatly both spiritually and physically if they were to bring these church offices into proper biblical perspective. God does not just leave things to chance in the local church, nor does He leave them to man's whims. As in every aspect of His programme He has laid out for us His plan. We just need to study the Scriptures and implement those instructions in our churches.

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## THE HUMAN SOUL IN YORUBA/IGBO TRADITION AND THE BIBLE

*A. O. Peter Ogunboye with Lois Fuller*

*"Making all things new" includes bringing our worldview into conformity with the biblical worldview. In this article Peter Ogunboye reflects on the traditional world view of the Yoruba and Igbo pertaining to the human soul and then compares this with the biblical perspective. As we enter this new century we need to engage more forcefully with traditional world views and find ways of bringing them into conformity with biblical theology based on the Scripture.*

The issue of whether or not human souls exist somewhere in the spirit realm before conception is a major difference between African beliefs and most Christian thought. In Africa, problems like *emere*, *elegbe*, *abiku* or *ogbanje* in Yoruba and Igbo (belief that certain children have agreed in the spirit world before conception to die young) make many people clients of herbalists despite their Christian affiliations. Their views of these problems are traceable to the belief in the pre-existence of the soul. Chinwe Achebe, in her book on the *ogbanje*, says, "More than half of the Nigerian population both educated and illiterate alike, secretly or otherwise consult traditional healers. This is so whether they are church goers or not" (Achebe 1986:3).

The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic approach to this issue which will prove understandable and useful to African

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**A.O. Peter Ogunboye** is a lecturer at the Chris Apostolic Church Seminary in Ibadan, Nigeria. He earned his BA from the University of Ibadan in 1995 and a B.Th. from the United Missionary Church of Africa Theological College.

Christians, and to provide biblically approved solutions to problems relating to the soul.

### **THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE "SOUL"**

The Hebrew word for the soul, *nephesh*, and its Greek equivalent, *psyche*, "have a number of shades of meaning and accordingly it is often difficult to translate" (Green 1970:901). The ancient Hebrews "took the soul to be whatever it was in a body which made it alive, made it a living rather than a dead thing. This animating force was believed to reside in the blood" (Shaffer 1968:2). The soul was the non-material part of man, the real person, who thinks and feels and wills, the seat of spiritual and moral qualities.

Theologians do not agree whether the Bible teaches that man is made up of two parts (dichotomist theory) or three parts (trichotomist theory). In the dichotomist theory, man is made up of the material part (body) and the immaterial (soul or spirit). In this theory, soul and spirit are taken to be synonyms or aspects of the same thing. The trichotomist theory, popularized by Watchman Nee, holds that man is made up of body, soul and spirit. The spirit perceives spiritual matters and responds to spiritual forces, while the soul deals only with reason, emotion, and personality.

The creation story in Genesis refers directly to the two aspects of man. God created the body of Adam out of the dust, and breathed into him the breath of life, and the result was a living soul or living being. Here body plus spirit equals soul. Perhaps soul is what binds the body and spirit together.

### **TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE COMPOSITION OF HUMAN BEINGS**

The Yoruba and Igbo views of the component parts of man are somewhat different. They certainly see man as having a material part (the body) formed from dust (by *Obatala* in Yoruba myth) and an immaterial aspect.

This immaterial aspect is not simple. "Paradoxically, man is one, but the self is multiple" (Metuh 1991:110). Man can exist in his material body or in a spirit body.

In Yoruba thought, the immaterial part of a person consists firstly of *emi* (the life-force which makes him breathe). It is not clearly stated where the *emi* goes after departing from the body at death. The Igbo use the term *obi* (heart) for "a man's life-force, the animating principle which links man with other life-forces in the universe" (Metuh 1991:110-111). The breath can sometimes leave the body in dreams and could also come under the influence of witchcraft. At death, the *obi* leaves the body but it does not survive. Metuh says, "at death, the breath ceases to exist" (Metuh 1987:174).

The second component is the Yoruba term *okan* (heart). For the Yoruba, the heart "is the seat of the emotion and psychic energy" (Idowu 1962:170).

The Yoruba also have something called the *ori* (head). This is the personality soul. The physical head is the symbol of the inner person. God puts the *ori* in man. Before the *ori* is sent into the world, it kneels before God to receive its destiny. The *ori* also functions as a guardian spirit of the person, so sacrifice is made to it. It is the essence of personality, hence it must be kept in good condition so that it may be well with the person, and so that it may favour one.

The Igbo have a similar concept in the *chi*. The *chi* is the destiny-spirit which is believed to be an emanation of the Creator. It is a sort of spirit double or guardian genius associated with the person from the moment of conception. When a person dies, his *chi* goes back to God to give account of his work on earth. A man's abilities, faults or misfortunes are ascribed to his *chi*. When a person reincarnates, he is given a different *chi* by God, with a different kind of destiny in life. A person must achieve his *chi's* destiny in life to be successful. Each individual has his or her own cult where he or she propitiates the *chi*. However, a person who is yet to have a child only shares in the propitiation of his parents' *chi*. One establishes one's own cult after becoming a parent.

