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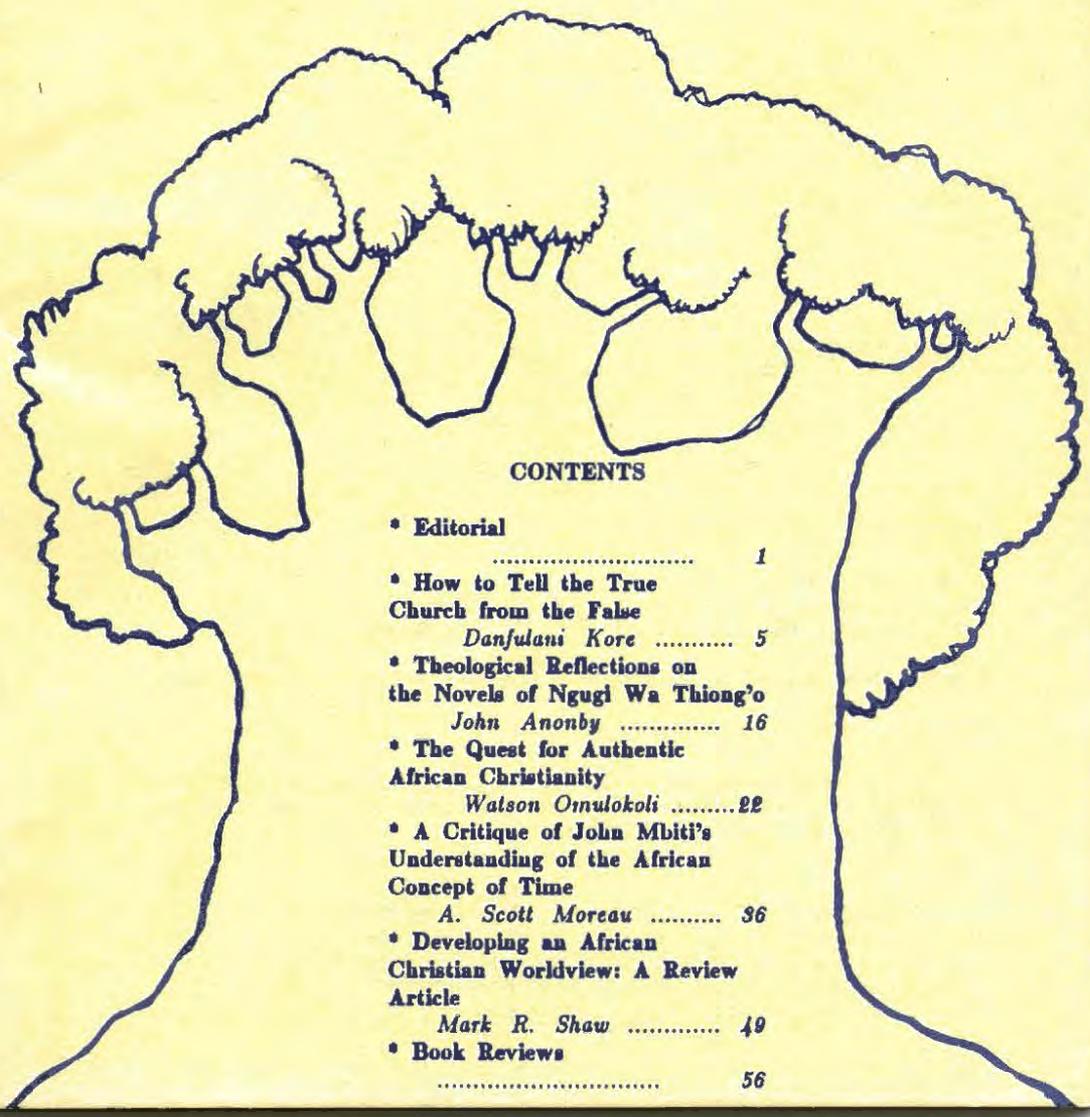
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THE EAST AFRICA JOURNAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

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EAJET is published twice a year (in June and December) by the Staff of Scott Theological College in order to provide African evangelical theological students with editorials, articles and book reviews on subjects related to theology and ministry.

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Cover



The Baobab tree is the EAJET symbol for the gospel in Africa. The good news of Christ, like the Baobab tree, is ageless, enduring and firmly rooted in African soil.

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Editorial: The African Church in the Year 2000

Five years ago Scott Theological College began the *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. Much has happened in Africa and in African Christianity since that time. New post-graduate schools of theology appeared in Nairobi. New magazines like *Beyond* and *Step* carved their niche in the media. David Barrett published his *World Christian Encyclopedia* and demonstrated that 17% of the world's evangelicals now live in Africa. Church attendance continued to grow. Parachurch agencies like InterVarsity, Life Ministry and Navigators increased their profile in Universities and Schools throughout the continent. Hundreds of young African evangelicals have returned home with doctorates in various theological disciplines. Evangelical Fellowships emerged in Kenya and Zambia. The Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar(AEAM) extended its influence. The Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa(ACTEA) facilitated the enrichment and upgrading of hundreds of theological schools across the continent. Independent churches organized themselves into the Association of African Independent Churches(AAIC). African evangelicals like Tokunboh Adeyemo, Tite Tienou, David Gitari and (albeit posthumously) Byang Kato published books and articles that attracted attention from Christians all over the world. The 1980's have been auspicious years for evangelical Christianity on this continent.

Yet despite the signs of growth that the last five years brought the task of building and perfecting the Megachurch of Africa remains daunting. How much like a lion in winter the Africa Church appears. Like a lion she is impressive in her size and physical strength. Yet the spiritual chill of traditionalism and clericalism cling to her like a winter frost. The need for renewal remains. What would the editor of *EAJET* writing in the year 2000 have to say about African Christianity in the late 80's and 90's? Dream with me for a moment

EAJET celebrates in this year of 2000 AD its 18th year of publication. Looking backward over the last decade and a half this editor can only comment in astonishment on the way God has skillfully shepherded the Church in this continent. Consider a few of the more remarkable developments:

1) **The Church and Culture.** This broad issue, so hotly debated in the 70's and 80's, has seen a glorious resolution of conflict. Problems remain but consider what has transpired. The dualism between sacred and secular that so plagued the churches 15-20 years ago has been overcome. The worldliness that this dualism brought into Christianity (for it segregated whole areas of life such as business, money, the realm of the spirits, public justice, work, urbanization and its effects, art, etc. from the rule of Christ and the transforming

power of the Gospel) has at last been countered by vigorous movements of the church that seek to bring all of modern African life under the explicit Lordship of Christ and seek to redeem God's good creation in Africa which has been so ruined by sin, for God's glory once again. The most significant sign of this transformation of culture has been the rise of several major Christian universities in East Africa. These universities, founded by major Christian denominations as well as a consortium of some of the independent churches, offer a wide range of majors and have gained respect around the continent and in the west for their high standards. The most notable feature of these institutions is the vigorous Christian commitments and perspectives they bring into their teaching. The approach to politics, art, science, sociology, psychology etc, has not only been *accomodated* to the Christian faith but rather these truly Christian universities have *transformed* the way these subjects are understood. A truly Biblical worldview has made this transforming vision possible. These universities are producing a new generation of African leadership in all fields, leaders who because of their distinctively Biblical worldview respect the God-giveness of much of African culture and preserve it from simply being swept aside by modernization. A new African culture is coming into being, one that preserves African cultural authenticity by centering it more fully on the Triune God who has created it and seeks to develop its potential for his glory.

2) **Church and State.** The church/state conflicts which emerged in Africa in the 70's and 80's were finally overcome in the 90's. The harassment of churches and clergy which included closure and detention finally came to an abrupt halt when African political leadership found they could not silence the prophetic voice of the churches and grudgingly accepted the church's role as the conscience of the state. Though some churches lost courage and slipped into a cowardly silence as the rule of law was threatened by power-hungry politicians most persisted in their cry that God's law, as represented in the 10 commandments, are supreme over all human laws and authorities and faithfully continued to act as God's representatives in defending his law. This view that successful nation-building ultimately comes from submission to God's moral law saved Africa from political and economic disaster. The church was able to keep its credibility as a representative of God's law in society by refusing to encourage revolutionary movements on the one hand or by seeking positions of privilege and power in government on the other. The faithful proclamation of both law and Gospel produced the legions of Christian moral crusaders who were able to renew a love and fear of God's law throughout society. Totalitarian trends withered in the moral climate created in the nation by Bible-believing and preaching churches.

3) **Church and mission.** The last 15 years have seen the evangelisation and discipling of millions of East African muslims. All-African interdenominational mission agencies proliferated and thousands of East African young people gave their lives for fulltime service in other African countries as well in service to the rapidly declining nations of Europe and North America. AEAM, IVCF-Africa, Life Ministry, Navigators and a host of other para-church agencies paved the way for this new student volunteer

movement. Theological colleges and seminaries were filled to capacity with these newly recruited young people seeking to be equipped for both church ministry and cross-cultural mission.

4) **Church and Theology.** The theological anemia that had plagued the church in the 70's and 80's has been largely overcome. Liberal theology which nearly destroyed spiritual vitality with its denial of the authority of Scriptures, the transcendence of God, the divine lordship of Jesus Christ and the necessity of the new birth had become a nearly forgotten footnote of African Church History during the 90's when it was bypassed by a surge of top quality books by African evangelical writers establishing evangelical supremacy in the areas of systematic theology, philosophy of religion, comparative religion, new testament, church history, christian education, ethics, preaching and pastoralia. Like gnosticism in the 2nd and 3rd centuries the liberalism that had infiltrated protestant and catholic theology so mightily in the first 75 years of the twentieth century shrank into obscurity during the last 25 years of the century due to the evangelical theological renaissance that illuminated the continent.

. . . . but it is not the year 2000 and the future that we dream about has not become a reality. Are we foolish to engage in such triumphalist visions? No more foolish than the Church of the first century which proclaimed Christ faithfully and confidently and released the power of the Spirit into the Roman empire, transforming it intellectually, culturally, politically and spiritually before the third centennial of Christ's death and resurrection was celebrated. Work and Pray. Then watch the transforming vision take shape.

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How to Tell the True Church from the False

Danfulani Kore

Have you ever walked around one of the great cities on this continent—say, Harare or Nairobi or Lagos—and been struck by the vast array of churches scattered throughout? Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans, Adventists, Holy Spirit churches, Apostolic Churches, Zionist churches etc., dot the urban and rural landscapes of Africa. For many observers the multiplicity of denominations is the great scandal of Christianity. For others, the wide diversity of groups is a testimony of Christianity's dynamism and vigor. In this chapter we want to tackle some questions that explore the differences that divide Christianity and that wrestle with the vexing question of the boundaries of the true church. In the course of our exploration we will seek to discover those essential marks or notes that distinguish genuine Christianity from her many counterfeits.

1. How many different denominations and church groups are there in Africa? Why the great number? What are some major differences between these various groups?

The fact of Diversity

The church in Africa is a wildfire of diversity. Thousands of denominations with vastly different theologies, polities and liturgies compete for the African soul. Take as representative the case of Nigeria. Christianity in this nation of some 70 million people and 500 tribes is represented by a large Roman Catholic presence (10% of the population), an even larger Protestant presence of well over 16 million (appx 23% of population) distributed among 35 different denominations and a smaller percentage of African independent churches of over 600 separate varieties! What accounts for such diversity? Two reasons can be suggested here. One concerns the need among groups with a strong adherence to the Bible to preserve biblical distinctions in areas that are secondary and yet important but about which no consensus seems to exist. Areas such as baptism, polity and spiritual gifts have largely accounted for differences among many truly Christian denominations. Thus Baptists seek to baptise only those who can profess faith while Anglicans and Presbyterians baptise infants. Some groups insist on the rule of bishops, others only of elders and pastors. Pentecostals emphasize the charismatic gifts of healing and speaking in tongues while others do not. These differences are important but not of the essence of the Gospel, that is to say they do not affect in any major way the message of salvation by faith in Christ. For this reason

denominations who differ in these secondary areas often cooperate in evangelism, mission and theological education to name a few areas. They differ in non-essentials but hold firmly to saving essentials.

Critical Divisions between the Churches

More critical is the second reason for the splintering of the churches in Africa. When churches differ over essential matters like the authority of scripture and salvation through Christ, separation must inevitably occur. This separation is often total because no adequate basis for unity exists when fundamentals of the Christian faith have been denied. Broadly speaking, the different denominations and churches can be categorized into four groups by their respective views on religious authority. Denominations and churches that accept the Bible as the infallible and inspired word of God and authoritative in all matters of faith and practice can be broadly classified as evangelical. Evangelical type denominations have their theological roots in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century which held strongly to the principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). Liberal or Ecumenical protestantism is a label for those denominations and churches that have drifted from adherence to the authority and reliability of scripture and have substituted human reason and social or cultural consensus as the basis of religious authority. Such churches accept the higher critical study of the scripture and argue that such study has shown the Bible to be a flawed and merely human document and therefore not in any unique way the word of God. A third group consists of those who accept church tradition as equal to or greater than scripture. Roman Catholicism is sometimes held up as the great exemplar of this third view of authority. A final type of church would be all those who base their religious authority on direct revelation, either through an inspired prophet or through members of the congregation in general. Many of the independent churches in Africa would fit in this category. Thus while many differences that seem to divide Christians are small and still allow for a good deal of cooperation, other differences are critical in nature and have caused deep and abiding schisms that are not easily breached.

2. As we examine some of the Biblical words for the church such as body, bride, temple and called out ones what definition of the nature of the true church emerges?

The Church as the Body of Christ

The church, in some passages of the New Testament, is described as the body (*soma*) of Christ. In Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians there are many references to the church in such terms. In many cases it refers to the Christian community, the church as a unified divine organ (Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 10:17, 12:13, 27). All believers in Christ are interrelated, enjoying the same position and sharing in the same dynamic relationship to Christ irrespective of their different backgrounds (1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Eph. 2:16). All believers must receive nourishment and growth in Jesus alone. He holds the church - His body- together (Col. 2:19). All members have roles

(functions) to play in building up fellow believers (Eph. 4:12, 16). Christ the Saviour leads and possesses the church (Eph. 5:23, 30). The church as the body of Christ rightly belongs to her Lord because He suffered to establish the church (Col. 1:24). Christ's peace should rule the totality of believers who are called members of one body (Col. 3:15). In I Cor. 12:12-27, the Apostle Paul explains the interplay of the many members of Christ's body. Each member of the body has a distinct function just as do the parts of the human body (12:15-17). These various members have been designed by God (12:18-20), to function effectively for the good of the whole body.

The Church as the Bride of Christ

In other passages in the Bible, the church is called the bride (*numthe*). The Old Testament depicts the joy that exists between the bride and the bridegroom (Isaiah 61:10; Psalm 19:5; 62:3; Jer. 7:34; 16:9). The beauty of the glorified church is portrayed like that of the bride in the presence of her bridegroom (John 3:29; Rev. 21:2, 9, 18:23). Christ has the church at the centre of his program for all of history (Eph 1:22,23). Christ plans to present his bride as blameless before his heavenly Father (I Thess. 5:23). Just as the term "body" points to the cooperative oneness of the church, so the term "bride" points to her purity and holiness.

The Church as the Temple of God

Furthermore the church is described as a spiritual temple (*naos*). In the Old Testament the temple referred most commonly to the physical structure erected in Jerusalem. But the Old Testament concept did not stop there. Certain passages make clear that the physical temple was but a type of a greater temple, a heavenly sanctuary which was holy to God (Ps. 11:4, 18:6). The book of Revelation speaks of God in His heavenly glorious temple (*naos*) (14:15, 15:6, 16:1,17). Seen in light of its metaphorical and theological usage the term "temple" refers to the spirit-filled body of the Christians, which is said to be a habitation of God. Hence, individual believers in Christ are called His temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19-20). Believers are God's own because the Spirit indwells them making them God's possession forever (Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 6:16). The singular use of the word "Temple" when referring to the church emphasizes the oneness of the church community and reinforces the fact that Christians are to avoid disunity and division.

Other names for the Church

"Called out ones" (*hetois*) and "Saints" (*hagios*) are two other designations of the church. In the cultic sense, called out ones or holy ones are those who are dedicated to God, fully belonging to him and set apart for His service and good pleasure alone (Is. 48:2, 52:1; Matt. 4:5). The word "church" (*ekklesia*) appears 115 times in the New Testament. Only twice, the term is used to refer to non-christian assembly (Acts 19:32-39,41). Two times it is used to refer to the children of Israel in the Old Testament. In other words, the term is primarily used to refer to the saints, i.e. believers in Jesus Christ. In other places the

church is linked to the Kingdom of God (Matt 16:18) not as its embodiment but as its witness. The witness of the church to the worldwide and historically progressive spread of the rule of Christ over all of life reminds us that in addition to the oneness of the church as a body and the holiness of the church as bride, temple and called-out saints, the church must proclaim (as did the Apostles) the message of the Kingdom and seek its extension throughout the world in mission.

Can we draw these various word pictures together and come up with a definition of the church that would incorporate the truths embedded in each term? One suggested definition for the church would be the following: All believers on earth and in heaven who belong to Christ and are committed to the Apostolic Gospel, to biblical / oneness, to God-centered holiness and to worldwide mission. Local congregations around the world from countless denominations who follow Christ and embrace these four marks of oneness, holiness, apostolicity and global or catholic mission-orientation are therefore but parts of the one true church.

3. What do we mean by the terms "visible" and "invisible" church? What is the relationship of the two? What are the marks of a true church as taught by evangelical church fathers like Luther and Calvin? How applicable is their teaching on the marks of the church in Africa today?

