



Introduction to the Series

Kevin Rodgers



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Introduction to the Series
Africa Theology Series

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SERIES PREFACE

The Africa Theology Series is a multi-volume series of books on Christian Theology. Unlike a typical systematic theology, each book in this series is a stand alone volume on a specific topic or doctrine. Also, unlike a traditional systematic theology, this series expands the scope to include biblical, systematic and applied theology. The goal is to give the African church a biblically faithful and contextually appropriate tool to help them, as Jude 3 states, “Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

The book in your hands is meant to serve as an introduction to the entire series. This book will lay the foundation for all the subsequent volumes. However, it is worth noting here four overarching goals for the entire series. Understanding these goals will help the reader gain the most insight when reading each separate volume. These goals are:

- Bridging knowledge with action
- Interacting with major faith systems
- Moving from defense to offense
- Creating a readable and helpful resource

KNOW, BE, DO: BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE WITH ACTION

Each volume in the Africa Theology Series seeks to move the reader from theological foundations (Know) to cultural implications (Be) then finally to practical applications (Do). In the African context, the concrete is much more impactful than the theoretical. In fact, oftentimes grievous errors in the pulpit or in pastoral practice come from those who can articulate the great doctrines of the faith both eloquently and sufficiently. These men often hold degrees from theological institutions where they were trained in sound doctrine and biblical orthodoxy. In other words, the errors that seem to plague the African church aren't necessarily from a lack of knowledge but rather from a lack of application of that knowledge into practice.

A short-sighted overcorrection would be to throw out knowledge-based teaching and instead simply focus on obedience-based action. However, this

would be just as dangerous and ultimately counter-productive to healthy church. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not against one another but rather two sides of the same coin. To have one without the other is not only incomplete but insufficient to build a biblically faithful and missions minded church.

The Africa Theology Series addresses these challenges by helping the pastor or church leader see the interconnectedness of knowledge and action. There is an African proverb that says, "Two hands wash one another." We need both knowledge and obedience. Therefore, each volume will, in its own unique way, lay a theological foundation for the specific doctrine being addressed as the authors seek to answer the question, "What should I know?"

The reader will then be challenged to see how this knowledge (what I know) necessarily informs identity (who I am). Every culture has elements that the Bible can affirm and appreciate and also elements the Bible condemns and corrects. Seeing your culture and your worldview through the Biblical lens is a painful but necessary step. In fact, this step of transformed hearts is the bridge needed on the path from transformed minds to transformed actions. The authors will challenge the reader to think deeply and introspectively about the cultural implications of doctrine as they seek to answer the question, "Who should I be?"

After knowledge and being comes doing. This is where information gets to work. Sound doctrine is not merely for the academic minded nor should it be reserved only for the seminary classroom. Instead, right doctrine must be applied and spill over into right practice. The authors of each volume will assist the reader in understanding the practical application of the doctrine in their lives as they answer the final question, "What should I do?"

The following statement provides a short summation of this goal:

KNOWLEDGE *informs* **BEING** *which drives* **DOING**

**MY NEIGHBOR'S FAITH:
INTERACTING WITH MAJOR FAITH SYSTEMS**

Another unique feature of the Africa Theology Series involves interaction with other major worldviews/religions. Africa is a very religious place where atheists are few and far between. Whereas books from the West might lean more into apologetical arguments aimed at skeptics, this series looks to interact with the other major faith systems on the continent.

While there are obviously outliers, the majority of Africans fall into one of several religious categories. These categories are much more diverse than a simplistic designation and are oftentimes complex combinations of two distinct categories into one. One such example would be the syncretization of two distinct categories (Islam and ATR) into one faith system (Folk Islam).

Practically this means that two Muslim men from the same tribe and living in the same city might have drastically different understandings of their faith. This also implies that some who would claim to be Evangelical Christians actually practice a much more animistic faith. These nuances and caveats are real and rampant but beyond the scope of this series, which will examine only the orthodox positions of each faith system.

However, the problem of neatly labeling categories becomes even more challenging due to the ambiguous nature of African Traditional Religion (ATR). There is no such thing as THE African Traditional Religion with an agreed upon set of beliefs. Instead, ATR is a large designation for those who would cling to an animistic faith ranging from voodoo to ancestral worship and everything in between.

It would be impossible to try and interact with every potential version of each faith system. However, it is incredibly important to understand the basic tenets (even if not held by everyone in the same way) of the major faith systems on the continent. In other words, it is helpful to know what an “average” Muslim believes about the doctrine of God and how that’s different than the Evangelical Christian. Therefore, each volume in this series will provide side-by-side comparisons to highlight major differences between Evangelical Christians and these other religious systems.

CHANGING TACTICS: MOVING FROM DEFENSE TO OFFENSE

There is an anecdotal account of how those working to detect counterfeit currency spend their time only examining real currency. The story is used to illustrate the importance of focusing time and energy studying the truth instead of spending time dealing with falsehoods. While this is a point worth noting and we would agree that knowing the truth is of utmost importance, we also believe it is a good and biblical practice to expose falsehoods.

The Africa Theology Series adopts an offensive standpoint instead of choosing to play defense alone. Far from being done in a mean-spirited fashion, each volume takes pastoral care to warn the flock of the dangers of false doctrines currently wreaking havoc on the African Church.

The prosperity gospel and many practices in Neo-pentecostalism pose an even greater threat to healthy church and missions advance than Islam or ATR. Throughout the New Testament there is a constant warning of dangers that arise from wolves pretending to be sheep. These dangers are especially devastating because they come from within the church. Paul tells the church in Corinth of a tactic of Satan wherein he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

Any good shepherd knows he is responsible to care for his flock. This means two things practically: one, he must provide for them by leading them to grazing grounds and sources of water; secondly, and just as important, he must protect them by keeping them from dangers which seek to harm the flock.

In the same way pastors must provide and protect their flocks. They must lead their people to the green pastures of God's Word and to drink from the Living Water of knowing Christ. However, pastors must be able to defend their flock and protect them from enemies who would seek to destroy and harm.

Each volume will seek to expose the various errors and dangerous ways of prosperity teachers and Neo-pentecostal practitioners. The authors will show how these false teachers twist and misuse the Scriptures and, therefore, confuse various key doctrines. The hope, then, is that these volumes will help pastors and church leaders protect both themselves and their flocks by nurturing a spirit of discernment that can detect and expose unbiblical teaching and practices.

SHORT AND SIMPLE: CREATING A READABLE AND HELPFUL RESOURCE

The American author Mark Twain once said, "I'm sorry this letter is so long. I did not have time to write a short one." In this quote Twain reveals a common misconception that the more words that are spoken (or typed) then the better the content. While it is true that sometimes exhaustive explanations are necessary, the reality is most subjects can be sufficiently and succinctly explained without endless words.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series are intentionally short and written in a way to be accessible to the largest audience of readers. The shortness comes from a ruthless approach to writing that seeks to explain the most significant truths with the fewest amount of words in the simplest way possible.

The goal is to create a resource that is readable and helpful. The authors seek to use story, dialog, proverbs, concrete examples, and other illustrious words to help complicated doctrines become understandable and applicable.

Each volume also includes quick access reference guides for comparative charts on the various beliefs of each faith system.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

There is an African proverb that says, “A baby on its mother's back doesn't know the journey is long.” Everyone, to some level, has benefited from the hard work of others. Teachers, pastors, theologians, authors, professors, parents, and myriads of others have suffered greatly to carry us along. We are where we are today because of their sacrifice.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series have come about because many men who have many responsibilities deemed it worthy to set aside time to create the resource you now hold in your hand. These resources are the result of countless hours of work so that the African church might grow in her faithfulness to the task. Our hope is that their sacrifice “carries” you along in your faith journey.

Mark Phillips and Kevin Rodgers
Series editors

INTRODUCTION

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICA

Africa is on the rise. Never have we been at such a historic moment where the center of Christianity has shifted from the North and the West to the South and the East. For decades, missiologists Andrew Walls and Philip Jenkins have been reminding the world that the epicenter of Christianity has subtly moved from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere. Recent data from the Pew Research Center also indicate a decline in evangelical Christianity in the North and the West, while the number of believers is drastically increasing in the South and East. One of the most pronounced examples of this shift is Sub-Saharan Africa. The Pew Research Group projects that nearly 40 percent of the world's Christians will reside in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2050.¹

It is apparent that the West is no longer the center of significant kingdom growth. When one considers the pattern of Christianity, the history of Christian witness in Africa, and the statistical predictions of Africa's exploding Christian population, it seems clear: the future of the church is in Africa. If the future of the church is in Africa, then the future of Christian theological education and scholarship needs to also be from Africa. For too long the West has dominated the worldwide round table of theology and it is time for the African church to take her place alongside the West and lend her voice to the theological milieu of today's global conversation. The rest of the world has much to learn from Africa and she has a unique cultural perspective that can help the rest of the world see the same truth from a different angle, and perhaps see it more clearly.

¹ Kevin W. Rodgers, "Africa May Be the Next Missions Epicenter: How Do We Prepare?" 25 March 2020, <https://www.imb.org/2017/02/10/africa-may-be-the-next-missions-epicenter/>.

Additionally, the African church needs the ability to educate and train the next wave of pastors, theologians, and missionaries who will be sent out from Africa to the rest of the world. The mission field of the past is becoming the mission force of tomorrow, and the future of the gospel advance will be the responsibility of the African church. Theological education that caters to the unique cultural worldview and the unique pedagogical needs of the African pastor, teacher, and missionary is needed. Thus, we have undertaken the task of writing the Africa Theology Series. This initial volume will introduce the entire series and will explain the unique approach that will be undertaken. It is our prayer that this series will fill a specific need in today's African church that is currently being underserved.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THIS SERIES

The Africa Theology Series is designed to fill a niche that is currently not being filled in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most pastors and theologians in Africa rely on Western sources for their study of theology. Those who have the funds to purchase books often line their shelves with the classic systematic theologies like Grudem and Erickson, or they rely on a hodgepodge of authors, most of whom are suspect at best. Today's African Pastor reads books from popular authors like Joel Osteen, or Joyce Meyer, and fills in the gaps with YouTube videos that come from a variety of sources. Whether it is sound Western theology or heretical Western theology, the West dominates the theological landscape of Africa today.

In addition, these books (regardless of quality) are very expensive and hard to come by on the continent. This theological famine creates a void in the life of the typical African Christian that they are willing to fill with anything they can get their hands on. If it is available, and especially if it is free, it is to be consumed without any thought for the spiritual or nutritional value found inside. This has led to a theological anemia of sorts in the African church and it is killing her from the inside out. The African church needs theological reference materials that are solid, but also that are uniquely tailored to the needs of the African church. For over a century, the African church has subsisted on a diet from the West, which has kept her going but has not really been satisfying.

Others have sensed this same need and tried to solve the problem. Historically, Western missionaries just translated Western theological books into local languages and hoped that would be sufficient. In recent years, there have been attempts to write things from the African perspective. Many of the African seminaries are publishing journals that are theological in nature and from an African, academic perspective. However, they are often not widely distributed, and they are usually aimed at an educational level beyond the typical African

pastor or church leader. The greatest effort has been the “AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY” which was published in 2006 by Zondervan.² Yet, this was a Bible commentary and not an African biblical or systematic theology. Additionally, it emphasized diversity in authorship which made it interesting in approach, but theologically weak at times, depending upon the particular author. Of course, other noble attempts are being made in this regard, but it is our view that this series will be unique because of its perspective, approach, scope, and application.

BAPTISTIC IN PERSPECTIVE

One of the unique aspects of the Africa Theology Series is that it is written from a Baptist point of view. This is not to say that other evangelicals are wrong or illegitimate, but that there will be a consistency to the authorship of this series. The writers of each volume will come from various countries around Sub-Saharan Africa, but each will be Baptist and writing from a Baptist perspective. This is to ensure consistency in approach, hermeneutical balance, and ecclesiological agreement.

Baptists tend to be “people of the book,” and while they value diversity, they agree that the word of God is the final arbiter in all matters of theological discussion. Baptists value cooperation, but they also value autonomy and the belief that every Christian has the Holy Spirit and is able to hear from God and understand the Bible. While there is a diversity of opinion on various issues of theology, there is a shared value on the sufficiency of Scripture and the accessibility of Scripture to the born-again Christian. The point here is that Baptists believe that anyone with the Holy Spirit can understand the Scripture and that the Bible is for everyone. We do not need the church to determine what is true or false, but we can come together as a community, and through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and arrive at the truth of what the Bible teaches. “Revelation and Inspiration in the scriptural sense are not bestowed on all believers. But illumination is bestowed on all Christians who will permit the Holy Spirit to do so. Thus, the priesthood of believers becomes a vital and personal experience,

² Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

as each one submits to the illumination of the Holy Spirit who guides into all truth as it was revealed of God through divinely inspired men.”³

DIALOGICAL IN APPROACH

A particularly exciting aspect of this series is the emphasis on a dialogical approach to authorship. Each volume is co-authored by a Baptist missionary coming from the Western perspective and an African Baptist theologian. This collaboration process ensures that each theological topic is handled from multiple angles. This not only contributes to a spirited and engaging writing process, but it also creates a final product that is concrete and applicable to the target audience of this series.

As the word suggests, the key component of a dialogical method is the concept of dialogue. The assumption is that theology and contextualization are best done in community and are not the sole preserve of a single individual. “It must be understood that the task of theologizing is the privilege and the responsibility of every Christian person and every Christian group. For the Christian world is seriously deprived as long as it continues to allow theologizing to remain the private preserve of a single discipline within a single culture.”⁴ This series teams Western missionaries, who are experienced in Africa, with African theologians, and encourages them to collaborate in the writing process and produce a work that is biblical, well rounded, culturally appropriate, and helpful for the local African pastor or missionary.

The structure, format, and method of integration of the two authors were determined by the writing teams. They were given the freedom to collaborate and the flexibility to approach the topic from the most helpful African perspective they saw fit. However, in each volume, there is a theological section and then an application section. The focus is for each volume to be a helpful treatise on a particular aspect of theology, but to also be practical and easily applied to a given African context. No other series values collaboration in this way; this approach allows our authors to bring historical theology, global perspective, Bap-

³ Herschel Hobbs, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964), 65.

⁴ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 298.

tist heritage, and biblical theology together into a work that is theologically robust and still accessible and helpful in the local context.

CONTEXTUALIZED IN SCOPE

The majority of theological volumes today focus on a particular topic and trace its historical roots, the biblical witness related to that theological topic, and then at times there is a section related to practical application. To limit the scope of these volumes and also make them thoroughly practical and Africa, the writing teams were instructed to focus on application within four given African contexts: African Traditional Religion, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-Pentecostalism.

Africa is a diverse continent with thousands of people groups and thousands of local languages.⁵ This is one of the challenges of trying to write contextualized theological books because the needs are so many, and the contexts are innumerable. However, there are some general categories that are fairly consistent across the continent and these are the ones that the authors of this series have focused on.

