

PROVERBS
AND
AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Papers from the Consultation
on African Proverbs and Christian Mission
at Ricatla Theological Seminary, Maputo, Mozambique
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Edited by
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PREFACE

Proverb is the wisdom of a people. It is wisdom which has been distilled from experiences made over the years, which, when taken seriously, can equip peoples to live wisely and well. It is thus, perhaps, not without significance that at a time and in a world and a continent where society is bombarded with constant bad news, scholars from different nations, sometimes divided by national ideologies and other things, are able to come together to reflect together on Proverbs-wisdom.

The assumption in all this is that true scholarship should enlighten us onto wisdom, the factor that has the capacity to bind together peoples. That is why the theme links Proverbs and Mission. For mission is more than making converts; it is concerned with building community of communities guided by wisdom, which turns out to be good news.

African Proverbs Project, Colorado Springs, especially its Co-ordinator Stan Nussbaum and Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, USA are here mentioned with gratitude for initiating this project and this Maputo consultation in particular. The goal of the project is to promote the collection, study and use of African proverbs with particular attention to their implication for Christian mission.

By some logic, the organisation of this consultation was entrusted to me at the Ecumenical Theological Education Programme of the World Council of Churches, Geneva. We rejoice at the collaboration of and with gratitude to our Assistant Ms. Diana Chabloz-Basso who took on most of the logistical work, in spite of her heavy schedule, preparing with me a global consultation "Ecumenical Theological Education: Its Viability Today".

The processing of this volume has been undertaken by Ms. Salomey Dadieh of Ghana and Switzerland. To her we express deepest gratitude. Having to type pieces with several different African languages, complicated further by poor editor's handwriting has called for gifts of patience, charity and discernment.

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1. AFRICAN PROVERBS AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

John S. Pobee

The religious book of the Christian, the Bible, contains a genus labelled as Wisdom Literature. It includes such books as Proverbs, Psalms, Job and Ecclesiastes. These works prove to be extra-biblical in origin. Such writings, often based on experience, warn against, seek to cure stupidity and naivety (cf Proverbs 8:5, 22:3). Jesus also made use of proverbs in his style of teaching. Proverbs are not just information or news; they are profound knowledge. As such experience and initiation into them are crucial for decoding their message.

In African societies too a cultivated person is identified by the fact that he/she spruces his/her utterances with appropriate proverbs at the appropriate time and place. That is because *homo africanus*' wisdom is distilled in proverbs. They have a place, a serious one, in legal as in clan proceedings, in political as in social structure, in entertainment, in behaviour and values of the society. A proverb in African societies is a good conversational weapon, and is employed with great effect to make discreet allusion or point a morale in a delicate and inoffensive way.¹ Thus proverbs are a most important and effective style of communication among Africans. A priori proverbs can be a powerful instrument in communication of gospel to African peoples, which is what missions seek to do.

However, proverbs do not exist in isolation; they are located and should be located in the context of African cultures, African mind, African history, African custom, African religion. The Journals of Ramseyer and Kühne in the 19th century Gold Coast (Ghana) had considerable material on African anthropology which was seen as a crucial element in the work in Africa. Though the African proverbs have a social and cultural context, nevertheless, they are relevant to the new context with its marks of modernity and secularisation

In 1853 and 1854 H.N. Riis and A. Riis, two Basel Mission missionaries published in German and English respectively *A Grammatical Outline and Vocabulary of the Oji-Language with Special Reference to the Akwapim Dialect together with a Collection of Proverbs of the Natives*. Similarly, 1857 J.B. Schlegel produced in German *Key to the Ewe Language, based on the Anlo Dialect, Together with a Vocabulary, Proverbs and some stories in Ewe*.

One more study was the work of another Basel Mission missionary to Gold Coast, J.G. Christaller: *Twi Mbeusem Mpena-Ahansia Mmoano. A Collection of 3600 Tshi Proverbs in Use Among Negroes of the Gold Coast Speaking the Asante and Fante Language*. Basel 1879.

Christaller's preface to that publication includes the following: "in their public assemblies and transactions, political and judicial, the arguments of speakers, the statements of the plaintiff and the defendant, the questions and decisions of judges are interwoven with proverbs set out and reviewed as convincing proofs of the soundness of opinions set forth by the speakers."

The conclusion is unavoidable: the earliest missionaries in the Gold Coast identified proverbs as a vital and important mode of communication of the peoples and with that, key to penetrating the world-view of the Africans. They have authority. They belong to oral tradition of the people and are community sayings. Thus they must always be understood in their social and cultural context.

¹ J.B. Christensen, "The Role of Proverbs in Fante Cultures" in *People and Cultures of Africa* ed. E.P. Skinner. New York: Doubleday 1973:508-524; D. Paulme, "Oral Literature and Social Behaviour in Black Africa" in Skinner, op cit 525-542; W.R. Bascom, "Verbal Art", *Journal of American Folklore* XVIII (1995), 245-252.

In contrast to that, one is struck by the fact that missions did not make more of proverbs in evangelism. Sermons by Africans use them, but I am not aware of a conscientious and concerted systematic effort at the use of proverbs to explicate the gospel. But I know of two attempts.

1. Dr. Elizabeth Amoah - Ethical Concepts from Akan Proverbs - MA thesis c. 1974, University of Ghana.
2. Dr. Noah Dzobo - Proverbs and African Theology - Mlava Theology.

In 1979 I published *Toward an African Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon. In it I make considerable use of Akan proverbs to explicate burning issues in Africa - Sin, Power, Marriage. The *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, January 1980 carried a review of it by David P. Sheridan as follows:

"The juxtaposition of biblical texts and Akan proverbs attempts a mutual illumination, I sense here an inadequate contextualization in which a text-centred approach to the New Testament encounters the particularity of the Akan proverb. Can two world-views, which have become local views in the global village, truly be the basis for a theology whose dynamite is to function not as a regional ontology, but as a meaningful statement to the whole world? I think not. Pobee's book is valuable as an attempt at translation. Yet its limitation is the lack of an intercultural hermeneutic which encompasses both the biblical and African world views."

I do not here seek to defend myself. But this review seems to me to point to the issues at stake in the task ahead of us.

1. The North has lost the dynamism of proverbs in their society and, therefore, cannot fully appreciate the critical role in African societies.
2. Particularity of Akan proverbs - here we come upon an issue in ecumenical debates often put as the local and the universal or as I prefer Contextuality and Catholicity. His comments mask a captivity to the Enlightenment culture which thought it possible and necessary to write a universal grammar. This figment of the imagination regarding universal grammar was reinforced by the ideology of modernity. I do not see contextuality and Catholicity as two ends of a straight line, rather the particular is in the Catholic and the Catholic in the particular
3. Not unrelated to this are Enlightenment commitment to rationality and the consequent propositional style of expounding reality. Proverbs, of course, do not conform to the propositional style and were consequently not appropriated. As if that were not enough, there was also the ideology of Social-Darwinism which was Eurocentric and negative about things African and, indeed, the Tropics.
4. However, the comment of Sheridan points to the task ahead of us - inter-cultural hermeneutics. What hermeneutics do we need for translating the biblical material, which is not a-cultural and the wisdom of homo-africanus distilled in the proverbs? In this the model I propose is that Christianity is Africanized and not Africans Christianized. Saaymann in a communication writes: "Intercultural education and communication concern educative interaction between at least two autonomous subjects, in which I learn about the other, but also about myself in the light of the presence of the other". Such an exercise involves a redemption of mission, discerning the motifs for mission e.g. God's ownership of creation; all people as God's children; the desire to bring salvation to all peoples. Could these be some of the topics we can garner from proverbs?
5. Translating across cultures is interpreting ideas. The Akan have a proverb that *koto nnwo anoma*, ie the crab cannot beget a bird. The Bible has a saying that is a corresponding interpretation of it "can grapes bear forth figs?" When I use the Akan proverb it captures the essence of the biblical text. But what does this mean for my conviction that the Bible is the common patrimony of those who believe in Jesus Christ. The test is relating the proverb to a reality and a context.
6. Collections do exist of proverbs both in African cultures and the Bible. Where collections of proverbs do exist in African cultures, the need is not so much to collect them as to introduce peoples to them.

2. The Proverbs and the Gospel from Experience to Allegory

A.T. Dalfovo

This Paper relates the allegorical language of proverbs to that of the gospel and it refers this language to experience as to its sources. The conclusion will be that paremiology helps the use of the gospel. The paremic frame of reference of this Paper is the Lugbara culture.

1. The Allegory in Proverbs

Proverbial sayings appear in various forms. They may consist, for instance, of a play of words (*Alaka piri alaka*, "Alaka grass is all alaka grass"), a rhyme (*Otako amboro, efi kokoro*, "A large termite hill, without content"), or an antithesis (*Abe yo, inya yo*, "No hoe, no food"). But the prevailing form is, at least within Lugbara culture, the allegorical language that frames them.

Proverbs operate allegorically, namely, they refer to a subject under the guise of another subject of aptly suggestive resemblance. A proverb develops a metaphor, namely a meaning that differs from the literal meaning of the words used. Some proverbs appear to be literal. Even then, they ultimately relate to a meaning that goes beyond their material expression. For instance, *A'api ko ri, nya ko*, "No digging, no eating," has its final significance in food and life requiring exertion. *Abe lo nga ceni ko*, "The handle alone does not dig," fundamentally suggests that it is not the tool but the handling of it that is effective. *Abi ondi 'i ceni ko*, "A wall does not crumble by itself," eventually means that events have a cause.

The allegorical characteristic of Lugbara proverbs emerges or also from the term used to designate them, which is *e'yo obeza* or also, more rarely, *bibila*.² *E'yo* is a very expressive term referring to "word," "speech," "reason," "issue," and similar meanings. *Obeza* derives from the verb *obe* that the suffix *za* adjectives. *Obe* means "to mix," "to twist." The combined expression *e'yo obeza* literally means "mixed words," "twisted speech" or "indirect talk." A person who speaks in a way he is not understood, may be told, *E'yo mini yoleri ni e'yo obezaro*, "What you are saying is mysterious." An elder explained: "A person talks *e'yo obeza* when, for instance, he backbites, but in a way in which he does not seem to be doing it. The person uses words that do not reveal what he is really saying." *E'yo obeza* is an expression proper of "upper" Lugbara, although it has now spread to the rest of Lugbaraland. The corresponding expression in "lower" Lugbara is *bibila*, which also means "indirect talk."³ Here too, the statement *Mi bibila* to would mean, "Would mean, "Your words are very mysterious."⁴

The preference for the allegorical aspect of proverbs emerged also when compiling my collection of Lugbara proverbs. Several persons supplied mere allegorical utterances as if they were proverbs. For instance, *Aci ve mi ra*, "The fire has burnt you," a compliment to one who has prepared good food. *Ba ndre ma ocoo ni taba ndre ri le*, "people looked at me like a dog looks at tobacco," namely a person was disregarded. Asked why these idioms were considered proverbs, the answer was that "they were not direct." The allegory was taken as the essential component of proverbs. Also riddles were sometimes supplied as proverbs because of their allegorical language.

² *E'yo obeza* is used in the Lugbara translation of the Bible in which the Book of Proverbs is called *E'yo O'beza (Biblia)*, Kampala, The Bible Society in East Africa, 1968). This use has consolidated the adoption of the term by all Lugbara.

³ The specifications "upper" and "lower" refer to geographical positions approximately corresponding to the south for the "upper" and to north for the "lower" Lugbara.

⁴ In some parts of Lugbaraland, as in Maracha County for instance, *bibilia* has unfavourable implications. Its meaning bears on crooked words and hiding wrong intentions. For this reason, some people avoid referring to proverbs as *bibilia*.

2. The Objectivity of Allegories

Allegory is one of several terms, like metaphor, symbol and analogy, closely related among themselves, such that they are sometimes used synonymously. Simply defined, an allegory is a narrative or a text that expresses a concept different from the literal one. Aristotle describes it as an extended metaphor. A metaphor is a term describing one thing by stating another. An analogy is a similarity of relations among different things. A symbol is something standing in for something else.

The common element in all these terms is the dualism of meaning they are built on. There is in them a primary or literal meaning and a derivative or figurative meaning. In other words, there is in them an established image with an idea to it; for instance, the image of the occiput with the idea of blindness.

The disputed issue in the relation between primary and derivative meanings or between image and idea concerns the objectivity or subjectivity of this relation, namely whether the relation originates from within the primary meaning or whether it is applied by the speaker. Is this relation created or merely discovered?

There are reasons favouring both sides of the dilemma. In fact, the prevailing solution ascribes to one or to the other of the terms mentioned (metaphor, allegory, symbol,...) either a subjective or an objective relation as their specific characteristic. But there is no general agreement on such definitions, and authors tend to clarify their specific understanding of the terms on this point.

Practically, however, the relation between primary and derivative meanings may be considered objective in the sense that a person lives in a specific culture and he uses the language and meaning established in that culture, including the way in which primary and derivative meanings relate. For instance, also such apparently subjective exercise as that of devising a national flag is ultimately founded on existing paradigms related to the need of having instruments to cater for social cohesion and national identity. Concerning proverbs in particular, the relation between handle, hoe, field, granary, food and ideas bearing on the basic needs of life, or the relation between cattle, bride-wealth, marriage, children, descendants and ideas concerning the need to perpetuate life, are present in culture as the objective material from which the allegorical language of proverbs is drawn in an exercise that may be described as modelling rather than inventing.

Thus it may be said that the relation between image and idea or between primary and derivative meanings is founded on the objective givens of culture. These relations are not established but elaborated upon through a kind of maieutic process which brings forth what is, at least embryonically, already present in the womb of culture. A proverbialist already knows, for instance, about the stubbornness of the goat, the anger of the buffalo, the unconcern of the elephant. Such analogical references and metaphorical figures cannot be guessed or invented. They need to be drawn from each culture. In some cultures, in fact, a donkey could mean peace, in others dullness. A tortoise could suggest wisdom to some, backwardness to others.

This practical objectivity of allegories shows how versatile one must be in one's culture. One needs to be steeped in it to be able to detect the network of meanings that establish allegorical language, to be able to find similarities in seemingly dissimilar things and to communicate truths that would not be communicable by other means.

3. Religious Language

Religious language is allegorical. It needs to be so, as the transcendental cannot be expressed within the literal meaning of human language. Biblical revelation has adapted itself to this human requirement. The books of the Song of Songs and of Revelation, for instance, as well as the prophetic writings are highly allegorical.

St. Paul underlined that the Old Testament prefigured the New Testament (1 Cor 9,9 Rom 4:23f, 5:14, 15:4). "Now all these things happened to them by way of example, and they were described in writing to be a lesson for us, to whom it has fallen to live in the last days of the ages" (1 Cor 10:11).

The allegorical interpretation of the bible gradually leads, as St. Paul envisaged, to transcend the letter, attaining the spirit (Rom 7,6 2 Cor 3:6) until one day, perfect knowledge is achieved. "Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now, I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am myself known" (1 Cor 13,12).

The attention to the allegorical aspect of the Bible became an exegetical procedure vastly practised by the early Fathers of the Church, which contributed to a unitary vision of the history of salvation embracing both Old and New Testaments. Today, the allegorically approach is practised particularly in applying the Bible to everyday life.

Two authors could exemplify the enduring issue of religious language in its allegorical dimension and the purpose and the limit of this language: Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965).

Taking the word "good" as an example, Thomas Aquinas explains that this word is applied to the Creator and to the creatures, neither univocally, namely with the same meaning in both cases, nor equivocally, namely with different meanings, but analogically in the sense that it is used in two different contexts, yet keeping a similarity.⁵ The analogical language does not take us into the actual nature of God's perfect goodness. It only indicates the relation between the different meanings of this word when it is applied to human beings and to God. Analogy does not give us full knowledge of the divine being, but at the same time it does not leave us in agnosticism. It lets us have a glimpse of the transcendental, not a full view of it.

Paul Tillich develops the "symbolic" nature of religious language. He distinguishes between a sign and a symbol. Both point to something beyond themselves. A sign does so by arbitrary convention. A symbol instead participates in that to which it points; it grows out of the individual or collective unconscious. A symbol unlocks dimensions in our soul corresponding to then new aspects of the world that it reveals. Whatever we say about religious reality has a symbolic meaning. It points beyond itself while participating in that to which it points. Faith cannot express itself in other ways. The language of faith is the language of symbols.⁶

4. The Gospel

In the gospel, the allegorical language is found, above all, in the parables. The gospel has about 65 parables. Forty of these are repeated more than once; if such repetitions were to be considered, the parables would amount to over 100. There is an insistence about Jesus talking in parables. (Mt 13:3, Mk 4:2-3, Lk 8:4-5, Mt 13:10f, Mk 4:10, Lk 8:9, Mt 13:13, Mt 21:45, Lk 20:19, Mt 22:1). His disciples were impressed by such abundance and they asked an explanation. Jesus replied, "To you is granted the secret of the Kingdom of God, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables" (Mk 4:11). "In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables" (Mt 13,34). The parables were at the core of Christ's methodology, namely *meta*, "following" and *odos*, "the way"; thus, at the core of the way followed by him to convey his message.

Jesus Christ privileged the allegorical language of parables such that, today, as Ian Crombie writes,

"what we do is in essence to think of God in parables. The things we say about god are said on the authority of the words and acts of Christ, who spoke in human language, using parables; and so we too speak of God in parable - authoritative parable, authorized parable; knowing that the truth is not literally that which our parables represent, knowing therefore that now we see in a glass darkly, but trusting, because we trust the source of the parables, that in believing them and

⁵ *Summa Theologica*, P.I.Q. 13, Art. 5; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, B.1, Chapters. 28-34.

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.-----, *Dynamics of Faith*, New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

interpreting them in the light of each other we shall not be misled, that we shall have such knowledge as we need to possess for the foundation of the religious life."⁷

The gospel, however, has only three or four expressions that could be called proverbs.⁸ Without indulging in surmises, one could infer from the extension use of allegorical language in the gospel that there were also proverbs, most probably, used by Jesus Christ. The proverbs that were not in tune with the novelty of his teaching, could have been utilised by Jesus as elements of contrast to better highlight his message, as he did, for instance, in the six contrasting statements in the Sermon of the Mount, "You have heard how it was said to our ancestors.....But I say this to you...." (Mt 5, 20-48). One could also add that, in recording the words of Jesus, proverbs must have proved, as it is in their nature to do, particularly difficult to render within a new cultural context. Therefore, the evangelists were not perhaps interested in passing on proverbial expressions that would be properly appraised and understood only in their original culture.

At the same time, though proverbial statements in the gospel are few, the allegorical language they draw from and they are made of is abundant, particularly through the parables. It may be worth noting that, often, the definitions of a parable and of a proverb refer to each other as if the two terms were synonymous.⁹ In Lugbara culture, the close relationship between parables and proverbs emerges from the fact that most Lugbara stories or apologues end with a proverb.¹⁰ The story constitutes the premises and the proverb the conclusion of syllogistic wisdom.

5. Experiential Origin

Emphasising the allegorical dimension of the proverbs and of the gospel should not lead one to lose sight of the primary or literal meaning on which the allegory is built. Meaning is primary before being derivative, literal before being figurative. In other words, one needs to know the experience from which the allegory draws in order to appraise the latter.¹¹

The proverbs themselves help in this, as they originate inductively from experience. They are, as some authors summarized, "short sentences drawn from long experience",¹² "the echoes of experience",¹³ "the mind of one and the experience of all".¹⁴ The type of experience that generates the Lugbara proverbs is mostly the ordinary one that people meet in their daily life. In my collection of Lugbara proverbs, 14 per cent of them refer to the home, 10 per cent to the community, 8 per cent to work, and 5 per cent to food, which amounts to over one third of the proverbs.

Proverbs, however, are not just mere account of experience. They report experience that has been pondered upon and appraised. Sixteen Lugbara proverbs encourage to go beyond appearance and to recognize substance or value, as "the potato mound covered with lush leaves may have nothing under it," and "a big termitehill may be empty." A proverb advises to consider all sides of an issue as "it is the machet that is used only on one side," namely that of its edge. Such discernment helps to appraise, for instance, that "millet chaff generates millet" from the grains left in it, or that "an old hoe is ever a friend," namely useful. In other words, one learns where true values lie. This consideration of experience is necessary particularly when it is problematic. I found 92 (12%) Lugbara proverbs referring directly to problematic situation and many others doing so indirectly.

⁷ Ian Crombe, "Theology and Falsification". In A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1955, pp. 122-123.

⁸ He replied, "No doubt you will quote me the saying, 'Physician, heal yourself' (Lk 4:23). "They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the market place. We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't cry" (Lk 7:31). Here the proverb holds true: one sows, another reaps (Jh 4:37). Jesus said to them, "A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house" (Mt 13:57).

⁹ A parable is a "comparison, allegory, proverb". A proverb is "a wise saying, an allegory, a parable." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Parable", "Proverb")

¹⁰An apologue is an allegorical story intended to convey a useful lesson. (*Oxford English Dictionaries*, s.v. "Apologue").

¹¹ Experience, here, refers to a person's direct participation in or observation of the life situation. This provides practical knowledges from which to elaborate theory.

¹² Cervants in Winstedt, E., *Malay Proverbs*, London: J. Murray, 1950, p.1.

¹³ Abbé de Saint-Pierre in Abdelkaf, M., *One Hundred Arabic Proverbs from Libya*, London: Vernan & Cates Ltd., n.d., p.vi.

¹⁴ John Russell in Abdelkaf, M. *op. cit.*

The experiential origin of proverbs contributes to their credibility more than any other aspect. People accept a proverb because they recognize in it their own individual and social experiences. Generally, no controversy arises over a proverbial assertion as there could be, for instance, over a theoretical enunciation, because a proverb is not a deduction from abstract principles but an induction from concrete experiences, namely from the common aspects of life that every person shares.

Concerning the issue of experience, it may be worth noticing that religious experience in particular contributes little to the formation of proverbs among Lugbara.¹⁵ Though religion permeates all aspects of Lugbara life, there is a mixture of fear and respect for it that prompts resorting to it only in case of need.¹⁶ In line with it, no mention of religion is made unless strictly required.

Table 1 shows that proverbs referring to religion are 37 out of 773, representing 4.79 per cent. If one were to narrow down the religious topics to the first four, as suggested by some discussants, the proverbs bearing on religion would be reduced to 1.27 per cent. The religious topics most mentioned are poison, divination and the traditional doctor that together make up 3.08 per cent, namely 75 per cent of the topics in Table 1. Poison has been included here as its nature and effects transcend its material semblance.

TABLE 1 Religious Topics in Proverbs

<u>Topics</u>		<u>Proverbs percentage</u>
Adro (God)	3	0.38%
Ori (Ancestral Spirits Sacrifices, Shrines)	3	0.38%
Nyuka (Curse)	1	0.13%
Adra (Spiritual Power)	3	0.38%
Acife (Divination Stick)	6	0.78%
Ojoo (Traditional Doctor)	7	0.92%
Oleoo (Sorcerer)	4	0.53%
Enyata (Poison)	10	1.29%
<hr/>		
TOTAL	37	4.79%

6. Incarnation

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ implies the incarnation of the gospel into humanity. The gospel remains relevant in as far as it remains true to that Incarnation. This entails keeping the allegorical language of the gospel fresh or, in other words, keeping the experience that supports such language, alive by translating that experience of the past into the experience of present cultures. Repeating the allegories of the gospel without a reference to contemporary experience weakens, and perhaps nullifies, the allegorical foundation on which they stand.

Paremiology helps the continuous incarnation of the gospel as proverbs offer a unique example of allegorical language in living cultures today. It is a language distilled in short, pithy, fixed and popular form, making proverbs condensed works of art, precious stones mounted in the linguistic heritage of a people.¹⁷

¹⁵Within Lugbara experience, religion may be considered to involve belief in supernatural beings and the attempt to establish a relationship with it and a certain control of supernatural forces. M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen, *African Systems and Queries on Anthropology*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, p.174.

¹⁶ For example, John Middleton's *Lugbara Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960, shows how religious ritual and political authority are intermingled in Lugbara living.

Paremiology, however, should be considered a discipline, namely a branch of learning requiring a systematic approach. It is part of education. Traditional education had its way to transmit paremic knowledge. School education has undermined traditional education in several ways, one of them being the paremic aspect of culture. Our societies have been gradually missing, not only proverbs requires a reappraisal of traditional vis-a-vis contemporary education.

Considering the scope of this conference, the attention to paremic education could be made to bear on church training institutions. Drawing from evidence in Uganda and some surrounding countries, I found that the interest in proverbs in church institutions is very limited. It is generally restricted to being the subject of a few essays and of the limited research that goes into writing them up.¹⁸ Proverbs are topics for study on the part of students rather than instruments for teaching on the part of lecturers. Consequently, the study of proverbs in these institutions is undertaken by relatively young persons. It is carried out during vacations, namely for a rather limited time, and the proverbs collected and analyzed are comparatively few. Such research is undertaken without convenient training in proverbial language and wisdom. Their authors do not seem to follow up their research by nourishing a particular interest in paremiology vis-a-vis Christian mission.

To conclude, education in paremiology could contribute to what every Christian would like to be, namely an image with an added meaning, an image pointing to an idea beyond itself, the image of Jesus Christ. Etymologically, the term "proverb" derives from pro "instead of" and verbum "word". A proverb is what stands in place of another word, of another meaning. Could not that word be ultimately THE WORD that has been from the beginning? In which case we would be the "proverbs" to that word.

¹⁷ Combining various definitions, a proverb may be described as a short, pithy, fixed, popular, experiential, prescriptive, and allegorical sentence.

¹⁸Out of 313 dissertations submitted to Makerere University from 1871 to 1978 by the Theological Colleges of Eastern Africa for the Diploma in Theology, only five were on proverbs (i.e. 1.6 per cent).

3. Proverbs and African Christian Identity

Willie van Heerden

1. Introduction

Proverbs are expressions of wisdom. Wisdom is filled with paradox. In a paradoxical way wisdom, which is primarily concerned with order, can facilitate change. This feature of wisdom could serve as backdrop for a discussion on possible reactions to religious pluralism - an issue which christian mission has to face. Metaphorical proverbs are ideally suited for the paradoxical task of preserving 'order' and bringing about 'change' in intercultural communication. And this, I contend, is one of the reasons why proverbs might play a significant role in the establishment of an African christian identity.

2. Wisdom and proverbs

All wisdom is not taught in your school (Hawaiian proverb)

'Wisdom' is not a homogeneous entity. Any discussion of wisdom, or certain expressions of wisdom, needs to be clear about the aspects of wisdom under consideration. Briefly, I wish to identify four typical expressions of wisdom (cf Winton 1990:28)

- * Speculation about the figure of Wisdom/personified Wisdom. This is an important theme in the wisdom traditions of many cultures. Personified wisdom is also an important theme in Old Testament wisdom literature. Some scholars claim that the so-called "Wisdom Christology" should be seen against this background (cf Winton 1990:28).
- * Wisdom as a human attribute. The designation of someone as 'wise' is a common feature of most cultures, but the range of meanings for such a comment is fairly broad (cf Wilckens 1971: 465-526), and may not always be very closely related to the use of proverbial sayings.
- * Wisdom as insight (mantic wisdom). In this case, wisdom is associated with the interpretation of dreams, knowledge of the future, and special understanding. For example, Daniel's wisdom concerns the understanding of secret things (especially chapter 2), and in Dan 2:27 the wise man is linked with the 'encounter, magician, and diviner...' in the task of explaining the meaning of a mystery.
- * Proverbial (experiential) wisdom. Wise utterance and instruction overlaps in some respects with the preceding two categories. One feature of proverbial wisdom is to encapsulate different aspects of wise behaviour: to describe the way things are, or to give advice about the wise choice.

It is the latter form of wisdom with which I am most concerned in this study, although I am convinced that African cultures also reflect the other expression of wisdom.

What is 'wisdom' all about? Typically, wisdom teachers are intent on gaining a sound, practical grasp of reality based on insight and understanding, and to live accordingly (i.e. to make good judgements) (cf Spangenberg 1991:228). It is often stated that consciousness of a certain order underlies wisdom. Wisdom traditions, however, are not static. The wisdom of Israel, despite difference in time, developed through the same phases that Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom, for example, did (cf Loader 1986:9).

According to the early stages of these wisdom traditions wise people are they who in their everyday activities seek to integrate themselves harmoniously into divine order underlying reality. This is achieved by doing the right thing at the right time. Examples of this phase are plentiful in Proverbs 10:29: A word must be timely (15:23; 25:11), a loud greeting at an inappropriate

occasion becomes a curse (27:14) and correct actions are prescribed for specifically described circumstances (10:5; 14:35; 16:11; 23:1-3).

In the following phase there is a process of fossilization. Apart from examples in Proverbs there are the three friends of Job who are exponents of a systematic, or dogmatic sort of wisdom. Rigid wisdom is a result of writing down wisdom utterances. In the process its actual relation to reality is weakened and wisdom petrifies into an abstract, rock-hard system. When scripturally encoded wisdom can no longer be brought into relationship with the realities of situation and time. Reality is compressed into dogma or doctrine (cf Loader 1986:9).

Soon a crisis ensues. The Preacher of the book of Ecclesiastes, for example, reacted to this rigidity by appreciating the idea of relativity. He never comes to a final happy ending. One element is repeatedly placed in opposition to another, and the frustration resulting from the tension is accentuated. Prof. Jimmie Loader, in his book *Polar structures in the Book of Qohelet*, emphasized the role played by polarization in this book. The Preacher eventually refuses to resolve the tension. He remains involved in his traditions and detached from it. He offers vehement criticism of the mainstream wisdom of his day and yet uses and appropriates for himself all the typical forms of expression that characterized wisdom.

In a situation of religious pluralism (eg. the practice of christian missions) wisdom's actual relation to reality is weakened by another factor: cultural differences. People from different cultures to a certain degree live in different realities/worlds. The right thing at the right time in one cultural context might be inappropriate in another. Qoheleth's approach provides an 'answer' to this problem: Keep the different traditions in tension, or in balance, with each other.

A modern psychiatrist, Dr. M. Scott Peck, recommends a remarkably similar approach to life. "Wisdom is filled with paradox... In part wisdom is the understanding of paradox. But, as if it were not enough, the acquisition of wisdom is itself paradoxical". (peck 1985:117). Peck compares the acquiring of wisdom with a dance. Wisdom is born from a dance that often requires two partners (cf Peck 1985:118).

In similar vein the New Testament scholar, Klyne Snodgrass (1990:190-191) reminds us of the tensions and paradoxes inherent to the Bible and people's lives: "To live biblically is to live in the midst of tension... Tension allows us to live as whole persons and to do justice to all the gospel... The truth is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, but in both extremes. The grace of God, which provides the coherence to our lives, is the power by which we live out our tensions. We live between truths."

This section on wisdom is intended to provide a framework for the discussion of an issue which is most relevant to the practice of christian missions: people's possible reactions to religious pluralism. In the section that follows, I use two pivotal concepts in wisdom traditions, namely 'order' and 'change', to serve as sort of a grid for explaining these different reactions to religious pluralism.

3. Reactions to religious pluralism

Man is no palm nut, self-contained (Twi proverb)

Some are wise and some otherwise (English proverb)

Prof. Willem Saayman (1981-117-119) identified four possible reactions to religious pluralism by (South African) christians and churches. A first option is to decide that all adherents of other religions must be converted to christianity. The second option is to adopt a superior attitude towards other religions, in the expectation or hope that they will eventually die out of their own accord. A third option is to convince people of all kinds of religion to join forces against a common enemy like communism. A fourth option is to use cordial hospitality as the key to understanding the relationship between christians and adherents of other religions.

In terms of 'order' and 'change' these four options could be schematically portrayed as follows:

	Order		Change	
	Self	Other	Self	Other
Option 1: They must be converted	Yes	No	No	Yes
Option 2: Their religion will die out	Yes	No	No	Yes
Option 3: Join forces against the enemy	Yes	No	No	Yes
Option 4: Cordial hospitality	Yes	No	No	Yes

This schematic portrayal suggests that options 1 to 4 boil down to three basic attitudes:

- (a) We are superior to the others (options 1 and 2)
- (b) Order is to be preferred above change (option 2)
- (c) All parties should put a high premium on order and change.

In my opinion Saayman's fourth option is in accordance with the paradoxical nature of wisdom. He explains (Saayman 1981:119) '...it is characterized by genuine respect for the mysterious presence of God in these (other) religions. It opens the way for a dialectical interaction' - the dance from which wisdom is born. It implies that one faith is not simply the donor and the others recipients. People of any faith both give and receive.

This option should not accommodate a retreat into an easy pluralism (every man under his vine and under his fig tree') (Deist 1994:340), as opposed to forced unity. An easy pluralism does not allow for the possibility of hard-earned, meaningful changes in the religious frameworks of the parties involved. I want to quote an Afrikaans poet, NP van Wyk Louw (1950, 1986:416), who said that his picture of a true 'intellectual' closely resembles that of the truly religious person. "...he will look to examine beliefs, opposed to his own: explore terrains of life, unfamiliar to him as a result of his own temperament and background. He will often call on the enemy to become familiar with his strange world. He will despise nothing except his own limitation" (my own free translation). Van Wyk Louw did not regard this attitude as passive whatsoever. It is almost like 'capturing' the other person's belief. One should expose oneself, or even 'break oneself open' (cf Boshoff 1992-136). This attitude does not make for a comfortable state of affairs. It calls for the 'forced labour' demanded by humility. This links up neatly with Peck's observation that a deeply meaningful personal religion always requires a personal struggle with life's mysteries. We cannot relate to God simply through our parent's teachings. That is why 'God has no grandchildren' (Peck 1985:120).

Proverbs are tools for doing this 'forced labour'. In order to determine how proverbs could facilitate insight and understanding, but also meaningful changes, we now turn our attention to some features of proverbs.

4. *Metaphorical proverbs*

A proverb is a chameleon. It can see in two directions at the same time.

Wolfgang Mieder (1993:9) observed that some scholars want to count only metaphorical proverbs as *bona fide* proverbs. Metaphorical proverbs should however be distinguished from literal proverbs (aphorisms, apophthegms). We can state that metaphors constitute an important marker for many proverbs. It is exactly the metaphor of the proverb that enables us to employ proverbs in so many different contexts.

Hugh Petrie, an educationist, wishes to challenge the view that the cognitive significance of metaphor is severely limited. There are two sources from which he issues his challenge. These two sources are directly related to the topic of my paper. On the one hand, he argues, metaphor enables one to transfer learning and understanding from what is well-known to what is less known in a vivid and memorable way. He also claims that the very possibility of learning

something radically new can only be understood by presupposing the operation very much like metaphor (cf Petrie 1979:438). These very objectives are of great importance in the practice of mission: a better understanding of other peoples, as well as creating opportunities for the radical restructuring of one's religious frameworks. An issue in the voluminous literature on metaphor, which is of particular interest to me, is the difference between literal language, comparative metaphor, and interactive metaphor.

Literal language requires only assimilation to existing frameworks of understanding. Literal proverbs (aphorisms, apophthegms) like the following serve as examples:

*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but he who hates correction is stupid (Prov. 12:11)*

He who calls the chief's regent 'little bow legs' calls for the time he will emigrate. (Haya proverb)

A talkative person does not know he is abusing the chief. (Haya proverb)

On the comparative view of metaphor, what a metaphor does is to say implicitly that two apparently dissimilar things have a similarity in common after all. The comparative metaphor might allow for extensions of already existing knowledge, but it would not provide a new form of understanding. It requires simple extensions of the framework in the light of a more comprehensive framework. The following metaphorical proverbs are of this kind.

*Grey hair is a crown of splendour;
it is attained by a righteous life (Prov. 16:31)*

A child is an axe, when it cuts you, you still pick it up and put it on your shoulder. (Bemba proverb)

There are, however problems with attempting to construe all metaphors as implicit comparisons. Consider the following example (Petrie 1979:442)

Virginity is the enamel of the soul

Is the comparison to be between the positive features of clarity, strength, and protectiveness, or the negative features of rigidity, brittleness, and enclosure? Nothing in the metaphor tells us. Only contextual knowledge of speaker or hearer seems useful.

