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Editorial

What Is New and What is Old

J. Nelson Jennings

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After instructing his followers through several parables Jesus asked his disciples, “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, ‘Yes.’ And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old’” (Matthew 13:51-52).

Gospel ministry—particularly cross-cultural gospel ministry—involves a new-old dynamic. There are new settings, new people, new technologies, new languages. There is also the same triune God, the same need to receive, the same posture of humble service. New challenges and questions emerge in gospel ministry; and, earlier examples, methods, and principles inform how to meet such new opportunities in gospel service. Most importantly, while he gives new insights into his spectacular goodness and holiness through redemptively working new settings, the same God doggedly keeps his eternal covenant to re-make his sin-wracked creation into a glorious new heaven and earth.

This issue’s articles all pointedly analyze, instruct, and exhort how servants in mission are to “bring out of [the gospel’s] treasure what is new and what is old.” Oral peoples like the Maasai need a new biblical hermeneutic that matches their generations-old, inherited mental framework. A new work of God’s Spirit among the Zulus has come about through tried-and-true preaching on repentance and faith and humble concrete service. Technologically-shaped African youth have new questions to be met by biblical, time-proven postures of serious listening and focused study. Today’s secular Spaniards need to see contemporary examples of Christians who live genuinely and sacrificially.

Noteworthy as well is the call for articles for next October’s issue on the new and old theme of “Pentecostal / Spirit-Empowered Mission.” Mission movements that explicitly acknowledge the fresh work of God’s Spirit have swept across recent generations of worldwide Christianity. These movements are new, yet the same Spirit who has been at work across the generations is acknowledged as empowering more contemporary revivals and large-scale conversions to faith in Jesus Christ.

May God continue use the articles before you here to guide you, and those you serve, in “bringing out of [the gospel’s] treasure what is new and what is old.”

**An *Enkiteng* Hermeneutic—
Reading (and Hearing!) the Bible with Maasai Christians:
A Review Essay and Proposal**

Joshua Robert Barron

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Abstract

God’s communication of his Word to people has always been culturally specific. Rather than falling prey to a feared cultural relativizing of the Christian gospel, the cultural contingency or particularity of divine-human communication entails the importance of contextual realities within different cultures, often represented by their languages. Human contexts should therefore be taken seriously by biblical hermeneutics. Moreover, care must be taken not to denigrate any cultural context due to its alleged inferiority to another, as has happened all too frequently in modern interactions between Europeans and Africans.

The “Maasai and the Bible” project, sponsored by VID International University in Norway in cooperation with Tumaini University Makumira in Tanzania, has taken the specifically Maasai human context seriously in an examination of biblical hermeneutics. The project has resulted in four recent publications studying Maasai reception and hermeneutics of biblical texts. This article introduces that project, reviews its four books, then proposes an *enkiteng* (cow) hermeneutic as an appropriate approach to Scripture in Maasai contexts.

Key Words: African hermeneutics, intercultural hermeneutics, Maasai Christianity

Introduction

We all read, or listen to, Scripture through a hermeneutical lens. All such lenses are necessarily tinged by culture. No reading, or hearing, of Scripture is acultural (Ukpong 1995, 6). All human understandings of Scripture, like all Christian theologies, are culturally contingent. This should not surprise us because Scripture itself is not acultural. Rather it is itself contingent on the particularity of its languages and, therefore, of those languages’ cultures. This is true of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as well as every translation ever produced. All divine-human communication is necessarily specific to a given culture. Because this cultural contingency is inherent in all human understanding, “none of us has a neutral perspective on ... the Bible” (Mburu 2019, 22). Acknowledging this reality does not relativize the message of the gospel. Instead, the cultural contingency of human understandings of the Bible entails that the contextual realities within different cultures—often represented by their languages—matter. It is therefore not appropriate to demand, for instance, that an African adopt a European culture in order to follow Christ. By extension, then, biblical hermeneutics must not neglect human cultures but engage them.

Some practitioners of historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation are convinced that they are just reading scripture with all culture cut away. They are, of course, gravely mistaken and confused by their own cultural myopia. A healthy hermeneutic will not only attempt to explain, insofar as this is possible, what the text meant to the original recipients (whether as readers or as listeners) in their particular cultural contexts but will also deliberately engage with the cultures of contemporary recipients.

Just as “a *Theologia Africana* which will seek to interpret Christ to the African in such a way that he feels at home in the new faith” (Sawyer 1971, 240) is necessary for a healthy African Church, so do healthy African hermeneutics require “African biblical scholars [who

are] wary of running away from their African selves or identities and relying heavily on Western paradigms” (Masenya and Ramantswana 2015, 2). Moreover, “Interpreting the biblical text is never, in African biblical hermeneutics, an end in itself. Biblical interpretation is always about changing the African context. This is what links ordinary African biblical interpretation and African biblical scholarship, a common commitment to interpret for contextual transformation” (West 2018, 248).

In the specific context of the Maasai people of East Africa, “While there are certainly areas where Maasai culture can benefit from Christian transformation, a recovery of traditional Maasai cultural values through a theologically robust process of inculturation can strengthen the Maasai churches as well” (Barron 2019, 17). This process will necessarily require a contextual African (Maasai) hermeneutic. The Maasai and the Bible project (directed by Professor Knut Holter at VID Specialized University in Stavanger, Norway), researching the responses of the Maasai of Tanzania and Kenya to the Bible, has resulted in four recent publications. This article introduces the “ordinary reader (African) hermeneutics” used by the researchers of that project and by myself, introduces the Maasai and the Bible project and briefly review its publications, and propose a hermeneutical model for Maasai hermeneutics. Note that I have more fully reviewed those volumes elsewhere (Barron 2021c); some of my observations there will necessarily overlap with what follows. Note as well that the three Peter Lang volumes are academic monographs, whereas the Acton volume is more accessible.

Intercultural Hermeneutics, African Hermeneutics, and the Intersection between the Academy and Ordinary Reader

Academically trained “professional” readers and untrained “ordinary” readers often approach biblical texts from strikingly different perspectives. Both groups have something to offer the Church, however, and neither should scorn what the other brings to the table. Biblical scholars such as Justin S. Ukpong of Nigeria and Gerald O. West of South Africa have emphasized, specifically within African contexts, the value that ordinary readers bring to biblical interpretation and the ways in which ordinary readers and trained scholars each have something to offer the other. Within the maturing field of African biblical studies or African hermeneutics, interpreters deliberately address African contextual realities. Because no one approaches biblical texts from a neutral cultural perspective (even if some people might think, in their monocultural myopia, that they achieve this feat), it is just as important to be aware of the cultural and linguistic contexts of readers (and listeners) as it is of the various contexts of the original audiences of the biblical texts. Intercultural hermeneutics recognizes both that no readings of Scripture are free from cultural bias and that the cultural context of the readers actually enable understanding. In addition, intercultural hermeneutics admits that any given biblical interpretation may be more or less valid (Elness-Hanson 2017, 16–17 and 40) as well as that the biblical texts are inherently “plurivalent” (Nkesela 2020, 11). While many recent studies make use of intercultural hermeneutics to privilege the voices of “ordinary African readers” in Bantu contexts (e.g., see Kĩnyua 2011), heretofore there have been few examinations of Nilotic cultural contexts.

In many parts of the world, engaging with the culture necessarily entails engaging with the orality of the culture. As an overly literate exegete, it is all too easy for me to neglect the importance of the intended aurality of the Scripture: these texts were written not just to be read, but to be listened to. While Augustine of Hippo may have been inspired by the singsong chant of *tolle lege* (“take and read”), Paul does not teach us that faith comes by reading but rather that “faith comes by hearing” (2 Cor 5:17). Deuteronomy claims to be “the words that Moses spoke” to the Israelites and to which they listened (Deut 1:1). When Hilkiah found the lost book of the Torah, the people did not gather around to read it silently. Rather, Shaphan read it

to Josiah, and then the king read it to all the people (2 Ki 22:3–23:2). While it is commendable to devote oneself to read and study the Word of God like Ezra (Ezra 7:10), even so that Word is meant to be heard. It is clear that “the ancient societies of the Bible were overwhelmingly oral. People originally experienced the traditions now in the Bible as oral performances” (Rhoads 2009, ii). Likewise, orality and aurality remain essential to many African societies today. Many African Christians—including among groups like the Maasai—primarily experience the Word of God as a spoken Word. It is therefore necessary for biblical interpretation in Maasai contexts to consider biblical texts as they are heard, not only how they appear in literate form.

Maasai and the Bible Project

Knut Holter of VID Specialized University in Norway recently oversaw a several-year project entitled “Potentials and problems of popular inculturation hermeneutics in Maasai biblical interpretation,” informally abbreviated as the “Maasai and the Bible” project. The Maasai are a Nilotic people living in Kenya and Tanzania. This Maasai and the Bible project was carried out in the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and in collaboration with Tumaini University Makumira. A Maa language translation of the Bible has been available at least in part for 50 years. The Bible is by far the most widely available Maa language text and can truly be said to be “a Maasai book.” It is daily read, or listened to, by Maasai Christians striving to live their faith within Maasai contextual realities. The Maasai and the Bible project sought to explore the hermeneutics of Maasai “ordinary readers.”

When I informed missiologist Doug Priest, Jr.—former missionary among the Maasai of both Kenya and Tanzania and author of *Doing Theology with the Maasai* (Priest 1990)—about the books resulting from this project, he observed to me that “contextualization and indigenous theology have come a long ways since my time.” They have indeed! Peter Lang’s “Bible and Theology in Africa” series, edited by Knut Holter, has been a blessing toward this end, providing examples of this contextualization and indigenous Christian theology for the benefit of World Christianity. The description of this series reminds us that

The twentieth century made sub-Saharan Africa a Christian continent. This formidable church growth is reflected in a wide range of attempts at contextualizing Christian theology and biblical interpretation in Africa. At a grassroots level ordinary Christians express their faith and read the Bible in ways reflecting their daily situation; at an academic level, theologians and biblical scholars relate the historical traditions and sources of Christianity to the socio- and religio-cultural context of Africa. In response to this, the Bible and Theology in Africa series aims at making African theology and biblical interpretation its subject as well as object, as the concerns of African theologians and biblical interpreters will be voiced and critically analyzed (Peter Lang 2021).

The Maasai and the Bible Project has provided, in addition to a handful of academic articles, three monographs to this Peter Lang series and an edited collection of research essays published in Nairobi:

Elness-Hanson, Beth E. (2017). *Generational Curses in the Pentateuch: An American and Maasai Intercultural Analysis*. Bible and Theology in Africa 24. Edited by Knut Holter. New York: Peter Lang, 291 pp., ISBN 9781433141218. Hardback. US\$97.60.

Lyimo-Mbowe, Hoyce Jacob (2020). *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading*. Bible and Theology in Africa 29. Edited by Knut Holter. New York: Peter Lang, 225 pp., ISBN 9781433173493. Hardback. US\$99.95.

Nkesela, Zephania Shila (2020). *A Maasai Encounter with the Bible: Nomadic Lifestyle as a Hermeneutic Question*. Bible and Theology in Africa 30. Edited by Knut Holter. New York: Peter Lang, 227 pp., ISBN 9781433173684. Hardback. US\$99.95.

Holter, Knut and Justo, Lemburis, eds. (2021). *Maasai Encounters with the Bible*. Nairobi: Acton Publishing, 180 pp., ISBN 9789966888934. Paperback. Kenyan Shillings 1900.00 (between US\$18.00–19.00).

As my professional life for the past 14 years has revolved around the realities of Maasai Christianity, and since I speak the Maa language, I learned of this project with great anticipatory excitement.

