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# Message from the Editor: 150 Years of the Van Dyck Bible

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This 2015 volume of the *Cairo Journal of Theology* (*CJT*) opens with four articles on the occasion of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Van Dyck Bible. Cornelius Van Dyck was a medical missionary sent in 1840 to Beirut, Lebanon, by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Utilizing the previous translation work of Eli Smith and collaborating with local assistants, he translated the Bible into Arabic, completing the task in 1865. The

Van Dyck Bible, which is still widely used, has been highly influential and is sometimes referred to as the "Authorized Version" or the "King James Version" of the Arabic-speaking world.

The four articles present various aspects of the issues that surround the Arabic translation of the Bible. Michael Shelley, the director of the Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, provides the reader with a general introduction to Bible translation, reviewing subjects such as biblical inspiration, form criticism,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>\*</sup> The image of Van Dyck on this page has been taken from: Ed Lauber, "An Outstanding Example for Bible Translators," *Heart Language*, August 13, 2014, http://heartlanguage.org/2014/08/13/an-outstanding-example-for-bible-translators/.

source criticism, redaction criticism, the New Testament canon, and the cultural and linguistic adaptability of the Scriptures. Uta Zeuge-Buberl, who recently received her PhD from the University of Vienna for her dissertation on the work of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missionaries (ABCFM) in Beirut, Lebanon, tells the story of Cornelius Van Dyck's work in Beirut and specifically his work on the famous Bible that bears his name. Joshua Yoder, ETSC's New Testament professor, places Van Dyck in his own time, reviewing the state of the art of textual criticism in the nineteenth century and Van Dyck's decision to base his translation of the Bible on the version that scholars refer to as the Textus Receptus. John Daniel, ETSC's instructor of Greek who has worked on the "New Van Dyck" translation project, presents the specific issues that confront those who would produce a modern translation of the Bible in colloquial Arabic.

We hope that you will enjoy reading these four articles. As noted, they open the 2015 volume of the *Cairo Journal of Theology*. The volume continues with two book reviews by myself: Rodney Stark's revisionist history of the West, which highlights the importance of the Christianity for the rise of the West and the success of modernity; and Philip Jenkin's account of the religious aspects of World War I, a war that he argues redrew the religious map of the modern world. During the year, we hope to add more articles and book reviews to this 2015 volume. Please, check http://journal.etsc.org for the latest additions.



# Scripture Matters: Authority, Content, Canon, and Translations of the Bible

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### The Bible's Central Place in Christian Faith and Practice

For Christians the Scriptures matter. Their sacred texts, commonly known as "the Bible,"<sup>1</sup> have a central place in forming Christian faith and practice. The Bible contains numerous writings from a period covering more than a thousand years and written or compiled by numerous people. It is divided into two main parts. Christians most often call the first part "the Old Testament" but sometimes refer to it as "the Hebrew Scriptures" because it was originally, for the most part, written in Hebrew.<sup>2</sup> For Jesus and the very first Christians this part of the Bible was their Scriptures. What Christians call "the New Testament" did not yet exist during the lifetime of Jesus.

Christians speak of the Bible as "sacred" or "holy," which means it has an important place in God's purposes for humanity. They commonly speak of the Bible as the Word of God, which means that Christians throughout the world consider it an authoritative book for faith and practice. Many believe the Bible is authoritative because God inspired it, but what does the word *inspire* mean? New Testament scholar Craig Koester writes,

<sup>1</sup> The English word "Bible" derives from the Greek word *biblion*, which means "book." See Craig Koester, *A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 9. This short book is an excellent introduction to much of what this essay covers.

<sup>2</sup> Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Daniel 2:4b–7:28 are written in Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. See *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 1, s.v. "Aramaic".

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The word *inspired* is used in the Bible itself (2 Timothy 3:16)<sup>3</sup> and is included in official statements of many Christian groups, including Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic churches. Yet the Bible itself does not say *how* the inspiration took place and Christians have developed different positions on this issue. Some declare that each word of the Bible was communicated to the biblical authors by God. Others hold that the message was inspired but the actual words were not. Still others suggest that inspiration refers to the authors of the Bible, not to its words or message.<sup>4</sup>

Another way to talk about the Bible's authority is to say it has authority for Christians because it witnesses to God, what God has done by creating and caring for the creation, including humanity, and most especially what God has done through Jesus Christ. In fact, the New Testament identifies Jesus as the Word of God. Thus, "Christians believe that the words of the Scriptures are authoritative because they are primary witnesses to the *Word*, Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

#### The Bible as a Library

The Bible is usually found in the form of a single book, but in reality it is a collection of many documents. For that reason, it has been likened to "a great library containing many books that were written at different times and places by different people."<sup>6</sup>Among Christians there is some difference about how many books are in this library. The Bible used by Protestants contains sixty-six individual books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New Testament. The Bible used by Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have additional books.

Like a library, the Bible is divided into different sections. The larger section is called the Old Testament, the other is called the New Testament. "A 'testament' is a written expression of some-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Greek word is *theopneustos*, which means God-breathed or breathed into by God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Koester, A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible, 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17.

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one's will, and the Old and New Testaments express the will of God for people."<sup>7</sup>What Christians call the Old Testament is for Jews their entire Bible. Christian Bibles, on the other hand, also contain the New Testament, a collection of documents written between 50 and 110 C.E.

## The Old Testament

Christian Bibles usually group the books of the Old Testament into four categories: the Pentateuch/Law, the Historical Books, the Poetical and Wisdom Books, and the Prophets. Much of the material in the Old Testament circulated orally before it was written down. Altogether, the collection of books in the Old Testament was written over a span of about one thousand years. As Koester says, the books of the Old Testament

provide a panoramic view of God's dealings with his people over many centuries. These texts celebrate the wonder of God's creation and the joy of Israel's liberation from slavery. They portray the anguish of Israel's apostasy and God's own relentless quest to win his people back again, by disciplining them in exile and graciously liberating them once more. Through its stories and songs, prophecies and proverbs, the Old Testament bears witness to the faithfulness of God and helps people in every age discern what it means to be God's own people.<sup>8</sup>

### The New Testament

As already mentioned, for Jesus and the earliest Christians, the Old Testament was their Bible. Eventually, new documents written by early Christians were recognized as authoritative writings that witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ and what it means to be his followers. The formation of the four New Testament Gospels occupied a period of fifty to sixty years after the time of Jesus, roughly the years 30–90 C.E. What was the process that lay behind their formation?

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18. <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 40. A couple of days after Jesus' death his disheartened disciples believed something extraordinary had happened: the one who died on a cross was now alive. They believed that God raised him from the dead. This was a transforming event. The disciples began to recall with fresh vividness what Jesus had said and done. All this was news they could not keep to themselves. It was "good news," which is what the word *gospel* means, and it had to be shared with others. They shared it first with fellows Jews in Palestine. Then, as the New Testament book of Acts tells us, they soon realized this news had significance for the whole world. They thus moved beyond the borders of Palestine into the larger world. They told the story of what Jesus had done and what he taught, and the whole story was colored by what they believed happened in his death and resurrection.

For the first few decades, this story was shared orally. That is, the written Gospels we now have were not written immediately. The story was told through preaching, teaching, and worship within the community of believers that was forming. It was also shared with people outside the community and given as verbal instruction to new believers. As this information about Jesus was told and retold, it was shaped into common patterns that made it easier to remember. New Testament scholars, through the discipline known as "form criticism," try to discern what forms or patterns the material had in the oral period. For instance, as we study the Gospels we find units of material, such as parables, miracle stories, and sayings of Jesus. In the shape in which we have them, they were easy to remember and share.

Eventually, information about Jesus that was shared orally was drawn together in written form in the New Testament Gospels. However, not all this oral material was recorded in the Gospels. We find evidence for this in the New Testament itself. Near the end of the Gospel of John, we read, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book" (20:30).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The Bible translation used in this essay is the *New Revised Standard Version*.

A further branch of Gospel scholarship is called "source criticism." It seeks to discover what larger blocks of material than forms lie behind the New Testament Gospels. For instance, it is widely thought that the Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel to reach its final form, and it is commonly held that Matthew and Luke drew upon Mark extensively, and often almost verbatim, in writing their Gospels. Each, however, also has material unique to his version. At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke refers to other accounts, apparently written, of Jesus' story:

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. (1:1-4)

A third branch of New Testament scholarship is known as "redaction criticism."Each Gospel was originally composed for a particular context. Redaction criticism seeks to discover the special interests, emphases, and concerns that led each Gospel writer to write a Gospel for his context.

New Testament scholarship is painstaking work. To the novice, and even to those of us who have had some training in it, it seems to involve a lot of trivial detail. However, the careful and meticulous study of the Gospels does not affect their broad structure as literature that seeks to tell a story that the writers believed to be vitally important for the whole world. As John says at the end of his Gospel, "these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

Yet, if the teaching of Jesus was one, then we might expect only one Gospel. Why are there four? Perhaps the best response to this question is that the writing of the Gospels was bifocal. By this we mean that the writers composed their Gospels looking back *to* Jesus but *from* the concerns and emphases of their own context.<sup>10</sup> They sought to demonstrate how Jesus could be good news in their situation. That is, each Gospel was written with a particular community and situation in mind and to explain how Jesus was relevant to that situation.

Yet, it might further be asked, why four Gospels and not more? Certainly there were more situations and contexts in the early church than four. The early church thought about this question, and in fact more than four Gospels circulated among early Christians, accounts claiming to present an authentic picture of Jesus. The early church excluded other possibilities, because they were judged to have interpreted the story of Jesus in a questionable or unacceptable manner.

What does this teach us about the Christian understanding of the Bible as revelation? Generally, Christians do not see the Bible as a verbatim record of what God spoke through the prophets. They talk about God through the Holy Spirit working to inspire and guide the biblical writers, but they were not simply passive instruments; they were actively involved in the process.

What about the Epistles, the other major part of the New Testament? These are personal correspondence. They are letters from early Christian leaders—Paul, Peter, James, and John—addressed to cities and small churches in them or to individuals. How can these be considered divine revelation? By New Testament criteria, such letters are not incompatible with revelation. They were part of the life of the developing church. They educated new believers in the meaning and responsibilities of discipleship. They were part of the same world in which the Gospels were formed, but they had a different purpose. Their purpose was not to tell the story of Jesus. Rather, they were written to give spiritual and moral education in what it means to be Christian.<sup>11</sup>

Paul's letters predate the written Gospel portraits of Jesus. Written between the years 50 and 60 C.E., his letters were com-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Kenneth Cragg, Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For further explication, see Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 249–53, and Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 92–99.

posed during the oral period of Gospel formation, described briefly above, when information about Jesus was being passed around orally, not yet in a final written form. However, Paul's letters presuppose the information about Jesus that was developing into the Gospel portraits. His call to new Christian communities to imitate Jesus makes sense only against this background. How Christians live, and what they do, is based on who Jesus was and is.

One of the loveliest New Testament passages, Philippians 2:1–11, calls on the Philippians to be ruled in all their actions by "the mind of Christ." Paul then describes what he means by praising Jesus' self-giving. Of course, this could only make sense in light of the Gospel material about Jesus that was circulating orally. So we see that the Epistles supplemented the Gospels in embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior. These two different types of literature presented a joint witness, the one a narrative account of Jesus' story, the other having a pastoral function of nurturing the new Christian communities in what it means to be followers of Jesus.

How are these letters relevant now after their time and outside their context? Their original destination was specific. They were very personal. Why should they be included in the New Testament? The answer is that they should be seen as offering precedents that can be interpreted for ongoing guidance in other times and places. The situations the apostles handled in these letters continually recur. These letters still have value because the guidance they offer was based in real human situations, not in hypothetical cases.

## The New Testament Canon

The collection of the New Testament writings into what Christians call the "canon" took several centuries to be finalized. The final collection as we have it today goes back to the fourth century, but even then the final collection only recognized documents long-established among Christians. What is the canon? The New Testament contains twenty-seven writings known as the New Testament Canon. Canon is a Greek word that means "measuring rod."<sup>12</sup> The writings of the New Testament were selected from many other early Christian writings as having a special status. They were accepted as the authoritative expression of the faith passed on from the time of the apostles. They are the standard against which other teachings and writings are to be measured.

The formation of the canon took more than three centuries, though most of the New Testament books were recognized as authoritative by the late second century. Through a process of consensus, the four Gospels were so acknowledged early, along with the thirteen Epistles of Paul and the book of Acts. By the late fourth century, the church in Europe and North Africa reached agreement about the books of the New Testament as the developing consensus received the endorsement of ecclesiastical councils. The process took a little longer further east in the Syrian church, spilling over into the fifth century.<sup>13</sup>

Two factors stimulated this development. One was the precedent of the Old Testament, which by the time of Jesus enjoyed general acceptance among the Jews as a body of sacred, authoritative writings. As already mentioned, the Old Testament was the first scripture of the Christians. However, second, the teachings of Jesus and his apostles naturally came to have a dominant place in the life of the early church. They were continually referred to in preaching, teaching, and worship.<sup>14</sup>

After the period of the first apostles, there was a steady growth of writings, both gospels and letters (e.g. the Nag Hammadi collection). These needed to be assessed. Some of these belonged to groups of people judged to be too far outside the mainstream of the church. Some of these groups claimed to have special knowledge beyond what the first disciples of Jesus taught

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., 23–56; Koester, A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible, 61–63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 57–59; Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 115.

(e.g., the Gnostics). To stem the development of such groups, it was necessary to have authoritative scriptures that could be used to measure or assess their claims.<sup>15</sup>

The recognition of this body of Scripture took time. Several criteria were utilized in determining whether or not a document could be accepted. One criterion was apostolic authority. This did not mean that all the New Testament writings were actually written by the apostles, but their contents were attributed to one of Jesus' disciples or their close associates. Other criteria included: catholicity, a document's relevance to the whole church; orthodoxy, a document's agreement with the faith of the church; and traditional usage, whether a document was commonly used in the worship and teaching of numerous churches.<sup>16</sup>

The canonical process began very early. We can even say it began in the time of the apostles as Christians selected material to be used in preaching, teaching, and worship.<sup>17</sup>As the Gospel of John says, not everything he was aware of went into the composition of his Gospel (20:30). Again, the words of New Testament scholar Craig Koester are pertinent here.

The books of the New Testament take readers on a journey through the ministry of Jesus and the formation of the early church. The texts capture the exuberance of the crowds who awaited Jesus' healing touch and the horror of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. They depict the astonishment of the disciples who witnessed the resurrection and provide glimpses into the joys and challenges confronting the community of faith. Through stories, songs, and letters, the New Testament bears witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ and helps Christians of every time and place understand what it means to be Jesus' disciples.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Koester, A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible, 61–63; Cragg, Jesus and the Muslim, 115–16; Gamble, The New Testament Canon, 59-72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 67–71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 16–33, esp. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Koester, A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible, 53.

### Translations of the Bible

The Christian understanding of Scripture and the desire to disseminate it broadly in other languages can be seen as grounded in incarnational theology. For Christians, God has always been active in history, but the pivotal moment of God's work in history is the person and work of Jesus Christ. They confess that the Word of God was incarnated in Jesus. This not only means that God's Word was embodied in a particular human being but also in the culture and language of that person. Yet, from the beginning, Christians have seen the story of God's activity in Jesus as having relevance beyond his time, culture, and language, and the oral and written telling of that story as capable of being embodied in other cultures and languages. Mission scholar Ulrich Fick writes,

It is impressive to see how much the written message of God shares and expresses the essence of his incarnation in Christ.

We confess that Jesus of Nazareth was true God and true man. In this dual identity he personified the creator in creation, the infinite in a finite being. Jesus could be misunderstood and misinterpreted like any other human being, because he was fully human, and at the same time people encountered in him the fullness of God which is beyond explanation.

The Scripture which speaks of Christ can be described in exactly the same terms. "The Word became flesh" is the theme of any version of the Bible, not merely in the sense that God condescends to allow us to describe him in anthropomorphisms (what other way do we have to describe a person, even if this person is beyond our ability to describe?), but in the much deeper sense that he enters our thought patterns and speech forms so that we can hear him in our words....

The vulnerability of God in man is continued in the vulnerability of the Scriptures. The Bible can be misunderstood as much as Christ could. The Bible can be misused in a variety of ways, just as there are attempts galore to misuse Christ: magically, selectively, nostalgically, or, worse, supporting of our own ideas and goals.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ulrich Fick, "The Bible Societies—Fruit and Tool of Mission," *International Review of Mission* 70 (July 1981): 123–24. The fact that the New Testament documents were first written in Greek rather than the Aramaic Jesus and his first disciples spoke shows how quickly the message about him moved beyond its first cultural and linguistic context, as his disciples journeyed beyond the confines of Palestine into the surrounding world. As noted by mission scholar Lamin Sanneh, the Apostle Paul was a key figure in this breakthrough.

Paul formulated pluralism as the necessary outworking of the religion he believed Jesus preached. That pluralism was rooted for Paul in the Gentile breakthrough, which in turn justified cross-cultural tolerance in Christian mission. One idea in Paul's thought is that God does not absolutize any one culture, whatever the esteem in which God holds culture. The second is that all cultures have cast upon them the breath of God's favor, thus cleansing them of all stigma of inferiority and untouchability.<sup>20</sup>

No doubt, the fact that Paul was a Jew who grew up in a Hellenistic cultural context and was able to think and communicate in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek aided him as he moved across cultural and linguistic frontiers. His work, and that of other known and unknown followers of Jesus in this early period of Christian history, served as an important impetus for the Christian recognition of all cultures and their languages as acceptable in God's eyes, making it possible to speak and write about God's work in other languages. This is a quality of Christianity that led Sanneh to write that "the genius of the religion" is its "ability to adopt each culture as its natural destination and as a necessity of its life."<sup>21</sup>

There was an important precedent for rendering the record of God's dealings with humanity into other languages. Prior to the time of Jesus, the Old Testament was translated into Greek in what is known as the Septuagint. The subsequent rendering of the Bible—both Old and New Testaments, in part or in their entire-ty—into numerous languages through the centuries is rooted in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Marynoll, Orbis Books, 1989), 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid., 69.

the conviction that God respects and can utilize any culture and its language(s) to convey the story and teachings that it contains.<sup>22</sup>

Even with such rationale for rendering the Bible into the many languages of humankind, some will ask, why have there been multiple translations into the same language? We can point to several factors, which revolve around the twin concerns for accuracy and readability. First, previously unknown Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts continue to be discovered, which sometimes, after careful and reasoned comparison, scholars judge bring us closer to the original text than previously known manuscripts did. Periodic new translations strive to take these discoveries into account. Second, scholars continue to learn more about biblical languages and cultures, which help us to understand better the Bible and the contexts to which its writings were originally addressed. Such factors are then taken into account when trying to render the meanings of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words and phrases into modern-day languages. Third, modern-day languages do not remain static. They change over time, as old words take on new meanings, new words enter into usage, and people look for translations that are more readable in light of the contemporary use of their language(s). Some of these changes may occur over a period of centuries, others happen in a matter of decades or less.<sup>23</sup> Fourth, translations in particular languages, such as English, take into account "different kinds of readers, having different degrees and different kinds of exposure to the Scriptures."<sup>24</sup> There are, for instance, readers who have had little or no exposure to the Bible, others who have been taught that they cannot trust the Bible, and others who may seem to be well acquainted with it but find it confusing.<sup>25</sup>Finally, translators

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> For a good introduction to the history of the transmission of the Christian message through many languages and cultures and some of the interesting ramifications, see Sanneh, *Translating the Message*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Koester, A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible, 79–80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Eugene A. Nida, "Bible Translation for the Eighties," *International Review of Mission* 70 (July 1981): 133.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25°</sup>Ibid., 133–35.

not only take into account the biblical languages in relation to their context but the receptive languages in relation to their contexts, for example, their histories, religions, economy, anthropologies, and physical environments. This then impacts how translators seek to convey the meaning of the original texts in ways that make sense in today's terms.

As Sanneh writes, at the root of the Christian desire through the centuries to translate their scriptures into vernacular languages is the conviction that "in Jesus Christ was to be found the message of salvation, a message that was expected to cohere in the vernacular." Christians have "expected the vernacular to be the congenial locus for the word of God, the eternal *logos*<sup>26</sup> who finds familiar shelter across all cultures, but one also by which and in which all cultures find their authentic, true destiny."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> A Greek word that can be translated as "word." Perhaps the best known New Testament use of it occurs at the beginning of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God. ... And the *logos* became flesh and lived among us, ..." (1:1, 14).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 205.



## "I Have Left My Heart in Syria": Cornelius Van Dyck and the American Syria Mission

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Cornelius Van Alan Van Dyck (1818-1895) was one of the most prominent American missionaries sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to their mission in Ottoman Syria in the nineteenth century. In studies on Syria's cultural awakening in the second half of the nineteenth century, the nahda, Van Dyck, or al-hakīm (the wise) as he was often called, is well remembered as a polymath, who contributed modern textbooks on different subjects to Syria's new educational institutions. Above all he is known for completing the translation of the Bible into Arabic with its first edition published in 1865. Van Dyck's remarkable achievements often overshadow the fact that he actually began as a missionary doctor in Syria, preaching the Gospel while curing the people's diseases. This article will focus on his first thirty years in Syria, which can be marked as a period of transformation and change in his life. Van Dyck slowly distanced himself from the Syria Mission by embracing more liberal views and discovering his love for science and the Arabic language.

On August 13, 1818, Van Dyck was born in Kinderhook, New York, into a family of Dutch immigrants. He studied medicine at the Jefferson College in Philadelphia and took his first job a as teacher of chemistry in a girl's school when he was eighteen years old.<sup>1</sup> Being a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, Van

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Henry H. Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 2 vol. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 1:104–5.

Dyck was sent by the ABCFM as missionary doctor<sup>2</sup> to Syria and reached Beirut on April 1, 1840.<sup>3</sup> Before his departure, he neither received theological training nor any introduction into the Arabic vernacular—circumstances that were to change soon after his arrival in Syria.

The Syria Mission repeatedly asked for more missionaries to be sent to improve its efforts with the Syrian Christians and Muslims. The ABCFM, therefore, requested its two missionary doctors in Syria, Cornelius Van Dyck and Henry De Forest, to pursue additional theological training in order to work as preachers.<sup>4</sup> Van Dyck's father, a country doctor, had wished to see his son in the ministry of the church.<sup>5</sup> Realizing the possibility of having a second chance at fulfilling his father's wishes, Van Dyck began studying theological books. But in 1845 he expressed his doubts to Rufus Anderson, corresponding secretary of the ABCFM, saying that he was uncertain whether he should become a minister: "at present my whole heart is drawn towards the sacred office. But the required qualifications, the responsibilities, the magnitude of work are points which make me hesitate."<sup>6</sup> Van Dyck finally received his ordination on January 14, 1846, in 'Abeih, southeast

<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of the nineteenth century "American medicine …was hardly 'scientific'; doctors still bled patients for all manner of ailments so that [they] had little edge over the native practitioner": Robert L. Daniel, "American Influences in the Near East Before 1860," *American Quarterly* 16/1 (Spring), 82.

<sup>3</sup> The Missionary Herald 36 (1840), in Kamal Salibi and Yusuf K. Khoury (eds.), *The Missionary Herald: Reports from Ottoman Syria 1819–1870* (Beirut: Mediterranean Press, 1995), 3:222.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson to the Syria Mission (On board the Turkish Steamer, April 23, 1844): archive of the ABCFM in Harvard University, Cambridge, MA) 16.8.1, vol. 8. (16.8.1. and 16.8.2. are microfilm sections, accessible in Lamont Library at the Harvard University, the volume number is often followed by an item number in brackets.) Hereafter the ABCFM archive is abbreviated as ABC.

<sup>5</sup> Rufus Anderson, "Memorandum of Discussions with the Missionaries during my visit to the Levant in 1843–1844": ABC 30.10, vol. 3, 34 (located at Harvard Houghton Library, hereinafter abbreviated as HHL).

<sup>6</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson (Beirut, October 30, 1845): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 3.1. (142).

of Beirut, where the mission had established a school and a church.<sup>7</sup> Only one year later Van Dyck wrote to Anderson that he was suffering from feeble health due to the amount of labournot uncommon among the missionaries at that time.<sup>8</sup> In addition to his sacred office Van Dyck and his friend Butrus al-Bustānī, who was employed as a "native assistant" by the mission, were commissioned to establish the new mission seminary in 'Abeih in 1846.<sup>9</sup> Van Dyck taught geography and biblical studies, whereas Bustānī taught arithmetic, Arab grammar and defining of words.<sup>10</sup> Except for an Arabic grammar<sup>11</sup> and an introduction to arithmetic<sup>12</sup> the missionaries had no Arabic textbooks for the variety of subjects they offered in the mission schools. Only after establishing the American Mission Press in Beirut (AMP) in 1834 and

<sup>7</sup> The Missionarv Herald 42 (1846), in Salibi and Khoury, Reports from Ottoman Syria, 3:482. For more information on 'Abeih see also: The Missionary Herald 40 (1844), in: ibid., 388-89; Jessup, Fifty Three Years in Syria, 1:107.

<sup>8</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson ('Abeih, October 5, 1847): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 5 (314).

The Missionary Herald 43 (1847), in Salibi and Khoury, Reports from Ottoman Syria, 4:2-4. The former Mission Seminary founded in 1837 in Beirut had to close its doors due to the enticement of students by local and foreign merchants and diplomats: William M. Thomson, "The Committee in the results of the Seminary submit[s] the following report" (April 6, 1844): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 1 (23).

<sup>10</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson ('Abeih, November 9, 1846): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 5

(315). <sup>11</sup> The grammar was written by the famous poet and scholar Nāşif al- $\overline{z} = \overline{z} + \overline{z} +$ Yāzijī (Kitāb faşl al-hitāb fī uşūl luģāt al-a'rāb). It was the first secular book published by the American Mission Press in 1836: Dagmar Glaß and Geoffrey Roper, "Arabic Book and Newspaper Printing in the Arab World, Part I: The Printing of Arabic Books in the Arab World," in Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution: A Cross-Cultural Encounter, ed. Eva Hanebutt-Benz and others (Mainz: WVA-Verlag Skulima, 2002), 190-91.

<sup>12</sup> Kitāb dalīl al-şawāb fī usūl al-hisāb was a small book written by the native helper Rizq Allah al-Barbārī. It was printed by the American Mission Press in 1837 and used in the Beirut Mission Seminary: Smith, "Report of Works Printed at the Missionary Press in Beirut" (1844): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 1 (28).

employing competent Syrian helpers were the Americans able to start printing new school material.

Within a few years Van Dyck had acquired such Arabic fluency that he was able to write textbooks on geography, algebra, geometry, logarithm, trigonometry, and natural philosophy for the 'Abeih seminary.<sup>13</sup> He and Bustānī would sit together for nights on end creating suitable material for their classes.<sup>14</sup> It was a long process, which required a lot of additional studies of the two men "to ensure the necessary accuracy in thus composing text books for [the] future".<sup>15</sup>

In 1851 the ABCFM assigned a new task to Van Dyck. After his colleague Simeon Calhoun was installed as head of the 'Abeih seminary, Van Dyck, William M. Thomson,<sup>16</sup> and the native preacher John Wortabet were sent to Sidon to establish a new mission station and a native church in Hāşbeiyā, seventy kilometers from Sidon. Van Dyck enjoyed his "pleasant residence" and the "interesting field" in Sidon, but after six successful years as a minister and physician he had to move back to Beirut.<sup>17</sup> Eli Smith, head of the AMP and mission library, had since 1848 been translating the Bible into Arabic with his assistants, Buţrus al-Bustānī and Nāşīf al-Yāzijī. When he died in 1857, the project was unfinished. In 1851 the mission had already considered the

<sup>13</sup> Most of these books were compositions of modern American or European and classical Arabic literature. The missionary Henry Harris Jessup later wrote about Van Dyck's book on geography (*Kitāb al-mir'āt al-wadīya fi l-kurat al-ardīya*, first edition in 1852): "His geography of Turkey, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, is a thesaurus of graphic description, and full of apt quotations in poetry and prose from the old Arab geographers and travellers. The people delight in it and quote it with admiration. I found it to be one of the best possible reading books in acquiring a knowledge of the Arabic vocabulary." Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 1:107.

<sup>14</sup> Jūrjī Zaydān, *Tarāğim mašāhīr aš-šarq fī l-qarn at-tāsiʿ ašar, al-juzʾ attānī 2: Fī riğāl al-ʻilm wa l-adab wa l-šiʿir (Cairo: Matbaʿa al-Ḥilāl, 1903), 30.* 

<sup>16</sup> Thomson was also Van Dyck's father in law: Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, 1:107.

<sup>17</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson (Beirut, October 31, 1857): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 5 (344).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson (<sup>6</sup>Abeih, November 9, 1846): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 5 (315).

possibility of Van Dyck assisting in the translation of poetical parts of the Bible because of his great competency in the Arabic language.<sup>18</sup> After Smith's death it was beyond question that Van Dyck was the only member of the mission able to finish the translation. But he was not at all eager to leave Sidon "for the whirl of the multitude, the case hardened and the dusty roads and lanes of Beirut."<sup>19</sup> As a center of culture and trade, Beirut eventually offered plenty of opportunities for Van Dyck to become more than a missionary doctor.

First, he became the new head of the AMP, which the ABCFM had actually wanted to close since 1844. Rufus Anderson constantly demanded that the printing work should be kept "subservient to the pulpit" and that more efforts should be spent on preaching.<sup>20</sup> Like his predecessor Smith, Van Dyck now had to fight for the AMP's continuance, arguing that the new Arabic Bible had to be printed in Beirut to serve the final goal of the mission.<sup>21</sup> Van Dyck was not hesitant to admit that the press was the "only point where [the] Mission stands ahead of all other missions in the great field."<sup>22</sup> This was obviously a subtle critique of the mission's small success in the areas of preaching and converting. The budget of the AMP was constantly reduced, leaving the financial burden on European and American Bible societies.<sup>23</sup> Van Dyck did not agree with the policy that did not allow the AMP to spend earnings from its book sales on new publications or reprints. In a letter to Rufus Anderson, he argued contentiously

<sup>18</sup> Anderson to the Syria Mission (Boston, July 17, 1851): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 8 (4).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of* Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches, (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1872), 1:263.