African Traditional Religion is not really a codified religion with a specific text and teaching, but is instead, a loosely held set of spiritual principles that are commonly found across the continent. More will be shared about this later in this volume, but ATR includes concepts that are specific to Animism as well as a belief in the spirit world and its influence over daily life. Magic and witchcraft play a dominant role in ATR, and it is simply an attempt to somehow mitigate, or even leverage, the spiritual forces that influence Africans daily. ATR is more of an implicit part of the worldview and cosmology of Africa as it is an actual religion. It underlies the surface of every African's perspective, to a certain degree, and often other religious forms, like Islam and Catholicism, are just a veneer thinly laid over the top of ATR.

Islam has been in Sub-Saharan Africa for over one thousand years and moved down into the sub-continent from North Africa and the Middle East.

⁵ There are over 3,000 different ethnic groups speaking more than 2,100 different languages in all of Africa. The people there practice a variety of religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and traditional religions specific to their ethnic group.” See <https://study.com/academy/lesson/ethnic-groups-in-africa.html>.

There are a variety of expressions of Islam across the continent including Sunnis, Shias, and Sufism. Each variety presents its own challenges and many times the local culture is bound up with Islam in such a way that it is impossible to tell where Islam ends and where Africa begins. Understanding biblical theology in light of Islam is crucial in Africa. Africans do not exist in a vacuum, but instead, will bring certain preconceived ideas to the text. Doing solid theology in an Islamic context is not easy, and this is one of the reasons why this series addresses Islam in every volume. It is imperative that the next generation of pastors and African missionaries be equipped to understand how the Bible speaks to their current Islamic context.

In other parts of Africa, Roman Catholicism is the dominant religious form. While it might appear to be Christian on the surface, it also brings many challenges and much baggage to the discussion of any given theological issue. For those who are ministering in a Roman Catholic context, they will often face as much opposition and persecution as they do in an Islamic one. One of the goals of this series is to equip practitioners of theology to know how to navigate the muddy waters of Roman Catholic theology and how to rightly understand a particular theological perspective and communicate truth in that context.

Finally, while many Neo-Pentecostals appear to be evangelical on the surface and close to a biblical understanding of Scripture, they are often so influenced by the Prosperity Gospel and aberrant theology, that they too can present a challenge when it comes to rightly dividing the word of God. Like Islam and Roman Catholicism, Neo-Pentecostalism is pervasive across Sub-Saharan Africa and it presents numerous hermeneutical and theological challenges. This series attempts to address this African context in every volume and to help the Bible student understand how a particular doctrine is expressed in the Neo-Pentecostal world and how they can address that in the lives of the people they work with. These four specific contexts give us a framework from which to understand the Africa Theology Series, and they also make it practical and engaging for the modern African believer.

PRACTICAL IN APPLICATION

A final hallmark of the Africa Theology Series is the emphasis on practical application. Our desire is for this series to be widely used among pastors, mission-

aries, theologians, and church leaders on the African continent. The series is designed to be easily accessible to all and applicable to the African context. While there is an emphasis on the academic nature of the subject at hand, each writer attempts to write in a way that can be understood by the majority of church leaders who will utilize this resource.

The writing teams are all practitioners in Africa, and they write from their personal experience and ministry context, as well as from a biblical and academic perspective. The intention is for others to benefit from their expertise and to connect with real-life situations that are faced by people in ministry every day. There is an emphasis on concrete examples and case studies instead of just abstract speculation about complex theological issues. Each volume engages a particular topic from an African perspective and in light of the African realities of African Traditional Religion, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-Pentecostalism.

The goal of this series is to practically equip the pastor, African missionary, or church leader to engage in teaching and discussion of a particular theological topic in a way that is effective and relevant to their local African context. This series is a reference for the local church leader that can be used to train people and help them be more theologically grounded and able to utilize these biblical and theological truths in their daily lives and witness.

THE CONTEXTUAL EMPHASIS OF THIS SERIES

THE AFRICAN COSMOLOGY, WORLDVIEW, AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

It is impossible to talk about African Traditional Religion⁶ and not also talk about the African worldview since they are intrinsically connected to the point that it is difficult to discern where one stops and the other begins. From the Western perspective, our tendency to divide things up and create dualistic categories, allows us to distinguish between religion and worldview and to see that there could be a worldview that is devoid of religion. This point is debatable because everyone's religion informs their worldview and those who claim to not have a religion in the West, often speak in religious terms about their lack of religion. However, in African cosmology, ATR and worldview are so intertwined that they must be dealt with together and it is difficult to determine which one begets the other.

Additionally, ATR is difficult to define because it is not a religion like other religions. There is no sacred text like Christianity's Bible or Islam's Koran. There is nothing codified or written down that establishes the basic tenets of ATR.

⁶ By African Traditional Religion, this writer refers to the commonly accepted definition. ATR is the term used to describe the basic general beliefs of traditional Africans before it was influenced by Christianity, Islam or the West. It involves a belief in a distant creator God and a host of spirits and forces that permeate every aspect of life. In addition to this, there is a strong aspect of animism and ancestral worship in ATR. However, recent scholarship by Thomas Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2007) has suggested the need to define what is meant by ATR. He contends that ATR was actually influenced by first and second century North African Christianity and that some of that influence remained as Bantu tribes migrated south in the seventeenth century. This is a radical statement, but it could explain some anomalies in ATR. For instance, it is interesting to note that while followers of ATR worship ancestors and are animistic, they are also monotheistic. These two do not often go together, and African monotheism (akin to Deism) could actually be the lasting influence of early first and second century Christianity on ATR.

There are various places of worship utilized in ATR, but they are determined by the particular tribe and the particular need. Additionally, there are no religious leaders in ATR. Some tribes and clans will have priests and others who help in cultic practices, but again this varies from tribe to tribe without any type of consistency.

Instead of being a systemized religion, ATR is basically a loose set of religious principles that are a part of the holistic worldview of traditional Africans across the entire continent. These principles vary from tribe to tribe, but there are similarities across all tribes. Also, these principles are interwoven into the fabric of the culture and worldview of every African person to varying degrees. This makes ATR very slippery to hold on to and understand, and it also means that ATR is laying just under the surface of each person's outward beliefs and religious allegiances. Instead of being a religious system that is adhered to, it is more of an understanding of why and how the world works.

African Cosmology

Cosmology is the study of how the world began. ATR and the African worldview have a definite answer for this. ATR is an interesting mix of monotheism and animism. While most traditional Africans are animists and look fearfully to the spirit world and the spirits of their ancestors for guidance and help, they still recognize a creator God.⁷ Unlike other animists, Africans universally believe in a single God who is all-powerful and all-knowing, and who created everything, including man.

Each tribe has its own story of creation and its own story of where creation began. "All over Africa, there are places each of which is considered to be the sacred city, the sacred grove, or the sacred spot, especially because it is believed, according to the people's cosmology, that the place is the center of the world, the place where creation began, where the human race has its cradle, and from where the race dispersed all over the earth."⁸ In the majority of the cre-

⁷ Kevin W. Rodgers, "A Study of Theology of Place in Zambia and the Implications for Missions" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 68.

⁸ E. Bọlaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 161.

ation myths in Africa, the story is told of God who created all things on the earth, including man and animals. In most of the stories, God sees and loves His creation, but He is either indifferent, fearful, or angry with man. In most of the stories, God placed man in the world and either man discovered fire and burned the bush, or he killed and ate other animals which caused God to dislike and distrust man. God then either punishes man or in many cases He runs away from man and goes to the heavens. There is a sense in each creation story that God is unhappy with man and that He is distant and disinterested in the affairs of man.

So, while there is a close connection to Christian cosmology, that a single all-powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent God created the world, there is also a perspective that God is far away and that He is unconcerned with the day to day affairs of mankind. He is a God who *will* punish, and He is a God who *can* help if He chooses to, but often He is too far away to be reached, and so it is necessary for extraordinary measures to be taken to get God's attention. Thus, in African cosmology, there is what Hiebert called "the excluded middle"⁹ which is a host of ancestral spirits, angels, demons, clan spirits, nature spirits, and magical forces that are very close and very present, which one must appeal to in order to get to God. Many have termed this as Animism, and it is why Africans can be Monotheists (believing in one God) but still be Animists who worship the beings in the excluded middle.

Influence of Animism

Van Rheenen defines Animism as, "the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them

⁹ The "excluded middle" is a term coined by missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert, to describe a category in the spiritual world that is often overlooked or "excluded" by people in the West. Those in the West often see the present world in scientific terms and the future world after death in religious terms, but they fail to answer the spiritual questions about the present world in spiritual terms. Thus, they fail to offer answers to the difficult spiritual questions of daily life which forces African Christians to return to their ATR roots, which does offer answers, even if they are not biblical ones. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 196.

to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.”¹⁰ He goes on to explain that beings vary from culture to culture but include personal spirits that include God, gods, ancestors, ghosts, clan spirits, nature spirits, angels, demons, and Satan. Forces are impersonal powers that include magic, astrology, witchcraft, the evil eye, etc.¹¹

Animism (and especially ancestral spirits) is very important in the African worldview and African Traditional Religion because this is the only way to navigate the spirit world and get to the God who can change things. Instead of appealing directly to God, most African animists will appeal to ancestral spirits or other supernatural beings to appeal to God on their behalf. Whenever there is a problem in daily life, there is a spiritual reason for that problem. There is no such thing as coincidence or chance like is typical for most Westerners. There is a spiritual cause behind the problem and so there is a need for a spiritual solution. Many times this will involve going to an African witchdoctor, or diviner, who can discover who, or what, is the cause behind your problem, and then they will prescribe some kind of traditional medicine or use some magical means to solve the problem or give you power over what is harming you.

This animistic aspect of traditional African culture flavors everything that Africans believe and experience. There is an openness to the spirit world and to the influence it has on everyday affairs that is unparalleled in the West. Most Westerners mistakenly live a dualistic life with a distinct delineation between the sacred and the secular. When they think of spiritual things it relates to life after their death, not the influence of the afterlife in their current daily life. Africans, on the other hand, have a very holistic perspective on life where the spiritual realm is just as important (perhaps more so) as the physical realm. There really are not two realms at all, but one - the present realm, where a thin veil separates the living and the dead. They think in terms of the “living dead” who are those people who have died, but their spirits remain involved in day-to-day human affairs. Then there are the “unborn living” where the spirits of deceased ances-

¹⁰ Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

tors influence (or in some cases actually inhabit) newborn babies so that those babies carry on the name and spirit of the deceased.

This African perspective on the spirit world and its influence and connection to everyday life make a profound impact on African culture, African religion, and even interpretation of the Bible.

This worldview, which recognizes a multitude of spirit beings and ascribes mystical powers to objects, extends to every sphere of the African's life. It determines his relationships within the family, his relationship to the land on which he lives, and his relationship to the tribe to which he belongs. When looking carefully at how society functions in these spheres of life (lineage, land, tribe), it becomes clear that in each one a spiritual power is in ultimate control (ancestor spirits, gods of land and tribe). This unseen power is the ultimate originator and guardian of the traditions (taboos, rituals, and other laws) that govern this sphere of life. It will bring bad luck (sickness, accidents, social strife, natural disasters, etc.) to those who ignore or transgress these traditions.¹²

With such far a far-reaching impact on everyday life, it is easy to see how this religious/cultural worldview would influence one's perspective on Christianity and the Bible. Grebe and Fon go on to say that this perspective produces fear, bondage, and superficial solutions to felt needs. Christianity grew, they say, because it provided the answer to how man could relate to the Supreme God.¹³ Jesus Christ bridged the gap across the excluded middle between God and man and helped man get to God.

However, while early missionaries who brought the gospel answered the big question about a relationship with God and eternal life, they often failed to answer the questions about everyday life. From the African worldview, the ancestors and the spirits of the excluded middle have the power to regulate the affairs

¹² Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon, "African Traditional Religion and Christian Counseling," in *Insights in African Ethnography* (ed. Barbara Moore; Africa Area: Summer Institute of Linguistics, no. 2 1997), 93-146.

¹³ Grebe and Fon, "African Traditional Religion and Christian Counseling," 106.

of everyday life, so many Africans have merged African Traditional Religion with Christianity and created a condition called *Syncretism*. Syncretism is “the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness and speaks with a voice reflective of its culture.”¹⁴ Christianity does answer the everyday problems of life, but the historical emphasis on the big questions to the exclusion of the everyday left a gap that was filled by African Traditional Religion.

This does not mean that African Christianity should not be African, it just simply means that when one shapes his Christianity with the culture to the point where it is no longer biblical, then syncretism has occurred. This refers to the supra-cultural truths of Christianity that are always true for all people. This does not refer to the *forms* of Christian expression, for while the supra-cultural truths will remain constant from culture to culture, the forms (or expressions) of those truths may vary depending on the cultural context.¹⁵ In some ways, African culture is very consistent with biblical Christianity. However, in other areas, there are significant disconnects and those disconnects have led to Syncretism, an openness to false religions and expressions of Christianity that are more culturally African than biblically Christian.

Examples of these “disconnects” include the cosmological perspective. In the biblical model, there is a spirit world that operates alongside God and man, but that spirit world is limited to angels and demons; with the spirits of those who have departed either going to heaven or hell. As has been stated, in the African model there are a variety of spiritual beings between God and people. Instead of embracing the biblical model, Africans have added angels and demons to their cosmology along with all the other spirits. Some of this was fueled by ineffective Bible translation and an assumption that maybe the biblical

¹⁴ Gailyn Van Rheenen, “Syncretism and Contextualization: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself,” in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (ed. Gailyn Van Rheenen: Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006), 7–8.

¹⁵ Kevin W. Rodgers, “A Study of Theology of Place in Zambia and the Implications for Missions” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 132.

perspective brought by early missionaries was just the spirits of their world and not the African one.¹⁶

Another example is the relational nature of African culture and the importance of mediators. Historically for Africans, ancestral spirits were the mediators between God and man, and now, Jesus has been introduced. Does this make Him another ancestral spirit, or does that negate the presence of the ancestors in daily life? Additionally, there are proven methods from witchdoctors that have been relied on for years. This leads the African to wonder, “Could this knowledge be from God, and what is the difference between magic and Western medicine.”

A final example is the importance of action and works in the African worldview. As a shame/honor and fear/power-driven culture, the African worldview is often about doing the right things to get the right results and avoiding the wrong things (taboos) in order to avoid punishment from the spirits. The concept of grace is a difficult one for the typical African and the fabric of their society is interwoven with ideas of punishment for wrongdoing and avoidance of punishment if one does what is expected. No one is an individual and individualism is not rewarded. The importance of community in religious life and the importance of following the rules lead many to struggle with the concept of grace, which is a founding principle of biblical Christianity.

These examples, and many more, often lead the African to seek a religious expression that is more consistent with his culture than what is being offered by many evangelicals.¹⁷ While there are many erroneous religious expressions that

¹⁶ Grebe and Fon, “African Traditional Religion and Christian Counseling,” 107.