The Church: Visible and Invisible

In the New Testament the church is declared to be the central purpose of God in this present age. The church as it is known today is the outcome of Christ's life during His earthly ministry. The church actually began to function after the resurrection and ascension of Christ (I Corinthians 15:20, Colossians 1:18). One concept of the church as presented in the New Testament is that of an organism, a living union of all true believers in Christ. However, another concept is that of the local church - a company of professing believers in a particular geographic area (I Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:2, Phillipians 1:1). These two different concepts of the church are sometimes referred to as "invisible" and "visible" in nature. The nature of the church is both local and universal in scope. The "invisible" church specifically refers to all who are saved in the present age, whether they are now on earth or in heaven. Thus, the term includes all genuine believers who constitute the true body of Christ, both the living and dead believers (saints) in Christ (Matt. 16:18, Acts 9:31, I Corinthians 6:4, Ephesians 1:22, 23; 3:16, 21; 4:1-15). The one true church of God consists of all redeemed individuals "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, worshipping and confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, to the glory and God the Father (Phillipians 2:10, Revelation 5:9; 7:9, Col. 3:11). All members of the church find their unity in the risen Christ. On the other hand the "visible" church refers to an assembly of professing believers in Christ, who have been baptized and who are formed into a body to do God's will. So, a "visible" church includes the universal fellowship of believers on earth who meet visibly in particular local assemblies. They are visible and tangible in operation, demonstrating that believers belong to Jesus Christ. Generally speaking, the

church includes the whole local body which worships Christ in a locality (I Cor. 11:18; 14:4-19). The professing believers in the "visible" church may not all be true believers. The visible church is a mixed group. Some who attend church, though orthodox, may not be true believers, and therefore need to receive Christ (Matt. 6:21-23). All that hear the Gospel are not necessarily saved. But only those who are genuinely saved are the true members of the invisible church. They are identified as members of the universal church. These have been called, sealed, and sanctified to be saints in Christ. The spiritual house (I Peter 2:5, 9) is not simply the local church, nor even a group of believers. It is rather the mystical body of Christ -- the church universal.

Luther and Calvia on the Marks of the Church

Martin Luther, the key figure of the sixteenth century Reformation, believed in the four classic attributes of the church. He declared that "The church is holy, because its members are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It is one, because it has one Lord and is united to Him; it is apostolic, because it is founded on the proclamation of the apostle, the gospel of Christ; It is catholic, or universal, because it is not restricted to one people, nation or time." Yet how are these attributes detected in practice. Luther advised that two important notes be looked for: pure preaching of the Word of God and the correct administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution.

Similarly, John Calvin, another key church reformer, stated that the church includes all the elect, the dead and the living. "The church is catholic, that is universal. It cannot be divided, for this would mean that Christ is divided, and that is impossible. Its head is Christ, and through Him all the elect grow up together as one body." He believed that the Catholic church is "invisible" and is known only to God but that at the same time it overlaps the visible church, which though comprised of particular churches in different localities yet embraces all the living believers throughout all the world "who consent to the same truth of divine doctrine and are united by the bond of the same religion." In the visible church are many hypocrites, mere professing Christians who are mixed up with the genuine ones and have all the external rights and privileges belonging to that name. However, Calvin insisted that all Christians should associate themselves with the external communion of the church, even though the church be imperfect. Calvin emphasized the fact that none of the elect is perfect, and that they should stand daily in need of the forgiving grace of God.

What are the visible marks of the church that demonstrate her genuineness? Following the reformers we would suggest Biblical teaching and Biblical practice as the two sides of the one true church.

Loyalty to Biblical Teaching and Practice

The Bible forms the basis for faith and practice of members of a true church of Christ. Members give their total loyalty to the Word of God for it is there that the living Christ speaks to his church and the true church recognises his voice. The true church is the one that is sound in doctrine, pure in life,

and "ready to do every good work" (Titus 1:9, 2:12). The true church teaches the plain truth of the Word of God openly to every man's conscience in the light of God.

Another mark of a true church is demonstrated when members walk in love because God is love (I John 4:7-12). Believers love both God and His Word, as well as fellow members in Christ. Members in the body of Christ also walk in holiness because they have been called to be holy. Therefore they actively resist all forms of evil in order to live a holy life based on the knowledge of their new position in Christ (I John 4:7-12). Members limit their fellowship by walking only in the light and in the wisdom of God since the former have become imitators of God (I John 1:5-7; Ephesians 4:32, 5:15; James 1:5, 3:17).

Therefore, a true church accepts the total record of the Bible as divinely inspired, authoritative and absolutely trustworthy. Members of a true church preach that the only way of salvation for mankind is in Christ Jesus (Acts 4:12). The life of the church that is in genuine union with Christ is to be Spirit-controlled. Both pastor-teachers and church members are to be loyal to Scripture--the Word of God. Christ is the only supreme Lord over their lives. They strive to live holy and loving lives in accordance with the Word. By so doing, believers of true churches become living witnesses of the Gospel of Christ to the lost world which deeply needs salvation in Christ.

It appears there is much to be desired today if the above marks of a true church are to be powerfully demonstrated by the church in Africa. Some denominational churches and para-church organizations do not seem to have the sound doctrine coupled with sound practice that is taught in the Scriptures. Many churches stumble on in confusion about what constitutes a genuine church or body of Christ. There must be a renewing wind of the Spirit to revive both orthodoxy and orthopraxy within our divided congregations.

4 In light of both our definition of the church and the marks of a true church, what evaluation should an African evangelical make of some of the cults that are found in Africa such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and other cultic groups?

The Cultic Presence in Africa

Cults are on the increase in Africa. More and more new cults and sects are emerging with new doctrines which seem to be diametrically opposed to the Christian faith. Jesus Christ strongly warned His disciples that many cults would seek to counterfeit the genuine Gospel that sets people free (Matt. 6:21-23). Why do Cults thrive? Experts suggest that cults grow among "people who have no solid Christian background." Nominalism in our churches make thousands susceptible to dangerous cults which mix Christianity with Paganism (Christopaganism). An outstanding specialist on cults stated that, "These cultists emulate Christianity: their voluminous writings are sprinkled with biblical quotations; they talk much about Jesus and Jehovah, and claim to have the only true interpretation of the Scriptures."

The most common cults present in Africa include the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventism, and the Saints of the Latter Days (Mormonism), just to mention a few. The steady rise of cults is partially due to the decline of

authentic Christianity in the mainline denominations.

The Teachings of Seventh-Day Adventists and Mormons

The Seventh-Day Adventists worship on the Sabbath as in Judaism. Adventism teaches that when one is saved it is only "past sins" that are forgiven. They do not believe that anybody is now saved forever or already has everlasting life as stated in the Bible (John 3:16, I John 5:12, 13). Also their teachers and preachers teach and proclaim that tithing is essential to salvation. They teach that only those who are good enough can get to heaven. This, of course, is salvation by works and not by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

In addition Adventist theology teaches that the prophecy of Revelation 12-17 points to the experience and work of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The followers believe that the writings of Mrs. White are as inspired as the Holy Scriptures.

Another cult growing in popularity is Mormonism. The followers do not regard the person and work of Jesus Christ as sufficient for one's salvation. Like the Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons believe and teach that baptism is essential for the salvation of both the living and the dead. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that baptism does not save the living and nothing can save the dead. They demand good works for salvation. Mormonism counts Adam as a god, and teaches that man can become god. The cult's doctrine that elders in the Mormon churches should have as many wives as possible goes against the explicit declaration of the Bible that the bishop (elders) "should be the husband of one wife" (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). In sum both Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists hold beliefs that seriously distort the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Teachings of the Jehovah Witnesses

But the threat posed by the two cults mentioned above is not as great as that posed by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Historically this movement was founded by C.T. Russell as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society and the International Bible Students Association. The title "Jehovah's Witnesses" was applied to the group in 1931 under the leadership of J. F. Rutherford. After Rutherford's death in 1942 Nathan H. Knorr became the chief officer who contributed immensely through his writings and teachings toward the numerical growth of the cult in various cities of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Of most concern to Christians in Africa is the cult's denial of the deity of Christ and by implication the doctrine of the Trinity. The followers of the cult regard Christ as one of the first beings created by God. Christ existed as a spirit being before his incarnation. He was a chief of the angels, highest of all Jehovah's creation, the direct creation of God, the "only begotten", and in his name, created all things - angels, principalities and powers, as well as the earthly creation.

Thus, as far as Jehovah's Witnesses are concerned, Christ is not God but rather a creature. Passages in the Bible which teach the deity of Christ are explained away. In the New World Translation, the Jehovah's Witnesses

have included in their translation of the New Testament several quite erroneous renderings of the Greek. For example, John 1:1 is mistranslated in order to agree with the teaching of the cult, as follows: "Originally, the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Bruce M. Metzger explained that "By using here the indefinite article 'a' the translators have overlooked the well known fact that in Greek Grammar nouns may be definite for various reasons, whether or not the Greek definite article is present." Metzger further argued that "it must be stated quite frankly that, if the Jehovah's Witnesses take this translation seriously, they are polytheists."

In similar fashion Jehovah's Witnesses interpret Colossians 1:15-17 in a way that seems to deny the full deity of Christ. They seize upon the word "First-begotten" (*prototokos*). In answer to the argument of the cult, responsible Bible scholars have pointed out that the force of the Greek supports the full deity of Christ for what is "begotten" must be of the same kind as the "parent." God can only beget God. The Holy Scripture makes it clear and plain that "in Christ all the fulness of the deity lives in bodily form", and that consequently all believers "have this fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:9-10).

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Philippians 2:6 shows that Christ is not equal with God. They fail to understand that Christ simply stripped His prerogatives as God's equal in a special mutual subjection that exists within the Holy Trinity, in order to accomplish the work of salvation. Having achieved this goal, "God also had highly exalted Christ Jesus, and given him a name which is above every name . . . of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth . . . to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:7-11). Also both the Old and New Testaments use 'Jehovah God' to refer to Jesus (John 12:39-41, cf. Isaiah 6:5, 44:6). Jehovah's Witnesses resemble 4th century Arianism in their view that the Son of God was the first and highest created being. The sect identifies the son with Michael the Archangel. The truth of Christ's deity, incarnation and atonement are thus seriously distorted and represents a spiritual danger to thousands in Africa. Furthermore, in the area of eschatology the sect believes that in 1918 Jesus came to the Temple of God and commissioned 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses and later they include Jonadabs, meaning an indefinite number of earthly "men of good will."

How then should the evangelical church in Africa respond to such cults? In the midst of our conflict with them appropriate responses should include love, a positive Christian witness and clear biblical refutation of cultic teaching.

5. The New Testament constantly talks of false teachers, false Apostles even within true churches (see I Timothy 1:3-11, 1 John 4:1-3, 11 Cor. 11:13). Briefly, discuss the different marks of these false apostles and the heterodox trends in teaching that they seek to promote and apply this to the African setting.

False Teachers in New Testament Times

In the New Testament one reads that numerous churches faced the problem of internal false teachers and false apostles who claimed to speak the truth but in fact distorted the Christian message. Normally they preached another Jesus,

another Spirit, or different gospel other than the truth declared in the Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1-3, II Peter 2:1). Such false teachers and apostles paid much attention to religious trivia, such as myths and endless genealogies in which Judaism prided itself (I Timothy 1:3-11). They were legalistic, argumentative and empty talkers. They often exalted themselves with self confident boasting (II Corinthians 10:5, I Corinthians 4:12). They set themselves against the true knowledge of God and distorted the Word of God in order to gain followers. The apostle Paul denounced dishonesty in tampering with the Word of God by such false teachers. Paul declared in strong terms, "We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways, we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"(II Corinthians 4:2). Further these false apostles and teachers felt it necessary to produce instant and visible results in terms of impressive numbers of followers in order to appear successful in their ministry. Consequently, they were quite willing to employ even deceitful means in order to achieve their ends.

The Apostle John (I John 4:1-6) warned believers against "many false prophets who have gone into the world" and the dangers they put in the way of Christian fellowship. So-called prophets who refused to confess Christ's deity and incarnation, were energized and filled with demonic spirits. Every Christian heresy can be traced to a faulty view of Christ's person and His work. This is the spirit of error (Anti-Christ).

What kinds of teachings earned the label "false" in Apostolic times? The common denominator of a wide variety of false teachings is the tendency to downplay the person and work of Christ and therefore to imply that His accomplishment on the cross is somehow insufficient for salvation. The clear indifference or even hostility to Christ the only Saviour made the alternative systems proclaimed by the false Apostles "another Gospel" (Gal. 1:8).

False Teachers in Africa Today

In Africa today there are both false teachers and false apostles and prophets. These are represented in different denominational churches, independent movements and sects throughout the continent. Some African theologians and church leaders do not totally accept the written Scriptures as the basis for one's faith and practice in life. In fact, some sects such as the "Brethren of Cross and Star", teach that truth is found only in the New Testament and not in the Old Testament. Others believe and teach that the Bible is not inerrant and divinely authoritative. Some theologians in Africa teach and stress the need to combine both traditional religions and Christian faith together. This, they believe, would harmonize the plurality of African cultures in the interests of Christian unity and national aspirations for self-identity and cultural authenticity. The goal of some seems to be an African theology based on African Traditional religions (customs and beliefs) rather than the Bible.

Much of the so-called "African Theology" is a different gospel which effectively denies the uniqueness of Christ as the world's only Saviour and Lord. It is right that Christians of every culture should aim to restate the gospel in ways that would be meaningful within their cultural contexts, but the aim should not be to exalt cultural norms over scriptural absolutes. Today some independent

non-evangelical movements or sects teach that one is saved only if he is able to speak in tongues, engage in long prayers, and heal others. An independent church in Ethiopia exalts healing, exorcism and glossolalia as the heart of the Christian faith. Similar groups exist throughout the continent of Africa. Such groups are in danger of stressing peripherals at the expense of the one essential: salvation by faith in Christ alone. In similar danger of neglecting the centrality of the gospel are teachers and groups which claim to receive new revelations that are to be regarded as authoritative as Scripture.

Syncretism (Combining Africa traditional religions and some Christian beliefs), is the danger risked by many who attempt to contextualize Christianity. Dr. Kato warned that many theologians in Africa spend their time defending African traditional religions and practices that are incompatible with biblical teaching.

We must assert again in the churches of this continent that religions do not save. That prerogative belongs only to the Lord Jesus. As far as the scripture teaches there is only one way of salvation: "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is *none other* name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Only in Christ has salvation come to the nations. The Gospel of Christ can never "come to terms" with the so-called African religions. The two are quite distinct.

6. Given the grave theological divisions within African Christianity how would you answer someone who insisted that all churches should become one? Compare the different views of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) on this point. Why is it important to avoid "unity in the dark"?

Church Unity according to the AACC

The preceding sections show that the confession of the true church is the supremacy of the person and work of Jesus Christ whose written Word becomes the only authority in matters of belief and practice in the daily living of members. The total loyalty of all members of the true church is toward their Lord and Saviour. The fact that this confession is not upheld by all churches in Africa creates deep scepticism about any meaningful union taking place apart from a massive theological reformation.

Not that efforts for the formal reunion of churches are lacking. The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) founded in 1963 has worked zealously for church union. Yet on what basis has the AACC (a close affiliate of the World Council of Churches) sought unity among the fractured body of Christ? What are the purposes or goals for the Christian Church in Africa? What views does AACC hold? Are these goals and views of AACC in concord with the Holy Scriptures?

Evangelism, according to AACC, is not to be interpreted in the narrow sense of "saving souls" but in the wider and more political sense of serving mankind. The purpose of teaching the gospel is "to satisfy the longings of the Africans" for "identity, authenticity and liberation." Historic Christianity has always expressed grave doubts concerning whether merely humanising the gospel offers any genuine hope for mankind. The AACC has continued to imply

that its first loyalty is to renew the African cultural heritage. Dr. Byang Kato expressed the fears of many that AACC was rapidly becoming a champion of a syncretistic gospel which seemed to demand that traditional religion be accepted as a valid way of salvation. Kato warned that

According to the Word of God, no one people can claim the monopoly of God's free gift in Christ Jesus, not even the Jews who have received the oracles of God (Col. 3:11). Any claim of monopoly of God's grace by any one group or class of people is foreign to the gospel. Paul calls such claim of monopoly as not really a gospel (Gal. 1:6, 7). This must be distinguished from the unique claims of Christ. It is Christ the Saviour, and not the sinners to be saved, who can claim uniqueness.

Unity according to AEAM

Sensitive to the dangers of syncretism, the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) was formed in the 1960's to affirm the authority of scripture in our doing of theology and as the only basis for lasting unity between churches. While deeply concerned about political, social and economic problems confronting contemporary Africa the Association still has made its first priority the faithful proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour of the world (John 12:29, 3:16; I John 2:2).

The true hope for unity of churches in our spiritually divided continent is not a diluted gospel accommodated to human desires. What is needed more than ever if we are to see growth not only in unity but also in holiness, intellectual cogency, spiritual vigor, evangelistic zeal, cultural potency and social relevance is a return to the historic New Testament faith. For the African Churches to become authentically one, holy, catholic and apostolic nothing less than a turn from our dreams, traditions and private revelations and to a new acceptance of *sola scriptura* will do.

Theological Reflections on the Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiongo

John Anonby

As a student of both theology and literature, I have attempted to gain insights on the role of Christianity in East Africa as well as to explore some of Kenya's social and political aspirations as distilled in its literature. Teaching at a theological college attended by students who represent many denominations has enhanced my awareness of some of the struggles as well as opportunities and challenges of the Church in a dynamic, changing society. My decision to commence my research into Kenyan literature through a careful reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's writings is, however, a more delicate matter that requires an immediate preliminary explanation: Ngugi, regardless of one's personal response (which may range from unqualified admiration to total antipathy), is widely known as "Kenya's best-known writer" ¹; he has, in fact, achieved international recognition. Ngugi's novels have spanned the crucial period just prior to Kenya's independence up to the present, and they focus on many of the conflict-laden issues of this entire era.

Although Ngugi is currently living in self imposed exile in England, alienated from a Kenya that has not embraced the Marxist-socialist views he has persistently advocated, Ngugi's novels nevertheless provide the Christian reader with an opportunity to scrutinize anew his or her own beliefs and ideals. As an evangelical Christian with a strong northern European heritage as well as a Northern American upbringing, I have found Ngugi's novels a fascinating challenge to some of my most cherished values. A student in a missionary school prior to his enrollment at Makerere College in Uganda, Ngugi had absorbed much Christian learning, which is reflected in the plethora of Biblical allusions and motifs which permeate his novels. It is important to recognize, then, that Ngugi's rejection of Christianity was not facilitated by a superficial encounter with Christian beliefs, but emerged after a profound awareness of the incompatibility between certain essential points of Christian doctrine and his personal views of ultimate reality. This problem was compounded (and perhaps even initiated) by what he regarded as discrepancies between institutionalized and Biblical Christianity (or "mere" Christianity, to borrow a term from C. S. Lewis).