<sup>21</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson (Beirut, June 14, 1862): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 7.2 (498). <sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Van Dyck to Clark (Beirut, January 25, 1868): ABC 16.8.1., vol. 7.2. (515): "The Board has given us the pittance of \$1000 perhaps sometimes much less . . . we have never had enough to keep alive anything more than a miserable one."

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that none would have noticed if the AMP spent its income for urgently needed books. He therefore asked:

[W]ill the P[rudential] C[ommittee] give the permission asked and allow us to print one Hymn Book with clear consciences; or shall we have to do it without such permission and guilt our consciences as we best  $can?^{24}$ 

Van Dyck pointed to the inevitable interconnectedness between the evangelistic and educational work of the mission, which depended on the printing of religious tracts and textbooks.

In 1865 he traveled to the U.S. in order to superintend the electrotyping of the recently finished Arabic Bible.<sup>25</sup> He resided in New York for two years and spent his time well by teaching Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary and using this salary to obtain additional training in ophthalmology<sup>26</sup> and a doctoral degree in theology at Rutgers College in New Jersey.<sup>27</sup> Van Dyck was eventually offered a chair at Union, but after a two-year absence from Syria, he replied: "I have left my heart in Syria and thither I must return."<sup>28</sup> His missionary colleagues felt relieved, for they had feared Van Dyck would accept a new position in New York. Due to its weak condition, the Syria Mission heavily relied on Van Dyck and his manifold skills.<sup>29</sup>

After his return to Syria in 1867 Van Dyck discovered that the female boarding school, run by the Syrian Protestant Mihā'īl

<sup>24</sup> Van Dyck to Anderson (Beirut, August 30, 1864): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 7.2 (501). <sup>25</sup> Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 1:77.

<sup>26</sup> Lutfi M. Sa'di, "Al-Hakîm Cornelius Van Allen Van Dyck (1818-1895)", ISIS 27 (May 1937), 29. In the early 1860s Van Dyck observed a high rate of eye diseases in Syria. He later wrote an unpublished treatise named Amrād al-ʿavn.

<sup>27</sup> Catalogue of the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1836-1936 (New York, 1937). In 1890 he also obtained the degree L.H.D. from the Rutgers College and the degree of LL.D. from the University of Edinburgh in 1892: ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 1:108.
<sup>29</sup> Clark to Van Dyck (Boston, August 15, 1866): ABC 2.1.1, vol. 31 (HHL).

'Aramān,<sup>30</sup> had severe financial problems. Hence, the ABCFM wanted to transform it into an American boarding school with an American staff. But Van Dyck opposed an "Americanization" of the Syrian institution: "I call it a failure, and I'd rather shut it up or give the building to the Syrian Protestant College than to try to make an Americanized female boarding school of it."<sup>31</sup> He pointed to the ABCFM's original aim to encourage indigenous Protestant institutions to become self-supporting.<sup>32</sup> Van Dyck's position on the matter was clear: He wanted the ABCFM to withdraw slowly from the mission field in Syria, in order to clear the way for an independent Syrian Protestant community. The ABCFM finally agreed to support the institution's independence by organizing different funds. The female boarding school eventually became American after it had come under the auspices of the Presbyterian Women's Board of Missions.<sup>33</sup>

The aforementioned Syrian Protestant College (SPC), an American institution of higher education, was established under an independent Board of Managers in 1866. While still residing in New York, Van Dyck accepted the chair as medical professor and established the medical department with his former missionary colleague John Wortabet, a Syrian Protestant. When Van Dyck had to justify his new position before the ABCFM, he mentioned the low salaries of the missionaries of the Syria Mission,

<sup>30</sup> 'Aramān replaced Bustānī in the Mission Seminary in 'Abeih after 1850: The Missionary Herald 46 (1850), in Salibi and Khoury, Reports from Ottoman Svria, 4:112.

<sup>31</sup> Van Dyck to Clark (Beirut, January 15, 1868): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 7.2

which stood for a "self-governing", "self-supporting" and "self-propagating" indigenous Protestant community: Rufus Anderson, Foreign Missions: Their Relations and Claims (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), cited in R. Pierce Beaver (ed.), To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 97.

<sup>33</sup> Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 1:225–26. The female seminary later became the American School for Girls, now known as the Lebanese American University: Daniel Bliss, Letters from a New Campus: Written to His Wife Abby and Their Four Children During Their Visit to Amherst, Massachusetts, 1873–1874 (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1993), 237 (no. 16).

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which compelled them to take additional jobs.<sup>34</sup> Even though he requested to receive a lower salary from the college than his colleagues, the ABCFM criticized Van Dyck's additional job at the SPC. Van Dyck replied that he would work more for the college if the ABCFM would be willing to reduce his salary, small as it was  $^{35}$ 

In 1870 the Syria Mission was transferred to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions because the ABCFM could no longer maintain all of its mission enterprises due to budgetary constraints. In spite of his discord with the ABCFM, Van Dyck wrote in a farewell letter to his former employer:

When requested a year or more since, to leave the mission and devote myself to work in the Syrian Protestant College, I replied: "No! I have served the Board thirty years, and the connection has been one in which I have enjoyed great happiness in my work, and I hope to die in its service."<sup>36</sup>

Several farewell letters were printed in the sixty-sixth volume of the Missionary Herald, the periodical of the ABCFM. Interestingly the Missionary Herald omitted a phrase from Van Dyck's letter. It quoted "Now the tie is severed!..." <sup>37</sup> but did not add "and the question of remaining in connection with the Mission is an open one."<sup>38</sup>

In 1870 Daniel Bliss, president of the SPC, announced in his annual report that Van Dyck would now be able to obtain a full professorship.<sup>39</sup> Van Dyck resigned from his position at the AMP

<sup>34</sup> Van Dyck to Clark (Beirut, 24 February 1869): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 7.2 (519). <sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Van Dyck to Clark (Beirut, August 31, 1870): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 7.2

(520). <sup>37</sup> The Missionary Herald 66 (1870), in Salibi and Khoury, Reports from Ottoman Syria, 5:254.

<sup>38</sup> Van Dyck to Clark (Beirut, 31 August 1870): ABC 16.8.1, vol. 7.2

(520). <sup>39</sup> Bliss to the Board of Managers (Beirut, June 24, 1870): ABC 16.8.2, vol. 2, 14.

in the early 1870s<sup>40</sup> but still remained in connection with the Syria Mission, preaching from time to time in the mission church.

In the meantime Van Dyck's popularity as a scholar and author in Ottoman Syria had developed independently from the missionary circle. On his fiftieth anniversary of residence in Syria the American missionaries were but one of many congratulants from different religious denominations and institutions. On November 13, 1895, the "Nestor, the veteran of fifty-five years," Cornelius Van Dyck died of typhoid. The American missionary Henry Harris Jessup later wrote: "The whole city felt his death as a personal bereavement, and his funeral was attended by men of all sects and nationalities."<sup>41</sup> *Al-ḥakīm* Van Dyck, who "left his heart in Syria," achieved more than his former missionary colleagues and became widely regarded amongst the Syrians as one of them.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, *Centennial of the American Press, 1822–1922* (Beirut: American Press 1923), 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 2:613. Until today Van Dyck's grave can be visited at the Anglo-American cemetery in Beirut.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Jessup, *Fifty Three Years in Syria*, 1:107.



# The Greek Texts of Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck

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Eli Smith, the progenitor of what would eventually become known as the Van Dyck translation, began the task of translating the Bible into Arabic in 1848. By the time of his death in 1857 he had completed his translation of the New Testament and overseen the printing of the first sixteen chapters of the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent fate of Smith's translation is recorded by Henry Jessup:

At the next annual meeting of the mission after Dr. Smith's death (April 3, 1857), a committee was appointed to examine and report on the state of the translation of the Scriptures as left by Dr. Smith. [...] It was found that in the translation of the New Testament, the Greek text followed had been that of [Augustus] Hahn, but in the first thirteen chapters of Matthew, there are some variations from that text according to the text of [Samuel Prideaux] Tregelles and others....

The mission then appointed Dr. [Cornelius] Van Dyck to the work. . . . As the American Bible Society required a strict adherence to the Textus Receptus of Hahn's Greek Testament, Dr. Van Dyck revised every verse in the New Testament, taking up the work as if new. The basis left by Dr. Smith was found invaluable, and but for it the work would have been protracted very much beyond what it really was.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his last progress report, from April 1, 1856, Smith reported the printing of the first part of Matthew. Translation of the whole New Testament had been completed by the time of Smith's report of April 3, 1855. See Henry Jessup, *Fifty-three Years in Syria* (New York: Revell, 1910), 1:66–76.

<sup>2</sup> Jessup's source is a report on the history of the translation that Van Dyck wrote in 1885 at the request of Rev. James S. Dennis, a member and librarian

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The purpose of this short essay is to review the work of Smith and Van Dyck in terms of the progress of New Testament textual criticism during the nineteenth century. By placing the decision to insist on fidelity to the Textus Receptus in its historical context, I hope to show that the Smith-Van Dyck translation was conceived and brought to fruition in a time when textual criticism, though not new, was still developing and had not yet won widespread acceptance. Advances since the mid-nineteenth century in the availability of ancient manuscripts, the techniques of textual criticism, and the quality of the critical texts available have brought with them greater acceptance of the use of textual criticism and the departure from the Textus Receptus or majority text.

#### The Textus Receptus

The term Textus Receptus originates from a "small and convenient" edition of the Greek New Testament first published at Leiden in 1624 by the Elzevir brothers, Bonaventure and Abraham. In the second edition of this text, published in 1633, the Elzevir brothers asserted: *textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus* ("[the reader] has the text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted").<sup>3</sup> As a result of this bit of publicity, the term Textus Receptus ("received text") came into popular use as a term for the type of Greek New Testament text that was most widely disseminated at that time.

Although the Elzevirs derived their text for the most part from an edition published by Theodore Beza in 1565, this text can ultimately be traced back to the work of Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch humanist who famously debated Martin Luther over the question of free will. Although Beza had access to the ancient

of the Syria Mission in Beirut. In the report, Van Dyck cites and comments on minutes from the general meetings of the Syria Mission. Jessup quotes the report at length, but in summary form rather than verbatim (*Fifty-three Years in Syria*, 1:66–76).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 105–6.

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texts found in Codex Bezae and Codex Claromontanus, he did not make much use of them because of the extent to which they diverged from the generally accepted text of his time.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Beza's text largely resembled the fourth edition (1551) of the text published by the Parisian printer and publisher Robert Estienne, also known as Stephanus. Stephanus, starting with his third edition, had begun to favor the text produced by Erasmus for the publisher Johann Froben, first published in 1516. This near exclusive fidelity to Erasmus' text (as found in its fourth and fifth editions) required almost three hundred changes in the editions Stephanus had published in 1546 and 1549.<sup>5</sup>

Erasmus prepared his text on the basis of incomplete and inferior manuscripts. The extent of variation among New Testament manuscripts was not fully appreciated in the early sixteenth century, and Erasmus imagined he could find manuscripts at Basle to send directly to the printer as copy for typesetting. Instead, he found manuscripts riddled with errors that required correction.<sup>6</sup> Erasmus could not find a manuscript with the entire New Testament. He used one for the gospels and another for the Acts and Epistles. Both manuscripts date from no earlier than the twelfth century.<sup>7</sup> These he compared with several other manuscripts in order to spot errors. Erasmus translated the Latin Vulgate into Greek to help him with these difficulties, and thus, as Bruce Metzger puts it, "here and there in Erasmus' self-made Greek text

<sup>4</sup> Metzger, Text, 105.

<sup>5</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, A History of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 57.

<sup>6</sup> Metzger, *Text*, 98–99. A photo of a page of one of the manuscripts used by Erasmus (MS. 2), with Erasmus' clarifications and corrections for the printer written on it, can be seen in plate XV. See also C. C. Tarelli, "Erasmus' Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943): 155–62.

<sup>7</sup> The Gospels manuscript may date from as late as the fifteenth century, a mere century before Erasmus' own time. See Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 52. For Revelation, Erasmus had only one manuscript (also twelfth century), which lacked the final leaf containing the last six verses and had commentary in Greek that was "so mixed up [with the text] as to be almost indistinguishable" (Metzger, *Text*, 99).

are readings which have never been found in any known Greek manuscript—but which are still perpetuated today in printings of the so-called Textus Receptus of the Greek New Testament."<sup>8</sup> Erasmus' level of confidence in his own text can be appraised from the fact that for his fourth edition (1527) he made corrections based on the Greek text printed in the Complutensian Polyglot, which had been published in 1522 soon after Erasmus' third edition left the press.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Elzevirs claimed to give "nothing changed or corrupted," they did not simply reprint any of Erasmus' (or Stephanus') editions but used Beza's, with influence from Erasmus, the Complutensian Polyglot, and even the Vulgate. As a result, their text contained nearly three hundred differences from Stephanus' third (1550) edition, considered the standard for the Textus Receptus in England.<sup>10</sup>

Such figures, however, do not tell the whole story. The chief problem with the Textus Receptus was not that it claimed an immaculate status for a text that in fact was in some degree arbitrary. The chief problem was that it reflected a type of text, sometimes called the "majority text," that many scholars today consider to reflect later developments in the transmission of the New Testament text rather than the original readings of the New Testament books.<sup>11</sup> Although most extant New Testament manuscripts carry this type of text (thus the term "majority text"), this is because most of the New Testament manuscripts that have sur-

<sup>8</sup> Metzger, *Text*, 99–100. A famous case of such interpolation is the socalled *Comma Johanneum* in 1 John 5:7–8 (marked with italics): "For there are three that bear record in heaven, *the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth*, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one" (KJV). Erasmus did not include it in his first edition because he could find it in none of the Greek manuscripts he consulted. However, he was obliged to include the words in his third edition after a manuscript containing the words was produced, though he suspected that the manuscript had been manufactured for the purpose.

<sup>9</sup> Metzger, Text, 102.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 60–61.

<sup>11</sup> Kurt Aland, "The Text of the Church?" *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 131.

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vived into the modern era were copied during the Byzantine period and later, when this particular text had become the standard. The earliest surviving manuscripts, however, do not bear witness to this type of text.<sup>12</sup> Just as the nineteenth century saw the flourishing of New Testament textual criticism, it also saw the growth of the available early manuscript evidence. The more this sort of early manuscript evidence was uncovered without a trace of the majority text type, the less likely it began to seem that this text really represented the original readings of the books.

## Eli Smith's Text

What Greek text or texts did Smith use as a basis of translation? In 1854 Smith detailed the state of his library in a report to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The report, however, is focused on the resources used in translating the Old Testament. It does not provide much information on the resources Smith had at his disposal for the New Testament work, textual or otherwise. Thus we turn to a report made by Van Dyck in 1883, related by Isaac H. Hall:

Dr. Smith adopted no known text of the Greek, but selected from [Constantin von] Tischendorf, [Karl] Lachmann, [Samuel Prideaux] Tregelles, and [Henry] Alford, as he thought fit. He had gone on far with the New Testament when Alford was published; and he stopped until he could go back and compare what he had done with Alford.<sup>13</sup>

This report is problematic, as it seems to represent historical hindsight rather than the texts Smith might actually have had at his disposal. In particular, although Tregelles published *An Ac*-

<sup>12</sup> See Aland, "Text," 139-143, and Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the* Status Quaestionis, ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 297–320.

<sup>13</sup> Isaac H. Hall, "The Arabic Bible of Drs. Eli Smith and Cornelius V. A. Van Dyck," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 11 (1885): 279 (originally presented to the Society Oct. 25, 1883), quoting "an account written by Dr. Van Dyck himself and kindly transmitted to me in May, 1883" (276).

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*count of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* in 1854, the year of Smith's report to the board quoted above, this was merely a survey of previously printed editions of the New Testament and an explanation of his own critical principles. Tregelles did not begin to publish his own text until 1857, the year of Smith's death (he released the text in six parts between 1857 and 1872). Indeed, according to Margaret Leavy, Smith left Beirut in the winter of 1855–56 and was never able to resume his work after that.<sup>14</sup> Smith could not have used Tregelles in his work.

The work of Karl Lachmann, on the other hand, would have been available. Lachmann's first edition was published in 1831 and marked the first time in the modern era that a text had been published based solely on the ancient manuscript evidence, without reference to previously printed editions. Thus the Textus Receptus was completely ignored, to the extent that Lachmann did not even indicate where and how his text diverged from it, though he supplied variant readings from other sources in the margin.<sup>15</sup> Lachmann's stated purpose was to reconstruct the form of the text widely used in the fourth century—he was less sanguine about the possibility of going beyond that. Thus he gave priority to the readings found in the most ancient manuscripts (the uncials) rather than to the readings found in the majority of manuscripts.<sup>16</sup>

It is intriguing to consider that Smith may have used Lachmann's first edition rather than the second, larger edition that began to appear in 1842 (its second volume was not published until 1950). In the earlier edition Lachmann gave preference to what he called "Oriental" sources such as Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Vaticanus—the type of text used by the Alexandrian

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Leavy, *Eli Smith and the Arabic Bible*, Yale Divinity School Library Occasional Publication 4 (New Haven, CT: Yale Divinity School Library, 1993), 19, http://web.library.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/OccPub4 .pdf.

<sup>15</sup> Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 110–11. The first (1831) edition did print Lachmann's departures from the 1624 Elzevir edition in the back—see A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), 30.

<sup>16</sup> F. G. Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. rev. and aug. by A. W. Adams (London: Duckworth, 1975), 178.

theologian and exegete Origen—as opposed to those he called "Occidental," representing the type of text used in the West from Irenaeus onward. In Lachmann's larger second edition he gave the Western authorities more weight, though the resulting text did not differ greatly from the earlier edition.<sup>17</sup>

As for Constantin von Tischendorf, the famous discoverer of Codex Sinaiticus published eight editions of the Greek New Testament between 1841 and 1872. Smith could feasibly have used one of the early editions. However, only the later editions reflected the evidence of Sinaiticus, which Tischendorf did not discover until 1844 (he only became aware of the existence of the New Testament section of it in 1859). In 1867 Tischendorf became the first to publish the text of Codex Vaticanus.<sup>18</sup> The great age of these two manuscripts, which date from the fourth century AD, and their tendency to agree with each other against the majority text, provided a major impetus for the rejection of the Textus Receptus as representative of a later text type, leading to the publication of a revision of the English Authorized Version and a new Greek text by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, both in 1881 (the former is not based directly on the latter, but reflects it to a great extent).

It is not unrealistic to think that Smith acquired and used the texts published by Lachmann and Tischendorf. Hall writes of Smith's penchant for scholarship:

But for the collecting of such books as were necessary in order even moderately to furnish the Bible translator, it is the universal testimony that the work was planned and executed by Dr. Smith—except so far as continued after his death. I do not refer to the Arabic books, for in that respect Dr. Van Dyck's gatherings were much superior; but to the critical and linguistic appa-

<sup>17</sup> Vincent, Textual Criticism, 110–11.

<sup>18</sup> Though it had arrived in the Vatican library by 1481 at the latest, for centuries scholars were granted only limited access to it. Collations were made in 1669, 1720, and 1780, and Tischendorf himself was able to make his own collation in 1866, on the basis of which he published his edition in 1867. It was then formally published in 1868 (though only the New Testament section; the Old Testament did not appear until 1881).

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ratus, such as are needed and appreciated in the better libraries of Europe and America, but are scarcely valued, or even understood, by the average missionary or clergyman at home. Such a collection, and yet quite moderate in extent, was brought together chiefly by the influence and efforts of Dr. Smith; though how he justified it as a necessity to those who could not see the use of such costly tools of trade, is one of the questions which had better remain unasked.<sup>19</sup>

Smith's interest in acquiring and employing the edition of Henry Alford as soon as it was published reinforces this impression of his habits.

Van Dyck lays great emphasis in his report on Smith's use of the work of Alford, who was Dean of Canterbury and the author of an influential commentary on the New Testament.<sup>20</sup> The time of publication of Alford's Greek testament fits Van Dyck's recollection: the first volume was published in 1849, so Smith would have had ample time to acquire and make use of at least part of Alford's work (the fourth volume was not published until 1861). However, it was not until the fifth edition that Alford rewrote the text and list of variant readings in response to the work of Tischendorf and Tregelles.<sup>21</sup> In the earlier editions, on the other hand, he was influenced to a greater degree by the Textus Receptus.<sup>22</sup> Thus, had Smith indeed been using the texts of Lachmann and Tischendorf, any revision of earlier work that Smith would have done on the basis of Alford would likely have led him back in the direction of the Textus Receptus. It may be that one should understand Van Dyck's phrase "compar[ing] what he had done with Alford" to mean that Smith checked to see if Alford had dared to make the same departures from the Textus Receptus that he had

<sup>19</sup> Hall, "Arabic Bible," 284.

<sup>20</sup> Metzger, Text, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 138. According to Robertson it was the 6<sup>th</sup> edition (*Introduction*, 35).

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, *Introduction*, 35.

## Van Dyck's Text

Curiously, Van Dyck's report of 1885 claims that the committee tasked with reporting on the state of the translation project following Smith's death found that except for the first thirteen chapters of Matthew, where "there are some variations from that text according to the text of Tregelles and others," Smith had followed the Greek text that Van Dyck reported to be the standard for the American Bible Society, that of Augustus Hahn.<sup>23</sup> First published in 1840, Hahn's text reproduced the Textus Receptus, though it did provide alternate readings from scholars such as Johann Griesbach and Karl Lachmann.<sup>24</sup> Despite this, Van Dyck (as summarized by Jessup) reported that he had to revise "every verse in the New Testament, taking up the work as if new," though using Smith's earlier translation as a basis accelerated the work considerably.

However, according to Isaac Hall, Van Dyck did not use Hahn's text for this task, but a reprint of a much older work:

Here I may say that Dr. Van Dyck informed me orally that the particular variety of the Textus Receptus which he used, by direction, was that of [John] Mill: I think, in some of its English reprints. (Of course the professed reprints vary very much. The Oxford edition of 1836, with its repetitions, is almost the only one that is accurate—correcting Mill's misprints.)<sup>25</sup>

A fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, John Mill's "epochmaking" edition of the Greek New Testament was published in

<sup>23</sup> Jessup, *Fifty-three Years in Syria*: "The American Bible Society required a strict adherence to the Textus Receptus of Hahn's Greek Testament" (see the quotation at the beginning of this article). "The first thirteen chapters of Matthew" coincides to a significant extent with the portion of Matthew (sixteen chapters) that had already been printed by the time of Smith's last progress report of 1856.

<sup>24</sup> Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 115. Vincent also mentions Tischendorf in this connection, but his first text was not published until 1841, too late for Hahn's first edition. A second edition of Hahn was published in 1861.

<sup>25</sup> Hall, "Arabic Bible," 282–83.

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the year of his death, 1707.<sup>26</sup> Mill did not deviate from the standard text (as found in Stephanus' 1550 edition) but did include a thorough (for the time) digest of variant readings that he had collected over a period of thirty years from manuscripts, early versions and patristic sources.<sup>27</sup> Thus Mill was likely a source for at least some, and possibly many or all, of the variant readings that Van Dyck eventually was permitted to publish along with his translation.

If it is true that Van Dyck used Mill's edition "by direction" (presumably by direction from the American Bible Society, the organization that had insisted on fidelity to the Textus Receptus), then there is some irony here. Despite his loyalty to the Textus Receptus in his printed text, in his own day Mill had been the subject of criticism from those concerned with the integrity of the New Testament text. His willingness to print approximately thirty thousand variant readings alongside the main text was seen as undermining confidence in the standard text.<sup>28</sup> For the more evidence of alternative readings came to light, the more tempting it became for scholars to think of revising Erasmus' text in light of them.

### Conclusion

The preceding account should make clear two things. First, Eli Smith began his translation at a time when pioneering work in New Testament textual criticism was being done. Even the earliest works of text criticism that Smith is alleged to have used did not start to appear until the 1830s, less than twenty years before Smith began his assignment. The majority would have been only

<sup>26</sup> The assessment belongs to Metzger (*Text*, 107). Similarly, Kenyon writes that Mill's edition "remained for a long time the foundation of all subsequent textual study" (*Text*, 175), and Vincent judges that Mill's edition "marks the foundation of textual criticism" (*Textual Criticism*, 67).

<sup>27</sup> Metzger, *Text*, 107–8. Though Metzger states that Mill reproduced Stephanus' text "without intentional variation" (108), Vincent notes that his text did in fact stray from its exemplar in a few places (68).

<sup>28</sup> Metzger, *Text*, 108, citing by way of example Daniel Whitby, *Examen variantium lectionum J. Millii* (London, 1706).

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recently published, or in the process of coming out, at the time Smith was working in the 1850s. Second, the latter half of the nineteenth century, which saw the publication of the codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, was a significant period for New Testament textual criticism and the production of a more accurate Greek text of the New Testament. Wider knowledge of these two codices, with their numerous readings in agreement against the Textus Receptus, did much to undermine its primacy.

In 1886, about the time Van Dyck was recalling Smith's work, Benjamin Warfield wrote the following assessment of the progress of textual criticism up to his time:

Already in Mill's day (1707) as many as 30,000 various readings had been collected; and from [Richard] Bentley and [John Jakob] Wetstein to Tischendorf, Tregelles, and [Frederick Henry Ambrose] Scrivener, the work has been prosecuted without intermission, until it has now reached relative completeness, and the time is ripe for the extimation [sic] of the great mass of evidence that has been gathered.... The scholar of to-day, while beckoned on by the example of the great collators of the past to continue the work of gathering material as strength and opportunity may allow, yet enters into a great inheritance of work already done, and is able to undertake the work of textual criticism itself as distinguished from the collecting of material for that work.<sup>29</sup>

From Warfield's vantage point in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a great deal of the task of collecting variants had already been done, but the task of adequately assessing their import for the New Testament text had only just begun. The publication of Westcott and Hort's Greek text in 1881—and a revised

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886), 21–22; I consulted the 7<sup>th</sup> edition (1907). Warfield mentions Tregelles and Tischendorf as the two editions to choose between, perhaps giving some indication of why Van Dyck mentioned them alongside Lachmann and Alford as sources of Smith's variant readings.

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version of the King James Bible largely based on it—represented a large step in this direction in the English-speaking world.<sup>30</sup>

The translation and publication of the Van Dyck Bible occurred at a point when modern textual criticism was still taking shape, when important evidence for the ancient form of the text was still coming to light, and when editions of the Greek text that were wholly independent of the Textus Receptus were just beginning to be printed. In attempting to make use of some of this textual evidence in his Arabic translation, Eli Smith was indeed ahead of his time. In rejecting any departure from the traditional text, the Van Dyck translation that finally emerged was a product of its time.

### Postscript

As for the fate of Smith's work, Hall writes:

From various sources I have learned that the New Testament translation of Dr. Eli Smith was actually not used by Dr. Van Dyck: principally, I understand, because its following an eclectic text would make it at least a little confusing to one who was under orders to follow the Greek Textus Receptus. But I also heard, and am inclined to believe, that the manuscript was burned (I never could learn by whom), and that the few printed sheets or proofs were destroyed. At all events, Dr. Smith's translation of the New Testament was not adopted (or, we may say, it was rejected) by the Bible Society, on account of its underlying text; and I could find no trace of the manuscript copy in Beirut. Nothing would be more natural, in view of the ideas that then prevailed respecting the New Testament text, than for some one to destroy it in holy horror, or as a well-intended but misguided work; for Dr. Smith was much ahead of his times, though apparently not a New Testament critic. I am inclined to think, on the whole, that it was destroyed as if useless, with tac-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> For an assessment of the importance of Westcott and Hort, see Frank Pack, "One Hundred Years Since Westcott and Hort: 1881–1981," *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983), 65–79.

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it acquiescence of all concerned, as one would destroy a first draught after a fair copy was produced.<sup>31</sup>

But in its republication in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* the following tantalizing subscript is attached to Hall's report:

Since the above article was printed, a note has been received from the author, as follows:

The report that the manuscript translation of Dr. Smith was destroyed, and not used by Dr. Van Dyck, is now contradicted. and seems likely to be proved untrue; and an early opportunity will be taken to publish the matter correctly, as soon as a complete statement on that point arrives from Dr. Van Dvck. It is the belief of those in charge of the mission archives that all Dr. Smith's manuscripts, of all the work he did, are preserved in tin boxes in the library of the mission. The present aspect of the matter is that the story of the destruction of his manuscript translation of the New Testament rests upon the fact that all that was printed of the New Testament under his direction, viz. Mathew i. to end of xvi., was destroyed, for the reason that it did not follow the Textus Receptus. It may be added that some valuable additional reports on the subject of the Arabic Bible by Dr. Smith have recently come to my knowledge, which throw light on the subject, and deserve to be printed in full.<sup>32</sup>

This writer is not aware of any subsequent publication of additional details.

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<sup>31</sup> Hall, "Arabic Bible," 282. <sup>32</sup> Hall, "Arabic Bible," 286.



# Contemporary Issues and Challenges in the Translation of an Arabic Bible

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There are many contemporary challenges and issues in the field of biblical translation that need more than a single article to discuss adequately. Some of these are general challenges that are associated with the translation of the biblical text in any language, for example: choosing the level of vocabulary; deciding on shifting word meanings; negotiating semantics (that is, understanding words in their context), which often causes scholars to swing between consistency and the variant meanings of the words; and deciding on syntactical equivalents in a target language. Also, scholars must choose the type of translation they want, whether a literary or abstract translation, or something else.

In this article, I will focus on three main challenges that are related to the translation of the Bible into Arabic: (1) the challenges of choosing the text; (2) the challenges of choosing the language; and (3) the challenges of choosing the goals and strategies of the translation.