For reasons such as these some people have claimed that there is also an interactive level of metaphor. It would be more illuminating in some of these cases to say that the metaphor creates the similarity than to say that it formulates some similarity antecedently existing (cf Black 1962:37). If it creates similarities, then it could provide the bridge between a person's earlier conceptual and representational schemes and the later scheme of the totally unfamiliar matters to be dealt with. Such radically new knowledge is possible because it accommodates anomaly or paradox, which requires changes in the framework of understanding.

The following apparently contradictory counsel serves as another example of an interactive metaphor.

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you will be like him yourself.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes. (Prov. 26:4,5)*

and

To give is to store (Chitonga proverb)

Thus, the functions proposed for metaphor, and therefore for metaphorical proverb, are that it does make learning more memorable, it does help move one from the more familiar to the less familiar, and it does provide one mechanism for changing our modes of representing reality in thought and language.

Thomas Green (1979:463), another educationist, reacted to Petrie's explanation of interactive metaphor in a way that underlines the relevance of Petrie's work for my paper: "It seems to me that the paradigm case for learning something radically new in Petrie's sense would occur in the case of *religious teaching* (my emphasis). I do not see how one can come to possess religious knowledge as more than an agreeable possibility except through the use of metaphor." Petrie (1979:450-452) divides the process of acquiring radically new knowledge (undergoing changes in one's cognitive or religious frameworks) into four different components. The first component he calls the anomaly step, or paradox step. This consists of a person's perception of the situation as problematic enough to call for changes in one's cognitive, or religious frameworks. A person need not be aware of this.

The second step is providing a metaphor. An interactive metaphor provides a variant cognitive structure, although at the time of the variation, it need not contain the final solution or diagnosis. An interactive process is set in motion in the mind of the person who perceived the anomaly, or paradox.

The third step is actually acting in the world and observing the results. An interactive metaphor is not going to succeed unless activity takes place. The activity is guided by the metaphor. The point of the metaphorically suggested activity is to see if it will remove the anomaly, or if it will make sense to live by the paradox.

The fourth step is the logical outcome of the preceding step. One acts according to the modified cognitive structure or religious framework.

If one combines the last two steps, this process bears a striking resemblance to the phenomenon of 'rites of passage'. Victor Turner (1969:94), with reference to the pioneering work of Arnold van Gennep (1909), has shown that all rites of passage or 'transition' are marked by three phases: separation, liminality (margin), and reincorporation. It is of interest that some scholars have observed that liminality often provides a social setting for wisdom instructions (cf. Perdue 1981:114-127)

The three phases of liminality correspond with Petrie's components of the process of undergoing radical changes in one's cognitive or religious frameworks:

separation	:	anomaly, paradox
liminality	:	providing a metaphor
reincorporation	:	acting in the world

According to this scheme, metaphorical proverbs would play a role in the second step in particular. It is interesting to note that many features of proverbs correspond to Turner's description of liminality (cf Turner 1969:95). A few examples may prove the point:

* The attributes of liminality, or liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude the network of classifications that normally locate states and

positions in cultural space. The ambiguity of proverbs and the difficulty of defining them in terms of linguistic criteria is a well established fact (cf Mieder: 1993:18).

* The hermeneutical openness of proverbs is matched by Turner's observation that strong feelings of comradeship, or alienation may result from the state of liminality (cf Turner 1969:96). Comradeship strengthens 'order'. Radical, or even moderate alienation, tends to lead to social change.

* The authority behind proverbs often silences the voices of people in conflict situations. In a liminal situation the neophyte usually becomes passive and humble in the presence of authority figures who seem to have absolute control over them.

In this paragraph I narrowed the focus to some of the functions of metaphorical proverbs, which prove that proverbs might be useful tools for achieving two objectives:

- * To have growing respect for, and a better understanding of each other (and each other's cultures) as a result of an extension of one's knowledge.
- * To be able to undergo - to bring about - radical changes in one's own or other people's conceptual and religious frameworks.

5. A story: 'The worst journey in the world'

A proverb is always wise (Russian proverb)

The philosopher, Mary Midgley (1989:15-17) tried to explain the difference between 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' by quoting an incident at the end of Apsley Cherry-Garrard's book, *The worst journey in the world*. The book tells of the long, gruelling, winter journey undertaken during an Antarctic expedition by Cherry-Garrard and two friends. They risked their lives struggling through cold, dark, and inhospitable terrain in a desperate effort to bring back the first specimens ever secured of the emperor penguin's eggs. The journey broke down the health of the three companions. Cherry-Garrard's two companions died. The journey did, however, bring back three eggs, of which two were later found to have been broken. When the one remaining egg reached England, Cherry-Garrard was left to take it to the Natural History Museum. But, when he arrived there, nobody seemed to know anything about the egg or to be in the least interested in receiving it. He finally left it with some unconcerned official, and went his way.

The christian gospel could be treated as an 'egg' - something to be 'passed on' to recipients. The hard facts of doctrine or scholarship could also reduce the gospel to mere 'knowledge'. But who will receive the egg? If knowledge is divorced from wisdom, it becomes boring background furniture in which nobody is much interested (Midgley 1989:15). Problems of knowledge should be subordinate to more fundamental problems of living. And that is what wisdom and proverbs are all about.

The story of Cherry-Garrard's egg reminds me of an Ashanti proverb:

The responsibility of power (read: sharing your religion with others) is like holding an egg. Grasp it too tightly and it will drip through your fingers; hold it too loosely and it will drop and break.

If we cling too tightly to certain expressions of the christian tradition, others will not be able to receive it. The alternative is not 'anything goes'. Not really knowing what we share, is not much better than standing empty handed. In intercultural communication we need the wisdom to avoid both traps.

Conclusions

Proverbs, as expression of wisdom, are to be revalued in situations of intercultural communication. The metaphorical nature of proverbs paves the way for its literary beauty, imagery, ambiguity, hermeneutical openness, provocative value, and variety of applications. Proverbs are tools for communicating the christian gospel wisely.

May we live up to the expectation of the following proverb.

When the occasion comes, the proverb comes (Oji i.e. Twi proverb)

...and keep the following piece of advice in mind:

If you want to live wisely, ignore sayings - including this one

- Laurence Peter

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4. Toward an African Narrative Missiology¹⁹

Rev. Joseph G. Healey, M.M. &
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The person who has not travelled widely thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook).
Ganda (Uganda) Proverb

Even an elephant (that is, an important person) can be sent.
Sukuma (Tanzania) Proverb

I. The African Spirit of Moving Out

A Ganda proverb says *The person who has not travelled widely thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook).*²⁰ The Kikuyu version is *one who never travels thinks it is only his or her mother who is a good cook.* The Bemba say *The child who does not leave home praises his or her mother's cooking as the best.* A similar Akan and Gurune (Ghana) proverb is *The one who does not travel thinks his or her mother's soup is the best.* These African proverbs (a continent-wide proverb cluster) describe a person who remains at home without visiting other people and without travelling to other places. The person is used to his or her home only and to the food in his or her own home.

In fact, these proverbs teach the very opposite value and encourage people to go out and learn from others. Without doing this human beings can be self-centered and think that they are better than others. By staying in their own little world people become isolated. A Kikuyu proverb graphically expresses this experience: *By staying in the same place one gets lice.* The Gusii express the importance of getting up early in the morning and moving out by picturesquely saying *The person whose feet feel the morning dew is better than the person who remains at the fireplace.*

These African proverbs point to the same universal truth. If people stay in the same place, if human beings are confined to a particular country or group of people or point of view or ideology, then they can remain individualistic, provincial, tribalistic, nationalistic, and racialistic. Thus people stay in their narrow, ghetto-like worlds.

A Chewa proverb says: *A crocodile's young ones do not grow in one pool.* The young children of a crocodile have the custom of sleeping together in the hot sun -- resting on the sand or on rocks. But when they go hunting they do not travel together. Each one goes a different place to find food and eat. Each one goes to his or her own pool.

When African elders coined this proverb they remembered that even human beings are not able to find a good place to live unless they strike out on their own and work. Each person has to be responsible. This Malawian proverb encourages people to travel to different places and to get accustomed to different things. Human beings leave behind their narrow point of view, tribalism, and home ways to search out new places and experiences.

A similar Sukuma proverb says *The salesperson does not have only one door.* The seller goes to every door to sell his or her wares. A person is accustomed to be praised in one place and scorned in another place. He or she is ready for any response. The seller perseveres whatever happens.

These characteristic proverbs from across the continent of Africa -- Ghana, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya -- describe the universal human experience of moving out, of going elsewhere. This reaching out experience is a learning experience as seen in many similar African proverbs and sayings. *Travelling is learning* (Kikuyu). *Travelling is seeing* (Kikuyu/Shona). *Those*

¹⁹ This paper has been adapted from the eighth and final chapter of the manuscript *I Pointed Out the Stars: An African Narrative Theology of Inculturation* by Joseph G. Healey, M.M. and Donald F. Sybertz, M.M. The Pauline Publishers in Africa in October 1995. There are references in the text to materials (stories, explanation, etc.) from the earlier chapters.

²⁰ For a catechetical commentary on these various proverbs, sayings, and riddles on mission see *Mlezi*: No.95 (October, 1985); No.101 (October, 1986); No.107 (October, 1987).

who travel see much (Sukuma/Swahili). *One who does not move about knows very little* (Haya) Thus travelling broadens the mind and enlarges one's experience.

The missionary experience is very similar. It is an experience of moving out and reaching out and reaching out. And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 15:15). Missionaries are not meant to look inward only but to reach out. Missionaries are called to explore new vistas and new ways of doing things, to be flexible and ready for new experiences. Missionaries adapt to new and unexpected situations. Compare this with St. Paul's description of his missionary work in *Philippians* 4:12-13 "I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

The values expressed in the African proverbs above portray this missionary activity of moving out, of reaching out. The images of the crocodile's young and the travelling salesperson describe the life and work of apostles and missionaries. They go to every place, every country, all people, every door, every ethnic group without getting discouraged or despairing (although there are many disappointments). The missionary is always on the move.

Another analogy is fishing. A Sukuma proverb says *A person who goes fishing never passes by a stream without trying to spear a few fish*. Like the fisherfolk who never go by a fishing place without hurling a spear or casting a line, so too the missionary never passes up an opportunity to preach the gospel. This analogy relates to always trying and not being afraid to launch out into the deep. Compare Jesus's words to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Another Sukuma proverb says *what causes one to give up a job is another job*. Peter was open to a new calling in life -- to become a fisher of people. He left his nets to spend his time and energy in preaching the Good News of Salvation to other people.

Missionaries travel light. He or she goes from house to house, from door to door to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Compare this experience to Jesus's instructions to the twelve apostles in (Luke 9:3-6):

He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money -- not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

So too the missionary. He or she goes out among the people and learns from them. Then the missionary may form a new community, build an out-station, or start a new project. Later the missionary moves to a new place and begins all over again.

Travelling and moving broadens the missionary's horizons. He or she learns new things. A Ganda proverb says: *A blacksmith builds alongside the road that he or she may get advice*. The blacksmith is accustomed to build his or her shop near the road to show off one's wares. The person works the forge and hammers on the anvil as passersby watch the work. The blacksmith learns a lot by talking with people who pass by and thus widens life experience.

II. To be Called Is To Be Sent

There is a popular Swahili saying *To be called is to be sent*. Another is *We are called. We are sent*. In the busy flow of life people come and go. Often they have specific responsibilities. Among the Logir Ethnic Group in Sudan there is a custom of the leaders or elders calling for a person in the middle of the night or very early in the morning. Then the person is sent on a specific mission which is often connected to rituals or religious ceremonies.

Still another version of this saying is *We are not only called but also sent*. This is the wording on a Theme Poster in the "Training for Community Ministries" series from the Lumko Missiological Institute in South Africa. It is used in conjunction with the following role play:

Mr. Z has a chat with his neighbour Mr. X who is also a Christian. They remember that they heard that somebody is very ill but is not a believer. Mr. X thinks they should go and invite him to the faith and to baptism. Mr. Z is against it, since nobody sent him to do so. It would only cause trouble if he was not sent. He finally says that he was called to the faith, but not sent.²¹

This leads to a discussion in the larger group of how people become aware that every Christian is sent to take an active part in the missionary and pastoral activity of the church.

During the Easter Vigil Service on Holy Saturday Night in East Africa the newly baptized are sometimes instructed with the Swahili saying *To be called is to be sent*. The meaning is that the newly baptized adults are first called by Christ, the church, and the local community. Then they are sent in service and mission. The new Christian is first a disciple, then an apostle. In the encounter between Jesus Christ and human beings Christ first calls people to a personal relationship with him that moves to discipleship and then to mission. First people deepen their faith life and commitment and develop a close union with Jesus.

The Sukuma story of the *Fast Runner Matambo and the Cripple Jishegena* provides several insights into this experience:

Once there was a warrior in the chiefdom of Bulima Mwanza called Matambo, a name which means "one who is quick on his feet" or "a fast runner" in Sukuma. He was a favourite of the local chief Lunyalula not only because he was fast but also due to his heroic feats as a warrior. There was another person living at the chief's compound named Jishegena which means "a badly deformed person who can move only with great difficulty by dragging himself or herself along the ground." The chief was very fond of Jishegena because he was an expert at playing the game of bao.²² The two used to spend hours together playing this game.

Matambo looked down on Jishegena and used to taunt him saying, "Jishegena, you are good for nothing. Why do you sit around here all day long just playing bao?" One day after being told by Matambo that he was a worthless creature, Jishegena became exasperated and challenged Matambo saying, "Matambo, even though I am crippled and can barely move I can beat you in a race." Matambo looked at Jishegena with contempt. Jishegena said, "Okay, let's have a race. If you beat me I will give you two cows." Matambo smiled and said, "All right, if you beat me I will give you four cows.

"On your mark. Get set. Go!" Before anyone knew what had happened Matambo was away and gone. With great difficulty Jishegena dragged himself along the ground and lay prostrate at the feet of Chief Lunyalula. Then he turned his head to Matambo running in the distance and yelled at the top of his lungs: "Matambo! Matambo! Where are you going? Why are you running away from our chief? If all of us run away from him who will be his subjects? His chiefdom will come to an end." Marvelling at the wisdom of Jishegena the people began to clap their hands enthusiastically and praise him for throwing himself at the feet of the chief.

Chief Lunyalula was delighted at the cleverness of Jishegena. He gave him a gift of cows and an important post in his chiefdom.

From this story comes the common Sukuma proverb *The clever person is not overcome by difficulties*. Other African proverbs on this same theme include: *Ability is wealth. Where there's a will, there's a way*.

²¹ *Developing Shared Ministry*. No. 18 in the "Training for Community Ministries" series (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications -- Africa, 1992), p.15.

²² A game using a playing board like a chess board with sixty-four holes for squares with seeds or pebbles for counters. It is still avidly played by Julius Nyerere, the retired President of Tanzania.

In this process of applied inculturation Christians can compare Jishegena's relationship with the chief with the missionary's relationship with Jesus Christ. The heart of mission and the starting point of evangelization is union with Christ. Just as Jishegena threw himself prostrate at the feet of Chief Lunyalula so human beings have to surrender themselves to the love of Jesus calling us to intimate union. At the center of the *New Testament* teaching is a personal relationship to the Trinity made possible in Jesus Christ. As Karl Rahner said before his death: "The personal dimension of the faith is an *essential* part of Christian existence." Mission is the sharing of a personal experience of the Risen Christ living in us.

Then Christians are sent out in mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus calls his followers to leave "house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news" (*Mark* 10:29). People are invited to share their faith with others. The newly baptized is sent out by his or her local Christian community to be an apostle in the SCCs, apostolic groups, out-stations and beyond. Pope John Paul II describes "the baptismal vocation as a missionary vocation."²³ Mission is an essential part of the Christian call and the heart of the Christian identity. "The whole church is missionary by its very nature."²⁴ Everyone is a missionary.

This can be seen in Jesus's call to his first followers, the twelve disciples, who later became apostles. This can also be seen in the baptismal call and the different sacraments. The process is not linear, but like a spiral. Christians continually deepen themselves as disciples of Christ and then go out in mission. This is repeated again and again. Africans understand this process very well through the rhythms of the different farming seasons - preparing the soil, planting, weeding and harvesting. The rhythms of nature and the liturgical seasons also help here.

A Swahili riddle goes like this:

"I have a riddle."

"Let it come."

"I shot my arrow without feathers; it has returned with feathers?"

(answer) "Runner bean."

In its cultural context this African riddle has two levels. First is the literal meaning of the words: the example of an arrow being shot. The second level is the example from the farming cycle. The seed of the runner bean (a common type of bean) is first planted alone and naked. Then it grows into a shrub bearing runner beans. So the once naked (featherless) bean returns as a leafy shrub (with feathers).

The missionary parallel is the Father sending the Son to redeem humankind. There is a close similarity to *Isaiah* 55:11: "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Then there are the eloquent words of St. Paul's "kenosis" passage in *Philippians* 2:6-9: "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name."

Along with this riddle on the feathers, the Sukuma riddle on the peanut can be interpreted in a missionary context. The Father sent His Divine Son into the world in a humble, hidden state (featherless, hidden in the ground as a bare seed). But through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Paschal Mystery the Risen Christ returned in His glorified state (with feathers, with showy flowers). "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (*John* 12:24).

²³ "Message of Pope John Paul II for World Mission Day, 1987," *International Fides Service* (June 17, 1987): 297.

²⁴ *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, No.2.

A further Biblical parallel is: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (*John* 17:18). Jesus sends His disciples "to the ends of the world" (*Acts* 1:8) to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. "The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go" (*Luke* 10:1) Their work was very fruitful. "The seventy returned with joy, saying 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'" (*Luke* 10:17).

This is portrayed in Charles Ndege's oil painting *Jesus Sends Out Seventy Tanzanian Disciples*²⁵ on the back wall of the Chapel of the Maryknoll Language School, Musomo, Tanzania. The setting is near Lake Victoria in the small village of Makoko, three miles from Musoma, Tanzania. The time is 9 a.m. with a bright tropical sun glowing on the horizon. In the background are local sailboats on the lake, small islands, and rock formations that are characteristic of the local ethnic groups, the Kwaya, Kuria, and Ngoreme and one modern tin-roof house. Jesus stands in the middle dressed in the royal colour of red. He is sending out modern Tanzanian disciples two by two -- men and women, adults, youth and children. There is a mixture of elderly couples, women carrying babies on their backs and young boys and girls wearing a combination of traditional and modern African clothes. Some are still listening to Jesus's commission to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (*Mark* 16:15). Others have begun walking away on their missionary journeys. Some of these disciples have already gotten into the small boats two by two. Their faces radiate the joy and enthusiasm of being messengers of the good news.

Members of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC reflected on this mission passage in *Luke* as follows: The seventy people were a mixture of men and women, old and young. The SCC members emphasized that Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs. This was the community reaching out in mission. The disciples helped each other along the way. Today SCC members follow in the footsteps of the first disciples and imitate especially the apostolic spirit of St. Jude Thaddeus. The SCC is a community that is both gathered and sent. Several African proverbs on community were mentioned. Two Christian, James and Maria Goretti, said that modern disciple does not go out alone, but with the Holy Spirit.

The SCC tries to live out this pastoral and missionary spirit in concrete ways. SCC members visit Christians in the neighbourhood who no longer receive the sacraments or have complicated marriage situations. On the celebration of the community's feast day (St. Jude Thaddeus on October 28), each member invites one or two Christians who are wavering or "new" people in the neighbourhood to the Eucharist and meal. This is also a way of implementing the gospel on the "Good Shepherd."

A Kipsigis (Kenya) proverb says: "People who remove honey from a beehive are always two." "Two people can take a splinter out of an eye" is the Kimbu version. Compare *Mark* 6:7: "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." Ukpong points out that "The missionary mandate (*Matthew* 28:19-20; *Mark* 16:15; *Acts* 1:7-8) was given to the apostles not as individuals but as a group."²⁶ There is added strength and support when missionaries are sent in groups and teams.

In the African values of community and relationships, doing things together is very important. A widely used Swahili saying in East Africa is *Unity is strength, division is weakness*. The missionary and evangelization outreach in Africa is often done in groups of two or in teams. Examples are when SCC members go to an area where the Christian faith is minimal or lacking and the home visitations of apostolic groups such as the Legion of Mary. A popular proverb in Kuria and Ngoreme says: One person is thin porridge or gruel; two or three are a handful of 'ugali' (the Swahili word for stiff cooked maize meal). Many African proverbs echo this "unity is strength" theme: *When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion. The voice of many is heard by God. Two small antelopes can beat a big one.*

²⁵ A similar oil painting on a moveable panel was done with the landscape and setting of the rural parish of Issenye in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania in the background: the huts and physical characteristics of the Issenye, Wataturu and Nandi Ethnic Groups, a field of sorghum, and a cow pen.

²⁶ Justin Ukpong, "Contemporary Theological Models of Mission: Analysis and Critique," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 27, 3 (June, 1985): 168.

The *Parable of the Two Brothers* has been told on the basis of the proverb *To make marks on the trees*. The Sukuma people use this story and proverb to build good relationships among friends and relationships in different communities of people and with different people with whom we meet (symbolized by the marks on the trees). Another Sukuma proverb says *Relationship is in the soles of the feet* to emphasize the importance of going out to other people.

Jesus told his apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Matthew 28:19*). Today in a Sukuma way Jesus tells his modern evangelizers: "Go and make marks. Proclaim the good News of Salvation to everyone you meet." An important missionary method is to make friends, to cultivate human relationships as the second son in the Sukuma story did. To evangelize in depth missionaries have to be accepted as sisters or brothers with people. True evangelization is not making superficial marks on trees, but making spiritual marks of friendship and brotherhood/sisterhood through the preaching of the gospel that transforms people's lives.

Mission has many twists and turns as reflected in the true story, *The First Challenge of Evangelization is Chickens*.²⁷

A Jesuit priest from Medellin, Colombia went to Zaire in Central Africa to be a missionary. On the plane to Africa he daydreamed about the millions of Zairian people who were just waiting for him to come and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. He dreamed that he was really needed to convert and save the people of Zaire. He anticipated a big welcome at the Kinshasa Airport. Unfortunately the plane was six hours late and only arrived at 1 a.m. The missionary priest found no one to meet him and soon he was waiting alone in the International Arrivals area. Then he spotted a white man in a cassock on the far side of the large room. He recognized him as a Jesuit Brother from his own community.

Rushing over, the priest exclaimed: "Oh, Brother, I'm so happy to see you. I was worried that my letter wouldn't arrive, and no one would be at the airport to meet me." The Brother replied: "Oh, I haven't come to meet you. We never got your letter. I've come to collect a shipment of baby chicks." Then the newly-arrived priest in a concerned voice asked: "But you'll give me a ride, won't you?"

"That depends," said the Brother matter of factly. "After I lead all the chicks on my pickup truck, if there's still room I'll be glad to give you a lift." The missionary priest thought to himself: "Here I've come thousands of miles and my first challenge of evangelization in Africa is chickens. I have come to help and save the African people. But now I am the one who needs to be helped."

III. The Journey of Discovering the Deeper Meaning of Life

The missionary is sent to proclaim the good news. In this experience the individual missionary (both expatriate and African) and the African people are on a journey of discovering the deeper meaning of life. This is reflected in the wisdom experience of African Oral Literature. African proverbs convey the spirit of this quest and search: *Travelling is learning* (Kikuyu), *Travelling is seeing* (Kikuyu/Shona). The missionary joins the local people on the journey. All are fellow seekers. Mission includes communicating what one has learned about the meaning and mystery of life: How Jesus, his life, and his teachings reveal the meaning of human existence; how life can be fruitfully lived and human society transformed through salvation in Christ.

For the missionary this journey includes "accompanying the people". This includes walking with the people in their hardships and uncertainties. In this journey missionaries are challenged to be present

²⁷ Story supplied by Rodrigo Mejia, S.J., who formerly lived in Kinshasa, Zaire and presently is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

with people through simple lifestyle, lack of security and a certain vulnerability to changing social, economic, and political situations.²⁸

The missionary discovers many times that he or she is evangelized by the people. Both the expatriate missionary in Africa and the African missionary in another part of Africa than his or her home country discover again and again that they are evangelized, taught, inspired, and transformed by another culture, people and country. In this process the missionary is not the bringer or giver but the receiver and ideally the sharer; not the teacher but the learner, not the leader but the servant. In fact, a new model of mission is that of being a missionary from a position of powerlessness and weakness as portrayed in the expression "the poor evangelizing the poor." A classic and still relevant mission metaphor is the poignant description by D.T. Niles, a Protestant who said that "mission (or evangelism) is one beggar telling another beggar where the bread is."

For the African people this journey includes understanding how the deepest African values are centered on the very meaning of life and human existence. The deepest meaning of life is found in personal relationships and community as reflected in many African proverbs. It is important to share these communitarian values with others.

Yves Congar points out that in the patristic era the church's mission was seldom viewed as "going out to attack people apostolically." A far more common idea was that the church exercises its mission through the "radiance of small loving groups."²⁹ "See how they love one another" was a description of the early Christians. Today this means the attraction of Small Christian Communities which are also called living ecclesial communities. Christian go out as a community to evangelize other communities, not just individuals. Communities evangelize communities in a process of mutual evangelization and mutual enrichment. The faith is caught more than taught. Witness and presence are important dimensions of mission.

Part of the discovery process in this journey is for the African people to realize, in the words of Pope Paul VI and echoed by Pope John Paul II, that they are now missionaries to themselves.

IV. Missionary Activity In An African Context

Mission praxis in Africa can lead to new theological insights. Missionary outreach as a community response is a significant African contribution to the World Church. While in Western countries "team ministry" is an important part of the apostolate, African local churches have developed a "community ministry" approach. The whole local community is involved in the apostolate. For example, SCC members visit a Christian who has become lax in practising the faith or an out-station community welcomes the newly baptized adults during the Easter Vigil Service. The 1979 AMECEA Study Conference described the missionary role of Eastern Africa SCCs in these words: "SCCs are an effective way of developing the mission dimension of the church at the most local level, and of making people feel that they are really part of the church's evangelizing work."³⁰

More and more SCCs are involved in evangelization and mission outreach. In Tanzania a group of pastoral workers realized that parts of Sukumaland were only 2 to 5 percent Catholic. The over-worked catechists were fully occupied with the pastoral care of the existing Christian community. This relates to the Choke Law of mission which says that as the Christian Community gets larger and large, the pastoral care gets more and more time consuming and absorbing. This "chokes off" personnel, time, and energy for primary evangelization and other direct missionary work. So a new ministry started in the SCCs: Evangelizers or Evangelists. These lay people focus on primary evangelization -- reaching out to those belonging to the African Traditional Religion in the geographical radius of their SCC. This includes home visitations, welcoming people to church celebrations and SCC meetings, and linking the Christian faith to the local African culture and customs (for example, inculturation through songs, proverbs, and stories).

²⁸ See "Mission -- A Total Way of Life, *Missionary Spirituality Report* No.8, a supplement to Maryknoll Formation Journal (Fall, 1982).

²⁹ Yves Congar, quoted in Brian Hearne, "Missionaries -- An Endangered Species?" *Furrow*, 35, 11 (November, 1984): 710

³⁰ "Conclusions of the AMECEA Study Conference 1979, *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 21:5 (October, 1979): 2.

In African countries the adult catechumenate is an essential part of the missionary praxis. The steps of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) have been carefully adapted to the local African context and situation. The commitment and zeal of many Africans baptized as adults is reflected in the Kuria and Ngoreme proverb: *Those who discover a treasure value it more than those who are born with it.* In contemporary missiology there is great respect for world religions such as African Traditional Religion. God is present among African people before the missionaries arrive. In mysterious ways God invites everyone into the Kingdom. There is a Swahili riddle that goes: *"God's door is always open?"* The answer is *"heaven and earth."*

One example of the contextualization of the adult catechumenate in Africa involves the "inquirers." In North America and Europe most inquirers come from a Christian background of different Protestant or Evangelical denominations and pass through the various rites and stages of the RCIA. Most African inquirers are members of the African Traditional Religion and thus have no such Christian background. One Tanzanian parish introduced a simple *Preliminary Rite for the Reception of Inquirers* which opens the evangelization period and makes the transition to the later rites of the RCIA.³¹

In some parishes in Tanzania the SCCs have started the ministry of Accompanier in the Adult Catechumenate. A catechumen chooses a SCC member to "accompany" him or her through the stages of the RCIA. The catechumen is invited to participate in all the activities of the SCC. Personal relationships and friendships are an important part of people preparing for baptism to feel "at home." Growth in faith is an experience of living in a believing community. Some time the whole SCC accompanies "their" catechumens -- another example of community ministry.

Another dimension of community is from the viewpoint of those being evangelized. Donovan described a *critical incident* during the evangelization of the Maasai that concerned the meaning of communal faith. After the period of one year of instruction (comparable to the adult catechumenate), he visited one community to prepare the adults for the final step before Baptism. The missionary priest explained which people deserved to be baptized and which couldn't be baptized because they had missed meetings, didn't show enough effort, or didn't understand the gospel message sufficiently. Then he narrates what happened in the true story *Padri, why Are You Trying to Break us Up and Separate Us.*

The old man, Ndangoya, stopped me politely but firmly. "Padre, why are you trying to break us up and separate us. During this whole year that you have been teaching us, we have talked about these things when you were not here, at night around the fire. Yes, there have been lazy ones in this community. But they have been helped by those with much energy. There are stupid ones in the community, but they have helped by those are intelligent. Yes, there are ones with little faith in this village, but they have helped by those with much faith. Would you turn out and drive off those lazy ones and the ones with little faith and the stupid ones? From the first day I have spoken for these people. And I speak for them now. Now, in this day one year later, I can declare for them and for all this community, that we have reached the step in our lives where we can say 'We believe'..."

I looked at the old man Ndangoya. "Excuse me, old man, "I said. "Sometimes my head is hard and I learn slowly. We believe,' you said. Of course you do. Everyone in the community will be baptized."³²

The Maasai Adult Catechumens wanted to be baptized not individually but as a group, as a community. This is a significant insight for missionary and pastoral ministry. In the context of the African communitarian society the faith is caught rather than taught. The Adult Catechumenate is

³¹ See *Kama Visamaki*, 10 (1985): 88. This is the newsletter of the Office for the Renewed Catechumenate of the Tanzania National Liturgical Commission. The title means "Like Little Fish" in Swahili.

³² Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, pp.92-93.

best carried out in a community setting. The Lumko Missiological Institute in South Africa has been a pioneer in developing Catechumen Communities, a specific type of ScC where adult catechumens reflect on the Bible, talk about the Catholic faith, and journey together in a community setting.

Another example is Mwanhuzi Parish in Shinyanga Diocese where a Catechetical Team of seven committed Catholics meet with the adult catechumens and their sponsors after the Sunday *Eucharist* in small groups to reflect on their faith together. Other Catholics are invited to Join -- people preparing for *confirmation*, people who want to learn more about their faith, lax Catholics, and those in irregular marriages.³³ This is a concrete example of a life-centered and an African culture-oriented catechesis.

Another African contribution is to see mission in terms of reconciliation and healing which brings about wholeness. The large number of African proverbs on community and relationships and on healing reflect African priorities for a harmonious, holistic, and integrated way of life. Today mission praxis includes conflict resolution, peacemaking, and consensus building. Traditionally Africans would talk and talk under the *palaver tree* until they agreed on a common solution or an equitable compromise. A Yoruba says *A wise person who knows proverbs reconciles difficulties*. Maintaining good relationships is more important than exerting individual rights or winning a case. These values are important in the world today where "success at all costs" and "Winners and losers" mentalities seem to dominate. More important than the task or the achievement are the personal and communal human values. An African proverb says *We are our relationships*.

During this historic visit to Kampala, Uganda in 1969 Pope Paul VI hailed the coming of age and the maturity of the Church in Africa with the now famous words; "You are now missionaries to yourselves."³⁴ Taking the example of Tanzania, Pope John Paul II eloquently sounded this missionary call in a speech in Moshi, Tanzania in September, 1990: "Now it is your responsibility to be witnesses of Christ in Tanzania, in other countries of Africa and to the ends of the earth."³⁵ Cardinal Otunga, the Archbishop of Nairobi, has stated: "Until Nairobi Archdiocese sends priest, Brothers, Sisters and lay missionaries to other parts of the world, the Church in Nairobi is not a mature, established church."³⁶

More and more Africans are home missionaries in their own countries and going to other countries in Africa and other parts of the world. On October 18, 1987 World Mission Sunday was actively celebrated in East Africa. The theme was "We Are All Missionaries" with special mission-related Scripture readings, posters and printed materials in English and Swahili, and other audio-visual materials.

On one particular world Mission Sunday Iramba parish in Musoma Diocese focused on the special needs of Sudan -- the largest country in Africa with very few local African priests and pastoral workers, a long history of civil war, and on-going natural disasters. A special collection was sent to El Obeid Diocese in western Sudan as part of the mutuality of mission in an African context.

A major development in the post-Vatican II World Church is that Local Churches in Africa (and other parts of the Third World) have a rising missionary consciousness with concrete examples of being a "Mission Sending Church." The last five years have seen an increasing number of East Africans joining international congregations such as the Jesuits and Spiritans (Holy Ghost) and international Missionary societies such as the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) and Consolata. The Kenyan bishops stated that encouraging local vocations to international missionary societies is a Kenya Church response to world mission.

³³ This is comparable to the RCIA groups in the United States where Catholics who want to learn about their faith participate in the weekly small sharing groups.

³⁴ Pope Paul VI, Discourse at the Closing of the First Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), Kampala, Uganda (31 July, 1969), AAS 61 (1969):575.

³⁵ Pope John Paul II, Tanzania Is Becoming Missionary (Homily during Eucharistic Celebration in Moshi, Tanzania on 5 September, 1990), *Osservatore Romano* (6 September, 1990).

³⁶ Maurice Otunga, in an unpublished speech to the Maryknoll Society, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985.

The Congregation of the Apostles of Jesus -- a genuine African religious missionary congregation -- was founded in Uganda in 1968 to proclaim the gospel to those who are not Christians and to conduct pastoral work in needy "mission churches" (now called developing churches). Its growth has been phenomenal. Presently there are 184 priests, 223 perpetual professed members (including priests, theologians who have finished their pastoral year, and Brothers), 147 temporary professed, and hundreds more in major and minor seminaries. Seven houses of training (novitiates, minor, and major seminaries) are located in Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Presently the Apostles of Jesus are working in twenty-six dioceses in five countries (the four countries previously mentioned above and Ethiopia). The Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary, the women's counterpart of the Apostles of Jesus, was founded in 1977.

Tanzanian men and women are increasingly answering the missionary call *ad gentes*. The Religious Superiors' Association of Tanzania (RSAT) and the Religious Women Superiors' Association of Tanzania (RWSAT) carried out a survey and wrote a case study of its members. As of 1 September, 1991 there were 168 Tanzanians belonging to missionary-oriented congregations and societies who are serving as missionaries outside of Tanzania: ninety-four sisters, sixty-eight priests and six brothers.³⁷

V. Laity in Mission

At the 1977 World Synod of Bishops in Rome Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania first emphasized that "99 percent of the Catholic Church are laity."³⁸ Just as an increasing number of lay missionaries are coming to Africa from Europe and North America so African lay missionaries are going to other countries in Africa and to other continents of the world. This can be a powerful expression of how each African country is both a receiving church and a sending church -- an important step in the development of an authentic World Church. The *Lineamenta* of the 1987 World Synod of Bishops on "Laity" stated:

The Decree *Ad Gentes* underlines the importance and indeed the irreplaceability of the laity in the missionary activity of the church: "The church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy" (No.21).³⁹

Lay missionary couples with children are a powerful witness as described in this true story *We Wanted To Be Like Them*:⁴⁰

A striking story is told about one remote area in Sudan. Expatriate missionaries, especially priests, Brothers, and Sisters had labored there for many years with few visible results. Then expatriate lay missionaries -- married and single -- came to the area and soon many Sudanese became Catholics. A Sudanese elder explained: "When we saw the priests and Sisters living separately and alone we didn't want to be like them. But when we saw Catholic families -- men women and children -- living happily together, we wanted to be like them." In the family-oriented African society married missionary couples with children have a powerful and unique witness, presence, and credibility.