¹⁷ It is important to note that these “disconnects” are often not real disconnects but they are perceived disconnects on the part of the hearer. Biblical Christianity has the answer to all of life’s problems, not only those for eternity but of those for today. In addition, when Christianity is properly contextualized it has the ability to be practiced rightly in any culture around the world. Every culture has good aspects (or ones that are consistent with biblical principles) and bad aspects (those that are inconsistent with the Bible). This is not a case of Western Christianity versus African Christianity, but instead having a biblical Christianity that is able to express itself in every culture effectively and still be biblical. The point of this book is that some religious expressions have found a home in Africa; not because they are true, but because they easily mesh with African culture and do not have to adapt.

have been fueled by the African Cultural and Religious worldview, this volume will limit its scope to three particular ones: Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-Pentecostalism (especially the Prosperity gospel). The failure of traditional, biblical Christianity to answer the everyday issues of life has caused Africans to default to their traditional perspectives and these perspectives mesh well with these three religious perspectives. These three erroneous religious perspectives are so pronounced in Africa because they easily dovetail with African culture and they do not ask the culture to change in any way. One can be fully “African” and follow their perspective without any cultural adjustment. However, biblical Christianity, when correctly contextualized, will allow the African to be free in African expression and areas of culture that are consistent with the Bible but will force the true believer to reject those areas of their culture that are inconsistent with the Bible. For many, this is the rub.

ISLAM IN AFRICA

A BRIEF HISTORY

Everything has a story and every story has a beginning. The story of how Islam came to dominate massive territory in Africa is complicated. To try and generalize would be a disservice to the reader and historically inaccurate. Below are the major periods that summarize critical moments in Islam's interaction with the continent and the people of Africa. In no way is this the full story but rather an attempt to explain significant points in time where Islam and Africa's stories overlap.

The First Hijrah

During the seventh century, Islam made its first transcontinental journey from Asia to Africa. According to oral tradition, this first voyage (called the "First Hijrah" or "Migration") was made by refugees who were fleeing persecution in the Arab peninsula. However, it was not long afterward that the feet of soldiers, not refugees, marked Islam's more permanent entrance and later conquest of the northern part of the continent. Soon after the death of Mohammed (639), and during the reign of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, the Muslim Arab General, Amr ibn al-Asi, began a military campaign in Egypt.

Egypt was conquered quickly and in 642 Libya fell into Islamic hands as well. By 681, under the Umayyad dynasty, there were successful military campaigns in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. From this control of North Africa, Islam was able to establish a base from which to cross into Europe in 711. The strategic value of controlling North Africa cannot be overstated as it provided the launching point to further conquest by a religion seeking to spread its global influence. On another note, during this initial conquest, Islam's quick and violent entrance onto the continent "effectively ended Christianity in Africa for several centuries."¹⁸

¹⁸ C.J. Speel, "The Disappearance of Christianity from North Africa in the Wake of the Rise of Islam," *II Church History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (December 1960): pp. 379-397.

From Militants to Merchants: Islam's Advance Gains Speed

Following their more violent beginning, Islam continued to spread throughout the African continent through other means. After *conquest*, Islam spread most rapidly through *commerce*. As the majority of Berbers now practiced Islam (either through conversion or coercion) they carried this newfound faith along their long-established trade routes. In the eighth century, these trade routes crisscrossed much of West Africa and moved from the east coast into the interior of central Africa, finally reaching Lake Chad. Islam also continued to spread south from Egypt through the Sudan region along the eastern shores of the Swahili Coast. By the twelfth century, Islam had reached as far south as Mozambique.

Islam spread along the Swahili Coast with relative ease as Muslim traders from Arabia and Egypt began to permanently settle in towns and trading centers along the coast. The local Bantu peoples and Arabs mixed, as did their languages, with intermarrying being common and a blending of cultural practices which led to the evolution of a unique Swahili culture. "The Muslim religion ultimately became one of the central elements of Swahili identity."¹⁹ This period of massive expansion was aided by the "consolidation of Muslim trading networks which were connected by lineage, trade, and Sufi brotherhoods."²⁰ Being a Muslim in Africa meant profit in the marketplace and power in the political realm.

The spread of Islam in Africa cannot be characterized as strictly jihad, but it is also not without a violent and bloody history. While economic factors seem to be the main driver of the proliferation of Islam, there were also periods of militant campaigns.

Islamic Spread in West Africa

As Islam was spreading through the trade routes, they were enveloping entire West African kingdoms along the way. The rulers of these kingdoms ranged from tolerance to full-on acceptance, opening the door for widespread adoption of Islam as the official religion of the kingdom. Islam, from its beginning in

¹⁹ *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Swahili Coast," https://www.ancient.eu/Swahili_Coast/ 2019, April 01.

²⁰ Sir Thomas Walker Andrew, *The Preaching of Islam: a history of the propagation of the Muslim faith* (London: Constable, 1869), p. 26.

West Africa was very accommodating of an animistic worldview leading to syncretism. Islam seemed able to, for the most part, absorb the older faith into the new one creating what is known as Folk Islam.

Islam began its control on West African empires by taking Gao in 985. The Ghana Empire, then five centuries old, was next to fall into the hands of Islamic control just a few years later. From there, the religion spread quickly and widely, taking control of the Mali Empire and the Songhai Empire. By the end of the fourteenth century, the rulers of the Kingdom of Kanem (modern-day Lake Chad region) and Hausaland had adopted Islam making the “encirclement of Africa below the Sahara Desert complete.”²¹

To generalize the rulers and peoples of this period is difficult. Many embraced Islam wholeheartedly and converted to the religion. However, to say this was the majority or even the norm is uncertain as there were many African leaders who recognized that adopting Islam would be beneficial to trade. This is not shocking or even new to the religion’s roots. Islam was a religion born in the commercial society of Mecca and preached by a prophet who himself had for a long time been a merchant.

Both the religion and its founder provide a set of ethical and practical precepts closely related to business activities. The moral code helped to sanction and control commercial relationships and offered a unifying ideology among the members of different ethnic groups, thus providing for security and credit, two of the chief requirements of long-distance trade.²²

It is no wonder, then, why the most actively commercial peoples of Africa (the Dyula, Hausa, and Dyakhanke) were among the first to embrace Islam and carry it along their routes.

This diversity of response is especially highlighted in West Africa. For example, there are no accounts of the Ghanaian kings in the Ghana Empire converting to Islam. Instead, their response appears to be one of tolerance that must be assumed was necessary for survival in the marketplace. This is not to

²¹ Mark Cartwright, *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, s.n. "The Spread of Islam in Ancient Africa," <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1382/> Mark Cartwright.

²² Ibid.

say there were no converts to Islam, but rather to point out that Islam's advance in Africa is a complex matter. The eleventh-century Ghanaian capital of Koumbi Saleh is a good illustration of this fact. The capital was divided into two distinct towns. One town had twelve mosques while the other, only ten kilometers away, contained no mosques other than one built for visiting merchants, but rather, was full of traditional cult shrines.

Just a bit north, however, was a different story. The Mali Empire (thirteenth century) and Songhai Empire (fifteenth century) seem to have embraced Islam much more whole-heartedly. This is likely because their kings made pilgrimages to Mecca. Oftentimes, they would bring back Muslim scholars, architects, and books. Through this more thorough Islamization of the culture, Africans became influencers and contributors to global Islam. A distinctly Islamic African architecture was birthed, and African Islamic scholars and clerics arose. Great mosques, Koranic schools and Islamic universities were constructed across these kingdoms and gained international reputations. In this way, Islam was quickly losing its foreignness in Africa.

Resistance to Islam

Islam swept through North and West Africa with speed and relative ease. Even along the Eastern Coast, Islam seemed to move effortlessly through peoples and places. As already mentioned, even those who did not convert to Islam saw the financial and political benefits of at least tolerating the new religion. However, this was not the case in more inland East Africa.

There, Islam faced stiff competition from Christianity which was firmly entrenched in Nubia (Sudan region). Christianity had reached this area by the end of the first century where it greatly developed under the influence of the Eastern Roman Empire. By 580, Christianity had become the official religion of northern Sudan, centered around the Faras cathedral. Christianity also had a stronghold in modern-day Ethiopia during the Kingdom of Axum (1st – eighth century).

These areas were able to fend off Muslim conquest and influence until military intervention in the fourteenth century from the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt. Once the Christian influence was defeated, these kingdoms became yet more bases of Islamic dominance on the continent as two important Muslim

states were established with the Sultanates of Adal and Ajuran. Other pockets of resistance and challenges to Islamic expansion also arose elsewhere. One notable people group being the Mossi who controlled the lands south of the Niger River. Besides simply resisting Islamic influence they went on the offensive, even attacking and conquering the fabled city of Timbuktu in 1477. However, When Askia Mohammad I became the leader of the Songhai Empire with the desire to spread Islam, he waged a holy war against the Mossi kingdoms in 1497. Although the Mossi forces were defeated in this effort, they still managed to resist attempts to impose Islam. The arrival of Christian missionaries from Europe, and later America, also led to a slowing down of the advancement of Islam in Africa, especially along the western coast of African states like the Kingdom of Kongo. Islamic domination of the Swahili coast was also regularly challenged.

Sometimes the fighting was not against some foreign army or traditional king, but rather Islamic in-fighting, as different sects and streams of Islamic doctrine vied for ideological control. In 1802, in modern-day Nigeria, Uthman dan Fodio was a religious teacher and ethnic Fulani herder, who launched jihad to purify Islam. His was the first in a series of holy wars to rage across the center of the continent during the ninth century and into the early twentieth century. Most of these jihads began as religious rebellions within Islam, uprisings against African kings whom the Sufi reformers believed had corrupted the faith. "Yet time and again, as Europe's Christian colonial powers arrived in Africa, these holy wars morphed into battles against the infidel West."²³

These jihads, while largely forgotten, represent some of the earliest and bloodiest confrontations of Islam with the West. They drove colonial policy toward Muslims not only in Africa but worldwide. They also laid the groundwork for Islam's opposition to the modern West.

By 1810, 75 years before the British would call Nigeria their colony, Dan Fodio's army had conquered a large area of West Africa as their own Islamic empire. Their conquest was sweeping in both its range and its speed. However, their conquest was resisted and ultimately halted by a least expected enemy: the tsetse fly.

²³ Eliza Griswold, *The 10th Parallel* (New York: Picador, 2010), p. 21

As Dan Fodio's military mounted on horses and camels crossed the tenth parallel, the desert air moistened and the ground grew wetter. Here the notorious tsetse fly belt began, and sleeping sickness killed off the jihadis horses and camels, effectively halting their religion's southward advance.²⁴

Halting the spread of Islam in Africa became a focus for evangelical Christian missionaries in the early twentieth century. The German missionary Herman Kumm, and his wife Lucy, built a handful of grass huts to serve as a station for their new organization, the Sudan United Mission, along this same tenth parallel where the tsetse fly had stopped Dan Fodi's calvary a century before.

At the world missionary conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in June 1910, some twelve hundred protestant missionaries gathered to chart the greatest crisis Christianity was facing. Many argued that the most pressing challenge to their faith and the world's future was Islam. John Mott, the founder of YMCA, spoke at the conference and later wrote in his book, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*:

Two forces are contending for Africa – Christianity and Mohammedanism [Islam]. In many respects the more aggressive is Mohammedanism. It dominates Africa on its western half as far south as 10 degrees N. latitude, and on its eastern half, as far south as 5 degrees N...If things continue as they are now tending, Africa may become a Mohammedan continent.²⁵

Islam has indeed continued to grow in Africa. First through military conquests, then through the market, and most recently through migration. This most recent wave of Islamic growth did not happen until the second half of the ninth century when the British brought their labor force from India, including Muslim-Indian nationals, to their colonies in Africa.

Today there are seven countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with Muslim majority populations: Niger (98.3%), Senegal (96.1%), Gambia (95.7%), Mali (95%),

²⁴ Ibid, p. 21.

²⁵ John Mott, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions* (New York: Educational Dept. Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., 1910), p. 167.

Guinea (89.1%), Sierra Leone (78.6%), and Burkina Faso (61.5%).²⁶ However, almost every country in Sub-Saharan Africa has a growing Muslim population. In 2020, there were 311,000,000 Muslims²⁷ in Sub-Saharan Africa making up 30.3% of the total population. This means Sub-Saharan Africa is home to roughly 16% of the global Muslim population. Nigeria has the fifth-highest population of Muslims worldwide and is first in Africa.²⁸ The spread of Islam has been wide, but it has also been deep.

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

The spread of Islam was made possible through initial military conquests and capitalizing on existing trade routes. The conversion of key peoples who were the main merchants of their day led to a religion that could spread rapidly and cross borders with ease. Islam has continued to grow to this day through the migration of peoples. One interesting thing to note is that after these initial conquests and conversions, Islam appears to have leveled off insofar as rapid growth is concerned. This is especially obvious when compared to Christianity. In 1900, Muslims made up 14% of the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa whereas Christians made up 9%. By 2010, Muslims now made up 29% of the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa whereas Christians were an astounding 57%!²⁹

There is a myriad of factors for these numbers, but a few observations can be made. First, the twentieth century witnessed an unparalleled focus on Christian missions and Africa was a key field for missionary engagement. This missionary zeal led to the conversion of primarily animistic peoples, seen by their drastic drop from 76% of the total population in 1900 to just 13% in 2010.³⁰

Islam's slower but steady growth appears to be more consistent with the natural growth and migration of peoples. In other words, regarding growing their respective religions, the strategy of the twentieth century appears to be

²⁶ All statistical data is taken from the *World Factbook* on www.cia.gov.

²⁷ According to Pew Forum.

²⁸ *World Factbook* accessed on www.cia.gov.

²⁹ According to Pew Forum.

³⁰ Ibid.

procreation for the Muslim and proselytization for the Christian. That is obviously an over-generalized statement, but the fact remains that neither religion seemed to gain much ground by converting adherents from the other's faith. Instead, after the ninth century, it appears that Islamic majority peoples remained Islamic and non-Islamic peoples saw large numbers convert to Christianity. The main point to be noted here is that Christianity's rapid growth in Africa did not come through seeing Muslims won to Christ.

In the twenty-first century, many Africans see their religious affiliation as part of their family or people's heritage. The vast majority of the continent contains Muslims and Christians living rather peacefully with one another in the same country, village, and sometimes family. In West Africa, there are a myriad of mixed families where the husband is Muslim and the wife Christian, or vice versa. These dynamics do not seem to cause major rifts in the family and point to a deeper reality at work: religious affiliation seems to be inherited more than chosen. A study revealed that "Neither Christianity nor Islam is growing significantly in sub-Saharan Africa at the expense of the other; there is virtually no net change in either direction through religious switching."³¹ Whether for fear of stirring up strife and conflict, or a deeper worldview thought that "X" people are always Muslim and "Y" people are always Christian, cross-proselytizing does not seem to be happening very often in Africa. In Niger, even top denominational leadership encourages Christians to live at peace with their Muslim neighbors. Unfortunately, living in peace often means not sharing your faith.

While this is certainly an issue that must be addressed within Christianity, it is not problematic in Islam. In Christianity, one must individually repent and believe in Christ. In Islam, there is the expectation that you are born Muslim and therefore will remain Muslim. Understanding Islam itself and its history in Africa can help explain some of this reality.

"To be Songhai is to be Muslim"

This is a statement uttered and believed by the vast majority of the Songhai people of West Africa and is the same sentiment expressed by myriad people groups across the continent. Their people have been Muslim for as far back as

³¹ Lugo, Luis. "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Penforum.org*, 15 April 2010.

they can remember, to the point that it is unthinkable to consider oneself otherwise. A Songhai is simply born a Muslim and to call him or her to anything else would be like asking them to not be a Songhai person.