### Choosing the Text

What is meant by choosing the text? Aren't we talking about translating the Bible? Yes, but with regard to the Old Testament, we might choose between the Masoretic text and the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Scholars, however, are agreed that translating the Masoretic text is really the only option as the Septuagint is an ancient translation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Though the Old Testament that we have is a translation of the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint still has an important role to play in helping us to understand the Hebrew Text. This is so not only because it was based on older man-

With regard to the New Testament, we must choose between two main texts. The first is the Textus Receptus, and the second is the Critical Text. Without elaborating on the differences between the two texts or discussing textual criticism, it is clear that the Critical Text should be used for any modern Arabic translation.

Some people think that hiding the Critical Text from laypeople is the best approach because it would be confusing for them to change the language of well-known biblical passages. In addition, they believe that this would raise questions about the authenticity of the Bible among Non-Christians. Today, however, it has become impossible to hide controversial passages and wordings because they are widely available. If the church attempts to deny or hide the problem instead of simply confessing and facing textual difficulties, it will raise more problems than it solves.

Those who would attack Christianity can readily locate wellknown Christological verses (Mat. 18:11, 24:36; Luke 23:24; John 6:69; Acts 2:30; Heb. 2:7; 1 John 5:7,8) and compare the versions of these verses they find in the Textus Receptus to those in the Critical Text. When they find differences, they can then fill the internet with non-scholarly attacks that, for the uninitiated or unsophisticated, will seem to undermine the faith. Therefore, we should not hide such differences. Moreover, this is really a minor problem in that the discrepancies between the texts do not affect any core doctrine of the Christian faith. In the case of the Christological verses, they simply reflect early and later expressions of the church's theology of Christ.

The Arabic translation popularly known as the Van Dyck Bible depends on the Textus Receptus while other modern Arabic translations depend on the Critical Text. The latter include the Good News Arabic Bible, the Simplified Arabic Translation, and the Jesuit translation. Where these newer Bible translations differ from the older translations, they may be confusing to the typical Arabic reader. Sometimes, to avoid this problem in the case of

uscripts than the Masoretic Text but because it was the source of almost all the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. In spite of its importance, we have yet to see a real attempt to translate it into Arabic.

well-known verses, translators substitute translations from the Textus Receptus or a version of it. For example, there are instances where the Jesuit translation reverts to the Vulgate when the Critical Text might discomfit readers. This of course violates all the translation rules that scholars use to ensure that we have a faithful biblical text.

Because of the felt need among Arabic-speaking Christians for a newer, more colloquial, and more accurate translation of the Bible, the Arabic churches of the Middle East now have an opportunity to produce a Bible translation that is based on the Critical Text. In fact, they might even go beyond the Critical Text to consider other possible texts in the light of how they reflect a later theology. This could positively affect the church, not only in regard to Christology but also in other theological points. (For examples of controversial texts, see the following: Mat. 17:21, 20:16, 22:23; Mark 11:26; John 5:3, 4; Rom. 8:1, 11:6; 1 Cor. 6:20.) As the church enters the new millennium, such research could lead toward a reinvigorated Middle Eastern theology and renewal of the church.

## Choosing the Language

Not all Arabophones are Arabs either in ethnicity or culture. Today there are nearly three hundred million native Arabic speakers spread over twenty-seven nations, from Morocco to Oman. We can divide the countries that use Arabic as their official language into five main dialects:

(1) *The Gulf dialect* is widespread in the Arabian Peninsula and southern Iraq. Though the people of this region are mostly Arabs by ethnicity and culture, the more one travels east the more encounters a Persian influence on language.

(2) *The Syrian dialect* includes western Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. This dialect and all its variations reflect the influence of the more ancient Semitic languages, such as Syriac, Aramaic, and Nabataean.

(3) *The Egyptian dialect* reflects the influence of the ancient Egyptian language.

(4) *The Maghreb dialect,* which stretches from the western Egyptian Sahara to Morocco, reflects the influence of the Amazigh language with its different dialects.

(5) *The African dialect* is found in Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Chad, and Somalia. It reflects the influence of Hamitic as well as ancient traditional languages.

Some might think that Modern Standard Arabic could become the *lingua franca* of Arabophones through which Arabic speakers might avoid a diversity of dialects. This is true to an extent. Arabophones call Modern Standard Arabic the "Newspaper language" since it is a correct, modern, and standard form of Arabic. It reflects the standard vocabulary and modern syntax of Arabic speakers with at least a minimum education. Nevertheless, there are a still a number of local differences among those who speak this standard language. Hence, in reading a newspaper in Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia one can see differences in both vocabulary and syntax. Also there is a tendency in modern Arabic literature to mix Standard Arabic with colloquial versions.

Developments in Arabic literature from the Arabic renaissance in the 1930s until now have helped to produce more changes in the language than occurred from the seventh century until the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the pioneers of the Arabic renaissance, the writers of the postcolonial generation continued this trend as did the writers of the last two decades, whose innovations in literature in the areas of subject, genre, and form (syntax and semantics) may have helped-some have argued-to produce the Arab Spring. These rapid and profound changes have presented a large challenge to the church, for there is now a widespread feeling that the church needs to produce a fresh translation of the Bible that reflects the modern era. Those who would undertake this translation should begin by answering the question, which language do we want? Do we want several colloquial Arabic translations, several standard Arabic translations that reflect local dialects, or one translation that reflects a general Middle Eastern language and theology?

The Van Dyck Bible was an attempt to produce a standard Arabic translation for all Arab speakers, but it followed an old

Arabic linguistic structure. Moreover, it seemed to local communities to be too general and at the same time too syntactically and semantically odd. Nevertheless, it became well known to many Middle Eastern Christians and, due to its strangeness, helped to create closed Christian communities. The Good News Bible overcame the problem of the old structure but it couldn't avoid the problem of being too general. And the same can be said for the Simplified Arabic translation.

As an example, let's look at the specific case of the Egyptians, who constitute almost one quarter of the Arabophone population. There is no Arabic translation that reflects a pure Egyptian Arabic, and when Arabic translations included Egyptian scholars, they only dimly reflected standard Egyptian Arabic. The standard Arabic in Egypt is simpler syntactically than that of Lebanon and Syria, but it has a wider range of vocabulary due to the influence of the colloquial Egyptian dialect. This was reflected only in the simplified Arabic translation, but the influence is slight. This might be because of disagreements among the translators or simply a reflection of the difficulty inherent in the translation process.

Let's return now to the possibility of producing local colloquial translations of the Bible in Arabic. Though we can divide the local dialects of Arabic into five main groups, there are numerous subdivisions among them that in some cases represent major phonetic, semantic, and syntactic differences. These differences exist not only between cities but even between neighboring villages. Consequently, producing a Bible in colloquial Arabic for a large population is highly problematic. The solution to the problem may lie in selecting the most common dialect in a country, which for Egypt would be the Cairo dialect. However, there are still a number of problems to overcome, including the lack of standard written rules for colloquial Arabic. If for example we consult Wikipedia, we will find that Egyptian Arabic is treated as a separate language, but despite the really great effort of many editors, it is soon apparent that the standard Arabic vocabulary has merely been replaced by a more colloquial one without any attempt to adjust the syntax.<sup>2</sup> This is simply due to the lack of a standardized colloquial grammar. In addition to these problems, there are a number of basic questions that will have to be answered before a colloquial Arabic translation can be responsibly undertaken. What level of colloquial we are aiming at? How we are going to write it since there are no orthographical rules for colloquial Arabic? Should we use the Arabic alphabet or the Latin alphabet that has been adapted for Arabic use and is now widely used in the social media (internet-based sharing of information)?<sup>3</sup>

Due to all the difficulties noted here and others that could be added, we would be hard pressed at the moment to create a really good colloquial translation of the Bible for Egyptians or the other four major dialect groups. On the other hand, Lebanese Arabic is already largely expressed in the Good News Bible, and Maghreb Arabic is generally reflected in the Sharif Arabic Bible, so perhaps it's time for translators to stop dallying, overcome the obstacles, and produce colloquial translations for all five dialects of Arabic. Egyptians scholars could lead the way by producing an Egyptian Standard Arabic Bible.

## Goals and Strategies

Translators of the Bible must take into consideration the cultural context of the people for whom the translation is intended and the appropriate educational level of the intended readers. They must also decide where the translation will fall on the continuum between literalness and dynamic equivalence in translation. Once these goals are set, strategies follow. Translators often begin with creating criteria against which to test the translation as it develops. This will be the work not of one person but a translation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> There is a complete colloquial Maghreb Arabic "darja" translation, but it is inadequate as its considered less a translation than a simplified version.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> There have been some attempts in Lebanon to use the Latin alphabet to translate the Bible into Lebanese colloquial Arabic. Also, the Egyptian Bible Society has sidestepped the problems mentioned here by producing an audio version of the Bible in colloquial Egyptian Arabic.

team. Unfortunately, in many cases the goals and strategies for achieving them were not always clear in the creation of past Arabic translations.

The Van Dyck translation team had the goal of creating the standard translation for most Middle Eastern Christian communities. In this it largely succeeded. Though other translations appeared at the same time, such as the "Shedyaq" and "Dominican" translations, only the Van Dyck translation was widely used throughout the Middle East and became known as "the King James version of Arabophones." The translations that came afterwards tried to correct or avoid the apparent problems in the Van Dyck. In other words, it became the standard against which others were measured.

More than this, the Van Dyck became for later translators a Meta-Text, a text that operates as a starting point for new translations, a guide that subtly influences the strategies of translators.<sup>4</sup> The Meta-Text of Cornelius Van Dyck was clearly the King James Version, which operated as a template in his mind that affected every aspect of his translation project, from the selection of its general literary level to the most minute decisions of diction and syntax. This is a general tendency in Bible translation and not one unique to the Van Dyck Bible. It is clear, for example, that the Living Book translation used the New International Version as its Meta-Text, the Simplified Arabic Translation used the Easy to Read version, and the Good News Arabic Bible used the Good News Bible. On the other hand, the Jesuit translation did not have an actual Meta-Text, but we can still see other factors that influenced the translation, such as Catholic tradition and the Vulgate Bible. In effect, these functioned as an indirect Meta-Text. Ideally we should produce an Arabic translation that is Meta-Text free, but this would be very difficult to do even if the translators were

<sup>4</sup> The expression Meta-Text was first used by the linguistic scholar Anton Popovič. See Mark Shuttleworth and Moira Cowie, *Dictionary of Translation Study* (Manchester, United Kingdom: St. Jerome Publishing Limited, 1997), s.v. "Meta Text." to adhere very strictly to previously established goals and strategies.

Some think that a New Revised Van Dyck would be a good solution that would be accepted by most churches. In its day, the Van Dyck Bible represented a triumph of the ecumenical spirit in that it was accepted by most of the Christians in the Middle East. Today, however, producing a revision of the Van Dyck would raise many questions. What is the new translation's translation strategy? Who will accomplish the task? How can we guarantee the integrity of the translation to prevent its being influenced by a Meta-Text or sectarian considerations? Should the Textus Receptus or the Critical Text be used? And even if all these questions could be successfully answered, does the church really need in this twenty-first century a revised Van Dyck Bible?

As old things die, new things are born. We saw the first fruits of a new era begin to appear in the Arab Spring, and we see it still in the shifting balance of power between East and West. We see it also in the current information era, engendered largely by the social media. In this new age facts are relative, and people do not value the news they glean as much for its truthfulness as for its trendiness. People are now able to write what they want and when they want, and above all they want to put their own spin on things-whatever they are. These trends in our post-modern age raise fundamental questions about well-known, well-established translation rules. Is an accurate translation possible? What should the target age of a new translation be? How do we find syntactic and semantic equivalents—and whose equivalents are they? What is the right communication load? What are we to do about Realia-the appearance of the local language of the source in the translation?<sup>5</sup> How do we avoid so mixing the language of the source text with the target text (the translation) that we create a hybrid, what translators call the Third Code?<sup>6</sup> To what extent can a modern translation use contemporary language and syntax without distorting the message? For example, The Message Bible

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid., s.v. "Realia."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid., s.v. "Third Code."

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prefers "yes, yes, yes" to "Amen."<sup>7</sup> At the surface level it is Realia and Third Code free, but at a deeper level these things are still there. Like the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave, they point to a different reality. After all, "Yes, yes, yes" is inevitably a very thin disguise for "Amen."

In our time the need for a so-called "Thick Translation" has appeared. This is a translation that depends on explanatory introductions, footnotes, and glosses to explain the translated text.<sup>8</sup> These kinds of translations are intended to avoid any misunderstandings that might result from the text coming to us from a different culture, time, and space. This is actually one of the solutions that could be used in Bible translations. The thickness of the translation would remove much of the obscurity and mystery of the various cultural and literary genres of the Bible, and at the same time it would provide a literal translation.

### Conclusion

This article has moved very quickly through a number of critical issues that confront those who would undertake a new modern Arabic translation. It should also be said that it has not touched on the huge cultural and social challenges that must also be faced. That's for another day. For now, let's sum up.

The church in the Middle East, first of all, should be frank with itself and with others about the Textus Receptus and the Critical Text. If we are to have a new Arabic translation, it should be based on the Critical Text. This translation should be accurate according to the best translation standards, but it should also present the Bible to readers in a living language that they can easily understand and to which they can readily respond. A pure colloquial Egyptian translation might not be possible at the moment, but let's not shelve the idea. It's a worthy goal. And who knows

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> It is an English translation that is very free in its use of modern syntax and semantics and includes much youthful language.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Shuttleworth and Cowie, *Dictionary of Translation Study*, s.v. "Thick Translation."

what the future may hold? For the present, however, a modern standard Arabic translation that reflects a pure Egyptian dialect and the literary developments of the past few decades in Egypt is a goal well within reach. Such a translation should avoid, so far as humanly possible, Meta-Texts, and, instead, offer a translation that is fresh enough to portray the past in vivid colors while at the same time serving as a starting point for a contemporary Middle Eastern theology. And this Arabic Bible could certainly be a thick translation, for who could deny that the typical Middle Eastern Christian would greatly benefit from a Bible that explains the meaning of the text while not straying from a literal translation. Finally, this translation should be the subject of much discussion before, during, and after its completion so that the full impact of God's word can be felt in our society.

Let's not let politics, culture, or ecclesial pusillanimity get in the way of giving God's people in the Middle East the precious gift of his word in their own heart language. We owe it to ourselves and our children. No excuses. No delay. Let's get it done.

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# Review of *How the West Won* by Rodney Stark

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How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity. By Rodney Stark. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014. 432 pages. \$27.95.

A generation ago, historian Rodney Stark observes, most American colleges and universities eliminated their freshmen courses in "Western Civilization." There was a good reason for this. Fueled by an arrogant ethnocentrism, these courses tended to assume a privileged position for Western culture while ignoring or implicitly deprecating all the others. Clearly this was unacceptable in our pluralistic and arguably more enlightened era. Ironically, the result of the change in policy, Stark writes, is that Americans are "increasingly ignorant of how the modern world came to be. Worse yet, they are in danger of being badly misled by a flood of absurd, politically correct fabrications, all of them popular on college campuses."

Stark is a merry iconoclast who has written a slashing, fun book. He delights in demolishing the false or at least suspect truths that often pass for conventional wisdom on college campuses—and presumably everywhere else, too. His chief targets are not just the inevitable distortions of a campus culture dominated by political correctness. He also takes on falsities that were common even when "Western Civilization" classes were in their heyday, such as the overemphasis on art and literature and the under emphasis on the key importance of Christianity. Most importantly, Stark wants to explain why Western civilization has succeeded in producing the scientific and technological advances of modernity while other cultures have not. Most people think of the successive empires that existed in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt as the high water marks of developing civilization, but Stark takes a different view. For him they tended to drain essential resources from the huge regions that they dominated, strangling creativity and producing mass misery in order to fund splendid public-works projects (for example, the pyramids). These were largely stagnant cultures that had little use for scientific discoveries or technological innovations. In contrast, the small city-states of Greece produced startling innovations in almost every area: politics, philosophy, literature, and science.

"The ancient Greeks," he explains, "took the single most significant step toward the rise of Western science when they proposed that the universe is orderly and governed by underlying principles that the human mind could discern through observation and reason." Because early Christian thinkers believed in a rational creator, they embraced the Greek devotion to reason. Moreover, they added to this a belief that history is progressive. Together, these ideas laid the foundations for all subsequent Western scientific and technological developments. Other cultures, following different philosophical and theological principles, largely rejected the possibility of either science or progress.

Stark devotes every chapter to correcting common historical misconceptions: the fall of the Roman Empire was not a tragedy but an immense benefit to humankind; there were no "Dark Ages" since this period was one of remarkable technological advance; the "Scientific Revolution" of the seventeenth century was actually not a revolution but a culmination; and so forth. Galloping through history at a break-neck pace, Stark can make some questionable generalizations of his own even while debunking the more widely accepted generalizations that he despises. Nevertheless, this is a thoughtful and needed book. In fact, Stark is often simply popularizing what professional historians have been discovering or debating in recent years—a task, sadly, no longer performed by professors teaching Western Civ.



# Review of *The Great and Holy War* by Philip Jenkins

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*The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade.* By Philip Jenkins. New York: Harper One, 2014. 448 pages. \$29.99.

Over the last dozen years historian Philip Jenkins has done more than anyone to popularize ideas about the new demographic configuration of Christianity in the world: the decline of the Church in the West and its rise in the Global South. Especially important is his trilogy of books on this subject: *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2012), *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (2006), and *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (2007). To this already impressive body of work he has now added *The Great and Holy War*, a book about how World War I was the occasion for a religious revolution that recast the world's religions into their current shape.

The war, which began a century ago on July 28, 1914, was understood by most combatants in religious terms, and religious language and iconography were suffused in the conflict to an extent that today would be inconceivable. Both sides demonized their opponents and used the medieval imagery of knights and crusaders, believing that they were engaged in a cosmic conflict. German Protestant ministers preached that their nation had a messianic role to play in Europe. The French believed that fallen soldiers arose from the dead—"*Debout les Morts*!"—to help their living comrades in arms. Soldiers on both sides reported angels and saints appearing in the midst of battle to help their side. The Germans often saw the archangel Michael, while the English saw St. George, and the French Joan of Arc. Peasant girls in Portugal famously saw a vision of Mary at Fátima in 1917, but both Russian and French soldiers also saw visions of the Virgin during the war. Above all, this was a time of apocalyptic signs, the most striking being the British success under General Sir Edmund Allenby in capturing Palestine and entering Jerusalem. The crucial battle against the Turks was fought near the hill of Megiddo—Armageddon itself.

Sixty-eight percent of all Christians lived in Europe at the beginning of the war. Today the number of Christians living in Europe as a percentage of population can be counted in the single digits in most European countries. Orthodox Christianity nearly became extinct during the Soviet era in Russia, which began during the war, and numerous Christian communities in the Middle East continue to be threatened with extinction, a process that began with the Armenian genocide of 1915. On the other hand, Christianity in Africa has experienced explosive growth in recent decades, and if current trends continue Africa will have more Christians than any other continent by 2030, a success story that Jenkins traces to the disruptions of the war era. For Muslims the war was traumatic in that they saw the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the loss of the caliphate in Istanbul, loosing the Islamic extremism that continues until today. And of course for Jews WWI was a breathtaking game changer as the Balfour Declaration of 1917 paved the way for the creation of the modern State of Israel.

Quite simply, World War I redrew the religious map of the world. Understanding how this happened and its continuing implications for today is the thrust of Jenkins's lucid, insightful, and always fascinating narrative.

# A Critical Investigation into the Manuscripts of the "So-Called" Van Dyck Bible

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On the afternoon of 24 August 1864, Cornelius Van Dyck set his pen down upon his desk, having just translated Malachi 4:5. Years later, Cornelius' son, Edward Van Dyck, recalled that moment. Edward was waiting for his father to come home for dinner. He was standing in the courtyard outside of the American Mission House in Beirut. Suddenly, Cornelius appeared on the balcony of the second floor. "Edward, it is finished. Thank God! What a load is off me! I never thought I was going to live to finish this work."<sup>1</sup> With that, the two walked home together for their meal, before what would have been the normal prayer service that evening. At that moment, this Arabic Bible translation finally came to completion. It would be published by the American Mission Press in the next year, 1865.

The "so-called" Van Dyck Bible has been one of the most important nineteenth-century Bible translations.<sup>2</sup> While there certainly were and have been other Arabic Bible translations before and since the Van Dyck, this particular translation has attained a unique status, much like that of the King James Version

<sup>1</sup> Isaac H. Hall, "The Arabic Bible of Drs. Eli Smith and Cornelius V. A. Van Dyck," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 11 (1882–1885), 286.

<sup>2</sup> Here I have adopted Dr. Sara Binay's terminology with the recognition that C. Van Dyck was not the sole author of the translation. See Sara Binay, "Revision of the Manuscripts of the 'So-Called Smith-Van Dyck Bible': Some Remarks on the Making of this Bible Translation," in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-Critical and Literary Aspects*, ed. Sara Binay and Stefan Leder (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2012), 75–84.

as the Authorized Text of the English-speaking world. In Egypt specifically, the translation has been an important unifying factor for the church, being accepted and utilized by, not only the Evangelical Churches, but the Coptic Catholic and Coptic Orthodox Churches, as well. I remember watching (online) with excitement the enthronement of Patriarch Tadros II at St. Mark's Cathedral in 2012, when I saw and heard that the deacon was reading from a copy of the "so-called" Van Dyck! This was only possible because of the important work done by the Egyptian Bible Society to bring the different families of Egyptian churches together.

Given the prominence Egyptian pastors and priests have had throughout the Arabic speaking world, especially in the Gulf and North Africa, as well as in the diaspora communities of Australia, Canada, and the United States, it is safe to say that this translation has been utilized in a wide variety of settings among Arab Christians around the world. It is not the only Arabic Bible translation being used by Arab Christians, of course. Among the Arab Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and others, there are a variety of translations, including the very popular 1878 "Jesuit Bible" that was updated in 1969. Among Arab Evangelicals the 1978 *Today's Arabic Version New Testament/Good News Arabic Bible* (TAV/GNA) and the 1988 *Living Arabic Bible Version* (LANT/NAB) are widely used.<sup>3</sup>

The Egyptian and Lebanese Bible Societies, as well as biblical scholars from ETSC and other Arab seminaries, have been engaged in discussions to update or edit the Van Dyck, or to undertake a completely new translation. One of the initial projects from this debate was the publication of the 2006 *New Testament with Study Notes*. While this was not a new translation, it included very important critical notes at the bottom of the text, detailing to its readers that in a variety of places the Greek or Hebrew words could be rendered into Arabic in a variety of different ways. This was done, in my estimation, to educate Arab Chris-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Kenneth Bailey's important article, "Tārīkh al-tarajimāt al-ʿarabīyah lil-kitāb al-muqaddas" in *Al-Hudá*, no. 856 (1982), reviews the important Arab Bible translations in history.

tians about the original history of the Bible as a Hebrew and Greek text, to prepare its constituency from charges of "tahrif" (deliberate corruption), and finally to respond to the confusion over rendering the nineteenth-century Arabic into the vernacular.

While the debate over how to bring the nineteenth-century Arabic into the vernacular is a fascinating and important topic, I will leave this for those native Arab speakers who can address this problem much better than this author ever could! There are well-qualified Arab biblical scholars whose intimate knowledge of the language and Bible far exceeds my own. My research, which I hope will be forthcoming in a detailed monograph on the translation, revealed two important issues that will shed some light on the current focus on this translation: the role of each of the translators, and the importance of the *eclectic* Greek New Testament as a source for the translation.<sup>4</sup> Both of these discoveries have an important bearing upon any further discussions and planning related to a new, revised, or updated translation of the "so-called" Van Dyck.

My interest in this translation began back when I was the Coordinator of Graduate Studies at ETSC. At that time one of the students, Nashat Habib Megalaa, began work on his MATS Thesis, *The Van Dyck Bible Translation After One Hundred Fifty Years*. While I had the honor of starting Nashat on this research, it was Dr. Darren Kennedy and Dr. Atef Mehany who assisted and guided the project in 2008 after I had left Cairo. It was at this time that I began looking at the 2006 New Testament edition and thinking about the issues involved in a new translation of the "so-called" Van Dyck. In 2011 I spent several weeks at the Rare Book Room of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut where I was able to continue my research on the "so-called" Van Dyck Bible and review the original manuscripts (MSS). The MSS had just been digitized to preserve their original state. While the MSS themselves were critical to my investigations, so too

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For the *eclectic text*, see Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1881).

were the early prototypes of the printed Bibles with the penciled notes and *tashkil* (vocalization marks) of Cornelius Van Dyck. The last group of documents that I reviewed were the minutes and reports of the American Missionaries during this period. These records are housed at a number of libraries, including the Houghton Library at Harvard University, the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, and the Eli Smith Papers at the Yale Divinity School Library. Ultimately, it was a careful investigation of the MSS of the translation that proved to be the key to unlocking some of the mysteries of this important Bible translation.

I have not been the only person to view these MSS, of course. Once the Bible translation was published, the MSS were deposited into the American Mission House in Beirut. In 1885 the American missionary James F. Dennis organized and placed the MSS into three tin boxes in the Mission House to preserve them. There is evidence that Dennis reviewed the MSS and made several notations in the documents. Much later, the MSS came into the hands of Dr. Kenneth Bailey, Professor of New Testament at NEST from 1967 to 1984. Dr. Bailey made extensive use of these texts in his teaching. He also arranged to have copies made, one set of which resides at ETSC. Dr. Bailey then had the originals moved to the Rare Book Room of the NEST library in 1975. In 1981 James and Rachel Pollack reviewed the MSS and original Bibles and included them in the Library catalogue.<sup>5</sup> Sometime before 2008, with the cooperation of Dr. George Sabra, Dr. Sara Binay was granted access to the MSS and did an initial investigation. These findings were later presented at the 2008 Orient-Institut Beirut conference "Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Translation - The Arabic Bible." In 2009 Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML)/Saint John's University (Minnesota, USA) digitized all of the MSS. I arrived at NEST in January 2013 and was assisted by Head Librarian Ms. Martine Charbel-Eid and Dr.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> James W. Pollock and Rachel Pollock, "Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Library of the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon," *Theological Review* 4, no. 1–2 (1981).

Christine Lindner, to whom I am extremely grateful for their aid and support.

It has long been accepted that there were at least five translators involved in this project: the two American missionaries, Eli Smith (1801–1857) and Cornelius Van Dyck (1818–1895); and three Arabs, Butrus al-Bustānī (1819–1883), Nasif al-Yazigi (1800–1871), and Sheikh Yusuf al-Asir (1815–1889). Eli Smith was appointed by the American missionaries to begin the translation project in 1847. He was the one who hired al-Bustani and al-Yazigi to work with him. In his 1854 report to the American Mission board, he wrote that it was al-Bustānī who provided the first translation, "giving the work a native coloring which a foreigner could not so easily accomplish. . . . bringing into it the terms and phrases in common and good use to express the ideas of the original, and especially those current in Christian theology and literature."<sup>6</sup> Once al-Bustani was finished, he would pass it on to al-Yazigi, who was a "man of letters" noted for his high standard of Arabic. Once al-Yazigi had gone over al-Bustani's translation, he would provide his own translation. Smith would then go over those edits until he was satisfied. (This was a standard process that Smith used in other publication projects at the Mission Press.) He would then send out copies of the translation to a wide assortment of missionaries, scholars, and clergy around the world to offer critique and comment. An assortment of letters and papers in the Houghton Library archives demonstrate that Smith received comments on his translation from German Orientalist scholars such as Gustave Flügel, and Emil Rödiger, as well as local Syrian sheikhs, priests, and bishops.

Eli Smith passed away in 1857 without completing the translation, and his work was then assigned to Cornelius Van Dyck.

<sup>6</sup> Eli Smith and C.V.A. Van Dyck, *Brief Documentary History of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Arabic Language*, ed. Henry H. Jessup (Beirut, Syria: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1900), 8. This important document of reports by Smith and Van Dyck was later compiled and edited by Henry H. Jessup in 1900. The Mission Board was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the first ecumenical American missionary association.

Van Dyck was a medical missionary who was held in high regard for his knowledge and ability in Arabic. Thus, Van Dyck was given responsibility for completing the translation. Van Dyck took over the project and began his revision. In a curious decision, instead of continuing to work with al-Bustani and al-Yazigi, he dismissed the two from their responsibilities and hired the Egyptian Muslim Sheikh Yusuf al-Asir. Al-Asir was known for his open-mindedness as a Reformist Scholar. He not only worked for the American Mission Press but also taught Arabic at the Syrian Protestant College and contributed several hymns to the Protestant Hymnal of Lebanon and Syria.<sup>7</sup> He was involved in a number of literary and religious associations in Beirut as part of the nineteenth-century al-Nahda (Renaissance). Van Dyck had known al-Asir because he too was active in the literary revival in Beirut, but more importantly he hired al-Asir because he wanted a native Arab-speaking Muslim who did not have any preconceptions regarding Arab Christian terminology.<sup>8</sup>

While much of this information is known, what has been debated is the extent to which each translator significantly contributed to the work. Ultimately, the Bible was named after Cornelius Van Dyck because he completed the project. In addition, based upon the history of the American Syrian Mission by Henry Jessup, a tradition developed in which Van Dyck completely "revised every verse" of the Bible after Smith's death.<sup>9</sup> In at least one version of this story, Smith's manuscripts were burned and Van Dyck started the translation "anew."<sup>10</sup>

However, on examination of the MSS firsthand, one is able to see the distinctive handwriting of each of the contributors as well as the autographs of Smith and Van Dyck. In matching up Smith and Van Dyck's reports of their work, the minutes from the Mis-

<sup>7</sup> Kitāb al-tarānīm al-rūhīyah (Beirut: American Mission Press, 1949). I am grateful to Rev. Salam Hanna for pointing these hymns out to me.

<sup>9</sup> Henry H. Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, vol. 1 (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1910), 74.