Content Summaries of the “Maasai and the Bible” Publications

Generational Curses in the Pentateuch: An American and Maasai Intercultural Analysis

The first monograph published as a fruit of the Maasai and the Bible project was Elness-Hanson’s *Generational Curses in the Pentateuch*. Given the cultural importance of the curse (*oldeket*) in Maasai culture, I was especially pleased when this volume was released. Whereas “American, Enlightenment-influenced has frequently demythologized the concept of the curse” (8), as well as other spiritual realities, for the Maasai (and other African groups), the efficacy of both curses and blessings is assumed as a matter of course: “the results are real” (95). While Maasai consider blessings to be “the way of life,” frequently “the fear of curses” is what “drives and controls behavior” (91–92). Thus typical Western hermeneutics often fail to have answers for the questions which Maasai Christians, in common with many Christians across Africa, are asking. Elness-Hanson attempts to come alongside Maasai readers, recognizing her own outsider status, with an intercultural hermeneutic (15) that takes seriously the African (and specifically Maasai) questions being asked of the biblical texts.

After discussing the importance of intercultural analysis within World Christianity in order to “purposefully nurture agency for the voices of those on the margin” (3), Elness-Hanson outlines the contexts from which she researches and writes, and she introduces key terminology. She then begins her research by asking, “How does the traditional Maasai worldview shape the Maasai theologians’ interpretative lens when viewing Pentateuchal generational curses?” to come to “a fuller understanding” the biblical texts in question for both the Maasai as well as for the rest of us (57). Diving deeply into Maasai cultural contexts, she notes the importance of reconciliation as foundation to Maasai understanding of curses and provides a dialogical exegesis of four primary OT texts. Anyone interested in doing the hard work of intercultural hermeneutics, especially in African contexts, should read this book. Elness-Hanson concludes by emphasizing the value of intercultural biblical hermeneutics in “building brides of understanding across cultures,” especially in the context of “the rise of World Christianity” (248).

Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading

A biblical scholar from Tanzania, Hoyce Jacob Lyimo-Mbowe helpfully approaches her work from an African cultural perspective. Informed by the work of African women scholars such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and especially by Madiapoane Masenya’s *bosadi* hermeneutic (e.g. Masenya 2004), Lyimo-Mbowe inquires whether biblical texts are oppressive or liberative and emancipatory for Maasai women. (*Bosadi* means “womanhood” in Northern Sotho.) A traditional Maasai man stereotypically treats the Maasai woman (*enkitok*) as inferior to the

man, counting her as a mere child rather than as an adult (e.g., see Barron 2019). As most Maasai churches are overwhelmingly female (see Hodgson 2005), it is important that the voices of Maasai Christian women (*inkituaak*) are not silenced. Lyimo-Mbowe's proposed *enkitok* biblical hermeneutic lays a foundation with the social action philosophy of "see, judge, and act" (80) that has a goal of bringing a Jesus-centered social transformation. Her discussion reminds me favorably of Andrew Walls's discussions on the nature of Christian conversion (Walls 1990, 2004, 2012; for conversion in Maasai contexts see Barron 2021a). Lyimo-Mbowe then adds two important Maasai values: unity and solidarity (83). The result is "a participatory approach that brings together the oppressed [i.e., Maasai women] and oppressors [i.e., Maasai men] to discuss their challenges from the biblical point of view and find solutions together" (85). After reviewing the understandings of Maasai "ordinary readers" of four OT passages, including one story that deals with a polygynous family that resonates with Maasai contextual realities, Lyimo-Mbowe concludes with a recognition of the transformative role of the Christian faith, emphasizing that "the Church as a voice for the voiceless should intensify efforts towards the emancipation of women" (212). I believe that her *enkitok* approach to biblical hermeneutics may provide an opportunity for an "Ephesians Moment" (Walls 2002, 2007) of reconciliation between Maasai men and women (see also Barron 2019).

*A Maasai Encounter with the Bible:
Nomadic Lifestyle as a Hermeneutic Question*

Zephania Shila Nkesela, another Tanzanian biblical scholar, considers the very culture and lifestyle of the Maasai as a hermeneutical question. Within the worldview of traditional Maasai culture, there is no such thing as private ownership of land (*enkop*). Instead, temporary occupiers of land hold it in trust from God (*enkAi*) Godself, the creator and true owner of the land (121). (The Maa name for God is *enkÁí*. The predominate dialect of Maa in Tanzania pronounces this as *enÁí* or *ηÁí*, which these three Peter Lang monographs anglicize as "Ngai." For more on Maasai naming of God, see Barron 2021b.) Politically, Tanzania's forced *Vijiji vya Ujamma* or villagization policy under President Nyerere (1979–1977) constrained the semi-nomadic Maasai to live in settled villages. Moreover, Kenya's earlier policy limited Maasai herdsman to designated "group ranches," and Kenya's current policy forces privatization of land resources. Even so, many Maasai men continue to travel with their flocks and herds seeking adequate grass and water for their livestock. These contextual worldview and political realities unavoidably impact Maasai understandings of Scripture.

Nkesela wryly notes that "Christianity does not demand changing all aspects of the indigenous people's culture." He proceeds to observe that insisting that converts to Christianity must abandon their cultures "might not be a good strategy for Africans like the Maasai" who place such a strong value on their ethno-cultural identity (41). As Kwame Bediako noted nearly 30 years ago, "A clear definition of African Christian identity" is impossible apart from an integration into "an adequate sense of African selfhood" (Bediako 1992, 10). Thus Nkesela acknowledges the cultural "oral text" from which Maasai will necessarily approach the biblical text (37–38). Building on Knut Holter's "complementary model" of contextualized OT studies (e.g., Holter 2006; see also Holter 2000 and 2008), trained biblical scholars such as Nkesela (and myself) are able to partner with Maasai "ordinary readers" who "acknowledge each other as equal participants despite the different contributions" which each group offers (113). This Maasai contextualized biblical study can address "traditional [and] modern African experience and concerns" (12) while providing "mutual enrichment" (194) for ordinary readers and scholars alike.

Maasai Encounters with the Bible

Knut Holter, a Norwegian theologian with a long history researching African biblical scholarship, and Lemburis Justo, a Maasai theologian, have edited this important collection of essays arising from The Maasai and the Bible Project. In the Foreword, Kenyan theologian Jesse N. K. Mugambi notes that this book contributes to “the necessity and importance of counter-balancing biblical *hermeneutics* with biblical *exegesis*” (9). Listed below as subtitles are the nine chapter’s authors and titles of *Maasai Encounters* listed in the table of contents; some chapters are given longer titles in the text itself.

1. Knut Holter, “Content of a Contextual Project”

Stressing that “the Bible is a Maasai book!” (13), Holter outlines the volume goals, offers “some reflections and perspectives on the encounter between Maasai and the Bible” (13–14), notes “the changing cultural contexts of Christianity” (14–18), provides a brief ethnographic introduction to the Maasai, and briefly summarizes each of the following chapters.

2. Hoyce Jacob Lyimo-Mbowe, “Genesis 1:27 in Maasai Context”

The chapter’s longer title is “Reading Genesis 1:27 with Maasai Research Participants.” After distinguishing between “ordinary readers” and “professional readers,” Lyimo-Mbowe offers a distillation of the pertinent parts of her monograph reviewed above.

3. Zephania Shila Nkesela, “Genesis 13:8–9”

The full title is “Abraham’s Solution to the Land Crisis in Genesis 13:8–9.” Noting that the instinctive Maasai interpretation of this pericope is “If this worked for Abraham and Lot why not for us?” in contemporary land crises, Nkesela’s essay gives glimpses into his PhD research project; his dissertation was later revised as the monograph reviewed above.

4. Suzana Sitayo, “Women, Land, & Bible in Context”

The full title of this essay is “Women, Land, and Bible: Reflections on Mbowe’s and Nkesela’s Essays.” As a Maasai, a woman, and a trained theologian with a pastoral calling in the ELCT, Sitayo’s reflective response is most welcome. Sitayo acknowledges that within Maasai Christianity, “The traditional worldviews continue to dominate people who attend church services, and they also tend to shape the Christians’ view of the Bible.... [T]he church cannot any longer ignore the role of traditional practices and worldviews, simply because it shapes the way people read, understand, and interpret the Bible” (62). She then observes that many “popular” readings (which I would call *misreadings*) of the Bible actually “cement an oppression of women that is culturally based” (64). Sitayo then asserts that intercultural hermeneutics can serve to emphasize that the proper message of the Scripture offers emancipation and liberation for Maasai women (65). My own research among Kenyan Maasai confirms Sitayo’s claim (Barron 2019).

5. Gerrie Snyman, “Coloniality, Christianity & Identity”

Snyman’s essay, more fully entitled “Is There a ‘Post’ in ‘Colony’? Reader Reception and a De-Colonial Framework,” sets the book’s essays within the broader context of African hermeneutics and biblical studies generally, noting the legitimate concern for decolonization.

6. Lemburis Justo, “Maasai Context in Relation to the Bible”

Lemburis Justo, co-editor of this book along with Knut Holter, is the second Maasai contributor. On a personal note, I must report that I had only just become acquainted with Justo in December 2020 and was looking forward to getting to know him and to collaborate with

him when I learned of his untimely death from illness at the beginning of this year (2021). The full weight of his loss will be felt not only by his family but also by the Maasai Christian community.

The full title of his essay is “Maasai Context in Relation to the Bible: Experiences from Theological Education by Extension.” In Tanzania the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) program, which is widely used across Africa, began operating in 1974 as “a joint venture between the Arusha Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and the [Roman] Catholic Archdiocese of Arusha” (91). As such, the program has extensive experience “of Maasai contextuality in relation from the Bible” (91). Because TEE is designed to arise from and take place within local contexts (92), it provides an opportunity for “the community involvement” which “enriches and complements the work of theological and biblical scholars” (93).

Justo laments that too often there has been a rift between any theologizing by Maasai ordinary readers and that done by academically trained church leaders. With great frequency, African “professional interpreters” have disregarded “their own cultural contexts as incompatible” with proper scholarly exegesis. In that context, he reminds such professional readers that, though “our exegetical methods detach and distance us from our own culture by offering scientific techniques, the cultural reality of the exegete cannot be excluded from the process of scriptural interpretation” (95). Justo’s point is that, instead of rejecting their Africanity as foreign to Christianity, African exegetes should bring the perspectives which arise from their very Africanity into the exegetical process. When an African disregards or discards his or her culture in favor of the “objective” methods of Western scholarship, the typical result is merely an imposition of Western cultural paradigms “on African interpretive communities” (95), bringing about the need for the hermeneutical decolonization which Snyman discusses in the previous chapter.

Engaging with Kenyan theologian John S. Mbiti (1979), Justo emphasizes that Christian conversion takes place within cultures rather than throwing out culture (96–97). As Andrew F. Walls states in many places, Christian conversion is the turning toward Christ “what is already there.” Justo then gives an example of this understanding of conversion with an intercultural exploration of the Maasai concept of the “firstborn” in dialogue with the Christological uses of “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος) in the NT (99–105). Acknowledging that the Maasai “ELCT is not at ease, yet, with contextual theology” (105), he points the way forward for “Maasai hearers, readers, preachers, and interpreters” to be enabled to “relate the message of Christ to their own framework of thought” while remaining thoroughly within “the realm of Christian faith and tradition” (105). Note as well how Justo lists “Maasai hearers” first, before “Maasai readers.”