This sort of thinking goes back to the Islamic entrance into Africa. As already mentioned, the eighth to the fifteenth centuries saw entire kingdoms and regions “converted” to Islam in a relatively short period. This means that today many peoples have been Islamic since less than a century after Mohammed’s death. In other words, Africans have been Muslims for almost as long as anyone in the world. From the beginning, native converts studied and became scholars, missionaries, and even saints, and so “Islam came to be seen no longer as a foreign religion but as a black African one.”³² Africans forget that there was a time before Islam. They tend to forget that North Africa was a bastion of Christian scholarship long before Islam came ashore. Unfortunately, due to the missionary movement of the twentieth century, Christianity is often seen as a new arrival at best and a white man’s religion at worst. In these ways and more, Christianity struggles to shake its foreignness.

People either embraced Islam whole-heartedly or rejected it whole-heartedly. These people groups were often already divided before Islam came. For instance, there has always been conflict between animal herders and farmers over land disputes. In places like Nigeria, the herders are largely Muslim and the Christians largely farmers. Much of the current conflict and even current terrorism activity in Northern Nigeria has more to do with these land disputes than religious convictions. It is too easy to label this a religious battle (which both parties often try to exploit) when the reality is much more complex. Religion gets blamed and named for ethnic, social, and political frustrations that are centuries old.

A Stone Left Unturned

Beyond the history, though, there are other reasons for Islam’s stronghold on lives. Perhaps the most important observation is that Islam is not only a religion. Instead, it is a comprehensive way of life, catering to all the fields of human existence. Islam guides “all aspects of life – individual and social, material and

³² Mark Cartwright, "The Spread of Islam in Ancient Africa." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1382/> Mark Cartwright.

moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international.”³³ You simply cannot tease out religion from culture. In Islam, they are interconnected. Islam brought with it a culture of its own, including dress and language. There are not large efforts to indigenize Islam into the culture, but rather to Islamize the culture.

This has led to another reason that Islam remains so entrenched in certain peoples. While it seems counter-intuitive that a culture dominating one’s life like Islam would leave any stone unturned, they have, it appears, left a huge one untouched. That stone is traditional religion. From its inception in Africa, Islam has, in large part, allowed animistic traditions and practices, and beliefs to remain with little to no conflict. “Some scholars have even argued that Islam IS a traditional Africa religion!”³⁴

Much ink has been spilled distinguishing what is known as Folk Islam (a syncretistic faith where Islam and traditional African religion combine) and Orthodox Islam. However, as Phil Parshall and Rick Love helpfully point out, with a large majority (over 70%) of global Muslims, and closer to 95% of African Muslims, practicing Folk Islam, then Folk Islam for all intents and purposes is Orthodox Islam.³⁵

Islam focuses on external conformation whereas Christianity focuses on internal transformation. This does not mean Christians in Africa have not also fallen prey to syncretism. What it means, instead, is that Islam much more naturally welcomes a dual allegiance. In Niger, there is no problem and no contradiction noted when someone walks right out of the Friday mosque to attend a spirit possession ceremony. This focus on rituals and outward appearances while leaving the heart untouched has left a vast majority of African Muslims unsure what their religion or their holy book even teaches.

³³ John L. Espisito, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44.

³⁴ Douglas E. Thomas, *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2015), p. 125.

³⁵ Both Parshall and Love have written extensively about this thought. Love especially explores this idea in “Church Planting Among Folk Muslims” as published in *International Frontier Journal* VOL 11:2 April 1994.

This strategy of dominating certain aspects of culture (dress, routine, language) while leaving alone other aspects (worldview and beliefs) has left millions of people who look and talk and behave like seventh-century Arabs, but who believe and make sense of the world like their ancestors. This, along with some of the other factors already mentioned, makes engaging Muslims with the Gospel a uniquely challenging task.

Islam and the African Worldview

While syncretism is rampant and Folk Islam is the norm, there is perhaps a deeper reason these two religious systems can co-exist so interchangeably: despite looking very different from the outside, Islam and African Traditional Religion have many of the same values. When Christianity arrived on the continent there were large-scale calls for reform. Forsaking idol worship, polygamy, and any other cultural norms that were contra-biblical were all expectations for the new convert to Christ. However, this was not the case in Islam which was much more compatible and accepting of almost all these practices.

Islam is very much in agreement that there is an unseen spiritual realm affecting everything from travel to pregnancy. While Allah is largely uninvolved with his creation, much like the god of deism, Satan, demons, witches, jinn and the like are running amuck on earth. In all the established pharmacies in Niamey, Niger, with modern medicines from Europe, one can also purchase powders to fight off evil spirits. This bottle of powder is said to have been blessed and produced in the Arab world and endorsed by a well-known Islamic teacher.

Another similarity is the ritualistic nature of both faiths. In both Islam and most traditional African faiths, the focus is on the right practice of rituals. Knowing what the Arabic words that are prayed mean or thinking devotionally on them are not on many Muslim's radars. Instead what is important is their rote repetition in rote positions of prayer. Beyond the actual practices, however, is the goal. While most Muslims would likely say they are trying to cover over wrongs through their prayer and fasting, a deeper look reveals a different motivation. The idea of blessings and curses is very prevalent and again melds well with traditional beliefs. Spirits and demons must be appeased and manipulated for both prophylactic and therapeutic purposes. Religiosity is less about holy living and more about crop production, posterity, and honor among peers.

A final similarity is in the way that both Islam and an African worldview perceive authority. There is the idea of the Big Man. This Big Man must be obeyed and even served/worshipped by the common people. He is not to be questioned and his authority is not to be challenged. Islam is more than happy to comply with this worldview. Since the majority of Muslims worldwide do not speak Arabic fluently, their knowledge of their faith and even their holy book is largely dependent on their imam (read Big Man). Whatever he says goes, no questions asked. Individual thought and reflection are discouraged, and communal conformity is encouraged, if not enforced.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

With one-third of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa self-professing Muslims, it would be poor stewardship of the Gospel to not pray and plan for engaging Muslims with the Gospel. Simply agreeing to live at peace with an “I’ll leave you alone if you leave me alone” attitude does not reflect the heart of our Savior and His Great Commission. It is because of this reality that each book in this series will spend significant time helping the reader understand the worldview of his Muslim neighbors even better. Understanding what they believe about God and how they understand salvation will be critically important for effective ministry. This information will also, necessarily, inform strategies. However, there are some general observations for unique challenges that can be made even now regarding ministry among Muslims.

Unique Challenges

As already mentioned, most Muslim majority people groups do not remember a time when they were not Muslims. Individuals likely have no “conversion” event, but rather believe they were born this way and that they cannot change. Another challenge (that can also be an opportunity) is the Muslim’s understanding of community (ummah). There is a natural brotherhood generally across the world and specifically in their local context. To leave this community is almost unthinkable and comes with a price. In places where Sharia Law is established, it can cost someone their life. But even in secularly governed countries, to leave the ummah of Islam is to commit cultural suicide. Therefore, strategies must point to a new and real community that the convert will be welcomed into. Mus-

lims do not live compartmentalized lives as so many Christians do who think little of Christ outside of Sunday. They must be shown a real community exists on the other side of conversion that touches and interprets every part of their day and every activity.

Laying down our “Christian” culture

Reaching Muslims will call for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting strategies that are different than those most familiar to the reader. It will require learning new skills and trying new strategies than those that are effective among animistic or even nominal Christians. For example, large crusades and street preaching are typically not as effective as dialog with a small group. A “Come and See” model is largely ineffective.

Another challenge to evangelism is that, because Islam is not contextualized, a large number of Muslims do not know what they truly believe, but rather rely totally on their imam. When engaging with the Gospel, terms like “Son of God”, “prayer”, “salvation”, and even “heaven” must be carefully explained. Short and pithy Gospel presentations might sow the first seed, but likely much more explanation will be necessary.

Also, the kind of church that will be welcoming to Muslims (both seekers and believers) will be very different than those who grew up in a “church” culture. Certain elements that are common in a Christian culture church (men and women sitting together, dancing, shouting, drums) will be misunderstood at best and seen as blasphemous at worst among most Muslims.

Engaging Muslims with the Gospel has historically erred in two directions. First are those who require Muslims to, “Become like me.” This approach means cultural suicide for the convert as they give up everything culture-wise to follow Christ. All disciples count the cost to follow Jesus and everyone will inherently lose certain things when they come to Christ. However, no one should have to give up their culture just to enter someone else’s culture. Instead, everyone should weigh and view their culture through the lens of the Bible and be willing to lose anything that does not line up. Christianity can cross any culture. A Fulani should not have to become a Yoruba to follow Jesus. Yes, they must be willing to and should rid themselves of any cultural practice or belief that is

clearly unbiblical, but there is much freedom in the expression of the church and worship for the new believer.

The other error has typically been, “Remain like you.” Now, there are NO calls for losing any aspect of culture. Some proponents of this strategy would even say it is not necessary to call the new convert a Christian, but rather to continue to self-identify as Muslim. Whereas the first approach was an under-contextualized model, this is an over-contextualized model. The goal of missions is to develop strategies that are Biblically faithful and culturally appropriate. We do not force anyone to become like us, but we cannot allow anyone (including ourselves) to remain as they are.

CONCLUSION

Thinking deeply about ministering to Muslims is one of the goals of this series. The desire is to equip church leaders and church members to understand, love, and engage their Muslim neighbors with the Gospel. In doing so, Africans will return to some of their most ancient roots and follow in the footsteps of their oldest ancestors.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN AFRICA

Each volume of the Africa Theology series will either explore aspects of biblical theology, systematic theology, or practical theology. However, what is unique is that, depending on the topic, it will be examined in light of what various false religions believe about that topic and how to help the local church counter those false beliefs. One of the religions that is very prominent in Africa is Roman Catholicism. It claims to be historical Christianity, but over the last two thousand years, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has veered away from the true biblical perspective. It is necessary to understand these various theological topics in light of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic church, but it is also important to understand the history of the RCC in Africa and why they are so prominent across this continent.

HISTORICAL CURRENTS

Roman Catholic missions in Africa date back to the Franciscan Monk, Ramon Llull, who made his first mission trip to Tunis in 1291 A.D. Before Llull's approach, the answer of the RCC to Islam had been the crusades. Llull and others became convinced that it would be more effective to win Muslims with conversion by the word of God than by force with the sword.³⁶ While Llull could be considered the earliest RCC attempt at missions in Africa, his work was limited to far North Africa and Muslim peoples. Actual attempts by the RCC to reach Sub-Saharan Africa would come much, much later.

The history of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa begins with the arrival of Bartholomew Diaz at Walvis Bay on eighth December 1487. He appropriately called it the gulf of Santa Maria de Conceição. The first Mass, celebrated perhaps in late December 1487 or early January 1488, was celebrated on the island of the Holy Cross (named as such by Diaz), just off Port Elizabeth. 10 years later Vasco da Gama, on his way to India, would, on Christmas day, sight the land to which he gave the name "Tierra de Natal". These explorers also brought missionaries

³⁶ John Mark Terry and Robert L. Gallagher, *Encountering the History of Missions: From the Early Church to Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 104.

with them, but the priests did not concentrate on evangelizing South Africa. Indeed, there is no evidence of any missionary work during these early days.³⁷

Efforts to spread Roman Catholicism to Sub-Saharan Africa did not come until the arrival of the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century. The Portuguese were some of the earliest colonial explorers to Sub-Saharan Africa and with exploration, they brought their religion. While the Portuguese colonialists were particularly interested in the slave trade and other opportunities to exploit Africa, they also brought with them Roman Catholic priests to minister to their needs and establish the RCC religion in their settlements. They were particularly active in Congo, Angola, Mozambique, and other territories across Sub-Saharan Africa. “The Treaty of Tordesillas signed on June 7, 1494, divided the newly discovered lands outside Europe between Portugal and the Crown of Castile, along a meridian 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands. The lands to the east would belong to Portugal and the lands to the west to Castile. In this treaty, the Pope recognized Portuguese claims to Africa. Thereafter, missionary activities in Africa were sanctioned by the Portuguese King.”³⁸

Roman Catholic influence extended beyond the influence of Portuguese colonialists as later French, Belgium and other predominately Roman Catholic countries became involved in the colonial history of Sub-Saharan Africa. From these predominately French, Belgium, and Portuguese colonies Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit orders began to slowly proselytize and spread Roman Catholicism across Sub-Saharan Africa. Today, Roman Catholic missions can be found in every country of Sub-Saharan Africa and priests come from various parts of the world, from Polish priests working in Zambia to Italians and Irish working in Kenya. Also, many priests of African descent are being sent to other parts of the world. “With one of the world’s largest Catholic populations, estimated at 158 million, Africa is the continent where the [*Roman Catholic*] church is at once strong in terms of sheer numbers and devotional vitality and weak, in-

³⁷ Unknown, “History of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa,” accessed April 23, 2020, <https://sacbc.org.za/history-of-the-catholic-church-in-southern-africa/>.

³⁸ Unknown, “Portuguese Catholic Missionaries in Mbanza, Kongo – Africa,” accessed April 23, 2020, <https://www.globalblackhistory.com/2016/05/portuguese-catholic-missionaries-mbanza-kongo-africa.html>.

evitably touched by the poverty, corruption, conflict, and disease afflicting the larger society. By 2025, one-sixth of the world's Catholics, or about 230 million, are expected to be African. The world's largest seminary is in Nigeria, which borders on Cameroon in western Africa, and overall, Africa produces a large percentage of the world's priests."³⁹

THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Typical Roman Catholicism in Africa tends to be a mixture of classical Roman Catholic theology with a healthy amount of African Traditional Religion mixed in. While there are signs of change in the Roman Catholic church in Africa, particularly the RCC charismatic movement, the RCC remains quite different from evangelical Christianity. Some fundamental issues were rampant in the RCC that sparked the protestant reformation and the formation of denominations of "protestant" churches that exist today. There have been attempts by the RCC to correct some of the excesses that led to the protestant reformation, and there have been attempts (like Vatican II) on the part of the RCC to see value in other churches. However, the three fundamental issues that caused true Christians to leave the RCC are still the issues that separate Evangelical Protestants and Catholics today. These three issues revolve around the Bible, the nature of the church, and the nature of salvation.⁴⁰

Sola Scriptura is a Latin term that means by the Scripture Alone. Simply put, it is the long-held Christian belief that the Scriptures are the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice. What the Bible teaches becomes the deciding voice on all matters. For Roman Catholics, however, they hold that the RCC interpretation of Scripture is equal to or above the Bible. Roman Catholics do believe that the Bible is the word of God, but that the traditions of the church, that were handed down through the ages, are of equal value and equal weight for faith and practice. In other words, the question for

³⁹ Rachel Donadio, "On Africa Trip, Pope Will Find Place Where Church Is Surging Amid Travail." *New York Times*, March 16, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/16/world/africa/16popo.html?r=0>.

⁴⁰ Justin Taylor, "The Difference Between Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants," July 4, 2007, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/difference-between-roman-catholics-and/>.

the RCC is not “What does the text mean?” but it is “What does the Pope say the text means.” This allows the RCC to adhere to several false doctrines, like the veneration of Mary, seeing the Eucharist as another sacrifice of the body of Christ, and purgatory. All of these are inconsistent with the Bible and have no scriptural support, but they are a part of “church tradition” and are therefore considered to be true in the Roman Catholic Church. The majority of Evangelicals believe that the Bible is inerrant and infallible and that it is the sole authority. They believe that an ordinary believer can rightly interpret the text of Scripture (given the right understanding of the rules of interpretation) and that Scripture interprets Scripture. In other words, the meaning of the Bible text is plain and when something is unclear in one part of the Bible other parts will make it clear.