Another story about lay missionaries is *What Brought You Here?*⁴¹

³⁷ See Joseph G. Healey, "A Missionary Reflects on the African Synod: 'You Shall Be My Witnesses,'" *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 33, 6 (December, 1991): 347-58 and "You Shall Be My Witnesses: A Missionary Reflects on the African Synod," *African Christian Studies*, 9, 2 (June, 1993): 11-20.

³⁸ Christopher Mwoleka, intervention at the 1977 World Synod of Bishops in Vatican City.

³⁹ 1987 World Synod of Bishops on Laity, *Lineamenta* (Vatican City, 1985), No. 4.

⁴⁰ Originally published in Joseph G. Healey, "World Mission: An African Perspective," *Emmanuel*, 95, 9 (November, 1989): 493, 525.

⁴¹ Joan Sharkey, "Missioner Tales," *Maryknoll* (March, 1989):56.

After arriving in Tanzania as a lay missionary from the United States, I was spending time with Paschali, a carpenter working in our parish of Ndoleleji, and his wife Paulina during the sombre period of mourning for their one-year-old daughter who had died two nights earlier. Paschali mentioned that he was not one of the Sukuma people who live around Ndoleleji. He told me that he came from the Lake Victoria area farther north. Looking out at the brown, flat, eroding terrain around us, I couldn't understand why anyone would leave his ethnic group and the lush land around Lake Victoria. Finally I asked Paschali what possessed him to make such a move. He turned to me with a smile asked, "What brought you here?"

African lay missionaries are now being trained to work in their own countries and to go to other countries as well. African lay missionary societies have started in different countries such as the Catholic Lay Missionaries of Kenya. The saying is *We are called. We are sent* appears in Swahili on the cover of booklets produced by this group with a map of Kenya and different arrows reaching throughout the country and outside to other countries.

For all African Christians the baptismal call is a missionary call. This is described in the Ghanaian story *The Parable of You Are My Arms and My Legs Now*⁴² on the theme "We Are Christ's Messengers:"

One year during the wet season there was a very bad storm. It blew the roof off the church in one small village. When the catechist came to inspect the fallen roof he was saddened to see that one of the rafters had fallen, broken a large statue of Christ over the high altar. The people had been very proud of this statue. Now the statue had no arms and no legs. These had been broken off by the fallen rafter. The catechist was very worried. He decided that he would get some cement and lime and put new legs and arms back on the statue. Then the people would be happy again. While the catechist slept that night he had a dream. In the dream Jesus appeared to him and said, "Do not put back any arms or legs on the statue, as I do not need them now." The catechist was amazed and said, "Please Jesus, why do you not need them any more?" Jesus answered, "You are my arms and legs now!" Then the catechist woke up and understood what Jesus meant. The commentary on this parable emphasizes that lay people are Christ's messengers and are called to announce the good news:

In the day of our Baptism we are called into God's family. We (Christians) are like the apostles. We are the apostles of today. We are now called to bring the message and consolation of Jesus Christ to other people. We are his messengers. Like the dream the catechist had, we are the arms and legs of Jesus Christ for many people in the world today.⁴³

VI. Characteristics of the Missionary's Life

Important characteristics and qualities of the missionary vocation and life are reflected in different African stories, proverbs, sayings, and riddles. The missionary tries to be "at home with" the local people and culture. This is portrayed in the true Tanzanian story *You're Not a White Man. You're our Father*:⁴⁴

A touching story is told about an expatriate missionary priest who lived for a long time in a remote part of Tanzania. He lived alone, a single white man among his African flock. One day a British government official arrived on a tour of the area. All the African children ran out to welcome the visitor. They clapped and danced. After the official left, the children excitedly told the missionary priest, "We saw a white man! We saw a white man!" A few children said that the visitor was the first foreigner they had ever seen. The priest was amazed and exclaimed, "But I'm a white man. I'm a foreigner. I've been living here with you all these years." One of the children said, "You're not a white man; You're our Father."

⁴² African Parables Series No. 1, p.44.

⁴³ . Ibid

⁴⁴ . Healey, A Fifth Gospel, p.51

The African values of patience and endurance can help missionary activity which can be lonely, frustrating, and discouraging. Some African proverbs that reflect these values of patience and a slow, but sure approach are:

1. The patient person eats ripe fruit (Haya)
2. The person who preserves unripe fruit eats it when it is ripe (Swahili)
3. Eyes that know how to wait put the crown on the head (Ganda)
4. Little by little the moon becomes full (Oromo)
5. One by one makes a bundle (Ganda)
6. A little rain each day will fill the river to overflowing (Bassa, Kpelle)
7. Slowly, slowly the rat eats the hide (Kuria/Ngoreme/Sukuma)
8. Slowly, slowly is the way to pour porridge into the gourd (Kuria/Ngoreme)

Compare these proverbs to James 1:4: "Let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." Successful evangelization in Africa requires great patience and fortitude. The missionary is often involved in the *waiting apostolate*

Yet there is also an urgency in proclaiming the good news of salvation. "But he said to them, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose'" (Luke 4:43). A Ganda proverb says one who sees something good must narrate it. A Sukuma riddle goes like this:

"I have a riddle."

"Let it come."

"As I walk along I spit out white shells?"

(answer) "Sugar cane pulp."

This is a riddle about a person who brings a blessing wherever he or she goes. Spitting out the sugar-cane pulp that looks like white shells is a symbol of spreading good news. The Sukuma believe that white is a symbol of blessing, good luck, good fortune, good heartedness, and the performance of good deeds. The applied meaning refers to the bearer of the good news who walks along and spreads the good news of salvation. This refers to Jesus, the apostles, and modern missionaries. Compare this with Romans 10:14-15:

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

The riddle also refers to spreading the good news of the wisdom of African culture contained in stories, proverbs, sayings, and riddles.

In a Sukuma story Samike composed a Song of Thanksgiving to Luhumbika. Overcome with joy the dance leader couldn't restrain himself from singing this song of praise and thanksgiving to his master diviner-healer. He went about telling people the good news that he had been healed by Luhumbika. Samike could not keep silent, but was compelled to tell others what Luhumbika had done for him. As a result the fame of Luhumbika spread and the number of his disciples multiplied. In a similar vein a Ganda proverb says One who sees something good must narrate it.

The first apostles could not keep silent, but were compelled to tell others what Jesus had done for them. As a result the fame of Jesus Christ spread and the number of his disciples multiplied. "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (*Acts 2:47*). Today

Christians, realizing what God has done for them in Jesus Christ, are overcome with joy. This includes giving personal testimony and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ saving work.

This is related to the Ghanaian story *The Parable of the herbalist Who Kept All His Secrets To Himself*:^{45,46}

Once there was a very wise and powerful herbalist. He knew the secrets of the trees and the earth. He could make wonderful medicines from roots and leaves. There were always great numbers of people waiting in his compound to be treated and healed. He cured many and his name had spread throughout the whole country. But he was getting old. His son was preparing to be a herbalist too, but when he asked the old man to explain the secrets and how to prepare the medicine, the oldman would simply say. "Go back, you are not yet ready." One day the boy knocked on his father's door and there was no answer. When he went in he found his father dead. Everyone in the town was very sad about his death. They had lost a good friend who had healed them when they were sick but even worse, they had lost his secrets and his medicine. They all knew this was a great waste.

The commentary on this parable states:

When Jesus came he cured and helped many people. He knew the secrets of the universe. He called himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*John 14:6*). But he did not keep all his secrets or powers to himself. Rather he passed them on to his disciples. These are the teachings of the Christian faith. Today all Christians are Jesus' disciples and people have heard and lived by his teachings. They are not meant to be kept as secrets but to be spread so that all may come to experience eternal life, For this reason, it is especially the duty of parents, teachers, and Christian leaders to make sure that the words of life are passed down to children.⁴⁷

A related missionary quality is taking risks. A Kikuyu proverb says *The one who does not risk leaving something behind will find nothing*. In other words, to gain something one must lose something. A Sukuma proverb goes *A real person goes beyond himself or herself, that is, is not afraid of trying*. A related Sukuma proverb *The ant tries to eat the rock* (that is, it tries even if it cannot do it). The missionary has to leave behind his or her home culture to discover new things in a new place. Culture shock involves a dying process. This is related to the peanut riddle and the "grain of wheat" analogy. The missionary enters into the life of a new people and puts down roots in a new place and new culture -- an experience that he or she may be called to again and again. This is connected to the risk in the evangelization process. The missionary is open to new ideas and new cultures. Such a person goes to unknown territory and is not afraid to experiment. The creative missionary methods of St. Paul are an inspiration to all contemporary missionaries: *I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some* (*1 Corinthians 9:22*).

Vulnerability is a closely related virtue and special value for mission today. The missionary is challenged to enter deeply in the Paschal Mystery of dying and rising. A missionary spirituality evolves through a spirituality of inculturation and being evangelized by the African people and culture. Especially the expatriate missionary today has to be willing to put aside his or her agenda and be at the service of the Local Church. The Sukuma peanut riddle has a special meaning for the missionary who proclaims the Good News of Salvation in a transcultural situation. The missionary has to resemble the poor man from the interior of Tanzania, the bare peanut seed, and especially Jesus Christ himself in being a grain of wheat that is willing to die for the promise of the missionary harvest. This is reflected in a popular missionary prayer in East Africa.

⁴⁵ . African Parables Series No. 2: 25.

⁴⁶ . Ibid.

⁴⁷ This "openness" is reflected in an elderly missionary's advice to one of us: "In Africa live with a sense of humor and a sense of wonder." Part of this wonder is seen in the mystery of faith.

Lord, I never stop wondering at the way YOU came among us and the way YOU shaped YOUR MISSION. For the mission YOU have given us does not depend on subtle minds and weighty intellects, but on the grain of wheat willing to die for the promise of the harvest.

Another quality is commitment, dedication, and a single-minded purpose. An African example of practical evangelization is the story-proverb of The Hyena and *the Two Roads*. The last sentence of the story is the proverb *Two roads overcome the hyena* which appears in Kikuyu, Luyia, Lango (Uganda), Swahili, and other African languages. The meaning translation of the proverb is *Two roads proved to be the downfall of the hyena of Greed and overcame the hyena*. The message is clear. You can't do two things at once. A parallel scripture passage is Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth."

This proverb teaches the African value of doing one thing at a time and doing it well. The contemporary missionary dedicates himself or herself totally to preaching the gospel: "Proclaim the message ; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" (2 Timothy 4:2). This single-minded purpose focuses on the priority of evangelization. From the viewpoint of those being evangelized, the hyena story suggests that the catechumen leaves his or her old ways and chooses Christ without wavering.

Another missionary characteristic is humility as portrayed in the Sukuma proverb *Even an elephant (that is, an important person) can be sent*. This proverb uses the symbol of the elephant, the largest and strongest animal, to teach missionary service and humility. The use of this proverb in African context is seen in the true Tanzanian story *The Sukuma Bishop Who Was Sent By His Worker*:

One day a Sukuma bishop in Tanzania prepared to go on a safari to a distant parish in his diocese. One of the workers on the compound of the bishop's residence wanted to send a package to a friend who lived in the very place where the bishop was going. Before asking help from the bishop, he used the proverb *Even an elephant (that is, an important person) can be sent*. The bishop immediately agreed to take the package.

God sent the most important person, the greatest person -- Jesus Christ his beloved son -- to redeem humankind. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Yet Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even on a cross" (Philippians 2:8) The missionary tries to imitate Christ.

A final characteristic is openness²⁹ to the mystery of the Holy Spirit at work in African people and African cultures. The missionary participates in God's plan of salvation as portrayed in the true Tanzanian story *African People Who Knew*⁴⁸

On Christmas morning I drove my motorcycle from Ndoleleji, Tanzania to an outlying center to celebrate the Eucharist. As I motored along, I saw men in the fields ploughing with oxen and women planting. It struck me that these farmers knew nothing about this day and its meaning. They were not Christians. In this rural area there were not even any commercial reminders of Christmas -- no Santa Clauses, Christmas carols, or tinsel.

At the end of my journey, however, several hundred people of faith were waiting for me. They had set this day aside to come together to celebrate their knowledge of God's love and its breaking into their history. Latin American theologian Juan Luis Segundo defines a Christian as "a person who knows." In that remote corner of the world I joined those African people "who knew" to celebrate the Eucharist, to rejoice in our togetherness, and our personal sharing with one another in the glorious mystery of Christmas.

So the missionary is open to the Spirit and creates the path by walking.

⁴⁸ Ken Thesing, "Missioner Tales," *Maryknoll* (December, 1992)

VII. Constructing An African Narrative Mission Theology

In reflecting on theology Muzorewa states:

The African church has been too long an object of mission for Christians of other nations. The African church itself needs to develop a theology of mission. The church cannot remain dependent on the parent church indefinitely. The church needs to reformulate its self-understanding so that it may genuinely know itself as a part of Christ's mission to the world. What is our direct response to Christ's command to follow him and love him? WE have the poor, oppressed and the sick among us; what is our response to the least of these, our brothers and sisters? An articulation to these questions indicates our theology of mission.⁴⁹

One important source of this African mission theology is the proverbs, Sayings, riddles, stories and other examples of African oral literature that we have been exploring. This cultural source together with contemporary experience help to construct an African narrative missiology. Hearne states:

There is only one God, one whom we all are groping to find, the one whom Jesus called "Abba," the one who summons all people to reach out of their individual, tribal, nationalistic, and racial worlds to encounter one another -- and this is the basis for mission. Mission is a challenge to broaden our horizons, to explode our petty images of God and of one another, and to enter with wonder deeper and deeper into the mystery. A Ganda proverb says: The person who has never travelled widely thinks his mother is the only cook (the best cook). This has mission theology within it!⁵⁰

Another source for mission theology are the symbols and signs connected to an African symbolic theology. The potter is a metaphor for mission and the clay pot is a symbol of mission. The Bible mentions that God is like a potter (see *Jeremiah* 18:1-6). As he watched the Chewa potters in the mountains of Malawi, Mario Aguilar found that African pottery reflects deeply the call to mission of all people:

The mission of Jesus, the one sent by the Father, was very much like that of a potter, as he moulded his own disciples and as he tries to mould us as well. That potter tries to mould us into new beings who are more loving, caring, open to others, and ultimately more human because we search for Christ and his Good News.

Nevertheless, our own call to be Christians through *Baptism* means that we do not only receive life and shape from God but that we also have to give that life of Christ to others. In other words, we mould and shape the life of others through our own faith and belief in the Good News. We are like potters who give shape and form to clay, while God gives life to those objects -- the pots which in themselves, do not have life. God is the "Master Potter," and we partake in his own task, in his own mission.⁵¹

Another insight of mission theology is mutuality in mission. A dramatic development in contemporary missiology is that mission is from everywhere to everywhere. Now the Local Churches in Africa (and other parts of the Third World) are both Mission Sending Churches and Mission Receiving Churches. Now African missionaries are called forth by Local Churches and sent to other parts of the world. For some Africans this means they have been sent to another country. For most Africans this means being evangelizers in their own cultures.

The Pastoral Statement on World Mission by the Catholic Bishops of the United States emphasizes: "Each local church is both mission sending and mission receiving."⁵² This statement clearly points out that a deeper understanding of the theology of mission recognizes that the old distinctions between "Western mission sending churches" and "mission lands receiving churches" no longer apply. There is now a mutuality in mission, a mutual sharing, a mutual giving and receiving. Local

⁴⁹ Guinyai Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, p.100.

⁵⁰ Brian Hearne, "Mission in East Africa," *Furrow*, 34:1 (January, 1983): 28.

⁵¹ Mario Aguilar, "African Pottery and Mission," *Seed*, 5:10 (October, 1993): 25.

⁵² To the Ends of the Earth, No.15

Churches throughout the world are in mutual dialogue with each other. Christians are part of both sending and receiving churches. Thus African people are both evangelized and evangelizers.

The question of geography in mission is increasingly irrelevant. One cannot describe a charism by geography. Missionaries are from everywhere to everywhere.⁵³ Donald Dorr states:

In recent times the Catholic missionary agencies have either abandoned or carefully nuanced the geographical definition of "mission to the nations." In general they have moved cautiously from geography to ethnicity or culture as the main criterion for defining their specific role.

Consider the deeper meaning of the proverbs and sayings: *If we stop reaching out we die. All that is not given is lost. You only have what you give away. Giving is not losing; it is keeping for tomorrow. To give is to save. Sharing is wealth.* Christians everywhere are called to announce what God has done for them in Christ. This means declaring publicly what faith means to each person. "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops" (*Matthew 10:27*). Otherwise Christians' faith will wither and die. The most mature SCCs in Eastern Africa have recognized that unless they reach out in mission they will die.

This gives a new focus to events such as World Mission Sunday. This annual event is no longer an experience of the rich Western Churches helping poor Third World Churches. Rather it is a vivid reminder that "the whole church is missionary by its very nature."⁵⁴ "The whole church is missionary and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God."⁵⁵ World Mission Sunday and similar events are important for each Local Church to understand and put into action its missionary character. This includes the celebration of the Local Church's missionary identity; solidarity with other Local Churches in mutual missionary responsibility; and mission awareness and mission education for everyone.

There is an on-going debate on what is mission today and what are the parameters of mission theology? The meaning of terms such as "transcultural mission," "cross-cultural mission," "multicultural mission," and "mission as crossing boundaries" enter into the debate. In clarifying the meaning of mission *ad gentes* in Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter *The Mission of the Redeemer*, William Frazier divides the one universal mission of the church into the following:

1. Ad Gentes/Initial Evangelization/Ad Extra. This is further sub-divided into territorial, new worlds, and cultural sectors.
2. Re-evangelization/New Evangelization/Ad Intra.
3. Pastoral Ministry.⁵⁶

A dynamic tension exists between mission as inculturation and mission as prophetic proclamation. Michael Amaladoss insightfully points out that inculturation is not really a topic of mission theology. "Conversion of this group of people is mission. But I do not see why their expression of the gospel in their own cultural forms (symbols and art) should be considered mission. A local church in trying to be itself is not doing mission."⁵⁷ Inculturation is more the task of the African Local Churches developing their self-identity and expressing this identity through art and symbols. Hearne comments:

⁵³ For international mission societies such as Mill Hill and the Missionaries of Africa the principle is that the individual missionary works outside his home country: for example, a Dutch missionary may work in France or Germany. A Tanzanian missionary may work in Kenya or Malawi. For national missionary societies this means working outside your home country: for example, an American missionary (Maryknoll) works in Tanzania or Japan.

⁵⁴ Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, No.2

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, No.35. Also quoted in *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, No.59.

⁵⁶ William Frazier, "Mission Ad Gentes in Redemptoris Missio." Maryknoll, N.Y.: Privately printed, 1993.

⁵⁷ Michael Amaladoss, "From Vatican II Into the Coming Decade," *International Review of Mission*, (April, 1990).

Amaladoss even claims that this is no longer a missionary element, but simply the normal living out of what has been received from the life and witness of the missionaries. There is a deep truth here. Christian mission lies beyond the control of those who have been evangelizers. The gospel has a life of its own. Like the Kingdom, it grows beyond the understanding and the control of those who thought they were planting the seed. The parables of Jesus remain as the most challenging and as the most radical invitations to those who try to articulate a *mission theology*.⁵⁸

Rewriting (and reliving) the parables in an African setting such as *The Parable of the good Maasai* can help develop this mission praxis and theology. A concrete application of these *most challenging and most radical invitations of Jesus* is the recent tragic civil war in Rwanda and Burundi. Recent population statistics⁵⁹ show the following:

Rwanda:	Hutu Ethnic Group:	90%
	Tutsi Ethnic Group:	9%
	Roman Catholic:	65%
	Protestant:	9%
	Total Christians:	74%
Burundi:	Hutu Ethnic Group:	82%
	Tutsi Ethnic Group:	14%
	Roman Catholic:	78%
	Protestant:	5%
	Total Christians:	83%

Contextualizing (or actualizing) the gospel in Rwanda and Burundi today means telling *The Parable of the Good Hutu and The Parable of the Good Tutsi* and challenging people to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Hearne points out:

The challenge of mission is to remind us that we are called to reach out in love to those who differ from us in religion, culture, race, and class. Mission refers to every effort we make to reach out to those we meet. Mission, in the sense of transcultural and transracial reaching out, means that we are called to try to communicate with people who share different worldviews and different value systems.⁶⁰

In a related example Donders⁶¹ reports:

Scholars at the Department of philosophy and Religious Studies (at the University of Nairobi) in Nairobi, Kenya did some research on psychology of conversion, as they called it. The gospel story that influenced most "converts" to make their step was the one of the Good Samaritan. The story recounts how a man from one ethnic group, a Samaritan, opens his heart and his purse to a victim who belonged to another ethnic group, a Jew.⁶²

These views indicate that developing a narrative theology of inculturation (together with the praxis) is connected to, but does not fall directly under mission theology. It is more a part of the Local Church developing its own identity and reformulating its own self understanding in local cultural terms. Yet once achieved, the cycle continues through reaching out to others. In fact, the self-understanding occurs during the reaching out and missionary response. The Local Church attains full maturity when it becomes a Mission Sending Church.

⁵⁸ Brian Hearne, "Missio Ad Gentes," *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER), 35, 1.

⁵⁹ See the statistics in the computer version of PC Globe Maps 'n' Facts (1993 copyright).

⁶⁰ Hearne, "Missio Ad Gentes," 11-12.

⁶¹ Joseph Donders, *Charged With the Spirit: Mission Is For Everyone* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), p.129.

⁶² This parable is an original story on the sub-theme of "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue" of the 1994 African Synod. The purpose of this parable is to tell the story of the African Synod from a different point of view especially through the experience and vision of African people on the grassroots level. This parable is based on the following scripture texts: Isaiah 9:1-2; Isaiah 52:7; Wisdom 18:14-15; Luke 8:4-15; John 14:2; and John 15:4. It also draws on the written explanation of the Zambian carving Christ the Mediator which is described in Endnote 40 of Chapter Two. Originally published in Joseph G. Healey, "Five African Parables (Life Stories) On the Main Topics of the 1994 African Synod," *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER), (February, 1994): 50-53.

VIII. Examples of African Narrative Theology and Practical Evangelization

1. *The Parable of Planting Seeds of God in African Soil.*⁴⁴

Once upon a time -- and it was the beginning of all eternity -- God our "Creator and Source" began the work of creation. "God's Spirit" went to every part of creation -- the galaxies, the stars, the planets -- to establish the Reign of God. The Seeds of God were planted everywhere. The "Unsurpassed Great Spirit" scattered seeds of love and peace and truth and hope far and wide over the whole universe.

The "Spirit of the Creator God" sowed Seeds of God throughout the planet Earth. These seeds were planted in the hearts of all people, all cultures, all races, all ethnic groups, in all kinds of earthly soil. Seeds of the Word of God penetrated all the great religions of the world. Some of God's Seeds were planted in African Traditional Religion. Amidst the diversity of peoples and cultures and religious traditions there are many dwelling places in God's house.

At a certain point of time almost 2,000 years ago in the silent watches of the night when a peaceful stillness enveloped all things, God's all-powerful "Eternal Word" leaped down from heaven to earth. We call this "Eternal Word" Emmanuel -- "God here with us." Jesus Christ's Good News of Salvation went to every corner of the earth starting in the Middle East and then going to the Mediterranean world and on to northern Africa and throughout Europe. Jesus Christ's followers planted the Seeds of the Gospel in the hearts of all people everywhere on earth. In time these Seeds of the Gospel reached North America, South America, Asia, the Pacific, and other parts of Africa. The response of each person was different and can be compared to planting seeds on the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and in good soil.

The continent of Africa has its own special story. The Sower went out to sow the seed in Africa. The Sower is Jesus Christ. The Seed is the Word, the gospel, the Good News of Salvation. The soil is the hearts of the African people and African cultures. The ground in which the gospel is planted is holy ground. The Seed of God is at home in African soil. Before the first expatriate missionaries arrived in Africa with the explicit proclamation of the gospel, the "Supreme Being" had already visited the people whom the "High God" knows and loves. African religious heritage and culture have always been a privileged place of God's revelation. The proverbs, sayings, stories, and myths of the African people show that the Holy Spirit sowed the Seeds of the Good News in African cultures long before the African people ever heard Jesus's words and teaching. Yet many of these seeds remained hidden in the ground, a treasure yet to be fully revealed.

Jesus Christ is also the seed itself. He is the grain of corn which has fallen into Africa's soil and brings forth a hundredfold. All life has changed like a tree. He has penetrated the African soil and transformed it into his own body. Like the tree of the ancestors' spirits, he links up the earth with the sky, the living with the "Great Spirit", and his intermediaries, the ancestors. Africans call Jesus the "Chief Diviner-Healer," Eldest Brother-Intercessor, "Our Guest," "Protective Hero," and "Victor over Death."

Many Africans are farmers who know the cycle of nature very well. God is a deep part of their holistic religious experience. Some African names for God are "Sun," "Rain" and "Great Rainbow." African farmers are patient and persevering. They know and feel the rhythm of farming. An African proverb says *A slow rain bears the most fruit.*

At a certain point weeding is necessary. Christ himself is the "Chief Weeder." He uprooted the weeds of sin out of the field of the world. Christ continues to "weed" today as he speaks to people through the scriptures, through their consciences, and through reading the contemporary signs of the times. Christians are also called to be weeders and to continually remove anything in their lives that prevents the action of God from bearing fruit within them. One local African name is

translated "There Are No Weeds in My Field." A significant part of this weeding process is to root out social and structural sins such as inequality, discrimination, tribalism, and corruption.

Missionaries came from the lands of Europe and North America to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. Beautiful upon the mountains of Africa -- Kilimanjaro, Ras Dashan, Meru, Elgon, Toubkal -- are the feet of the messengers who announce peace, bring good news and proclaim salvation. They toiled long and hard to plant the seed everywhere on the continent of Africa. They watered the soil and helped the young flowers and plants to grow. Other missionaries came to help in the first harvests. In many places Christianity flourished. The number of African Christians grew and multiplied. African prayer traditions have flowered. Now there is new reverence and respect for earthing the gospel in local African customs and traditions, for rooting the faith in local African cultures. The process of inculturating the Christian faith has matured and is bringing forth rich fruit.

Throughout Africa there is widespread belief in one "Supreme God." The Holy Spirit is active in different religions. In many places in Africa the one "High God" speaks through Allah and the world religion of Islam. There is new respect for African Traditional Religion. African Independent Churches are flourishing.

Today the Christian of the Local Churches in Africa are missionaries to themselves. They are rooting the Christian faith in their own diverse African cultures. As the Seeds of the Gospel are sown in African soil, the roots are growing deeper and deeper. Now Africa must grow its own fruits. Now Africans themselves are responsible for the harvests. The time has come for gospel seeds to be recognized, cultivated, and germinated in order to bring forth flowers the world has not yet seen before. In some places this means planting the gospel seed in African culture and letting it grow wild -- in freedom, but with careful attention. Indeed new flowers are growing in African soil. African flowers are blooming in liturgy, music and art. New spiritual traditions are evolving. New African images and symbols of Jesus have emerged.

Gradually the Church in Africa is bringing to full maturity Seeds of the Word and taking its place alongside its sister and brother local churches around the world. Africans are also becoming missionaries to others. Rich African fruits are now part of the World Church. Seeds of God continue to be sown among all peoples, all cultures, all times. The "Eternal Word" continues to go forth.

2. *Paul's Two-Year Spiritual Journey*⁶³ -- a real life story adapted to illustrate practical evangelization. One of the most important aspects of mission in Africa is the adult catechumenate. The stages are included in the RCIA (Rite of Christian initiation of Adults). This story took place in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania:

"Late one afternoon Maro sat in front of his house in Kenyamonta village in Mara Region in western Tanzania. As he puffed on his pipe he felt very content for a 79-year-old man. He had enjoyed a long, full life and except for occasional arthritis his health was still pretty good. As an elder in his clan and village he was highly respected and looked up to. He fondly remembered his three wives (the youngest Theresa was still living), his 16 children and too many grandchildren to count. He had many cows, good fields and even a strong house with a tin roof (permanent dwelling those 'smart' young government officials like to call it).

But something was bothering Maro. His mind and heart were restless. Oh yes, it was that provocative question the Catholic priest at Iramba Parish two miles away had asked him. Just how did he put it: 'Maro, you may be 79-years-old, but why don't you be baptized a Catholic?' Maro had laughed at the question and put off the priest with a local Kingoreme proverb about not starting anything new late in life.

But now the priest's question was bothering Maro. After all, why didn't Maro get baptized? Why didn't he become a Christian in his old age? For years his third wife Theresa had been pestering Maro about getting married in the Catholic Church so she could receive communion again. But

⁶³ Originally published in Healey, *What Language Does God Speak*, pp.53-57.

Maro always managed to wave his hand and make a joke about 'not teaching an old dog new tricks.' So Maro puffed on his pipe and thought, he thought and puffed on his pipe. Finally he said, 'So be it. I'll get baptized and please everyone in my extended family. This will make the priest and my Catholic friends happy too. So be it.'

Maro thought he could make it a quick affair, but the priest and catechist said it would be a two-year period of instruction -- a two-year spiritual journey they called it. 'I won't be alive in two years,' Maro laughingly told them. But anyway he started. It was during the month of May and they called it the 'Service to Receive the Inquirers.' About 80 people started the two-year period along with Maro. He appreciated that there was a special class just for the older men and women who wanted to use the local language Kingoreme.

Actually Maro found the priest and the parish council leaders very helpful. Due to his arthritis he didn't have to walk to Iramba Church for all the instructions. He participated in the weekly Sunday Eucharist, of course. Sometimes the catechists Pius and Nicholas came to Maro's home for the instructions. He never missed the weekly meeting of the Small Christian Community (SCC) of Kenyamonta town. He chose Petro Mosi, an old Catholic friend in the SCC, to be his companion and helper during the two-year adult catechumenate. Seeing how the Christians shared together in the SCC, Maro agreed that the Catholic faith 'caught more than taught.'

As the different stages of the two-year adult catechumenate went on, Maro tried to be as faithful as everyone else. Having the classes in Kingoreme was a big help. He was pleased that the catechist affirmed the importance of certain Nogareme religious customs and used Kingoreme names for God such as "Nyamhanga." He like the saints being called 'our ancestors in the faith.' He learned a lot about the Ten Commandments and the seven sacraments -- things he had heard his wives and children talk about for many years. Maro was also interested in the explanation of the church as a 'community of believers.'

As the other older people, Maro wanted to choose a Christian name early. He said, 'As old as I am, I will have only a short time to use my new Christian name.' He chose 'Paul' because he admired how the great saint had taken a decisive new direction in his life. Maro's good friend Makore chose the name Elias because he wanted to be taken up to heaven as soon as he died. With Theresa as his only living wife, Maro (now Paul) realized he could be received into the Catholic Church rather easily. But of the other men in his class had several wives and complicated marriages to sort out. Other people dropped out for the classes after several months.

The official 'Rite of Initiation into the Catechumenate' took place the following March. At this time Maro formally chose his new name Paul. He told everyone how proud he was to be preparing to become a Christian. He said, 'I want to be baptized not to please others, but because I have seen and believed myself.' His old Catholic friends kidded him that his four and five-year-old great grandchildren had been using their Christian names since birth and Paul was only starting when he was 80-years-old.

Paul started the second year of the adult catechumenate along with 44 other people in the parish. The twice-weekly catechism classes continued and he learned a lot about the *New Testament* and the mass. He particularly liked the stories of Jesus Christ's miracles and parables. Paul's eyes were too bad for regular reading but he enjoyed the weekly *Bible* sharing in his Kenyamonta town SCC. In December Paul participated in a three-day religious education seminar at the Iramba Parish center. 'Only four months and your baptism at Easter,' the priest told everyone. Paul said, 'I've waited for 80 years. Now I can certainly wait for four more months.'

Finally April came and the final preparations during Holy Week. All together 38 catechumens prepared to be baptized during the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night ranging from 81-year-old

Paul Maro to 15-year-old Pamela Owino. Everyone praised Paul for persevering during his two-year spiritual journey.

As the water was poured over his head, Paul was overcome with emotion and said to himself, 'Yes, now I am a Christian.' Then all the newly-baptized went out of the church to change from their old clothes into white garments symbolizing their new life in Christ. As they returned joyfully singing and dancing, a wave of joy, happiness and enthusiastic clapping filled the whole church. After the adult baptisms Theresa came up for the blessing of their marriage. As the two of them received communion together for the first time, the beaming faces of all of Paul's children and grandchildren were wet with happy tears.

At the end of the Holy Saturday liturgy many Christians danced in the church and sang the joyful Easter song *Jesus Christ Has Risen. Let us Praise Him*. Paul clapped with everyone else and thought to himself, 'I feel young. After all, I'm starting a new life.'

3. *Local African Celebrations of World Mission Sunday*. World Mission Sunday is celebrated on the next to last Sunday of October. During the last few years it has been celebrated in many different ways in East Africa using proverbs, sayings, songs, plays, dramatizations, posters, and symbols. Some examples are:

(a) The SCC's in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania decided to celebrate an annual "Small Christian Community Day" on World Mission Sunday to emphasize the missionary responsibility of the SCCs. Some special features of this annual celebration⁶⁴ include:

- i. A special display of posters, pictures, booklets and a world map highlights World Mission Sunday, The main themes of the pope's annual message and the annual celebration of the SCCs. This includes information on Iramba's sister parish, Christ the King Parish in Ansbach, Germany.
- ii. Each Christian is encouraged to invite one member of the African Traditional Religion to the church and the social gathering afterwards. One year about fifty "guests" came -- both children and adults.
- iii. Members of the SCCs sit together in the parish church. So the Sunday Eucharist becomes a communion of thirteen SCCs. Special missionary and community songs are sung such as *Whom Shall I send (Here I Am, Lord)*, *Let Us All Go Forth, Go Into the Whole World, Proclaim the Greatness of the Name of the Lord and Announce Love in the Community*. Sometimes the Youth Group performs a short play such as *Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Disciples*.
- iv. The homily highlights missionary themes by using stories and proverbs such as the African sayings: *In times of trouble a member of a African Traditional Religion seems to know God more than his or her ancestral spirits. We are children of the same God. We are branches of the one God*. Concrete examples are given of how the local Christians can be missionaries in their own situations and places.
- v. The special collection for World Mission Sunday reminds the local peoples of being mission-minded and mission-sending. It is sent to help wider church concerns.

(b) In the last few years members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) have helped to promote a new worldwide evangelization. Special efforts are Evangelization 2000, Lumen 2000, Schools off Evangelization and Lay Evangelizing Teams.⁶⁵ More and more people are coming to believe that the "Whole church is missionary" (Second Vatican

⁶⁴ For a detailed description of the 1984 celebration see "Mission Sunday: A Small Christian Community Day," *AMECEA Documentation Service (ADS)*, No.301 (March 15, 1985), 4 pages.

⁶⁵ See the videos *Testimonies From Uganda* and *Testimonies From Kenya* in the "Evangelizing in the Nineties" Series produced by UKWELI Video, Nairobi, Kenya.

Council) and that Jesus Christ sends us to "go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation" (*Mark 16:15*).

In East Africa the CCR is promoting a new Pentecost and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with all people. There is a special opportunity to emphasize evangelization on World Mission Sunday. Through prayer, singing, laying on of hands, preaching, teaching, and Christian witness believers can announce and proclaim the Good News of Salvation "to the nations." This includes touching the heart and emotions of people, not just the intellect.