7. Knut Holter, “Maasai and Ancient Israelites”

Anyone who has spent any time with the Maasai will appreciate the full title of this next essay, “The Maasai and the Ancient Israelites: Religio-Cultural Parallels.” When my wife and I moved, with our young children, to live among the Maasai adjacent to the Maasai Mara over 14 years ago, it was not long before we noticed many similarities between the Maasai and the ancient Israelites whom we read about in the biblical texts. We were not the first. In 1910, Moritz Merker published an ethnography of the Maasai in which he went so far as to claim that the Maasai *must* be either Jewish or “one of the so-called lost tribes of Israel” (109). In popular discourse, much has been made of these similarities. Some, following Merker, have argued for a genetic approach, i.e., that the Maasai are the lineal descendants of ancient Israel. Holter offers a robust critique of three versions of this interpretation (108–112). Others take a thematic approach, noting that such similarities can arise from “more or less corresponding socio-

economic conditions” (112–113); Lyimo-Mbowe and Nkesela’s contributions to this volume take this approach. Leonard A. Mtaita, a Maasai Lutheran theologian, provides an earlier example of this framework, investigating a “conscious contextualization of faith and church in relation to doing mission with the Maasai” (113; see Mtaita 1998). Others, such as Justo in this volume, have pushed this socio-economic connection further with a deeper dive into biblical studies. The chapter concludes by noting that the thematic approach to these similarities “has a great potential—partly for ‘enculturating’ biblical texts and motifs in Maasai culture, and partly also for facilitating a deeper understanding of these biblical texts and motifs” (117).

8. Beth E. Elness-Hanson, “YHWH in the Kimaasai Bible”

This chapter was the first one I read in this volume, as I have been deeply invested in the relevant issues. As I observe elsewhere,

The divine name, YHWH, in the OT is typically rendered as *Lord* in English translations, with the small caps distinguishing the divine name from various titles (such as *Adonai*) which are translated as *Lord*. The then-current edition of the Maa Bible (1991) obliterated this distinction by translating both *Lord* and *Lord* as *Olaitoriani* (the Maa version was translated from the English RSV with no reference to the biblical languages); *olaitoriani* is derived from the Maa verb *aitore*, “to rule over, to be in charge” (Barron 2021c).

When I served as a Bible translation consultant with The Bible Society of Kenya for their project of revising/correcting the Maa Bible (2011–2017), I made a case for doing something different (see Barron 2021b, 9–11 and 13–14). I was unsuccessful, and the 2018 edition of the Maa Bible retained the usage of *Olaitoriani*. In this chapter, Elness-Hanson makes a stronger case than I had been able to make that rendering YHWH as *Olaitoriani* in OT texts is both unsuitable and limiting. (Disclosure: though I had quite forgotten the matter until I read this chapter, Elness-Hanson had actually consulted with me on this issue, and on p. 138 she cites an email I wrote to her in 2013.)

In important ways, using *olaitoriani* to render God’s divine name, the title *Adonai*, and other titles of lordship (including for human masters) serves “to reduce the dynamics of Hebrew vocabulary and flattens the dimensions of the text” (135). “At the core of the identity represented by the name YHWH is the relationship with a covenantal, reconciling, and relentlessly loving God. However, “the God who rules” does not adequately relay this in a Maasai context” (137).

I could not agree more. I only wish that the entire revision committee of The Bible Society of Kenya had had an opportunity to read this essay or, better, to discuss this issue with Elness-Hanson before the 2018 edition of the Maa Bible had gone to press.

9. Jesse N. K. Mugambi, “Bible and Ecumenism”

In this chapter, “The Bible and Ecumenism in African Christianity: In honour of Professor Knut Holter,” Professor Mugambi “explores usage of the Bible” specifically “as the scriptural foundation of the Christian faith” (147). He expresses hope that other scholars will follow the example of the many books resulting from Holter’s teaching and research (including the three volumes reviewed here). He rejoices in John S. Mbiti’s signal achievement as “the first African scholar to translate the entire New Testament from original Greek Text into an African language as the sole author” (149), which he considers as a primary mark of maturity for African Christianity (149–150). Blaming the ignorance on the part of translators of either the biblical languages and/or of the target language (with its culture), Mugambi notes that for many

Africans the Bible is considered an alien book. Nonetheless, for African Christians the Bible retains a “unifying and indispensable function ... in the Christian faith” (158). Believing that the participants of The Bible and Maasai Project have set an example for others, he encourages others concerned how “the Bible is used in the African context” (169) to “go and do likewise!” (179).

Maasai and the Bible Project: Observations and Conclusions

Each of these four volumes clearly demonstrates that “the Bible has the potential to strengthen” Maasai culture (Nkesele 2020, 213) and thus, by extrapolation, African culture in general. The books show how “the concepts of authentically Christian and authentically African are complementary rather than contradictory” (Barron 2021c). While these publications have some room for improvement (see my critique, Barron 2021c), I wholeheartedly recommend all four of these books as “must reads” for anyone working in missions or in theological education among Nilotic groups generally and the Maasai and Samburu specifically. I likewise recommend then for anyone, African or otherwise, who works with African Christians or with African churches.

Ordinary Reader Hermeneutics Is Vernacular

It is increasingly recognized within the discipline of African Biblical Hermeneutics that “both scholarly readers and the ordinary readers [are] capable hermeneuts” (Kĩnyua 2011, 2; see also West 1999, Elness-Hanson 2017, Lyimo-Mbowe 2020, Nkesela 2020). Ordinary readers, of course, are those who are not part of the scholarly guild or who otherwise lack training in interpreting biblical texts. As someone who is a scholarly reader with a commitment to equipping ordinary readers, I must ask myself whether “our biblical scholarship is committed more to our (elitist) peers than to people on the grassroots” (Masenya 2016, 4). It is also apparent that ordinary readers are most at home when approaching the biblical text in their own vernacular. Kwame Bediako saliently reminds us that “Mother tongues and new idioms are crucial for gaining fresh insights into the doctrine of Christ” (Bediako 1998, 111)—true not just for Christology but for biblical interpretation generally. As a foreign missionary myself, I remember that access to vernacular Bible translations necessarily results in African hermeneutical agency as well as placing foreign missionaries in a subordinate position to the local Christians (Sanneh 2009, 196; West 2018, 245). I am a partner of ordinary Maasai readers, and I am not in charge.

An *Enkiteng* Hermeneutic?

After observing that “the Bible in African languages remains the most influential tool of rooting the Bible in African consciousness,” Masenya (Ngwan’a Mphahlele) and Ramantswana go on to note “the limitations of foregrounding the Bible as written word within aural contexts” (Masenya and Ramantswana 2015, 5) of Africa. These twin realities loomed large for my wife and me when we moved in 2007 to “the bush” of Maasai Land in southern Kenya in order to assist the local churches with curriculum development. Our work must be grounded in the Maa translation of Scripture and must take account of the importance of orality in Maa culture. We must not be concerned only with the “ordinary Maasai reader” but primarily with “the ordinary Maasai listener.” The first matter at hand, of course, was to learn the Maa language. But eventually we had to begin creating curricula! We had previously taught at a small Bible institute in South Africa (2000–2001). We had seen that simply transplanting western ways of thinking and studying was not working. Pastors could be trained to preach a good sermon in English, but they weren’t being equipped to exegete Scripture in their own vernacular. (Of course, we have also seen U.S.-American seminary grads who could pontificate doctrine but who couldn’t connect with the ordinary readers and hearers in the pews of their churches.) So

we were committed to finding a different way. First of all, we knew that Maasai church leaders needed to teach in the Maa language and *as* Maasai Christians instead of just reproducing a British style lecture. What would that look like?

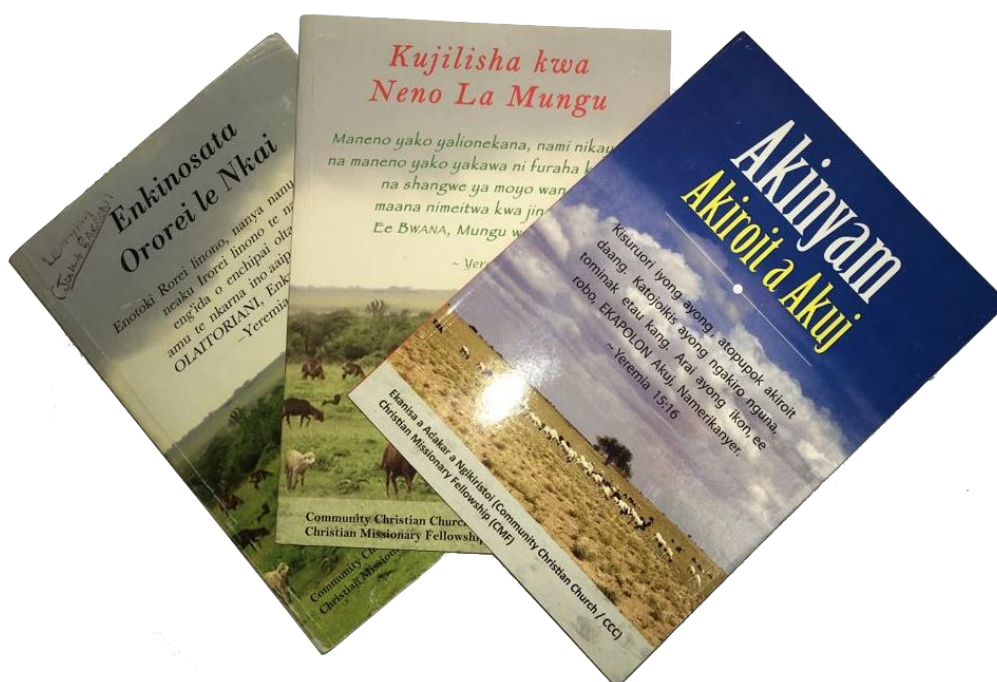
We learned that, traditionally, the Maasai teach and engage in character formation through storytelling, parables, drama, and proverbs—and never through a western style lecture! (Etymologically, a *lecture* is the act of reading something that had been written. In many Kenyan schools and universities, lectures are the act of a lecturer reading his or her lecture notes, which were written by someone else. So from start to finish a *lecture* is simply foreign to Maasai culture.) This same teaching style is common across much of Africa. Kĩnyua, an Agĩkũyũ biblical scholar from Kenya, proposes that scholarly readers and ordinary readers alike should “engage the Bible through the language of the African theatre and storytelling” (Kĩnyua 2011, 322). Why, we wondered, weren’t we seeing that in the local Maasai congregations? Why were Maasai Christians instead trying to imitate foreign models? We set out at once to learn as many traditional Maasai stories and proverbs as we could and to learn traditional Maasai modes of communication. Effective communication had to be appropriately contextual for the culture. This brings us to *enkiteng*.

Enkiteng is the Maa word for “cow.” Traditionally, the Maasai are semi-nomadic herdsfolk, raising cows, sheep, and goats. Culturally, cows are the most important animal. To be wealthy means to have cows and children. The Maasai will see the wealthiest (in others’ eyes) world leader who has neither cows nor children as impoverished. The plural of *enkiteng* is *inkishu*. Interestingly, the Maa word for “life” is *enkishui*. This linguistic similarity points to the integral and intimate connection in the worldview of the Maasai between cows and human life.

So when we were asked to teach an “inductive Bible study” course at a local Discipleship Training School (since rebranded as the Maasai Discipleship Training Institute), we started with a parable about cows. Cows, of course, are ruminants—they chew the cud. They don’t just swallow chunks of food down without chewing. They chew it thoroughly before swallowing. Later, they regurgitate the grasses they have eaten and chew the cud a second time. In that way they can extract all the goodness out of the grass—something that elephants, for example, cannot do, as even a casual comparison of cow and elephant dung will reveal. Likewise, a good shepherd (the most common Maasai designation is *olchekut* (for men) or *enchekut* (for women), both referring to a shepherd of livestock generally, not just of sheep) knows the importance of pasture rotation. Only grazing in one spot is bad for the pasture and eventually bad for the cows as well. Instead, it is necessary to migrate to new pastures to allow the grass to recover at the former one. In the same way, Christians should intake Scripture as the cow intakes grass, taking time to “chew the cud.” Similarly, Christians should “graze” throughout the whole of Scripture, not just from their favorite Gospel or Epistle.