The Igbo also have the *eke*, "the spirit of a deceased ancestor who reincarnates in a child. It is assigned to the individual by God at conception. An ancestral guardian can incarnate in several people at the same time" (Metuh 1987:112). Each person has an altar for his *eke* at the family ancestral shrine, where he offers sacrifices to his *eke* for good fortune. The *eke* is the ancestral guardian which links man with his family clan. It is believed to be an ancestral shade incarnate

in each new baby. The baby takes after the *eke* in appearance and/or character. Parents may have to consult a diviner to find out who the *eke* is of a new child because if the child does not follow the regulations of his *eke*, he may fall sick or die. The shadow is associated with the self both in Yoruba and Igbo concepts of human immaterial nature. Among the Yoruba, it is *ojiji*. "The shadow cast by a living human being on a sunny day is a sign of the presence of the self in the living human being" (Metuh 1987:172). When the self leaves the body at death, the shadow ceases to exist, hence the common belief that corpses do not cast shadows. It is believed that certain things can be done against the shadow while the person is alive which will have its effect on the person's body, such as attack with charms. The Igbo shadow spirit (*onyinyo*) in the Igbo view is the visible form of the shadow cast by the human body. It is the shadow-spirit that incarnates in the body and is assigned an ancestral guardian. "He survives after death as an individual person and can in turn become an ancestral guardian" (Metuh 1987:180).

#### **BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL**

That the disciples asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn 9:2) seems to indicate to some people that the Jews believed in sin before conception. A few Christian theologians (such as Origen) have held to an idea that human souls sinned before conception and therefore were sent into the world to suffer and be cleansed. However, as Hodge says, "It does not pretend to be a scriptural doctrine and therefore cannot be an object of faith" (Hodge 1973:II, 66). Furthermore, it is also said of the theory that "it makes the body something accidental" (Berkhof 1988:197). This is because at first, according to the theory, the soul was without the body. Man is therefore complete without the body if he can exist consciously in a world of pre-existence.

Since the Bible does not speak of the creation of any man before Adam, or of any human apostasy before his fall, we have no biblical basis for believing in the pre-existence of souls.

Among biblical theologians, there are some who believe that as each child is conceived, God creates a new soul *ex nihilo* to go with the conceived body. The soul is not generated or derived from the

parents but created by the immediate agency of God. The Greek and Latin Churches favoured this theory, while the Lutherans and Reformed Churches were divided. Those who support this theory say it shows how Jesus could be conceived of a tainted human being and yet be sinless in his soul. The main difficulty with this theory is how to account for the sinfulness of all other human souls. Does God create the souls sinful? This seems unlikely. Another problem is that Genesis 2:2 says that God rested from creating on the seventh day. No end of the seventh day was mentioned.

The other main Christian theory about the origin of human souls is called traducianism. According to this theory "the souls of men are propagated along with the bodies by generation and are therefore transmitted to the children by the parents" (Hodge 1973:67). This theory accounts for the transmission of the sinful nature, as well as other non-material characteristics by which children resemble parents. It does not, however, explain how Jesus' human nature could be untainted by sin.

Scriptural support for this view includes: 1) God only breathed the breath of life once into the nostrils of man and has given the responsibility of procreation to man since then. When Eve was made, there was no new breath. She got both her soul and her body from Adam. 2) God ceased his work of creation after the sixth day. To say that God keeps creating new souls seems to violate this rest. 3) In Hebrews 7:9-10 (compare Genesis 46:26) it says that Levi was still in the loins of his ancestor Abraham when he met Melchizedek. Whether we accept a creationist view or a traducian view of the origin of the human soul, the fact remains that the biblical view is that human souls originate as entities at conception and not before.

#### **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL BELIEFS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL**

When considering the origin of the soul from an African perspective, it is best explained and understood under two headings. These are Pre-existence and Reincarnation.

### **Pre-existence**

Belief in the pre-existence of the soul forms the basis for the issue of the soul in African belief. Pre-existence of the soul is best understood in the light of the destiny of man. The Yoruba believe that the *ori* receives the *ipin* (destiny) before a man is born. It kneels before God and chooses or receives the destiny. "The general picture, therefore is of a complete 'person' kneeling before Olodumare to choose or receive" (Idowu 1962:174). Imasogie confirms this by saying, "Before coming to birth, each person, in the form of his personality, chooses a destiny which he desires to actualise on earth" (Imasogie 1985:50). Then the person starts his journey into the world. Some spirits make other agreements before incarnation, such as the *emere* spirits who form a pact among a group of them to all come back to the spirit world quickly without growing old in the world.

The Igbo concept is similar. God (*Chukwu*) gives the *chi* to the individual and that individual enters into an oath agreement with his *chi* about his destiny and what will happen to him in life. On his way to the world, the person has to pass interrogation by two female deities, who may try to influence him to renege on the oath and choose a different life. Both the Yoruba and the Igbo believe that once a person is born, he does not consciously remember about the agreements he made before his birth, but a diviner can reveal them to him. If he is getting into trouble, he may go to find out if he is unlawfully deviating. The *ori* or *chi* still knows about the destiny however, and should guide the person to fulfil it.

The Igbo and Yoruba also believe that God is still creating more human spirits in the spiritual world all the time. These newly created people are later born, although new babies are reincarnations of ancestors. The new baby is somehow a new creation as well as being a reincarnation.