One example of the power of the laying on of hands was the celebration of 1988 World Mission Sunday in Tarime Parish (near the Tanzanian-Kenyan border) in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania. After the homily the priest celebrant called all the elders to stand together in the front of the church. Then he laid hands on them saying: "Go and spread the faith." Then the elders called all the parents forward, laid hands on them, and commissioned them saying: "Go and spread the faith." In turn the parents laid hands on the youth. Then the youth went through the whole church and laid hands on all the children.

1993 World Mission Sunday was celebrated in a similar way in Mhunze Outstation, Ndolejeji Parish in Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania. Twelve Christians (the head catechist, the assistant chairperson of the outstation council, and the leaders of the ten SCCs) symbolizing the twelve apostles were called forth. The priest celebrant lay hands on them and sent them forth with the words "Go and spread the faith." They in turn lay hands on all the parents. Then in succession twelve parents lay hands on all the youth and then twelve youth lay hands on all the children. Each time there were six men and six women to symbolize inclusiveness and equality. In addition an informal play was put on in which a five-year-old girl told the Good News of Jesus Christ to her four-year-old friend who then went "across the church" to tell a three-year-old boy. This dramatized the 1993 *Message of World Mission Sunday* that their children can be missionaries to their peers.

So truly as the saying goes *We are all missionaries*. All Christians -- men, women, youth, children -- can go out to announce the gospel, to spread the faith, to evangelize. *To be called is to be sent*. All Christians can go forth to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people.

- c. This missionary call is portrayed in a Swahili poster that was used to celebrate World Mission Sunday in East Africa on 20 October, 1991. The poster was designed by Sister Dolorosa Kissaka, C.O.L.U. of the Communications Department of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference and distributed by Father Michael Gaula, the former National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in Tanzania.

The poster (in Swahili) uses *Acts: 1:8*, the Scriptural theme of the 1994 African Synod, with *YOU* in bold, colorful letters followed by the words... *WILL BE MY WITNESSES*. The drawing shows a mixed group of Tanzanians (men and women, laity, priests and religious) at a crossroads with three possible roads. A few people take the road to other parts of Tanzania. A few take the road marked with one sign saying "Congo/Zaire/Zambia/Namibia" and another sign saying "Sudan/Ethiopia/Libya/Somalia." A few take the road marked with a sign saying "America/Europe/Asia/Australia." Thus Tanzanians are answering the missionary call through different vocational charisma and through going to different parts of the world. This poster is an example of African Symbolic Theology.

Acts 1:8 can be re-written to echo Jesus's challenge to Tanzanians today: "You shall be my witnesses in Dar es Salaam, in all of Tanzania and East Africa and to the ends of the earth." Taking the example of Tanzania, Pope John Paul II eloquently sounded this missionary call in a speech in Moshi, Tanzania in September, 1990: "Now it is your responsibility to be witnesses of Christ in Tanzania, in other countries of Africa and to the ends of the earth."⁶⁶

4. *We Hear Christ Calling Us* -- a Lesson Plan in the East African Adult Catechumenate which is also called the RCIA (the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults). a large part of missionary work in Africa is working with adult catechumens. In Section One of the book *Our Journey together* on the "Period of First Contact," Session Six is entitled "We Hear Christ Calling Us."

We have adapted this catechetical session for Sukuma adult inquirers in Tanzania beginning with the story of Matambo and Jishegena which is narrated on pages 5-6. In this preliminary stage of the adult catechumenate it is helpful to use stories and examples from the Sukuma customs and traditions to show that Christ is calling these inquirers from within their own culture and life experience. A summary of the lesson plan is as follows:

1. *Our Life.*

What do members of the group hear in this story of Matambo and Jishegena? Are there people like Matambo in the church today? Are there people like Jishegena? Whom are you most like? What is the meaning of the common proverb *The clever person is not overcome by difficulties*?

2. *God's Word.*

There is an important link between this Sukuma proverb and Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." How can Jesus help you in your burdens, difficulties and trials? Jesus calls his disciples. Someone in the group reads Matthew 4:12-22. What do you hear in this scripture passage? What did Jesus demand from his followers? What is Jesus demanding from you? Then there is a period of silence when someone in the group slowly and prayerful reads verses 17 and 22 three times out loud. Then the inquirers tell each other what they have heard.

3. *A Step Forward on Our Way.*

Jishegena threw himself at the feet of Chief Lunyalula. To whom do members of group turn or what do they do when faced with problems and difficulties in life. Discuss in the whole group including the reading of John 6:60, 66-69. What do members of the group have to leave behind in order to follow Jesus? Discuss small buzz groups and then report back to the whole group.

⁶⁶ This was the text of the Swahili poster for the 1992 World Mission Sunday in Tanzania.

5. Mossi Proverbs and Biblical Wisdom

Laurent Nare

Introduction

According to the last Ethnologue edition (12th Edition, by Barbara F.F. Grimes, Editor, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc. Dallas, Texas, 1992), the Mossi (or Moose in their own language) represent today 53% of the population of Burkina Faso, the former Upper Volta, in West Africa., and they may be more than 4,700,000, not including 2,000,000 other users of the same language.

Studies in Mossi language (the language is called moore) and Mossi Proverbs just began with the first Christian Missionaries. We may here mention the Reverend Pastor John HALL, the Reverend Dr. Jean GOARNISSON, but first of all the Reverend Father Gustave ALEXANDRE, who compiled six small volumes of Mossi Proverbs, (1954). Later on various authors dealt with Mossi Proverbs and we may here mention Y. TIENDREBEOGO, (1963), D. BONNET, (1986) F.-X. DAMIBA, (1982), L. NARE (1986).

1. Themes and Values often Emphasized in Moosi Proverbs

One of the most typical features of proverbs in any culture is their polyvalence and the great flexibility they present, as to how they can be used. Therefore it is very difficult to give a fixed canon, concerning the themes or values covered by proverbs. Generally speaking proverbs proceed rather by observation and statements based on experience. Rarely they will give a direct recommendation. Themes and values are therefore very often indirectly expressed.

This being said, we can nevertheless indicate the following themes and values more often coming up through the proverbs in Mossi culture:

2.1. Truth and sincerity:

Togs sid n gâand kom
sâw a yag ziri n di sagbo

Telling the truth and sleeping without food over night
is better than telling a lie in order to get food.

Ziri yolgo segda sîini
n yûnd kaga

The bag of the liar holds sesame
and lets nuts get through

Lying is an anti-social behaviour. Before negatively affecting social relations, it destroys the inner peace of one own's conscience, and should never be tolerated. Unfortunately it is a current reality:

Sida a yen-ye pa met Wayugi ye
With truth only Wayugi (a city in Burkina) cannot be built.

Vênegem-vênegem sâ da beê
sûnkaam ka koosdê ne pagd ye

Should transparency always prevail
ground nuts should not be sold with their shells

2.2 Truth and justice do not commonly prevail, but should objectively prevail:

Pâng sâ n tâud sore
Bûum butta moogo

If violence is walking on the road
Legitimacy must go though the bush

*Sid sâ n pukki
zug gomsda a toore*

Whenever the truth appears
The head nods by itself

*Bugum ka soond korgâ ye
Never can fire be hidden in a bag*

2.3. God is guaranteeing such a justice, his favour going to the poor and the needy:

Wênd n band zôang ki

God is the one removing the grains of sand from the blind man's millet.

*Kiib rit medga
ti Wênd pund biim*

The orphan is eating an unspiced sauce
But God is adding some stock.

2.4. Old age is not everything, objective truth and real capability must prevail, not just social position.

*Deng m ba n yâ wobgo
ka kêoong ye, yaa gôaaga.*

To have seen an elephant before one's father
is not a matter of age, but of more travelling

Ninkêem yirg zi ti yâag bitta
The absent-minded old man is not aware that the youth is growing

*Ninkêem bû tirga
la vê a rog m to*

The old man should judge rightly
and keep away from saying he could have been my father.

*Ninkêem sê bîngî
a to n dikda*

Where an old man had hidden
There an old man will find

2.5. Wisdom suits the old age:

A zagl kùundame, t a yam ka kùundê ye
This one is getting old, but his mind is not getting old
(he shows no wisdom)

*Kiuda ninkêem n kong kaam,
Ka kuud ninkêem n kon yam ye*

You may kill an old man and find no fat (in him)
You should not kill an old man and find no wisdom.

2.6. Speech is a human privilege, which should not be under-estimated:

Goam ka yôodo, belgda muk ma,
Saying that words have no value is a (poor) consolation for the deaf's mother

2.7. Strength in speech is to be preferred to physical strength:

Gom n lubi n sâw yôk n lubi
Prevailing in speech is better than prevailing in wrestling

2.8. Speech should be used with caution and discretion

*Gomd yaa sugr yandre,
fo sâ n foog a, fo ka toê n lebs tui-a ye*

Speech is a straw from the roof
Once you pull it out, you cannot return it

*Gomd yaa koom,
a sâ n daage, ka tõe n leb n wûk-a ye*

Speech is (like) water
Once it is poured down you cannot collect it again

*Sâan noor kaada zêedo,
a ka kaad goam ye*

The mouth of a guest may absorb more sauce
and refrain from absorbing words (from intervening in quarrels)

2.9. Women are feared for the use they can make of their tongues:

Pag noor la a lokko
The woman's mouth is her quiver

*Daag yi laafi
yaa pagb n loe bâongo*

The market ended peacefully,
that means the women have shown moderation

3.0. One's mother, and motherhood in general, belongs to the supreme values:

Ma yaa ned fâa dũnia
The mother is everyone's universe

Biig tar ma a tar zom
As long as a child has a mother, it has its meals

Pag be neere, a tara biiga
Is a woman beautiful? That means she has a child

2. Value in Mossi Proverbs and the Current Agenda in our Nationa and Churches

Traditional proverbs do not only belong to the past. Many proverbs can apply in the present condition to the various situations of our nations and churches. People will currently use proverbs to discretely express criticism to the authorities, when anything is wrong. A good chief has to be popular:

*Tiis la googo
Neb la naaba*

Many trees, that make the forest
Many people, that make a chief

On the other hand, any orientation of the leadership in order to direct the people must be based on principles evident to the same people, and in conformity with the norms very often expressed through the proverbs known to them. For example, solidarity within the family is very well understood, when extended to the whole nation or to the Church Community:

Buud yelle, buud n kelegda
A family issue, the family has to face it

*Salensaas ye ti bamb n ka zems taab noore,
sâ n ka rê b tũkdê-la wobgo*

The ants say: They disagree among themselves
otherwise they would have carried the elephant away.

Authority and hierarchy must be respected.

*Yaw yiid kêema,
yaa yiwâoongo*

The younger brother over the elder
That is a broken house

Waaf bâana a zùurê
A snake is thinner at its tail

Koom beeme ti kosùk beê
There are waters and high waters

But leaders are reminded that they basically share the fragile human condition of their flock:

Bûmb ning sê maan talga na maan naaba
Whatever happens to the commoner will happen to the ruler

3. Relationship Between African Traditional Wisdom and Biblical Wisdom. Some General Reflexions

Referring to comparative studies like the doctoral dissertation of Philippe Dinzonlele NZAMBI, (1992) and our own dissertation mentioned above, *Proverbes salomoniens et proverbes mossi*, published in 1986, we may say that African traditional wisdom, especially as expressed in African Proverbs, can be easily related to Old Testament wisdom.

Obviously there are differences, but there are striking similarities in form and content between African proverbs and Biblical Proverbs of the Old Testament. The question arises, as to whether these African proverbs also relate to the New Testament Mission. It seems important to indicate that the New Testament Mission expressed in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and brought forward by his disciples includes an important dimension of sapiential teaching. The old Testament and the New Testament as well, since they show a significant continuity between each other, are using human language and human wisdom in order to communicate a higher, divine wisdom. Jesus identified himself with the new Solomon (Cf. Mt 12:42). He used parables and also proverbs in his own teaching (Cf. Lk 4:23; Mk 4:34). We know the questions raised concerning him: "Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" (Mt 13:54) and par.). Relating to his childhood we read: "And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people" (Lk 2:52). One just needs to go through the New Testament to find such proverbial sentences used by Jesus (Mt 9:12 and par.; Mt 9:17 and par.; Mt 10:24 and par.) and his disciples in their teaching (Cf. 2 Co 9:6). See Kim E. DEWEY, (1980 81-99), who is also quoting an interesting study: BEARDSLEE, (1970, 61-73).

4. Interaction Between Biblical Studies and African Proverbs Studies

To the question is to what contribution Biblical Studies may bring into the field of African proverbs studies, we may answer that it is to be a very positive contribution.

Biblical literature is one of the oldest literature belonging to human heritage. As such it may be a reference for any other literature or any other culture, including our oral African cultures, so that a comparison always presents an interest. Its dimension of divine revelation and message of salvation, adds, for us believers, a unique feature, so that as a reference, this literature becomes unique and without any parallel in history. It is well known that in various nations, the translation of the Bible gave birth to their written cultures. In that way, we may say that the Bible assures to many oral cultures in the world a kind of "redemption", contributing strongly to their survival and development. Any comparative study dealing with Biblical proverbs and non-Biblical proverbs will promote directly or indirectly the study of proverbs in that non-Biblical culture.

On the other hand, a greater attention to African proverbs will affect positively the way Biblical Studies are done. Until very recent times, oral cultures were not taken seriously. Non-written languages were no languages, but only dialects, non-written history was no history, but only stories, myths and legends, even nations without a written literature were no nations, but just tribes. Nowadays it is more and more recognized that human cultures first developed orally

before getting a written expression. Illiteracy is the first condition of man. Everybody is being born, even in the so called First World, as an illiterate. One first learns how to speak and then later one needs to go to school, in order to learn how to read and write. Orality never became obsolete after emergence of written forms of culture.

That is what we have understood from scholars in literary sciences such as JOUSSE (1925), and Jolles, (1930). In this line, Biblical scholars like NYBERG (1935), BIRKELAND, (1935), and ENGNELL, (1945) (the Scandinavian School), gave a major attention to the pre-literacy stage of the Old Testament tradition, while others investigated the pre-literary stage of the New Testament tradition. See M. JOUSSE (1929), and D.M. STANLEY and R.E. BROWN, (1970:145,790).

Now, the Biblical literature as a written tradition had, and still has, the advantage that it can be spread among various readers and be transmitted from generation to generation. The disadvantage is that, as an Ancient literature, it is no more living, so that it is no more easy to understand it today. The African oral traditions instead have that advantage that they are still living. A good knowledge of them, specially in matter of proverbs, offers a good help for a better understanding of similar cultural products in the Biblical literature. That is something we personally experienced through our comparative study of the Solomonic proverbs in the Bible and the Mossi proverbs.

Many other theological disciplines, like missiology, religious studies, moral and pastoral theology, or even non-theological disciplines, dealing with African proverbs could be of great benefit to Biblical studies. We may here mention disciplines such as Law (Cf. Robert PAGEARD, (1969), History (See African Royal names or devices), Sociology, Poetic Literature in general, Songs, etc. Any development in these disciplines, in the African cultural context may help better understanding the various dimensions of African proverbs, and better understanding our African proverbs should help better understanding of the Biblical proverbs and many other parts of the Biblical literature.

Conclusion

Fostering Further Research on African Proverbs in our Country/Region and All over Africa

Only in the Moore speaking linguistic area, a big amount of proverbs remain unregistered. And we should remember that many other languages are used in the country which equally have their own rich cultural patrimony, with proverbs, equally worthy to be collected and made known to the rest of the world. *Ethnologue* gives list of up to 65 languages and dialects in Burkina Faso. If a complete collection of proverbs cannot be immediately obtained for every language, something can be done and such an undertaking encouraged among the users of the various languages, not only in that country, but also in all other regions of the African continent.

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6. Using Ga and Dangme Proverbs for Preaching¹

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1.1 Introduction

It can be claimed that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached in Africa to Africans since the very beginning of the Christian era; this, if we assume that the Ethiopian eunuch - who, after his conversion and baptism, "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39) - would have shared the good news with his countrymen. In any case, from the writings of Tertullian (born c.160 AD), himself a great figure in the history of the African Church, it is clear that before him, the Church in North Africa was already big and influential. Sadly, the great North African Churches - which produced many important personalities in the history of the Church (including Tertullian, Cyril, St. Augustine and Leo Africanus) - were destroyed "because they failed to reach the hearts of the true natives of the Province." (Holme 1898 and 1969:254)

The issue of how to make the Christian message and teaching reach the hearts of Africans has been discussed under various names: indigenization, adaptation, accommodation, Africanization, inculturation, etc. These earlier discussions and the enterprise of the latter-day African Theology, coupled with the efforts of African independent Churches (now called African Instituted Churches), have led to the adoption of new forms of worship and liturgy, African musical instruments and rhythms, African spirituality, and so on, which are more suited to the African context than their European counterparts used hitherto.

These innovations are contributing tremendously to make the gospel reach the souls of Africans. But more needs to be done, particularly to reach their minds and clearly live out the values of the Kingdom more consistently. To this end, the use of proverbs in preaching and teaching is crucial. In this paper, we discuss the use of Ga and Dangme proverbs in preaching and teaching.

1.2 The Ga and Dangme

The Ga and Dangme live in the south-eastern corner of Ghana in a kind of triangle. The base of the triangle is formed by the Atlantic Ocean, stretching from Accra, the capital of Ghana to Ada Foah in the east, at the estuary of the river Volta and the ocean. The Volta forms the right side of the triangle and runs south to north from Ada Foah to the Volta Lake at Akosombo, with the left side running down south along the Akwapim hills to Accra.

For a long time the Ga and Dangme people were regarded as a twin-ethnic group called Ga-Adangme, and treated as such. Together, they form about 13% of the population of Ghana. At present for practically all purposes, they are two separate ethnic groups. The Dangme are made up of eight traditional areas: Ada, Ningo (Nugo), Prampram (Gbugbla), Kpone, Shai (Se), Yilö Kröbö, Many Kröbö, and Osudoku. Each of the eight Dangme sub-groups speak dialects of Dangme which are linguistically similar and mutually intelligible, with only slight differences of usage and pronunciation; but there are more significant differences in names of things. The Ga traditional area comprises Ga Mashie, Osu, La, Nungua, Teshie and Tema, all of whom speak Ga with little dialectical differences.

Although the Ga and Dangme languages are related and have some linguistic similarities, they are not mutually intelligible. It is easier for a Dangme to understand Ga than the reverse. Both Ga and Dangme are taught in schools in Ghana up to diploma level at the university. Discussions have been going on to teach them up to degree level.

According to Dangme and Ga traditions, which are preserved in old songs, as well as some written records, the Ga-Adangme came from a far-distant land. Some traditions mention Chad as their

original home, and others mention Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin), though most traditions say that their original home was Benin - commonly identified as a place in the south central part of modern Nigeria. Whichever the actual location, it is commonly said to lie somewhere on the eastern side of the Volta River, to the north and east of present Togo, probably somewhere within Nigeria.

It is said that some seven hundred years ago, they were driven out by invasions of the Fulani tribe under a chief named Dafeleo. They wandered through Nigeria, Yorubaland and Dahomey. After various stops, they crossed the Volta and most of the tribes founded the Lanimo Kingdom in what is present day Osudoku. After a bitter war that arose among them, they broke up some three to four hundred years ago and went in several directions until they settled in their present locations.

The Ga and Dangme have a great deal in common in their culture. For example, they both have a patrilineal system of inheritance. Again, originally, their societies were ruled by traditional priests, but later, under the influence of their Akan neighbours, they came to be ruled by secular chiefs. In many respects their cultural outlook is similar to that of other Ghanaian and, for that matter, African ethnic groups. Their traditional occupations are fishing and farming, but they can now be found in every kind of occupation. Although they are quite enterprising, the Ga and Dangme are characteristically modest and abhor inordinate ambition, especially for material gain.

Christianity was introduced into Ga and Dangme land over one hundred years ago first by the Presbyterians followed by the Methodists. Now there are many denominations: mainline, African instituted, Pentecostal, charismatic and all. It is estimated that some 55% of Ga and Dangme people are Christians. As in all traditional African societies, the Ga and Dangme use proverbs a lot. However, the extent of use of proverbs in preaching is very little, compared with their use in everyone's life.

1.3 Features of Ga and Dangme Proverbs

Ga and Dangme proverbs, like those of other African traditional societies are attributed to the ancestors. In many African societies, when a proverb is cited, it is preceded with a statement like, "So said the elders...." This may be a way of according proverbs authority. It is also a way of saying that all the people own the proverbs (Dzobo 1975); also, that they contain experience, wisdom, and valid counsel which are to be acknowledged by all. Thus, the collective thought, beliefs, and values of an African people can be discerned from their proverbs.

Like all other proverbs the world over, they are usually short sayings, although there are a few long ones. They contain the experiences and wisdom of the people of old. But even today new proverbs are composed by those who are observant, experienced, thoughtful and creative. The experiences and wise advice contained in the proverbs are derived from observations made about the nature and behaviour of human beings, animals, birds, plants, and other natural as well as supernatural objects and beings. Some of the proverbs state facts from the history, customs and practices of the Ga and Dangme. Others express their philosophical thoughts, their religious beliefs, and their values.

A close look at Ga and Dangme, as other African traditional proverbial sayings, shows clearly that the main concerns expressed in the proverbs relate to every aspect of human life. The ultimate purpose of the proverbs is to teach wisdom and moral lessons. Thus they contain, and are used to convey, moral lessons and advice on how to live a good and prosperous life.

The proverbs touch on **all conditions of life**: wealth and poverty, health and sickness, joy and sorrow; and **occupations**: farming, hunting, fishing, building, trading, and so on; and **other kinds of activity**: healing, cooking, walking, sleeping, marriage, childbearing, upbringing, etc. There are proverbs which speak about and to **all manner of people**: kings and citizens, nobles and slaves, women and men, children and adults, apprentices and master craftsmen, and so on.

The proverbs contain observations and good counsel against undesirable vices like anger, backbiting, greed, ingratitude, laziness, lying, pride, procrastination, selfishness, stealing and so forth. Many other proverbs also praise and advise people to cultivate virtues that promote progress and ensure

wellbeing; as for instance, circumspection, co-operation, gratitude, humility, patience, perseverance, prudence, respect and unity.

The statements made in the proverbs reflect true everyday occurrences. They usually have two meanings: (a) the literal or primary meaning, and (b) the deeper or real meaning. The real meaning of African proverbs is not always apparent. This is precisely why they are called proverbs. For instance, the Akan, Dangme and Ga expressions for "to cite a proverb," *bu abë*, means "to bend," "curve," or "twist words," to make them complicated (Yankah 1986). Take, for example, the Ga proverb *Kë onyië shuö sëë le owuu bö*. (If you follow in the trail of an elephant, you do not get smeared with the dew.) The statement is literally true. The elephant is a very big animal, and as it goes through the forest stepping on the grass and destroying the shrubs, it gets smeared with the dew. Therefore, if you follow in its trail, you stand less risk of getting smeared with the dew, since the elephant has already cleared it off the grass and shrubs. But the proverb has a real or deeper meaning: if you associate with an important personality, say, a rich, or knowledgeable, or powerful person, you will not lack. It can also be applied to mean that if you believe and trust in God, you will not be disappointed but will succeed.

This feature of proverbs having both a literal and a deeper meaning sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish them from sayings, idioms, riddles and puzzles. In particular, it seems there is no cut and dried line between proverbs and sayings. All of these have hidden meaning and are difficult to understand. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish one from the other. One of the main differences between them lies in how they are used. Riddles and puzzles are usually cited for fun and entertainment, but not so with proverbs. Proverbs are cited in serious discourse. Again, among the Dangme and Ga, the words or sounds used in a puzzle are often onomatopoeic; that is to say, they sound like or describe the thing talked about in the puzzle. Idioms are usually used in public when it is impolite or indecent to say something in plain words; in such cases similes or Idioms (euphemisms) are used to make it respectable. For example, you may not say that one is a thief but you can say (literally in Ga) that his hands pick things. Perhaps the most important difference between these other forms of speech and proverbs is that every proverb contains some wisdom and good advice. Take, for instance, the Ga proverb: "If cotton wool is in your anus, you do not jump over fire." This proverb has to do with temptation and discretion; it warns against foolishly exposing yourself to the thing that will ruin you.

Ga and Dangme proverbs share many other common features with those of other African societies. They can be used for several purposes, as for instance, the linguistic analysis of a particular language or dialect. Historical information as well as the thought, customs, beliefs and values of a society can also be obtained through their proverbs. Besides, the proverbs are a literary device used to embellish speech. This is because many of their idioms are embedded in the proverbs. As it were, the proverbs are used as sweeteners to communicate effectively. As one Ga writer (Nee Adjabeng Ankra 1966) put it, speaking without citing proverbs is like eating soup without salt. Proverbs are cited to confirm, reinforce or modify a statement; or to heighten and attract attention to a point or message; or simply to summarize a speech. Sometimes, too, they are used to communicate a fact or opinion which it might be impolite or even offensive to state in direct speech or plain language. They are also used to make people appreciate speech, or to facilitate understanding and lead to conviction. As one Yoruba observation has it: "A proverb is the horse which can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas." Although all these uses are important, they are, in fact, means to an end. The ultimate purpose of proverbs is to impart wisdom; teach good moral and social values; warn against foolish acts; provide a guide to good conduct; and help them to succeed in life. In a word, proverbs are meant to counsel people to live good and successful lives.

II. The Use of Proverbs in the Bible

In both the Old and New Testament, proverbs have been used to teach important lessons.

II.1 The Content of Biblical Proverbs

The biblical proverbs cover a very wide range of issues. Some of those in the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are concerned with religious morality, common sense, good manners, family relations, business dealings and etiquette in social relations. Others deal with the need to have regard for the poor; respect for the king; honour of parents; discipline of children; protecting the rights of the needy, poor and voiceless; qualities like humility, patience, honesty, righteousness and kindness; and the image of the capable wife. They advise against temptations like indulging in violence, pride, laziness, worthless and wicked life, and sexual impurity.

The parables of Jesus - which are proverbial sayings - also deal with general issues. These include: entry into the Kingdom of God, the final judgement of the good and the evil, mercy, justice, the question of priorities, attitudes to the Word of God, right use of opportunity, accountability, and rewards.

II.2 Purpose of the Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is quite clearly a guidebook to successful living, as the opening verses (Proverbs 1: 2-6 TEV) declare.

Here are proverbs that will help you to recognize wisdom and good advice, and understand sayings with deep meaning. They can teach you how to live intelligently and how to be honest, just and fair. They can make an inexperienced person clever and teach young men how to be resourceful. These proverbs can even add to the knowledge of wise men and give guidance to the educated, so that they can understand the hidden meanings of proverbs and the problems that wise men raise.

The one who heeds the voice of wisdom as revealed in the proverbs, and avoids the temptations listed, is assured the rewards of long and pleasant life, wealth, honour and happiness (Proverbs 3: 16-17).

II.3 The Relation Between Israel's Faith and the Proverbs

There is evidence of some religious base of the wise words. At the very beginning of the Book of Proverbs, it is acknowledged that to have knowledge, one must first have reverence for God (Proverbs 1:1). There are also references to what God hates or loves (eg., 11:1; 11:20); and the types of persons and acts that he blesses or punishes (e.g., 10:27, 29; 16:1-9; 17:5). Again, God is acknowledged as the supreme judge and orderer of the affairs of the world (Ecclesiastes 3:1; 12:11, 13-14). He is the giver of proverbs (Ecclesiastes 12:11).

On the other hand, it appears the bulk of the wise sayings and proverbs have no specific reference to Israel's religious faith. Rather, they are shown to have been derived from study and practical observations of everyday life. See, for example, 1 Kings 4:29-34, Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12-133; 12:9-10). This is no less so in the parables of Jesus, as for instance, the parables of the mustard seed and the drag net (Matthew 13:31-32 and 47-50).

II.4 The Use of Old Testament Proverbs in the New Testament

As has been noted, the bulk of the Old Testament proverbs, like those of other ancient peoples, are based on practical everyday experiences. In other words, they can be said to be, at least in part, the fruit of worldly wisdom. In spite of this fact, New Testament writers like Peter, Paul and James made use of them, just as they used other Old Testament passages. Jesus himself used proverbial sayings frequently; sometimes he used old ones, and at other times he composed new ones.

A few examples will substantiate the claim. Jesus' comparison of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-27) seems to be based on Proverbs 12:7. Luke 14:8-10 (taking a lower seat when invited to a wedding feast) is a variation of Proverbs 25:6-7). Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:20 (feeding a hungry enemy, and making him burn with shame) is also directly from Proverbs 25:21-22.

James 4:6 (God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble) is a reference to Proverbs 3:34. Again, 2 Peter 2:22 (a dog going back to its vomit) comes directly from Proverbs 26:11.

The New Testament writers used the wisdom of the 'fathers' to communicate their message. Thus, the Bible supports the use of proverbs in teaching both social and religious values. For us, this precedent legitimizes the use of African proverbs in communicating the message of the Bible. The themes and values expressed in Ga and Dangme proverbs can be supported with biblical themes and values. We shall support this claim with some examples in Section V below.

III. Suitability of Ga and Dangme Proverbs for Preaching

We are aware that, for various reasons, not everyone will like the idea of using Ga and Dangme - and for that matter African - indigenous proverbs in preaching or teaching the Christian message. We examine some of the possible objections.

III.1 Possible Objections to Using African Proverbs in the Church

First, objectors may contend that since African proverbs are part of the African traditional cultural store, Christians must not go back to them, once converted to Christianity. Secondly, they may be reluctant to use African proverbs because of fear that they may overshadow Bible texts or themes, since some of the proverbs are so vivid that they may be more easily remembered than the Bible texts that they may be meant to help explain. Thirdly, some Christians may be uncomfortable with the traditional proverbs, for the reason that some of the teachings they contain conflict with the teachings of the Bible. For example, one Ga proverb says that: "The truth that can destroy the town (i.e., Community) is not (to be) told." According to Christian teaching, the truth must be told; Christian must not tell lies.

III.2 Response to the Objections

These possible objections to the use of indigenous African proverbs in the Church are quite strong. However, there are responses to them that are equally strong and worthy of careful and sympathetic consideration.

It is true that some aspects of traditional culture must be left behind when one becomes Christian; for example, calling up the spirits of the dead, or cursing people who have wronged us. The Bible forbids such practices. (See, for example, Deut. 18:9-13; Luke 6:27-36; Rom. 12:17-21.)

But this does not mean that all aspects of African culture are unchristian. It is good to remember, too, that culture is very broad. It includes (1) **the beliefs** of a people, e.g., about God or the nature of humans; (2) **their values**, e.g., what they regard as good or bad, right or wrong and, therefore, ought or ought not be done; or what they consider to be true, or beautiful; (3) **their customs**, e.g., how they behave, relate to others, talk, greet, dress, eat or build houses; and (4) **the institutions** that help them express the above, such as the social structure, the institution of chieftaincy, the family, system of government, courts, markets, clubs and associations, etc. It is this system of beliefs, values, customs and institutions that binds a people together and gives them a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity.

As can be seen, no part of a people's life falls outside their culture. Therefore, it will never be possible to reject the whole of a culture; to try to do so would mean to refuse to live in this world. One must remember also that many aspects of African culture are in line with biblical teaching, as for example, the African emphasis on the family, community, fellow-feeling, respect for elders, awareness of the supernatural and belief in God.

On the second issue (the possibility of proverbs overshadowing Bible texts and themes), it is true that there can be a real danger, if proverbs are not used well. The answer is that preachers should not build their sermons around proverbs. They must use Bible passages for sermons, and use the proverbs to explain, illustrate or reinforce the biblical truths with concrete examples. This must be done to help make it easier for their hearers to understand the message of the Bible. Proverbs that teach what is in opposition to what the Bible teaches should not usually be used. But one may cite them, if the intention is to show a better way through biblical revelation, in the manner in which Jesus said, "You have been told of old... You have heard that... But now I tell you..." For the Christian, the Bible as the revealed word of God must remain the highest authority when it comes to considering which religious claims to believe or conduct to follow.

As a solution to the third problem of the possibility of a proverb teaching something that is opposed to biblical teaching, we would suggest the following. In selecting proverbs for use in preaching, the preacher must ask and answer the following questions. (These same questions could be asked whenever one is considering whether or not any particular cultural practice can be followed by a Christian.)

1. Does it undermine the claim that Jesus is the Saviour? Does it suggest that something else is needed for redemption?
2. Does it suggest that Jesus Christ is not the supreme Lord?
3. Does it water down or oppose the teaching that the Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith and conduct? In other words, does it teach a way of life that is opposed to what the Bible teaches?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes,' then that proverb (or practice) must be rejected. If the answer is 'No,' then the proverb (or practice) can be used.

III.3 Why Proverbs Should be used in Preaching

Proverbs have the power to change people's conduct, because the truths portrayed in them are so plain that those who understand the morals and advice they contain, feel compelled to conduct their lives in the manner prescribed in the proverbs by the wise elders of old.

Admittedly, desiring or feeling compelled to live the good life is not enough, for one can know and even will to do good, and still be unable to do it (See romans 7: 14-25). It can also be contended that it is those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit in them that have power to do the good. Yet it is important to note that Jesus Christ himself, who brought this new power to work in a person, also used the method of influencing people from the outside by appealing to their minds and hearts through teaching. To do this, he used stories and proverbial sayings.

There can be no doubt, then, that the present-day Church may attain its goal (which is to make all peoples the followers of Christ and teach them to obey what he has commanded), if it encourages the proper use of proverbial saying. In using these indigenous proverbial sayings, however, the Church must correct and replace what is not so good in them, and add on from the Scriptures what is more excellent.

III.4 The Advantages in using African Proverbs

The many positive features of African proverbs make them most invaluable and unavoidable as instruments of teaching. At this point in Africa's history when there are cries everywhere for moral and social reform, the use of proverbs in moral education is urgent. The Church which has always been interested in people living the morally good life, must use African proverbs even more earnestly, especially in preaching and teaching. Their use will help immensely to teach the truths of many biblical themes and stories, and to affect the moral, social and spiritual lives of the people for the better; for when a proverb is used correctly, it speaks to the intellect, the soul and the heart - that is, to the understanding, the feeling and the will. Over the centuries, African proverbs have

successfully done this. They can, thus, be used to great advantage in Christian preaching and teaching.

The use of African proverbs in African congregations has great advantages. The citing of relevant proverbs makes the audience interested, stay awake, and pay keen attention to the message. It also gets them involved by using their imagination. Thus, they understand the message better. Moreover, they enjoy the message, remember it, and see themselves agreeing with the truth being proclaimed. It is because of these advantages that our Lord Jesus himself used proverbial sayings frequently. And he succeeded in getting his hearers to understand and respond to his message - even if they did not always accept it.

IV. Emphases of Ga and Dangme Proverbs

An analysis of Dangme and Ga proverbs shows that certain themes regarding the successful life occur again and again. Different people may classify the themes differently. We have identified 15 major themes to be the most common ones. These are stated here, briefly, with selected examples of the proverbs that express them.²

IV.1 Making Right Use of Opportunity and Acting Appropriately

One should make maximum use of opportunity, avoid procrastination, refrain from what one cannot do, and do well what one can do.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Këji onine shë Akle nö lä ogbeö lä nyöñlo* (Ga). (If you lay hands on the animal of your hunt, you do not allow it to escape but kill it right away.)
- (2) *Kuöwi (ovönö) ke në Mawu bö lä sibilö he je ö e dë si ngë e nane nö se si në ebuu* (Dangme). (The frog says, since God created it to squat, it never stands on its legs but only squats.)
- (3) *Kë nu tsë yë tö mli lä eshaa* (Ga). (If water keeps too long in a bottle, it goes bad.)

IV.2 Cause and Effect, and Boomerang Reaction

People are to be careful how they behave, because certain consequences follow certain other acts, and whatever one does bounces back at one.

- (1) *Kaa fööö looflö* (Ga). (A crab does not give birth to a bird.)
- (2) *Apletsi ke e ngë nö ko tita nö puë se e li kaa lä nitsë e hlemi nya në e ngë puë* (Dangme). (The goat says it is messing up someone else's compound without realizing that it is soiling its own tail.)