A convenient introduction to Ngugi's disenchantment with Christianity can be found in his widely publicized speech to the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Nairobi on March 12, 1970, which appeared in an essay entitled "Church, Culture and Politics" in Ngugi's

*Homecoming*². In this address, he makes a number of sweeping indictments against Christianity, two of which are pertinent. He sees, first, a "contradiction" between Christianity, "whose basic doctrine was love and equality between men" and what he regards as its unholy alliance with colonialism, "which in Kenya was built on the inequality and hatred between men and the subsequent subjugation of the black race by the white race."³ His second caveat is that "Christianity set in motion a process of social change involving rapid disintegration of the tribal set-up and the framework of social norms and values by which people had formerly ordered their lives." He thus laments the loss of "primitive rites," traditional African dances and the "images of our gods," all of which, he feels, "robbed people of their soul."⁴ These concerns are given eloquent literary treatment in his first novel, *The River Between*, which describes the invasion of Kikuyu land by foreigners "with clothes like butterflies" and traces the fulfillment of the prophecy of the old man, Chege, that "these followers of Joshua [a zealous convert to Christianity] would bring so many divisions to the land that the tribe would die."⁵

While it is necessary to point out that Ngugi's speech to the Presbyterian Assembly had been launched by a public denial of Christianity ("I am not a man of the Church. I am not even a Christian")⁶, the two issues mentioned above deserve at least a modest response by any reflecting Christian believer living in present day Kenya. The past history of both colonial and missionary activity in East Africa cannot, of course, be altered. Undoubtedly, many European settlers, whether ostensibly Christian or not, treated the nationals with condescension, contempt, and even cruelty. The extent to which this was the case can only be regretted. It is also true, however, that many Christian missionaries, by their message of salvation and the example of their self-sacrificing lives, made an enduring social, educational, and spiritual contribution to this part of Africa. Ngugi's cynical comment that it was "the desire of the missionaries not to bring light to the African souls, but to wrest political power"⁷ from them is, at best, a hasty generalization and, at worst, a myopic distortion.

Ngugi's second articulated concern -- the rapid social change and the subsequent loss of traditional tribal values brought about by the intrusive impact of Christianity -- is a more complex matter, with ramifications that extend beyond the scope of this essay. While it can be convincingly argued that Christianity was not the only disruptive element in East African tribal societies (and one might well wonder what "imperialism" would have produced without some of the modifying features of genuine Christianity), Ngugi's distaste over the dilution or negation of tribal traditions cannot be fully assuaged. The reason for this stems from the nature of the Gospel itself: true Christianity is intrinsically and irrevocably intrusive. (We are here reminded of the paradoxical utterance of the Prince of Peace: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth...I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

Though we can all agree, as we adopt a retrospective view, that missionary activity frequently reflected the social, economic, and political predilections of its devotees, the fact remains that Biblical Christianity cannot embrace every cherished tribal custom or belief. Some of the "primitive rites" and "images of our gods" which Ngugi wishes to preserve must be

relinquished by the individual who enters into a personal relationship with Christ; this applies equally to the pre-Roman Druids of Britain, the Vikings of pre-Christian Scandinavia, and the Kikuyus (or any other tribal group) of Africa. Attempts either to divest Christianity of its cultural accretions or endeavours to preserve the unique features of one's own tribal, regional, and national customs are legitimate on going activities, provided that Biblical truth is firmly adhered to without dilution, diminution, or compromise. At the most profound level, to employ the phrase of Byang Kato, "Christianity is absolute."⁸

All of Ngugi's novels depict, in one form or another, the underlying criticism that Christianity, at least in its historical manifestations has failed to come to terms with man's basic social, economic, and political needs. Ngugi attributes this failure to two apparently unrelated but nevertheless closely connected tendencies in Christianity: the ostensible otherworldliness of Christian piety on the one hand and its juxtaposition to the earthly expediency of institutionalized Christianity on the other. Ngugi unrelentingly portrays these tendencies in relation to Kenya, where, he contends, the missionaries propounded the doctrine that "the poor were blessed and would get their reward in heaven" along with the concomitant admonition "to obey the powers that be", i.e. the colonial administration as a result, he maintains, "the Church became the greatest opponent of the African struggle for freedom."⁹ The economic counterpart is reinforced in Ngugi's recounting of the popular anecdotal story of the people who were told by the invading settlers to close their eyes in prayer, only to discover afterwards that their land had been taken.¹⁰

The ineffectuality, perniciousness, and ultimate absurdity of Christian otherworldliness is a persistent theme in Ngugi's novels. In *The River Between*, the Kikuyu leader of a tribal Christian faction, Joshua, repudiates the worldly "Egypt" in his single-minded quest for "the promised land" in Heaven (p. 31) while his own home disintegrates around him. The protagonist of *Weep not, Child*, Njoroge, is initially confident that if he remains faithful to God, "the kingdom of Heaven"¹¹ would be his, but he is unable to maintain his faith when confronted personally by harsh realities of the Mau Mau struggle which involves members of his immediate family. In *A Grain of Wheat*, another Joshua-like "Christian soldier" emerges in the character of Jackson, who preaches that "politics [is] dirty, worldly wealth a sin"¹² He later pays for his political detachment with his life as a group of angry Mau Mau hack him to pieces with pangas. Ngugi regards Christian otherworldliness as an aberration in his satiric treatment of Lillian, a white-robed charismatic evangelist who had previously achieved notoriety as a prostitute who persistently avowed her virginity. Though a minor character in *Petals of Blood*, a novel in which Ngugi focuses on the political and economic disparities in a newly independent Kenya, Lillian has significance as a symbol of the power of "religion" as "a weapon against the workers",¹³ some of whom have abandoned their responsibilities in a newly formed union to embrace Lillian's eschatological message of the imminence of the "kingdom of God" (p. 305). Ngugi's ideological protagonist in this novel, Karega, who represents the "working and peasant masses", has an alternative vision of an earthly "kingdom of man and woman" in a society freed from "imperialism" and "capitalism" (p. 344).

Ngugi's contempt for the otherworldly stance of the Christian gospel is reinforced by an even harsher criticism: institutional Christianity is primarily motivated by a this worldly self-interest diametrically opposed to "the primitive communism of the early christian church."¹⁴ Unlike the Mau Mau patriot, Kihika, portrayed in *A Grain of Wheat* as a dominating Christ-figure who lays down his life to bring justice to the poor and needy, the Christian establishment is represented by characters such as Rev. Jerrod Brown in *Petals of Blood*. A black man highly respected in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Brown is approached by a destitute and bedraggled delegation whose members have trekked on foot to Nairobi to get government assistance for the starving people in their distant constituency. Instead of attending to any of their physical needs (one child, for instance, is critically ill,) Brown dismisses them with a perfunctory offer of the spiritual "bread and fish of Jesus" and a platitudinous prayer (p. 149).

The priority Jerrod places on his personal prestige and comfort at the expense of his own people is reflected on a much larger scale by the organized and politicized "Christian" community depicted in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi's most recent novel.¹⁵ Instead of emulating the prototype of self-sacrifice, Christ on the Cross, whose name they bear, modern Christians are portrayed as callously and ruthlessly pursuing their economic interests in the guise of traditional Christian trappings. In this chilling work, replete with inversions, parody, and satire, Ngugi presents a picture of an international conference of financiers conducted in the form of a Sunday church service. Large "bottles of whiskey, vodka, brandy and gin" have been provided for the occasion --a parody of a Christian communion service--as they celebrate "the democracy of drinking the blood and eating the flesh of..workers"(pp. 89, 92). Their rationalized mandate for their colossal enterprises takes the form of recurring appeals to Christ's parables of the talents in Matthew 25, in which the greatest rewards are disseminated to the servants who have multiplied their master's money. The celebrated "Savior," however, is not Christ but rather the god of finance: "Money rules the world" (pp. 89-90).

The eloquence, potency, and ingenuity of Ngugi's unsympathetic treatment of Christianity in his novels are likely to arouse two divergent responses, depending on the predisposition of the reader. The non-Christian will be tempted to agree with Ngugi that Christianity is, at best, a fantasy and, at worst, a sham. On the other side, the committed Christian may be inclined to dismiss Ngugi's remonstrances out of hand, and thereby evade coming to terms with issues that deserve a hearing.

The otherworldly pose and the thisworldly expediency which Ngugi castigates in institutionalized Christianity are distorted manifestations of a profound paradox that lies at the very centre of real Christianity, which is simultaneously the most otherworldly and the most thisworldly of all religions. Christ stated unequivocally, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). Hence, neither the Christian nor the non-Christian who employs force to suppress others to serve his or her own ends is operating within the principles of the kingdom of God. As a mere economic system, neither capitalism nor communism is intrinsically more or less Christian than the other. When Ngugi appeals to "the primitive communism of the early Christian Church of Peter" as justification for "violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust order",¹⁶ thereby attempting to

exonerate the savage acts of Mau Mau, he is moving away from Biblical Christianity, the "primitive communism" in Acts was prompted by voluntary altruistic participation, not communal coercion or bloodshed. A similar departure from genuine Christianity is demonstrated by the capitalist who employs the parable of the talents to exploit others. On the other hand, those who have sacrificed their lives for the Christian faith, such as Jackson in *A Grain of Wheat*, are not fools, but have inherited an incorruptible crown. True Christianity is uncompromisingly otherworldly.

It is also adamantly thisworldly, for God's eternal program is inextricably tied to *this* earth and to our present responsibility to alleviate the misery of our anguish-laden planet. We are admonished to pray, "Thy will be done *in earth* as it is in Heaven," (Matt. 6:10), and are also warned by what C.S. Lewis terms as that "terrifying" 25th chapter of Matthew, where Christ expels from his presence those who have neglected to attend to the basic earthly needs of the deprived and the oppressed. There is no room for complacency here. Neither is there any place for the subtle transmutation of the biblical paradigm of altruistic thisworldliness into either individualized or institutionalized self-directed expediency, which has so frequently marred the face of Christianity, not only in Ngugi's East Africa but throughout the world, at different times and places.

Nevertheless, Ngugi's prolonged search for a just society, admirable as it may be, cannot be consummated by merely rearranging the foci of power and influence. His emphasis in all of his novels is on "what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships,"¹⁷ whereas the real issue is what man's spirit does to his political and economic environment. Capitalism without reference to God is just as insidious and materialistic as the dialectical materialism of atheistic Marxism. Only he whom the Son makes free is free indeed (John 8:36), and only such an individual can realize his or her full potential as a facilitator of lasting Uhuru-- but this responsibility must be discharged on earth.

Notes

¹G.D. Killiam, *An introduction to the writings of Ngugi* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 1.

²Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp. 31-36.

³ *Homecoming*, p. 31.

⁴ *Homecoming*, pp. 31-2.

⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1983 [1965], pp. 19, 37. This novel, though written first, was published subsequent to Ngugi's second novel, *Weep Not, Child* (London: Heinemann, 1964). Subsequent references to the novels are cited parenthetically in the essay.

⁶ *Homecoming*, p. 31.

⁷ *Homecoming*, p. 33.

⁸ Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), p. 168.

⁹ *Homecoming*, p. 33.

¹⁰ *Homecoming*, p. 33.

¹¹ *Weep Not, Child*, p. 49.

¹² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1984 [1967]), p. 36

¹³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1977), p. 305.

¹⁴ *Homecoming*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982).

¹⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Mau Mau, Violence and Culture," in *Homecoming*, pp. 28-9, 36.

¹⁷ Author's Note, *Homecoming* p. xvi.

The Quest for Authentic African Christianity

Watson Omulokoli

In January, 1953, Kwame Nkrumah paid a state visit to Liberia at the invitation of President William Tubman. Addressing a mass rally at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia, the future President of Ghana took as his theme: "The Vision That I See." He pointed out that, "...it is better to be free to manage, or mismanage your own affairs, than not to be free to mismanage or manage your own affairs." He went on to explain that it was this conviction which motivated him in 1949 to found a political newspaper, the *Accra Evening News*. The guiding philosophy of those who were behind the paper was contained in its motto: "We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility."¹

It was this kind of attitude which governed those who fought for freedom in pre-independence Africa. At the moment most African countries have extricated themselves from the shackles of colonialism and oppression as the "wind of change" has already blown by, sweeping away with it the manacles of foreign domination. In its wake it has left, instead, governments run and controlled by the indigenous peoples of those nations. Underlying this attainment of sovereignty is the drive for the kind of power which enables these independent states to control and shape their own destinies. Hand in hand with the achievement of self-determination is the ability to mobilize and harness their resources, with a view to channelling them to productive ends for their respective peoples. On the ecclesiastical front, similar cries are being voiced and echoed throughout the length and breadth of the African continent.

Resulting essentially from European Christian missionary activities in the last few centuries, the Christian faith has found root in Africa. In consequence of this reality, Christianity has become part and parcel of the prevailing pattern in many parts of the continent today. In 1970 it was estimated that by the year 2000, the Christian population in Africa would stand at about 350 million or 46% of the entire population of the continent.² To ensure that this largely nascent manifestation of Christianity attains its own authenticity and distinctive dignity, countless African thinkers and practitioners are engaged in the exercise of trying to analyze it, with a view to helping shape its course and identity for the days ahead.

The Issues at Stake

At the root of this search for authentic African Christianity in many quarters on the African scene are two main premises. One of these premises arises from the widely-shared suspicion that the European purveyors of the Christian faith to Africa did not take it to the continent pure and unalloyed, but rather carried it there clothed in Western European garb. The contention then is that to reclaim the core of the Christian faith, it is necessary that the prevalent forms of Christianity be stripped to the bone to rid the continent of any objectionable manifestations therein. But this is just one side of the coin, the obverse side of it, we may say. The corollary to this is the second premise which represents the reverse side of this coin. Here it is strongly held that apart from stripping the current brand of African Christianity of its foreign matter, and therefore, leaving it bare, pure and unadulterated, we need to dress it in African clothing if it is to be of any lasting significance to the indigenous peoples. The reason for this approach is the firm belief that there are certain indispensable African cultural distinctives which must form part of the totality of the experience of any African, even when he espouses the Christian faith.

In this vein, Professor E. A. Ayandele articulates the nature of the problem before us when he points out that there are four challenges facing the Christian Church in Africa which must be dealt with if its future is to be ensured. To a large extent, the last two of the problems he postulates, i.e., myopic nationalism, and the type of ecclesiastical sectionalism which disavows genuine ecumenism are subjects which ought to be ironed out in the context of the Church throughout the world as these cancerous tendencies are not the exclusive preserves of African Christianity. Taking his focal point as the state of affairs in the mainline institutionalized Christianity, he perceptively puts forth the case in the right order of priority when he states,

Perhaps the most important of these problems to which the attention of those genuinely concerned about the Church in Africa has been drawn increasingly in our generation, is how the transplanted churches from Europe and the New World are to be transformed into the Church of God in which African culture can integrate, in which the African can worship uninhibited emotionally or psychologically "in spirit and in truth."³

Having spelt out the first issue, he then follows this with the second in which he wonders how "institutionalized Christianity in Africa" can take its unique and dignified role as a recognizable entity in the body politic of the world-wide Church of Christ. This quest for authenticity in Africa's brand of Christian thought and practice has been sounded and echoed in widely divergent quarters.

In his own way, the President of the Republic of Zambia, Dr. Kenneth D. Kaunda, refers to this when he says, "The more sensitive theologians are beginning to explore what it means to be a Christian in a genuinely African or Asian way."⁴ From a slightly different perspective, it is to this same issue that

the Bishop of the Diocese of Maseno South in Kenya, The Rt. Rev. J. Henry Okullu, addresses himself when in a section on the "Indigenisation of Christianity" he contends that, "If the Church in East Africa is to make its voice effectively heard in the spheres of public life of these nations, then it must speak the language of Africa."⁶ Still at another level of analysis, Professor John S. Mbiti argues that we need to recognize the tragedy that when "organized Christianity" went to the African, it failed him in that it alienated him from what would have been the ideal totality of his religious existence. Mbiti sees this as "... the bitter pill which we must swallow in all honesty. But it is the tragic situation which we as Christians and intellectuals must seek to remedy."⁶ Spelling this task out more pin-pointedly he continues to maintain,

We have to Africanise Christianity, that is, give it an indelible African character. It is not enough to transplant prefabricated Christianity from Rome or Geneva to Kampala or Lagos: that period is now over. We have to produce a type of Christianity here which will bear the imprint *made in Africa* and which will not be a cheap imitation of the type of Christianity found elsewhere or at periods in the past. This involves Africanising church structures, personnel, theology, planning, commitment, worship, transaction of its mission, and financial independence.⁷

Briefly stated then, the problem on hand is that the Christianity which was introduced to Africa is by and large not African in flavour, and often not Christian in its centre. Sometimes unconsciously and at other times intentionally, the European messengers spread Western civilization in the name of Christianity. At other times they tried their best, but failed simply because of their imperfections as part of the human lot. Whichever the case, the result was that because of these limitations, these missionaries could not easily convey "the pure milk of the Gospel", but like the majority of human beings, were unable to emancipate themselves from the cultural, emotional and social frame in which they were accustomed to live and express their religious life in Europe and America."⁸

Having said all this, may we interject here that these efforts should not be misinterpreted as a vicious campaign to vilify and discredit the work of European missionaries and the related agencies wholesale. It would be erroneous to assume that the dislocation under discussion was uniform, and that because this was so, any cure administered in this sphere must be given in equal dosage across the board. From all evidences, it can be safely said that although much of the Christianity that was exported into Africa was defective in that it was overlaid with Western European interpretations, it is grossly misleading to charge that all missionaries were rascals and scoundrels who, in pre-meditated connivance, set out with the intention of suppressing the socio-cultural institutions of Africa, with a view to substituting them with Western civilization. Instances abound in which these agents tried as conscientiously as possible to walk the tight-rope in their mission by taking into account the essentials of the Christian faith on one hand, and an understanding of the culture in which they functioned on the other.

The Call for Thorough Analysis

Very grave responsibilities are linked with the all-important assignment of dealing with the theme of authentic African Christianity. Among other things, in our discussion we need to consider whether in our approach we are called upon to prescribe what ought to be, to describe what has been and still is, or to find some equilibrium in which we deal with both of these aspects. Regardless of which option we decide upon, it will be important that we take into account all the issues and facts involved. Indeed, before we embark on the task of dispensing the appropriate medical remedy for the maladies in view, we need to do some thorough inventory into the nature of the disease, about the requisite prescription, and into the conditions under which the latter has to be administered. Anything short of this kind of in-depth analysis will not do as it would simply lead into our being embedded further in the same quagmire from which we are endeavouring to extricate ourselves.