### **Reincarnation**

The concept of reincarnation in African belief is different from the Platonic, Asian or classical view of the transmigration of souls. In Africa belief, "there is no reincarnation in the classical sense. One can only speak of partial or more precisely, apparent reincarnation" (Idowu 1976:187). This is because it is believed that ancestors return

in one or several children in the family. Even when an ancestor returns, he can still be venerated at the ancestor shrine. The soul of the man who reincarnated still has its own individual existence in the spiritual abode while some characteristic traits of him are made manifest in his grandchildren. Only aged, good people who have direct descendants and were properly buried can reincarnate.

We can see from the above that in African belief, the origin of the non-material part of a human being comes from diverse sources, including fresh creation by God (some part of which is in pre-existence), assignment of a guardian spirit by God and reincarnation of an ancestor.

### **THE DESTINATION OF THE SOUL IN THE BIBLE**

Some people hold that the soul ceases to exist altogether at death. This idea is called annihilation. Neither the Bible nor African Traditional Religion accepts this view.

According to the Bible, physical death is a termination of physical life by the separation of body and soul. It only marks the end of our present physical life. The Bible presents three important stages of the soul after physical death. These are the intermediate state, resurrection and eternity. It also presents two important destinations of the soul, which are heaven and hell.

The intermediate state is the state of souls between the time of death and resurrection to judgement. For believers, it seems that their souls immediately enter the presence of the Lord during this time (2 Co 5:1-8) and the wicked enter a place of suffering (Lk 16:23-1 2 Pe 2:9). At the resurrection, both the righteous and the wicked dead will be raised, the former enter heaven proper, and the latter are sent to the eternal lake of fire.

### **DESTINATION OF THE SOUL IN AFRICAN BELIEF**

African belief includes the continuing life of the soul after physical death.

To the Yoruba, natural death occurs when the days of the destiny chosen by the *ori* are complete. A death is only considered natural if the person is very old and does not die in an accident. Death of this

nature is a good thing because it provides the transitional process through which man completes his journey on earth. The aged are aware that they will soon die. They say, "I am going home." It is not a terrible thing, but good and natural.

Burial rites reflect belief in life after death. Some rites provide a way for the spirit of the deceased to join the ancestors in their abode in the spirit world. This is important so that the deceased will not become a homeless ghost troubling the living. There is often a ceremony some time after the burial to send off the spirit of the deceased, who is believed to have been hanging around for a while. Messages are sent to those who died previously through the deceased, and things are put in the grave for him to take along on his journey to that place. Other rites permit a happy reincarnation of the deceased.

There are also rites to establish veneration and communication with the deceased as he now becomes an ancestor with spiritual powers to help and discipline his living relatives. Libations, sacrifices and other feasts and ceremonies are held in their honour regularly. Departed ancestors have a big stake in the continuation of the family since they hope to come back into the world through it by reincarnation. Therefore they are expected to guard the family well-being.

The Yoruba say that the good deceased live in the "good heaven," with God and the divinities, while those who lived evil lives go to the "heaven of potsherd". Not all African traditions make this distinction, though wicked people are usually not regarded as being received by the ancestors. There is no reincarnation for those in the bad heaven or who are not received by the ancestors.

Sometimes women do not become ancestors in the sense of being venerated for blessings. Among the Igbo, only some sections do it. Metuh says that the final end of and the aspiration of every Igbo is to reach the spirit land of his ancestors, to be venerated by his descendants as an ancestor, and eventually to reincarnate (Metuh 1991:120)..

### **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF PREMATURE DEATH**

Generally speaking, the Bible's view is that there are three main reasons for early death. People die young because they are afflicted by enemies, such as the death of the Hebrew babies in Egypt, Ex 1:16, and the death of Job's children, Job 1: 18-19, which was caused by Satan. There are also instances where Jesus performed miracles that reveal the cause of premature death to be the work of demons (eg Mt 17:14-18, where the demon was working to kill the boy). As the scripture says, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (Jn 10:10).

Early death can also come as a punishment from God (such as the death of Er and Onan, Ge 38-6-10, and of David's first child by Bathsheba, 2 Sa 12:14) or as a way of rescuing them from greater evils to come if they should live (as revealed in Isa 57:1 and the death of Abijah, son of Jeroboam, in 1 Ki 14:1-18). We can infer from this last case that although God says, "With long life will I satisfy him" (Ps 91:16) that the scripture is not rigid that everybody should live till his old age before fulfilling the will of God for his life. Christ, for example, spent only thirty-three and a half years on earth and was able to fulfil his mission on earth after which he died. Moreover, one should expect to see little children in heaven, for it is not how long one lives that matters but how well such a life is lived in accordance with the will of God.

### **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL BELIEF ABOUT PREMATURE DEATH**

In most African cultures, including that of the Yoruba, death at an early age is never seen to be a natural event. Even if the natural cause is obvious, they always ask, "What killed him or her?" They may go to a diviner to find out who is responsible. Usually the oracle names someone who has used sorcery or witchcraft to cause the event or sickness that killed the young person. The person named is often a family member and this leads to a lot of division and suspicion in families. On the other hand, the diviner may reveal that the child or young person was an *abiku*, a child who had covenanted in his pre-existence to die young.

If a person is killed before the time set in his destiny, people believe that such a person appears as a tangible and living ghost in some remote town, where he lives out his normal life-span as a normal person. He cannot be accepted yet into heaven because he has not fulfilled his destiny. If however, he is discovered by someone who knows he is dead, he disappears. The Yoruba call this *akudaya*. Since the person disappears, no one has ever been able to bring concrete proof of this phenomenon to others for verification.