IV.3 Circumspection, Cautiousness and Discretion

Life is full of dangers; therefore, one should be circumspect, cautious and discreet, in order to avoid pitfalls that so often bring unnecessary trouble and pain to the unwary.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Kë odonti yë odunaa lä ohuruuu otëkeee la* (Ga). (If cotton wool is in your anus, you do not jump over fire.)
- (2) *Henökwëmö jeee yakagbömö feemö* (Ga). (Being circumspect does not mean one is a good-for-nothing fellow.)
- (3) *Ke o yë Nakonyë we mi ö, o be nakonyë pa he fu nuë* (Dangme). (If you do not go to Nako-mother's house, you will not smell the foul smell of Nako-mother's sore.)

IV.4 Co-operation and Community

No one can make it alone in life, and what affects one affects all; so people should live together in community and co-operate with one another.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Nine kake nui ngmo* (Dangme). (One hand (or finger) does not catch a louse.)
- (2) *Kë oyë lëlä mli lë oloö emli nu* (Ga). (If you are in a canoe you (are obliged to) bail water out of it.)

IV.5 Self-reliance and Individual Responsibility

Notwithstanding the emphasis on co-operation, many Ga and Dangme proverbs stress the importance of individual responsibility and self-effort. One cannot expect others to do everything for one.

Proverb:

- (1) *Mö ko enuuu tsofa ehaa helatse* (Ga). (No one drinks medicine on behalf of a sick person.)
- (2) *Ahaa mö yoo ni aha le saa hu afata he* (Ga). (No one gives away a daughter (to a man) in marriage and provides him with a bed besides.)
- (3) *Apletsi ke e nyë në a he, se pi lë në a he* (Dangme). (The goat says that it was its mother that was bought not itself.)

IV.6 On Virtues

Society is built on all kinds of commendable virtues. All must cultivate these, if society is to progress. Such virtues include: fortitude, generosity, hardwork, honesty, humility, patience, perseverance, self-effort and taking one step at a time.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Këji okotsa ekwööö nshö lë, osiliki duku kplekee* (Ga). (If your soft sponge does not travel beyond the seas, you will hardly see your silk head kerchief coming down.)
- (2) *"Aekoo" hi fe "Sëë fêê."* (Ga). (To be told "Well done" is better than "How was back?")
- (3) *Kposuö ke hesiami hu hi, se lë ngua në ö tatu gbee lë* (Dangme). (The elephant says it is good to be humble, for huge as it is, a tiny ant kills it.)

IV.7 On Vices

Vices destroy both individual and community life. Each person should eschew cultivating bad character traits and habits such as: greed or selfishness, hardheartedness, haste, hypocrisy, ingratitude, laziness, pretence, pride and treachery.

Proverb:

- (1) *Akë hinmäli enyö Kwëëë tö mli* (Ga), meaning, You do not look inside a bottle with both eyes.
- (2) *Adaa dani akpaa* (Ga), that is, One must grow up before one chuckles (like a hen that is mature and about to lay eggs.) In other words, one must take one's time in life and be ripe for something before seeking to do it.
- (3) *Ali nö piani në a suu kane gbökuë kë hyëë e he mi* (Dangme). (you do not know a fellow during the day and light a lamp at night to identify him.)

IV.8 The Value of Human Beings

No human being is entirely useless. Every individual is valuable and can fulfil himself or herself in some way. Therefore, all people must treat each other with respect and look upon themselves with dignity.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Gbömö fön hi fe shia folo* (Ga). (A bad fellow is better than an empty house.) That is to day, it is far better to have a human being around than to have no one at all around, even if the person around is not a particularly good fellow.
- (2) *Msö nö nyu hu gbeö la* (Dangme). (Muddy water also can be used to put out fire.)

IV.9 Contentment

It is wise not to indulge in greedy clamour for bigger things; instead, one must be contented with small beginnings, and hold in high esteem, whatever is one's own.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Böböyo hi nya mi në a kpaä anyagba* (Dangme). (You do not whistle when there is morsel in your mouth.
- (2) *Adamöö ekome no akaneö enyö* (Ga). (You depend on one to count two.) This proverb advocates contentment with small beginnings, while working gradually for the bigger things; it discourages hasty or greedy clamour for bigger things.
- (3) *Nö ko je we e muö nine ngö tsöö we e je blö* (Dangme) and *Mö ko kë ebëku etsööö etsëmëi awe* (Ga). (No one uses his left hand to point to his fathers' home.) In Dangme and Ga culture, the left hand is associated with that which is dishonorable, contemptible and worthless.

IV.10 Being Calm and Letting Things Take Their Natural Course

Life is full of vagaries, uncertainties and disappointments. Therefore, it pays to remain calm and trust nature to take its course, instead of seeking to have one's own way in everything. Those who desire to be able to cope with the ups and downs of life and live peaceful and victorious lives must be aware of such facts of life.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Këji nu në lä, etsöö naamöhe* (Ga). (When it rains, the rainwater itself reveals safe spots.)
- (2) *Ejuröfeelö lä gbëhe ewöö* (Ga). (The generous, hospitable person often sleeps by the way side.) In other words, it is a fact of life that a good person is often treated unjustly; and one must learn to live with that fact.

IV.11 Against Worrying or Being Too Certain About the Future

Since the future is unknown to human beings and can bring changes in one's fortunes, one should not be too certain about the way things turn out; yet, one need not worry unduly.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Anuuu nu atooo Aharabata* (Ga). (One does not drink water in anticipation of Harmattan drought.)
- (2) *Je ngë se kë nya* (Dangme). (The world (or life) is backwards and forwards.

IV.12 Preparing for the Future

Although one may not be certain about the future - indeed, for that very reason - one should be forward-looking, and plan for the uncertain future!

Proverbs:

- (1) *He waomö atoö waonaa yë* (Ga). (It is because of a future need to scratch oneself that one grows finger nails.)

- (2) *Piani kuma he në a yaa pa mötu ngë* (Dangme). (It is because of afternoon thirst that you (have to) fetch water in the morning.)

IV.13 Respect for Experience and the Elderly

Past experience is invaluable for success in the present and future. Elderly people have a wealth of experience. Youth ought to respect and learn from them. To heed the advice of the elderly, is to find success and life, to ignore it, is to court failure and death. The current attitude and saying that 'the wisdom of Solomon has nothing to do with the age of Methuselah' is not the common view of African societies.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Blema kpaä nö atsaä* (Ga). (You (have to) pattern your rope according to the original (ancient) twist.)
- (2) *Onukpa lee nö ko lë ele wödöi wöö* (Ga), (If an old person knows nothing at all, he knows how to slumber.)
- (3) *Kpêni tui hungmë se buömi blema munyu* (Dangme). (The beard does not tell the eyebrow ancient stories.); for before the beard grew, the eyebrow was!

IV.14 Keeping Domestic Matters Private

Even though it is good to have a 'we-feeling' and share things together, the wise person knows that there are matters that are better kept private. The value of discretion and secrecy is so important that at a child's out-dooring and naming ceremony on its eighth day, the child is exhorted, among many things, to hear much and see a lot, but speak little.

Proverbs:

- (1) *A wui jeme to kpa ngë ma nö* (Dangme). (A goat belonging to an esoteric society is not tethered in the market place.)
- (2) *Kuku nö ha a kuku nö nëe laa ngë* (Dangme). (A rubbish heap knife must needs get lost in a rubbish heap.)

IV.15 God's Providence and Care

Life in Dangme and Ga society is often harsh, and many a person experiences helplessness and hopelessness. But there is trust in God's providence and care. It is believed that the sovereign God (*Nyingmo* or *Ataa Naa Nyönmö*) can overrule, and that if He allows someone to encounter a problem or be given some heavy responsibility, He also gives the grace and ability to bear or discharge it.

Proverbs:

- (1) *Kë Nyönmö tere bo jatsu lë, ehaa bo tako* (Ga). (When God gives you a load He also gives you a soft pad to carry it.)
- (2) *Beni ahuko Lañma tēi anö lë jēi aduji lë yeö nii* (Ga). (Before Lañma (i.e., a stony hilly area on the western boundary of Ga land) was cultivated the monkeys that lived there had food to eat.)

These expressions of trust in God may be said to be summarized in the Dangme proverb, *mëmëëmë tē ngo buë mi*. (The salty taste never ceases in a salt-pot.) One of the meanings of this proverb is that God's grace and mercy towards humankind never cease, for loving kindness is of the very essence of God.

Needless to say, the themes presented above do not represent all the themes that Ga-Dangme proverbs address. The fifteen themes stated above only represent the topics that occurred most frequently when Ga and Dangme proverbs were examined. It is possible to regroup them in other ways, and to include other themes that are not included here. Themes like the value of children, the dignity of womanhood, justice, peace, human free will, the inevitability of death, and many others occurred rather infrequently in the sample. But there can be no doubt that they and many

others are important in Ga and Dangme society. The church, especially in Ga and Dangme areas, can and should, use these themes as basis for teaching authentic living in the communities.

V. The Gospel and Traditional Ga and Dangme Proverbs

In this section, we evaluate Dangme and Ga traditional values in the light of biblical teaching. We shall also enumerate some important traditional values that should receive more attention than the Church has given them.

V.1 What the Gospel Affirms

The Ga and Dangme call to make the right use of opportunity and act appropriately is affirmed in biblical texts like the popular passage that there is a time for everything under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8); in Jesus' response to his mother at the wedding in Cana that his time had not yet come (John 2:1-5); and in Paul's exhortation that believers should live not as ignorant people but like wise people, finding out what the Lord wants them to do and using every opportunity they have (Ephesians 5:15-57; Colossians 4:5-6).

Again, the teachings on cause and effect and boomerang reaction are echoed in the deuteronomic principle which runs through the Bible: namely, that if you obey the Lord, you will prosper; if you disobey, you will suffer. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 28.) The Bible teaches also that a person will reap exactly what he sows (Galatians 6:7-10). Then, again, the theme of co-operation, interdependence and community is commanded in Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

Quite apart from the fifteen themes stated in Section IV, there are many other important values that are taught in Ga and Dangme proverbs which the Gospel affirms. The following are some examples.

V.1.1. Justice, Fairness and Impartiality are counselled in the Ga proverbs: Kë okëë nwëi nö lë, okëö shikpöñ hu nö. (If you speak in respect of heaven, you must say something about the earth, too.) The idea expressed here is essentially the same as the one expressed in Deuteronomy 16:18-20 concerning the appointment of judges and administration of justice in Israel.

V.1.2 The Dangme realize the blessing that comes from the **truth**, as stated in their saying: Anökwalejö ka tsui he. (Truth-telling cools down any angry heat.) The Bible also teaches that knowing the truth makes one free (John 8:32) and speaking the truth to one another makes for harmony (Ephesians 4:20-32).

V.1.3 The desire and counsel for **peace and reconciliation** is expressed in the Ga proverb: Ajö, ajö lë, esëë bë sane. (*Peace, brings no trouble in its wake.*) Similar sentiments can be found in Matthew 5:25-26 and Romans 12:14-21 where people are advised to make peace and not seek litigation or revenge.

V.1.4 Knowledge and wisdom are not the monopoly of any one person. Therefore, the wise thing to do is to confer with others in order to benefit from their wisdom. This awareness is shown in the proverb: Yi kake yë da mi (Dangme), or Yitso kome eyaaa ajina (Ga), meaning, One head does not sit in council. Proverbs 3:7 and Romans 12:16 advise people not to claim any special wisdom, and in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul show the limitation of human wisdom.

V.1.5 Human beings have certain God-given rights, among which are the **freedom to express oneself and seek redress**. The Ga say: Ayiii mö ni atua lë yaafö hu. (You do not beat a person and prevent him from crying), meaning, you do not trespass on someone's right and restrain him from complaining. Many biblical injunctions and stories clearly state the principle that people have the right to complain and to seek redress for their grievances. Examples are the appointment of divisional judges (Exodus 18:16-26) and of helpers in the Church to settle disputes and distribute food and funds to the needy (Acts 6:1-6).

V.1.6 In a Ga or Dangme household, parents and children have mutual rights and privileges as well as **obligations and responsibilities**. Parents are to provide for their children, bring them up and train them properly, while, children are to obey and respect their parents, and look after them in their old age. Sayings such as the following two express these important Ga and Dangme traditions: Akë kômi elëë bi. (You do not bring up a child on kenkey, a Ga staple food), meaning that training is more important than feeding. Bi ni nuu nii lë eyaa anuu nii mañ. (The child who does not listen or pay attention to advice goes to 'they-don't-listen-town', that is, such a child experiences the undesirable. The Bible affirms these teachings: that parents are to train their children (e.g., Psalm 78:5-8; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4), and provide for the family (2 Timothy 5:8); while children are to obey their parents, heed their wise insights (Proverbs 5:1-14; Ephesians 6:1-3), and take care of their aged parents (1 Timothy 5:4).

V.2 What the Gospel Adds

As far as social and moral values are concerned, it may be difficult to find any entirely new value that the Gospel adds to those of the Ga and Dangme. What may seem new are really differences of degree rather than of kind. That is to say, they are corrections of, or improvements on, the indigenous values and ideas. Such examples will be discussed below under "What the Gospel Corrects or Replaces."

However, the Gospel has brought new ideas in religious and spiritual teachings. For example, while in the traditional African context, the sources of the proverbs are accepted to be the human composers, in the Bible, God is acknowledged to be the final source, at least of some, of the proverbs. (See proverbs 1:1 and Ecclesiastes 12:11). Again, proverbial sayings have been used in the Bible in a new way to communicate the important message of God's gracious provision of salvation and eternal fellowship with himself through the sacrificial death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus used proverbial sayings to teach lessons about the Kingdom of God. Where people respond positively to the message, God gives them the power to become his children and to live out good lives. Thus, if, following the biblical example, Ga and Dangme proverbs can be created (or existing ones modified) to tell the message of Christ, it will be an important addition to proverb used among the Ga and Dangme.

V.3 What the Gospel Corrects or Replaces

During his teaching, Jesus corrected and replaced some of the Old Testament teachings in important respects. (See e.g., Matthew 5:17-48.) He did that not to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets, but to make their teachings clearer. In the same way, the Gospel can be said to have corrected and replaced some of the values in Ga and Dangme proverbs. Following are examples.

V.3.1 Inferiority of Women

It seems natural that wherever people live together and relate to one another, some should take a leadership role and others a subordinate position. This is to ensure harmony and smooth running of their affairs. This arrangement is reflected in various proverbs and sayings. Sometimes, however, the arrangement is misunderstood. One such example, among the Ga and Dangme, is where women are treated as if they were inferior to men. The Bible has corrected this view by revealing that both men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28), and that both have fallen and have been redeemed by Christ and made heirs of the Kingdom (1 Peter 3:7). So before God, there is no difference between men and women (Galatians 3:28). They are equal and must have mutual regard for each other (Ephesians 5:21), while playing different roles that best suit their peculiar nature.

V.3.2 Selective Truth-telling

There is a Ga saying that: Anökwale ni jwaa maa awiee. (Truth that can destroy the town (community) is not (to be) told.) This suggestion that the truth should not always be spoken needs to be corrected and replaced with one that commands the truth in all circumstances. The Gospel teaches that we must no longer tell lies but rather always speak the truth to one another (Ephesians 4:25-32) because truth makes.

V.3.3 Discrimination

Again, the tradition to respect the elderly and those who have distinguished themselves in society has come to mean discrimination against the less fortunate. So people such as the rich, elderly and political leaders are unduly favoured, as these Dangme proverbs show: Adowa se mi pöë. (The antelope's back does not get wet), meaning the evils of an elder or important personality does not easily leak out. Also: Blö he ngmöhulo hu we ngmö kpêkpêê. (One who farms by the path does not keep a crooked farm), which means that a wealthy person is never guilty. While the Bible supports respect for the elderly and the noble (see e.g., 1 Timothy 5:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:17), it disapproves of discrimination and favouritism. Instead, the Gospel teaches fair, just and equal treatment for all (Acts 10:34; James 2:1-13).

V.3.4 Fatalism

The Ga proverb, Oföi yitso mli kpaaa la (There is always blood in the head of a tsetse fly) and the like, were meant to caution people when dealing with a person known to have done some evil. Unfortunately, this caution has been taken to suggest that people can never change from bad to good: once bad, always bad! But the Gospel has shown this view to be mistaken; for when anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As has been shown above, there is much that the Bible affirms in Ga and Dangme beliefs and values. These must be firmly preserved. But the Bible also corrects and replaces some of the values, as we have shown. In traditional society itself, proverbs are changed to suit new situations. In much the same way, the values and beliefs they contain ought to be changed, where new light and understanding shows them to be incorrect. There is no need to hold on rigidly to them. This search for renewal is one of the most beneficial tasks the Church in Africa can perform for the progress of society.

V.4 Values which Local Proverbs Add to Biblical Emphases

It may not be possible to find positive values in Ga and Dangme proverbs which are entirely absent in the Bible. However, there are a number of values that are of special relevance to African societies which the Church in Africa must emphasize more than it is doing at present. This is necessary for two main reasons: (1) In some cases, the Bible does not lay as much emphasis on the values as in traditional African cultures. (2) Owing to the strong influence of non-African cultures especially European culture, and other factors on African societies, these values - important as they are for keeping up the society - are getting lost; thus, causing break-down in African societies.

We draw attention to the following, and suggest that Churches add to them, and find effective ways of protecting them.

- (1) Marriage: its seriousness and permanence;
- (2) The family: its closeness and strength;
- (3) Human community and fellowship rather than individualism: the tradition that all are their brother/sister's keeper;
- (4) Respect for the elderly, authority and procedure;
- (5) The reality of the world of the spirit: the mistake and failure of the view that only material things are real or matter;
- (6) Dependence on the supernatural: hence, e.g., knowing how to appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit in one's life; and
- (7) Need for development of the whole person: body, mind and spirit.

VI Annotating Proverbs for Preaching and Teaching

In using a proverb for preaching or teaching, it is important to see that it is relevant to the theme or Bible text or occasion. It may be necessary to explain the proverb at various levels. Sometimes, the literal meaning of the proverb, or some terms and concepts contained in it will need to be explained. At other times, it is desirable to indicate the occasions on which it is used or can be used in the traditional context. Finally, in the light of its usage in the traditional context, the proverb must be appropriately used to convey the lesson on hand. This may require a lot of imagination and meditation, depending on the user's ability and experience in the use of proverbs to communicate. For biblical texts and teaching, as well as much reflection. The exercise can yield very rewarding results, as for example, when light suddenly breaks, as it were, and one discovers a meaning and application that was never intended the proverb was composed.

Following are two sample annotations.

VI.1 1. Ga Proverb: Këji onyië shwuö sëë lë, owuuu bö.

Literal Translation: If you follow in the trail of an elephant, you do not get smeared with the dew.

2. **Explanation/origin:** The elephant is the biggest forest animal. As it goes through the forest, it breaks down shrubs like a bulldozer. If there is dew on the grasses, it wipes all. Therefore, anyone who follows it will not toil or get smeared with dew.
3. **Meaning:** If you associate with an important person (such as a wealthy, or courageous, or knowledgeable person), you do not toil.
4. **Purpose/occasion for Citing the Proverb:** This proverb is cited to show that it is good to associate with some important person.

Preachers can use it to call attention to the fact that the Lord God is Almighty, and that all who believe in him and do his will, will not lack; all will be well with them, for God will guide them and destroy Satan's works for them.

It can also be cited by preachers to encourage people who have just accepted Christ; or those being received into full membership of the church; or those who have just taken on a new position, such as pastors, chiefs or rulers.

Again, the proverbs can be used during New Year services to strengthen faith and trust in God. It can also be cited to explain the teaching that since Christ has carried our sins to the cross, we need not carry the burden of our sins any more.

5. Relevant Key Bible Theme/Story

- (1) We will be victorious because the Lord God has promised to be with us, and lead us (Deut. 31:7-8; Joshua 1:1-9).
- (2) Seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these other things will be added on to you (Matthew 6:25-34).
- (3) Christ has won victory over Satan for us (Col. 2:13-15).

VI.2.1. Dangme Proverb: Nö ko hi nya mi në laa lilë.

Literal Translation: There can be nothing in the mouth which is hidden from the tongue.

2. **Explanation/Origin:** Since the tongue and the mouth are together, nothing which comes into the mouth can be hidden from the tongue. The mouth and tongue in the proverb are taken to represent husband and wife.
3. **Meaning:** Anything that one does will come to light by all means.
4. **Purpose/Occasion for Citing the Proverb:** This proverb is cited to teach that just as nothing that comes into the mouth can be hidden from the tongue, so also a husband or wife cannot do anything and hide it from the other. It is used to advise husbands and wives to be open and truthful, and not hide things from each other, because truthfulness makes a successful marriage.

Preachers can use this proverb at a marriage service to advise couples. It can also be used to remind all Christians that God is everywhere and sees everything; therefore, nothing can be hidden from him. It can be used to warn them to be careful about what they do or say, and to advise them that if they commit any sin, they must confess it to God so that he may forgive them.

5. **Relevant Key Bible Theme/Story**

- (1) The man and the woman were both, naked, but they were not embarrassed (Gen. 2:25).
- (2) Where we are and whatever we do, God sees us and know all, so we cannot hide anything from him (Psalm 139).

VII Suggestions for Further Study and Follow-up

Scholars and educational institutions will do well to find ways of encouraging further study and use of African proverbs in teaching the good life. To this end, the following suggestions are made.

VII.1 For Theological Colleges, Seminaries and Other Educational Institutions.

It will be a good idea for institutes of African Studies and Religious Studies Departments, Theological Colleges and Seminaries, to undertake the study of African proverbial sayings, and design courses for teaching them and how they may be used in the church and in schools. Seminaries can prepare seminarians to apply them in preaching and teaching. This can be done as part of courses in biblical exegesis. (i.e., explanation of the meaning of Bible texts), the techniques of preaching, and in Jesus' use of parables. Lecturers and students could use existing collections of proverbs, or undertake projects to collect proverbs of their own people.

If institutions do this, they will not only improve upon the quality and relevance of the education they give their students; they will also be helping in an important way to preserve the experience and wisdom of our ancestors as well as preserve proverbs that are in danger of getting lost, for the benefit of the present and future generations.

Schools and other institutions of higher education could revive interest in the study and use of proverbs among the youth. This can be done by teaching proverbs as part of their cultural studies, and during periods when moral and social values are taught.

VII.2 For Teachers and Preachers

Individual teachers and preachers as well as the general reader can do some further studies in the use of proverbs. The following are suggested.

- (1) Readers, especially teachers and preachers, can collect proverbs in their own mother tongues, and record them.
- (2) They may write notes on proverbs they have collected and/or those already in print. The notes may follow the pattern used in the sample annotations above. Those who can, should publish their collections and notes in the form of books for wide circulation and the benefit of others.
- (3) Teachers can group collections of proverbs into topics that they can use to teach moral and social values to their students.
- (4) It will be a useful exercise for teachers to critically reflect on proverbs and draw out their special strengths that must be stressed in contemporary society, as well as weaknesses which need to be modified or dropped.
- (5) Preachers, teachers and scholars should critically evaluate African proverbs and find out:
 - (i) What the Gospel affirms about their values, or adds, corrects and replaces; and

- (ii) What values and themes in African proverbs should be given more emphasis in the African Church than are given in the Bible.
- (6) Preachers are encouraged to select hymns or other songs that can be used with each proverb they annotate.
- (7) Preachers should try using proverbs sometimes, and find out what difference it makes to their preaching.
- (8) Both preachers and teachers are further encouraged to find and cite at least one appropriate indigenous proverb in their own mother tongue in every sermon or major address that they may give.

VIII Conclusion

As stated in the Introduction, much progress has been made in the effort to make Christianity part of the African's way of life. But much still remains to be done. The African Proverbs Project (1993-96), which sponsored this consultation, is making an important contribution to that effort of making the Christian message take deep root in the African soil - just as is being done by the use of African choruses, drums, local language Bibles and hymnbooks, and having Africans as heads of the Churches in Africa. It is our prayer and hope that the African Church will meet the spiritual, intellectual, moral and emotional needs of Africans, through the use of the rich store of African proverbs.

End Notes

1. The bulk of the material in this Paper is from the manuscript of my book in progress, *Ga and Dangme Proverbs for Preaching and Teaching*, to be published under the African Proverbs Project (1993-1996).
2. These are given more extensive treatment in the forthcoming book.

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7. Bassa (Liberian) Proverbs and Biblical Communication

Abba G. Karnga

Introduction to Bassa Proverbs

The wisdom of Bassa is the innate knowledge of the members of that tribe embedded in the Elders. Formal publication of those thousands of ancient proverbs in the store of knowledge that the Bassa people of Liberia have had, was overdue. But, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." (Eccl. 3:1) Now is the time.

"Diversity of Wisdom," is one of the ancient proverbs of the Bassa people. It is weightier and well expressed in the Bassa Language as, *FONNON-WHODO SE-HWEOHN*, than when it is expressed in the English Languages as, "Diversity of Wisdom." This proverb means that each Bassa proverb is a multi-wisdom. That is, because of the different experiences that the Elders have had for one proverb, there are many wisdoms and different kinds of meanings for one proverb. This proverb seems to be the key that opens the wisdom door of Bassa.

The wisdom of Bassa is always associated with its Elders. Their ability to use experience and knowledge well, is based upon the weight of their basic wisdom which is sensible and reasonable for decision making. That kind of God's given wisdom is what we call "proverbs," preserved in memories of the Bassa Tribe as a legacy from their ancestors.

Communicating through proverbs is one of the many ways in which the Bassa Elders communicate effectively to issues and feelings of people in a coded language. The following emblems are just examples of a few of the many expressions used by the Elders for effective communication: Proverbs, Figures of Speech, Musical Instruments, Body Language, Signals, Idioms, Truisms and many more.

Beginning and Control of Bassa Proverbs

According to The Bassa Elders, proverbs as a wisdom, was discovered in a story told, any event experienced by a knowledgeable person or persons of the community and also with Nature being helpful in the collections of proverbs. Experiences that old hunters have had with both wild and domestic animals including birds, were converted into useful proverbs to interpret technical issues, hurt feelings, critical decisions, rules and regulations, moral and religious taboos, etc.

Definition of Proverbs

The Zulu Tribe of South Africa described proverbs as, "A brief pithy story condensing in witty or striking form wisdom of experience. The description continues in their book, "PROVERBS AND POPULAR SAYINGS" collected by James Stuart and edited by D. Mick Malcolm, that it is, "a familiar and widely known saying in epigrammatic form."

Consistent with the meanings of proverbs, "COLLINS COBUILD ENGLISH LANGUAGE DICTIONARY" defines proverbs as "a short sentence that people often quote and that gives advice or tells you something about human life and problems in general."

"THE OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA ENGLISH DICTIONARY" says a proverb is "a short pithy saying in general use, help to embody a general truth."

"THE NEW LEXICON WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY" defines proverb as "a brief familiar maxim of folk wisdom."

According to the Scripture, a proverb is figurative language. The Disciples of Jesus for example, pleaded with Him to speak plainly without using proverbs (John 16:29).

The proverbs of Bassa as the birthright of posterity and heritage, preserved by the ancestors of wisdom, is as old as the Tribe. That is why it is necessary to trace its source to the oral history of the Bassa Tribe. In so doing, the ancient proverbs are passed on from generation to generation through the oral history, vocal musicology, folklore, and traditional legends which were already embedded in

the memories of the sagacious and legendary Elders, the the accustomed historians, the vocal musicologists, and the traditional folklorists. The proverbs as the wisdom of the people, can be likened unto a reservoir, or a water tower that is used for water storage before it is supplied to the different parts of the city in different quantities from the same source.

Coverage and Capacity of the Bassa Proverbs

Now that the proverbs are on the way to becoming a written literature, I am inclined to believe, that scope or the coverage and the capacity of the Bassa proverbs will be enlarged to become extensive. But in the oral context, the proverbs had been very unique, limited and solely the property of the Elders. The proverbs were like a law book and wisdom only for the Council of elders when used from memories to plead cases for their clients; counsel and console bereaved family members and relatives; teach for good character and moral behaviour; and warn young men and women in the community to behave right and well. Unless one were an Elder and knew the Bassa language well, the values of the proverbs were of no use to him/her.

As some of the oral proverbs have been collected to become literature, the Bassa proverbs would no longer be limited to Bassa Elders. To this end, a new standard of purpose needs to be considered critically since the Bassa proverbs can be read and examined by other experts. A new way of guidelines must be opened in which improved interpretations of native ethics, ideals, morals, and principles of life could emerge, and to make the studies of proverbs more inclusive so as to touch on all conditions of life and all manners of people.

I am hopeful that when such a new way is open, it would become a challenge to all enlightened men and women of Bassa in particular, and of all fellow proverb researchers. In addition, I am confident that by so doing, more of the inherited wisdom of the true native Bassa people already buried in the basic proverbs, will come out to be as authoritative for development, for teaching and learning purposes and for interpreting the scripture in the context of the Bassa people. When that vision has become a reality that the written proverbs of Bassa have been accepted to be used for preaching, teaching and literacy work, then the effort is truly worth the risk.

Context and Use

The knowledge of the root of the Bassa Tribe is inserted in the ancient proverbs of the Tribe. One of those proverbs says: "*SODA SOA NYON DABAIN DIE KON*," ("On the old mat is woven the new"). This proverb was passed on to me by Elder Geah-Kwui deputy Sarwah. The Elder looked back to the time of the ancestors and narrated a legend from which the "old Mat", proverb was taken. The word "legend" in the Bassa Language is called, "*Dyuaun-Kadyu*."

As no Elder of the Bassa Tribe can speak a sentence or two, without using a proverb, Elder Sarwah is prevalent among the Bassa Elders. While Elder Sarwah was in search of information about the origin of the "Old Mat" proverb, he discovered that the "Old Mat" was a seat of authority used solely by the Bassa King. Nobody could weave its replacement or one like it, unless he weaves it on the "old Mat." Traditionally, it is "ON THE OLD MAT THAT WE WEAVE THE NEW."

The root of the Bassa Tribe was traced by knowing the origin of the "Old Mat" proverb. The Bassa people according to the legend, were led their King on the lone "Old Mat" when they migrated from Ethiopia in the 16th century B.C. to this part of West Africa, the then "GRAIN PEPPER COAST," known as "LIBERIA" today. The story continued that the people escaped from the destruction of the 16th century war which broke out between Ethiopia and Egypt. The migration was led by King Suahn Vehnehn, meaning "great ape." Later, Suahn Vehnehn was changed to Fannah Boeh Vehneh with a new meaning of "great man of wisdom."

The King and his people were identified as people from the direction of the sunrise. They travelled from Ethiopia and passed six countries: Sudan, Chad, Cameroon, Slave Coast (Nigeria), Gold Coast (Ghana), and the Ivory Coast before reaching the Grain Pepper Coast. Finally, their "Hook of leadership" struck in the soil of the Grain Pepper coast and suddenly, they stopped by the decree of the King. The "Old Mat" as spread on the ground and the King ordered each family to build a home.

The Bassa legend based in this "Old Mat" proverb is worth accepting to be converted into a true written history of the Bassa people of Liberia who have had no previous written history up to this time. Since this legend is based on factual people and true events, it needs to be authenticated and be substantiated by the following four circumstantial evidences:

1. Traditional Name

The original name of the Bassa people was Gor-Nyon Be, meaning, people of the East or people from the direction of the sunrise. The country of Ethiopia claimed by the legend, is also located in the East.

2. Historical Evidence

The traditional legend narrated the event of the war which broke out between Ethiopia and Egypt in the 16th century B.C. World History confirmed that in the 16th century B.C. Ethiopia and Egypt fought, and Ethiopia was conquered by Egypt. That was the cause of the migration of the Ethiopian Bassa to the Grain Pepper Coast. Another history, "THE LIBERIA-HISTORY OF THE FIRST AFRICAN REPUBLIC 1970," by Dr. C. Abayomi Cassell, confirmed the 16th century migration of people from the Eastern countries including the tribes, Grebo, Bassa, Kru and the Krahn. "Those who settled in the Montserrado and Bassa areas became the Bassa Tribe and that a portion of them formed what is known today as the Krahn Tribe. Those who reached the Cavalla River eventually became the Grebo Tribe," he concluded.

3. Religious Evidence

The people of Ethiopia are staunch religious people of Africa. Likewise the Bassa people of Liberia. The Liberian Bassa are involved in Christian activities more than any other tribe in Liberia. Grand Bassa, their County, is sometimes described as Church County.

4. Evidence of Domestic Stewardship

The steward of Queen Candace of Ethiopia rendered faithful and honest service to the Queen. He was also noticed as a constant religious man (Acts 8:26-40). Similarly, the Liberian Bassa have good testimony for being good stewards. They are found faithful and some of them are employed by leaders and businessmen for domestic services in their homes.

5. Literature in Bassa Tradition

A Bassa proverb says: *SE-DEH-DYUO MON ZUDUEH*. "TO KNOW NOTHING IS TO BE FOOLISH." This proverb emphasizes that the necessity and desirability of being informed, and makes whatever educational system the Tribe has, compulsory. The head of each family and each kinship are in the Vanguard of their cultural school to make sure that all of their children strive for knowledge and wisdom of people and things.

The Bassa tradition believes that one who is ignorant is likened unto a half human being, or like a bee drone known in Bassa as *Doeh Vun-Mley*, which does not make any honey but allow, monotonous humming or buzzing noise all day long around the bee-hive. In light of this great impact that the proverb has on the Bassa people for the desire of knowledge, no parent wants to see his or her children to become victims of ignorance.

The invention of "BASSA VAH" is the result of this great longing for knowledge. The Bassa Vah was a symbol of communication of the Tribe in the days of old. According to oral history, Mr. Di-Wadah invented the Bassa Vah in the early part of the B.C. century. He chewed on raw leaves to make marks to represent something for communication. He demonstrated physically, the meanings of marks that he chewed on the leaves to some women of the community, which was also the development of what we called a "body language." His movements of arms, eyes, hands or head are intended to send a particular message.

The success of the Bassa Vah, was the development of the Bassa Vah Script. Later in the early 1800's another Bassa man, Thomas Flo Narvin Lewis, invented the Alphabet of the Bassa Vah Script and called it, *EHNIN KA SE FA*. Since the invention of the Bassa Alphabet by Mr. Lewis is more scientific than the invention of the Bassa Vah by Mr. D-Wadah, let me briefly discuss how much Mr. Thomas Flo Narvin Lewis had done to develop the Bassa Vah Script.

Thomas Flo Narvin Lewis was a son of a Bassa Chief named Mahdeh Flo. The Flo family hailed from District No.3 of Grand Bassa County, Liberia, in the Siahn Section of Hwodoa-Zohn Clan. Thomas Narvin Flo was adopted by an American Missionary lady and gave him the name "Lewis" (family name of the adopted mother). While living in America for many years, he graduated from the Medical College at the Syracuse University in New York, 1907 and later, became a renowned medical doctor. Tom Narvin was the first highly educated son of the Bassa Tribe.

Although the ideographic code of the Bassa Language was not documented in Liberia when Dr. Lewis left the Country but while he as studying in America, he based his alphabet on the pre-existing ideographic code of his Bassa people. In view of this, Dr. Thomas Narvin Flo Lewis was given the credit as the inventor of the Bassa Script Alphabet of the original Bassa Vah.

The Bassa Language is now among the few language of Liberia which has its own original written Script Alphabet. The Bassa people can be proud to reverse the proverb from "TO KNOW NOTHING IS FOOLISH," to, "TO KNOW SOMETHING IS WISDOM." Although the Bassa Language was never being accepted by tge "Elite Government of Liberia," to be taught in formal school, we are happy and hoping that a day will come when efforts made by the indigenous learned people of Liberia shall be recognized and be used for history, development and benefits of many in Liberia.