<sup>10</sup> Hall, "The Arabic Bible of Drs. Eli Smith and Cornelius V. A. Van Dyck," 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Smith and Van Dyck, *Brief Documentary History*, 29.

sion that records the progress of the translation, and the original MSS themselves, it is clear that most of the translation was undertaken and completed by Butrus al-Bustani. His work was reviewed and edited by Eli Smith. Nasif al-Yazigi made only minor changes. This was the case for the translation of the whole New Testament. The MSS clearly show that Cornelius Van Dyck made very few changes to the New Testament work of al-Bustani. For the Old Testament, al-Bustani was the sole translator for Joshua through Esther, Jeremiah, and Lamentations. His work was only later reviewed and edited by Van Dyck. Van Dyck was only the sole translator of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi. In the case of the Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, Van Dyck was assisted by Yusuf al-Asir. Van Dyck, however, did complete much of the editorial work in providing cross reference notes and *taskil* for the final printing of the text. Even in this, however, I wonder if he was not assisted by Yusuf al-Asir.

This conclusion is contrary to the initial research by Dr. Binay. She did not believe that the MSS showed direct evidence of translation work by al-Bustani or that the MSS were original.<sup>11</sup> However, in a conversation I had with Dr. Kenneth Bailey, he indicated that, based upon his work with these New Testament MSS, he too believed al-Bustani to be the primary translator. It is for this reason that Dr. Bailey prefers the title "Busani-Van Dyck Bible." Based upon this research, it is my view that Butrus al-Bustani originally translated all of the New Testament and that Eli Smith and Naşif al-Yazigi recopied and edited this original translation. Cornelius Van Dyck then "reviewed" the New Testament, leaving most of the text intact.

The second important discovery in this research has been the undervalued importance of this translation as part of the nineteenth-century study of biblical manuscripts and the search for an original New Testament text. When Eli Smith began, he collected a wide assortment of the latest studies on the New Testament.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Binay, "Revision of the Manuscripts of the 'So-Called Smith-Van Dyck Bible'," 78–80.

One of his closest friends was Edward Robinson, a famous New Testament scholar from Union Seminary and the "originator" of Biblical Geography in Palestine.<sup>12</sup> Robinson assisted Smith in acquiring the latest publications on New Testament manuscripts, particularly those of Karl Lachmann (1793-1851), Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-75), Constantin von Tischendorf (1815–1874), and the Anglican Dean of Canterbury, Henry Alford (1810–1870). These scholars were noted for their inclusion of the oldest New Testament manuscripts then known to come up with what has become known as the *eclectic text*.<sup>13</sup> These older versions included variant readings, such as the exclusion of Mark 16:9 and following. However, the American Bible Society, which was paying for the cost of publication of this translation, would at that time only accept the Textus Receptus, that is, the New Testament text of Theodore Beza (1519-1605) of Geneva, whose work became the basis for the English translation of the King James Version.

Smith's original translation followed that of the *eclectic text* in many places. One can see this when it comes to the "Johannine Comma" of 1 John 5:7. In the *eclectic text*, the phrase "Father, Word and Holy Spirit, these three are one" is omitted, under the argument that it was not included in the older New Testament manuscripts. However, the American Bible Society at that time insisted that the Textus Receptus be used as the only biblical source for the translation. Therefore, Van Dyck inserted 1 John 5:7. One can clearly see Van Dyck's addition to the MSS here in order to bring it in line with the text of the Textus Receptus. It is for this reason that the tradition developed that Smith's original MSS were burned and that Van Dyck rescued the translation by "revising every verse." However, this was not true and Van Dyck himself was conflicted about having to conform to the Textus Receptus. In 1863 he reported that Eli Smith

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Robinson is famous for his "discovery" of Robinson's Arch on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> These published New Testament *eclectic texts* were used by Westcott and Hort, and ultimately by Nestle and Aland, which became the basis of the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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knew that the so called "Textus Receptus" and [Augustus] Hahn's text were not the best and most authentic reading, and he was anxious that the true reading should be given as far as it could be. He therefore made use of Tischendorf, Tregelles, and Alford in the New Testament text, and he used his own judgment, in which all the Mission had the utmost confidence, so that the matter was left entirely in his hands.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Van Dyck made the necessary corrections to the translation to conform to the American Bible Society, and the Bible was published in 1865.

While history and tradition has come to call this the "Van Dyck Bible" for his "rescue" of the text, we have noted that others, especially Butrus al-Bustani and Eli Smith, had a greater hand in the actual translation than did Van Dyck. In addition, we have noted the participation of a wide variety of Arab Christian, European and American biblical scholars who all provided suggestions as to the rendering of certain words from Greek and Hebrew into Arabic. Thus, rather than the "Van Dyck Bible," the "so-called Van Dyck Bible" as has been suggested by Binay and others, or even the "Bustani-Van Dyck" Bible as suggested by Bailey, my research would suggests the best alternative title for this translation would be "ABT1865"—the *1865 Arabic Bible Translation*. It is my suspicion that Cornelius Van Dyck would have approved of this title as well.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Smith and Van Dyck, *Brief Documentary History*, 27.

# Message from the Editor: Secularization in Africa?

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In the years following the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, the United States has waged two wars in the Middle East, there have been numerous Islaminspired terrorist attacks throughout the world, and the Middle East has experienced the Arab Spring. In the field of popular culture, a number of writers have responded to the rise of religionrelated violence by rejecting religion altogether. These writers include Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens.

While in the past atheists such as Nietzsche have recognized the moral value of religion but rejected it on epistemological grounds, the "New Atheists" have seen religion not only as irrational but as dangerous in that it inspires violence as well as social policies and attitudes that are against the general interests of modern society. The later include Christian approaches to abortion, contraception, and homosexuality. Christians have mounted a vigorous response to these thrusts, as can be seen in the books of Dinesh D'Souza, Alister McGrath, and others. Nonetheless, the general trend in the West toward increased secularization is continuing unabated, and the recent attacks on religion in general have helped to provide an intellectual undergirding for this trend.

While secularization in the West is a well-established fact, the same trend in Africa is hardly known or even recognized today. Scholars and Christian leaders, however, are increasingly encountering and studying the issue. To further this effort, the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo hosted a consultation on the subject, "Declining Religious Participation: Secularization and

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Discipleship in Africa," held December 11 and 12, 2014. The consultation was sponsored by the Reformed Mission League (its Dutch acronym is GZB) of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and it came at the initiation of Herman Paul, a professor of secularization studies at the University of Groningen.

Attended by about a dozen scholars from Africa, North America, and Europe, the participants generally agreed that their work was largely preliminary and that the subject is important and will no doubt increase in importance in coming years. Paul's positioning paper and five of the papers presented and discussed at the consultation were later revised and appear as articles below. A summary of the conclusions and recommendations reached at the consultation is included in a final article, jointly written by Benno van den Toren and Willem J. de Wit.

Though the subject is new and perhaps will strike many readers as counterintuitive, it is clear from the evidence given at the consultation that the rise of secularization in Africa is a real phenomenon that, for all people of faith, is both significant and urgent.



# Secularization in Africa: A Research Desideratum

Herman Paul (h.j.paul@rug.nl) University of Groningen

When, almost half a century ago, the Roman Catholic Secretariat for Non-Believers organized a conference on "secularization in Africa," it did so at a time when secularization theory was the reigning paradigm for the study of religion at Western universities. This is clearly visible in the conference proceedings, published in 1973 in a bilingual volume with research reports from various African countries. Although these reports were written by a diverse group of authors, including both African church leaders and European missionaries, almost all contributions tried to interpret issues of religious belonging, church attendence, and church membership through the prism of Western secularization theory. It was the work of sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Peter Berger that provided the lenses through which "secularization in Africa" was perceived. "Secularization in Africa," moreover, was invariably measured by the standard of "secularization in Europe." In almost all chapters, Western examples, not seldom interpreted in quasiapocalyptic terms, served as points of reference for understanding "secularization in Africa."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, when Patrick Astor from Nairobi examined "the impact of secularization" on religious life in Kenya, his definition of secularization not only followed Western models in being focused on the spread of non-Christian ideas ("Rationalism, Deism, Posivitism, etc.") and in regarding education and "sophisticated city life" as primary sites of transmission of such

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Sécularisation en Afrique? Secularisation in Africa? (Rome: Secretariatus pro non credentibus, 1973).

ideas; it also invoked Western standards by equating secularization in Africa with growing conformity to such practices as found in the larger cities of Europe and North America:

Unchecked technology, in fact, has led the masses in the West to an artificial kind of life, exercising pressure for social conformity and cuting off man from reality and the making of personal decisions. The artificial and subnormal situation has made it possible to spread the absence of any deep moral convictions that leads, in the end, to the absence of any serious motivations beyond the appeal to self-interest.<sup>2</sup>

So, whatever the local expertise brought in by these authors in the early 1970s, their conceptual framework was heavily indebted to Western examples and theories.

Wasn't this somwhat ironic? In their attempts to identify the sources of secularization in Africa, allmost all authors pointed to Western-style education – higher education in particular – as a major factor contributing to changing religious behavior and declining church attendance. Also, in response to the perceived "imperialism" of Western-style theology in Africa, some of the essays collected in *Sécularisation en Afrique*? argued quite passionately in favor of "contextual" or "indigenous" modes of theology, based on "African" rather than "Western" assumptions about God, humankind, and the world.<sup>3</sup> Yet in thinking about "secularization," they made not a single attempt to free this concept from Western connotations or to challenge its indebtedness to Western experiences, let alone to develop an alternative African definition or to drop the term in favor of another, "indigenous" African concept.

When, almost twenty years later, the volume *Mission in Afri*can Christianity (1993) appeared, based on a conference in Sa-

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Astor, "Modern Civilization and Religious Life in Kenya: The Impact of Secularization," *ibidem*, 136.

<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Charles Chikezie Agu, *Secularization in Igboland: Socio-Religious Change and its Challenges to the Church Among the Igbo* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989) strongly suggested that "incarnational" African theology might serve as a remedy to Western-style secularization. gana, Kenya, little seemed to have changed. When, for example, J. N. K. Mugambi from the University of Nairobi presented his views on secularization, he drew heavily on Harvey Cox, the once-famous American author of *The Secular City* (1965), in arguing that "the cosmopolitan confrontations of city living" tend to expose "the relativity of the myths and traditions men once thought were unquestionable." Although Mugambi joined the authors mentioned above in calling for "indigenization and inculturation" of the Gospel, all the footnotes of his article referred to English-language literature. And although the author perceptively observed that much of Western social-scientific reflection on urbanization was based on a "linear model of history," he made no attempt at identifying the presuppositions of Western secularization theory. His understanding of secularization was fully modeled after Western examples.<sup>4</sup>

One wonders: why did none of these authors in the 1970s or 1990s observe a discrepancy or incongruity between their desire to develop an African theology and their rather uncritical use of Western secularization theory? Why did nobody, as far as I can see, raise the question of what an African alternative to the Western concept of "secularization" might look like?

## Beyond the secularization paradigm

Admittedly, this is an anachronistic and, ironically, typically Western question. As for its anachronism, it is obvious that the question whether we can think of alternatives to Western secularization theory, especially in trying to understand religious change in Africa, has gained currency only after the secularization paradigm in Western academia has fallen into disgrace. This was not yet the case in the early 1970s. By that time, Peter Berger was still prophesying that 21st-century Christians would "be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> J. N. K. Mugambi, "Christian Mission in the Context of Urbanization and Industrialization in Africa," in *Mission in African Christianity: Critical Essays in Missiology*, ed. A. Nasimiyu-Wasike and D. W. Waruta (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1993), 75–76, 82, 74.

culture."<sup>5</sup> Although the situation had changed by the early 1990s, after the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and the growth of the Religious Right in the United States, among many other things,<sup>6</sup> it took a while before the debate on the limits of secularization theory had reached a stage in which it counted as problematic to rely on secularization thinkers such as Cox and Berger (Rodney Stark pronounced his famous *requiescat in pace* for secularization theory as late as 1999.)<sup>7</sup> Only when, in the 1990s and early 2000s, growing numbers of scholars came to question the legacy of twentieth-century secularization theory, a space for thinking about alternatives began to emerge. So the question whether we can think of alternatives to Western-style secularization is clearly a late twentieth, early twenty-first-century question.

Apart from this, the question is, to some extent, a typically Western one, not merely in the sense that academic debates on "the post-secular" have often taken place at Western universities,<sup>8</sup> but also because a growing awareness of the limits of secularization theory is especially found among churches that feel embarrassed about their previous appropriation of the secularization paradigm. A good example is the British Centre for Church Growth Research in Durham, led by David Goodhew, who argues that Western churches hardly seem to believe anymore in the possibility of church growth, because "church leaders and churches have consciously or unconsciously internalized both the secularization thesis and its eschatology of decline, thereby creating an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "A Bleak Outlook Is Seen for Religion," *The New York Times* (25 February 1968).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory," *Social Forces* 65 (1987), 587–611.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P," *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999), 249–73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See, e.g., *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, ed. Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Johathan Van Antwerpen (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

ecclesiology of fatalism."9 Goodhew's search for alternatives is therefore clearly motivated by a sense of disappointment about the degree to which Western churches have come to think about themselves in terms of secularization. Something similar applies to my own special chair in secularization studies at the University of Groningen, which was established in 2012 by two missionary organizations in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in order to foster critical reflection on the church's understanding and misunderstanding of secularization. After decades of failed attempts at bringing secularization in the sense of declining church involvement to an end, these organizations wanted to pause and wonder: What have been the gains and losses of understanding religious change almost exclusively in terms of secularization? What have become our blind spots, our misperceptions, or even worse, our misguided presuppositions? Are we perhaps in need of correction, not only empirically, but also theologically?

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the workshop at Cairo Theological Seminary at which the papers gathered in this issue were originally presented was sponsored by one of these organizations, the GZB.<sup>10</sup> Consistent with its overall policy, the GZB wanted to create a moment of reflection on the terms and categories in which religious change in Africa is best approached, not merely in order to "give" something to its African partners, but also, more importantly, to "receive" something from them. What can Western churches learn from how African churches address such issues as church-leaving or declining religious involvement? To what extent can Western churches escape the "eschatology of decline" (Goodhew) inherent in much secularization thinking by appropriating African categories of analysis - a transfer in the opposite direction, so to speak, than was the case in the earlier phases of reflection referred to in the opening paragraphs of this essay? Seen from this perspective, indeed, the challenge is not to apply Western secularization theory to African case studies, but

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> David Goodhew, "Church Growth in Britain, 1980 to the Present Day," in *Church Growth in Britain, 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> For more information, see their website: http://www.gzb.nl.

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rather to examine what modes of praying, listening, thinking, and speaking about declining religious practice exist in Africa – in the hope that they may encourage Western churches to develop better (theological) resources for understanding their own situation.

This, to be sure, does not amount to a romantic idealization of the non-West (of a sort that once inspired Dietrich Bonhoeffer to visit India "in order to judge whether the solution will come from there . . .; for otherwise things appear to be beyond repair").<sup>11</sup> The question rather testifies, I hope, to a desire to be taught by Christians who live and worship in different times or places, in the hope that their insights can fruitfully be appropriated also beyond their immediate contexts.

### Questions and suggestions

If I review more recent literature on "secularization in Africa" from this specific point of view, I see at least two promising developments. One is that empirical research has been growing both qualitatively and quantitatively since the early 1970s. While the late 1990s saw the publication of Aylward Shorter's and Edwin Onyancha's influential *Secularism in Africa*, based on empirical research in (once again) Nairobi,<sup>12</sup> Abel Ngarsoulede more recently defended a PhD dissertation on secularization in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on N'Djamena in Chad.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the empirical part of Ngarsoulede's thesis is almost entirely based on interviews with clergy and church members. Although such interviews can be notoriously unreliable as long as they are supposed to offer adequate analysis of the situation at hand, they are a wonderful source for how Christians in a specific region per-

<sup>11</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ökumene, Universität, Pfarramt 1931–1932*, ed. Eberhard Amelung and Christoph Strohm (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1994), 33.

<sup>12</sup> Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Abel Ngarsoulede, "Enjeux sociologiques et théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne: une étude de cas à N'Djaména en République du Tchad" (PhD thesis, Bangui Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, 2012). ceive the threats and opportunities facing their churches. Indeed, as Jacob Haasnoot's paper<sup>14</sup> illustrates, it takes a minor change of perspective to treat such interviews as sources in their own right – that is, as conversations that are worth examining because they illustrate the modes of perceptions and categories of thought that African Christians in one region or another bring to issues of religious change. More research of this kind would be welcome in order to answer the question whether African Christianity has any alternatives on offer for Western secularization theory.

Even more promising, in this regard, is theological reflection of the sort recently undertaken by scholars such as Elio Messi Metogo and Benno van den Toren.<sup>15</sup> I should add that a clear distinction between empirical research and theological reflection does not exist, if only because both Shorter and Onyancha, on the one hand, and Ngarsoulede, on the other, present their empirical findings in the context of a theological argument. In any case, despite the fact that some of this reflection still follow Western examples, the literature contains quite a few ideas and approaches that may be of interest to Christians in search of an alternative to Western secularization theory. By way of example, I mention two of them.

Mesi Metego, to start with, shows a sharp eye for the fine texture of religious practice in examining a number of "traditional African" prayers, such as collected in *Les religions de l'Afrique noire: textes et traditions sacrés* (1969). He observes that these prayers tend towards the "pragmatic" in the sense that they ask for material blessings more than that they praise the godhead. Also, in so far as these prayers are addressed to a god, they do not typically attribute to this being such Christian qualities as "provi-

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Haasnoot, "Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts: Perceptions of Church Leaders of an Episcopal Diocese in South Sudan," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 121–31, http://journal.etsc.org.

<sup>15</sup> Elio Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris: Karthala; Yaoundé: Presses de l'UCAC, 1997); Benno van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22 (2003), 3–30.

dence."<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Van den Toren makes rather similar observations about Christians who "use highly supernatural practices to pursue secular goals." Although they sing God's praise and pray in his name, it is health and material well-being that they seek in the first place. In Van den Toren's judgment, this "might be a form of secularization that is more specific for Africa: the secularization of religion by making religious practices - traditional, Christian or Islamic – serve secular goals."<sup>17</sup> These, I would say, are remarkably qualitative assessments, which as such distinguish themselves from the dominant quantitative trend in secularization studies. If secularization relates to goals that people pursue in life and to desires they hope to get fulfilled, does that imply that counting church attendance and analyzing church membership rates are not the most important things to do? Does it imply that we better focus our attention on "lived religion" at the level of praying and preaching or, more generally, on what people desire, dream of, and hope for?

Secondly, while secularization theory is typically not very specific about the nature of "the secular" as distinguished from "the religious" – secular people simply miss the gift of religious musicality, as Max Weber memorably put it – Shorter and Onyancha offer a more content-rich description of "the secular" when they argue that "consumerism" is the principal form of secularism in Kenya. This is to say that the most prevalent alternative to Christianity is not "unbelief," but "consumer materialism."<sup>18</sup> Although Shorter and Onyancha do not develop this conceptually, it is only a small step from here to argue, as others have done, that consumerism itself is a (secular) religion and, consequently, that people who seek fulfillment of their desire without Jesus Christ are not "irreligious," but committed to a different religion than Christianity.<sup>19</sup> And if this makes sense, might

<sup>18</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa*, 27, 22.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York; London: Continuum, 2004);

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?*, 48–50, 79–80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa," 12, 11.

secularization be understood, not crudely as "becoming secular," but more finely textured as a process of reorienting one's desires so as to expect fulfillment in the *saeculum*, that is, the world in which one lives here and now?<sup>20</sup>

# Conclusion

Arguably, these questions and suggestions are premature to the extent that they only reflect some of my "aha" experiences in reading recent literature on "secularization in Africa." These, in other words, are not necessarily the questions that African Christians themselves would raise or the insights they would like to share with their brethren and sisters in Europe. Consequently, the issues just mentioned do not intend to close down the learning process referred to above. On the contrary, they open it by illustrating that even the small body of existing scholarship on "secularization in Africa" has a lot to offer to Western Christians pondering the pros and cons of their inherited secularization paradigm. The transcultural conversation would become even richer, however, if new lines of research would be developed and new publications on "secularization in Africa" would become available. So it is not only for the benefit of African churches, but also in the interest of European ones that I hope this special issue will make a contribution to encouraging such new explorations.

Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> I made a similar suggestion in Herman Paul, "Stanley Hauerwas: Against Secularization in the Church," *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 29 no. 2 (2013), 26–27.



# Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church

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John Mbiti, the African theologian, describes Africans as 'notoriously religious'.<sup>1</sup> By this he refers to the characteristic of African society to find answers to the questions of life in the spiritual and mystic world. Secularism, on the other hand, is the complete opposite. The term was used in 1846 by George Jacob Holyoake to describe a philosophy of life that regulated life by empirical experience and reason and sought human improvement through service.<sup>2</sup> As a worldview it finds the answers to the questions of life in this life.

In the modern globalized world the conceptual principles and values of secularism as a philosophy of life are exported to Africa and so challenge the prevailing worldview. This is the context of the mission of the church in Africa. This paper will explore some of the issues for the church to address that arise from the dialectic relationship between African worldviews and Western human secularism.

#### Secularism is a Western Philosophical System

At the simplest level the term *secular* simply means to be concerned with the affairs of this world as opposed to that of the sacred, monastic, or ecclesiastical. Secularism as a process is the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heineman, 1969), 1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> George Jacob Holyoake, *The Principles of Secularism*, Gutenberg Project, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36797/36797-h/36797-h.htms (accessed November 24, 2014).

demythologizing of life. Spiritual answers to the questions of life give way to answers based in observable cause and effect. Once it was believed that consumption was caused by a person sucking the life out of another through witchcraft. Today it is identified with the tuberculosis bacteria that can be treated through antibiotics. As human understanding of the physical mechanisms of world grows, so life is increasingly demystified and therefore secularized.

Secularization however is more than a demystifying process. In its form as a philosophy, commonly called secular humanism, it pervasively informs the religious and cultural identity of Western society.<sup>3</sup> This philosophy was born from Western philosophical notions according to which humanity is free, is independent, and has come of age.<sup>4</sup>

It builds its values and opinions on that which can be tested by the experience of this life. The concept of God is superfluous in secularism. Humanity now lives solely out of, by, and toward this life, which is a closed self-sufficient biological and material system. Morality in secular humanism still holds to vestiges of Christian values but is Christian ethics "shorn of its doctrine." <sup>5</sup> In the world of global contact, the power advantage that technology and development has given the West enables it to export these values to Africa through several channels:

*The agenda of Western political structures.* Western aid is tied to secular philosophy. Funding is tied to achieving the goals of the secular humanists' agenda, such as pro-choice.

*The education system.* The education system offered in Africa today, state or private, has been entirely borrowed from the western colonial powers of France, Britain and Portugal and is governed by certain suppositions and axioms, many of which can be

<sup>3</sup> Graeme Smith, A Short History of Secularism (London: L. B. Tauris, 2008), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, A Short History of Secularism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> B. J. van der Walt, *Transforming Power: Challenging Contemporary Secular Society* (Potchefstroom: ICCA, 2007), 298.

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traced back to the thinking of humanist secularists such as Dewey.

*Population growth and technological advance.* The certainties of the past when the African child's integration into society was through the socializing processes of culture, the custodians of which were the adults, has been turned on its head. In the sub-Sahara about 40 percent of the population is under fourteen. These children are experiencing two developments. The first is Africa's rapid transition in the use of technology. The second is new levels of material prosperity. This prosperity feeds into the sense of wellbeing and a disassociation with spiritual issues that dominated the past.

The challenge of secularism to the church in Africa is twofold. Firstly, it is to equip the African church to respond to secularization as an inevitable process following the growth of technology and living standards. Secondly, it is to recognize that secularism is the colonizing power of Western thought. Both these require a theological response from the church.

# African Values as a Philosophical System

The African response to secularism will be colored by the values of the African worldview. We will attempt to describe some of the characteristics of this.

Despite the pervasiveness of Christianity as a major religion in Africa, African culture has its own characteristics. These in the past were articulated in the structure of African religion but today continue to inform Africa's response to both Christianity and secularism. In African cultural thinking, existence is viewed in terms of an integrated and indivisible whole. All human beings and nature are animated by a basic 'vital force.' Human beings and nature are bound together in a symbiotic relationship. This relationship extends to the spiritual world. The Divine organizes and integrates humankind and the world. In traditional religious values, the ancestors are part of the whole. They exist in symbiotic relationship with the living as custodians of society or as intermediaries between the living and the dead. They mediate social identity for the living and, together with various spirits and the Supreme Being, influence the well-being and prosperity of the individual or social group.

John Pobee claims that there are three main principles governing the way Africans look at the world.

1. The African has a deep religious ontology, which forms an integral continuum, whereby the living world is incorporated and brought under the spirit world.

2. The African identity and worldview have very strong connections. The African says: "I exist because I belong to a family."

3. A human being's sense of finitude, vulnerability and mortality leads many Africans to believe in the power of magic and of super-beings.<sup>6</sup>

#### The Characteristics of African Worldviews

In brief, African worldview values can be listed as follows:

*A universe united in the individual.* There is a close relationship between African religion and African worldview. The religion informs the worldview and the worldview informs the religion. Both are characterized by a cosmic wholeness. There is little distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the natural and the supernatural.<sup>7</sup> The personal world is not separated from the self, self cannot be separated from community, and the community cannot be separated from deity.<sup>8</sup>

The object of this oneness is not the spiritual realm but humanity.<sup>9</sup> Behind this universe is power that can be released for the sake of human prosperity and well-being. In some contexts this is called "The Good Life," meaning the individual's right to

<sup>6</sup> J. S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 43–45.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: ABACUS, 1994), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Constantine, M. Mwikamba, "Search for an African Identity" in *Social* and *Religious concerns of East Africa: A WAJIBU Anthology*, ed. G. J. Wanjohi and G. W. Wanjohi (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> John S. Mbitim, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), 33–36.

health, wealth, prosperity, and longevity. When this is threatened, the assumption is that someone or something has taken away my "Good Life." It is the individual who is the link that holds the forces of the universe in unity. It is as if the whole world exists for man's sake.<sup>10</sup> Misfortune is the result of a disruption in this cosmic flow. This disruption can be caused because someone has taken it from me through spiritual means or because of the displeasure of the spiritual powers.

The unity and the wholeness of the universe, which sees no distinction between the secular and the spiritual or divine other, has its terminus in the existence of humanity.

*Time is the present.* Traditional African worldview sees time as the perpetual, unquestioned present. Greater emphasis is placed on the past than the future. The future is limited and does not stretch too far into what is essentially an unfathomable reality. This present experienced reality is neither after nor before, and within it the ideal state of affairs is the indefinite repetition of the past. The concept of progress is also intimately linked to the past. Within the context of this worldview, progress is primarily the realization by a given generation of stages which others have reached before it.<sup>11</sup>

*Community.* Relationship is a very important hermeneutic principle in the creation of understanding. It stands to reason therefore that the relationship between the group and the individual is the basis of self-understanding and identity. Desmond Tutu designates the characteristics of this relationship with the word *ubuntu.*<sup>12</sup>

*Hierarchical leadership.* Social psychologists have observed that African societies show a strongly hierarchical structure in which social power is centralized in the few. The notion of strong leadership is common, with power status and face-saving being important values. Smith provides us with a good working descrip-

<sup>10</sup> Betsie Smith, "Worldview and Culture: Leadership in Sub-Sahara Africa," *New England Journal of Public Policy* vol. 19, no. 1 (2003): 246.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Smith, "Worldview and Culture," 253.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Double-day/Random House, 1999), 31.

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tion of traditional leadership as being derived from social status and bloodline with little to do with function and personal qualities or merit.<sup>13</sup> Models of strong leadership continue to characterize leadership styles.

#### *The Presence of African Worldview Values in Contemporary Africa*

Much of the discussion on African values is derived by theologians and commentators by reflecting on the past and African Traditional Religion. A further question for our discussion is the extent to which the values that are drawn from the world of the traditional African worldview permeate the present.

To identify how worldview influences thought and behavior, we turn to the world of the cross-cultural and social psychologists who have put their minds to understanding cultural differences in social contexts. Geert Hofstede (1983) reviewed the business culture within national contexts and identified six dimensions along which cultural values that could be analysed. These are: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint.<sup>14</sup>

Hofstede included several African nations in his research.<sup>15</sup> While his main concern was not the nature of the African worldview, he nonetheless gives a scholarly description of African business culture in multinational enterprises. These represent Africans who have high levels of contact with secularization. His findings indicate the presence of the same values in contemporary African society as those identified in the previous section, 2.1. African business society tends to be structured along hierarchical values; there is a distance between those in authority and those not; this hierarchy plays out in the distinction between male and female roles; this in turn is moderated by the communal and relational concern of the society that value nurture over achievement;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Smith, "Worldview and Culture," 248.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Min*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The raw data is available from http://geert-hofstede.com/kenya.html.

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the group rather than the individual is at the heart of social organization and arbitrates identity and the cultural concepts of time stress the present and have a short-term orientation.

From this research it is clear that there is a certain tenacity when it comes to worldview values. Contemporary African worldviews continue to reflect many of the fundamental values of more traditional African society. This should not be a great surprise as continuity and identity go hand in hand. The presence of these values must be considered and their impact on the churches approached in accommodating secularism considered. This does not mean however that we can correctly deduce that because of this conservatism, secularism will have no impact in Africa and therefore is not an issue for the church.

### How Does Secularization Play Out in African Church?

As we review the impact of secularism on the church in Africa, there are two areas of particular concern. The first stems from the Church's mission itself and the second arises from themes in African worldview. Both of these provide hooks on to which to attach the values of secularism.

The first area if concern is the common ground between the gospel and the message of secularism. Secularism is very appealing to human nature. It looks at the development of self in terms of maximum self-fulfillment. It also has the appearance of goodness as it sees its mission as the betterment of humanity *per se* and the salvation of the planet. Many expressions of Christianity espouse the same goals. Further, if secularism is the adoption of Christian ethics without the doctrine, then much of the humanist agenda will resonate with Christian values.