Occasionally it is believed that a person could be killed young by God because of his wickedness. Evidence is in the kind of death a person has. If he dies by suicide, strange accident, or certain diseases such as leprosy, dropsy, smallpox or epilepsy, this is taken as evidence that his death is a punishment from God. Such people are not given full funeral rites and cannot become ancestors (Metuh 1987:137).

The *abiku* (Yoruba) or *ogbanje* (Igbo) are children "born to die". The *abiku* is caused by a kind of spirit called *emere*, which makes a covenant with others of its kind before it enters a pregnant woman, that it will come back to the spirit world early. It causes the child incarnated in the womb to become an *abiku*. Pregnant women are warned against going out in the afternoon when *emere* spirits are believed to be going about looking for someone to enter.

*Ogbanje* are the equivalent among the Igbo. They are evil spirits of dead children. When they are about to be incarnated, the goddesses at the gate to the world subvert them to choose other destinies than what their chi received. They also have a group loyalty to other *ogbanje* spirits. They die young to the frustration of their relatives.

#### **AFRICAN SOLUTIONS TO PREMATURE DEATH**

People use protective "medicine" such as charms, on themselves and their children to try to prevent spiritual enemies from doing harm to young people. Children are warned against kinds of behaviour that make them vulnerable to spiritual as well as physical enemies.

Traditionally, if parents have been losing one baby after another, or if they see strange behaviour which makes them suspect their child has a spirit influence that may take him back to the spirit world early,

they take some action. The case must be properly diagnosed by a diviner, who also gives the treatment for this specific type of child. The treatment is aimed at persuading the child or its spirit mates to allow it to stay in the world or cutting the spirit influence drawing him or her back to the spirit world. The condition cannot be cured, just mitigated.

### **BIBLICAL SOLUTION TO PREMATURE DEATH**

If one wants to avoid early death as a punishment for sin, of course one should seek to live to please God. If God wants to take a person early in life for a good reason, Christians can agree to that. But when early death threatens from the powers of demons or spiritual enemies or forces other than God himself, the Bible has a solution in faith and prayer for God to deliver.

Since the Bible says that "it is appointed unto men to die once", (Heb 9:27) the possibility of a person coming back as another person is ruled out. Likewise, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, that each person will be reunited with his resurrected body, would make it impossible for a person to have more than one body. In Christian thought, the body is not a temporary part of the person, but an eternal part, to be joined again to the immaterial part at the resurrection.

We have also seen that the Bible does not support the idea of the pre-existence of human souls in the spirit world where they can make pacts or take bad decisions about their earthly lives.

The Bible does, however, show that people can be "demonized" by evil spirits. It is not difficult to see that the enemy of our souls has a stake in keeping people deceived about what is really going on in the spirit world by providing the expected manifestations to fit traditionally held theories. Jesus points the way to how we should react. When confronted by people with strange spirit manifestations, he knew that demons were responsible. He cast out the demons and set the people free. In order for people to keep their freedom they need to repent of the sinfulness that makes them vulnerable to demonic attack, find forgiveness in Christ and renewal of life by the Holy Spirit, and if necessary, be delivered of demonic oppression.

A biblical view of the nature of human beings will help African Christians to resist temptations to non-Christian spiritual behaviour such as going to diviners, using charms and making covenants with gods and spirits. Proper diagnosis of spiritual problems will lead to relevant, effective and godly treatment and solutions. Christians will be able to recognize the work of Satan and by prayers and faith in God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, overcome.

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**BOOK REVIEWS****Gordon Molyneux*****African Christian Theology: The Quest for Selfhood.***San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993,  
422 pp., \$59.90.

In this fascinating study Molyneux focuses on the process of theologising as seen in three church communities in Africa. What distinguishes this contribution is that Molyneux's primary concern is not so much with evaluating finished theological products as it is with exploring and explaining the practice of theological reflection in contemporary African Christianity. Additionally (and fitting for a continent with a collective rather than individualistic cultural orientation), Molyneux focuses on theological reflection in communal settings rather than as the project of individuals. The material is based on PhD research done at the University of London. The specific objects of research were three different church communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC-formerly Zaire): Roman Catholic, Kimbanguists, and Evangelical; and three different modes of theological expression: the publishing programme of an academic institution, a denomination's procedure for hymnic certification, and a series of pastoral seminars.

Molyneux's initial chapter offers a historical survey of the political, ecclesiastical, and theological background to the development of African identity theology. The 'winds of change' that swept across Africa after World War II provide the orientation for the political analysis. The rise of the African indigenous church movement (often referred to as African Independent Churches or African Initiated Churches) gives the second focus. And the rise of African identity theology in light of the political and ecclesiastical developments furnishes the third. This chapter is a valuable survey in its own right, and also sets the stage for the rest of the discussion.

The second chapter (which has also appeared in the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 11:2 [1992], p. 58-89) considers the theological reflection that has taken place at the Faculty de

Theologie Catholique de Kinshasa (FTCK), a Louvain-modeled Roman Catholic university founded in Kinshasa in 1954. Molyneux's special interest is the agenda of this institution's remarkable publications programme, which for many years formed the cornerstone of the university's emphasis on scholarship. In particular, for those who do not read French and are not familiar with theological reflection in francophone Africa, and especially in Catholic francophone Africa, Molyneux opens a welcome window on the rich heritage that is available from that milieu. As the FTCK has arguably been among the most prominent sources of African academic and literary theological reflection, this chapter is in itself a valuable contribution to the literature on African theologies.