Some of the peculiar distinctions between the Bassa Language and other languages of Liberia, worth mentioning are specifically these three:

1. Language of Nasalization: Most of the Bassa words are sounded in the nose, for example: to cook is "pin," to go is "mu," water is "ni," to walk is "na," etc.
2. Language of Tonal Marks: The 7 vowels of the Bassa characters have different tonal marks referred to as: Accents or Stresses, to indicate the modulation or regulation of the voice of the speaker. These linguistic tones are:
 - (a) Néhìn Wudu Dyi (High Tone)
 - (b) Doèh Wudo Boun (Low Tone)
 - (c) Kpa Wudu Dyii (Mid Tone)
 - (d) Gbiain Wudu Dyi (Slanting Tone and,
 - (e) Gbenhìn Wudu Mu (Double the Tone)
3. Language of its own Original Script: The Bassa Alphabet has 30 letters including, 23 consonants and 7 vowels. According to the modulation oft the vowel sounds, each vowel repeats itself five times so as to accommodate each of the five tonal marks. Each mark is place inside each letter of the 7 vowels to modulate the voice of the speaker.

After Dr. Lewis had modified and arranged the Bassa Alphabet into a proper alphabetical order, he returned to Liberia in 1910. He opened a school for the Bassa book, and taught Bassa as a written language of Liberia to his Bassa People with considerable sense and circumspection to the negative attitude of the "power that be" at that time. He selected several key verses in the Bible and translated them into the Bassa language, and taught his people the "WAY OF SALVATION" up to the time he was killed in 1935, at the age of 55 (1880-1935). His Bassa Script is his legacy left behind for the Bassa Tribe of Liberia.

Later, after his death, the original Bassa Alphabet was converted to an International Phonetic Alphabet by some West Missionaries of the General Association of the Regular Baptist Council. (GARBC), to continue the Bible translation work among the Bassa people.

Emphasis of Bassa Proverbs

Wisdom of Life Experience: Most of the African traditional proverbs are ancient, and preserved the life experience and wisdom of those ages. All of the Bassa proverbs preserve the life experience and the Indigenous wisdom of the Elders of the Tribe.

In view of the foregoing, I believe that it is expedient at this point, to classify some of the Bassa proverbs under certain keynotes or themes that might be a help to gain a deeper insight into the studies of the traditional proverbs of the Bassa people. With this understanding, let me share the inherent wisdom of the Bassa people and emphasize it in some of their ancient proverbs.

1. Wits of Elders in the Community

The wits in the wisdom of the Elders for honor are worthy to be cherished. The value of Elders in the Bassa tradition, is the foundation of wisdom for each kinship, lineage, and community. To disregard and ill-treat an elder or an aged man or woman, and uproot him or her from the family circle or from the community center, is a great loss. Such a loss for example, is like a college professor who purposely throws away his brand-new set of "The World Book Encyclopedia" into a garbage truck, or like being a renowned Pastor of a popular Evangelical Church wilfully burning his own study office where he keeps all his New Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible, his New Open King James Version Study Edition of the Bible along with all new Bible commentaries.

There are many proverbs that speak about the value of Elders in tribal society. The following are a selected few just for example:

- (a) *NYONNON-SOA SE-DEH KON NI, OH KONNON DIO-DYOA*. That is: The Old Lady might seem to have nothing, yet, she has her "Dio-Dyoà." *The dio-dyoa* is a precious seed of a certain tree, used to cure skin diseases, but it is uncommon except found with a few aged women. In the Christian context, the dio-dyoa could be likened unto the prayer of an old Christian woman.
- (b) *NYON-VEHNNEHN SE VONON BEHIN, KEH OH DYUO GBAA KA*. In other words: The Elder is unable to fight, but he has a rich experience for struggles. This proverb is a response to a young person who might think that he could beat an old man in a fight. The Elders are not strong physically as the young men, but can fight in many ways to even sabotage the progress of any young man in life. On the other hand, victory in the battle of life can be won only by those who believe in the wisdom of the Old Christian Bible.
- (c) *SO-GEHN NI CHEH-EH OH DEH XWA*. This proverb says: Chicken egg cannot turn its hen over. This is an advice to some young people who by their book knowledge, might claim to know better than their parents. This proverb can also be a lesson to many Christians who instead of begging God to forgive them by His grace, they tell God what they want Him to do for them.
- (d) *NYON-VEHNNEHN MON MU-DEDEIN BOHKE. OH KU DYOH-HWODO*. The English equivalent is: An Elder is a bath-tub, it restrains laughter. As the bath-tub cannot expose any secret of us who stand before it daily, so is the Elder in the community in whom you confide your private problems. Similar to that is the God of the Bible, who knows all the private problems and sins of all peoples, but He never made them a figure of fun.

2. Advantage of Opportunity

The right and relevant use of opportunity on time, is a privilege. There is a specific class of Bassa proverbs which teaches that doing things rightly, decently and orderly, at the earliest opportunity, are prerequisites to success in life. The following few proverbs have been selected to represent the many proverbs which teach the advantages of the right and earliest use of opportunity:

- (a) *DAH JWEHN-DE NI CHANNAAN, BOEH KOEH KPON-EHNIN DYI*. That is: Ants are fused around where there is a greasy palm nut. Relatives and friends of a wealthy man used the opportunity of being members of the family or friends of the rich man to converge on him until he is broke. But when his avenue of wealth is closed, no more relatives or friends, can be seen around him.
- (b) *NYON NI PO GAA-KON*. This proverb means: There is no need to augment a man. The Bassa tradition believes that to be a man is an opportunity given by God. Now that you are man, you must be proud of your manhood and make good use of that opportunity of manhood.
- (c) *NI DA WOUUN HWEDEIN NI, OH NYU TONON*. This means: Water becomes saliva when it remains in the mouth too long. Becoming a leader of any organization or group of people, is an opportunity and not a right. Others reverse the opportunity into their right and prefer to keep it at that, until they have become "dirty saliva" in the mouth of each follower. The proverb urges that the opportunity must be used as quickly as possible to avoid it being misused.

3. Teamwork and Confidence

In teamwork, if confidence is created in each member of the team, then development is possible and necessary. Members of each Bassa community are interdependent. In such unified community, no one member can do any major work or solve any great problem without the co-operation of another member of the community.

The spirit of give-and-take developed in a group of people, gives them more confidence to be sincere. Although each member has his or her own reservation in the gregarious society, he or she must be co-operative in the teamwork of farming, family house dubbing, brushing paths between towns, sharing meal, burying their dead, etc. The following proverbs are selected to teach a spirit of interdependence in the tribal community:

- (a) *DEEH POEIN-DYI HWEH KE WA KIDI TEDE*. That means: Red ants bend nest, only when they are united. The people of Bassa learned this wisdom from the ants and applied it to improve their living conditions in the community.
- (b) *SON DYOA DO NI FIA GBINNIN*: It means: A single hand cannot coil a boa constrictor. The boa is a very huge and long snake and when a hunter kills such a snake, it must be wreathed before being carried into town. One needs more than one hand to wreath and so, it is selfishness on the part of a hunter to make the attempt alone when more than one hand is needed.
- (c) *MONIN-MONIN SE KUNUN KON*. The English equivalent is: There is no remedy against a multi-assault than to surrender to its force. In a unified community, for example, there is no room for any bandit to break into anybody's home. If the attempt is made, only one loud outcry from that house is enough to have any group of bandits under control by the united force of the men in the community. It is well said that, 'in unity there is strength.'

4. Life Protection with Care

I believe that there is no other task greater than the task of someone who cares for others. The greatest concern of all leaders of Bassa communities, is the preservation of life and property of

the people in the community. A certain category of proverbs is set aside to support such a grave concern. The following few are just an example to teach members of the Tribe how to beware of dangers and prevent them:

- (a) *M PININ M MION-KPO KOPO MU NI, WA ZAIN M SE PINAN DYEDE*. Literally: If you cook yourself in a "tin can," people will dish you up by a piece of bamboo stick. That is, if you treat yourself cheap, you shall be treated cheap by the people. This proverb is a warning to many young people who are loose in the community, do not care whom they sleep with, where to eat, what to eat, how to talk, who to talk to, and what to say. They become so cheap that they have not association with good people who could have protected them and helped them develop.
- (b) *BEHIN-BEHIN DI POOH-WHEHN*. The is: Only peers eat roasted palm nuts together. Roasted palm nut is oily with red oil and it is eaten with hands. An elder who cares for himself, prefers not to eat roasted palm nuts together with little children; he no doubt will mess his clothes with the children, or get themselves involved with the affairs of the youth and thus might easily put themselves in a shameful mess in the community.
- (c) *DYI-TE GBE-DYU ZA HWEE-HWEE! PIE*. In a literal sense, the proverb is saying: A walkabout puppy takes a loud screech from the street back home. This is an advice to those who like to go walkabout and stay out late in the night. Unless they learn to return home on time, they might be like the Walkabout Puppy who usually comes home late with a painful screech, "Hwee-Hwee!"
- (d) *DEE NI BA DYOH-MA KOUN*. This proverb says: A stranger does not carry "*Dyou-Ma*" under his arm. "*Dyoh-Ma*" is a human skin-top drum used for secret dance in a secret society by members of that society only. As the human-skin-top drum is never to be seen by non-members of the society, it is quickly put away only by a resident who knows where to hide it properly. The visiting quest, although member of the society, does not know where to hide the "sacred drum" when the wicked dancers are chased out by community authority. During that disturbance, if the drum is being exposed to the authority, all members of that society will be pressed to tell whose skin is on the top of the drum. The advice of this proverb is that people who care for their lives should get away from such a wicked fraternity.

5. Need of Moral Ethics in Society

A need to implant moral ethics in Bassa communities is worthy. Generally, the emphasis of all Bassa proverbs is placed on morality and how to teach rules about right and wrong behaviour of people in healthy societies. Some of the codes of ethics or virtues of life that the Bassa proverbs teach include:

- (a) *XWEH SEHEH WODOEIN SONMON KEH*. i.e. how then can a snake born a worm. This proverb is talking about fearlessness. When a child who was born in a diligent family becomes lazy, fearful and stupid, then this proverbial is used to caution the weakening child.
- (b) *NOOH-DYUEH NYINNIN-KPODO NI BOA-DYI*. - The face of a stubborn child is not big. This proverb talks about stubbornness and selfishness against kindness and generosity. One of the ways in which to teach a stubborn child a lesson is to minimize his daily meal, or sometimes, to let him go hungry for a day or two. The stubborn child will have no need to visit the toilet when he has not eaten enough because of his stubbornness. He or she might soon learn the lesson when he or she is hungry.
- (c) *M DY KOEH CHEHN-EHN DYUO NI, M DIEH PIUU*. - If you know how to butcher an ant, you will eat its liver. It speaks of being patient. The price of patience is that much delicate as that of butchering an ant to find its liver. A person who is able to control his feelings so that he does not get annoyed even in situations which other people would find frustrating, is likened unto the one who butchers an ant to find its liver.

- (d) *DUUN-KU-NYON NI SE DE*. - No diligent person can persist in poverty. This proverb praised the success of hard-working people and advises others to be hard-working.
- (e) *DYUEH WII-WON DYEIN OH MONON-ZA*. - A merciful mouth of a self-pitying child, won him a bundle of rice. This is the result of applying self-effort. When an effort applied by one's-self is humble, success is real. The teaching of this proverb is a good example.

6. Causation and Natural Events in Society

Teaching of causation in contrast to the results of natural events, worth claiming the attention of the Bassa people. The Bassa tradition believes that whatever happened to anybody in life, or to the community in which they live, has happened for a cause. In the light of that cause, there should be the result of anything which had happened. If anyone should go against the law of nature, he shall surely be in trouble with nature. Likewise, if anyone should go against the law of human ethics, he shall find himself in trouble with his fellow human beings. Some of these issues are addressed by the following Bassa proverbs:

- (a) *PEE-NYUEHN NI SE HWIO XWADAUN*. - When night comes we must quit pleasures of the day. The result is that everybody must go home when the night comes.
- (b) *DIBII NO WODOEHIN KE OH NI HWOH XWEH*. Literally it means: Whatever is born by a black deer cannot resemble the *xweh* deer, which is a different animal. It will be against the law of nature if a black deer should give birth to a *xweh* deer.
- (c) *NYON NI TEH-MEHIN DYU DYOA*. - We do not identify an elephant to children. Generally, it is a known fact that an elephant is the largest land animal. Once anybody sees an elephant, he or she will know that this is what people call elephant, without further identification.
- (d) *MON NYU M MIN-ONUM XWEH SE DYODOUN ZAUM KANMA*. - This proverb says: To bury one who causes his own death, is not difficult. In Bassa tradition, funeral service is very expensive. But when one causes his own death, the body could be thrown away and that with no blame.

7. A Concern of Preparation of the Future

The concern for preparing for the future is optional in Bassa tradition. The future being very uncertain and taken to be optional, this does not deprive the concerned people of planning for tomorrow's necessities of life. The following proverbs therefore, alert the Bassa people to prepare for the future:

- (a) *NYON SE-DYUO KE ZON-ZON*. - The Day is Dawn when one is unaware of it. No day can dawn on anyone who had not gone through the night struggle, or else he or she cannot expect to see the sky to grow light after the night.
- (b) *MON KON ZEHN-IN-JE NI KPANNAAN GIIEH*. - I scraped at redwood for you to become red. Many parents who are distressed by the ingratitude of their children whom they love above all things, use this proverb to express great disappointment, and to also caution the younger ones. In the days of old, redwood was the lucrative commodity of the Bassa people. To fell those hard redwoods by using domestic tools like cutlasses and axes with hands, was a very hard labour just to prepare for the good future of one's posterity.

8. Fatalism of Man and the Uncertainty of his Life

The Bassa tradition teaches that God does not eat or take back, what He has set aside for His children. They believe that if one was destined by God to be rich, he will be rich anyhow, come what may; if to be poor, he will be poor. Thus many members of the Bassa tribe are fatalists in the life of uncertainty. The following proverbs speak to the issues:

- (a) *HWEHN-HWA DA, NYON NI DYE WANAN-DEH DYII ZIEH.* - "The crow says: No one know from whence come bugs in the air. With this uncertainty, the bird keeps its mouth open all day, waiting for flies to fly around in the direction for its food.
- (b) *WODO-WODO MON NI DUKPA, OH NI SO-PEHN-NAIN.* - Blood relationship is a river gulf of ages; nothing can move it.
- (c) *NIEHN DEHBEH NYON MUEH, PA NYON BIDI TEHBEH MU.* - Water enters your bottle only when it loves you. That is, the power of love is absolute and can never be forced on anybody.

9. Complacency and Unconcerned Thought of Life

Complacency and comfort without concern for others indicate selfishness. Some Bassa are pleased with themselves and do not think that there is any reason to worry or do anything about a situation which concerns others in the same community. The following proverbs are lessons to the selfish behaviour of such complacent and unconcerned people:

- (b) *M DEHBEH-EH BAUN-BAUN MUIN, M BEHDEHEH SEIN MU.* - Being greedy for more, you can miss all. The Bassa tradition frowns on the greed of people for anything in the community.
- (b) *KPE-JI NI VONIN GANNAN.* - A Leopard which has authority never fights by strength. In other words, one who thinks he has everything, needs not exert any physical force to get what he already has.
- (c) *BANAN SE-MUGE.* - Wealth is not discriminatory. There can be no discrimination between a gold merchant and a rich farmer. All that he knows is that he is a rich man, likewise the rich farmer. Both of them are only complacent with their wealth without discriminating against each other.

10. A Struggle Between Optimism and Pessimism in Bassa-Land

The battle between optimism and pessimism with respect to the future development of life is very tough. People living in tribal community do not always have the same opinion with regard to future plans of the community; neither do they have the same hope for the future. Others are certain and hopeful for the future development of the community and its people, while others, are worried and think that the intended plans for the future will be unsuccessful. In this struggle, the following proverbs are used for advice:

- (a) *HWIDII-DE-GBEA NI KPA KAUNKA.* - A hopeful crab basket can even fail to catch the intended crab. This proverb is an advice against placing unnecessary hope in someone or in something. There is no reality of hope in any human being other than in God Almighty.
- (b) *NYEHN-BUN WONON HWEH KE GBEEH PENH BO.* - Dog sleeps by the fireside only when it is warm there. The dog perhaps, was optimistic of someone's effort to the preparation of the warm fireside.
- (c) *GEDEPOOH FAA DYUEH WONON BEDEEH MU PO-DEH.* - The God who split His child's mouth, has something to put in it. Every member of the Bassa Tribe is optimistic of God's grace to provide food for him or her.

11. Privacy of Family Matters in Tribal Society

The privacy in family matters in the Bassa tradition is delicate and important. It must be handled well and with great care. Knowing the importance of these family matters, a specific class of proverbs is set aside to address the family problems of private nature.

- (a) *HWEHN SEIN SE HWIE-DYI SEHIN HWEHN.* - In other words: Not every bunch of palm nuts is chapped in the road. In the Bassa tradition, only bunches of good palm nuts are chapped in the road so that travellers would pick good palm nuts and take them along.

- (b) *MAA SE CHOH-DE BEDE.* - No Woman has an Adam's Apple. Bassa men tend not to confide in women with their private matters. Women, they believe, do not have Adam's Apple to keep down secret matters in the back of their throats.
- (c) *NYON KE WUDU-DYU NI PO-DEH GAUN.* - This proverb is an advice against a talkative child. It means: Do not seal your carton of secret in the presence of a talkative child. A talkative child does not know the value of private concern.
- (d) *BUNNUN-ZON DOH-DOH PO KPOOH ZON.* This proverb says: The frequent vibration of the frog's throat implied his guilt. It is an advice to someone whose fearful-look might imply a guilty conscience.

12. Price of Human Dignity in Bassa-Land

The price of human dignity in Bassa Community is very high and with great value. There are many areas and many ways of human concern in which the Bassa people interpret the dignity and value of mankind. Some of those concerns are expressed by their sorrow and pain in time of bereavement. At such a time, they wail, fast, shed tears with bitterness, and even desire to be buried with the deceased. In time of a childbirth, particularly boy, there is a lot of merry-making to welcome. In time of receiving guests, they put themselves out to welcome and entertain the guests to the highest degree of their resources. Their defense of human dignity and value, is a complete contrast to that of cruel leadership of their community and the wicked deeds of men and women in the community.

There is a special category of proverbs that demonstrates the concern of the Bassa people for the dignity and value of human being.

- (a) *BAA-MAA SE DYU KON NI, OH GBEHN-IN-GBE.* - A barren woman rears a dog to represent her child. In other words, she will take her relative's children for her pets.
- (b) *XWEH-JE POEIN NYON SON NI-GBO.* - True reconciliation takes place at the funeral reception of a loved one.
- (c) *WODOEIN-DYU SE BINAN-KON.* - The truly-born child is blameless to the parents. They have blind love that does not see any wrong in their child or children. This proverb is a caution to such parents.
- (d) *XWADA SE KPOOH KON, KEH CHUDI-MEH-NEHEHN BE NYUAN XWADA-KPOOH KEH.* - Unless there are shrubs, there can be no jungle. In other words, people constitute power and wealth, and yet people can be without power and wealth. That is, power and wealth do not determine the value of people.
- (e) *VAN-AN SE'M BADA HWEH OH GBEHN KE M BADA DE.* - A Billy Goat had beaten me but his horns cannot beat me again. That is, the cruel leadership and wicked deeds of men will not be allowed to fall on their posterity in the community.

13. Warning Against Immoralities in Society

There is strong warning against immoralities. As many members of the Bassa Tribe are very sensitive to criticism, especially those in leadership positions, they do not tolerate the practice of any immorality that might lead to the criticism of the community or the leaders. Such of vices as dishonesty, sexual promiscuity, stealing, ungratefulness, pride, hypocrisy, personal greed, etc., must be vigorously avoided.

- (a) *WUDU SE WIDI.* - Word is not money to be spent. Some ungrateful people are even mean with just a word of thanks for a good deed done to them.

- (b) *GAN-AN-DYU KE OH DU XWEE BEHIN-DYI.* - This proverb says: A little horn is commensurate with its little sound like "Du-Xwee," than to take on the bigger horn like "Du-Xwuu." It is a deception when little people begin to practice bigness.
- (c) *BODOOH-ZOO GBA NI PA.* - This proverb advises against pride: The school of an arrogant principal is unpopular.
- (d) *CHEH-CHEH-BUNEHN ZI BI DYIIN.* - This proverb talks about the damage of one being in a haste: The hasty rat misses its hole. of course, when a rat has missed its hole, it becomes a target of children for their meat. This is implied that people who are in unnecessary haste, endangers themselves.
- (e) *HWODO-NYIN-NIIN-NYON NYUEHN KE NYON DABA MONON WUDUUN.* - The unusual appetite of a greedy farmer can cause another farmer to abuse rice. Although rice is a staple of the Bassa people, the lust of it can damage the value of it. This proverb is against personal greed for food:
- (f) *BODOA-VEHNNEHN JADA BODOA.* - This proverb speaks to the behaviour of hardhearted or tough people who feel too big for anything or for anybody in the community. The literal translation is:
Big cutlass breaks the cutlass. In other words, a farmer who has a big cutlass can go against any big tree with it, or strike it against any stick, but pretty soon he would find himself with a broken cutlass.
- (g) *GBOUN-BOA SE NYONMON-VEHNNEHN JUEH.* - Having a big hip, does not determine the position of the headwife of the chief. This is a proverb warning against hypocrisy.
- (h) *MON FOOH-KEH, MON-KON MEH-EHN KANNA-DYI.* This proverb speaks against a lazy man who has a healthy gut: You being lazy, have a healthy gut. Idleness is incompatible with industriousness in a healthy community of the industrious farmers.

14. Individual Pride with Initiation to take Responsibility

The pride of an individual taking the initiation to become responsible in the community, is a great challenge. As becoming responsible men and women in the society is exciting, it requires independent efforts and personal determination for its realization.

- (a) *NYON NI DI NYON MUE-DO BII DEHIN-DEH.* - One cannot eat a delicious meal for another. Eating for yourself is a true independence.
- (b) *NYON MEON NIIN BU NONMON WIN-IN SUN-EHNIN.* - It is pleasant to scatch around your own anus. That is another sign of being independent, for you do not need any cooperation for you to scratch your own anus.
- (c) *DEH NA-NYON DYEEH HWEDE-NYON NI DYE-DE.* - The sight seen by a traveller is not the sight seen by non-traveller. Such a personal experience of the traveller is his or her independent treasure.

15. The Apprehension of Farm Failure

The danger of farm failure in the Bassa Community is a grave matter. When a threat of crop failure seems to be real in the community, it gives rise to a deep fear among the farmers. The society was a farming community.

- (a) *BIDI KONIN-NYAAN, NA NIIN-NI.* - The early cow drinks fresh water. In essence, starting your farm work on time is a major remedy to farm failure.
- (b) *DEH-DO SE DOBOEH DE-PO. VOOH MON MYUUN-DEH JAA.* - Nothing can take priority over the need for a full belly. Food production is truly inevitable, as nobody wants to live with an empty stomach. Nobody will make light of going to work on his or her farm daily.

- (c) *OH SE BAN NI, OH KON KOH-BADA.* This proverb says: Despite a crop failure, the harvest time is unavoidable each year. In other words, it could be true that in time of farm failure, each farmer may not have enough to share with others, he always will have enough at harvest time for the survival of his immediate family members.

16. Healthy Attitudes of Community Leaders

Healthy outdoor activities, healthy appearance of each member with healthy skin, healthy appetite and healthy body attest to the healthy community and through that the quality of the leader.

- (a) *DYI-KAN-NAAN DEE KE OH ZI BANAN-DYI.* The proverb says: To be healthy is sweeter than to be rich.
- (b) *HWINON DYEEH GBANAN ZAA.* - The tribal doctor who diagnoses a case must treat it. A healthy community must have some trusted herbalists to care for the health of the people in the community.
- (c) *HWINON SE ZUDU.* - (The medicine man is not a twit). This proverb gives credit to the knowledge of the tribal medical doctors. The medicine man or the herbalist is not the same as the "witch-doctor." Although non-Africans make no distinction between the good medical doctors and the wicked doctors, the tribal medical doctors are friends of the people in a healthy community. To the contrary, the witch-doctors are selfish businessmen with their witch-craft medicine against good people.

17. Knowledge of the Divine Care

Although Non-Christian Bassa people strongly believe in the intervention of their ancestors in time of trouble, they believe the God Almighty and appreciate His approval of their blessings through the ancestors. Knowing very well that the God Almighty cares for them, they call Him "THE BIG GOD." or *GII VEHNNEHN,*" (Bassa). Some of their proverbs about God implied some of the Divine Attributes of God. The following few proverbs are selected for our examples.

- (a) *GEDEPOOH NI ZI-KPODO.* i.e God never passes on the side of injustice. This proverb is about the justice of God. "My God will see you," for example, is one of the major curses of the Bassa against someone who might have done them an injustice. Sometimes it is true that their God sees the evil doers with some punishments.
- (b) *GEDEPOOH NI NYI NYON GON-ON HWEH KE NYON NI MON-ON KPA DYI.* - When God gives you a "nevermind" (best) dare not ask for its appeasement or its mitigation. God's best to someone, is more than any thing else.
- (c) *GA! MON A DEIN KONMON GBOH.* This proverb says: Agony, it is by you that we began our wealth. The word "Ga" is pregnant. It has many meanings. It means agony, suffering, sweat, toil, pain, poverty, tears, or even blood. The word "*Konmon*" also has many meanings: wealth, riches, affluence, prosperity, or resources.

"SUFFERING, YOU ARE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR WEALTH," This was the theme of my Christmas message 1994. This proverb is the traditional meaning of Christmas. The great message of God's care for mankind was prophesied by Prophet Hosea that the beginning of this great treasure was found in the refugee life of the Lord Jesus when God said through Prophet Hosea, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son" (Hosea 11:1).

This prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 2:13 & 14:

"The angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream saying, Arise, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child and destroy

him When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt."

It was there in Egypt that the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, was registered as a refugee. This was the first advent of Christ on earth to suffer for our wealth. The Apostle Paul described this marvellous event as the GRACE OF GOD, in these words:

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8.9).

Looking at the decayed evangelical churches in Africa today, we must look for ways in which to revive the decayed church and overcome the existing distrust of many African Christians and some unbelievers, to the church which they have seen and believe as an imported religion. In order to disqualify this view of the belief of the people, the messengers of the gospel must take the culture of the people into serious consideration, rather than to continue to reject the people's culture only on the basis of an ethnocentric belief with prejudicial actions to the hurt of the gospel.

The meanings of proverbs have a relationship to the history of the Bassa people. Hence, the context of the tribal proverbs should be a place where the gospel could have revealed itself to the indigenous people of Bassa. Thus with Owango Welo we affirm, is that "contextualizing can be understood as the action of putting or understanding something in its proper context."

8. Traditional African Proverbs and African Christian Identity

Dupe Oduyoye

1. *Historical reflection on the use (or non-use) of proverbs in our churches and our theological training institutions.*

Proverbs are used in our churches to rub in lessons taught in the course of sermons and meetings of women, men and youths in congregations which use African languages. Such congregations are in the majority - even in the mission-founded Churches.

In our theological training institutions, practically all of which conduct their training in non-African languages, proverbs seldom come to mind. Whereas in oral cultures the authorities cited in elevated discourse are anonymous proverbs, the authorities demanded in literate cultures are documented references to written literature, with mention of author, title, chapter and verse and page. The training institutions are part of the culture of literacy; the church congregations are still part of oral cultures.

It is surprising that the Book of Proverbs in the Bible does not feature strongly in the syllabus for confirmation classes in our churches. For the age group at which youth are confirmed in (13-17) in churches which practice infant baptism, it seems more pertinent to confront these youngsters with Proverbs 21:25 & 26.

t_a awat àsel t^emiyt- n-nu^w
kiy me-^an-u^w yad-ay-w la-^as-o^wt.
Kol hay-yo^wm hi-t- awwah ta-^awah
w^e-saddiyq yi-t-ten w^e-lo ya-h^esok.

What the sluggard is searching for will be his death
since his hands do not want to work.
Throughout the day his mind is full of 'I want...';
while the generous gives and gives and yet lacks nothing.
- than to confront them at the age of fourteen with the
doctrine of the Trinity or of the divinity of Jesus.

to^wrat hakam (Pr. 13:14) is certainly as important as to^wrat
YHWH. It is m^e-qo^wr hayy-iyim "the ma-gwero of life". What more
does a person need to be "saved"? Is this not the tree of life
(Pr.13:12b- ta- ^awat ba -ah) the opposite of to-^wh l- t m^e-
mussak-ah (Pr.13:12a)

2. *Themes and values most often emphasized in proverbs in our culture.*

The following themes will be found in the table of contents and in the sub-headings of Areje, 1985):

NATURE

Inanimate: The Earth(1), Rain(13), Rivers(3), Fire(4), Water (1), Morning(2), Moon(2), Stars
(1), Trees(9).
Plants: Bitter leaf (1), Okro(2), Yam(12)
Food: Pounded yam(4)

Animate: Insects (16)
 Birds (8), Partridge(3), Dove(3), Vulture(4) Hawk(7), Fowl(14), Ostrich(1), Cattle egret(1),
 Animals: Elephant(17), Lion(2), Tortoise(8), Monkey(6), Toad(4), Crab(2), Snails (4), Snakes(6), Frog(4), Mouse(10), Antelope(1), Hare(1), Lizard(3), Cobra(2)...
 Domestic Animals: Dog(25), Goat(7), Cat(6), Ram(3), Horse(6).

PARTS OF THE BODY

Head(6), Hands(7), Eyes(6), Fingers(4), Teeth(3), Chest(1), Chin(1), Hair(1), Mouth(2)

Physical Defects: Baldness(3), Blindness(4), Deafness(2), Lameness(2), Hunch back(2),
 Stammering(1), Impotence(1)

Health and Illness(4): Leprosy(3), Lunacy(7), Congenital Illness(1),

Clothes and Dresses(7)

WORK, MONEY & THRIFT(10): Money(11), Spendthrift(3), Miser(7), Borrowing(4), Debt (3), Poverty(8), Riches(6), Prosperity(2).

Tools and Occupations: Blacksmith(4), Needle(3)

Home, Market and Farm(12)

CHARACTER TRAITS(4): Patience(8), Haste(4), Perseverance(1), Anger(4),
 Stubbornness(2), Disrespect(2), Laziness(9), Talkativeness(1), Tale bearing(4), Lying (4), Truth(6), Self Deception(5), Hypocrisy(2), Treachery(2), Honesty(1),
 Stealing(2), Thieves(17), Robbers(4), Greed(1), Jealousy(2), Vengefulness(2), Hospitality(1),
 Cowardice(3), Cruelty(1), Bravery(1), Loitering(2), Drunkard(4), The gentleman(4),
 Quiet nature(1).

SINGLE LIFE, MARRIAGE AND IN-LAW(3): Love(10), Marriage(9), In-laws(8), Polygyny (2), Concubines(1).

CHILDREN(25)

YOUTH & OLD AGE(20): Old Age(13), Elders(24)

NEIGHBOURS, FRIENDS & RELATIONS(2): Friends(10), Relatives(18),

FATE, GOD & THE DIVINE BEINGS(5): Providence(1), Guardian Angel/Destiny(5),
 God(7), The Divinities(5), *Ogun*(1), *Sàngo*(6), *Esù*(2).

MEDICINE, SACRIFICE & DIVINATION: Medicine(2), Sacrifice(5), Divination(8)

ANCESTRAL MASQUERADES(11), The Bull roarer(2)

DEATH(22), Burial(1)

CHIEFS, KINGS & PRINCES(10)

A BYWORD AND A NAME(7)

3. How closely these themes and values do or do not relate to the current agenda in our nations and our churches.

Take the Yoruba proverb: *Alaaru t' o n je buredi - Awo ori e l' o n je, tio mo.*

The head porter who eats (wheat) bread is eating the scalp of his head, although he does not know it.

The proverb dates about 1850 - first contact of the Yoruba with wheat bread and the English word bread (*bùrédi*). It was fashionable but more expensive than the local staples.

In 1995, the proverb is still relevant because wheat bread and imported foods of which it is the supreme symbol are still more expensive than the local staples. In the last ten years a book with the title. The Wheat Trap was about the economic effects of massive importation of wheat flour into Nigeria. Nwoke also wrote on "Traditional Food Plants, a Must for Food Security". Food Security is certainly basic to economic well-being and is an area where common sense must not be lost by Africans who have been bombarded with the three Cs(Civilisation, Commerce and Christianity) for two centuries.

Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, (1984:226-227) writes "It is essential that poverty should not be defined using foreign parameters. Poverty is not synonymous with cooking on a coal fire or feeding babies at the breast... or eating non-western type foods...Thus poverty may be the result more of thoughtlessness on the part of the government and people...much of Africa's poverty is self-induced.

Alààárù t'ó 'n je búredì
Awo orí è l'ó 'n je tí ò mò.

I put in the tone marks this time so that you may hear it from the talking drum. And dance to it! It is, after all, a pro-verb, meant to sound and resonate.

4. Whether proverbs relate to New Testament mission or only to Old Testament wisdom.

It is interesting that we assign "mission" to the New Testament whereas we assign "wisdom" to the Old Testament. But there is wisdom concern and style in the Gospel.

...anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock...

"But any one who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand." "Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves. Be, then, as gentle as the lamb but as wise as the serpent."

Any one who uses *m^esal-iyim* as much as Jesus did was certainly one of the *h^ekam-iyim* (the *soph-oi*:*Twi o-sofo* ("wise elder"/clergy man"). Jesus was not "preaching" to his disciples (his pupils) in Matthew 5-7 which we call the Sermon on the Mount: "he opened his mouth and sat down and taught them".

It was, therefore not merely an Africanist gimmick when, at the opening service of the last Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Harare in October, 1992, the following scene was enacted: A stool was placed in the proscenium; an old man with walking stick was helped onto the stage; he took his seat; and he began to speak words of wisdom.

The pulpit is not the only valid platform from which the New Testament "mission" can be disseminated. Or does *án- -be is to 'óros* (Mt.5:1a) mean "he went up the pulpit"? How about *kath-is-ant-os aut-ou* (Mt.1:1b): does it mean "he stood up"? Perhaps half of the New Testament mission in Africa, then, is not being prosecuted from pulpits in the context of liturgy but in homes, farms and workshops in the context of daily *kazi* (Ki-Swahili "work") where the *o-osofo* (the *soph-os*) is the "missionary".

We only need to compare the lady called *Hok^em-ah* (LXX *Sophia*- Yoruba *oríta*) with the "man" called the *Log-os* (*Had-dabar*) "the World" in the Gospel of John, chapter 1:

Soph-ia *The Log-os*

YHWH *qanah* me the *é s-iyt* In the *arch* was the *Log-os*,
of his *derek*... and the *Log-os* was divine...

When he established the heavens, Everything was made through him,
I was there Pr. 8:22-31 and there was not anything that was made

in his absence. John 1:1-3ff

The standpoint of Sophia at the crossroads is significant: it is the point where human beings make fateful choices, where they make a route selection that becomes eventually crucial. See the masal in Robert Frost's poem, "The Road not Taken".

YHWH's creation (Hebrew *qnh*: Greek *gen*: Arabic *kwn*: Yoruba *kan*) *m-qnh*: Zulu *N-guni*: Ndebele *N-goni* is called his *d r k*, his "way" - his direction *W To-^wrah* is all about "giving directions, pointing the way", and the *osofo* should be a *mo-^wr h* "an instructor, a coach". The New Testament "mission" must not be allowed to become a hit-and-run affair. Let the *o-sofo* learn from Jesus to take his seat before opening his mouth: let him teach, not just make announcements!

5. Need for further proverb research in our country/region.

If the objective is to collect traditional proverbs and preserve them in writing for posterity, work has been done for many ethnic groups in Africa during the nineteenth century Christian missionary activities. C.A. Akrofi (1958) states: "the most notable of the collections of Twi Proverbs which have already appeared in print are those by Riis, Christaller and Rattray, of which the largest was Christaller's collection of 3,600 proverbs."