Another significant difference between the RCC and Evangelical Protestants is their belief that the church is an extension of Christ and necessary for salvation. Instead of the church being the body of Christ or the visible representatives of Christ on the earth, the RCC actually believes that the Roman Catholic Church is divine like Christ is divine. In other words, you do not come to Jesus for salvation, you come to the RCC for salvation because Jesus and the RCC are one. In the Catholic Catechism, it states,

It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism. In the *Rituale Romanum*, the minister of Baptism asks the catechumen: "What do you ask of God's Church?" And the answer is: "Faith." "What does faith offer you?" "Eternal life." Salvation comes from God alone; but because we receive the life of faith through the Church, she is our mother: "We believe the Church as the mother of our new birth, and not in the Church as if she were the author of our salvation." Because she is our mother, she is also our teacher in the faith.⁴¹ It would be unfair to say that the RCC believes that the church is the author of salvation. Salvation, in their mind, comes from God but it comes “through” the Roman Catholic Church. While the church does not save you, it is impossible to be saved apart from the RCC.

⁴¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Edition), Article 2, Section 168 – 169.

The third significant difference between the RCC and other Evangelicals is what they believe about the nature of salvation. Evangelicals hold to the word of God which states, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift not from works, so that no one can boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9 CSB) In other words, salvation comes simply by God’s grace through faith in the finished work of His son on our behalf on the cross. There is nothing more needed beyond understanding the gospel, repenting of sin, and placing one’s faith in Christ. Those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in repentance and faith shall receive salvation as the gift of God. Those who receive salvation are united to Christ through the bond of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, the RCC teaches that it is necessary to receive faith and baptism, via the Catholic church to obtain salvation. The word that is often used to describe salvation in the RCC is that it is “sacramental” in nature. Sacraments, in RCC theology, are the means of receiving grace from God. There are seven recognized sacraments in the RCC: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, marriage, and holy orders. The first three in this list are what is called the “initiation” sacraments and they are the way that one can enter into the church. Baptism, confirmation, and communion (or the Eucharist) are the means of receiving grace from God through the RCC, and according to their theology, there is no way that one can be saved or enter heaven apart from those Grace giving sacraments. This amounts to a “faith plus works” approach to salvation and this is inconsistent with Evangelical theology and the clear teaching of Scripture.

COMPATIBILITY WITH TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CULTURE

The Roman Catholic Church has spread all across the continent of Africa and there are many millions of adherents. Their success has been due to a variety of factors. They have worked hard to reach many people and for over one hundred years they have been active in the most remote parts of the continent. The early “White Fathers” were known for going to the most difficult places in Africa, learning the local languages, and endearing themselves to the people. One must admire the way they sacrificed to establish themselves and also the way that they ministered to the African people. One of the primary reasons they have been so successful is that they have a longstanding tradition of building and staffing

hospitals and schools. Additionally, the RCC has focused on feeding the poor, healing the sick, and attending to the other developmental needs of the majority world. This has gone a long way to endear them to the people and to make the RCC the established church in many places across the continent. Yet, this is not the only factor that has contributed to their success. There are many places where RCC theology and practice intersect with African culture and Traditional Religion in a way that makes it appealing to the people of this continent.

Ancestors and Mediators

As has been mentioned before, traditional African culture and religion are animistic in nature. There is a veneration of ancestors in Africa and a desire to appeal to them to mediate between God and man to solve the everyday problems of life. This propensity to appeal to the “excluded middle” for help dovetails nicely with the Catholic church’s veneration of saints and the mediatorial work which they accomplish within the RCC. In reality, the RCC has created an excluded middle with its concept of saints who can mediate between people and God. It is common knowledge that the RCC sees Mary as the holiest of all those saints and the holiest human who has ever lived. Many Roman Catholics pray to Mary and ask her to intercede to God on their behalf. While this is unbiblical, the Bible makes it clear that there is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, it does make the RCC very appealing to the African mindset. The RCC has created a whole subset of holy people called saints and members are encouraged to appeal to them along with appealing to Mary and God for help. This concept is very close to the African tradition of appealing to ancestors for help, and for many animistic cultures around the world, they see the saints of the RCC as just Western ancestors that they can pray to alongside their cultural ancestors.

The concept of mediators is a very important one in African culture. Africans tend to be polite people who rarely interact directly with others in authority. While those in the West value directness and eye contact, Africans will demurely look away when talking to someone they respect, and they will often avoid contact with powerful people as a sign of respect. For instance, in a marriage proposal in the West, it is considered respectful to go to the father of the bride and directly ask his daughter for her hand in marriage. In Africa, this is the

height of disrespect and the African tradition is to use a mediator to accomplish this task. In Zambia, it is often an elaborate process of approaching your grandmother, who then goes to your uncle, who will then approach the prospective bride's uncle, who will then talk to her father.

In almost every cultural exchange in Africa there is protocol and a set of rules to follow to not offend other people. Mediators are often used to navigate these things which can be as simple as asking someone for a ride into town or as elaborate as planning a wedding or funeral. This propensity in African culture to use a go-between is one of the things that makes the RCC so appealing to Africans. They already venerate people who have passed away and they appeal to them for help. Now the RCC offers a "Christian" version of this where they can appeal to dead Christian heroes of the faith to be mediators between them and God. Yet, there is no biblical evidence that those who have died are still active in this world of the living and there is no evidence to demonstrate that we should appeal to those who have died and gone to heaven, or even priests here on this earth to be our mediator with God. Instead, in Christ, we are granted direct access to the Father and can go directly to Him when we pray in Jesus' name.

Purgatory

Related to the close connection between Animism and the Veneration of Saints is the idea of purgatory. In the RCC, purgatory is a transitional condition between death and heaven. For those who are still in the good graces of God, but have not yet been purified, there exists a place where one's soul goes to suffer and experience purification before entering the joy of heaven. Catholics are divided about what actually happens in purgatory and where it is located. Some see descriptions of this place in some of the Bible's passages on *Sheol* (the grave or place of the dead) and some will use passages out of context to proof-text the concept. The Bible is clear that purification comes from the finished work of Christ on the cross and there are no rituals, suffering, or anything else that one can do to purify themselves. While the RCC will often point to various verses to propose the doctrine of Purgatory, they primarily point to the teaching of the RCC and past Popes and Bishops who have supported this belief.

Regardless of what one thinks about the idea of purgatory, it is easy to see the appeal of this doctrine to the ATR mind. African Traditional Religion is built around the concepts of the living dead who are not in heaven or hell but are somehow stuck in this world and continue to interact with humanity. In some cultures, there is a belief that these ancestral spirits will pass on after many years to another plane of existence, but for the immediate future, they are bound in an intermediary state where they can either harm or help the people they were connected to in life. Most of the rituals related to funerals, handling of the body, and cultural practices that surround the treatment of the remaining spouse, are connected to appeasing this person's spirit who has died and ensuring that they bring help and not harm to the family. While the RCC doctrine of purgatory might not be biblical, it is surely appealing to ATR which already has a similar concept in its cosmology.

Works Based Religion

Another appealing aspect of the RCC to African culture is its emphasis on salvation by works instead of by grace alone. African traditional culture focuses on the punishment of those who break cultural rules and taboos and rewards for those who follow the rules and protocols that must be observed. There is very little tolerance for individualism and African societies are highly structured insisting that everything and everyone remain in their place. Standing out from the rest is discouraged and will often be met with retribution in the local village. Because Africans are relational people, the relationships within the society are of paramount importance and these rules and protocols are designed to promote harmony and wellbeing. Yet, when one steps outside of the societal norms there can be great pushback from their family, clan, or village.

This works-based thinking, (or rewards versus punishment), meshes well with the RCC perspective on Christianity. The RCC is highly structured as well with many rules and protocols to be observed. As has been mentioned, even salvation is dependent upon keeping the sacraments and not simply grace and faith alone. This writer's observation has been that most Africans struggle with the concept of grace in the Bible. A. W. Tozer defined biblical grace in this way: "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the

undeserving."⁴² From God's perspective as explained in the Bible, grace is when God gives us what we do not deserve like forgiveness, eternal life, etc. Mercy is when God holds back from us what we do deserve; things like judgment, condemnation, wrath, and hell. The idea that people who do not deserve favor can be given favor, is foreign to the mind of most Africans. In their worldview, you are punished for what you do wrong and rewarded for what you do right. The sin is not in the act of doing wrong as much as it is in the act of getting caught. If you are caught you deserve to be punished, if you do not get caught then you have cleverly avoided the judgment you deserve. Yet, in God's economy of grace He always knows when we sin, and yet He loves us and forgives us despite that.

This is not to mean that grace is cheap. On the contrary, Jesus suffered and died for the entire world to pay for the sins we have committed. Grace cost Jesus everything even though we freely receive it from God. These concepts tend to go against the grain of African culture because individuals who fall out of line suffer for their mistakes and those who keep the status quo (or the appearance of it) are rewarded by society. This law-oriented culture (as opposed to a grace-oriented one) is more at home in the RCC than it is in Evangelical Christianity. The RCC talks about grace, but they mean "benefits received from God" when they use the word "grace"; things like healing, or special favor from God. Instead in the RCC, forgiveness and salvation from sin is a combination of obeying the Bible and church, and then receiving grace (or favor) for the things you do. For instance, when one sins against God, they must go to the priest and confess to be restored. He will then give them a penance to do or prayers to pray to be forgiven. Forgiveness and the "grace" are dependent upon works. It is possible to "fall from grace" in the RCC and the need to be restored. These concepts are foreign to the Bible and to genuine evangelical Christianity. Yet they interconnect perfectly with the traditional African worldview and thus are easily understood and accepted by RCC members.

⁴² John MacArthur, "What is Grace?" accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/grace-to-you/read/articles/what-is-grace-10339.html>.

Ritual and Cultic Practices

African traditional religion is often rife with various rituals and cultic practices. There are special places for special ceremonies and there are myriad rituals and protocols related to those ceremonies. Stages of life are crucial in the African context and there are rituals related to birth, puberty, marriage, childbirth, and death. Africans highly value these things and they tend to respect rituals even more if they are highly elaborate.

Elaborate would be one word to describe the religious process of the Roman Catholic Church. They have a hierarchical system of religious leaders who are professional in nature and highly trained. The mass and religious services are often done in Latin and there is much ceremony where every motion, every gesture and every word are laden with meaning and history. Yet, the system is also very predictable and can be reproduced at any given church or cathedral around the world. The RCC values ceremony, protocol, ritual, and most of all history. This established system is very cultic in nature. By cultic, this writer does not mean false as much as he means prescribed, rigid, formal, and ritualistic. The same things are done the same way over and over again because that is the tradition and the power is found in the ritual.

These same statements could also describe African Traditional Religion. Like Catholicism, ATR thrives on ritualistic practices that profess to have power when done in the prescribed way, by the prescribed person, with the prescribed elements. Biblical concepts like “the priesthood of all believers”⁴³ or the “au-

⁴³ Based on verses like 1 Peter 2:4-9 and Revelation 5:10, the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers is a biblical concept that asserts that everyone who is born again by the Spirit is filled with the Spirit and able to go directly to God in prayer. They have no other mediator but Christ (1 Timothy 2:5) and they are therefore equal with all other believers in the world and do not need to go through a pope, priest or church in order to gain access to God. Access to God is based on the finished work of Christ on the cross and now those who are in Christ are priests to God. This is not a special class of minister but is a designation for all Christians.

tonomy of the local church”⁴⁴ are foreign to the RCC and also foreign to ATR. In ATR, only certain people have the power to perform rituals, do magic, or break curses. If you need help you do not pray to God yourself, but you go to an ancestral spirit, or even better, you go to a witch doctor who can manipulate the spirits to perform the service you desire. In ATR and the RCC, you are not the priest; instead, you need a priest. This concept of ritual and cultic practices in the RCC makes it a very appealing church for the typical African worldview.

Veneration of the Church and the Institutional Emphasis

Connected to this concept of ritual and religion is the idea of the veneration of the church and the RCC's emphasis on the institution. When the RCC uses the word church they are referring to the worldwide church that has its seat in Rome. The majority of evangelicals believe that the church is universal in nature but local in expression. When an evangelical speaks of the church, they are typically referring to a local body of baptized believers. The vast majority of the times the word “church” is used in the Bible, it is referring to a local body of baptized believers. The church is made up of people and is not connected to a building or meeting place. A biblical church can meet in a house, under a tree, in a schoolroom, in a traditional church building, or any other number of places. The church is not wood, bricks, and mortar; the church is people. In the RCC the church is a combination of the priesthood, the buildings, the people, the

⁴⁴ Based on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, each Christian can pray to God directly and know His will through prayer and His word. Knowledge of the will of God is not limited to a specific class of clergy but is available to all who are in Christ. Thus, when making decisions as a church body, each individual member who is indwelt with the Holy Spirit is capable of praying and discerning His will. Therefore, God leads His church through directing the individual members of the church as they pray together with the leadership of the church. Since God guides His children directly, there is no need for a pope or an authoritative body beyond the local church to control or direct the local church. Each local church is therefore autonomous and accountable directly to God since it is made up of individual members who are each accountable to each other and God. While autonomy is biblical, cooperation is equally a biblical concept, and so, even if a local church is not ruled by an outside body, person or denomination, it should be accountable to other churches and cooperate with other churches for the sake of mutual edification and particularly for fulfilling the Great Commission.

sacraments, the history, and traditions. In short, it is an institution that is to be admired and supported.

These are some of the reasons why the RCC has such elaborate buildings and ornate structures. The church is invisible in the world, but the church is visible in the institution. Evangelicals would say the church is visible in the people or the church members. The RCC is very institutional and very concrete. Africans tend to prefer the concrete over the abstract. They prefer things that they can see, taste, touch, and feel, rather than ideas. This makes the RCC very appealing in Sub-Saharan Africa because they are very visible with their buildings, the uniforms for the nuns, the collars for the priests, etc. You can see where the Catholic church is active and the bigger the institution, the more powerful and relevant it seems to the African mind. The Bible says that God's kingdom is visible, but the RCC kingdom is a very visible one and that corresponds with the African culture that values what can be seen and what is concrete rather than what is abstract.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the dominant reason that the RCC has been so successful in Africa is its ability to assimilate other cultures into its own perspectives. Especially since Vatican II, the RCC has attempted to appreciate other cultures and other religions and be more pluralistic in its perspective. What they often call assimilation or accommodation is in reality absorption. Often the RCC will overlook the syncretistic practices of their adherents as long as people will still affiliate with them. These concepts and many, many more are what make the RCC so appealing to many people in Sub-Saharan Africa. Like Islam, there are many connections between RCC theology and the worldview of traditional Africa. These connections cause many Africans to see the Roman Catholic Church as legitimate and this causes them to gravitate to the church. They do not see a conflict between their traditional religion and Roman Catholicism but instead try to find a way to meld the two together, so they have a "Christianized" ATR.