The objectives spelt out in the nature of the problem before us are so noble and laudable that they call for the serious attention of all who are interested in the welfare of the Path of Christ in Africa. Nevertheless, a lot of groundwork still remains to be done before we can even establish beyond a doubt to what extent the basic assumptions of the two projected premises are justified. There are subterranean intricacies which we must unravel completely before we can confidently embark on the construction of our own lasting edifice. Somehow, one has a sneaking suspicion that while a lot of truth exists in the oft-heard loud protestations, some spade work is called for to enable us to determine categorically what is the undesirable substance that is embedded in the current form of African Christianity on one hand, and on the other hand, which is the proper costume with which to clothe it if it is to hold its ground as staunchly African and at the same time as ardently Christian.

To say this is not in any way to advocate the imposition of a moratorium on this quest and the resultant debates into which it has plunged African Christian thinkers and the rank and file alike. On the contrary, the proper view would be that this exercise should go on unabated until we have established the validity or lack of the same of these claims. In the meantime we must recognise that there are those obvious elements in either category on which consensus of opinion prevails at all levels and in every sector of the continent. In these spheres, no useful purpose would be served in hesitating to implement the necessary changes, as it is deemed appropriate.

As for the rest, if they are as weighty and as serious as we allege that they are, then let us deal with them with the meticulous attention that they are due, before we come to any definitive steps that have to be taken to rectify whatever is amiss. In this category we include all the hazy, controversial and grey areas of thought and practice where unanimity of view does not exist. It might be argued that pursuing such a course of action is tantamount to resorting to delaying tactics which only undermine the introduction of the sorely needed changes. However genuinely felt this view might be, it must be balanced with the need for building a firm and solid foundation instead of hurrying into easy and unstable palliative remedies. We should definitely shy away from

undermining our credibility by being found guilty of the fact that while criticising, as we must, those who made blunders in the course of introducing Christianity into Africa, we ourselves are sloppy in the way we go about altering the unpalatable situation. In a very timely reminder, Bishop Okullu points out that, "the criteria for formulating such a theology will have to be examined with utmost care in the light of the different stages of understanding prevailing in Africa today."⁹

The Broad Historical Span

While engaging in this enterprise of intensive research, we need to take into serious account the answers, responses and reactions that our predecessors in this same pilgrimage have arrived at. We grant that it is decidedly more admirable and seemingly glorious to be viewed as being in the vanguard of pioneers blazing a new trail than being mere links in a tradition, carrying forth a torch which others before us have lit. Yet, by the same token, it is destructively self-deluding to imagine ourselves as innovators when our real problem is that we have been too lazy to take the trouble and time to discover how those who went before us dealt with these same issues. In our eagerness to wipe European Christian missionary history from our memories we often fail to grasp the fact that there were African Christians before us who sought in their own ways to espouse the essence of the Christian faith, but in the context of the African cultural milieu of their times. The fact that many of them accepted whatever they were presented with as the incontrovertible truth should not lead us to hastily assume that this air of acquiescence was uniformly true.

Even where European missionaries introduced defective forms of Christianity, it would be unfair for us to operate under the assumption that the recipient Africans were so inert as to accept unquestioningly and uncritically the package delivered to them. History would not bear this assumption out as true. Instead, the truth of the matter is that the history of Christianity in Africa is littered with abundant demonstrations of the fact that, once awakened to the truth of the core of the Christian faith, African Christians have sought to right the warped Gospel given to them by instituting trends that were truer both to the essence of the Christian truth and also to the African situation into which the same was established. Through the haze of Westernized European Christianity, Africans were able to look beyond and through the vehicle till they beheld the real central concerns. Once they appropriated the Gospel of Christ for themselves, the entire picture altered so dramatically that things would never be the same again. African Christianity in its proper identity began to take shape from the earliest days as African men grasped that allegiance to Christ was the central theme of their new-found faith. Christianity as it had gone to Africa was undergoing drastic changes, albeit often imperceptible to the indiscriminating eye. These discoveries and their implementation often brought conflict between the more perceptive African Christians and their European detractors.

This kind of assertiveness on the part of African Christians is part of the long story of the presence and prevalence of the Church of Christ in Africa through the years. The grounds for this courageous stand have varied from time

to time, but that it has been there cannot be so easily dismissed. Without this spirit of enterprise in the realms of things spiritual, in church polity, and in church extension, the course of the Christian faith in Africa in all its varied modes would be much worse off than it is today.

For this reason it would do us a great deal of good in our present quest to take a leaf from our predecessors who have struggled with these issues in the past, often under very adverse circumstances. It would be sheer lunacy on our part to assume that we are writing a completely new chapter in this search instead of merely bringing to the fore once again that which has existed in the Church in Africa in different forms over the years. Thus, in all our analysis and assessment, in order to do justice to the issues in question, we need to pause a little and put them in their proper perspective – including the relevant historical precedents, however inconclusive they may seem to us. Their answers, responses and reactions may not augur particularly well for us, nonetheless, they represent invaluable lessons which we can ill-afford to ignore.

It is at this point that Professor Ayandele, for one, is very instructive when he draws our attention to some West African Christians of the past who grappled with these same questions which so engagingly occupy our attention today. One need not look very far to discover that such examples could be duplicated many times over on the Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa scenes.

As for West Africa, we learn of how between 1892 and 1914 the phenomenal increase in the number of Christians in Nigeria resulted in more responsibilities being shouldered by the indigenous Christians, while the prestige of European missionaries plummeted. There was a revolt against Christianity as it was portrayed by its European exporters. The case against them was essentially in two directions. For one, they uprooted and destroyed African institutions and culture, and secondly, they replaced these, not with the Christian faith in its purity, but instead, with fossilized European civilization masquerading under the banner of Christianity. These men were ready to be Christians but not to be Europeans. They set out to be vibrant Christians, and at the same time, authentically African. The leading voices in this struggle in the West African context were James Johnson, Edward Blyden and Mojola Agbebi.

While Johnson argued that even in pursuing the Christian calling, the "African should be raised upon his own idiosyncrasies",¹⁰ Blyden charged, as Ayandele puts it, that "In practical terms the vandalism of Christian missions should be arrested by the establishment of an African Church based upon the Bible alone, for 'the Christ we worship must be African.'" ¹¹ It is clear that what these Christian African nationalists were fighting was not so much the Christian faith per se, as Western European civilization camouflaged under the cloak of Christianity. Indeed, "There was no thought of questioning Christianity itself, but cultural nationalists sought to discover the 'pure milk of the Gospel' and give it characteristics of the Nigerian situation. When discovered, they argued, Africans should 'demonstrate in practice the Christianity which the white man only theorizes.'" ¹²

In this quest the battle was fought on two fronts or levels. One level was that which dealt with the superficial non-essential that Europeans had introduced into Africa in the name of Christianity. These included such

paraphernalia as mode of dress, names, life-style, and the bulk of the apparatus used in worship. These were to be discarded as useless, and if anything, substituted with their African equivalents. Then there was that level of the essential and fundamental aspects of the Christian faith. The tenets embodied therein were to be taken seriously and accordingly adapted to the African milieu, as they were embraced as the epitome of Christianity. In this way, the essence of the Gospel of Christ could find its own level in the context of the more serious considerations of African institutions and culture.

In all seriousness, they no longer wanted the prevalence of a situation where the distinctive feature of a "Christian is not moral character or allegiance to Christ, but outward dress."¹³ They were tired of the emerging "superficiality of Christianity in West Africa" which was a veneer in which, once one had gone through the motions of the proper ecclesiastical ceremonies, what mattered most was the respectability and acceptability that one attained as a ticket to cherished social functions. The end result was that, "This failure of Christianity to be deeply rooted in the people impelled educated Africans to study their religion in order to see how much features of indigenous worship could be grafted on the 'pure milk of the Gospel'."¹⁴

While James Johnson and Edward Blyden were champions in these spheres, Ayandele faults them for failing to put many of their convictions into practice. Instead he singles out David Brown Vincent, later known as Mojola Agbebi, as the most thorough-going of these Christian African cultural nationalists. He says of him,

The only educated African who approximated a practical cultural nationalist was D. B. Vincent, leader of the native Baptist Church. From 1891 onwards he refused to work for any Christian mission in spite of high positions promised by Bishop Tugwell. Convinced that it was a 'curse' to depend on foreign missions, 'doing the baby for aye', he preferred to be poor but independent. In 1894, while in Liberia, he changed his name to Mojola Agbebi. He cast off European clothing ...¹⁵

What was unique about men like Mojola Agbebi was that disavowing European Christianity did not mean dispensing with Christianity as such. It may even be argued that the opposite was true. In freeing themselves from the shackles of Westernized European Christianity, they were now at liberty to commit themselves more wholeheartedly to the Christian faith as they understood it in the African setting of their day. By 1902 Mojola Agbebi was castigating European Christianity as "a 'dangerous thing', 'an empty and delusive fiction' ..." ¹⁶ Then when touring Britain and the USA in 1903-1904 he returned to Africa, "Repelled by American civilization which he described as a 'snare', and its Christianity, which was a 'counterfeit'."¹⁷ But one of the more forceful of his views came in 1902 when he attempted to make some distinction between the essentials and non-essentials of the Christian faith. In his view;

Prayer-books and hymn books, harmonium dedications, pew

constructions, surpliced choir, the white man's style, the white man's name, the white man's dress, are so many non-essentials, so many props and crutches affecting the religious manhood of the Christian African. Among the great essentials of religion are that the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.¹⁸

Comprehensively African

Coupled with this task of exhaustive investigation is the need for clear-cut definitions. It is along these lines that it must be obvious that a proper understanding of what is meant by authentic African Christianity is fundamental as it will help us avoid the employment of any misnomers in our discussion. This raised the necessity of much care so that in our concept of African Christianity we do not end up sowing and dispensing half-baked and ill-digested ideas in which the Africa we posit is that which only exists in the realm of the abstract and imaginary. Such a faulty perception could mislead us into finding ourselves embroiled in a struggle against a non-existent enemy who happens to be merely a figment of our own imagination.

All too often, we are tempted to anachronistically lag behind by speaking to a selected Africa, which, although very real, yet is not fully representative of the dynamic Africa of all time in its many and varied forms. If we adopted this comprehensive view, we would be saved from the tendency of extolling one period of Africa over the others or one sector of even our present sub-cultures at the expense of the rest. The rationale for this larger view is that even in the midst of the drifting sands brought about by the furiously blowing winds of change, there still remains that central strand with the barest modicum of a common denominator which distinguishes the sum of Africa culture and personality in all its shades and facets as something readily identifiable.

Of course our task in this connection would be made eternally easier if, instead of dealing with a dynamic reality, we were confined to a static entity. As it is, however, the bedeviling factor of change has played havoc on the entire state of affairs and dictated otherwise. Consequently, whether we like it or not, we are called upon to confront the new situation that we have been forced into. Under these circumstances, as the core of the indisputably recognizable Africa culture faces the winds of change, we have three options before us. We can stand acquiescently helpless in the path of this wind, and therefore open ourselves up to be blown by it however and wherever it desires; we can resist it head on, and be prepared to face the resultant consequences; or we can hoist our sails deftly in such a manner that while being affected by the impact of the wind's force, we convert it into our willing servant.

This latter alternative could prove to be our best way out of the present dilemma. Adjusting to this attitude can help us to inculcate the Christian faith into our lives, while at the same time emerging out with our African identity intact. To do this effectively we will need to realize with Okullu that,

... making Christianity indigenous does not mean engaging

in a cultural excavation to resuscitate the Africa of a hundred years before Christianity came. African culture is what we are today and tomorrow. The Church's task is to speak to the people of East Africa here and now in the varied forms and degrees of their development ... It must speak to him in today's language and his today's situation and his today's aspiration.¹⁹

Centered in Jesus Christ

The task before us is truly awe-inspiring in that while taking into account the African milieu, it has to highlight Jesus Christ as the focal point in the Christian faith. As precedents elsewhere in the world have shown, the answer to this challenge will not be a once for all solution. It will be a problem which will recur time and again each time that the essence of the Christian faith becomes blurred by its interaction with the relevant cultural manifestation. Throughout the history of Christianity there have been those alert voices that have periodically called upon the Church in their respective times and localities to re-align itself with the centrality of Jesus Christ in all of its functions.

On the European continent, one of the most under-rated voices in this direction was that of the Danish thinker, Soren Kierkegaard. Charging that the Church of his day had failed to grasp and live up to the demands of Christ, he felt that while most of its members were comfortably happy with their station in Christendom, real Christianity was alien to them. In opposition to the open-ended approach of those around him, he put forth a masterly summation of the exclusiveness of the Christian faith when he said of Jesus Christ, "He himself is the way, that is in order to make sure that there is no deceit as to there being several ways, and that Christ went on one of them - no, Christ is the way."²⁰

In the United States of America, the eminent church historian, Martin E. Marty, wrote disapprovingly of the new shape of American religion as it appeared to be in the latter part of the 1950's, castigating it as the Christianity which had been so much eroded and corroded²¹ to the point of remaining nothing but "religion-in-general",²² he challenged it to return to the centre by recapturing "the Biblical view of man in community; the revelation of God in the form of a servant; and the Remnant motif as an impulse for the sacred community."²³ With all due credit to Martin Marty's proposal of a Christian "culture ethic" for the United States of America, it was left to the Christian statesman, Martin Luther King, Jr., to give the most pungent directive to conformist American Christianity. Convinced that "if the church of Jesus Christ is to regain once more its power, message, and authentic ring, it must conform only to the demands of the gospel,"²⁴ he went on to explain,

Living in the colony of time, we are ultimately responsible to the empire of eternity. As Christians we must never surrender our supreme loyalty to any time-bound custom or earth bound idea, for at the heart of our universe is a higher reality - God and his kingdom of love - to which we

must be conformed. ²⁵

It is clear that even in the Western and European world, there are those, who having come to grips with the Gospel of Christ, have not wanted to settle for the caricature they are presented with in the name of Christianity. They have spoken against the practice of parading Western civilization and culture, coated with a razor-thin layer of Christianity as a poor substitute and fake imitation of the real thing - faith in Christ. In his usual skillful way, C.S. Lewis dismisses the popular European conception of Christianity as merely a commendable ethico-moral system. As he points out, "If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance." ²⁶ Rather than view Jesus Christ "as a great moral teacher," He should be seen for what He is as the one to whom we must surrender "and call Him Lord and God." ²⁷

If Christianity is truly universal, as we allege it is, then it must recommend itself to every culture in an amicable way, while at the same time transcending the limitations of the particular cultural set-up. The man in Australasia, in the Americas, in Europe, and in Africa should be comfortably Christian without surrendering his own cultural distinctives to any other culture but that of Jesus Christ. By the same token, the central core of Christianity as manifested in any given locality should be such that it is readily identifiable by others from outside it as truly Christian. As the Bible tells us, in I Corinthians 3:11, where Christianity is concerned, "There can be no other foundation beyond that which is already laid: Jesus Christ Himself." For us in Africa our battles in this sphere would be in vain if we reject European Christianity for being non-Christian only to replace it with an African Christianity which is so overlaid with our own cultural matter that it fails to meet the tests of true Christianity when it is subjected to close scrutiny. To wind up with the kind of end-product which is African at the expense of being Christian would be self-defeating as all the endeavours of our exercise would boomerang in our very faces.

Professor Mbiti believes that even where organized European Christianity failed to fulfil the religious aspirations of the African man, "Christianity can do this, not as a religion but as a way of life ... Our Lord Jesus Christ did not start a religion. He called men to become citizens of the Kingdom of God ... To be a disciple of Christ meant to be so intimately united with Him that Paul could rightly speak of Christians as 'the Body of Christ'." ²⁸ Bishop Okullu concurs with this view when he recognizes that the new African Christianity which we construct in the place of the corrupt one that we are setting out to discard, "must be Christ-centered in order to enable the theologian to communicate with all Christians for the building and establishing of the Church." ²⁹ When we are anchored on "this solid ground our adventures in the quest for authentic African Christianity will be more liberating than it would have been otherwise. With Bishop Stephen Neill we join the chorus that, "The old saying 'Christianity is Christ' is almost exactly true. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged, and in the light of which it stands or falls." ³⁰ Even the hallowed and cherished African Christianity that we set out to erect must conform to this central prerequisite, that it be Christo-centric above all else.

Conclusion

In the same way in which we criticize the Christian preaching and teaching of yester-years, and instead applaud trends of our day, there are those who censure* present-day preaching while nostalgically looking back on the patterns of by-gone generations. In this vein, in a perceptively interesting commentary, President Kaunda of Zambia compares and contrasts the preaching and overall Christian approach of his earlier growing-up years with those of his adult years. Asserting that much of present-day preaching is deficient in passionate conviction, he points out that its chief characteristic is that it "consists of a bout of moralizing about world affairs or some agile juggling with intellectual propositions which chase each other's tails until the congregation is dizzy."⁵¹ While abreast of its times, this one-dimensional approach does not get to grips with the total needs of the man in the pew.

In contrast to this, there is the Christian faith as practiced by his parents and their peers in his childhood. Although by our standards some of their religious perceptions would be outdated, "crude and over simple", yet they stand out as giant in that, inherent in their Christian approach was that efficacious element of redemption which made an impact on all who were involved in it. This is why it is contended that whatever else it may have lacked, its greatest asset was that it had the power of transforming the lives of countless men who came in contact with it. Kaunda observes,

It was this power of the Gospel which enabled humble, and often unlettered village men to stand in the pulpit of the old brick church at Lubwa and speak with tongues of fire. They had passion, real passion, a quality noticeably lacking in much modern preaching ...⁵²

President Kaunda confesses that even today, his life has been profoundly moulded by the power of the Gospel that he encountered in his earliest days. Firmly wedded to what his parents taught him about God, he considers it to be so much part of his personality that in times of crisis he finds himself reverting "instinctively to the passionate simplicity of the old religion."⁵³ As the very basis and foundation of his life, he finds that these moments of reflection open up a fresh desire in him "to share the certainty and assurance of those village Christians - the hope against hope that the God they never doubted will not let me down either in my hour of need."⁵⁴

What is filtering through in all this is the fact that the Christian faith as Europeans had introduced it has gone through the sieve of the African mind and being, undergone such tremendous changes that it has emerged as no longer Western European Christianity but rather as something truly African and unashamedly Christian. This is the picture portrayed in these further words.