In such places, what now needs to be done is to feed the collections back into oral use by the products of formal schooling (literate culture). One of the most effective means of doing this is the mass publication media of the voice recording cassette. With musical beat in the background to give it an air of entertainment and enjoyment. We have to sugar coat the bitter pills of truth for a generation that escaped liquid quinine.

Where no collection exists, or where the existing collections are not comprehensive, there is need to interview elders and document the proverbs on tape and in print.

I think that everywhere it will be fruitful to make a comparative study of proverbs and incantations/spells. It seems to me that proverbs are the incantations of every man while spells and incantations are merely the "proverbs" of sorcerers. Any adult without proverbs, therefore, lacks authority (authoritative contribution to social discourse). His arguments are baseless.

Proverbs should also be contrasted with riddles. When this is done it will be seen that whereas riddles go with jokes, proverbs are no joking matter. Riddles and jokes belong to Primary School and to the kindergarten. Proverbs turn the riddles on their heads from Senior High School to university.

6. Biblical Studies

How much and what kind of interest has been shown in proverbs by the discipline of Biblical Studies?

Scholars in African Traditional Religion have shown more interest in proverbs than Biblical scholars. Almost every writer on African Traditional Religion lists proverbs among the sources of African Traditional Religion. N.K. Dzobo who published *Ewe Proverbs* in recent years is a scholar of religious education.

In "Bible et Culture Africaine", his contribution to the Jerusalem Congress on Black Africa and the Bible (April 24-30, 1972), I. de Souza says in the section "La Littérature Sapientielle" that *Le but de cette littérature est de transmettre une philosophie, conception de la vie, la façon de se comporter dans la vie, vis-à-vis des voisins, des événements et surtout vis-à-vis de Dieu pour être heureux. Il ne s'agit pas d'une philosophie systématisée, abstraite, formulée en des thèses et démontrées, dont le levier serait la raison raisonnable. Mais ce sont de réflexions engendrées par l'expérience de la vie, l'observation des événements des menus faits quotidiens et de la nature.*

Ici encore nous voyons une notable similitude avec la littérature africaine...

Les africaines sont donc à l'aise quand ils ont l'occasion de feuilleter ou d'entendre lire la littérature sapientielle de la Bible, parce qu'il y a sur ce point une certaine connaturalité entre l'âme israélite et l'âme africaine. (Black Africa and the Bible, pp.85-86) The Israel Interfaith Committee.

In the Index of Biblical References in a book like John Rogerson, I find an index entry of two lines for Proverbs in comparison with fifty three for the Psalms. This is almost enough to answer the question: "How much interest has been shown...?" Peripheral, not central.

For about the last twenty years the syllabus of Christian Religious Knowledge (Old Testament) in the West African School Certificate Examination has focused on the history of Israel. From the call of Abraham to the entry into the Promised Land. From Samuel to the Conquest of the Northern Kingdom and Judah from Hezekiah to Zerubbabel

In the seminaries and department of religious studies, the concern has been with history - salvation history (the Noth hypothesis or the John Bright construction?) In John Rogerson (op cit) the index entries for Genesis runs into 89 lines, for Exodus into 44 lines.

The trouble is that the book of Proverbs cannot be invoked to support any thesis that the advice on which upper class Israelite youths were guided through life differed radically from the advice by which upper class youths in any other communities of the world were guided. The ideological claim (*sahaad-ah*) of Biblical religions is not supported by the tenor of the proverbs compiled in the Book of Proverbs. Indeed it turns out that the provenance of many of the proverbs in the collection is extra Israelite. *Soph-oi* (French *sav-ants*) seemed to have possessed the *jus ubique docendi* ("the right to teach everywhere").

What kind of interest has been shown in proverbs by the discipline of Old Testament Studies? Scholars of the wisdom literature of the Bible have pointed out the close similarity of Proverbs 22:22 - 24:22 to passages in the wisdom of Amen-emope (Egyptian). The word *sil^e s-o^wm* ("thirty") which introduces this passage.

"Have I not written for you *sil^es-o^wm*
full of knowledge and wise advice?"

Leads a Yoruba-speaking reader of the book of proverbs to enquire if the similarity between Yoruba *o-gbòn* "thirty" *o-gbón* "wisdom" (Amharic *gabanna*"understand") *gbón* "be wise" (Hebrew *gamal* "be fully ripe) *kpon* "be ripe", *g^emwl* "be ready to be weaned" be fully grown like a *gamal!* is significant or merely accidental.

hok^em-ah, the Hebrew word for "wisdom" (*hakam* "be wise") is cognate with Amharic *akkama* ("to heal medically") and therefore with Yoruba *o-ògùn* ("medicine") - *pharmakeia* which in Galatians 5:20 is listed by Paul as one "of the works of the flesh" and translated into English as "sorcery". You see how "Biblical Christians" would like to distance themselves from the book in the Bible which, instead of warning youths from the *àr^em-ah* "cunning" of the animal that is most *àru^wm* "cunning" of all the animals that God has created (Gen.3:1) positively sets out to teach the naive *àr^em-ah*. (Pr.1:4)

But however much we try, we cannot run away from the pragmatism of the Book of Proverbs in the Bible. It was admitted into the canon of Scripture because of a recognition that the *to^wrah* has many aspects: it includes

the *to^wrah* of one's mother (see Proverbs 31:1-9 etc)
the *to^wrah* of one's father (see Proverbs 2:1 etc)
the *to^wrah* of the *h^akam-iyam*

No young Christian student who is steeped in the book of Proverbs would abandon his studies in his final year because he has discovered through his evangelical Christian fellowship that worldly knowledge is useless and dangerous for the soul - whatever that is. Of Hebrew *nfs* which the King James version taught the English speaking world to understand as "soul",

Proverbs 19:2 says that without knowledge, *nfs* which is not good

Zulu *m-pisi* "hyena" (ravenous appetite)

Ki-kamba *m-biti* "hyena"

English A-m-bit-ion

Without knowledge

a-m-bit-ion is not good.

Latin *pet-o* "I seek"

English without knowledge, ap-pet-ite is not good

pet-i-tion is not good

This is bad news for those who think that God grants all petitions, indulges every *nfs*. The person who said that we should be sensitive to the sentimentality of the sentimental cannot like the book of Proverbs. Such people in an electricity system without earth wire.

7. **What Old Testament Studies have to contribute to the study of proverbs.**

The inclusion in the Old Testament of a whole collection of proverbs is instructive.

A study of two Hebrew words which are applied to proverbs (*masal* "proverb, parable, symbolic speech, meditative discourse" and *hiyd-ah* "indirect allusion, riddle") point to the need to widen our concept of "proverb" beyond the pithy quotables which the English word "proverb" (Latin *pro-verb-ium*) suggests. We must think of all varieties of pro-verbs, including actions which speak louder than words - Hebrew '*o^{wt}*', Arabic '*aayah* "sign, sign-act". Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was an '*o^{wt}*' (a natural '*o^{wt}*' because of the humble status of a donkey, a cultural '*o^{wt}*' because of reference in Hebrew literature to "Behold here comes your king riding on an ass, the foal of an ass.) Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples was an '*o^{wt}*'. Mahatma Ghandi's spinning wheel was an '*o^{wt}*'. So were his leather sandals, his lin cloth. It takes sharp conviction to "preach" in this way: it is preaching through a whole life style. It is the most authentic way to preach. Your sermon is actually your life - your life style. "Why do you say... but do not do...?" It is very foolish.

A sapiential psalm like Psalm 49 addressed to *kol ha-àmm-iyim* "all peoples" (:Ewe *ame* "person"), *kol yos^eb-ey hal d* "all the inhabitants of the *welt* (*h-ld:w-lt*. Cf. Arabic *h-lq* "creation":Lu-Ganda *h-ng* in *Ru-hanga* = *w-ng* in Wanga, the *rwh* of order). The address of Psalm 49 to both the children of 'Adam' and the children of 'uys' -the rich and the poor together show the ecumenical nature of the Wisdom literature in the Bible pragmatic, non-sectarian in orientation. It is useful for teaching in a pluralistic environment. If the third century Christian use of the pristine insight into the stability of triads (God is three-in-one: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) scandalises Muslims, why not be satisfied with Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 which speaks of one (loneliness), two (fellowship) and three. *ha-hu^{wt} ham-m^e-sullas* is not speedily snapped. (Pr. 4:12b)

That is the pragmatic, non sectarian statement of the doctrine of Trinity. No preacher can say that this is a "mystery": you can try it out physically; you can observe it psychologically; you can postulate it metaphysically. Or if you do not need metaphysics, what have you lost by not acceding to a doctrine of the Trinity which, the next time it is preached about on Trinity Sunday, you are going to hear the preacher declare that it is not to be understood with the intellect because it is a mystery. Mystery indeed! Is Christianity the champion among mystery religions?

What does the Old Testament have to contribute to the study of proverbs?

8. How greater attention to proverbs could affect the way Old Testament is taught.

Greater attention to the book of Proverbs in the Bible will correct the partisan tendenz of the particularist views of Yahwism in the Bible. The intention of the Book of Proverbs is to cure stupidity (*k^esiyl-u^{wt}*) - the stupidity of the *petiy* "naive" who believes everything and the one who sees danger and does not duck:

The *àru^m* sees evil and takes cover
But the *p^etay-iy^m* continue and get hurt. (Pr.22:3)

O you naive people, understand *àr^em-ah*.
And you stupid ones, understand intelligence. (Pr. 8:5)

The Book of Proverbs is only one of the *k^etub-iy^m* (Literature; Writings) section of the Hebrew Bible. The others are the *To-^wrah* and the *nebiy'-iy^m* "the Prophets". Greater attention to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes Ecclesiasticus and Job would ensure that the whole corpus of Hebrew scripture receives coverage - sometime along the line from Primary School to Secondary School (where the present emphasis leads many secularists to declare that a study of the Bible does not necessarily lead to keener moral sensitivities), the Seminary or undergraduate studies in University Departments of Religious Studies (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.). There is a wide range of opportunities (time slots) to slot in a greater attention to proverbs.

Proverb comparison should happen. And proverb controversy. Ezekiel was not afraid of it.

9. What Old Testament study needs to gain from other disciplines in the study of proverbs.

There is an International Association for the Study of Proverbs. For proverbs exist in every culture, in every language. The ancient wisdom of the world is locked in them: anthropologists study them; linguists study them, classicists study them. Collaboration with all these will be found stimulating.

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9. Proverbs and the Christian Message and Christian Life

L. Kalugila

1. Language

Swahili is a language which is written with Roman script. Usually words are written without many consonants standing alone as in the word proverb. Many words have consonants with vowels as in the word *Katika* meaning "in". Few words have consonants without vowels as in the word *maktaba* which means "Library".

1.1 Origin of Swahili Language

Swahili which is one of the Bantu languages has its origin in the coast of East Africa and has different dialects. It is a combination of many different Bantu languages, e.g. Kiamu, Kibanadiri, Kibonde, Kichangamwe (-a dialect on the Changamwe people of Mombasa), Kichage (Moshi-Tanzania), Kidyomu (-a dialect of Dyomwu Mombasa), Kigunya, Kigalla, Kihadimu (south Zanzibar), Kikaguru, Kikamba (Kenya), Kikami (Kenya), Kikuyu (Kenya), Kikwere (Kenya), Kimaku (Kenya), Kimalindi (Kenya), Kingao (Rufiji-Msumbiji) around central Kilua, Kimrima (-a dialect of the people of Pangani in Tanga), Kimvita (-a dialect of Mombasa), Kingozi Kingala (Zaire), Kingazija (a-dialect of Comoro Islands, Kingindo, Kingoni, Kinguana (Zaire, Tanzania, etc.)), Kinyasa (Malawi), Kinyamwezi (Tanzania), Kinyika (Malawi), Kinzwani (- a dialect of Kingazija Comoro Island), Kipemba (one of the dialect of Pemba Island), Kipata, Kipolomo (Kenya), Kisiyu (Kenya), Kisagara (Kenya), Kisambara (Tanzania), Kisela (one of the dialect of the Tambata people of North Zanzibar), Kitaita (Kenya), Kitshwana, Kivanga or Kivumba (one of the dialect in Tanga-Tanzanian), Kiyao (Kenya), Kizaramo (Tanzania), Kizigua (Tanzania), Kisulu (South Africa) and some other Bantu languages⁶⁷ (Broomfield, 77-85).

Swahili, as other languages in the world which borrow and lend words, has borrowed words especially from Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Indic languages, English, Gujarati, Hinduism, Somali, etc. and few words from Latin, Portuguese, German and French. The loan words have been Swahilized and follow the rules governing the Swahili language.

1.2 The use of the Swahili Language

Swahili language is spoken in many East African countries, e.g. Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zaire, Zambia, Malawi, Comoro Islands, Malagasy and Mozambique (Msumbiji). On the use of Swahili, Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi of the University of Uppsala comments: "Some form of Swahili was spoken probably more than a thousand years ago along the coasts of East Africa from North of Brava in Somalia to south of Beira in Msumbiji (Mozambique). Later in the last century traders, missionaries and colonisers used Swahili in the interior of East Africa, Zaire, (the Congo), Rwanda and Burundi as a 'lingua franca'."⁶⁸ (See Lodhi and Kalugila, 1978:1).

In general we can say that it is today spoken by approximately 80 million people. Moreover, it is taught nowadays in many universities all over the world and used as a means of communication by Broadcasting Mass Media, i.e.. TV and Radio not only in Eastern Africa but also in many different countries all over the world.

It is a national language in Tanzania, Kenya and Zaire. Many books have been written in Swahili and there are dictionaries e.g. Krapf *Vocabulary of six East African Languages (Swahili, Nyika, Kamba, Pokomo, Yao, Galla*, Tubingen, 1850. Later his dictionary was published as *A Dictionary of the Swahili Language*, London: Tubner & Co., 1882. Madan also wrote two dictionaries: *English-Swahili Dictionary* Oxford, 1894 and *Swahili-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1903. Ch. Sacleux also wrote a dictionary known as *Swahili-French Dictionary*, Paris 1939. However, his first small dictionary was published in 1891 known as *Dictionary Francais-Swahili*.

⁶⁷ See also G.W. Broomfield, "The Re-Bantunization of the Swahili Language" in *African* 4:77-85.

⁶⁸ Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi and Leonidas Kaligula, *More Proverbs from East Africa* Vol. 2, Uppsala 1978:1.

There are a number of grammars, the earliest one according to my knowledge was written by Edward Steere known as *A Handbook of Swahili language*, London 1875. There followed another one written by Delaunay, known as *Grammaire Ki-Swahili* Tours, 1898.

In Tanzania Swahili is a means of instruction from nursery school to Standard VII. Biological, Theological and Social-Science Swahili terms have been worked out and listed down in form of small dictionaries. The institutes of Swahili Research (at Dar-es-Salaam and Zanzibar) are continuing doing Swahili Research: gathering old Swahili manuscripts, e.g. Swahili in Arabic scripts, poems, songs, stories, official deeds, agreements, receipts, exchanged diplomatic letters between rulers of the period before European/American missionaries came to Africa, personal correspondences, colonists, diaries, etc. Dr. Alpers in 1967 found in Goa the earliest writing in Swahili with Arabic script dated 1724⁶⁹ (see J.W.T. Allen, 1968:109-110; Mohammend Ali, 1960:13-21).

1.3 People

Most of the people in Eastern Africa are Bantus. However, there are few of the Nilotes e.g. El Molo, Kalenjin, Maasai, Teso and Turkana, Cushites, e.g. Boran, Galla, Gurreh, Somali. Nearly every tribe has its own language; for example in Tanzania there are 120 languages. In Kenya there are a number of languages and some have dialects e.g. Kiluha languages (Kenya) has 8 main dialects: Kimalagoli, Kinyore, Kisuha, Kibukusu, Kikisa, Kisamia, Kitiriki and Kitachoni; and Kichagga language (Tanzania) has the following dialects Kimachame, Kilodmoshi and Kivunjo.

	<u>Population Data</u> (in thousands)	<u>Education Data</u>	
		% of age group Primary School	% of age group sec. school
Burundi	5149	59	4
Comoros	434	?	?
Congo	2100	100	52
Kenya	23021	.94	20
Malawi	8155	64	4
Mozambique	14967	.82	7
Rwanda	6657	.67	3
Somali Rep.	5882	20	12
Tanzania	24739	69	3
Uganda	16195	58	8
Zaire	33615	76	22
Zambia	7486	100	19
Zimbabwe	9257	100	46

2.1 Collection of Swahili Proverbs in Eastern Africa

In many countries in Eastern Africa proverbs have been carried out/passed or/used orally for centuries. Only in the 19th century have few researchers of the Swahili language started to collect some proverbs. An interesting work was done by N.E. Taylor who gathered Swahili proverbs, and all together 599 plus 4 in the addenda. He gave short explanations. He did this work as he also gathered Giryama proverbs, Nyika proverbs, Taita proverbs (only one), Uganda proverbs (two). Taylor explains that the task was not easy especially when he had to translate them. He comments in his preface: "The compiler, in submitting this work to his brother-missionaries and other students in East Africa literature, would acknowledge his sense of its defectiveness, especially in two points: first as

⁶⁹ J.W.T. Allen, "The Collection and Preservation of Manuscripts of the Swahili World" in *Swahili*, Journal of the Institute of Swahili Research Dar-es-Salaam 1968:109-110; Mohammad Ali "Maende leo ya Maandishi ya kiswahili" in *Swahili* Vol. 36/2 (September 1960):13-21.

to style - the want of success, which he feels has attended his attempts to translate the subtitles of idiom as literally and, at the same time, as idiomatically as possible; secondly, as a matter, - there were no doubt, a few of the author's readings and upon being tested, will be found mistaken.

If the writer had not enjoyed exceptional advantages, this collection would never had been published; but, having those advantages, he felt under an obligation to attempt a work on which he could have wished that one gifted with greater powers had been engaged,"⁷⁰ (1891:ix).

After Taylor there have been others interested in compilation and transmission of proverbs (see Nussbaum's Bibliography and in *Africa Proverbs Scholarship*, by Wolfgang Mieder. However, some of the works are not mentioned in these bibliographies. Here in an additional list: (**Misemo na methali toka Tanzania**, Book One by C.K. Omari, E. Kezilahabi and W.D. Kamera, Dar-es-Salaam, 1975, reprinted 1978. Their second volume has also been published. *Misemo*, Book One by E. Meena, Nairobi, 1975. Another list will be sent to you later. Perhaps I have to mention here that the author of this paper is busy collecting more proverbs for his third volume.

As a whole there are a number of proverbs collected in some vernaculars but not translated into Swahili. These need to be translated so that they can be read and studied by a wider audience. On top of that there are many proverbs which have not been collected and it is high time to do that. This has to be taken seriously before many of them are forgotten. It is understood that compilation and transmission is not for a single day but for generations, still something has to be done without delay. There can be minor collections and larger collections there is no limit (as the superscriptions in the book of Proverbs are set, i.e. Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 30:1; 31:1).

It is not easy to arrange Swahili proverbs in order or in a logical sequence, but they can be arranged by using assonance and catchwords which deal with special subject matters (a good example is what is given in Prov. 10:11b, 12b; 10:14-15, 18-21).

Concerning order Lodhi has this to say:

"A proverb in Swahili, and indeed in many African languages is frequently used in for other than the idiomatic one given in proverb collections depending on the context, e.g. "Tumeshakula ng'ombe mzima tushindwe na mkia? Tumeshakula ng'ombe mzima tushindwe na mkia! Umeshakula ng'ombe mzima mbona unashindwa na mkia?" There are also some different but very similar proverbs in Swahili e.g. "Huwezi Kuwashia jirani taa na hali kwako kuna giza" (You cannot bring light to your neighbour when it is dark at your own place), and "Usiache kwako umezimika ukaaenda kuwasha kwa jirani" (You should not leave the fire at your home being extinguished and go to make fire at the neighbour's home).⁷¹ (Lodhi and Kalugila, 1978:1).

2.2 Types of Swahili Proverbs in our Culture

There are three main types of Swahili proverbs:

2.2.1 Proverbs expressed in few words instead of long sentences, e.g.

Swahili *Afadhali kujaribu*

English Trying is better

Swahili *Akuombaye mpe*

English If a person asks you for something give him

Swahili *Kitakachopoa hakikuchomi*

English That which will cool never burns you.

2.2.2 Proverbs inform of songs, e.g.

Swahili. *"Sili, sili wa mtama
Ungawa na nyingi nazi*

⁷⁰ N.E. Taylor, *African Aphorisms or Saws from Swahili-land* London 1891:IX.

⁷¹ Lodhi and Kaligula op cit 1.

Sili: msambe ni mwema
Sili: hauniumizi
Sili kwa uto wa nyama
Wala kwa wingi mchuzi
Sili: haunioendezi
Sili wa mtama, sili."

English: "I eat not, I eat it not (the uji, gruel) of Turkish corn
 Though it has much coconut,
 I eat it not: say ye not, it is good: I eat it not.
 (though) it hurts me not.
 I eat it neither with fat of meat,
 Nor much curry.
 I eat it not: it liketh me not.
 I eat not (gruel) of Turkish and corn, I eat it not,"⁷²

Swahili: *Ushikwapo, shikamana*
Utwewapo nijua, lala.

English When thou art caught hold of, hold on.
 When has the sun set on thee, (stay and) sleep (there).
 - Do not despise a man's friendship nor the hospitality
 that comes ready to hand, and go further only to fare worse.⁷³

2.2.3 Proverbs in form of sayings, e.g.

Swahili: *Waarabu hujuaana kwa vilemba.*

- Arabs recognize one another by their turbans.
 (i.e. people of the same interest or work have their own identity).⁷⁴

2.3 Uses of Swahili Proverbs in our Cultures

There are different uses of proverbs in our culture; it follows to what any proverb is about. There are Swahili proverbs about.

2.3.1 Religious e.g. about God describing him as a Creator, how he takes care of his creation, what he does, what he wants human beings to do, etc. - this is against the view that we Africans did not believe in God before the missionaries came to Africa.

2.3.2 Concerning human beings individually or collectively e.g. common themes: daily life, poverty, human nature, family life, men, women, children, slander, love, marriage, etc.

2.3.3 World-view

In short they deal with religious, social and political life.

Those who taught or uttered proverbs were regarded as wise men, people with understanding. Moreover, it was believed that a wise person was thoughtful, could act with insight, prudence and could achieve success. This is not unlike what we read in Prov. 13:14: "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that one may avoid the snares of death."

2.4 The use of Swahili Proverbs in giving Christian message

It is clear from the foregoing that Swahili proverbs have been in use for many centuries before Christianity was introduced in Eastern Africa.

⁷² Taylor op cit.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Kalugila *Swahili Proverbs from East Africa* Uppsala 1977:26.

After Christianity was introduced, preachers used and still use proverbs in their sermons. African preachers cited proverbs because they had learned them from childhood by being told by their parents and other relatives or heard other people citing them. Missionaries had also to learn them, in their diaries and some tried their best to publish them.

In theological colleges, at seminars and meetings of any kind - religious or political -proverbs are cited, because they are useful in conveying the message to the people. Many proverbs in our culture are very much related to the proverbs found in the Bible. They deal with similar themes and have related values.⁷⁵ (Syberts and Healey, 1984)

The following few themes can serve as good examples:

2.4.1 About God:

People in East Africa as other Africans believed that there is God, there was no speculation about that. This is clear as stated in the following proverbs:

Swahili: *Mungu si Athumani*
English: God is not *Athumani*.
 Athumani is a person's name.

According to this proverb God is said to be existing. He is different from human beings, he is not a god as other gods. While believing that there is only one true God who is above other gods, people still believed that there are many other gods and therefore they asked them for help in their prayers; they offered to them sacrifices; they uttered curses by their names and blessed others in their names, during festivals they were praised and also during other important occasions.

Nevertheless they still believed that there is One true God the Creator. A good example is that of Bahaya people (North-western Tanzania). When a person was sick his relatives or friends tried to find medicine for him and prayed their gods to heal him, but when he became seriously sick they said "Ali amumikono ya Ruhaya or Rubaho" lit. "He is in the hands of the Creator or the One who is there always. They said that the one who is now to determine whether the sick has more time to live or to die is God the Creator, other gods have no help.

A proverb which supports this view that people believed in other gods says.

Swahili: *Asiyejua uwindaji hatambihki miungu.*
English: He who does not know how to hunt never sacrifices to the gods.

3. Comparison of our Proverbs and those in the Bible

<u>Proverbs in our Culture</u>	<u>Proverbs in the Bible</u>
1. Have been used for centuries orally but written recently.	1. Have been used for centuries orally but written down very early.
2. There have been schools: <u>jando</u> i.e. during initiation or circumcision.	2. There have been schools: proper
3. Pupils	3. Pupils
4. Teachers who gave instructions	4. Teachers who gave instructions.
5. The word "Hekima for	5. The words Hokma/sophia

⁷⁵ Donald Sybertz and J. Healey, *Kueneza Injili Kwa Methalis* Ndanda-Peramiho 1984.

wisdom is used.	are used.
6. Cited also in homes	6. Cited also in homes
7. Cited on special occasions e.g. birth, wedding, burial, festival, meetings etc.	7. Cited on special occasions e.g. birth, wedding, burial, festival, meetings etc.
8. Cited by individuals	8. Cited by individuals
9. Cited by a number of	9. Cited by a number of people. people.
10. Deal with themes, e.g. on the <u>existence</u> of God His <u>work</u> , acquiring <u>wisdom</u> , <u>love</u> towards God and towards neighbours, caring for <u>poor</u> , building one's <u>home</u> , the <u>Law</u> in the community, working hard, warning against laziness, bribery, <u>adultery</u> , <u>deceit</u> - in general against <u>bad behaviour</u> being <u>righteous</u> , rewards of wisdom, <u>good family life</u> , <u>life</u> , national	10. Deal with themes, e.g. on the <u>existence</u> of God His <u>work</u> , acquiring <u>wisdom</u> , <u>love</u> , towards God and towards neighbours, caring for the <u>poor</u> , building one's <u>home</u> , the <u>Law</u> in the community, working hard, warning against laziness, bribery, <u>adultery</u> , <u>deceit</u> in general against <u>bad behaviour</u> , <u>being righteous</u> rewards of wisdom <u>good</u> national life. <u>family</u> life, <u>life after death</u> .

4. Suggestion for Further Studies

More collections of Swahili proverbs are needed and the possibility of publishing the available material should be investigated. Also old pamphlets and books that are out of print should be reprinted because proverbs themselves are never old and their availability will help new researchers not only to do duplicates, but also preachers will have more material in their hands.

- 4.1 Swahili proverbs that are compiled should be thoroughly studied and arranged or classified in a thematic way in order to help tutors in seminaries as well as seminarians and preachers.
- 4.2 More study about the analysis of proverbs should be tackled deeply, i.e. examining their history, language forms, types, style contents or structures, frequencies, and function.
- 4.3 A study should be made as to how tutors (-in teaching), seminarians (-in writing their theses), preachers (-in their sermons), conferences lectures (-in their speeches), and politicians or leaders of countries (-in their speeches) are using proverbs.
- 4.5 A study should be made concerning non-Swahili teachers (-those teaching Swahili as a subject) are emphasizing the use of proverbs.
- 4.6 Relation of proverbs (proverb to proverb) should be studied.
- 4.7 A study on riddles and sayings should be carried out as these have been also taught and used from generations to generations in our cultures and are useful today and will be useful to the coming generations because they have nearly the same values as proverbs. And a comparison can be made between them and those in the Bible.

- 4.8** The following topics should be studied.
- a) Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking East Africa Folklore.
 - b) Attitude and Cultural Patterns in Swahili Proverbs.
- 4.9** A study should be made on how to translate proverbs (this will help writers and translators both of the Bible and secular academic and non-academic books).
- 4.10** The use of the Book of Proverbs in Churches is essential and therefore, an investigation is to be made to see whether Churches are including texts from this important book.

10. Sesotho Proverbs and Gospel Teaching and Preaching

M.I. Mokitimi

Proverbs are known to be vehicles of communication in most societies in Africa and they serve to establish accepted social norms. Their function is also to advise, warn and disapprove any deviation from social norms. They also help to shape attitudes and actions. They are, therefore, seen as effective means to exercise social control.

Since proverbs are used to encourage and comment on social behaviour, I think likewise, they can be used for Christian teaching and preaching. I wish here to give examples of Sesotho proverbs, with their English translation as well as Biblical quotations that can be illustrated by them.

New Testament Teaching

1. *Lets'oele le beta poho.*
The multitude is capable of defeating a bull.
More hands are better than one/unity is strength.
Mk 3:13-19. Jesus appointed twelve disciples to help him with his work of preaching.
2. *Ha ho tume li melala.*
It is not always those with physical strength who are famous.
A little body does often harbour a great soul.
Lk 2:41-52. Jesus in the temple when 12 years old.
3. *Mohale o tsoa maroleng.*
A hero comes from the dust
Heroes do not often come from famous families.
Lk 2:20-27. Jesus came from a poor family. his father was mere carpenter.
4. *Moprofeta ha a bokoe ha habo.*
A prophet is not acceptable in his own country.
Lk 4:20-30. People said Jesus was Joseph's son and not a prophet.
5. *Sejo-senyane ha se fete molomo.*
Little food can be shared by many.
Mt.15:32-38. Feeding the four thousand.
6. *Hlapi folofela leraha, metsi a pshele u a bona.*
Fish wriggle into the mud, the water dried while you were watching.
Learn to survive even without a benefactor or a supporter.
Acts. 1:12-26. After the death of Christ, his disciples continued with prayers and preaching.
7. *'M'a-ngoana o ts'oara thipa ka bohaleng.*
A mother holds the knife at the sharp end.
A woman will always protect her child against all odds.
Lk.23:55-56; Lk. 24:1-3. The women who had followed Jesus to his cross prepared spices and ointments for his body.
8. *Ha le fete khomo le je motho.*
A cow may not be saved instead of a person.
Pay a fine to get a man out of trouble.

- Lk. 6:1-11. Jesus heals a man on Sabbath.
Lk.13:10-17. Jesus heals a woman on Sabbath.
9. *'Mesa-mohloane ha a panye.*
The locust roaster does not blink.
Victory requires a watchful care.
Mt. 25:1-13. The Foolish maidens.
10. *Khomo ha li na mo-tloha-pele.*
Cattle are not only for those who left first.
The last will be the first.
Mt. 20:1-16 Workers started to work at different times but were paid equally.
12. *Mayo ke maboyo.*
Going is like coming back.
One may be forced to come to his old home.
Lk.15:11-32. The Prodigal Son.
13. *Ho bua hase liketso.*
To talk is not to act.
Actions speak louder than words.
Mt.26:30-75. Peter had promised to be with Jesus but he betrayed him.
14. *Metsi a macha a nts'a a khale.*
Fresh water drives out stale water.
The new order replaces the old order.
Mt.5:21-48 Jesus teaches that he has brought new teaching to strengthen the old teaching.
15. *Sefate se tsejoa ka litholoana tsa sona.*
The tree is known by its fruits.
Lk.7:21-23. John's disciples knew who Jesus was by his works.
16. *Motho o kotula seo a jetseng.*
A person reaps what he has sown.
Mt.25:14-30. Parable of the talents.
17. *Hloahloa ha e nehanoe.*
Luck cannot be given to one another.
Acts.8:9-25. Simon wanted to buy the Holy Spirit to perform miracles like the Apostle.
18. *Lekhetho ke boroko le khotso.*
Tax is sleep and peace.
Pay your taxes and you will be at peace.
Acts.13:1-7. Paul asks people to respect those in authority.
19. *Monoana ha o its'upe.*
A finger cannot point at itself.
One should not praise himself but should be praised by others.
Lk.18:9-14. The story of the Pharisee and the Publican praying-teaching about humility.

Old Testament Teaching

1. *Leoto ke moloi.*

The foot is a witch.
One never knows where he will end.

Gen.42:1-38. Joseph's brothers unknowingly met him in Egypt.

2. *Mali a llelana.*

Blood cries for another.
Blood is thicker than water.

Ex.2:11-23 Moses helped the Israelite who was fighting with the Egyptian.

3. *Khomo boela haeno u holile.*

Cow, return to your home you are mature.
When one gets older he normally goes back to his own home.

Ex.2 Children of Israel had to leave Egypt to go to their own country.

4. *Thupa e otlolloa e sa le metsi.*

A stick is straightened while still wet.
Strike the iron while still hot.

1 Sam.1:21-28. Samuel was given to Eli after he was weaned.

5. *Leshala le tsoala molora.*

Fire begets ashes.
A good parent may have a worthless child.

2 Sam.16:15-23. Absalom was not a good son to David. He was later killed.

Conclusion

In this paper I have given examples of Sesotho proverbs to illustrate that they can be integrated in Christian gospel preaching and teaching. Their use can enhance the preaching and teaching of the gospel because they relate well with the teaching from both the Old and New Testament. Themes which are normally emphasized in gospel teaching are also reflected in some traditional African proverbs. Both Christian teaching and preaching of the gospel and traditional proverbs help to teach people to lead a normal and good life.

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11. Missiological or Moral

Stan Nussbaum

This study is done in the context of a projected series in the usage of proverbs in African Bible Guide Series. The African Bible Guides Series consists of eight booklets produced during an experimental writer training program in 1990 and 1992 at the INTERACT Research Centre, Selly Oak College, Birmingham, England. In this paper, which is actually more of a research report than a research "paper", we want to consider the question of traditional proverb use in Christian teaching and preaching, particularly the question whether this use is primarily for rather generic moral purposes or whether it includes much of a missiological, gospel-related nature.

The eight "Bible Guide" booklets provide a useful focus for this kind of proverb study for three reasons. First they cover a broad range of biblical material one book at a time -- Luke, James, Hebrews (all 1990) and Nehemiah, Amos, Acts (in two booklets), Colossians (all 1992). Their "moral" and "missiological" style and balance varies a great deal from one to the next. All these books were selected because of special relevance for Africa, as explained on the inside back cover of the 1992 booklets.

Secondly the writers represented a broad cross-section of African Christianity and theology -- independent, Pentecostal, evangelical, ecumenical and Roman Catholic. Twenty-two African writers from twelve countries were involved, ranging in age from 24 to 62. Half were men, half women. Not quite half were ordained. One had a doctorate in New Testament studies, a few had no formal Bible training at all. The writing was done in teams of five or six with a "scribe" taking notes as Bible passages were discussed. The team then edited the scribe's draft copy the next day, and later reviewed the final draft. Quite possibly this was the most diverse group of African Christians ever to write Bible educational material by consensus as a team.

The third reason is that the writers were specifically encouraged to use proverbs for the benefit of the target readership of the guides, "the grass roots leadership of African churches, that is, people who preach or teach every week without any formal Bible training...These people include African independent church leaders, elderly pastors, rural church leaders, women and people who do not read well. The African Bible Guide Series starts from the point of view of these people. The guides are being written to explain things in ways which will help them to think, 'For once we have material written by Africans who really understand us and our situation.'" (excerpt from unpaginated "Introduction", *Colossians: an African guide for preaching and teaching* edited by Joshua Kudadjie (Birmingham: African Bible Guides, 1992).

During the writing project no instructions were given about "missiological" or "moral" uses of proverbs. No advice was given about which texts to select for comment. That was a major part of the expertise which the writers themselves brought to the project. As we look back over the eight booklets we then have a unique opportunity to see what happens when a wide variety of African Christians are assigned to use proverbs for Bible teaching purposes. Which texts do they choose, which proverbs do they relate to these, how much missiological substance is there to the resulting work, and what does this exercise mean for Bible teachers generally?