NEO-PENTECOSTALISM IN AFRICA⁴⁵

HISTORICAL CURRENTS

Over the past century, Pentecostalism's global expansion has changed the face of Christianity, especially in the Majority World. The origin of this expansion is a hotly debated topic. The question is simple: did Pentecostalism expand from a single center or multiple centers? The prevailing view holds that Pentecostalism erupted in the first decade of the 1900s from a single center under the influence of Charles Parham and William Seymour who functioned as the icons of the movement. While some disagreement continues about the true founder, most historians settle on the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 as the catalytic event of the first wave. The Azusa Street single-origin view, which early historians heralded, gained additional following when Walter Hollenweger promoted it in his 1972 and 1997 comprehensive works on Pentecostalism.⁴⁶

Cecil Robeck, who is the recognized expert on the Azusa Street Revival, affirms that “‘Azusa Street’ rightfully continues to function as the primary icon expressing the power of the worldwide Pentecostal movement.”⁴⁷ African theologian Cephas Omenyo also advocates for the centrality of the Azusa Street Mission:

Today, African Christians can state with certainty, that the gallant attempt Seymour and Azusa missionaries made to work in Africa was a

⁴⁵ The next two sections (Historical Currents and Theological Overview) consist of excerpts reprinted with permission from Dr. Randy Arnett from his seminal work Randy Arnett, *Pentecostalization: The Evolution of Baptists in Africa* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; 1st edition, May 4, 2017).

⁴⁶ Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches*, 1st U.S. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), and Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997). See also Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 104–05; and David Du Plessis, “Golden Jubilees of Twentieth Century Pentecostal Movements,” in *Azusa Street and Beyond: 100 Years of Commentary on the Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement*, ed. Grant McClung (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2006), 71.

⁴⁷ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 10.

glorious effort. Africans can raise their heads, with their chest out with pride (not shame), for the initiative and sacrifice made by Azusa missionaries, which has transformed African Christianity into a viable and vibrant one. They constitute a major factor that accounts for the paradigmatic shift of the center of gravity of Christianity to the southern continents, particularly Africa... This story must be told loud and clear through the research and writing of African and indeed world Church history, with Seymour and the Azusa movement given its proper place.⁴⁸

The debate over the origins of the global Pentecostal movement results from differing understandings of what constitutes Pentecostalism. For example, many of those who promote a multi-center view consider any charismatic phenomenon as a Pentecostal event regardless of the phenomenon's origins. The broad inclusiveness of this position is particularly troubling because Pentecostal-like phenomena, such as speaking in tongues or trances, also appear in Traditional Religion throughout the world. If we use a criterion based on Pentecostal-like phenomena, then, indeed, Pentecostalism could have multiple centers. However, when we use the more restricted qualification of Holy Spirit inspired phenomena, the single-center seems much more reasonable.

The missionary vision drove early Pentecostalism. As the Azusa fire spread, new Azusa-like centers of Spirit baptism were spawned. The new centers joined, nurtured, and extended the movement by sending forth their own missionaries. In 1908, just two years after the initial Azusa Street event, A. H. Argue could identify twenty-eight locations where people had been Spirit baptized.⁴⁹ Anderson chronicles the spreading fires in those early years, as well.⁵⁰ According to him, by 1909, missionaries who had been Spirit-baptized at Azusa Street were in at least three African and six Asian countries. By 1910, Pentecostal missionaries

⁴⁸ Cephas Omenyo, "William Seymour and African Pentecostal Historiography: The Case of Ghana," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 9 (2006), 258.

⁴⁹ A. H. Argue, "Azusa Street Revival Reaches Winnipeg," *The Pentecostal Testimony* (May 1956), 9.

⁵⁰ Allan H. Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (London: SCM, 2007), 50–57.

were in more than fifty countries. In addition, Pentecostal preachers embarked on extended world tours.⁵¹ During the next quarter-century, Pentecostal groups took root in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Western Europe.⁵²

The second wave struck in the 1960s when Pentecostalism surged into the traditional mainline churches, especially in the United States. In the post-World War II era, Pentecostalism's public image swelled as healing evangelists traversed the United States, and television brought prominent Pentecostal preachers, such as Oral Roberts, into the American home. In 1959, Dennis Bennett, the rector of a California Episcopal church, sparked the Charismatic movement by his public confession of having received Spirit baptism. Within a couple of years, Charismatics could be found in Anglican churches worldwide. Within a short time, the Anglican movement breached denominational boundaries and spread to other historic churches globally. Repeatedly, the movement passed into a denomination's overseas counterparts. In this way, the Pentecostal movement created a Charismatic stream among Episcopalians, Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and others.⁵³

Two distinctive elements characterized the second wave. First, the second wave left denominational structures intact. While many churches, including the Episcopal church of southern California, ousted the "tongues-speakers," many others quietly allowed them to continue. Second, the Charismatics tended to be less emotional in their expressions than Classic Pentecostals. The worship services were more orderly, and the spiritual gifts were used more privately than in the first wave of Pentecostals.

⁵¹ Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 52.

⁵² See Faupel for a partial listing of the United States (pp. 214-19) and world (pp. 219-21) expansion. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel* (Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 1996).

⁵³ See Vinson Synan, ed., *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), chaps. 7-9.

The third wave followed in the late 1970s as new, independent churches were born and existing churches splintered and evolved.⁵⁴ Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan ascribes the wave to John Wimber of Fuller Theological Seminary and founder of the Association of Vineyard Churches.⁵⁵ This wave consisted of the formation of vast numbers of independent, locally-initiated groups that were dissimilar to the first and second wave groups. These groups rarely maintained ties to the Classic Pentecostal or the mainline denominations. Oftentimes, they were led by apostolic, charismatic leaders.

The *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* labels the third wave as neo-charismatic, which includes “the vast numbers of independent and indigenous churches and groups that cannot be classified as either Pentecostal or charismatic.”⁵⁶ In summary, the three-wave view holds that Pentecostalism originated in the United States from where it spread in consecutive phases. In the first wave, missionaries went and established Azusa-inspired Pentecostal centers. In the second wave, a segment within the historic churches embraced the Pentecostal experience. In the third wave, independent groups arose that resisted identification with the first two waves but had Pentecostal-like practices.

In Africa, Pentecostalism developed in two streams. The first stream arose out of the Azusa Street type of Pentecostal phenomena and is more closely associated with Classic Pentecostalism. The second stream consists of the African Initiated Churches (AIC) and favors a prophetic-charismatic orientation. Churches and movements founded by charismatic prophets constitute the main current of this stream. The Azusa Street type of Pentecostalism first took root in South Africa, from which the movement spread into central Africa. By 1908, Azusa Mission-inspired missionaries had joined John Alexander Dowie-inspired

⁵⁴ The term should not be confused with C. Peter Wagner’s Third Wave. In 1983, Wagner coined the term to describe those who were sympathetic with the first and second waves but did not self-identify with them. See C. Peter Wagner, “A Third Wave?” *Pastoral Renewal* 8 (1983), 1-5.

⁵⁵ Synan, *The Century of Holy Spirit*, 9.

⁵⁶ Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard van der Mass, eds., *New International Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 75–76.

missionaries.⁵⁷ In 1913, they organized The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. Another group organized The Assemblies of God of South Africa the following year.

Central Africa's Pentecostalism developed through contacts with The Apostolic Faith Mission and missionaries from Europe and North America. East Africa developed more slowly and had a higher incidence of AICs. One of the most prominent, the Roho, initially began as a charismatic segment in the Anglican Church. In the 1920s and 1930s, the AICs grew significantly, catalyzed by William Wadé Harris, Garrick Braid, Simon Kimbangu, Zakayo Kivuli, and others. The growth resulted from the dissatisfaction with the historic churches that disparaged the Pentecostal-like phenomena.

The massive expansion came in the 1980s when many of these independent churches promoted Word-Faith and deliverance themes. The churches grew explosively at the expense of both the AICs and the mainline churches. By the end of the 1990s, the distinction between Pentecostal and Evangelical churches had lessened and the dominant form of Christianity had become Neo-Pentecostal.⁵⁸ What can be clearly noted, though, is that Pentecostalism in Africa in every form did not represent the traditional church or the roots of Christianity. Instead, it was either an American import (which only began in the early 1900's) or it was mixed with traditional cultural religions. Either way, it is not possible to draw a direct and unbroken line between historical Christianity and the relatively recent phenomenon of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement. African Pentecostalism is not truly African because its roots are from America and it is not truly historic Christianity because its origins are found in the recent past.

In retrospect, three catalysts propelled Neo-Pentecostalism's African expansion. In the early 1970s, Benson Idahosa and his Faith Ministry Centre pro-

⁵⁷ Dowie was a late 1800s faith healer who founded the Christian Apostolic Church and the City of Zion in Illinois. He exerted significant influence on Pentecostalism in the US and southern Africa. See E. L. Blumhofer, "Dowie, John Alexander," in *New International Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard van der Mass, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁵⁸ See Paul Gifford's evaluation of African Christianity in the 1980s in Paul Gifford, "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity," *African Affairs* 93 (1994), 513-34.

vided an initial base for Neo-Pentecostal faith and practice. Then, in 1980, Kimuyu's training center instilled an aggressive missionary spirit in its students. Finally, in 1986, Reinhard Bonnke's Harare Fire Crusade launched a continent-wide effort to expand Neo-Pentecostal faith and practice. One of the consequences of the growth of Neo-Pentecostalism was the demise of the older AICs and the stagnation of the mainline churches.⁵⁹ Both the AICs and the mainline churches fared well in the 1950s and 1960s when the need for self-expression, independence, and nation-building were important themes. Afterward, widespread disillusionment ensued as the African governments failed to deliver on the early promises of independence and well-being.⁶⁰ Pentecostals, in general, and Neo-Pentecostals, in particular, spoke to this disillusionment. To regain numbers, both the AICs and the mainline churches adopted a more conciliatory approach to the Neo-Pentecostals and incorporated some of their practices and theology.

The debate over the origins of Pentecostalism will likely continue because of the varying definitions and attributes used to identify Pentecostalism. Nonetheless, while they disagree about origins, scholars seldom dispute the extraordinary advance of the movement over the past century. The advance in Asia, Latin America, and Africa followed similar paths. The historical expansion of the movement consists of three eras. In the first era, Pentecostalism burst forth in a form that emphasized the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. Thousands of unnamed evangelists propagated the Pentecostal message and experience. Many Azusa Street-inspired missionaries scattered into the world. The faith missions, and particularly the Christian and Missionary Alliance, welcomed these Pentecostal missionaries and often embraced the Pentecostal message.

After the Second World War, the movement expanded into non-Pentecostal churches in a charismatization process. This surge accentuated the experiential aspect of worship that the mainline churches had failed to stress. In this way, the

⁵⁹ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 95.

⁶⁰ See John Clark's survey of the political climate of Francophone Africa. John Frank Clark and David E. Gardinier, eds., *Political Reform in Francophone Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

Charismatic movement functioned as a renewal movement similar to the Pietist movement of the early eighteenth century. At the same time, the second era raised awareness of the need to contextualize faith and practice, which in many cases meant the de-Westernization of the mainline churches.

In the third era, the movement resurged in a form different from the original. The message emphasized healing, prophecy, and Word-Faith theology more than the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Beginning in the 1980s, independent churches propagated rapidly around the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America. These Neo-Pentecostal churches adapted to diverse environments.

The churches and ministries that arose adhere to varying forms of Pentecostalism. On the one hand, some ministries are little more than ATR with a Pentecostal vocabulary. These ministries adapt and alter the Pentecostal message and practices. On the other hand, some churches hold to Classic Pentecostal practices. In between, a large segment of churches reflects a transnational ethos that favors Word-Faith teachings. Many of the Neo-Pentecostal leaders maintain strong connections to American televangelists.⁶¹ Printed and electronic media from American sources are everywhere and even in the Francophone countries, neo-Pentecostals promote English as the preferred choice for Pentecostal practices, such as deliverances and prophecy.

THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Although Pentecostalism emerged over a century ago in Africa, the ethos of the movement today originates from the new Pentecostalism that has arisen since the 1970s, and particularly since the 1980s. In this new ethos, we discover four essential pillars of Neo-Pentecostalism.

To begin, its ethos maintains that the omnipotent God breaks into everyday life. Neo-Pentecostalism engages the African worldview by recognizing the daily struggles and dangers wrought by spiritual forces and responds to this struggle by emphasizing God's intervention. ATR treats these forces as powers to be appeased and pacified. Unfortunately, mainline churches, prior to the charismatic movement, discounted this spiritual reality. In contrast, Neo-Pentecostalism

⁶¹ Omenyo, "Charismatic Churches in Ghana," 265.

engages reality by claiming God's presence and incursion into the cosmic struggle. So, God is both transcendent, as one who is above and beyond creation, and immanent, as one who is among his people. Simply, the same God who intervened in the Bible intervenes today. God's presence brings the supernatural to daily life. This experiential worldview permeates all aspects of the Pentecostal movement.

Further, Neo-Pentecostalism's ethos prioritizes the presence of the Holy Spirit as manifested in the charismata. Neo-Pentecostals experience God in tangible ways. The charismatic manifestations prove that the Spirit envelops the church. Unlike the mainline churches that tend to divide members into laity and clergy, Neo-Pentecostals foresee the widespread availability of the Holy Spirit and the distribution of the charismata to all members, not just the clergy. In this way, Spirit baptism yields conspicuous, visible results.

Next, the ethos highlights the conversion experience. The manifestation of the charismata accompanies and validates conversion. For Neo-Pentecostals, conversion is a dramatic, life-reorienting event that the "born again" metaphor aptly describes. Direction and values change for the individual. Moreover, conversion has a continuing effect that encompasses all the believer's life. The rebirth has practical implications, not the least of which is the abandonment of previously held customs, beliefs, and practices that are sinful or demonic.

The faith and practice of Neo-Pentecostals focus on the experience of believers as they resist and overcome the spiritual forces that bring distress to daily life. Neo-Pentecostal faith and practice revolve around four fundamental beliefs—charismatic gifts, salvation, special people, and the Bible. While few Neo-Pentecostal groups consciously articulate these beliefs, careful observation reveals these four main streams.

Charismatic gifts

First, and per their ethos, the personal experience with God holds a prominent place in Neo-Pentecostal belief. This experience is closely tied to Spirit baptism by which the individual believer receives the charismatic gifts. These gifts manifest the changed relationship with God. In this respect, Spirit baptism is a marker for Neo-Pentecostal identity. Although Spirit baptism and the charismatic gifts are prominent features of the experience of the Holy Spirit, they are not

the sole experience. The belief in a personal experience of the Holy Spirit is encouraged, promoted, and expected as part of one's daily Christian walk.

Salvation

Second, salvation is an essential component of Neo-Pentecostal faith and practice. Well-being for today constitutes the main emphasis of salvation. Hence, salvation is understood primarily as freedom from power-induced problems, such as sickness, poverty, misfortune, affliction, fear, and disrupted relationships.

Accordingly, salvation includes both therapeutic and protective aspects. This concept of salvation is one of the most attractive features of Neo-Pentecostalism. On the one hand, salvation, as therapy, restores well-being. Healing applies to all aspects of life. Healing reverses sickness, adversity, interpersonal conflict, and failures. The therapeutic aspect also includes deliverance from affliction by evil spirits. Thus, salvation restores physical, emotional, spiritual, and social health.