There was nothing sophisticated about their faith, but it was real and strong and wholesome. And it was a Gospel with power which changed men. There was power in my father's preaching and in our lusty hymn-singing. When those Lubwa

Christians sang the old chorus— "There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the Lamb" — they meant it. And they could point to members of their family, neighbours and friends who had been brought to Jesus and freed from all the dark forces of evil and superstition which never seemed far from the surface of the old life. My father died when I was eight years of age and no one who was part of the great congregation who attended his funeral could doubt the reality of Eternity.³⁵

It used to be anathematic in many circles to consider this portrait of Christianity and the allied mood of Independent African Churches as representing the Christian faith. Although they have been despised by the mainstream of Christianity in Africa as being driven by excessive enthusiasm, they have in their own way found the kind of equilibrium which had made the Christian faith they embrace African, without sacrificing for once its central distinctives. However humbling, demeaning and unpalatable it may be, we need to turn to these forms for lessons which may be helpful to us in the days ahead. Ranger is right when he says that in the past these churches have been viewed,

... as though they were an abnormality, almost a disease which needed some special explanation, which might be diagnosed and perhaps cured. It seems to me to be more sensible to regard African independency rather as one of the many different forms of African Christian initiative.³⁶

Now the tables are slightly turned in certain circles — namely academia — where it is now in vogue to consider these same groups, albeit from the safe distance of academic and intellectual non-involvement, as the epitome of African Christianity. Either attitude is regrettable. If they are truly Christian, they should not be discriminated against as obsolete and obscurantist. At the same time, it is indecently dishonest for the so-called African Christian intellectuals to endorse them wholesale uncritically for the persons who need the throbbing of the drum while they themselves find comfortable sanctuary in the dull, sleep-inducing music of our elitist cathedrals, churches and chapels. No, we cannot have our cake and eat it too in the hypocrisy of academic research. The religious sphere, particularly in the African context, is the last arena for those seeking mere intellectual titillation.

It was the African political theoretician and practical revolutionary Amilcar Cabral (1924–1973) who said, "I am a simple African man, doing my duty in my own country in the context of our time."³⁷ We too need to emulate him in our Christian vocation with all that this practical idealism involves in our endeavour to arrive at authentic African Christianity.

Notes

¹ Kwame Nkrumah *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London:

Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1959), p. 152.

² David B. Barrett, "A.D. 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa", in *International Review of Mission* (New York, January, 1970), p. 47.

³ Emmanuel Ayankanmi Ayandele, *A Visionary of the African Church: Mojola Agbebi, 1860-1917* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), p. 3.

⁴ Kenneth David Kaunda, *Letter to My Children* (London: Longman, 1973), p. 17.

⁵ John Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974), p. 52 (1975 Reprint).

⁶ John S. Mbiti, "Our Stand Towards African Traditional Religion", in *Write: Journal for Christian Writers in Africa* (Kitwe, African Literature Centre, 1973), p. 13.

⁷ Mbiti, *The Crisis of Mission in Africa* (Mukono, Uganda, Uganda Church Press, 1971), p. 2.

⁸ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842- 1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), p. 242.

⁹ Okullu, *Church and Politics* p. 53.

¹⁰ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria* , p. 252.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-255.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

¹⁹ Okullu, *Church and Politics*, p. 52.

²⁰ *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 1852, Section 1277. (A selection edited and translated by Alexander Dru).

²¹ Martin E. Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York:

Harper & Row, 1959), p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Pocket Books, 1968 Printing), p. 15 (first publishing in 1963 by Harper & Row).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: Collins, 1979), p. 133 (First Publishing in 1952).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.

²⁸ Mbiti, "Our Stand Towards A. T. R.," in *Write*, p. 14.

²⁹ Okullu, *Church and Politics*, p. 53.

³⁰ Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 9.

³¹ Kaunda, *Letter to My Children*, p. 19.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

³⁶ T. O. Ranger, *The African Churches of Tanzania* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972 Reprint), p. 4.

³⁷ Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches*, edited by Africa Information Service (London: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 2.

A Critique of of John Mbiti's Understanding of the African Concept of Time

A. Scott Moreau

John Mbiti has become well known over the last twenty years as one of the major black African theologians. His examination and understanding of his own tribe (the Akamba of Kenya) have been greatly utilized in his descriptive analyses of general African thought patterns and philosophical outlooks. His articulate and voluminous writings have made him as well known as any other African theologian alive today.

In many respects he is a pioneer, one of the first to attempt to systematize and analyze, from an insider's perspective, the African understanding of the world in which we live and how that understanding affects the Africans' view of Christianity. His works stand as both an encouragement and a challenge to all who are interested in the Church in Africa. He is an encouragement in paving the way for greater understanding of the African perspective on religion and the resulting insights in contextualization that come from his analyses. He is a challenge to all of us who have a desire to understand the African mindset with a view to developing a relevant theological approach for this continent. In this brief article, we will seek to analyze Mbiti's understanding of what he considers to be the key concept for understanding the religious and philosophical perspective of the African, the concept of time.¹ This evaluation will be divided into three major sections beginning with a look at Mbiti's understanding of the African View of Time. This will be followed with an evaluation of Mbiti's analysis and a discussion of the implications of his view for contextualization.

Mbiti's Understanding of the African View of Time

As we present Mbiti's analysis, we must keep in mind that the sort of analysis (systematic, analytical, and categorical) to which Westerners would like to submit the concept being studied is unknown in traditional Africa. There are collections of oral myths, there are linguistic indicators available for our scrutiny, but there are not systematic treatises dealing with the philosophical or theological understandings or implications of the rather abstract term "time" available within traditional Africa. Indeed, their concrete orientation does not lead us to expect anything of that nature, and it does not appear likely that a fully traditional African would even desire such an analysis. In that sense, we must recognize the aspect of Mbiti's role, which is that of an African (albeit a

Western-trained one) presenting a Western analysis of an African concept.

Mbiti's understanding of the African view of time was first expressed in his doctoral dissertation, in which he attempted to examine New Testament eschatology from an African cultural perspective. His dissertation was based on a study of his own tribe, the Akamba. It was grounded on an examination of two data bases: the verbal tense forms of the Kikamba language and the body of myth within Akamba oral tradition. In his later works, these views were expanded and generalized to include not only the Akamba, but all of traditional Africa. This was based on an examination of the literature available on a number of tribes across sub-sahara Africa.

In Mbiti's doctoral dissertation, he states that the foundation for seeing the Akamba's view of time is to recognize that time is conceived of as two-dimensional "with a long 'past,' and a dynamic 'present.' The 'future' as we know it in the linear conception of time is virtually non-existent in Akamba thinking."² He later generalized this to be true of the thinking of all of traditional Africa:

According to traditional concepts, time is a two dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time. If, however, future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they at best constitute only potential time, not actual time. What is taking place now no doubt unfolds the future, but once an event has taken place, it is no longer in the future but in the present and the past. Actual time is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves 'backward' rather than 'forward': and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place.³

This understanding of time, for the African, undergirds his whole concept of himself, his tribe, and the universe in general, according to Mbiti. If this is true, then it is imperative that we firmly understand this concept of time, and, furthermore, that we be able to relate the Gospel with adequate terminology and sensitivity to be understood by those who operate in the frame work of such a view.

Mbiti's doctoral dissertation proposes Kikamba names for the two dimensions of time: *tene* and *mituki*. *Tene* covers the far or remote past, and *mituki* the immediate past to the near future (there being no concept of the remote future, according to Mbiti). In a later work, he adopted the Swahili terms *samani* and *sasa* as their respective equivalents. Mbiti maintains that such a categorization is justified by an analysis of verb tenses available in the languages of the tribes he has studied. To illustrate, he lists nine tenses commonly used (with *kikamba* and *Kikuyu*, both of Kenya, providing the examples) to illustrate the distinction between *samani* and *sasa*. He further

explains them as follows:

Sasa has the sense of immediacy, nearness, and 'now-ness'; and is the period of immediate concern for the people, since that is 'where' or 'when' they exist. . . . Events (which compose time) in the *sasa* dimension must be either about to occur, or in the process in realization, or recently experienced. *sasa* is the most meaningful period for the individual, because he has a personal recollection of the events of phenomena of this period, or he has a [personal recollection of the events of phenomena of this period, or he is about to experience them . . . *sasa* is not mathematically or numerically constant. The older a person is, the longer is his *sasa* period. The community also has its own *sasa*, which is greater than that of the individual. But for both the community and the individual, the most vivid moment is the *now* period *Sasa* is in itself a complete or full time dimension, with its short future, a dynamic present, and an experienced past. We might call it the Micro-Time (Little Time). The Micro-Time is meaningful to the individual or the community only through their participating in it or experiencing it.

Zamani is not limited to what in English is called the past. It also has its own 'past,' 'present' and 'future,' but on a wider scale. We might call it the Macro-Time (Big Time). *Zamani* overlaps with *sasa* and the two are not separable. *sasa* feeds or disappears into *zamani*. But before events become incorporated into *zamani*, they have to become realized or actualized within the *sasa* dimension. When this has taken place, then the events 'move' backwards from which nothing can go. *Zamani* is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, the dimension in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before. ⁴

He further buttresses his understandings by an analysis of time reckoning among the tribes he has studied. He relates:

When Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events but not just for the sake of mathematics. Since time is a composition of events, people cannot and do not reckon it in vacuum. Numerical calendars, with one or two possible exceptions, do not exist in African traditional societies as far as I know. ⁵

That the traditional African expresses time in concrete terms comes as a surprise. The modern technical definition of a second as "9,192,631,770 periods of the unperturbed microwave transmission between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of Cs ¹³³" ⁶ shows the Western reliance on abstract

conceptualizations, and is far too removed from perceptual reality to be of use to the traditional African. His world is oriented to observable events, and even the concept of "definition" as we know it may be foreign to his framework.

As we understand it, Mbiti's view of the African understanding of time may in one sense be likened to a man standing in a river and facing downstream. The current may be thought of as the flow of time, with the view of the man in the river including primarily that which is peripherally around him and secondarily on that which has already gone past him (downstream). *Sasa* time is that which directly around the wader, *zamani* that which has already passed him by. The future is only what can be seen in peripheral vision, and so the 'upstream' time holds little importance in the perceptions of the man in the water. It will pass when and how it passes, and then it will become of consequence to him. Only what is currently passing or has already passed is of significance, for it has become part of his concrete reality and is therefore important. As Mbiti relates, "History moves 'backward' from the now moment to that period beyond which nothing can go,"⁷ "that period" being the horizon in the distance. The cycles of nature (seasons, years, hours of the day, etc.) may be thought of as debris floating along on a recurring basis; not always exactly the same, but always comfortingly familiar. Rather than the man moving into the future by going upstream, he lets the future come to him by remaining stationary. Since he knows it will reach him eventually, there is no need to focus on it, and he cannot speed its advance (which does not mean the African is fatalistic, only not overtly mindful of the future).

Within this same illustrative framework, the Western concept may be seen as a man *swimming* upstream. Time is not viewed as in control of the swimmer, for he advances himself against it. In fact, it is more static than dynamic, and the focus is more on what dangers and events lie ahead than on what has been already passed. The Westerner moves *through* time (note that the Western science fiction concept of a time-traveller is based on a more static view of time through which the traveller can move, and which has no equivalent that we are aware of in African traditional thought) while time moves by the African.

It is obvious that if Mbiti's view is correct, then there will be some significant issues of contextualization that must be carefully evaluated if we desire to present the Gospel in the African context in a relevant fashion. The most obvious of these concerns would be that of eschatology; would a distant future home in heaven or a distant future judgment of life's actions hold the traditional African's attention in the same way that it does in the West? Would a grand expose' on the second advent of our Lord and the millennial kingdom motivate him in the same way that it does one in the West? In order to properly consider these and related questions, we must evaluate Mbiti's understanding of the traditional African mindset. Our evaluation will be presented categorically with four areas of concern taken under consideration.

Evaluation of Mbiti's Views

Mbiti's Personal Training

It is highly evident from both Mbiti's presentations and his educational background (he took his Ph.D. in New Testament at Cambridge) that he thoroughly understands Western analytical thought processes. His whole conception of African thought is presented in Western categories which follow analytical reasoning. His research in the literature on African traditional religions is massive, but the vast majority of that research was Western produced. At the same time Mbiti is African born and raised. Thus, his cultural roots are African while his academic training is Western, and he is as qualified as anyone to attempt to synthesize from his own understanding a Western analysis of African thought. Unfortunately, the training that qualifies him to deal with Western analysis simultaneously tends to remove him from the traditional patterns. The tension he himself faces in trying to interface between the two systems is evident. For instance, while repeatedly reminding us that Africans are holistic and tend not to categorize, he proceeds to categorize in order to lay out the thought in Western patterns. Therein is both a strength and a weakness. The strength is that Mbiti's analysis does enable Westerners to get a glimpse at the inside of an African thought pattern. The weakness is that the African thought pattern being so analyzed is wrenched out of its natural setting and is submitted to a dissection and disassembling into categories foreign to it and for which it was not intended, so that it can be understood by people utilizing a different thought process than it represents. In addition to this, the understanding as presented is a *Western* perception of *African* thought, and not an African perception of itself. Is it possible to submit the African concept of time to such categorical analysis? Is it possible for a Western analysis of African thought to catch the heart of that thought, or only the Western view of it?

We do not desire to go the route of some who might contend that any Western analysis of a non-Western thought pattern must by nature be superficial (or any other form of a non-absolute perspective), but we do desire to raise the question of appropriateness of the analytical technique in being fully and properly able to grasp the concept being analyzed. Further research must be done before a decision can be made as to the appropriateness of Mbiti's analysis here, but the question of that appropriateness must be raised.

Terminology and Categorization

In regard to terminology, Mbiti has labelled the African concept of time as "two dimensional." We question his understanding of the term and implications of it. From our understanding of his analysis, it should be seen that Africans have more of a linear concept of time (one-dimensional) than a two-dimensional one (which would have to be called a planar concept). The primary difference between the African and the Western conceptions appears to be not in the number of dimensions but in the direction and focus of the attention. Both may be viewed as punctilinear, since they both focus on one point in the time continuum and extend from that point. For the African, that focal point is the present, and the direction of the extension is the past. For the Westerner, the focus may be seen as some point in the future, with the extensions going both to the present moment (though not necessarily beyond it into the past) and towards a more distant future. From

our understanding, they are not to be viewed as exact mirror images (as Mbiti presents them) though they do resemble each other. The primary differences are that their focus is in opposite directions and that they start at different points.

In regard to categorization, Mbiti's terms *sasa* and *zamani* appear to be more of a strained attempt to develop a case for "two dimensional" time than a true understanding of the categories. As we view them, they are more artificially impressed categories which help show the feasibility of an analytical system than categories that a traditional African would give. Such a splitting of time into two dimensions (really two directions within one dimension) runs counter to the unity of all things in traditional African thought, and is thus open to criticism. These categories are comfortable to Westerners, but are they agreeable to a traditional African? In addition, to break time into these two categories does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of having a concept of the future. As a general rule, we would express a reticence to accept the artificially neat categories of concepts that were not developed with such categorization in mind, and thus are reluctant to concur with Mbiti's analysis. We agree that these categories do give insight into the traditional African conceptualization of time, but to define the categories as precisely as Mbiti does is to overstate the case for their existence in the traditional mind.

Generalizations

Mbiti's presentation may hold very closely to the Akamba concept of time, but it seems somehow overly convenient for him that this system is to be seen as true for all of Africa. With some 1,000 languages spoken on the continent, the full analysis that would enable us to draw a continental conclusion can hardly be considered finished. Realistically speaking, the scope of Mbiti's research, while prodigious for an individual, does not serve to enable him to speak in the definitive way he has a tendency to do. We are willing to accept his concepts for the Akamba and the Kikuyu, but not as willing to consider that these tribes in Kenya form the definitive base for all African tribal thought. Byang Kato takes Mbiti to task in this regard, and utilizes the testimony of scholars from other tribes in Africa (two of whom have worked closely with Mbiti in Uganda) to deny Mbiti's assumptions that the Akamba concepts are universal.⁸ In that sense, we consider Mbiti to have generalized far beyond what the scope of his research would allow. (We must confess, however, that he has done far more research in this than we have, so our conclusions might be more readily questioned than his.) Research of a comparable base has been done by other scholars, with different conclusions on the key concepts being reached. Placide Temples, followed by Janheinz Jahn, for example, posited NTU, or 'vital force,' as the key to understanding the African mind so there obviously remains much research to be done.

Analytical Methodology

Linguistic Analysis

Linguistically Mbiti has confined himself to only one category, that of verb tense analysis (and this primarily in Kikamba and Kikuyu). We question whether or not it might be appropriate to examine other available evidence that might indicate an awareness of the future. For instance, an analysis of nouns or adjectives which indicate a future conception would be helpful (Mbiti makes it sound as if there are none). Are there words for ideas such as "future," "eternal," "tomorrow," "next year," etc? It should be noted here that in his book, *Concepts of God in Africa* he lists names for God that display His eternity; "The Everlasting one of the Forest," "The Eternal One," "He of Many Suns, the Eternal One."¹⁰ In spite of the fact that he demonstrates that the tribal African has a concept of an eternal God, he denies that they have a concept of the future, an obvious contradiction.

In terms of a more general linguistic analysis, are there proverbs that relate future consequences for present actions? Kato cites one of the Jaba, "When you die your grave will burn with fire if you are naughty now."¹¹ Such examples demonstrate that Mbiti has too narrowly restricted his linguistic analysis, and that his arguments must be thoroughly reworked and more carefully undergirded if they are to be seen as acceptable.

Myth Analysis

We question Mbiti's assertion that because myths concerning the end of the world are not generally found in traditional African lore that there is no solid conception of the future. The absence of such myths might be seen as necessary for the absence of a conception of the future, but cannot be seen as sufficient for such conclusions. In addition, Mbiti presumptuously covers a vast amount of territory in relating "there are innumerable myths about *zamani*, but no myths about any end of the world[emphasis mine]."¹² Has he had access to all African myths? He does cite one possible example of a myth of the end of the world (from the Sonjo do not let it guide their lives.¹³ Must they let the future guide them before we can say that they have a definite concept of it? In addition, the concept under consideration is not *only* the end of the world, but it is time as it relates to the future in general. This is in our opinion the weakest area of Mbiti's analysis. While we agree that there is a vast preponderance of myth relating to the past, and that this does help demonstrate a general orientation in that direction, we would not agree that this eliminates the possibility of the African having a solid concept of the future at all. Indeed, even one myth of the future would be enough to show that a conception of it does exist (for example, the Sonjo myth Mbiti mentions).