The second is the common ground between the values of secularism and African worldviews. We might be excused for thinking that the philosophy of secularism has little common ground with the spiritual realities present in African worldviews. African communities however are not passive or idle in their receptivity to global cultural flows, but answer back.<sup>16</sup> While some values are too alien to the existing worldview to be entertained, there are others that either prove their worth or resonate with existing values and are therefore adopted into the worldview. We will shortly examine how the secular agenda, while representing a very different philosophy of life, is able to inhabit the African worldview.

#### The Secularizing Process of Christian Mission Activity Itself

In Genesis we find a secularizing or demystifying element in the narrative. Genesis resists the belief of Ancient Middle Eastern religion that God is manipulated through sympathetic magic and accessed in creation.<sup>17</sup> God is above the creation and only accessed through his deliberate acts of self-revelation in word and world history. God, man, and creation (temporal and spiritual) do not form a circular continuum but are distinct from each other with all aspects of creation being equally accountable to the creator. Human access to God is not through the creation but through the divine word of communication and relationship. The dynamic of Genesis is that, rather than God being accessed in or through the creation, the creation is accessed in and through God. This intrinsic distinction that separates man, creation, and the creator continues as a demystifying challenge whenever Christianity faces polytheistic, pantheistic, or animistic religions.

Charles Kraft contends that the church has turned to secular notions to deal with spiritual power and therefore has been a secularizing influence. Seeking to assist Christian evangelism by breaking the power of the spiritual world, the Church has turned to medicine, an education system founded on secularized principles, and the adoption of science in agriculture. In all of this, it has responded to spiritual questions with secular answers and so advanced secularization.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Gregg A. Okesson, "Sacred and Secular Currents for Theological Education in Africa," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 1 (2007): 26.

 $<sup>^{17}</sup>$  For a full exploration of this see G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, World Biblical Commentary (Waco ,Texas: Word Books,1987): xlv–l.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> C. H. Kraft, ed., *Appropriate Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 365.

The second challenge is the adaptation in many parts of the Western church of its theology to the secularizing values of the Enlightenment. One of David Bosch's contributions to mission theology was to identify the way Western Enlightenment philosophy fed into the understanding of the nature and task of mission.<sup>19</sup> Increasingly, the Church has looked to the agenda of secular humanism and international humanitarian and political forums to define its mission. These values are fed back into the African church through Western funding bodies for mission and through scholars returning to Africa who have completed their studies in institutions dominated by this agenda.

A third but related theological trend has been the way the concept of mission has been interpreted. Stung by the accusation that mission was too spiritual or dualistic and ignored the holistic implications of the kingdom of God, the church has adopted a developmental model of mission. The trend of looking for secular answers to spiritual questions has continued, and often there is little difference between the development programs of the church and those of the secular NGOs.

#### African Values That Resonate with Secular Values

We now turn to receptors within African worldviews themselves. These we can term *false friends*. On the surface there is a measure of continuity between them and secularism. They seem to say the same thing as each other, but at a deeper level there is disagreement. Some of these are now explored

*The secularity of cosmic religion.* Harold Turner has pointed out that in much African Traditional Religion there is little or no immediate encounter with God.<sup>20</sup> The world around us becomes the sacrament of our worship. Shorter and Onyyancha speak of the secularity of cosmic religion.<sup>21</sup> When the physical and material becomes identified with the spirit, then the spirit becomes the

<sup>19</sup> David J. Bosch. *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1980), 38–40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Referred to in Okesson, "Sacred and Secular," 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Awald Shorter and Edwin Onyyancha, *The Church and AIDS in Africa, A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Pauline Press, 1998).

physical world and there is a blurring of the difference. In traditional African thought, the biological world is to be valued as it is part and parcel of the divine world.

In secularism the appreciation of nature is based on viewing man from the perspective of being one of evolution's developments. Taking one's rightful place means working with the biological world to preserve it. Sustainability and preservation of what is are key concepts. Humanity must respect this world as it is no more or less than it. To diminish creation is to diminish humanity.

In both cases the importance of the physical material world is elevated. While philosophically the route to an appreciation of the material and biological is very different between the systems, the outcome is something that each in its own way resonates.

The collective nature of the African world-view. One of the strong values of African society is its collectiveness and emphasis on collective identity. We have already seen Mbiti's "I exist because I belong to a family." This value challenges liberal epistemology's emphasis on the individual as the creator of understanding. "I know because I think" is challenged by "I know because we know." Counter-intuitively this collectivism and nurture orientation provides the opening for the secular humanist agenda of social justice, peace, and development. This addresses the communal impulses of the African worldview but with answers that use only material values.

*The importance of the present.* In her work on African Independent Churches, Mofokeng highlights the present as a characteristic African value.<sup>22</sup> The spiritual world is focused on the now and immediate of my life. It is seen in the present as it brings direct benefits such as healing and prosperity. Focus is on this life rather than the next. The secular agenda also concerns itself with personal fulfillment and present wellbeing, while discounting notions of the afterlife.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> N. H. Ngada and K. E. Mofokeng, *African Christian Witness* (Pieter-maritzburg: RSA Cluster, 2001), 15.

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*Personal wellbeing and prosperity.* Personal wellbeing and prosperity are important objectives in much of traditional religion. The ANC in South Africa can justify the sacrifice of an ox at national gatherings as being essential for the prosperity of the country. The spirit world and ancestors play an important role in ensuring this health and prosperity. When reviewed, secularism also promises fulfillment, growth, and creativity for both the individual and humankind in general.

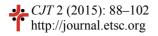
# Conclusion

The challenge of Western secularism to the African church is not straightforward. On the face of things, many aspects of African worldviews are at odds with secular human values. However, this does not mean that that African worldviews are not influenced by these alien values. Cultures and worldviews are not watertight. They react to new ideas, particularly when there is an element of common ground between them and they are perceived of as being beneficial. While there are many unique aspects to African worldviews, they nonetheless have values that are open to be modified by the secular agenda. Secular values when adopted are not left unaffected but molded and conscripted to the agenda of the African values. This gives the church the opportunity to involve itself in this process of challenging both African and secular values with the transforming power of Christ.

The church in Africa addresses its culture with the gospel. This gospel makes demands on all cultures, and no culture can exist in blissful harmony with it. The philosophies of secularization and the more intuitive philosophy informing African worldviews, together with the way they interact in African society, are all critiqued by the church through a deliberate process of evaluation.

As the African church reflects on the influence of secularism on society, it needs to be critical of its own teaching and practice. For this it needs to teach a theology of God, man, and creation that allows the African believer to access the created order through God and not God through the created order. This apSeed: Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church

proach keeps the centrality of the Trinity in creation, despite the de-spiritualizing process of scientific understanding and growing prosperity. Furthermore, the church should be able to identify the characteristics of its mission that distinguish it from global development agencies. Again, this is a theological task.



# Sociological and Theological Perspectives on Secularization in Africa

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It is not clear if secularization is a social phenomenon exclusive to the West or a European exception to the general religiosity of the world. Recent developments, in fact, suggest that African societies may also be evolving in this direction. If so, what ethical suggestions can theology offer to African societies? Before pursuing this line of thought, it will be helpful to define the meaning of the term *secularization* in order to clarify our understanding of this important subject.

In Western thought, the term *secularization* has a double meaning, loss and emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Bryan Wilson says that secularization occurs when the clergy loses control of its properties and resources, or when clergy or religious leaders decrease in numbers. He adds that one can also speak of secularism when religion suffers a loss of social status, its belief system is abandoned, or religious practice is neglected.<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas argues that secularization can be understood as a change of mentality due to modernity, which has led to the rejection of metaphysical thought.<sup>3</sup> From the same point of view, Charles Taylor defines secularization as the removal of religion from the public sphere.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ed., *Dictionnaire critique de la théologie* (Paris : Quadrige/PUF, 2002), 1095.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, "Secularisation," in *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey, 747–50 (London/New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 424.

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The long debates about religious faith in the West have often shown that many have a greater faith in human reason than in God. These discussions also focus on the heritage of the Church, especially when the transfer of a religious institution's property to the state or general public has occurred. Therefore, it is argued that secularization refers to the process by which a society transitions from a close identification of religion and the state to one of near total separation. The discussions particularly focus on the social function and the future of religion. Sperna Weiland argues that secularization, defined as the abandonment of the triune God, is a fundamental change in the human experience.<sup>5</sup> It removes the fields of religion and metaphysics from human life and thought.

Without intending to contribute to the debate on secularization in the West, we can affirm that Africa has become a secularized continent as well as Europe. Similarities between the two continents and the specific aspects of secularization in Africa are highlighted in this work. The approach to this debate that this paper will take consists of reflecting on the shared reality of secularization in Europe and Africa, emphasizing sociological and theological issues. It will also propose a theological response.

According to our research and analysis, secularization is both a process and an outcome. It concerns all religions: Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions. We therefore believe that secularization, understood as the gradual decrease of the authority and relevance of religion in human society, is a global phenomenon whose manifestations are as varied as its causes and the contexts in which it is found.

#### The reality of Secularization

#### Aspects of Secularization

In West Africa, current research identifies the main markers of secularization to be the following:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Jan Sperna Weiland, *New Ways in Theology*, trans. by N. D. Smith (Dublin: Gill and McMilan, 1968), 8.

a) *Disenchantment*. This refers to the demystification or unmasking of the traditional sacred cosmos, beliefs, and taboos accepted by people.

b) *The desacralization of power*. Desacralization means the removal of the religious character or sacred understanding of something or somebody. Kwame Bediako thinks that Christianity has played a key role in the emergence of freedom in the modern world through its confrontation with traditional African beliefs.<sup>6</sup> According to Bediako, ancestors are believed to have maintained good relationships and have worked for the well-being of society. Thus, traditional chiefs have performed the crucial function of being intermediaries between the ancestors and society. The authority of the chiefs is presumed to be that of the ancestors.<sup>7</sup> When Christianity undermines their authority, it also undermines the authority of religion.

c) *Emancipation from religion*. Secularization generates rationales that undermine traditional objects of faith, dogmas, and individual ethics. The result is the emancipation of individuals and sectors of society from the influence of religion and the structures that embody its authority.

d) *Secularity*. This is a process by which theological ways of thinking and being give way to mental habits that have no explicit reference to the sacred. Secularity means that religion cannot exert influence over state organizations, functions, and laws.<sup>8</sup> Secularity leads to the emancipation of public spheres: state, economy, ethics and science. It results in the liberalization of people's beliefs in the areas of marriage, reproductive control, social cus-

<sup>6</sup> Kwame Bediako, "Le Christianisme et l'autorité en Afrique," March-April 1992, http://www.cpjustice.org (accessed December 5, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Histoire de la laïcité: Genèse de l'idéal*, Culture et société (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 2005), 18. Henri Pena-Ruiz argues that the combination God and Caesar is a dangerous liaison so that there must have a separation between them. He writes: "In proclaiming the mutual emancipation of religious and political power, laity allows the first to assert freely, but not compel, and the second to devote themselves fully to the interest of all, without public privilege for believers or atheists."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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toms, and personal sense of identity. It also tends to lead to gender equality and a separation of church and state.

e) Social change or social transformation. This occurs in ways that tend to enhance individualism in the sense of personal autonomy. Two things are important to note about this idea: (1) Secularization seems to come hand-in-hand with modernity, which includes an emphasis on rationalism and ethical values based on social conventions; (2) Secularization results in a turn from spiritual to material concerns.<sup>9</sup>

f) *Decline of religion*. This is accompanied by an increase in pluralization, atomization, privatization, indifference, and unbelief. The decline of religion can be understood as a loss of its authority. Essentially, authority is based on power held by a person over another person, a group of people in a given community, or an institution.<sup>10</sup> Authority is power that is acquired by people due to leading a model moral life, acquiring skills as a professional, or providing visible services in a society in which the person is invested.

g) *Altering the content of belief.* Baubérot identifies this form of secularization as existing among Christian intellectuals working in areas of secular society. Such people tend to alternate without recourse to traditional beliefs and to the Christian God. They are inclined to revert to traditional beliefs when the Christian God seems to be slow to respond. Their double life is observed in the tension they maintain between their two belief systems. The result is that in the long run they tend to became more secular.<sup>11</sup>

h) *Re-enchantment*. Research shows that large numbers in the population are returning to religion, but not necessarily to Christianity. The emergence of new religions and new spirituali-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Bastian, ed., *La modernité religieuse en perspective comparée: Europe latine et Amérique latine* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), 309.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> G. Glez, "Pouvoir temporel du pape," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. A. Vacant and E. Mangenot, 12:2670–2772 (Paris: Librairie Latouzey & Ané, 1933).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Cf. Jean Baubérot, "La sécularisation," in *Encyclopédie des religions*, ed. Giuseppe Annoscia, 219–22 (Paris : Encyclopaedia Universalis, 2002).

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ties and the multiplication of temporary places of worship in our secularized societies are the result of re-enchantment.

Disenchantment, social change or transformation, desacralization of power, rationalization, pluralization, privatization, atomization, and indifference are common aspects of secularization in Africa and the West. Emancipation from religion is a typical manifestation of secularization in all countries and continents in which research has been conducted. According to Messi Metogo, unbelief is generally identified in Africa within certain social strata – the rich and well educated.<sup>12</sup>. Kenya is the only African country that shares with the West a decline of religion. In addition to what is shared by the two continents, the re-enchantment and alternation of beliefs appear to be unique aspects of secularization in sub-Saharan Africa.

The consequence of all the above is seen in the promotion of new values accepted by secular people. Also these characteristic elements of secularization are caused by several abstract and concrete realities that affect people in all social strata.

#### Causes of secularization

Research identifies several factors of secularization and its victims that exist in both the West and Africa. In this presentation, we will simply list them in order to inform people.

The first cause of secularization is the Christian religion. Some African researchers such as Dopanu, Tshimbulu, and Ngarsouledé as well as certain Westerners note that Christianity is among the ancient causes of secularization in Africa.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Eloi Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Un essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris/Yaoundé: Karthala/Presse de l'UCAC, 1997), 79.

<sup>13</sup> Abiola T. Dopanu, "Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland," in *AFER* vol. 48, no. 3 (2006): 146–47; Tshimbulu, "Laïcité et religion en Afrique," *Social Compass* vol. 47, no. 3 (2000): 331; and Abel Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne: Une étude de cas de N'Djamena en République du Tchad" (Thèse de doctorat, Faculté de Théologique Evangélique de Bangui, 2012), 109–10. Ngarsouledé: Sociological and Theol. Perspectives on Secularization in Africa

The second cause of this social evolution is urbanization, which is noted in the research of Shorter, Onyancha, Dopanu, Messi Metogo, and Ngarsouledé. Cities and slums in Africa added to the rural exodus and widely opened the way to materialism and the transmission of secular ideas through Western media and information technology.<sup>14</sup>

The third cause of secularization in Africa discovered by the researchers is modernity. Modernity makes dramatic changes in the lives of African people. Shorter, Onyancha, Dopanu, Messi Metogo, and Tshimbulu all mention the emancipation of African societies. Dopanu and Tshimbulu, in their study of the Yoruba and other African people influenced by modernity, add the influence of rationalism.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth cause of the evolution of African societies is the spread of Western education that instructs and informs Africans about Western civilization with its ideologies. It also models a new African mentality. Messi Metogo notes that Western education and media have conveyed new forms of knowledge even to the illiterate.<sup>16</sup>

The fifth cause mentioned by the research is the influence of the media and digital technologies.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the observations of Messi Metogo given above, Shorter, Onyancha, and, Ngarsouledé note the same cause in their research. Print media, television, video, and telephone are influential forms of commu-

<sup>14</sup> Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa; A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 57–59; Dopanu, "Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland," 146–147; Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 12–13; and Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne," 91.

<sup>15</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa*, 155; Dopanu, "Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland," 145; Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 12.

<sup>16</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne," 97–102.

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nication identified by these authors.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, the media can be a positive influence in that it promotes education and provides helpful information. On the other hand, it is harmful in that it corrupts morals and promotes a materialistic worldview. It also degrades culture, undermines traditional churches, and fosters hostility toward Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

Shorter, Onyancha, and Messi Metogo also note two additional causes: poverty and the myth of God's withdrawal—the latter idea being prevalent in some African countries. The settlement pattern in African cities, in which poor rural people migrate to large urban areas, often does not result in alleviating poverty since immigrants tend to send money back to relatives in their villages.<sup>20</sup>

#### Those Most Attracted to Secularization

Secularization in Africa as in the West tends to appeal strongly to intellectuals, government officials, businessmen, social elites, and youth who are exposed to Western culture through education.

We mention in passing those who are most susceptible to secularization in Africa. These are adults who are living in the poor countries of Central and West Africa, such as the entire Yoruba tribe in Nigeria that has come under the influence of secularization.<sup>21</sup> Very often the deplorable social conditions of some African households leads to secularism, to rebellion against God, or to unbelief. According to Tshimbulu, African societies are generally emancipated from the authority of religion.<sup>22</sup> He points to traditional African religions, economics, and politics as spheres of social life in which secularization is clearly prevalent.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa*, 73; Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne," 97–102.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 38–39, 61–64.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 32, 57–70.

<sup>21</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa*, 38–39, 61–64.

<sup>22</sup> Tshimbulu, "Laïcité et religion en Afrique," *Social Compass* vol. 47, no. 3 (2000): 336.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

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The above reasons for secularization are not, of course, without sociological and theological consequence.

# Sociological and Theological Perspectives on Secularization

#### Sociological Perspective of Secularization

In the West the damaging effect of secularization is clear in the undermining of the ethical foundations of society, the decline of religion, and the rise of rationalism and a worldview based on science. These things tend to promote the search for personal and collective autonomy that has little or no room for religion. In effect, they result is a misdirected attempt to be independent of God. This is ultimately unsatisfying for many because humanity's thirst for absolute freedom is inconsistent with its need to find fulfillment in transcendent purpose.

Max Weber, approaching the problem from a sociological perspective, studied the relationship between ideas and the socioeconomic life of people – that is, the relationship of religion to economics and social stratification. In his opinion, beliefs determine ethics, which have a direct effect on the economy and social life.<sup>24</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger affirms this relationship, noting that collective faith in techno-productive values leads human society to a dead end.<sup>25</sup> Modernity with its stepchild secularization has produced a crisis in human society: life without God. Though the desire for human autonomy may lead to freedom, it often comes at the cost of alienation and despair.

In Africa, several authors have reflected on this problem. Shorter and Onyancha observe that on this continent secular values deeply affect all areas of life and society. Curiously, the increasing number of Christians does not prevent the simultaneous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Max Weber, L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme, Agora 6 (Paris: Plon, 1964), 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Religion, modernité et sécularisation," in *Vers un nouveau christianisme?* ed. Danièle Hervieu-Léger and François Champion, Sciences Humaines et Religions (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 216.

development of functional secularism.<sup>26</sup> Messi Metogo affirms this idea in observing that contemporary African societies are characterized by religious indifference and unbelief, though in their depths they have a natural sense of the presence of the supreme God.<sup>27</sup> According to Benno van den Toren, culturally sacred areas and taboos of vesterday in Africa are now desacralized, making accessible areas that previously only the shameless would have explored.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, individual Christians often act without reference to God or are quick to resort to their tribal gods in a crisis. Kwame Bediako noted that Christianity lost much of its social function in the context of African independence<sup>29</sup>

Both in the West and in Africa emancipation from religion is today's trend. It is apparent that individual lives, sectors of society, and whole communities are now outside the influence of religion and religious authority.

#### What Is at Stake Theologically?

In Africa, social, economic, and political difficulties have resulted in a decline of religious feeling in the hearts of people. People now use language that reflects general unbelief. Phrases such as the "silence of God," "impotence of God," "indifference of God," "injustice of God," and "partial love of God" are common. Secularization in this continent covers both the cultural, moral, and social aspects of contemporary society. This includes the field of metaphysics, which confronts human beings with ultimate questions. The effects of secularization are manifest in the rising generation, especially among students, intellectuals, business men, and women. The theological effects include the following:

es," 7–9. <sup>29</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western* Religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 186.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, Secularism in Africa, 29, 38–39, 157.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Church-

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a) The recourse to God when all human efforts fail:<sup>30</sup> In this context, one can observe a kind of religious relativism in that dogmatic assertions now have less influence on the lives of Christians.<sup>31</sup> At the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, then Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) said, "Secularization invades every aspect of daily life and generates the development of a mentality in which God is made absent, in part or in whole, in existence and human consciousness."<sup>32</sup> This secularization is not only an external threat to believers. It has been evident for some that it also exists even inside the Church. "It distorts the interior and deep Christian faith, and, consequently, the lifestyle and daily behavior of believers," Ratzinger added.<sup>33</sup>

b) The internal tension in the life of intellectuals, social elites, and public officials is another theological effect. The contribution of Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon further illuminate this point. According to them, people who work in the public sphere are caught uncomfortably between ecclesiastical and traditional practices. Most African Christians have grown up in cultures intimately linked to the religion of their own ethnic group.<sup>34</sup> The rationale behind these practices can be described as rude but compelling. Hence, many African Christians develop a double life. They are fundamentally committed to Christianity but create dynamic equivalents to the Christian faith when they experience difficulties. They quickly return to traditional African religions because of the strong pull of their group identity. As a court without justice is ineffective, says Jean Baubérot, so the authority of religion is lost when its dogmas are questioned by people from outside or

<sup>30</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Benoit XVI), "La sécularisation des esprits," speech given March 8, 2008, http://www.cerclegustavethibon.hautetfort.com/archive/ 2008/03/10/la-secularisation-des-esprits.html (accessed March 24, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Grebe et Wilfred Fon, *Religion traditionnelle africaine et relation d'aide* (Abidjan: CPE, 2000), 10–12.

by secularists from within its walls.<sup>35</sup> In consequence, the decline of religious practice, the crisis of vocation, and the erosion of morality are often factors leading to the decline of religious authority.

c) Emancipation from the authority of religion and God. Researchers have found that the human thirst for freedom draws people to free themselves from all forms of authority, especially from that of God whose word restricts their freedom.<sup>36</sup> According to Mark Shaves, religious authority is a social structure that seeks to impose its language to compel individuals to release control over their tangible property and other desires of their hearts. And it is precisely this religious authority against which secularized men and women seek freedom. Hence, in the right circumstances, faith in God can become obsolete.<sup>37</sup>

d) Competitive religious pluralism in Africa. Religious pluralism characterizes secularization in Africa. Steve Bruce observed the same phenomenon in the context of the West where traditional dogmas, long taken for granted, are replaced by the enthusiastic commitment of the people to a string of competitive sects.<sup>38</sup> For him, this new religious effervescence results in the decline of religion. In the face of social innovations and secular ideas, Christianity is unable to defend its intellectual credibility. In consequence, in Africa as in the West, people participate in religious institutions more out of habit than a commitment to doing the will of God.

We conclude that secularization appears at once to be both liberating and enslaving. On the one hand, it educates and awakens human beings to the possibilities to self-emancipation, highlighting their intellectual faculties and practical skills; it shows them, for example, how to master their environment. On the other

<sup>35</sup> Jean Baubérot, Vers un nouveau pacte laïque? (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne," 141.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Blumenberg, cited in: Rosino Gibellini, *Panorama de la théologie au XXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 155.

<sup>38</sup> Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

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hand, it inspires in them a godless way of thinking about and behaving in the world. Secularity is a strong new master that relentlessly drives religion from society. The result is that soon religious feelings will have eroded in African societies as much as they have in the West.

In consideration of the above, how are we to behave, and what type of theological response should we bring to this evolution of African societies?

# Theological Response to Secularization

#### Application of the Trinitarian Model

We have chosen to take a Trinitarian approach to the problem of secularization. The involvement of the triune God in the secular side of humanity has ethical implications to be considered. For from the beginning the will of God is that human beings should live in community, in social harmony, and in accordance with his will. Individualism, religious indifference, or the privatization of religion are all deviations from the plan of the Creator. While secular kings have limited control over their people, Christianity's omnipotent and omnipresent God is present in and sovereign over his creation. He shares their lives without approving of their sins. He directs, advises, and defends their interests against the enemy and equips them with substantial provisions. In the same way, African Christians are called to be engaged in their societies without compromising their commitment to God. In effect, they are called to be in the world without being worldly.

Christianity in Africa is called to confront several challenges at the same time. This involves three things:

a) Rethinking the ways in which to communicate the Gospel in Africa in order to effectively confront the problem of secularization in a rapidly changing social context. b) Working for the social, economic, and cultural transformation of Africa in the context of increasingly secular values.<sup>39</sup>

c) Reestablishing religious authority so that it can be effective in helping to create healthy societies and, in the process, give new meaning and value to politics.

Since the Church in Africa is called to imitate the work of Jesus Christ, it must strive to incarnate gospel truths in a secular environment.

#### Commitment of the Church

To be more effective in the secular world, the Church should focus on two activities: Bible translation and a reassertion of theological themes relevant in the African context.

*Translation of the Bible*. Thoughtful African Christians agree with Lamin Sanneh about the need to translate the Bible into local languages, for the Bible is crucial in transforming cultures. By translating the Scriptures into local languages, the Church seeks to make the message understandable in the heart-language of readers and listeners in order to achieve a faith response. The ultimate goal of this task is to touch and transform lives in order to bring them into the kingdom of God.

Translating of the Bible into local languages, as a response to secularization, has at least two potential benefits:

a) It promotes the enculturation of the gospel in individual lives and the culture. It has the potential to reach readers at the deepest possible level, to touch the eternity that God has placed in their hearts.<sup>40</sup>

b) It allows Africans to use the word for *God* that already exists in their languages, thus making it clear that God has been with their people long before the first missionaries arrived.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 15–18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process; The African Dimension* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid.

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We agree with Sanneh that contemporary churches should learn from the experience of the churches in North Africa in the centuries when Islam first appeared on the continent. Those churches completely disappeared when confronted with the challenge of the new religion. Historians often note that a strong contributing factor to the churches' demise was their lack of vernacular Bibles.

*A reassertion of relevant theological themes.* To respond to secularization, contemporary churches should carefully study local cultures and traditions in the context of modernity. By doing so they will be able to better communicate the gospel message in relevant ways to Africans.<sup>42</sup> Just as important is the need of the Church to reassert certain fundamental theological themes in order to confront secularization and remain relevant to the problems of common people. The themes that should be highlighted include the following:

a) *The immanence of God.* The promise of the constant presence of Jesus Christ with his Church appears invalid in the present condition of African people. As the feeling of God's remoteness grows, doubts inevitably arise about his relevance in modern society and life.

b) *The work of the Holy Spirit*. As the role of the Holy Spirit seems less and less relevant in human life, other voices are more readily heeded by Africans. For many, ancestral spirits seem closer and more sensitive to the plight of people than the Holy Spirit. These beliefs may result in people being completely deaf to the voice of God's Spirit.

c) *Scripture*. Given the hardships of everyday reality, people resolutely evade the authority of God in the Scriptures by accepting other authorities. Contemporary society accepts neither the uniqueness nor the literal interpretation of Scripture. Hence, the authority of Scripture fades more in hearts and consciences.

d) *Salvation*. The question of salvation in its immediate and eschatological aspects is questioned by many. This affects the foundation of faith in God and results in people identifying the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Bediako, "Le Christianisme et l'autorité en Afrique."

pursuit of immediate material gain as a better use of time and effort.

e) *The Church as a spiritual institution*. In responding positively to the socio-economic conditions of people in need, the Church may lose its identity as the Body of Christ. When the Church is seen primarily as an institution that provides goods and services, people may follow Jesus only for the "loaves and fishes" rather than a desire to enjoy true fellowship with God.

f) *The social gospel*. Despite the danger of an overemphasis on social concerns, the Church must help to meet the needs of people or risk irrelevance. This is especially true of Africa where much of life is characterized by poverty, the migration of large numbers from rural to urban areas, violence among young people, child soldiers, street children, alcoholism, and the proliferation of incurable diseases through prostitution.

g) *Leadership*. The thirst for power and the prevailing corruption of African leaders indicates that they have not internalized Christian values. An important task of the Church, therefore, is to teach the principle of servant leadership under God. As Bediako writes, "African Christianity may have no greater political [task in] African societies than to assist in this transformation of outlook."<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, modernity is a mixed bag. It may mean a rise in secularization that undermines the influence and authority of religion and leads to moral disaster, but it can also mean the prevalence of education, science, technology, and a general expansion of human horizons. The great challenge of the Church in Sub-Saharan Africa today is come to grips with the new ideas and forces unleashed in the modern world in order to harness them to a Christian worldview, one that is at once life- and spiritaffirming. On this depends the fate of the continent.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 142.



# African Neo-Pentecostalism in the Face of Secularization: Problems and Possibilities

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# Introduction

Africans,<sup>1</sup> particularly sub-Saharan Africans, are often considered "notoriously religious"<sup>2</sup> or "incurably religious."<sup>3</sup> This article challenges that assumption by looking at one of the most unlikely movements to consider if one wants to do so: African neo-Pentecostalism. For many Western observers, neo-Pentecostal or neo-charismatic movements seem to be paradigmatic expressions of the religious outlook that characterizes Africa. These movements can also be used as proof that this religiousness not only belong to Africa's past but is equally expressed among the rising middle class of urban professionals. Neo-Pentecostalism thus provides an expression of an "alternative modernity," which shows that secularization is not a necessary consequence of modernity.

I agree that African neo-Pentecostalism shows that alternative modernities do exist. Modernity does not automatically lead to secularization, as the older secularization thesis presupposed. In

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a public lecture at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo as part of the consultation on "Declining Religious Participation: Secularization and Discipleship in Africa" that was jointly sponsored by the Seminary and GZB (Reformed Mission League, the Netherlands). I want to express my thanks to the sponsors of this important consultation and the other participants for their fruitful interactions on this theme.

<sup>2</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969), 1; cf. Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 25f.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 235.

this article, I intend to show, however, that the relationship between neo-Pentecostalism and secularization is more complex than it initially appears. For a number of reasons, neo-Pentecostalism could be a Christian response to secularization, but it could also be a factor contributing to Africa's secularization. The jury is still out.