On the other hand, salvation ensures well-being by providing a shield of protection against anything that may threaten well-being. Abundant life includes success, prosperity, health, posterity, and peace. Notably, the Word-Faith movement has strongly influenced the protective aspect of the salvation theme. Many, probably most, Neo-Pentecostal groups espouse elements of the Word-Faith movement. The Neo-Pentecostal media present God as the God of success, breakthroughs, and possibilities.

At this point, the significant differences between ATR and the mainline churches become apparent. ATR seeks to appease and manipulate the powers to bring healing and provide protection. The mainline churches offer a heavenly salvation for the future, and community development projects, and medical care for the present. Neo-Pentecostalism promotes a present, immediate salvation of abundance and well-being by vanquishing the spirits.

Special people of God

Third, Neo-Pentecostals are the special people of God. Their view of salvation distinguishes them from other groups. Consistently, the Neo-Pentecostal movement has insisted on two separate components. For one, the believer is

regenerated and sanctified. For two, Spirit baptism provides the external marker of the internal change, thereby setting the believer apart. In this way, Neo-Pentecostal believers are distinct from other Christians. Also, Neo-Pentecostals situate themselves in opposition to other groups. They condemn ATR for its ungodliness. They condemn AICs for their syncretism with ATR. They condemn the mainline denominations for their modernity. Thus, their stance toward others segregates and differentiates them.

Additionally, Neo-Pentecostals consistently call for a clean break from the past. Believers must break with their sinful past that includes wrong behaviors. Then, they must break the demonic chains of bondage within the immediate circle of relationships. Finally, they must break with their ancestral pasts that include covenants and curses in the family lineage that enslave succeeding generations.

Finally, Neo-Pentecostals establish their uniqueness through a warfare worldview that views the cosmos in dualistic terms. They consider the world divided into two parts—Satan and his people who oppose God and his people. In the Neo-Pentecostal worldview, the believer leaves the domain of Satan to join the domain of God where he engages in the battle that rages between the two sides. This warfare worldview stands in sharp contrast to that of ATR and the AICs, where they largely give in to the power of the spirit world. It differs, also, from that of the mainline churches that often dismiss the spirit world as superstitious or primitive. The genius of Neo-Pentecostalism lies in its acceptance of the cultural understanding of the spirit world while urging Neo-Pentecostal followers to wage war against the spirits. The warfare ethos underlies many Neo-Pentecostal practices.

Bible

The various Neo-Pentecostal groups recognize the Bible; however, its authority varies. In Africa, Neo-Pentecostals rarely employ the historical-critical, author-centered hermeneutic taught and advocated by the mainline denominations. Rather, they employ a reader-centered hermeneutic that allows them to interpret freely based on the reader's immediate perspective and experience. This interpretation employs as much literalism as possible. Furthermore, the hermeneutic

perspective unites around African spirituality and the well-being of the believer as expounded by the Word-Faith movement.

Finally, while the Bible is recognized as the authority, it is not the final revelation. God continues to speak.⁶² Both revelation and theology continue to develop as pastors, prophets, and apostles speak under inspiration. In practice, a word from a prophet today holds more power and appeal than an antiquated word from God in the Bible.

WORSHIP

The experience of the Spirit dominates worship. In this way, Neo-Pentecostal worship reverses the Western emphases on cognition, organization, planning, doctrine, and preaching/teaching. Neo-Pentecostals enthusiastically anticipate supernatural intervention. This preoccupation with the supernatural not only characterizes worship but also drives it. Services are unscripted, Spirit-filled, expressive, joyful, spontaneous, exuberant, and loud.

This “total response” approach creates a variety of voluntary and involuntary gesticulations, such as dancing, clapping, finger-snapping, prostration, jerking, and shaking. The spoken voice in worship includes shouts, shrieks, prophecies, and speaking in tongues. Sometimes, the services incorporate indigenous religious practices to the extent that the line blurs between appropriate and inappropriate contextualization, between biblical and pagan practices.

Beyond the gesticulations, worship includes prayer, testimony, preaching, and, above all, proper ritual. Worship invites the participants to engage in spiritual warfare. Proper ritual ensures that demonic forces are disempowered.⁶³ Prayer subdues the evil spirits that afflict both the meeting place and the participants. Testimony serves as an act-word event that reminds the participants of God’s supernatural intervention in daily life. Preaching engages the congregation in combat by demonstrating God’s continued intervention.

⁶² Kenneth J. Archer, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4 (1996), 80.

⁶³ Pentecostals retain ATR’s ontology and ritual engagement of the spirit world but reject the assumptions of ATR. They employ familiar symbols that resemble the ATR engagement. Cf. Robbins, “Globalization of Pentecostal Christianity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* (October 2004), 33:117-143.

Notably, preaching is a part, but not the climax, of the worship service. The sermon reminds the participants that the same supernatural experiences of the Bible are available to present-day believers. In this way, the focus of the message is the present, rather than the historical past. The experiences of the biblical characters are subsumed under the meaning of the passage for today. Furthermore, preaching requires the active participation of the congregation. Consequently, the hearers carry out actions during and after the message that enables the word to take effect. In summary, the immediate meaning and experience of the text trump historical-critical exegesis. The message excites, inspires, stimulates, and empowers.

MANIFESTATIONS

Undoubtedly, the most noticeable aspect of Neo-Pentecostalism, besides its global expansion, is its visible manifestations. In Africa, three kinds of manifestations—adoration, revelation, and power—are a normal and ordinary part of a Neo-Pentecostal's life.

Adoration

Adoration encompasses speaking in tongues. This charismatic gift serves as an external marker to demonstrate and authenticate the supernatural element in the speaker's life. Speaking in tongues often accompanies the salvation experience, either as a concurrent event or a later, second experience. The manifestation also occurs as a part of private or public worship. In both cases, it focuses on praise and adoration. Oftentimes, when an interpretation is offered, the speaker is the interpreter.

Revelation

Revelation encompasses three different kinds of manifestations: prophecy, discernment of spirits, and dreams and visions. Prophecy provides another avenue, besides the Bible, by which God speaks to people. Prophecies occur as spontaneous expressions during a gathering of the church and usually entail a warning, exhortation, or important piece of information, all of which affect future action. A prophecy may be given in tongues in which case the prophet or another person will interpret the message.

Another form of prophecy, the word of knowledge or revelation knowledge, consists of a revelation about an impending event and the actions to take in response. Prophecy demonstrates that God can speak through anyone in the community at any time. This point is particularly important because, anecdotally, women give most of the spontaneous prophecies. Indeed, prophecy is a credibility enhancer for the prophet because of the perception that God uses that specific person as a vehicle of revelation. Another revelation manifestation, the discernment of spirits, serves to police the prophets. Discernment judges the validity of the prophecy or word of knowledge. At other times, this charismatic gift is used to identify the presence of evil spirits.

The final kind of revelation manifestation is visions and dreams. These are personal revelations that provide direction or understanding. Notably, solutions to problems often arise from visions and dreams. They are commonly reported by the founders of churches and ministries. These visions also give direction to the organization and contribute to the founder's authority.

Power

The power manifestations relate closely to the idea of spiritual warfare. Three power manifestations—prayer, deliverance, and anointing—precede or accompany signs and wonders. The first, and most obvious manifestation, is prayer. They believe the spiritual battle requires combat prayer. Therapeutic prayers call for healing and often assume miraculous intervention. Protective prayers serve to protect the individual, church, town, nation, or some other entity from spiritual affliction. Both types of prayers have specific contexts and usages that can never be divorced from spiritual warfare. As such, these prayers are accompanied by gesticulations that symbolically enact the combat. Prayers dramatize the battle with evil forces by stomping, clenching fists, punching the air, hitting a wall or furniture, and finger-snapping. The prayers cry aloud as they take authority over the spiritual forces.

A second kind of power manifestation is deliverance. Deliverance services focus on liberating demonized people from the power of evil spirits. Specialized deliverance ministries abound. A third kind of power manifestation is anointing. Anointing stands as a central feature of African Neo-Pentecostalism because of its association with power and sacrament. Individuals, events, and objects may

be anointed. An anointing allows the Spirit to act—the greater the anointing, the greater the power. Through anointing, the preacher, prophet, apostle, or pastor manifests great power to effect signs and wonders. An object, such as oil, water, or a handkerchief, when anointed, can mediate power to its owner. Moreover, anointing may be conveyed from an anointed person to another person or object through physical, visual, or auditory contact. For example, anointing may be transferred through radio waves. An ordinary bottle of water may be anointed and, thus, mediate grace and power to the one who possesses it.

ORGANIZATION

Beyond the ethos, doctrine, worship, and manifestations, Neo-Pentecostals have five notable characteristics related to organization. First, Neo-Pentecostals leverage media to promote their message. Besides banners and posters, Neo-Pentecostals fully employ electronic media. The larger churches, such as The Redeemed Christian Church of God, include in their business portfolios television stations, studios, and internet service providers. The Neo-Pentecostal message has invaded the public space as many scholars have already demonstrated.⁶⁴

Second, leaders promote an image of signs and wonders. The merit or worth of religious specialists is determined by their healing and protective effectiveness. Religious specialists who perform well are valued; and those who do not are shunned. Similarly, a Neo-Pentecostal leader's credibility rises and falls in direct correlation with his ability to produce signs and wonders. The inability to perform miracles, prophesy, and heal indicates a lack of spiritual power and, thus, diminishes the leader's prestige. Likewise, the presence of signs and wonders demonstrate that an organization is both genuine and spiritually powerful. Consequently, leaders and organizations continually foster an image of power and credibility through signs and wonders.

⁶⁴ E.g., Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (1998), 258-77; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Anointing through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana," *Studies in World Christianity* 11 (2005), 9-28; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Get on the Internet! Says the LORD: Religion, Cyberspace and Christianity in Contemporary Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 13 (2007), 225-42; and Ogbu U. Kalu, "Holy Praiseco: Negotiating Sacred and Popular Music and Dance in African Pentecostalism," *Pneuma* 32 (2010), 16-40.

Third, African Neo-Pentecostalism promotes the “Big Man” motif of leadership. Idahosa introduced Word-Faith theology in the 1970s following his brief stay in the United States. He made it a cornerstone of his ministry and propagated its teachings. Subsequently, Word-Faith came to underlie much of Neo-Pentecostalism. As an outgrowth of Idahosa’s teaching, the Big Man ideology took root and grew in the churches. In contrast to the mainline churches that have long taught humility, the Big Man concept esteems powerful, rich leaders who, because of their well-being, show God’s blessing on them.

Fourth, Neo-Pentecostals recognize five leaders: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. The apostle holds the highest position. He claims to be in the line of the original apostles and thus transmits their spiritual power. Furthermore, the apostle is considered the head of the church and has authority over everyone else. He, along with the prophet, rules over the other leaders. In the larger groups, the apostle or prophet appears as a CEO-type leader who manages assets and enterprises of substantial worth. In some of the more mainline churches, neo-Pentecostals will use the term Bishop to describe the ruler of many churches.

CONCLUSION

African Neo-Pentecostalism may be portrayed in six broad strokes. First, Neo-Pentecostals believe themselves to be the special people of God who alone are born again and sanctified, as manifested by Spirit baptism. Second, Neo-Pentecostals offer a comprehensive view of the cosmos by identifying the spiritual causes of all problems. Third, they offer healing, both as deliverance and prosperity, to address these causes. Fourth, while they practice an egalitarian approach to the charismatic gifts, the organizational structures are hierarchal with the apostle and prophet at the head of the entity. Fifth, they leverage media to proclaim their message. Sixth, their deep worldview is founded on the experience with God and the expectation of divine intervention in the natural world.

While this description provides some helpful indicators for identifying Neo-Pentecostals, the task is immensely complicated by the pluralistic sea of religious expression in Africa. In this sea, a variety of Pentecostal expressions impinges on and thrives in Baptist churches.” Neo-Pentecostalism has influenced almost every church in Africa, and while there are some positive aspects

to the movement there are many negative ones as well. They tend to emphasize experience and subjective belief over the truth of God's word and they tend to be more concerned with thinking than with feeling. True biblical theology emphasizes the words of Jesus that we must "worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth." A church can be spiritual and African in worship, while also being grounded in the truth. However, Neo-Pentecostals often throw out the truth in favor of the "feelings" and African expression.

PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND ATR

The “Prosperity Gospel” is an aberrant theology that has found a very comfortable home within neo-Pentecostalism. “Simply put, the prosperity gospel is a re-reading and misinterpretation of certain verses in the Bible. According to prosperity gospel proponents, God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ are understood to have promised a state of well-being, of abundance, of victory over social stagnation, of an abundance of money and materials to meet the needs of Christians. As a result, Christians can live a life of spiritual and material abundance in the world.”⁶⁵

We have already noted the connection between ATR and Animism where Van Rheenen defines Animism as, “the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.”⁶⁶ If in the traditional African worldview there is a need to gain “power” over the personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces that influence day to day life, then the prosperity gospel provides a “Christianized” way to connect with African Traditional Religion.

While the prosperity gospel comes from America, it has found a home in the worldview of Africa that is bound by latent African Traditional Religion and Animism. Traditional religion and witchcraft are unacceptable in the Christian circles of Africa, but the Prosperity Gospel offers an opportunity to practice a form of ATR dressed up in Christian dress. Thus the power encounters of witchcraft and magic, are replaced with the power encounters of “name it, claim it” theology and the traditional medicine and rites of the witch doctor are replaced with the prayers of a prophet or “man of God” and the various anointed articles (clothes, water, oil) that he sells. All the forms of African Traditional Religion are found bound up in the so-called “Christian disguise” of the pros-

⁶⁵ From, *The Abandoned Gospel*, pre-publication copy pg. 29-30. Published by AB316.org and Lifeway.

⁶⁶ Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 21.

perity gospel. Thus, it makes perfect sense in the traditional African worldview and has found great appeal on this continent.

Author and Professor Nick Moore comes to the same conclusion in his recent article:

Put simply, the Prosperity Gospel operates on the concept of transaction. Input translates to output. Or, to use more biblical (albeit out-of-context) language, “Whatever a man sows, he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7 HCSB). The posited meaning here is that when someone performs an act of religiosity or devotion, this somehow obligates God to return blessing or favor, just as a payment obligates a vendor to render a service. The application point for the PG is that righteous living, believing, giving, and praying obligates God to return financial, emotional, familial, or professional blessings. We see this principle espoused on a spectrum that ranges from blatant formulas, such as those of the preening evangelist on a telethon, to the subtler “follow Jesus and he will make your life all you ever wanted it to be” message coming from the pulpits. But behind all of this pseudo-Christian and quasi-biblical lingo is animism. The PG movement is nothing more than humans seeking to discover the forces that are influencing them and then manipulate their power. This is animism at its core, with a few Bible verses and Jesus attached. The PG movement has spread like wildfire in Sub-Saharan Africa because there is nothing really new about it. Whereas previous generations of Africans lived in constant fear of the ancestral spirits who dwelt among the trees—and sought out a shaman or witch doctor for some form of power to overcome them—newer generations of Africans live in constant fear of the spirits of poverty, sickness, failure, and depression. They seek out a “pastor” or a prophet or a bishop for some formula that may give them spiritual power for a breakthrough or a deliverance.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Nick Moore, “Africa, Animism, and the Dangers of the Prosperity Gospel,” accessed October 26, 2018, <https://www.imb.org/2018/10/26/africa-animism-prosperity-gospel/>.