The third chapter (which has also appeared in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 20 [Je 1990], p. 153-187) assesses the theological process evident in some 560 Kimbanguist hymns. (The exact number of hymns is difficult to determine, since it is given as 560 on p. 170; 565 on p. 174, and 569 on p. 175). The history of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (EJCSK; officially founded in 1959) is chronicled, with fresh insights given through interviews of key church members. This forms the context for the analysis of the hymns as examples of oral theology. Molyneux recognises that for a comprehensive assessment of the oral streams of theology in the EJCSK far more work would have to be done (e.g., incorporating sermons, talks during retreats and at the firesides in the homes of members, etc.). Since his research intended a comparative treatment of the theological process within three traditions, the fact that the hymns were accessible in written form, that they were in wide use, and that they were therefore highly influential in the church, suggested particular analysis of the hymns.

Molyneux's access to the hymns came through several weeks of study at the Department of Hymns for the EJCSK, including extensive interviews of key individuals. Perhaps even more fascinating than the hymns themselves is the process through which they are composed (through revelation given to the hymn-writer) and then authenticated by the church. The latter is a standardised procedure in which the recipient performs the hymn several times to give opportunity for its transcription. In addition to transcribing, the officials note the quality of the tune and even the demeanour of the

recipient during the performance. Once the hymn is transcribed, the recipient is thanked and excused so that analysis can take place. At the time of Molyneux's research, there were 46 people in the country who were registered by the church as having the gift of receiving hymns through inspiration. In the year 1986, 277 hymns were processed by the Department.

The fourth chapter explores the practice of theology as undertaken in the *Communauté Évangélique au Centre de l'Afrique* (CECA), founded by the Africa Inland Mission after its entry into DRC in 1912, and representative of the evangelical wing of African Christianity. The first half of the analysis explores various means of theological growth in CECA, notably the Bible schools and seminaries that have been established, the Theological Education by Extension programme, and the women's movement known as "Women of the Good News." Molyneux then turns his attention to several experimental "Gospel and Culture" seminars initiated by John Gration, former missionary in DRC and Kenya, and at that time professor of missions at Wheaton College Graduate School. The seminars themselves, held in 1983, were interactive ones in which pastoral leaders of the CECA community focused on the actual theological needs they encountered in their role as church leaders but which had not been addressed in their theological training. The focus of the seminar discussions was intentionally on issues relating to traditional African culture rather than those relating to contemporary (urban) Africa. Gration's intention in the seminars was to facilitate African-focused theological reflection on issues that the African leaders perceived to be of significance. Molyneux evaluates these pioneering seminars, one held in Swahili and the other in French.

The fifth and final chapter summarises the findings, provides issues for further reflection, and indicates lessons that can be learned from the differing methods of theological reflection.

Why is this study so important? One reason is that method in African theological reflection has tended to be taken for granted. If nothing else, Molyneux reminds us of the importance of theological processes that do not fit our standard academic mode. He also clearly demonstrates that more than one method is not only

appropriate for the church, but is vitally needed if the church is to provide relevant theological structuring for its adherents.

Molyneux's unique contribution to the discussion is in providing a descriptive evaluation of the actual practice of theology in three different communities (Roman Catholic, Kimbanguist, and Evangelical) through three quite different "media" (a publications programme, a hymnic programme, and reflective pastoral seminars) all within one African nation. While literature on oral African theology is slowly starting to appear (e.g., Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Orbis, 1996), there is almost no work on the process of theological reflection in Africa, and nothing else comes close to Molyneux's contribution in presenting such disparate efforts within a single country.

It is for these reasons that Molyneux's book would seem to be among the most important studies on African theology in the 1990s, since it illustrates and suggests a whole new genre for research on theology in Africa, one that turns attention to the processes of theological expression in African Christian communities. Perhaps the most unfortunate reality concerning Molyneux's thesis is the relative lack of awareness of it. Published in 1993, this pioneering text on the theological process in Africa has been largely ignored in book reviews and publication notices. In addition, the publisher's pricing will have given pause to many potential purchasers. In light of the fact that theological process can be just as significant as theological product (whether book, journal article, hymn, or seminar), and the fact that theological processing remains largely ignored in discussions of African theology, this text should be considered essential reading for everyone concerned with contemporary theological reflection in Africa.

*A. Scott Moreau*  
Missions and Intercultural Studies  
Wheaton College

[Editor's note: this book may be obtained direct from the author at a special price of 15 Sterling pounds or \$25.00, postage and handling included. Inquiries may be addressed to: Dr. Gordon Molyneux, Paddock View, Netherfield Lane, Standstead Abbots, Herts. SG12 8HD, UK.]

**Peter Hicks**

***Evangelicals and Truth: A Creative Proposal for  
a Post-Modern Age***

Leicester, England: Apollos, 1998

*Evangelicals and Truth: A Creative Proposal for a Post-Modern Age* is one of several recent publications that grapple with the rise of postmodernism and its impact on the proclamation of the gospel. The author, Peter Hicks, who lectures in philosophy at London Bible College, deals with the question from a philosophical perspective.