It is worth mentioning here that “eating” or “chewing” is a common idiom in Maa. Where Hebrew speaks of “cutting a covenant,” Maa speaks of “eating an oath.” Traditional greetings include elaborate exchanges of “eating the news.” When you want to catch up with someone, you will invite them, *mainosa ilomon!* (“let’s eat the news!”); the word *ainos* is one of the verbs for eating; *enkinosata* refers to the act of eating. Thus we speak of *enkinosata Ororei le Nkai*, “eating the Word of God,” *anaa enkiteng nanyaal ing’amura*, “as the cow chews the cuds.” (The Maa phrases meaning “eating the news,” using the verbs *ainos* or *anya*, are usually translated as “chewing the news” in English, though *nanyaal* is the proper term for “to chew;” this is probably due to the influence of the English idiom of “chewing the fat.”) We have developed this intricate subject more fully in Maa elsewhere (e.g, Barron and Barron 2008, 27–28 and 48–57).

That first course on *Enkinosata Ororei le Nkai* was so well received and proved so helpful that we developed it into a full curriculum which went to press in December 2008. The full title translates to “Eating the Word of God: Comprehending the Holy Bible: How You Can Really Listen to the Word of God in the Bible so that You Grasp Its Meaning.” We created it with the understanding that for the majority of the Maasai congregants in rural congregations orality is far more important than literacy, especially among the older generations. Sometimes the teacher or preacher might be the only reader in the gathering. (In other words, we took the African contextual reality of the importance of orality quite seriously.) After an introductory “instructions for teachers” which explains how to use the following lessons and demonstrates the importance of communicating in a Maasai fashion, there are ten lessons (though most Maasai teachers take more than ten sessions to teach the material). All the lessons are parable based, using parables which arise naturally out of Maa culture—just as the parables of Jesus rose naturally out of his surrounding cultural context—and include the frequent use of *enkiguran* (“drama”). We give examples of how one may, as a Maasai, “chew the cud” of the biblical texts in order to direct Maa cultural questions to Scripture.



The Enkinosata book has since been translated into / adapted for kiSwahili and NgaTurkana. Just this month we have been asked to publish second editions of the Maa and kiSwahili editions, and to consider preparing an English translation as well.

Charles Nyamati, the Tanzanian theologian, taught that “the Christian has something to learn from the traditional African; not in the sense of new doctrines, but in the sense of new insights and new ways of understanding God” (1977, 57); I would add “new insights and new ways of understanding Scripture.” As we worked on the *Enkinosata* project and as I have continued to develop in my other research and teaching what I have here called an *enkitemu* hermeneutic, I have tried to encourage Maasai believers “to embrace and celebrate the use” of their Maa language in their biblical interpretations and in their theologizing and “to make full use both of Maa culture and language” in intersection with the Scripture as they build up the Church of Christ in Maasailand (Barron 2021b, 15). I hope that as a professional reader I thus have been able to join Maasai indigenous and ordinary readers of Scripture as “partners in an ethical way of relating the biblical texts to the context” (Nkesela 2020, 10).

Conclusion

Like Masenya and Ramantswana, I am convinced that “For Africans to contribute meaningfully in the global village, they are not required to abandon their African optic lenses. Rather, it is through such lenses that they are called upon to contribute to the global intercultural theological or biblical hermeneutics table as equal partners” (Masenya and Ramantswana 2015, 3). Through this *enkiteng* hermeneutic—an intercultural Maasai African Biblical hermeneutic—Maa culture and the cultural sensibilities of the ordinary readers among the Maasai people are privileged. This “encounter between the Maasai and the Bible provides conceptual tools for strengthening not only [Maasai culture] but also African culture and identity more generally” (Nkesala 2020, 194), enabling Maasai Christians to translate “biblical truth into [the] vernacular categories and worldview” (Shaw 2010, 167) “of the broader Maa culture” (Barron 2021a, 5). Masenya and Ramantswana correctly assert that “the survival of African Biblical Hermeneutics depends on African biblical scholars digging more wells from which Africans will quench their thirst” (Masenya and Ramantswana 2015, 11). Through an *enkiteng* hermeneutic, I have seen numerous such new wells flow with the *enkare namelok* (“sweet water”) of new insights for Maasai Christianity (for some examples of possibilities of such new wells, see Barron 2019 and Barron 2021b).

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Losing Yourself for the Sake of the Gospel: Witness in the Early Church and Implications for Evangelism in Spain Today

Deborah Galyen

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Abstract

This article analyzes Jesus's call to self-denial for the sake of the gospel in Mark 8:34-38 as a potential paradigm for witness in Spain and other post-Christian societies. The article traces the theme of self-surrender/self-denial throughout the biblical narrative, showing that it is a necessary part of repentance and turning toward God in faith. Examples of how the early believers embraced this call provide implications for evangelism among Spaniards and other secular societies today. The author has served with the Assemblies of God World Missions in Spain since 2008 and is a PhD candidate at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.

Key Words: Christian ethics, Early Church, Europe, evangelism, Secularism, self-denial, Spain, witness

Introduction

“Jesus is fine, as long as he doesn't interfere with your freedom.” “You're the only practicing Christian I've ever met.” As a church planter in Andalusia, Spain, I hear statements like these regularly; the phrases exemplify the worldview and experiences of men and women in post-Christian, southern Europe. While being very familiar with the idea of Christianity, individuals lack contact with real believers and suspect that fervent religious commitment might inhibit their personal freedoms. After centuries of Roman Catholicism and decades of evangelism by Protestant missionaries, Spain remains challenging for those involved in Christian proclamation and church planting (Escobar 2014, 194). According to the Joshua Project, only 1.6% of people in Spain, from any background, report evangelical-type belief in Jesus as Savior (Joshua Project 2021). Long-term pastors see individual breakthroughs but acknowledge that Spain's small evangelical networks have had little or no impact on the broader society (Protestante Digital 2021).

In a land filled with church buildings, public crosses, and pilgrimage sites, men and women in Spain still need a “genuinely missionary encounter” with the gospel, as missionary Lesslie Newbigin declared decades ago upon returning to Europe (Newbigin 1986, 1). Those who bear the gospel in Spain face the question of what this genuine encounter should look like among people cynical about historic religion, especially Christianity, and committed to the ideals of pluralism and the pursuit of self-actualization. However, the gospel has faced daunting obstacles before, and the New Testament and early church narratives document the extraordinary growth of the Church in a hostile, pluralistic environment. Modern believers can learn from their example about the ways in which ordinary Spirit-transformed Christians who answer Christ's call to “lose themselves” can impact the world.

Mark 8:35-38 in Biblical Theology

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can

a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (ESV).

The fact that all four Gospel writers report these words reflects their centrality in the message and ministry of Jesus (Matthew 10:39, Luke 17:33, John 12:25). While modern readers may gloss over Jesus’s words as hyperbole, Ben Witherington III points out that Jesus directed His call of radical self-denial to both the crowd and the disciples—to everyone, not a select, elite leadership core (Witherington 2001, 244). To “come after” Jesus, men and women must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. Jesus’s call to “lose one’s life” for his sake and the sake of the gospel is nothing less, Witherington says, than “a walk on the wild side” (Witherington 2001, 244), a willingness to turn every aspect of life over to him without conditions, and even, if necessary, to die physically for his sake. Rather than hyperbole, Jesus walked this path and presented it as the reality of discipleship.

In the verses just before this passage, Peter objects to Jesus’s saying that the Son of Man must suffer and be killed; Jesus then fiercely rebukes him for choosing “the things of man” rather than the way of God (Mark 8:31-38). As Darrell Bock notes, the self-sacrifice of their Messiah went against everything the disciples hoped for: “What was an expectation of a deliverance by power would be accomplished in another way, by suffering and sacrifice” (Bock 2015, 244). Jesus was teaching His disciples and the crowds that the way he would provide their salvation—radical self-sacrifice motivated by love—would form the path that they, too, must follow, both as disciples and witnesses (“for the sake of the gospel,” verse 35). Jesus called them to give up their rights to the “self in the full sense of that term” (Bock 2015, 245), in the assurance that they would gain much more: reconciliation with the Father, adoption as his children, the indwelling power of the Spirit to live as his witnesses, and eternal life (John 1:12; Acts 1:8; John 3:16).

While the coming of the Messiah revealed the full nature of God’s redemptive plan, the call to self-surrender flowing from obedient trust traces back through the narrative of the Old Testament. The original choice of humanity to rebel against God meant that sin twisted the very core of their beings. Seizing the power to decide good and evil for themselves, the first humans fractured their relationship with the Creator and thus their identity as God’s image-bearers, leading to spiritual alienation at their core, reflected in broken relationships with each other and the creation. Therefore, God’s initial call to Abraham and his later dealings with Israel always included the requirement to turn away from the sinful, fractured self, to risk losing “the whole world” as Jesus later put it, and turn in faith toward him. God called Abraham to leave his family and ancestral lands and head out toward a land God would show him (Genesis 12:1). Abraham gave up his family’s idols, his security, his culture, and the right to control his destiny, because he trusted that God would fulfill his promises. Abraham’s later test of faith, the sacrifice of Isaac, re-affirmed his willingness to “deny himself”—to surrender his most precious treasure and symbol of his future, in obedient trust to the Lord’s command (Genesis 22). Renouncing the old self, whether the traditional self-in-community or the more modern Western individualistic self, has always been part of turning toward the Creator so that his image in humanity may be restored.

Ultimately, neither Abraham nor Israel as a nation could live in perfectly obedient trust with the Lord; because of sin, they failed to exemplify the righteousness produced by faith which God requires of his image-bearers. But Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, the new Israel, the new Adam, answered the call on humanity’s behalf and perfectly lived out that trusting obedience, all the way

to death on a cross. When men and women deny their sinful, broken selves and turn in faith toward Jesus, they become sharers in his Sonship by grace. United with Christ, their “selves” are healed, and his indwelling Spirit empowers them to live in a new way—to receive new identities, to be born again (John 3:16). Robert Stein says that answering the call of Jesus directly confronts the human aspiration to control our own lives, because we must say “no to the self as the determiner of one’s goals, aspirations, and desires; to accept the cross of suffering shame and/or death” (Stein 2008, 406). Encouraged by the epistles of the New Testament, the Spirit-empowered believers of the first centuries attempted to live out this life of radical faith, self-surrender, and obedience to Christ, and the world around them turned upside down as a result (Crum 1984, 4).

Self-denial as Witness in Acts and the Early Church

“Losing Yourself” in the First Decades

Jesus’s call to “lose oneself” for his sake was picked up and demonstrated by new believers as the gospel swept from Jerusalem outward into the Roman Empire, according to the book of Acts. Jewish Christians bravely followed the Spirit’s leading by accepting Gentiles into the family of God, “losing themselves” as they risked their own social standing and acceptance in synagogues for the sake of the gospel of grace (Acts 15). Believing Gentiles, for their part, renounced idolatry and in so doing risked their reputations and livelihoods, as they burned magic books and disrupted the trade in silver idols in Ephesus (Acts 19).

Paul directly connected the way he and other Apostles lived and responded to hardship as giving credibility to their role as gospel-bearers, and he urged believers in Corinth to follow their example rather than imitate the competitive, self-centered ways of the world. After declaring his commitment to “the ministry of reconciliation,” (II Corinthians 5:18), Paul explains: “We commend ourselves in every way, by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities ...patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love ... as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (II Corinthians 6:4-10). Possessing the “everything” of forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, a new spiritual family, and the power of the Spirit for daily life gave Paul and others courage in the face of the loss of “the whole world”—their former certainties and earthly security.

The Apostle Peter seemed to think that facing repercussions for following Christ was normal, and after reminding believers of their amazing inheritance as citizens of Christ’s kingdom (I Peter 1:4), he urged them to be careful how they lived in front of the world. Their actions and attitudes, especially under pressure, revealed the reality of Jesus to their neighbors.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing ... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame (I Peter 3:9-16).

The New Testament writers never held back from urging both Jewish and Gentile believers to embrace a new ethic based on what their Savior had done. Blessing instead of reviling, sharing truth with gentleness and respect, cheerfully accepting “suffering for righteousness’ sake” (I Peter 3:14), the new community burst into the world full of the Spirit’s power in weakness, not their own strength.