I reflect on this movement as someone who comes from the Netherlands, one of the most secular countries in Europe, but also as someone who has lived in Central Africa for eight years. As such, this essay is part of an intercultural theological conversation between two continents that has been unfolding in my own life and is intended as a contribution to an intercultural theological conversation in the global church. I hope that these reflections will help Western Christians reflect on whether, and, if so, to what extent, African neo-Pentecostalism can help us develop a Christian position in a secular post-Christendom society. I also hope that these reflections might help African Christians reflect on what the appropriate response might be to secularizing forces in modern Africa. As this is a short article, it can obviously be no more than an invitation to others to join me in a conversation on these wide-ranging issues.<sup>4</sup>

In the first section I discuss different forms of secularization in sub-Saharan Africa, arguing that it can easily go unnoticed because it expresses itself in different ways. I will argue that one form, which plays a dominant role, is easily missed when looking at sub-Saharan Africa from a modern secular perspective. In the second section I introduce the broad cluster of movements that are grouped under the label of neo-Pentecostalism. I give particular attention to their relationship with the traditional African worldview, naturally focusing on those traits that are crucial to understand their relationship with secularization. In the third section, I will argue that neo-Pentecostal movements may be part of the answer to secularization, but are themselves also vulnerable to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For the understanding of intercultural theology that undergirds this article, see Benno van den Toren, "Intercultural Theology as a Three-Way Conversation: Beyond the Western Dominance of Intercultural Theology," *Exchange* 44 (2015): 123–43.

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secularizing processes. I will indicate why further research is needed and give some pointers as to the direction in which neo-Pentecostal theology and praxis will need to be developed in order to allow for a truly Christian response to secularization, a response that could also be a gift to Christian communities in the global North.

### An African Form of Secularization?

Secularization is a multifaceted phenomenon. Because of this, one can often miss crucial forms of secularization when one looks for phenomena relating to one or a limited range of expressions. Overt atheism, agnosticism or, more generally, the erosion of belief in the supernatural is rare in sub-Saharan Africa, but other forms are clearly identifiable. In an earlier article, I have distinguished a number of these expressions,<sup>5</sup> and I limit myself here to some short observations.

A first expression of secularization is probably better called *de-sacralization* or *disenchantment* of the world. According to many theologians, it has its roots in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures themselves. This becomes clear when we compare the biblical worldview to the worldviews of the pagan environment of Israel and the early church. In these contexts, human beings were surrounded by all sorts of spiritual forces and sacred powers with which they needed to carefully negotiate. By the declaration in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures that this world is God's creation, it is de-sacralized. Political powers are no longer sacred and can therefore be criticized. Fertility is demystified and depends on the Creator God rather than on the mastery of magical powers. Illness is no longer demonized and we can therefore look for natural treatments.<sup>6</sup> By introducing a biblical worldview of a de-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Benno van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2003): 3–30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Friedrich Gogarten, Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit: Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk Verlag, 1953); Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen, Christianity in World History: The Meeting of the Faiths of East and West (London: Edinburgh House Press,

sacralized world, Christianity itself has been a secularizing force in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

A second form of secularization is the declining participation of individuals in religious activities. Though limited studies are available, it can be identified in a number of places. For example, though it is hard to present precise data, research shows that church attendance is low among Nairobi's urban poor.<sup>8</sup>

A third expression of secularization is the diminishing authority over or grip on society that religion has as more and more areas of life become emancipated from its influence. This is a consequence of the increasing differentiation or pluralization of society since the arrival of colonization, modernity, and globalization. In traditional Africa, all areas of life were integrated and intertwined and therefore also permeated by the religious aspect of life. In the modern era, many areas of life, such as commerce, politics, the media etc., gradually establish their own dynamic and independence from religion.

In the fourth place, the relationship between the individual and his or her religion has changed under the influence of modernity. As Charles Taylor has pointed out, secularization does not necessarily mean that people become less religious, but it does mean that religion is never self-evident, that it is always a matter of choice, and that religious commitment is always made in the face of alternative options.<sup>9</sup> Recent sociological research amongst civil servants in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, shows that this phenomenon can also be seen in Africa: all civil servants interviewed were practically involved in their religious communities, whether Protestant, Catholic or Muslim. Yet, the relationship to these communities had changed in a manner that would not have

<sup>1964);</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 58; Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man*, 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 57ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 12.

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been possible before the influence of modernity: the individuals retained a certain autonomy vis-à-vis their religious communities and viewed their adherence increasingly as a matter of personal choice.<sup>10</sup>

A fifth expression of secularization, which will receive the most attention in this article, is the secularization of religion itself, its adaptation to the values of the secular culture.<sup>11</sup> In the West, this often takes the form of adapting religious beliefs to a secular worldview. Belief in miracles, in the authority of Scripture, and in heaven and hell may become less important, or can even be denied, while continuing a religious affiliation and religious practices. In sub-Saharan Africa the secularization of religion itself may take a different form. In Africa religious practices often retain a strong sense of the supernatural but can be secularized by using these religious practices for secular goals. How many politicians will go to their village to consult their ancestors, ask for prayer from their pastor, or see a *marabout*, not for any inherently religious purpose, but in order to succeed in their political careers? How many students will wear an amulet or acquire a "prophetic pen" or other blessing in their churches, not because they want to be closer to God, but because they need this supernatural power to succeed in a hostile world? These examples could be multiplied.

If this is considered secularization, it is a secularization of the Christian religion because the Christian faith is in its intention is a theocentric religion that resists the utilitarian use of its practices. This is different for African Traditional Religions (ATRs). Many studies of these religions – including those by scholars who intend to understand these religions positively – have stressed the

<sup>10</sup> Abel Ngarsoulede, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne : Une étude de cas de N'Djamena en République du Tchad" (Thèse de doctorat, Faculté de Théologique Evangélique de Bangui, 2012), 129ff.

<sup>11</sup> This fourth form is distinguished as a particular expression of secularization by the Dutch sociologist of religion G. Dekker: G Dekker and K. U Gäbler, eds., "Secularisatie in de westerse samenleving," in *Secularisatie in theologisch perspectief* (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 32. anthropocentric and pragmatic nature of these religions.<sup>12</sup> They are anthropocentric in the sense that religious practices are focused on the flourishing of the human being or, rather less individualistically, of the clan. They are pragmatic in the sense that religious practices are used in view of what they are intended to achieve: protection, healing, or blessing. This is one reason why the traditional African worldview is vulnerable to secularization.<sup>13</sup>

This may be one of the reasons why secularization processes in Africa can so easily go unperceived by the Western observer. For Westerners, religion seems to be everywhere in Africa because the "supernatural" is everywhere. People are very aware of supernatural powers and their influence on all aspects of daily life. Automatically considering everything "religious" that from a Western perspective is considered "supernatural" is, however, a misconception. First of all, many phenomena considered "supernatural" by Westerners are not "supernatural" in a theological sense. Deceased ancestors, water spirits, and the power of charms are beyond what the materialistic Western worldview considers natural, but for Africans they are still part of the created order. Their understanding of the created order is, however, much larger than the Western materialistic view, but that does not necessarily make these aspects of life religious. And secondly, as already pointed out, these "spiritual" practices may be used in order to attain what we might consider "secular" goals. As Kwasi Weridu observes.

The procedures [religious practices] associated with the belief in sundry extra-human beings of varying powers and inclinations, so often given pride of place in accounts of African reli-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Magesa, *African Religion*, 69; cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*; Okot p' Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Eloi Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris; Yaoundé, Cameroun: Karthala; Presses de l'UCAC, 1997), 47ff.

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gions, are in fact practical utilitarian programs for tapping the resources of this world.<sup>14</sup>

This confronts us with the issue of how we should define secularization. Because it relates to decreases in the influence of religion, the definition of secularization depends on a more basic definition of religion. Scholars of religion are increasingly aware that it is impossible to formulate a culturally and religiously neutral definition of religion. A definition of religion always presupposes a particular understanding of what religion is or is supposed to be.<sup>15</sup> This also allows room to define religions from a Christian perspective. It seems that from such a Christian perspective the God-directed focus should be a central element of true religion in distinction from all sorts of semi- or even pseudo-religious practices that can only be understood with reference to what religion truly should be.<sup>16</sup>

This is one of the reasons why we need to look critically at the thesis that Africa is incurably religious, not only in relation to Africa's present, but also in relation to Africa's past. In order to assess this thesis, it is insufficient to point to the pervasiveness of the "supernatural" in the Western sense or to simply point to the fact that no, or very few, areas of life are lived without reference to the supernatural. One would first need to look at the question of what place is given to God the Creator himself. Here one finds very different assessments of ATRs, depending on whether one considers the relationship with a whole range of intermediate spiritual powers as effectively being a mediated relationship with

<sup>14</sup> Kwasi Weridu, "The Moral Foundations of African Culture," in *Philosophy from Africa*, ed. A.P.J. Roux and P. H. Coetzee, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2002), 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Cf. Christoph Auffarth and Hubert Moher, "Religion," *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad, trans. Robert R. Barr (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> B. van den Toren, "Religion," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and Daniel J. Treier (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic; Brazos Press, forthcoming).

the Creator<sup>17</sup> or rather as an expression of a this-worldly focus<sup>18</sup> that eclipses the relationship with God.<sup>19</sup> A further question is how central the relation with religious realities (however understood) was in pre-colonial Africa. There are only sparse data on this issue. The data that do exist, from Ghana for example, do, however, reflect the pragmatic and anthropocentric approach to religion noted above. Jan Platvoet and Hank van Rinsum note, rather polemically:

Religious practice usually consisted in brief bursts of highintensity religious communication, when some calamity – death, illness, or some other misfortune – had struck [...] [The permeation of] other domains of Akan and Ju/'hoan social life [...] varied considerably, per society, per "institute," and per event. [...] And thirdly, if present, it was more often a minor side affair than central and crucial.<sup>20</sup>

# Neo-Pentecostalism as a Contextual Christianity for Modern-Day Africa

In order to assess African neo-Pentecostalism in relation to the processes of secularization in Africa, we will first need to establish its particular character as a contextual Christian movement that is both deeply rooted in Africa's pre-colonial worldview and at the same time closely related to Africa's present, characterized by modernity, urbanization, and globalization. I use the label *neo*-

<sup>17</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief* ([London]: Longmans, 1962).

<sup>18</sup> So p' Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Ferdinando, "Screwtape Revisited: Demonology Western, African and Biblical," in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons, and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. Anthony N.S. Lane (Carlisle; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press; Baker Book House, 1996), 103–32.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Platvoet and Henk J. van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious? Confessing and Contesting an Invention," *Exchange* 32, no. 2 (2003): 144. For further discussion of the thesis see Kehinde Olabimtan, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?" II, A Response to Jan Platvoet & Henk van Rinsum," *Exchange* 32, no. 4 (2003): 322–39; Jan Platvoet and Henk J van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?" III, A Reply to a Rhetorical Response," *Exchange* 37, no. 2 (2008): 156–73.

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*Pentecostalism* to refer to a cluster of movements that may otherwise be referred to simply as African Pentecostalism,<sup>21</sup> new charismatic churches,<sup>22</sup> or simply the charismatic movement.<sup>23</sup>

This cluster of movements is not united by a central organization nor by a precise doctrinal profile but rather by a set of characteristics – not necessarily all equally pronounced – that distinguishes them from the mainline missionary churches in Africa, African Independent Churches (AICs), and classical Pentecostalism. Neo-Pentecostal churches are unlike the missionary churches planted by the modern mission movement in that they are founded by African leaders and their theology is thoroughly contextualized, taking up central elements of African Traditional Religions and worldview.

They share their emphasis on the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit with the classical Pentecostal churches but can be distinguished from these churches not just by their African origins, but also by the different emphases in their spirituality and praxis. Following 1 Corinthians 12, classical Pentecostalism stresses the fact that all those baptized with the Spirit have received gifts with which they can serve the body of Christ. It is anti-hierarchical therefore movement, unlike neoan Pentecostalism which attributes great authority to the founding and current leaders. Classical Pentecostalism privileges the gifts of tongues (glossolalia) and of healing. Healing remains central in neo-Pentecostalism, but the importance of tongues diminishes in comparison to the ministry of deliverance. Neo-Pentecostalism generally puts a great emphasis on prosperity and power, although the movement itself encompasses a range of positions concerning the role of "health and wealth" in the Christian life.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., ibid., 178–80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Cf. Peter Hocken, *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements* (Ashgate, 2009), 29ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Joseph Bosco Bangura, "The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone (1980–2010): A Missio-Historical Analysis in View of African Culture, Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology" (VU University, 2013).

In most of these respects, neo-Pentecostal churches resemble AICs, and the movements are sometimes grouped together.<sup>25</sup> There are, however, crucial differences. AICs tend to give a relatively positive evaluation of African traditions and look for a positive relationship between elements from ATRs and Christian traditions. Though, as we will see, neo-Pentecostalism fits well with a number of crucial characteristics of the traditional African worldview, it radically rejects and condemns ATRs precisely because neo-Pentecostals take the spiritual world so seriously: involvement with traditional African religious practices is condemned as involvement with evil spirits, as blood-covenants by which one is bound to the power of the devil himself.<sup>26</sup> A further difference between neo-Pentecostal churches and AICs relates to their social base: whereas AICs thrive in and appeal to rural communities in which traditional practices are alive, neo-Pentecostal movements belong to the world of the rising urban middle-class and elites <sup>27</sup>

The strength and vitality of the movement is partly the result of this combination of a strong link with Africa's past and worldview, and an equal involvement in the needs of the present. With regards to the African traditional worldview, there are a number of important characteristics that make the neo-Pentecostal message very powerful in this cultural context.<sup>28</sup> In the first place, African neo-Pentecostalism fits with the traditional view of the universe in which spiritual powers are omnipresent. It relates to a world in which nothing happens by chance or simply

<sup>25</sup> So Harvey Gallagher Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA; Wokingham: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Kalu, African Pentecostalism, 67, 75ff.

<sup>27</sup> Bangura, "The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone (1980-2010),"237f.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Ogbu Uke Kalu, "Preserving a Worldview: Pentecostalism in the African Maps of the Universe," *Pneuma* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 110–37; Cephas Omenyo, "Charismatic Churches in Ghana and Contextualization," *Exchange* 31, no. 3 (2002): 252–77; Allan Anderson, "Pentecostal Pneumatology and African Power Concepts: Continuity or Change?," *Missionalia* 19 (1990): 65–74.

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by natural causes, and in which people experience deep need (1) for divination or knowledge of the spiritual causes of their distress, (2) deliverance from the powers of evil that harm and oppress them, and (3) protection against these powers. In the second place, neo-Pentecostalism fits with the traditional holistic understanding of salvation. Mission-churches tended to present salvation as mainly or exclusively spiritual. This simply does not make sense in the African traditional worldview. In ATRs spiritual wholeness is always reflected in physical and social well-being, and it is the experience of social and physical need or disaster that fuels the desire for spiritual well-being. Thirdly, neo-Pentecostalism fits well with the traditional practice of seeing material objects infused with spiritual power, particularly the power to protect and heal. Neo-Pentecostals take the power of amulets and fetishes with utter seriousness - and consequently reject them - but also provide alternatives in the forms of anointing oil, blessed water, calendars, or handkerchiefs. The question of how we evaluate these three characteristics theologically will be addressed in the last section, but for now it is clear that in all of these respects African neo-Pentecostalism is able to build powerful bridges to the African past. Compared to internally secularized forms of Christianity imported by mission churches, neo-Pentecostalism fits extremely well in a world that is highly spiritually charged.

African neo-Pentecostal movements would share most of these characteristics with AICs, but neo-Pentecostal churches are particularly adapted to the needs and expectations of the growing urban populations, particularly the new urban elites.<sup>29</sup> Let me just mention a number of areas that have been noted by others. In the first place, these churches provide new communities when the rural communities are far removed and cannot support the new life in the city. The elders and particularly the leading couple, or the 'daddy' and 'mummy' of the church community, replace the advice and authority of the elders in the village. In the second

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Bangura, "The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone (1980–2010)," 237f.

place, these churches present an image that is highly attractive to the new middle class and elites: churches are modern and well equipped, well represented in modern (social) media, and linked in with global networks. Thirdly, these movements fit well with the desire to be successful in an urban environment. Rather than criticizing or simply neglecting the aspirations of these new middle classes in modern cities, as traditional churches often did, these new movements see them as entirely legitimate and a sign of divine blessing. Furthermore, they promise divine help, protection, and guidance in a world where even modest success can only be achieved by overcoming enormous hurdles. These are places where you can ask for prayer when you are hoping to pass an exam in a corrupt system, when you need a visa from a Western country that continues to add more obstacles to travel, and where you can pray for a job application in a context of nepotism. Fourthly, these are churches that proclaim moral values that are more fitting to urban life than the values of traditional communities and rural churches. A crucial example is the promotion of marriage and the support for the nuclear family in a situation in which the traditional moral models of the extended family no longer provide guidance and support.<sup>30</sup> Finally, African neo-Pentecostalism fits a globalizing world in that it combines a strong African rooting with a sense of belonging to a global scene with similar movements that may relate to similar contexts and needs in other parts of the globe.<sup>31</sup>

# African Neo-Pentecostalism and Secularization

In the last section, we have already encountered a number of hints as to how sub-Saharan neo-Pentecostalism relates to different aspects of secularization. In this final section, I want to look at the complex relationship between these movements and secularization in its multiple expressions. I will look subsequently at the five expressions of secularization distinguished in the first main

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Cf. ibid., 229f.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Cf. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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section of this article. At the same time I will begin to raise a number of theological issues that will definitely need further exploration.

When we consider, in the first place, secularization as desacralization, neo-Pentecostalism should be considered an antisecular movement, but from a Christian theological perspective, this does not necessarily count in its favor. We noted that this aspect of secularization is a consequence of the belief in this world as God's creation and in humankind as created in the image of God. In an important sense, neo-Pentecostalism is therefore a step back from the freedom that human beings have received over and against the mystical powers that used to control their lives. Human beings therefore allow themselves to be mastered by all sorts of spiritual powers and ideas rather than using their God-given authority to master these. Examples of this could be found during the West African Ebola outbreak that began in December 2013 in Guinea and ravaged Liberia and Sierra Leone. A number of neo-Pentecostal preachers declared the outbreak a consequence of spiritual powers and therefore encouraged their followers to look for help in spiritual deliverance rather than in the proper hygiene needed to contain the spread of the disease.<sup>32</sup> It would, however, be wrong to simply fall back on a onedimensional Western understanding of disease and healing. The power of these Pentecostal preachers over the population may well point to the limitation of the purely secular understanding of illness and more theological work needs to be done to develop a holistic understanding of disease and healing in which physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of illness and healing are properlv integrated in a Christian theology and praxis.

In the second place, we need to note that neo-Pentecostalism is a countermovement to secularization in that it does not accept the split between different spheres of life in which religion, or more specifically the Christian faith, is only relevant for certain areas of life, but not for others. The movement is highly relevant

 $<sup>^{32}</sup>$  According to a newsletter from Dr. J. Bosco Bangura from 11 August 2014.

to life in modern urban centers like Lagos, Kinshasa, and Nairobi. It also relates freely to aspects of life with which the mission churches, AICs, and classical Pentecostal churches only interact with difficulty: churches pray for success in work, for the processing of documents in corrupt bureaucratic systems, and produce worship clips around a new Mercedes. God returns to the world of work, money, and success and increasingly to the world of government.

The meaning of Christ's Lordship over all spheres of life is therefore taken seriously. We do need, however, to ask the question whether He is only brought into the marketplace as Protector and Provider and whether His Lordship over the world is sufficiently taken into account. While certain values of the modern neo-liberal world are engaged with critically (for example, in the fight for transparency in government and for marriage fidelity) other values may be embraced too uncritically, such as the system of economic growth at the expense of the environment and, in general, laissez-faire economic policy. Critical dialogue between neo-Pentecostalism and liberation theology might prove fruitful in this respect.

In the third place, the highly modern character of neo-Pentecostalism (albeit a modernity that is clearly "alternative" to the Western model) helps its adherents to give shape to their Christian commitment in a context in which many others experience faith as less relevant or even irrelevant. Thus it counteracts the pressure of individual secularization under the pressures of modernization, which has rendered so many expressions of religion virtually obsolete.

Neo-Pentecostalism seems, in the fourth place, well adapted to contemporary secular society in which a religious worldview can no longer be taken for granted and for which adherence to it is always a choice that needs to be made in the face of alternatives and possible doubt. The movement places stress on personal commitment and continuous re-commitment in common with the broader Evangelical movement in which it was birthed, both originally in the Azusa Street revival and more recently in the evangelical renewal movement in Africa in the 70s and 80s of the last Van den Toren: African Neo-Pentecostalism in the Face of Secularization

century.<sup>33</sup> Neo-Pentecostalism may in this respect have an edge over more traditional evangelicalism through its clever use of social media, which allows it to be constantly close to the fastpaced and transient lives of its adherents in modern urban environments. Nevertheless, it may also have weaknesses in that its stress on immediate blessings and benefits may lead to large followings in the short term, but may not be sufficient when hardship comes and demands patience and endurance. Its emotionally charged meetings fit our contemporary media-savvy world but may not necessarily lead to a commitment that can survive the dreariness of much of our daily lives. Long-term commitment cannot only be based on emotional experiences but needs to be based on the recognition of the truth of the Gospel. In this respect dialogue between neo-Pentecostalism and more traditional forms of evangelicalism could prove fruitful.

The fifth and final expression of secularization in Africa that needs our attention is the anthropocentric and instrumentalist approach to religion, the use of religion for secular purposes. In this respect, neo-Pentecostalism seems at first sight to be entirely in line with the traditional African anthropocentric approach to religion in that it has a strong utilitarian side to it.<sup>34</sup> As many analysts have pointed out, this is part of its appeal.<sup>35</sup> This also then counts as its weakness because a pragmatically chosen god or religion can easily be exchanged for another one – or for secular gods – if these prove to be more effective. Robin Horton argues that this pragmatic use of religion is in fact in line with a modern scientific outlook,<sup>36</sup> and Eloi Messi-Metogo argues that it is precisely this pragmatic trait that makes the African neo-Pentecostal seem vul-

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Bangura, "The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone (1980– 2010)," 31ff.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 238–40; cf. Gabriel Tchonang, L'essor du pentecôtisme dans le monde: une conception utilitariste du salut en Jésus-Christ (Paris: Harmattan, 2009). <sup>35</sup> See footnote 28.

<sup>36</sup> Robin Horton, Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion, and Science (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 161; cf. Platvoet and Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?" (2003), 139.

nerable to secularization.<sup>37</sup> So, does neo-Pentecostalism carry the source of its own destruction in itself?

This is an area where further research and dialogue is needed in order to explore how Christian communities can build a strong faith that provides an alternative to Western models of secularization and secularized Christian commitment and that provide models for "alternative modernities." The image is complex, and it is too easy to conclude that neo-Pentecostalism simply provides a utilitarian religion in line with Africa's past that uses religion in the search for this-worldly blessings. In contrast to Platvoet and Van Rinsum's description of Akan religion, neo-Pentecostalism does not simply provide a religion to which one turns in case of need or crisis.<sup>38</sup> Neither is this the religion of many secular Europeans who turn to their religion for *rites de passage* and in times of illness and personal or corporate calamity. Most adherents of neo-Pentecostal movements are deeply and regularly involved in religious practices. They attend long Sunday services, may go to regular prayer meetings, and keep in touch with their community through modern social media.

Furthermore, it is too easy and one-dimensional to consider these religions entirely anthropocentric. An analysis of worship events and worship songs in these services would show a double focus. Worship often functions like an ellipse, a form with two different centers. One focus is the blessing and deliverance experienced and expected. The other focus is God Himself as the Deliverer. In that sense they are not different from many biblical Psalms that sing the glory of the God of Israel while recounting experiences of deliverance. Neo-Pentecostal worship has many elements that are truly God-directed and other elements that focus strongly on his presence, protection, and deliverance in daily life. More analysis is needed to explore the relationship between the focus on God and the place for human needs. Is God exclusively worshiped because of His provision for us or because of Who He is? Is deliverance the proper reason for worship or, rather, one of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Platvoet and Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious?" (2003), 140ff.

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the principle occasions for it? Is there a place for worship and trust in the face of adversity when a solution is not yet in view and might not be envisaged this side of the grave?

The results will probably be complex and varied when looking at different songs, songwriters, and movements, and even more so when looking at how different worshipers relate to God.

Such an analysis cannot only stop at a description of these different vectors in communal and individual worship. It will also need to ask theological questions that are not only important to neo-Pentecostals, but have accompanied the Christian community in many different contexts. How does one present salvation as properly holistic, touching on all dimensions of human existence, and at the same time as properly theocentric in a manner that respects that the gift of God's love surpasses by far any other gift that He can give us? How do we proclaim a holistic Gospel in a way that it properly relates to felt needs without becoming a crutch for the weak or one more joy in an otherwise self-centered existence? These questions will not just determine the spiritual health of neo-Pentecostalism and its ability provide a properly Christian alternative to secularization in Africa and elsewhere. They are part and parcel of all expressions of Christianity that seek to relate to the needs of a secular or not so secular world and yet know that the love of God is the greatest gift that one can ever receive

# Conclusion and Questions for Further Exploration and Dialogue

The jury is still out on the question of whether neo-Pentecostalism might be the answer to the threat of secular modernity that faces sub-Saharan Africa. Secularization is itself a multifaceted phenomenon and neo-Pentecostalism is far from uniform – each movement relates differently to each of the five aspects developed in this article. Therefore, it is untrue and unhelpful to present this movement as another proof that Africa is incurably religious and will not succumb to the pressures of secularization coming from the West. At the same time, it is too easy and one-sided to write this cluster of movements off as a complete surrender to an instrumentalist approach to religion and therefore ready to give in to the secularizing powers of modernity.

Further analysis and dialogue are needed, not just in order to better understand what is going on, but also to discover what Christian faithfulness means both in Africa and in the North-Atlantic cultural sphere. This article is written in the hope of contributing to intercultural theological dialogue and learning in this area. What lessons might the secular West and older forms of mission Christianity in Africa learn from the neo-Pentecostal ability to link the Christian faith with many aspects of modern life that Christians elsewhere experience as thoroughly secular? And what would a thoroughly Christian worldview in Africa look like? Is it possible to find an alternative to a flat secular worldview that does not fall into a re-sacralization of the world, remembering that this created order is just that: created, rather than divine? And for Christians all over the world: how can we develop – and live out! – a holistic and integrated understanding of salvation that takes seriously the fact that the God of Israel has acted and still acts for our salvation but that does not make our commitment and love for Him merely pragmatically dependent on the immediacy of the blessings we experience?



# Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts: Perceptions of Church Leaders of an Episcopal Diocese in South Sudan

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## Introduction

*Why this research*?<sup>1</sup> The idea for this study is a combination of my own interest and my participation in an IZB- and GZB-funded<sup>2</sup> research project on *Church and Secularization* by Professor Herman Paul at the University of Groningen. In my initial interviews with African Christians and leaders, I found that secularization is mainly seen as a Western problem. At the same time those interviewed did see the need for effective discipleship in the African church in order for the gospel to have more impact in people's lives and in society.

In his positioning paper for the GZB conference "Declining Religious Participation: Secularization and Discipleship in Africa" (Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, December 11– 12, 2014), Herman Paul states that in the West "… [we] begin to realize, not only the conceptual imperialism inherent to applying secularization language to non-Western contexts, but also the *difficulty* of understanding changing patterns of religious life in other terms than secularization." The question now is "… how to interpret declining church membership rates or changing attitudes towards God, church, and religion …" in non-Western contexts. "The point is not to apply Western secularization theory to Afri-

<sup>1</sup> I thank professor Herman Paul for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this report.

<sup>2</sup> Two mission organizations within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands: IZB focuses on mission *in* the Netherlands, while GZB supports the worldwide mission of the church.

can case studies, but rather to examine what *modes of praying*, *listening, thinking, and speaking* about declining religious practice exist in Africa – with the purpose of learning from them and investigating to what extent they can provide Western churches with better (theological) resources for understanding their own situation."<sup>3</sup> This report contributes in a small way to these questions and issues.

*Research question.* I chose the word *discipleship* as the keyword in this research because this is one of the ways in the Diocese of Kajo-Keji (DoKK) to describe the state of the church: the church is seen as healthy when its members are being discipled. When this is not happening, the church is not healthy, even if it has a large number of members. The discourse of secularization is not used to talk about the situation in the diocese. It is mainly used to talk about the decline of Western churches.

This research was done in the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, in the Diocese of Kajo-Keji. The reason is that this church has a vast membership of which a large percentage are inactive members. At the same time we see that the diocesan leadership of the church has made evangelism and discipleship priorities in the mission of the church.<sup>4</sup> Another factor is that this church has experienced very different contexts: its members have lived in exile and they now experience freedom in an independent country. I wanted to know what language diocesan leaders use to describe growing and declining participation in their church. Why are people not discipled, and how can this situation be changed? Are the answers to these questions framed in a different narrative than the one used in Europe about secularization?

<sup>3</sup> Herman Paul, *Declining Religious Participation: Secularization and Discipleship in Africa*, Positioning paper for a workshop at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt, December 11–12, 2014, dated: August 28, 2014; an elaborated version has been published as: Herman Paul, "Secularization in Africa: A Research Desideratum," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 67–75, http://journal.etsc.org.

<sup>4</sup> A resolution of the 2013 Diocesan Synod says: "Synod resolved that *Evangelism and Discipleship* should be promoted and strengthened in all parishes so that more people will come to Christ. (Rom. 10:14–15)." This reflects the priorities of the Diocesan Strategic Plan 2013–2015. Haasnoot: Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts

*Research methodology*. In order to answer the research question, I have looked at relevant strategic documents of the DoKK<sup>5</sup> and interviewed a number of key leaders in the diocese.<sup>6</sup> This research is limited to the Diocese of Kajo-Kejo of the Episcopal Church in South Sudan and Sudan and does not automatically apply to other denominations or to the whole of South Sudan.