His argument is developed in three sections, each of which begins with a brief paragraph outlining its content. In the first section Hicks explains what he means by truth and evangelicalism, and then gives a swift survey of changing notions of truth in western thinking from Plato through to the present day. He emphasises the significance of the Enlightenment attempt to make human reason the ultimate epistemological authority, and its ultimately disastrous consequences for any notion of objective and certain truth. The result is the relativism of postmodernism, which cannot, however, be lived out in practice: 'our postmodern age has continued to function as if truth, meaning and even authority continue to exist.

In the second section Hicks discusses what he identifies as significant evangelical conceptions of truth from the time of the Reformation down to the present day. His survey in this section is fascinating and for the most part very instructive. Nevertheless, the attempt to include so much leads occasionally to superficiality or a lack of clarity. The chapter on fundamentalism is particularly problematic, as the author does not sufficiently clarify the relationship between the approach known by that name today, and the theological position held and advanced by the authors of 'The Fundamentals' in the early twentieth century. In the final chapter of this section Hicks identifies three positive (in his view) features of modern evangelicalism: the charismatic movement, representing, he suggests, a swing from a largely cerebral form of Christianity to a

largely experiential one; a greater openness among evangelicals to the possibility that they may at certain points be wrong, and a willingness to be corrected; and holism, the desire to engage the beliefs of evangelicalism with the whole of life. He then indicates the significance of these trends for the question of truth.

In the last section, 'Evangelicals and Truth Tomorrow' Hicks seeks to rebut the relativist position. He argues that it is untenable, firstly, in that it cannot even state its case without being inconsistent with it and, secondly, because it destroys meaning and makes communication impossible. He then gives his own proposal, in which he seeks to go back to what he terms the pre-Enlightenment conception of truth, while also drawing on more recent evangelical thinking. Fundamental to his proposal is the belief that knowledge of truth must begin with God and not with man. God is the source of all truth, which means, firstly, that it can once again be regarded as objective and, secondly, that it is fundamentally unified rather than fragmented (although it is certainly multidimensional). Furthermore, it can be received, but not created, by human knowers, because they have been created in the image of God, one implication of which is that they have a capacity to receive what he communicates. However, he insists on the necessity of conversion, without which 'knowing and living the truth will be seriously inadequate'. This does not mean that there are two types of truth, one for the Christian and the other for the non-Christian: a non-Christian may know Christian doctrine, and even, Hick claims, have certain experiences of God (although his argument at this point is shaky and questionable). What distinguishes the Christian's knowledge is that God has become the centre and key to everything, while the knowledge of the non-Christian will 'lack the full integration and application to every area of life'.

The book is an ambitious undertaking, covering as it does the history of western epistemology over two and a half millennia, and the development of evangelical epistemological approaches in the five hundred years since the Reformation, as well as putting forward an evangelical response to late twentieth century postmodernism. It is quite a *tour de force* and certainly repays careful study: it has much to offer the reader. It would benefit from more in the way of

introductory and summary chapters. The brief paragraphs which preface each section are not adequate as signposts to guide the reader through the author's argument. It is surprising too that there is no introductory chapter: it would be helpful to have the aims of the book made explicit at the outset.

The book is written primarily for a western readership, dealing as it does with movements in western philosophy and evangelical responses to them. However, the issues discussed by Hicks have also a universal significance: the source of truth, the possibility of a certain and objective knowledge of truth, and the nature of the Scriptures and their role in the quest for truth. Accordingly *Evangelicals and Truth* will be a useful tool for African students of theology and their teachers.

*Keith Ferdinando*

AIM Congo Branch Executive Officer  
Bunia, Congo

**Mark A. Noll**

***Turning Points: Decisive Moments in  
the History of Christianity***

Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Books, 1997

Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997

As the information on the cover informs potential readers in *Turning Points*, Noll takes readers on a tour of twelve decisive moments in Christian history. He also reflects on some twentieth-century events that may someday be considered 'turning points'. The result is an absorbing book which gives a fairly swift survey of church history, and avoids getting lost in the details. Each chapter starts with a hymn from the period under consideration, and concludes similarly with a prayer. There are also quotations from significant Christian

writings through the ages, interspersed within the text, black and white illustrations, and helpful, brief bibliographies at the end of each chapter. The introduction gives the author's reasons for studying the history of Christianity: it shows the historical character of the Christian faith; it gives perspective on the interpretation of Scripture; it is a laboratory in which to examine Christian interactions with surrounding culture; and it can help shape proper Christian attitudes - of humility faced with human failure and sin, and gratitude to God who remains faithful to his people.

In fact, however, not all the events identified are really turning points. Noll himself recognises this, as when he discusses the coronation of the emperor Charlemagne by Pope Leo III in 800: 'when Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne the "new" emperor, it only solidified a connection that had been developing for more than half a century'. The importance of the coronation, and of many (but not all) of the other events which Noll discusses, lies in their symbolic significance, what they symbolised, rather than in the event itself. So, what he is often looking at is not so much a turning point, but rather a trend of great importance which can be epitomised in some particular moment or event. This is what gives the book its great value, as a survey of some of the most fundamental developments in the history of Christianity, 'written for laypeople and introductory students rather than scholars'. It also means that, regardless of whether the reader accepts or disputes the central significance of the particular events that Noll has chosen to underline, it would be difficult to question the importance of the trends which they represent.