Planning: The African Anticipation of the Future

Byang Kato points out very appropriately in his analysis of Mbiti's position the fact that the African lives a life which demonstrates an awareness of the future.¹⁴ Almost without exception every traditional African male eagerly anticipated his initiation to manhood with a definite future outlook. There is of necessity definite "financial" planning on the part of the boy's family in order to insure that he will be able to afford the bride-price necessary for

marriage and full tribal responsibilities. The fact that children are such prized possessions because they secure the future continuation of the family line also indicates a future awareness. None of these would be stressed to the extent that they are if there were in reality no concept of the future. In a very real sense, the African must anticipate the future in order to become a meaningful part of the past.

It should also be noted that one very prominent factor in the vast majority of the African independent churches today is a heavy apocalyptic emphasis. Such an emphasis, while looking to an immediate future return of Christ, would strongly suggest a definite future orientation. More research should be done in this area, as the independent churches by nature provide us with the best case studies for understanding African perceptions of Christianity.

In light of the above analysis it must be seen that John Mbiti's understanding of the African concept of time cannot be seen as definitive. At the same time, we must also recognize that he has indeed given us some valuable insights in aiding our understanding of some of the traditional African orientation. As such, his contributions are not to be ignored or belittled, for they represent an insider's careful analysis and thought. In addition, they do reflect aspects of a true understanding of the African mindset. There is little room for doubt that generally the traditional African focuses on the past far more than is done in the West or that his sense of and concern with time differs from that of the average Westerner. While we doubt that a completely accurate generalization of all African tribal peoples can be made in regard to time, we do respect Mbiti's attempts to make their concept more readily understandable to us.

In summary, we have recognized as fact that the traditional African has an understanding of time that differs from ours in the West. We may further conclude that his focus is basically in the opposite direction of ours (though it should not be conceived of as a mirror image of ours.) To say that his concept of time is that of history flowing backwards and to say that this is true of all of traditional Africa is to overgeneralize the case. To say that time is *the* key for understanding the traditional African is to overstate it. We disagree that the African has at best a vague and ill-defined focus on the future. We do not maintain that the African concept of the future is as sharply defined as the Western one, but hold it to be more sharply focused than Mbiti suggests. It is important for us to recognize the differences in perspective in order that we may more properly contextualize the Gospel for the traditional African, a question to which we now turn our attention.

Implications for Contextualization

At the outset of any discussion of contextualization in relation to Africa, it must be recognized that more and more of Africa is undergoing a process of Westernization (usually under the name of "development" or "modernization"). Each year there are fewer and fewer of what we might call purely traditional (or tribal) Africans. The impact of the West, whether in education, industrialization or urbanization has been so great that it is very difficult to assess in a general sense across the continent. Some tribes have been radically altered, a few remain virtually unaffected. Due to the difficulty of

objective continental assessment of the changes, the following remarks will be limited to the contextualization issues for the purely tribal mindset (in the most general sense). We recognize that such a mindset may very well be no more than a fictional entity, but feel that this analysis will still be useful in that it can provide a foundation for similar discussions in the more complex urbanized or educated African scene. Any discussion that attempts to meet the needs of the modern African can neither neglect the complexities that modernization has introduced today nor ignore the reality of the fact that the traditional mindset forms the base for much of modern African thought and society. The traditional provides the foundation for modern issues.

In addition, we must realize that in our discussion of these issues there are two levels to be considered. The deeper level is the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, who is able to work even through our worst cultural blunders. While we desire to be as relevant and theologically precise as possible, we acknowledge that only the Spirit can draw people to true conversion to Christ. He can use our worst mistakes as easily as our best methods, and we cannot lose sight of His presence and ministry in both believers and to unbelievers in any discussion of our method.

Even though the Spirit can use the worst methods, typically He does give us responsibility and accountability for going past these to better and more relevant approaches. He has chosen to bless proper methodology (and heart) more often in the past than shoddiness, but good methods are not to be mistaken for the most important ingredient to success in ministry. It is the development of these methods with which the following discussion is concerned, but we desire to constantly remember that the presence of the Spirit is essential to success in contextualization, and that proper sociological/anthropological considerations in-and-of themselves do not guarantee genuine results.

Also, having noted Mbiti's difficulties with overgeneralizations, we find ourselves compelled to generalize for the sake of brevity in dealing with the issues involved. We hope that the generalizations presented will be recognized as fairly representative of the traditional African, but that they will not be understood to apply equally across the board in each and every African tribal context.

Some Issues in Evangelism

Traditional Western techniques of evangelism presuppose a strong concern for the future in their emphasis on our eternal destiny. Whether the motivation is to avoid Hell or to get to Heaven, the focus is on some time unknown to the respondent (his judgment before God). The stress is on a future punishment of reward given for present acts. How would this come across to the traditional African?

First, the African looks to the past in order to discern his way into the future. The Gospel, in his mindset, must link past to the future (or future to the past) to have full relevancy. A message that does not give the traditional African a linkage to his past as a key to future success (at the judgment) is likely to be misunderstood or ignored. In addition, it may be requiring of him a type of wrenching from his accustomed mindset that the Gospel itself does not

demand. We acknowledge that the Gospel itself is the same in all cultures, and will always demand a certain amount of wrenching, but reiterate that the particular packaging and baggage into which we put it must be as relevant to the culture into which it is being placed as possible. To have the best possibility for effective use by the Spirit our presentation must show the traditional African how it offers him a more solid link with his past, and how it will enable him in his eternal life in the future to most effectively participate in the lives of his descendents (by properly teaching them so that they will join him in their eternal home when their time comes.) For example, the concept of God's "plan for our life" as related in the *Four Spiritual Laws* tract produced by Life Ministry may not have meaning to the traditional African if related in the purely futuristic concept of the West. The African would have to see how such a plan encompasses past, present, and future, lest he take on a veneer of Christianity and use it to cover a heart shrouded in syncretistic thinking (seen in many independent churches).

Second, the traditional African is generally not looking for an escape from the problems or circumstances surrounding him. (But note the opposite for many modern Africans.) He is more often vitally linked and fulfilled in his circumstances and tribal customs than the Westerner in his situation and the idea of a future escape may even be seen as a refusal to accept full responsibility in the here and now (as well as with past traditions.) In that sense, the Gospel should not be offered as a carrot on a stick that entices him to escape present circumstances and relationships, but rather as God's plan that will enable him to most fully participate in his heritage and cultural responsibilities, and thereby maintain his links with the past.

Third, to the traditional African the idea of a future Heaven or Hell based on a present decision to accept Christ may not be as motivating as it is in the West. We should not neglect the truths of Heaven and Hell, but neither should we use them in the same way that we do in the west. As one alternative, we might more strongly stress the relational aspects of being a child of the tribe of God (one of which is an eternal destiny with Him) or the consequences of being excluded from that tribe (eternal destiny separated from Him). This would be more readily grasped by a mindset that is focused on relationships and which is not as concerned with future consequences as present (or past) realities. The exact methodology of evangelism would depend on the particular tribal setting, but this general concept could be seen as a starting point in discerning the most appropriate method.

Fourth, the African concept of history and tradition would tend to make the traditional African more able to grasp the concepts of the Jewish traditions (in the Old Testament) and to see how readily Jesus fit into those patterns. In that regard, it may be more advisable to start the study of the New Testament in the book of Hebrews so that the African can see how Jesus was the fulfillment of the traditions of His own tribe (the Jews). John, so popular in the West as a beginning book in the New Testament, might be more confusing to the traditional African because of its more typically Greek philosophical thought patterns. This is not to imply that we should not use the book of John, but rather that we might be better advised to start with a book that ties into the tradition of the Bible to which the African can relate. Matthew, to cite another example, might be a better Gospel account with which to begin than

the other Synoptics or John.

In Summary, our evangelism should be less future oriented, less escapist, and more relationship and tradition centered. This may not be an easy task, but the work will possibly be rewarded by people coming to Christ with a clearer and more relevant understanding of the Gospel. That is what contextualization is all about.

Some Issues in Church Management

Modern church growth management in the West maintains that proper planning and future focus are integral to continued growth. The planning and organizational approaches that have been developed to date are almost entirely future directed and heavily change oriented, both of which run counter to the traditional mindset. (Obviously the urban, educated mindset of many parts of Africa today would be more comfortable with these emphases). It might be feasible in utilizing church growth and management in traditional settings to focus in on ways to get the community as a whole involved regardless of the time constraints. Goals such as a "10% increase per year" would not have as much meaning as a goal to "reach our tribe (or clan or family) for Christ before the next generation" might. This is one area which needs far more thought, especially with the continued importation of "baptize!" American business management techniques in the African scene. American techniques may be useful for African business ventures, but are they right for even the modern African church, let alone the traditional?

Some Issues in Eschatology

One of Mbiti's most critical complaints of the African Inland Mission in Kenya was their literalistic view of eschatology.¹⁵ He finds them all too wanting, yet he himself so symbolizes the teachings of the New Testament as to remove any possibility of literal fulfillment (or even of correspondence to reality).¹⁶ In spite of our disagreements with such a truncated eschatology, we do agree that the considerations of teaching eschatological issues in a culture with far less future emphasis than ours must be addressed.

At the outset, we must understand that a biblical truth is valid and true no matter what a culture may hold in regard to it. As such, it must be taught. Contextualization comes not in changing the truth itself, but in the manner and approach we have in conveying that truth to the receptor culture. As biblical truth, eschatology must be taught, even if it means introducing a radical change or shift in the culture as a result. We do no favor to anyone by withholding truth from them, but we also do no favor to them if we package biblical truth in cultural baggage not necessary to that truth which may distort it in the receptor's mind. The balance here is to find a culturally sensitive approach which will allow traditional Africans to come to grips with eschatological issues in their own fashion.

We agree with Mbiti in general that the African focus on the future is of a far shorter outlook that we have in the West. Actual planning for events beyond the next generation is often not done. The result of this perspective is to foreshorten future events and thus put them into the

prospect of the immediate future. The apocalyptic flavor of the independent churches mentioned previously shows how such a foreshortening can affect African Theology. In some respects the African independent church often faces the same problems as the Thessalonian church, in which people allowed their anticipation of Christ's return to overshadow the necessity of daily living a life pleasing to Him. Paul specifically addresses some of the associated issues in his letters to the Thessalonian church, and thus an introduction to eschatological issues through 1 and 2 Thessalonians might help to circumvent some of the apocalyptic abuses of the African church. In addition, there might be special emphasis given to the implications of Christ's return in regard to community and ancestral issues. For instance, how does His return affect the traditional African's view of looking to the ancestors for guidance and advice as intermediaries in the spirit realm? The traditional African in particular would need help in getting the biblical perspective on how the reality of possibly being part of the terminal generation before Christ's return should affect his life, his worship, his relationships, and his livelihood. He needs to understand exactly what Christ will hold him accountable for at His advent, and how that should affect his day to-day living. He must also be guided from developing an overly literal outlook on eschatological passages (his concrete orientation leading him naturally in that direction) as well as an overly symbolic one (from his traditional religion, which is full of symbol). It is obvious that we need balance as much as he does, and the first step is to establish a proper biblical perspective in *our own* thought process before we attempt to pass it on to others. Obviously much more could be written on this (Mbiti's whole dissertation addresses this one concern), but space demands that we only mention some of the issues and suggest a few ways to develop solutions for them.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, space considerations do not allow a full consideration of all of the relevant concerns of contextualizing biblical truth in light of the African concept of time. This article is intended only as a basic introduction to the major issues and questions involved, and leaves the bulk of work on the actual process of contextualization yet to be done. The traditional African concept of time will possibly have effects on our methodology in teaching, in evangelism, in church growth and in practical living, and this analysis has yet to take into account the fact of over 100 years of interaction between Africa and the West. It should be obvious that the task is incredibly complex, and remind us ever anew of the need for the guidance and wisdom of the Spirit in directing our steps. Perhaps the danger of doing nothing for fear of making a mistake is the greatest of all dangers, and we must avoid the 'paralysis of analysis' inherent in overexamination of issues. While we do desire to be as usable as possible in our initial contact, we must remember that doing something and learning from the inevitable mistakes made is far better than trying to analyze too much and doing nothing as a result. Our hope is that this study will provide a foundation upon which to act and more quickly learn how to properly evaluate the African concept of time and its implications for contextualization of the Gospel in the African context.

Notes

¹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*(Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 15-28.

² John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concept*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 24.

³ Mbiti, *Religion*, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶ Charles W. Misner, Kip S. Thorne, and John Archibald Wheeler, *Gravitation* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1970), p. 28.

⁷ Mbiti, *Eschatology*, p. 28.

⁸ Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*(Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975), pp. 61-62.

⁹ As pointed out by David J. Hesselgrave in *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 150. Janheinz Jahn's original proposal can be found in chapter 4 of *Muntu: An outline of the New African Cultures*, trans. Majorie Greene (New York: Grove, 1961).

¹⁰ John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*(New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 27-28.

¹¹ Kato, p. 62.

¹² Mbiti, *Religions*, p. 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 24, n.1.

¹⁴ Kato, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵ Mbiti, *Eschatology*, pp. 51-61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-50.

Developing an African Christian Worldview

A Review Article of *Creation Regained*
by Albert Wolters,
(Inter-Varsity Christian Press; Leicester, England, 1986)
98 pp., np

Mark R. Shaw

It was decided long ago that African Christian theology should not sit quietly with its hands folded and allow western theology to be repeated verbatim in her classrooms and churches. The cry went up as indigenous theology stood to its feet that a new approach and fresh formulations of questions and answers were needed if Christianity would avoid the fate J. V. Taylor warned against in *The Primal Vision*. The fate was that of becoming a daylight religion of reason and thus irrelevant to the world of the dark--the world of the spirits and magic-- so real to Africans thus denying that "total victory of him who is Lord of the dark as well as of the day" (p 12-13). The response to that cry has been mixed. Solid advances in a truly Biblical African theology have appeared but so have theologies of a more syncretistic character that have sometimes tended to consecrate with one hand a reactionary attitude to western theology while with the other sprinkling theological holy water on the surrounding culture, all the while issuing firm assurances that this was the way forward. Black theology and African Liberation theology have joined African evangelical theology in uttering a weary groan over these failed attempts to contextualize our global faith. Yet the valid question remains--how do we do African theology in a distinctively Christian way, a way that avoids the pitfalls of either amputating the culture or swallowing it whole? In desperately short supply are fresh ways of approaching the problem.

Albert Wolter's *Creation Regained: A Transforming View of the World* may well be that needed fresh approach. Don't let the slender size of this IVP paperback fool you. It is loaded with insight, critical and creative thinking and may be one of the most thoroughly Biblical books I have ever read. Wolters is Associate Professor of Religion and Theology as well as Classical Languages at Redeemer College in Ontario, Canada and also teaches at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. His little book tackles the enormous subject of building a Biblical worldview. His thesis is deceptively simple: to reform our often fragmented and patchwork worldviews and conform them more closely to Scripture we need to grasp the cosmic scope of the Biblical doctrines of creation, fall and redemption (pp 10,71). He unpacks this richly laden thesis in four chapters that deal with the topics of worldview, creation, fall and redemption respectively, concluding with a chapter that gives helpful examples of how

to apply the Biblical view to life's issues.

Chapter 1, entitled "What is a Worldview" gives some basic ideas and definitions that make the rest of the book intelligible. He defines worldview, rather loosely, as the "comprehensive framework of one's basic beliefs about things" (p. 2). Everybody has a worldview we are told because everyone has beliefs that guide action and interpret events around us in some kind of sensible way. A worldview varies somewhat from a "philosophy of life" in that the former is less self-conscious and is more caught than taught. What does this have to do with the Christian? For we who are members of the church of Christ whether we hail from Aberdeen or Abidjan the worldview question is particularly pressing. We often find ourselves growing up with or subtly absorbing traditional worldviews that are at points hostile to Scripture. "What is the relationship of worldview to Scripture?", Wolters asks. "The Christian answer is clear: our worldviews must be shaped and tested by Scripture" (p. 6). There is a problem, however in allowing the Scriptures to influence the shaping of our worldviews:

As Christians we confess that the Scriptures have the authority of God, which is supreme over everything else--over public opinion, over education, over child-rearing, over the media, and in short over all the powerful agencies in our culture by which our worldview is constantly being shaped. However, since all these agencies in our culture deliberately ignore, and in fact usually reject outright, the supreme authority of Scripture, there is considerable pressure on Christians to restrict their recognition of the authority of Scripture to the area of the church, theology, and private morality--an area that has become basically irrelevant to the direction of culture and society as a whole. (p 6)

Christians often respond to this pressure by becoming dualists. That is to say, they loudly affirm the authority of Scripture, but silently regard it as irrelevant in academic, intellectual, economic, political or "secular" spheres. Christ is lord but his lordship is over a little island of piety floating in my heart. Wolters has an answer to the problem of the dualism that affects the African Church as much as the North American or European Church--a return to the reformational world. This worldview, rooted in the Scriptures is distinct from other so-called Christian worldviews for primarily two reasons.

The first distinctive feature is its insistence that the Biblical doctrines of creation, fall and redemption are cosmic in scope and not simply cultic words relegated to "sacred" realms which leave untouched the "secular" realm. Exploring this distinctive is the central burden of the remainder of the book. The second distinctive of the reformational worldview is that it interprets the Biblical concept of salvation as the "restoration of creation" rather than "escape from creation" or some other extra-creational experience. Wolters had me

listening and listening intently by this point. How would he develop these ideas? Chapters on Creation (2), Fall (3) and Redemption (4) answered my question.

A Worldview shaped by the Doctrine of Creation

Five points made in Wolters' discussion of creation seem to me germane to the construction of a consistently Christian worldview. The first insight deals with the scope of creation and its law. Creation is not just snow-capped Kiliminjaro or the circulatory system, that is to say, areas normally consigned to the physical sciences. Creation is instead cosmic, covering cultural activity as well as history and science. Creation stands for the whole realm and range of human activity as well as nature (Gen 1:28). God rules this creation by imbedded norms or laws (Col 1:16,17). Man's task is to use his own abilities and the earth's potentialities in a way faithful to God's intended purpose and their own inherent standards and norms. Wolters illustrates:

The worlds of art and pedagogy are bound to given standards....Not all art is good art. Both artists and aestheticians are called, each in their own ways, to discern the criteria that define good art--criteria that are not arbitrary but rooted in a given order of things that must be honored. Things are no different in the fields of pedagogy and child rearing. There are stages of emotional and intellectual maturity in the child's development that must be respected by the educator. The teacher cannot afford to ignore a child's natural curiosity or spontaneous playfulness. A pedagogy that ignores these given realities is antinormative; it flies in the face of the law of creation (p. 23).