*Historical context*. Before I can present my findings I have to say a few things about the historical context of South Sudan as a whole and especially about the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Kajo-Keji.

First about the country. Sudan became independent in 1956. The first Sudanese civil war started in 1955 and lasted seventeen years. Through the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, South Sudan became an "Autonomous Region." When Sudan was declared an Islamic state under Shari'a law in 1983, the second civil war started and this war lasted for twenty-two years until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2005. This agreement lasted until 2011 when South Sudan declared its independence.

Then about the church. It was in 1929 that the first Anglican missionaries reached Kajo-Keji to start mission work in the area. They opened a school, provided basic health care, and shared the gospel. In 1946, Lazaro Tongu was ordained as the first Sudanese clergy in the Kajo-Keji area. Around 1947, the message of the East African Revival came to Kajo-Keji via Uganda. "They challenged some of the traditional beliefs and idol worship. [-] The whole life of many people in the area was transformed. Many

<sup>5</sup> I had access to the Strategic Plans of 2009–2013 and 2013–2015 and also to documents of Diocesan Synods from 2008 onwards.

<sup>6</sup> I have interviewed nine Diocesan leaders of which one by email, the others face-to-face. We used English. A summary of the interview was sent back to them for approval. Because of time constraints, I have not interviewed any of the pastors or church members in the parishes. It is my impression that the outcome of this research will not change much by including them but it would give the research a broader basis.

gave up smoking and alcohol consumption, habits considered sinful in the Revival Movement."<sup>7</sup>

The people of Kajo-Keji speak the Kuku language, one of the dialects in the Bari cluster. The Bible in Bari language was published in 1976. The Diocese of Kajo-Keji was formed in March 1986, and the first bishop enthroned in 1997. The current bishop, the Rt. Rev. Anthony Poggo, was elected and enthroned in 2007. The diocese has eight archdeaconries, sixteen deaneries, fifty-seven parishes, five sub-parishes and more than one hundred preaching centers.<sup>8</sup>

Kajo-Keji County is found in Central Equatoria State and it borders Uganda in the south. It is situated west of the river Nile and it covers 5,760 km<sup>2</sup> of mainly arable land. According to the 2008 census, the population is almost 200,000. It is estimated that 75 percent is associated with the Episcopal Church.

# Findings

### *State of the Church – Past and Present*

How do Diocesan leaders see their church now compared to the situation in the past? The socio-political context has changed dramatically: from living in exile to living in an independent South Sudan. What is the impact of this change for the church when we look at discipleship?

Quantity versus quality. All leaders that were interviewed made a statement like: "We have the numbers [of Christians] but faith doesn't go as deep as it should." Many people get baptized and at confirmation services many are confirmed, "but we don't see the impact of these numbers in the churches." Most of those interviewed say that this is because of a lack of teaching and follow-up. A number of the leaders say that teaching was better in the past. The former generation learned to read and write during catechism class. This took one or two years. Also confirmation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Oliver M. Duku, *The Gospel comes to "Dreamland": A History of the Church in Kajo Keji* (Nairobi, 2014 [reprint]), 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> According to DoKK Strategic Plan, 2013–2015.

class was done more thoroughly than now. Many give the impression that in the past the spiritual health of the church was better. But some don't agree with this: "Also then people were not discipled," and "The teaching was not better then."

*Spiritual versus physical.* What was the emphasis in the mission of the church now and how was it before? All seem to agree: "We are strong in development issues and working on infrastructure [now] but there is a gap in our spiritual development." This also has to do with the context. During the war and exile, "the Word was like a medicine for healing." Now as a church in the newest nation, there is a strong focus on building schools and churches and development. One person says: "Even the Revival Movement is focused more on development and social services now than on spiritual growth."

According to many the spiritual development needs more attention: "The late Bishop Manasseh used to say: I want to build a cathedral in the heart of the people. That is priority number one. The physical buildings will come later."

According to one person, it is not only a matter of context but also that in the past Christian ministry was defined as a spiritual discipline only. Christians were not supposed to do business because that was seen as a worldly matter. Now the church is promoting holistic ministry.

*More versus less committed.* The majority of leaders stated that people in the past were more committed to the faith and church. During the period of exile, there were many fellowships of believers for the revival movement, women, and for youth, and Christians eagerly attended these fellowships. That is not happening anymore. Why? One leader says: "During the exile people shared their suffering and hardship together during these fellowships. They also had more time." He adds: "The challenge for the church now is to see how we can make the gospel relevant in our time when people are busy with their lives and work."

Several leaders also noticed that Christians were more willing in the past to work voluntarily for the church. "They would receive their [spiritual] payment later." That attitude is now much less apparent. Pastors lacking motivation and vision. This point is mentioned often: "We lack teaching in our parishes because some of the clergy have not been trained properly." One person says that 50 percent of the pastors are not living in their parishes. They don't give pastoral care and counseling. They are "Sundaypastors." Someone else says: "Some pastors are not focussed on discipleship because they think that repentance is enough."

According to one person, it is not so much that pastors are not willing as it is that they are not able: "They lack knowledge, vision, training, and good materials. They have not been discipled themselves, so they don't know how to do it."

*Youth is left out.* A number of leaders are concerned that the youth don't get enough attention in our time. During the exile, the youth took an active part in fellowships: "We had good, active choirs then. It changed the lives of youth."

Someone else points out a generational conflict: "The Church has a lot of *don'ts*. Youth don't like that. They want to see things, and put them in practice. The older generation want to keep to traditions. We see few youth in our churches."

### A Disciple and a Church Member

I asked the nine leaders: how do you define a disciple of Jesus, and is there a difference between a disciple a church member? Most people responded with words like "follower" or "learner." One person said: "A disciple is a person who has committed his life to following in the footsteps of Jesus. Day by day he is willing to learn, to practice the faith, and to grow more like Jesus."

A church member is not necessarily a disciple. A member is just there but not active or committed. A commitment to following Jesus is the feature of a disciple. "A member is everyone coming to church. Not committed, baptized, or not, but not bornagain. His lifestyle is the same as the world."

What does that mean in practice? What does a disciple do? Here people mentioned the following: reading Scripture, obeying God, praying, teaching others, witnessing, showing compassion, and promoting unity.

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Ta	Table 1: Negative Influences on Spiritual Growth and Solutions						
	ority Negative Influence	Solution/Strategy for Discipleship					
	# of times						
men	tioned						
6	Poverty, illiteracy, conflicts and	Social services in the community					
	trauma are obstacles to faith and to	(e.g. income generating projects).					
	growth in faith.	Holistic mission.					
5	Lack of teaching in the Church,	Strong and relevant teaching in the					
	e.g. wrong ideas about infant bap-	Church. This needs training of					
	tism (that it is the same as salva-	pastors and lay readers.					
	tion) or the emphasis on outward						
	behavior, like not drinking or be-						
	ing a polygamist.						
5	Traditional practices like rituals	Strong and relevant teaching in the					
	relating to birth, marriage, and	Church. This needs training of					
	funerals. Social pressures make	pastors and lay readers.					
	people forget about Christian faith.						
	Also traditional healers have a						
	negative effect. This can lead to						
	syncretism.						
5	Modern life. Wanting to satisfy the	Strong and relevant teaching in the					
	body and looking for money.	Church, especially for the youth.					
	Searching for better jobs. Doing	Also: weekly discipleship classes					
	business. No time left for religion.	and other fellowship groups.					
	Youth are attracted by disco and						
	modern dancing. For men and						
	boys drinking is a temptation.						
4	Pastors that are not committed to	This needs training of pastors and					
	their ministry or who lack a vision	lay readers. Visionary and servant					
	for discipleship.	leaders are needed.					
4	Discipleship is not seen as im-	Disciplines like reading the Bible,					
	portant.	personally and in groups.					
3	Pastors and lay readers don't know	Good contextualized teaching mate-					
L	what to teach.	rial in the Bari language.					
2	The lifestyle of some of our lead-	This needs training of pastors and					
	ers can be a stumbling block. Lack	lay readers.					
	of servant-leaders in the Church.	-					
2	Different denominations that are	Unity among Christians.					
	criticizing each other don't help.						
	People move from one place to						
	another and don't grow in faith.						
2	People don't know about Christi-	Disciples must multiply themselves.					
	anity.	Evangelism and open air preaching.					
1	Worship not addressing the heart.	Contextualized worship					
1	worship not addressing the healt.	Contextualized worship					

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### Negative Influences on Spiritual Growth and Solutions

What are negative factors, both outside and inside the church, that influence spiritual growth and discipleship? What can be done about this? See table 1.

### The Church in Ten Years

Thinking about the purpose of the Church gives focus to the question of discipleship. What shall the church look like in ten years' time? The following features were mentioned, in order of priority (depending on how many times this feature was mentioned):

*1. The church is missional:* "The purpose of the church is to disciple the nations, to reach the unreached, to teach them, to help them grow and become Christ-like."

2. The church is transformational and holistic: "In situations of conflict, Christians must respond differently than non-Christians. Christians must bring change to the world." And also: "She is able to care for the spiritual and physical needs of its members."

*3. The church is for all people*: "Also youth and men are active in the church."

4. The church is self-funding: "Our church will stand on its own feet. We will be funding major developments ourselves."

### Africa and the West: How Can We Learn from One Another?

Both in Africa and in the West discipleship is getting higher on the agenda. But our contexts are very different: while the church in the West is getting smaller, the church in Africa is growing. Do we have enough in common to learn from each other in this area? Most people said: yes, we can learn from each other. We learn by comparison. Several said: "The West can help us to prevent making the same mistakes they did. The West is a learning ground for us." The West can also learn from Africa: "From our enthusiasm and our vigor to love God" and to see "why we have numerical growth." And: "Africans can also go to the West. Africans can show people in the West the light of the Gospel." One person Haasnoot: Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts

summarized: "We have to work together and share experiences and resources to fulfil the mandate of the Great Commission."

One person felt that our contexts are very different: "We don't know about secularization in that sense."

## Observations

In this section I will summarize my findings and interpret them. Table 2 shows how discipleship and religious participation is labeled in the past and the current context.

Table 2: Discipleship in Changing Contexts				
Area	Church during exile and war	Church after CPA (2005)		
Quantity vs. quality:	Quality of faith was higher	Numerical growth is there but spiritual growth is lacking		
Spiritual vs. physical:	Focus on spiritual matters	Focus on structural develop- ment		
Level of commitment:	More committed to faith	Less committed to faith		
Leadership:	Pastors lack training, seemed more committed	Pastors need more training, not committed to discipleship		
Youth:	More active in fellowships	Church not attractive for youth		

*Disciple as a committed learner*. A disciple is described by all leaders as someone who is committed to follow Jesus and learning from him. A member is someone who is associated with the Church but not active, and in his lifestyle there are few features that are different from non-Christians.

With an estimated 75 percent of Kajo-Keji county belonging to the Episcopal Church, there is a danger that church membership becomes something to be expected when you live in this area. Although the church wants to be a church for all people,<sup>9</sup> it is clear from the definitions above that current diocesan leadership wants *members* to become *disciples*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> This is an ongoing debate between the Revival Movement and Church leadership. While the Revival Movement is focusing on Christians that are born-again, Bishop Anthony Poggo stated that he is "a bishop for all members of the Church."

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*Negative influences on discipleship and strategies*. In table 1 I have tried to link the negative influences on spiritual growth with the proposed solutions given by those interviewed. We note that the socio-economic context, lack of good teaching in the church, traditional culture, and the pressures of modern life are seen as the biggest threats to discipleship. Holistic ministry and the training of church leaders are the most important solutions to reverse these influences.

*The future church.* Asked how the church should look in ten years' time, those interviewed see a church that is strong in teaching, evangelism, giving, and serving. There is optimism and hope that the Church can have an impact in the lives of its members and in society as a whole.

The first two features (missional and transformational) are surprising since the church is now already growing in numbers and is bringing change to communities. Apparently, those interviewed felt that this is not yet enough.

*From Africa to the West.* Most leaders felt that we can dialogue in the area of discipleship. For Africa, the West is a negative example from which it can learn. It is also interesting that a number of leaders talk about sending African missionaries to the West. For them it is clear that the old paradigm of doing mission in the world Church is a thing of the past.

## Conclusions

Based on what is presented above, I have come to the following conclusions:

1. The problems and solutions regarding discipleship development are similar to what we find in other places in Africa and the world.

2. It is interesting that the leaders who were interviewed seem to follow "a narrative of decline": In the former context of exile we were more focussed on spiritual life and more committed to the faith. Although we do grow in numbers now, our commitment and spiritual life is below standard. In his inaugural address, Herman Paul showed how this "master narrative of decline" has been the prominent paradigm for understanding secularization in Europe.<sup>10</sup> This parallel is quite unexpected and striking.

The problem with such a narrative is that it can have "discursive power." The narrative starts to guide the way we think, act, and seek solutions.

3. According to those interviewed, the future church should especially be missional and transformational. Even though there is numerical growth in the Episcopal Church in Kajo-Keji and it has an impact on the development of the county, the interviewed leaders felt that they should do better. As long as the negative influences on spiritual growth are reversed by holistic ministry and leadership training, they feel the church can progress and improve. Apparently the discursive power of the narrative of decline does not reach far into the future.

4. If what is true for the Diocese of Kajo-Keji applies to other contexts in Africa, then these perceptions of growth and decline in religious participation provide a powerful rationale for building more partnerships between African and Western churches and institutions for the purpose of sharing experiences and learning from and with each other in this area.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Herman Paul, Ziektegeschiedenissen, De discursieve macht van secularisatieverhalen (inaugural lecture, University of Groningen, September 24, 2013), http://www.rug.nl/staff/h.j.paul/oratie.pdf.



# Growing in Christ on African Soil: Thoughts on Enhancing the Contextualization of Discipleship Training in Rwanda

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Rwanda is a small landlocked country in Central East Africa. The 1994 genocide in which almost a million people died in one hundred days put Rwanda on the map and has had an ongoing impact on Rwandan society. This paper first gives a brief overview of the history of Rwanda and of the Anglican Church of Rwanda (ACR). It then looks at possible contributors to secularization. The third part highlights two events that impacted the ACR positively but that, despite this, did not bring about change in the training of leaders and disciples in the ACR/Diocese of Kigali. The last part considers the need for better organizing and contextualizing the training of leaders and disciples.

My thesis is that better organized and contextualized training of leaders and disciples will bring about growth in Christ on African soil.<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Background

### Historical Background of Rwanda

Historically three ethnic groups inhabited Rwanda: the Hutu ('Bahutu'), the Tutsi ('Batutsi') and the Twa ('Batwa'). The three groups emerged "through a complex process of immigra-

<sup>1</sup> I am referring to growth for the whole of the Church in all areas the Church is concerned with (i.e. worship, leadership, teaching, preaching, evangelism, pastoral care, and care for the needy).

tion and social and economic differentiation that took place over several centuries."<sup>2</sup> The Rwandan culture is considered to be "remarkably homogenous,"<sup>3</sup> as the Rwandan people share the same language and live more or less interspersed throughout the country.

There are different views regarding Rwanda's history. One view is that in the pre-colonial past the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa lived in harmony, which was only disturbed by the division created by European colonialism. Another view of the history is that shrewd Tutsi rulers exploited the Hutu and made them their servants.<sup>4</sup> During the decades before the genocide, several outbursts of violence against the Tutsi have been recorded that caused millions of people to flee to neighboring countries. Rwandan refugees in 1979 formed the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity (RANU), which eventually became the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

The RPF entered Rwanda in 1990 and began a civil war. The genocide of 1994 in which approximately one million people died was directed primarily against the Tutsi, though many thousands of Hutus were also slaughtered. After the civil war, violence spread beyond Rwanda's boarders to the neighboring countries of the Great Lake Region.<sup>5</sup>

### Historical Background of the Anglican Church of Rwanda

British Anglican missionaries, who entered landlocked Rwanda through the neighboring country Uganda, established the first Rwandan Anglican church in 1922. Right from the start, their mission was holistic. Their three-fold focus was on evangelism,

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Longman, "Culture of Rwanda: History, People, Traditions," 2011, http://www.everyculture.com/NoSa/Rwanda.html (accessed December 3, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> H. R. Scheffer, *Rwanda* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1986), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Catharine Newbury, "Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda," *Africa Today* 45, no. 1 (1998): 10.

<sup>5</sup> See Gerard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford: University Press, 2009). education, and healthcare.<sup>6</sup> The first mission station was founded at Gahini, in northern Rwanda.

In 1930 a revival started in Rwanda that spread throughout the whole of East Africa, leading to the growth of churches but also, according to some writers, to a more inward-looking faith that was mainly concerned with personal salvation and eternal life.<sup>7</sup>

The Anglican Church of what is now the Church Province of Rwanda became indigenous in 1963, shortly after Rwanda's independence. The Province of Rwanda was formed in 1992, only two years before the genocide. The Church went through a deep crisis during and after the genocide.

According to U.S. government statistics, the population is 56.5 percent Roman Catholic, 11.1 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 26 percent other Protestant denominations, 4.6 percent Muslim, and 1.7 percent people of no religious beliefs.<sup>8</sup> A total of over 90 percent is considered to be Christian.

The Province of the Anglican Church of Rwanda (the PEAR, Province de L'Eglise Anglicane du Rwanda) reports that "today the PEAR has grown to 11 Dioceses and over 1 million members (1,000,000 Anglicans). The PEAR has over 450 clergy, 350 parishes, around 2,250 congregations and 2,500 catechists."<sup>9</sup>

# Possible Contributors to a Process of Secularization in Rwanda

When I first arrived in Rwanda, a minority of the population

<sup>6</sup> Wim Groenendijk, Assessment of the Institutional Capacity of the *EER/DK to Implement Integrated Development Programs* (Kigali: Eglise Episcopale au Rwanda/Diocese de Kigali, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> R. Bowen cited in Gérard van 't Spijker, *Redéfinir l'Eglise* (Oegstgeest: Hendrik Kraemer Instituut, 2002). For a more critical view see Marinus Overdulve, *Identité et ethnicité*, (Oegstgeest: Hendrik Kraemer Instituut, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> "International Religious Freedom Report for 2013," United States Department of State, 2013, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222297 (accessed December 3, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> "Dioceses," Province of the Anglican Church of Rwanda, 2014, http:// www.ear-acr.org/index.php/dioceses (accessed December 3, 2014). seemed to attend church service on Sundays.<sup>10</sup> I heard about intellectuals who had left the church. An alternative to church going was apparent in Kigali around 2009 when every Sunday morning a few thousand people would go out to jog and chant songs together. It seemed obvious to me that the role of the Church and religion had diminished in society. The media brought new concepts in opposition to the teachings of the Church, and young Christians started to ask us about those new ideas.

From a Western point of view, I observed signs of a process of secularization and religious decline. I would like to define secularization along the lines Chaves proposes in his article "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority": not as a decline in religion but as a decline in the scope of religious authority. Following the work of Dobbelaere, Chaves describes secularization as "multidimensional" and observes a declining scope of religious authority at three different levels: society, religious organizations, and individuals.<sup>11</sup>

What are the possible contributors to secularization in Rwanda? I did not have the opportunity to travel back to Rwanda to interview Anglican Church leaders; therefore my observations and conclusions will be based on my recollections and reading. To avoid possible biases, I have tried to document my observations as thoroughly as possible. It is good to remember that it is often only in hindsight that a story can be told with a clear understanding of all the contributing factors, and I hope that this is the case with my article.

<sup>10</sup> Figures from a 1986 research in Nairobi show that only a 2.5 percent of the population attended a worship service (quoted in Benno van den Toren, "Secularization in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 1 [2003]: 4), and Kigali city didn't seem to do much better on an average Sunday. Van den Toren states that low church attendance is not necessarily a proof of secularization, but pastoral experience shows "that those who do not attend church also tend to neglect their faith in other areas of life" (Van den Toren, "Secularization in Africa," 8).

<sup>11</sup> Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (1994): 754.

### Loss of Unity

The East African Revival touched the lives of numerous people. The unity of people from different ethnic backgrounds working and praying together was a witness to many.<sup>12</sup> However, over the years the unity disintegrated and the church started to show ethical and theological weaknesses, especially during the time preceding the genocide. Bowen identifies those weaknesses in three areas: ethnical divisions, unjust actions of stateless Tutsi exiles, and over identification with the regime.<sup>13</sup> Though churches and Christian organizations protested in the years before the genocide against the Rwandan regime,<sup>14</sup> there was a general tendency toward a consolidation of the bond between the church and the government.<sup>15</sup> This left the church powerless to participate in the liberation of a people who had become stagnant under the yoke of dictators.<sup>16</sup>

### The Weak Vision for Mission of the Church

The Anglican Church of Rwanda was far less mission-minded than I thought it would be. Preparing myself to go to Rwanda, I read about the East-African Revival, about the many converts,

<sup>12</sup> Osborn states: "Never before . . . have [sic] a group of leaders in revival of different races, cultures and background been so committed to Jesus Christ." Herbert H. Osborn, *The Living Legacy of the East African Revival* (Eastbourne: Apologia, 2006) 54. This union led to "multi-racial, multi-tribal" cooperation: Roger Bowen, "Revivalism and Ethnic Conflict: Questions from Rwanda," *Transformation* 12 (1995): 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gérard van 't Spijker, "The Churches and the Genocide in Rwanda," *Exchange* 26, no. 3 (1997): 246–47.

<sup>15</sup>After the genocide, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches admitted their negative role during the genocide. They state in a common declaration through the All Africa Conference of Churches that "the 1994 genocide showed the failure of a church, which had been the herald of racial ideology since 1959." Cited by Tharcisse Gatwa, "Victims or Guilty? Can the Rwandan Churches Repent and Bear the Burden of the Nation for the 1994 Tragedy?" *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 351 (1999): 349.

<sup>16</sup> Tharcisse Gatwa, "Eglise et Société dans le Context de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs: Redefinir le Role Prophetique de l'Eglise" (Oegstgeest: Hendrik Kraemer Instituut, 2001).

and about how widespread the Revival was. The fire of the Revival, however, was not burning anymore, and there was little focus on mission. Perhaps the vision for mission had faded away when the unity that characterized the Revival disappeared. No doubt the vision for mission was further blurred later by the genocide.

Yusufu Turaki states that "the African Church has a weak vision for mission. Quite a lot is happening in the area of missions, but there is still general weakness in this area. The vision and burden of mission were not properly transferred by the missionaries, nor were they properly received by the African church leaders."<sup>17</sup>The weak vision for mission is not limited to the Rwandan situation as the Church throughout the whole of Africa struggles with it.

### Nepotism, the Akazu

In 2012 I finished my master's studies at the Business School of the York St John University with a dissertation on the promotion of church leaders in the Kigali diocese of the Anglican Church of Rwanda.<sup>18</sup> In my research I interviewed five leaders. Every leader but one said that nepotism formed one of the biggest problems within the Anglican Church. Nepotism in Rwanda is connected to the Rwandan concept of the *Akazu*.

The Akazu (literally, small house) is a small group of loyal people, mainly family members. "The Akazu, was at the center of the circles of power in Rwanda," says Michel Bagaragaza.<sup>19</sup> The Akazu is suspected of having taken a leading role in the organization of the Rwandan genocide. The same principle was visible in the Anglican Church. When some of our pastors only went

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Yusufu Turaki, "Evangelical Missiology from Africa," in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, edited by W. D. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Part of the findings I present in this article were first presented as research at the York St John University.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> "Rwanda: Akazu Intitially a Family Circle," All Africa, 2014, accessed December 3, 2014, http://allafrica.com/stories/200606150015.html.

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through a brief training of two weeks before being ordained,<sup>20</sup>the bishop presented them anyway. They had to be accepted as candidates for ordination because they were directly connected to the ecclesiastical *Akazu*.

*Lack of Contextualized and Focused Training of Church Leaders* Rwanda ideological beliefs were traditionally passed on to new generations during communal meals. Those meals are a practical demonstration of what is called *ubuntu* (humanness), a core value of sub-Saharan Africans. The communal eating was also "an important means of passing ideological beliefs from one generation to another."<sup>21</sup>

The leadership structure in Rwanda in the time before the colonization of the country was quite complex. Rwanda "existed as a centralized monarchy under a succession of Tutsi kings from one clan, who ruled through cattle chiefs, land chiefs, and military chiefs."<sup>22</sup> Village or town level decisions were made by groups of elders or other types of councils, mainly chaired by chiefs, who executed both political and ritual power<sup>23</sup> (see appendix 1).

Three types of agnatic<sup>24</sup> kinship were recognized in Rwan-

<sup>20</sup> The normal requirement of the Diocese of Kigali for ordinants was this two-week training plus having studied and successfully finished a three year-long TEE program.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa: Politics, Ideology and Community* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2005), 33.

<sup>22</sup> "Official Website of the Government of Rwanda: History and Geography," Government of Rwanda, 2011, accessed December 17, 2011, http://www.gov.rw/History-and-Geography.

<sup>23</sup> Societies with a complex structure and a centralized authority, such as Rwanda, appointed chiefs over wider geographic areas. Those chiefs were connected with every family and ultimately with each person in the entire country. Such a paramount chief existed as "ritual and political head"—ritual, because an African ruler he is more than just a secular ruler. Peter J. M. McEwan and Robert B. Sutcliffe, *The Study of Africa* (London: The Camelot Press, 1965), 122.

<sup>24</sup> Agnatic Kingship is a patrilineal principle of inheritance in which the order of succession to the throne goes via the male descendants of the king.

da.<sup>25</sup> The *inzu* (extended family) consisted of a group of people who had one common ancestor.<sup>26</sup> Closely related is the *umuryango* (lineage), an identity consisting of all people or extended families with common ancestry (called *amazu*, plural of *inzu*). The third and biggest kinship group is called the *ubwoko* (clan).<sup>27</sup>

All Rwandan men were trained through an educational system called *itorero ry'igihugu*. The teachers were provided by the royal court and were known as the *intore* (the elect). Belonging to the itorero was a national duty. "The military being rooted in the society demanded that every Rwandan male belongs to a military regiment (*itorero*)." It was moreover an initiation to manhood.<sup>28</sup>

The current Kinyarwanda word for *church* is this very word: *itorero*. It is the place where the King calls the elect to be trained.

### *Ethnic Tensions (Tribalism)*

Another possible aspect of secularization is the tension between the ethnic groups in Rwanda. My research for the master thesis "Leading Innovation and Change"<sup>29</sup> (from the years 2011-2012)

<sup>25</sup> Jacques J. Maquet, "Les Groupes de Parenté du Rwanda," *Journal of the International African Institute* 23, no. 1 (1953): 25; René Bourgeois, *Banyarwanda et Barundi*, vol. 2: *La Coutume* (Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1954), 112–13.

<sup>26</sup> The extended family (inzu/amazu) and the lineages (umuryango/imiryango) are Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. Clans are not ethnically identified, "in fact, the 'clans' could hardly be so called, since there was no memory, even legendary, of an eponymous common ancestor." G. Prunier, *The Rwandan Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst & Co., 1999), 16.

<sup>27</sup> There are twenty different clans in Rwanda and two categories of clans, the *abasangwabutaka* ("those who are considered to be having found their place") and the *abamanuka* ("those who are descending"). See Alexandre Kimenyi, "Clans, Totems, and Taboos in Rwanda," http://kimenyi.com/clans .php (accessed November 2, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Frank K. Rusagara, *Resilience of a Nation: A History of the Military in Rwanda*, (Kigali: Fountain Publishers Rwanda, 2009), 49.

<sup>29</sup> Adriaan Verwijs, Toward a Visionary Church Organization: A Study on Promotion and Change in the Anglican Church of Rwanda, Diocese Kigali revealed a significant difference between Kigali and rural areas by looking at the background of the deacons and pastors and at their formal education. While over 90 percent of the church leaders in rural areas are Hutu,<sup>30</sup> the majority of church leaders in Kigali City are Tutsi.

Not one of the pastors and deacons of Kigali had formerly worked as a catechist, while all of them finished secondary school and over 50 percent hold certificates of higher education. In the rural areas, most pastors began their careers as catechists before being promoted to being pastors. Most of them only partially completed primary education. Not one of the catechists or pastors from the rural areas was promoted to be a city pastor.<sup>31</sup> Pastors and church leaders experience those differences, and all Christians must be aware of those tensions and of the injustice of the inequality.

# Distance between the Realities of Rural Areas and the Kigali City Area

The last contributor to secularization to be considered here is the distance between the realities of the rural areas and the Kigali City area. The physical district of the Diocese of Kigali is bigger than Kigali City itself. A huge part of the diocese is rural, and most of the Christians have a premodern background. Many of the people living in the rural area are still illiterate and live in extreme poverty.<sup>32</sup>The people in the city live in a fast developing urban context with high speed internet, and many of them enjoy the benefits of an economic growth of almost 10 percent per year.<sup>33</sup> The turnover of the Kigali Anglican Cathedral is many times the turnover of the Anglican churches in the rural area of

<sup>(</sup>Dissertation, Business School York, St John University, 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> "International Day for the Eradication of Poverty," United Nations, 2011, http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/poverty/ (accessed March 26, 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> "Rwanda GDP: Real Growth Rate," Index Mundi, 2011 http://www .indexmundi.com/rwanda/gdp\_real\_growth\_rate.html (accessed December 3, 2014).

the Diocese of Kigali. Many young Christians coming from rural areas study at the universities in Kigali City. In doing so, they move from a premodern culture where faith is dominant to an educational environment where a Western postmodern worldview is dominant. The gap between the two worlds is huge. The urban pastors do not have the experience or knowledge of their students, so they cannot adequately answer their questions.

# Two Events that Impacted the Church

# GAFCON

From the Rwandan perspective, meetings of the Anglican worldwide community are traditionally dominated by a Western, liberal agenda. The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) held in Jerusalem in 2008 was a response to this problem. It addressed questions about the rise of secularism in the churches, human sexuality, and poverty. Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini of Rwanda was one of the main contributors to GAFCON. Dependency on the West and the influence of Western Theology is missing on my list of possible contributors to secularization in Rwanda, for by participating to this conference the ACR turned its back on the West.<sup>34</sup>GAFCON represented two-thirds of world Anglicanism, with many participants from the so-called Global South.<sup>35</sup> Through this event, Rwanda lost the contributions of many of its faithful supporters in the West.