Throughout his analysis Noll seems to be striving to maintain a certain detachment from the history he records, and specifically from the doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues they sometimes raise. Thus, while on several occasions he makes clear his own evangelical commitment, he tries not to allow this to colour his presentation. From the academic historian's viewpoint such apparent impartiality may be considered a virtue, although Noll admits in the introduction to his book that absolute historical objectivity is impossible ('Identifying such critical turning points is a subjective exercise ..'). The problem is that his approach seems to suggest equal value, in

Christian terms, for fundamentally opposed movements. Thus the chapter on the reformation is followed by one on the counter reformation, or 'Catholic Reform' as Noll prefers to call it. In terms of the purely historical impact of the two movements, it could indeed be argued that they were both equally significant, but in the context of a history written from a Christian point of view, the reader might perhaps expect the historian to offer some analysis at a deeper, more theological level too. Indeed, the neutral, 'value-free' approach, does itself imply a certain commitment. Objectivity in historical scholarship is not possible for mortal men.

Further, some of his judgements are very questionable, which may at times be due to a lack of familiarity with the subject under discussion. Thus his unqualified reference to the Zionist churches of South Africa as 'a dynamic Christian movement' and 'a biblical, Christ-centred, Pentecostal form of Christianity', a 'distinctly African variety of Christianity' begs a number of questions. A more thorough analysis and a greater willingness to make theological distinctions might have led to a different conclusion. More surprising, however, are his brief allusions to the Puritans, which see their significance mainly in terms of their disruptiveness: 'Puritan zeal drove England to civil war in the 1640s ..', while largely (though not entirely) ignoring their huge pastoral and theological importance (and their contribution to the creation of Mark Noll's own nation!). Moreover, given its importance in the history of Christianity there is relatively little discussion of theological liberalism, and again no assessment of its devastating consequences, although Noll does quote Niebuhr's penetrating critique: 'a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.'

Nevertheless, despite qualifications such as these, the book remains a fascinating study of some of the crucial movements within the history of the Christian faith. To conclude once again with the cover blurb: 'This is history that is both readable and compelling.'

*Keith Ferdinando*

AIM Congo Branch Executive Officer

Bunia, Congo

**Keith Ferdinando**

***The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective:  
A Study of Demonology and Redemption  
in the African Context***

Carlisle UK: Paternoster Publishing, 1999  
(450 pages, paperback; ISBN: 0-85364-830-1)

If you are thinking of "must" books to buy in the year 2000, here is one that should definitely be at or near the top of your list. Dr Ferdinando has served for many years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), most recently as principal of the distinguished *Institut Supérieur Théologique de Bunia*. Here, in work based on doctoral research at London Bible College (UK), he offers a comprehensive overview of a topic of utmost relevance to African Christianity. And he does so in a manner that displays the best of evangelical biblical scholarship.

The unifying theme of this magnificently conceived and magisterially composed study is the complete, all-encompassing "triumph of Christ" as a manifestation of the universal sovereignty of God. Written from the perspective of Africa, this text seeks nevertheless to transform the traditional pessimistic religious perspective by means of a Word-illuminated focus on the significance of Christ's sinless life and sacrificial work of redemption on the cross. In the penetrating light of our Lord's overwhelming victory over all satanic forces of wickedness, both biblical demonology and African occult are revealed for what they are and relegated to their temporary, subordinate and subdued place in this world, as they await their ultimate destiny in God's final judgement. That is the essence of the fundamentally optimistic and encouraging message of Scripture that Ferdinando carefully documents for us.

In his introductory chapter, Ferdinando directs attention to a major problem facing African Christianity today that stands as the central focus of the book. As Dr Osadolor Imasogie of Nigeria has put it: "The usual resort of the African Christian in crisis situations is a reversion to African traditional religious practices." Christ might be

able to save from sin, but the redemption announced by the missionaries seemingly offers no response to the profoundly *felt* need for salvation from witches and evil spirits. The result was [and is!] a syncretistic amalgam of Christian faith and traditional religion, with a whole area of reality remaining unredeemed by the gospel.

Ferdinando next considers some of the principal "methodological problems in the study of African traditional religion" (chapter 2), including the broad and diverse nature of the subject field, the amorphous status of unwritten indigenous religious beliefs, the potential for distortion in one's personal perspective on the subject, the misunderstandings that result from cross-cultural translation, and the influence of alien analytical presuppositions (e.g., of "functionalism"). This is followed in chapters 3-5 by a very useful summary of African traditional religion, with special emphasis upon traditional beliefs concerning the spirit world, witchcraft, sorcery, and magic. References are made either in the text or in footnotes to studies that span the sub-Saharan continent, resulting in a wide ranging if necessarily selective overview of the topic. Chapters 4-5 each includes a sub-section drawing attention to some of the insights, coupled with outstanding problems, that derive from typically rationalistic, skeptical, anti-supernaturalistic "Western interpretations" of the spiritual phenomena under discussion. Then in his helpful "conclusion" to Section One (chapter 6), Ferdinando points out the crucial existential dilemma encountered by traditional worshippers and their sympathisers (i.e., those who are not yet free of ancient ancestral beliefs).

For them "demonic" witches, sorcerers and [malevolent] spirits remain a constant menace, and salvation consists in the repeated frustration of their attempted destruction of life, but can never be final or definite (p. 131).