“Losing Yourself” in the First Centuries

Far from being an unattainable idea, self-denial and obedience to the Way of Christ were normative for early Christians, Eckhart Schnabel argues. They accepted that joining the family of Jesus included “losing,” or renouncing the socially-acceptable, familiar ways of living in order to walk a new path. “Paul, Peter, and John and presumably all early Christian missionaries regarded the behavior of the followers of Jesus in the contexts of the growing churches and of daily life in their families and at their workplace as important for missionary outreach” (Schnabel 2004, 1547). Larry Hurtado links the Christians’ distinctive lifestyles to persuasive witness, since for any new movement to grow, “there has to be a clear difference between being an insider to the group and an outsider” (Hurtado 2016, 7). According to his research, the best estimates of Christian growth indicate that there were around 1000 Christians in 40 AD and five to six million by 300 AD (Hurtado 2016, 4). If early Christians had simply “affirmed and reflected” the values, beliefs, and behaviors of their neighbors, no one would have bothered to join them (Hurtado 2016, 10). Instead, using the *Epistle to the Diognetus* of the second century as an example, early Christians exhibited radically counter-cultural behaviors, Hurtado argues. They turned their backs on the idolatry of their society and such evils as the killing of unwanted infants, and they refused to participate in the violence-as-entertainment spectacles of the gladiator arena (Hurtado 2016, 144, 149). Perhaps even more surprisingly, following Jesus’s example the Christians responded to slander, insults, and rejection by loving, offering respect, and praying for those who hated them (Hurtado 2016, 153).

Glenn Fluegge, commenting on the early church’s evangelistic methods, writes that “the most immediate, unintentional, and yet inestimably effective attraction to the church was the pious life of its members” (Fluegge 2016, 10). The Christians’ way of life contrasted greatly with the Roman or Greek way of life, especially in the areas of sexual fidelity, household relationships, and moral courage even in the face of martyrdom (Fluegge 2016, 10). Referencing Tertullian, Fluegge observes that the behavior of ordinary Christian men and women—like sacrificial generosity, caring for widows and orphans, and all kinds of “deeds of love”—gave outsiders “a favorable and attractive view of the church. This left them prepared for more intentional, and thus structured, methods of evangelism” (Fluegge 2016, 11). Along with transformed family and household relationships, their patient endurance under pressure and praying for their enemies rather than striking back reflected their deep confidence in God (Schnabel 2004, 1537, 1547). In his exploration of evangelism in the Early Church, Michael Green agrees that “there can be no doubt that it was the changed lifestyle of the early Christians which made such a deep impact upon classical antiquity” (Green 1970, 19). In fact, Green argues, Christians’ bold insistence on real conversion, real faith, and total surrender to Jesus as Lord and Savior was what made an impact in an ancient world “more relativist and far more pluralist than our own” (Green 1970, 21).

Implications for Witness among Spaniards and Secular Post-Christians Today

Particular Challenges of a Secular Context

In some sense, no one should be surprised that Jesus’s call to deny self and follow him are not palatable to Spaniards who are part of a Western and global culture, which Charles Taylor famously described as an age marked by expressive individualism and self-orientation (Taylor 2018, 473). A recent survey of 1600 people in the region of Catalonia reported that 47% of people still considered themselves religious, but only 4.2% of the group felt that these beliefs *held any significance* for their personal relationships (Departament de Justicia 2020), indicating that the link

between religion, belief, and behavior has been broken. Meanwhile, the World Values Survey reports that more than 60% of Spaniards say they attend religious services once a year or less, with 46% saying almost never (World Values Survey 2017-2020). Spaniards, like many others in the Western world, are seeking various non-religious ways to make sense of life. In popular culture, Christianity represents many things which young secularists reject: moral obligations, traditions, authority, restrictive gender roles and definitions, and exclusivist claims about good and evil as well as heaven and hell.

In addition to the offensiveness of Christianity's perceived values, the postmodern embrace of "mosaic" beliefs and flexible, non-binary thinking creates unique problems for Christian witness (Lee 2015, 29; Lee 2021). Spiritual experiences may truly impact a secularist who also feels free to fold that experience into her own ever-changing, self-defined worldview. As Pastor Anne Johanson writes about conversion in Denmark (Johanson 2020, 126), spiritual experiences can be catalysts, but alone they don't bring people to Christ. Verbal proclamation also plays a large and necessary part in any true witness to Christ, yet individualist, educated Spaniards—like anyone raised in a Western culture—are adept at hearing and believing only the parts of the gospel message that resonate with their own core values. As Pastor Johanson states, the third facet of effective witness among Europeans (after spiritual experiences and competent preaching) is contact with the visible witness of life in the faith community (Johanson 2020, 170). Here, the Early Church again has much to teach modern gospel-bearers.

Renouncing the Idols in the Post-Christian, Secular West

The Book of Acts tells the story of new believers in Ephesus burning their magic books and idols, and the believers of the early centuries willingly faced Roman persecution and social exclusion as they rejected Emperor-worship and lived publicly as Christians. Both offer examples of people "losing themselves"—renouncing their old ways, turning their backs on their old identities, behaviors, and familiar sources of security—for Jesus's sake as they embraced new life and new identities as citizens of his kingdom. The question raised for this article's focus concerns what, exactly, *renouncing the idols* looks like today in secular Europe and Western cultures. There are still people who engage in explicit sorcery and magical rituals, but millions more are enslaved to the modern idols of materialism, self-sufficiency, sexual freedom, and the pursuit of fame. The witness of the Early Church suggests that Christians in today's secular societies must grapple with their own entanglement with contemporary idols and provide visible examples of what it looks like to renounce those idols' power and live instead under Christ's authority. To believe that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life, rather than one option among many similar paths, non-Christians must see Spirit-empowered believers living radically different lives, especially in core areas such as sexual purity, loving one's enemies, and refusing the temptations of greed, power, and self-definition (Newbigin 1995, 38). If Christians seem to have renounced nothing but, instead, just like the pagans around them pursue influence by worldly means, retaliate when attacked, are more concerned with their own rights than the well-being of others, or are obsessed with "finding the real self" as Charles Taylor put it (Taylor 2018, 475), they weaken their ability to testify to Jesus as King (II Peter 2:2).

In cases where Christians are indeed committed to a lifestyle rooted in biblical principles and Jesus-honoring attitudes of gentleness and respect, the question must then be asked if their lives intersect enough with non-Christians for their witness to matter. Gerald Sittser explains that early believers had very little privacy. By necessity, living in densely populated urban areas or multi-

family structures, the daily choices that transformed their core domestic relationships (husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants) played out in front of their neighbors, leading to natural questions about the faith that inspired such change (Sittser 2019, 111). Today, for many Christians employment is the only place they regularly encounter others of different worldviews. Housing, school, and social interactions provide what might be better possibilities for both verbal and non-verbal relational witness. In any case, Christians must intentionally choose to interact in these arenas. As secular societies drift away from the particularly Christian moorings of their heritages, believers may be tempted to protect themselves and their children by creating a safe, parallel world, shutting out secular influence in order to freely practice the Christian faith. While these Christian subcultures may provide a comfortable option for weary believers, they create barriers to natural witness.

The gospel must be contextualized for secular Spain and the Western world in the sense of communicating in ways that non-believers understand, and social media and other new technologies have much to offer in this area. But contextualization also means that we who bear Jesus's name, whether Christian leaders, pastors, missionaries, or ordinary disciples, must understand the every-day idols of Western culture and offer a credible alternative to living under their power. Urgent questions demand answers:

- *What are believers in a secular society willing to lose for Jesus's sake and the gospel?*
- *How do believers live out their faith transparently and openly among their neighbors, so that their Jesus-honoring choices provoke curiosity and engagement?*
- *What is today's equivalent to early Christians burning the magic books, renouncing idolatry, and facing persecution with humility and gentleness toward accusers?*

Believers certainly face pressure as Western societies become more antagonistic toward faith, but if the goal is to persuasively witness to Jesus, Christians must be careful not to emphasize their rights in a way that owes more to Enlightenment principles and individualism than to the Cross. The secular person's viewpoint—"Jesus is fine, as long as he doesn't interfere with your freedom"—can only be shaken by seeing the followers of King Jesus renouncing their idols, embracing his Way, and experiencing abundant life despite loss and hardship. Counterfeit freedom is exposed by encountering the real thing. The way of our crucified King turns secular society's obsession with self-protection and self-empowerment upside down: when those who love Jesus lose themselves for his sake, everyone gains.

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Apologetics in a Digital Age: Incarnating the Gospel for Africa's Next Gens

Kevin Muriithi Ndereba

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Abstract

This article explores how digital media culture affects young people in African cities in three major areas. First, it leads to a shift in the area of knowledge and certainty; second, it leads to isolation and attendant mental health issues; third, it provides a bridge for engaging popular culture's philosophical and religious ideas that are propagated by new media. This article proposes that, to counter digital isolation or assimilation, Christian leaders are called to "wise-engagement" modelled after Paul's apologetic in Acts 17. The article offers practical considerations for engaging in the apologetic task among Africa's next gens (generations).

Key Words: apologetics, digital media, next gens, practical theology, youth ministry.

Laying the Groundwork

The African continent plays a prominent role in God's mission to the world today (Sanneh and Carpenter 2005). Since 77% of her population are young and diverse, Christians must negotiate a plurality of worldviews and religions in engaging this critical demographic (Hajjar 2020). Apologetics must therefore be a critical component of any meaningful engagement in the continent.

The task of apologetics is an intellectual engagement of questions posed to Christian faith and takes either an offensive or defensive approach (Craig 2008, 15; Frame 1994, 1-2). In its traditional approach, apologetics has used different methodologies in handling a variety of questions, including offering a philosophical foundation for the existence of God, assessing the evidential claims surrounding Jesus Christ's Resurrection, and exploring the intersection of science and religion (Cowan and Gundry 2010; Craig 1991, 2018; Habermas 2012).

Though different apologetic schools emphasize particular aspects of the apologetic task, in general to engage in apologetics is a biblical command for all Christians. First, apologetics is part of ordinary Christian discipleship. *Apologia* is the Greek word for making a case for something (1 Pet 3:15). Peter is writing to dispersed Christians in the early Christian communities, instructing them, and us, that *apologia* is something with which every Christian should be conversant. Given the context of suffering and persecution that defines his letter, Peter shows us how "giving a reason for the hope that you have" is part of everyday Christian witnessing. Second, apologetics is not an "unspiritual" intellectual diatribe but a spiritual task of Christian formation. Paul writes, "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor 10:3-4 ESV). Intellectual strongholds are barriers that present themselves up against a worshipful knowledge of Christ. The task of apologetics is therefore to offer credible reasons for believing in Christ, while also critiquing faulty arguments against Christian belief (Frame 1994). Third, transformative apologetic engagement may make use of extra-biblical evidence such as theistic proofs and archaeological findings, but these are grounded in God's revelation in Scripture. It is precisely because God has made an intelligible world in the first place that we can engage in logical argument and scientific development (Frame 1994, 21-25). In other words, reason, arguments, and evidence are subordinate to Scripture. God has provided the evidence all people need. The problematic issue is people's "suppression of the truth" (Rom 1:18-20, Acts 17:31).

How exactly the apologetic task should be practiced in missional engagement with Africa's young people is the central question this article addresses.

An Insider's Perspective

My own pilgrimage is that I am a fourth generation Kenyan Christian and was nurtured in a Christian home. Having made a profession of faith at 16 years old, during my campus years I came across international students from other philosophical and religious backgrounds—including some students with no particular commitments. My prominent question at this time concerned the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in light of other religions. Some would merely retort, “just believe.” However, this response was not sufficient for my theological and philosophical issues surrounding the exclusivist view of truth.