Classified List of Applications of Traditional Proverbs

Classification of proverbs is of course every paremiologist's nightmare. No defensible way to do it has yet been discovered. One can only try to communicate the factors which were in mind when this or that classification was adopted. This paper uses a four-part classification, defined as follows:

- * theological -- proverbs relating to God, especially the Father, as Africans may have known him before ever hearing of Jesus Christ
- * Christological -- proverbs relating to Christ
- * missiological -- proverbs relating to some aspect of being sent as Christ's witness
- * moral -- proverbs with a universal moral application that fits readily with an African traditional worldwide

Let it be acknowledged that one cannot draw too strict a line between "missiological" and "moral". The Christian "mission" if seen as part of the *Missio Dei* is never that detachable from the "moral mission" of calling people to live wisely according to God's guidance. However there is a crucial point at stake in making some kind of distinction. No one doubts that African proverbs are clever, memorable, powerful aids to wise living; what we want to examine is the extent to which they may also contribute on the Christological and missiological front.

They clearly were not designed or intended to do so because they predate contact with Christianity. But it is of the nature of proverbs in any culture to be flexible, capable of adaption in the light of new situations and new information. That flexibility represents the Christological and missiological potential of African proverbs, the focus of our study.

The classifications made here are NOT classifications of the proverbs in themselves; they are classifications of the way the proverbs are used by the writing teams of the African Bible Guides. After each biblical text quoted, there is a short statement giving my summary of the way the writers have connected that text and their proverb. Sometimes my summary may be too short to make the connection clear or to indicate why that proverb is classified where it is. In that case one would need to look at the guide itself to get the full picture, but brevity was required because of the limitations of space of this paper.

The entries each have six components:

- 1) A reference number, which contains an (a), (b) or (c) when more than one proverb refers to the same verse in the same way.
- 2) a topic
- 3) a biblical reference and short quotation or paraphrase which is the heading "sermon text" chosen for that section of the guide.
- 4) my summary of the biblical context, the point the guide writers were making and/or the connection of that point to the proverb quoted
- 5) the proverb itself
- 6) the language or country from which the proverb comes, or the words "not given".

A handful of the proverbs are not traditional African says but come from English, French or biblical sources. They are included in the lists anyway because of the light they throw on the mix of traditional and imported influences which make up modern African. They carry no numerical weight that affects any of the observations and conclusion.

I. Theological

1. (a) God--power

* *Luke 1:37, For nothing is impossible with God. God enabled a virgin to conceive without a human father.*

A blind man can pick up a bird. Zaire

(1b) God--power

* *Luke 1:37, for nothing is impossible with God. God enabled a virgin to conceive without a human father.*

The king removes the bracelet from his shoulder. Ghana

2. (2a) God--causing prophetic speech

* *Amos 3:8, the sovereign Lord speaks. The prophet is bound to announce whatever God has said.*

"A common saying" (English)

(2b) God--causing prophetic speech

* *Amos 3:8. The sovereign Lord speaks. The prophet is bound to announce whatever God has said.*

Can the drum talk without being touched? Nigeria

3. God--listening, love

- * *Nehemiah 9:9. You heard their call for help. God had helped Israel many times, but it just kept on crying so he had to recite a list of all the things he had already done.*

When a baby does not cry, you do not list the contents of its stomach. (i.e., you do not remind it that it has just eaten) Not given.

4. God--love

- * *Luke 15:20, He rose and went to his father. Coming to God is actually coming home, as shown by the prodigal son.*

Your mother's house is the best. Kenya

5. God--love

- * *Luke 15:20, He rose and went to his father. God is gracious and accepts repentant people back into his home.*

No mother can throw away her child even though the child is covered with boils. Zaire

III. Christological

A. Rejection

6. Christ--rejection

- * *Luke 5:37, No one pours new wine in old wineskins. Jesus teaching was equally rejected by the Pharisees who were attached to the law of Moses and by people today who are attached to witchcraft.*

The devil you know is better than the angel you do not know. Ghana (English)

7. Christ--rejection, supplanting

- * *Luke 18:47, The leaders were trying to kill him. The Pharisees were jealous and wanted to enjoy his popularity.*

You stand up so I can take your seat. French

8. Christ--rejection, entrapment

- * *Luke 20:25, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Jesus coped with the trick questions of his enemies.*

You have removed the feathers from the bird and are bringing it to me to ask what it is. Ghana.

9. Christ--rejection, betrayal

- * *Luke 22:3, Satan entered Judas. Jesus was betrayed by a member of his own inner circle.*

The eye which you have been struggling to treat can turn and bewitch you. Kenya.

10. Christ--betrayal

- * *Luke 22:21, the hand who will betray me is with mine on the table. Jesus was betrayed by a member of his own inner circle.*

If an insect bites you, it is from your own cloth. Ghana.

11. Christ--rejection

- * *Acts 26:6, I stand here to be tried because of the hope I have. Paul was on trial because many Jews refused to accept that Jesus was the hope of Israel.*

If you don't accept what you are taught, you become foolish. Not given.

12. (12a) Christ--false praise.

- * *Luke 4:22, All spoke well of him. Yet Jesus did not trust the superficial praise of the crowd. Someone is masking your face with mud. Kenya.*

(12b) Christ--false praise

- * *Luke 4:22, All spoke well of him. Yet Jesus did not trust the superficial praise of the crowd.*

Don't put ashes in my hair. Ghana

B. Empathy, help, love

13. (13a) Christ--empathy

- * *Hebrew 2:10, Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Jesus understands our suffering perfectly because he also suffered.*

Only the one who has buried a relative can console the bereaved. Not given.

(13b) Christ-empathy

* *Hebrews 2:10, Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Jesus understands our suffering perfectly because he also suffered.*

Only the diver knows what the crocodile suffers. Not given.

14. Christ--priesthood; empathy*

* *Hebrews 5:1, Chosen from his fellow men. Jesus was one of us in that he was a human being; he goes beyond this proverb by caring about us as much as he does about his own ethnic group.*

The lion from your own area will not consume you in a day. Swahili.

15. Christ--companion; helper*

* *Luke 8:14, They are choked by life's worries. We must walk with Jesus down life's thorny path so he can help us when we run into difficulty.*

Two people should walk together in the bush. Kenya.

16. Christ--paradoxical closeness

* *Hebrews 2:11, Jesus calls them brothers. Jesus our saviour is also our brother.*

If the king sits on the bench with his brother, he is still the king. Ewe.

17. Christ--intercession

* *Hebrews 10:22, Let us come near to God. Jesus is our great high priest who will provide a safe way for us to approach God with our needs.*

He who has relatives up in the tree will always have ripe fruit to eat. Benin.

18. Christ-ultimate sacrificial love

* *Hebrews 2:10, Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Jesus went beyond all human devotion by laying his life down for us.*

No matter how great the widow's love for her husband, even in her wailing she is careful not to slip into the open grave. Benin

C. Superiority

19. Christ-superiority

* *Luke 3:16, Baptism. John the Baptist did not elevate himself above the Messiah.*

The armpit is not greater than the shoulder. Zambia

20. Christ-superiority

* *Colossians 1:15, Christ is... superior to all created things. Christ is superior to all other powers and spirits.*

Even the highest rulers on earth still have someone above them. Shona.

21. Christ-newness, superiority

* *Luke 5:37, No one pours new wine in old wineskins. Christ is better than all who preceded him, even though people prefer the familiar to the new.*

Not all old things are good; a new thing might be better. Kenya.

D. Unclassified

22. Christ--newness, continuity of OT and NT

* *Acts 13:15, A message of encouragement. Paul preached in the synagogue, showing how the news about Jesus was based on the older message (the Old Testament).*

It is on the old mat that one weaves the new one. Liberia.

23. Christ--miraculous birth (see also under God--power)

* *Luke 1:37, For nothing is impossible with God. God enabled a virgin to conceive without a human father.*

A blind man can pick up a bird. Zaire.

The king removes the bracelet from his shoulder. Ghana.

25. Christ--Trust

- * *Luke 4:1, It is written. The tempter promised Jesus the kingdoms of the world, which were not his to give. If nakedness promises you a cloth, ask his name. Ghana.*

III. MISSIOLOGICAL—Applying a traditional proverb in a missiological sense

A. Characteristics of people in mission

26. Sharing; Brotherhood*

- * *James 1:27, Taking care of widows and orphans. The kind of sharing we customarily practice within our kinship group should be extended to other needy people.*

Even if brothers have only the head of a fly, they will divide it evenly among them. Tswana.

27. Compassion*

- * *Luke 16:25, In your life you received good things, Lazarus received bad things. Christians should help the poor however they can.*

A smile costs less than electricity, but it gives as much light. "Father Pierre" (Zaire)

28. Ambiguous Feelings*

- * *Acts 9:15, Go because I have chosen him to serve me. Ananias was reluctant to go and pray for the blinded Saul even though God told him to do so.*

The porcupine gut is bitter but greasy. (i.e., known to be bitter tasting yet appetizing because it looks greasy enough to fry well). Liberia.

29. (29a) Fearlessness

- * *Hebrews 2:15, The fear of death. We have well-established phrases intended to put the fear of death into enemies, but these phrases do not hold us captive any more because Christ has conquered death.*

I will show you who I am. Expect me at any time. Benin.

(29b) Fearlessness

- * *Hebrews 2:15, The fear of death. We have well-established phrases intended to put the fear of death into enemies, but these phrases do not hold us captive any more because Christ has conquered death.*

You will see. Tswana.

(29c) Fearlessness

- * *Hebrews 2:15, The fear of death. We have well-established phrases intended to put the fear of death into enemies, but these phrases do not hold us captive any more because Christ has conquered death.*

We will cut it. Zulu.

30. Persistence*

- * *Luke 18:8, He will see that they get justice. The unjust judge gave in to the persistent widow; God is quicker to hear us, and even when he seems slow we should persist in our prayers.*

Even the termites can bring down an oak tree. Zaire.

31. Humility*

- * *Luke 18:14, he who exalts himself will be humbled. The proud Pharisees would get less from God than the tax collector who approached God more carefully.*

If you want to get back what the chicken has taken, you must approach it very carefully. Zambia.

32. Dependence on God

- * *Acts 9:40, Tabitha! Get up! Peter prayed before raising Tabitha, showing that he was always depending on God for power to heal (unlike some modern healers).*

I won't beg God to help me. (i.e., I have plenty of strength to take care of this matter on my own.) Nigeria.

33. Leadership; Purity*

- * *Nehemiah 9:3, They confessed their sins and worshipped the Lord. The revival in Israel should be a model for our churches, and it should start from the leaders downward.*

The fish starts rotting from the head. Not given

34. Propriety*

- * *Nehemiah 9:4 There was a platform for the Levites. Nehemiah was not a Levite so he did not preside over the ritual functions that properly fell to the Levites.*

The finger next to the ear is carried into the ear. Not given

B. Anticipating Opposition

35. Teamwork; Help

- * *Luke 10:1, He sent them out two by two. Ministry is done better in pairs than alone.*

To walk together is not to fear. Zambia.

36. Confidence; Identity

- * *Acts 21:37, may I say something to you? When the mob threatened him in Jerusalem, Paul was not afraid to speak to them because he was a Jew thoroughly familiar with the beliefs of his attackers.*

One cannot be lost in one's own familiar path. Liberia.

37. Lack of comprehension

- * *Acts 21:20 Thousands of Jews have become believers. Many of the Jews in and near Jerusalem had become believers but they were still very attached to the law of Moses and very skeptical about Paul's way of welcoming Gentiles as followers of Jesus.*

The monkey's scent cannot depart from its bones. Not given.

38. Persistence in evil*

- * *Luke 13:9, If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, cut it down. God allows time for repentance, but often people do not use it.*

The elephant's task are too heavy, but he likes them. He does not want them removed. Kenya

39. Criticism*

- * *Luke 7:30, The Pharisees rejected God's purpose. As Christ was rejected no matter what he did, so we may also expect that there will always be some people who criticize our Christian life and ministry.*

No matter how well the chicken dances, it does not please the hawk. Ghana.

C. Warning and Judgement

40. Reversal; despising others*

- * *Luke 13:29, People will come from east, west, north and south. A warning to the Pharisees that outsiders would be more welcome at God's banquet table than they would be.*

The person who is looked down upon can actually marry your mother. Zambia.

41. (41a) Reversal*

- * *Amos 6:1, How terrible... for you that have such an easy life. The proud and selfish rich people would learn that their easy life was bringing judgement on the whole nation, especially on themselves.*

What is sweet for the mouth makes the stomach run. Kpelle

(41b) Reversal*

- * *Amos 6.1, How terrible.... for you that have easy life. The proud and selfish people could learn that their easy life was bringing judgement on the whole nation, especially on themselves.*

Ikun (a kind of squirrel) loves bananas but does not know what is sweet kills. Yoruba.

42. Guilt; Punishment*

* *Luke 17:37, Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather. Judgement will come on those who do not receive God's kingdom.*

The owners follow the pig who has eaten the cassava. Zambia.

43. Judgement*

* *Amos 5:18-20, The day of the Lord... a day of darkness. A day of no escape.*

It will be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire? Not given (English).

44. Exposure; Guilt*

* *Acts 5:3, Why did you let Satan take control of you? The judgement of Ananias and Sapphira tells us that no sin can be hidden from the Holy Spirit.*

You can't hide your nakedness from your bath bucket. Not given.

45. Sympathy

* *Luke 13:5, Unless you repent you, you too will perish. Calamities that strike people do not necessarily mean that they are more deserving of judgement than people who escaped.*

When one gazelle is captured, the other gazelles should not laugh. Zaire.

IV. Moral - Applying a traditional proverb in a moral (ordinary) sense

A. Integrity and hypocrisy

46. Accusation, guilt

* *Luke 6:42, Take the log out of your own eye. Look at your own faults.*

When you point one finger at someone, there are four fingers pointing back at you. Ghana.

47. Hypocrisy; Blindness to own faults

* *Amos 2:6-8, 12, The people of Israel have sinned again and again. Amos first criticized other nations, then told Israel not to feign innocence as they relished his criticisms of others.*

If you point your thumb to insult a person, your other four fingers are pointing to yourself. Ghana.

48. Hypocrisy

* *Luke 11:39, Inside you are full of greed and wickedness. A reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes.*

Not all that glitters is gold. Not given.

49. Hypocrisy

* *Luke 20:47, Such men will be punished most severely. A reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes.*

It is not the uniform that makes a monk a monk. French.

50. (50a) Integrity

* *Luke 6:43, No good tree bears bad fruit. A good person does not produce bad actions.*

A crab can not bring forth a bird. Ghana.

(50b) Integrity

* *Luke 6:43, No good tree bears bad fruit. A good person does not produce bad actions.*

You can not get dirty and clean water from the same spring. Kenya

51. Character

* *Acts 16:2, All the believers spoke well of him. Timothy had a good reputation.*

Actions speak louder than words. "It is often said" (English).

B. Compassion, care

52. Compassion

* *Luke 6:31, Treat others as you wish to be treated. Wealthy Christians should not lord it over their employees.*

Do not give your friend a basket which you yourself can not carry. Kenya.

53. Sympathy

- * *Luke 23:28, Weep for yourselves and for your children. It was natural for the women to weep for Jesus as he was going to the cross.*

When you are eating the hand of a monkey, think of your own hand. Ghana.

54. Extended family**

- * *Colossians 3:20, Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents. The word "parents" can be interpreted in the traditional sense of the extended family and the elders in the community.*

The child is yours alone while it is in the womb. When it comes out, it is for everybody. Igbo.

55. Family; Discipline

- * *Colossians 3:21, Parents, do not irritate your children. Children need both discipline and encouragement.*

You use your right hand to beat a child and use the left to bring him back and embrace him. Yoruba and Shona.

C. Positive values

56. Prayer; Dependence on God

- * *Acts 10:2, He and his whole family worshipped God. Cornelius, though an important person, kept praying to God, not taking his position for granted.*

Good things need a lot of prayers to keep them intact. Yoruba.

57. Humility

- * *Luke 14:8, Do not take the place of honour. Wait to be seated where the host tells you.*

If you just sit anywhere, other than the place where you are supposed to sit, you will end up sitting on the chicken droppings. Zambia.

58. Identification with a group or goal

- * *Nehemiah 10:32-33, We will each contribute. All the Jews contributed to the annual expenses of the temple because they all felt a sense of ownership in it.*

The owner honours his own the most. Liberia

59. Work, Participation; sharing

- * *Luke 6:20, Blessed are the poor. But this blessing does not mean the poor should not work as hard as possible.*

If one does not go along on the hunt, you do not get a share of the meat. Not given.

60. Reversal

- * *Nehemiah 5:1, Men and women...began to complain. The poor were speaking out effectively against the rich, a reversal of the normal state of things.*

When a dog bites a man, it is no big news, but when a man bites a dog, it makes headlines. "It is often said" (English).

61. Leadership

- * *Nehemiah 10:1, The first to sign was the governor, Nehemiah. In the ceremony of national recommitment to God, Nehemiah as leader was the first to sign.*

The snake's head makes the snake move faster. Not given.

62. Wisdom of elders

- * *Acts 13:15, A message of encouragement. Paul was called on to address the synagogue because he was the senior person in the group of visitors.*

The elder knows where to locate the crab's heart. Liberia

63. Discernment, Deceptive appearances

- * *Acts 16:6, We met a slave girl. The slave girl was a fortune teller who was often right, but her power did not come from the right spiritual source.*

Who can tell the mechanics from the madmen by the way their clothes look? Nigeria.

64. Skepticism

* 24:11, they did not believe the women. Peter had to go to the tomb to see for himself.
Your own legs will be your saviour. Kenya.

D. Wrongs

65. Gossip

* James 3:8, The tongue is full of deadly poison. Gossip can be powerful even when it is a complete fabrication.

He modelled a cow of clay and it started to moo. Tswana.

66. (66a) Money

* Hebrews 13:5, The love of money. A corrupting influence.

Money is a witch. Tswana.

(66b) Money

* Hebrews 13:5, The love of money. A corrupting influence.

God made man. Man made money. Money made man mad. Not given

67. Bribery

* Amos 5:10-13, I know... how many crimes you have committed. Bribery was a major problem
Amos condemned.

When Naira (Nigerian money) is speaking, the poor man doesn't talk. Nigeria

68. Oppression

* Nehemiah 5:1, Men and women... began to complain. The oppressed Jews complained to
Nehemiah about their rulers and he got the abuses stopped, showing the oppressors what
happens when they "over-squeezed" their victims.

If you over-squeeze a baby bird, it messes in your hand. Not given.

69. Fickleness, Absence of leadership

* Nehemiah 13:9, Ritually purified. Nehemiah had to ritually purify the temple because of a
misuse of one of the rooms while he was away in Babylon.

When the cat is absent, the rats dance in the warehouse. Not given.

70. Going wrong

* Acts 25:3, They begged for favour. Festus began well in handling Paul's case but later gave in to
the unjust appeals of Paul's opponents.

It is too soon to rejoice over the rising of the sun. Not given

71. Contagious evil

* Luke 6:43, No good tree bears bad fruit. A good person does not produce bad actions.

One bad tree makes the whole area bad. Zambia

D. Warning and Judgement

72. Warning

* Luke 10:11, Shake the dust off your feet. A warning can be a help if people heed it.

Where there was warning, there is no weeping. Zambia.

73. (73a) Judgement; Warning

* Amos 8:2, The end has come. The vision of the basket of ripe fruit was a symbol that Israel
would reap the harvest of its evil ways.

If you do not hear it, you will feel it. Liberia

(73b) Judgement; Warning

* Amos 8:2, The end has come. The vision of the basket of ripe fruit was a symbol that Israel
would reap the harvest of its evil ways.

The fly follows the corpse all the way to the grave. Nigeria

74. Group punishment*

* Amos 1:3, I will certainly punish them. God's punishment of a nation's leaders also affects the nation as a whole.

When the sinners suffer, the righteous will partake. Not given.

Observations on content

The classifications of proverb applications may be summarized as follows:

- Theological -- 7
Power 2; Prophecy 2; Love 3
- Christological -- 22
Rejection 8; Empathy, help, love 7; Superiority 3; Unclassified 4
- Missiological -- 23
Characteristics of people in mission 11; Anticipating opposition 5; Warning and judgement 7
- Moral -- 33
Integrity and hypocrisy 7; Compassion, care 4; Positive values 9; Wrongs 9; Warning and Judgement 4
- Total -- 85 (includes two proverbs listed both under theological and christological)

Emphases and themes

Though we must repeat the caution about attaching too much weight to the classification system adopted, the numbers are clear enough to make a general conclusion safely -- the proverbs quoted are not used by the Guide writers merely as spicier alternatives to moral platitudes. They help us understand Christ himself and the meaning and cost of being involved in his mission. The total of Christological and missiological applications (22+23=45) is slightly more than the number of applications we have designated theological and moral (7+33=40).

Within the general categories there are some which occur with perhaps surprising frequency. Of the 22 references to Christ, 8 deal with his rejection. Of 23 missiological applications, 5 deal with anticipating or coping with opposition and 7 deal with warnings of Judgement for those who do not accept God's message. It appears that the Bible Guides writers are acutely aware of conflict both between Christ and his world and between Christ's followers and their worlds.

Love comes through as a noticeable theme in all four of the general categories. In the theological category 3 or 7 references are to God's love. In the Christological section, 7 of 22 relate to his empathy and love. Only 2 or 23 missiological applications relate to love and compassion for the missionized -- a surprisingly low proportion. In the moral section it is only 4 of 33.

Going by these numbers alone we might infer that the writers saw themselves more as recipients of the love of God and Christ than as changed people passing it along to others. Combining these numbers with the previous observation about the prominence of the theme of conflict and judgement, we might feel pressed toward the conclusion that the missiological outlook of the writers was rather lopsided toward confrontational mission and deficient in compassionate mission. However, we must also remember to weigh proverbs as well as count them. One of the two missiological applications about love is definitely in the heavyweight class: proverb 26 about brothers evenly dividing whatever they have, even the head of a fly, is applied by the writers to people outside our own kinship circle, especially those whose own circles are broken (widows and orphans). This radical extension of kinship sharing to disadvantaged non-relatives would have incalculable effects for witness and Christian mission if ever it were taken seriously. Christ has made them "family" to us and we live as if they are. What a powerful aspect of Christian mission that is! We will never know how lopsided the real views of the writers were, but our reflection gives an instructive question for us to ask

ourselves about the church in Africa as and where we know it. To what extent does that lopsidedness toward confrontation typify it, and what corrective action can be taken? Confrontation will not and should not be absent from faithful mission as a whole, but an imbalance in that direction would itself need to be confronted.

Some puzzling omissions

Though one cannot make any conclusive argument from silence, it may be of interest to note and ponder the following topics which were rarely mentioned if at all:

- Though there are eight references to Christ's rejection, none are specifically about the crucifixion. The three proverbs quoted for Hebrews 2:10 are the only ones which touch on that event (Jesus being made perfect through what he suffered; 13a, 13b, 18, of which the first two deal with empathy and the third with sacrifice)
- The resurrection is not to be found among the 22 references to Christ.
- The Holy Spirit is only mentioned once (Proverb 44, in connection with the exposure of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira); contrast 7 mentions of God the Father and 22 of Christ.

These omissions are difficult to explain in light of the fact that Luke, Acts and Colossians were three of the seven biblical books covered in the guides. We leave the question open as to whether African proverbs can be applied to these missing themes so central to Christian mission. If they can, as I would venture, then we need some people to show us how. That may be chief among the challenges which await those who want to go further down the intriguing trail which the writers of the African Bible Guides writers have begun to blaze.

Observations on Types of Proverb Application

Though we have made no count of the proverbs which could be classified under each of the following types, it is clear from the Bible Guides that the business of proverb application does involve some visible patterns which may be suggestive for other Bible teachers.

1. Decorating the meaning with humor or other vivid imagery

The most frequent method of application, decoration is an invaluable aid to communication and memory even though it may add little or nothing new to the content. For example, who could ever forget proverb 68 about oppression: if you over-squeeze a baby bird, it messes in your hand.

- Nehemiah 5:1, Men and women...began to complain. The oppressed Jews complained to Nehemiah about their rulers and he got the abuses stopped, showing the oppressors what happens when they "over-squeezed" their victims.

The proverb acknowledges that the squeezer may never have any compassion for the baby bird, but the proverb still counsels the heartless powerful person not to squeeze in a way that is unwise even from a selfish point of view.

Or again, proverb 2b, Can the drum talk without being touched? This adds no new content to Amos's statement that he must speak because God has spoken to him, but it adds weight and strength Or again, the emotive potential comes through in proverb 28, The porcupine gut is bitter but greasy. (i.e., known to be bitter tasting yet appetizing because it looks greasy enough to fry well).

- * Acts 9:15, Go, because I have chosen him to serve me. Ananias was reluctant to go and pray for the blinded Saul even though God told him to do so.

The proverb draws the hearer into the story by calling to mind the ambiguous feelings one often has when sent on a mission, knowing one should go yet reluctant because of some uncertainty or threat in the situation. This level of communication lets the hearers sense deeply that they understand what the biblical text is talking about, and that understanding translates to motivation for action.

2. Clarifying through illustration

Many parts of biblical teaching require some factual knowledge which many African churchgoers do not have, and proverbs can often help clarify some of these points. For example, most would have very little idea of what it meant to be a Jew in the time of Christ and they would therefore have difficulty grasping the heavy emphasis in Acts and the Pauline epistles on the transition of the church

from a Jewish to a Jew-Gentile body. Many African Christians simply would have no background to understand how devoted the Jewish believers were to their Jewishness and what problems this caused in the early church. For the sake of clarification, the writers of the Acts guide used proverb 37, "The monkey's scent cannot depart from its bones," in their comment on Acts 21:20 about Jews in Jerusalem who had become believers and were skeptical about Paul's teachings about the Gentiles. The proverb does not explain "Jewishness" but it does communicate how deeply it was ingrained in the hearts of the Jewish believers, which is a good starting point for any more explicit teaching one might wish to do.

Another example is proverb 58, "The owner honors his own the most." This was applied as follows:

- * Nehemiah 10:32-33, We will each contribute. All the Jews contributed to the annual expenses of the temple because they all felt a sense of ownership in it.

The text does not specifically mention ownership, but that is the idea. The Jews gave because they felt ownership in the temple, and many Africans do not give because they do not feel ownership in their churches. The proverb clarifies this very powerful point which would otherwise be missed by most readers and hearers.

3. Making the point through contrast with a traditional proverb

In a few cases the writer quoted a proverb in order to contrast it with biblical truth, a bit like Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount with the phrases, "You have heard...but I say to you..." These are quite interesting and powerful, as shown in these examples:

16. Christ--paradoxical closeness

- * *Hebrews 2:11, Jesus calls them brothers. Jesus our saviour is also our brother.*

If the king sits on the bench with his brother, he is still the king.

The writers were trying to reverse the emphasis of this proverb so as to say, "If your brother becomes a king, he is still your brother." Jesus as king is easy for many Africans to grasp. It feels right. Jesus as brother feels strange, inappropriate, maybe even wrong. The writers were coming to grips with that tension in this application.

18. Christ--ultimate sacrificial love

- * *Hebrews 2:10, Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Jesus went beyond all human devotion by laying his life down for us.*

No matter how great the widow's love for her husband, even in her wailing she is careful not to slip into the open grave.

The widow's love, one of the highest forms of human love, still stays within the limits of common sense that everyone accepts. The point of the quotation is that Christ's love does not. He holds nothing back.

30. Dependence on God

- * Acts 9:40, Tabitha! Get up? Peter prayed before raising Tabitha, showing that he was always depending on God for the power to heal (unlike some modern healers).

I won't beg God to help me (i.e., I have plenty of strength to take care of this matter on my own.)

The contrast here is between the person who uses a well-known saying to boast and the person who depends on God. Removing that boastful proverb from our lips is a Christian duty and witness.

4. Modifying or extending a traditional proverb in view of biblical definitions

We have already pointed out the radical implications of proverb 26 on sharing. This is a new application which has become appropriate because Christ has made us new people in a new kingdom.

- * James 1:27, Taking care of widows and orphans. The kind of sharing we customarily practice within our kinship group should be extended to other needy people.

Even if brothers have only the head of a fly, they will divide it evenly among them.

5. Modifying or extending the biblical text in view of African definitions

It is not only the traditional proverbs which can be extended. So can the biblical text. Only one application worked this way, but it is worth noting as there may be more of this type of work to do. Proverb 54 on the extended family said, " The child is yours alone while it is in the womb. When it comes out, it is for everybody." The application was as follows:

- * Colossians 3:20, Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents. The word "parent" can be interpreted in the traditional sense of the extended family and the elders in the community.

The text is read and applied from an African view of family. This could lead into a long hermeneutical debate, but we will leave that as one more piece of unfinished business from this paper.

The African Bible Guides writers have not produced a definitive method of applying proverbs to Bible teaching but their work is certainly a suggestive model for further testing. Traditional proverbs are not old wineskins which cannot tolerate new wine. They are old friends still capable of making new friends.

12. Statement of the Working Consultation on "African Proverbs and Christian Missions"

Seventeen participants from thirteen countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uganda and the USA) met for five days at the Seminario Unido de Ricatla near Maputo, Mozambique to discuss the relationship of African proverbs to Christian mission in Africa. The Working Consultation was sponsored by the African Proverbs Project.

In his opening talk on "Proverbs and Mission," John Pobee emphasized that proverbs are a vital and important mode of communication and key to penetrating the worldview of Africans. Yet he pointed out that he is "not aware of a conscientious and concerted systematic effort at the use of proverbs to explicate the gospel". In commenting on the crucial role of proverbs in African societies, Pobee stressed the importance of an intercultural hermeneutic that encompasses both the biblical and African worldview.

The consultation emphasized the importance of using proverbs in proclaiming the message of Christianity. African proverbs are a living reality that can promote an authentic African Christianity. The cultures, churches and scholarship in the northern and western continents have not sufficiently recognized the importance of proverbs. Western theological methodology has not taken proverbs and narrative theology seriously enough probably due to a different appraisal of proverbs. Proverbs and stories have not been considered part of proper academic theological discourse since they do not fit the propositional style and framework of theologizing. Out of fear, oversight or various pressures even African theologians and African theological conferences have not used proverbs sufficiently.

Papers on African proverbs and Christian mission were presented from three regions: West Africa, Southern and Central Africa and East Africa. Some of the significant points mentioned related to the collection, publication, study and use of African proverbs are as follows:

1. African proverbs must be understood and used in their social and cultural contexts. This principle underlies the complex nature of some proverbs which are apparently contradictory but are "true" in their own context and usage.
2. There is an ongoing task in classifying proverbs. Often they can fit under several headings.
3. Proverbs are often used in a participatory way. Good preaching and teaching use proverbs to involve the congregation or audience.
4. There is a certain cycle in using African proverbs. Children hear them while growing up. They are less used by young people especially in the cities. Then after marriage and while raising children adults return to using proverbs. They are very popular with older people. This shows that lived experience is an important prerequisite in using proverbs.
5. The study and use of proverbs need to look at universal truth in relation to particular situation (contextuality).
6. Proverbs and sayings are sometimes expressed through stories, tales and songs which are also important forms of African oral literature.
7. The study and use of proverbs have to address the new contexts of Africa such as urbanization and secularization. One challenge is how proverbs can reach the new African world especially the youth and can transform the whole society.

Two groups of writers met during the consultation; the African Proverbs Series group chaired by John Mbiti and the Proverbs for Preaching Series Group chaired by Joshua Kudadjie. Final plans were made for publishing five collections of African proverbs (Akan, Ghana; Lugbara, Uganda; Moore, Burkina Faso; Oromo, Ethiopia; and Southern Sotho, Lesotho) and five books of proverbs for preaching and teaching Bassa, Liberia; Chichewa, Malawi; Ga and Dangme, Ghana; Swahili, East Africa; and Yombe, Zaire).

One afternoon the participants met in three discipline groups: Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology/Pastoral and Religious Studies. They discussed the interaction between African proverbs and their respective specializations. The Biblical Studies group recommended that more attention should be given to the proverbial literature in the Bible and in the African tradition. A critical approach to proverbs is needed to avoid deifying them. Biblical Studies need the contributions of other disciplines such as Paroemiology, Canon Law, Linguistics, Philology, Anthropology, Literature and Philosophy. Despite the advancement of science proverbs are never out of season.

The Systematic Theology/Pastoral group pointed out that there are not collections of proverbs in many African languages such as Xhosa in Southern Africa. The most used proverbs in pastoral work (preaching and teaching) need to be identified. A possible Phase II of the African Proverbs Project could promote the collection of proverbs and their pastoral applications by seminary students to be published in booklets. Articles in missiological journals could promote changes in theological teaching methods. Proverbs collections on AIDS and justice and peace issues (for example, reconciliation and peacemaking) are especially important. It was mentioned that the traditional Swahili proverb *Better a curtain hanging still inside than a flag blowing to and fro outside* has a new application as a slogan in anti-AIDS campaigns.

The Religious Studies group recommended the following:

1. Encourage the use of wisdom in proverbs in discussing and analyzing issues in Philosophy, Ethics and Religious Studies/Theology.
2. Design courses and encourage students to collect and analyze proverbs in their own languages.
3. Take advantage of the contribution of Linguistics and Anthropology and the study of visual symbols and art.
4. Organize interdisciplinary seminars on proverbs from time to time.
5. Launch a Journal of African Proverbs.

Morning Worship formed an important part of the consultation. On the first day participants were reminded of the scriptural text of Matthew 7 that the wise person is the one who hears and obeys the words of Jesus. African proverbs preserve much of the traditional wisdom of Africans and should be used to communicate the message of Jesus and his church. In the devotions on the second day the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) was compared to the Parable of the Two Brothers of the Sukuma Ethnic Group in Western Tanzania. There is a mutual illumination and enrichment when biblical stories and African stories are used together. Some values taught in these stories are forgiveness, reconciliation, inclusiveness, personal relationships and close bonds and joy within the extended family.

The next Morning Worship used John's vision of the heavenly worship in Revelations 7 to recognize the fullness of God's time and the call to be faithful and effective instruments in using African proverbs as one of God's many gifts to various peoples and races to be used for his glory and praise. The fourth devotion used a passage from Mark 8. Just as the blind man needed a "second touch" by Jesus in order to see people clearly and not just as trees moving about, using proverbs to transmit the Christian message in Africa is one way of giving the message a second touch.

The fifth Morning Worship on the theme "Serving Each Other" (Mark 9) used a children story about who is the first or last person. We should work together and serve one another as seen in the Ewe (Ghana) proverb: Antelopes say that they go in pairs so they can clean each other eyes. The Closing Worship used Solomon's prayer and God's response (1 Kings 3) to stress the importance of wisdom in all human affairs. All Christians have the responsibility to work for the goals of Christian mission. To succeed we must ask for the wisdom of God who works through the Holy Spirit. We should also use human wisdom such as African proverbs.

There were various times during the consultation to encounter the people, culture and reality of Mozambique. During a meeting with the local Christian community of Ricatla the old and young women and the youth sang and danced. Then the women demonstrated the local art of moulding and

decorating clay pots using shells from the nearby lake. One afternoon the participants visited the neighbouring village of Marracuene and saw some of the effects of the long civil war in Mozambique.

Bento Siteo, a teacher at Eduardo Mondlane University, spoke on the present Mozambique reality. He traced the history of the 28 year war, the multi-party elections in October, 1994, the reconstruction efforts of the FRELIMO government and the present plight of Mozambique refugees in, and coming back from, neighbouring countries. He described various moving examples of reconciliation and peacemaking and the urgent needs of social and economic development in the country.

The follow-up of this Working Consultation will include the following:

- * Wide distribution of this Final Statement.
- * A volume of the papers and proceedings of the consultation to be published in 1996 with the possibility of individual papers also being published in theological journals.
- * Suggestions for a possible Phase II of the African Proverbs Project.
- * There was a lot of enthusiasm for on-going proverb projects at the grassroots level and the promotion of more theological reflection and writing on proverbs. Participants committed themselves to spread these concerns as expressed in the Ganda (Uganda) proverb: One who sees something good must narrate it. Everyone agreed with the Sukuma (Tanzania) proverb: That which is good is never finished.