The bulk of the book (Section Two) then presents a comprehensive, progressively developed study of the proper biblical response to the ever-threatening dominion of darkness, as represented in the Old Testament (chapter 7), post-biblical Judaism (chapter 8), the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (chapter 9), the Pauline Epistles (chapter 10), the Johannine Writings (chapter 11), and the

General Epistles (chapter 12). Each chapter contextualises the prevailing conceptions, beliefs, and practices connected with the "spirit world" as these were manifested in Bible times. Particular emphasis is placed on human suffering and the forces of evil since these dominated the thinking and lives of people then, and also now in many parts of the contemporary world (not only in Africa!). Ferdinando counters all such fundamentally pagan beliefs with the biblical alternatives set forth in the sequence of biblical materials surveyed. Throughout this discussion, the significant differences between the biblical and African perceptions of evil powers of the occult world are pointed out, as are the disparate responses that are offered to these ever-present threats to one's body, life, and spirit. Ferdinando believes that it is in this confrontational, contrastive, and Word-constituted manner that the war must be waged by the believing community--and won--in this ongoing, often covert battle for the eternal soul of Africa.

In two final summary chapters (13-14) Ferdinando recapitulates his essential argument. In fact, this would be a good place to begin if one wished to gain a succinct overview of the book as a whole. At the risk of oversimplifying (and perhaps leaving something out), let me offer the following synopsis of Ferdinando's main points:

- a) God is in total sovereign control of the universe that He created and will one day judge; His divine rule extends over Satan, demons, and all other forces of wickedness.
- b) Christ obtained present and ultimate victory over Satan and evil powers on behalf of all people through His redemptive, sacrificial death on the cross.
- c) The primary purpose of Christ's substitutionary life and death, however, was to atone for people's sin, which is the real cause for human suffering and bondage to Satan in the world.
- d) People are responsible for and must repent of their own sinfulness; they cannot blame the devil or demonic forces for their lost condition.
- e) The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to create and to strengthen faith, which enables people to defeat all forms of satanic attack and to live victorious lives no matter what their physical circumstances in this world.

f) Christianity does not guarantee safety and freedom from demonic malevolence or personal suffering in this life; for many believers the struggle against such hard testing will continue on a daily basis right up to the grave, when they will receive the glorious reward of Christ's triumph over sin, death, and Satan.

g) In reality, the "parasitic powers" of evil (i.e., dependent upon human sin, p. 302) are of secondary importance in the Scriptures, which from beginning to end focus on the wonderful works and ways of God, especially on behalf of His saints.

Ferdinando applies these basic truths in a concluding section where he presents "some implications for the African church" with regard to: the gospel, evangelism, pastoral ministry, medical care, and theology (pp.396-407). To be sure, the issues raised here could well contribute to the overall mission statement for any church community or denomination on the continent. Although there may be (depending on one's doctrinal viewpoint) several topical slights or omissions (e.g. the operation of divine *providence* in the world, the function of God's Law in rebuking human sinfulness and in guiding sanctified living, and the place of the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in the believer's life of faith), the rest of Scripture is well covered as it pertains to the author's masterfully contextualised "study of demonology and redemption in African perspective." The work is supplemented by a final "excursus" dealing with the interpretation of the difficult Pauline expression *ta stoiceia tou kosmou*: "elementary principles/ elemental spirits of the world" (pp. 409-416), as well as by a comprehensive 33 page bibliography.

Few if any controversial issues or problematic passages are avoided or ignored in this excellent exegetical and pastoral overview as Ferdinando clearly and concisely—in Hebrews-like fashion—sets forth a convincing case of Scripture's bold affirmation of the omnipotent supremacy of Christ. He is our all-sufficient Saviour and Lord, who enables Christians everywhere to deal with the varied, culturally-conditioned attacks of Satan in their lives, as well as the temporal suffering or oppression that they may be presently facing. Syncretism or accommodation to ancient ancestral beliefs, practices, values, and/or perspectives is not the answer. Only an ever-deeper, personally applied understanding of what God has already done and

will do for us in and through Jesus the Redeemer will do. No compromise is possible--only a fuller, faith-founded commitment to knowing and living Christ more completely. What an encouraging message!

This text is an absolute must for church leaders, pastors, theological students, and educated Christians throughout Africa--east, west, north, and south. *However*, in order to render it more accessible to many potential users, it needs to be reproduced in a simplified, more economical edition. Several suggestions come to mind in this respect: replace complex vocabulary, revise complicated argumentation, reduce the number of footnotes (or eliminate them altogether), provide translations instead of original-language citations of biblical passages, and periodically introduce some summary diagrams, charts, or other graphics. As soon as possible such an edition should also be translated into French, and into other major languages of Africa. Ferdinando's glowing vision of Christ's supreme triumph confidently puts the Scriptures in the forefront (where they rightly belong) in the life-and-death battle of contemporary African Christianity with diabolical deception of all forms, whether traditional or modern. His biblically-based optimism is as spiritually educative as it is personally contagious. Indeed, may it serve to inspire many similar works by believing biblical scholars in Africa, as we embark upon a new millennium of God's gracious guidance, provision, and protection.

*Ernst R. Wendland, PhD*  
Evangelical Lutheran Seminary  
Lusaka, Zambia

*keeping up with contemporary Africa . . .*

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*Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 19.1 2000

Printed by Kijabe Printing Press  
P.O.Box 40 Kijabe

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