My initial encounter with Christian apologetics was interacting with the works of William Lane Craig, Hugh Ross, and C. S. Lewis on digital platforms. Here was a stream of Christianity that appealed to both faith and reason. In my early twenties, upon reading the letter of First John, I had a deeper spiritual experience of the reality of sin and the offer of the grace of God in the gospel, and eventually I yielded my life to Christ. My intellectual barriers were really cushioned in spiritual antagonism to the claims of Christ. In other words, unbelief is usually a holistic issue that not only affects the head (thinking), but also involves the heart (affections) and the hands (volition) (Eph 4:17-19). Many emerging Africans have these tensions of Christian faith and the critical questions being asked.

However, the questions of young Africans regarding the Christian faith are more nuanced than Western apologetic approaches can address. While traditional apologetics methods have engaged Westerners' typical questions about God's existence and the problem of evil and suffering, apologetics engagement in interreligious contexts such as in African cities raises different questions (Netland 2012, 11). As practical ministry experience shows, young Africans are raising questions surrounding Christianity's acquiescence to the hostile colonial enterprise, the place of the Bible in shaping Africa's socio-economic challenges, and the reality of God in the presence of widespread suffering. In addition, the author's initial engagement in corporate life as an engineer, present pastoral ministry in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, postgraduate theological education at the University of South Africa, and experience as a lecturer at the Pan Africa Christian University inform this article's awareness of questions that young Africans are asking.

African Youth Are Not Monolithic

The “youth bulge” that is characteristic of the continent is varied in its definition. Young Africans are not monolithic but can be viewed through many different lenses. Rural and urban, traditional and postmodern, economically marginalized and privileged, plus religious and non-religious are just some of the categories taken up by the censuses of different countries. Further, there are rising communities of atheists in different parts of Africa, including the author's own city and country, Nairobi (Kenya), and other cities and countries like Lagos (Nigeria) and Cape Town (South Africa), among other prominent African cities. My practical ministry experience shows there is a rising generation of young Africans who demystify the “Africans are religious” tagline commonly proposed by religious scholars (Mbiti 1990). Given these varied cultural identifications and worldviews, how might apologetics engagement be a handmaid of transformative ministry to young Africans?

The COVID pandemic has raised the salience of digital technology in our everyday life as well as in Christian ministry. An oft-repeated statement in ministry engagement during the past year has been that “the world is online, but the Church is offline” or that “the Church's

evangelists must not answer the questions that they are asking but the questions that the next generation is asking.” Clearly there is a role that digital culture is playing in popular youth culture, with attendant consequences for apologetic engagement.

Employing an Empirical Methodology

Apologetics ministries in Africa include Ratio Christi South Africa, The Africa Center for Apologetics Research (Uganda), the Institute of Christian Apologetics Studies (Ghana), and Apologetics Kenya, among others. Ratio Christi is based on integrating a philosophical approach to the articulation of Christian faith and focused on campus students and professors. In Africa, the local chapters can be found in universities such as Potchefstroom and Pretoria (Ratio Christi South Africa n.d.). The Centers for Apologetics Research can be found in many countries worldwide, with the African office located in Uganda and engaged particularly in counter-cult research and evangelistic engagement in Africa (The Africa Center of Apologetics Research 2021). The Institute of Christian Apologetics Studies (ICAS) engages in evangelism and training for the apologetics task in Ghana, West Africa (Institute of Christian Apologies Studies (ICAS) 2021). Apologetics Kenya is a national ministry whose purpose is “to engage skeptics and to equip believers” to respond to questions asked within a postmodern and postcolonial African context. They have a vibrant digital ministry and host annual conferences (Apologetics Kenya 2021).

The research gap relative to African youth is that, while apologetics ministries in Africa are doing a commendable work in creating apologetic content, there is more that can be done in engaging digital natives in Africa. The digital age has shaped youth cultures deeply and in various ways, and apologetic engagement has not approached the unique issues raised by the changes in new media—especially within African contexts.

What follows comes from research the author has conducted into digital cultures and next generations (“gens”) within the fields of youth studies and youth ministry (Ndereba 2021a). Part of the research studies how young people are engaging with new media, how that engagement shapes youth cultures, and implications for discipleship. The research was a qualitative study among 15 young people in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), a Kenyan denomination, among its urban congregations in Nairobi. The article also includes other studies among young people within the fields of digital culture, youth studies, and adolescent development in order to broaden the approach. The following section unpacks arising themes and exegetes Acts 17 as a model of practical apologetic engagement.

Isolation, Assimilation, or Wise-Engagement?

In terms of the assumptions that underlie various analyses of digital media among young people, two extreme approaches can be taken. Both are based on critical approaches to digital media. Topf, for example, critiques the modern technological reality as a form of the Tower of Babel in how social media companies have become disproportionately wealthy and how the cyber-world negatively impacts human anthropology (Topf 2021). Although he does not then propose that we should be techno-phobic, Topf’s approach to digital culture and social media exemplifies an isolationist perspective. In addition to the just-described issues, this perspective considers the rising research in the area of how digital media has led to the increase in sexual deviant behavior or negatively affected mental health issues (Tamburrino et al. 2020), for example, and proposes that digital media should be abandoned. The second perspective gives rise to what can be called an assimilative approach. This approach considers the benefits of digital media in communication, learning, and entertainment and proposes that we should uncritically assimilate new media in all that we do. This article proposes a middle approach of

“wise-engagement” of digital culture if we are to use it for the purposes of Christian ministry—and, more specifically, for apologetics engagement (Ononogbu and Chiroma 2018).

Three Effects of Digital Culture among African Next Generations

The need for “wise-engagement” arises from the fact that digital media culture has shaped Africa’s next gens in three important ways. First, it has affected them in the area of knowledge and certainty. With the ubiquitous nature and availability of technological adaptation, young people have access to a barrage of information and knowledge. The reality of “influencers” challenges the traditional notions of experts and institutions of learning, for instance. Fake or merely fascinating news has created a reality that conflicts with balanced, creative, and critical thinking. On the other hand, technology has been a handmaid of globalization and the attendant multi-lateral flows of ideas. The rising phenomenon of atheist societies in Africa’s major cities can be correlated to access to the New Atheist movement through the digital content of such proponents as Dawkins and Hitchens. A similar argument on the universality of digital media can be made for the rise of Christian apologetics in the country as a result of digital access to the ministries of William Lane Craig and John Njoroge, among other influential apologists. One effect of these changes in knowledge production and movement is that young people have a lower level of trust for “traditional institutions” as well as experts and may innocently imbibe hostile ideologies, especially in an age of “keyboard experts.” Another effect is that young people are now more acquainted with conflicting arguments, so it takes greater effort to engage them, especially given the digital context of postmodernity.

Second, whereas digital culture has connected young people, it has also isolated them. Fascinating research by the psychologist Jean Twenge explores how digital media has affected the healthy transitions of young people into adulthood (Twenge 2017). She expands on work done in the area of emerging adulthood, which reveals how adolescence is extending into the mid-twenties (Arnett 2011). For instance, Twenge correlates how more screen time means more isolation and eventually more loneliness (Twenge 2017, 98). She unpacks a study conducted between 1991-2015 and reveals that “31% more 8th and 10th graders felt lonely in 2015 than 2011, along with 22% more 12th graders” (Twenge 2017, 97). Although some analysts critique the correlation of increased screen time with mental health challenges (Alonzo et al. 2020), similar negative consequences have been shown in the African context, including issues to do with addiction and cyber-crime (Ephraim 2013). The negative impact of social media on young people in Nigeria, such as loss of identity, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills, has also been noted (Ononogbu and Chiroma 2018, 52). Apologetics must therefore also take an affective approach in addition to the cognitive approach that characterizes much of traditional apologetics (Ndereba (2021b).

Third, digital media creates an opportunity for engagement with secular and with religious ideas. Rather than withdrawing from digital media, Christian apologists must take the Pauline approach of Acts 17 to create meaningful engagement with pop cultural ideas—whether those have to do with African traditional ideas, the question of identity, or the question of truth. The South African practical theologian Anita Cloete has engaged with youth issues at the intersection of digital media and religion. From her research with young people, she reveals that they utilize religious and philosophical ideas in digital film and other media in worldview construction (Cloete 2019, 65). Thus, meaningful missional engagement with young people necessitates the appropriation of films, TV series, music, and other media so as to unpack worldview issues at play and how to engage them with the biblical worldview and gospel.

Engaging Africa’s Next Gens Like Paul in Acts 17

Growing up with digital culture has contributed to rising generations of Africans' marked differences from older generations. In Africa, whereas postmodernity is definitive of global youth culture, there are certain cultural identities and practices unique to the next gens in Africa's cities. In practical ministry, these complexities can be seen in youth double denominational belonging (Okwuosa et al. 2020) or the dabbling in African traditional cultural practices (Sommers 2010, 324; Uwaegbute 2021). Those involved in youth ministry must therefore exegete African youth culture even as they seek to exegete the Word. Paul's various approaches in his defenses in the Book of Acts reveal how he uses different methodologies for different audiences. When engaging with a largely Jewish audience, Paul engages and confronts their Jewish understanding based on the common knowledge he has with them of the Old Testament and its ultimate fulfilment in Christ (See Paul in Salamis in Acts 13:5, in Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-3). When he engages with the Gentiles, particularly the Epicurean and Stoics in Acts 17:16-34, Paul uses their religious knowledge as a point of missional contact and moves forward to commend the gospel to them.

Compassion as the Starting Point of Engagement

Paul's model reveals Jesus's heart for engaging with people from a place of compassion (Mt 11:28-30, Lk 7:13, Jn 11:34-38). Unfortunately, apologetics has been caricatured as an enterprise of winning an argument rather than winning a person. Even more worrisome is a widespread distorted vision of young people. Older people can easily make value judgements on young people based on surface-level cultural issues rather than engaging the deep-level cultural issues involved (Mueller 2006). Rather than engaging the symbols of youth culture (for example, dreadlock hairstyles, contemporary fashion styles, hip-hop sub-cultural realities), ministry leaders often push young people away. Paul reveals how compassion is the starting point of engagement. After all, we who are followers of Jesus are called to apologetic engagement from a place of "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15b). Paul is "provoked"—literally stirred, stimulated, irritated (See also 2 Pet 2:8)—at the idol worship of the Athenians (Acts 17:16). It is compassion that drives him to engage them rather than to abandon them.

Connecting Point in the Culture

Apologetic engagement with youth culture, rather than being an uncritical dumping of information, is a sensitive engagement with the values behind popular cultural symbols and ideas. This is what it means to connect with what young people value, whether they do it knowingly and unknowingly, and engaging the assumptions behind their value systems. We who serve young people must be present in their lives. Paul reasons "in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons, and in the marketplace every day..." (Acts 17:17). One-time evangelistic contacts may work in some circumstances, but with the contemporary cultural complexities there is need to make use of our relationships for the sake of missional engagement. Additionally, connecting with young people means noting their religious and cultural symbols. Paul observes the altar's inscription "to an unknown God" and uses it as a point of apologetic engagement (Acts 17:23). Paul uses the altar as a cultural bridge to move the Athenians from where they are to where they should be—that is, from an unknown God to the living God. Finally, Paul's knowledge of the culture's influencers—Epimenides (Acts 17:28a) and Aratus (Acts 17:28b)—is exemplary for how apologetic engagement must be aware of and engage with the influencers of Africa's next gens.