GAFCON released a statement called the Jerusalem Declaration, which was introduced as follows: "We express our loyalty as disciples to the King of kings, the Lord Jesus. We joyfully embrace his command to proclaim the reality of his Kingdom [...]. The Gospel of the Kingdom is the good news of salvation, liberation and transformation for all. In light of the above, we agree to chart a way forward together that promotes and protects the bibli-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> "Jerusalem 2008," GAFCON, 2008, http://gafcon.org/conferences/ jerusalem-2008 (accessed December 8, 2014).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> D. Holloway, "The Future and the Jerusalem Statement," *GAFCON*, 2008, http://stephensizer.blogspot.com/2008/08/gafcon-future-and-jerusalem-statement.html (accessed December 8, 2014).

cal gospel and mission to the world."<sup>36</sup> The Jerusalem Declaration presents a traditional view of the Church and its mission, confessing the Triune God, building on the Holy Scriptures, and upholding the Ecumenical Councils. The thirteenth statement uses strong language: "We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed. We pray for them and call on them to repent and return to the Lord."<sup>37</sup>

The Jerusalem Declaration was presented by Archbishop Kolini to the pastors of the ACR as something of a triumph for the churches of the Global South. He saw these younger, poorer churches as taking a stand against the older, wealthier churches of the West by rejecting the authority of those who deny orthodoxy and orthopraxy. That is too much of a tribute in my view, as part of the support for GAFCON came from conservative churches in the West. However, the fact that the ACR stopped accepting support from liberal churches and expressed its own theological beliefs in the Jerusalem Declaration reflects its growing self-esteem and independence.

### Purpose Driven

Archbishop Kolini announced in a meeting of the Diocesan Synod in November 2007 that before his retirement in December 2010 he was planning to organize a convention of the entire Diocese of Kigali. He wanted us to focus on three things during three consecutive years: discipleship in 2008, evangelism in 2009, and fellowship and the family in 2010.

The 2009 evangelistic campaign was to be a convention of the whole Diocese of Kigali. The vision<sup>38</sup> of the convention was "to

<sup>36</sup> "The Complete Jerusalem Statement," Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, 2008, http://fca.net/resources/the-complete-jerusalem-statement (accessed December 8, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> The Kinyarwanda terms differ from the English terminology we are used to. Icyerecyezo is 'that was is revealed" (vision). Ikigenderewe can be translated as "how to go about it" (mission). Objectives in Kinyarwanda is rendered by "ibyo twifuza gukora" (the things we want to do).

help people to turn to the Cross."<sup>39</sup>The convention, Kolinisaid through a communication of the Department of Mission and Training, "had to be understood in the light of the crisis in the worldwide Anglican Church,"<sup>40</sup>referring to the declining role of Scripture and what GAFCON calls "the secularization of the Anglican Church."<sup>41</sup>

The Diocese decided that the convention had to have as its main objective the transformation of the Church to being Purpose Driven. Following the ideas of Rick Warren,<sup>42</sup> the church would now focus on five major goals to fulfill its mission: worship, fellowship, discipleship (or the training of the laity), evangelism, and care for the needy. Some churches added a sixth topic, care for those who are working in the Church either voluntarily or as employees.<sup>43</sup>

Personally, I was very critical of the church using Warren's book as a guideline for the convention and beyond. My feeling was that it lacked depth and that following it would further degrade the already weak theology of the ACR. Pastor Antoine Rutayisire and I tried to determine how best to go about organizing the convention and the training. Rutayisire, who directed the office of the African Evangelistic Enterprise before becoming a pastor, said that Billy Graham always asked his organizing team to prepare a year in advanced of each crusade and to focus especially on prayer. The Department of Mission and Evangelism

<sup>39</sup> P.D. Maniriho. and Emmanuel K. Kayijuka, *EAR D/K Convention 2009* meetings report summary: Inama zakozwe kuri iyi tariki ya 03/01/09 (Kigali: EAR, 2009), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Emmanuel Nkubito and Adriaan Verwijs, "Letter to the pastors," Kigali, EAR, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Wagner, "Anglicans Gather in J'lem to Protest Secularization", 2008, accessed March 22, 2015, http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Anglicansgather-in-Jlem-to-protest-secularization.

<sup>42</sup> Rick Warren, "About the Book," 2011, http://www.purposedrivenlife .com/en-US/AboutUs/AboutTheBook.html (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Antoine Rutayisire, *Action Plan St Etienne 2009* (Kigali: EAR, 2008). P.D. Maniriho. and Emmanuel K. Kayijuka, *EAR D/K Convention 2009 meetings report summary: Inama zakozwe kuri iyi tariki ya 03/01/09* (Kigali: EAR, 2009). organized a 24/7 prayer chain.

Archbishop Kolini called a meeting in May 2010 to evaluate the impact of the 2009 convention within the four archdeaconries in our diocese (Remera, Bugesera, Ruhanga, and Kigali).<sup>44</sup> We concluded that the convention was highly effective. We had received around one thousand five hundred new Christians, more than one thousand people who had left our Church came back to attend the services, and over two hundred people were baptized in one local church alone (Ruhanga).Also, a total of approximately five hundred cell groups emerged under the guidance of the Department of Mission in 2009, a number that increased to 774 groups in 2010.<sup>45</sup> An unexpected positive effect of the small groups on the church and society was the spontaneous emerging focus on unity and reconciliation.<sup>46</sup> The people started to work together on long-term projects and to help one another when necessary.<sup>47</sup>

The evaluation mentions the impact of reconciliation through the groups, especially on the youth. A significant part of the cell groups function as agents of change in their local areas.<sup>48</sup> My

<sup>44</sup> The following topics were used to measure the impact of the convention (Mukiza, *Raporo*): 1. Is the local Church focused on evangelism which changes people to become real disciples of Christ? Does the Church build unity and peace amongst all Christians and their neighbors? 2. Does the Church fight poverty, especially through the small groups? Do Church members pray for each other's needs? 3. Does the Church focus on good leadership?

<sup>45</sup> Joaz Mukiza, and John Paul Ruzindana, *Raporo yamahugurwa yakorewe bamwe mubayobozi bayobora amatorero shingiro muri za paruwasi* (Kigali: ACR, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> In Kinyarwanda: *isanamutima*, the healing of the heart.

<sup>47</sup> The major impact of the convention in the area of development through home groups was probably in the one of the poorest areas of our Diocese, the archdeaconry of Bugesera. The women were especially involved in development programs through buying life stock together. A total of 2,498 families were impacted positively through the Bugesera development program (Mukiza, *Inama*).

<sup>48</sup> Pastor Dorocella Mukamurenzi stated in December 2010 that a significant part of the cell groups in her archdeaconry function as agents of change in their local areas. Part of the secret of their success must be the fact that the church reaches the people where they are and is present in their homes and question became: what is so good about Warren's book? When I try to answer this question, I think that it is the simplicity of Warren's approach. Warren adopts Jesus' words from the Great Commandment ("Love the Lord your God" and "Love our neighbor as yourself" [Matt. 22: 37, 39]) and from the Great Commission ("go and make disciples of all nations" [Matt. 28:19]). This connects directly to the words of Jesus in Matthew 4: 23 (on preaching, teaching and healing) and to the visible structures the first Anglican missionaries raised (churches, schools, and a hospital). The focus on prayer is consistent with the Rwandan and African mindset and thinking.<sup>49</sup>

### Contextualized and Confused Training

The training of leaders and disciples changed after GAFCON and the introduction of the Purpose Driven principles. This is especially true of the Kigali Anglican Theological College (KATC) and in the training of pastors and leaders in the Anglican Church of Rwanda, specifically in the Diocese of Kigali.

*Contextualized training*. Anglican Church leaders normally study theology at the KATC, which provides a three-year study program in English. The program is roughly modeled after Western theological institutions. The professors, who are either Rwandan or at least resident in Rwanda, try to contextualize the content of the courses. After GAFCON another model was introduced. Students study at KATC one topic for a month and then return to their ministries to apply what they had learned and to write a paper based on theory and practice. The study is mainly conducted in the local language, Kinyarwanda. Pastors and leaders also re-

lives and is familiar with their joys and pains; willing not only to pray but also to give a helping hand. Joaz Mukiza, *Inama y'Ivugabutumwa n'Iterambere* (Kigali: EAR, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Yusufu Turaki says that the theory and practice of Christian Missions in Africa has revolved mainly around five major areas: 1) the ministry of teaching; 2) the ministry of preaching; 3) the ministry of healing; 4) the ministry of prayer, and 5) the ministry of recruiting and sending missionaries. The key text he uses is Matthew 9: 35–38 (Turaki, "Evangelical Missiology from Africa," 271). We in Rwanda added the Great Commandment to those areas.

ceive training based on the different purposes proposed by Warren, the PEAR produces books to be used in the cell groups.

*Confused training.* Having said that, much of the teaching of the church didn't change and was not aligned to GAFCON or the Purpose Driven principles. It remained what I would call a "confused training."

The TEE program was first developed in the Congo by missionaries in the eighties. It was later translated into Kinyarwanda and put into use in Rwanda years before the genocide. Deacons and pastors need to go through TEE before they start the process of preparing for ordination. The training for ordination itself is very brief, only two weeks, and it is mainly concerned with the practicalities of performing church services.

Every year dozens of people from abroad come to train the pastors. Most of them do not know and are not interested in the context and history of Rwanda, and many of them are not even trained in the topics they teach. The main part of the theological training is connected neither to the current history of Rwanda, nor to traditional Rwandan training methods, nor to GAFCON and the Purpose Driven principles, nor to the reality of modern Rwanda. I believe this has an alienating effect on the trainees. Church leaders did not seem to enjoy the training, and the department hardly ever received positive feedback on it. This confirms my belief that it is a "confused training."

# Focusing and Contextualizing the Training: A Quest for Organizational Change

The changes the ACR went through were partly reactive. GAFCON was organized as an answer to the Global South's concerns about the increasing secularization of the thoughts and practices of the worldwide Anglican Community. Beginning in 2007, the ACR has been going through a period of change that it did not anticipate. It was the events of this period within the Anglican Community that led the ACR to participate in GAFCON.

The change was not thought through beforehand, which means that the church has been moving forward without knowing

exactly where it is headed. The confusion caused by uncoordinated change is visible in the teaching in the ACR. The training of leaders and disciples is not well organized or truly contextualized, and much of the program is not connected to GAFCON and the Purpose Driven principles.

In order to better organize and contextualize the training of leaders and improve discipleship, the ACR programs needs to be more intentional. Organizational change can happen in different ways, but it is usually best when it is based on careful deliberation and thoughtful leadership. This has unfortunately not been fully the case in the past, but the recent changes at KATC indicate a move towards a more contextualized training of church leaders (see above).

The leaders of the ACR focus mainly on traditional leadership models, which are traditionally both task-oriented and relational.<sup>50</sup> Yukl developed a tri-dimensional leadership model in which change and innovation are added as a separate category.<sup>51</sup>In this model, the leader is an agent of change. Yukl's stages of directing change (change, adaptation, and innovation) correspond with the classic stages of change Kurt Lewis proposed in 1947: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing.<sup>52</sup>

The leader guides the organization from situation A to B and has to understand the whole context: the people who are involved, the situation the organization is in, the process of change, and the desired results.<sup>53</sup> Understanding the context is part of the

<sup>50</sup> Francisco Gil, Ramón Rico, Carlos M. Alcover, and Angel Barrasa, "Change-oriented leadership, satisfaction and performance in work groups, "Journal of Managerial Psychology 20, no. 3–4 (2005): 313.

<sup>51</sup> Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010), 70.

<sup>52</sup> T. Kippenberger, "Planned Change: Kurt Lewin's legacy," *Antidote* 3, no. 4 (1998): 10–12.

<sup>53</sup> For further elaboration see Scott Isaksen and Joe Tidd, *Meeting the Innovation Challenge: Leadership for Transformation and Growth* (Chichester: The Atrium, 2006), 18. According to Isaksen and Tidd, change viewed from a systematic point of view includes four elements:

People Understanding the people involved

Context Understanding the situation

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process of organizational change as culture plays a major role in organizations and in processes of innovation and change. Scholars in the field of organization can be helpful in applying organizational theory to particular cultures. Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others."<sup>54</sup> For Schein, "culture is a pattern of shared tacit assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration."55 Schein introduced a model based on this definition that is a helpful tool for researchers as it focuses on intrinsic artifacts, values, and basic assumptions of the organizational culture and can help expose the cultural idiosyncrasies of the organization. Schein's model helps the researcher to see connections between the organizational and the national culture.<sup>56</sup> Broadening the focus and connecting the dots between the organizational and the national culture can be helpful.

Leading a process that will bring innovation and change to a culture such as Rwanda's must include considering the core values of both the society and the organization. The focus, however, can be on the organizational level. This is because the corporate culture—unlike the national one—can be influenced by the leadership of the church.

My contribution is essentially to call for organizational change. The Bible uses several metaphors to describe the Church. One of them is the metaphor of the body with its various members each having their own function and task. The different members function together to grow the Church so that in every way it will be Christ like (Eph. 4:15) and built up in love (Eph. 4:16).

Method Understanding the process

Outcome Understanding the desired results.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software for the Mind* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), chapter 1, Kindle edition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), chapter 2, Kindle edition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 299, Kindle edition.

The Church functions as an organism in which each part plays a unique role. Some of the members are given to the Church to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ in order to mature in manhood (Eph. 4:11). My fear is that uncoordinated and unfocused teaching will lead to the opposite of Paul's vision, to "people who are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge gives an overview of what a learning organization is, providing an elaborate theoretical and practical framework. According to Senge, learning happens through the experience of all the members of the organization. In more biblical language, this might be expressed as the whole body being involved in the learning process, with each member contributing its unique gift. This is the vision the church in Rwanda should embrace.

The ACR will have to change to truly connect to the culture, grow in maturity, and produce a theology (a missiology, ecclesiology, and polity) that fits the culture. In short, the church will have to organize and contextualize its leadership and discipleship training to bring about growth in Christ on African soil.

In their book on organizational renewal and change, *Built to last*, Collins and Porras distinguish between time-telling and clock-building.<sup>57</sup> Time telling is based on the myths of the "great idea" or "the charismatic leader" and at best produces ephemeral results. In contrast, a clock-building organization is founded on a deep belief in its core values. "The crucial variable is . . . how deeply the company believes its ideology and how consistently it lives, breathes, and expresses it in all that it does."<sup>58</sup>Although they agree that effective change has to take into consideration the shifting issues of contextualization, they also insist that leaders should never lose sight of their core values. This is an important message for the Church, which has practical implications for how it might proceed. For example, the ACR might begin a process of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: Harper Business Essentials, 2002), chapter 9, Kindle edition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid., chapter 2.

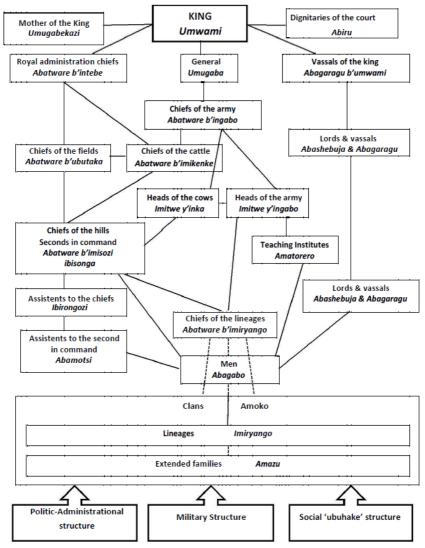
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change by first embracing the Jerusalem Declaration.

### Conclusion

Only African churches that are rooted in their native soil will be able effectively to train leaders and disciple followers of Jesus Christ. And only a church that has a well-designed and wellcoordinated training program will be able to communicate effectively its core values. To these ends, further research should be done by the ACR, the churches in Africa, GZB, and sister churches and Christian organizations throughout the world. Research should be specifically focused on the guided organizational change needed to help the church contextualize its message. This is essential if the Rwandan church and the churches of Africa in general are to slow down and even reverse the process of secularization.

# Appendix 1: Overview of the Leadership Structure in the Rwandan Pre-Colonial Society



Based on: Government of Rwanda, "Official Website of the Government of Rwanda"; McEwan and Sutcliff, *The Study of Africa*; Maquet, "Les Groupes de Parenté du Rwanda"; and mainly Cornelis M. Overdulve, *Rwanda: Volk met een geschiedenis*, Allerwegen 25, no. 15 (Kampen, Kok: 1994), 16. See Verwijs, *Toward a Visionary Church Organization*, 25.



## Secularization and Discipleship in Africa: Conclusions and Recommendations

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Africa has for long been considered a most religious and possibly "notoriously religious"<sup>1</sup> or even "incurably religious"<sup>2</sup> continent. Yet, some research from African cities and reports from church leaders indicate that secularization also presents a potential or very real challenge to the Church on this continent. Christian communities not only face the challenges of African Traditional Religions and Islam, but also of modernity with its secularizing influence.

This article presents the conclusions and recommendations for further research that resulted from the GZB<sup>3</sup> consultation "Declining Religious Participation: Secularization and Discipleship in Africa," which was held at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo on December 11–12, 2014.<sup>4</sup> Our consultation, consisting

<sup>1</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 235.

<sup>3</sup> GZB is the Dutch acronym for the Reformed Mission League, an agency that reports to the synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (http://www.gzb.nl).

<sup>4</sup> This conference was an initiative of Herman Paul, GZB/IZB professor of secularization studies at the University of Groningen, whose positioning paper was discussed in absentia. For an elaborated version of this paper, see: Herman Paul, "Secularization in Africa: A Research Desideratum," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 67–75, http://journal.etsc.org. The following persons presented during the consultation: Atef M. Gendy (welcome), Jacob Haasnoot, Abel Ngarsoulede, Sherif Salah, Amir Sarwat, Dick Seed, Benno van den

of current and former theological educators from different parts of Africa, explored what the influence of secularization and the related declining religious participation might mean for Christian discipleship in Africa and how theological education and ministerial training should respond to this. Together we arrived at the following considerations, initial conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

### Secularization and Declining Religious Participation

First of all, we needed to address the question of whether the term *secularization* is actually appropriate to describe these African processes or whether it is a Western notion that cannot be validly applied to this continent. At the very least, in exploring secularization in Africa, we should not simply import Western notions of secularization.

Moreover, the definition of secularization presupposes an understanding of religion. The Western notion of secularization associates religion with the supernatural and sees a strong supernatural interest in traditional and contemporary Africa. Westerners, therefore, tend to perceive Africa as profoundly religious, but this aspect of African Traditional Religion simply means that traditional Africans have a multi-layered understanding of the created order, not necessarily that they give a greater place to the Creator.

Africa provides examples that modernity does not automatically lead to secularization, as the older secularization thesis argued. Africa shows that there are "multiple modernities," such as modern expressions of otherwise "conservative Islam" or various Neo-Pentecostalisms. Yet, in many areas, even in more rural areas of South Sudan, modernity is seen as a challenge to Christian

Toren (public lecture and conclusions), Adriaan Verwijs, and Willem J. de Wit (short paper and chair). We thank GZB (especially Iwan Dekker) for making this conference possible, ETSC for hosting this conference, and Michael Parker as the editor-in-chief of the *Cairo Journal of Theology* for his willingness to publish the papers that were submitted for publication.

commitment that is distinguished from and added to the challenge of African Traditional Religion.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas Christians and others in the West tell stories of how secularization has affected Christianity and the church, there is currently very little "secularization discourse" happening in Africa, and we are not aware of dominant "secularization stories" that need to be critically analyzed. In this sense the situation is different from Europe where stories of secularization have become so dominant that the stories themselves have enforced the secularization process.<sup>6</sup> In Africa the risk is not that we might inadvertently contribute to secularization by telling unwarranted secularization stories, but rather that secularization processes remain hidden because they are not expected in such a religious continent or because secularization takes different forms than those common in the West.

A potential secularization story for Africa might go like this: before colonization Africa was a deeply religious continent in which religion permeated all aspects of life. The arrival of modernity planted the seeds of secularization and Christianity was an important contributor to this process (a) through its worldview, (b) through its contribution to the development of religious pluralism and therefore to the diminishing grip of any one authoritative religious system on life and society, and (c) through the importation of Western education, hospitals and the like.<sup>7</sup> This secularization story should be critically evaluated: was pre-colonial Africa as deeply and comprehensively religious as this story suggests?<sup>8</sup> Can we conclude that Africa is now much more secular than before, or is the picture more nuanced?

<sup>5</sup> See especially Jacob Haasnoot, "Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts: Perceptions of Church Leaders of an Episcopal Diocese in South Sudan," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 121–31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Herman Paul, "Secularization in Africa" and his other publications on this topic.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Jan Platvoet and Henk J. van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious? Confessing and Contesting an Invention," *Exchange* 32, no. 2 (2003): 123–53.

For example, church leaders of South Sudan tell a story of spiritual decline after the end of the civil wars even while reporting numerical growth in the same period.<sup>9</sup> This may tell us that "stories of decline" have a certain attraction, which may need to be replaced by alternative stories, possibly stories in terms of new challenges and new opportunities.

As for secularization and African Traditional Religion, the notion that traditional Africa is deeply and "incurably" religious may need to be examined. African traditional society and religion have a number of characteristics that can actually promote secularization such as (a) the focus of African Traditional Religions on immediate and this-worldly health and blessing, (b) the anthropocentric and instrumentalist attitude toward religion, and (c) the remoteness of the creator God.<sup>10</sup>

A further point of caution is that regional differences should be taken into account when speaking about secularization in Africa. There are important differences between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa and between rural and urbanized areas, with the Republic of South Africa being a unique case. One generalized story about secularization in Africa may not work.

For example, in the wake of the Arab Spring and the tensions around the Morsi government, Egypt has seen a sudden surge in interest in atheism.<sup>11</sup> It is not clear yet whether this is incidental to a specific historic context or whether it might also happen elsewhere in Africa. In Rwanda higher education has a secularizing influence,<sup>12</sup> which may also be the case in other parts of Africa, but this cannot simply be assumed.

<sup>9</sup> See Jacob Haasnoot, "Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts."

<sup>10</sup> Eloi Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris; Yaoundé, Cameroun: Karthala; Presses de l'UCAC, 1997). See also Dick Seed, "Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 76–87.

<sup>11</sup> Amir Sarwat addressed this issue during the conference.

<sup>12</sup> See Adriaan Verwijs, "Growing in Christ on African Soil: Thoughts on Enhancing the Contextualization of Discipleship Training in Rwanda," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 132–51, http://journal.etsc.org.

There is very limited field research on the precise extent of secularization in Africa. For the last two decades, we could find research on sub-Saharan Africa only for Yorubaland,<sup>13</sup> Nairobi,<sup>14</sup> and N'djamena.<sup>15</sup> These incidental data give evidence of the reality of certain forms of secularization and religious indifference. Yet, because there is no detailed information about religious participation in Africa's distant or recent past and because the research has not been done over a stretch of time, they cannot prove a process of increasing secularization and/or religious indifference.

Even though, in the light of the above, the exact extent and possible increase of secularization in Africa cannot be determined, a number of forms in which secularizations occurs have become apparent that constitute opportunities and/or challenges for Christian discipleship:<sup>16</sup> (a) secularization as the desacralization of nature and political authority; (b) secularization as the diminishing religious participation of individuals and communities; (c) secularization as the withdrawal of different aspects of life and society from the influence of religion; (d) secularization as the changing authority of religion over individuals in which both the adherence to the religion and the shape of one's religious life increasingly becomes an issue of personal choice and commitment;<sup>17</sup> and (e) secularization as the use of religious means for secular goals.

The last point may well be a form of secularization that is stronger in Africa than elsewhere because it builds on the anthropocentric and instrumentalist character of African Traditional

<sup>13</sup> Abiola T. Dopanu, "Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland," *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 3 (n.d.): 139–56.

<sup>14</sup> Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi City (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Abel Ngarsoulede, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique Subsaharienne : Une étude de cas de N'Djamena en République du Tchad" (Doctoral thesis, Faculté de Théologique Evangélique de Bangui, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Bernard van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2003): 3–30.

<sup>17</sup> Ngarsoulede, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique Subsaharienne."

Religions. Christian practices themselves may be secularized because they are used to obtain immanent and this-worldly blessings, healing, and protection, rather than with a focus on God and eternity. Westerners may not immediately perceive the "secularization" that such practices have undergone because they may still look very "supernatural."

## Discipleship and Theological Education

The notion of secularization is relevant for the discussion of discipleship in Africa. Whereas problems of Christian commitment and discipleship in sub-Saharan Africa are often discussed in terms of syncretism with traditional African religious practices, the concept of secularization is at times a better lens through which to see the issue. It allows the researcher to explore the specific challenges for evangelization and discipleship that are related not to the influence and appeal of African Traditional Religions but rather to that of secular modernity.

If we want to formulate a meaningful Christian response to secularization, we should face the challenge of how this concept relates to unavoidable processes such as urbanization, pluralization, and the differentiation of society. This in turn will help distinguish between processes that need to be resisted and that demand faithfulness to what discipleship has always meant and processes that cannot be resisted and that demand new forms of discipleship in changing contexts.

Discipleship itself is a biblical calling, but it is at the same time a popular buzzword in some Western and African churches. The word is itself is not a solution for every ill. We need to reflect on what discipleship should look like and what aspects of discipleship are essential in forming answers to secularization and "nominal Christianity." We believe that it should have at least the following characteristics:

Discipleship means living in freedom. In answer to the tendency to search for freedom outside Christianity and the church in a secularly conceived autonomy, persons should be invited to find freedom at the core of the Christian faith, in Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Models of discipleship and discipleship training should be contextually appropriate.<sup>19</sup> For example, Christian discipleship in urban, plural, and fast moving contexts demands a different type of commitment than in more homogenous and stable societies. This commitment also needs regular maintenance and renewal in the face of sometimes hostile, often simply indifferent, but always changing environments. Moreover, discipleship should be contagious: it is not only about learning to follow Jesus but also about inviting others to join the circle.<sup>20</sup>

Discipleship should be understood and practiced in a holistic manner that touches all areas of life: in this way it reflects God's interest in the totality of life and responds to the traditional African and secular interest in immediate and this-worldly blessing. At the same time, discipleship should remain thoroughly theocentric and Christocentric, so that the attention on earthly blessings will not turn Christianity in an anthropocentric and instrumentalist religion, which potentially leads to secularization.

As for theological education, an experience of alienation from a childlike and unquestionable faith is a rather common and sometimes necessary experience of critical theological study and is in a manner also an expression of secularization. For students who find themselves in this situation, theological formation (that is, discipleship training) should help them (re)gain a post-critical joyful commitment to the triune God.

Theological studies should prepare students (a) to engage in attractive and relevant forms of proclamation and discipleship training, (b) to adopt and offer models of Christian leadership that are able to induce organizational and personal change and that

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Willem J. de Wit's presentation on secularization and theological education during the conference and his On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and an Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011), esp. 9, 162, 173, http://willemjdewit.com/living-god. <sup>19</sup> See Verwijs, "Growing in Christ on African Soil."

<sup>20</sup> See ibid.

themselves reflect the values of Christian discipleship, and (c) to engage positively and attractively with people who are influenced by secular thought or who are one-sidedly busy with or submerged in "secular" activities and sectors of society. Contextual theological training should therefore not only deal with Africa's pre-Christian traditions. The attention paid by theological education to African tradition should be placed in the wider spectrum of the different influences that shape Africa today.

Discipleship is taught and caught through concrete examples and not only through abstract ideas. Students should not only learn general models of discipleship that they can implement but should also learn to explore what faithful discipleship might look like in their specific contexts.

### Possibilities and Needs for Further Research

In light of the previous conclusions and the papers presented during the conference, we have identified the following research questions. Some of these questions could be researched for a master thesis, others could be elaborated in papers for a follow-up conference, and still others could be the object of extensive field research.

First, the question of definition deserves further attention: what is a workable definition of secularization in Africa, both for Muslim majority countries and other African countries?

Second, the causes and spread of secularization need further research. Questions to consider include the following: 1. What are the inherent factors in African Traditional Religions that lead to secularization?<sup>21</sup> 2. What is the secularizing influence of urbanization? 3. What is the secularizing influence of the media, including social media? 4. What is the secularizing influence of education?<sup>22</sup> What is the influence of secularization among university students? 5. What do students (e.g., in Egypt) who read Western atheist authors make of them and how are they influence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Cf. Abel Ngarsoulede, "Sociological and Theological Perspectives on Secularization in Africa," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 2 (2015): 88–102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Cf. Seed, "Western Secularism, African Worldviews, and the Church."

enced by them? 6. What is the secularizing influence of Western theology and mission practices?

Third, the discipleship and leadership programs of the churches in Africa deserve further study and evaluation in order to gage their effectiveness in addressing secularization and other related matters. For example: 1. What does the church currently do about the secularizing influence of urbanization and is it effective? 2. Can we compare some existing *discipleship* programs in terms of their biblical faithfulness, contextual relevance, and general effectiveness? <sup>23</sup>

Finally, some more normative theological questions ask for deeper reflection: 1. What should Christian commitment, faithfulness, and discipleship in contemporary Africa look like? 2. How can God be present in the business of everyday life? How should we think of God's presence and activity in the created order, and is there possibly a via media between Western secularization and the (re-)sacralization of the world as seen, for example, in African Independent Churches and African Neo-Pentecostalisms? 3. What learn from Neocan we Pentecostalism's strong connections both to the African past and to African modernity of upcoming urban people and are there aspects of this movement about which Christians should be warv?<sup>24</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Cf. Haasnoot, "Thinking about Discipleship in Changing Contexts" and Verwijs, "Growing in Christ on African Soil."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Cf. Benno van den Toren, "African Neo-Pentecostalism in the Face of Secularization: Problems and Possibilities."