But how can we discover those norms and God-given standards in the confusing varieties of our cultural and societal life? Here a second point about creation is relevant. Creation is fundamentally knowable. Wolters surveys many texts that point to the clarity of creation but his discussion of Proverbs 8 and Isaiah 28 is most revealing. Wisdom is so imbedded in every aspect of creation, culture, society and experience that the writer of proverbs exults about "the feast of insight and understanding to which Lady Wisdom invites mankind" (p. 27). Isaiah 28: 23-29 makes some suggestive points that Wolters summarizes:

The Lord teaches the farmer his business. There is a right way to plow, to sow, and to thresh, depending on the kind of grain he is growing....A good farmer knows that and this knowledge too is from the Lord, for the Lord teaches him. This is not a teaching through

the revelation of Moses and the Prophets, but a teaching through the revelation of creation--the soil, the seeds, and the tools of his daily experience.... An implication of the revelation of God in creation is that the creation order is *knowable*. This fundamental knowability of the creation order is the basis of all human understanding, both in science and in everyday life. (pp 28-29)

Worldviews divide on this question of the essential knowability and revelatory nature of creation/culture. The built-in meaning of all things stamped by the creator with an invisible "made by God and to be used as he intended" is denied by many non-Christian worldviews and is often ignored by Christians. Wolters in contrast has reminded us of the great value God places on his general revelation.

But doesn't such a position downplay Scripture? Are we not in danger of denying the great reformation principle of *sola scriptura*? We note a third point in Wolters discussion: Scripture augments and corrects our understanding of creation--law and presents us with the story and truths of redemption about which creation is silent. There is no need to reconcile friends.

A fourth point about creation relates to the role of historical development. Gen 1:28, the cultural mandate, is the founding charter for human development and the creative exploration of creation which Wolters describes as "crying out to be implemented in new and amazing ways (p 38)." Man is not to be glorified as the measure of all things but God is to be glorified as we "participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God's helper in executing to the end the blueprint for his masterpiece."(p 38).

Yet doesn't sin mean that creation and culture have been ruined? "If God does not give up on the works of his hands, we may not either", declares Wolters (p 39) or more pointedly: "God does not make junk and He does not junk what He has made."(p 42) This fifth point spills over into the idea that we must, as Christians, always insist on the essential goodness of creation (Wolters uses the image of a sick child whom the parents never abandon but relentlessly fight the disease that threatens the child until that life is restored to health) for this essential goodness is denied by many alternative worldviews. Man's misery is blamed on his body, psyche, finitude, authorities over him, law, society, environment, reason, technology, culture, etc. Man will blame this temple of God's glory for everything rather than face the true origin of human misery--sinful rebellion. Rebellious man will do anything rather than submit to God's creation laws. "Humanism", writes Wolters, "defines humanity in terms of freedom, and defines freedom as autonomy, obeying no laws but one's own." The Bible in contrast sees the essence of our humanity in servanthood and loving submission to the Creator's will. "Humanism considers law to be the *contradiction* of freedom; the Bible considers law to be the *condition* of freedom."(p. 43) Why is man instinctively hostile to creation? Wolters' chapter on the Fall explains the problem.

A Worldview Aware of the Effects of the Fall

Wolters describes the effects of the fall on human life in chapter 3. Rebellion against God's person and law has touched all of life. "Whether we look at societal structures such as the state or family, or cultural pursuits such as art or technology, or bodily functions such as sexuality or eating, or anything at all with the wide scope of creation, we discover that the good handiwork of God has been drawn into the sphere of human mutiny against God" (p 44). The death principle of Ecclesiastes ("all is empty") is woven into the fabric of God's inherently meaningful creation. Evil is the perversion of the good but not the annihilation of the good. While creation and culture have been split down the middle with rebellion and corruption, they are still redeemable. "In short, evil does not have the power of bringing to naught God's steadfast faithfulness to the works of His hands" (p 47). For this reason Wolters argues that evil must be seen as sin rooted in corrupt and prideful desires of man and Satan. These desires and the cultural work that flows from them are riddled with corruption but the Christian when confronting sin must ask the "structural/directional" question: what is creational about this person, event or object and what about them or it is moving away from obedience to God or towards obedience? Asking the structural question keeps us from calling God's work evil. Asking the directional/obedience question keeps us from blindly yoking up with rebellious ideas, values or relationships.

A Worldview committed to the Cosmic Impact of Redemption

Wolters begins chapter 4 on redemption by noting that "virtually all of the basic words describing salvation in the Bible imply a *return* to an originally good state or situation" (p 57). Many salvation words begin with the prefix re-, such as redemption, restoration, reconciliation, renewal, regeneration (literally "a new genesis"). Even the greek word for salvation, *soteria*, has at its root the idea of health after sickness, and wholeness after danger. The implication is that salvation restores creation it does not junk it. Salvation is not escaping to heaven, or experiencing transports of religious ecstasy. When the Christian has been redeemed by Christ he has been made truly human again. His intended purpose to be God's image in creation, exercising dominion over all things for God's glory has now been restored. The regenerate Christian should then seek to be God's agent for restoring all creation and culture:

Marriage should not be avoided by Christians, but sanctified. Emotions should not be repressed but purified. Sexuality is not simply to be shunned, but redeemed. Politics should not be declared off limits, but reformed. Art ought not to be pronounced worldly, but claimed for Christ. Business must no longer be relegated to the secular world, but must be made to conform to

Christian standards. Every sector of human life yields such examples (p 58).

What is Christ's role in all of this? How does the cross of Christ restore art and literature or politics and music? Christ re-established the kingdom of God through his life, death and resurrection. The kingdom is not simply one of inner piety, nor is it a political kingdom like other political realms. Creation ruled by man under God's overlordship is the kingdom of God and when Christ cleansed rebellious mankind by the cross, God could recreate this righteous rule once again. Wolters distances the reformational view of the kingdom from humanistic versions represented by Liberation theology. Overly internalizing or politicizing the kingdom idea reveals the two realm thinking and reduces the kingdom to something "spiritual" or something "secular." Christ has established a beachhead in rebel territory for the reconstruction of the kingdom on earthly soil. The church is that beachhead. Through regenerate men and women the witness of the Kingdom can be extended to all of life and culture. Wolters spends a good bit of time reminding the reader that the line of rebellion is not between different spheres (e.g. the idea of some that prayer is "sacred" but politics is "secular" or sinful). The line of rebellion rather runs through the middle of every sphere (prayer can become filled with carnal corruptions and conversely politics can be used to advance justice and righteousness for God's good pleasure). "Redemption, then", Wolters concludes, "is the recovery of creational goodness through the annulment of sin and the effort toward the progressive removal of its effects everywhere. We return to creation through the cross, because only the atonement deals with sin and evil effectively at their root"(p. 69). I found Wolters understanding of the Kingdom of God and its implications for the church to be highly compatible with the conclusions drawn in such first rate exegetical /theological works as Geerhardus Vos' *The Kingdom and the Church* and Herman Ridderbos' *The Coming of the Kingdom*. Wolters calls us to follow Mark's version of the great commission by preaching "the good news to all creation"(Mark 16:15).

How do we work for this renewal of African life and culture in all spheres? Wolters concludes his argument in chapter 5 by discussing the distinctions between 4 words: reformation, consecration, revolution and repristination. The Biblical worldview calls for the Christian to purify all things from within (do cultural work for redeemed reasons, in a way that seeks and submits to creation—law and the power of the Holy Spirit). He never gives up on things refusing to call for a total and rapid change that destroys the old order. This is revolution which tears down but cannot build and renew. Reformation repudiates the way of consecration also whereby we give external blessing to unredeemed and unreformed ideas and institutions (e.g. just working for a Christian organization does not make my work Christian if I do it pridefully, immorally or sloppily yet working as a journalist with a hunger to exalt truth for God's glory would be Christian service). Reformation also rejects repristination which calls for repudiation of progress and a simplistic return to simple living. Cultural development for God's glory is a command. Technological growth must be reformed not abandoned.

One final illustration of how the reformational worldview works out in

life is seen in Wolters discussion on sphere sovereignty and totalitarianism. God created things after their "kind" implying that variety is a creational norm that must be kept sacred. Uniformity or the totalitarian rule of any creation structure whether family, church, or state over other spheres diminishes the richness of creation. Wolters writes:

Totalitarianism of whatever form is the directional perversion of the creational structures of society. The Christian is called to oppose all totalitarianism, whether of the state, church, or corporation, because it always signifies a transgression of God's mandated societal boundaries and an invasion into alien spheres(p. 88).

Spheres of life should co-operate but not dominate one another. Theocracy in the sense of a church-dominated society would be Biblically wrong from the perspective of a reformational worldview.

I am enthusiastic about Wolter's brief but penetrating presentation of the Biblical worldview. Yet I have some questions. Wolters is speaking from the perspective of someone influenced by the philosophy of Herman Dooyewerd formerly of the Free University of Amsterdam. Some British evangelicals like Oliver Barclay and American evangelicals like Cornelius Van Til have argued that dangers lurk in the shadows of this view. Most frequently mentioned is the idea that the Word of God becomes for a Dooyewerdian, one's interpretation of general revelation. Others point out that sphere sovereignty has been used as a justification of apartheid in South Africa. These are serious claims which one cannot take lightly. Yet I believe that Wolters presentation of reformational thinking is sufficiently rooted in the Scriptures to steer clear of these abuses of an otherwise promising way of thinking.

My enthusiasm centers largely on the value of this approach to the worldview question that haunts Africa. It would appear that the reformational worldview could help the church overcome the obstacles to the formation of an African Christian Theology that is authentically African, purified of western distortions, and yet exuding a glistening fidelity to the Word of God in Christ and in Scripture. By recovering the creational in African culture and life the church can work to extend the benefits of redemption to every sphere touched by the Gospel, which is every sphere. The future will be bleak for African Christian Theology and life if we on this continent simply shed one brand of dualism for another. With Biblical thinking Christ can at last become Lord over the dark as well as the day.

Africa: A Season for Hope
by W. Dayton Roberts
Regal Books Ventura, Calif. USA, 1985
\$4.00

Five of seven chapters in this small, thought provoking book, are written by World Vision staffers. The other two are written by Festo Kivengere, Bishop of the Church of Uganda and team leader with African Evangelistic Enterprise, and Robert Clobus a Catholic Missioner in Ghana. As the title suggests the authors collectively believe that this is a time of great hope for Africa.

The theme of the book is the famine situation which is present in such large sections of the continent Bishop Kivengere sets the under lying tone when he *describes* the heart breaking situations that he has seen in the refugee camps – the suffering and hunger and nakedness. Then he points to the basis of hope when he quotes the woman who said "if it were not for Jesus in my heart I would have died long since".

One of the urgent pleas of the book is for "Missionary Earthkeeping". Fr. Clobus points out our need as Christians to do more than just prepare people for the next world; we need to help them have a better world to live in now. One is reminded of John Wesley's word that there is no holiness that is not a social holiness.

The chapters on "current food conditions" and the country by country survey of needs are very helpful, though it would seem that even by the time this review is published, they will be somewhat out of date. They are however, the chapters which helped me to realize how widespread and serious the problem is.

This book should be read by all Christians in Africa for it will challenge us to pray for those in need, as well as seeking how we might be able to help. It can be read in one evening, but the burden it will lay on you will last a long time.

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Universe: God, Man and Science
by Adam Ford
(Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1986)
pp. 220, Kshs. 187/-

Windows on Science and Faith
by Tim Hawthorne
(I.V.P., Leicester, 1986)
pp. 128, Kshs. 74/50

Not infrequently my students return from youth camps amazed by the sophistication of the questions posed about the relationship between science and the Christian faith and it is not just A level students who are perplexed about

evolution theory or the possibility of miracle. The problem is that most of the apologetics texts used in our theological colleges are drastically out of date. This century has seen some amazing breakthroughs in scientific knowledge from quanta and quarks at the micro-level to the Big Bang and quasars at the macro, from relativity theory in physics to the mapping of the D.N.A. molecule in biology. All this calls for a shift in apologetic strategy. For example the challenge now is no longer reconciling the Bible with a causally enclosed, mechanistic universe but with a cosmos governed at the most fundamental levels of matter and life by pure chance, for the experts inform us that both the activities of sub-atomic particles and genetic mutations leading to evolutionary development are of a purely random nature. We need, therefore, a new generation of authors who are both committed to Christ and conversant with contemporary science to help us begin to answer the pressing intellectual problems of today's intelligentsia.

We can be grateful then to Prof. Tim Hawthorne for updating his *Questions of Science and Faith* (1980) and for Rev. Adam Ford's contribution. The two authors have much in common. They both acknowledge the inadequacy of scientific reductionism, and the tentative nature of modern scientific descriptions of the world (Hawthorne quotes with approval the words of the space physicist Robert Boyd: scientists "know they do not really understand but merely picture to themselves the behaviour of God's world by insubstantial images of an ever elusive reality" pp. 19-20). They both reject the semi-Deistic God-of-the-gaps in favour of an all pervasive, sustaining deity. Both cover much the same subject matter: The New Physics, the origin and destiny of the Universe, miracles, evolution and the origin of life, and the question of whether man is qualitatively different from the animals. As one might expect, Hawthorne as Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Nottingham Medical School concentrates on the biological issues while Ford, a keen amateur astronomer, focuses on cosmological questions. Ford also provides a chapter on theodicy and one on ecological issues.

Their scientific views also have much in common. For example, they both assume the truth of evolution theory and the great age of the cosmos. Both reject mind/body dualism in favour of the monist view. Needless to say many fellow Christians would take issue with them on their conclusions. They do, however, disagree on whether sub-atomic events and genetic mutations are intrinsically random. Hawthorne says no, the Bible teaches that God ordains everything, there is no such thing as chance (Prov. 16:33). Ford says yes, God instituted purely random processes and he did so in his wisdom to ensure, for instance, flexibility in life forms as they are enabled by chance genetic mutations to adapt as evolving species to drastic environmental changes. This contention constitutes an important element in his theodicy.

Yet the most significant disagreement between the two authors is at the epistemological level. As an evangelical, Hawthorne maintains that the Bible is a divinely inspired document and therefore authoritative in all it teaches. It is not a scientific text book but science should be expected to harmonize with what Scripture does teach. Hawthorne himself believes that Adam was a product of the evolutionary process and the fact that he had human contemporaries may be inferred from eg. Gen 4:14,17, 6:2. Physical death preceded Adam, and the Fall only entailed spiritual death. Adopting the Day/Age theory, he feels that the evolutionary sequence is marvelously presented in Gen. 1 (he omits to mention the awkward fact that birds [Day 5] precede the land animals [Day 6]).

In contrast, theologically Ford is a modernist. Certainly, he believes, the Scriptural writers were inspired in the sense that God elevated their insights so that they were drawn to record their thoughts using their own fallible words and concepts but we the reader and the scientific enquirer may expect to receive equal inspiration. Ancients like Adam and Noah are relegated to myths without historical basis. Fundamentalism is pilloried. Creationism is a "Kindergarten image" which should be discarded along with "a nursery Noah's ark" (p. 75). In fact, Ford informs us, "The literal interpretation of scripture....can be traced back to the sixteenth century, and could be argued to be a heresy which resulted from the Reformation" (p. 93). Unfortunately Ford ignores the fact that the only explicit Biblical teaching on inspiration (II Tim 3:16) affirms that it is the *writings* (graphe) that are inspired, and would he really prefer to revert back to the pre-Reformation hermeneutic where fanciful allegorisation held sway? Reformation exegesis was not in fact characterised by wooden literalism, it sought rather to arrive at the plain meaning of the words while taking such factors as genre and figures of speech fully into account. At its best, modern fundamentalism follows the same methodology. Sadly, like many neo-liberals Ford seems to find a greater affinity with the optimistic evolutionary mysticism of Teilhard de Chardin (pp. 104 - 109) than with Biblical Christianity, and the Eastern sages seem to hold a great fascination for him (see pp. 55, 72, 107). While avoiding the Deist frying pan he is in danger of falling into the pantheist fire.

Notwithstanding its inadequate theology, *Universe: God, Man and Science* is the more profound book of the two and the author has done a better job in integrating his religious faith and scientific beliefs. He is also the better communicator. Again and again Ford's prose borders on poetry as he evokes the awe and grandeur of God's universe. Here is but one example early in the book where the world is described at the atomic level:

Even steel girders and mountains are no more than a gossamer of energy. In a telling phrase the physicist Paul Davies has said that we and all other material things have been 'spun from a frolic of Nothingness.' All hard things, which seem so solid to us - tables, paving stones and heads - are in fact like fine three-dimensional lace, a sort of ghostly spider's web woven from energy as energy performs its unending cosmic dance. (p. 17)

Ford has produced a better written, more passionately enthusiastic book which manages to press home the evidence for God implicit in such modern discoveries as the finely tuned nature of physical laws, the tiniest variation of which would result not only in the cessation of all life but the disintegration of matter itself.

Hawthorne is more tentative and prosaic (perhaps as befits a professional scientist) and when writing on his own area of expertise he becomes somewhat hard to follow. Yet he sometimes borders on the simplistic when venturing into other scientific disciplines (e.g. he claims the cosmos began as an "immensely dense ball of matter" ,p. 46, whereas as Ford correctly informs us on p. 53, physicists believe

that it was a million years after the Big Bang that the first atoms began to form.) Occasionally he seems to miss the point. For instance he rebuts Monod's contention that life developed purposelessly as a result of totally random genetic mutations by arguing that in fact God is instrumental in the production of these mutations and they are therefore purposive. However, Monod has a stronger case than this suggests. His main point is well paraphrased by D.J. Bartholomew, "Mutations are entirely consistent with the hypothesis that all change is by accident. The expected linkage between action and outcome which is the characteristic of purposive action is entirely lacking" (*God of Chance*, S.C.M., 1984, p. 19). In other words there is no sign of purpose or plan or intentionality in these mutations; most are *not* conducive to the survival of the species.

Hawthorne is at his most thought provoking when he shares the latest discoveries in molecular biology which he claims provide independent evidence for evolution. Evidently the nature of the proteins within different species show varying degrees of relatedness such that computers can use the data to construct family trees which are remarkably similar to those constructed from the fossil record. "In fact, if the fossils had never been discovered, this molecular study would push us to much the same conclusions as those of Darwin" (p. 67). This kind of correlation weakens the view that evolution falls short of a true scientific theory on the grounds that it is non falsifiable. This is a discovery of the greatest importance in the evolution debate and yet it is not widely known. It is not discussed, for example, in N.M. de S. Cameron's recent study *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible* (Paternoster, 1983).