Within the Kenyan context, ministering to young people may thus mean engaging with the ideas behind Sauti Sol's music or sensitively discerning Caroline Mutoko's lifestyle hacks among urban Kenyans. Sauti Sol's music articulates a combination of plural religious values, a contemporary and global appeal within the Afro-pop music subculture and an aesthetic of

postmodern African identity. These songs navigate both global youth culture as well as its localized elements of Kenyan youth cultures and sub-cultures, evident from the language to the turns of phrases in the lyrics. Such music presents an urban Kenyan contemporary culture which is conversant with a global youth culture, thereby revealing how seamlessly religion, popular culture, and postmodernity intertwine (Ntarangwi 2009). Caroline Mutoko is a popular radio host-cum-digital influencer who is the image of an articulate feminist voice, aware of the key dialogues happening in the culture and offering wisdom that is palatable to the working-class urban Kenyan (Gitau 2019, 411). Together, Sauti Sol and Mutoko unpack how postmodernity, new-age philosophical ideals, glocalised youth cultures and subcultures, and lived realities of young people in African cities can present common points of contact with the gospel. After all, the aspects of truth, identity, and multiculturalism find their nexus and fulfillment in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conviction with the Gospel

Although some Christians drive a wedge between apologetics and evangelism, these approaches to people outside of Christ are always held in a symbiotic relationship within the biblical canon. Apologetics is a handmaid of evangelism, so that when the intellectual barriers are removed Christ can be presented with clarity. Paul takes this approach in his engagement with the people of Athens. After he shows Christ-like compassion and then connects with them, the Spirit convicts them with Paul's message of the gospel. Paul's progression is not an undirected presentation of the gospel, but he begins carefully with a deep engagement with their worldviews about divinity and reality. By beginning with the doctrine of God and making a case for his spiritual nature, his self-sufficiency, his sovereignty, and his immanence, Paul directly engages with the Greco-Roman conceptualizations of divinity—particularly their polytheism and Hellenistic philosophy (Jipp 2012, 579-581; Rothschild 2014). Once he clears the way, Paul then calls the people to “repentance,” the normative call of all the preachers of the New Testament, including Jesus and the other Apostles (Mk 1:15; Jn 1:12-14, 3:5; Acts 2:38-39; 2 Pet 3:9). At the end of the day, it is faith in the good news of Jesus Christ that is the heart of true transformation.

The gospel message is presented within particular cultural and inter-religious contexts. While postmodernity allows us to consider different cultural contexts from our own, thereby revealing our subjective interpretations of reality, it also creates a conflicting climate for the truth claims of Christ (Mueller 2006, 62). In today's digital age, tolerance is often confused with blind acceptance of contradictory truth claims. Entertainment is preferred to intellectual engagement. Ad-hominem are a favorite strategy for keyboard atheists and apologists rather than long-term conversations. We must seek to answer the age-old questions surrounding issues to do with justification in knowledge as well as objectivity in truth, as well as attendant theories such as the non-contradictory laws of logic, which are a hallmark of any reasonable defense of the Christian faith. Eventually, however, those discussions must only serve to offer Christ to Africa's next gens.

Holistic Apologetics in a Digital Age

With the now accepted COVID-shaped reality of our world, and with many transitions in the life milestones of young people, apologetic engagement must holistically consider youth contexts. The COVID context is a “low-hanging fruit” for engaging such classical questions of apologetics as the problem of pain, evil and suffering, or particular Christian doctrines, including eschatology. The author suggests that, as important as it is to engage in these conversations, how we go about them is just as crucial. Digital cultures are affecting young people in distinct ways. A holistic apologetic methodology must engage the head, the heart,

and the hands. Gould describes such a holistic approach as a “re-enchantment of the reason, the conscience, and the imagination” (Gould 2019, 32).

Digital cultures shift how we consume and critique knowledge claims. Without a careful consideration of how such claims shape the lives of young people, we who seek to serve them may be engaging in discourses that are detached from their lived realities. This article has considered how digital culture shapes young people in three key areas: knowledge, mental health, and popular culture. By exploring Paul’s engagement in the context of Athens in Acts 17, this article has proposed critical tools for incarnating the gospel for “iGens”, that is, African youth who are digitally native. First, we must engage digital cultures with compassion. Second, we must consider common points of popular cultural contact with young people. Third, we must offer Christ clearly in light of the apologetics task within the varied postmodern, modern, and traditional worldviews and interreligious climate of Africa’s key cities.

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The Life and Ministry of Erlo Hartwig Stegen

Elfrieda M.-L. Fleischmann and Ignatius W. Ferreira

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Abstract

While the start of the twentieth century was marked by great Protestant mission advances in the Global South, other interest groups such as European colonialists promoted their own sets of ideologies that often impeded missionary work. In an effort to bring the gospel to the Zulu nation in South Africa, Louis Harms envisioned his missionaries bringing the gospel to Africans before they would experience the destructive influence of colonization. About a century later, Erlo Hartwig Stegen, true to Harms's vision played a fundamental role in bringing the gospel to the Zulu nation. This article provides insight into the missionary role that Erlo Stegen played both during and after the South African Apartheid dispensation, focusing on his missiological context, style, principles, and legacy.

Key Words: Erlo Hartwig Stegen, KwaSizabantu Mission, revival, South Africa, Zulus

Introduction: Historical Roots of Revival and Missions (1708–1902)

In contrast to the European Reformation during the sixteenth century, adherents of Humanism only a century later contended that truth could be obtained only by *reasoning* and thereby rejected all claims to truth that they considered in opposition to common sense (Paas 2016, 234). Rationalism reached its peak in the seventeenth century and was followed by Romanticism. Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was therefore exposed to a confluence of philosophies that undercut the authority of Scripture.

In sharp contrast to this increasingly autonomous atmosphere of the nineteenth century, a Protestant revival was experienced in Lüneburg Heath, northern Germany in 1840 under Louis Harms (Kim 2011, 252). This revival swept humanistic philosophies aside and realigned Christianity and Christian living with Scripture. Some historians have favorably compared the effect of the Lüneburg revival to the Reformation brought about by Martin Luther three centuries earlier (Jackson 1953, 156-157). The effect of Bible-based preaching in the Lüneburg revival was felt throughout the whole region of lower Saxony in northern Germany. One direct consequence of this revival was a great overflow of missionaries, with many missions being established in countries spread throughout various continents, such as India (1864), Australia (1866), North America (1867), New Zealand (1875), Persia (1880), Brazil (1898), and later Ethiopia (1927), Indonesia (1974), Egypt (1978) central Africa (1980), and South Africa (Oosthuizen 1985, 13).

As part of his effort to safeguard a commitment to scriptural authority against the onslaught of critical human philosophical influence, Harms envisioned missionaries who would share God's salvation plan with Africans and protect them against the increasingly autonomous European mind-set of individualism, materialism, and secularization (Fleischmann 2021). With this long-term goal in sight, Harms aimed through his missionaries to educate indigenous African people to read the Bible for themselves before the destructive influence of Europe's Enlightenment could arrive and capture their attention. As spiritual life and belief in the authority of Scripture was ebbing in Europe, Harms placed a sacred trust in his missionaries to Africa, in the hope that Africans would in turn be instrumental in reviving Europe through the sincere and undiluted

preaching of Scripture (Stegen 1983). From Harms's prayer life emanated the vision to build a ship, the *Kandaze*, that would take the gospel to Africa (Harms, 1900). The *Kandaze* brought the forefathers of another great missionary, Erlo Hartwig Stegen, to South Africa. Erlo Stegen would become instrumental in a significant revival among the Zulus, in which God empowered Zulu missionaries to preach God's word with authority even to Europeans. That revival among the Zulus seems to have been a fulfilment of Harms's missionary and revival vision of a century before. This article focuses on the role that Stegen played during and after the Apartheid South African dispensation, focusing on his missiological context, style, principles, and legacy.

Erlo Stegen the Person

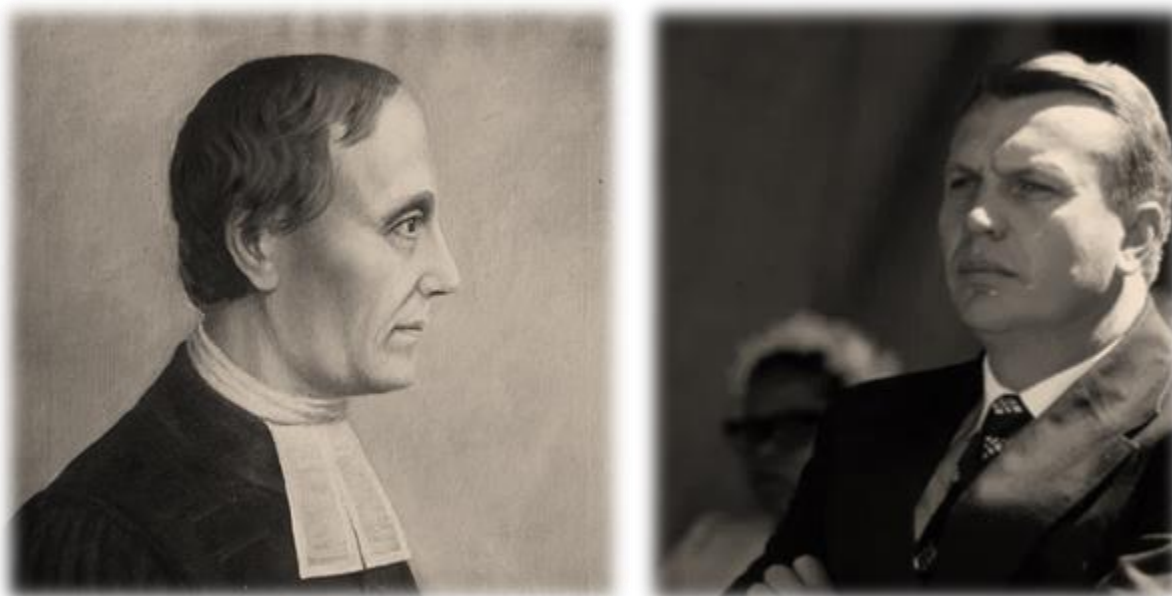


Figure 1: Louis Harms (left) and Erlo Stegen (right)

Stegen's ministry has been conducted mainly among the Zulu nation, and little academic work has been done on his life, ministry, and teachings. Important to note at this juncture is the fact that there are some remarkable similarities between the ministries of Louis Harms and Stegen, two men who served a century apart from each other. In fact, Stegen's work was an indirect result of Harms's missionary endeavors.

Ancestral Roots and Christian Influence

Both Harms (1808–1865) and Stegen (1935–) came from Christian family backgrounds. Harms's ancestors were Protestant Christians. Stegen's maternal ancestors, the Witthöfts, arrived on the *Kandaze* (the ship that Louis Harms had built) in 1871 in Port-Natal (Durban) (Du Toit 1986a, 32; Kitshoff and Basson 1985, 14). Stegen's paternal grandfather, Heinrich Christoph Stegen (1849–1904), encountered the revival led by Harms and felt a calling to Africa. Heinrich, age 33, and his wife Catharine (1862–1934), age 21, left by ship from Hamburg for South Africa in June 1883. They planned to support Harms's Hermannsburg Mission Society through agricultural activities (KSB 2016a; Volker 2017, 427).

Early Years and Education

Erlo was the fourth son among six children and was born at Paardefontein, South Africa. He was forced to quit his schooling at an early age due to recurrent headaches, which became his “thorn in the flesh.” Unable to attend school, Stegen instead used his spare time to study Scripture, memorizing large portions thereof as he was confined to the farm. During these isolated years he developed a deep love for Scripture and often meditated over its contents (Fleischmann 2021).

Conversion

Erlo Stegen’s conversion was intense. Through the inspired preaching of Anton Engelbrecht at Lilienthal, he became increasingly aware of the evilness of his own heart and his tendency to lie and fight—even after taking Communion. He realized his need for the working of the triune God in his life. Although at the age of about 13 he had a desire to live a life that was pleasing to God, Erlo found his nature revealing the opposite; the conflict drove him to turn to Christ as his Savior. Scripture passages impacting his conversion were James 1:22–24, James 2:10, Matthew 5:21–22, and Ezekiel 18:4 (Fleischmann 2021).