In short, Neo-Pentecostalism, and the more radical brand of it called the Prosperity Gospel movement, has found fertile soil in the cosmology and world view of sub-Saharan Africa. The latent animism coupled with various facets of African Traditional Religion has provided categories of understanding for these aberrant theologies that make them particularly appealing to many people.

While these theological positions are not historically Baptist and not orthodox in theology, they feel more “African” to many professing Christians. This causes those who have no biblical or hermeneutical training to be easily seduced and swept up into churches that are unbiblical, and sometimes heretical, because they appeal to their African roots and African culture.

This does not mean that one must reject their African culture to be a true Christian. On the contrary, it is very possible to have sound theology and be a part of a Bible-believing church that still has African worship, African personality, and African forms. It is when one rejects sound theology because of culture that one gets into trouble. Instead, the Bible must be correctly interpreted and every culture (Western, African, Asian, etc.) must be held up to the light of the word of God and judged by it. Those things that are found in a culture that are consistent with the Bible can remain, and those things that are inconsistent with the word of God must be rejected.

Even though they mix some measure of truth together with lies, Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel are not biblical, and they must be rejected. However, many African believers fall prey to their teaching because those teachings are consistent with what their culture has always taught them and with what they find in African Traditional Religion. Many have traded witch doctors for prophets who perform the very same function, and yet they feel better about it because it is supposedly “Christian.” Instead, they must be taught to turn to the God of the Bible and to follow Him rather than some power broker dressed up in religious garb. ATR, Animism, Neo-Pentecostalism, and the prosperity gospel all go hand in hand, but the one who truly follows Christ will follow the Bible and its teaching, regardless of how culturally comfortable something feels.

THE HERMENEUTICAL GROUNDING OF THIS SERIES

The gospel of Jesus Christ has gone across the globe and one can find churches that are a part of His kingdom in practically every country of the world. Each people group, and every demographic segment in those people groups, have varying cultural perspectives. Even when speaking about “African culture” it is a bit of a misnomer because there is no one African culture. Culture in Africa is as diverse as any place in the world with myriad languages, peoples, and socio-economic contexts. Yet, the incredible thing about the Bible, is that it can be understood and interpreted in every one of these contexts. Additionally, there are not multiple meanings to a given text, but typically there is a single intended meaning to a given text by the biblical author who wrote that text.⁶⁸ While each verse has a single meaning there are multiple varied applications based on the situation and context into which that verse is being applied.

This series is committed to the fact that the truth is clear and the same for all in every culture. However, it is also committed to the fact that every culture has positive and negative aspects. Each culture has blind spots that hinder it from seeing some things clearly, and therefore it needs the community of believers from other cultural perspectives to bring necessary corrections. Additionally, each culture has some distinctive vantage points that allow it to see

⁶⁸ Of course, there are a few examples of texts that have multiple meanings. There are examples of Messianic prophecy where a verse was describing a historical figure and also pointing towards the Messiah who would come. Other times New Testament writers like Paul would use a particular passage from the Old Testament and bring out a *sensus plenior* (or fuller sense) in addition to the plain, historical interpretation of the text. A classic example is his comparison of the children of Sarah and Hagar to those who are free from the Law or bound to it (see Galatians 4). These examples are few and limited and typically they are explained by the biblical writer. Rather than see them as taking liberties with the text it is best to view them as inspired by the Holy Spirit and able to make connections that we cannot because we do not experience the same kind of inspiration today since the canon of Scripture is closed.

some things more clearly, and therefore it has something to offer the rest of the world in understanding theology correctly.

Thus it is important to do the complicated work of contextualization in dialogue with brothers and sisters around the world so that we first, rightly interpret the single meaning of a text, and then second, correctly communicate it into the specific cultural setting in a way that the meaning is preserved and understanding is fully attained. Valid contextualization allows members of the receptor culture to contribute to the conversation about how best to communicate supra-cultural truths in terms that they can understand and apply. The Africa Theology Series is committed to examining specific doctrinal issues from an African point of view and it is committed to communicating those supra-cultural truths to Africans in a way that will preserve the truth and still be meaningful from their cultural vantage point

It is no easy task to arrive at the supra-cultural meaning of a text and then communicate it correctly to the reader so that it is effectively understood from his or her cultural vantage point. To accomplish this level of exegesis, exposition, and theologizing there must be some “ground rules” or pre-understandings that both the reader and author adhere to, regardless of cultural background. The first pre-understanding needs to be that they recognize the authority and priority of Scripture. Then the author and reader can progress together and see how His word speaks to their individual contexts. In addition, there needs to be established ground rules of biblical interpretation and hermeneutics. This ensures that the believers in the receptor culture will be able to distinguish issues of context, prescription vs. description, and the subtleties of application, significance, and meaning. Finally, there must be an interaction with the historical perspectives of the church where the believing community in Africa interacts with the contributions of other Christians in antiquity. The dialogical approach of this series is not just a dialogue between Africa and the West; it is also a dialogue between today’s African church and the historical church from which we all were born.

PREMINENCE OF SCRIPTURE

The Africa Theology Series is built on the foundation that the Scripture is pre-eminent and the ultimate determinant of truth. The Bible was written by men

through divine inspiration. This means that while these authors were in control of their own thoughts and utilized their unique personalities and vocabularies, the Holy Spirit moved them in the selection of each word. The Bible, therefore, is a perfect treasure of God's instruction to all of us regardless of our culture, timeframe, or background. Scripture has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. As such, Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.⁶⁹

While God has revealed Himself in other ways, like through Creation, so that all human beings are exposed to His existence and accountable for their sin, creation is not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will, which is necessary for salvation. Therefore, God determined at different times and in different ways to reveal himself, and to declare his will to his church. He has been revealed to us through His written word and through the person of Jesus Christ, who is Himself, the exact representation of God. The Church, in an effort to better preserve and make known the truth collected all of the divinely inspired writings given to us (both old and new testament) and compiled them into a single written revelation which we know today as the Holy Bible. This decision makes Holy Scripture essential to knowing the will of God. It is, therefore, the true center of Christian union and the standard by which all human behavior, creeds and confessions, and human philosophies and opinions should be evaluated.⁷⁰

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Since the Bible is the divinely inspired revelation from God and since there is no other Holy Scripture besides the Bible, it alone is the standard by which every religion, every church, and every person is measured. Scripture derives its authority entirely from God (who is truth Himself) because He is the divine author. Therefore, we are to receive it and live by it and measure everything else by it.

⁶⁹ Parts of this statement have been taken from the *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000 edition.

⁷⁰ This last sentence was taken from the ABTEN statement of Faith.

God's word (the Bible) has complete authority over every person on earth and every government, culture, and society whether they choose to recognize that authority or not. Therefore, as Christians, we judge everything based on the Biblical revelation and we interpret it carefully and correctly because it speaks to our lives even today. While we must understand the text within the context in which it was written, we can know the "timeless truth" that is relevant for every person in every place in a given text. This allows us to correctly interpret it for our context today and apply it to our lives in a myriad of unique ways. God's word has the unique nature of being authoritative and speaking directly to each one of us, but also being timeless and intersecting with different times and different cultures in relevant ways.

SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The Holy Scriptures contain the entirety of what is necessary to know God, to follow God, and to glorify God. It is sufficient to reveal all that is necessary for the salvation of humanity, and for faith and life. Nothing at any time should be added to the Bible and nothing should be taken away from the bible. While the bible is accessible to all men, the Holy Spirit must reveal and apply spiritual truth to everyone. The bible is the revelation of God to mankind and as such, it is spiritually discerned.

Not every part of Scripture is equally easy to understand nor clear on the author's intended meaning. However, what is necessary to be understood, believed, and followed for salvation is clearly taught and expounded in one section of Scripture or another. As a result, everyone, educated or non-educated, literate or non-literate, may obtain an understanding of Scripture's content sufficient to grasp the essential message of what the Word of God teaches.⁷¹ The people of God are expected to read the Scriptures for themselves and to search them to verify every word that is proclaimed as following the counsel of God.

HISTORICAL/GRAMMATICAL HERMENEUTIC

The main rule of the interpretation of Scripture is that the Bible itself is the best interpreter of Scripture. This means that if there is a particular passage that

⁷¹ Taken from ABTEN's statement of faith.

is hard to understand, then you can look to other parts of the bible to rightly interpret that passage. No doctrine or theology should be built on a single verse. Instead, we fully understand doctrine and theology by looking at the whole counsel of the word of God and we understand a particular verse within its context and in the light of the rest of the counsel of Scripture.

A second primary rule in the interpretation of Scripture is that context is extremely important. Any given verse must be understood in light of the verses that surround it as well as in the light of the chapter and the book in which it is found. There is the context within the book and within the bible. There is also the context of history; old or new testament, directed to whom, applicable to whom? Then there is the context of the literary genre. Is it a verse in a book of the law (like Leviticus), or in a book of history (like Chronicles), or in a book of poetry (like Proverbs)? The type of literature in which the verse is found will also affect our understanding of a particular passage; especially as to whether it should be understood literally or figuratively.

A third primary rule of biblical interpretation is that there is only one single meaning to any given passage of Scripture. The text must be understood within the context of when it was written and to whom it was written. It means what it meant to the one to whom it was written to and that meaning is still the meaning today. Now it is true that there are multiple applications for a text and that every passage has something to say to us today, but we must be careful not to confuse meaning with application. There is only one meaning to any verse in Scripture, but it can be applied in a variety of ways. Many today make the mistake of confusing the meaning and misapplying it in our time today. For instance, in the Old Testament, there are specific ceremonial and dietary laws that were given to the people of Israel. These laws were written to them and applied directly to them, whereas today Jesus has fulfilled all of those laws and we are now no longer under them. Because some have confused meaning and application they insist that since the bible says pork is unclean that it is still unclean today. If they only look at one text of Scripture from the Old Testament then that could be true. However, if you read the entire bible and use Scripture to interpret Scripture you find that while it was unclean for Jews in the Old Testament, Christians are now free to eat pork and things have changed.

A general rule of thumb to help us with this is to realize that all Scripture was written “for” me, but it was not all written “to” me. This means that there is something I can learn from every text and God has put it in the bible for my instruction and edification, but not everything that was written there was written directly “to” me. I have to understand the meaning in light of who the verse was written “to” and then find the application that is there “for” me today. An example of this would be in Acts chapter 2 when the early church was all selling their property and bring all the proceeds to the Apostles to distribute as every one had need. This was “describing” something that was happening in the early church, but it was not “prescribing” what we must do today. However, there are truths there for us to learn and emulate, like the people of God should be generous in their giving and they should care for one another.

Whenever you are interpreting a passage in the bible you must understand it in its context and ask who was this written to and why was it written. After unlocking those questions, you can then ask “What is the timeless truth in this passage?” In other words, what is the main point of this passage that would apply to every person in every period of time? Figuring out that timeless truth will help you then to know how to apply the text to your life and your particular situation. The Historical/Grammatical rule of interpretation means one must understand the original author’s intent and understand the literal meaning of the text as it was intended by that original author. Then one can take that literal, historical, grammatical, original meaning and interpret it within the larger framework of the rest of the Bible to find a timeless truth, that reaches across all cultures and that is applicable in a meaningful way in your life today—one meaning and many applications.

THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS SERIES

WESTERN CATEGORIES IN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

As has already been stated, this series is designed to be written by Africans for Africa. Our hope is that then these volumes would go from Africa to help the rest of the world. However, it is important to note that while these volumes are African in context and authorship, we are still using Western categories for the volumes. We concede that it is a Western approach to think in terms of categories like Systematic Theology, Biblical Theology, and Practical theology. While we hope that Africans will redefine how the world thinks about theology, we believe that for now, it is best to use these globally acknowledged categories as we think theologically. The point of this volume set is to equip the local African pastor with an accessible theological library that will be useful in his day-to-day ministry. What is most important is the topics that are addressed and the way in which they are addressed. We trust that the use of Western categories for outlining the book set will not be too distracting to the African reader.

HOLISTIC IN SCOPE

Another unique feature of the Africa Theology Series is the attempt to be holistic in scope. In other words, instead of just focusing on a particular area of theology, this series will try to be as comprehensive as possible. Some volumes address orthodox doctrinal issues which are timeless and relevant throughout history. Other volumes are specifically directed at practical application and effective ministry here in Africa today. The goal of the series is to be contextualized and applicable to the African pastor today, but also timeless and effective for anyone in any context. Additionally, the series is designed to cover the broadest spectrum of needs as possible in 16 volumes and be a resource that can be enjoyed in a daily devotional study, or as a specific reference set for problems and issues that might arise in future days.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE

One final note referring to the theological framework of the series rests in the emphasis on biblical theology. It is the theological contention of this series that there is one overarching theme and storyline throughout the word of God. This is what is referred to as the biblical “Grand Narrative.” Bruce Ashford tells us, “The Bible unfolds this grand redemptive narrative from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, and the gospel is the good news that Jesus is the Savior of the world.”⁷² In short, the bible is not a loose connection of books that tell us different things about God, but instead, it is a single story laid out throughout 66 books.

This story is one of God’s glory and greatness, His creation of all things, His love and care for that creation, our fall, and the process by which God has provided Redemption through the purpose and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the central figure of the Scripture and everything should be understood and interpreted in light of His preeminence and our relationship to Him. “The redemptive work of Christ extends through God’s people to God’s cosmos, so that in the end ‘creation itself’ will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. The good end of God’s redemptive purpose is a world in which the new heavens and new earth are formed, a world in which righteousness dwells, thus restoring God’s good order for his world.”⁷³ Therefore we understand all of Scripture in light of this larger story of His redemption of the world and we interpret all things in light of God’s bigger purpose and plan for His world, His people, and His glory.

⁷² Ashford, Bruce Riley. *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church and the Nations*. Page 12 of Kindle version

⁷³ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

The *Africa Theology Series* is an important collection of materials because it is written by Africans for Africans. It is a series that should be on the bookshelf of every local church pastor because it allows him to understand some of the most important aspects of theology, but in his context and at a level that is accessible and relevant for his everyday ministry.

The work of theology is more important in Africa today than at any other time in history. The world is looking at Sub-Saharan Africa to be the next leading continent in global Christianity. As Western evangelicals continue to push the boundaries of liberalism and licentiousness, it is the church in Africa that is calling the world back to holiness and biblical standards. As the need continues to grow for a final push of missionaries to the last frontier, it should be African missionaries that lead that global advance. As the evangelical church hungers for a spiritual and theological reformation, it must be the African church and African theologians that chart the way forward. It is time for Africa to take her place and be used by God to pave the way into a brighter future.

That will not happen without sound theological works written by African scholars for the equipping of the African church. We welcome you to this series, hoping that this series will be the continuation of a trend of African theological volumes that will prepare the African church to lead the world into a greater expansion of the Kingdom of God. May God bless you as you do the important work of theology in a difficult African context. Whether you are dealing with Islam, Neo-Pentecostalism, Roman Catholicism, or some other religious context, it is our prayer that this series will serve you well as you serve those in the local church.