Both books are informative and stimulating reading. They point up the danger on the one hand of fundamentalist obscurantism whereby, in the words of Ford, "the major and most exciting insights of modern science are rejected as godless frauds" (p. 50) and on the other hand the subjective natural theology which Ford seems to put in its place. Hawthorne provides a middle way: all truth is God's truth and his Word and works will surely cohere when correctly interpreted.

However, the task of the correct interpretation of each is an ongoing one in which Biblical exegetes and Christ centred scientists should be energetically and humbly engaged. While the results are still coming in we should avoid unwarranted dogmatism and take heed to Prof. Hawthorne's timely advice: "Perhaps it is more important to be 'in love and charity with our Christian neighbours who differ from us, than to adopt any particular position" (p. 7).

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Pauline Theology & Mission Practice
by Dean S. Gilliland
(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983)

This book, following many of the arguments of Roland Allen's classic *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1923), goes way beyond Allen's treatment of Pauline Theology to application to such areas as church planting, discipleship, leadership, discipline, worship and finance in the Church in the 1980's.

Gilliland, with 20 years of missionary experience in West Africa, challenges church planters and pastors alike to look to Paul's teachings not as a systematic theology or theological treatise, but as principles and insights for effective "missionary" effort and practice. In every part of the book, the author directs the reader to Paul's ministry as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Pauline Epistles, pointing to the relevancy of Paul, the greatest missionary in the history of the Church, to our methods for today. Not only does the author draw on scripture and personnel missionary reflections, but the book contains a healthy discussion of missiological literature and practice relevant to Pauline teaching.

The author contends that Paul's theology has four main characteristics as it relates to evangelism, conversion, the convert and the church. First, Paul's theology is *dynamic*, oriented to the present as well as the future, able to adapt to the needs of a people in a particular situation or place. This dynamism must be part of the Church's theology, as it contextualizes the message of the gospel to the needs and problems of the hearer. However, according to Gilliland, the Church both in the West and Africa, has too often taught a dogmatic theology, oriented to the past, which has often made the Church so rigid that it could make little impact on those it has been commanded to reach.

In addition to a dynamic theology, the author suggests that before all else, the theology of Paul was *evangelical*. While not neglecting the total man, Paul called his work "the ministry of reconciliation", pointing people to the cross. Yet, too often we see Paul only as the preacher of salvation. His theology is also *holistic*, dealing with the home (Col. 3:18-27); marriage (Eph. 5:22-25); social ethics (II Thess. 3:10); politics (Rom. 13:1-7); health (1 Tim. 5:23), personal relationships (Col. 3:13), etc. For Paul, "practical application of Christian truth was more important" than precise understanding of the content.

Lastly, the author sees Paul putting the cure and care of souls before any other issue in his ministry, making his theology *pastoral*. Right doctrine and correct belief were not so important at the outset, as whether the Christian had given allegiance to a new authority.

One of the most interesting sections of the work, to this reader, is his chapter (4) on the "Dimensions of Conversion". The author notes that Paul talks about conversion both theologically and existentially. Conversion is first theological; we have access to the Father because of God's work through Christ of "forgiveness, cleansing, redemption, justification, liberation, reconciliation" and similar theological sounding activities. Yet, conversion has a certain ambiguity, according to the author, if we attempt to confine the experience to a particular point in time. "Conversion is both a completed and a continuous act." To understand conversion more clearly, the author points to the process and existential nature of the experience. Conversion is a "turning" (*epistrepho* - mentioned over 35 times in the New Testament), a change in direction and allegiance. The movement is now to God instead of away from him. Gilliland contends that it is not the absolute degree of attainment which proves that one is a child of God, but rather a noticeable progress in the right direction:

Too often the tendency is to emphasize "how a Christian ought to act" and to confuse that with what God does in conversion. With all respect for my African brothers who ministered with me in Africa, I confess that I was unhappy when, once people publicly decided to follow Christ, certain restrictions were immediately imposed as evidence of conversion. For example, after a morning worship service, when a call was made for those who wished to "accept Jesus", very often the pastor would ask those who came forward, "Do you promise not to work on Sundays? Do you promise not to drink alcohol and be faithful in attendance at Church?" While these questions reveal the ethical code that the church expected of converted people, giving the "proper" answer to these questions did not constitute conversion...This is not a matter of omitting a rite formerly practiced or performing a new ritual. It is being a new person." (pp. 106-7).

With many of the author's illustrations from the African milieu, and numerous applications to the special problems and opportunities in the African context, I strongly recommend this book to the full-time Christian worker and layperson alike. Many will profit from its concise approach and will be stimulated to a richer understanding of Paul and his theology, and how to apply Pauline principles to the growth and strengthening of the Church on this continent and beyond.

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Hebrews: The Communicator's Commentary Vol. 10
 by Louis H. Evans Jr.
 (Word Books, Waco, Texas, USA)
 pp. 259. \$15.95

The Communicator's Commentary series brings together excellent biblical scholarship, popular approach, vivid and impelling illustrations, exciting application and valuable outlines, to give help to the preacher and teacher in preparing to communicate God's word. The commentaries combine fresh insights to Scripture, rich illustrative material and innovative ways of utilizing God's vibrant truth. A

prime objective is for each reader to find that God speaks with newness through the Scriptures. The series further presents personal faith, caring for individuals and social responsibility as essential parts of biblical Christianity. The New King James Version has been chosen as the basic text for the series.

What about this volume? These are some of the claims: 'A new commentary for a new age'; 'This stimulating commentary'; 'Excitingly clear and relevant'; 'This stunning commentary';... will become one of the most cherished and used commentaries for the exposition of the epistle today'. These are stirring words. So I looked forward to great things as I prepared to read this book while rereading Hebrews.

The commentator begins by introducing himself to us as well as telling us of his family background (Calvinistic and Mennonite). He describes his pilgrimage into an ever deeper faith, and his heart concerns for the Church. These are essentially in terms of a renewed commitment to Christ and all that that means in terms of belief and practical living. This is further developed in two themes that run through the commentary: purity and strength of faith, and social concern for justice. His overriding desire is to be 'a servant to your growth'.

He lists a number of reasons why this letter is largely avoided: the rejection of the liturgical significance of blood sacrifice; the demythologizing of Jesus, and the foreignness of atonement principles to modern technology; the emphasis of the Church on social concerns to the detriment of a personal relationship with God; the complex structure of the epistle.

This last point is taken up in his discussion of the letter's style. But he is misleading when he says 'More than any other N.T. writer, our author is classical in his Greek style'. Although his elegant Greek is closer to Classical Greek than the other writers, it is still Hellenistic not Classical Greek.

In common with most scholars he makes no attempt to identify the writer of the epistle. He puts the date that it was written shortly before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. The recipients were Hellenistic Jews. He argues that they were Jews of the Greek-speaking provinces; other commentators preferring Rome, or Palestine (but not Jerusalem); but he recognises that we cannot be certain about this. His purpose was to convince and urge his readers to a committed Christian discipleship; particularly in light of the pressures of loyalty to Judaism.

There is a useful section dealing with Jewish principles of interpretation which gives valuable insights into the way the argument of the epistle so often flows. The truths of Scripture were drawn out using rules of interpretation called 'Middoth'. He gives a summary of several important Middoth, explaining that they were recognised as giving the grounds for authoritative proofs which would convince another of the truth of an argument. He looks at these again on pages 108-110 when Christ is compared with Melchizedek.

He makes a distinction in his outline between the passages of teaching and exhortation. This is needed in order to bring out the full clarity and development of the teaching. As an additional aid the exhortation sections are shown in the outlines using italic type.

One of the claims of the series is for fresh and exciting innovations. Does this volume meet the standards set? Yes, there are many new and unusual illustrations. For the brightness of His glory ch. 1:3, the illustration used is of radiation, drawn from atomic physics. However the terrifying nature of accidents at atomic power stations is hardly what the author had in mind when referring to

the radiance (NIV) of God's glory, the radiance of the sun is a far better example. The leaking of a dead car battery pictures the warning about drifting away in ch. 2:1. The warmth of belonging as part of an extended family is admirably caught when he discusses the word 'house' in the early verses of chapter 3. An incident from his flying experience illustrates the peace and calm of rest in contrast to panic and anxiety. Making a surfboard out of fibreglass pictures the way assurance of hope acts as a catalyst to set our hearts immovable on Christ. Cyclotrons and radio-active isotopes help us to understand how easily we lose our vitality. These last few illustrations, while excellent for his Western readers, have little relevance in Africa.

There are some very fine points in this commentary. One is the theme of social justice for all, regardless of colour, race or creed. Another is his treatment of Jewish interpretation. A third is the explanation of the Semitic background to the use of Oaths. There is a fine survey and discussion of Atonement, looking in particular at its necessity and its effect on the worshipper. But why does he twice draw from the *Mishnah* rather than from Leviticus 16, particularly when the *Mishnah* does not agree with Leviticus? When he reaches chapter 11 there are two excellent sections dealing with 'faith and obedience' and 'faith and the future', the latter section being especially helpful. The exhortations of chapter 13 are well applied to today's situations, even though it means reading African for American, Nairobi and Lagos for New York and Washington.

In spite of its fine points the commentary is very uneven. There are places of great detail which are very helpful, but these are followed by sections passed over with only a few general remarks. There are times when the detail highlights a word here or a thought there, but misses the main point. True, the details often lead to an innovative illustration, but it is the illustrations that often seem to decide what will be commented on and what will be skimmed over. For example, 'what is man that You are mindful of him?' hardly carries the idea of God focussing on an individual with an awesomely powerful telescope. Then he really strains his exegesis to find in 6:1-3 the three aspects of the early Church's understanding of the Christian life and discipleship: the invitation from Christ, teaching/nurture, and the 'Go' of the apostolic mandate.

It is the writer's use of Greek that I found most disturbing. Frequently he simply quotes it alongside the appropriate English word without explaining its significance. For those who know Greek it is unnecessary; for those who don't, it contributes nothing. More serious are those times when he uses it incorrectly; the point he is making may be correct or helpful, but it is supported by faulty evidence.

Referring to the verb forms in the first two verses he says that the first form indicates a *progressive* past. The context does indicate a process, but the verb form does not indicate what is progressive. Discussing the meaning of *apostle*, the author asserts that when we remove the prefix of the Greek word we are left with *stolon* (it should be *stolos*). He then describes the way biologists use the word *stolon*, giving the impression that this is a Greek word, whereas it is an English word derived from the Greek. The word *enlightened* is common in the NT, almost always meaning a radical transference from darkness to light; This is correct, but the four verses he quotes in support do not even use the word. He is not correct in saying that *miantos* translated *undefiled* in 7:26 also means without any moral blemish. The word refers to what is unstained

or uncontaminated, whereas the word *amomos* is used for the absence of moral and physical blemishes.

There are a few errors. In the middle of page 140, "faith" should read "patience". Towards the bottom of page 191, *moncin* should read *mencin*, "great" on page 257 should be "greet". The most careless error occurs on page 84. He is describing the Israelites grumbling for meat saying that they were tired of manna while waiting to cross the Red Sea with the Egyptians hard behind them. Manna was not given until they were in the desert after crossing the Red Sea while the grumbling for meat happened after leaving Mt. Sinai, as recorded in Numbers 11. The bibliography omits reference to the fine commentaries on Hebrews by F. F. Bruce and P.E. Hughes.

This is a lively and readably commentary with a wealth of novel ideas; however, all too often the text is made to fit the innovations. The book is full of good ideas for preachers, but as an exegetical model it leaves a great deal to be desired. One is left with a feeling of disappointment that a commentary which promised so much produces so little.

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Forgiveness and Atonement

by H. D. McDonald

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'The idea of the forgiveness of sins is central in the Christian message.' So the book begins, and over the 8 chapters the author explores the scope and reach of the forgiveness of sins and its relation to revelation, Christ, grace, justification, guilt, experience, and atonement. McDonald's primary concern in this book is not forgiveness between wronged human parties but rather God's forgiveness of human sins, although the spill-over is inescapable: 'Christians are a people divinely forgiven; therefore they are, and therefore they must be, a people who forgive divinely.' (p. 51)

No true Christian can ever doubt the central importance of the forgiveness of sins. When the culpable sinner, by trusting in Christ as Saviour, crosses the threshold from death to life, he enters through no other door than the door of forgiveness; from then on he treads on forgiveness ground and breathes forgiveness air. However, while the Christian accepts this truth readily enough, the modern climate of opinion is against it. For this reason McDonald devotes the first chapter to addressing two basic questions: Is forgiveness necessary? and is it possible? For no matter how feasible forgiveness may be, if it is not necessary it is irrelevant; and however necessary it may be, if it is not possible it is a cruel, tantalizing illusion.

In an illuminating chapter on Revelation and Forgiveness, the author searches for the source of the notion of the forgiveness of sins. He shows that nature knows little or nothing of it: 'The consideration of God's works (ie nature) will not help a man to the knowledge that there is forgiveness with God' (John Owen). And conscience, for all its value as an umpire in the conflict between right and wrong, is unable to forgive the wrong to which it has drawn the sinner's notice. 'Forgiveness of sins contradicts the teaching of conscience' (Otto Borchert). It is rather to revelation alone that we owe the idea that 'there is forgiveness with God.' It is a surprise; something that we would never have imagined, had not God Himself told us in His word.

More specifically, Chapter 3 discussed forgiveness in relation to Christ. Again and again Christ talks of the forgiveness of sins in His teaching. He emphasises the Father's willingness to forgive. But beyond that, He himself dares to pronounce the word: 'Your sins are forgiven', and we realise that Jesus is not merely pointing away to forgiveness, but in some way is actually providing it, effecting it.

Forgiveness and grace go hand in hand, the former one of the clearest possible expressions of the latter. God is not compelled to forgive: 'To say that we are saved by grace is to say that we are saved both without merit on our own part, and without necessity on God's part' (A. H. Strong). This fact should forever banish that sort of impertinent, blasé carelessness expressed by Heinrich Heine, who on his deathbed declared: 'God will forgive; that's His business (*C'est son metier*)'. No, rather as J. I. Packer explains, 'Grace is free in the sense of being self-originated, and of proceeding from one who was free not to be gracious.'

Forgiveness and justification are so bound together in the 'salvation event' that they are almost inseparable. Thus Karl Barth can declare: 'The forgiveness of sins or justification of the sinner by faith is *the* gift of the Holy Spirit by which all others, so far as they are really that, must submit to be measured; that is the common denominator, so to speak, upon which everything that can seriously be called Christian life must be set.' Certainly Christian experience would neither wish, nor be able, to divide them apart. From the standpoint of theological definition, however, a distinction can be made: ...Forgiveness is conceived negatively, as the blotting out of one's past deeds by wiping the slate clean, while justification is defined positively, as the admission of the forgiven soul into a position of right relationship with God. Thus, while justification is a legal term looking at God and man in terms of Judge-convict, forgiveness is filial privilege, seeing God and man in terms of Father-son.

The whole question of guilt is much discussed in modern psychology, and since Freud and Jung various ways have been sought to relieve guilt by explaining it away. The chapter on Guilt and Forgiveness establishes a helpful distinction between false guilt and true guilt. Paul Tournier points out that 'Any guilt suggested by the judgment of men is false guilt if it does not receive inner support by the judgment of God.' A further distinction is made between subjective guilt (the feeling of unease and shame when we are reproached by God in our innermost soul) and objective guilt (a broken relationship with God with or without accompanying feelings). It is when guilt is acknowledged before God that release is possible. 'The Christian life is one of assured forgiveness of sins and presupposes the removal both of the sense of guilt and of guilt itself' (Henry).

Chapter 7 emphasises the importance of actually experiencing forgiveness.

The poet Keats declared: 'Nothing ever becomes real until it is experienced; even a proverb is no proverb to you till it is experienced.' Perhaps nowhere is this truer than in the matter of forgiveness. Knowledge about it can never substitute for the experience of it. The author quotes another poet, this time John Donne: 'He that cannot define repentance, he that cannot spell it, may have it; and he that hath written whole books, great volumes on it may be without it.' How then is it possible to experience the forgiveness of God? By repentance and faith in Christ. The discovery of forgiveness is made to faith alone. In Christ, God's forgiveness is offered to man; by faith it is personally accepted by man. The author approvingly quotes John Owen to insist that faith has priority over feelings: 'That may be believed which is not 'felt'; yea, it is the will and command of God that faith should stand and do its work where all sense fails.'

Up to this point the book might have been entitled merely 'Forgiveness'. That it bears the full title 'Forgiveness and Atonement' underlines the foundational importance of the atoning death of Christ (Chapter 8) for although forgiveness is free to the sinner, it cost God nothing less than the death of His Son. If there is forgiveness with God it is realised solely on the grounds of Christ's atonement. But how? While McDonald approvingly quotes R. W. Dale when he declares: 'It is not the *theory* of the death of Christ that constitutes the ground of forgiveness but the *death itself*, he himself insists that theologically that death should be understood as *sacrificial* and *substitutionary*. He concludes (p. 135); This then is the nature of the atonement: 'God Himself in love has satisfied the ethical demands of His divine nature by substituting Christ's penal sufferings for our just punishment and thus established the grounds for His righteous pardon of human guilt and sin.' In support he quotes Romans 3:23-26, the passage Luther labelled 'the very centre and kernel of the Epistle and of all Scripture.'

To sum up: Here is a book I heartily recommend. It is expensive for its size, and there are two or three printing errors, it is not earth-shakingly controversial, but it would be a valuable addition to the library of the serious Bible student, the preacher, the teacher of theology, - valuable indeed to anyone who desires to understand better the grounds of his standing before God and who longs to be able to explain more clearly to others 'the hope that is within him'. There are several places where the prose seems to lift off into pulpit eloquence, and one suspects that parts have been transposed from sermons McDonald has preached, but it is hard to blame him for this is stuff to thrill both the mind and the heart.

One final remark. The book (as should be evident from this review) is liberally strewn with lucid and memorable quotes from theologians, poets, hymnwriters. As there is no index or bibliography in the book, I made a list of these writers and observed that they represent some 15 or 16 centuries, many different countries from Africa (Augustine) to Europe, and from America to Asia, and many different theological persuasions. Not only does this enhance further the value of the book, but also it is entirely appropriate in a book on this subject. For every member of that multitude that no man can number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne of God, is there because of the forgiveness of sins which God has provided through the atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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