Calling

Stegen received his calling soon after his conversion. However, being confronted by the prospect of a poor life in economic terms, he disregarded it. Young Erlo cherished three activities: farming, making money, and sports, the last of which he hoped would be his destiny. For 18 months during 1950 and 1951 Erlo went through inner torment, which he later described as like a foretaste of hell (Stegen 1988). To put his mind on something else, he took part in various activities and worked hard at them. He excelled in tennis, even qualifying for the national South African under-16 team (Du Toit 1987, 20). However, even though he accomplished this particular dream, Stegen remained utterly unhappy and restless until he accepted God’s calling on his life.

The Ministry of Erlo Stegen

Whereas Louis Harms was a preacher doing mission work, Stegen was a missionary who also became a preacher after he established the KwaSizabantu Mission in the heartland of what is now South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal province in 1970. Since then, the mission has grown into one of the largest Protestant missions in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a hub for mission activities, with semi-annual youth conferences that draw between four and six thousand youth for seven days of services. Various national and international outreaches are also conducted from this mission. As a pioneer of experimental farming activities, Stegen equipped the mission to sustain itself economically (Fleischmann 2021).

Revival

Under Harms’s preaching revival came to Hermannsburg in 1848 (Kim 2011, 252). Prussians, Saxons, and Hessians would come from the surrounding villages, sometimes walking 80 kilometers to hear sermons over the weekend (Harms 1900, 49). The church building was soon too small. As a solution to this problem, Harms conducted three services every Sunday (Stegen 2013, 5). His once-a-year mission festivals drew crowds of up to 6,000.

Revival came to Stegen and his little Zulu congregation at Maphumulo in 1966 after months of studying the book of Acts and honest introspection. Confronted by God’s Word, as they measured themselves against the first church in Acts, they cried out to God for his mercy and sought to mend their ways where they had lived unscripturally, dishonoring him (Visser 2014). As

they sought Him with all their hearts, they suddenly became aware of his presence (KSB 2007). They experienced a “rushing of the wind” and knew that God had answered their prayers.

Directly after this experience, the first person who came to Erlo Stegen for help was the head of a school for witches (Khwela and Dube 2019). Thoroughly convicted she confessed her sin, Stegen prayed for her, and she was delivered. The Holy Spirit convicted individuals of sin, righteousness, and judgment starting with the strongholds of evil. Day and night, people arrived uninvited to seek Stegen’s assistance (Khwela and Dube 2019). They all had a strong desire to find peace with God.

Becoming a Popular Preacher

As with Harms, large crowds would congregate to hear Stegen preach in Zulu. Speaking with a strong sense of God’s authority, he quickly became a popular preacher. His fearless and honest preaching awakened the people to their lost and miserable state. Some loved him for it, while others hated him for refusing to compromise with their sin. Whereas Harms’s sermons have been printed and published in text, hundreds of Erlo Stegen’s audio sermons can be found on various digital platforms (for example, Sermon Index2021; KwaSizabantu Mission 2021). Ministers’ conferences at KwaSizabantu Mission have typically drawn nearly 2,000 ministers and preachers of the gospel; semi-annual seven-day youth conferences have attracted 4,000 to 7,000 youths at the Mission’s expense (Fleischmann 2021). An estimated three million people have visited KwaSizabantu Mission over the past half century free of charge (Fleischmann, Ferreira and Muller 2021a).

Opposition

The construction of Harms’s mission ship, the *Kandaze*, encountered opposition from friends and brethren who hinted that he was out of his mind (Greenwald 1867, 18; Stevenson 1862, 333). Although he received warning letters, Harms carried on with the work (Harms 1900, 80). Convinced that the ship was God’s will, he sought God for the funds. God in return provided the needed finances in various ways, and “the vessel was built by faith and laden with prayer” (Harms 1900, 81).

Two themes have appeared prominently in Stegen’s ministry: rivers of life and opposition (Fleischmann, Ferreira, and Muller 2021b). From the very start of the revival, many turned from their sin to Christ and received new life. Others fell away along the road and became bitter enemies of the work (Fleischmann, Ferreira, and Muller 2021b). One of his leading admirers, the Zulu Prince Buthelezi, remarked that “despite extraordinary burdens wrought through spiritual battle, Stegen has flourished and his life’s work at KwaSizabantu has flourished with him” (Buthelezi 2015, 1-2). Similarly, Hammond stated that Stegen’s mission “has thrived in spite of times of great opposition and slanderous campaigns against it (Hammond 2006, 4). Stegen experienced waves of attacks from various angles on him personally and on his mission work” (Fleischmann, Ferreira, and Muller 2021a). Since he was meeting with Zulu brethren during the zenith of Apartheid, Stegen was frequently interrogated by the South African police, who suspected him of being a communist (Khwela and Dube 2019). His ability to hold assemblies was strictly curtailed because, according to the Native Administration Act of 1927, meetings of more than ten persons in native areas were allowed only by permission of the Native Commissioner or Resident Magistrate (Landis 1957, 46).

The Missiological Impact of Stegen's Ministry

The impact of Stegen's ministry can be witnessed in the lives of many. First, from the inception of the associated Zulu revival, the gospel has radically changed the lives of the worst of sinners, as further described below. Second, during the 1980s Kurt Koch conducted extensive research on these cases and published a book, *God amongst the Zulus*, in German and in English (Koch 2011). Third, Stegen has gone on extensive missionary trips and been invited to speak at outreach events on every continent (Fleischmann 2021). Fourth, with the coming of the digital age, his sermons have been indexed on numerous digital platforms and have been downloaded worldwide (Sermon Index 2021). Fifth, the annual KwaSizabantu ministers' conferences have brought together a network of preachers, ministers, and Christian workers from all denominations and have provided a platform for dialogue and discussion (Fleischmann 2021).

Stegen's missiological context was an Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. At the zenith of the Apartheid system, he worked among the Zulu nation within KwaZulu Natal province. Stegen therefore had to face much opposition, not only from the Apartheid government of that time but also from many white South Africans. Due to the lack of educational opportunities for the Zulu nation, Erlo Stegen followed the school of Old Testament prophets as well as Jesus in the New Testament, namely training people through personal mentoring rather than classroom study. He equipped his Zulu co-workers for over five decades through the integration of work and learning, enabling them to become capable missionaries who spread the gospel through a scriptural life and revival power (Fleischmann 2021). In turn, these Zulu co-workers are now training a younger generation of missionaries. As the Zulus grew in spiritual depth, the mission work expanded.

Stegen led the mission work with a firm conviction that God would provide. Although Stegen did not open a theological seminary, he and his wife, Kay, established a teacher training college for missionaries, today called Cedar International Academy NPC. Trusting God to sustain the mission work, Stegen never requested donations or took collections from people but brought his needs to God in prayer (Fleischmann 2021). Stegen has continued until today to make his mission and its branches multi-racial and self-sustainable through experimental farming (Joosten 2019). KwaSizabantu Mission has grown to become one of the largest mission stations in the Global South. In addition, African missionaries have been equipped to take the gospel back to Europe in a powerful manner.

The Legacy of Erlo Hartwig Stegen

Stegen has created a missiological legacy with wide-ranging influence in evangelical circles. His stance that mission stations should be self-supportive has borne fruit. Today the KwaSizabantu Mission has developed into a self-sustainable mission station (Fleischmann 2021). Yet to Stegen, God's call to obedience remains more important than anything else. Stegen holds the view that if there is no unconfessed sin between him and God, he is usable in God's hands to accomplish His purposes (Fleischmann, Ferreira, and Muller 2021b; Visser 2014). Stegen therefore views his top priority as caring for his relationship with God (Fleischmann 2021).

Mission, Not Apartheid

Experiences on multiple dimensions provided Stegen with a conceptual lens to make sense of the pain caused by the racial hierarchies of the Apartheid regime. Having grown up under a mixture

of South African Apartheid and entrenched, nationalistic German culture, Stegen first had to come to grips with the issue of racism and nationalism in his own life (Fleischmann 2021).

Confronted by the Holy Spirit and having accepted God's call to service among the Zulus, Stegen experienced God's resurrection power in his life to overcome his own pride and nationalistic tendencies, and it became his constant prayer to see the world as God sees it. Stegen's example of serving the Africans (Khwela and Khwela 2019) as a missionary affected other farmers as well, to the extent that they, too, during the height of Apartheid allowed Africans to sit in the front seat with them as they traveled, even though they were despised by some other farmers for doing so (Duvel 2019). When Mrs. Mzila, one of his congregants, lacked food, Stegen ordered seeds, hoed her garden, and planted vegetables, showing her how to sustain herself and her family practically (Duvel 2019). His way of living and serving his Zulu neighbors within a time of racial hatred made a deep impression among the Zulu nation (Dube 2019). In Stegen's attitudes toward interracial relationships, he was half a century ahead of his time, breaking new ground and preparing the way for others to follow.

Under Apartheid (which cut through both laws and culture), whites did not mix with other races. The year 1950, during which the Group Areas Act—setting up the basis for the construction of an apartheid society—was passed (Kaplan et al. 1971, 86), was also the time of Erlo's conversion, which in hindsight laid the foundation for the construction of a multi-cultural society, even in the midst of Apartheid. As South Africa became increasingly polarized along racial lines, God destined Stegen to bridge the widening racial gulf through sacrificial living and service to his fellow human beings (Fleischmann, Ferreira, and Muller 2021b).

During the Apartheid years, the law forbade establishment of a mission outpost within three miles from another one (Van Rooy 1987, 12). This law restricted Stegen from preaching in the more densely populated Umvoti River area, since another missionary or church was already there (Du Toit 1987, 29). In 1957, a new regulation issued by the Minister of the Interior prescribed further restrictions. Through the earlier Communal Reserves Act of 1909, any religious organization other than the established church was required to obtain special permission to hold any service to be attended by more than five members (Kaplan et al. 1971, 303).

Stegen's only option was to pitch his evangelization tent at Kings Cliff, south of the Umvoti Valley on his brother Friedel's shop grounds, where he would preach daily for the next 14 months (Fleischmann 2021). Later he moved his tent to Maphumulo, north of the river and onto another one of Friedel's shop grounds.

As noted earlier, white missionaries living among the Zulu nation and supporting them, such as Stegen was doing, were viewed with suspicion by the Apartheid government. As no mainline church was financing Stegen's ministry, he used his farming skills and experimented with various projects to provide the necessary means of support to the Zulu people (Joosten 2019). At the same time, the Holy Spirit abolished separatist attitudes and racism lurking within the hearts of his congregation (Ngubane 2018). Stegen's converts became one sanctified body in Christ.

Mission as Living a Counterculture Informed by the Word of God

Stegen's preaching has emphasized living a scriptural and holy life, pleasing to God (Visser 2014). Living a simple life informed by the Word of God has enabled Stegen to break through the layers of Zulu pride (Fleischmann 2021). Living in their midst as they lived, even through the trying

Apartheid years, touched the Africans deeply. KwaSizabantu Mission was established in 1970 as a multi-cultural mission with no racial apartheid (Fleischmann 2021). Even during these early years, all races shared their meals together in the dining hall.

Conclusion

It could be said that the vision of Louis Harms, to send missionaries to Africa to safeguard the gospel against the onslaught of the Enlightenment in Europe, has been realized in the ministry of Erlo Stegen. In both ministries, mission was the fruit of revival. Through the revival that occurred among the Zulus, God equipped missionaries to bring the message of revival to Europe.

More than 18,500 youth dealing with drug addiction have passed through the spiritual restoration program at KwaSizabantu Mission over the past seven years. Their testimonies of God's transforming power in their lives have reached over 5,500 schools across South Africa during this time. As mission work is God's business, God has provided the Global South with missionaries able to reach out to the Global North. In his sovereignty, he can use any sanctified vessel to impact the world through revival.

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Call for Papers:

“Pentecostal / Spirit-Empowered Mission”

For Publication in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2022

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- Missiological Analysis
- Strategic Models

Proposed titles with approximately 100-word abstracts are due January 31, 2022. Full manuscripts of approved paper proposals will be due July 31, 2022. Manuscript guidelines can be found on the *Global Missiology* website at <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>.

Please address all submissions and questions to globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com.